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Introduction: Oceania lives

TALEI LUSCIA MANGIONI, NICHOLAS HOARE AND KATERINA TEAIWA

'Oceania Lives' is a culmination of several years of collaborative biographical research and dialogue by the Oceania Working Party (OWP) of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (*ADB*). The revitalised OWP is a Pacific-led working group of Pacific studies scholars, artists, community workers and public figures from across Australia who are concerned with the sharing and telling of Pacific lives in the lands now known as Australia.[1] Operating amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and without secure funding, the objective of the OWP has been to focus on nurturing a sustainable environment of intellectual curiosity and generative academic debate about how we can, and should, do Pacific biography. It has been slow and relational work—deliberately so. Selecting and managing Pacific entries in the *ADB* is one part of the job, but holding workshops, annual meetings and gathering at events such as the Australian Association for Pacific Studies (AAPS) 2023 conference, 'To Hell with Drowning', is another. Two workshops, with keynote presentations by Lisa Hilli, and Melinda Mann, Kim Kruger and Imelda Miller, respectively, were crucial in bringing our working party together to discuss Indigenous Pacific women–led, transdisciplinary and creative forms of doing Pacific biography, as well as the ethical imperatives and considerations of sharing Pacific lives with diverse audiences. Both workshops provided wellsprings of inspiration and critical pathways that led us to this special issue—a consideration of how to do Pacific biography in Australia.

Building on a long but inconsistent tradition of historical biographical writing about Pacific Islanders in Australia by the *ADB* and others that we have detailed elsewhere,[2] the OWP is now newly committed to exploring how the telling of Pacific Islander lives can shift Australia's national story in a time of unprecedented attention to the Pacific region and Pacific peoples. This 'rush for Oceania' is a result of escalating geopolitical tensions driven by the great power rivalry between the United States and China that has shaped the policies of other 'traditional powers' such as France and Great Britain, as well as numerous other Pacific-rim states, including not just Australia, but also New

1 The membership includes Professor Katerina Teaiwa (chair since 2017, co-chair since 2024), Professor Kate Fullagar (co-chair since 2024), Associate Professor Chris Ballard, Namila Benson, Dr Dion Enari, Dr Ruth Faleolo, Dr Nic Halter, Dr Innez Haua, Dr Nicholas Hoare, Lisa Hilli, Kari James, Kim Kruger, Dr David Lakisa, Dr Leah Lui-Chivizhe, Dr Vicki Luker, Talei Luscia Mangioni, Dr Melinda Mann, Dr Kirsten McGavin, Dr Patricia O'Brien, Professor Jioji Ravulo, Dr Jonathan Ritchie, Rita Seumanutafa-Palala, Dulcie Stewart, Sēini Fale'aka Taumoepeau, Deveni Temu and Emele Ugavule.

2 For a more in-depth exploration of the work done prior to 2017, see Katerina Teaiwa, Nicholas Hoare and Talei Luscia Mangioni, 'Finding Australia's "Missing" Pacific Women', in *Reframing Indigenous Biography*, ed. Shino Konishi, Malcolm Allbrook and Tom Griffiths (Abingdon: Routledge, 2024).

Zealand, Indonesia and Japan.[3] In the strategic framing of the 'Indo-Pacific' region (which is frequently counteracted through the discursive counter-framing of the 'Blue Pacific' by Pacific Island states), the Commonwealth of Australia, formerly governed by a conservative Liberal–National coalition government (2013–22) and now the Australian Labor Party (ALP) (since 2022), has typically assumed the 'deputy-sheriff' role to the United States.[4] As Solomon Islander scholar Tarcisius Kabutaulaka notes, Canberra's geostrategic thinking has historically mapped the Pacific as Australia's 'patch' or 'backyard', a nation-state of continental 'stability' and 'power' surrounded by an 'arc of instability' of Pacific states.[5] Seen from such a perspective, the inspiration for Australia's current foreign policy differs little from Alfred Deakin's famous 1887 line, 'to be pacific, we want the Pacific'.[6] Such geostrategic attention is not reflected in the national biographical record, in spite of Australia's long involvement with the Pacific Islands.

In the Australian media, the Pacific is commonly represented as a dire and disastrous place, with Pacific Islanders in the region and the diaspora regularly affixed to narratives of deficit. For example, Kanaky New Caledonia, once famous for its tropical paradise tropes, quickly became a tropical hell, as Australian tourists were reportedly left stranded during the period of colonial violence beginning in May 2024. Similarly, the 2022 Australian federal election campaign was destabilised by sensational media claims about the influence of China on neighbouring Solomon Islands. Generally speaking, we hear all too much about anger, instability, rising tides and natural disasters, and not enough about Pacific Islands success (or even, for that matter, quotidian, everyday life).[7]

Within the confines of the Australian continent, the Pacific diaspora is over-represented in the sports and entertainment industries and under-represented in others. Despite the media favouring certain stories, like other Australians, many are simply navigating the challenges of everyday life on top of rising inflation, low job security and poor healthcare provisions. Meanwhile, those on temporary work visas under the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme have become Australia's invisible

3 Reclaiming Oceania Collective, 'The Rush for Oceania: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Oceans Governance and Stewardship', in *SGDIA Working Paper Series* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 2018).

4 Even though prime minister John Howard never used the term, Tarcisius Kabutaulaka traces this positioning to 1999 and the Howard-doctrine of the time. See Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, 'Australian Foreign Policy and the RAMSI Intervention in Solomon Islands', *The Contemporary Pacific* 17, no. 2 (2005): 289, doi.org/10.1353/cp.2005.0058.

5 Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, 'Mapping the Blue Pacific in a Changing Regional Order', in *The China Alternative*, ed. Graeme Smith and Terence Wesley-Smith (Canberra: ANU Press, 2021), 44, doi.org/10.22459/CA.2021.01.

6 Deakin's Pacific Monroe Doctrine is discussed in Benjamin Mountford, 'Colonial Australia, the 1887 Colonial Conference, and the Struggle for Imperial Unity', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 47, no. 5 (2019): 925–31, doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2019.1677341.

7 See, for example, the reporting of Victorian tourists by CNN: Jessie Yeung and Hilary Whiteman, 'They Flew to New Caledonia for a Romantic Escape. Now They're Trapped as Macron Tries to Quell Deadly Riots', *CNN World*, 23 May 2024, edition.cnn.com/2024/05/23/europe/new-caledonia-tourists-stranded-australia-intl-hnk/index.html. Such visions are a part of a bleak historical legacy of Australian government and media imaginings of the Pacific region. See, for example, this analysis from the 1990s: Greg Fry, 'Framing the Islands: Knowledge and Power in Changing Australian Images of "the South Pacific"', *The Contemporary Pacific* 9, no. 2 (1997): 305–344.

labour force. Roughly 32,932 workers (as of March 2024) from 10 participating countries serve in jobs such as fruit picking, meat packing, hospitality and aged care.[8] These migrants have changed the social fabric of regional, rural and remote communities across Australia, filling roles vacated by earlier diasporic communities.[9] Yet, given the frequency of accounts of worker exploitation, it is little wonder that some question whether this is a contemporary iteration of blackbirding.[10]

A confluence of narrow representational practices by mainstream media severed from history has made the task of Pacific biographers more necessary than ever. However, we do not wish to meekly or merely reproduce the 'empowerment rationale' for Pacific studies in an Australian context—something that has been pursued by Australian-based thinkers and writers on the Pacific since the mid-1990s.[11] Crowding the field with further hollow and spurious claims to being 'the first' to represent or be represented is not the goal here. Instead, a greater focus on sensitising fellow Pacific academics and, by extension, Pacific communities to histories of Pacific Islander relationships to lands, seas and skies that expand in its entirety from Pleistocene Sahul to modern Australia is necessary. Australian-based scholars of the Pacific, a growing number of whom come from Pacific diasporic communities, need deeper understandings of local, regional and transnational Pacific histories. Whereas young scholars might have once been exposed to sustained historical training at university, Pacific history positions have been dashed across Australia, with few opportunities for undergraduate or postgraduate students to specialise in the sub-discipline. The same can be said of Australian secondary school students, who are taught next to nothing about the Pacific region and are rarely offered viable pathways into Pacific studies and related disciplines at university.

This has implications for Australian universities, government institutions and the wider knowledge sector. We know that the geopolitical rush for the Pacific and the growing demand for Pacific expertise has led to the creation of a greater number of Pacific-related jobs and dedicated research centres. While many of these new positions go

8 Participating countries are Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. See Stephen Howes, 'How Many PALM Workers Are in Australia?', *DevPolicy Blog*, 2 July 2024, devpolicy.org/how-many-palm-workers-are-in-australia/.

9 Makiko Nishitani and Helen Lee, 'Invisible Islanders? Precarious Work and Pacific Islander Settlers in Rural Australia', in *Labour Lines and Colonial Power: Indigenous and Pacific Islander Labour Mobility in Australia*, ed. Victoria Stead and Jon Altman (Canberra: ANU Press, 2019), 150–84.

10 At the height of the international Black Lives Matter movement in mid-2020, prime minister Scott Morrison publicly suggested that there was no slavery in Australia. This prompted numerous South Sea Islander/Australian South Sea Islander as well as Pacific Islander leaders, through their community support work to seasonal workers, to highlight the issue of modern-day slavery in Australia's food supply chain. Since then, the academic debate has caught up. See Kirstie Petrou and John Connell, *Pacific Islands Guestworkers in Australia: The New Blackbirds?* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-5387-3; cf. Stephen Howes and Richard Curtain, 'Pacific Seasonal Workers: Not the New Blackbirds', *DevPolicy Blog*, 18 July 2023, devpolicy.org/pacific-seasonal-workers-not-the-new-blackbirds-20230718/.

11 On the primacy of the 'empowerment rationale' and later reflections, see Terence Wesley-Smith, 'Rethinking Pacific Islands Studies', *Pacific Studies* 18, no. 2 (1995): 115–37; Terence Wesley-Smith, 'Rethinking Pacific Studies Twenty Years on', *The Contemporary Pacific* 28, no. 1 (2016): 153–69, doi.org/10.1353/cp.2016.0003.

to Pacific scholars, there is no guarantee that these recruits come with a background in Pacific studies and its related disciplines. Can we really expect these people to become 'instant experts' on such a broad range of contemporary issues without first establishing a background in Pacific histories (academic, vernacular or otherwise)? We hope that encouraging careful and critical research on our predecessors' life stories in and outside Australia can be a step towards deepening the level of expertise available to the Pacific scholarly and policy–focused community.

Australia's Pacific scholars do not need to look far for intellectual inspiration. The 2016 special issue of *Biography*, 'Indigenous Conversations about Biography', edited by Alice Te Punga Somerville, Daniel Heath Justice and Noelani Arista provides apposite insights into sharing Pacific lives in this complex geopolitical, media and academic landscape.[12] They ask: 'What is the value of an Indigenous life in a time of continuing settler-colonial policy and practice?' Over 60,000 years ago, the mega-continent of Sahul comprised the modern-day landmasses of New Guinea, Australia and Tasmania. Ancient migratory superhighways, previously connecting Sorong almost to Port Moresby and criss-crossing all the way down the Australian continent, have been verified by Indigenous songlines as well as old stock routes and trade lines from the nineteenth century.[13] Beneath the settler fiction of Australia, Country today is composed of roughly 250 Indigenous 'different and distinct groups', each with their own cultures, customs, languages and laws.[14] While many Pacific peoples have long-lasting kinships in place with Indigenous Australians through marriages and adoptions, they are not themselves indigenous to the contemporary Australian continent or surrounding seas of the Torres Strait Islands. Therefore, from a 'trans-indigenous' perspective, it is useful to consider the types of lives Pacific Islanders lead in this place as peoples indigenous to the broader region.[15]

The experiences of this broad and historically diverse migrant community complicate easy understandings of a harmonious multicultural Australia. One of the early Pacific communities, known as South Sea Islanders, were predominantly brought to Australia against their will. Kidnapped through a practice known as 'blackbirding', those who survived (they died in large numbers) were treated in a racially targeted way, leading

12 Alice Te Punga Somerville and Daniel Heath Justice, 'Introduction: Indigenous Conversations about Biography', *Biography* 39, no. 3 (2016): 239–47, doi.org/10.1353/bio.2016.0034.

13 Stefani A. Crabtree, Devin A. White, Corey J. A. Bradshaw, Frédérik Saltré, Alan N. Williams, Robin J. Beaman, Michael I. Bird and Sean Ulm, 'Landscape Rules Predict Optimal Superhighways for the First Peopling Of Sahul', *Nature Human Behaviour* 5, no. 10 (2021): 1303–13, doi.org/10.1038/s41562-021-01106-8. See also Dana Morse, 'Researchers Demystify the Secrets of Ancient Aboriginal Migration across Australia', *ABC NEWS*, 30 April 2021, www.abc.net.au/news/2021-04-30/research-into-ancient-aboriginal-migration-across-australia/100105902.

14 AIATSIS, 'Map of Indigenous Australia', aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia.

15 Here, the term 'trans-indigenous' is borrowed from Chickasaw scholar Chadwick Allen, who used it to propose methodologies for a global native literary studies; however, in line with Alice Te Punga Somerville, we acknowledge that this often re-inscribes a US-centric indigenous studies hegemony. Instead, and in line with other Pacific studies scholars, particularly historians like Tracey Banivanua Mar, we use it here to rethink Pacific Islander peoples and their relationship to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander struggles in so-called Australia and the region. See Alice Te Punga Somerville, 'Searching for the Trans-Indigenous', *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 4, no. 2 (2018): 96–105, doi.org/10.5749/vergstudglobasia.4.2.0096.

to mass deportation in the years following the *Pacific Island Labourers Act* (1901). In this issue, Darumbal and South Sea Islander (Vanuatu/Kanaky New Caledonia) scholar Melinda Mann powerfully remarks on her own lived experience that straddles these two doubly marginalised identities, asserting:

> As an Aboriginal person and South Sea Islander, I recognise my dual blackness as Aboriginal and as South Sea Islander … I recognise that I am, and people like me are, the embodiment of the expansion of a violent imperial power that forced Black people together on this continent. We exist as a result of the colonisation of the Black Pacific. We are a reminder of the racist, capitalistic endeavours that drove the dispossession of Black lands here, which led to the dispossession of Black islands there—all for this place, now known as Australia. In my refusal of a settler narrative, I situate myself today through relationships with all my ancestors. I also acknowledge that, as an Aboriginal person and grounded in my father's Country, my Country, Darumbal, I am home. I was already here when my South Sea Islander forebears arrived to bring me the rest of my Black world.
>
> However, for my mother and many South Sea Islanders, 'belonging' is not easy. They hover between places as if suspended in time, perhaps floating somewhere across the Pacific, where those old Kanakas voyaged against their will, belonging neither here nor there but to each other. And in speaking of those Black islands of the Pacific, we acknowledge that biographical work speaks of people from those places and that we are their descendants. I recognise the lands and waters of the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Fiji, PNG and Kiribati. I acknowledge the sovereignty of those Pacific nations and that South Sea Islanders are indigenous to the Pacific but estranged from native lands and waters, and dispossessed of languages and cultural practices, birthrights, spiritualities and religions. The kidnapping and coercion of South Sea Islanders expedited the growth and wealth of early agricultural industries, particularly in Queensland, and occurred simultaneously with the dispersals, massacres and removals of Aboriginal people, weighing heavily on this work.
>
> We recognise that the violent practice of blackbirding South Sea Islanders to these lands as slaves is not separate from, nor the same as, the massacres and dispossession of Aboriginal people, but it is related to these atrocities. In this relatedness and relationship with these experiences of these lands, we honour the unceded sovereign nations of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders. And as the children of enslaved people today, we do more than acknowledge the unceded sovereignty of First Nations peoples. We commit to undertaking any South Sea Islander biographical work we do to honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of all generations and their lands and waters. In doing so, we honour our own histories of relationship with their lands. Today, we honour the Ngunnawal/Ngunawal and Ngambri peoples' love and connection to this place.[16]

16 Melinda Mann, Kim Kruger and Imelda Miller, 'Centering Relationality in South Sea Islander Biography', in *Oceania Lives*, this issue.

Mann provides a guiding light as to how we, as Pacific Islanders and supporters, ought to get on with this work: in solidarity and dialogue with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as with South Sea Islanders who represent a 'distinct cultural group' within Australia with deep and continuing connections to First Nations peoples in this continent and the Pacific Islands. As a working party, we believe that bringing these histories together with Pacific Islander histories, challenges and activisms, presents a unique path towards mobilising Indigenous and Oceanic scholarship in reclaiming the narrative from outside interests.

This special issue calls attention to the colonial interests and investments of both pre-Federation and contemporary Australia. Through storytelling and biography, the life stories in this special issue explore the notion of 'Australian coloniality' (which we describe in more detail below).[17] For the most part, the methodological work of the OWP enacts Alice Te Punga Somerville, Daniel Heath Justice and Noelani Arista's call to transform biographical studies, such that 'Indigenous [or more broadly Pacific] people [are] the biographers rather than biographees'.[18] The OWP, operating from a range of disciplines and professions, has presented a useful opportunity to 'focus on the things that Indigenous people want to talk about when it comes to biography'.[19] Its meeting format has been open, informal and conversational, and has involved regular consultation with the Indigenous Working Party of the *ADB*, particularly with former Indigenous research officer Kiera Donnelly, resulting in the formulation of a set of ethical protocols to use when telling Pacific life stories and seeking out Indigenous (and Pacific) life stories in the settler colony and the region. Here, beyond our professional roles, we see the importance of Pacific readers, creators and teachers in informing this work in multiscalar ways.

An emergent set of protocols for doing Pacific biography

The OWP acknowledges a particular urgency in highlighting Pacific peoples in the national story of Australia from which they have hitherto been missing. It further acknowledges the long and continuing historical, cultural and linguistic connections between Indigenous peoples in Australia and those of Oceania. Accordingly, the OWP hopes to offer a critical reading of the concept of 'Australia'. A critical Pacific studies revisioning of 'Australian coloniality' is a useful analytic frame to re-present 'Australia' as a pervasive force that extends beyond its overbearing imaginary of 'girt-by-sea' continental consciousness and far out into the Pacific.[20] Such a reading applies particularly to the settler colonial administration of about 250 nations of Aboriginal

17 Teaiwa, Hoare and Mangioni, 'Finding Australia's "Missing" Pacific Women'.

18 Te Punga Somerville, Justice and Arista, 'Introduction: Indigenous Conversations about Biography', 240–41.

19 Te Punga Somerville, Justice and Arista, 'Introduction: Indigenous Conversations about Biography', 240–41.

20 Victoria Stead and Jon Altman, 'Labour Lines and Colonial Power', in *Labour Lines and Colonial Power: Indigenous and Pacific Islander Labour Mobility in Australia*, ed. Victoria Stead and Jon Altman (Canberra: ANU Press, 2019), 1–26, doi.org/10.22459/LLCP.2019.01.

and Torres Strait Islanders, as well as the former Territories of Papua and New Guinea, Norfolk Island and Nauru, not to mention Banaba, which was also devastated by Australian-led phosphate imperialism.[21] As Pacific historians Helen Gardner, Jonathan Ritchie and Brad Underhill have recently argued, the decolonisation era in the Pacific from the late 1960s (specifically the independence of Papua New Guinea in 1975) and active uncoupling of Australian history from Pacific history from around this time has led to the current state of national amnesia about our shared Pacific pasts. They write:

> The current metanarratives of continental history … [have] sidelined Australia's nearest neighbour and forged an active forgetting of shared pasts. The moat of oblivion that excludes Papua and New Guinea [and more broadly the Pacific] from Australian histories reveals the exclusionary power of the continent in the psyche of the nation and the difficulty of extending Australian history beyond the continental borders.[22]

The concept of Australian coloniality pushes us outside of formal imperial arrangements and into an interrogation of further historical, religious and economic forms of imperialism across sites such as Fiji, Kiribati, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Kanaky New Caledonia, Tahiti and elsewhere—sites that have been sidelined from the telling of Australia's national story. Further, as anthropologists Victoria Stead and Jon Altman have argued, Australian coloniality usefully interrogates 'more diffuse (but nevertheless violent) forms of post- and neo-colonialism articulated through "development" and border [and carceral] regimes'.[23] Tongan scholar Epeli Hau'ofa has pointed out the 'staggering' impact of the Australian (and New Zealand) education systems upon Pacific Islanders who comprise the ruling classes of their communities. He writes: 'it is not at all surprising that development policies of the islands are increasingly and smoothly synchronised with the policies set in Canberra and Wellington, the main centres of control for our region'.[24] Such colonial and imperial histories are fundamental to appropriately understand Australia's waxing and waning colonial presence in the region, received by many across the Pacific with ire or ambivalence.

The contentious November 2023 announcement of the Falepili Treaty between Tuvalu and Australia, for example (as well as many other emerging neo-colonial security, economic and migration pacts), brings to the fore the shifting dynamics of Australia–Pacific relations at the intersection of regional security, climate change and

21 Katerina Teaiwa, 'Ruining Pacific Islands: Australia's Phosphate Imperialism', *Australian Historical Studies* 46, no. 3 (2015): 374–91, doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2015.1082609.

22 Helen Gardner, Jonathan Ritchie and Brad Underhill, '"The Moat of Oblivion": Australia and the Forgetting of Papua New Guinea', *Australian Historical Studies* 55, no. 2 (2024): 253, doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2024.2322485.

23 Stead and Altman, 'Labour Lines and Colonial Power'.

24 Epeli Hau'ofa, 'The New South Pacific Society', in *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 14–15.

differing definitions of what constitutes climate justice.[25] Indeed, whereas Australia's history as an extractive colonial economy shadows its contemporary dependence on fossil fuels, rising sea levels and increased incidences of disaster have serious repercussions for state sovereignties across the region.[26] Nevertheless, as the majority of Pacific peoples living on the lands now known as Australia are indigenous peoples on land that is not their own, the OWP frames itself and Pacific peoples as settlers. Further, the OWP highlights the limits and regressive nature of the Australian policy of multiculturalism, seeing it as a means of evading the settler identity in what Indigenous studies scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang have described as 'settler moves to innocence'.[27] The importance of highlighting a spectrum of stories of both resistance against, and collaboration with, the Australian state and empire more broadly is necessarily highlighted as a means of creating generative dialogues on our shared histories for Pacific communities in Australia and the region.

For the sake of consistent terminology, the OWP uses the terms 'Oceania' and 'Pacific' regularly and interchangeably to refer to the region, and Oceanian and Pacific Islander peoples (of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia). While 'South Sea Islander' was a fairly common term applied to peoples coming from the entire region to Australia (from French Polynesia to the Solomon Islands) across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this is not to be confused with the use of South Sea Islander (SSI) to specifically refer to the forebears of the Australian South Sea Islander (ASSI) community. ASSI refers to Australian-born descendants of SSIs (typically from Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Kanaky New Caledonia and elsewhere) who gained recognition from the Australian government in 1994 as a 'distinct cultural group', though many today acknowledge that identifying as 'Australian' is no longer satisfactory politically, preferring instead to revert to the use of 'South Sea Islander' or 'South Sea', or even reclaiming the term 'Kanaka' in their self-identifying terminology.

Māori refers to the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa/New Zealand, who make up a large proportion of Pacific Islander migrant communities in Australia. Māori ambivalently identify as Pasifika in the Australian context and were able to migrate to Australia throughout the era of White Australia (1901 to the mid-1970s) as a result of their special status and naturalisation pathways.[28] Pasifika is an umbrella term borrowed from Aotearoa/New Zealand to refer to all diasporic Pacific Islander

25 Taukiei Kitara and Carol Farbotko, 'This Is Not Climate Justice: The Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Treaty', *Toda Peace Institute: Global Outlook*, 13 November 2023, toda.org/global-outlook/2023/this-is-not-climate-justice-the-australia-tuvalu-falepili-union.html. See also Prianka Srinivasan and Virginia Harrison, 'Mapped: The Vast Network of Security Deals Spanning the Pacific, and What It Means', *Guardian*, 9 July 2024, www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jul/09/pacific-islands-security-deals-australia-usa-china.

26 Tarcisius Kabutaulaka and Katerina Teaiwa, 'Climate, Coal, Kinship and Security in Australia–Pacific Relations', *Australian Institute of International Affairs*, 21 August 2019.

27 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 9.

28 See Sam Iti Prendergast, 'Trans-Indigeneity and Sovereignty That Endures: Reflections on Māori Diaspora', *Waka Kuaka: The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 132, no. 1 (2023): 11–26, doi.org/10.15286/jps.132.1-2.57-72.

migrant communities from Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia.[29] Most Pacific Islanders migrated after the breaking down of the so-called White Australia policy (formally, the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*) in the 1970s. Since the early 2000s, the majority of migrants tend to be from Fiji, Samoa and Tonga; however, this population also extends to smaller diasporic groups from the Cook Islands, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, Niue, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Nauru, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and the Republic of the Marshall Islands.[30]

It is clear that Pacific Islanders in Australia are sick and tired of seeing one-dimensional and stereotypical portrayals of themselves. Given the historical framing of 'belittlement' of the Pacific and its peoples by Australian media, government and academia, the OWP, as a restorative project, aims to rectify such narratives by centring the empowerment and agency of Pacific peoples.[31] A highly urbanised and youthful population across Australia adds to this pressure. The OWP offers a counter-framing of the typical deficit discourse of Pacific peoples and emphasises the need for accurate and culturally safe representations and stories of Pacific Islanders. Pacific Islanders are to be represented as peoples with agency, often as mobile indigenous peoples and always in the historical context of where they are coming from. Diverse portrayals allow for acknowledgement of how Pacific peoples could also be accomplices of empire or could enact colonial ways of thinking and doing in the region. Such representations attempt not only to move away from hagiographic storytelling that only focuses on the good—so-called Pasifika excellence—but also to allow for ordinariness, or even complete wickedness, which, through its very complexity, subverts colonial narratives of teleological progress and development of the 'savage other'. As Marxist Fijian historian Simione Durutalo has observed, biographies of venerated Pacific personalities have historically reflected the views of a Pacific elite ruling class, often with chiefly or other privileged connections, who were recruited by empire as a means of absorbing the outlook of the coloniser.[32] Often, the selected personalities were indigenous men with government, religious or trade connections. It is telling that the majority of Pacific Islanders in the *ADB* are Papua New Guinean politicians, and mainly men. This reflects both the nature of the colonial and political archives available in Australia and the interests of former members of *ADB* Pacific working parties, predominantly The Australian National University–based (male) academics with strong interests in Papua New Guinea (PNG). The current OWP seeks to rectify this as much as possible by applying an intersectional lens that seeks the inclusion and representation of stories of people from minority groups and other identified

29 Dion Enari and Innez Haua, 'A Māori and Pasifika Label—An Old History, New Context', in *Genealogy* 5, no. 3 (2021): 70–77, doi.org/10.3390/genealogy5030070; Kirsten McGavin, 'Being "Nesian": Pacific Islander Identity in Australia', *The Contemporary Pacific* 26, no. 1 (2014): 126–54, doi.org/10.1353/cp.2014.0013.

30 Huiyuan Liu and Stephen Howes, 'Pacific Islanders in Australia: 2021 Census Results', *DevPolicyBlog*, 31 March 2023, devpolicy.org/pacific-islanders-in-australia-census-results-20230331/.

31 Epeli Hau'ofa, 'Our Sea of Islands', *The Contemporary Pacific* 6, no.1 (1994): 148–61.

32 Simione Durutalo, 'Buccaneers and Chiefly Historians', *Journal of Pacific Studies* 11 (1986): 153.

priority areas, such as SSI/ASSI, women and gender-diverse peoples, peoples from sports and creative industries, and, particularly, grassroots activists including labour and community organisers.

It is also important to encourage Pacific methods of engagement and storytelling, as, often, such publications become narrative authorities on peoples' lives. Given that all (Pacific) biography is subjective, there is a tension between biography undertaken by an author or authors in consultation with family members and community, and biography that does not engage with family and community.[33] The OWP encourages family members to write biographical entries or otherwise to be co-authors, and authors and co-authors to view communities as important sources of guidance and information. The biographer is expected to engage with families and communities throughout the process. The OWP maintains that indigenous placenames, both in Australia and the Pacific, should be used consistently, and that indigenous personal names and other forms of identification (e.g. clan, province, country) should also be used, where known. Here, Pacific languages or even translations (especially those with regional cachet such as Tok Pisin) can be used to improve accessibility of the content to diverse audiences from across a multilingual region and diaspora. As the OWP is composed of Pacific scholars, community leaders, activists and artists, most of its work is undertaken by subcommittees. Its purpose is to promote a culturally safe way of doing Pacific biography in which Pacific expertise is used to verify and guide authors to follow established protocols. There is a commitment within the OWP to promote Pacific biographies authored by Pacific peoples or co-authored with Pacific peoples and done in deep collaboration with Pacific communities. Equally as important is making these stories and biographies available to the public and Pacific communities in the diaspora and across the region primarily through the *ADB* website and social media.

The OWP believes in making Pacific stories and biographies available to the public and Pacific communities in the diaspora and across the region. This will be done through the *ADB* website, a 'Pacific Biography in Australia' Facebook page and other social media channels. The OWP also encourages the distribution of these stories through creative formats. Establishing connections with different peoples within the galleries, libraries, archives and museums sector, as well as the arts sector, is therefore a priority, as this will help to move the stories beyond traditional academic formats and into the public domain. The biographies would need to be accessible, use simple language and be clearly captioned.

Understanding the limits of the colonial archive in terms of telling Pacific lives, the OWP sees an opportunity for employing decolonial methodologies in its biographical project. Instead of dependence on the colonial archive, the OWP encourages authors

33 Aroha Harris, 'Biography as Balancing Act: Life According to Joe and the Rules of Historical Method', in *Indigenous Biography and Autobiography*, ed. Peter Read, Frances Peters Little and Anna Haebich (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008), 94–95, doi.org/10.22459/IBA.12.2008.07.

to utilise indigenous language archives, non-documentary, visual and creative primary and secondary sources to inform their biographies, including films, family interviews, and internet and digital sources. The OWP acknowledges that traditional methods of doing biography, especially as practised by *ADB* authors in previous decades, is limiting; thus, it embraces an approach that decolonises the genre through utilising Pacific methods, such as writing biographies of objects and spiritual beings, collective biographies and more. As Torres Strait Islander historian Leah Lui-Chivizhe outlines in her work on turtle shell masks, often there is less interest in biographies or histories of objects 'after they left our beaches' and more in the histories of objects 'in their place of origin, and the men, women, animals, places and stories connected to their meaning and use'.[34] These approaches linking objects, places and peoples inform how the OWP, through its emergent craft of biography, history and storytelling, could generate alternative visual and creative outputs for Pacific communities.

The OWP is committed to upholding an ethical process for the official biographies published by the *ADB*. At the same time, it is exploring social media as an experimental space to promote, test and create dialogue with the general public. In 2020, a social media Facebook page, 'Pacific Biography in Australia', was created to draw stories of potential biographical subjects from the archives and bring them into public circulation. This proved to be a positive way of connecting with family members from the islands and those living in the diaspora in Australia. It was a way of crowdsourcing and verifying certain facts, including those that came from the archives and were attributed with incorrect provenance. While there were clear limitations to the amount of in-depth and accurate research that could be conveyed, with over 2,000 followers, the page provided a great avenue for reaching the Pacific community and promoting the work of the OWP. Facebook is one of the most frequently used platforms for Pacific discussion today (even more than Twitter/X or Instagram). Overall, despite operating on a shoestring budget, the slow and relational work of the OWP has resulted in a set of principles for doing work collectively that will help guide the future of Pacific biography in Australia. These principles are demonstrated in the submissions for this special issue, which are detailed below.

Contributions to the special issue

The initial dialogue articles come from two distinct workshops hosted by the OWP in recent years, both of which were designed to focus on aspects of history that counter dominant Australian understandings of the Pacific and its relation to the continent. In their edited dialogue originating from a 2022 workshop at ANU, Melinda Mann, Kim Kruger and Imelda Miller outline the importance of 'Centring Relationality in South Sea Islander Biography'.[35] As descendants of South Sea Islanders and Australian

34 Leah Lui-Chivizhe, *Masked Histories: Turtle Shell Masks and Torres Strait Islander People* (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2022), 7, doi.org/10.2307/jj.1176770.

35 Melinda Mann, Kim Kruger and Imelda Miller, 'Centring Relationality in South Sea Islander Biography', this issue.

South Sea Islanders, as well as various Aboriginal communities in what is now known as contemporary Queensland and New South Wales, the authors acknowledge the importance of a trans-indigenous approach to knowledge production, especially as it portends to Pacific biography. As a migrant community, South Sea Islanders and their descendants occupy a unique position in Australia, belonging to some of the earliest known waves of Pacific Islanders to travel there in service of colonial extractive economies, often through the practice of blackbirding. A refusal to assimilate or warmly embrace a settler brand of multiculturalism is viewed as fundamental for SSI/ASSI academics and practitioners, which may also be a guiding light for other diasporic communities. Through the telling of diverse life stories of SSI forebears and their descendants (or 'game changers' as Miller describes them), whose identities often cut across both Indigenous and Pacific settler worlds, many contemporary communities may come to understand themselves. These radical politics are devised in the context of rapidly shifting Australian immigration standards and visa and working arrangements, as more and more Pacific Islanders embrace seasonal employment while economic and climate-related migration increases in an era of multiple crises.

Papuan New Guinean scholar and artist Lisa Hilli makes a case for the forgotten collective biographies of Pacific peoples who have been marginalised by hegemonic narratives of the national story while also being crucial to the prosperity of the settler nation-state. Like SSI communities whose labour was plundered for the economic benefit of state and federal governments, the work of the FMI (Filles de Marie Immaculée/Daughters of Mary Immaculate) Sisters of Vunapope during World War II is similarly under-acknowledged. War histories and military histories are particularly evocative in the Australian mindset, as WWII history is frequently taught in primary and secondary schools as part of the curriculum. Acknowledging the heroism of Australian WWII veterans, Hilli, in 'Honouring the FMI Sisters of Vunapope',[36] gestures towards their own heroic actions in helping to save multiethnic prisoners of war by bringing them food during the Japanese occupation of New Britain. As well as shining a light on these forgotten women through visual life writing, Hilli discusses her use of an indigenous creative research praxis and methodology, and the artistic ethics that guided her in working with communities to represent Papua New Guinean women. As a Tolai woman with links to Rabaul who grew up as a member of the Papua New Guinean diaspora in Australia, she interrogates both the military history of PNG as a prominent 'theatre of war' for WWII and the colonial history of Papua and New Guinea under Australian rule. The notion of 'who' ought to relay these histories is explored in a provocative dialogue between the author and Papua New Guinean storyteller and theatre maker Wendy Mocke.

Imperial lives was a theme popularised by previous Australian-based Pacific biographers, particularly in the context of subjects who encountered early 'explorers' or were otherwise well-known personalities in the early colonial period of the

36 Lisa Hilli, 'Honouring the FMI Sisters of Vunapope', this issue.

Pacific.[37] Rather than imperial lives, the scholars in this issue prioritise the agency of ordinary Pacific Islanders and focus on the relationships that emerged between Pacific Islanders and European beachcombers, sailors, traders and missionaries throughout the Pacific. These Islanders came into contact with the British penal colony of New South Wales, and other fledgling British colonies as they emerged, such as Van Diemen's Land, South Australia and Western Australia. While it is difficult to find their perspectives in the archives, it is interesting to consider the potential of these connections and what they mean for contemporary diasporas who live and work on the lands now known as Australia. Two short, reflective and experimental articles speak to these colonial histories. In 'Koe folau 'o Futukava mei Tonga ki Aositelelia', Tongan scholars Ruth (Lute) Faleolo and Emma 'Ilaiū Vehikite examine the voyage of Futukava of Mu'a to Australia alongside Methodist missionary Reverend Walter Lawry in 1823.[38] The article re-traces the voyage of Futukava; retells his stories with reference to Tongan oral traditions; and re-visits archival information available in Australia, New Zealand, Tonga and England. Futukava's narratives are presented alongside a collection of images (old and contemporary) that trace the sites he visited, as well as those cited by Lawry in his letter. Through speculative reflections, Faleolo and Vehikite re-present Futukava's migration narratives, intersecting Tongan history with Australian history, both in time (*ta*) and space (*va*), in a way that recaptures the significance of interwoven migration narratives across Oceania.

Taking a creative approach to history and biography, in 'My Grandmother Is (Not Just) a Small Brown Fragment',[39] Norfolk Island scholar Pauline Reynolds uses object biography—namely, a piece of barkcloth (*tapa*)—poetry and prose to tell the story of her family's migration, as descendants of Mā'ohi Nui (French Polynesian) women and members of the *Bounty* mutiny, from Pitcairn to Norfolk Island in 1856. Through a discussion of the origins of the paper mulberry tree (*aute*) and its voyage to Tahiti and Pitcairn Island, the genealogy of the woman who transformed the plant to cloth, and its journey from Pitcairn to Norfolk Island to Australia and eventually to a university archive, we come to understand the value of the Macleay barkcloth, despite it being only a fragment of the original. In a wider sense, the examination allows for reflections that disrupt the accepted narratives around Pitcairn and Norfolk as well as the wider Pacific story. The *tapa* reveals the importance of looking beyond documentary source materials, beyond the Western worldview from which many museums function, allowing for the decolonisation that occurs when Pacific communities connect with ancestral treasures (*tao'a*) as ancestors (*tupuna*) within these spaces.

37 See any of the early Pacific Portraits collections edited by J. W. Davidson and Deryck Scarr.

38 Ruth Faleolo and Emma 'Ilaiū Vehikite, 'Koe folau 'o Futukava mei Tonga ki Aositelelia: The Voyage of "Footoocava" from Tonga to Australia', this issue.

39 Pauline Reynolds, 'My Grandmother Is (Not Just) a Small Brown Fragment', this issue.

The special issue also explores more contemporary histories that interacted with post-Federation Australia, particularly in the context of a postwar regional decolonisation agenda throughout the Pacific region from the 1960s onwards. In 'No Planners, No Bombs, No Rambos',[40] Fijian-Australian scholar Talei Luscia Mangioni traces the political and intellectual life story of the renowned Fijian activist Amelia Rokotuivuna, who is positioned at the epicentre of many trans-indigenous, Black and Pacific counter networks of empire throughout this period. Mangioni highlights the importance of acknowledging the grassroots histories and legacies of our 'Pacific feminist foremothers' throughout Fijian colonial and postcolonial history who have been tarnished and expunged from the national record in favour of the triumphs of statesmen they confronted and challenged, and even occasionally counselled or inspired. Mangioni contends that Rokotuivuna's early life informed her decades-long career with the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the women's liberation/feminist movement of Fiji, and outlines the intellectual thought work that earned her a rightful place within the genealogy of Pacific grassroots resistance movements. Rokotuivuna contributed importantly to regional debates on the status of women and Pacific feminism, and was a leading critic of Western development, nuclear colonialism and the Fijian coups of 1987 onwards. Across these three themes, Mangioni traces the development of political ideas that are strewn across Rokotuivuna's many speeches, press interviews and other writing, as well as published and unpublished materials in the YWCA of Fiji, Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific and her friends' personal archives. Writing from the intergenerational position of a diasporic Fijian woman living in Australia, Mangioni concludes with reflections on how thinking alongside Amelia Rokotuivuna has informed her understanding of the enduring economic and neo-colonial relationship between Fiji and Australia and the crucial need for biographies concerned with grassroots women and feminists such as Rokotuivuna.

The work of Australian anthropologist Camellia Webb-Gannon explores the artistic contributions of the West Papuan woman Lea Firth of the renowned Australian band the Black Sistaz.[41] Identifying as 'West Papuan through and through', the Australian citizens and residents that make up the Black Sistaz—Petra, Lea and Rosa Rumwaropen—have earned a place in Australian music history for women, Indigenous Pacific artists and decolonisation activists alike. Petra, Lea and Rosa are biological sisters and the daughters of August Rumwaropen, a member of the West Papuan rock-reggae-fusion band, the Black Brothers. They sing to perpetuate his musical-political legacy and to campaign for independence in West Papua. In doing so, they have created a new legacy in three key ways. First, their decolonisation leadership as West Papuan 'sistaz', or women, represents a shift from the predominantly male-

40 Talei Luscia Mangioni, 'No Planners, No Bombs, No Rambos: The Intellectual Legacy of Amelia Rokotuivuna in Fiji and Oceania', this issue.

41 Camellia Webb-Gannon, 'Singers, Sisters, Soldiers, Seekers: Lea Firth and the Black Sistaz on Being 'the Voice' for West Papua', this issue.

led West Papuan decolonisation movement of previous decades, and an opportunity to inspire Melanesian 'warrior princess' activists. Second, belonging to the West Papuan diaspora in Australia has facilitated the creation of novel political-musical alliances for the West Papuan independence struggle with Indigenous Australian and other Black musicians, strengthening regional solidarity for the West Papuan cause to an unprecedented degree. Third, rather than singing overtly about independence as other musicians in support of West Papuan freedom have done, the Black Sistaz draw on their indigeneity to keep the struggle alive through their music, for example, performing songs in the Biak language, singing in close harmony (representing strength in community) and a cappella (symbolising pragmatic self-reliance). 'Not having that connection to land means [singing is] the only way to keep our culture alive'. The Black Sistaz insist they lead very ordinary Australian-Melanesian lives—as mothers, breadwinners and active members of their Melbourne communities—yet their expressive voices and impressive life stories are 'extra'-ordinary. Webb-Gannon explores how the Black Sistaz use their voices to convey their experiences of living as West Papuans abroad, singing their way through everyday life in family, church and community settings, while at the same time singing a testimony to the battle for justice in their homeland. 'We need to be the voice', Lea Rumwaropen has stated, 'because [West Papuans at home] can't speak'.

The history of Pacific biography in the region, with a particular focus on political life writing, is also explored in this special issue. In 'Whatever Happened to the Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Contemporary Biography?',[42] Pacific scholars Nicholas Hoare and Theresa Meki examine the aforementioned dictionary's overlooked history. The Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Contemporary Biography (PNGDCB), which bears connections to the *ADB* and many similar national-focused projects visible elsewhere in the region (e.g. the *Solomon Islands Dictionary of Biography*) was chaired by John Waiko and edited by James Griffin and Andrew Griffin. A Flagship project of the Papua New Guinea Centennial Committee, a group formed in 1984 to mark 100 years of modern PNG, the PNGDCB was pitched as a hybrid *Who's Who*–style dictionary of national biography (DNB) for prominent Papua New Guineans since WWII, and was seen by the editors as the first step towards a full DNB. Despite many of the entries drawing favourable attention in the *Times of Papua New Guinea*, the project was beset by problems—mostly financial—and never saw the light of day. Subsequent efforts were made by Sam Kaima, senior lecturer at the University of Papua New Guinea, to revive the project at the turn of the twenty-first century, but these too were largely unsuccessful. Through an analysis of Jim Griffin's research papers at the National Library of Australia and interviews with surviving board members, the authors seek to retrace the footsteps of the Centennial Committee and to understand why the project was launched, how far it progressed and why it ultimately failed. The feasibility of relaunching the project today is also explored, for

42 Nicholas Hoare and Theresa Meki, 'What Ever Happened to the Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Contemporary Biography?', this issue.

while the methodology and form would require re-interrogation, the motivation for the project remains intact. As Kaima commented in the year 2000: 'This country is now losing a lot of people without us recording their life stories in the form of a book to remember them in the future.'

A further exposition of the difficulties encountered in political life writing is presented by Christopher Chevalier in his reflective piece about publishing Solomon Mamaloni's biography. In 'A Long and Winding Road: Completing a Biography of Solomon Mamaloni',[43] Chevalier recounts his experience of researching and writing a biography of Mamaloni—Solomon Islands' first chief minister and a three-time prime minister—commencing in 2009. The manuscript went through the review process at ANU Press twice. Following the first review (in 2016), he edited it down to 110,000 words. In the second review (in 2018), one reviewer perceived it to be ideologically biased. Encouraged by the number of people viewing his PhD thesis online, and aiming to make the biography as accessible as possible to Solomon Islanders, he decided to forego the formal publishing process and publish his Mamaloni biography online. He also made it available through Facebook, ResearchGate and Academic.edu. This enabled him to monitor metrics, receive comments, make corrections and accept additional information for incorporation in later versions, which may include a print book. In his contribution to this special issue, Chevalier reviews his experience and reflects on the lessons learned from writing the thesis and how it altered his writing and interpretation of the life of Solomon Mamaloni.

Romitesh Kant concludes the volume with a reflection on the life and impact of the prolific historian Brij V. Lal in Fiji.[44] It is a unique perspective written by somebody from a younger generation, clearly inspired by Lal's vision for a democratic and liberated multiethnic Fiji. Kant's focus on Lal's political and historical work on Fiji, rather than his broader historical or biographical works in Pacific history, is significant. What does Kant's emphasis say about Lal's legacy? That his influence transcended the academy as a vibrant public intellectual and commentator in Fijian society? Here, Kant examines some of Lal's efforts to connect Fiji's colonial past with its contemporary identity as an independent nation-state; his scholarship on Girmityas indenture history as well as notable ways that Indo-Fijians have been instrumental to Fiji's diverse political landscape; and his quest for democracy in Fiji, engineered through his academic pursuits and civic engagement around the Fiji constitution process, which led to his exile by the Frank Bainimarama government. Through personal reflection, Kant considers the important lessons that can be gleaned by contemporary Pacific scholars today from Lal's rigorous scholarship and life, both of which were committed to justice and accountability.

43 Christopher Chevalier, 'A Long and Winding Road: Completing a Biography of Solomon Mamaloni', this issue.
44 Romitesh Kant, 'Bridging Histories and Horizons: Professor Brij Lal's Contribution to Fiji's Past and Future', this issue.

One further Pacific-Australian life story that will now need to be told is that of Sēini Fale'aka Taumoepeau (also known as SistaNative), who passed away in May 2024 during the preparation of this special issue at just 48 years of age. In a tribute by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, she was described as 'an artist, orator, song woman and storyteller who spent over 30 years advocating for Pasifika communities and their representation in the Australian media landscape'. Well known as the inaugural host of Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) Radio Australia's Pacific Mornings program, Sēini was also a cherished member of the revitalised OWP and mentor to many of its members. We dedicate the contents of this special issue to her life and memory.

Research Articles

Centring relationality in South Sea Islander biography

MELINDA MANN, KIM KRUGER AND IMELDA MILLER

> As storytellers today, we refuse an anti-indigenous colonial narrative in the telling of who we are and how we came to be here.
>
> —Melinda Mann

This is an edited transcript of a co-presentation, 'South Sea Islander and Melanesian Life Stories', delivered on 21 April 2022 by ASSI scholars, curators and community leaders, Dr Melinda Mann, Kimberley Kruger and Imelda Miller. It took place on unceded Ngunnawal/Ngunawal and Ngambri lands at The Australian National University. It was hosted by the OWP of the *ADB*, and organised by Professor Katerina Teaiwa, Talei Luscia Mangioni and Dr Nicholas Hoare. The event was supported by The Australian National University's Gender Institute and Decolonial Possibilities, a Flagship project of the School of Culture, History and Language.

Dedication to Aunty Lillia 'Lily' Engstrom

Imelda, Kim and Melinda introduce themselves through photographs of family and ancestors in acknowledgement of the protocol of describing who you are, where you come from and who you belong to. Kim's photographs include her ancestors Kaurua and Nota who were brought from Tanna in the 1890s, pictured with Nota's daughter Lillia.

Kim Kruger: Thank you for the warm welcome. My name is Kim Kruger, and I am very excited to be here with Melinda Mann and Imelda Miller today. We start by acknowledging the Ngunnawal/Ngunawal and Ngambri peoples and paying respect to them by following their law, which is to look after the land and look after the people. Sadly, we learned overnight that Aunty Lily, Lillia Engstrom (née Noter), passed away yesterday on 20 April 2022, so we agreed to dedicate this workshop to her memory.[1] She was the last of the first generation of Australian-born South Sea Islanders in my family. She was born here in so-called 'Australia' and was of my grandfather's generation. It's important to acknowledge the lived history of our people, as the people we will be talking about today are known by and connected to people living now.

1 Lillia Virginia Engstrom, née Nauta/Noter, 1933–2022.

These are Aboriginal lands

Dr Melinda Mann: We want to position ourselves on Aboriginal lands for this workshop, and I want to ensure that we avoid referencing Aboriginal sovereignty in a way that thins out Aboriginality. The Secwepemc and Syilx documentary filmmaker Dorothy Christian highlighted the importance of recognising

> [the] specificity of Indigenous nations as a way to refuse entrenchment of the colonial story of the settler population that denies indigenous peoples long history or long relationships with the land.[2]

This point about refusing the colonial story of settlers is how we want to position ourselves today.

As South Sea Islanders, we are complex. We are neither colonial settlers nor visitors but the descendants of slaves. As storytellers, we refuse an anti-indigenous colonial narrative in the telling of who we are and how we came to be here. We know too well that settlers tell themselves lies about their own nation's history especially when comparing the enslavement of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander peoples with slavery elsewhere. In our refusal of anti-indigenous colonial narratives, we acknowledge that we've conducted South Sea Islander storytelling across individual nations of the continent's traditional and ongoing owners. Namely, we live on Wurundjeri, Yuggera Jagera and Turrbal, and Darumbal lands and are here today on Ngunnawal/Ngunawal and Ngambri lands. We recognise that it is not sufficient to simply 'pay homage' to unceded sovereign people and their lands. The issue at hand is biography and the biographies of people who were forced onto these lands for the white nation and for empire building. So, as part of my introduction, and before we commence this workshop proper, I want to sit in this acknowledgement of unceded sovereignty to explain what it means to recognise who we are, where we are and whose lands we are on.

Australian South Sea Islanders—past, present and those who are yet to be born—exist here on Aboriginal lands and islands throughout the Torres Strait. Regardless of how our forebears came, South Sea Islanders have become the beneficiaries of lands and waters stolen from Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders. I'm reminded of my own South Sea Islander community and the land that was 'gifted' to South Sea Islanders by Paul Alexander Joske for what is now known as Joskeleigh. My great-great-grandfather, Charles Brown, married Susan Oba and was one of seven siblings from Oba Island, now known as Ambrym. Charles Brown was taken from Pentecost Island, Vanuatu, in the mid-1800s. We have family stories about how that old man bore scars on his legs from the chains that kept him captive. He was forced to labour

2 Dorothy Christian, 'Indigenous Visual Storywork for Indigenous Film Aesthetics', in *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology*, ed. Jo-ann Archibald, Q'um Q'um Xiiem, Jenny Bol Jun Lee-Morgan and Jason De Santolo (London: Zed Books, 2022), 41–55.

in the Yeppoon and Rockhampton area. He secured a parcel of land in Joskeleigh that he handed down to my great-grandmother, Rachael Brown, and then eventually to my grandfather, Cedric 'Wiki' Warcon. My mother and her siblings now own portions of this block of land. It will soon be handed down to my siblings and I and many cousins. This land is a tiny section of Darumbal Country. Darumbal Country is my father's peoples' land, so it has always been mine. Despite how land has been transferred from slave owners or their associates to enslaved people, Aboriginal sovereignty reminds us that my South Sea Islander family's land was never ceded by my father's family. Stolen Aboriginal lands cannot be gifted away to atone for the sins of those who organised, participated and benefited from blackbirding.

As an Aboriginal person and South Sea Islander, I recognise my dual blackness as Aboriginal and as South Sea Islander. As a descendant of Darumbal, Vanuatu and New Caledonian nations, I recognise that I am, and people like me are, the embodiment of the expansion of a violent imperial power that forced Black people together on this continent. We exist as a result of the colonisation of the Black Pacific. We are a reminder of the racist, capitalistic endeavours that drove the dispossession of Black lands here, which led to the dispossession of Black islands there—all for this place, now known as Australia. In my refusal of a settler narrative, I situate myself today through relationships with all my ancestors. I also acknowledge that, as an Aboriginal person and grounded in my father's Country, my Country, Darumbal, I am home. I was already here when my South Sea Islander forebears arrived to bring me the rest of my Black world.

However, for my mother and many South Sea Islanders, 'belonging' is not easy. They hover between places as if suspended in time, perhaps floating somewhere across the Pacific, where those old Kanakas voyaged against their will, belonging neither here nor there but to each other. And in speaking of those Black islands of the Pacific, we acknowledge that biographical work speaks of people from those places and that we are their descendants. I recognise the lands and waters of the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia, Fiji, PNG and Kiribati. I acknowledge the sovereignty of those Pacific nations and that South Sea Islanders are indigenous to the Pacific but estranged from native lands and waters, and dispossessed of languages and cultural practices, birthrights, spiritualities and religions. The kidnapping and coercion of South Sea Islanders expedited the growth and wealth of early agricultural industries, particularly in Queensland, and occurred simultaneously with the dispersals, massacres and removals of Aboriginal people, weighing heavily on this work.

We recognise that the violent practice of blackbirding South Sea Islanders to these lands as slaves is not separate from, nor the same as, the massacres and dispossession of Aboriginal people, but it is related to these atrocities. In this relatedness and relationship with these experiences of these lands, we honour the unceded sovereign nations of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders. And as the children of enslaved people today, we do more than acknowledge the unceded sovereignty of First

Nations peoples. We commit to undertaking any South Sea Islander biographical work we do to honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of all generations and their lands and waters. In doing so, we honour our own histories of relationship with their lands. Today, we honour the Ngunnawal/Ngunawal and Ngambri peoples' love and connection to this place.

Telling the life stories of our 'game changers'

Imelda Miller: Having our ancestors with us in the introduction is important and probably helped bring the emotion out. As an outline of what I will cover today, I will explain who the South Sea Islander people are and why it's important to do biography work in our communities and write for the *ADB*. In addition, something that's been coming up a lot for us in all our different workplaces is the issue of protocols, especially who has the right to tell somebody's story. With a growing interest from academia in global histories of slavery connected to Queensland and South Sea Islander history, many outside our communities want to research us. Going forward, how do we manage, control and assert ownership over these stories? It's a practice we're trying to feed into the larger OWP for the benefit of our communities.

I wanted to start by saying thank you to both Kim and Melinda for positioning us here in this space and for the work we do in our community. I'm reminded that this is emotional work and traumatic as well. I wanted to thank the OWP for bringing us together and having this opportunity to talk with one another face-to-face to discuss protocols and how we want to do the work that is so important. I'd also like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners and thank both of you for doing that on our behalf. Being on these lands is a privilege and our relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters are important to us. Our families are interconnected, and so too are some of our experiences.

As a curator, I don't always get the opportunity to work on South Sea Islander material and history. When I do, my work has been on ASSI identity and the creation of spaces around plantation material, culture, archival documentation and contemporary collections interwoven with personal narratives and memories to acknowledge a hidden history and to value an authentic ASSI voice past, present and future. People ask me why I work in museums: I feel that there's important work to do in archives because they tell our stories. It's really important for us as a community to reclaim that space and our narratives. I feel a big part of my work is not just me connecting to those collections but encouraging community to connect with the collections and archives that tell *our stories* as a collective. It is through this connection of people and objects that our community stories come to light. We are the experts and we know our families, connections and lived experiences. Some not so well, but that's why we'll come together and discuss them. I see the archives as a fantastic way to bring people together to talk about history. We're so busy living our everyday lives that we don't get time to sit in our history and talk about our history

to one another. At the State Library of Queensland, I did some work a few years ago as part of an exhibition—what we call a 'White Gloves Tour'. It's when people wear white gloves to look at original documentation kept in the archives. Normally, people don't get to see this original material. However, by creating spaces and pathways for community and archival collections to come together, you can begin to understand the significance and relevance of this material to community today. In more recent times, we have used a similar process to connect people to significant sites in places such as Joskeleigh and Ayr. We have hosted community days to encourage people out to these sites to connect to the places, to research and to empower people to understand their role in remembering or connecting to the histories and ancestorial stories connected to these sites.

Today, I wanted to do a '101' about South Sea Islander/ASSI community experiences in this landscape. This particular history has many narratives, and I'm only skimming the surface. The ASSI community was officially recognised by the Australian government in 1994, followed by the Queensland government in 2000. Very little is known about this recognition and Australia's forced enslavement of Pacific Islanders as plantation labourers between 1847 and 1904—these are our forebears who are called South Sea Islanders. Today, their descendants, ASSIs, all continue to follow a path made by generations before us to articulate our history, using our own words to change the narrative about South Sea Islander history, our communities and our lived experiences over the last 160 years.

When people think of us, they usually think of sugar, but we are much more than just sugar. Our community, like many others, has made significant contributions to the development of this country. These narratives must be more visible and accessible to the wider public and our communities. I hope today we can shed some light on how the *ADB* can be a platform to highlight the achievements of some of our 'game changers' in the ASSI community. South Sea Islander stories are often hidden, defined by a unique but under-researched history of South Sea Islanders and their descendants who were the backbone of Australia's sugar industry. Human trading of Islanders started as early as 1847 in New South Wales. However, the main trafficking of South Sea Islanders was in Queensland between 1863 and 1904. Our ancestors were mainly from the island nations of Vanuatu and the Solomons, but also New Caledonia, Fiji, Kiribati, Tuvalu, New Ireland and Milne Bay provinces of PNG. Over 62,000 contracts were issued to South Sea Islanders—men, women and children.

Many came here by force, and others came by choice, particularly in the early stages. The practice of blackbirding involved the use of trickery or coercion to secure cheap or unpaid labour. Men, women and children worked for long hours in cotton and sugar plantations in what we now call Australia for little, if any, money, and for much less than white labourers. Some lived and worked in slave-like conditions, undertaking backbreaking work, such as clearing the land of scrub, trees and rocks ready for the planting of sugarcane, in tropical northern heat of 40°C in the summer and 3°C

in the winter. Surviving was no easy task. South Sea Islanders were exploited and discriminated against, and there was little protection from the work, the environment or the system. This was a new land, a new plantation and a new power system. Islanders had few rights compared to other workers.

Islanders came from different places, spoke different languages and were forced to live together under the plantation labour system that controlled their daily lives, including what they wore, where they worked, what they ate and how they lived. South Sea Islanders were employed all along the Queensland coastline and into northern New South Wales on what were called 'indentured labour' contracts. Many worked for 40 years. South Sea Islanders worked these lands and crossed backwards and forwards across the Pacific. The people, as I said, came from different islands and different countries. Once here, they tried to create a place by having families and creating a community. By 1901, some 10,000 South Sea Islanders were in Australia, and they were not just working—they were living and maybe even thriving here; some owned or had been gifted lands; they were making connections and establishing local relationships; they were marrying people on other islands; and they were marrying First Nations people, moving along the coastline and throughout the landscape.

However, in 1901, the government of the day brought about the so-called White Australia policy with the introduction of the *Immigration Restriction Act*, which was designed to stop non-European immigration into Australia. This led to the mass deportation of South Sea Islanders. Many Islanders sought to stay in Queensland and fought to be granted an exemption from moving. I want to make special mention of this because our ancestors were 'game changers'. Some wanted to stay because they were making families and some were too old to go. The circumstances had changed. And so they were fighting for rights for people who had none. This is important. After all, when people think about what or who an ASSI is, this is a really crucial point, because family and making and creating a community are what changed us. By wanting to stay here, South Sea Islanders were saying goodbye to the island life they once knew. This led to the loss of languages, dances and cultures. I can't even imagine how that must have felt for them. However, in that, they were thinking, I suppose, of future generations. It was the likes of people such as Alick Malicola, Henry Tonga and other members of the Pacific Islander's Association, as well as members in Rockhampton such as William Petersen, who fought and put up petitions to the king in 1902–03 and prime minister Alfred Deakin in 1906, to fight against the deportation of South Sea Islanders. There are petitions with South Sea Islander names in the archives, proving that people fought for the right to stay or go. During this time, many Islanders who weren't granted exemption were sent back to the islands, with some 1,200–1,500 remaining here. The precise number is unknown because people hid in the bushes. We are the descendants of the South Sea Islanders who remained. And that is a really important point in our history and our identity.

The people who stayed weren't from 'here'; in opting to stay here, they had to say goodbye to 'there'—their island homes. South Sea Islanders then formed little communities hidden on the outskirts of coastal towns, perhaps reminiscent of a home they remembered from across the oceans, places where they could maintain a more familiar, self-sufficient island lifestyle, including fishing, growing market gardens, boat-making, carpentry, labouring, singing and playing music, and educating their children. South Sea Islanders were, thus, creating a new cultural identity. From 1910 to 1970, there is little documentary record of these new emerging communities, but people continued to face new challenges through discrimination and further exploitation. However, Islanders continued to support their families by going to work, some taking their children with them to help get money for their families. They went to war. They worked in hospitals and pastoral and maritime industries. Later, people found work in railways, mines, education and even politics. For 90 years, our South Sea Islander ancestors moved through their lives, settling communities along the eastern coastline in northern New South Wales and further afield. In 1994, the Australian government acknowledged the ASSI community as a distinct cultural group. A small contingent of our community went to Canberra, and I actually remember them saying: 'We need to go … We need to go there. This is a big occasion.' When I think about it and look at people like Uncle Warren 'Joe' Leo, I wonder what it meant for them to wait that long to be recognised, to be seen as a cultural group. It's because of them that I knew who I was from an early age, and I'm very thankful for these game changers, these role models, who took a risk and shone a light so that we could step in those footsteps.

Now, 29 years on, there's still little known about the achievements and contributions of Australian South Sea Islanders in this country. Such recognition is long overdue. Now is the time to continue the movement for visibility, starting with our South Sea Islander game changers and role models. It's wonderful to think that, one day, Australian South Sea Islanders might automatically be included in the conversation about Australia's history, rather than an afterthought. I think this game changing is history-making.

South Sea Islander life writing

Kim Kruger: We acknowledge the South Sea Islander biographical works that are already written and that we live and work in a continuum of biographical storytelling. Much of this work is in our community histories, like *Fragments of a Lost Heritage* (1989) by Noel Fatnowna. There are community histories from Mackay and from Kanaka Town in Rockhampton, and there are individual and family biographies. *The South Sea Islander Garden of Memories* and *Fields of Sorrow: Oral History of the*

Mackay South Sea Islanders (Kanakas) and Their Descendants are from Mackay too.[3] Everyone should know who Faith Bandler is. She wrote a biography of her father's experience called *Wacvie*.[4] It was about speaking back to the narrative that 'slavery didn't exist', the notion that the South Sea Islander experience was not one of slavery. These community histories and family biographies are important. Truth-telling challenges the dominant narrative.

In my research on my mother, Patricia Corowa's political life, these community biographies have been important, because they tell us who we are and what our cultural values are as South Sea Islander people. *Some* of these values are shared with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We acknowledge that we are not starting something new and that storytelling and knowing our history and genealogies are all part of who we are. We know who we are through our stories. Our community biographers have left significant information for us. As an example, this morning Imelda showed me the book *The South Sea Islander Garden of Memories.*[5] The book includes an entry on Charlie Miller and his wife Mary Romud, who is my ancestor, providing new information to me and my family's history research. There is more of my family history in Lloyd Willie's *History of Kanaka Town*.[6] These community histories are our canon. There are many more community and family biographies than those mentioned here, and they are all important because these histories, based on our families' oral histories, are where we learn about and remember our role models and game changers and the history their lives embodied.[7] Waanyi author Alexis Wright's important essay 'What Happens When You Tell Somebody Else's Story?' makes clear that, as holders of our peoples' stories, we need to be in charge of telling them, not only because they hold ancient wisdom, but also because if we let other people tell them for us, they can become distorted or be used against us in the service of other peoples' agendas.[8]

Turning to the *ADB*, it is published in printed form, but there's also a large web presence with different sections. As a member of the OWP, I have been looking through the dictionary for South Sea Islander people. Using various search terms, I found about 13 people. I searched 'South Sea Islander' and 'Kanaka' as well as family names. There are a handful of entries on the Fatnowna family and a few more of other historically significant people. That's not many given our 150-year history on

3 Mackay City Council and Pat Hamilton, *The South Sea Islander Garden of Memories* (Mackay: Mackay City Council, 1998); Christine Andrews and Penny Cook, *Fields of Sorrow: Oral History of the Mackay South Sea Islanders (Kanakas) and Their Descendants* (Mackay: Australian South Sea Islanders United Council, 2000).

4 Faith Bandler, *Wacvie* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1977).

5 Mackay City Council and Hamilton, *The South Sea Islander Garden of Memories*.

6 Lloyd Willie, *History of Kanaka Town* (North Rockhampton Kanaka Town Reunion Committee, 1998).

7 See Carine Davias, 'Interconnected Spaces in the Life Narratives of Australian South Sea Islanders', *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 38, no. 2 (2016): 63–71, doi.org/10.4000/ces.4892; Clive Moore, *Hardwork: Australian South Sea Islander Bibliography with a Select Bibliography on the Sugar Industry and Pacific Labour* (Sydney: Australian South Sea Islanders, Port Jackson Limited, 2019).

8 Alexis Wright, 'What Happens When You Tell Somebody Else's Story?', *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 15, no. 2 (2018): 136–39, doi.org/10.1002/aps.1576.

this continent. So, taking up Imelda's call to honour our game changers, and centring ourselves as experts on our history, it is clear that we need to write more entries on South Sea Islanders for the *ADB* that place our communities and our peoples' contributions on the record, thereby making our history visible.

The *ADB* online features different headings, signifying different parts of the dictionary. The blue headings are the 'official' dictionary; everything in that section has been commissioned by the *ADB* and research edited (fact-checked). New *ADB* entries (blue section) are published in hard copy every five or so years. Indigenous *ADB* entries (blue section) are overseen by the Indigenous Working Party (IWP), which Katerina Teaiwa has described as a sister group to the OWP. There is a green section called People Australia, which features biographical articles that have not been commissioned by the *ADB*, short entries on people about whom little is known and placeholder entries for people who will eventually be added to the *ADB* proper, and several other sections. The *ADB* (blue section) usually only publishes entries on people who passed away 25 or more years ago. It is currently working on entries for people who passed away up to the year 2000; however, some Indigenous *ADB* entries have been published for people who died more recently (e.g. Jimmy Little). In general, though, people like Aunty Faith Bandler, who passed away in 2015, are not eligible to be considered for the *ADB* yet. Instead, she has entries on People Australia, Obituaries Australia and Pacific Islander Biography.

The life of Aunty Mabel Edmund

Dr Melinda Mann: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entries can be found across all sections of the *ADB* online, and all appear in the Indigenous Australia section. Importantly, not all of the entries in Indigenous Australia have been commissioned by the IWP. Many come from the Australian Indigenous Autobiography Archive and take the form of notes under standardised subheadings.

My consideration of South Sea Islander and Melanesian life stories focuses on ethics and protocols. To do this, I consider the overlap that exists between Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander populations via the Indigenous Australia entry for the late Mabel Edmund, which comes from the Australian Indigenous Autobiography Archive. It details her birth in 1930 in Rockhampton and her cultural heritage as both Aboriginal and ASSI. Under education, it notes that she attended two high schools in North Rockhampton. Her occupations are recorded as autobiographer, memoirist, Indigenous leader, Indigenous rights activist, Labor Party organiser, local government counsellor and artist. She was a member of the Order of Australia and helped to establish the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service in 1973, serving as district president, state councillor and, eventually, state secretary. She was appointed to the Aboriginal Loans Commission and her political affiliation was with the ALP. Mabel worked on various sheep and cattle stations including Bombandy station near Rockhampton, and Rosedale station near Jericho

in Queensland. She served as a local government councillor for the Livingston Shire Council, which takes in the Yeppoon and Capricorn Coast areas to the east and north of Rockhampton. Mabel wrote the autobiography *No Regrets*, which was published by the University of Queensland Press in 1992.[9] In 1996, she published *Hello, Johnny!: Stories of My Aboriginal and South Sea Islander Family*.[10] As an artist, she had her first exhibition at the Rockhampton Art Gallery during National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week in 1987, and, in the following year, she had another show at the Rockhampton Art Gallery. In 1989, her paintings were displayed at the Walter Reed Community Arts Centre in Rockhampton, and an exhibition of her works at the Rockhampton Opera Gallery in 2002 was titled *Life Has Been Good: The Art of Mabel Edmund*.[11] In 2022, the Rockhampton Regional Council opened its new public Museum of Art facility. One of Mabel's works was exhibited at the inaugural exhibition *Welcome Home*, featuring the most significant works from the Rockhampton permanent collection.

Today, I want to talk about biography and the way that biographies have been created, defined and used in my community. I'm focusing on Mabel Edmund because we are from the same Aboriginal and South Sea Islander communities and families. Her Indigenous Australia entry is based on excerpts from her first autobiography, *No Regrets*, published in 1992. This was the year of the Mabo decision and prime minister Paul Keating's Redfern Address. *No Regrets* was written during an extraordinary decade for race relations and Black politics. It continues to have an influence 30 years since its publication and 15 years since Mabel's passing. I anticipate that Mabel's written and artistic works will grow in influence over the coming decades as her stories become reference points and sources of evidence for future generations.

For personal context, Mabel Edmund was my paternal grandfather's youngest sister. My grandfather was one of the 'Johnnys' she wrote about in her second memoir, *Hello, Johnny!*, published in 1996. We spent a lot of time with Aunty Mabel, who had a very special bond with both my parents but particularly my father, Robert, who is mentioned in her books along with some of his siblings, Marcia, Carol, Bill and George. Aunty Mabel was incredibly generous. She took time to visit us when we lived interstate. She was so much fun, one of those aunties we wanted to be around all the time. When she came to visit, she would often take care of my siblings and I when our parents worked picking fruit. On one occasion, I recall her addressing a racism incident that I had been involved in at my primary school. I was in Grade 5. She had heard me sharing with my family that sometimes students called me racial slurs instead of my name and that it had become almost constant. Aunty Mabel took it upon herself to meet with the school principal and then asked if she could address

9 Mabel Edmund, *No Regrets* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1992).
10 Mabel Edmund, *Hello, Johnny!: Stories of My Aboriginal and South Sea Islander Family* (Rockhampton: Central Queensland University Press, 1996).
11 Mabel Edmund, *Life Has Been Good: The Art of Mabel Edmund: 18 March – 5 May 2002* (Rockhampton: Rockhampton Art Gallery, 2002).

the class, to which he agreed. I was sitting at my desk towards the back when she walked into my classroom. She was tiny in stature and had the sweetest voice but her determination to talk about the impact of racism made her look 10 feet tall to me. It was the mid-1980s and from that point forward I knew I wanted to be like her.

Aunty Mabel became my most trusted guide and she continues to inspire. She was the person I went to when I was deciding if I should go to university in the early to mid-1990s. In fact, she was the only person I knew who had any idea what a university was. I talked with her about getting married and I remember her hesitating when I asked her that question. I probably should have paid more attention to her hesitation. She was also one of the very first people I brought my babies to visit shortly after they were born. In telling my stories of her, I want to respect that Aunty Mabel's legacy belongs to her children and her children's children, and that they continue her work in our community, leading to significant changes. Her family are strong advocates for infrastructure for Aboriginal and South Sea Islander communities, especially in the work to reinstate names of Darumbal places.

Of particular value to the legacy of Aunty Mabel are her artistic works. Most of her works are acrylics on canvas and feature land and waterscapes, animals, families, societies and non-human forms, representations of customary law and practices. Images of the everyday lives of Darumbal people prior to colonisation add depth to Aunty Mabel's written autobiographical work. Her paintings of slave ships arriving in Queensland loaded with human cargo position her as one of few central Queensland artists, perhaps the only one in the region's history, to paint first contact invasion and blackbirding. Through her art style, she also depicts the relationship between Aboriginal lands and these events. In this discussion about biography, I want to point out that autobiography—the act of self-writing—especially for Black people, is a process that involves family contributions and negotiation around the ownership of specific stories. Imelda talked a bit about that and how such stories are retold, how they're allowed to be retold. Self-storying impacts not only family but also the broader white community and how it knows itself, as well as Indigenous scholarship and Black activism.

Distinguished Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson, in her seminal text *Talkin up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*, references Aunty Mabel's autobiography several times. Similarly, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, an acclaimed poet and storyteller, wrote about Aunty Mabel's life in an award-winning short story.[12] Drawing from numerous self-writings by Indigenous women, Moreton-Robinson points out that Indigenous women have been writing books about their lives and their families, kin and community—the people, places and events that shaped each *her*story—since the 1970s. She writes briefly of Aunty Mabel's experiences as an Aboriginal girl, woman, wife and mother, and as the granddaughter of a blackbirded

12 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2000), 10, 14, 27. See Edmund, *No Regrets*, 71, for information on Oodgeroo Noonuccal and Edmund's relationship.

Kanaky man. Moreton-Robinson points out that Aunty Mabel married into a large South Sea Islander family. She writes of Mabel's experiences of isolation and exclusion by other South Sea Islanders because of her mixed Aboriginal and South Sea Islander ancestry, her work as a domestic servant and stock woman, her experiences of racism and her career as an artist. Moreton-Robinson's illuminations show how Indigenous women have, by their own hand, made themselves the subjects of their own writing. In doing so, they have reduced the power of anthropological analysis by offering their own expert accounts of their humanness and humanity.

This act of literary resistance is both personal and political. As the colonial project on this continent continues to develop, the warning by Jan Larbalestier in 1991 that 'living Black and writing about it can be seen as a process of political confrontation' really comes to the fore, making complex the writing of Black experiences.[13] We see how this manifests now with Indigenous and diasporic Pacific communities, where the politics of knowing has moved away from lived experience based on relationality and accountability to a position as the 'one' or 'the only one'. Professor Chelsea Watego, Munanjahli and South Sea Islander woman, explains her reason for using storying as the basis of her book *Another Day in the Colony.* She states:

> there is an increasing volume of Indigenous scholarship that involves the extraction of Indigenous experience in order to become the ultimate knower of it. All of these examples exact violence on Black people, Black communities and Black consciousness because they are a colonising practice, of discovery, and of claiming something that doesn't belong to you–yet, or not at all.[14]

So, what I posit here is that, in the collation of biographies for the *ADB*, the objective should not simply be to gather a representative collection of South Sea Islander profiles. Instead, the goal should be to create a process situated in a relational protocol for South Sea Islander communities themselves to recount the lives of individual South Sea Islander peoples. South Sea Islander stories are inherently connected to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands and waters. A relational protocol in a biographical writing process ties the storying to the sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with their lands. This approach moves the work from extracting individual lives from families and communities to expressions of lived experiences—from 'one' story to 'everyone' storying. It ensures that the major beneficiaries of South Sea Islander biographies, even before they become *ADB* entries, are South Sea Islander families and communities. In the absence of a great breadth of South Sea Islander literature, biographies may become the critical recordings of South Sea Islander lived experiences from which future generations might infuse other literary forms. Regardless, refusing colonial narratives in biographical writings necessitates activation of relational protocols.

13 Jan Larbalestier, 'Through Their Own Eyes: An Interpretation of Aboriginal Women's Writing', in *Intersexions: Gender/Class/Culture/Ethnicity*, ed. Gill Bottomley, Marie de Lepervanche and Jeannie Martin (London: Routledge, 2020), 75–91, doi.org/10.4324/9781003116165-5.

14 Chelsea Watego, *Another Day in the Colony* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2021).

Perhaps even more importantly, a community-led approach to the collection of biographies for the *ADB* could entrench a deeper sense of South Sea Islander belonging. For South Sea Islanders, in the absence of ancient and ongoing geographical and ancestral ties to this continent or elsewhere, 'belonging' needs to be grounded in community-specific relationships and accountability to each other. Building the capacity of South Sea Islander communities to create and hold biographies of their loved ones could and would generate opportunities to reinforce reciprocity, obligation and shared experiences, coexistence, cooperation and social memory. So, I argue that the additional layers of Aunty Mabel's artistic contributions to her written biographical works increase the depth of her storytelling and her breadth of works. These combine to be key signposts she has left for us to follow or be inspired by. One of these signposts is to be deliberate in biographical endeavours by considering all of the ways written and artistic biographies contribute to remembering.

Aunty Mabel Edmund's Indigenous Australia entry on the *ADB* website also benefits the wider population. As a biographical sketch of a Darumbal woman, it increases the visibility of people who are both First Nations and South Sea Islander, highlighting the contributions of both to Australian history. It showcases the demographic reality of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and/or South Sea Islander coexistence. Aunty Mabel's legacy of organising and advocacy fuels some of the strongest voices among Aboriginal and South Sea Islander mob I know. The life stories of South Sea Islanders may do the same or they may, just as importantly, simply bring back to our collective memory those who have come before.

The life of Lisa Bellear

Kim referred to images from Narrm's Warrior Woman Lane, named for Lisa Bellear, that depict a mural by Charlotte Allingham of Lisa riding a bike wearing badges from various causes, her photographs and poetry flying out of a bag behind her and the poem 'Hanover Street, Brunswick' in which Lisa refers to herself as a warrior woman. An image of the short biography of Lisa from the Victorian Women's Trust's, 'Women in the Life of the City'[15] *project, was also referred to.*

Kim Kruger: I now turn to the Indigenous *ADB* entry that I wrote on my cousin Lisa Bellear, published online in 2023.[16] Lisa was a Goenpul, Noonuccal and South Sea Islander woman, a political activist, radio broadcaster and prolific writer and photographer. Her grandmother, Aunty Sadie Bellear (née Corowa), and my grandfather, Arthur Corowa, were siblings. Lisa and I are two of only five people in our very large family that were born in Melbourne and lived there permanently. We are a long way away from the rest of our family in northern New South Wales

15 Victorian Women's Trust, 'Women in the Life of the City', 2018, www.vwt.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Women_Life_City_2018_small_web-2.pdf.

16 Kim Kruger, 'Bellear, Lisa (1961–2006)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, published online 2023, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/bellear-lisa-32123/text39693.

and north Queensland. Lisa's mother, Aunty Jocelyn, died when Lisa was a baby and she was adopted by a non-Aboriginal family against the wishes of Aunty Sadie. I met Lisa through the Melbourne Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community when I was 17 years old. We found we lived around the corner from each other, and she employed me in my first job out of high school at the University of Melbourne. From then on, we would spend most weekends together at community and family events. We were in each other's lives a lot. Sadly, she passed away in 2006, aged just 45, a devastating loss for all who knew her.

After being adopted out, Lisa was introduced to the Melbourne Aboriginal community through Aboriginal students at the University of Melbourne and people at the hostel where she lived. They helped Lisa find her family in Sydney and back in the Tweed. This was done through genealogy experts in the community—the aunties in the Fitzroy pubs—and community organisations that helped to work out connections using oral history. The aunties had been doing that ever since there was a community in Fitzroy. When they heard that Lisa's mother had passed away, she was informally adopted by a Torres Strait Islander family, and she became very active in the Aboriginal community in Melbourne and nationally.

Lisa was an extremely driven person. She qualified as a social worker at the University of Melbourne. Then she became the Koorie Liaison Officer and created an amazing environment for Aboriginal people on campus. She was essential in supporting some of the first Aboriginal lawyers and the first Aboriginal doctor in Victoria, all significant game changers, and, importantly, she brought grassroots community into the privileged place that is the University of Melbourne. It was where the elite went to study, and she just broke it open by bringing the aunties out of Fitzroy and onto campus. They went about telling people how to behave and teaching Aboriginal protocols to people who came in from all over the continent.

The creative arts were very important to Lisa. She wrote poetry constantly, took photos everywhere she went, took a turn in stand-up comedy and promoted the work of artists in all fields. She was a community radio broadcaster. She had a radio show called 'Not Another Koori Show', which she started with her sisters Destiny Deacon and Janina Harding, covering Indigenous news and issues. The show ran for over 20 years. She was politically involved, especially in Stolen Generations work. Since her passing, there has been a lot of commemoration of her. Lisa was a really dynamic person; she had her finger in many pies, yet, she was also very unassuming. A lot of her work was unpaid; often, she didn't have any money, so she'd be riding around on a bike, getting from one meeting to another, carrying all sorts of things with her.

The City of Melbourne named a street after Lisa. That was a funny thing because they approached us about naming a street after her following advocacy by Koori Women Mean Business and the Victorian Women's Trust. They said: 'We are trying to get more women's contributions to civic life recognised in the life of the city.' They came up with a list of 100 women, of whom 20 were Aboriginal. Lisa was the first person

to be commemorated from their recommendations. However, the City of Melbourne said: 'We can't use Bellear. We can't call it Bellear Lane because there's a Bellair Street five kilometres away. People might get confused.' So I said: 'OK? Well, can you call it Lisa Bellear Lane?' They said: 'We don't use first names.' This was odd because they wanted to recognise this woman, but they didn't want to name her. So, we came up with Warrior Woman Lane[17] from a line in one of Lisa's poems. So they named the lane, and the sign was stolen about four times because everyone thinks of Xena or has their own warrior woman in mind. So we went back to them and said: 'You need to tell them who this warrior woman is.' And so we got the City of Melbourne to install two temporary artworks in the laneway to provide context. We included the poem, entitled 'Hanover St, Brunswick', in which Lisa called herself a warrior woman in the mural by Wiradjuri and Ngiyampaa artist Charlotte Allingham, which represents all of Lisa's many interests and tells her story.[18] Lisa's Aboriginal, South Sea Islander, feminist, Black power and Stolen Generations–survivor interests, as well as her ties to Torres Strait Islanders, are all represented in the badges on her lapels. Some of her photos are in the bag flying out of the back because she was kind of chaotic, and she would rush around from place to place.

Part of Lisa's practice as a photographer was to take photos in the community and give them back to the community. They were for the community, not for white people. She was writing her PhD about undoing paternalistic practices in photography of Aboriginal people and articulating her practice of 'countering erasure'. She was looking at colonial photographs that were captioned 'black boy' or 'pickaninny' or similar for her PhD, so she made sure to always name the people in her photographs and return the images to the people in them. I worked on an exhibition of Lisa's photographs, *Close to You: The Lisa Bellear Picture Show*, drawn from 15,000 of her images, at the Koori Heritage Trust in Melbourne.[19] They are significant because they record the Aboriginal community from an insider perspective at a time before every phone had a camera.

Writing the entry on Lisa for the Indigenous *ADB* grew out of the experience of these two projects, the laneway commemoration and the photographic exhibition. Narungga poet and academic Natalie Harkin, an IWP member for the *ADB*, recommended I write Lisa's entry. Natalie is part of an amazing group of artist scholars, The Unbound Collective from South Australia, and I got to meet her through the Australian Association for Pacific Studies. Thus, Indigenous relationality operated in both the commissioning and writing of this entry, evidenced through my demonstrated knowledge of Lisa, community links and the process of checking stories and facts through trusted and reliable networks of people.

17 'Honouring Warrior Woman Lisa Bellear', Warrior Woman Lane, warriorwomanlane.com/.

18 See Lisa Bellear, *Dreaming in Urban Areas* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1996).

19 Virginia Fraser, Kim Kruger and Destiny Deacon, eds, *Close to You: The Lisa Bellear Picture Show* (Melbourne: Koorie Heritage Trust, 2016).

I want to explain the process of writing the entry, because there are some lessons the OWP can learn from the IWP that I found helpful. For example, the IWP provided a style guide. It had some suggestions of things to include, which helped me start writing the entry. The IWP adheres to the *AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research,* which is framed by the principles of Indigenous self-determination, Indigenous leadership, impact and value, and sustainability and accountability.[20] These are good principles for the OWP to consider. The style guide also gave starting points, like including the person's primary name and all the names they went by, their clan and language group, and their community and significant family in the first paragraph. In Lisa's case, I included information about her mother and father, as well as her uncles, as they are well known, but are not in the dictionary. One of her uncles, Robert (Bob) Bellear, was a judge, and another, Sol Bellear, was a significant activist in the Aboriginal community.

These style points helped me to get the first draft done. I drew on everything I'd already written about Lisa. And I also read a lot about her. She's very significant to many Aboriginal feminist poets and writers. They're grateful to her for smashing down doors and changing the way they think and talk about themselves. I wanted to acknowledge what she meant to this next generation of writers, people like Ellen Van Neerven and Timmah Ball.[21] I wrote about shared lived experiences, like all the meetings she dragged me to, the fights she had and all that sort of stuff. In keeping with the ethics protocol, I wrote the draft and then sent it to Lisa's family, because I'm not her direct family. A process of back and forth followed, with the family advising what they wanted to be kept in and taken out. A research editor at the *ADB* then fact-checked everything and made suggestions for changes that I passed to the family. It was a long process! It was good to do it during the pandemic and not to have tight deadlines on everything because it allowed more time for the process of back and forth with the family. I wanted to bring these reflections to this workshop for us to think through further, because we want to discuss protocols and things. It's like the steps involved in a peer-reviewed article, except, instead of peer reviewed, it is family reviewed.

Another work in Warrior Woman Lane has a QR code that links to further information about Lisa and her work, and you can also listen to her voice on one of her radio broadcasts. This is a form of living archive, a dynamic biography. I was so honoured to be approached to write the *ADB* entry. For me, it was significant to write from what I understood to be Lisa's worldview, which, really, reflects our shared worldview. People can fact check for themselves by listening to her radio broadcast and reading her writings. Thinking about the role of the *ADB*, and its use as a reliable starting point for researching people, my entry on Lisa will likely be read by school

20 See AIATSIS, *AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research* (Canberra: AIATSIS, 2020), aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research.

21 Ellen Van Neerven (they/them) is an award-winning Mununjali poet. See Timmah Ball, 'Imagining a Black, Queer Aboriginal Melbourne', *Literary Hub*, 12 December 2018, lithub.com/imagining-a-black-queer-aboriginal-melbourne/.

students and others. Touching on what Imelda spoke about, we need to increase our visibility as a community and not erase our people. As a bonus, writing an *ADB* entry means I have a publication credit. It's a great way for emerging researchers to develop their writing. Writing *ADB* entries is a way to build up emerging South Sea Islander scholars' publications. At the same time, we're laying some ground for people coming after us regarding what the old people did for us.

The presentation concluded with a discussion of the key takeaways discussed throughout.

This discussion of our work, the genealogy of biography or life writing for South Sea Islander peoples and communities, the importance of telling our own stories, comes from grappling with the ethics and protocols of writing our people into the *ADB* and onto the historical record. Our starting point is our positionality, as a distinct cultural group that has only been formally recognised by the state in the last 30 years, as 'neither indigenous nor immigrant', but with many shared impacts of settler colonialism on our histories as well as cultural values shared with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on whose land we now live.[22] We understand our obligation to nurture good relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, respect their sovereignty, and live in solidarity and reciprocity.

We can learn much from what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have established in written protocols for life writing: having the right people tell the story; family permission; and writing from a place of community and collective self-determination, empowerment and strength. We can also draw on the protocols developed by South Sea Islander organisations, like Mackay and District ASSI Association's 'Drumming the Story: It's Our Business'. These protocols were developed with 78 families from the district and emphasised open communication, recognition of other community priorities and waiting to be invited rather than setting the agenda as a researcher. We are also mindful that there are protocols from home islands in the Pacific that may also need to be observed.

We brought these considerations to this workshop to see what protocols other participants had enacted and to offer our findings as a starting point for the OWP to develop its own protocols and for our South Sea Islander communities to tell us what they need to help tell their stories proper way. We don't need to crash in and reproduce extractive practices that cause harm in our communities. As South Sea Islanders with long associations, including intermarriage, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, we are well placed to offer a way forward for all Oceanic communities living on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands to demonstrate reciprocity and good relationality in all that we do, including our life writing.

22 Kim Kruger, 'The Black Power Activism of Patricia Corowa at the Intersection of Aboriginal and South Sea Islander Political Organisation' (unpublished manuscript, 2020).

Honouring the FMI sisters of Vunapope

LISA HILLI

> 'The Little Sisters' (Indigenous Sisters) would creep in and leave a bunch of bananas or taro for us. They were tortured but did not stop doing this. The food would just be left there … We never saw them and were never allowed to speak to them.
>
> —Sister Berenice Twohill[1]

In a valley concealed by dense tropical forest several kilometres inland from the Catholic Mission of Vunapope, a group of local Papua New Guinean women trudged tirelessly up and down a steep incline every day, delivering locally grown produce at the risk of their own lives to sustain an interned group of approximately 300 malnourished civilians. This remarkable group of Papua New Guinean women kept these civilians alive for almost three years. They were Katolik (Catholic) sisters from the Daughters of Mary Immaculate (Filae Maria Immaculata) congregation, more commonly known as the FMI sisters of Vunapope.

The international group of civilians detained during Japan's military occupation of Rabaul in World War II were predominantly European and American affiliates of the Catholic Church congregations Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (OLSH) and Sacred Heart Mission (MSC). Sister Berenice Twohill was one of a few Australian citizens who chose to stay in the territory, rather than flee with the majority of Australians upon Japan's invasion in January 1942. The Australian telemovie *Sisters of War*, released in 2010, portrayed the Australian Catholic sisters' harrowing experience; however, it reduced the 45 FMI sisters' efforts and lives to only one Papua New Guinean woman, and excluded the mixed-race children who were also detained.

Similar to the attack on Pearl Harbor in the American-occupied Territory of Hawai'i several weeks earlier, Japan's invasion of Rabaul caught everyone in the former Australian-occupied Territories of Papua and New Guinea by surprise. Under Emperor Hirohito's reign, Japan saw itself as the liberator from Western imperialism of the indigenous peoples of Asia and the Pacific during WWII or the 'Sacred War'.

1 Sister Berenice Twohill, 'Interview with Sr. M. Berenice Twohill', 13 October 2000, www.angellpro.com.au/mission.htm (site discontinued).

Interviewed in Noriko Sekiguchi's award-winning 1989 film *Senso Daughters*, a former Japanese military officer said: 'Japan was defending Papua New Guinean people. We only used their land as a battlefield.'[2]

Offering a Japanese female perspective, *Senso Daughters* illuminates the confronting history of Japanese military sexual exploitation during the war in and around Rabaul, which affected Korean, Okinawan, Japanese and Papua New Guinean women. The Cosmopolitan Hotel in Rabaul was the largest military brothel and one of many operated by and for Japanese servicemen and officers. A Japanese matron in New Guinea, Formiko Omori, stated in the documentary that 'the comfort women were a necessary evil … if we hadn't taken those women with us there would've been a lot of trouble for the native women'.[3]

The remaining Australian, American and European civilians fled to the safety of the Catholic Mission of Vunapope, a temporary refuge, where they were eventually detained by the Japanese. It was here at Vunapope that the Japanese informed the 'Black Sisters' that 'they were free from the slavery of their European masters'.[4] However, the FMI sisters refused to abandon their faith and concern for the wellbeing of the people who had taught them the ways of their embraced European spirituality. Banished from Vunapope by the Japanese military, the FMI sisters fled; while a few returned to their villages, a large number of the 45 sisters remained nearby in huts built by local Tolai men.

In their temporary accommodation, the FMI sisters began to grow local produce to feed the Catholic missionaries, civilians and mixed-race children interned at Vunapope. Most of the mixed-race children had Papua New Guinean, German, Japanese and Chinese parents or parentage. They were the genealogical embodiment of people in the contact zone of the German New Guinea colonial era of 1884–1914. Any fatherless children who were of mixed parentage during the German New Guinea colonial era were removed from the villages by Catholic representatives and raised at Vunapope by German nuns. After World War I, most of the German Catholic missionaries were allowed to stay in the Australian territory. At Vunapope, these mixed-race children invented a creole German language known as Unserdeutsch, with influences from Tok Pisin, a language brought back by enslaved Melanesian labourers in German Samoa plantations operated by the Deutsche Handel und Gesellschafts Plantagenet.

The Unserdeutsch (our German) creole evolved from these mixed-race children, who used it to discreetly communicate with each other at Vunapope without German nuns being able to understand them—a linguistic and bodily resistance to learning

2 As quoted by former Japanese military officer in Noriko Sekiguchi, *Senso Daughters* (Canberra: Ronin Films, 1990), DVD, 55 min.

3 Formiko Omori, matron, in *Senso Daughters.*

4 Formiko Omori, matron, in *Senso Daughters.*

the Deutsche language. The mixed-race children and their descendants later became known as the Unserdeutsch of Vunapope—a distinct community. They mostly live in Queensland today and are indebted to the FMI sisters' efforts. While interned at Ramale, Japanese soldiers offered lollies and treats to mixed-race children that they recognised as having Japanese physical traits.[5]

When American-Australian Allied forces bombed the Catholic Mission of Vunapope, all remaining civilians initially detained there were marched by foot, several kilometres inland to a deep valley known locally as Ramale (see Figure 1). The FMI sisters continued to dedicate themselves to growing and providing fresh produce for the prisoners there, until they were liberated by Australian soldiers aided by the Red Cross after Japan's surrender in September 1945. Captured by an Australian military photographer, a black and white photograph shows several FMI sisters inside Ramale on 14 September 1945, wearing habits of modest grey, black cinctures around their waists and white head gowns, radiating with joy (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: Unserdeutsch children at Ramale.
Source: AWM 096831.

5 Personal communication with Chris Kikuchi, Unserdeutsch of Vunapope community, Brisbane, 2018

Figure 2: FMI sisters of Vunapope.

Note: Digital collage by Lisa Hilli, commissioned by the Australian War Memorial, 2020. Photographed inside a liberated internment camp in PNG in 1945. Twelve FMI sisters are veiled and adorned with flowers that reference some of the 17 nationalities among the 300 civilians they helped keep alive at Ramale during WWII. The flowers also reference the 'comfort women' brought to Rabaul. In the original image, FMI sisters at Ramale with Sister Cecelia (centre) and Sister Teresia (right of Sister Cecelia). September 1945.

Source: AWM 0968604.

The only other photograph of the FMI sisters from the Pacific theatre shows two sisters in the presence of the Kempeitai (Japanese military police) who tortured them (see Figure 3). The sisters were tortured for allegedly saying '*Amerika namba wan Nippon namba tu*' (America number one, Japan number two). They were punished by a bamboo torture method, carried out by Papua New Guinean men. Prior to being punished, the Kempei asked Sister Teresia if it was true that she had spoken disparagingly of Nippon, which she denied. The Kempei then asked the sisters collectively: 'Sisters Black Skin, you like me cut off your head or Sister Teresia's only?' They replied: 'Please Sir, cut off all the Sister's heads. We prefer it that way.' The Kempei then asked: 'Aren't you frightened to die?' They replied: 'No Sir, we are glad to die.'[6]

6 Sister M. Adela, *I Will Give Them One Heart* (Vunapope, 1968), 63–64.

Figure 3: Japanese Kempeitai (police) officer named Muru with Sister Teresia (left) and Sister Cecelia (right) who were tortured with bamboo after being falsely accused of saying 'America number one, Nippon number two!', 5 December 1945.
Source: AWM 099283.

The FMI sisters' peaceful resistance to Japanese occupation of their lands during WWII can be described in their words, spoken during a conversation with Sakaiama, a Japanese officer in charge of Telo near Bitapaka: 'this is not our war but yours. We have nothing to do with it. We obey your laws, but we are not fighting anybody.'[7]

The year 2012 marked the centenary of the establishment of Papua New Guinea's first Catholic convent for indigenous women. The FMI sisters who died during WWII are remembered through a memorial at the entrance to the FMI Convent at Vunapope, thanks to the FMI archivist Sister Margaret Maladede, and a commissioned artwork by the author, which is held in the national collection of the Australian War Memorial (see Figure 4–6).

7 Sister Adela, *I Will Give Them*, 63–64.

Figure 4: Daughters of Mary Immaculate, FMI Convent, Vunapope, 100-year memorial.

Source: Image by Lisa Hilli, 2018.

Figure 5: Memorial detail of FMI sisters who died during WWII, Vunapope, Papua New Guinea.

Source: Image by Lisa Hilli, 2018.

Figure 6: Detail of 45 hand-embroidered cotton cinctures (religious belts worn by nuns) representing the heroic FMI sisters at Ramale.

Source: Artwork and image by Lisa Hilli, commissioned by the Australian War Memorial, 2020.

The names of 41 of the 45 heroic FMI sisters who remained are listed below.

Sister Adelaide
Sister Agatha
Sister Agnes
Sister Anna
Sister Augusta
Sister Balbina
Sister Benedicta
Sister Bernadetta
Sister Catherina
Sister Cecelia
Sister Celestina
Sister Christina
Sister Clara
Sister Cornelia
Sister Cresentia
Sister Dominica
Sister Elisabeth
Sister Georgina
Sister Gerads
Sister Joanna
Sister Josephine
Sister Juliana
Sister Kristine
Sister Liobe
Sister Ludwina
Sister Lusia
Sister Magdalena
Sister Maladena
Sister Margarita
Sister Mechtildis
Sister Monica
Sister Perpetua
Sister Petronilla
Sister Rita
Sister Rosalia
Sister Scholastica
Sister Sophia
Sister Tarsisia
Sister Teresia
Sister Theresa
Sister Whilelmena

On sharing Pacific lives

Lisa Hilli and Wendy Mocke

The following is an edited transcript of a dialogue between Lisa Hilli and the writer, actor and theatre maker Wendy Mocke, held on 11 February 2021. It took place online during the COVID-19 pandemic following a presentation by Hilli about her creative commission for the Australian War Memorial on the FMI sisters of the Vunapope Catholic Mission.[8] The presentation and dialogue were part of the 'Sharing Pacific Lives in Australia' workshop hosted by the OWP of the *ADB*, organised by Professor Katerina Teaiwa, Talei Luscia Mangioni and Dr Nicholas Hoare. The event was also supported by the Asia Pacific Innovation Program of the College of Asia and the Pacific at The Australian National University.

Wendy Mocke (WM): *Tenkyu stret, susa.* I'm extremely emotional hearing about our history. It's incredible work and just so profound. I'm hearing the richness of our history and the importance of our ancestors, particularly the women who played a part in our history. I will try my best not to *maus wara tumas*, which in Tok Pisin means to dribble on and stick to the time I have. In all of your newest artistic projects, Lisa, you've been able to tap into your national culture: how has your culture influenced or played a part in your art practice?

Lisa Hilli (LH): It's been very much a foundation to begin with, but it's been like an inherent one. It was always there because I was fortunate to have a very strong mother who raised me in Brisbane with a lot of strong cultural values, and I didn't realise that until I became an adult of about 25. I didn't realise that my upbringing was quite different from that of many other Australians—and so, it's everything. The matrilineal strength in Tolai culture is significant and important. We trace our ancestry through women, and land is shared through women, but that doesn't always necessarily mean there's equality there. I just assumed that there was. When I started talking to the FMI sisters, I had some jarring moments and realised that Tolai culture has been the foundation of my identity, and I'm fortunate I have that.

WM: So, as a Melanesian artist myself, I know that it's, as you mentioned, almost an instinct to bring our family with us to the work. However, we approach different artistic projects. You also photographed your mother as a part of the FMI sisters of Vunapope project. What did it mean for you to be a Pacific Islander Tolai woman documenting this specifically Pacific Tolai story?

LH: I don't think I realised its impact until I finished the work because whenever I return home, back to PNG and Rabaul, it's really hard to explain to my family what I do as an artist. If I say I'm a photographer, I think my family understand

8 Claire Hunter, '"It Was a Real Labour of Love"', Australian War Memorial, *Memorial Articles*, 14 September 2020, www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/artist-lisa-hilli-and-the-fmi-sisters.

that. So, in this actual work, I was there with Steven Gagau and many members of the Tolai community from Brisbane.[9] I was doing the research, and it wasn't until I actually finished that I realised what I was doing and why I went into it. I think it was purely because of 1) religion and 2) war—these are two really big notions of cultural identity for Papua New Guineans. They embrace and celebrate them. I was blown away because Papua New Guineans are so religious and spiritual, so anything to do with spirituality is embraced. I feel like they finally got what I did and why I do what I do. I just felt lifted. I felt lifted by my community and proud. It was probably one of the first times I was acknowledged in my 16-year career.

WM: I think you're definitely right, though. War and religion are popular themes for all Papua New Guineans. They can jump into them quite quickly and attach themselves to them. For an artist like you, that must have felt, as you mentioned, that your community had boosted your work.

LH: I think it's just a moment of pride, like seeing other Papua New Guineans be proud of these women. For me, it was like a double win because it was like, yes, I made this work. I'm really happy it's finished. And now Papua New Guineans, not just women, but Papua New Guinea men are embracing this and sharing it and they're boasting about it. That is significant in terms of the gender issues in our nation.

WM: As you mentioned in your presentation, there's a lot of research behind this. So, this consumes your whole life for a period, which I completely understand.

LH: It's like a third of what I did [laughs].

WM: I've had many conversations in the spaces I've been a part of with the theatre and screen world about who has the authority to tell what stories. Now, I'm interested to know, what's your take or opinion on outsiders to Pacific cultures recording and telling Papua New Guinean stories? Is there a way to do it correctly? And if so, how?

LH: I think we're at the point where we need to tell the stories from here on because so much is out there. I kept coming across so many stories, histories and documents telling stories about Papua New Guinean history. However, it's never from our perspective, our views. That's why I wanted to highlight Sister Margaret's history, specifically her 100-year history.[10] I clutched onto it like it was gold because I thought, where else am I going to get that? I did come across history that was very specific to Ramale, like the *Sisters of War* film based on a manuscript of the Australian Catholic sisters and nurses who were at Ramale.[11] That film completely erased all the mixed-race children from the film, and they reduced the 36 nuns, the 36 FMI sisters, to one

9 Steven Gagau is a Tolai cultural researcher and community collaborator affiliated with various academic, professional and voluntary organisations in Australia, including the University of Sydney, the Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures and the Australian Museum. He was present for the online lecture and presentation.

10 Sister Maladede, 'Daughters of Mary Immaculate (FMI)'.

11 Brendan Maher, *Sisters of War* (Fitzroy: Pericles Film Productions, 2010), television drama, 95 min.

woman. I kept coming across that and got a lot of interest from the Catholic Church in Australia. I know I annoyed the MSC (Missionaries of the Sacred Heart) Sisters in Sydney, particularly the archivist there. I kept asking many dumb questions because I didn't know anything about Catholic history or religion. But they ended up writing something on their website a year later because I was asking all these questions. So now, when you search for FMI sisters on the internet, all of these references come up, whereas when I was doing research two years ago, there was hardly anything.[12] There's a lot of information out there, so it's about championing those stories. But it's a lot of work. It takes a lot of time and dedication. But it's still important. I think that using my art is one avenue of circulating and memorialising history.

WM: Is there a way to do it correctly if you were outside that particular culture?

LH: I don't know, and it's a hard question to answer.

WM: I often get that in creative rooms or private spaces, it's people outside of Pacific cultures wanting to tell their stories. And if they don't do it, who else will? Navigating those conversations can be quite complex and a bit difficult. As you finesse your craft, you get a bit better at saying: 'Hold up. No, you don't have any authority to tell those stories.'

LH: I think if people are going to be telling a Pacific story on behalf of Pacific people or even the Pacific history, they need to do some reflection in terms of how they position themselves in that story or history. I think that's important because, during the research, I actually met the descendant of Bishop Louis Couppé, who was the Frenchman who established the Vunapope Mission.[13] And he's now doing his PhD on the FMI sisters. We had many conversations back and forth over Facebook Messenger. Not once during the exchange did I hear him discuss his direct genealogical link to that mission. So, he was still doing the same thing, still on the same paradigm of speaking on behalf of the people. He was asking me all these questions, even silly questions, like 'what is Tolai power?' [laughs] But I never once heard him self-reflect upon his own genealogical link to that history. I thought that was a huge oversight. I think it's really important to reflect on what your name is—even if it's not genealogical, even if it's historical. Are you part of the majority group, part of a European group or not? Look at that connection, reflect upon that and be very self-critical. I think that's how you place yourself very carefully.

12 Aside from Hilli's own website (lisahilli.com), articles can be found on the websites of the Australian War Memorial and Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. See, for example, 'Daughters of Mary Immaculate, PNG, Founded by Archbishop Louis Couppe MSC, a World War II 80th Anniversary', Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, 9 January 2022, www.misacor.org.au/item/28157-daughters-of-mary-immaculate-png-founded-by-archbishop-louis-couppe-msc-a-world-war-ii-80th-anniversary.

13 Hugh Laracy, 'Louis Couppé (1850–1926)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 1981, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/couppe-louis-5790/text9821.

WM: Do you think Australians know how to engage with Pacific artists and Pacific stories in the research and art world?

LH: No [laughs]. I've seen way too many Australian artists who aren't from the Pacific who go in and try to use Pacific art. Oh no, just stop. I'm so over it. I'm sorry; it makes my blood boil, and I have to spend all my energy back into my art practice and do it the right way.

WM: I feel you, *susa*. Okay, so what's your take on Australian attitudes towards Melanesian stories and histories?

LH: I think we're certainly appreciated as great storytellers. But we're not always given the platform to hold that space like I'm doing right now. I think what's important is being able to hold space and to tell our stories our way. If you look at the hierarchy of who gets to tell and share stories, publish and circulate stories, we are always at the bottom. It's really hard for us to get to that level to speak uninhibited, unhindered. I think this commission allowed me to go hard and really centre the women of my community. And that was a luxury. But it wasn't that there were always Australians telling me what to do. It was more myself saying, 'can I do this? Am I allowed to represent my own people?' And always having to question psychologically, 'am I allowed to do it because of that colonial conditioning? Am I allowed to do it?' So, we are allowed to centre ourselves. That was like a big undoing, and I'm always working on that. We're always working on something internally. For myself, I had to really justify that. I think we're all responsible for allowing others to share space, hold space and tell their stories when needed and when it's really important to do so.

WM: I think a lot of other Melanesians and Pacific people and I can relate to having to do the work continuously to unpack a little of that colonial conditioning, not feeling like if you take up space and being able to centre your people in the work, it's almost as if, am I allowed to exist here? So, I think that's something we actively do daily, and it's always in the back of our minds.

LH: And particularly with the commission because it looked at Australia and Papua New Guineans' shared war history, and I'm using Australian taxpayers' money. There was pushback here and there, but I pushed as far as I could go. I inserted the Korean, Japanese and Okinawan women's histories in that artwork, which was important.[14] I didn't have to do that, but I did it because the FMI sisters supported everyone. They were completely unbiased, so I tried to take their views and attitudes of embracing all humans, regardless of race and gender. They support everyone, and they are my idols.

WM: You mentioned that doing this creative project challenged many of your own perceptions of religion. Tell us a little bit about that.

14 See Noriko Sekiguchi, *Senso Daughters*.

LH: Well, that's a can of worms. I came from the perspective that religion and colonialism came in and basically fractured the culture of Papua New Guinea but also introduced new structures that we still embrace today, like religion. Over the years, I learned that. I was raised religious. I hated going to church as a child but went with my mum begrudgingly. Once I became an adult, I said, 'No, I'm not into religion.' I don't have any issues with religion. It was just not for me. Over the years, I've understood how important spirituality is to Papua New Guineans and all Pacific Islanders. I loved the duality in how we embraced it, but we also indigenised it.

So, at the FMI sisters' convent, I saw this beautiful structure that had a garden, and there was an honouring of the Ave Maria where she's standing. They've got this beautiful Tolai architectural structure, which we call *pal na pidik*. And it's a sacred structure. They combined indigenous architectural design motifs with a European female spiritual deity. I was also reading about hymnody and choral singing and how we indigenised European hymns as well. I was looking at that and thinking, 'Oh, wow, this is amazing because we've completely transformed a different culture that's been introduced and made it our own'. And that's what we do as Pacific Islanders. We are always reinventing and redesigning things that fit the purpose of our beliefs and our ideas. So, I had to really embrace these sisters' perspectives and knowledge of why they joined the church and also confront that there was gender inequality within my own community. That was the biggest one. It was Sister Margaret who enlightened me on this. I walked out of there with my head down, thinking, 'Oh my god, I've got to do some soul searching. I'm also a woman who's grown up outside of the culture.' I was very naive in terms of insights and personal experiences. It was really important that I embraced their perspective. My family is religious. I respect everyone who is religious. There's a lot to be learned through the teachings of religion in terms of its values.

WM: In terms of your process as an artist, whenever I write or devise creative projects, I often ask who my work is for, and why, as somewhat of an anchor to bounce off and ground me in my work. I'm wondering, through your work as an artist, researcher and historian, who do you create your work for, and who is it most important for you to reach?

LH: I feel like the first person I make work for is me: it's self-serving. It's because I want to. I want to see the things I don't see. What I always aspire to when I make artwork is, 'I've not seen this. This isn't being represented. I need to see this.' When I do that, I find that there are a lot of other people who are drawn to that. So, if I'm feeling this, you must be feeling this too—and find my community that way.

For this particular commission, I felt like I was making it for both Papua New Guineans and Australians because Australian and Papua New Guinean history goes back. It's deep, and it's going to be there forever. I wrestled with that for a bit, thinking, will we ever be able to unshackle that? The answer is no. There's good and bad in all relationships. I wanted to highlight that this was a positive aspect of

that shared history. I felt like I was making it for the FMI sisters to honour them because they need to be honoured and to be known in terms of what they did. People dismiss or think that nuns are tucked away with their prayer beads, doing nothing. I certainly had that assumption too. Then I realised, okay, what they do is actually really important for them and the broader community. Through their teachings and education, they were able to teach the next generation of Papua New Guineans.

I wanted to do the work for FMI sisters because I think they need to be honoured. But I also wanted to show Australians the sense of humanity of Papua New Guinean people, particularly women. That was important because I don't feel like our voices are heard strongly or loudly enough in terms of an autonomous voice, an independent voice. I wanted to show the amazingness of these women because they're the women I grew up with in my community and family. I relate to these women because I knew them. That's just what PNG women do. They will go and trudge down the mountain, carry the food and bring it to you. That's what they do. I don't think people understand that. I think there's this negative view, particularly in the media about PNG women, that we are beaten down. That's not the case, and that's not the PNG I know and have seen, that I've experienced, that I've lived. I wanted to show a different side, a very beautiful aspect of PNG in women's humanity.

WM: I love that you've humanised these amazing women. Oftentimes, women are portrayed as these silent types. Often, you don't really see them, and they're not acknowledged for their contributions to history, to communities. I think it does draw many similarities to your process as well. We start with these little seedlings of ideas of trying to understand our world and what it's like to be in this skin and to speak this language and understand where our ancestors have come from. Then you realise that it's actually a bigger, broader subject that our community can sort of relate to and connect with. Finally, Black women have featured prominently in your work from the get-go. What has learning about the FMI sisters' stories added to your life as an academic artist and a Melanesian woman?

LH: It's given me a sense of a deeper understanding of spirituality and women's autonomy in PNG. That's been a big thing for me in terms of understanding that because I didn't, and I humbly acknowledged that I had these assumptions. I think it's really important to do that as a researcher, as an academic, as an artist because if you don't, then you're not always going to get the story you think you want or that should be told. You can go in and try and get the story, but is that a true story from that person's perspective or whoever it is you're talking to for the research? So, I was always mindful of that and ensured that I acted in that Melanesian way when I engaged with people from my community. I feel like I am in the perfect position to be able to tell these kinds of stories. That's what I've learned. You and I both are aware of whether you're telling me these kinds of stories, and I think it's very important that we use our platforms to do it. So, if you are speaking broadly to the group, if you recognise that you're a person who has these distinct qualities or traits, identity and cultural

affiliations, go and tell that story because you have a very important and distinct insight into a sense of identity history or story from that particular community group. I think that's important. No one else from outside of the community will ever understand that and get as close to that as you.

WM: Incredible. *Tenkyu, tenkyu, susa*. Lisa, I'd like to thank you for your time and also for the creative work and endeavours you pursue. Your passion for history, your reactivating cultural objects and your active choices in centring people's narrative, particularly Melanesian women, are nothing short of amazing and extremely valuable to our community. *Tenkyu, susa*.

Koe folau ‘o Futukava mei Tonga ki Aositelelia: The voyage of ‘Footoocava’ from Tonga to Australia

RUTH (LUTE) FALEOLO AND EMMA ‘ILAIŪ VEHIKITE

Introduction

‘Koe folau ‘o Futukava mei Tonga ki Aositelelia’ translates as the ‘voyage of Futukava [or Footoocava (as the Reverend Walter Lawry penned it)][1] from Tonga to Australia’. Our recovery of this written account of the 1823 voyage marks the beginning of exploratory research into Futukava’s story and that of others like him: men and women who do not feature prominently in modern Tongan mobilities scholarship or history, but nonetheless provide evidence of the existence of Pacific people in Sydney during the early to mid-nineteenth century. As co-authors of this research, we would like to acknowledge the village of Mu‘a Tongatapu, where our paternal forefathers descend and where the nineteenth-century journey of Futukava began; in other words, the village and people to whom these recounted narratives belong.[2] Our research has involved archival document analysis, a review of available literature and, importantly, the tracing of oral histories through members of our communities both in Tongatapu and the diaspora.[3] The methodology incorporated in this historical biographical work is *talanoa–vā*, a Tongan narrative approach that is based on the maintenance of respectful sociocultural relational spaces, where reciprocal knowledge sharing occurs.[4] By incorporating insights from the latest Tongan research, we are reclaiming and decolonising the narrative of a Tongan ancestor from drowning in the

1 The spelling of ‘Footoocava’ by Lawry is incorrect in Lea Faka-Tonga: first, because there is no ‘c’ consonant; second, because the use of a double ‘oo’, where ‘o’ in Tonga sounds like the ‘o’ in ‘octopus’, causes a total mispronunciation of the chief’s actual name—Futukava. The correct Tongan vowel is ‘u’ for the extended ‘oo’ sound that Lawry was referencing from the English language ‘oo’ as in ‘look’, which sounds like ‘u’ in Lea Faka-Tonga.

2 Co-authors Ruth Faleolo and Emma ‘Ilaiū Vehikite are first cousins. Their fathers, ‘Ahoia ‘Ilaiū and the late Sioeli ‘Ilaiū (1948–2023), are brothers. ‘Ahoia is the first son, and Sioeli was the second son, of their late grandparents, Semisi (1922–2000) and ‘Ilaisaane ‘Ilaiū (1921–2003) from Mu‘a, Tongatapu.

3 Among others, we thank historian of Tonga’s missionary past Rev. Dr Geoffrey Cummins for his communications with us on this subject.

4 See Tevita O. Ka‘ili, *Marking Indigeneity: The Tongan Art of Sociospatial Relations* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2017); Ruth (Lute) Faleolo, ‘Talanoa moe vā: Pacific Knowledge-Sharing and Changing Sociocultural Spaces during COVID-19’, *Waikato Journal of Education* 26, no. 1 (2021): 125–34, doi.org/10.15663/wje.v26i1.763; David Taufui Mikato Fa‘avae, Ruth (Lute) Faleolo, ‘Elisapesi Hepi Havea, Dion Enari, Tepora Wright and Alvin Chand, ‘E-Talanoa as an Online Research Method: Extending vā–Relations across Spaces’, *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 18, no. 3 (2022): 391–401, doi.org/10.1177/11771801221118609; Ruth (Lute) Faleolo, ‘Re-visioning Online Pacific Research Methods for Knowledge Sharing that Maintains Respectful vā’, *Waka Kuaka: The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 132, nos. 1–2 (2023): 93–110, doi.org/10.15286/jps.132.1-2.93-110.

abyss of a colonial past.[5] It is our hope that this paper is the beginning of an ongoing process of discovering and recovering further untold stories from Tonga's migration records, both written and oral.

The *Palangi* (or European) version: Footoocava

Before moving to Futukava himself and our reasons for writing about him, we first need to spend some time with 'Footoocava'—the *Palangi* or European version of the man depicted by the Wesleyan missionary Walter Lawry in his November 1823 letter to the editor of the colonial newspaper the *Sydney Gazette*. Here, Footoocava is rendered as an important young chief busily and excitedly recounting the wonders that he had seen aboard a voyage to Sydney from his homeland with another Tongan called Tata who, Lawry tells us, 'had gone to another part of the island for the same purpose'.[6] Importantly, the scene, where Futukava is reporting back to his elders and chiefly circle, is situated in Mu'a, the spiritual centre and former capital of the Tu'i Tonga Empire where Lawry had also unsuccessfully tried to establish his Christian mission.[7] But the content of the report was fixed firmly on the sights of the New South Wales colony. According to the missionary:

> His [Footoocava's] remarks upon the stone walls, large houses, articles for barter in the shops, number of ships in the harbour, exercising of the soldiers, variety of fruits, enormous size of the horses and horned cattle, extent of the country; and, above all, the unbounded liberality and kindness of our friends produced an electrifying effect upon the chiefs, who sat amazed and overwhelmed to hear such reports from their own relatives, whose veracity they never questioned.[8]

Footoocava told the chiefs about the Methodist schools he visited and described 'the sacred attention which the *better sort* of people in Port Jackson pay to the Sabbath day, while the *mea varle* (people foolish) concerned themselves but little about it'.

5 See, especially, Ruth (Lute) Faleolo, Edmond Fehoko, Dagmar Dyck, Cathleen Hafu-Fetokai, Gemma Malungahu, Zaramasina L. Clark, 'Esiteli Hafoka, Finausina Tovo and David Taufui Mikato Fa'avae, 'Our Search for Intergenerational Rhythms as Tongan Global Scholars', *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal* 8, no. 2 (2024): 663–704, doi.org/10.18432/ari29797; Inez Fainga'a-Manu Sione, Ruth (Lute) Faleolo and Cathleen Hafu-Fetokai, 'Finding Harmony between Decolonization and Christianity in Academia', *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal* 8, no. 2 (2024): 519–46, doi.org/10.18432/ari29764.

6 Walter Lawry, letter to the editor, *Sydney Gazette*, 27 November 1823, 4. Tata, from Ruth's maternal grandparent's village of Houma, is the focus of another genealogical and village-based investigation.

7 In 1822, Lawry called Mu'a the 'Metropolis of Tonga', see Walter Lawry, 'Diary on Convict Ship Castlereagh and in Australasia, 1818–1825', 90, in Rev. Walter Lawry Papers, 1818–1847, State Library of New South Wales, cited in Phillip Parton and Geoffrey Clark, 'Low-Density Urbanisation: Prestate Settlement Growth in a Pacific Society', *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 31 (2024): 1485–521, doi.org/10.1007/s10816-024-09647-8. On Lawry's failed attempt to establish a mission, see Noel Rutherford, 'Shirley Baker and the Kingdom of Tonga' (PhD thesis, The Australian National University, 1966), 10–11; E. W. Hames, *Walter Lawry and the Wesleyan Mission in the South Seas* (Auckland: The Wesley Historical Society of New Zealand, 1967); Charles F. Urbanowicz, 'Motives and Methods: Missionaries in Tonga in the Early 19th Century', *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 86, no. 2 (1977): 251; I. C. Campbell, *Island Kingdom: Tonga Ancient & Modern* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 1992), 52.

8 Lawry, letter to the editor.

Footoocava's cameo then finished with an explanation to the surrounding chiefs that 'the men of Tonga would never be wise till they adopted the same measures as the *anga lelei*, good minded people of New South Wales'.[9]

The explicit references to Christianity and conversion suggest that Lawry's account concentrates on Footocava's experience and journey as a way of highlighting his own missionary work with our ancestral villagers and the religious objectives of the Wesleyan mission. The positive portrayal is a way of saying that the missionary's time in Tonga had not been a waste, and that all was not lost in the larger project of bringing Tongans out of their spiritual 'darkness'. Welcomed initially at Muʻa for the potential wealth of trade goods that he could provide, Lawry left Tonga with the belief that his life was in danger.[10] For the most part, his 14-month stint in Tonga from August 1822 to October 1823 was far from a success and, without mention of this context in the letter, the distinction between the missionary's agenda and Futukava's indigenous agency is perhaps not immediately obvious.

Moreover, Lawry's letter establishes the setting as being an assembly of chiefs seated around a 'cava ring'—better known to Tongans as *faikava*. According to Edmond S. Fehoko, the *faikava* is a habitual and cultural gathering (usually of menfolk) that reinforces *pukepuke fonua* (the maintenance of language and cultural ways).[11] *Faikava* continues to be practised in more contemporary contexts by Tongans and is especially important as a 'cultural classroom', in which engagement in debates, songs and music, *talanoa* (storying) and *talatalanoa* (free flow unstructured dialogue) help to maintain language and cultural practices.[12] This particular *faikava* of chiefly men in Muʻa would have been a regular gathering of leaders for the purpose of reinforcing cultural knowledge and shared understandings of current affairs. For us, this quite possibly meant that, rather than just hearing about Futukava's impressions, it was a further chance to reevaluate the Palangi (Lawry) and his political agendas. In response to hearing that the chiefs thought he could have been a military spy, Lawry wrote: 'it was nothing new for us to hear of their taking counsel together about the propriety, and even necessity, of killing us'. Such a comment reminds us that Lawry's was not the first ill-fated attempt at converting Tongans to Christianity, as, two decades earlier, the London Missionary Society had sent a missionary party during the middle of the Tongan civil war. Three of these men were killed at the village of Haʻateiho, while the rest fled to New South Wales.[13] No wonder Lawry wrote with a 'heavy heart' and 'discouragement' when he first set sail to Tonga, via New Zealand, in 1822.[14] While there is much more we could analyse here

9 Lawry, letter to the editor.

10 Campbell, *Island Kingdom*, 52.

11 See Edmond Samuel Fehoko, 'Pukepuke Fonua: An Exploratory Study on the Faikava as an Identity Marker for New Zealand–Born Tongan Males in Auckland, New Zealand' (MA thesis, Auckland University of Technology, 2014).

12 See Edmond S. Fehoko, 'The Cultural Classroom: The Faikava as an Epistemological Site for Teaching and Learning', paper presented at the *Kava: A Workshop for Kava Researchers and Enthusiasts, Anthropology and Pacific Studies Seminar Series*, University of Waikato, 21 April 2017, hdl.handle.net/10289/11048.

13 Campbell, *Island Kingdom*, 46.

14 S. G. Claughton, 'Walter Lawry (1793–1859)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, published first in hardcopy 1967, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lawry-walter-2337/text3045.

about Lawry's attempts to introduce Christianity to Tonga, we first want to highlight the potential gaps in Lawry's historic and sociocultural understanding, aspects that we think help explain why Futukava's journey was so important for himself and his *kainga* (kin) at this time, and the impact of this trip for the future of the island kingdom.

The Tongan version: Futukava

While Futukava's story might not ever be fully recovered, a better understanding of both place and modes of relationality can help us move closer to the Tongan version of the story. As noted, Lawry had initially settled at Muʻa, Tongatapu's first capital and seat of dynastic kings since at least the thirteenth century.[15] Here, he was a guest at the royal residence known as Api ko Uoleva (Figure 1) and placed under the protection of Palu, also known by locals as Fatu (but whom Lawry called Palou), the son of Mulikihaʻamea and heir to the Tuʻi Haʻatakalaua title.[16] As ʻIlaiū Vehikite discovered in 2021 when undertaking historical research in Muʻa (principally Tatakamotonga), Fatu/Palu and his chiefly counterparts were well known in the oral histories of the village (the royal estates and *palasi* or palace are sometimes referred to as 'the home of Fatu'), but the name Futukava was not readily recalled by the elders she spoke with. This does not mean that the historical context of Lawry's visit two centuries ago—and thus the circumstances of Futukava's voyage—is not widely appreciated, enabling us to make further inferences from the sparse written record.

It was, of course, a time of civil war and though Futukava might well have been too young to witness the beginnings of strife from 1799, especially the deaths of the Tuʻi Kanokupolu and Tuʻi Haʻatakalaua, he would have heard the oral traditions of the wars unfolding at the evening fire and been told about the importance of chiefs in bringing about relative stability after so much uncertainty. Given his age and stage, Futukava could well have undergone training to lead his village and strengthen alliances and been charged with the management of village fortresses and the organisation of local agricultural and cultural activities. He would have seen the big boats pulling into Nukuʻalofa and may have wondered how Lawry's ship might fare in the winds that he had used to navigate trade routes around the Tongan archipelago. More than this, Futukava must have known that another young Tongan, Tata, from Houma, in the west of Tongatapu, was also contemplating the voyage; the opportunity to build a partnership with Tata and form an alliance with his village, in addition to other educational and commercial opportunities, would have been very attractive.

15 The Uoleva property is still demarcated by the line of ancient trees that once stood tall in front of the palace buildings. Today, the trees are less majestic, as they have been cut after an arson that demolished the estate structures and historic building site soon after the turn of our new millennium. Parton and Clark have recently reminded us that Muʻa was Tongatapu's largest pre-European settlement, home to an estimated population of 6,700–7,600 people. Parton and Clark, 'Low-Density Urbanisation'.

16 Paula Onoafe Latu, 'Fakaongo and Tauʻataina: The Influences of the Tongan Traditional Religion, the European Civilization and the Wesleyan Teachings on the Formation of Tongan Religious Identities' (MPhil thesis, Massey University, 2011), 142n321.

Figure 1: Api ko Uoleva: The old palace grounds where Fatu lived at the time Lawry landed.

Source: Artwork by Lydiah Malia-Lose Faleolo, 22 February 2025, referencing a photograph taken by Emma ʻIlaiū Vehikite, 6 July 2021, Muʻa Tatakamotonga.

Futukava would have heard tales of Palangi and their ways before meeting Lawry and long before his journey to Sydney. He might have even met the castaway Palangi called William Mariner, who arrived in Tongatapu as a 14-year-old shipwreck survivor off the coast of Lifuka or the fellow *Port-au-Prince* survivor William Singleton, who introduced Lawry to the chiefs at Muʻa.[17] He would have certainly grown up in Muʻa

17 William Mariner, *Tonga Islands: William Mariner's Account: An Account of the Natives of the Tonga Islands in the South Pacific Ocean, with an Original Grammar and Vocabulary of Their Language*, ed. John Martin, 4th ed. (Neiafu Vavaʻu: Vavaʻu Press, 1981); Claughton, 'Lawry, Walter (1793–1859)'.

hearing the old people tell and retell tales of Semisi Kuki—the infamous Captain James Cook, who visited in 1773, 1774 and 1777. The impact of this white fella Kuki would have been hard to miss as he and his crew had left behind fair-skinned children on Tongatapu from interactions with Tongan women. Futukava might have also lost relatives due to the dangerous pathogens and diseases brought to his village by these early European visitors, including the missionaries. Curiously, Lawry's arrival came at a time of relative tranquillity in the civil war, and this coincidence must have added to the mystery of the special book that he kept close to him whenever engaging in strange *talanoa* about another God with the Tongans he encountered. Futukava and his elders surely became suspicious of the powers claimed by Lawry and his God, and this is likely why Futukava was keen to stay close to the missionary at Mu'a Tatakamotonga and even follow him to Aositelelia (Australia). For reasons of strengthening local ties and furthering opportunities with the newcomers, Futukava would have been acutely aware that this was an opportunity not to miss.

For Lawry, this carefully curated voyage to Sydney was a chance to undo the negative influence of 'the first white man in Tonga' named Morgan, another runaway convict from Botany Bay who had been repeatedly blamed for leading Tongans astray.[18] In one of his later writings, Lawry wrote that Tongans 'to this day … remember Morgan's lies and believe them' and refuse to be convinced otherwise of their 'mistaken notions'.[19] It is clear that Lawry laid the blame for his failed mission on Morgan;[20] however, local villagers in the Tatakamotonga area recount narratives of Lawry being distracted from his mission by 'Mele', his wife Mary Cover, who was of poor health and had miscarried while in Tonga.[21] Historians are also quick to cite his wife's ill health as a principal reason for the failed mission. Yet we cannot ignore the personal security situation. Lawry felt that his own life would have been in danger had he stayed in Tonga much longer. Ensuring the safe passage of Futukava and Tata to New South Wales and back would offer the Tongans proof that he meant well and that his word could be trusted.

The reasons for Lawry's remembrance and commemoration in Mu'a Tatakamotonga today are, therefore, slightly distinct from his actual experiences in the early 1820s (Figures 2 and 3). There are several families in Mu'a that are seven generations or more practising Christians—descendants of those ancestors who initially turned to Christianity in the mid-late 1800s in response to the message about Christ shared by the Palangi missionaries that arrived on our shores. Although historians have highlighted the challenges that arose for the missionaries who tried to convert the 'apathetic' people of Mu'a, the village was forever changed as a result of their presence.[22] Today,

18 Claughton, 'Lawry, Walter (1793–1859)'.

19 Lawry, n.d., cited in Claughton, 'Lawry, Walter (1793–1859)'.

20 In his later writings, Lawry was also concerned with the influence of 'Popish superstition', see Walter Lawry, *A Second Missionary Visit to the Friendly and Feejee Islands*, ed. Elijah Hoole (London: John Mason, 1851), 88.

21 Rev. Donald Phillipps, 'Walter Lawry and the Mission to the Friendly Islands—1822/1823', Methodist Church of New Zealand, 31 January 2022, hail.to/methodist-church-of-new-zealand/article/yZQ8sUC.

22 Sione Lātūkefu, 'The Case of the Wesleyan Mission in Tonga', *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 25 (1969): 95–112, doi.org/10.3406/jso.1969.2252; Sione Lātūkefu, *Church and State in Tonga: The Wesleyan Methodist Missionaries and Political Development, 1822–1875* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974), 175.

the ripple effects of missionary interactions from the 1800s, including those that occurred between Lawry and Futukava, are manifest in the way of life of our kinfolk, many of whom have become fervent observers of Christian beliefs and practice, and remain committed to all things related to the Free Wesleyan Church in Tonga.[23] Futukava's role in this needs to be re-examined because, as historian Noel Rutherford concludes, Futukava 'fired the imagination of his people with stories of the wonders he had seen', and, because of him, 'the first glimmerings of interest in the God of Papālangi (White Man's Land) began to be shown by the Tongans'.[24]

Figure 2: The memorial stone at the edge of the lagoon marking where Lawry first landed in Muʻa Tatakamotonga.

Source: Artwork by Lydiah Malia-Lose Faleolo, 22 February 2025, referencing a photograph taken by Emma ʻIlaiū Vehikite, 28 June 2021.

23 For perspectives on this, see Faingaʻa-Manu Sione et al., 'Finding Harmony'; David Taufui Mikato Faʻavae, 'Sacred vā-Rhythms: A Book Review of Winston Halapua's *Waves of God's Embrace, Sacred Perspectives from the Ocean* (2008)', *Art/Research International: A Transdisciplinary Journal* 8, no. 2 (2024): 705–13, doi.org/10.18432/ari29772.
24 Rutherford, 'Shirley Baker and the Kingdom of Tonga', 10–11.

Figure 3: The inscription reads: 'Ki he kololia 'o e 'Otua mo fakamanatu 'a e tu'uta 'i he fanga' ni mo e lotu 'a Rev. Walter Lawry 'i 'Aokosi 12, 1822/To the Glory of God and to commemorate the arrival of the Rev. Walter Lawry who landed at this site August 12, 1822; Na'e tatala pulonga 'e he'ene 'Afio ko Taufa'ahau Tupou IV hono 6 'o Siulai 1976/This stone was unveiled by His Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV July 6, 1976.'

Source: Artwork by Lydiah Malia-Lose Faleolo, 22 February 2025, referencing a photograph taken by Emma 'Ilaiū Vehikite, 28 June 2021, Mu'a Tatakamotonga.

Conclusion

We end the story there, mindful of the questions that remain unanswered about Futukava's life and his version of events. In comparison with Lawry, of whom much is known and whose life is commemorated in Mu'a as the first Christian minister to arrive in the kingdom, we are still searching for simple biographical facts about Futukava, such as: When was he born? When did he die? Who were his parents, grandparents, spouse, children, other family members? Where did he live after his voyage to Sydney? And could he have possibly returned to Aositelelia with the series of Tongans that took up the opportunity to train as *faifekau* (priest)? On a later visit to Tonga in 1850, Lawry met both Futukava and Tata, and while he reported that Tata had become a priest, all we learn about Futukava is a comment about the status of Christianity in the kingdom.[25] While our questions remain unanswered for now, we hope that they prompt future historical research in Muʻa Tatakamotonga about Futukava's chieftainship. Because, even though Rutherford's conclusion above is fascinating (based, it seems, principally on Lawry's 1823 letter to the editor), it is also unsatisfactory without more context and knowledge about Futukava's life and motivations.

As prompted by Dion Enari and others in their desire to see Oceanic narratives indigenised, there is much scope here for further involvement of Pacific historians and researchers who might help to rewrite history, from a Pacific perspective.[26] This brief exploration of Futukava's journey to Aositelelia hints at new possibilities for Tongan migration studies, particularly Tonga's nineteenth- and early twentieth-century intersections with Australian history. What is clear is that our modern migration stories have much deeper precedents and, just as we have been working to understand the motivations of our people today, more work could be done to understand the motivations of our ancestors, too.

Acknowledgements

ʻFakafetaʻi kihe ʻEiki; ke langilangiʻia pe ia! Fakamālo atu to our Tonga-based *kainga*, as well as those in tuʻa Tonga who have been a part of our research into the history of Futukava and Lawry. A special thanks to our local community and extended families in Muʻa Tatakamotonga who have helped, and for the warmth of your generosity and hospitality during our visits. We would like to acknowledge our fathers Rev. ʻAhoia ʻIlaiū and the late Sioeli ʻIlaiū for their knowledge shared with us over the years about our cultural history in Muʻa Tatakamotonga. Our thanks also extend

25 Lawry, *A Second Missionary Visit to the Friendly and Feejee Islands*, 88.

26 Dion Enari, Jacoba Matapo, Yvonne Ualesi, Radilaite Cammock, Hilda Port, Juliet Boon, Albert Refiti, Inez Fainga'a-Manu Sione, reviewers: Patrick Thomsen and Ruth (Lute) Faleolo, 'Indigenising Research: Moanaroa, A Philosophy for Practice', *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 56, no. 11 (2024): 1044–53, doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2024.2323565.

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We would like to acknowledge Lydiah Malia-Lose Faleolo, for her valuable artwork in the final stages of this work. She has captured well the solemnity of historical sites that echo past ancestors' footsteps and political events that continue to shape the present lived experiences of our kin in Tonga.

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Dedication

For a supportive, caring and loving father, Sioeli 'Ilaiū (1948–2023), who we miss dearly.

My grandmother is (not just) a small brown fragment

PAULINE REYNOLDS

This is the story of a small rectangular barkcloth (*tapa*) provenanced to Pitcairn Island, which is held in the Macleay Collections, Chau Chak Wing Museum, at the University of Sydney, Australia (Figure 1). It has no extraordinary patterns or painted surface design. It measures 17.6 x 6.8 centimetres, the surface is embossed with the valleys and hills made by the parallel grooves of a wooden or whalebone beater (known as *i'e* in Tahitian and *e'e* in the Pitcairn–Norfolk Island languages), and it is dyed a rich red-brown.[1] The quality and density of the cloth, as well as the colour and intensity of the dye, is similar to the long bands that were cut and pasted over the shoulders of the *tīputa* (a poncho or tunic-like garment) made on Pitcairn in the early 1800s, which will be discussed later in this paper.

Figure 1: *Tapa* from Pitcairn and collected from Norfolk Island.
Source: Macleay Collections, Chau Chak Wing Museum, no. ET84.163.

Behind every object in a collection are several stories or biographies to be written: the maker and the knowledge they used to create it from within their understanding of the world, the story of the owner and sometimes the story of exchange with the collector. Sometimes, the story of the collector and their worldview overshadows all else, including that of the object itself. This is the case with the Macleay barkcloth.

1 Pitcairn Island is the only Polynesian island known to have produced beaters made from whalebone. See Pauline Reynolds, '*Tapa* Cloths and Beaters: Tradition, Innovation and the Agency of the *Bounty* Women in Shaping a New Culture on Pitcairn Island from 1790 to 1850', *Textile History* 47, no. 2 (2016): 190–207, doi.org/10.1080/00404969.2016.1211435.

This article traces the *tapa* fragment's life journey with poetry and prose: how it came to the Macleay Collection, the genealogy of the woman who inherited it and that of her mother or grandmother who likely made it, and its journey from Pitcairn to Norfolk Island in 1856. Within this context, we come to understand the value of the Macleay barkcloth through an Indigenous Pacific worldview, despite it being a fragment-of-a-fragment of the original cloth. This paper is framed and informed by a relational worldview, one in which *papa tupuna* and *kamfram* are seen as key organising principles, situating things, ideas and people through relationships.[2] In this case, I situate myself in relation to the maker of the barkcloth.

The Macleay barkcloth's journey began long before it arrived at the University of Sydney and long before it made the journey to Norfolk Island from Pitcairn Island in 1856. Perhaps its story begins in September 1789, when 12 women and a baby girl crossed the sparkling black sands of Matavai Bay, Tahiti, to board the *Bounty*. Some went secretly, knowing that they would be leaving Tahiti alongside nine of the *Bounty* mutineers, while others boarded simply to farewell the mutineers, only to be held by force at the ship's departure. Along with them, six men from Tahiti, Ra'iatea and Tupua'i sailed away beyond the horizon in search of a new island home where the mutineers hoped they could hide from the British Navy. Those 12 women brought with them plants and tools, as well as knowledge of the fabrication of *tapa*, which they had learned on their origin islands of Tupua'i (in the Austral Islands), Huahine and Tahiti (Society Islands) within Te Moana Nui a Hiva.

The Macleay *tapa* is made from *Broussonetia papyrifera*, known as aute in Tahiti, Pitcairn and Norfolk.[3] It was one of the significant crop species circulated throughout prehistoric Oceania by early settlers who brought it with them from Taiwan.[4] When the *Bounty* arrived on Pitcairn in early 1790, a timeworn and overgrown aute plantation was immediately recognised by the new settlers. It was at the heart of the first dispute among the mutineers, who were aware of the necessity of this plant for the survival of the community.

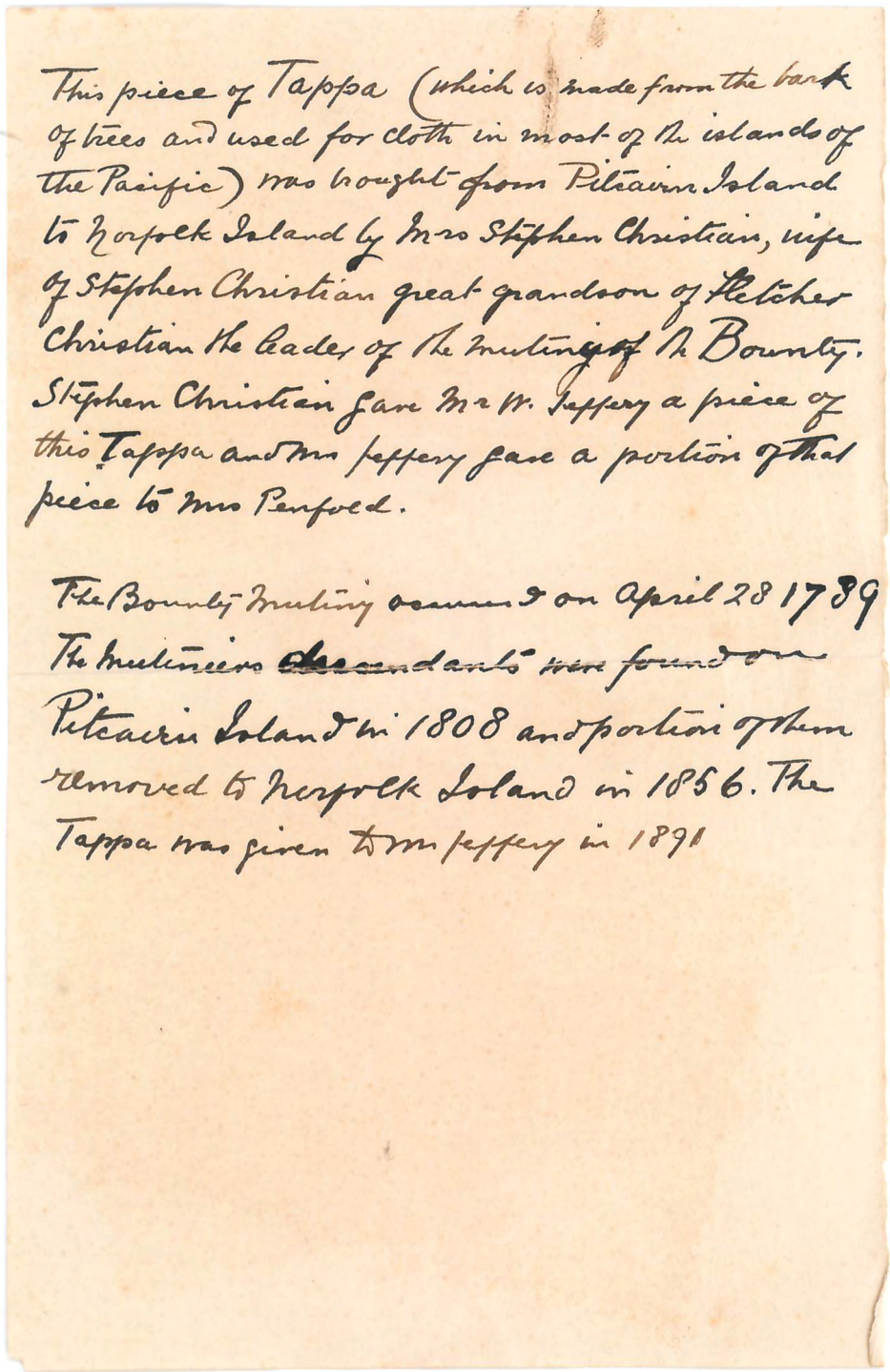
The collector's and the donor's story

The Macleay barkcloth is a fragment, not only of a larger cloth, but also of a much larger history than is first apparent in the museum records. Figure 2 is a photograph of the handwritten note describing the people involved in the collection of the *tapa*.

2 *Papa tupuna* (Tahitian) and *kamfram* (Pitcairn/Norfolk languages) refer to one's genealogy and one's origins.

3 *Broussonetia papyrifera* is called paper mulberry in English.

4 D. Seelenfreund, A. C. Clarke, N. Oyanedel, R. Piña, S. Lobos, E. A. Matisoo-Smith and A. Seelenfreund, 'Paper Mulberry (*Broussonetia papyrifera*) as a Commensal Model for Human Mobility in Oceania: Anthropological, Botanical and Genetic Considerations', *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 48, nos. 3–4 (2011): 231–47, doi.org/10.1080/0028825X.2010.520323.


This piece of Tappa (which is made from the bark of trees and used for cloth in most of the islands of the Pacific) was brought from Pitcairn Island to Norfolk Island by Mrs Stephen Christian, wife of Stephen Christian great grandson of Fletcher Christian the leader of the mutiny of the Bounty. Stephen Christian gave Mr W. Jeffery a piece of this Tappa and Mrs Jeffery gave a portion of that piece to Mrs Penfold.

The Bounty Mutiny occurred on April 28 1789
The mutineers ~~descendants~~ were found on
Pitcairn Island in 1808 and portion of them
removed to Norfolk Island in 1856. The
Tappa was given to Mr Jeffery in 1891

Figure 2: Handwritten note that accompanies the small *tapa* fragment.
Source: Macleay Collections, Chau Chak Wing Museum, 2022.

Below I present the note's text word-for-word, reformatted into poetry form so that it might be read through my eyes. The note tells a fragment of the *Bounty* story, my family story, exploited, told and retold; importantly, it does not include relevant information about the maker of the Macleay barkcloth and the cloth itself. Towards the end of this article, I respond with a rewording and translation of the note, a kind of decolonial interpretation called 'My Grandmother Is (Not Just) a Small Brown Fragment', also in the form of poetry.

This piece of *tappa*

This piece of Tappa
(Which is made from the bark of trees and used for cloth in most of the
islands of the Pacific)
was brought from Pitcairn Island to Norfolk Island
by Mrs Stephen CHRISTIAN,
WIFE of Stephen CHRISTIAN
Great grandson of FLETCHER CHRISTIAN
the leader of the MUTINY OF THE BOUNTY.
Stephen CHRISTIAN gave Mr W.[?] Jeffery
a piece of this Tappa and
Mrs Jeffery gave a portion of that piece to Mrs Penfold.
The BOUNTY mutiny occurred on April 28 1789
The MUTINEERS' descendants were found on
Pitcairn Island in 1808 and
[a] portion of them removed to
Norfolk Island in 1856.
The Tappa was given to Mrs Jeffery in 1891.

It took some intense sleuthing to work out the connection between the people mentioned in the note and the donors, highlighting the patriarchal quality of the colonial archives.[5] The museum's online record tells us that the Macleay *tapa* was donated by Mrs E. M. Andrews and Miss E. C. Bootle to the University of Sydney's Nicholson Museum in 1984 on the understanding that it would be relocated to the Macleay Collections. Elwyn Andrews and Elizabeth Bootle were sisters and great-nieces of Sir Grafton Elliot Smith, born in 1871 in New South Wales, a well-known archaeologist who oversaw the examination of Tutankhamen's body when the tomb was first discovered in Egypt.[6] Among the 100 artefacts donated by Andrews and Bootle at the same time as the Macleay *tapa* were a mummified baby crocodile, dated 712 BC – 364 AD, and a bag of bones—supposedly a mummified kitten—which Elliot Smith described in a letter posted from Egypt to his nephew, William

5 See, for example, Helen M. Buss and Marlene Kadar, *Working in Women's Archives: Researching Women's Private Literature and Archival Documents* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001).

6 Lise Mellor, 'Smith, Sir Grafton Elliot', The University of Sydney School of Medicine, Online Museum, 2008, www.sydney.edu.au/medicine/museum/mwmuseum/index.php/Smith,_Sir_Grafton_Elliot. Occasionally, the Chau Chak Wing Museum website refers to Elliot Smith as Elliot-Smith.

Edwin Penfold, in Australia.[7] It becomes clear that 'Mrs Penfold', who received the barkcloth from Mrs Jeffery, was William's mother (Elliot Smith's sister-in-law), and grandmother to William's sister's daughters, Andrews and Bootie, who inherited all of these treasures.

Women were the makers, keepers and eventual collectors and donors of the *tapa* fragment, yet the note is fixated on the relationship with the *Bounty* mutineers and their leader Fletcher Christian, and his descendant, Stephen Christian, while the three women who were instrumental in the process of collection, Mrs Stephen Christian, Mrs Jeffery and Mrs Penfold, are only mentioned by their married surnames. The way the document is framed, like all archival material, exposes the biases of the person who wrote it (most likely Elliot Smith), much the same way that collections reflect the curator's as well as the collector's understanding of the world.[8]

According to Simon Fowler, 'sources and archives are neither neutral nor natural. They are created', which is why there are silences or missing pieces of information in the first place.[9] The overwhelming silence in this instance is the exclusion of female and indigenous agency required in the making of and caring for the fragment. It is ironic, because the *tapa* fragment is the reason for the handwritten note, yet its value is weighted upon its connection to the *Bounty* mutineers. It characterises the way my family history has been told since the first accounts of the mutiny and settlement on Pitcairn were published by voyagers, chroniclers and writers of fiction and non-fiction. Voyagers generally celebrated Fletcher Christian, the leader of the mutiny, and the last standing mutineer, John Adams, who introduced Christianity to the surviving women and children on the island.[10] This in turn was represented as a kind of moral fable about the rise of Christianity by European chroniclers, while fictional works reflected similar trends, focusing on masculine themes of oppression and freedom, the oppressor and the oppressed.[11] On the other hand, a smaller group of

7 'Detailed Person Record, Grafton Elliot Smith', University of Sydney, Chau Chak Wing Museum, www.sydney.edu.au/museums/collections_search/?record=eparties.10220; Michael Turner, *50 Objects 50 Stories. Extraordinary Curiosities form the Nicholson Museum, University of Sydney*, exhibition catalogue (Sydney: Nicholson Museum, 2012), 102.

8 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Sean Mallon and Nina Tonga, 'Materializing German-Sāmoan Colonial Legacies', in *Refocusing Ethnographic Museums through Oceanic Lenses*, ed. Philipp Schorch, Noelle M. K. Y. Kahanu, Sean Mallon, Cristián Moreno Pakarati, Mara Mulrooney, Nina Tonga and Ty P. Kāwika Tengan (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020): location 3541 of 7033, Kindle ed, doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvn5twfj.11.

9 David Thomas and Simon Fowler, 'Enforced Silences', in *The Silence of the Archive*, ed. David Thomas, Simon Fowler and Valerie Johnson (London: Facet Publishing, 2017), 1, doi.org/10.29085/9781783301577.004.

10 See, for example, Thomas Raine, 'Narrative of a Visit to Pitcairn's Island in the Year 1821. By Capt. Raine', *The Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review* 268 (July 1824): 425–27; Frederick William Beechey, *Narrative of a Voyage to the Pacific and Beering's Strait, to Co-operate with the Polar Expeditions, Performed in His Majesty's Ship 'Blossom', under the Command of Captain F.W. Beechey in the Years 1825, 26, 27, 28* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831).

11 See, for example, John Barrow, *The Eventful History of the Mutiny and Piratical Seizure of HMS* Bounty*: Its cause and consequences* (London: John Murray, 1831); Lady Diana Belcher, *The Mutineers of the Bounty and their Descendants in Pitcairn and Norfolk Islands* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1871).

writers portrayed the story of the women, but this is always an idealised (or at worst, sensationalised) version of events where the women's origins, culture and language are misrepresented and their worldviews are not adequately explored.[12]

The relationships between discourse and ideology are such that documentary sources reflect the values and biases of their authors. However, this is not the case with artefacts of material culture, which embody the culture of those who created them.[13] Non-traditional primary sources, like the Macleay barkcloth, are invaluable because they allow some insight into the lives of its makers. On this, the archives often remain silent. The Macleay *tapa* fragment is the smallest extant one I have found, yet it is enormously significant because it highlights the importance that Pitcairners attached to culture and their history. Mrs Stephen Christian inherited and kept it with her on Pitcairn, and then brought it with her to Norfolk Island, in the same way other women brought ancestral treasures with them when the Pitcairners moved en masse to Norfolk Island in 1856.

Ellen Quintal's story

The Macleay *tapa* leads us to the life of the original owner, referred to in the note as 'Mrs Stephen Christian'. Ellen Christian, née Quintal, was born on Pitcairn Island in 1837, the second-youngest child of Maria Christian and John Quintal. Maria was the daughter of Sully, a Tahitian woman who was a baby when her mother, Teio, brought her aboard the *Bounty*. The only child of her generation to have two Tahitian parents, Sully married Charles Christian, second-born of Mauatua and Fletcher Christian. Teio had married the mutineer William McCoy aboard the *Bounty* during its voyage to Pitcairn. After his death, she lived with John Adams. Ellen's mother was Betsy Mills. Her father, John Quintal, died of tetanus a year after her birth. John's father was Matthew Junior and his father, the mutineer Matthew Quintal, married Tevarua, a Tahitian woman who died from a fall while searching the edge of a cliff for birds' eggs on Pitcairn. She had borne five children in nine years. John's maternal grandmother was Vahineatua; her daughters and granddaughters produced cloth. Betsy's sister Dinah made a beautiful *tīputa* (now held in Aberdeen, Scotland) that included various kinds of *tapa* cloth, one of which is not unlike the Macleay fragment.

12 See, for example, Rowan Metcalfe, *Transit of Venus* (Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2004); Glynn Christian, *Mrs Christian Bounty Mutineer* (London: Hendon Books, 2019); Mary Russell Mitford, *Christina, the Maid of the South Seas: A Poem* (London: A. J. Valpy, 1811); Lord George Gordon Byron, *The Island, or Christian and His Comrades* (London: John Hunt, 1823).

13 James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1977).

In 1856, when the *Morayshire* arrived to transport Pitcairn's entire population—along with three Englishmen who had married into the community—to Norfolk Island (understood by the Pitcairners as a gift from Queen Victoria), Ellen was 19 years old.[14] A young and impressionable officer on the *Morayshire*, George Curgenven, met Ellen and her friends on Pitcairn. He described them thus:

> The young women were all dressed in a garment extending loosely from shoulders to heels made of Tapa cloth and over this a loose short gown. We went afterwards to see them making this cloth or rather paper, from the inner bark of the paper Mulberry tree. They beat the bark with wooden mallets on a block into long strips until it is as thin as paper, these strips are then joined together by beating their over-lapping edges together until the piece is wide enough to make a garment, after being dried in the sun.[15]

Curgenven also described the goods the Islanders insisted on bringing with them to Norfolk, including remnants from the *Bounty*. He referred to gifts the Islanders made to him, a 'tapa mallet made of Whale's tooth, [and] some of the Tapa cloth'.[16] In his personal diary, Curgenven offered an intimate view of the young women of Pitcairn. He wrote about Ellen's apparent romantic attachment to the ship's acting lieutenant, G. W. Gregorie RN, who 'seems to be very happy, he is with Ellen Quintal all day long (he calls her dear Nelly) talking or reading to her'. In mirror hand, he secretly added that the two spent all day and the evening together on the deck, Gregorie's head in Ellen's lap.[17]

In Figure 3, taken a year after the Pitcairn Islanders arrived on Norfolk, Ellen is seated second from the left (middle row). In 1861, despite her earlier attachment to Gregorie, she married John Stephen Christian, known as Stephen. Later in life, she would become known to the whole community as 'Aunt Ellen'.

My paternal grandmother, Violet Christian, was born on Norfolk Island in 1916, six years after Ellen's death. She shared her ancestors with both Ellen and Stephen. The practice of making *tapa* did not continue on Norfolk after the Pitcairners' arrival, perhaps because the aute plant—their chief material for making barkcloth—did not grow there.[18] They may have chosen to discontinue the practice, although it was revived on Pitcairn when some families returned there in the 1860s. While the women did not continue the practice on Norfolk, several brought *tapa* with them from Pitcairn, an illustration of their attachment to the matrilineal indigenous practices of their foremothers.

14 These were John Buffett (from Hull near Bristol), John Evans (London) and George Hunn Nobbs (Anglo-Irish descent).

15 George James Curgenven, 'An Account of the Removal of the Pitcairn Islanders to Norfolk Island in the Year 1856', Brendon Curgenven, 5, www.curgenven.info/george/pdf/pitcairn.pdf (site discontinued).

16 Curgenven, 'An Account of the Removal'.

17 George James Curgenven, 'Pitcairn to Norfolk, 3 May to 6 June 1856', Brendon Curgenven, 3, www.curgenven.info/george/diaries/eightPitcairntoNorfolk.pdf (site discontinued).

18 *Tapa* can also be made from banyan; however, this was not practised until recently.

Figure 3. Pitcairn Islanders, 1857.
Source: National Library of Australia.

Tao'a in the Tahitian language (Reo Mā'ohi), like *taonga* in Reo Māori, can mean treasure (plural or singular), particularly in reference to ancestral artefacts. In the Polynesian sense, treasured *tao'a* comes to represent their makers, and the museum becomes a space where one might gain some intimacy with one's ancestors. Extending research beyond documentary sources and focusing on *tao'a* presents an opportunity to understand the practices of the past. Each of the Pitcairn barkcloths has become part of a recognised group of *tao'a* in collections worldwide, highlighting the place of women in the community, which is often ignored in archival and literary representations. As I have argued elsewhere, these *tao'a* can be thought of as physical manifestations of traditional knowledge handed down through matrilineal lines.[19] Indeed, Ellen's barkcloth contains social and cultural information that today is only accessible through the intermediary of the museum. Accessibility is an issue that is fundamental to indigenous researchers and one that must be reflected upon with regard to *tao'a* in museums and private collections. There are instances, for example, in Australia and other countries, where collections remain inaccessible to representatives of their origin cultures. This is a serious ethical dilemma because we are dependent on museums' and private collections' availability and openness.

Alongside the concept of artefacts as ancestral treasures is that of gifting or exchange, which is emphasised in the handwritten note (see Figure 2). In the Society Islands in early contact times, it was customary for *tapa* and nourishment to be presented to

19 Pauline Reynolds, 'Forgotten Women: A New Bounty–Pitcairn Narrative', (PhD thesis, University of New England, 2021), 4–5.

every visiting ship's captain. This practice continued on Pitcairn. Therefore, each of these *tapa* cloths was once a generous gift, presented to a visitor who either sold it, gifted it to another, or perhaps handed it down through their family or donated it to a museum or library. In 1808, the first contact between Pitcairn's Anglo-Polynesian population (the children of the unions of six of the Polynesian women and six of the mutineers), and the outside world occurred when the island was 'discovered' by Captain Mayhew Folger of the sealer *Topaz* of Boston, Massachusetts. He was gifted a long length of *tapa*, yet today only a fragment measuring 24.1 x 20.32 centimetres survives in the collections of the Nantucket Historical Association.[20] Of the 80 Pitcairn *tapa* I have identified in collections around the world, 47 are fragments. This indicates a trend that followed Alexander Shaw's creation of sample books in 1787 from cut-up barkcloth collected by James Cook. Produced in London, the sample books—entitled *A Catalogue of the Different Specimens of Cloth Collected in the Three Voyages of Captain Cook to the Southern Hemisphere*—comprise a title page, introduction and list of *tapa* samples. According to Nicholas Thomas, professor of historical anthropology and director of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, 66 copies have been located; however, it is likely that up to 100 copies exist.[21] The sample books contain some misattributions of places of manufacture, but their value, despite the fragmenting and cutting up of culture, is that contemporary researchers and artists can at least examine the varieties and qualities of textures and, in some instances, work out the techniques employed at the time of contact. Shaw, for his part, was catering to the European interest in Oceanic textiles, which eventually extended to Pitcairn cloths.

At the beginning of this paper, I referenced the two long bands that sit over the shoulders of the many Pitcairn *tīputa* fabricated during a period of innovation and creativity on the island in the 1820s.[22] Ellen's *tao'a* fragment matches, in texture, size and colour, the shoulder strips. Of the dyeing process used to colour the shoulder bands, Rosalind Amelia Young, Pitcairn historian and poet (and Ellen's contemporary) wrote:

> to render it tough it is dyed, the dye being obtained by steeping the red inner bark of the doodooee (candlenut tree) in water. When dry the dye has a reddish brown colour, which is very pretty when fresh.[23]

20 'Pitcairn Island Mulberry Tree Paper', 1925.0027.001, Nantucket Historical Association, nantuckethistory.org:443/permalink/?key=1003_m237.

21 Nicholas Thomas, '"Specimens of Bark Cloth, 1769": The Travels of Textiles Collected on Cook's First Voyage', *Journal of the History of Collections* 31, no. 2 (2019): 210, doi.org/10.1093/jhc/fhy009.

22 Pitcairn *tīputa* are held by the British Museum, London; Kings Museum, Aberdeen; Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford; National Museums Scotland, Edinburgh; Munich Völkerkunde Museum, Germany; and the Field Museum, Chicago.

23 Rosalind Amelia Young, *Mutiny of the Bounty and Story of Pitcairn Island 1790–1894 by a Native Daughter* (Auckland: Pastor David Nield, 1924), 149.

Figure 4: 'My Grandmother is a Tīputa'.
Source: Whakatāne Museum and Arts, 2022.

The *tīputa* appear to have been made in a kind of production line because of the uniformity of the many examples found in museums today. The main element that is not uniform is the bands: on some *tīputa* they are serrated, and on others they are straight. One example with straight shoulder bands was made by Ellen's aunt, Dinah Quintal (née Adams), the eldest daughter of Vahineatua and the mutineer John Adams. In 1821, Dinah gifted her *tīputa* to a ship's captain who, two years later, presented it to a friend, who eventually deposited it at the King's Museum, Aberdeen.[24] As Dinah is one of my ancestors, I think of her *tīputa* in a relational way. Knowing that it was imbued with her perspiration, possibly her tears and what appears to be a small splash of blood on the front, makes it not only a relational representation, but also an emotional site, where each stage of the *tīputa*'s lifespan is layered with accretions of meaning, an embodiment of its maker as well as its journey.

Dinah's *tīputa* along with other historical examples was the inspiration for my revivalist piece (Figure 4) called 'My Grandmother Is a Tīputa' for the 2022 exhibition *Hina Sings …* It was constructed as an embodiment of my grandmother Violet Christian, and my great-great-great-great-aunt Ellen, as well as all of the mothers, aunties, grandmothers great-aunts going back to the original women settlers.[25] 'My Grandmother is a Tīputa' also acknowledges the connections and relationships between the islands of Oceania, because it is composed of the inner barks of aute (paper mulberry), 'uru (breadfruit) and 'ōrā (banyan) from Pitcairn, Tahiti, Huahine, New Zealand, Norfolk Island, Oʻahu and Fiji. While this is not an ancestral *tao'a*, it is a homage to the originals' complex conceptualisation and layering of different techniques and grades of *tapa*, a celebration of the skills and generosity of the women who gifted their *tao'a* to visitors, which wound up in various collections for the benefit of their descendants.

The following is my response to the handwritten note that accompanied Ellen's *tao'a*, and a more authentic biography of the *tao'a* itself. In this poem, I emphasise its biography from an indigenous perspective, highlighting the female agency involved in its creation and care, and the Tahitian-Pitcairn-Norfolk relational worldview, showing Ellen's matrilineal line leading back to Hina, the Tahitian moon goddess of *tapa* makers. It is also an interpretation of the handwritten note's ideas, and a translation of some of its words into the language and paradigms of the barkcloth's original maker.

24 The University of Aberdeen Museums, Scotland, reference number is ABDUA:4007.

25 Pauline Reynolds, 'My Grandmother is a Tīputa', *Hina Sings …* exhibition, 2022, aute, 'ōrā and 'uru barkcloth, turmeric dye, 60 x 144 centimetres, Whakatāne Libraries and Galleries, Te Kōputu a te whanga a Toi, New Zealand.

My grandmother is (not just) a small brown fragment

This fragment of my/a/the grandmother
(Made from sweat, knowledge, and plants that descend from those brought from Taiwan by ancient tupuna)
was carried from Hitiaurevareva (Pitcairn) to awas Fenua Maita'i (our Good Island)
by Ellen Quintal
daughter of Maria Christian
granddaughter of Sully (of Tahiti)
great-granddaughter of Teio (of Tahiti)
great-great-granddaughter of Teio's mother (of Tahiti)
descendant of Hina, moon goddess and
patron of tapa makers.
Ellen's husband gave a visitor
a fragment of Ellen's tao'a (ancestral treasure)
the visitor's wife cut the fragment into a smaller fragment
and gifted it to her friend.
On April 28, 1789 mutineers stole the *Bounty* from its 'uru (breadfruit) mission
The grandchildren of Tahitian and Huahine va/wa-hine (women)
and British mutineers lived on Hitiaurevareva
without a single visit from the outside world
until 1808, and
the islanders were gifted
Norfolk Island—a Fenua Maita'i
by Victoria, Queen of England in 1856.
This fragment of my/a/the grandmother
was gifted to a visitor to awas Fenua Maita'i in 1891.

No planners, no bombs, no Rambos: The intellectual legacy of Amelia Rokotuivuna in Fiji and Oceania

TALEI LUSCIA MANGIONI

Our Pacific feminist foremothers …

Two years ago, my supervisor Professor Katerina Teaiwa brought me along to a dinner of Pacific feminists visiting Canberra for their annual regional meeting. Before a table of women adorned in statement earrings, bold lipsticks and avant-garde fashion with bright patterns and exaggerated silhouettes, I spoke of my intention to write this small biography of the Fijian activist Amelia Rokotuivuna. The response I received more than affirmed that her life story was worth telling. Some breathed a collective sigh, while others looked sentimental, as if remembering the warmth of a dear friend. Whether they had been told stories by those within the movement or had themselves worked alongside Rokotuivuna, it was clear she had mothered a generation of women leaders, especially those of us who hailed from Fiji.

'Will the real Amelia Rokotuivuna please stand up?' a recent *Fiji Times* article asked, testifying to the somewhat controversial reputation that preceded her.[1] She was the definition of a *yalewa kaukauwa*, a strong woman, remembered by many for her brave commitment to peace and human rights, a woman who was, fundamentally, a 'fun-loving, warm human being'.[2] Internationally and among grassroots communities, she was cherished as a Fijian feminist foremother with a 'boisterous argumentative political wit' that birthed many transnational movements across the Pacific.[3] To her critics, however, she was disparagingly viewed as the far-too-radical Fijian feminist, socialist and commoner who broke ways with tradition. She was the thorn in the side of the Fijian establishment, especially when she heckled them from the back of the room at their meetings.[4] Love her or hate her, she was a 'fiercely proud Fijian' who 'interacted with all with uncompromising honesty, regardless of their wealth, power, status or qualification'.[5] She is today recalled as a 'visionary' who held views that were ahead of her time.[6]

1 Meli Laddpeter, 'The Woman They Call Amelia Rokotuivuna', *Fiji Times*, 22 January 2023, 16.
2 Wadan Narsey, 'Tribute to a Brave Woman', *Fiji Times*, 7 June 2005, 12. *Yalewa kaukauwa* translates as 'strong woman' in the Bauan dialect of the Fijian language.
3 Narsey, 'Tribute to a Brave Woman'.
4 Nicole George, *Situating Women: Gender Politics and Circumstance in Fiji* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2012), 3, doi.org/10.22459/SW.11.2012.
5 Narsey, 'Tribute to a Brave Woman'.
6 Narsey, 'Tribute to a Brave Woman'.

Rokotuivuna's life story reminds us of the Marxist Fijian scholar Simione Durutalo's words about how Pacific Islanders have suffered from 'the alienation of our past'.[7] A 'distorted history' assembled by what Durutalo has described as the 'ANU orthodoxy' and its acolytes in Australia and abroad has provided Pacific Islanders with very little analysis of how colonial, economic and imperial forces have shaped the contemporary power dynamics of their societies.[8] For Durutalo, writing in the 1980s, the historiography of Fiji has been plagued by many distinct shortcomings. Frequently, there has been a predilection to portray British colonial policy as benevolent: in popular imaginings, the British, portrayed as reluctant to colonise Fiji, adhered to a policy of 'indirect rule' before happily bestowing independence upon Fiji in 1970 as they began withdrawing from the Pacific.[9] This dominant historiography and its accompanying biographical works, which tend to overly venerate elite Fijian leaders of the past (such as Cakobau, Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna and Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara) who collaborated with the British, entrench the myth of a 'paramountcy of Fijian interests', which in turn elides class divisions in Fijian society between the ruling chiefly class and the commoners. This has further obscured the long-lasting strategy of the British to 'divide and rule' Fiji society in order to prevent any possibility of a mass 'trans-ethnic anti-colonial struggle'.[10] Despite the 'ANU orthodoxy' having pronounced a need for 'islander-oriented histories' in place of imperial histories, there has been a calculated evasion of historical and political analyses of imperialism and cultural decolonisation by professional historians, which has deeply influenced Fijians' understanding of themselves, their national story and who their national heroes are.[11]

A 'people's history' from below—a grassroots history—focusing on the resistance led by women has been cast aside. As Fiji historian Robert Nicole warns, women's histories in colonial Fiji are especially 'difficult … because the lives of indigenous and migrant women were recorded mainly through the lenses of European and Fijian elites'.[12] Consequently, and woefully, the legacies of our feminist foremothers throughout Fijian colonial and so-called 'postcolonial' history, such as Rokotuivuna, have been expunged from the national record, their legacies tarnished in favour of the triumphs of the statesmen they openly confronted and challenged, and even occasionally counselled or inspired. As Pacific scholars Teresia Teaiwa and Claire Slatter have argued, Pacific feminists like Rokotuivuna and their published and unpublished writings are *samting nating* (or marginal) to mainstream feminist security studies and other disciplines.[13]

7 Simione Durutalo, 'The Liberation of the Pacific Islander Intellectual', *Review* 4, no. 10 (1983): 10.

8 'Durutalo, 'The Liberation'; Simione Durutalo, 'Buccaneers and Chiefly Historians', *Journal of Pacific Studies* 11 (1985): 118.

9 Durutalo, 'Buccaneers and Chiefly Historians', 126, 139.

10 Durutalo, 'Buccaneers and Chiefly Historians'.

11 Durutalo, 'Buccaneers and Chiefly Historians', 152.

12 Robert Nicole, *Disturbing History: Resistance in Early Colonial Fiji* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), 187, doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824832919.001.0001.

13 Teresia Teaiwa and Claire Slatter, '*Samting Nating*: Pacific Waves at the Margins of Feminist Security Studies', *International Studies Perspectives* 14, no. 4 (2013): 448, doi.org/10.1111/insp.12042.

The generative intellectual interventions of Melanesian women in the Pacific region and beyond have been glossed over. As Kanaka Maoli and Black artist-researcher Joy Lehuanani Enomoto observes:

> Black women of Oceania are often left out of the frame in discussions about global Black liberation struggles, and ironically they are left out of conversations of Black indigeneity, even though they remain central players in movements for Black self-determination.[14]

Today, the writings, both hard copy and digital or electronic, of Black Pacific and especially Melanesian women (which have informed and inspired many self-proclaimed gender experts on the Pacific) are difficult to locate within contemporary academic search engines and databases. Their erasure is further compounded by contemporary neoliberal academic metrics and the extractive reading practices of researchers today. When discussed, their intellectual contributions are often not considered in terms of their broad scope; rather, they are compartmentalised to suit researchers' own narrow areas or periods of interest. What is needed is a commitment to recovering the voices of Pacific feminists across the sea of archives and libraries, and to considering the richness of their intellectual influence.

Here, I contend that an intellectual biography of our feminist foremothers of the Pacific is a useful avenue to accomplish this task. In line with the Black feminist Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Pacific scholars must document the revolutionary practice of intergenerational 'mothering' by activist women of the 1970s and 1980s, through 'creating, nurturing, affirming, and supporting life'.[15] Many of these women grew up in a time when Indigenous mothering was under the microscope of colonial officials. As Fijian historian Tracey Banivanua Mar explains:

> In state-sponsored efforts, Indigenous mothers everywhere and especially in Fiji were being taught by well-meaning European women how to mother, how to clean and how to think and behave like civilised women. This even as the kitchens and nurseries of white families throughout the islands and many parts of Australia were staffed by Indigenous houseboys and housegirls.[16]

Nevertheless, our Pacific feminist foremothers are also notably what the Kanaka Maoli educator and activist Haunani-Kay Trask poetically describes as 'slyly/reproductive'.[17] In place of a patriarchal form of nation-building that submits to the 'biological mandate for women to bear children', Pacific feminist foremothers birthed 'ideas/

14 Joy Lehuanani Enomoto, 'Black is the Color of Solidarity: Art as Resistance in Melanesia', *Postmodern Culture* 31, no. 1 (2020), doi.org/10.1353/pmc.2020.0027.

15 Alexis Pauline Gumbs, 'Intergenerational Introduction: Foremothers for Mothering', in *Revolutionary Mothering*, ed. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martens and Mai'a Williams (New York: PM Press, 2016).

16 Tracey Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous Globalisation and the Ends of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), ix, doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139794688.

17 Haunani-Kay Trask, 'Sons', in *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* (Corvallis: Calyx Books,1999), 55–56.

books, history/politics, reproducing//the ropes of resistance for unborn generations'.[18] Rather than dwell on tired debates about whether Pacific women identify with the feminism concept (since it can be perceived as a foreign threat to Pacific culture) or how they have been routinely silenced within the global canon of feminism, I attend to a citational politics that historically honours Pacific women like Rokotuivuna who have actively committed themselves to the intellectual project of collective liberation from a Pacific feminist perspective over the past five decades.[19]

Through the lens of intellectual biography, I begin with an exploration of Rokotuivuna's early life, as it informed her long career with the YWCA of Fiji and beyond. I then outline some of the intellectual thought work that earned her a rightful place within the genealogy of resistance of Pacific grassroots movements. She contributed to regional debates on the status of women and Pacific feminism, and was a leading critic of Western development, nuclear colonialism and the Fijian coups of 1987 onwards. Across these three themes, I trace the development of her political ideas, strewn across her many speeches, press interviews, writings and other published and unpublished materials, contained in the archives of the YWCA of Fiji, Nuclear Free Pacific/Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific (NFP/NFIP) movement and the personal collections of her friends. Writing from the intergenerational position of a diasporic Fijian woman living in Australia, I conclude with some reflections on how learning with Amelia Rokotuivuna has refined my understanding of the enduring economic and neo-colonial relationship between Fiji and Australia and the crucial need for intellectual biographies concerned with grassroots women figures such as Rokotuivuna in Oceania.

Early life

Amelia Vakasokolaca Rokotuivuna was born on 7 August 1941 at Vatukoula to parents Naomi Ceinamarama and Sovari Rokotuivuna.[20] She was the third child in a family of five children: Manaini, Sevuloni, Amelia, Apisalome and Viniana.[21] Rokotuivuna's 'sovereign standpoint' was deeply informed by her upbringing in

18 Trask, 'Sons'; Joy Lehuanani Enomoto, Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada and No'u Revilla. '"We're Asking You to Remember Why We're Here": Interview with Joy Enomoto', *Biography* 43, no. 3 (2020): 605–6, doi.org/10.1353/bio.2020.0067.

19 Important work in the realm of intellectual biography of fellow Pacific feminist foremothers is currently being undertaken by Pacific studies scholars Kim Kruger (of her mother, Aboriginal–South Sea Islander activist Patricia 'Patsy' Corowa); Hineitimoana Greensill and her grandmother, Māori activist Tuaiwa Hautai 'Eva' Rickard; Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua; and Hawaiian activist Haunani-Kay Trask. See also Anaïs Duong-Pedica, 'Thinking with Suzanne Ounei', *Amerasia Journal* 48, no. 2 (2022): 158–74, doi.org/10.1080/00447471.2023.2260507.

20 Vanessa Griffen, 'Two Fijian Women: An Interview Compiled by Vanessa Griffen', in *Women's Role in Fiji*, ed. Jyoti Amratlal et al. (Suva: South Pacific Social Sciences Association, 1975), 48. This section draws on an interview conducted by Vanessa Griffen of Amelia Rokotuivuna and her mother Naomi Ceinamarama. In this beautiful mother–daughter dialogue, the women compare their lived experiences and discuss how gender roles have changed, with Naomi coming from the standpoint of a traditional Fijian woman and Amelia being a proud leader of the feminist movement in Fiji.

21 She also lived with members of her extended family. Manaini Rokotuivuna-Belo, pers. comm., 2 April 2024.

the Fiji colony of the British Empire on the cusp of independence.[22] Her humble childhood was spent mostly living in the village of Vatukoula within the gold mining compound located at the northern tip of Viti Levu. From its opening in the 1930s, the village resembled something of a Wild West frontier town, attracting people from all over Fiji for its perceived riches.[23] Rokotuivuna's father worked as a chef in the mines, and in his spare time worked on his nearby plantation with his family. As elsewhere in Fiji, labour was heavily racialised, with Anglo-Australians and Europeans at the top and all other ethnicities below. Indigenous Fijians such as the Rokotuivunas (who lived at Loloma settlement) comprised most of the so-called 'unskilled' workforce and endured the poorest living and working conditions. Rokotuivuna's large family lived in a company house made of corrugated iron with two rooms (one for sleeping and the other for eating), while outside was located something resembling a French-built ablution block, with crouch trench toilets and communal taps for washing.[24] In this substandard housing situation, Rokotuivuna became acutely aware of:

> the racially based occupational system, where a particular ethnic group couldn't advance beyond a point in terms of work, or in terms of improving their living conditions, because you were prescribed areas that you lived in, and ethnic Fijians were at the bottom.[25]

Living in a settlement community exposed her to a multiracial, albeit segregated, urban life and to the systemic inequality brought on by early foreign extractive industries that were placed on a pedestal by colonial officials promoting the development of Fiji to the world. Later, she noted that living within earshot of miners and critical trade unionists at Vatukoula had laid the foundation for her emergent class consciousness.

As a young girl in a household of mainly boys, and having a mother who believed that all children should do chores, Rokotuivuna was able to lead a less conventional Fijian girlhood than others.[26] Her brothers took on much of the burden of housework, leaving her free to do as she pleased.[27] She enjoyed playing 'boys games' such as 'spinning tops and playing marbles' with the four boys she grew up with, who were made to bring her on all their adventures around town.[28]

At age 11, Rokotuivuna was sent to live with her aunt for a year, curtailing her sense of autonomy. Much to her distress, as a cousin in the home, she was made to cook, clean and perform other chores that she had never previously been required

22 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 'Towards an Australian Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory: A Methodological Tool', *Australian Feminist Studies* 28, no. 78 (2013): 331–47, doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2013.876664.

23 William Sutherland, *Beyond the Politics of Race: An Alternative History of Fiji to 1992* (Canberra: Department of Political and Social Change, ANU, 1992), 31; 'Atu Emberson-Bain, *Labour and Gold in Fiji* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

24 Amelia Rokotuivuna, unpublished interview by Claire Slatter for 1000 Peace Women nomination, 2006, 2.

25 Rokotuivuna, unpublished interview by Slatter.

26 Griffen, 'Two Fijian Women', 49.

27 Griffen, 'Two Fijian Women'.

28 Griffen, 'Two Fijian Women', 50.

to do. Around the same time, her mother, noting Rokotuivuna's academic aptitude and wanting the best education for her child, decided to 'lay down the law on how Amelia was to behave'—that is, like a lady—and to send her to Fiji's most elite high school for indigenous Fijian women, Adi Cakobau School (ACS).[29] While her father was considerably more relaxed about his daughter's errant demeanour and boyish sensibilities, Rokotuivuna and her mother frequently clashed over her expected behaviour as a young woman. Rokotuivuna and her mother nevertheless retained a very close bond, spending their evenings discussing passages of the Bible, sharing local gossip and, at times, bickering endlessly over different topics, especially which children she should and should not befriend: Rokotuivuna liked to argue a point *and win*!

In 1953, Rokotuivuna began boarding at ACS on the *vanua* of Vuna at Sawani, Naitasiri—one of the very lucky few to be sent from Vatukoula.[30] It was here she became aware of 'social snobbery' and her family's comparatively low standing compared with students from 'wealthy homes and [with] parents who were teachers or doctors'.[31] The school was strict, academically competitive and embraced Western social mores of decorum, sophistication and domestication. ACS was intended to train the wives of future Fijian leaders; it was there that Rokotuivuna learned to eat with a knife and fork, how to dress and groom herself, how to play women's sports like netball and how to perform a variety of supplementary household chores.[32] During this time, she looked up to her older peers, particularly her eldest sister Manaini, who had earned high regard from her family and village after training as a teacher. She desired to replicate Manaini's success. While Rokotuivuna's friends opted for typing and nursing training—both of which she considered to be somewhat dull professions—she saw Manaini as having achievements, respect and, most importantly, the freedom to do exactly as she wanted.[33] Perhaps desiring the same freedom afforded to her in childhood, she aimed to follow in her sister's footsteps and become a teacher.

At ACS, Rokotuivuna became aware that she was part of a new 'educated elite' that instilled 'a sense of duty to do certain things for the common good' and an 'obligation to serve'.[34] However, to her great disappointment, at age 19, she failed the university entrance exam and 'because of her age she did not want to resit the exam, so she left school'.[35] Her dream of becoming a teacher evaporated when friends from high school told her that they had not learned anything more at Nasinu Teachers College than they had in their secondary school education.[36] Changing direction, she applied

29 Griffen, 'Two Fijian Women', 52.
30 Amelia Vakasokolaca Rokotuivuna, pers. comm., 3 April 2024.
31 Griffen, 'Two Fijian Women', 54.
32 Griffen, 'Two Fijian Women'.
33 Griffen, 'Two Fijian Women', 53.
34 Rokotuivuna, unpublished interview by Slatter, 2.
35 Griffen, 'Two Fijian Women', 54.
36 Sumitra Gokal, 'Amelia Rokotuivuna', in *Women of Fiji* (Suva: Lotu Pasifika Productions, 1978), 18–19; Griffen, 'Two Fijian Women', 55.

to Koronivia Agricultural School to become a veterinarian; however, women were prohibited from applying that year.[37] Unable to follow in the steps of her sister or become a veterinarian, she turned her attention to a path she had not previously considered: studying medicine to become a doctor.[38] Unfortunately, she failed her first year at the Fiji School of Medicine due to shortcomings in physics and chemistry. To pass the time, she took on work as a panel operator at the Fiji Broadcasting Commission.[39]

Fate intervened in 1962 when Rokotuivuna was appointed to a paid position as assistant to Ruth Lechte, the executive director of the YWCA in Suva; it seems that her reputation as an enthusiastic Fijian youth leader during her time as head prefect at ACS helped her gain the role.[40] Rokotuivuna worked alongside the new Fiji chapter's Anglo-Australian expatriate founders, Lechte and Anne Walker, in their offices on the first floor of the Old Suva Town Hall. At other times in the early 1960s, she also worked as a receptionist and coordinator of the YWCA's girls' clubs.[41] Rokotuivuna and Lechte worked with local women to launch a network of multiracial kindergartens and youth and women's clubs throughout Fiji. The YWCA sought to educate women critically and creatively, with multilingual programs offering 'vocational training, public affairs, music and drama, crafts and art, and multiracial sports clubs in netball, softball, cricket, and tennis'.[42]

In 1965, Rokotuivuna followed through on her dream of tertiary education after receiving a British technical aid scholarship to study for a diploma in social administration at Swansea University College in Britain. There she studied 'social problems, strategies of development, and models of community work', which, in her view, lacked both a Christian, faith-based, 'whole picture' analysis and a Marxist social and political economy analysis, which were present in Fiji and in emergent independence movements in Africa and elsewhere.[43] Unlike other activists of her time who were radicalised during their tertiary studies overseas (e.g. the Kanak Foulards Rouges in France and Micronesian students in Hawai'i during the late 1960s and early 1970s), she began contextualising these educational fields within her burgeoning interest in Fijian politics. While in London, she gained experience working with youth, elderly and women's clubs, and went on several study and YWCA-related trips to Geneva, Cyprus, Bombay and Australia.[44]

37 Gokal, 'Amelia Rokotuivuna', 18.

38 Amelia Tawake Rokotuivuna, pers. comm., 17 April 2024.

39 Gokal, 'Amelia Rokotuivuna', 18.

40 Griffen, 'Two Fijian Women', 55. According to Nicole George, Amelia Rokotuivuna was a 'personality well known' to Marjorie Stewart, the founding president of YWCA, who encouraged her to apply for the role. See George, *Situating Women*, 43.

41 George, *Situating Women*, 43.

42 Anne Walker, 'Activist's Work Took Her from Fiji to the World Stage', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 October 2012, www.smh.com.au/national/activists-work-took-her-from-fiji-to-the-world-stage-20121017-27rg9.html?js-chunk-not-found-refresh=true.

43 Rokotuivuna, unpublished interview by Slatter, 3.

44 Gokal, 'Amelia Rokotuivuna', 19.

Returning to Fiji in 1967, Rokotuivuna found plans for a new five-level YWCA building at Sukuna Park, Suva, well underway. In 1968, she became general secretary of Lautoka YWCA but was quickly called to return to Suva by the YWCA Board of Directors to be trained by, and eventually replace, Lechte as national executive director.[45] Rokotuivuna now regularly served the YWCA by travelling the world to represent the Fiji and Suva YWCA as a 'youth and community organiser, and also as a skilled administrator'.[46] Her travels included attending the YWCA's World Council Meeting in Accra, Ghana, in 1971, and a study tour to complete in-service and training courses in administration across various YWCA centres in Canada, including six months at Woodstock, Ontario, in 1972 in preparation for her promotion. The YWCA continued to gain traction by providing women 'opportunities for personal growth and developing active concern for human beings' through community and group services.[47]

In 1972, when Rokotuivuna was in her early 30s, and the YWCA's new building and Fiji's new era of political independence were both fresh, Rokotuivuna became the YWCA's executive director. Mainly concerned with carving out a space for marginalised early school leavers, she refused to replicate the hierarchies she had experienced both during and after her conservative high school education. She proposed a comprehensive political education for ordinary people who had fallen through the cracks of society. Her focus on apprenticeship and friendship brought many young feminists (especially those from the University of the South Pacific [USP] and the local chapter of the Student Christian Movement)—such as Claire Slatter, Vanessa Griffen, Joan Yee, Peni Moore, Shamima Ali and 'Atu Emberson-Bain—into her orbit.[48] By this time, the YWCA of Fiji was becoming widely recognised, both locally and internationally, for its role in public advocacy for nation-building. According to Rokotuivuna, 'the bulk of [the YWCA's] work [was] being a pressure group to the government … we research a subject then take it to the government to action'.[49] She affirmed the position of Fiji Islander youth and encouraged a community of practice and radical pedagogy rooted in building kinships, solidarity and community with women from different ethnic and class backgrounds.

The respect Rokotuivuna received in national and international fora reflected her ability to create a positive, collaborative and empowered workplace. She recognised that the YWCA's 'credibility rested on our practical programs'. Under her watch, the organisation improved the 'material conditions' of women through vocational programs to allow young people to get jobs and developed policies on youth,

45 Laddpeter, 'The Woman They Call Amelia Rokotuivuna'.
46 Vanessa Griffen, pers. comm., 25 July 2023.
47 Gokal, 'Amelia Rokotuivuna', 19.
48 Teresia Teaiwa, 'On Women and "Indians": The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion in Militarized Fiji', *Security Disarmed: Critical Perspectives on Gender, Race, and Militarization*, ed. Barbara Sutton, Sandra Morgen, Julie Novkov (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 131; George, *Situating Women,* 44.
49 As quoted in Marilynn Hehr, 'Working with the YWCA Gives Fijian Woman a Lot of Satisfaction', *Calgary Herald*, 29 March 1972, 57.

nutrition and sanitation for the government.[50] Much of Rokotuivuna's power and influence came later, a flow-on effect of how well she did her job as executive director of the YWCA. In addition to her activist work, she managed the staff and programs of the Suva YWCA, including the highly successful YWCA Café, adult education and night classes, and vocational and craft programs, all in one building.[51] Rokotuivuna oversaw the successful, commercial side of the YWCA along with its employment, skills-building, and training classes for urban and also, rural women.[52] Critical conversations with itinerant researchers and activists were nurtured at the YWCA. Reflecting on this unique collision of ideas, Rokotuivuna stated:

> There is something to be said about being part of a group of people who actually think about issues and are not glib—they help develop your thinking, help give flesh to your ideas. You might have a vision but the actual sinews of that vision are informed by the knowledge you gain from people around you, more so than your own reading. It was really through conversations, discussions, and debate within the group I was a part of that my understanding grew.[53]

According to Black historian Quito Swan, Rokotuivuna had by then 'transformed the YWCA from a space of vocational training into a powerful hub of radical praxis and political pressure'.[54] In 1972, Rokotuivuna proudly proclaimed that the YWCA not only wielded 'a lot of political pressure' in her country but also held 'high credibility'; therefore, when the YWCA expressed 'an opinion, after scrutiny of educational or economic policies, the government usually gives it careful consideration'.[55] As the Fiji historian Margaret Mishra has argued, under Rokotuivuna's leadership, the Fiji YWCA's commitment to 'radical feminism' was strong, especially through its Public Affairs Committee. According to Mishra, the women of the YWCA read international feminist texts and critical debate and developed their own 'multi-textual and amalgamated standpoint' contextualised by their collective Third World position in the Pacific: they did not, she stressed, 'merely assimilate these transnationalist discourses' of women's liberation, lesbianism or Marxism.[56] The Public Affairs Committee received heightened backlash for going against the conservative patriarchal views of Fiji churches, particularly on issues to do with women's bodily autonomy, such as abortion and homosexuality.[57] Rokotuivuna recalled that they were often condemned as 'child-killers' or 'man-hating lesbians' by their detractors.[58]

50 Rokotuivuna, unpublished interview by Slatter, 3.
51 Griffen, pers. comm.
52 Griffen, pers. comm.
53 Rokotuivuna, unpublished interview by Slatter, 2.
54 Quito Swan, 'Povai: Fiji, Pacific Women, and a Nuclear Free Pacific', in *Pasifika Black: Oceania, Anti-Colonialism, and the African World* (New York: NYU Press, 2022), 169, doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479889334.001.0001.
55 As quoted in Kay Alsop, 'Drop-Outs Drop in at Fiji', *Province*, 1 April 1972, 32.
56 Margaret Mishra, 'A History of Fijian Women's Activism (1900–2010)', *Journal of Women's History* 24, no. 2 (2012): 127, doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2012.0018.
57 Mishra, 'A History of Fijian Women's Activism', 130.
58 As quoted in Mishra, 'A History of Fijian Women's Activism', 129.

Such criticisms ultimately led to her resignation in 1977 under the guise of an internal restructure by a board that wanted to 'tame' the YWCA. In her final year of service as executive director of the YWCA, Rokotuivuna stated:

> I think one of the difficulties is that the community has never been able to place us—Europeans accuse us of being anti-white, Fijians of going against traditional ways and Indians of being a church organisation.[59]

Following her time with the YWCA, Rokotuivuna moved into other professional positions that enabled her reputation as an inspiring grassroots Fijian feminist and socialist thought leader to grow. Under her visionary leadership, the YWCA and, later, the NFP/NFIP movement became hotbeds for radical and socially progressive ideas around peace, security and liberation that shaped the agendas of Fiji, the region and the world. In Fiji, the British afterlife of political power was dominated by male elites from chiefly backgrounds and multinational corporations. Within this context, and working from the margins with a more nuanced understanding of the reality of a multiracial Fiji, Rokotuivuna was able to advance the position of women and the common people. Her staunch criticism of Western development, nuclear colonialism and the Fijian coups of 1987 and 2000 interlock to create a braid that I explore in the remainder of this article.

No planners

After Fijian independence in 1970, the YWCA emerged as a revolutionary locus that struggled against a neo-colonial, racist, hetero-patriarchal capitalism that subjugated the position of all Fijians, but especially women. From early on, Rokotuivuna made public statements about:

> the effects of Fijian cultural traditions and norms on the position of women, for instance, the fact that [indigenous Fijian] women are land-owners but are not consulted on the management of resources, their marginalisation from community decision making and their heavy workload which could be shared by men.[60]

Her opposition to economic extractivism was most vividly expressed in the report *Fiji: A Developing Australian Colony*, published in 1973. Condemning the links between European capital and Fijian political power, the booklet provided a 'critical re-evaluation of Fiji's development in light of the fact that Australian companies own and control about two-thirds of the Fijian business world'.[61] The work sought to educate ordinary Australians about Australia's position as the dominant economic

59 As quoted in 'The Woman They Call Amelia Rokotuivuna', *Fiji Times*, 22 January 1977.

60 Rokotuivuna, unpublished interview by Slatter, 7.

61 Amelia Rokotuivuna and International Development Action, *Fiji: A Developing Australian Colony* (North Fitzroy: International Development Action, 1973), 3. Rokotuivuna worked with several of her mentees on this publication, including Wadan Narsey and Claire Slatter.

power in Fiji, including its octopus-like 'post-independence colonial rule through corporations' such as Burns Philp, W. R. Carpenters and the Colonial Sugar Refining Company. In the introduction, Rokotuivuna noted the myopia of the Australian settler public, perceiving itself as the 'little guy' in the international order and failing to comprehend the economic and political interoperability of Australia in Fiji and, thus, Australia's neo-colonial dominance in Fiji:

> Whenever the alarming issue of foreign ownership is talked about in Australia, Australians tend to think only in terms of what is happening in Australia. It hardly ever occurs to Australians that the people in smaller countries may also think about the same issues in self-centred terms, the difference being that it is not American/British dominance in Australia that is the issue, but Australian dominance in Fiji.[62]

In a chapter entitled 'Development for Whom?', Rokotuivuna admonished the 'smug complacency' of the 'uncritical leaders' of Fiji's economic elite, who, post-independence, had rushed the construction of commercial projects that allegedly brought jobs, roads and government income.[63] She wrote: 'Their oversight can prove costly and the process itself [is] generally "advertised" to non-developed nations as being unequivocally good.'[64] Comparing Fiji with Indonesia, she noted that development had increasingly become a 'dehumanising process' in which 'this country is not being developed for its people, but rather for absentee owners of foreign enterprises'.[65] She argued that development premised on a Western teleology of progress and success was coming at the expense of Pacific values, such as reverence for relationality and extended family, respect for elders, indigenous forms of governance and a looser sense of time. She concluded:

> The aim of development is to improve qualities of life. If we want to foster the qualities of life we already possess, then we should redefine the categories of efficiency, complexity, sophistication etc. that make up our current conception of 'Development'. Development has to be defined in normative terms as well, so that we look at our problems from the point of view of the majority of people for whom the advertised 'higher living standards' will not be attainable. It is when we mentally as well as physically move in such a direction that we can then claim that we are developing this country, Fiji for the majority of people living here.[66]

Rokotuivuna's call for local populations to have their interests represented in development processes was extended to the interpersonal with the compelling essay 'Are Planners Human?' She comically answered her own question at the beginning of this work: 'Unfortunately, planners are human which means we cannot expect

62 Rokotuivuna and International Development Action, *Fiji*, 9.
63 Rokotuivuna and International Development Action, *Fiji*, 13.
64 Rokotuivuna and International Development Action, *Fiji*, 14.
65 Rokotuivuna and International Development Action, *Fiji*, 15.
66 Rokotuivuna and International Development Action, *Fiji*.

any *caka mana* (miracles) from them.'[67] Development planners were disconnected from Pacific Islanders and biased in their perceived supremacy, according to her; they viewed Pacific Islander communities as problems to fix, and frequently dismissed Pacific Islanders despite their being critical knowledge holders. She was unwaveringly opposed to development practitioners that levied a patronising sense of expertise over national staff and local communities. She reflected:

> The practical requirement is not whether they [planners] can fish, make roti, weave a mat or plant dalo, but rather whether they can articulate their thoughts, not only verbally but also in copious volumes of writing. Nevertheless, I dare say that no dream of a good practical lifestyle is dreamt from the seat of writing, but rather in the fields of sugar cane, in the cassava patch, in a yagona party, while fishing in a canoe or building a fale. This is to say that to plan realistically you have either to have had experience of, or to possess a sound knowledge of, the kind of life the majority of people lead.[68]

From this position, Rokotuivuna advocated for communities to have self-determination in these conversations, and encouraged planners to consider 'what kind of life do we [the people] want for ourselves?'[69] This was at a time when development planning valued quantitative targets and performance measures over quality of life. She urged planners to consider the political and social framework in which planning was carried out, encourage community participation in planning and allow the benefits of growth to be evenly distributed.[70] She claimed, 'because of our position we have a special responsibility towards seeing that equitable distribution becomes a reality', and queried: 'You intellectuals, graduates, planners, economists, social workers, and professionals generally, what will you say when the majority ask, "what have you done for us?"'[71]

Following this line of thought many years later, Rokotuivuna published a handbook with the South Pacific Commission titled *Working with Women: A Community Development Handbook for Pacific Women* (1988), which advocated a critical approach to development that prioritised justice and self-determination of communities led by women on their own terms.[72] The handbook is an important blueprint of her theoretical, practical and pedagogical approach to working in women's community organising at the intersection of Western development and international aid. In short, she provided a definition of what community development ought to be:

67 Amelia Rokotuivuna, 'Are Planners Human?' in *The Pacific Way: Social Issues in National Development*, ed. Sione Tupouniua, Ron Crocombe and Claire Slatter (Suva: South Pacific Social Sciences Association 1975), 7.
68 Rokotuivuna, 'Are Planners Human?'.
69 Rokotuivuna, 'Are Planners Human?', 9.
70 Rokotuivuna, 'Are Planners Human?', 8.
71 Rokotuivuna, 'Are Planners Human?', 9.
72 Amelia Rokotuivuna, *Working with Women: A Community Development Handbook for Pacific Women* (Noumea: South Pacific Commission, 1988).

> Community development is a way of helping people so that they are able to improve themselves and their communities … [It] is to assist and encourage communities to work together and to use their own resources for the improvement of the entire community … It is [also] the changing of attitudes and ways decisions are made, increasing co-operation amongst people, making people feel confident about their ability, free expression by the people and instilling in the minds of people a sense of belonging with civic and community pride.[73]

From the handbook, one can glean a sense of Rokotuivuna's understanding of the roles of community development workers; how to build relationships between individual actors, groups and women; and how to communicate the message of their collective work through the extensive practical exercises she outlined—from getting to know one another through icebreakers to internal conflict resolution in groups. Her focus on communication provides insight into her activist praxis, in which she taught readers how to prepare and facilitate talks, public panel discussions, debates, discussion groups and brainstorming sessions. Further, once communities had confirmed what they wanted, she outlined how Pacific communities could communicate their findings with 'how-to' guides on creating audiovisual aids such as posters, flipcharts, community maps, flannelgraphs, booklets and pamphlets. She affirmed that the use of creative art forms as a mode of expression could be made useful to Pacific communities, stating: 'these art forms are not new to us, but what is new is the idea of using them as audio-visual aids in communicating new messages'.[74] She outlined how to make dramas, plays, role-plays, puppets and lollipuppets, stories, songs and dances, as well as organising embodied learning experiences such as film screenings, presentations, observation visits, demonstrations and displays. Beyond being solely a critic, Rokotuivuna expounded a rigorous practical way of doing community work and provided many occasions to spread her profound knowledge after working for decades in the women's movement.

No bombs

Another key issue that Rokotuivuna and the YWCA vigorously opposed was French nuclear testing in Mā'ohi Nui (French Polynesia). In 1970, she became a founding member of the Against Testing on Moruroa (ATOM) committee, formed after students learned of increased levels of radioactivity in Fiji's rainwater supply from the fallout of the tests.[75] Over five years, ATOM successfully pushed the Ratu

73 Rokotuivuna, *Working with Women*, 2.

74 Rokotuivuna, *Working with Women*, 78.

75 Vijay Naidu, 'The Fiji Anti-Nuclear Movement: Problems and Prospects', in *The Pacific: Peace, Security and the Nuclear Issue*, ed. Ranginui Walker and William Sutherland (London: Zed Books, 1988). The ATOM committee, led by USP scientists and scholars Dr Graham Baines and Dr Suliana Siwatibau, helped to educate members about the negative consequences of radiation brought on by French atmospheric tests.

Mara Alliance government to take an international stand against France.[76] In 1975, with the end of French atmospheric testing and its replacement with underground testing, ATOM organised the first regional Nuclear Free Pacific Conference. In her opening address as chair of the conference, Rokotuivuna advocated for 'the right to self-determination of the Pacific people and our real struggle for liberation from the clutches of the imperialists'.[77] She held the opinion that:

> we don't believe in peace by deterrent … the only way peace can exist is by equity of wealth and power—by bargaining position determined by one's wealth as a nation.[78]

Waxing lyrical on the need for political and economic independence for Pacific peoples who lived in both colonies and newly independent states, she declared:

> The right of self-determination is ours. The right to develop as we choose is ours. The right to live and grow to our full potential in a peaceful and healthy environment is ours.[79]

The conference articulated a grassroots vision of nuclear abolition by proposing the establishment of a nuclear-free zone that would encompass all of the Pacific (tenaciously including Micronesia under American occupation). Rokotuivuna played a key role as the primary drafter of the provisions of the original nuclear-free zone treaty, which was endorsed by the United Nations later that year.

As the idea gained traction, Rokotuivuna continued to raise the issue of nuclear colonialism in international fora across the Pacific and the world. Immediately after the Nuclear Free Pacific Conference, she, and fellow Pacific independence activists, attended the first United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in Mexico—1975 being International Women's Year.[80] There, she spoke on a tribune panel about the effects of nuclearisation on Pacific Islanders' lives. Discovering that they had to work together to have any impact, the activists joined forces and 'toward the end of the meeting were able to make statements concerning two issues uniquely important to the Pacific: French nuclear testing and independence for colonial territories'.[81] In October that year, Rokotuivuna and her collaborators, Vanessa Griffen and Claire Slatter, hosted the first Pacific Women's Conference in Fiji. It was convened 'as part of the world-wide meetings to discuss the status of women' across

76 However, the Fiji government continued to permit entry to American and French warships during this time. See Talei Luscia Mangioni, 'Art/Story of the Niuklia Fri Pasifik: On Doing Creative Pacific Histories', *The Journal of Pacific History* 59, no. 1 (2024): 37–59, doi.org/10.1080/00223344.2023.2297067.

77 Amelia Rokotuivuna in *Conference for a Nuclear Free Pacific* (Manoa: University of Hawai'i), Tape 1.

78 As quoted in Nicole Strickland, 'Nuclear Age Pawns', *Province*, 21 July 1975, 23.

79 Rokotuivuna in *Conference for a Nuclear Free Pacific*, Tape 1.

80 Anne Walker, *A World of Change: My Life in the Global Women's Rights Movement* (Melbourne: ARCADIA, 2018). Rokotuivuna was joined by others, including Déwé Gorodé (Kanaky New Caledonia), Unutea 'Tea' Hirshon (Mā'ohi Nui/French Polynesia) and Grace Mera Molisa (then Merakali; New Hebrides/Vanuatu).

81 Vanessa Griffen, 'The Pacific Islands (Oceania): All It Requires Is Ourselves', in *Sisterhood Is Global*, ed. Robin Morgan (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday 1984), 519.

social, economic and political realms.[82] With many anti-nuclear and anti-colonial women attending, the intergenerational and intersectional group created a resolution to 'support a denuclearised Pacific and in particular the proposals of the People's Treaty for a Nuclear Free Pacific', and to establish a Pacific Women's Resources Centre.[83]

In 1977, Rokotuivuna attended Pacifique '77, a conference in the Solomon Islands. Fijian participants highlighted consciousness-raising efforts in Fiji on issues such as dependency, colonialism and nuclear tests; referred to the anti-colonial regional newspaper *POVAI*, which had emerged after the ATOM conference and was written and edited by Vanessa Griffen and Claire Slatter under Rokotuivuna's supervision; and advanced the proposition that, since Fiji was independent and a regional hub, it had a responsibility to take a 'much stronger stand … to help all remaining colonial territories in the Pacific to gain their independence'.[84] Continuing to be heavily involved in the nuclear-free movement, Rokotuivuna was chairperson of the 1978 Nuclear-Free Pacific and Independence Movements conference held on Ponape/Pohnpei in the Trust Territory of Micronesia (administered by the United States) and organised by the Pacific Conference of Churches and Pacific Peoples Action Front. She asserted:

> The crucial question for Pacific nations is—'What kind of societies do we want for ourselves?' For it was evident to many of us at the two conferences that many of our nations in the Pacific, after gaining political independence continue in the economic and political systems and all the attendant sub-systems of our colonisers without questioning their relevance to our situations much less their validity.[85]

The secretariat of the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre was established in Hawai'i in 1980. Rokotuivuna, as a recognised foremother of the movement, continued to collaborate with the succeeding NFIP movement and the local Fiji Anti-Nuclear Group (FANG) throughout the 1980s. Her extended participation led her to appeal to a Christian morality that a nuclear-free Pacific was not just restricted to French nuclear testing and weapons but ought to include 'dissolving military pacts such as ANZUS, ending all tests, dismantling military bases, [and] banning uranium

82 Griffen, pers. comm.

83 Griffen, pers. comm.; Vanessa Griffen, *Women Speak Out! A Report of the Pacific Women's Conference, October 27 – November 2* (Suva: Pacific Women's Conference, 1976), nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-GriWom1-b2-16.html. The Pacific Women's Resources Centre operated for several years.

84 *Pacifique '77: Ecumenical Planning for Development* (Kohimarama: Pacific Conference of Churches and Melanesian Conference of Churches), 32.

85 Amelia Rokotuivuna, 'Foreword', in *Nuclear-Free Pacific and Independence Movements Conference: Reports*, ed. Vimal Madhaven (Suva: Pacific Conference of Churches/Pacific Peoples Action Network, 1979), 5. The subsequent meeting was held in Micronesia in the context of increasing American militarisation of the subregion and ongoing independence negotiations. It was decided that two separate conferences be held so that adequate time could be given to both issues. The movement (and its associated conference) was renamed Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific (NFIP) following the Hawai'i conference in 1980.

mining' given the harms on peoples and their environments.[86] Solidarity for peace and disarmament was of paramount importance. Connecting the struggle with the Methodist faith and sense of justice, she emphasised that:

> The tasks are ominous and we will succeed if we act in solidarity. Solidarity requires tolerance, creativity and commitment, from individuals and institutions. The Christian church, with its faith in a God who wills that all people must have life in abundance, cannot avoid involvement. It is my hope that faith will sustain and bind us together in the struggle for a nuclear-free Pacific.[87]

As political, economic and military links accelerated between the Ratu Mara government and the United States from 1982, allowing more nuclear warship visits to Fiji, Rokotuivuna became involved in the Coordinating Committee against Nuclear Activity in the Pacific organised by members of FANG and the Fiji Trades Union Congress.[88] By 1985, with the signing of the limited Rarotonga Treaty or South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone (SPNFZ) Treaty led by the South Pacific Forum, Fijian activists revived a conversation around its inadequacies. In 1986, Rokotuivuna joined Canberra's NFIP group alongside Julian Riklon (Marshall Islands) at The Australian National University following a landmark conference on Australia's Pacific Connections.[89]

In August 1986, Rokotuivuna was a conference organiser of a satellite NFIP event organised by FANG called the Solidarity Conference for a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific. The conference brought together participants from 16 countries, including well-known leaders Timoci Bavadra (Fiji), Susanna Ounei (Kanaky New Caledonia), Oscar Temaru (Mā'ohi Nui/French Polynesia) and many more. The participants discussed the implications of the watered-down nuclear-free zone (which would become the Treaty of Rarotonga 1985), which was forging ahead with the South Pacific Forum happening at the same time in Suva. Like Vanuatu, PNG and the Solomon Islands, participants agreed that it was far from the original vision proposed at the first NFP conference in 1975, as it permitted the transit of nuclear weapons through ships, submarines and aircraft. Conference participants recognised that it:

> [did] not address all the major concerns of the people in the region and must be replaced by a more comprehensive one which will, with support of South Pacific communities, ensure that Pacific air, seas and lands are not used for nuclear purposes.[90]

86 Amelia Rokotuivuna, 'Bombs Away—A Nuclear-Free Pacific', in *Tides of Change: Pacific Christians Review Their Problems and Hopes*, ed. Vaughan Hinton (Melbourne: Commission for a World Mission, Uniting Church of Australia with the Joint Board of Christian Education in Australia and New Zealand, 1981), 61.

87 Rokotuivuna, 'Bombs Away', 61.

88 Vijay Naidu was the main president of FANG throughout the 1980s. Other notable members and supporters included Simione Durutalo, Jone Dakuvula and Steven Ratuva.

89 'Pacific Conference Breakthrough', *Tribune*, 30 April 1986, 3; 'Features Art, Pottery at College', *Canberra Times*, 1 May 1986, 23.

90 Ellen Whelan, 'Pacific Peoples' Solidarity Forum', *Pacific News Bulletin*, September–October 1986, 7.

Frank conversations such as these on what was genuine security were rooted in Pacific struggles for self-determination, resulting in a set of resolutions from a moratorium on nuclear testing to the enlistment of Kanaky New Caledonia to the United Nations Decolonisation Committee.[91] The South Pacific Forum delegates would not have been able to miss the march of over 2,000 protesters to commemorate Hiroshima Day led by FANG on the second day of the conference.[92] Unfortunately, the conference's support of the coalition of the Fiji Labour Party/National Federation Party was seen as a threat; the conference was supposed to be held at the USP, but this was vetoed, resulting in its last-minute move to the headquarters of the Fijian Teachers' Association.[93] This raised grave concerns around the issue of academic freedom and political interference by the conservative Ratu Mara government. The leader of the Fiji Labour Party, Bavadra, called on the Ratu Mara government to withdraw from the SPNFZ and adopt 'an Alternative South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, which participants said would ensure a genuinely nuclear-free Pacific'.[94] Bavadra promised change with a non-aligned foreign policy that moved away from the nuclear defence umbrella of the United States and took a more hard-line approach to France on sovereignty struggles in Kanaky New Caledonia and Mā'ohi Nui (French Polynesia). This set the stage for collective distress when Bavadra's government was illegally ousted by the military coups of 1987, to which Rokotuivuna was staunchly opposed.

No Rambos

From early in her career, Rokotuivuna was concerned with equal rights and parliamentary representation in independent Fiji's new parliament. In 1965, to the dismay of many of its more conservative members, the YWCA publicly articulated a critique of colonial Fiji's system of electoral representation.[95] Through the YWCA, a younger generation of Fijian women argued that administrative and political structures, such as communal constituencies and communal voting based on ethnicity, should be abolished in the lead-up to independence. YWCA delegates Taufa Vakatele (then Bole), Suliana Siwatibau (then Kaloumaira) and Rokotuivuna advocated the slow introduction of a common role for voting.[96] The group proposed that Fijian chiefs should not be entitled to hereditary rule. Rokotuivuna admonished 'the hierarchical nature of indigenous political leadership and the longstanding practice of reserving Legislative Council positions for members of the Great Council of Chiefs'.[97] Subsequently, the YWCA and its younger supporters were branded

91 'Reagan Gets N-Ban 'Demand'', *Fiji Times*, 7 August 1986, 8. At this time, Fiji was the only member of the Decolonisation Committee.
92 'N-Protestors March in Suva', *Fiji Times*, 8 August 1986, 3.
93 'N-Protestors March in Suva', 8; 'FANG Aims for Nuclear Free Pacific', *Fiji Times*, 4 August, 1986, 2.
94 'Bavadra Urges Govt to Withdraw from Treaty', *Fiji Labour Sentinel,* August–September 1986, 2.
95 George, *Situating Women*, 48.
96 'Big Range of Women's Views Is Presented to Mrs White', *Fiji Times*, 29 April 1965, 7.
97 George, *Situating Women*, 48–49. The Legislative Council of Fiji was the colonial precursor to the present-day parliament.

'anti-chief' and 'anti-tradition' for contradicting the views presented by the Soqosoqo Vakamarama, considered the old guard of women's groups in Fiji. Nevertheless, Lolohea Waqairawai, a leader of Soqosoqo Vakamarama, reportedly 'showed no anger but instead, recognised that these were new trends of thinking, and she would never oppose them'.[98] Rokotuivuna, alongside other indigenous Fijian women activists, had begun to highlight Fijian inequalities and inequities in their culture and community positions.[99]

Commenting on the *Fiji Independence Order 1970 and Constitution of Fiji*, Rokotuivuna asserted that 'the rights of indigenous Fijians [were] firmly entrenched' and through parliamentary democracy, 'a plural society or what we call in Fiji multiracialism was enshrined and gave expression in a relatively fair system of parliamentary representation'.[100] In 1987, when two coups led by Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka (who had commoner status) ousted the Bavadra government, which had been democratically elected, Rokotuivuna remained openly committed to the democratic process. To the establishment, Bavadra was seen as dangerous: his coalition government had an Indo-Fijian majority; he was perceived as a 'commoner' (despite having genealogical connections to the chiefly village of Viseisei); and, most importantly, he came from a Western province as opposed to an Eastern one, which had previously dominated Fijian politics.[101]

Rokotuivuna's long-time friend Wadan Narsey remarked on her grit in condemning ethno-nationalism during this time:

> When Amelia publicly opposed the 1987 coup, she also went against her chiefs, the hierarchy in her religion, her community, numerous of her friends, and even many members of her family.[102]

The coups posed complicated questions for the regional NFIP movement whose leadership had tended to give tacit and often direct support to indigenous movements. The deafening silence following the military coups, the failure to condemn the overthrow of the election result and some members' unconditional support of Rabuka led the Fijian chapter, composed of people like Rokotuivuna, to temporarily distance themselves from the NFIP.

Rokotuivuna critiqued indigenous forms of militarism and railed against the 'Rambo'-style masculinities that were often discursively essentialised through the concept of *bati* warriorhood linked to Rabuka through his traditional role and genealogical

98 Eta Baro, 'Lolohea Akosita Waqairawai', in *Women's Role in Fiji*, 38.

99 Griffen, pers. comm.

100 Amelia Rokotuivuna, 'Cultural Integrity and External Impact: The Fiji Case', in *Proceedings of the Pacific Security Symposium* (Wellington: Ministry of External Relations and Trade, 1990), 44.

101 Teresia Teaiwa, 'An Analysis of the Current Political Crisis in Fiji', in *Coup: Reflections on the Political Crisis in Fiji*, ed. Brij V. Lal and Michael Pretes (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008), 32, doi.org/10.22459/C.12.2008.05.

102 Narsey, 'Tribute to a Brave Woman'.

connections to Cakaudrove province, military career in the armed forces and deployment of Christian/Methodist saviourhood.[103] At the time of the initial coup, she reflected on having a 'righteous anger' that was:

> A product of her good basic Methodist upbringing bolstered by a belief in a sense of justice which interpreted to me that what was happening in my country was just totally outrageous—it just could not be! Naïve maybe, but who is to say that you cannot have such feelings for the land of your birth and your ideals?[104]

On the Saturday after the coup, Rokotuivuna, Nikhat Shameem and her students from the grammar school, as well as Labour Party and church leaders, gathered together in Suva during this extremely frightening, unpredictable and unprecedented time, many fearing for their own lives.[105] Together, they bravely undertook a peaceful protest at Veiuto, where members of the deposed government were being detained, offering prayers by a Hindu priest and an emotional singing of the national anthem.[106] Pushed back by the army's military trucks, 'at the suggestion of Jackie Koroi and Ema Druavesi, [they] marched backwards while chanting'.[107] Later, the military wrapped a coil of barbed wire across the entrance to keep the protesters out; they also removed the government members from Veiuto after separating the Fijian and Indo-Fijian members from each other.

Rokotuivuna returned to Veiuto on Sunday and led a spontaneous march through the streets. With a megaphone in hand, she was joined by 200–300 people (most of whom were young Indo-Fijians with some indigenous Fijians too) and jeered at by onlookers. Reverend Akuila Yabaki, a Hindu priest and the Muslim community all offered their prayers. At Sukuna Park, Rokotuivuna was stopped, arrested and detained alongside others, including Fijian activists Jackie Koroi and Ema Druavesi and the aforementioned priest.[108]

As Vanessa Griffen has observed, Rokotuivuna was one of 'many women … involved in protesting the illegal removal of an elected government, and in urging a peaceful solution to Fiji's problems'.[109] Earlier in the year, at a meeting of Pacific feminists, she had begun to articulate a regional vision for Pacific feminism that suggests her reasoning for opposing the coups, which effectively silenced any form of public critique against the Fijian government. Put simply, she believed in:

103 Teaiwa, 'An Analysis of the Current Political Crisis in Fiji', 32.
104 Amelia Rokotuivuna, 'Reflections of an Activist', in *With Heart and Nerve and Sinew: Post-Coup Writing from Fiji*, ed. Arlene Griffen (Suva: Christmas Club, 1997), 137.
105 Rokotuivuna, unpublished interview by Slatter, 6.
106 George, *Situating Women*, 111.
107 Rokotuivuna, unpublished interview by Slatter, 7.
108 Rokotuivuna, unpublished interview by Slatter.
109 Vanessa Griffen, 'Women and the Fiji Coups', *Pacific News Bulletin*, February–March 1988.

> Some criteria:
> Feminism abhors violence
> Feminism reasserts the importance of community
> Feminism is a belief in sisterhood, that actions with lasting effects are actions taken collectively
> Feminism stands for equality—not the equality of women and men, but the equality of all people in society
> Feminism stands for social justice.[110]

For the remaining months of 1987, Rokotuivuna claimed that her 'most overriding emotion' was 'a sense of deep loss for Fiji'.[111] In 1990, she argued that the aftermath of the coup permitted 'an Interim Administration that is not accountable to the people', with a 'military which is deeply involved in civilian life'.[112] Fiji's first constitution was abrogated and replaced in 1990 with the *Constitution of the Sovereign Democratic Republic of Fiji*. Rokotuivuna critiqued both its 'premise' of a 'monocultural society rather than a "plural society" or multiracialism' and the fact that the Great Council of Chiefs, the membership of which is totally under the discretion of one minister, would assume a far greater role in the political process while marginalising the rest, not only Indo-Fijians but also Fijian commoners.[113] She stressed the importance of stability in Fiji, as it was a critical hub for the region, stating:

> We in Fiji have never felt so insecure. The ruling group feel insecure and the ruled feel insecure. Insecurity is endemic in our families, in our jobs, in being a citizen of Fiji and about our lives. It is an insecurity caused by a primarily national event but which I know and you know has a profound impact on the security of the region.[114]

From 1992 to 1995, Rokotuivuna worked as a program secretary for advocacy for the World YWCA in Geneva. During this time, she continued her important work on international women's issues. At the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, alongside over 200 Pacific women and a delegation of 20 from Fiji, she was a plenary speaker on behalf of the Gender and Development Programme of the Asia-Pacific Development Centre which was coordinated by Vanessa Griffen. As one of the main representatives of the Pacific, she gave a broad sweep of the many issues still facing the region, including the continuing nuclear presence in Mā'ohi Nui and Hawai'i, the violation and denial of the right to self-determination in Kanaky New Caledonia, West Papua and Timor-Leste, the inadequacy of state political institutions to deal with pluralism and accountability in Fiji, Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australia, the violation and lack of restoration of the rights of indigenous peoples,

110 Amelia Rokotuivuna, 'Women, Development and Feminism: Some Criteria', in *Women, Development and Empowerment: A Feminist Perspective*, ed. Vanessa Griffen (Kuala Lumpur: Asian and Pacific Development Centre, 1987).
111 Rokotuivuna, 'Reflections of an Activist', 144.
112 Rokotuivuna, 'Cultural Integrity and External Impact', 44.
113 Rokotuivuna, 'Cultural Integrity and External Impact', 45.
114 Rokotuivuna, 'Cultural Integrity and External Impact'.

the plunder of resources by transnational corporations in Bougainville and its impact on governments, the effect of structural adjustment programs on the living conditions of ordinary people in Fiji and the effects of an unjust system of international trade regionally.[115] Fiji's bleak subservience to neoliberal modes of dependency and insecurity as a result of political corruption and the coups had informed her thinking. She proposed that:

> The only effective engine for sustainable development is a just and fair international system. No amount of aid will help the countries of the South out of their misery unless they are given the chance to make an honest living.[116]

Upon her return to Fiji, she attended the 1996 NFIP conference, exactly 21 years after the first ATOM conference. Reflecting on the changes that had occurred over her career, she remarked: 'we were then not so schooled in the intricacies of the military establishment [but] … today, the NFIP movement is an expert on those things and more'.[117] She emphasised that 'corruption by governments is endemic in our region, participatory democracy is derided as alien, [and] resources are exploited callously with the acquiescence of our leaders'.[118] Further, that 'our Pacific cultures are steeped in reverence, deference and acquiescence towards leaders' and that:

> One of the ways we can curb the present malaise and reverse the situation is to nurture a culture of debate, discourse, questioning and demanding for accountability—a milieu of active participation in the governance of our countries.[119]

She proclaimed that the major role of NFIP should be 'to build a strong and vibrant civil society with a deep sense of justice and caring for our ordinary people'.[120] In conclusion, she remarked that, whereas 'in 1975 we were deriding the colonialists … [now] we have to face our own kind and tell them like it is'.[121]

Under Fiji's convenorship, the 1996 NFIP conference was guided by a strong position on women's rights flowing from the Beijing conference. Its first resolution was 'concerned by the violence perpetrated against women by colonisation, militarisation and nuclearisation'.[122] Delegates agreed that the 'NFIP Movement recognises the women's contributions and role in the campaign for independence and to be nuclear free'; and that 'the men of NFIP movement take responsibility alongside the

115 Amelia Rokotuivuna, 'Obstacles to Peace and Human Security: Including the Effects of Militarization, Violence, and Poverty', in *Look at the World Through Women's Eyes: Plenary Speeches from the NGO Forum on Women Beijing '95,* ed. Eva Friedlander (New York: Women Ink 1996), 41–45.
116 Rokotuivuna, 'Obstacles to Peace', 45.
117 Amelia Rokotuivuna, 'Introduction—Fiji', in *Never Again? 7th Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Conference, 9–13 December 1996, Fiji* (Suva: Pacific Concerns Resource Centre, 1996), 5.
118 Rokotuivuna, 'Introduction—Fiji', 5, 6.
119 Rokotuivuna, 'Introduction—Fiji', 6.
120 Rokotuivuna, 'Introduction—Fiji'.
121 Rokotuivuna, 'Introduction—Fiji', 6.
122 'Resolutions', in *Never Again?,* 135.

women for ending male violence at all levels including personal and governmental, religious institutions and other patriarchal institutions'.[123] Pacific feminists called for the defunding of the Fiji Military Forces, investment in social justice programs and implementation of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, as well as gender equality and women's empowerment strategic objectives.[124] At a time when marching in the streets was highly politicised, about 200 NFIP participants and supporters participated in a women's rights march through Suva that aimed 'to decrease violence in society and empower women to become full citizens and exercise their human rights'.[125] Reflecting Rokotuivuna's influence, the oppression of all women (with the Fijian coups in mind) was put centre stage for the first time at any NFIP conference.

In her later years, Rokotuivuna continued to be a critic of coup culture and political corruption. When the 2000 coup occurred, led by failed businessman George Speight, she again rose as a vocal opponent, arguing for a multicultural and tolerant Fiji that foregrounded human rights. On 1 June 2005, she died from cancer, survived by her son Peceli. Following her death she was nominated for a Nobel prize for her work in mothering generations of Fijian and Pacific feminists and activists. At a public address to her alma mater, ACS, in 2008, Wadan Narsey said he was sorry that there are 'so few Amelias' in Fiji public life today. He speculated that, had she still been alive, she would no doubt have condemned Voreqe Bainimarama's regime.[126] It is equally likely that she would have been sceptical of Rabuka's democratic return to power through a coalition of the People's Alliance, the National Federation Party and the Social Democratic Liberal Party at the end of 2022.

Reflections from a diasporic Fijian in Australia

My study of Amelia Rokotuivuna, the woman who mothered generations of Pacific feminists and whom current Pacific scholars ought to read and cite, has reframed how I personally understand the historical relationship between Fiji and Australia, the experiences of everyday Fiji Islanders across both countries, and how these dynamics inform what is now being referred to as the Fiji–Australia Vuvale Partnership. I am drawn to Rokotuivuna's life story and writings as they speak to the belittling Australian attitudes that Fijian and Pacific peoples encounter in their day-to-day lives in both Australia and Fiji. These are often sustained by Australian government and media outlets that relay overtly concerning economic, security and military agendas of the

123 'Resolutions'.

124 'Resolutions', 136. It should also be noted that those who spoke up against the Rabuka government for its position on French nuclear testing at this time were greatly penalised. For example, Meraia Taufa Vakatele lost her cabinet position in the Rabuka-led government when serving as a member of the Soqosoqo ni Vakavulewa ni Taukei party when she participated in an anti-nuclear march. See Asenaca Uluiviti and Sadhana Sen, 'Meraia Taufa Vakatele: Anti-Nuclear Activist and Feminist Trailblazer', *DevPolicy Blog,* 22 August 2023, devpolicy.org/meraia-taufa-vakatale-anti-nuclear-activist-and-feminist-trailblazer-20230822/.

125 Esita Sogotubu, 'Women March for Their Rights', *Fiji Times*, 11 December 1996, 1.

126 Wadan Narsey, 'So Few Amelias', *Fiji Sun,* 14 November 2008. See also George, *Situating Women*, 205.

settler nation-state to build influence in the region, allegedly in response to a rising China against its geopolitical rival, the United States. None of these foreign agendas augurs particularly well for democracy and peacebuilding in Fiji and the broader Pacific in an era of climate crisis. Through Rokotuivuna's words, I have sharpened my thinking around why Australians think they indelibly know or otherwise own Fiji and the Pacific, and what the costs of this are.

Pacific biography retains an outdated tendency towards telling the life stories of figures considered 'eminent'—that is, those who amassed political cachet from 'business, colonial, missionary, and government authorities'.[127] As a committed member of civil society, Rokotuivuna actively brought Pacific governments and colonial powers to account and, in doing so, had a multiscalar and transnational impact. As Pacific historians such as Tracey Banivanua Mar have argued, there is considerable value in unearthing the life stories of Pacific feminists and grassroots women such as Rokotuivuna.[128] Like Banivanua Mar, Teresia Teaiwa and many other 'Fiji Women Scholars who are Brilliant and Strong and Weary', Rokotuivuna died too young, her life tragically cut short at the age of 63.[129] Her contributions to Pacific intellectual history are profound, yet, due to her being viewed as a regional leader from below, they are frequently downplayed. However, through archival glimpses such as those presented here, a new generation can be reminded of her contribution to the radical genealogy of Pacific feminist foremothers that shapes our present.

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127 Katerina Teaiwa, Nicholas Hoare and Talei Mangioni, 'Finding Australia's "Missing" Pacific Women', in *Reframing Indigenous Biography,* ed. Shino Konishi, Malcolm Allbrook and Tom Griffiths (Abingdon: Routledge, 2025).

128 For a phenomenal contribution to Pacific Studies and the study of grassroots figures acting in what she describes as 'counter networks of empire', see Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific*.

129 Katerina Teaiwa, 'For Fiji Women Scholars Who Are Brilliant and Strong and Weary', *Australian Historical Studies* 49 (2018): 260–62, doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2018.1461054.

Singers, sisters, soldiers, seekers: Lea Firth and the Black Sistaz on being 'the voice' for West Papua

CAMELLIA WEBB-GANNON

'Not having … connection to land means [singing is] the only way to keep our culture alive' reflects West Papuan–Australian singer and songwriter Lea Firth (née Rumwaropen) as she considers what ignites her passion for music (see Figure 1).[1] Lea, 42 years old, is one of three Rumwaropen sisters who, until recently, performed together as the Black Sistaz trio—a band that has earned a place in Australian music history for women, Pacific artists and decolonisation activists alike. The sisters—Lea, Petra and Rosa—are the daughters of the late Agustinus (August) Rumwaropen, a member of the renowned West Papuan rock-reggae-fusion band, the Black Brothers, active from the late 1970s. The women formed the Black Sistaz band as a means of perpetuating their father's musical-political legacy—that is, to campaign for independence in West Papua, a Pacific territory that has been subject to a brutal Indonesian military occupation since the early 1960s. In 2022, Lea began to concentrate on developing a solo singing career, building on her work as a backing vocalist for various artists including her now husband, Gamilaraay singer, Mitch Tambo.[2]

In this article, I trace Lea's journey as a refugee, singer, daughter, sister, wife, mother, and women's empowerment and decolonisation activist. I explore the responsibilities that have been placed upon her and those that she has chosen to take on that require her to live both an ordinary life as a caretaker of her family *and* an extraordinary one as a representative of the West Papuan independence cause in Australia and role model for women. And I examine how Lea, as a member of the Black Sistaz and as a solo artist, has used her voice to convey her experience of living as a West Papuan woman abroad, singing her way through everyday life in family, church and community settings, while at the same time singing a testimony to the battle for justice in her homeland. Importantly, I document a shift in her activist strategy and use of her voice resulting from the realisation that 'the political' was exacting too much of a personal cost and that there are multiple ways of employing 'voice' for justice.

1 Grace Dlabik, 'The Black Sistaz: Freedom Fighting through Music', *Be Collective Culture*, 2019, becollectiveculture.com/entry/the-black-sistaz-freedom-fighting-through-music.

2 'Tambo' is the artist's stage name: his last name is Firth.

Figure 1: Lea Firth, 2022.
Source: Lea Firth archive. Photographer: Daniel Morolla.

Independently and in various partnerships—with her sisters, other Pacific and indigenous artists, and now with Mitch Tambo—Lea has been instrumental in creating a new legacy, carrying on from that forged by the Black Brothers. First, Lea's decolonisation leadership as a West Papuan 'sista', or woman, represents a pivot within the predominantly male-led West Papuan decolonisation movement of previous decades and an opportunity to inspire Melanesian (and other) 'warrior princess' activists.[3] Second, as a member of the West Papuan diaspora in Australia, Lea and her collaborators have facilitated the creation of novel activist-musical alliances for the West Papuan independence struggle with Indigenous Australian and other Black musicians, strengthening regional solidarity for the West Papuan decolonisation cause to an unprecedented degree. And, third, rather than singing overtly about independence as other musicians in support of West Papuan freedom have done, Lea draws on her indigeneity to keep the struggle alive through music, for example, using indigenous language and storytelling through song while working at a grassroots level with local communities to promote indigenous (West Papuan and Australian) cultural strengths. This article interrogates Lea's threefold legacy.

A brief history

Despite her Australian citizenship, Lea identifies, with her sisters, as 'West Papuan through and through'—an identity encouraged by their father who declared to his daughters when they were growing up that the moment they entered through their front door they were no longer in Australia but in West Papua.[4] West Papua, to Lea and her family, is their homeland—a place where they cannot reside due to a decades-long conflict and the family's consequent political activities. By creating a homeland within their own dwelling in diaspora, the Rumwaropen family demonstrated how 'indigeneity' can be 'both rooted in and routed through particular places'.[5] A peripatetic existence, necessitated as the Black Brothers band members and their families sought asylum in various locales, required that August find practices that allowed him to 'feel rooted without being localized' in the physical homeland—to 'take [his] roots with [him]'.[6] In addition to creating a homeland away from the homeland, the Rumwaropen sisters were astonished to discover when they visited West Papua for the first time as they were returning their father's body to Biak for his burial, that, over decades, August routinely sent photographs and stories of his Australian family life to his family in Biak. Petra noted:

> He was really good at writing letters. They used to always write, him and his siblings. So when we got there … in everyone's houses, there were like recent photos of us all and we were just [like] this is so funny! We didn't even realise Dad was doing all this stuff.[7]

3 See 'Mama Pasifika', Black Sistaz, YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLof9yI9HkU.
4 Lea Firth, interview by author, 21 October 2022 (via Zoom).
5 James Clifford, 'Indigenous Articulations', *The Contemporary Pacific* 13, no. 2 (2001): 469 doi.org/10.1353/cp.2001.0046.
6 Clifford, 'Indigenous Articulations', 470.
7 Black Sistaz, interview by author, 25 November 2017, Lifou, New Caledonia.

The Rumwaropen family had to create a new homeland outside West Papua because of Indonesia's colonisation of the territory, a short overview of which follows.[8]

Following its own independence from the Dutch in 1949, Indonesia proceeded to make sovereign claims to West Papua, a territory that had also been under Dutch colonial rule, although administered separately. The Dutch refuted Indonesia's claim to sovereignty, agreed that West Papuans were ethnically and culturally different, and began the process of preparing West Papuans for political independence.[9] At the end of 1961, the Dutch-supported New Guinea Council had chosen national symbols for its anticipated nation-state. In response, Indonesia commenced military incursions into the territory.

Amid fears that Indonesia could turn to communist powers for support, a deal known as the 1962 New York Agreement was struck between the United States of America, the Dutch and Indonesia (West Papuans were excluded) to cede administration of West Papua to the United Nations and then to Indonesia. The deal specified that a United Nations–supervised referendum would be conducted in 1969 in which West Papuans were to be given the chance to vote for independence or continued annexation to Indonesia. The referendum was a farce, with the United Nations turning a blind eye to the violent threats issued to the 1,024 West Papuans handpicked by Indonesia to coerce them to vote for integration.[10] Denied self-determination by external authorities in 1962 and 1969, West Papuans have been subject to six decades of oppressive Indonesian rule featuring land and resource dispossession, cultural diminishment, political repression and violent human rights abuses.[11]

Since the mid-1960s, indigenous West Papuans have resisted Indonesian occupation by employing methods of guerrilla warfare, international diplomacy, dialogue and non-violent civil resistance. A significant tool used in civil resistance, throughout history and across the world, is song. Songs can carry messages of resistance, emotionally buoy people in times of hardship, 'serve as repositories and disseminators of Indigenous knowledge' and constitute a powerful force for change.[12] In Melanesia and, indeed, across the Pacific, and in indigenous cultures elsewhere, performance of song and dance is foundational to the development of political-cultural identity.[13]

8 See Camellia Webb-Gannon, *Morning Star Rising: The Politics of Decolonization in West Papua* (Honolulu: Hawai'i University Press, 2021), doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv17kw97w.

9 Jim Elmslie, *Irian Jaya under the Gun: Indonesian Economic Development versus West Papuan Nationalism* (Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing, 2002), 11.

10 Carmel Budiardjo and Liem Soei Liong, *West Papua: The Obliteration of a People* (Surrey: TAPOL, 1983), 31.

11 See Otto Ondawame, *'One People, One Soul': West Papuan Nationalism and the Organisasi Papua Merdeka* (Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing, 2010); Elizabeth Brundige, Winter King, Priyneha Vahali, Stephen Vladeck and Xiang Yuan, 'Indonesian Human Rights Abuses in West Papua: Application of the Law of Genocide to the History of Indonesian Control', Yale Law School, 2004, law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/Intellectual_Life/West_Papua_final_report.pdf; Budiardjo and Liong, *West Papua.*

12 Polly O. Walker, 'Singing A New Song: The Role of Music in Indigenous Strategies of Nonviolent Social Change', *Nonviolent Alternatives for Social Change*, n.d., www.eolss.net/sample-chapters/c04/e6-120-07.pdf.

13 Michael Webb and Camellia Webb-Gannon, 'Musical Melanesianism: Imagining and Expressing Regional Identity and Solidarity in Popular Song and Video', *The Contemporary Pacific* 28, no. 1 (2016): 61, doi.org/10.1353/cp.2016.0015.

Ricardo Guthrie, drawing on George Lipsitz, writes that 'one of the most important functions of culture is to provide avenues of liberation through narratives which create emancipatory possibilities for the marginalised'.[14] The ethnographer Julian Smythe found in his research in West Papua that participating in communal song and dance did indeed lead to a temporary sense of liberation from the oppression of Indonesian rule. In West Papua, one *becomes* West Papuan through participating in communal song and dance.[15] Performance works as a medium through which to build cultural and political identity in many Pacific and other indigenous cultures.

The liberatory and mobilising effects of song may partly account for the tremendous popularity of the Black Brothers band that burst onto the music scene in Jayapura in the mid-1970s and went on to garner acclaim throughout Indonesia and across Melanesia in the following years. The Black Brothers percussionist, William Ayamiseba, who joined the band c. 1980–81, recalls that the music of the Black Brothers was always political, incorporating 'traditional music and [indigenous] language' to signal indigenous West Papuan pride.[16] The name of the band was symbolic, too. It was intended, according to Ayamiseba, to foster a sense of brotherhood among Black people (hence, the Black *Brothers*) and to draw attention to West Papuans as Black Melanesians in contrast to non-black Indonesians.[17] The Black Atlantic styles of music the Black Brothers played—reggae, rock and disco—further indicated the Black Brothers' political affinities, as did their sartorial style featuring Afro hairstyles, berets, black leather jackets and sunglasses, which directly referenced the 'racial pride and political solidarity of the seventies Afro-American tradition'.[18]

Although the Black Brothers rarely sang explicitly about West Papuan independence, the significance of their name, deployment of indigenous language, lyrical metaphors for political freedom and styles of music and fashion, alongside their immense following in Indonesia and the Pacific, were considered sufficiently threatening by Indonesian authorities that the Black Brothers sensed they would soon be in danger.[19] They therefore self-exiled from Indonesia in 1979 to PNG and then to the Netherlands.[20] August Rumwaropen, lead singer and guitarist in the band, had married Antomina, the mother of Lea, Rosa and Petra, when the Black Brothers were

14 Ricardo Guthrie, 'Embodying an Imagined Other through Rebellion, Resistance and Joy: Mardi Gras Indians and Black Indigeneity', *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 12, no. 5 (2016): 559, doi.org/10.20507/AlterNative.2016.12.5.9.

15 On this, see Julian Smythe, 'The Living Symbol of Song in West Papua: A Soul Force to Be Reckoned with', *Indonesia* 95 (2013): 73–91, doi.org/10.5728/indonesia.95.0073.

16 William Ajamiseba, interview by author, 25 November 2017, Lifou, New Caledonia.

17 Ajamiseba, interview.

18 David Pickell, *Between the Tides: A Fascinating Journey among the Kamoro of New Guinea* (Hong Kong: Periplus Editions, 2002). See also Tracey Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous Globalisation and the Ends of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016): 183–225, doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139794688.

19 'West Papua's Fight for Freedom, The Black Brothers and the Black Sistaz', *Wise, Gifted and Black,* podcast, Facebook, 2020, www.facebook.com/watch/?v=329862621664660.

20 Craig Lockard, *Dance of Life: Popular Music and Politics in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 105.

living in Jakarta. She left Indonesia along with the Black Brothers, giving birth to Lea in the Netherlands in 1981 and then to Rosa in 1982. Petra was born in 1985 in Vanuatu, a country in which the Black Brothers were hugely popular and were offered asylum until they were accused of meddling in national politics, jailed for six months without trial and then deported, finally to find refuge in Canberra, Australia, in 1989.[21]

Sistaz: West Papuan women doing decolonisation

Their itinerant childhood was difficult although experience-rich and full of love, the sisters recall. Moving from the Netherlands to Vanuatu to Canberra as refugees resulted in trauma due to a sense of displacement.[22] In Canberra, their family co-resided in households belonging to other families, not able to secure public housing of their own until they received Australian citizenship when Lea turned 15. Despite such precarity, joy and a strong identity were to be found in singing—Lea, Rosa and Petra sang at home with their father (who taught them to sing in the Biak language), at church and with their community. 'Part of our culture is singing', Petra reflects.[23]

Despite the sisters' perception of having been 'born into the [West Papuan independence] movement', the Rumwaropen sisters did not become the Black Sistaz until after their father's untimely death on 16 May 2005 (he was 55)—an event Petra describes as 'a slap in the face' that catalysed their activism.[24] August's passing stirred a sense of purpose in the sisters—a belief that their duty, at that point in time, was to carry on the music and the message of the Black Brothers.[25] In 2008, the three women, all in their 20s, moved to Melbourne to join the Melbourne-based West Papuan community and to commence a career of activism through music. Members of the first band they joined in Melbourne, Tabura, suggested that the three women, when performing (mostly covers of Black Brothers songs or as backing vocalists for other artists) as a trio, call themselves the Black Sistaz. It made sense to the sisters: 'We're the next generation of the Black Brothers, we're sisters, and we're black' (see Figure 2).[26]

21 Christie Eliezer, 'West Papuan Artist Rumwaropen Dies', *Billboard*, 23 May 2005, www.billboard.com/music/music-news/west-papuan-artist-rumwaropen-dies-1411992/.

22 Hilda Wayne, 'How the Black Sistaz Use Music as Activism', *Sistas, Let's Talk,* radio program, ABC Pacific, 7 December 2022, www.abc.net.au/pacific/programs/sistas-lets-talk/how-the-black-sistaz-use-music-as-activism-/14112716. Canberra was chosen as the site of settlement for the Rumwaropens and other Black Brothers families, according to Petra, because the city was home to those Australian citizens who had been lobbying the government to grant the group of West Papuans asylum. Petra recalls the West Papuan children in their community sticking together as being black in Canberra at that time made one conspicuous. See 'West Papua's Fight for Freedom'.

23 'West Papua's Fight for Freedom'.

24 'West Papua's Fight for Freedom'.

25 'West Papua's Fight for Freedom'.

26 'West Papua's Fight for Freedom'.

Figure 2: The Black Sistaz in performance, 2019.
Source: Lea Firth archive.

There was a critical difference between the Black Sistaz and the Black Brothers, however, as Len Garae noted in an article for the *Vanuatu Post*:

> They are female artists [and] they believe their music is [sufficiently] powerful to empower their Melanesian girls and generation to feel the heat of the fire that is burning deep within for freedom.[27]

Working as decolonisation activists in the music industry—an area of activism as well as an industry traditionally dominated by men—the Black Sistaz hoped to use their status as women performers and the messages in their music to mobilise Pacific women for decolonisation, and to convince them of their inherent beauty and worth.[28] Lea told journalist Giddy Heine in 2021:

> That's what we're about, we're the only women that represent our entire nation and country through music, we're trying to do everything we can and appreciate every platform that enables us to do so.[29]

27 Len Garae, 'The Black Sistaz', *Daily Post,* 4 December 2017, www.dailypost.vu/news/the-black-sistaz/article_522a741b-2747-5ad5-8baa-42dbe7680ddd.html.
28 Firth, interview; Black Sistaz, interview.
29 Giddy Heine, 'How the Black Sistaz Are Fighting for a Better West Papua from Their New Home in Australia', *Beat*, 2021, beat.com.au/how-the-black-sistaz-are-fighting-for-a-better-west-papua-from-their-new-home-in-australia/.

In a media interview in 2019, Lea relayed to a journalist the responsibility that she and her sisters—when performing as the Black Sistaz—perceived to 'be the voice because [West Papuans at home] can't speak'.[30] The concept of voice, Anastasia Sai writes, encompasses:

> not only the sounds made when someone is speaking or singing, but also entails the power to make such sounds or utterances. Having a voice is having a right or privilege of speaking or voting.[31]

The Sistaz are cognisant that their location in the diaspora affords them a power of voice not available to women in West Papua (i.e. the freedom to critique injustices) and have thus decided to exercise that power to speak out by using their physical voices to sing messages of freedom for women—freedom from both patriarchal and colonial oppression.

According to Geoffrey White, in traditional Melanesian society, leaders 'tend to be almost exclusively male'—a tendency that, in many contemporary contexts, has become 'a rigid ideology deployed against women' who seek to have a political voice. Even in matrilineal communities, White observes, 'male kin are more often the group's vocal representatives'.[32] Restrictions on women's public use of voice is often 'justified as "customary" practice', according to Martha Macintyre, 'which occur[s] in the context of cultural beliefs about sexual differences, ideologies of gender distinctions and complementarity, and traditional hierarchical relationship'. This invocation of custom serves to 'render women jural minors, refuse them property rights, and require all females to defer to adult men … [in] many regions' in the Pacific, including West Papua.[33] A report written by West Papuan women researchers and advocates about violence faced by their peers contends:

> We have experienced rape and sexual abuse in detention, in the grasslands, while seeking refuge, no matter where we were when the army and police conducted operations in the name of security. Furthermore, in our own homes we repeatedly have been victims of violence.[34]

30 Dlabik, 'The Black Sistaz'.

31 Anastasia Sai, 'Voicing the Voiceless: Textual Representation of Women in Melanesia' (MA thesis, University of Wollongong, 1997), n.p.

32 Geoffrey White, 'Indigenous Governance in Melanesia', State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper 2007/5, 12.

33 Martha Macintyre, '"Hear Us, Women of Papua New Guinea": Melanesian Women and Human Rights', in *Human Rights and Gender Politics: Asia-Pacific Perspectives*, ed. Anne-Marie Hilsdon, Martha Macintyre, Vera Mackie and Maila Stivens (London: Routledge, 2000), 146.

34 Documentation Working Group on Violence and Human Rights Violations against Papuan Women, 'Enough Is Enough: Testimonies of Papuan Women Victims of Violence and Human Rights Violations 1963–2009', 2009–10, 1, www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-IDN-Enough-Women_Papua-Report-2010.pdf.

Lea comments:

> We do come from a patriarchal society. In West Papua, it's like a different level. And I think there's still that island mentality and that [West] Papuan culture where women are the ones at home looking after the children.[35]

(It was not that way in Lea's family, though. Lea describes her mother as the 'breadwinner' and her father as the one who accompanied his daughters to school each day and delivered their forgotten lunchboxes). Not only are indigenous West Papuan women often subjected to sexist treatment and violence, but also, under conditions of colonialism in West Papua, they are exposed to racialised/racist beauty ideals in advertisements, in television shows and in salons.[36] Terje Toomistu observed in her research in West Papua that daily beauty salon work 'involves straightening the hair and lightening the skin of the [West] Papuan population' and that:

> [West] Papuan women feel discriminated against for aspects of their bodies that do not compare well with the lighter skin, straight hair and smaller body shapes of the Indonesian migrant women.[37]

The Black Sistaz have used the platform that their music provides them to speak out against the double colonisation of West Papuan women (through sexism and racism) —a condition that Raylene Ramsay has described (and the Kanak decolonisation activist and feminist Déwé Gorodé has identified) as the 'tightrope walk between colonial oppressions and the secondary oppression of indigenous women' by men.[38]

In their 2018 reggae single 'Mama Pasifika', the Sistaz call out to Pacific women: 'Hey girl, do you know your worth?' The lyrics tell the listener: 'You're a warrior princess', challenging the traditional Melanesian notion of warriors as men, assuring women that they can break the mould of stereotypical submissive femininity and fight oppression too. They also affirm Melanesian women's physical features—'curly black hair, brown eyes'—as beautiful. 'That is one of the biggest reasons we talk about black beauty and being proud of your Melanesian skin colour and your natural hair', Lea informed me in an interview, 'because the idea of beauty in West Papua especially is completely Indonesianised'.[39] 'Mama Pasifika' was selected to represent the Vanuatu 2019 International Women's Day campaign and the accompanying video features Melanesian women taking part in a range of careers, from law to science and technology to martial arts, 'redefining what it means to be a woman in

35 Firth, interview.

36 Firth, interview.

37 Terje Toomistu, 'Embodied Notions of Belonging: Practices of Beauty among *Waria* in West Papua, Indonesia', *Asian Studies Review* 43, no. 4 (2019): 583, 589, doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2019.1657066.

38 Raylene Ramsay, 'Indigenous Women Writers in the Pacific: Déwé Gorodé, Sia Figiel, Patricia Grace: Writing Violence as Counter Violence and the Role of Local Context', *Postcolonial Text* 7, no. 1 (2012): 3.

39 Firth, interview.

sports, politics, education and business', according to campaign partner Digicel.[40] The first verse and chorus are sung in English while the remainder of the lyrics are in Vanuatu Bislama and have been selected so that they translate well into the two other Melanesian lingua franca—Tok Pisin and Solomon Islands Pidgin. So has the song's title, 'Mama Pasifika'. In West Papua, 'mama' is a title for women generally; however, 'mama' also references a matriarchal figure, a female with power.

In a male-dominated media and performance industry, the Black Sistaz have used their voices to encourage an assertive ideal of Pacific womanhood—in 'Mama Pasifika' they sing:

> You got to spread your wings and fly, we got to stand up and rise up, Mama Pasifika we got to stand tall; We got the world at our feet, Mama Pasifika we got to stand strong.

Through their work, they form part of an emerging sisterhood comprising contemporary women 'moving into more cosmopolitan spheres of urban life or national politics' in Melanesia—women who, by choice and/or necessity, constitute a mobile elite that is 'inserting women at the centre of a new articulation of Oceanic identity'.[41] This new sisterhood includes the likes of Amanda Donigi, founder of *Stella* magazine for Pacific women, as well as other female journalists and media workers in Melanesia who are 'trailblazers and mentors, passionate and brave'.[42] It is a sorority with a traceable decolonial feminist genealogy in Melanesia of women 'express[ing] personal thoughts and political protest' through composing songs and poetry—for example, Grace Mera Molisa from Vanuatu, Jully Sipolo from Solomon Islands and Déwé Gorodé from Kanaky New Caledonia—but that also finds inspiration internationally.[43] The Black Sistaz were invited to perform at the 2017 Women of the World festival in London, in advance of which Lea commented:

> Meeting incredible women and knowing they are going to be around you, you feel part of a bigger and greater movement … I'm really looking forward to meeting Elaine Brown. She is the first girl from the Black Power Movement, who's in her 70s now and still going strong. I can't wait to meet and hear some truths with her words of wisdom.[44]

40 See Digicel, Facebook, 2019, www.facebook.com/DigicelVanuatu/videos/check-out-the-release-of-the-mama-pasifika-video-celebrating-vanuatu-women-and-g/386610508804081/?locale=ar_AR&paipv=0&eav=AfbZnjYfUjSOqOAZxptzziWsxqvEylNbLjq-U5hVVjaMS5vjPfikG6Xf8s81xPLAh48&_rdr.

41 White, 'Indigenous Governance in Melanesia', 13; Ceridwen Spark, 'An Oceanic Revolution? *Stella* and the Construction of New Femininities in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 25, no. 1 (2017): 56, doi.org/10.1111/taja.12066.

42 Spark, 'An Oceanic Revolution?', 56; Faith Valencia-Forrester, Bridget Backhaus and Heather Steward, 'In Her Own Words: Melanesian Women in Media', *Pacific Journalism Review* 26, no. 1 (2020): 63, doi.org/10.24135/pjr.v26i1.1104.

43 Macintyre, '"Hear Us, Women of Papua New Guinea"', 152.

44 Heine, 'How the Black Sistaz Are Fighting for a Better West Papua'.

Novel activist-musical alliances to strengthen support for West Papua

Not only are Lea and her sisters a source of inspiration to West Papuan (and other) women, but also they have been instrumental in forging powerful trans-indigenous alliances with other Pacific and Australian Indigenous musicians, mounting support for decolonisation in West Papua, Australia and elsewhere. This builds on a Black Brothers tradition. Petra remembers when the Black Brothers band members were first granted asylum in Australia and they performed at big concerts raising awareness about Aboriginal land rights, playing alongside Jimmy Barnes and Midnight Oil 'in support of the Indigenous mob here [in Australia]'.[45] 'Once viewed as the formal process of handing over the instruments of government', decolonisation, according to Linda Tuhiwai Smith 'is now recognized as a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic, and psychological divesting of colonial power'.[46] The Black Brothers, and the Black Sistaz in their wake, have acted to join forces with other indigenous artists through cultural (musical) collaboration to influence the long-term process of decolonising West Papua, as described by Tuhiwai Smith. To do so, they have appealed to audiences outside West Papua, bringing increased attention to the West Papuan decolonisation struggle, and have lent their influence and popularity to the decolonisation issues represented by the indigenous artists with whom they collaborate. Brydie-Leigh Bartleet argues that trans-indigenous musical collaborations offer opportunities to 'cross cultural divides and provide a strengths-based space to meet through shared passions and interests'.[47] For the Black Sistaz, music festivals and digital media interactions have proved productive sites for the performance of such collaborations.

Indigenous cultures have long pre-colonial histories of gathering with other indigenous peoples for exchanges of cultural performances. Examples include *corroborees* in Indigenous Australia, the *sing-sing* in PNG and the *pilou-pilou* in Kanaky New Caledonia.[48] Traditionally, in Australia, such gatherings would bring together different clan groups to 'perform and renew the law … in the presence of related peoples' and to exchange 'songs, dances and stories with people from far away'.[49] Now, festivals that involve indigenous performers hailing from different nation-states still benefit

45 'West Papua's Fight for Freedom'.

46 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 98.

47 Brydie-Leigh Bartleet, 'How Concepts of Love Can Inform Empathy and Conciliation in Intercultural Community Music Contexts', *International Journal of Community Music* 12, no. 3 (2019): 318, doi.org/10.1386/ijcm_00003_1.

48 Peter Phipps, 'Indigenous Festivals in Australia: Performing the Postcolonial', *Ethnos* 81, no. 4 (2016): 684, doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2014.989876; Vida Chenoweth, *Sing-Sing: Communal Singing and Dancing of Papua New Guinea* (Christchurch: University of Canterbury, 2000); Raymond Ammann, *Kanak Dance and Music: Ceremonial and Intimate Performance of the Melanesians of New Caledonia, Historical and Actual* (Noumea: Agence de développement de la culture kanak, 1997).

49 Phipps, 'Indigenous Festivals in Australia', 685.

from the chance to 'actively represent themselves and their culture[s] in a positive light'.[50] This is important in a global context in which most stories and news media concerning indigenous peoples involve narratives of loss and tragedy.

In 2017, I was privileged to form part of the audience at a music festival held in Hapetra on Lifou island in Kanaky New Caledonia, where the Black Sistaz were a headline act.[51] The festival was curated by the Kanak superstar musician Edou and was called Fest Mela—the name and the festival itself were intended to celebrate the Melanesian heritage of the performing musicians (and most of the audience) and to foster a sense of Melanesian cultural pride.[52] Edou had invited the Black Sistaz to perform not only because he appreciated their musical skill but also to create a special coming together of musical representatives of Melanesia's two remaining colonised territories, West Papua and Kanaky New Caledonia. In interviews with both Edou and the Black Sistaz at the festival, the artists revealed that playing music together with and for Melanesians is a political act in itself, a way of keeping people connected to their cultures within a colonial system that alienates people from their cultures. While Edou offered support for West Papuan decolonisation by asking the Black Sistaz to open his festival, the Black Sistaz in turn demonstrated their solidarity with the struggle for Kanak sovereignty by agreeing to perform at this indigenous Kanak event.

In 2022, the Black Sistaz performed at the Blaktivism festival in Queensland:

> representing for our big beautiful island of PNG & West Papua and standing in unity with the powerful & talented First Nations Artists from this beautiful land we now call home.[53]

The performance, alongside artists such as Bart Willoughby, Tasman Keith, Emma Donovan, Deline Briscoe, Barkaa and Kristal West, was intended to celebrate Australian 'Blak' activism (politically engaged criticism relating to Aboriginal issues and the celebration of urban Aboriginal culture/s[54]) in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. It was created to provide 'a place where healing, culture, fire, power, truth, beauty, light and shade [were] given space' through a gathering of indigenous performers from Australia, PNG and West Papua.[55] By aligning under the banner of 'Blaktivism', each artist's decolonisation message—whether it promoted West Papuan independence or Australian Aboriginal land rights—reached a bigger audience and was more loudly amplified than if it had been broadcast in isolation.

50 Phipps, 'Indigenous Festivals in Australia', 687.
51 Fest Mela, *Black Sistaz at Fest Mela 24I25 Nov. 2017—Hapetra—Lifou*, Facebook, 2017, www.facebook.com/musicliveNC/videos/1765675230140519/.
52 Edou Wamai, interview by author, 25 November 2017, Lifou, New Caledonia.
53 Blaktivism, *Sorong Samarai*, Facebook, 2022, www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=1627881547399001.
54 Jack Latimore, 'Blak, Black, Blackfulla: Language Is Important, But It Can Be Tricky', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 August 2021, www.smh.com.au/national/blak-black-blackfulla-language-is-important-but-it-can-be-tricky-20210826-p58lzg.html.
55 Queensland Performing Arts Centre, 'Blaktivism', 2022, www.eventfinda.com.au/2022/blaktivism/brisbane.

The Black Sistaz have also performed at Fest'Napuan, Vanuatu's largest music festival featuring musicians from across Melanesia playing 'reggae, melanisian [sic] fusion, string band, roots and pacific [sic] pop'.[56] Playing music at this festival in particular holds significance for the Black Sistaz because of its location: Vanuatu is the place that feels most like home to them after West Papua and is the only country that openly supports West Papuan independence.[57] Performing at Fest'Napuan 'was epic', Petra recalls:

> because we know the Melanesian crowd, they sit. You know they're enjoying it, but they don't really, they don't stand. Well not in Vanuatu, maybe not since their days when the Black Brothers were [playing]. But they really enjoyed it![58]

Peter Phipps contends that:

> At their simplest, [festivals] are staged because they matter to communities as a way to celebrate and affirm their belonging, and in order to both project and generate their cultures. At a deeper, historical level, they are part of a global, cultural-political assertion of indigenous political and cultural rights.[59]

For Lea and the Black Sistaz, performing at each of the above festivals has been a collaborative act of claim making, an assertion that, as indigenous peoples, they still have a voice. What was also evident at Fest Mela and from online viewing of the Black Sistaz' performances at Fest'Napuan was that their performances, in concert with others, were generative of joy among artists and festival goers who revelled in shared music making, responsive dancing and a sense of community brought together through the collective experience. And it was hope affirming and educational—performing to crowds who may have come to listen to artists other than the Black Sistaz has given the Black Sistaz a larger and more diverse audience and led to a more widespread awareness of West Papua's history, customs and decolonisation struggle, and to the possibility of increased solidarity internationally.

In the digital realm as well as through live festival performances, the Black Sistaz have actively created or participated in trans-indigenous and trans-Black alliances to tell the story of their personal history and the larger narrative of West Papua's history. The Sistaz collaborated on a musical-political alliance with PNG musicians George Telek and Ngaiire Joseph in a recording of Telek's 2010 anthem 'West Papua', a song calling for Papua New Guinean political solidarity with West Papuans that has amassed more than 18,000 views on YouTube. Digital alliances have also allowed the Sistaz to preserve the memory of the Black Brothers. For example, in 2022, Petra detailed the Black Brothers' exile journey on the podcast 'Wise, Gifted and Black', a show hosted by Melbourne-based Malawian 'Brother Nadir' to explore black-to-black connections in Australia.

56 Fest Napuan, *The Black Sistaz Live @ Fest'Napuan,* YouTube, 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbIzQMBuIfE.
57 Wayne, 'How the Black Sistaz Use Music as Activism'.
58 Black Sistaz, interview.
59 Phipps, 'Indigenous Festivals in Australia', 884.

Further solidifying black-to-black alliances through international reggae collaborations, the Sistaz have performed with Australian 'urban roots' band Blue King Brown, Jamaica-based Nattali Rize, Julian Marley (Bob Marley's son), Katchafire (an all-Māori band), Natiruts (from Brazil) and UB40 (Sona Productions 2020). 'You know what', Lea reflected in an interview:

> the collaborations are amazing. It's all about relationship. That's how you connect with someone and that's how you share stories and get people to actually care … Collaborating with the other indigenous artists has been such an amazing way to build solidarity and good relationships because you know they're going to go and speak to their communities and share. It's just word of mouth, you know the ripple effect is unreal![60]

Strengthening indigeneity in diaspora: Indigenous life as voice

One can only push a voice so far without straining it. For Lea, performing as one of the Black Sistaz and collaborating with other artists in pursuit of decolonisation for West Papua for more than a decade had been an immensely rewarding musical, activist and cultural journey, but it had taken a personal toll. During that decade, she told me, she went:

> through hell and back, personally, with a failed relationship, I was a single mother, like there's so many levels of a woman's journey that I can relate to, and that's not even talking about living in exile![61]

By 2021, Lea believed she had reached a point at which:

> I was making a lot of sacrifices … I [was] working five jobs so I could pay for my own airfare to go to wherever I needed to go because there was some conference or something happening and [the organisers] needed us to [represent the cause] while my kids are at home with my mum.[62]

The COVID-19 pandemic forced a pause in Lea's travel and performance schedule and she realised she had a chance, in her words, to:

> zone everything in and try and work out what my path is instead of what [another] person wants my path to be or what my parents want my path to be.[63]

60 Firth, interview.
61 Firth, interview.
62 Firth, interview.
63 Firth, interview.

Lea had recently married Aboriginal singer and former *Australia's Got Talent* star Mitch Tambo; she had a newborn baby and was caring for her three older children. As her performance life slowed down and her family responsibilities picked up, Lea recognised:

> I was just tired! And I felt [when travelling and performing] like I was missing out on my kids, and I realised that the [independence] struggle, and my commitment to it, I was putting on the same level as the wellbeing of my children … And I realised that yeah, I'm not doing that anymore.[64]

Lea's experience, a sort of activism 'burnout', is not uncommon among indigenous people who are viewed as cultural or political representatives of their people:

> I guess a lot of West Papuans who don't really know us, I mean they don't even have to be West Papuans, a lot of people … there's this notion that if you're living outside of West Papua or living in the Western world then you should be, like, you're earning money, you're like living the dream, and you've got to use your voice for 'us' who're left back here. But at the same time, I think our people back home need to understand that our life here isn't necessarily easier than theirs in a way.[65]

As Rachel Swain notes, 'tensions can be felt among responsibilities to communities, cultural custodians, national postcolonial issues, and one's own practice as an artist'.[66] Lea was experiencing such tensions.

Lea has spent the last two years 'do[ing] a lot of kind of inner work on [her]self'. This has resulted in a decision to 'pull back on the hard … activism where', in her words, 'I am out there with the flag in front of the Indonesian consulate or I'm on stages with [the West Papuan Morning Star] flag'.[67] Two key reasons lie behind this decision. The first is intensely personal and relates to her family. When Lea first flew to West Papua, the aeroplane was also transporting her father's body, lying in the hold, to Biak Island for burial. Flying over Biak but prior to the plane's descent, and in the pitch dark, Lea describes having a sensation of arms coming from the ground and pulling her down to where she belonged—on West Papuan soil: 'With everything in me', Lea remembers, 'I felt like I was home.'[68] Because of this profound attachment to her island place, Lea wants the opportunity to visit West Papua again, to take her children, and to visit her father's grave without arousing or encountering suspicion from the Indonesian government.[69] At this point in her life, she wants to focus on teaching justice in her home, rather than on stage.

64 Firth, interview.
65 Firth, interview.
66 Rachael Swain, 'A Meeting of Nations: Trans-Indigenous and Intercultural Interventions in Contemporary Indigenous Dance', *Theatre Journal* 67, no. 3 (2015): 510, doi.org/10.1353/tj.2015.0093.
67 Firth, interview.
68 Firth, interview.
69 Firth, interview. See, also, Clifford, 'Indigenous Articulations'.

> It's funny, I didn't even realise how West Papuan I was until I had children … Respect for elders is such a huge thing. [My kids] know the songs, they know the flag and they know … the weight of it … How I talk about justice is just telling my kids about my own experiences, like having to live places without a choice.[70]

The second reason relates to a shift in the way she wants West Papua and West Papuans to be perceived in the wider world. Tarcisius Kabutaulaka writes about how, 'in the last three decades, Melanesia has been portrayed predominantly as a place of conflicts, political instabilities, and poor social and economic development', and Melanesians are often represented as 'ignoble savages'—half naked, with a spear in hand.[71] Lea is keen to move away from this deficit discourse that prevails, even (or especially) in many activist portrayals of West Papua. She describes her renewed vision for activism for justice in West Papua thus:

> My way of educating people about West Papua is showing them the beauty of it, of our beautiful island. And that's our music, our food, our culture, you know there are so many beautiful things about West Papua that you don't see on television because it's *all* about the political shit that's going on.

She continues:

> It's not all [like] that, you know. There are so many amazing young people in West Papua doing amazing things, like there are a lot of academics, there are West Papuans everywhere now studying and a lot of them are entrepreneurs, opening their own businesses, and they're all really creative. We need to see more of that, we need to see more of the positive stories that come out of West Papua.

Lea is still using her voice for women, taking part in trans-indigenous collaborations and working for decolonisation in West Papua. For the time being, however, she is focusing on doing so at the same time as prioritising her health and family. Her singing goals are twofold. The first is to launch herself as a solo artist to sing for 'inner freedom' for women—not just for West Papuan women or Melanesian women or Pacific women but for *all* women 'out there just doing the best they can with whatever resources they have':

> The songs I'm singing now, they're in [Biak] language, where our women can understand, but they actually relate, every woman on this earth, on this planet, can relate to it, you know?[72]

70 Firth, interview.

71 Tarcisius Kabutaulaka, 'Re-Presenting Melanesia: Ignoble Savages and Melanesian Alter-Natives', *The Contemporary Pacific* 27, no. 1 (2015): 118–19, doi.org/10.1353/cp.2015.0027.

72 Firth, interview.

Figure 3: Mitch Tambo and Lea Firth, 2021.
Source: Lea Firth archive.

And the second goal is to continue writing and recording music with her husband, Mitch Tambo, focusing on 'mak[ing] a change together' (see Figure 3).[73] Their work together is evident in their rendition of John Farnham's anthem 'The Voice'—a song protesting violence against women—in Gamilaraay language (Tambo sings lead vocals and Lea is one of two backing vocalists in a 26 January 2020 Invasion/Survival Day performance).[74] It is in this latter course of action—collaborating with Tambo—that Lea is intent on continuing her decolonisation work from a cultural strength, rather than a deficit-based approach, and using a trans-indigenous as well as Melanesian framework.

73 Firth, interview.
74 NITV, 'Mitch Tambo performs John Farnham's You're the Voice in Gamilaraay language—video', *Guardian*, 27 January 2020, www.theguardian.com/global/video/2020/jan/27/mitch-tambo-performs-john-farnhams-youre-the-voice-in-gamilaraay-language-video.

> We have this youth initiative program called Walanbaa and Mitch [Tambo] was doing this for a long time before he stepped into the music scene. So, for the first little while I would just go along with him … and it was kind of our way of bringing West Papua into the conversation.[75]

Tambo would teach school-aged children about Aboriginal cultures; at the same time, they would become curious about Lea's presence—often asking questions about her hair (it is naturally dark and tightly curled, sometimes with long braids woven into it). Tambo would then introduce Lea as being from West Papua. 'Mitch and I are on the same page about this and we do believe that that's the way that you can change the world, through the children.'[76]

To this end, they are creating an educational program for children that canvasses West Papua's geographical beauty, food and cultures with the aim of piquing Australian children's curiosity about the territory. Lea brings a traditional *tifa* drum and teaches the group how to sing 'E Mambo Simbo', a joyful song about a West Papuan child who gets lost but is returned to their village. Lea's and Tambo's intention is not to whitewash West Papua's colonial history but to 'smash the stereotypes' concerning a part of the world about which, other than stories pertaining to conflict and cannibalism, Australian audiences rarely hear.[77] Lea and Tambo emphasise the parallels in their indigenous colonial histories—teaching about Indigenous Australian and West Papuan histories and cultures at once is akin to:

> two long lost brothers or sisters coming together—it's powerful … At one point we [Australia and West Papua] were joined, we were one land. And that's why I think it's so important for us to collaborate.[78]

Engaging in decolonisation advocacy at this intensely personal level—in small school and community-based settings, rather than from large international stages, is also a traditionally Melanesian way of conducting politics, according to Geoffrey White. The emphasis is placed on 'taking the local seriously', working out political positions in 'highly participatory … group discussion'.[79] This is the politically engaged pedagogical approach currently being taken by Tambo and Lea.

Conclusion

This article has offered a biographical sketch of Lea Firth and, in broader brushstrokes, of her sisters, Rosa and Petra Rumwaropen. Theirs is a journey of responding to a 'calling' to represent their nation of origin—West Papua—through music, following in the footsteps of their father, the late August Rumwaropen, lead singer and guitarist

75 Firth, interview.
76 Firth, interview.
77 Firth, interview.
78 Firth, interview.
79 White, 'Indigenous Governance in Melanesia', 3, 10.

of the celebrated band the Black Brothers. Although they still have long musical careers ahead of them, the women, who have performed as individual artists and collectively as the Black Sistaz, have already created inspiring legacies. They have used their voices to encourage Melanesian women to embrace their natural beauty as well as to take up warriorhood in the face of injustices, whether related to sexism or racism or both. Through music, they have created powerful trans-indigenous alliances around the world, working with Pacific, Indigenous Australian and other Black artists to raise awareness of the ongoing colonisation of West Papua. And, in Lea's case, she has used her indigenous identity to teach young Australians about West Papua's cultural and geographical beauty, encouraging them to learn more about their region by exploring with them, in collaboration with her Gamilaraay husband, Australia's and West Papua's prehistory as one land. In 2023, Lea is making peace with her decision to be *a* voice for women and for West Papuan decolonisation rather than *the* voice, an embodied symbol of a highly politicised movement, a status that had ultimately become unrealistic and overwhelming. All the while, her voice is as rich as ever as she sings justice to her roles as daughter, mother, sister, wife, artist, activist, West Papuan woman and global citizen.

What ever happened to the Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Contemporary Biography?

NICHOLAS HOARE AND THERESA MEKI

The 1980s were both troubling and exciting years for PNG and Papua New Guineans, not to mention scholars looking back at them. Pleasant memories of independence from Australia were still fresh, yet cracks in the postcolonial nation—arguably only held together by a bandaid in the lead-up to 1975—had begun to reveal themselves. The nation may have been independent, but were its people decolonised? As the poet and scholar Vincent Warakai evocatively wrote in 1984:

> We are dancing
> Yes, but without leaping
> For the fetters of dominance
> still persist
> Yes, still insist
> On dominating
> Holding us down.[1]

James Griffin, an Australian historian at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) and an important character in this story, believed that PNG's inaugural prime minister, Michael Somare, and other post-independence leaders had been handicapped by a stream of 'wicked fairies'.[2] Even if the report card after a decade of independence was 'understandably mixed', the experienced PNG and Bougainville observer added that nobody could seriously object to the fact that a 'nation state with reasonable prospects of survival has been created'.[3] This, Griffin argued, was an achievement worth celebrating, however cautiously. Whatever differences in opinion may have existed between Griffin and Warakai about the reasons for PNG's mixed report card after 1975, both would have surely agreed that more work was required to bolster the dual processes of decolonisation and nation-building.

1 Vincent Warakai, 'Dancing Yet to the Dim Dim's Beat', *Ondobondo: A Papua New Guinea Literary Magazine* 4 (1984): front cover.

2 Griffin agreed with Michael Somare's chief strategist, Tony Siaguru, who, in 1982, lamented that 'like so many wicked fairies, our troubles have all arrived together'. Cited in James Griffin, 'Cautious Deeds and Wicked Fairies: A Decade of Independence in Papua New Guinea', *The Journal of Pacific History* 21, no. 4 (1986): 201, doi.org/10.1080/00223348608572542.

3 Griffin, 'Cautious Deeds and Wicked Fairies'.

It might seem strange, then, to recall that alongside the opening of a new parliament building at Waigani in 1984, the PNG government also established a Centennial Committee to mark 100 years since the beginning of colonial rule (sometimes termed an 'intrusion') in both Papua and New Guinea. Presiding over a period of escalating foreign debt, prime minister Somare notably chose to frame the commemoration as a 'centenary of Papua New Guinea's involvement in the modern world'.[4] Facing criticism from some quarters of PNG society, the leading thinkers who made up the committee, such as historian John Waiko (chairman), foreign minister Rabbie Namaliu (patron) and senior civil servant Sir Paulias Matane, insisted that the purpose of the committee was not to celebrate but to 'examine critically and objectively' the colonial past.[5] No doubt welcoming the government's willingness to invest in PNG history and culture, Tongan-born UPNG historian Sione Lātūkefu labelled it a 'very brave and extraordinary venture'.[6] Of the committee's many outputs, the PNGDCB project was perhaps the bravest, and certainly the most ambitious, of them all.[7]

Like all DNB projects, the PNGDCB was designed to foster national identity through the compilation of biographical data about its most significant citizens.[8] The idea was to create an all-encompassing, authoritative and scholarly work of reference to allow Papua New Guineans and others to more easily access historical information about the lives of national personalities such as Somare, Governor-General Sir John Guise or politician Josephine Abaijah. Against these admirable intentions must of course be weighed the many difficulties of completing such a project in a young nation like PNG. The *ADB*, in many ways the model for the PNGDCB, had been established in 1958, close to six decades after the birth of that nation. Aotearoa New Zealand's modern *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* (*DNZB*) had only begun in 1983–84.[9] PNG, on the other hand, wanted something similar completed while still in its teens. It is clear that Griffin, who was chosen to lead the project alongside UPNG librarian Andrew Griffin (unrelated), had his work cut out for him.

4 M. T. Somare, 'Forward', in *Colonial Intrusion: Papua New Guinea, 1884,* ed. Clive Moore, James Griffin and Andrew Griffin (Port Moresby: Papua New Guinea Centennial Committee, 1984), i.

5 Sione Lātūkefu, 'Introduction', in *Papua New Guinea: A Century of Colonial Impact, 1884–1984*, ed. Sione Lātūkefu (Port Moresby: The National Research Institute & UPNG, 1989), x–xi

6 Lātūkefu, 'Introduction', ix.

7 Further planned scholarly and commemorative outputs included a history seminar organised by Lātūkefu (resulting in the edited collection *Papua New Guinea: A Century of Colonial Impact*), a picture book on PNG history called *Colonial Intrusion* (distributed gratis to 2,500 schools and libraries across PNG), and educational posters for schools and libraries; a historical radio series, *Taim Bilong Papua Niugini*, a PNG film festival, a literary competition, centenary stamps and coins, various photographic and archival exhibitions, and a contemporary DNB; and, if the centennial fund was not exhausted by that point, an updated encyclopedia of Papua New Guinea.

8 The field is particularly well served by two edited collections emanating from ANU symposiums. See Karen Fox, ed., *'True Biographies of Nations?': The Cultural Journeys of Dictionaries of National Biography* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2019), doi.org/10.22459/TBN.2019; Iain McCalman with Jodi Parvey and Misty Cook, eds, *National Biographies and National Identity: A Critical Approach to Theory and Editorial Practice* (Canberra: Humanities Research Centre, The Australian National University, 1996).

9 Melanie Nolan, 'Using Lives: The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* and Its Related Corpora', in Fox, *'True Biographies of Nations?'*, 86. For the longer history of New Zealand's dictionary of biography see Melanie Nolan, 'The Politics of Dictionaries of Biography in New Zealand', in *After the Treaty: The Settler State, Race Relations and the Exercise of Power in Colonial New Zealand*, ed. Brad Patterson, Richard S. Hill and Kathryn Patterson (Wellington: Steele Roberts Aotearoa, 2016), 40–61.

This article tells the story of the PNGDCB project during the 1980s and beyond. We demonstrate why the project was launched, how far it progressed and why it ultimately failed, before moving to focus on attempts to relaunch the project in the early 2000s. The key actors in this story are James Griffin (1929–2010), whose research papers have allowed us to retrace this history, and Samuel Tua Kaima (1957–2010), the UPNG scholar who tried unsuccessfully to revive the project. Of course, a project of this scale could never be limited to just two men, so the wider network of contributors is outlined also, including Andrew Griffin, Waiko (chair), Paias Wingti (patron) and Tony Deklin (who briefly became a co-editor), as well as academic figures such as Donald Denoon, Elton Brash and Alan Butler, who were essential in getting the project started in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Finally, given the vast amount of material that still exists from the initial project in Port Moresby and Canberra, and the vastly improved research capacity in PNG, we suggest possible ways to relaunch the project in time for the 50-year anniversary of PNG independence in 2025. While our motivations remain similar to those of the project's originators, we argue that the modern PNGDCB would need to pay closer attention to questions of representation rather than significance to make the project more inclusive and reflective of the realities of contemporary PNG society. In sum, we argue simply that timing matters in historical projects—so does funding and researching capacity—and that for these reasons of wider research and socioeconomic context, 1984 was not the right anniversary to which this particular wagon should have been hitched.

The beginnings of a 'major scholarly achievement'

While large, scholarly projects were not completely unknown in PNG prior to the 1980s, they were far from common in the nascent research landscape established by the UPNG following its inception in 1965.[10] Peter Ryan's three-volume *Encyclopaedia of Papua and New Guinea,* published in 1972, is one example; however, pertinent here is the fact that UPNG was only a minor partner and there were no Papua New Guineans on the editorial board. The PNGDCB, on the other hand, was based at UPNG and had much greater Papua New Guinean input. Of the 25-person inaugural editorial board, over half were Papua New Guinean and it was chaired by Waiko, the young nation's leading historian. Leader of the Opposition Paias Wingti, appointed patron at the first editorial board meeting, commended the board for setting itself 'a mammoth, but highly commendable task'.[11] He thought the publication of the dictionary would 'mark a milestone in our national history, and serve a very valuable need in the field of research to promote a deep knowledge of our nation'.[12] Waiko,

10 On the creation of UPNG, see James Griffin, 'The Instant University', in *Papua New Guinea Education*, ed. E. Barrington Thomas (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1976), 99–123; Ian Howie-Willis, *A Thousand Graduates: Conflict in University Development in Papua New Guinea, 1961–1976* (Canberra: Pacific Research Monograph 3, 1980).
11 Paias Wingti to John Waiko, 7 May 1985, Papers of Jim Griffin, MS 10462, Box 22, National Library of Australia (hereafter Papers of Jim Griffin).
12 Paias Wingti to John Waiko, 7 May 1985.

similarly, thought that, once finished, the PNGDCB would be 'a major scholarly achievement … an invaluable tool for scholars and others seeking contemporary biographical information about Papua New Guineans'.[13] Yet, as we know, the project was never completed; the gap in historical knowledge still exists. Prior to looking at what might have gone wrong in the research and writing phases, we need to interrogate further the assumptions that lay behind the project and how it came to fruition.

The sheer volume of work that has gone into the project or related endeavours at various times since the 1970s is striking. The UPNG library and the UPNG history department were both instrumental in formulating the idea for the project in 1974–75, first with the creation of a biographical register at the library and then through proposing a fuller biographical dictionary by the history department to be labelled 'Eminent Melanesians'. The library staff delivered on their side of the deal, producing a 77-page PNG biographical register in January 1978 brimming with bibliographic detail; however, the 'Eminent Melanesians' project was a slower burn. This was acknowledged in the introduction to the biographical register: authors Rod Lacey and Lātūkefu from the history department, and Alan Butler and Nancy Lutton from the library, discussed the differences between the simplicity of a 'catch-all' list of references free from any scholarly judgements, and the 'definitive completeness' of a dictionary in which committees were required to decide who to include and capable authors had to be found to write the entries. They warned that an authoritative reference work would 'take years of preparation, especially as PNG has such a shallow time depth in written sources'.[14] It is notable that, at this early stage, the authors were already predicting that a paucity of written archives would elevate the importance of oral history to the project (a well-acknowledged factor in Papua New Guinean historiography more generally).[15]

In fact, it was the 'Eminent Melanesians' project that eventually became the PNGDCB. Most people involved shared the view that the usual dictionary of biography rules about including only historic—that is, dead—subjects would not work in PNG given the dearth of written documentation about their past. The idea was thus to create something in between a biographical register and a fully fledged national dictionary of biography, something that better reflected the realities of PNG as a young nation—in other words, a more scholarly *Who's Who*. With these principles settled, the UPNG historian Donald Denoon was said to have done 'a considerable amount of preliminary work' on the project throughout 1979–80, and the *ADB*, with staff members interested in PNG such as Ken Inglis, Diane Langmore and Griffin's wife Helga (see below), also pledging pro bono assistance.[16] However, it took the appointment of Elton Brash as vice-chancellor of UPNG in 1982 to provide the

13 John Waiko to Jim Griffin, 5 March 1985, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.
14 Lātūkefu, 'Introduction', i.
15 Lātūkefu, 'Introduction', ii.
16 Despite being mentioned in early documents, Denoon denies having ever attempted such a project. Donald Denoon, pers. comm., 23 November 2022.

necessary institutional impetus. Much like the experiences of the *ADB* based at the ANU, which had the institutional backing of the vice-chancellor and was generously funded, Brash's patronage was essential in the early stages of the project.[17] However, unlike at the ANU, Brash's early years as vice-chancellor were marked by frequent bouts of student unrest, leading to a commission of inquiry.[18] Nevertheless, Brash still managed to find time to approach the National Planning Office of the PNG government in 1983 for funding to support what everyone by then understood would be a multi-year project. Brash also arranged for Wingti, at that point deputy prime minister in the Julius Chan government, to act as patron.

A further integral figure was the UPNG librarian and secretary of the Centennial Committee Alan Butler, probably best known for his five-volume *A New Guinea Bibliography*, appearing between 1984 and 1990. It was Butler who, in 1983, pointed out that the project's funding proposal was 'a bit thin'.[19] According to Butler, more important than tacking 'on all the letters of support and lists of prominent PNGs who are patrons or on the board' was a 'persuasive preamble'.[20] This would mean conscripting 'someone with a mellifluous pen to strike tears from the eyes of hard hearted foundation executives'.[21] Who better to do this task than the eloquent UPNG professor and 'the man of many words' himself, James Griffin?[22] As Griffin would become the central figure in the project for the rest of the decade, it is necessary to make a brief biographical detour.

A third-generation Irish Catholic from Warrnambool, a coastal town in the Australian state of Victoria, James Thomas ('Jim') Griffin was, in no particular order, a talented writer, educator, singer and historian. Starting out in 1952 as a secondary school teacher at Xavier College in Melbourne, he gained much in life from his 1956 marriage to German-Austrian wartime internee and long-time *ADB* research editor and scholar Helga Griffin (née Girschik), including six children.[23] In terms of research, aside from biographies of the prominent Australian Irish Catholics John Wren and Daniel

17 W. H. Oliver, editor of the first volume of the *DNZB*, often joked about the vice-chancellor of ANU dropping in on the *ADB* office 'to take another look at the volume that had cost half a million dollars'. W. H. Oliver, *Looking for the Phoenix: A Memoir* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2002), 141–42, doi.org/10.7810/9781877242984. For the history of the *ADB*, see Melanie Nolan and Christine Fernon, eds, *The ADB's Story* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2013), doi.org/10.26530/OAPEN_459998.

18 Ian Howie-Willis, 'Elton Thomas Brash (1938–1998)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, published online 2022, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/brash-elton-thomas-32346/text40091.

19 Alan Butler to Jim Griffin, 20 July 1983, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.

20 Alan Butler to Jim Griffin, 20 July 1983.

21 Alan Butler to Jim Griffin, 20 July 1983.

22 A 'man of many words' is the title of Helga Griffin's bibliography of her late husband's works. Helga Griffin, 'A Man of Many Words: Bibliography of James Thomas ("Jim") Griffin (1929–2010): Teacher, Academic Historian, Writer, Singer' (Canberra: Desktop Publication, 2018–21). Available in Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 52.

23 For more on Griffin's time in PNG, see Helga M. Griffin, 'Debates in My Head', in *Our Time but Not Our Place: Voices of Expatriate Women in Papua New Guinea*, ed. Myra Jean Bourke, Susanne Holzknecht, Kathy Kituai and Linda Roach (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1993), 49–54. Helga Griffin's life is well chronicled in Helga M. Griffin, *At Home in Exile: A Memoir*, rev. ed. (Canberra: ANU Press, 2021), doi.org/10.22459/AHE.2021.

Mannix (published posthumously), he is best known as a scholar of Bougainville.[24] Griffin came to this subject after joining the UPNG history department in 1968 and learning about Bougainville secessionism through the Mungkas Association and students such as Leo Hannett and Melchior Togolo. As has been stated elsewhere, he readily identified with Bougainvilleans for, in their travails against Port Moresby and PNG, he saw a replication of the centuries-old struggle of the Irish against the English.[25] Griffin, unfortunately, never completed his much-awaited book on Bougainville history, but he remained a 'participant observer' of Bougainville for many years and contributed two stand-out chapters to the Anthony Regan and Helga Griffin co-edited volume, *Bougainville before the Conflict* (2005).[26] The Griffins left PNG in 1976 for a four-year stint in Townsville where Jim was appointed the foundation head of general studies at the Townsville College of Advanced Education. In 1980, he gained a research position at The Australian National Univeristy's Research School of Pacific Studies to work on a history of Bougainville; however, facing impediments to his research, he was soon convinced by the UPNG vice-chancellor to return to PNG to become foundation professor of distance education, with a specific focus on establishing study centres across the provinces.

It was during Griffin's time as chair of distance education at UPNG that he was drawn into the orbit of the PNGDCB project. Even if the biographical project hardly fitted within the remit of his new professorship, his breadth of historical knowledge and standing at UPNG meant that he was an ideal candidate, and the task would have been difficult to turn down. In the words of his wife, Griffin believed that 'apart from Papua New Guineans themselves, it was the duty of Australian citizens to get involved in Australia's devolution of colonialism in PNG'.[27] His efforts in setting up satellite campuses in PNG can be interpreted as one part of his civic duty to the emerging nation; his attraction to the PNGDCB project was another. What is more, it played to his strengths. As his publication record attests, of all historical genres, Griffin was most at home with biography. Aside from the two book-length biographies mentioned above, he also wrote 21 entries for the *ADB* from 1969 until his death, including the following PNG-related subjects: planter and coastwatcher, Paul Edward Mason; infamous highlands explorer, Mick Leahy; Papuan policeman, Simoi; Catholic bishop, Sir Louis Vangeke; and three French Catholics from Yule

24 James Griffin, *John Wren: A Life Reconsidered* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2004); James Griffin, *Daniel Mannix: Beyond the Myths*, completed by Paul Ormonde (Mulgrave: Garratt Publishing, 2012).

25 H. Griffin, 'A Man of Many Words', 55.

26 Anthony J. Regan and Helga M. Griffin, eds, *Bougainville before the Conflict* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2005). Griffin did not, however, cause the secessionist movement as Australian Minister for Territories Andrew Peacock is said to have once claimed. James Griffin, interview by Edgar Waters, Canberra, 25–27 July 2006, Oral TRC 5679, p. 105 in transcript, National Library of Australia.

27 H. Griffin, 'A Man of Many Words', 71.

Island's Sacred Heart Mission, Alain de Boismenu, Henri Verjus and Marie Thérèse Noblet.[28] Most of these PNG entries had begun their lives as entries for the PNGDCB that began to take serious shape under Griffin's direction in late 1984.

So, what was the PNGDCB exactly? At its most simple, the project aimed to publish a collection of biographical entries of 'prominent and representative figures' in PNG's recent history. Co-edited by the two Griffins, and advised by a large and illustrious editorial board, some 1,700 personalities were to be included in a volume of 500,000 words published by UPNG Press. Somare, PNG's founding father, would command the longest entry at 2,500 words, followed by Guise, Chan and Wingti, the project's patron, with 2,000 words each. Meanwhile, it was thought that as little as 100 words would suffice for lesser personalities.[29] The original principles of the Eminent Melanesians project remained intact and the prevailing logic was that a full national dictionary of biography was overly ambitious; hence it would be a national dictionary of *contemporary* biography. However, by setting 1945 as the starting point, the editors were aware that authors would face sensitivities that contributors to regular national dictionaries of biography would not have to face. Put frankly by the editors:

> while it is desirable to have lively entries, it must be remembered that unlike DNBs which deal with the 'mighty dead' and in which authors can be fresh and independent, a PNGDCB is dealing with contemporaries and therefore must show tact.[30]

Dealing with living subjects was a major departure from most national biographical dictionary projects that strove to be both authoritative (and thus needed to cover the entire life of the subject) and objective (hence the requirement to maintain a certain historical distance from the subject). However, it was thought that maintaining an explicit focus on the contemporary period would help consolidate beliefs about the fledgling nation and its founding figures, and give the volume a distinct, postcolonial flavour.[31]

Unsurprisingly, methodology, selection criteria and procedures were all keenly debated over the course of three inaugural editorial board meetings in 1985–86, and guiding principles were agreed to. At the second meeting, for example, a 3:1 ratio for PNG nationals versus expatriates was settled on, with the proviso that settlers would have shorter, *Who's Who*–style entries rather than full narratives. Notably, a desire for representative entries rather than mere national figures was articulated.[32] In pursuit of this, provincial representatives would be appointed to ensure the breadth

28 See James Griffin, *Papua New Guinea Portraits: The Expatriate Experience* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1978)—Griffin's other great biographical achievement.

29 Minutes of the First Meeting of the Editorial Board, 24 May 1985, 3, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.

30 'Style of Entries and Procedure', Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.

31 There was a precedent here: the *National Biographical Dictionary of India* had, as its main criteria, at least according to *NZDB* editor Bill Oliver, the contribution the person made to Indian independence. Oliver admitted that he never fact-checked the point, but used it often in speeches and meetings. See Oliver, *Looking for the Phoenix*, 144.

32 'Minutes of the Second Meeting of the Editorial Board', 1 November 1985, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.

of the nation was included. Jim Griffin's extensive contacts and high standing in the provinces, Bougainville in particular, was perceived as a further trump card and reason for his involvement. Waiko, speaking on behalf of the Centennial Committee, told Griffin that he was 'most appreciative' of his 'willingness to shoulder this burden'.[33] Finally, befitting a modern research project, computerised 'data banks' were to be developed to store the biographical information collected during the project, providing a secondary output for future researchers and national planners. What, then, caused it all to unravel?

From national milestone to a burden in need of shouldering

Notwithstanding a series of unforeseen challenges that developed during the project's lifetime, it is hard to shake the feeling that the project set an overly ambitious timeline from the outset. Whereas the *DNZB* had begun a full year earlier than the PNGDCB and only just met its publication deadline of 1990, in time for New Zealand's sesquicentenary celebrations, the two editorial Griffins, Jim and Andrew, were originally pushing for completion of their project by December 1986.[34] Bearing in mind that the PNG Centennial Committee endorsed the PNGDCB project because it would be less complicated and less expensive than an updated encyclopedia, perhaps this deadline was always more aspirational than real. In time, it would be extended to 1988,[35] but even then, it seems like wishful thinking given the unique set of challenges that lay in the way of completing a project of its scale and kind in a developing nation such as PNG. All national dictionary of biography projects encounter problems of inclusion (and, therefore, exclusion), authorship, funding and politics (whether academic or national), so it is worth interrogating the assumption that the PNG context was more difficult than others at any kind of intrinsic level. Indeed, one of the great strengths of national dictionary of biography projects is that by collecting together hundreds or thousands of individual biographies they can more easily absorb and convey diverse and pluralistic ideas of nationhood than narrative-focused, national histories.[36] If PNG's much-commented-upon diversity did not pose an insurmountable problem, what problems did the project face? As we outline below, many of the difficulties were unavoidable or even the result of sheer bad luck, yet others were unique to this particular context and could have been sidestepped with greater foresight.

33 John Waiko to Jim Griffin, 5 March 1985, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.
34 Andrew Griffin to Klaus Neumann, 13 March 1986, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.
35 John D. Waiko, 'Application for Research Funds—1987', 17 November 1986, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.
36 Bill Oliver operated on the assumption that New Zealand was 'essentially a place where many different kinds of people live: that it is, in fact, best thought of as a society rather than as a nation'. Oliver, *Looking for the Phoenix*, 143.

First, the real or perceived lack of research capacity and infrastructure in PNG brought with it practical academic challenges. To take one example, prior to the project's first editorial board meeting in May 1985, Andrew Griffin commented:

> I am finding that there is a terrible lack of biographical reference material in PNG. Even the most basic information is not available—who held what position, when, etc. It is going to be a problem for us.[37]

The solution to this problem was to send out a trilingual questionnaire (in English, Tok Pisin and Motu) to all living candidates to fill this gap in essential biographical data and have the information stored in the computerised data banks at UPNG. However, less than half of the 700 questionnaires were returned, and there seemed to be a particular lack of buy-in among the PNG candidates compared to their expatriate counterparts. This leads us to ask whether ordinary Papua New Guineans understood the project's aims. Were they comfortable handing over personal information to UPNG and the Griffins? Was there enough in this project for them?

While more could have been done to attract grassroots support for the project, it was not something of which the editors were ignorant. To secure better cooperation in the provinces, two so-called 'traditional leaders' were appointed from each province to help coordinate and select lesser-known personalities. These leaders were people such as historians Waiko and Willington Jojoga Opeba for Oro Province, playwright John Wills Kaniku for Milne Bay and linguist Otto Nekitel for West Sepik. Other so-called impartial advisers were corralled into helping out where local leaders were not forthcoming, such as Mary Cath Togolo in Bougainville (called North Solomons) and John Howard in Madang.[38] In the absence of official working parties as in the state-based *ADB* model, these leaders were the closest the Port Moresby–based project came to guaranteeing a fair geographic spread of entries. These impartial advisers were also supposed to be safeguards against the dangers of 'wantokism', which, at its worse, could be described as a uniquely Melanesian expression of nepotism or clientelism but, at its best, channels Bernard Narokobi's 'Melanesian Way' and the values of brotherhood, interdependence and collegiality that are necessary attributes for a large, voluntary project.[39] As someone who despaired about the infiltration of politics at all levels of UPNG, Jim Griffin was highly attuned to 'wantokism', perhaps overly so. As we have noted, in all contexts, national dictionary of biography projects run into political challenges. Did the editors' efforts to maintain academic neutrality or objectivity isolate the project from the very people from whom they were hoping to solicit contributions? Were the political challenges much more acute in PNG than in other contexts?

37 Andrew Griffin to Jim Griffin, 11 April 1985, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.

38 'Minutes of the Second Meeting of the Editorial Board', 1 November 1985, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.

39 Andrew Griffin to Jim Griffin, 22 January 1985, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22. For Narokobi's endorsement of the 'wantok' system in modern PNG, see Bernard Narokobi, *Life and Leadership in Melanesia* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1983), 38–39.

It was once preliminary lists of potential candidates began to be drawn up and circulated that backlash occurred. Asked to respond to a list of possible academic inclusions, librarian Philip Calvert from the Goroka Teachers' College responded: 'What a collection of drunks, perverts and imbeciles you are threatening to immortalise!'[40] On the entire list of 'possibles', Calvert thought 'that the list was top-heavy with politicians … and not many people who have done "building" in the country'.[41] He also criticised the planned inclusion of outsiders like Gough Whitlam: 'I cannot believe anyone will turn to the PNG DCB for a life of Gough Whitlam. Lets [sic] leave them to the history books of Australia, etc'.[42] Asked to comment on the list of possible sportspeople, national librarian Fraiser McConnell was struck by the fact that 54 per cent came from rugby backgrounds. To him, this was a:

> little more than overkill. This [overabundance] of Ruggers further affects another statistic—the sex ratio is 11% female; 89% male. What seems to have happen [sic] is if you are a woman or play any sport except Rugby (overwhelmingly League) you must have won a medal at the Commonwealth or South Pacific games in order to have an entry. On the other hand, if you play the greatest game as long as you are an international player (never mind that you lose to Queensland so badly that no one cares to remember the score—60-3?), then you qualify.[43]

More seriously, McConnell pointed to problems with the editorial board and their involvement in the project:

> Otto Kakaw is on the Board, but to my knowledge he has never been asked to contribute; and recent discussions with the staff of the patron of the project reveal that Mr. Wingti is in the dark as to what is transpiring. These are the people who grew up in the 50's and 60's and would be able to make informed suggestions from personal history. As you and I both know, a lot of things are not recorded in books available to us today, and I feel it is imperative to use the memories of all those persons at our disposal to make this a truly representative tool.[44]

To most of these charges, Jim Griffin scribbled in the margins 'rubbish', or 'more rubbish', and highlighted the fact that Kakaw never turned up to meetings.[45] On gender more broadly, while the project was evidently male dominated, they did formulate an exclusive list of women candidates. Yet it is worth questioning whether these critiques from white, expatriate figures might well have reflected a wider scepticism about the project from Papua New Guineans, who were arguably less likely to pick up a pen and write to the Griffins.

40 Philip J. Calvert to Andrew Griffin, 29 January 1986, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.
41 Calvert to Griffin, 29 January 1986.
42 Calvert to Griffin, 29 January 1986.
43 Fraiser McConnell to Andrew Griffin, 27 January 1986, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.
44 McConnell to Griffin, 27 January 1986.
45 McConnell to Griffin, 27 January 1986.

Once the selection criteria were in place and suitable subjects were chosen, the editors then ran into the problem of finding volunteer authors. A full-page advertorial was published in the *Pacific Islands Monthly* hoping to attract contributors from 'the widest possible range of people who possess specialist knowledge and insights'.[46] However, betraying the real purpose of the advertorial, in June 1986 Andrew Griffin expressed privately his belief that the project was 'desperately short of volunteer writers'.[47] Based in Madang, John Howard had the idea of encouraging students from the Divine Word Institute and the Madang University Centre to contribute entries, and encouraged Howard Van Trease to do the same with his national history students.[48] One of the most sobering pieces of correspondence came from 16-year-old Robert Diria, son of Sir Kaibelt Diria, who offered to write about his father for the dictionary in exchange for school fees. Noting that his Seventh Day Adventist School received no aid from the government (hence the 399 kina school fees, of which his mother paid 200 kina), the schoolboy added that if he could not raise the remaining 199 kina, he would be expelled from the school.[49] Diria's example is a salient reminder that whatever missteps the Griffins may have made at an individual level, there were larger socioeconomic and structural issues holding the project back and that also led to a preference for expatriate contributors over Papua New Guinean.

Precise budget figures are difficult to come by, but, put simply, economic precarity at the national level clearly affected the amount of money that was available for the project. Very early in the piece, the West German government pledged to support the project by meeting printing costs; however, this was less than helpful given the project would never make it to publication.[50] More substantially, we know that an initial proposal for a five-year project totalling 200,000 kina was rejected by the National Planning Office in 1983 before funding was secured the following year through the establishment of the PNG Centennial Fund of 150,000 kina.[51] However, as this had to be divided between multiple centenary projects, and the PNG National Executive Committee was slow to provide the money in the first place, the funding situation was tight from the beginning. This probably explains why in 1985, several months after Jim Griffin was offered the position of paid editor on a six-month contract (with the option of renewal for a further six months),[52] the position was downscaled to an honorary one, with the Centennial Committee citing limited funds.[53] This meant that Griffin was required to split his time between Canberra and Port Moresby during the key year of the project, 1985, before moving to PNG more permanently in 1986–87 once a senior research fellow role was created for him in the UPNG history

46 'What's in a Name?', *Pacific Islands Monthly*, May 1986, 24. Something similar was published in *Una Voce,* the quarterly journal of the PNG Association of Australia.
47 Andrew Griffin to E. Barrington Thomas, 17 June 1986, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.
48 J. M. Howard to Andrew Griffin, 7 January 1986, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.
49 Robert Diria to Andrew Griffin, 8 June 1986, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.
50 M. Reinhardt to Elton Brash, 2 March 1984, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.
51 Minutes of Meeting of the PNG Centennial Committee, 19 March 1985, 5, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.
52 John Waiko to Jim Griffin, n.d., Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.
53 John Waiko to Jim Griffin, 5 March 1985, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.

department to focus on the project (he would become professor of history and chair of the department in 1988). Even Jim Griffin's offsider, Andrew Griffin, was limited in what he could contribute, as the UPNG library could only afford him to work on the project in a one-day-per-week capacity.[54]

Although rare, in the best of cases, tight fiscal environments can lead to innovation. More common, however, is that they confine horizons and reduce the appetite for risk. The latter definitely seems to have played on the mind of Jim Griffin when it came to hiring a dedicated research assistant to take the project forward. After originally winning funds to hire an Australian expatriate research assistant in late 1985, the project came under pressure from UPNG and the national government in 1987 to hire a Papua New Guinean instead. Griffin's initial response was that no qualified Papua New Guinean could be found and that there was no time to train one.[55] In an interview later in life, he considered this an attempt at 'crippling the project'.[56] Such a response is probably unduly defensive, but it needs to be kept in mind that this was just one in a series of 'wicked fairies' to visit the project in quick succession, compounding the difficult situation for the editor. Elton Brash, the great champion of the project, left UPNG in late 1985; Andrew Griffin, Jim's committed co-editor, returned to London in late 1986; and Jim Griffin's UPNG flat was robbed and ransacked in February 1987, causing the loss of research tapes and a tape recorder donated to the project by the National Library of Australia.[57]

On the other side of the ledger, thanks to a successful 'People of Destiny' series featuring short biographical entries in the *Times of New Guinea*, the project found itself a prestigious and enthusiastic backer in the form of Chris Roering and the Melbourne office of Oxford University Press in early 1987.[58] From then on, the PNGDCB became the Oxford Dictionary of Contemporary Papua New Guinea Biography (with the even longer acronym, ODCPNGB), and a new deadline of 1988 was set. PNG PhD law graduate Tony Deklin had joined as a co-editor,[59] and expatriate businessman Harold Quinton even donated 25,000 kina in April 1987 to see the project through to completion.[60] Yet, despite these positive signals, the list of negatives was still evidently long enough to get in the way of publication. Various explanations can be offered for why the project eventually lost momentum, but Griffin's promotion to the chair of the UPNG history department in 1988, with its additional administrative burden, could not have helped matters, neither would the beginning of the Bougainville conflict in the same year. The attitudes that fuelled

54 Andrew Griffin to Jim Griffin, 13 December 1984, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.
55 H. Griffin, 'A Man of Many Words', 69.
56 Griffin, interview, p. 95 in transcript.
57 H. Griffin, 'A Man of Many Words', 86, 88–90.
58 Oxford University Press were very much in the market for dictionary projects, having made overtures to Australia and New Zealand, and eventually succeeded in securing the United States with what became the American National Biography project. Our thanks to Melanie Nolan for providing this information.
59 'Membership of PNGDCB Editorial Board as at 17 July 1986', Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.
60 'Funds Boost for PNG Dictionary', *Niugini Nius*, 23 April 1987, 2.

the conflict between Papua New Guineans and Bougainvilleans were antithetical to the nation-building aims of the dictionary, and, as a committed 'participant observer' of Bougainville, Griffin's focus must have been diverted. For a relatively small civil society like PNG in the 1980s, it is not hard to imagine crises such as Bougainville consuming all available energy and resources.

The archival record suggests a gradual petering out over 1989–90 and, tellingly, one of the final records in Jim Griffin's papers dates to September 1989 when he was providing advice to Hank Nelson, Bill Gammage and Diane Langmore at the *ADB* about which PNG subjects should be included in their well-established national dictionary of biography project.[61] The *ADB* has proactively included PNG subjects ever since, but not anywhere near to the extent imagined by a full PNG dictionary of biography. Whereas some commentators have pointed to Griffin's time as editor as a failure due to the lack of a final publication, more credit needs to be given for the amount of work the original project managed to get through in the pre-internet age. Moreover, as Helga Griffin points out, during Griffin's time as editor, local writers such as August Kituai, Robert William Tabua, Sam Tua Kaima, Maclaren Hiari, Tukul Walla Kaiku, Joe Koroma and Bar' Rah Nuli were commissioned to write entries.[62] In other words, the original project did have a research capacity–building function and was not completely dominated by expatriates. Interesting for our purposes is the fact that one of these authors, Sam Kaima, would try to take up the burden and revive the project in the early 2000s. As far as we know, this was favourably viewed by Jim Griffin who wanted to see Papua New Guineans adopt the project that he had painstakingly started.

Sam Kaima takes up the burden in the new millennium

The sudden passing of five PNG leaders in the first months of the year 2000 spurred UPNG librarian Samuel Tua Kaima into action.[63] Having already contributed several entries to the project in the 1980s, Kaima wrote to Jim Griffin in April 2000 about reviving the dictionary, proposing to meet and gain permission to use his work at that year's Pacific History Association Conference in Canberra.[64] At the same time, Kaima also pitched his idea to former chair of the editorial board, John Waiko, informing him that over 2,000 biographical entries from the original project were still available on a database kept at UPNG's Michael Somare Library. Accessing the database posed a minor technological problem, as it was created using Prime mini computers that became outdated in the early 1990s; however, assuming enough time was given to allow the migration of files, the principal remaining problem was securing enough

61 Diane Langmore to Jim Griffin, 12 September 1989, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.

62 H. Griffin, 'A Man of Many Words', 69.

63 These five were James Yanepa, Andrew Maino, Stanis Toliman, Bernard Vogae and Ludwick Kembu. Sam Kaima also wanted to prepare a full biography of Bernard Vogae alongside UPNG students and Vogae relatives, Camilus Vovore and Norbert Tule. See Sam Kaima to Jim Griffin, 13 April 2000, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.

64 Kaima to Griffin, 13 April 2000.

funding to both improve the draft entries to a publishable standard and cover the printing costs.[65] As we have just seen, these were no small concerns, and without forthcoming funding, Kaima continued to amass biographical material on important PNG figures once they had passed away.

Kaima appeared an ideal person to carry the project into the new millennium. His background was in education and library science, but he also had a master's degree in Pacific Islands studies from the University of Hawai'i. He began as a trainee librarian at the UPNG library in 1980 soon after completing an impressive honours thesis on the history and culture of his home village, Wantoat in Morobe Province.[66] He worked with Andrew Griffin at the library during the original years of the PNGDCB and contributed articles to the project, as well as the *Times of PNG*'s 'People of Destiny' series. Interestingly, he left PNG in 1987 to undertake postgraduate study in Hawai'i, completing a master's in library and information studies alongside his master's in Pacific studies. Given his enthusiasm for the PNGDCB project, we cannot help but wonder whether things might have turned out differently had he still been in the country when Griffin was asked to hire a local research assistant. Alas, Kaima returned to PNG in 1989 as a lecturer in UPNG's Department of Library and Information Studies. Despite undergoing further study in archives and record management at Monash University in the mid-1990s, Kaima more or less remained in his lecturing role until 2002, when an unsuccessful bid for parliament led to a brief stint outside the university as an archivist at the PNG Institute of Medical Research. He was a prolific writer, and his passion for bibliographic and biographical research fitted squarely within the tradition established at the UPNG library by his predecessors Alan Butler and Andrew Griffin.

Having been received positively but ultimately inconclusively in the year 2000, Kaima tried once again to pitch the project at 'Telling Pacific Lives', a conference organised by Brij Lal and Vicki Luker in 2005 at ANU. Accompanied by a press release and an eight-page list of possible entries, his research paper was unfortunately not chosen for publication in the final edited volume.[67] We have so far been unable to ascertain whether Kaima did not attend the conference because his paper was not accepted or whether his paper was not accepted because he could not attend the conference. Regardless, it contained a blueprint for the revival of the project at UPNG to coincide with the thirtieth anniversary of PNG independence.[68] Kaima envisaged the creation of a project bureau or research office at UPNG, including research officers, typists and an editor-in-chief or manager. Rather than sending out structured questionnaires, politicians and other notable figures would be interviewed by dedicated research

65 Sam Kaima to John Waiko, 7 April 2000, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.

66 Ewan Maidment and Brij Lal, 'Samuel Tua Kaima (1957–2010)', *PARBICA Panorama*, April 2010/January 2011, 10.

67 Brij V. Lal and Vicki Luker, eds, *Telling Pacific Lives: Prisms of Process* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008).

68 The material for this paragraph is drawn from Sam Kaima, 'Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Contemporary Biography', 8 November 2005, 6–9, Papers of Jim Griffin, Box 22.

officers using oral history methods. To make sure that ordinary people were included, senior history students would be tasked with interviewing village elders and depositing the biographical data in the library database. He suggested that this could be done through the creation of a biographical life writing course within the history department that would also be available through the provincial university centres across PNG. The perennial question of funding was left unanswered, with Kaima admitting that it 'will be the major hassle to begin with'.[69] He optimistically suggested that revenue from sales of an original volume made up largely of the work already undertaken in the 1980s might be sufficient to cover ongoing costs for subsequent volumes. Alternatively, he hoped that UPNG could be responsible for the budget.

Kaima's apparent inability to revive the project at UPNG during the early 2000s is an interesting side plot that demands further research. Was his mid-decade appearance in Canberra nixed by Australian immigration (famous for making life difficult for Papua New Guinean travellers)? Or was he simply swamped with work back at UPNG and unable to get on a plane? Echoing our earlier comment about the PNG scholarly context tending to throw up unexpected and 'wicked fairies' (as in the son of a knight offering his services in exchange for money for school fees), Kaima died tragically of tuberculosis on New Year's Eve 2010, just several months after Jim Griffin himself. He was only 52. As Kaima's colleague Peter Orlovich wrote, 'it is a reminder of how precarious life can be in the developing world'.[70] Illness has cut short too many lives among the Pacific's best and brightest minds. Thus, in addition to providing a service to the nation, and offering an appropriate way to mark 50 years of independence, we believe that taking up the project once again would be a fitting tribute to both Kaima and Griffin.

Taking up the burden once again with an eye to 2025

In the last few years, Papua New Guineans have mourned the passing of significant national leaders. On the eve of PNG's forty-fifth anniversary, 16 September 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, pioneer woman politician Nahau Rooney passed away in her Port Moresby home.[71] Three months later, on 19 December, the country lost former prime minister and economic reformer Sir Mekere Morauta.[72] Then, on 26 February 2021, Sir Michael Somare passed away. The year 2023 saw the passing of the Centennial Committee's original patron Rabbie Namaliu, and 2024 the passing of playwright Nora Vagi Brash. The lives and achievements of these people, already widely respected in PNG, were reflected upon and scrutinised by many following their deaths, reminding us once more of the important need to

69 Kaima, 'Papua New Guinea Dictionary of Contemporary Biography', 9.

70 Maidment and Lal, 'Samuel Tua Kaima', 11.

71 Michelle Nayahamui Rooney, 'Nahau's haus krai: Reflections and Shared Moments', *N'drop in Oceania*, 18 July 2021, www.ndropinoceania.com/post/nahau-s-haus-krai-reflections-and-shared-moments.

72 Ross Garnaut, 'Sir Mekere Morauta: A Man of Rare Talents', *The Round Table* 110, no. 1 (2021): 183–84, doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2021.1877463.

revisit the PNGDCB. Moreover, in 2025, PNG as a nation will reach 50 years of independence. It is important not only for reasons of historical posterity but also for issues pertaining to national identity and unity that the prominent Papua New Guineans who shaped this nation become part of the collective national memory and are not forgotten by younger generations.

During Somare's 10-day *haus krai*[73] at the Sir John Guise indoor complex (1–10 March), political representatives from each province led delegations of mourners to pay their final respects to the late Somare and his family.[74] Many of the speakers at the *haus krai* shared rich, insightful and detailed accounts of their engagement with Somare in the years leading up to independence. It is exactly these kinds of anecdotes and memories from contemporaries of PNG's pioneer leaders that need to be documented. The Australian government–funded 'PNG Speaks' website holds oral history interviews with Papua New Guineans about their memories of the years leading up to independence in 1975.[75] However, these interviews are limited to famous Papua New Guineans such as Charles Lepani, Ted Diro and Matilda Pilacapio, to name a few. Recollections and contributions of the average Papua New Guinean are not generally recorded for public consumption in such a way.[76]

Unfortunately, what became apparent during Somare's *haus krai* is that it is mostly male pioneers and politicians who receive substantial media reporting upon their deaths. At one level, this is unsurprising as politicians, by the very nature of their role, receive substantial reporting and no less upon their deaths. However, without lessening their contribution to the country, there have been many other Papua New Guineans, contemporaries of Somare, Mekere and Rooney, who have also helped to develop the country in various ways yet are less likely to receive any state recognition due to their non-political careers. For example, on 11 April 2017, when PNG's flag designer Susan Karike passed away, the daily newspapers recorded the public grievance about the official lack of acknowledgement of her contribution to PNG's national flag.[77] Karike was a 15-year-old student at a Catholic mission school on Yule Island when the selection committee on constitutional development visited her school in February 1971. The initial proposal for the flag was designed by ex-patriate Australian artist and civil servant Hal Holman. Holman's design was a tricolour blue, yellow and green flag with the Southern Cross on the blue side and the white bird of paradise on

73 A site for mourning with the bereaved and showing final respect for the deceased.

74 Thierry Lepani, 'NCD to Host First Night of Haus Krai', *Post-Courier*, 1 March 2021, postcourier.com.pg/ncd-to-host-first-night-of-haus-krai/.

75 See *PNG Speaks*, pngspeaks.com. *PNG Speaks* is a partnership between the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the University of Queensland, Deakin University and the Papua New Guinea National Museum & Art Gallery.

76 A recent special issue of *Australian Historical Studies*, titled 'Wan Solwara: New Histories of Australia and Papua New Guinea', features Papua New Guinean reflections on independence, including Keimelo Gima, 'My Reflections on Papua New Guinea's Independence of 16 September 1975', *Australian Historical Studies* 55, no. 2 (2024): 255–73, doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2024.2324898.

77 Barnabas Orere, 'Flag Designer Susan Karike Abandoned by Government', *Post-Courier*, 4 July 2017, postcourier.com.pg/flag-designer-susan-karike-abandoned-government/.

the green side. Karike gave a facelift to that design by replacing the blue and green panels with red and black and she drew a diagonal line across to separate the gold bird of paradise on the top left and the Southern Cross on the black bottom half. The flag was presented and adopted by the House of Assembly on 4 March 1971.[78]

This type of historical information about lesser-known women, however brief, should be more accessible to Papua New Guineans, especially since PNG women's history has been, for the most part, undocumented. Anne Dickson-Waiko attributed this lack of documentation to how women were structurally located in PNG's patriarchal society, as well as the structural relocation during the colonial period and the colonial policies that were both gendered and racialised, institutionalising gender inequality and subordination.[79] PNG women did not experience colonialism, independence and nation-building the way their male counterparts did. Given PNG's gendered society, in which there is a tendency for male leadership and achievement, including that of the educated elite to be well documented, women's working-class experiences, life stories and achievements must be recorded to depict women's contributions to PNG's nation-building, as well as to facilitate gender mainstreaming.

Ann Turner's short (just 99 pages) 1993 book is one, and possibly the only, collection of PNG women's biographies.[80] Although brief, it documents the life of five remarkable PNG women. These women include Dame Meg Taylor, Nora Vagi Brash, Rose Muingnepe, Dr Rose Kekedo and Dr Naomi Martin who were notable in the decades following independence for achieving a series of 'firsts' for PNG women: lawyer (Dame Meg), playwright (Brash), PNG Council of Churches leader (Muingnepe), head of government department (Kekedo) and PhD (Martin). Since 1993, these women have climbed the career ladder reaching higher positions of leadership. Given that many other high-achieving PNG women have since arrived on the scene, the book's sequel is surely long overdue. Eric Johns's limited series of 'Famous People of PNG', designed for secondary-level students, included only three PNG women: Dame Carol Kidu, Dame Rose Kekedo and Dame Alice Wedega.[81] It is important that more publications depicting PNG women as role models are produced and incorporated into the school curriculum to inspire future generations of PNG women.[82]

78 Geoff Littler, 'The Papua New Guinea Crest and Flag', *Papua New Guinea Association of Australia*, 3 January 2023, www.pngaa.net/Independence_Anniversary/crest_flag_origin.htm.

79 Anne Dickson-Waiko, 'Taking over, of What and from Whom?: Women and Independence, the PNG Experience', Working Paper no 10, Alfred Deakin Research Institute, Deakin University Australia, 2010.

80 Ann Turner, *Views from Interviews: The Changing Role of Women in Papua New Guinea* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993).

81 Eric Johns, *Dame Alice Wedega* (Melbourne: Pearson Education, 2002); Eric Johns, *Dame Rose Kekedo* (Melbourne: Pearson Education 2002); Eric Johns, *Lady Carol Kidu* (Melbourne: Pearson Education, 2005).

82 Further examples include Josephine Abaijah and Eric Wright, *A Thousand Coloured Dreams: The Story of a Young Girl Growing up in Papua* (Mount Waverly: Dellasta Pacific, 1991); Turner, *Views from Interviews*; Carol Kidu, *A Remarkable Journey* (Melbourne: Pearson Education, 2002).

Revisiting the PNGDCB requires a renewed approach to its range and scope. Going forward, we hope for inclusivity and equality, not only for gender but also for sectoral representation. There are Papua New Guineans in different sectors of state and society, such as the arts, sports and agriculture, that should get ample representation. Further, as PNG is a post-traditional society operating with introduced Western institutions, it would be appropriate also to acknowledge traditional and chiefly leaders by documenting their lives and contributions to their respective localities. Other important questions need to be asked, such as will the subjects of the PNGDCB be dead, in keeping with historical dictionary of biography custom or should there be a consideration of living Papua New Guineans? Who gets the privilege of being selected? And what will be the criteria for selection?

Reviving and continuing the work of Jim Griffin and Sam Kaima would be a start. The authors acknowledge that, like previous attempts, relaunching this project would be a substantial undertaking. A lack of research capacity in PNG was identified as one of the original handicaps of the project, but this is much less of an obstacle today. Compared to the 1980s, there are now significantly more trained research personnel in PNG. Institutions that undertake qualitative research, such as the Melanesian Institute in Goroka, the National Research Institute and the Institute of National Affairs in Port Moresby, have trained, and currently employ, many Papua New Guinean social science researchers. In the last two decades, there have been various large-scale, multi-partnered research projects that have trained Papua New Guineans of various education levels to engage in related research activities, such as collecting and recording data, interviewing and participant observation. Created in 2012, the domestic election observation exercise at ANU is one of these. In 2017, the exercise employed over 200 local Papua New Guinean observers and its 35 teams were led by Papua New Guinean researchers with a handful of Australian researchers who provided mentoring.[83] An even larger undertaking was completed for the 2022 elections.[84] This network of local researchers can be utilised for other research projects such as the PNGDCB. Another ANU-led program building research capacity across the region is the Pacific Research Colloquium (PRC). Since 2012, the Department of Pacific Affairs at ANU has been bringing early career social science researchers from the Pacific for a 10-day intensive research workshop to further develop their skills. In January 2023, a PRC was successfully completed in PNG for the first time with over 40 local participants. The PNG alumni or cohort of PRC attendees might also provide a pool of qualified researchers from which the PNGDCB can recruit, not to mention Papua New Guinean graduates of other Australian universities and UPNG itself.

83 Nicole Haley and Kerry Zubrinich, *2017 Papua New Guinea General Elections Election Observation Report* (Canberra: Department of Pacific Affairs, The Australian National University, 2018).

84 Report in preparation.

In addition to sending out skilled researchers with questionnaires and recording interviews, information can now easily be recorded and uploaded onto tablets with applications that store and organise information in real time. Artificial information technology can now be used to transcribe oral history interviews almost instantaneously, and the quick digitisation of documents also minimises the risk of losing valuable data. In recent years, the Australian online research portal Trove has digitised the *Papuan Times*, *Papuan Courier*, *Guinea Gold,* and *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier* newspapers, not to mention the *Pacific Islands Monthly*, which are all easily accessible repositories for historical information. Other important aspects of revisiting the PNGDCB, such as funding, collaboration and project management, are in the process of being finalised, but the resources, networks and research capacity that hampered previous attempts are now more than sufficient, especially if one considers the possibility of close collaboration with the Australian Dictionary of Biography's OWP, led by Katerina Teaiwa at ANU since 2017.

Conclusion

More importantly, time is running out. With Namaliu's and Vagi Brash's recent passing, Kaima's words from the year 2000 are as pertinent as ever: 'This country is now losing a lot of people without us recording their life stories in the form of a book to remember them in the future.' It is clear that for most younger Papua New Guineans, their perceptions of the independence generation, the so-called 'founding fathers', now belong more to the realm of historical memory than any real, tangible presence. And as such, their legacies are now ripe for historical debate. We see that one of the great contributions of the PNGDCB is to provide a forum for Papua New Guineans to foster historical debate and deepen historical knowledge within PNG through the contributions of Papua New Guinean scholars. Practically, where the modern dictionary will differ from Kaima's and Griffin's vision is that it will be a largely online publication with the ability to publish progressively as submissions come to hand, adjustable and amenable to later revisions and additions, and not necessarily subject to the dictates and timelines of publishing houses. It will also involve adopting selection criteria more in keeping with the values of Papua New Guineans today. In pitching this project, we do not make any great claims to authority or completeness to which past dictionary of historical biography projects have laid claim. We believe that any such pretensions would only set us up for failure. However, we do believe that PNG will be ready, on its fiftieth birthday in 2025, to join the long list of nations that celebrate its citizens through the existence of a national dictionary of biography. Taking up the baton from where Griffin and Kaima left off, and partnering with PNG institutions and scholars, should lessen the burden for everyone this time and result in an ongoing cultural and educational resource of which the nation can be proud.

A long and winding road: Completing a biography of Solomon Mamaloni

CHRISTOPHER CHEVALIER

This paper looks back at my long journey to complete a biography of Solomon Mamaloni, who served three times as prime minister of Solomon Islands following the country's transition to independence from British colonial rule in 1978. The biography was published online in April 2022, following 12 years of research and writing. Here, I briefly reflect on some lessons that I learned in the process of completing the biography along with a PhD thesis in 2021 connecting oral histories and social history in Solomon Islands.

The biographical journey

Solomon Mamaloni (1943–2000) was arguably the most significant Solomon Islands politician of the twentieth century. He led Solomon Islands for 12 years, first as chief minister (1974–76) and then as prime minister (in 1981–84, 1989–93 and 1994–97). He was a staunch nationalist and anti-colonialist. His wit and sociability disguised a ruthless and wily politician. Only five months after his death, the government was overthrown in an armed coup. The conflict between militants that had begun in 1998, known as The Tensions, had become a civil war that Mamaloni had predicted and sought to prevent.

I had closely watched Mamaloni's often chaotic second and third administrations (1989–93, 1994–97) while working in the Solomons as a health program manager from 1989 to 1998. I met him while playing for his cricket team in the local Honiara league from 1989 to 1993. I returned regularly to the Solomons while working as a project officer for an Australian NGO, Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA. I had considered writing his biography as a PhD subject in 2006–07 but could not find a suitable academic program or supervisor at the ANU where I had connections in the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia program.[1]

Mamaloni's great political rival Sir Peter Kenilorea had succeeded Mamaloni as chief minister in 1976 and became the country's first prime minister at independence in 1978. Kenilorea published his autobiography in 2008, and this added to the

1 Known as the Department of Pacific Affairs since 2017.

importance and urgency of a biography of Mamaloni.[2] In 2009, I began to research the biography independently. By 2012 I had assembled an initial manuscript from a range of materials gathered during three field trips to the Solomons, visits to New Zealand and England, plus archival research at the Pacific Manuscripts Bureau, the National Library of Australia and online. I gave a presentation on writing the life of Mamaloni at a workshop in the School of History, ANU, which later became a chapter in an edited volume on *Political Life Writing in the Pacific*.[3] Inspired by the richness of the oral testimonies and stories gathered from over 150 informants for the biography, I also commenced a part-time PhD on oral history in Solomon Islands in the School of Sociology at ANU in 2013. The PhD research involved four field trips to the Solomons between 2013 and 2016, which provided more opportunities to conduct interviews and collect more stories about Mamaloni. At various times, I considered including Mamaloni as a case study but decided that the focus of the thesis should be on different oral history methods and social history rather than biography and political history.

I had originally intended to self-publish the biography online, to ensure that it would be freely available for Solomon Islanders, many of whom rarely read or are unable to afford books. However, academic colleagues and friends persuaded me that I should publish the biography with ANU Press, whose publications are available free online and widely publicised. Accordingly, I submitted a proposal in 2014 to the Pacific Editorial Board of ANU Press, which expressed interest in the biography. In August 2017, I submitted a 180,000-word manuscript (including endnotes and bibliography) that I had professionally copyedited at considerable expense. The ANU Press review process included two anonymous reviewers: they considered that the manuscript was too long and contained factual and typographical errors; that some of the political narratives were tangled, and that the conclusions about Mamaloni were unconvincing. One of the reviewers was Clive Moore, the foremost Australian historian of Solomon Islands, who chose not to remain anonymous, and noted corrections and comments on a printed hard copy. In March 2018, the chair of the editorial board advised me that the biography was publishable if revisions were made to address the reviewers' comments and the manuscript was cut to 110,000 words or less. I submitted a revised, 110,000-word version in December 2018. The manuscript was reviewed again by Clive Moore. A second anonymous reviewer severely criticised it, including:

2 Peter Kenilorea, *Tell It as It Is: Autobiography of Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Kenilorea, KBE, PC, Solomon Islands' First Prime Minister*, ed. Clive Moore (Taipei: Center for Asia-Pacific Area Studies, 2008). Now available online via Taiwan's Academia Sinica, www.rchss.sinica.edu.tw/1/archives/6d8b6cc4be629c79.

3 Christopher Chevalier, 'Understanding Solomon', in *Political Life Writing in the Pacific: Reflections on Practice*, ed. Jack Corbett and Brij V. Lal (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015), 33–46, doi.org/10.22459/PLWP.07.2015.03. The first part of the chapter provides a summary biography of Mamaloni.

> the political editorialising and tone, which falls well short of scholarly propriety … ideologically biased, hardly consistent with high scholarly standards … dogmatic and weakly substantiated claims … tendentious Australia bashing … [and] casts his political opponents in a forced and often gratuitous way.[4]

This second review, which arrived eight months later in August 2019, was thoroughly discouraging. I put the biography aside and focused on finishing the PhD, then entering its sixth year. The thesis was finalised, approved and released on ANU Open Research in July 2021.[5] After a few months' rest, I returned to the Mamaloni biography with the aim of making it free, particularly with Solomon and Pacific Islanders in mind. After further corrections and professional copyediting, the biography finally saw the light of day as a PDF document on several online platforms—ANU Open Research, Academia.edu and ResearchGate.[6] It was publicised via notifications on the Solomon Islands Information Network, the International Auto/Biography Association, LinkedIn, and several Facebook groups used by Solomon and Pacific Islanders, plus emails to Pacific university libraries, friends and colleagues.

My decision to self-publish online provided some significant advantages. It gave me greater freedom in terms of expression and layout, where the academic requirements of writing the thesis had come to feel like writing in a straitjacket. I was able to include visual content, such as scanned photographs, that did not meet ANU Press standards. Online platforms also provide real-time statistics of the number of views and downloads, and their locations.[7] Another advantage of the online PDF version is its search function, making the production of an index—a very exacting task—unnecessary or at least optional, but necessary for a printed version. Despite requests by the Mamaloni family and others for a print version, which would have been available if it had been published by a traditional publisher, I decided that the time, effort and cost (economic and environmental) involved were not warranted by the few readers that a print book might attract. However, I have since decided to produce a revised online edition with corrections and some extra stories to mark twenty-five years since Mamaloni's death in 2000 and renew attention to his remarkable life.

Looking back at the journey

Despite being demoralised by the ANU Press reviews, they did improve the biography. Clive Moore's detailed comments and corrections proved the most helpful. Criticisms of the biography as too ideological and unacademic forced me to decide whether and where to tone down or justify some of my interpretations.

4 Anonymous second reviewer report to ANU Press Editorial Board, August 2019.

5 Christopher Chevalier, 'Content and Context: Connecting Oral History and Social History in Solomon Islands', PhD thesis (Canberra: The Australian National University, 2021), hdl.handle.net/1885/238277.

6 Christopher Chevalier, *Understanding 'Solo': A Biography of Solomon Mamaloni* (2022), hdl.handle.net/1885/262993. By February 2025, there had been over 4,100 downloads of the Mamaloni biography on the ANU Open Research website. There had also been over 650 downloads on ResearchGate and Academica.edu.

7 For instance, of downloads on ANU Open Research, almost half have come from Solomon Islands.

Mamaloni's antipathy towards colonialism and imperialism resonates with my own. I re-examined my sources and added references to clarify that the biography's interpretations and conclusions about Mamaloni were not merely my opinions but reflected the polarisation of Solomon Islanders' opinions about Mamaloni and his legacy. Many informants and primary sources held Mamaloni personally responsible for the political and economic chaos of his administrations, while others approved of his independent and radical approaches. I used the Solomon Islands 10-cent coin with the head of Queen Elizabeth II on one side and a Makira sea-spirit on the reverse as a metaphor to emphasise that Mamaloni can be judged from either or both the colonial and the indigenous perspectives.

My parallel PhD journey also influenced and changed the biography in several ways. Although the Mamaloni biography could be regarded as an example of 'great man' history, I better understood how valuable views are 'from below' when elicited by oral history. The extra fieldwork from 2013 to 2015 provided opportunities to conduct almost 60 additional interviews for the biography and to spend several more weeks in Makira, which deepened my understanding of its history and the influence this had on his family and other significant families. As oral historian Linda Shopes argues:

> each person's story is, of course, unique, [but] it's also part of a larger story of life at a particular time and place and encodes a whole range of underlying relationships and structures.[8]

Sociological literature and concepts, particularly by C. Wright Mills, Pierre Bourdieu and Raewyn Connell, helped me to better understand the social and structural forces that shaped Mamaloni and his milieux.[9] Further reading of Pacific history helped me to consider Mamaloni's life in the wider Pacific colonial and postcolonial contexts. Decolonial Pacific authors, such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Tracey Banivanua Mar, Teresia Teaiwa and Katerina Teaiwa, revealed Islander agency and resistance in Pacific Island histories.[10] I better understood the significance of postwar colonial history and events, such as the postwar Maasina Rule resistance movement, in shaping Mamaloni's complex character and different identities.[11] He was part of a small elite, fast-tracked into political and administrative positions before and after independence through harsh but privileged education at colonial boarding schools. I also better

8 Linda Shopes, '"Insights and Oversights": Reflections on the Documentary Tradition and the Theoretical Turn in Oral History', *Oral History Review* 41, no. 2 (2014): 257–68, doi.org/10.1093/ohr/ohu035.

9 C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959); Michael Grenfell, ed., *Pierre Bourdieu, Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2013), doi.org/10.4324/9781315729923; R. W. Connell, *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in the Social Science* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2007).

10 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999); Tracey Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous Globalisation and the Ends of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139794688; Teresia Teaiwa, 'L(o)osing the Edge', *The Contemporary Pacific* 13, no. 2 (2001): 343–47, doi.org/10.1353/cp.2001.0071; Katerina Teaiwa, *Consuming Ocean Island: Stories of People and Phosphate from Banaba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

11 David W. Akin, *Colonialism, Maasina Rule, and the Origins of Malaitan Kastom* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press 2013), doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824838140.001.0001.

understood his unorthodox and seemingly reckless attitudes to finance and debt in light of the social credit ideas he had absorbed while in sixth form (Years 11 and 12) at Te Aute College in New Zealand.

Doing things differently

My journey to complete the Mamaloni biography was unduly long, and I often had cause to remember the wisdom of one academic who advised: 'Finish it before you hate it.'[12] I have often wondered how I could have written the biography while fulfilling the requirement of a PhD thesis differently. I could, perhaps, have undertaken a creative writing PhD with coursework units on writing and specific topics, plus supervision by professional biographers. I could also have pursued a PhD at the National Centre of Biography in the School of History at ANU. This would have allowed me to benefit from supervision and support more focused on the goal of producing an academic biography, presumably more suitable for publication by traditional publishers. Either pathway would have shortened my journey with less risk of failure, while also possibly creating avenues for post-doctoral research projects. However, these alternatives would not have resulted in the case studies produced in my thesis, which involved using different oral history methods to analyse and compare oral histories. The thesis contributes to Solomon Islands postwar history by illuminating multiple connections, changes and continuities in Solomon Islands since the Pacific War ended in 1945.

Completing the Mamaloni biography and the thesis was an enormous relief. It is difficult to anticipate (and probably best not to know) how long and hard it is to write or complete a thesis or full-length biography. Although a single author may appear on the cover, neither is ever an individual effort. Many people were involved in the Mamaloni biography, including just over 200 people whom I interviewed or who provided stories and opinions about Solomon Mamaloni. Both journeys highlighted the importance of editorial support and review throughout the arduous writing process. It would not have been completed without the unwavering support of Ian Lucas and Barbara Chevalier, who edited several versions of the biography along with professional copyeditors. Thanks also go to Clive Moore for his patience and hard copy corrections of several versions of the biography. On reflection, I can better appreciate the critical feedback I received and the ANU Press process. I hope that present and future researchers will find value in the Mamaloni biography, not only in its content but also in knowing that the academic publication route is not the only option. Self-publishing online is viable and, in this digital century, can reach a wide audience. But whether the research journey results in a biography or a thesis, persistence is the key to completing the journey.

12 Anonymous, pers. comm., 2013.

Bridging histories and horizons: Professor Brij Lal's contribution to Fiji's past and future

ROMITESH KANT

> I live at the interface of scholarship and practical engagement with society. I am … a politically engaged but independent intellectual … I take my rights, roles and responsibilities as a citizen seriously. I live in society, not above or outside it. I am part of the history about which I write. I write to communicate, not obfuscate, to be read rather than simply to get ahead. I would like to have my voice heard on matters of consequence to make a difference, if I can.
>
> —Brij Lal[1]

These words from Professor Brij Vilash Lal perfectly capture the essence of his unique approach to academia—one deeply rooted in integrity, a resolute sense of duty and an unwavering commitment to the Pacific and its people. A politically engaged yet independent intellectual, Lal bore a genuine responsibility towards the society that formed him. And, in him, Fiji found a voice that communicated to be understood, not just to be acknowledged, and a scholar driven to make a meaningful difference. It is not hyperbole to suggest that Lal was one of his generation's most consequential scholars. He was an academic who excelled in every possible way, from his research and writing to his teaching and public engagement. Born in 1952 to cane-farming parents in a cane-farming settlement in Tabia, Labasa, Lal's influence extends beyond the boundaries of Fiji and into the international academic and intellectual sphere.

This paper is structured around three pivotal themes that exemplify Lal's intellectual contributions to Fijian society and beyond. First, I examine his efforts to connect Fiji's colonial past with its contemporary identity, shedding light on the historical dynamics that continue to shape the nation. Second, I delve into Lal's significant contributions to the study of Girmityas indenture in Fiji, highlighting his role in bringing the experiences and contributions of Indo-Fijians to the nation's democratic fabric. Third, the paper reflects on Lal's inspirational role as a mentor and guide for emerging scholars. Through his commitment to academic excellence and civic engagement, Lal has left a lasting mark on the wider academic community, inspiring a new generation to pursue research that is both rigorous and deeply engaged with the realities of society.

1 Brij V. Lal, *Intersections: History, Memory, Discipline* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2012), 4.

From a personal perspective, while my own academic journey diverges from the formal discipline of history and instead focuses on contemporary Fijian politics, Lal's extensive body of work has been a cornerstone of my research. Our paths first crossed in 2014 during a research colloquium in which he was an assigned mentor, a meeting that, despite its professional nature and my lack of personal acquaintance with him, profoundly influenced my scholarly direction. This paper, therefore, is not just an academic exercise but a reflection of my engagement with Lal's legacy from the unique vantage point of a non-historian deeply influenced by his dedication to Fiji's sociopolitical discourse.

Conscience and rigour: Connecting the past and present

> I constantly move between the present and the past. The link between the two engages my intellectual interests and energy.
>
> —Brij Lal[2]

Lal wrote numerous books and papers on the history and politics of Fiji, particularly on the period of British colonisation from 1874 to 1970.[3] His work often focused on the role played by Fiji's people during this period and their unique contribution to the development of what is now modern Fiji. Notable here is Lal's 1992 work, *Broken Waves*, in which he provided an in-depth analysis of the British colonial administration to unveil the structured implementation of racial segregation policies.[4] The British colonial system strategically categorised the population into distinct racial groups, ostensibly to maintain order and maximise economic output, but with long-term consequences for interethnic relations and social stratification. Lal dissected the motives behind these policies and evaluated their enduring legacies, offering an understanding of how they sculpted Fiji's institutional structures and societal paradigms. While the colonial administration's initiatives were driven by self-interest, often to the detriment of the colonised, they inadvertently laid the foundations for specific modern infrastructures and administrative frameworks within Fiji. Rather than forgiving colonial actions, this perspective portrays history's intricate layers, highlighting the immediate repercussions and their prolonged ramifications. The book also critically examined Fiji's political turmoil, including the 1987 coup led by Sitiveni Rabuka. Lal's historical perspective allowed him to uncover motivations for these events beyond racial tensions, such as economic, social and political unease.

2 Lal, *Intersections*, 5–6.

3 For a full list of Brij V. Lal's publications as of 2017, see 'Bibliography of Brij V. Lal's Academic Writings', in *Bearing Witness: Essays in Honour of Brij V. Lal*, ed. Doug Munro and Jack Corbett (Canberra: ANU Press, 2017), 307–44, doi.org/10.22459/BW.07.2017.

4 Brij V. Lal, *Broken Waves: A History of the Fiji Islands in the Twentieth Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992).

By connecting the past and the present, Lal contributed extensively to the literature on Fiji's history, politics and democracy.[5] His legacy is significant considering the current political climate in Fiji, as his work has provided a solid foundation to build a more democratic society. As an active participant in the political process, he also promoted interethnic harmony, democracy and human rights through initiatives such as the 1996 Reeves Commission aimed at constitutional amendment.[6] His consistent critique of Fiji's political upheavals, paired with his advocacy for democratic processes, underscores his role as a critical observer and commentator on Fiji's path towards a more democratic society. His vehement opposition to the 2006 military coup marked him as a significant adversary to the undemocratic forces in Fiji. This stance ultimately led to his forced deportation from Fiji in 2009. From Australia, he continued to use his academic platform to voice his opinions on these critical issues.

In dissecting Fiji's modern coups, Lal explored the complex interplay of factors beyond mere ethnic tensions that have driven the nation into periods of political unrest. His detailed examination of these pivotal events in Fiji's history reveals a confluence of political ambition, economic insecurity, class struggle and ethnic divisions, offering a nuanced perspective that challenges simplistic interpretations. His scholarship illuminates how these coups were not isolated incidents spurred solely by racial discord but deeply rooted in Fiji's broader sociopolitical and economic context. Through this analysis, Lal argues for a comprehensive understanding of Fiji's political landscape, in which class dynamics and political power plays are recognised as significant contributors to the nation's historical and ongoing challenges.

Lal's work critically engages with the notion that the path to a stable and prosperous Fiji lies in addressing the multifaceted nature of its sociopolitical issues. By highlighting the interconnectedness of race, class and politics, he provides a framework for understanding the complexity of Fiji's identity and governance. This approach enriches Fiji's historical narrative and serves as a guide for addressing contemporary challenges. Lal's insistence on a holistic view of Fiji's sociopolitical dynamics highlights the importance of acknowledging and addressing the legacies of colonialism, class disparity and political inclusivity in the quest for social harmony and national unity.

Lal's rigorous approach to historical research underpinned his exhaustive exploration of Fiji's colonial and postcolonial history, ensuring that his conclusions were well founded and resonated with a broad audience. To address the limits of the colonial archive, Lal's methodology encouraged the importance of blending both oral histories

5 Brij V. Lal, *Islands of Turmoil: Elections and Politics in Fiji* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2006). See also Brij V. Lal, *Levelling Wind: Remembering Fiji* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2019), doi.org/10.22459/LW.2019.

6 Brij V. Lal, Paul Reeves and Tomasi Vakatora, *The Fiji Islands—towards a United Future: Report of the Fiji Constitution Review Commission* (Suva: Parliamentary Paper no. 36, 1996). See also Brij V. Lal and Vilsoni Hereniko, 'From the Sideline: Interview with Brij V. Lal, Historian and Constitutional Commissioner', *The Contemporary Pacific* 14, no. 2 (2002): 168–84, doi.org/10.1353/cp.2002.0012.

and archival sources to understand the past.[7] His ability to translate dense academic and archival texts into accessible narratives democratised historical knowledge, inviting the public to engage with Fiji's complex past and its implications for the present. His work exemplifies the critical role of empirical evidence in historical scholarship, serving as a foundation for a nuanced and informed discourse on national identity, social cohesion and political development.

By making complex history understandable and relevant to the contemporary context, Lal has facilitated a deeper public understanding of Fiji's sociopolitical challenges. This accessibility encourages a more informed and inclusive dialogue among Fijians about their shared history and prospects. Lal's scholarship bridges the gap between academic research and public discourse and empowers individuals to engage critically with their nation's history. Through his engagement, Lal provided invaluable insights into the dynamics of change in Fiji, offering a comprehensive perspective that fosters a deeper appreciation of the multifaceted forces that shape societies. His work stands as a testament to the power of historical understanding in contributing to a more inclusive and informed discussion about Fiji's path towards unity and progress.

Lal has also been instrumental in bringing to light Fiji's complicated and sometimes contentious political and constitutional history. His work has shed light on the complex interactions between Fiji's colonial and postcolonial governments as well as race and power dynamics during this period. His work connected history with politics, showing how understanding past events could shed light on present-day issues. He also brought historical events to life by linking them with lived experiences, most readily through his work on indentured labour.

Overcoming adversity: Valued contributions to understanding indenture

> They say history is often autobiographical—and it certainly was with Dad. His first academic passion was to find a voice for his own Aja (grandfather)—a girmitiya from India who serendipitously ended up in Fiji instead of Guyana.
>
> —Yogi Lal-Parks and Niraj Lal[8]

Lal's skill in intertwining history with lived experiences shines through his writings, which offer personal insights and connect historical narratives with the realities of everyday life.[9] For example, *Mr Tulsi's Store* presents a collection of stories that, while

7 Brij V. Lal, 'Indian Indenture Historiography: A Note on Problems, Sources and Methods', *Journal of Pacific Studies* 6, no. 2 (1983): 33–50. See also Brij V. Lal and Doug Munro, eds, *Texts and Contexts: Reflections in Pacific Islands Historiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).

8 Yogi Lal-Parks and Niraj Lal are Brij Lal's daughter and son. Yogi Lal-Parks and Niraj Lal, 'Dad', in *Serendipity: Experience of Pacific Historians*, ed. Brij V. Lal (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2024), v, doi.org/10.2307/jj.7583914.

9 Doug Munro, 'Autobiography and Faction', in *Bearing Witness: Essays in Honour of Brij V. Lal* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2017), 247–72, doi.org/10.22459/BW.07.2017.12.

not entirely autobiographical, draw heavily on his experiences growing up in rural Fiji.[10] This work offers readers a glimpse into Indo-Fijian struggles, joys and cultural nuances during the postcolonial era. Described by Lal as an experiment in 'faction', it stands out for blending factual history with fictional storytelling, providing a unique perspective on life in Fiji.

In a separate but equally influential work *Chalo Jahaji*, Lal delves into the history of Indian indentured labourers in Fiji.[11] This study goes beyond a personal narrative to integrate rigorous historical research with the deeply personal stories of those who lived through this era. *Chalo Jahaji* is part of a broader corpus of studies on indenture that extends to the wider Indian diaspora. Today, it serves as a cornerstone, offering a comprehensive study that extends beyond a personal or localised narrative to encompass the broader experiences of Indian indentured labourers across the Indian Ocean and beyond. Pitched to a global audience, this exploration into the history of indenture reveals the complex interplay of migration, resilience and cultural exchange that defines the Indian diaspora.

In the sociopolitical landscape of Fiji, an ethnically stratified society, traditional narratives have often highlighted the leadership and contributions of indigenous Fijian and European figures, framing the nation's history through their perspectives and actions. This focus, while often necessary, has also served to marginalise the roles of other groups, notably Indian and Indo-Fijian leaders, whose efforts towards Fiji's development have been significant, yet less recognised in mainstream historical accounts. Lal's work was instrumental in addressing this oversight, presenting a more inclusive narrative that acknowledges the contributions of Indo-Fijian leaders such as A. D. Patel and Jai Ram Reddy.[12] Their advocacy for a multiracial Fiji and efforts towards social and political inclusivity represent crucial chapters in Fiji's journey towards unity and diversity. Lal's detailed biographies of these figures challenge and enrich the historical record, offering new perspectives on Fiji's path to its present sociopolitical landscape.

In the vibrant scholarly discourse on Fiji's history, the intellectual debates between Lal and fellow historian Deryck Scarr[13] stand out, highlighting the dynamic and sometimes contentious nature of historical interpretation and the quest for inclusivity in narratives.[14] These discussions, emblematic of the broader debates within Fiji's

10 Brij V. Lal, *Mr Tulsi's Store: A Fijian Journey* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2013 [2001]).

11 Brij V. Lal, *Chalo Jahaji: On a Journey through Indenture in Fiji* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2012 [2000]).

12 Brij V. Lal, *A Vision for Change: A. D. Patel and the Politics of Fiji* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2011 [1997]); Brij V. Lal, *A Vision for Change: Speeches and Writing of A. D. Patel* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2011); Brij V. Lal, *In the Eye of the Storm: Jai Ram Reddy and the Politics of Postcolonial Fiji* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010).

13 Deryck Scarr, historian, authored biographies of two influential indigenous Fijian political leaders and chiefs. See Deryck Scarr, *Ratu Sukuna: Soldier, Statesman, Man of Two Worlds* (London: Macmillan Education, 1980); Deryck Scarr, *Tuimacilai: A Life of Ratu Sir Kaimasese Mara* (Adelaide: Crawford House, 2008).

14 Deryck Scarr, 'Where Did All the Flowers Go? A Rejoinder to Lal's Tirade against Tuimacilai and Its Ever-Mischievous Author', *eJournal of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Pacific Studies*, nos 1.2 and 2.1 (2010).

historiographical community, underscore Fiji's past complexity and contested terrains. Lal's work, characterised by its rigorous research and commitment to inclusivity, contrasts with perspectives that prioritise traditional leadership roles or colonial influences, stimulating a richer, more nuanced dialogue about Fiji's past. The repercussions of such discussions are not limited to the ivory tower; they influence how Fiji's history is taught, understood and integrated into the national consciousness. They encourage a critical examination of historical narratives and the power structures that shape them, advocating for a history that acknowledges the multifaceted nature of Fiji's development and the contributions of all its people.

First encounters: My introduction to a Fijian luminary

> Canberra was, for a novice like me, as I am sure it was for others, a daunting place, cold and forbidding, full of names of people whose works we had glimpsed at [the USP] in my undergraduate years or admired from a distance.
>
> —Brij Lal[15]

In January 2014, I had the privilege of meeting Lal for the first time at the PRC in Canberra. Before this encounter, my relationship with him had been solely through the lens of his works, absorbing the depth of his insights on paper. But here, I was not merely a student of his writings; I had been selected as a participant. Lal was to mentor me as I presented a co-authored paper on public participation and constitution-making in Fiji.[16] The dynamics of our first meeting are still vivid in my memory. It was more than a traditional mentor–mentee interaction; it was a meeting of concerned minds, worried yet hopeful about the future of Fiji. Lal's inquisitive nature was immediately evident, especially regarding the accessibility and impact of his works in Fiji. He often expressed a keen interest in whether his publications were available and being read in Fiji, a reflection of his lifelong commitment to contributing to Fiji's intellectual and cultural discourse.

Lal's desire for a deep understanding and connection with the Fijian community might explain why he showed a particular interest in my views on the shifting political climate. They were inquiries of genuine concern and a thirst for knowledge, especially given the ban that prevented him from entering Fiji and seeing things for himself. We discussed Fiji at length, its political nuances and the roles various actors were playing. The conversation was exciting. While I jumped at the chance to brainstorm ideas with a mentor, he used the opportunity to seek insights from somebody still living in Fiji. That exchange was a testament to Lal's character—always learning, curious and thinking about Fiji's future. Though our interaction was brief, its influence on my scholarly journey was significant. He showed me the path to

15 Brij V. Lal, 'Long Winding Road from Tabia', in Lal, *Serendipity*, 150.

16 Romitesh Kant and Eroni Rakuita, 'Public Participation & Constitution-Making in Fiji: A Critique of the 2012 Constitution-Making Process', SSGM Discussion Paper 2014/6, The Australian National University, openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/items/f4fc637f-7a91-4eca-a17a-4a3185f966ea.

blending academic rigour with genuine concern for the nation's democratic pulse. As I pen this reflection, I remember his words, his curiosity and, most importantly, his unwavering dedication to Fiji. It is a memory that inspires me to this day.

Unlike Lal, who hailed from a cane-farming settlement in Tabia, Labasa, my roots are deeply embedded in the urban landscape of Suva, where I was born and raised. This difference in origins provided a unique backdrop to our mentor–mentee relationship, enriching our conversations with diverse perspectives on the Fijian experience. The juxtaposition of my urban upbringing and Lal's rural beginnings underscored the multifaceted nature of Fijian society. This theme resonated deeply in our discussions about the nation's past, present and future. My urban upbringing significantly influenced my academic interests and how I viewed Fiji's political and social dynamics. As I navigated my studies in history, politics, economics and gender studies at the USP, my perspective was invariably shaped by the complexities of life in Fiji's capital. I delved deeper into politics for my postgraduate diploma and master's, culminating in a thesis that critically examined constitutional politics in Fiji—a topic resonating with the nation's tumultuous political history and my personal quest for understanding.

My journey into academia was marked by a certain reluctance that contrasted sharply with Lal's more streamlined path that saw him commence a PhD program in his mid-twenties. My career began with volunteering for a human rights organisation, the Citizens' Constitutional Forum, while pursuing my BA and joining a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) civic education project after the 2006 coup. This project, aimed at preparing Fiji for ultimately postponed elections, was a formative experience that underscored my commitment to civic engagement and democracy. Despite my intention to return to civil society work after completing my term at the UNDP, I joined USP as a teaching assistant, where academia gradually grew on me.

With a growing interest in gender dynamics, furthered by a postgraduate certificate in gender studies, my academic pursuits began reflecting a more nuanced inquiry into how these disciplines intersect within the context of Fijian society. In 2018, as I toyed with the idea of pursuing a PhD, there was no better person to seek counsel from than Lal. We met at the Gallery of Modern Art (GOMA) in Brisbane (where he had retired), a serene backdrop for what was to be a pivotal discussion in my academic trajectory. Over art and ambience, I presented my quandary: where should I embark on this rigorous academic journey? Lal steered me towards the ANU, extolling it as a unique institution that genuinely prioritised research on the Pacific. He spoke highly of the experts I would find there, individuals who would guide and augment my understanding of the region. Yet, Lal was also reflective of the changes ANU had undergone, acknowledging both its historical strengths and the complexities

introduced by its evolution.[17] This multifaceted perspective was symbolic of his broader understanding of the academic world—a world that has offered unparalleled opportunities for research and scholarship, yet has also faced challenges in maintaining its foundational values amid shifting priorities and cultural changes. Heeding his counsel, I applied and am now pursuing a PhD at ANU, conscious of its storied past and evolving present.

The experience has been transformative, and I often reflect on that pivotal discussion at GOMA. I owe a significant part of my journey to Lal's guidance. His view that ANU was best placed to nurture and curate Pacific research was not just based on its academic prestige but also, or rather, on its genuine commitment to the region, modelled in the long list of academics working there who had influenced Lal and been influenced by him over several decades. Looking back, I see that my journey with Lal has been one of profound learning and inspiration. Beyond the books and papers, his unwavering commitment to Fiji and the Pacific, his genuine mentorship and his belief in institutions that could bring about real change left a lasting mark on me. As I continue to navigate the vast world of academia, my urban upbringing in Suva and the insights gained from Lal merge, guiding my pursuit of research that contributes meaningfully to our understanding of Fiji and the broader Pacific region.

Carrying the torch: Upholding Professor Lal's values in a changing world

> The tumultuous events in Fiji over the last decade or so have pulled me back to the present, and a considerable part of my time and energy is spent on commentary and analysis of contemporary events in that country … it is a responsibility and an obligation that I cannot escape, nor would I want to. Silence in the face of oppression is not an option for me, nor is the defence of democratic values and the rule of law a crime.
>
> —Brij Lal[18]

In the face of Fiji's recent tumultuous events, the duty to engage critically with our present and contribute thoughtfully to debates on democracy, justice and human rights has never been more important. This responsibility, exemplified by Lal's unwavering commitment to speaking truth to power and standing firm against oppression, is a guiding light for young scholars. Lal's approach to scholarship—marked by a deep engagement with Fiji's past and present, a defence of democratic values and an active resistance against injustice—demonstrates the profound impact that dedicated

17 Lal's reflections on ANU, encapsulated in his 2016 'extinguished' or valedictory lecture, highlight the institution's transformation from a collegial, research-intensive environment to one navigating the pressures of modern academia. This nuanced view provides valuable context for understanding the complexities of academic institutions and their impact on scholarly work and community. See Brij V. Lal, 'ANU Made Me but Which ANU is Mine?', *Levelling Wind: Remembering Fiji* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2019), 515–36, doi.org/10.22459/LW.2019.

18 Lal, *Intersections*, 5.

individuals can have on society. However, in recognising that honouring his legacy extends beyond mere admiration, what else can be done to honour this remarkable man's memory for future generations?

For young researchers, emerging scholars and early career researchers, it involves a proactive engagement with his work, embracing his innovative methods, and a commitment to furthering the discourse he passionately advanced. This means delving into Lal's extensive research, drawing inspiration from his methodologies, and aspiring to emulate his dedication to making scholarship accessible and relevant to a broader audience. We must encourage new thinkers who draw from his scholarship, and fund initiatives that promote greater awareness about Fiji's past struggles and successes through history education programs or conferences, and we must continue to engage with his works critically to learn from successes and failures and advocate for change where needed most.

Addressing the role of Fijian political culture in Lal's work requires precision and sensitivity, especially given Fiji's complex sociopolitical context. Lal's research did not merely document historical events; it sought to understand the nuanced interplay of cultural, social and political factors that have shaped Fiji's identity. His respect for Fijian culture and his efforts to elevate the profile of Fijian history through education both within and outside Fiji were central to his work. Lal's approach to Fijian culture was not about appropriating or oversimplifying it; instead, he highlighted its richness, diversity and significance in shaping the nation's past and present. However, while exhaustive in many respects, Lal's work offers a limited exploration of women's roles and contributions, mainly neglecting the narrative of Fiji's first women soldiers during the transformative periods of the late 1950s and early 1960s.[19] This oversight points to a broader issue within historical scholarship in Fiji, in which the contributions of women, both during the colonial era and post-independence, are minimally addressed.

Considering the range of critical discussions on gender representation within Fijian historiography inspired by the pioneering work of scholars like Teresia Teaiwa, Margaret Mishra, Quishile Charan and Esha Pillay, young scholars have a unique opportunity to build upon Lal's work and rectify his, and others, scholarly blind

19 Lal did address the experiences of women in his research, albeit not as the central focus of his broader contributions. Notable works include his exploration of indentured women's experiences on Fiji plantations in 'Kunti's Cry' and the dynamics of sexual jealousy and suicide in 'Veil of Dishonour'. Both articles reflect his engagement with gender issues within the specific context of indenture and plantation life in Fiji. See Brij V. Lal, 'Kunti's Cry: Indentured Women on Fiji Plantations', *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 22, no. 1 (1985): 55–71, doi.org/10.1177/001946468502200103; Brij V. Lal, 'Veil of Dishonour: Sexual Jealousy and Suicide on Fiji Plantations', *The Journal of Pacific History* 20, no. 3 (1985): 135–55, doi.org/10.1080/00223348508572516.

spots.[20] My own PhD research, exploring the embeddedness of masculinities in Fiji's political sphere, represents one avenue through which we can extend Lal's legacy. As we endeavour to honour his comprehensive approach to history, we must also embrace the complexity of gender dynamics, and advocate for a historiography that transcends colonial and patriarchal narratives by embracing women's diverse experiences and adopting gender-inclusive approaches.

The call to action for young researchers, emerging scholars and early career researchers is clear: to carry forward Lal's torch by embodying the values of rigorous scholarship, public engagement and social justice advocacy. This involves critically engaging with Lal's work, exploring innovative avenues for disseminating research, and actively participating in ongoing dialogues about Fiji's history and contemporary challenges. By doing so, young academics will help foster a deeper understanding of Fiji and its place in the world, advocating for change where it is most needed. Finally, young scholars must note from him how to make a meaningful impact without compromising their beliefs or heritage. This can be achieved by remaining committed to one's cause or passion—even when all odds are stacked against you. As Lal wrote: 'Scholarship must, as a matter of moral duty, speak truth to power.'[21] Standing up to injustice was something that Lal never backed away from.

Beyond silence: Professor Lal's resolute advocacy for democracy and justice

> Dissent in a democracy should not be taken to mean disloyalty. I think it is the responsibility of every citizen, every civilized human being, to speak out against tyranny and oppression, against the subversion of democratic values and the rule of law. Scholarship must, as a matter of moral duty, speak truth to power. Silence cannot be an option. There are certain values humanity has embraced as its own that are worth standing up for and that transcend national and political boundaries.
>
> —Brij Lal[22]

20 See, for example, Teresia Teaiwa, 'What Makes Fiji Women Soldiers? Context, Context, Context', *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* 37 (March 2015), intersections.anu.edu.au/issue37/teaiwa.htm; Teresia K. Teaiwa, 'On Women and "Indians": The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion in Militarized Fiji', in *Security Disarmed: Critical Perspectives on Gender, Race, and Militarization*, ed. Barbara Sutton, Sandra Morgen and Julie Novkov (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 111–35, doi.org/10.36019/9780813545554-008; Margaret Mishra, '"Your Woman Is a Very Bad Woman": Revisiting Female Deviance in Colonial Fiji', *Journal of International Women's Studies* 17, no. 4 (2016), vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol17/iss4/5; Margaret Mishra, 'The Suspicious Death of Depot Baby 7480: "Maternal Negligence" in Colonial Fiji', *Australian Humanities Review* 59 (2016): 44–59; Esha Pillay and Quishile Charan, 'Undoing History's Spell on Bad Women: Counter-Colonial Narratives of the Female Girmit Role in the 1920 Labour Strike', essay, 2019, cdn.sanity.io/files/tj5lg93h/production/7389bbec1fa08b05f653c75feb9ce98eb2082b9b.pdf.

21 Lal, *Intersections*, 305.

22 Lal, *Intersections*, 305.

Lal's profound commitment to upholding democratic values, confronting injustice and advocating for the power of dissent in democracy represents a foundational pillar for all who engage in the scholarly pursuit of truth and justice. His assertion that dissent should not equate to disloyalty in a democratic society underscores the critical role of intellectuals, academics and citizens in challenging tyranny, oppression and the erosion of democratic norms. The recent political shifts in Fiji, marked by the end of Bainimarama's 16-year rule and the rise of a coalition government led by Sitiveni Rabuka, have provided a moment of reflection for the nation. Rabuka, a central figure in the 1987 coup analysed by Lal in *Broken Waves*, recently played a part in acknowledging Lal's indelible contributions to Fiji's historical and political discourse. In an act of reconciliation and acknowledgement, the new leadership revoked the prohibition order on Lal's wife, Dr Padma Narsey Lal, allowing her to finally bring his ashes back to the soil he loved so deeply.[23] This gesture, coupled with prime minister Rabuka's apology for the 'cruel' and 'inhumane' treatment Lal faced at the hands of the previous administration, signals a move towards healing and redress.[24]

The posthumous lifting of the travel ban on him and his wife is a poignant acknowledgement of his immense contribution and the need for his legacy to be interwoven with Fiji's future. The lifting of this ban is not merely procedural—it is symbolic, representing a nation acknowledging its past actions and moving towards reconciliation. As the nation navigates this new chapter with the democratic election of Rabuka, the ideals Lal championed—speaking truth to power, promoting democratic values and resisting oppression—become even more crucial. Under its new leadership, it is hoped that Fiji will continue to uphold and be guided by these principles, ensuring that the sacrifices and efforts of stalwarts like Lal are not in vain.

Understanding Rabuka's historical significance as the orchestrator of the 1987 coups that profoundly altered Fiji's political and social fabric is crucial for contextualising the complexities of Fiji's journey towards democracy. This act of repatriation not only represents a moment of healing but also invites a re-examination of the complex relationships between Fiji's political actors and its scholars. The reconciliation gestures towards the evolving nature of Fiji's political landscape and the potential for dialogue and understanding, even among those with deeply divergent views on the nation's past. As Fiji stands at the crossroads of a new political era, lifting the ban on Lal and his wife rectifies a historical oversight and embodies a broader call for reconciliation and the importance of integrating Lal's legacy into the nation's democratic evolution. The challenge for Fiji's current and future leadership lies in embracing and being guided by the democratic values and principles that Lal ardently championed. In this transformative period, the responsibility falls upon all of us—scholars, citizens and

23 Rashika Kumar, 'Dr. Padma Lal Arrives into the Country with Late Professor Brij Lal's Ashes after 14 Years', *Fijivillage*, 22 February 2023, www.fijivillage.com/news/Dr-Padma-Lal-arrives-into-the-country-with-late-Professor-Brij-Lals-ashes-after-14-years-4rfx58/.

24 Navitalai Naivalurua, 'PM Gives Nation's Apology to Dr Brij Lal's Family', *Fijivillage*, 25 February 2023, www.fijivillage.com/news/PM-gives-nations-apology-to-Dr-Brij-Lals-family-r548fx/.

global observers—to carry forward the torch of critical thought, courageous dissent and unwavering advocacy for democracy. By actively engaging with Lal's teachings and embodying the values he lived by, we honour his legacy and contribute to the ongoing endeavour of building a just, democratic and inclusive society in Fiji and beyond.

Conclusion

This exploration of the life and work of Professor Brij Lal reveals the profound depth of his contributions to understanding Fiji's historical and contemporary landscape. Through his scholarship, Lal provided invaluable insights into Fiji's colonial and indenture histories and paved the way for addressing critical gaps in gender representation within Fijian history. Though forcibly banned from Fiji due to his critiques of the Bainimarama regime, Lal's spirit and dedication to Fiji never wavered.[25] In honouring Lal's legacy, we commit to expanding the horizons of Fijian historiography, ensuring that future generations inherit a richer, more diverse historical discourse.

As I pen this tribute, I do so not only as an Indo-Fijian deeply influenced by Lal's scholarly works but also as a doctoral candidate exploring the nuanced interplay of masculinities in Fiji's political sphere. Inspired by Lal's dedication to truth and inclusivity, my journey seeks to extend his legacy by addressing the complex layers of gender and power dynamics within our society. Inspired by Lal's intellectual rigour and his commitment to equitable representation, I chart a course through my multidisciplinary research, focusing on the contemporary political landscape of Fiji. This journey, while divergent in its focus from traditional historical research, strives to contribute meaningfully to our understanding of Fiji's current sociopolitical gendered dynamics, reflecting Lal's influence in fostering a holistic view of Fijian society. In this endeavour, Lal's work serves as both a foundation and an inspiration, guiding my efforts to illuminate the narratives that shape our understanding of Fiji.

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25 Brij V. Lal, 'Fiji Made Me, but Which Fiji Is Mine?', *Islands Business*, 30 November 2021, islandsbusiness.com/features/fiji-brij-lal/.

Book Reviews

John Arnold review of Craig Munro, *Literary Lion Tamers: Book Editors Who Made Publishing History*

(Melbourne: Scribe, 2021), 288 pp., PB $29.99, ISBN 97819525713220

Craig Munro is uniquely qualified to write about book editors and book editing in Australia. He has been an editor and publisher through his long association with the University of Queensland Press (UQP), an author in his own right and a leading scholar in the field of the history of the book in Australia. Munro has thus been a participant, an observer and a chronicler of twentieth-century Australian publishing history.

Before discussing this book with its alliterative short title, a disclaimer is necessary. I have known the author for almost 40 years and worked with him as part of the editorial team on the history of the book in Australia. We also share a common interest in P. R. Stephensen, one of the key players discussed in the book. I am also thanked in the acknowledgements.

Literary Lions Tamers is a mixture of a memoir, scholarly research and descriptive biographies of major players, mainly on the publishing side of Australia's literary output in the twentieth century. Munro has researched those active in the first half of the century and worked with or interviewed those working in most of the second half, and the first decade of the twenty-first century. The book draws on his previous writings, particularly his excellent biography of P. R. Stephensen, the aptly titled *Wild Man of Letters*, first published in 1984. He also uses material from his other books.

Free of scholarly apparatus but including a detailed 'Further Reading' list and a generous 'List of Acknowledgements', *Literary Lion Tamers* reads like a series of radio talks (I am reluctant to say podcasts as the period covered predates the phenomena) that one could listen to sitting on one's favourite chair with a glass of red, smiling at the humorous bits, making notes about books that one should read or revisit, and thinking for the first time of the crucial role that editors play in the transmission of a submitted text into a published book.

Munro's book makes it clear that book editors are the heroes—or literary lions—of publishing, mostly unsung in their time, but with a few well known in their lifetimes, such as A. G. Stephens and P. R. Stephensen and, to a lesser extent, Beatrice Davis. He devotes four chapters to A. G. Stephens while almost a third of the book deals with the career of Percy Reginald Stephensen (1901–1965), the subject of Munro's PhD thesis and *Wild Man of Letters*, and a constant presence in his life for over 40 years.

The whole range of Stephensen's remarkable career is covered in *Literary Lion Tamers:* Rhodes scholar, the first to translate Lenin into English, fine press publisher in London in the late 1920s, responsible for a pirated edition in 1930 of D. H. Lawrence's banned novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and promoter of Aleister Crowley. Then, back in Australia, head of the Endeavour Press; moving to the right in the second half of the 1930s; publishing Xavier Herbert's *Capricornia*; establishing Australia First; being unjustly interned in World War II; and spending the postwar years an embittered man, earning his living as a ghostwriter for the popular travel writer Frank Clune. It is all there, and any reader interested in learning more about Inky Stephensen should go and read *Wild Man of Letters*.

After a chapter about Stephensen writing for Frank Clune—cleverly called 'Traveller's Ghosts'—Munro moves onto a short survey of the publisher of Clune's novels, Angus and Robertson. Here called 'The Old Firm' but in its day Anguish and Robbery by disgruntled writers, it provides a succinct summary of the various changes in management in the 1960s and early 1970s. Plotting and takeovers are outlined as is the role of Walter Burns, who became managing director after first becoming a major shareholder. Burns appeared to be more interested in the firm's property assets rather than its book-based ones. The wash-up was a takeover by Gordon Barton, the appointment in 1973 of a young Richard Walsh as managing director, asset stripping and the clearing out of many of the older and established staff. One was the legendary editor Beatrice Davis. Sacked in 1973 after more than three decades at Angus and Robertson, she was immediately snapped up by Thomas Nelson and remained there until finally retiring in 1981.

Munro devotes a chapter to Davis, claiming rightly that for 'more than three decades, along with the talented colleagues she trained and mentored at A & R, Davis helped put Australian literature on the map' (p. 183). The section covering her relationship with the pugnacious and garrulous Xavier Herbert makes for good reading. As related to Munro by Davis when he interviewed her, Herbert in the 1940s wanted to take her out for a good lunch. She suggested the Hotel Australia. Once there, Herbert talked non-stop for a couple of hours, never stopping to order any food. When they finally got round to ordering, the waiter told them 'I'm sorry sir, lunch is orf'. Her own lunches and afternoon teas at her home at Folly Point in Cammeray, Sydney, were memorable for their style and conversation.

Davis was given the manuscript of Herbert's novel to edit which eventually became *Soldiers' Women*. Like that of *Capricornia*, which Stephensen worked on for several years before its publication in 1938, the text was far too long. Davis's persistence and charm won over Herbert and the novel finally appeared in 1961 at half its original length.

The changes at Angus and Robertson that Munro chronicles occurred at the same time as a seismic shift in Australian society—opposition to conscription and the Vietnam War, the emergence of the counterculture and the second wave of Australian feminism—culminating in the election of the Whitlam Labor government in December 1972.

This period saw the emergence of many new publishers focusing on Australian authors: Sun Books, Outback Press and McPhee Gribble in Melbourne; Wild and Woolley, and Hale and Iremonger in Sydney. Their beginnings are detailed in *Paper Empires* (2006), the third volume of the history of the book in Australia series co-edited by Munro.

One publisher that transformed itself from a small operation mainly supplying texts for internal university use into a major Australian publisher was UQP. For nearly three decades, it was the leading and innovative publisher of Australian creative writing, launching the careers of writers such as Peter Carey, David Malouf, Rodney Hall and Marion Halligan, among many others, plus the short-lived one of Michael Dransfield. Munro was part of this resurgence at UQP, being both an editor and then publishing manager. He is also the chronicler of UQP's story, co-editing its history, appropriately entitled *The Writer's Press* (1988).

Munro devotes the final chapter to friend and fellow UQP editor Rosie Fitzgibbon. In recognition of her work, she was awarded the inaugural Beatrice Davis Fellowship in 1992. This enabled her to spend three months in New York working with the major American publisher W. W. Norton. The creation of the fellowship was, in itself, a tangible recognition of the role of book editors in Australian literary culture.

Their role is only barely recognised in the *ADB*. Keyword searching in the *ADB* online brings up the word 'editor' 1,437 times. But by far the majority of these entries deal with newspaper editors. There are 12 entries for 'editors and publishers' like A. G. Stephens and P. R. Stephensen. Both could be described as 'men of letters', with Stephensen also achieving notoriety and thus eligibility for an entry in the *ADB* due to his political views and internment during World War II.

Nan McDonald is the only subject in the *ADB* whose occupation is given as 'book editor'. A long-time employee of Angus and Robertson who worked under and with Beatrice Davis, she was also a noted poet. Munro discusses her work editing Eve Langley's novels in a chapter entitled 'The Anguish of Oscar Wilde', a name that the eccentric Langley once went by. Barbara Ramsden, editor at Melbourne University Press who is commemorated in an award named in her honour, also has an *ADB* entry. The Ramsden Award was given annually to an author and editor in recognition of the efforts of both parties to produce a quality fiction or non-fiction book from 1971 to 1992 and from 2006 to 2016. There is a touch of irony here in that the last Ramsden Award was given to Craig Munro and Julia Carlomagno (editor) for *Under Cover: Adventures in the Art of Editing* (2015).

Although the Beatrice Davis Fellowship is ongoing, the cessation of the Ramsden Award is a symbolic reflection of the fact that book editors do not get the necessary recognition that they deserve. One wonders whether the likes of Wendy Sutherland (long-time editor at Melbourne University Press) and Rosie Fitzgibbon will feature in future volumes of the *ADB*. Those editors who were also publishers, such as Hilary McPhee and Di Gribble, will justifiably have an entry. But full-time book editors, like backing singers for rock stars as featured in the 2013 documentary film *20 Feet from Stardom*, may remain in the background as the unsung heroes of the publishing world. *Literary Lion Tamers: Book Editors Who Made Publishing History* helps bring them closer to the centre of the stage.

Derek Drinkwater review of Chris Wallace, *Political Lives: Australian Prime Ministers and Their Biographers*

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Why did Edward Gibbon abandon a barely begun work about the Swiss wars of independence and embark on a six-volume history of the Roman Empire? Gibbon's reasons for doing so, set out in his memoirs, enrich our understanding of his intellectual journey from Switzerland to Ancient Rome.[1] In a similar vein, Chris Wallace—political historian, biographer and journalist—begins her study of twentieth-century Australian prime ministerial biography with a forthright and illuminating explanation of *why* and *how* it came into being.

Its genesis was her decision in 2011 to cancel a publishing contract and repay the advance on a completed biography of serving prime minister Julia Gillard because she thought that the book, if published, would be used as a political weapon against Gillard by her adversaries on the Opposition and government benches. This prompted Wallace to ponder the influence on national politics of biographies of serving twentieth-century Australian prime ministers. By exploring the implications of 'contemporary political biography' and assessing its significance as a form of 'political intervention' in shaping the 'reputational capital' of these prime ministerial actors—and their contributions to Australian governance—Wallace has produced an original study of 'image-making' and 'image-breaking' in political life from the perspectives of prime ministers and their biographers.

Wallace examines in depth 17 prime ministerial biographies, chosen from those written about the 25 prime ministers who served between January 1901 and December 2007. As she makes clear at the outset, the degree of collaboration between biographer and biographee is invariably central to a project's success or failure. Perhaps of greater significance, however, is the *biographer's* goal: a determination to shape the subject's political fortunes directly by depicting him or her in certain ways that

1 Edward Gibbon, *Gibbon's Autobiography*, ed. M. M. Reese (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), 76, 88–89, 93. Gibbon also considered the Florentine Republic among other possible subjects for his nascent historical talents, while scrupulously avoiding modern English history. See J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion: Volume One: The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737–1764* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 123–33.

might range from hostile to hagiographic ('impure' biography); or a desire to produce neither a hatchet job nor a hagiography but a straightforward work of biographical scholarship ('pure' biography).[2]

Both types are represented in Wallace's pages. Not, however, in the numbers most readers would expect. From 1901 until the early 1970s, only a trickle of such studies appeared. Between Federation and 1915—what Wallace aptly terms the era of our 'Absent Fathers' (Chapter 1)—none of the six to serve as prime minister was the subject of a biography.[3] Academia's potential biographers steered clear of the fray. Instead, the task of penning what amounted to contemporary biographical pen-portraits of Australia's early prime ministers was undertaken by a small number of educated 'scholar-journalists', chief among them Herbert Campbell-Jones and Alfred Buchanan. Chapter 2's focus is contemporary biographical studies of five of the six interwar prime ministers—W. M. Hughes (1915–23), S. M. Bruce (1923–29), J. H. Scullin (1929–32), J. A. Lyons (1932–39) and Earle Page (April 1939), only one of whom, the mercurial Hughes, was the subject of (two) biographies while prime minister. Both were hagiographic works; indeed, in their portrayals of him as a great Commonwealth war leader and patriot, they bordered on the idolatrous.[4]

Bruce had to wait until 1965 for a biography (he died in 1967),[5] while Scullin (1974),[6] Lyons (2011) and Page (2020) were the subject of posthumous studies. Wallace devotes most of Chapter 3 to the stance on, and involvement in, the biography of Australia's sixth interwar prime minister, Robert Menzies, who held office in peace and war (1939–41) and postwar (1949–66). The saga of how Menzies waxed warm and then cool on a proposed 1950s biography of him—at considerable

2 A distinction made by the British biographer Harold (later Sir Harold) Nicolson in 1927, which remains relevant today. 'Impure' biography, Nicolson argued, was characterised by undue subjectivity in the form of either exaggerated praise or reputational debunking; 'pure' biography derived from attempts to achieve historical truth by aiming at complete and accurate portraiture. See Harold Nicolson, *The Development of English Biography* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1927), 9–16; Maryam Thirriard, 'The Transnational Aspect in Harold Nicolson's *The Development of English Biography*', in *Transnational Perspectives on Artists' Lives*, ed. Marleen Rensen and Christopher Wiley (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

3 Just as noteworthy is the time that elapsed before the publication of what was, in each case, a posthumous biography: Edmund Barton (45 years after he ceased to be prime minister), Alfred Deakin (13 years), J. C. 'Chris' Watson (95 years), George Reid (84 years), Andrew Fisher (93 years) and Joseph Cook (74 years).

4 Still in political harness in old age, and increasingly obsessed with posterity's verdict on him, Hughes engaged three biographers at once—each ignorant of the others' efforts. The historian and author of the definitive biography of Hughes, L. F. Fitzhardinge, concluded that 'neutrality' was impossible with him; almost gave up on the task several times before finally relenting; and, after Hughes died, was confronted by a messy collection of private papers containing Hughes's false teeth.

5 His biographer, the *Melbourne Herald* editor Cecil Edwards, wrote to Bruce on 3 April 1963 of his intention to produce a biography 'which will not entirely repel the professors by its lightness or the ordinary reader by its dullness'. Wallace, *Political Lives*, 44.

6 In portraying the Scullin era, Wallace makes excellent use of Warren Denning's *Caucus Crisis: The Rise and Fall of the Scullin Government* (1937). Denning—a pen-portraitist in the tradition of Campbell-Jones and Buchanan—and a journalist-gadfly who enjoyed the political cut and thrust, also left behind a treasure trove of biographical work on prime ministers from Barton to Menzies (all, alas, unpublished), which included a book-length study of Menzies.

reputational cost to his would-be biographer, Allan Dawes—is a cautionary tale for political journalists presented by a serving prime minister with what seems like the opportunity of a lifetime.

The result (Ronald Seth's 1960 book on Menzies for young readers aside) was no substantial study of Menzies's life (or political career) during his long tenure in the Lodge (the definitive biography was published posthumously in two volumes in 1993 and 1999). Arthur Fadden, who succeeded Menzies briefly (August–October 1941), fared no better; a biography of him did not appear until 2014: 41 years after his death. Yet, as Wallace reveals in Chapter 4, which takes the story from World War II to the early 1970s, the first contemporary prime ministerial biography to be published in nearly 30 years appeared in 1943. Like most accorded this accolade, its subject, John Curtin—wartime prime minister from 1941 until he died in July 1945—was ambivalent about it. Frank Forde, prime minister for a week following Curtin's death before the ALP Caucus elected 'Ben' Chifley prime minister, is Australia's only prime minister not yet the subject of a biography (a posthumous life of Chifley, who was prime minister from 1945 to 1949, was published in 1961). Neither Menzies's successor as prime minister, Harold Holt (January 1966 until his death in December 1967), nor the stop-gap custodian of the office who followed him, John McEwen (December 1967 – January 1968), received any ambitious biographical attention until much later (McEwen, 1996; Holt, 2005).

Alan Trengrove, a journalist (like most prime ministerial biographers), helped demonstrate anew political biography's interventionist potential in his 1969 'informal' biography of John Gorton (prime minister, 1968–71). The Trengrove study was only the fourth major contemporary political biography of a prime minister to appear since Federation. Gorton's preparedness to permit Trengove to disclose his subject's illegitimacy—a masterly pre-emptive move by Gorton to neutralise attacks from political opponents—marked a significant shift in biographical disclosure. It was not one imitated by Gorton's successor 'Billy' McMahon (prime minister, 1971–72), whose efforts to control the biographical focus on him during his lifetime so as to be seen as 'the prime minister who never made a mistake' deterred would-be biographers (an ambitious, largely benign study of McMahon was not published until 2018, 30 years after his death, its title taken from a mocking description of him by his political nemesis, Gough Whitlam—'Tiberius with a Telephone').

As Wallace correctly points out, Trengrove's biography of the buccaneering political maverick Gorton, along with McMahon's defeat by Gough Whitlam in December 1972, ending 23 years of coalition governments, heralded a change in 'the culture of contemporary political biography' (p. 118). Whitlam's time as prime minister (1972–75) witnessed the beginnings of a new 'modern era' of prime ministerial biography and discourse. In Chapter 5, Wallace discusses the political biographies of Whitlam to appear during (and after) his years in office: four by the veteran political journalist Laurie Oakes (two of these co-authored with David Solomon)—a prime

ministerial tetralogy Wallace sees as *sans pareil* in Australian political biography.[7] Even Oakes, however, happily ceded authorial precedence to Whitlam's veteran speechwriter Graham Freudenberg, who wrote the post–prime ministerial definitive life, *A Certain Grandeur: Gough Whitlam in Politics* (1977; 2009).[8] Whitlam's successor as prime minister, Malcolm Fraser (1975–83), was the subject of two contemporary biographical studies and a later, more scholarly and reflective biography (1989).

Chapter 6 charts the colourful history of the biographies of prime minister 'Bob' Hawke (1983–91). These include three pre–prime ministerial studies (two written by journalists) and one from the pen of the woman of letters, Blanche d'Alpuget (later substantially revised); as well as a fourth (by Stan Anson) that appeared in two editions—the first while Hawke was prime minister and the second just after he was toppled by Paul Keating (prime minister, 1991–96). Wallace regards the d'Alpuget and Anson studies as being the most psychologically driven in the field of contemporary Australian political biography. However, the publication of Anson's generated a strong reaction from d'Alpuget (and others) about questions of purpose and method in political life writing. Paul Keating considered the timely insights to be garnered from contemporary political biography (Chapter 7, 'Polaroids of a Busy Life') as also being of value to future scribes; in contrast, his successor, John Howard (prime minister, 1996–2007), believed that a prime minister should sup with a long spoon in this area (both were the subject of two political biographies while in office).

Wallace has mined an abundance of published and unpublished sources and made good use of them. Nevertheless, there are surprising absentees. Given the small number of contemporary political biographies to appear between 1901 and 1973, when the first Whitlam biography was published, she has, understandably, broadened her canvas to encompass some posthumous biographical studies published well after their subjects left office. This enhances her study substantially. However, she has had little (or nothing) to say about a number of other notable posthumously published prime ministerial lives that have appeared more recently. The book would have benefited, for example, from greater attention to four significant works referred to only in passing: David Lee on S. M. Bruce (2010), John Robertson on J. H. Scullin (1974), Peter S. Golding on John McEwen (1996) and Patrick Mullins on Billy McMahon (2018).[9] Consideration of another four major titles not discussed at all would also have strengthened the book: Anne Henderson on Joseph Lyons

7 Wallace makes an interesting comparison between the Oakes-Solomon quartet (1,409 pp., 541 pp. with Oakes as sole author) and what has long been regarded as the touchstone of traditional biography among Anglophones, James Boswell's 1,104 pp. *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (2 vols, 1791). Comparable Australian works are J. A. La Nauze's study of Alfred Deakin (2 vols, 1965, 1,041 pp.); L. F. Fitzhardinge's biography of W. M. Hughes (2 vols, 1964, 1979, 1,024 pp.); and Blanche d'Alpuget's study of Bob Hawke (2019 edition, 996 pp.).

8 The 'Whitlam book industry', its subject later observed, was 'our largest growth industry after tax avoidance' during the 1970s and early 1980s.

9 David Lee, *Stanley Melbourne Bruce: Australian Internationalist* (London: Continuum, 2010); John Robertson, *J. H. Scullin: A Political Biography* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 1974); Peter S. Golding, *Black Jack McEwen: Political Gladiator* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1996); Patrick Mullins, *Tiberius with a Telephone: The Life and Stories of William McMahon* (Brunswick: Scribe Publications, 2018).

(2011), Stephen Wilks on Earle Page (2020), Tracey M. Arklay on Arthur Fadden (2014) and Bridget McKenzie on John McEwen (2020).[10] Although Wallace is alert to the importance of *Sydney Morning Herald* political correspondent Ross Gollan's successful efforts to deride Menzies and prepare the way for Fadden's ascent to the top job, more would have been welcome on how newspaper proprietors (and their editor and political correspondent mouthpieces) were involved in making and unmaking prime ministers—a chilling tale told in detail in Sally Young's *Paper Emperors*.[11]

In order to accentuate the often lengthy periods of time between a prime minister leaving office and the appearance of a substantial (or *any* biography), and to indicate how many biographical studies of prime ministers have appeared since Federation—contemporary and otherwise—the inclusion of a table such as that to be found in Norman Abjorensen's *The Manner of Their Going*[12]—his book on how prime ministers left office—would have brought home more starkly both the seriousness of this biographical neglect and the state of prime ministerial life writing by year or decade. A number of minor errors and omissions have also crept through: Robert Menzies's long-serving private secretary was Hazel, not Helen Craig; the British publisher is Hutchinson, not Hutchison; key honorifics, such as Lord and Lady, have been used inconsistently and sometimes incorrectly; Patrick Mullins's biography of prime minister Billy McMahon is referred to in the text and the index but not in the bibliography; and the Table of Contents reference to Chapter 8 should read p. 254 not p. 256.

More significantly: is Wallace's conclusion (set out in Chapter 8) that Australian political biography is in a parlous state accurate? It is not difficult to agree with her about the abysmal level of contemporary political biography from Federation until the early 1970s; nor to fault her conclusion regarding the regrettable absence of academics from the field during this time—one left largely to journalists to till. Most serving prime ministers were unenthusiastic about a biography being written; such reluctance to assist in what Barton dismissed as 'that life story business' doubtless discouraged most potential biographers—academic and otherwise. Yet a close examination of late twentieth and early twenty-first-century prime ministerial life writing by journalists

10 Anne Henderson, *Joseph Lyons: The People's Prime Minister* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2011); Stephen Wilks, *'Now is the Psychological Moment': Earle Page and the Imagining of Australia* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2020); Tracey M. Arklay, *Arthur Fadden: A Political Silhouette* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2014); Bridget McKenzie, *John McEwen: Right Man, Right Place, Right Time* (Cleveland, Connor Court Publishing, 2020).

11 Sally Young, *Paper Emperors: The Rise of Australia's Newspaper Empires* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2019). This volume's coverage ends in 1941 with Menzies's loss of office—a defenestration widely attributed to the press barons (pp. 539–41, 543–44).

12 Norman Abjorensen, *The Manner of Their Going: Prime Ministerial Exits from Lyne to Abbott* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2015, vii).

and academics gives more hope for the genre than Wallace is prepared to concede.[13] And it is puzzling that Wallace makes no mention of the Connor Court Publishing series, 'Australian Biographical Monographs', which includes a number of male and female federal (and state) politicians (including nine prime ministers).[14]

As long as the office of prime minister endures, Australian prime ministerial biography is a tree that will keep on giving. Wallace's inventive approach to political and historical study through a biographical lens will enable specialists and general readers alike to attain a better understanding of the strengths (and pitfalls) of this sphere of life writing. A revised edition would encompass not only biographical studies of prime ministers who served after the 2007 general election (six so far), but also might consider online publishing's future implications for political life writing (which Wallace discusses), as well as the significance of new, competitively priced and influential forms of contemporary political biography such as the 25,000-word *Quarterly Essay* (Issue 1, April 2001; Issue 97, March 2025). Funded by Schwartz Media and published by the Melbourne-based imprint Black Inc., this series already includes a dozen perceptive studies of the 'political lives' of Australia's seven, twenty-first-century prime ministers.[15]

13 Australia's six prime ministers since December 2007 have been the subject of at least one biography published before, during or after their time in office. Political biography—prime ministerial and otherwise—has, in recent years, yielded a number of excellent studies including the late Mungo MacCallum and Frank Bongiorno on prime ministers from Edmund Barton to Anthony Albanese (2012; 2023) (irreverent but insightful); Margaret Simons on Tanya Plibersek, member of parliament (MP) (2023); Peter Rees on Tim Fischer MP (2023); Anne Henderson's *Menzies versus Evatt* (2023); Zachary Gorman's edited collection of essays on Robert Menzies by diverse hands (vol. 1, 2022 and vol. 2, 2023 of a projected four-volume series); Troy Bramston on Robert Menzies (2019; 2023) and Bob Hawke (2022); Gideon Haigh on H. V. Evatt (2021); David Day on Maurice Blackburn (2019), one among several fine studies of significant Commonwealth politicians; and two biographical dictionaries—'Order, Order!', which contains entries on all speakers, deputy speakers and clerks of the House of Representatives (HoR) since Federation, the product of collaboration between the HoR and the National Centre of Biography within The Australian National University's School of History; and a similar work by the Department of the Senate encompassing all senators and clerks who served between 1901 and 2002 (4 vols, 2000–17).

14 George Reid (Luke Walker, 2021), Joseph Cook (Zachary Gorman, 2023), S. M. Bruce (David Lee, 2020), Joseph Lyons (Kevin Andrews, 2016), Robert Menzies (Scott Prasser, 2020), John Curtin (David Lee, 2022), Harold Holt (Tom Frame, 2018), John Gorton (Paul Williams, 2020) and Bob Hawke (Mike Steketee, 2022). Among other biographees in the series are senators Dame Annabelle Rankin, Neville Bonner and Dame Margaret Guilfoyle.

15 John Howard (three titles), Kevin Rudd (two), Julia Gillard (one), 'Tony' Abbott (one), Malcolm Turnbull (one), Scott Morrison (three) and Anthony Albanese (one). Some *Quarterly Essays* are strongly biographical in content, while others deal only with aspects of a subject's life and career.

Stephen Foster review of Graeme Davison, *My Grandfather's Clock: Four Centuries of a British-Australian Family*

(Carlton: Miegunyah Press, 2023), 320 pp., HB $50, ISBN 9780522879582

Graeme Davison was an early observer of family history and is a recent convert to its practice. In 1994, when most of his contemporaries were indifferent to or dismissive of the genre, he drew attention to the growing popularity of genealogy and pondered its significance.[1] Fifteen years later, following the triumphs of Ancestry.com and the television series *Who Do You Think You Are?*, he cast a sceptical eye over 'Family History in a Digital Age'.[2] Then came his conversion. Encouraged by his family, he 'succumbed to the appeal of family history' with the publication in 2015 of *Lost Relations: Fortunes of My Family in Australia's Golden Age*.[3] Now we have *My Grandfather's Clock: Four Centuries of a British-Australian family*. But his embrace of the genre was clear several years earlier when, at the start of a keynote address at a conference on family history, he led an enthusiastic rendition of 'My Grandfather's Clock' in a raised voice that would surely have cheered his Methodist ancestors.

Unsurprisingly, *Lost Relations* and *My Grandfather's Clock* have much in common. Both books rely on slim pickings of documents, memories and memorabilia, but draw extensively on genealogical and other digital resources. Both sides of the family were not remarkable, except that Davison makes them so. In *Lost Relations*, Davison traced his mother's ancestors, beginning in rural Hampshire around the time of Jane Austen and accompanying them to Victoria on the eve of the goldrushes, a third of the way through the book. *My Grandfather's Clock*, which follows his paternal line, extends more deeply into 'The Ancestral Past', with Australia not sighted until halfway through the book. It begins in the Scottish Borders in the sixteenth century, where he discovers that his ancestors were reivers, or cattle thieves—or, rather, that they might have been, for the written evidence offers no certainty. Does it matter? For genealogists bent on compiling the most complete family tree, it surely does. For family historians of Davison's calibre, it scarcely matters at all, for context takes precedence over lineage. The prevalence of the Davison surname provides sufficient reason to explore life on the Borders, a region less popular with tourists and historians than the Highlands, but in Davison's telling, equally worthy of attention.

1 Graeme Davison, 'The Broken Lineage of Australian Family History', in *Dangerous Liaisons: Essays in Honour of Greg Dening*, ed. Donna Merwick (Parkville: History Department, University of Melbourne, 1994), 333–52. See also: revised version in Graeme Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000).

2 Graeme Davison, 'Speed-Relating: Family History in a Digital Age', *History Australia* 6, no. 2 (2009): 43.1–43.10.

3 Graeme Davison, *Lost Relations: Fortunes of My Family in Australia's Golden Age* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2015), xiii.

Davison's known ancestors first appeared in the written record in the late eighteenth century, when they moved to the port town of Annan, some 30 kilometres north of Carlisle. In Annan, his four-times-great-grandfather probably acquired the long case clock that gave this book its title—not that it was known as a 'grandfather clock' until American Henry Clay Work published his song in 1876. From rural Annan, the family moved to growing centres of industry, first Carlisle, later Manchester, then Birmingham. Successive generations worked as a breeches-maker, block printer, bootmaker and tinplate worker, before John Potter Davison, ironmonger and painter, emigrated with his family to Melbourne in 1912. His son and grandson were successively plumber and historian.

Mobility is one of the themes of the book, more geographical than social—for, until recent generations, the Davisons seem not to have much changed their fortunes, moving 'back and forth across the divide between the respectable working class and the lower middle class' (p. 165). They set out for Australia, with just £20 to their name, just as their lives seemed to be improving. Davison wonders why. Were they driven by hope or desperation? Were they influenced by their local community of Methodists? Whatever the reasons, on their arrival in Melbourne they met with hard times: 'The Promised Land of milk and honey was proving to be a land of bread and dripping' (p. 131).

Methodism features prominently in the later chapters, as it does in *Lost Relations*. Davison pauses when his paternal grandfather converted to Methodism in the 1890s to explain its 'distinctive culture' and appeal among the industrial working class. 'Some of that culture', he writes, 'would be transmitted to me, along with the ancestral clock' (p. 112). Time, in both its spiritual and practical dimensions, was profoundly important to Methodists—but the ticking clock resonates throughout the book, well before the family converted to Methodism. For Davison, the measurement of time has always been a source of fascination: he admits his first words, according to his mother, were not 'Mummy' or 'Daddy' but 'Tick-tock' (p. 198). And his books include *The Unforgiving Minute: How Australia Learnt to Tell the Time*.[4] Here and elsewhere it is evident that his family story is grounded in a lifetime of research.

A search for roots can lead to unexpected places and themes. John Davison, the breech-maker, 'made his living helping to drive the kilt out of fashion' (p. 67), now his grandson invites a paragraph reflecting on Scotland's national dress; Richard, the shoemaker, took the pledge, and so renounced 'the commonest form of relief from the fatigue and stress of working-class life' (p. 90); George, the plumber, with his brother Frank, joined the boy scouts during the Great War, leading Graeme to discuss the scouting movement in its heyday; Graeme's own infancy as a 'clock baby', a regime encouraged by New Zealander Dr Truby King, inspires a section on child rearing.

4 Graeme Davison, *The Unforgiving Minute: How Australia Learnt to Tell the Time* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994).

As in *Lost Relations*, Davison is as much interested in the journey—literal as well as intellectual—as the destination. He takes us north from Carlisle along the A7 highway, observing statues of reivers and sixteenth-century battle sites. At Cummersdale, just west of Carlisle, he visits the factory where William Davidson (the family name was yet to be standardised) worked as a block printer, a highly skilled role creating intricate designs on fabric. There are false leads: a possible DNA connection turns out to be the result of a Davidson in Texas stirring the genealogical pot. He follows a William Davidson, convicted at the Carlisle Assizes, to New South Wales, only to find that he was too young to be an ancestor. Davison affirms his long-held interest in material culture, especially through the clock, which in different ways was symbolically significant to different generations. Mercifully, he spares his readers a disquisition on semiotics: he knows how to communicate history, and that family history is a good way to reach a wide audience.

What does it all mean? In *Lost Relations*, Davison concludes that family history has become 'a search for self-understanding'.[5] He acknowledges his debt to his parents and grandparents, and sees some continuities with more distant generations. But he 'abhor[s] the pernicious use of genealogy and genetics to attribute inborn characteristics to families and ethnic groups and to discriminate accordingly'.[6] *My Grandfather's Clock* is likewise 'a search for personal identity' (p. 3), with a similar interest in continuities that had previously been invisible to him. But his thoughts about inherited characteristics seem slightly more equivocal. In reconstructing the history of the clock—a metonym for his ancestral memory—he finds himself 'peering into that dark space where heredity and nurture, memory and history combine to make us who we are' (p. 19).

As is now obvious, the author is present throughout the book, as he was in *Lost Relations*. Liberated by age and stature from the traditional injunction to the academic historian (as expressed by his PhD co-supervisor, John La Nauze) that 'the first person is better avoided',[7] Davison shares with his readers his processes of search and discovery, and his personal reactions to what he finds. Approaching the Scottish Borders, he admits to an attack of nostalgia and wonders briefly if he is surrendering to a romantic myth. When he locates his bootmaker ancestor, Richard, in a turbulent town around the time of the Chartist movement, he would have been 'pleased if Richard had been among the radicals' (p. 87)—but always at his elbow is the professional historian, who tells him that the evidence is lacking. Sentiment has a place in family history, but never at the expense of critical analysis.

5 Davison, *Lost Relations*, 238.
6 Davison, *Lost Relations*, 4.
7 J. A. La Nauze, *Presentation of Historical Theses: Notes for University Students* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1966).

With the approach of the present, the author moves to the foreground, drawing as much on memory and personal experience as on the written record. Born during the war, he was just ahead of the baby boom and caught 'the big wave … as it crested' (p. 7). He writes affectionately of growing up in Essendon, in suburban Melbourne, describing the transition from Depression-era frugality to postwar consumerism: 'A domestic regime that had hardly altered for a century vanished in less than a decade' (p. 207). Then came schooling at Essendon High, one of just a handful of state high schools in suburban Melbourne, and Melbourne University, where, inspired by the greatly esteemed Kathleen Fitzpatrick, he discovered that history was 'not the cold retrieval of dry facts but a lively, open-ended conversation with the people of the past' (p. 241). Then to Oxford, with the help of a Rhodes Scholarship, and Canberra, where he completed what was later published as the seminal urban history *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne*.[8] Should these latter chapters be described as autobiography? Davison thinks not:

> Autobiography is about the author's self-making and includes the external world only as a background. But I want to bring the background to the fore, and view myself as a product, as well as a witness, of my times.
>
> (p. 6)

Yet as a witness, he reveals much of himself. In our age of mobile phones and earplugs, he laments the decline of whistling, 'a simple form of musical and psychological self-help that buoyed people's spirits in hard times' (p. 162). Similarly, he deplores the modern phrase 'play date', which suggests a regimented childhood so different from his own. Remembering how the church helped his grandparents to find their way in Australian society, he remarks that the 'decline of mainstream Protestantism since the 1970s has largely coincided with the decline of British migration':

> When I hear 'Old Australians' opposing the erection of a new mosque or urging newcomers to leave behind their homelands, I call to mind my grandparents who continued, to the end of their lives, to live within the Methodist Church and to call England Home.
>
> (p. 135)

Such reflections are never intrusive: part of Davison's skill is to move effortlessly across genres—family history, social/economic/religious history, autobiography, memoir. He is happy to call the book a 'family history', and so perhaps should we be. I think it would be better described in common parlance as 'reflective history', bearing in mind that all history is to some extent reflective. Whatever you choose to call it, *My Grandfather's Clock* offers deep insights into how history is researched and written, and encouragement to others to look to their own ancestors for 'a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world we will leave to our descendants' (p. 7).

8 Graeme Davison, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1978).

Zachary Gorman review of Stephen Wilks, ed., *'Order, Order!' A Biographical Dictionary of Speakers, Deputy Speakers and Clerks of the Australian House of Representatives*

(Canberra: ANU Press, 2023), 522 pp., PB $134.95, ISBN 9781760465759

Biographical dictionaries and biographical compilations have a very proud tradition in Australian historiography. The pinnacle, of course, is the *ADB*, which published its first volume in 1966 and has ever since been an invaluable resource for historians and researchers. Since 2000 we have also seen the publication of the *Biographical Dictionary of the Australian Senate*, a comprehensive study of every person who has ever sat in the Upper House of the federal parliament. The states, too, often have their own smaller biographical compilations, frequently produced to coincide with significant anniversaries. I certainly have made much use of the two volumes of *The Premiers of New South Wales*, which were released for the sesquicentenary of responsible government in 2006. *'Order, Order!': A Biographical Dictionary of Speakers, Deputy Speakers and Clerks of the Australian House of Representatives*, edited by Stephen Wilks, is thus a welcome addition to what is now a very large body of work.

Indeed, since the volume is produced by the National Centre of Biography at ANU, which is responsible for not only the *ADB* but also newer projects like the *Indigenous Australian Dictionary of Biography*, there is a great awareness of where this new book fits into the overarching whole. The entries themselves are modelled on *ADB* format, and many of the figures covered already have *ADB* entries, which the new extended articles aim at 'supplementing'. The intent of this book is thus not simply to produce biographies of some 65 important parliamentary office holders, but to use the lens of biography to enrich our understanding of three vital, complex and little-examined parliamentary roles.

In this aim, *Order, Order!* ultimately succeeds on the back of biography's great strength: that it is compelling and intimate. The foreword by David Elder, Clerk of the House of Representatives from 2014 to 2019, points out that the historical tradition of the House of Representatives has 'been very well documented in terms of its practice and procedure in the form of successive editions of *House of Representatives Practice*' (p. xi). But while few who are not directly involved in the workings of parliament would consult those editions, the biographical wellspring of anecdote, incident and personality offers the outsider with an interest in our parliamentary institutions something with which they can actively engage.

Take, for example, the first Speaker of the House of Representatives, Sir Frederick Holder. When one reads the iconic story that, after an all-night sitting that dragged on past 5 am, he disgruntledly uttered 'dreadful, dreadful' (p. xi) before collapsing on the floor and passing away, one wants to know more about the stresses and strains of the office that drove him to that point. Haydon Manning's biographical article relates that many blamed the death on ructions stemming from the fusion of the protectionists and free traders into the first united centre-right Liberal Party, which set up the largely enduring dividing line of Australian politics. As the *Bulletin* reported: 'What mania possessed the Fused crowd to rave as it did, the Lord only knows, but … if that insane bellowing killed him, then his dead body lies at the Fused party's door' (pp. 256–57).

Holder was thus killed by the party system, a perfect metaphor for one of the central tensions explored in the book, which is how does the Speakership maintain its necessary impartiality when the office holder is almost always a member of the governing party. The potential partiality of the speaker is not something that just affects question time and fair play in the House (indeed, many speakers have made use of the comparison to being sports umpires); it also affects the power balance between the parliament and the executive, which has arguably grown more lopsided over time.

With its much larger parliament, Westminster has a long tradition of allowing its speakers the luxury of largely eschewing themselves of their party affiliations by having their seats go uncontested at general elections. In Australia, however, with parliament's size constrained in part because of the nexus clause in the constitution, majorities are much smaller, and speakers cannot fully cease to be political actors. Even if they could, there are questions raised about the extent to which this would disenfranchise their electorate.

While the 'three elevens' of a tripartite party system initially allowed Holder the luxury of coming closer to the Westminster ideal than most of his successors, even his initial appointment was a political calculation on the part of Edmund Barton, who canvassed for Holder in the hope of robbing George Reid's Free Trade Opposition of the vote and voice of a former South Australian premier. As the various entries relate, each speaker has had to decide for themselves the extent to which they maintain their party affiliations, such as attending party room meetings, and it is worth noting that a common apprenticeship for many of them has been to serve as party whip.

An extreme example of independence is provided by Nationalist speaker Sir Littleton Groom, who was so concerned that he not cast a partisan vote, that he let the Bruce government be defeated in a division that prompted a snap election at which the coalition was swept from office. This was in spite of the fact that, as minister for trade and customs under prime minister Joseph Cook, Groom had been happy to stay in office while relying exclusively on the casting vote of the speaker. Such a career

progression from the front bench to the Speakership is quite rare; in the modern instance of Bronwyn Bishop, it arguably produced a speaker who had grown too used to being down in the partisan trenches.

One of the amusing occurrences to track in the various entries is that, for much of the parliament's history, the political affiliations of the speaker have been visually on display. This is because, from an early stage, Labor speakers tended not to wear the ceremonial gown, jabot and wig of the office, whereas the centre-right speakers tended to don them out of a Burkean respect for tradition. It was not until the election of the Howard government, at the tail end of the twentieth century, that Robert Halverson became the first non-Labor speaker to go without the wig. This transition itself embodies how the Speakership has gradually evolved from the Westminster model into a distinctly Australian tradition, which is no longer bound by British precedents when it comes to interpreting the standing orders—though, as the book rightfully points out, that Australian distinctiveness has origins that predate Federation in the parliamentary cultures developed in the various colonial parliaments.

Innovation has generally been positive, but there were certainly questions raised over the effects of such changes as televising question time or allowing 'tweets' from the Chamber. Clerk Ian Harris, who was responsible for important initiatives like introducing the acknowledgement of Indigenous cultures in the opening ceremony of the House, arguably went too far when he suggested that members of parliament delivering PowerPoint presentations might 'improve the impact or absorption of information' (p. 240). One minor criticism of the book is that, because the entries follow the dictionary style of alphabetical order, one has to make some effort to read them chronologically and be able to better track when and how things have evolved.

That being said, one of the great benefits of the collection is that incidents often overlap, and thus will be covered in multiple entries from a variety of perspectives, which helps to illuminate their complexities. One such moment is the Browne Fitzpatrick case, in which two men were controversially imprisoned for three months for breaching parliamentary privilege. Though the volume does not generally cover the careers of serjeants-at-arms, the fact that John Pettifer's career progression took him from that office to the clerkship, means that we even get to follow the person who accompanied Frank Browne and Raymond Fitzpatrick as they were transferred by Commonwealth vehicle from the Canberra police station to Goulburn gaol.

The articles on the Clerks are of particular note, as these highly trained parliamentary servants are the least likely to have previously been biographed, and their significant role often goes unheralded. It is endearing to read how many of them started out as essentially 'fans' of parliament, people who were excited to get to see great speeches and be close to the action, in the same manner as someone who works in an administrative role for their favourite football team. Clerks often serve decades of apprenticeship in

various parliamentary roles before becoming the chief executive of a department that now involves 185 employees, and the expert on hand relied upon to offer crucial advice that facilitates the smooth functioning of our democracy.

In the case of the longest-serving Clerk, Frank Green (who did have a pre-existing *ADB* entry), they could even be significant historical figures in a private capacity. Not only did Green famously comfort John Curtin when he was pacing around the grounds of the Lodge enduring sleepless nights worrying about Australian troops coming back from the Middle East, but also he acted as a go-between during fellow Tasmanian Joseph Lyons's defection from the Labor Party.

While generally the accuracy of the articles is of the exacting standards one would expect of the *ADB*, it did stick out that Bruce Smith, the classical liberal member for the New South Wales seat of Parkes, is twice inaccurately referred to as being from Queensland. Otherwise, *Order, Order!* is a very readable and valuable resource, not just for those that are interested in the evolution of the Australian parliament, but also for historians examining particular eras of our political history. Hopefully, it may be a stepping stone towards a future comprehensive 'Biographical Dictionary of the Australian House of Representatives' to match that already in existence for the Senate. After all, the comparative dignity of the two Houses is a crucial aspect of a Federation much debated during the constitutional conventions, and many of the figures covered in this volume would have been aghast to think that the Senate has thus been prioritised.

Michael Hamel-Green review of Sandra Goldbloom Zurbo, *My Father's Shadow: A Memoir*

(Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2023), 288 pp., PB $32.99,
ISBN 9781922979186

Sandra Goldbloom Zurbo's memoir of her peace activist father Sam Goldbloom, and of her own struggle to forge an identity while campaigning for peace alongside him, is an evocative and moving testament to how love and admiration for a father who played such a leadership role in the pursuit of peace, and who offered so much to his daughter during his life, can still be shot through with hurt and angst over unhealed wounds in a daughter–father relationship.

The very first sentence of the memoir disconcertedly asserts: 'My father … was my hero and nemesis all the days of his life' (p. vii). Yet (spoiler alert) the very last sentences end in an affirmation of what, despite all the flaws in a loved one, despite the pain and wounds they have inflicted, still matters above all else:

> A loving if fallible parent, Dad was proud of me just as I was of him, as he was of his other two daughters and all of our achievements. Really, though, when all is said and done, what matters most to me is that I loved him. And that he loved me.
>
> (p. 275)

To enable us to understand everything that played into this intense but sometimes fraught relationship, Goldbloom Zurbo makes effective use of non-linear narratives, incidents, episodes and occasions, often with recollected dialogue and beautifully concrete detail, all serving to bring to life moments as she experienced them. The non-sequential approach can sometimes incur risks in not understanding how someone has come to their position or attitude, as, for example, to what extent Sam Goldbloom's stances were shaped by his earlier experience of the Great Depression. The method is also challenging for a reader in making necessary connections between different times and places. Yet I found that the approach did, in the end, seem to work, with leitmotifs running through the narrative. While not chronological in sequence, there is a certain circular unity in the way the memoir starts with Sam in hospital during his illness and ends with one of the most moving accounts I have ever read of supporting and being with a loved one as they lay dying.

Sam Goldbloom was a hero to his daughter in many ways, and indeed someone who stood out as a prominent and very effective peace and disarmament advocate and organiser over many decades, not only in his home base of Melbourne but also Australia-wide, and in a number of international forums, including the World Peace Council.

While Australia liberally bestows awards on its sporting heroes and military and political leaders, it has been relatively sparing in its awards to those who have played major roles in working for peace and disarmament. Sam Goldbloom, castigated as a 'communist' or 'fellow-traveller' by right-wing media and organisations from the moment he became the founding secretary of the Congress for International Cooperation and Disarmament (CICD) in 1958, is one of the few peace and disarmament activists to have been appointed to the Order of Australia (AM, 1990), so honoured for 'his service to the community, particularly through the peace movement'. He and his family did, indeed, pay heavily for his principled stands, suffering ongoing surveillance by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation and being subjected to abuse in many different settings. While remaining a Labor Party member for some 50 years, Goldbloom never publicly disclosed whether he was also a member of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), although he made no secret of his hopes for the Soviet Union. As Sandra's memoir reveals, however, he did once privately tell her that he had been a CPA member. Asked at her memoir's book launch why he had kept this a secret, Sandra suggested that throughout his campaigning he was always concerned with building a broadly based mass movement for peace and disarmament, and, given the anti-communist hysteria of the day, was trying to avoid anything that would undermine that support.

While centred on her own experience and relationship with her father, and not seeking to be a comprehensive biography of his life, Sandra's memoir does describe and evoke some of the major peace actions and occasions in which Sam was a key organiser or initiator, not least his leading role in organising the 1970 and 1971 Vietnam moratoriums that successfully mobilised demonstrations of some 70,000–100,000 in Melbourne and up to 200,000 across Australia calling for an end to Australian involvement in the Vietnam War. It was Goldbloom and the CICD executive that convened the December 1969 meeting that initiated the moratorium movement; and Goldbloom who reached out to the parliamentarian Jim Cairns to be its chair, becoming a co-chair himself, alongside Jean Mclean and Harry Van Moorst. Jim Cairns later credited all three for the organisational work that mobilised such broad support and large numbers at the protests: Goldbloom, McLean and Van Moorst were 'closer to the grassroots than I was'.[1] In his perceptive scholarly history of the Vietnam War and the dynamics of the anti-war movement, John Murphy noted the importance of the local suburban groups established by the CICD in the early

1 Paul Strangio, *Keeper of the Faith, a Biography of Jim Cairns* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 205.

months of 1970 and the moratorium mobilisation.[2] Murphy also noted how the moratorium movement 'reflected a sea-change in political attitudes, in which middle Australia was no longer enthralled by the fears which had paralysed political debate since the Cold War began'.[3] The success of the moratoriums was, in no small degree, a vindication of Sam Goldbloom's insistence within moratorium forums on working to achieve a broadly based movement to stop the war and conscription rather than one based principally on appealing to a narrow constituency of like-minded progressives.

Sandra Goldbloom Zurbo's memoir vividly evokes what it was like to be part of the moratorium movement, both for her father and for herself working alongside him as an organiser and marshal at moratorium events. For those, like myself, who were also there, her chapter on the first moratorium memorably conjures up the joy and excitement that we experienced as more and more people poured into the centre of the city on a Friday working day 'to stop work to stop the war'; and then went on to stage a mass sit-in along Bourke and Swanston streets stretching as far as the eye could see. How extraordinary this was may be judged in retrospect when current state governments, Labor and Liberal, have begun to impose gaol sentences (some as long as six months) on individuals or small groups of environment and Extinction Rebellion activists for staging sit-downs on main roads. At the time of the first moratorium, they would have had to gaol some 70,000 Melbournians for doing precisely the same thing.

In her chapter on the first moratorium, Sandra Goldbloom Zurbo writes about how the action unfolded:

> Speeches over, donations collected, the massive crowd, a giant multicoloured slow-moving creature, begins to make its way out of the [Treasury] gardens and over to Bourke Street, where a sitdown will take place. Already an overflow of thousands, unable to fit into the packed gardens—not even to squeeze in—is amassed along Spring Street, all over the Parliament House steps and across the road … protesters fill that wide street east-west and north-south. They spill over into Swanston as far south as Flinders and north to Lonsdale Street … along the street people hang out of office windows … clearly amazed. And why wouldn't they be? We, the marchers, the marshals, the organizers, all of us are amazed. None of us expected it, not this scale; no one has seen anything like it in Melbourne before.
>
> (p.135)

In biography, autobiography and memoir writing, one big question is whether those involved were on the right side of history, whether they did, indeed, make a difference for better or worse on a particular issue or problem. This is certainly a crucial question

2 John Murphy, *Harvest of Fear: A History of Australia's Vietnam War* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 257.
3 Murphy, *Harvest of Fear*, 258.

when it comes to issues of war, peace, nuclear disarmament and ensuring our future survival, nationally and globally. These, of course, were the central issues that preoccupied and galvanised Sam Goldbloom for most of his life.

In his stance against Australian intervention in the Vietnam War, Goldbloom was an early voice sounding the alarm. In a speech on 9 April 1965, weeks before the government's 29 April announcement that it would be sending troops to the war, he affirmed that 'in the face of the dangers inherent in the Vietnam situation, the only treason is that of indifference and silence'.[4] As it transpired, over the 10-year war that ensued, a greater tonnage of bombs was dropped on Vietnam than on Europe during the whole of World War II, and over a million Vietnamese (up to 46 per cent civilians) lost their lives,[5] together with 521 Australian troops and conscripts who fought there. One of the key US leaders overseeing the Vietnam intervention was the defence secretary, Robert McNamara. Years later, in 1996, McNamara wrote:

> We misjudged then—and we have since—the geopolitical intentions of our adversaries … and we exaggerated the dangers to the United States of their actions … our misjudgements of friend and foe, alike, reflected our profound ignorance of the history, culture, and politics of the people in the area, and the personalities and habits of their leaders.[6]

At the time, of course, the repeated mantra of both American and Australian leaders was that we needed to go to war in Vietnam to stop the 'downward thrust' of communism through the whole of South-East Asia and then to Australia—the 'domino theory' as it was then labelled.

The Menzies Liberal government of the day successfully secured initial public support for the war and conscription at the 1966 federal election on the basis of the domino theory. Yet, when Vietnamese communists did eventually win the war, the predicted fall of the dominoes—the primary justification for a war that killed more than a million Vietnamese—mysteriously failed to eventuate. Even more mysteriously, there was no soul searching or royal commission into precisely why the much-vaunted collapse of the dominoes did not occur. With the honourable exception of former deputy national service minister Don Chipp,[7] there seems to have been no expression

4 Sam Goldbloom, 'Speech made on 9th April 1965, ANZ Congress for International Cooperation and Disarmament', cited in Murphy, *Harvest of Fear*, 146.

5 Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 442–53.

6 McNamara, Robert, *Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 321–23.

7 In 1992, Don Chip declared:

> I am certainly not proud of the part I played … As a person claiming morality, I should have gone deeply into the whole question of our involvement when Menzies first told me about sending the troops in … I am still the only former Liberal who has admitted we were wrong, and I have never been so sure about anything in my whole life, never. We were wrong.

Quoted in Greg Langley, *A Decade of Dissent: Vietnam and the Conflict on the Australian Home Front* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 225.

of regret by Australian government leaders of the day in making the decision to prosecute a war leading to such unimaginable numbers of deaths, a decision based on what McNamara concluded were misjudgements at the time.

In relation to nuclear disarmament, Sam Goldbloom was an early advocate for a Southern Hemisphere Nuclear Weapon Free Zone, organising a petition with some 200,000 signatures from across the country in support of a proposal by Arthur Calwell, then leader of the Labor Opposition. The proposal was taken up in differing forms by both the Australian and New Zealand Labor parties, eventually culminating in the establishment in 1985 of the SPNFZ, covering the Pacific Island nations and Australia and New Zealand, and now part of a patchwork of similar regional zones across the whole Southern Hemisphere.[8] This was yet another instance of Sam Goldbloom being ahead of his time. The nuclear-free zone plan was attacked at the time by Robert Menzies as 'the ecstasy of suicide',[9] yet the concept is now implemented and internationally recognised by almost all independent states in the Southern Hemisphere.

Sam Goldbloom accomplished much during his long stewardship of the CICD. Yet some of the most poignant threads running through Sandra's memoir are her accounts of the wounds inflicted by the very same father she loved and admired, and of her own efforts and struggles to find her own identity, to move out from under her father's formidable shadow. Even a father who is a hero, and with whom you share so much in terms of values and ideals, can be daunting in so many ways. How do you match what he attained? How do you seek to find your own identity, especially for a daughter in a society where patriarchy and misogyny continue to persist in so many ways?

As Sandra describes in her chapter 'White Knight Rescue', her father was very much her hero when he gave short shrift to an employer who had sexually harassed her, confronting him to his face:

> If I ever hear that you are making advances on any other girls who come to work here, you'll be in big strife. You're damned lucky I don't job you one.
>
> (p. 55)

Yet the same hero also deeply hurt her, both physically and emotionally. Sandra relates how, in her younger years and teens, Sam had no compunction about using corporal punishment for minor sins, such as wagging school or smoking cigarettes. Her mother later confirmed that it was mainly her who received such punishment.

8 Michael Hamel-Green, 'Antinuclear Campaigning and the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone (Rarotonga) Treaty', in *Proceedings of the 14th Biennial Labour History Conference*, ed. Phillip Deery and Julie Kimber, (Melbourne: Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, 2015), 51–62; Laura Rovetto, 'Peace Activism in the Cold War: The Congress for International Cooperation and Disarmament, 1949–1970' (PhD thesis, Victoria University, 2020), 129–30.

9 Robert Menzies, in Australian Parliament, House of Representatives, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 15 May 1962, 2318–29.

Despite the excitement of joining her father on international trips to Russia, Indonesia and other places, and meeting world-famous cultural and public figures, such as Paul Robeson, Benjamin Spock, Linus Pauling, Danny Kaye and Winifred Atwell, there were aspects of her father that deeply disturbed Sandra. For one, he had several affairs over the course of his long marriage to his wife, Rosa. For another, he would tell much embellished or even tall tales, especially relating to his efforts to expose Nazi immigrants coming to Australia. Yet a further source of disillusionment was his being silent about, or in denial of, some of the most indefensible aspects or interventions of the Soviet Union. He did take part in a delegation to protest the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia but then privately expressed his regret to Sandra at taking part in the protest. He made no secret of his great hopes for the Soviet Union, especially during the Gorbachev glasnost and perestroika eras. Later, Goldbloom was to be shattered by the turn that Russia took towards oligarchy and extreme authoritarianism.

Catholic peace activist and writer Val Noone was one of the speakers at Sam Goldbloom's memorial service at the South Melbourne Town Hall on 25 July 1999. He shared some words from Bertolt Brecht's poem 'To Posterity' that speak to some of the contradictions of Sandra Goldbloom Zurbo's driven and daunting father as portrayed in her memoir:

> Even anger against injustice
> Makes the voice grow harsh. Alas we
> Who wished to lay the foundations of kindness
> Could not ourselves be kind.
> But you, when at last it comes to pass
> That humans can help their fellow humans,
> Do not judge us
> Too harshly.[10]

10 Bertolt Brecht, 'To Posterity', trans. H. R. Hay, All Poetry, allpoetry.com/to-posterity. For another translation, see: Bertolt Brecht, 'To Those Born Later', in *Poems 1913–1956*, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim (New York: Methuen, 1976), 318–20.

Sarah Kirby review of Jillian Graham, *Inner Song: A Biography of Margaret Sutherland*

(Carlton: Miegunyah Press, 2023), 304 pp., HB $50, ISBN 9780522878233

Margaret Sutherland (1897–1984) is among Australia's best-known composers. Although she is often described as our foremost 'female' composer, the title stands without the qualification of her gender. Her works were heard widely during her lifetime, partly due to her fierce advocacy of her own music and that of other Australians, and they have continued to feature regularly on concert programs since her death. Sutherland was further remarkable as a promising musician of her era who, after taking the traditional pilgrimage to the musical centres of Europe in 1924, actually came home. Where many of her talented contemporaries stayed in London, Paris or Vienna, Sutherland dedicated her life to building in Australia the kind of cultural community and artistic opportunities she had experienced abroad.

Jillian Graham's biography of Sutherland is a beautifully and sensitively written chronological account of Sutherland's life, from her rather idyllic early childhood in Adelaide and Melbourne to her final symbolic role as the 'grand old lady of Australian music' (p. xiv). This book does not provide an in-depth analysis of Sutherland's music, acknowledging that others—particularly David Symons—offer this elsewhere.[1] Instead, it embeds Sutherland's compositions in the narrative of her life, providing social context to the formal and aesthetic shifts that occurred across her oeuvre. It uses a range of sources, including autobiographical writings, correspondence, published essays, talks and interviews to piece together Sutherland's own understanding of the events discussed. Sutherland, however, was always restrained in her writing, particularly about her own life. This creates an emotional distance from the events that Graham, resisting the temptation to fill in the gaps through speculation or invention, skilfully negotiates. Gender also figures large in this work, as it would in any biography of a woman of this era who 'did not behave quite as expected' (p. xv). Sutherland worked at a time when composition was considered exclusively the preserve of men, when many still believed that women lacked the mental aptitude to create art, and when women were expected to prioritise their home life rather than forging careers of their own.

Two major themes run through the narrative: the importance of Sutherland's unusually liberal upbringing in forming her personality and outlook, and the power of networks of like-minded women in challenging patriarchal restriction. The first of these Graham describes in the Prelude as 'Margaret's privilege' of 'growing up in one of the most creative, intellectual, liberal and prodigious families in Australian

1 David Symons, *The Music of Margaret Sutherland* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1997).

history' (p. xviii). Sutherland's family were not necessarily wealthy, but they were interested in the world, valued art and were egalitarian and progressive in their ideals. This intellectually nurturing environment encouraged the young composer to think independently and develop her talents organically. When, at the age of four, she moved with her immediate family from Adelaide to Melbourne, she entered the vibrant Kew household of her five unmarried aunts and uncles, all 'articulate, liberal-minded' individuals who 'participated equally in lively discussions' (p. 14) of art, science and nature.

It was here that Sutherland encountered some of her early formative influences, including her Aunt Jane—a professional artist and member of the Heidelberg School—who became a role model for steadfastly pursuing a career in a male-dominated field, and her Aunt Julia who became her first 'real' piano teacher, whose inspiring approach influenced Sutherland's later 'conviction that teaching should open doors rather than indicate directions' (p. 17). She also encountered her first school music teacher, Mona McBurney—the first woman to graduate with a bachelor of music from an Australian institution—at Baldur, a girls' school where McBurney's 'most unorthodox' lessons led Sutherland to pen some of her earliest compositions (p. 25). While Sutherland's early life is depicted as largely peaceful—barring family tragedies including serious illnesses among her siblings and aunts and the early deaths of her beloved father and uncle—the lack of restrictions she faced may explain what Graham describes as 'her later surprise and dismay at the discovery that her chosen pathway was uncommon' (p. 28).

The intellectual and creative freedom of Sutherland's childhood is shown in striking contrast to the oppressiveness of her marriage, but it was also at this time that the musical and social networks she developed with other women came to the fore. Following success in her studies at Marshall Hall's breakaway conservatorium and a period of teaching—out of financial necessity rather than interest—Sutherland was able to spend a year in Europe in 1924–25, a sojourn that proved 'formative and fertile for the ambitious young composer' (p. 53). With a strong dislike for formal education, she eluded the traditional path of many Australian musicians in studying at the Royal College of Music, instead seeking private lessons, first from Dorothy Howell, and then from Arnold Bax, whose 'undoctrinaire approach' she quickly grew to like (p. 57). Sutherland's renewed optimism was quickly dampened, however, on her return to Australia, when she realised the limited number of opportunities in Melbourne. But her experience in Europe and a growing awareness of the 'artistic, intellectual bubble in which she had grown up fed … her determination to create a better cultural scene in Australia' (p. 67).

Sutherland married Norman Albiston in 1927, and the unhappiness of this period additionally 'compounded her feelings of loneliness as a composer' (p. 83). She financially supported her new family while raising two children so her husband could establish his medical practice, but he showed only 'ambivalence' about her

talents, 'wanting to "cut her down"', according to Graham, likely resenting her success given his own 'stymied musical ambitions' (p. 90). Albiston—one of few practising psychiatrists in Australia at the time—suggested Sutherland's composing ambitions were the result of mental illness, publicly undermined her to critics, was adulterous with his patients and, at times, threatened to destroy her work. This relationship was evidently abusive in a way that Graham suggests would today be considered 'coercive control' (p. 96). But Graham is also careful in her construction of Albiston. Without discounting Sutherland's accounts of the abuse she suffered, Graham acknowledges that Albiston's third wife and grandchildren 'painted a kinder picture' of him (p. 152), and that the years following their divorce in 1951 were 'undeniably happier for both parties (p. 153).

Throughout her marital miseries, Sutherland was supported by the women of her various Melbourne networks. She had joined the Lyceum Club in 1922, and the connections she made there assisted her on both a personal and professional level. She was associated with the Victorian Branch of the British Music Society, through which she met the patron and publisher Louise Hanson Dyer, who would champion her music. In 1939, Sutherland was involved in the formation of the Melbourne Composers Guild, and through World War II was immersed in voluntary activities in support of the war effort and Australian cultural life. She also helped establish the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts in 1943—a forerunner to the Australia Council for the Arts—and became involved with the Catalysts, a group of 'Melbourne's female intellectual and creative élite' (p. 146). Through these societies she found many close friends, particularly the musicologist and violinist Lorna Stirling, and the activist Con Duncan, with whom she shared her home for many years.

Throughout the book, Sutherland is depicted as a passionate advocate for the arts in Australia, not least in her leading role in the Combined Arts Centre Movement in Melbourne. Through this, she spearheaded the establishment of the Arts Centre, saving the dilapidated Wirth's Park site on Melbourne's Southbank from commercial development, believing it 'should remain a place for the people of Melbourne' (p. 137). Her committee gathered 40,000 signatures in support, and—after several decades of government equivocation—she lived to see the opening of the Arts Centre in the 1980s. Sutherland also demonstrated her advocacy through heated exchanges with the ABC over its treatment of Australian music, earning her the reputation of a 'troublemaker'. Graham suggests that she was 'certainly an agitator who periodically perceived the ABC as conservative in its programming' (p. 115); however, a commitment to Australian cultural life lay at the core of her campaigning—not self-interest.

The final third of the book is much less tumultuous than the chapters covering her marriage. Freed of the trauma of her relationship with Albiston, Sutherland entered 'the happiest years' (p. 157) of her life. In dedicating a significant proportion of the

book to Sutherland's older years, Graham fulfils an important aspect of feminist biography, enabling a fuller understanding of her subject by 'shifting attention away from the "marriage plot" to a consideration of all stages of the life cycle',[2] on the model of Carolyn Heilbrun (whom Graham cites as an inspiration). The last decades of Sutherland's life saw her gain increasing success and recognition as a composer and lobbyist. In the early 1950s, she joined the Australian music advisory committee to UNESCO, formed the Camerata Society (in 1953) and composed in increasingly larger forms, from orchestral works to her only chamber opera, *The Young Kabbarli*. She received her first commission at the age of 69. Sutherland was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Melbourne in 1969, was made a life member of the British Music Society that same year, and of the Lyceum Club in 1972. She was appointed OBE in 1970 and AO in 1981. However, 'her real legacy', Graham states, 'was musical and cultural … She was a pioneer of Australian musical modernism, an unrelenting crusader for progressive attitudes to music and music education, and against apathy and ignorance' (p. 227).

Throughout the book, Graham refers to Sutherland as 'Margaret', lending an intimacy to the narrative. Yet the use of the subject's first name to me sits uncomfortably with the overall feminist arc of the book. As Sophie Fuller argues, throughout history creative women have often 'been kept firmly in their place this way, not being granted the respect paid to their male contemporaries who are inevitably referred to by just their surnames'.[3] While there is no question of the respect Graham affords her subject, it would be helpful to understand the process behind this decision, particularly given the distance Sutherland herself places between the subject and reader in her own life writing.

Perhaps the tacit acceptance of historically feminised tropes in the depiction of the subject here has parallels in Sutherland's own conception of the gendered associations of her music. Sutherland was a champion of the chamber genre, despite being one of few Australian women composers to achieve lasting success in larger-scale orchestral writing. Throughout music history, women composers have been largely excluded, either by training or cultural notions of propriety, from participating in the public genres of the symphony or opera, which have in turn become considered more 'serious' types of music, in contrast to the smaller-scale chamber works of the private sphere. Sutherland, however, strongly advocated that 'women's musical offerings should not be devalued because they did not conform to the dominant masculine paradigm' (p. 103).

2 Sara Alpern, Joyce Antler, Elisabeth Israels Perry, and Ingrid Winther Scobie, 'Introduction,' in *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 9; quoting Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), 51, 89–95, 131.

3 Sophie Fuller, 'Quartet Review: Did Four Women Really Change the World of Classical Music?', *The Conversation*, 12 April 2023, theconversation.com/quartet-review-did-four-women-really-change-the-world-of-classical-music-202330.

This is a beautifully produced volume, and magpie-eyed readers like me who are attracted to shiny things will enjoy the holographic sparkle of the dust jacket. A gallery of 37 images in the centre provides illustrations of Sutherland and the people and places that influenced her (though the captions are somewhat lacking in detail, and it would have been useful to have cross-references to these illustrations where they were mentioned in the text). Graham's biography is dedicated 'to all women who dare to challenge dominant paradigms'. From its front matter onwards, this is a book that celebrates not just its primary subject, but also the powerful shift in the cultural dynamics of Australian music that occurred across the twentieth century, with Sutherland at its helm.

Barbara Lemon review of Thea Gardiner, *Mab: The World of Mab Grimwade*

(Carlton: The Miegunyah Press, 2023), 162 pp., HB $45,
ISBN 9780522878905

Here she is with her Scottie dogs in the gardens of 'Westerfield' on the Mornington Peninsula; sitting on the banks of the Loire with friends; now in a private garden in Kyoto; and over there, seated on a rickshaw in Darjeeling flanked by seven West Bengalese servants and guides. It is not difficult to tell from her rich photographic archive that Mab Grimwade was … well, rich. Hers was no ordinary life.

The challenge for Grimwade's biographer has been in finding her voice, and any source material that might tell her story or provide an indication of character besides the photographs snapped by her husband, the scientist and industrialist Russell Grimwade. This is the challenge so familiar to historians of female subjects, regardless of wealth or status: their 'feelings, thoughts and opinions are relatively inaccessible to us' (p. xiii). We are so often forced to scrape together remnant materials and 'forge from them a cohesive, truthful narrative' (p. xiii), forgoing the detailed conventional forms of biography and instead using 'individual lives … as conduits to wider historical themes' (p. xiv).

Mab Grimwade was born Mabel Louise Kelly in 1887, the daughter of pastoralists whose wealth derived from a timely investment in the Broken Hill Proprietary Co. (BHP). She became a patron and supporter of many organisations in the arts as well as in science, built heritage, social welfare and education. The combined wealth of Mab and Russell Grimwade enabled the establishment of the Russell Grimwade School of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at the University of Melbourne, and by bequest, funded The Miegunyah Press, the prestige imprint of Melbourne University Publishing that is responsible for producing this attractive and lavishly illustrated book. But who was this woman?

It is difficult to imagine that the link between publisher and funder did not complicate the task of the biographer. Thea Gardiner has produced a beautifully written, evocative and very cleverly researched and assembled account of a long life and an influential woman. On digesting the story, however, the feeling is of having read something rather clean. Mab Grimwade's undeniably human life appears remarkably untainted. While it is a misguided exercise to assess past lives according to modern understandings, it is also true that the Grimwades shared an unquestioning and lifelong devotion to the concept of colonial Australia and to maintaining imperial ties. Gardiner points out that their:

> romantic view of Australian exceptionalism, extricated from the histories of First Nations people, was reflected in [their] passion for collecting artefacts of the country's colonial past, and in the homes that contained their treasures.
>
> (p. 25)

Their Toorak mansion was a 'shrine to Australiana' (p. 36), including a stained-glass window depicting Captain Cook's *Endeavour* by artist and friend Daryl Lindsay. The book declares the origins of their wealth and explains the extent of their privilege with sensitivity and skill, but it does not reflect further upon the people (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and environments that might have been sacrificed in order for Mab Grimwade to occupy the social and geographic territory, and to bestow the philanthropic gifts, that she did.

Gardiner acknowledges that Mab Grimwade was able 'to benefit from the opportunities available for genteel women, including a large inheritance, private education and frequent travel' (p. ix). The young Mabel spent her first 10 years in North Brighton before the family moved to 'Montalto' in Toorak, an enormous homestead and 11-acre property on Orrong Road. She attended private schools and spent three years with her family in Europe from the age of 13. She travelled through France and Switzerland, and her letters home to Australia from a French school where she boarded weekly give us a rare glimpse of character, adorned as they are with detailed and quite lovely drawings of invented costumes, heralding a later fascination with fashion. The few extracts from these letters reveal a factual mind, focusing on where, when and with whom she was travelling.

The reader gleans more from the chapter concerned with Mab and Russell's first encounter and subsequent marriage. Following a sojourn at a country property with various cousins and friends, Mab became engaged to Russell at the age of 21 before suddenly calling it off, apparently due to objections from her father. Soon after, newspapers reported her departure for South-East Asia where she travelled unchaperoned with her friend Kate Hood. On her return, she swiftly resumed the engagement with Russell. They were married in 1909 and moved into 'Miegunyah' in 1911. The property was bought by Russell in Mab's name as a wedding present and was located only a few hundred metres from 'Montalto'. Later, Mab became a partner alongside her two brothers in Charles Kelly & Co., a large and successful sheep and cattle enterprise. She continued as an active business partner until 1962.

According to Gardiner, Mab Grimwade was not outwardly political, but she subscribed to the Liberal and Country Party. She was a member of the Arts and Crafts Society and the Victorian Artists' Society, the Little Theatre Guild and the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust. She raised and donated funds for the National Gallery Society of Victoria, Royal Horticultural Society, National Trust of Australia, Australian Ballet, Native Plants Preservation Society and Free Kindergarten Union of Victoria. In addition to her financial generosity, she gave significant time to committee

work and event planning, and hosted many 'at-homes' including garden parties and a hat parade. She served as president of the Fitzroy Mission Free Kindergarten for nearly 10 years.

Support for these kinds of organisations fits neatly with the picture of Australian women's philanthropy of the time: essential for the betterment of Australian society, demanding of time and resources, befitting of a certain social standing and almost entirely uncontroversial. The records of these organisations and committees contain no personal correspondence from Grimwade, and Gardiner confirms that Mab did not seek exceptionalism or public prominence. She 'happily occupied her role as Mrs Russell Grimwade and, later, Lady Grimwade, rarely testing the parameters of her gender or her class' (p. ix). Her hobbies were those of the British aristocracy and the wealthy in other parts of the world: golfing, polo, tennis, horseracing, motoring and gardening. She regularly attended art exhibitions and openings, theatre performances and open gardens. She was 'thin, small and neat', writes Gardiner, stylishly dressed and 'rarely photographed without a hat or a string of pearls' (p. x). Many of her beautiful clothes are now held by the National Gallery of Victoria. Though she and Russell did not have children, she doted on her young relatives and was described as 'caring and generous, a good dancer, strong-willed and occasionally austere' (p. x).

There is no doubt that Mab Grimwade made a prodigious contribution to the society in which she lived and in which she was celebrated. During wartime, she actively supported the Australian Comforts Fund and the Red Cross. In addition to the organisations named above, she offered her energy, organisational skills and finances to support the Victorian Association of Braille Writers, the Victoria Association for the Blind, the Victorian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, and, of course, the University of Melbourne. While Russell Grimwade's name has become 'synonymous with scientific innovation and patronage, entrepreneurship and formidable philanthropy' (p. xiii), it was Mab who gave the greater sum of £80,000 from her own funds to the School of Biochemistry that was named for him. When, after his death, she donated £50,000 to the state government's cultural centre building appeal in 1959, her generosity was acknowledged by the naming of the Russell Grimwade Gardens at the National Gallery of Victoria.

The most unusual aspect of Mab Grimwade's life, even when compared to that of her peers, was the extent of her travel. She and Russell travelled frequently to 'experience different cultures and expand their large collection of furniture, art, Australiana and botanical specimens' (p. xii). This included visits to India, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), France, Italy, Algeria, Gibraltar, Spain, Holland, Germany, Austria, Hungary, England, Scotland, New Zealand, Hawai'i, Canada (British Columbia), North America (Portland, San Francisco, Yosemite Valley, San Diego and Los Angeles), Egypt, China and Japan. In Egypt, as in India, they 'travelled as privileged citizens of Empire, freely traversing the British-occupied territory equipped with an

interpreter and manservants' (p. 74). The new, twentieth-century steamers provided first-class passengers like the Grimwades with berths 'designed as floating microcosms of genteel homes' (p. 60). The few remaining diary entries from these travels provide the biographer with a rare, direct link to Mab's voice but, as with her teenage letters, the tone is factual, reporting extraordinary sights and unpleasant inconveniences rather than feelings or deeper reflections.

The point of interest here is that even where Mab Grimwade's contributions of time and money emerge as the more substantial, Russell's is the name they bear, while her personality remains indistinct. From Gardiner's telling, this is an outcome of which Mab Grimwade would have approved. She is an exemplar of a past social ideal that today seems unbalanced, and the biography does what it can to complete the picture.

As Gardiner points out, 'Miegunyah' was actually owned by Mab. Although the couple made a joint decision to leave the bulk of their wealth to Melbourne University Press, it was in fact her bequest along with the university's controversial sale of the property and its beloved garden 20 years after her husband's death that became what was posthumously called the Russell and Mab Grimwade Miegunyah Fund. Mab's story is number 218 in the second numbered series of the Miegunyah volumes, coming nearly 60 years after John Poynter's biography of Russell was published in 1967 as the very first title of The Miegunyah Press. Thea Gardiner is to be commended for filling this gap in the historical record with such a fine publication.

Susan Lever review of Ann-Marie Priest, *My Tongue is My Own: A Life of Gwen Harwood*

(Collingwood: La Trobe University Press, 2022), 480 pp., PB $37.99,
ISBN 9781760642341

Gwen Harwood, née Foster, was a brilliant and prolific letter writer. Three volumes of her letters have been published as books: those she sent to the then-serving naval officer Thomas (Tony) Riddell in 1943 (*Blessed City*), her letters to her friend Alison Hoddinott from 1960 to 1964 (*Idle Talk*) and a massive general collection edited by Greg Kratzmann, *A Steady Storm of Correspondence* (2001).[1] Even these omit substantial caches of unpublished letters and postcards in library collections or in private hands. Letter writing is a private art form with little likelihood of fame for the writer while alive, but *Blessed City* and *Idle Talk* can be read like novels of manners as Gwen Foster rejoices in the follies of Brisbane at war, or as Gwen Harwood satirises smalltown domestic life in Hobart. Harwood's letters are a record of her own life and her idiosyncratic, vivid perspective on it.

Harwood initially told Hoddinott to destroy the letters she sent her, then was upset to find that she had taken her at her word. She committed a vast energy and creativity to these letters, and she knew that they, as much as her poetry, represented a record of her genius. The lives of people like her, housewives in provincial Australian cities, might be overlooked by history—but her evidence would be recorded there.

Both Kratzmann and Hoddinott began work on biographies of the poet but the difficulties in protecting the sensitivities of her living relatives and friends led them to stop at the letter collections. Despite teasing her various potential biographers, Harwood clearly wanted a biography; however, her son, John Harwood, could not consider releasing the manuscript material to a biographer until after his father's death.[2] Ann-Marie Priest was his choice.

Working through this mass of material, Priest has produced a full and sympathetic account of Harwood's life that delineates her mischievous personality, her creativity and her commitment to her own talent against all the obstacles of provinciality and convention. It is a moving account of genius struggling against the constrictions of everyday life. As a teenager, Harwood was acclaimed as a piano prodigy by the

1 Alison Hoddinott, ed., *Blessed City: The Letters of Gwen Harwood to Thomas Riddell, January to September 1943* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1991); Alison Hoddinott, ed., *Idle Talk: Gwen Harwood, Letters 1960–1964* (Blackheath: Brandl & Schlesinger, 2015); Greg Kratzmann, ed., *A Steady Storm of Correspondence: Selected Letters of Gwen Harwood 1943–1995* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001).

2 John Harwood, 'Gwen Harwood and the Perils of Reticence: Notes of a Son and Literary Executor', *Australian Book Review*, no. 443 (2022).

citizens of Brisbane. Supported by a doting family, she had no doubt that her career would be brilliant. Her music teacher, Robert Dalley-Scarlett, another creative artist in the provinces, recognised her talent and she happily embarked on an affair with him. Though he was more than 30 years older, she was eager to learn what she could about creativity and sexual love. Throughout her life, Harwood found love inspiring to her art and fell in love many times. Her passion for the clergyman Peter Bennie, who proclaimed himself celibate, led to her entering an Anglican convent for a time.

Towards the end of 1942, General McArthur's decision to base himself in Brisbane brought an influx of servicemen, including the singer Tony Riddell. A friend of Bennie's, Tony needed an accompanist and found Gwen, who quickly fell in love with him. While Tony became her soulmate for life, it was his handsome and clever friend, another officer in naval intelligence, Bill Harwood, whom she married at the end of the war. Before the war, she aimed for a career in Europe as a musician. After it, she found herself in Hobart, Tasmania, living with a man who had very different social and cultural attitudes. He decided that they could not afford a piano.

Bill Harwood had a lectureship in the tiny English Department of the University of Tasmania, which, at the time, was based in the local high school buildings. The postwar housing crisis forced the Harwoods to live in a holiday cottage at Fern Tree, on Mount Wellington, without the conveniences Gwen had been used to in her family's hospitable home in Auchenflower. Soon she was the mother of four children, including twins, and she began to direct her restless creativity into poetry. Harwood readers will recognise 'In the Park', 'Suburban Sonnet' and 'Burning Sappho' as emerging from this period of her life. Sappho became her alter ego, the genius woman poet burning with creative energy and struggling against a literary establishment that saw her merely as a 'Tasmanian housewife'. There was a degree of role-playing in this and in many of her other poems such as the 'Professor Eisenbart' and 'Professor Kröte' poems. She could dramatise herself as the dutiful housewife and mother providing three hot meals a day, washing clothes in a primitive laundry and putting her talents to all the domestic tasks—her cooking, her comic Sappho postcards, her children. Or she could play the desperate artist and intellectual. She enjoyed her children and family life but the restless desire to create stayed with her.

As a teenager set on a musical career, Gwen had avoided going to university. Now she found herself an academic wife, on the edges of intellectual discussion. She set about educating herself, reading her way through library holdings of poetry and philosophy and arguing with Bill, particularly about his interpretation of Wittgenstein. Bill represented an almost absurd opposite to Gwen: he took Wittgenstein as proposing the possibility of a completely mechanistic language system, while Gwen saw the philosopher as valuing the 'unsayable'. Bill was an early proponent of the possibilities of artificial intelligence and set about building linguistic machines to prove his theory, declaring that a future machine would talk and even write poetry, telling friends: 'It will talk as well as Gwen!' Gwen wryly noted that 'apart from incompatibility'

they got on 'very well' (p. 199). She was a sociable person, lively and full of fun, while he preferred solitude and resented her friendships. For the most part, their marriage was held together by their mutual commitment to their children and their ability to share laughter and sex. To outsiders it appeared a happy marriage. As they grew older, though, Gwen's successes gave her the chance to enjoy a wider range of social contacts, while Bill became more withdrawn. When the *Australian* published her beautiful celebration of their marriage, the poem 'Iris', Bill responded with anger at what he saw as an exposure of their private lives.

If one aspect of this biography is the story of an Australian marriage, another is its account of the importance of universities and cultural networks for the survival of artists and intellectuals in the community. Access to a library was a major resource for Harwood, but visiting lecturers and performers kept her ambitions alive. She never left Australia, not even when invited to the launch of her *Collected Poems* in London, but writers' festivals and conferences allowed her to find a like-minded community. Rex Hobcroft's performance of all the Beethoven sonatas in a series of lunchtime concerts at the University of Tasmania was a revelation that filled Harwood with renewed hope that her suffering could produce art. Her attendance at a conference of music composers led to her discovery of new music, inspiring her to experiment with her own verse, and a friendship with Larry Sitsky that became a collaboration on librettos for opera.

Priest also gives us insight into the petty world of Australian poetry as Harwood grew increasingly frustrated with the rejections or silence from journal editors and eventually submitted the notorious acrostic poems 'Abelard to Eloisa' and 'Eloisa to Abelard' ('Fuck all editors' 'So long Bulletin') to the *Bulletin* under the pseudonym of Walter Lehmann. Bill was furious at the ensuing public attention, and she suffered recrimination and embarrassment with newspaper headlines about the Tasmanian housewife and her 'naughty' sonnets. Ironically, this notoriety made her a poet of account and she began to be included more regularly in anthologies. Angus & Roberston, after their usual delays, published her first book.

Harwood's erotic energy was allied to her creativity, and, despite her apparently conventional marriage, she passionately loved other men and women. Her natural sociability and quick-witted humour eventually led to a network of friends from Dorothy Hewett to Vikram Seth. These were her lifeline—much as she longed to move to the mainland, she could not afford to leave Bill who begrudged her even a small allowance.

This biography is a major contribution to the history of the lives of married women who aspire to creativity. Harwood was 10 years older than Sylvia Plath, and while Plath certainly achieved wider fame as a poet, her marriage to Ted Hughes, who shared her passion for poetry, proved disastrous.[3] She was younger than Eileen O'Shaughnessy,

3 Heather Clark, *Red Comet: The Short Life and Blazing Art of Sylvia Plath* (London: Vintage, 2020).

the subject of Anna Funder's recent *Wifedom*, a gifted woman whose marriage to George Orwell also proved fatal.[4] More recently, Helen Garner's diary selections in *How to End a Story* record an excruciating situation for a woman writer married to another artist.[5] Harwood was ready to concede that marriage to a 'Lady Poet' could not be easy, and she rationalised that her suffering, like Beethoven's, contributed to her art. The reader, however, is likely to despair for her.

Though I applaud La Trobe University Press for publishing this biography, I cannot help wishing that there was a briefer, more accessible version of it that could be promoted in the way of Funder's and Garner's latest books. It deserves to be part of the current conversation about wifedom and creativity that they have stimulated. Priest explains the logic of the book's title in her introduction, but it is hardly enticing to readers. Worse, the cover enlarges an unflattering image of the elderly Harwood staring out with some devilish intent. Surely there were better options for the lovely red-haired Sappho, depicted on page 89 with flowing hair and a new baby.

My Tongue Is My Own won the National Biography Award in 2023 and I hope it will be taken up by readers beyond the small band of Australian poetry enthusiasts. Harwood's poetry is as dazzling as any by Plath, though her fame will never match that of the tragic American. The book is not only essential for an understanding of this poetry, but also will prove a resource for any historian of Australian sexual, cultural and domestic life. It offers some of the intimate insight expected in a novel against a background of complex real experience, as it demonstrates how one woman managed to preserve her creative vitality against all the pressures of provincial Australian domestic life.

4 Anna Funder, *Wifedom: Mrs Orwell's Invisible Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2023).
5 Helen Garner, *How to End a Story: Diaries 1995–1998* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2021).

David Lowe review of Ryan Cropp, *Donald Horne: A Life in the Lucky Country*

(Melbourne: La Trobe University Press, 2023), 384 pp., PB $37.99,
ISBN 9781760641375

Donald Horne's *The Lucky Country* is arguably the most resonant book published in Australia. The claim that Australia is a lucky country is endlessly invoked by commentators, only occasionally with the rest of Horne's key sentence, 'run mainly by second-rate people who share its luck'. The emphasis was on what Australia lacked, not celebrating its good fortune. When *The Lucky Country* was published in 1964 it captured the zeitgeist of a country approaching the end of the Menzies regime and struggling to address squarely the consequences of British decline and rapid change in Asia. Horne looked to generational change, especially in politics and other forms of leadership, for Australia to realise its full potential. *The Lucky Country* went on to become such a runaway success that Horne would revisit and update it to ensure its ongoing status as a public conversation about Australians and their country. It was also a breakthrough moment for a 42-year-old who had written hundreds of thousands of words as a journalist and who long aspired to publishing a book. After *The Lucky Country*, publishing houses threw open their doors and Horne responded with more than 20 works of commentary, fiction, biography and memoir.

It is hard to imagine a biography of Horne not being shaped to reach a climax with the publication of *The Lucky Country*. Cropp is wise to put the book up front, acknowledge its teleological pull, but then invite us on a life journey that is much more than this one landmark publication. The result is a compelling biography, written in an engaging, accessible style that Horne would have approved, while buttressed with scholarly credentials that flow from its origins as a doctoral thesis. Cropp treads carefully in relation to Horne's private life. The emphasis is on his role as a public intellectual, as shaped by his work as a newspaper and magazine editor, administrator, academic and leader of public causes, especially the push for an Australian republic.

This is a life of two halves. The first, up to the late 1950s, captures a smart provocateur who preferred the rapier thrust rather than prolonged intellectual engagement with those he saw as opponents or inadequate. Whether on account of his father's declining mental health or otherwise, the younger Donald was raggedly exciting, but, to many, he was also easily unlikeable. An abortive cadetship in the new Department of External Affairs took him to Canberra in 1944–45. He found living in the tiny, isolated new capital irksome. Like many, he was also stirred by Labor's ambitious plans for postwar reconstruction. Horne railed against planning and the management of resources by burgeoning ranks of bureaucrats. He learned by heart slabs of text by

the libertarian philosopher John Anderson, Horne's former teacher at the University of Sydney, and by Friedrich Hayek. Planning was a version of socialism and could only result in the regimentation of society.

What stands out is Horne's intellectual restlessness and his gradual shift from Cold War ideologue to Cold War liberal, and ultimately the moderate left, from the late 1940s to the 1970s. Horne thrived on debates and publishing opportunities (including *Quadrant* magazine from 1956) made possible by the CIA-supported Congress of Cultural Freedom setting up in Australia. James McAuley, Peter Coleman and others were part of his regular circle of dinner and debating companions, as well as Anderson and his journalist mentor Brian Penton. While branded a stooge of American and local conservatives by leftist opponents, Horne was, even at the height of his anti-communism, far more interesting and open to intellectual adjustments. He cultivated and revelled in a contrarian stance. He would constantly thrash out ideas with friends over (often boozy) dinners and lunches, before arriving at positions he would then put to paper. As he reflected later, his goal, from early on, was to enrage readers.

Horne's outlook on a number of key issues in world affairs and Australian politics would shift over time, but his approach to the key challenges facing humankind was shaped in his Sydney education and early intellectual influences. Anderson's libertarianism and James Burnham's blast against new bureaucracy left their mark, and then Horne saw what he regarded as the typical excesses of planning up close in Canberra under the Curtin government.

While hoping in vain to be accepted as a novelist, he instead returned to journalism, something he had cultivated in his university days. His career in journalism progressed in fits and starts. Horne cut his teeth in Sydney, navigating the testy relationship with Frank Packer through Penton and later Clyde Packer. He got his start as editor of the lowbrow *Weekend*, then at the *Bulletin* and later as founding editor of the *Observer*. After a stint as co-editor of *Quadrant*, he took up Packer's invitation to return to the *Bulletin*.

The second half of Horne's life, from the late 1950s and especially from the publication of *The Lucky Country* in 1964, marks his emergence as a citizen intellectual and champion of an Australian republic. He was an early proponent of connecting the republic issue to Australia's need to respond to the transformations taking place in Asia, an argument that would attract greater momentum in the republican push in the mid-1990s. Before then, Horne was an early convert to the promises of a Whitlam government and was effusive about Whitlam's transformational leadership. He reacted with furious energy in protest at Whitlam's dismissal, even venerating him as a much-needed Australian king figure—at the same time that he grew more strident about the need for a republic! By the late 1970s, his transformation seemed complete, from anti-communist Cold War warrior to Labor Party shock trooper, striding out with the likes of Patrick White and Manning Clark to denounce the end of Australian democracy under Fraser and Kerr.

At the same time Horne established an academic career at the University of New South Wales, churning out books ranging from family road trips to a biography of Billy Hughes. The enduring power of *The Lucky Country* and its several updates ensured him ready publishers. While nothing approached the success of *The Lucky Country* (more than 80,000 copies sold in two years), his works mostly sold well. Horne's goal was to be an Australian Orwell, to distil and make sense of the present with easily digested phrases and word pictures. To do this, he read voraciously, debated key concepts and maintained a formidable writing schedule. Well into his 80s, he was churning out books, including *The Lucky Country Revisited*.

Cropp is judicious in acknowledging detractors who argue that Horne was forever offering up cultural symbols while not probing the economic foundations on which Australia ran and the sources of power that flowed. By the 1990s, according to some, he had become part of an Australian cultural mafia. But Cropp is also a sympathetic biographer, intrigued by Horne's constant exposure to, and rearrangement of, ideas. We meet a Donald Horne whose interrogation of himself, the life he lived, was intertwined with his persistent interrogations of Australia.

To nit-pick a work that is so accomplished may seem churlish, but one aspect I would have loved to have seen probed further is Horne's approach to Asia. Something is missing here. From early on, as Cropp tells us, Horne was seized by the profound implications of decolonisation in Asia: this was 'his enduring concern' (p. 152). It was a great test for Australians, Horne argued in several key pieces. How we responded would define our future. He was especially animated by the fate of West Papua, the sovereignty of which was claimed by Indonesia against Australian misgivings during the 1950s. The United Nations ultimately endorsed Indonesia's claim after a dubious 'act of free choice' by West Papuans in 1969 that is still contested today.

Indeed, as Cropp writes, the test for Australians created by a changing world was the central idea of *The Lucky Country*:

> the twin challenges of Asia and technological change had created an existential crisis for Australia. And given the disappearance of the British Empire, the inevitable logic of Australia's geography was—by his calculation—nothing less than full political independence.
>
> (p. 153)

Yet Horne did not start travelling to Asia until the mid-1960s, when the (second) Vietnam War was stirring and the great political tumult in Indonesia was nearing its climax. His strong views on the need to manage a restless Asia, and especially communism in Asia, stood in contrast to fellow Australians, such as the academic C. P. FitzGerald, the journalist Peter Russo and even the scholar-diplomat Macmahon Ball, who all wrote and spoke in the 1950s from their experiences in the region. Why didn't Horne attach significance to these Australians who spent time in and wrote imaginatively about Asia?

Perhaps the lack of engagement speaks to the arrogance and petulance of Horne up to the late 1950s. He relied, up to that point, on acerbic wit, a poisonous pen and a capacity to serve difficult masters such as Frank Packer. It was easier to outsmart opponents and show colourful contempt than it was to delve more deeply into the causes of his intellectual restlessness.

As this fine work of biography shows, Horne became more embracing of a wider set of ideas. While he never lost his love of well-lubricated lunches, the sharpest edges to his critiques were aimed less often at other commentators. As an academic, activist and administrator, he was able to bask in a new environment for public intellectuals that he had done so much to create.

Karl Neuenfeldt review of Keith McKenry, *Ron Edwards and the Fight for Australian Tradition*

(Melbourne: Arcadia, 2023), 372 pp., HB $49.95, ISBN 9781922952042

For a biographer, it can be a challenge to decide how to explore and amply encompass the creative life of a talented and tenacious individual, especially if that life was hyper-productive and hyper-active. A multifaceted life, be it personal, professional or proactive, does not necessarily make it easy to dissect its strands or disentangle them. For example, there may be a profusion of creative output but a dearth of textual sources or commentary; conversely, a dearth of creative output and a profusion of textual sources and commentary.

Navigating the extraordinarily productive and varied life of Ronald George (Ron) Edwards (1930–2008) must have presented a challenge to biographer Keith McKenry. Even for someone who had known and interacted with Ron over a long period, the sheer volume and diversity of his creative life and its 'paper trail' required focus and persistence. Luckily, the end result is a well-researched and engrossing book on Ron Edwards as a unique Australian, and on his lifelong series of fights for Australian traditions.

As the book reveals, some of Ron's 'fights' could be protracted and, perhaps, at times, counterproductive; nonetheless, to him, they were worth the effort. He was someone who cared enough to devote a lifetime to documenting, practising and propagating Australia's creative diversity (such as in painting, music, bush crafts and Indigenous research), but someone also not adverse to championing non-Australian traditions (e.g. traditional Chinese building techniques and calligraphy). Somehow, for Ron, sketching naked nymphs, collecting folk songs, making whips and surveying Aboriginal rock art not only overlapped but also somehow complemented each other as creative traditions worth celebrating.

McKenry's task was made somewhat easier (if simultaneously also probably harder) by the sizeable textual, audio and visual collections of Ron's artistic output available in national institutions (the National Library of Australia and the National Film and Sound Archive); private and public art collections; the numerous journals, books and pamphlets published by Rams Skull Press; and Ron's extensive personal and family archives, which includes his own, sometimes pithy, personal and editorial correspondence. McKenry not only incorporated elements from these sources but also conducted oral histories with family members, fellow collectors and even a nemesis or two. Given that oral histories of yarns, tall tales, bawdy and work-based songs, and bush skills were one of Ron's specialties, such sources add much to McKenry's

depictions of the life Ron created, not only nomadically but also in situ. His life's work and trajectory seem to have been a continual quest to record and thus preserve or revitalise cultural traditions and traditional life and work styles—regardless of the cultures from which they arose, be they Anglo-Australian, Indigenous or multicultural.

In McKenry's retelling, Ron's life story moves chronologically. Progressing from his parents' emigration from Britain to an unfettered childhood in Victoria, to his training in graphic arts, to his relationship with his equally artistically talented and hardworking wife Anne, née Ross. These strands ultimately lead to an active yet, at times, complicated and financially insecure family life. This unfolded in north Queensland during the Joh Bielke-Petersen era, a conservative cultural desert that declared war on anything suspected of interfering with the state's 'relaxed and comfortable' racism; embraced chequered but unchecked resource development; engaged in shonky and systemic graft; and celebrated morally iffy policing á la convicted former Queensland police commissioner Terry Lewis.

As an affront to Queensland's uber-conservatism, Ron and family actually dared to live cheek by jowl with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the then undeveloped beaches north of Cairns—plus they rode horses unregulated on the beaches and not at organised and sedate gymkhanas. Also, there were proximate communities of 'hippies', dope smokers and free love advocates—all of which would have probably provided not only inspiration but also camaraderie for 'artistic types' such as Ron, Anne and family. Especially those unafraid to live or flourish outside the bounds of so-called respectable Queensland society—as if Bielke-Petersen and Lewis provided exemplars of that particular fictional adjective.

McKenry also details Ron's contretemps when he encountered the over-prescriptive and puzzling policies and edicts of civic authorities, local planning departments and arts funding organisations. Ron encountered similar constraints in the byzantine world of academia, which arose when folk music and folklore studies emerged as an untilled field of focus in the hallowed groves of academe. He had to navigate its disciplinary silos and obsession with credentialism. Ron did not theorise about the arts—he just did them, either out of interest or disquiet before they disappeared, were diminished or suffered commercialisation.

McKenry does not shirk from detailing some unedifying examples of Ron's single-mindedness, obsessions and longstanding squabbles. Thus the book is not a hagiography of a 'mate'. Plus, Ron surely never claimed sainthood nor was he a Beelzebub from the bush. Rather, he was a talented artist, an endlessly inquisitive person and an indefatigable worker. To have created such an immense legacy of his explorations of Australian traditions, he would have had to have been talented, inquisitive and indefatigable. Keith McKenry has presented Ron Edwards as he was and the book shows what a well-researched and comprehensive biography can accomplish in not

necessarily valorising a person but rather presenting them in all their occasionally paradoxical humanness, which, in this instance, also perhaps helped propel the subject's inspired creativity.

The book features a selection of Ron's sketches and paintings and a fulsome bibliography, informative notes and a detailed index. These enhance the book both visually and academically and will provide future scholars with sources that encompass key elements of Ron Edward's substantial oeuvre.

Stuart Piggin review of Toby Raeburn, *The Remarkable Mr and Mrs Johnson: Founders of Modern Australia's First Church, Schools and Charity, and Friends of Aboriginal People, 1788–1800*

(Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2023), 311pp., PB $49.95, ISBN 9781922952790

There should be plenty of jobs for historians because history needs to be rewritten for every generation. It is half a century since the publication of the last full-length treatment of Australia's first chaplain, and this study is different in critical ways. Here indeed is an account for our times, sensitive to matters of gender and race. This is not a biography of Richard Johnson, but of Richard and his wife, Mary. Is this becoming a pleasing new genre? Witness Paul Cooper's *More Valuable than Gold* (Eider Books, 2016) a study of the philanthropy of John Goodlet and his wife, Ann. Both Raeburn and Cooper had to work hard to recover the women's stories, and both succeeded in leaving the reader in little doubt that Australian social history is richer for the contribution of Mary Johnson and Ann Goodlet. Raeburn is methodical (like his subject) and lists and analyses the primary evidence for Mary in one of four helpful appendices. Her role as a woman and as a distinctive personality is here portrayed with empathy: her sense of humour probably 'strengthened her resilience' (p. 196). Yet the contribution she made in support of her husband is reported with the approval customary in pre-feminist accounts: she provided 'an organised household' that facilitated his maintaining 'wide-ranging activities across fields of religion, education and justice' (p. 170) and enabled him to offer generous hospitality to convict and free alike.

Similarly, today's public and historians, more concerned with the story of First Australians than previous generations, will be grateful for Raeburn's treatment of the Johnsons' interaction with them. This, the major focus of the book, is very different from previous treatments of Johnson. Boorong, the young orphan whom the Johnsons took into their home, on reaching adolescence exchanged the Christian sanctuary they provided for a life with Bennelong. The Johnsons and their compatriots regretted this all too common preference that Aboriginal people had for their own people and culture. Today, historians have no such regret, but, like all fashions in the writing of history, it simplifies the melding of cultures. Raeburn impressively retains the complexity of cultural interaction in his analysis of Boorong's experience of walking 'in two worlds': she did not just walk out on the Johnsons; rather, she kept returning to them and leaving again, at times spending half a week in each place. Raeburn reports both the disappointment of the Johnsons who had invested so

much energy in 'civilising' and Christianising her and also their understanding, if not their approval, of her desire to be with her own people and for marriage, and of her freedom to choose voluntarily which it would be (pp. 138, 196). But neither does he gloss over the acceptance by Indigenous culture of the violent treatment of women by Aboriginal men. Rather, he criticises modern historians for overlooking this sad fact (p. 127). Boorong may have felt happier with her own people, but it seems she may have felt safer with the Johnsons (p. 143).

Bennelong took Boorong as his fourth wife and they attempted to live with the new arrivals (p. 198). Pemulwuy, by contrast, led his people in constant warfare against the invaders. Which was the better approach? The latter is now attracting the interest of historians who like to admire Aboriginal resistance to colonialism. Raeburn is more circumspect: he puts Pemulwuy's success down to the invaders' culpable underestimation of the warrior due to his disability, but he does not deny that resistance was ultimately futile. Yet he does not follow the trajectory of Boorong's experience to assert the wisdom of collaboration. The long-term effect of the Johnsons' investment in Boorong did pay dividends for the Christian cause. Boorong's son, Dicky, was educated in the Native Institution, was the first Aboriginal person to receive Christian baptism, and became the first Indigenous evangelist. He married Maria, a daughter of Yellomundee, an elder in the Darug nation. She was the first student of the Native Institution, and became, as historian Grace Karskens tells us, 'the matriarch of a vast family, and her descendants now number in their thousands'.[1] This unusually propitious outcome, which the Johnsons would not have foreseen, actually owed a lot to the many Christian families who supported Maria, support that was real even if more paternalistic than we approve today.[2]

All things considered—and it is the historian's job to consider all things—the colonial encounter poses a dilemma from which Raeburn does not shy away. On the one hand, the European settlement of Australia was a catastrophe for Indigenous Australians, ravaged by introduced diseases to which they had no resistance and dispossessed and brutalised 'in ways now understood as racist and unjust'. Yet the Johnsons 'seem to have been genuinely good people, motivated by truthful intent'. Raeburn identifies what he calls 'the good colonist paradox' and expresses eloquently the question it poses:

> How can modern-day Australians remember the Johnsons and others like them in ways that do justice to the fact they both contributed to invasion and colonization—and at the same time were good people who pioneered approaches to British religion, education, and charity, which form the basis of much of what is valuable about Australian society today?
>
> (p. xii)

1 Grace Karskens, *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2010), 450.

2 Stuart Piggin, 'The First Australians and Australia First: The Story of Maria Yellomundee', in *Christianity Matters in These Troubled Times,* ed. Kevin Donnelly (Melbourne: Wilkinson Publishing, 2022), 17–30.

Most modern readers will ask such a question, but maybe historians today should not be as embarrassed by it as Raeburn appears to be or as determined not to be seen as insensitive to the blinkers of colonials. Too ready a condemnation of Australian colonialism on the grounds that its values are not ours risks denying the one discipline that makes history what it is, namely context. Given the context of the Johnsons' experience in New South Wales, they could not help their involvement in the colonial project, but to condemn everyone who arrived in the First Fleet because they were ipso facto colonials affirms ideology without adding a mite to historical understanding. The value of history is to be found through the identification of differences between 'us and them' far more than through the identification of similarities. The Johnsons' peers, like us, were sensitive to matters of gender and race, but they thought differently from us about both. Their sensibility differed from ours and therefore we will feel critical of them, but that makes our judgement ahistorical.

Perhaps in his determination to avoid hagiography, Raeburn is inclined to revere the maligned and pull down the mighty. An example of the first is his patience with Richard Johnson's chief tormentor, Lieutenant-Governor Francis Grose, who did so much to generate economic take-off after Governor Phillip's departure, albeit with liquor as the currency. An example of the second is that he consistently depicts John Wesley as one given to finding justifications for slavery, but no evidence for this is offered and his important and cogent opposition to slavery that so influenced Wilberforce is not mentioned. Wesley's famous interest in medical treatments is here condemned for its inhumanity, yet Wesley was motivated by the humane desire to heal even if his cures, as we know today, did more harm than good. Wesley, Raeburn asserts, became 'expert at adapting dual messaging to win popularity from different audiences' (p. 13). One might retort that today's historians are experts in deflating the reputations of yesterday's heroes, but when they do that by contrasting modern enlightened thought with past ignorance, all it shows is that they were in the past and we are in the present. We have an instinct today for deconstruction, but it is too easy an exercise if we constantly rate the past against the present.

That said, Raeburn defends Johnson in a matter that, on first hearing, appals modern readers, namely Johnson's depiction of First Australians as 'ignorant and benighted heathen'. Johnson used these words, Raeburn contends, to explain their need of Christianity to other Europeans. He maintains that they were not meant in an inhumane way: 'On the contrary, it was because he and Mary respected Aboriginal people's humanity that they wanted to help them by sharing Christianity and British civilisation with them' (p. 158, cf. pp. 47, 52). The rather surprising upshot, in view of Raeburn's sensitivity to the values of his readers today and his determination to deconstruct past prejudices, is that the Johnsons emerge in a very favourable light. They are compassionate and hospitable to all, sharing their produce with all in need, and able to provide plenty of it, as Richard Johnson was the best farmer in the colony (p. 112). He was also conscientious in the performance of his duties; he not only 'conducted more than fifty baptisms, sixty marriages and one hundred burials per

year' (p. 164), but also was especially concerned for the welfare and education of children, with Aboriginal and European children receiving equal attention (p. 108). In the service of the sick, he was prepared to risk his own health. The Johnsons, we are repeatedly assured, were 'good people'.

Maybe it takes a good person to know one! What historians write is not only contingent on the times in which they live, but also their own life experiences. Raeburn's primary academic expertise is not in history, but in health sciences. He is particularly concerned with mental health and with the wide range of issues that affect it, including homelessness, ethnicity and diet. There is a lot about health and healing in this study, including Indigenous attitudes to health (pp. 140–41). The Johnsons are credited here with bearing 'the weight of mental healthcare' (p. 113). Raeburn is thus able to throw professional light on the nature and value of the pastoral care offered by the Johnsons. Perhaps of all the disciplines, history is really a fellowship of those with different gifts and experiences, where the contribution of each is best valued and respected. Raeburn's distinctive work experience clearly leaves its distinctive mark on his account.

It is too easy to criticise a book for what is not in it. Far better to evaluate what it does give us rather than bemoan what it does not. It is a serious bibliographical lacuna, however, that Raeburn seems unaware of the many contributions relevant to the Johnsons of the Evangelical History Association of Australia. Most especially, the research of Craig Schwarze on the early life of Richard Johnson corrects and enhances Raeburn's account. His parents were not 'a poor farming couple' (p. 1). They had benefited financially from the enclosures, and, on the many rungs on the social ladder, his father, a member of the gentry, was ranked second from the top! Dick Turpin, the infamous highwayman, is relevant to the story, not primarily because he once haunted the inn in Johnson's village of Welton, but because it was Johnson's grandfather, Cary Gill, a constable, who arrested Turpin and had him successfully charged and hanged.[3] Most seriously, evangelicalism is not as extensively treated by Raeburn as it might have been, and the Evangelical Revival is not even mentioned. The silos that separate us, then, in Australian historiography are regrettable. If, however, Raeburn is not as authoritative on Johnson's early life as he should be, he makes up for it by giving us the best account to date of the Johnsons' later life after they returned to England. That this experience was 'remarkable' Raeburn conclusively demonstrates, giving ample justification for the title of this valuable perspective on colonial Australia's origins.

3 Craig Shwarze, 'Drawing Back the Curtain: Revealing the Origins of the Rev. Richard Johnson', *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review* 2, no. 8 (2014): 47–60.

James Walter review of Margaret Simons, *Tanya Plibersek: On Her Own Terms*

(Collingwood: Black Inc, 2023), 320 pp., PB $34.99, ISBN 9781760643386

Arguably, political biography, like all research, should be driven by pertinent questions: what does the emergence of this political actor tell us about the social/political context of which they were a product; and what might we learn of our prospects if such an actor achieves influence? But there are specific questions when it comes to the biography of contemporary figures, written well before their careers are over and purposeful analysis of overall achievement can be attempted: why this subject, and why now? Chris Wallace, in her stimulating *Political Lives: Australian Prime Ministers and Their Biographers* (2023), argues persuasively that such biography usually constitutes a political intervention, intended to elevate (or tear down) a still active political figure.

These reflections are provoked by the difficulty I had in discerning what animates Margaret Simons in writing about Tanya Plibersek. She confesses that the idea of the book was put to her by her publishers at Black Inc.; that she was initially reluctant to accept due to her scepticism about the fan adoration that Plibersek generates; and that her subject, too, was not keen (though Plibersek ended up cooperating). Should the work of a hired gun, commissioned by enterprising publishers targeting a ready market (in those Plibersek devotees), be discounted because it was not first impelled by a driving question?

Well, no, not when it is undertaken by an investigative journalist and writer as experienced and outstanding as Simons, about a figure as captivating as Plibersek and backed by some of Australia's best political editors. But here's the rub: despite the considerable strengths of this biography, its likely appeal to Plibersek devotees and its skilful exploration of the subsidiary questions integral to good biography, it stumbles at that central question—why this subject, and why now? This, I think, raises an interesting point about the author's approach and the leader-centric political culture that implicitly frames the book.

First, though, to those strengths. Simons cogently addresses the questions essential to a compelling narrative: where did Plibersek come from, why did she become active in politics, why the Labor Party, what has she learned, what is she good at and what now can we expect of her?

Plibersek is the daughter of Slovenian refugees who met and married after their migration to Australia. Their Catholic faith, and the patriotism engendered for the new country that had given them freedom and opportunities denied in Yugoslavia, are integral to Plibersek's belief in the Australian dream exemplified in her parents'

experience. Their commitment to kindness, compassion and community is evident in her own approach to politics. While she no longer accepts 'the whole package' (p. 21) of Catholicism—given the critical thinking instilled by university education, and the blind patriarchy of the priesthood that diminished women and facilitated abuse by some among their number of those under their dominion—she identifies as a 'cultural Catholic' (p. 20), still committed to Christian values.

She idealises her father, a man who was qualified as a plumber but who worked, as did many refugees, as a labourer—a fettler on the railways—before gaining more elevated responsibilities on the Snowy scheme. This working-class trajectory perhaps encouraged a leaning towards Labor politics, but, if so, it was implicit: politics was rarely discussed by Plibersek's parents. Rather, it was her older brothers, Ray and Phillip, preparing for professional careers, and with differing political views, who brought political argument into the home. Ray, kind and protective of his sister, was the Labor advocate; Phillip, wilder (but more fun), given to physical and psychological 'experiments' in teasing his little sister, believed in self-reliance and an individual's responsibility to 'pull themselves up the ladder of opportunity' (pp. 16–17). So, they differed passionately on most political questions. Their attentive little sister took it all in, much in advance of most children her age. The brothers encouraged in Tanya elements that were characteristics of themselves: Ray's quality as the concerned caretaker, Phillip's tendency to ignore bounds and the risk-taking that feeds innovation.

Studying communications at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), Plibersek was influenced by formidable progressive journalists Julianne Schultz and Wendy Bacon, and joined a loose women's collective engaged with feminist debates. She is remembered as a social movement activist, critical of Labor's direction under Hawke and focused on women's safety and sexual harassment, unlike Anthony Albanese, six years older, who was more deeply engaged with Labor from the start. But, as her networks widened and she encountered parliamentarians on the left of the Labor Party, such as Meredith Burgmann, she was persuaded to the Labor cause. An idealist, her initial flirtation with Labor was brief: she joined in 1984, but left within a year, outraged when the government flipped established policy to allow uranium mining in Australia.

While at UTS, Plibersek began a relationship with another student, Michael Coutts-Trotter, whom she eventually married. His redemption story—scion of a notable Catholic family who became a drug addict and dealer, served a prison sentence, but then turned his life around to become a journalist, political staffer and, ultimately, a senior public servant highly regarded by both state parties—is well known to those who have followed New South Wales politics. Tanya's recognition of the sincerity and discipline of Michael's determined rehabilitation relatively early in this journey, and the ties between Michael and Tanya, are central to Simons's story. For it was from Michael that Tanya learned the lesson of compromise; as he gradually gained

promotion as a public official, she came to appreciate how much is to be gained by understanding the capacity and networks of expertise and support available to policy activists from productive relations with the public service.

After her resignation, Plibersek was out of the Labor Party, but she was not out of its networks. Gradually, those who recognised her talent and commitment persuaded her that it was better to be inside the tent than protesting outside. In the early 1990s, she rejoined the Labor Party. In 1998, still only 28, she was elected to parliament as the member for Sydney. Personable, clever, hardworking, committed and articulate, she was soon seen as a rising star. After the 2004 election, she was appointed to the shadow cabinet in multifaceted portfolios: youth; status of women; and work, family, community and early childhood education.

Consistently opposed to leadership disruption, Plibersek routinely supported 'the leader' against successive party insurgencies in the years of Opposition and throughout the turbulent Rudd, Gillard, Rudd period of government. Nevertheless, her capacity could not be ignored: Rudd, despite her support for Beazley against his challenge, appointed her to the housing and status of women portfolios in 2007; and Gillard, despite Plibersek's support for Rudd against her challenge, appointed her minister for human services and minister for social inclusion in 2010, and minister for health in 2011.

Simons differentiates between the portfolios Plibersek pursued (women and domestic violence) and those she was given (housing and, recently, the environment). In those undertaken between 2007 and 2013, there were substantial achievements, whether in domains with which she had been engaged for years (the landmark 'National Plan for the Prevention of Violence against Women and Children') or in those thrust upon her (her social housing initiative, allied to a national jobs plan in the wake of the global financial crisis, was one of the big successes of the Rudd government).

In every portfolio, Simons identifies the capacities that made for success. Plibersek is a consummate networker who created national and professional linkages among departmental officials, community and professional representatives and relevant experts. Just as she had argued that the team was more important than the leader in all the turmoil of the Rudd–Gillard years, so in her ministerial work she fostered team building, recognising the necessity of distributed leadership rather than imposing a hierarchical, top-down ethos. This generated intense loyalty among her staff, and respect among the professionals and public officials with whom she needed to work. She was on top of her brief and proved one of Labor's best public communicators. Her kindness and generosity were bywords.

The impression of efficiency and commitment allied with straight talking soon made her one of Labor's most recognised and popular figures. When Rudd lost the 2013 election, and Bill Shorten became leader, she was elected deputy leader, keeping her squarely in the public eye. Now she chose the role of shadow minister for foreign affairs

—a move away from the service and caring roles in which she had specialised, and one that would strengthen her leadership credentials. Here, she sought the advice of Gareth Evans. She was a 'sponge', he said, 'rapidly absorbing facts and ideas' (p. 259). Others were impressed by her capacity for systematic and strategic thinking. After the 2016 election, when Labor made significant gains but failed to win office, she moved again, this time to shadow portfolios for education and (once more) women.

When Labor lost again in 2019, Shorten resigned the leadership. The choice for succession appeared to be between Albanese and Plibersek. It was known that she was interested, but now she ruled herself out 'for personal reasons' (p. 284). Albanese's accession meant that she could no longer serve as deputy: they were in the same faction. The Labor convention is that leader and deputy roles must be shared between the left and right factions. She retained the shadow portfolios for education and women, though these were taken from her when Labor at last regained office in 2022: Albanese made her minister for environment and water—a complex, demanding role, but one far removed from the areas in which she had invested her all.

Simons painstakingly emphasises the importance of family to Plibersek and the 'sliding door' (p. 93) moments where the contest between political demands and family imperatives changed everything for her. One of these was in 1997 shortly before her preselection for Sydney, when her parental family was rocked by the news that her brother Phillip, working as a geologist in Port Moresby, had been murdered in a robbery. Plibersek was devastated but remained in the contest—she could think of nothing else but to keep going. Simons reads this as evidence of stamina and courage. Another was in 2019, coinciding with the period when Shorten's successor was to be elected, when it was discovered that her daughter, Anna, had been subject to a toxic relationship of intimidation and assault by her boyfriend that led to criminal charges and a case in which Anna was to be a witness. Plibersek decided she could not think of not being there when her daughter needed her and so withdrew from the race—though she says it was not the only reason.

Albanese had always been in the wings. The subtext of continuous rivalry with Plibersek is threaded through Simons's book. The surmise about whether Plibersek could, should (or might yet) be leader continues. As mentioned, when Labor won, Albanese appointed her minister for water and environment. It might be deemed appropriate, placing an experienced policy thinker, networker and team builder known for success in handling complexity in one of the most challenging roles. Yet, she is hedged about, with Madeleine King as minister for resources on one side, and a big hitter, Chris Bowen, as minister for climate change and energy, on the other: it might also be seen as boxing her in—consequent departmental ructions about who can determine what have emerged since Simons's book was published.

The issue of leadership is the ghost at the feast here. Simons rightly points out that by the time another leader is called for, new, younger candidates—Jim Chalmers and Clare O'Neil, for instance—will be positioned for the contest. So, has Plibersek's

'moment' passed? If so, why not stop now and assess? But to declare game over makes this a tale of unrealised potential, as if getting to the top is the surest criterion of success. Plibersek's story and her capacity for continuing policy innovation are not yet over. So why this book, and why now? Simons circling around the question of leadership, of sliding doors that might in other circumstances have led elsewhere (of the leader that might have been), seems indicative of the leader centrism on which so much contemporary political discourse depends. It deflects attention from Simons's chief gift to us: an engrossing, richly detailed exploration of one of our ablest policy entrepreneurs—an exemplar of the passionate change makers who bring professionals, experts, stakeholders and civil society together in solving collective problems, and on whom successful government depends.

Amy Way review of Alison Bashford, *An Intimate History of Evolution: The Story of the Huxley Family*

(London: Allen Lane, 2023), 576 pp., HB $59.99, ISBN 9780241434321

On Christmas Eve in 1920, a young Julian Huxley made a rather strange request of the readers of *Nature*, the world's premier science journal:

> I should be grateful if anyone possessing Axolotls, whether young or old, would give me the opportunity of purchasing some, as they are at present very difficult to obtain in the market.
>
> (p. 139)

Had there been a Christmas rush on the curious amphibians? Was this a precursor to the 1960s sea monkey obsession? Not quite, but in this small anecdote—one of hundreds that texture Alison Bashford's *Intimate History of Evolution*—we catch a glimpse of the familial fixation Julian inherited from his forebears. The 23-year-old Oxford student already had a pair of axolotls, but he had spent that December artificially inducing their metamorphosis by feeding them ox thyroid. Instead of achieving sexual maturity while retaining juvenile traits, the water-based creatures lost their frilly gills and fins to the mammalian hormones and emerged from their tanks as air-breathing, adult salamanders. Here was a Huxley engaged in quintessential Huxley business: pondering and documenting the transformation of life. In a book that walks a fine line between biography and intellectual history, Bashford examines the public and private selves of this famous family alongside their evolutionary ideas and enduring enchantment with the human condition.

Julian's request is as charming as his experiment is disturbing, and one cannot help but wonder what the axolotl might have made of their sudden transformation. Was it painful? Confusing? A dramatic reversal of their unique evolution? Axolotls are, in effect, salamanders that never 'grow up'. Or was this metamorphosis a continuation of an earlier interrupted development, spurred on by the hand of an unseen Creator? Such questions of animal interiority might have been more intriguing to an older Julian: an interest in psychology, conservation and ecology would occupy a large portion of his later work, especially at the London Zoo and as the founding director of UNESCO. In fact, compared to his other animal obsessions, the axolotl was a small fry. Julian, we learn, had a lifelong love affair with birds, in particular the mating rituals of the great crested grebe, and a deep fascination and respect for the emotion of primates, like Guy, London Zoo's beloved stoic gorilla.

As to whether the axolotl could comprehend its own evolution, Julian's response would have been firm: it was man, and man alone, who could understand his own place in nature. This is one thing that set Julian apart from his grandfather, Thomas Henry Huxley, the eminent man of science who occupies the other spotlight in Bashford's sweeping biography. His perception of man's 'special' place in nature was much more complex. Bashford's balanced biographical lens allows her to draw illuminating parallels between the two men, as well as the nuanced diversities in their science and societies. Indeed, she argues we should think of them as one long-lived man, 1825–1975, whose 'vital dates bookended the colossal shifts in world history' (p. xxiii). It is an effective, if unconventional, biographical strategy, revealing a Janus-faced man, one face gazing back into the deep past, the other forward to the possibilities of a genetic future.

The enormous life story of this amalgamated Huxley unfolds across 10 chapters and in four thematically arranged parts: I. Genealogies, II. Animals, III. Humans and IV. Spirits. For all its breadth, the book is filled with the rich detail readers of biography expect and enjoy. On New Year's Eve in 1856, for example, we sit with Thomas Henry as he makes a frank list of resolutions—a nineteenth-century version of the five-year-plan—that he hoped would lead to 15 or 20 'Meisterjahre' (master years). They are ambitious yet humble aspirations for the already rising (and notoriously scrappy) scientific star:

> To smite all humbug, however big; to give a nobler tone to science; to set an example of abstinence from petty personal controversies, and of toleration for everything but lying; to be indifferent as to whether the work is recognised as mine or not, so long as it is done:– are these my aims? 1860 will show.
>
> (p.66)

One expects archival gems in the biographies of familiar scientific figures, but Bashford has a way of introducing her subjects that feels like meeting them for the first time.

Despite the focus on its two central Huxleys, the book is still, in parts, *The Story of the Huxley Family*. The chapter exploring the family's ongoing experience with mental illness, or as Thomas Henry called it, 'malady of thought', is gentle and heartbreaking. Thomas Henry's crippling depression and Julian's 'months of paralysed inactivity' are chronicled alongside periods of mania, anxiety, hospitalisation and formal 'rest cures' for both them and many other family members. They were all horrifically linked through this shared inheritance. The suicide of Julian's younger brother, Trev, mere days after leaving a sanatorium in August 1914, is made even more painful by Bashford's juxtaposition of an earlier letter from the boys' mother, Julia. 'You have a goodly heritage', she wrote to her Eton schoolboys in 1904, 'I don't think there ever can have been children who started with fairer prospects than you boys'. A decade later, Trev had been reduced to a 'sense of hopelessness' by the 'impossibility of his high ideals' (p. 91).

Another strength of the book's composite, familial approach is the space it creates for the Huxley—and Arnold—women, who shed light on shifting gender roles and the family's literary talents, another shared trait. Henrietta, the devoted wife of Thomas Henry, writes moving poetry during the lonely years of courtship with her long-distance lover. Julia Frances Arnold, mother of Julian and member of the prominent literary Arnold family, embodies the fin-de-siècle 'new woman', receiving an education at Somerville College and then running her own school for girls, Prior's Field. Central to all the men in this story, though, is the razor-sharp Mary Augusta Ward (née Arnold), best-selling British novelist and beloved aunt to Julian. It makes sense to see her scholarly influence on her Huxley nephews, who often sent samples of their writing for Mary's appraisal, but Bashford reveals a delightful friendship between Mary and her uncle-in-law, Thomas Henry. A friend to the Arnold family long before his son married into it, he and Mary went on to exchange respectful theological banter and compare different heterodoxies for years. As a historian of gender and empire, who has carved her own esteemed niche in an academic world inhabited by men, it is no surprise that Bashford elevates the women too often sidelined in the histories of science.

There is one woman, however, who is almost entirely absent: Margaret Huxley, Julian's youngest and only sister. Appearing briefly as a distressed child on the death of her mother, Margaret's experience forms no part of the larger Huxley whole. Was this at the subject's request? Or the result of an 'unremarkable' or undocumented life? The reader is left to wonder. But without her, it is the Huxley boys who populate accounts of happy childhoods and fractured adolescence. Equally absent is Julian's eldest son, Anthony, who receives little mention beyond co-designing the great crested grebe into his father's memorial in 1975. Leonard Huxley, the middleman between Thomas Henry and Julian, is also rather indefinite. His poetry is filtered throughout, and his voice is heard in family letters, but the reader fails to get a sense of him as an individual. Perhaps compared to the women of this middle generation, he failed to cut the mustard, but it also seems to reflect Leonard's lived reality: overshadowed by the expectations of his brilliant father and outshined by his individualist and gifted son. As with all biographies, some figures are seen in sharper focus.

But to view this work only as biography, or even family history, is to undercut its enormous contribution to the history of science. Readers might well expect this, given the subject matter, but through her clever 'one man' framework, Bashford draws extraordinary comparisons and continuities between the ideas, methodologies, and worlds of Julian and Thomas Henry Huxley. It is a triumphant work of rigorous intellectual history. Bashford leads the reader through some of the most complicated and controversial chapters in scientific history, explaining decades of evolutionary theory as well as the Huxleys' relationship with notions of eugenics, vivisection, slavery and imperialism, to name a few. Julian, for example, had seen and denounced the horrors wrought on humanity by Nazi eugenics regimes. He had also seen the damage done to his own marriage by his lengthy affair with a 20-something fascist,

Viola Ilma, who was inspired by the 'vitality' and 'vision' of the Hitler youth. And yet Julian always remained an optimistic transhumanist, convinced that human comprehension of evolution allowed us to instil our own purpose into the process: 'The future of progressive evolution is the future of man' (p. 357). To all this Bashford adds the achievement of avoiding the tired narrative dichotomy of science v. religion, particularly when unpacking the heated debates of the 1860s. Famous as the world's first 'agnostic', Thomas Henry's stance against Christianity certainly influenced his involvement in the crowded discussions on the origin and development of species. But it was ideology, not faith, that set Darwin's bulldog growling. 'It is my business', he wrote, 'to the best of my ability to fight for scientific clearness—that is what the world lacks. Feeling, Christian or otherwise, is superabundant' (p. 382).

Marketing this book as a biography invites readers into intellectual history and the history of science, two fields often perceived as dull, dormant or disconnected from the real world. But good intellectual history is, by necessity, biographical. We cannot understand ideas, their development or dissemination, without understanding the individuals who crafted them and, in turn, the societies, cultures and politics those individuals were crafted by. As Bashford often reminds her reader, the science of the Huxleys was always cultural, always political. Their titanic ideas were as much based on the 'empiricism' Thomas Henry held onto so tightly, as they were on professional rivalries, social circumstance and personal cosmologies. Perhaps the most famous celebrity 'Darwinian' of his time, Huxley's early public support of Charles Darwin came primarily from his love of a good fight, even more so when it was coupled with the opportunity to rattle the 'establishment' and his fated nemesis, Sir Richard Owen. Attentive to all of this, Bashford has produced a truly intimate history of evolution: a thorough intellectual delineation of the developmental theories that have shaped our world, told through the lives, minds and experiences of a single, Janus-faced man.

There are many images we can connect with this 'man', this family. It's Jacqueline the chimpanzee, taking tea with Julian at the London Zoo, who graces the cover of this singular study of the Huxleys' abiding absorption with life, humanity and nature. Yet it might well have been the paedomorphic axolotl, young and old together in an inherited blend of juvenile maturity. Even more unique, though harder to explain to a publisher, would be the Huxleyan Axolotl, Julian's peculiar Christmas experiment; transformed and transformative, it stands powerless in the face of interior evolutionary forces yet somehow remains the author of its own complex identity.

Peter Woodley review of Peter Rees, *I am Tim: Life, Politics and beyond*

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> Australians have for years watched their Country Parties obstinately holding on to life, defying predictions of impending distinction.
>
> —B. D. Graham[1]

Thus begins B. D. Graham's authoritative book, *The Formation of the Australian Country Parties*, published by the Australian National University Press in 1966. Nothing much seems to have changed in the last 58 years. The federal party has had several name changes and there has been a merger in one state, but still the parties display a volatile brew of precarity and power. It bears out my own impression from reading the minutes of the New South Wales Country Party's Executive Council from the 1920s to the 1940s—the sense that the party was perpetually on the brink of existential threat from one source or another and anxious about opportunities and threats arising from its relationships with country towns, the city, coalition partners, labour and, in more recent times, as Peter Rees's biography of Tim Fischer shows, not-so-fringe parties and independents to the right and the left.

Leading any political organisation comes with challenges to negotiate pressures from without and within, but no more so than for leaders of Australia's parties of the country. Fischer was the ninth leader of the National (formerly Country, then National Country) Party in the federal parliament, and the fifth longest serving to date after Sir Earle Page, Arthur Fadden, Doug Anthony and Sir John McEwan. He served through some tumultuous episodes (some discussed below) that placed the party, representing a shrinking electorate, under enormous stress that could have caused it to split and wither. Whereas McEwan's party secured 21 seats (about 17 per cent of the House of Representatives and 26 per cent of the Coalition's seats) at the 1966 election, Fischer became deputy prime minister in 1996, leading a party with 16 seats (less than 11 per cent of a larger Lower House and 19 per cent of the Coalition's seats). By 2001, when he retired, the party had secured just 13 seats (less than 9 per cent and 16 per cent, respectively).

Timothy Andrew Fischer (1946–2019) was born into a Catholic farming family at Lockhart, near Wagga Wagga in the eastern Riverina region of New South Wales. He attended Boree Creek Public School and then boarded at Xavier College, a Jesuit

1 B. D. Graham, *The Formation of the Australian Country Parties* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1966).

school in Melbourne, where he showed an interest in politics, current affairs and debating. On leaving school in 1965 he joined the Narrandera branch of the Young Country Party—a move as unremarkable as playing football with the local seconds and attending village dances. Later, he was conscripted, trained as an infantry officer, and served as a platoon leader in Vietnam in 1968–69. With experience of a wider world, and unlikely to settle back into a small-town farming life, on his return to the Riverina Fischer secured preselection as a Country Party candidate. In 1971, following an electoral redistribution, he won the newly created New South Wales seat of Sturt. He was a member of the state parliament for 13 years, from 1976 in Opposition. Fischer was one of a steady stream of New South Wales politicians who have decamped to Canberra (John Fahey, Bruce Baird, Bob Carr, Kristina Keneally and Linda Burney, to name a few) when he entered the federal parliament as the member for Farrer in 1984. He was returned at five subsequent elections and is best remembered for his time as deputy prime minister and trade minister in the Howard government from 1996 to 1999. He retired from the parliament in 2001. In his mid-40s, he had married a farmer and active National Party member, Judy Brewer, and they had two sons. His most notable subsequent contribution to public life was as Australia's ambassador to the Holy See (2009–12). He was diagnosed with leukaemia in 2016 and died in August 2019.

Peter Rees is part of a tradition of Australian journalists who have turned their talents towards writing longer-form biographies and history, and he exemplifies the practised journalist's aptitude for producing fluent copy to a high standard. Military history is his main, but not exclusive, focus, and he has produced works on the historian C. E. W. Bean, Australian bomber crews in World War II and war nurses. *I Am Tim: Life, Politics and beyond* is Rees's second biography of Fischer, following *The Boy from Boree: The Tim Fischer Story* (2001), which was published on the subject's retirement from parliamentary politics. The bibliography in *I Am Tim* is an advance on its predecessor (which amounted to a short and unremarkable list of secondary sources) but still fills just three pages. Endnotes describe the sources underpinning each chapter in general terms. Making the best use of Rees's talents as a journalist, the work is supported largely by interviews and the author's personal contact with the subject, rather than extensive archival research, though the author does draw on an interview Fischer recorded for the National Library of Australia in 2006, and an unpublished memoir Fischer wrote for his family. Rees clearly knew Fischer well. The first biography was published with the subject's concurrence, and the second with the cooperation of his family and friends. Just how close to the subject should a biographer be? Does access arising from the subject's compliance and trust compensate for any loss of critical distance that a less intimate relationship might inspire?

The book demonstrates the strengths and highlights of Fischer's political career. He was a masterful 'retail politician', if by that we mean someone who thrives to sell themselves and their message directly to individuals and small groups on what we still call 'the hustings'. He was famously inarticulate, but even that trait became an asset—

an important part of his persona as a simple and unaffected 'man of the people'. In time he became almost universally known in Australia, with a recognition rating of around 90 per cent in his prime. For his energetic whistlestop campaigning, he gained the sobriquet 'Two Minute Tim', more concerned to impress as many voters as possible than to impart substance along the way. In the 1970s, he cheekily campaigned with Labor's famous 'It's Time' slogan, modified to read 'It's Tim!' Politicians nowadays are rarely seen west of the Nepean without a broad-brimmed hat (the bigger, apparently, the more authentic), but it was Fischer who made the accessory his own trademark.

From 1996, Fischer was faced with navigating tensions between the Howard government's neo-liberalism and the immediate interests of his party's constituents. On some important policy and strategic political issues, he was strong and, in hindsight, successful. Howard, with his bulletproof vest, is best known for championing gun control following the Port Arthur shootings in 1996, but Fischer played an equally important and more difficult part in sustaining the government's determination in the face of angry rural voters. Then, in 1998, as others went weak at the knees while playing footsie with a surging Pauline Hanson in 1998, Fischer stayed firm and placed One Nation last on his party's how-to-vote cards.

Fischer might not have shared the view of fellow New South Wales and federal politician John Fahey that 'vision is bullshit', but his forte was holding things together and getting things done through tactics and hard work, rather than adherence to a coherent ideology. Indeed, the book suggests that he liked a bet each way, and it would be difficult to pin down a consistent political philosophy beyond his conservative instinct on social issues. He claimed to be an 'economic dry' in his maiden speech in the federal parliament, but with a 'wet patch somewhere', and on another occasion caste himself as a 'qualified' free trader. Fischer supported the government's position on lower levels of trade protection in the face of opposition from some rural constituents, but, in the best traditions of his party, was very comfortable distributing grants to country electorates: he was neither the first nor the last member to regard pork-barrelling as fair play.

In places, Rees's treatment of these years verges on the eulogistic. As other party members 'crumbled' in the face of One Nation's surge in 1998, Fischer 'held his nerve' (p. 262). The whole purpose of his long parliamentary career could be summarised, apparently, as 'public service' (p. 274). There *are* moments of mild criticism though, and mention is made of Fischer's own admissions of fault or things that—on reflection—he might have done differently. In 1991, for example, Fischer withdrew a suggestion that United States military bases in Australia be used as bargaining chips in trade negotiations; the latter is cast as evidence of his 'propensity for overstepping the mark' (p. 150). Nevertheless, this is essentially a sympathetic political biography.

Fischer was out of parliamentary politics by his mid-50s, and for nearly another two decades led a rich and varied life, as a parent, public figure, author and enthusiast for various causes, including railways and honouring the memory of General Sir John

Monash. Rees paints these years as studded with a series of revelations of hidden misgivings, or metamorphoses, in which Fischer either modifies or completely overturns long-held convictions. For example, though he campaigned for his party during the 2001 election, he was apparently 'uncomfortable' about the government's manipulation of the *Tampa* affair, and later 'horrified' that the defence forces had been drawn into it (p. 296). We discover that the plight of refugees stranded in camps in Gaza, Lebanon and Jordan had 'long troubled' Fischer who, once out of parliament, gave voice to those concerns, influenced by Judy's strong views on refugee policy (p. 297). Also in his post-parliamentary life, climate change and sustainability became a passion, and he was 'disillusioned' with the Coalition government's policies (p. 336). He had been part of a government that reduced funding to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation over successive budgets but, according to his biographer, was a 'staunch defender of the public broadcaster' (p. 360). Having been one of the Coalition's most forthright critics of the High Court's Mabo decision in 1993, by 2017 he embraced the Uluru Statement from the Heart and blamed the education system of the 1960s for his lack of understanding of the history of dispossession. Having spent his political career holding to a conservative social belief system, it is 'understood' that he voted in favour of marriage equality in 2017 (p. 363).

In every case the change is represented as a thoughtful maturing of outlook, aided by the influence of Judy and others he encountered. And perhaps some flexibility of outlook, a capacity to receive new ideas and adjust one's thinking is a quality to be admired and encouraged in public figures, especially if the alternative is a political leadership that persists with an ideological crusade without regard for evidence. There is a question, though, about the leeway to which a public figure is entitled, especially if they have been one of the most powerful people in the country with capacity to speak with a metaphorical megaphone and to exert influence and control. Do changes of heart, of conscience, of mind, count so much if they are embraced only after one has ceased to be responsible for governing? And should a biographer seek to excuse, or to understand and contextualise, a subject's choices?

On balance, Rees convinces this reviewer that Fischer's softening is credible. In middle age he married a compatible but also independent partner who exposed him to different people and ways of thinking about the welfare of the bush. As a parent of a child diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, he faced more challenges than most. And following his own diagnosis of leukaemia, he had almost three years to ponder the immediacy of his mortality. There is still room for a scholarly biography of Fischer the politician, illuminating his role in the continuing negotiation of the National Party's relevance to rural constituents and the broader voting public, but this book is a compassionate introduction to Tim Fischer the man.

Contributors

John Arnold has worked as a librarian, bookseller and academic. He has had a long interest in the history of the book in Australia and Australian expatriate publishing in England. He is the author of *The Fanfrolico Press: Fauns, Satyrs and Fine Books* (2009), co-editor of *A National Culture in a Colonised Market: A History of the Book in Australia, 1891–1945* (2001), co-general editor of the *Monash Biographical Dictionary of C20th Australia* (1994) and co-editor of the multi-volume *Bibliography of Australian Literature, 1788–2000* (2001–22). He is currently working on a history and bibliography of the Scholartis Press, founded by the noted lexicographer Eric Partridge.

Christopher Chevalier grew up in Europe and was educated in England. In 1980, following university, he trained as a registered nurse. After assignments in Kenya, Ethiopia and Sudan (1980–87), he worked in the Solomons as a health program manager (1989–98). From 1999, he worked as a freelance social researcher, evaluator and trainer in the Pacific. In 2021, he completed a PhD at The Australian National University (ANU) in oral history and social history in Solomon Islands. He completed a biography of Solomon Mamaloni, the first chief minister and three-time prime minister of Solomon Islands, in 2022.

Derek Drinkwater, formerly a long-serving officer of the Department of the Senate, holds a PhD (political science and international relations) from ANU. His publications include *Sir Harold Nicolson and International Relations: The Practitioner as Theorist* (2005) and *The Biographical Dictionary of the Australian Senate*, *Vol. 1: 1901–1929* (2000) (assistant editor). He is a contributor to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (*ADB*) and *'Order, Order!' A Biographical Dictionary of Speakers, Deputy Speakers and Clerks of the Australian House of Representatives*. Derek has also published in the fields of parliamentary history and biography, public administration, and United Nations–World Bank governance building.

Ruth (Lute) Faleolo is a New Zealand–born Tongan researcher based in Brisbane, Australia. She is the daughter of ʻAhoia and Falakika Lose ʻIlaiū, based in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand.

Stephen Foster is an editorial fellow with the National Centre of Biography, ANU. His books relating to family history include *A Private Empire* (2010) and *Zoffany's Daughter: Love and Treachery on a Small Island* (2017).

Zachary Gorman is the research manager and historian for the Robert Menzies Institute at the University of Melbourne. A professional historian who has specialised in the history of Australian liberalism, he has been working as a researcher and academic since 2013, including several years at the University of Wollongong where he received his PhD. He has authored two biographies, one on Premier of New South Wales Sir Joseph Carruthers, and another on Prime Minister Sir Joseph Cook. He is currently editing a four-volume series on Menzies and the Menzies era, produced by Melbourne University Publishing.

Michael Hamel-Green is an emeritus professor in the College of Arts, Business, Law, Education and IT at Victoria University, Melbourne. His areas of teaching and research are in peace studies, community development, regional disarmament and security issues. He has published widely on nuclear-weapon-free zones, non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament. He has had a long involvement in peace, anti-war and nuclear disarmament movements, including as a draft resister during the Vietnam War. He is the author of the *ADB*'s article on Sam Goldbloom.

Lisa Hilli creates and curates exhibitions that shift narratives and art histories with a Melanesian feminine lens. She has specialist knowledge of lens-based practices, the language of textiles and the interpretation of museum collections. Her 2022–23 exhibition *Birds of a Feather* celebrated the resilience of Papua New Guinean women through the story of Dame Meg Taylor and was commissioned by the Potter Foundation, University of Melbourne. She holds an MFA by research from RMIT University and is a PhD candidate in the School of Culture, History and Language at ANU. Her practice-led PhD project focuses on the visual representation and authorship of Papua New Guinean women through photography and filmmaking. She is a descendant of the Gunantuna (Tolai) people of Papua New Guinea and a member of the Oceania Working Party (OWP) for the *ADB*.

Nicholas Hoare is lecturer and research fellow at the Department of Pacific Affairs, ANU. He is a dual citizen of Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand and is of Pākehā descent. A member of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*'s OWP since 2017, he has broad interests in biography and Pacific history, and has published peer-reviewed research in the *ADB*, *Journal of Pacific History*, *History Australia* and *International Review of Environmental History*. He was the 2024 David Scott Mitchell Fellow at the State Library of New South Wales, working on a history of the *Pacific Islands Monthly* (1930–2000).

Emma ʻIlaiū Vehikite is a local Tongan knowledge holder and historian, based in Muʻa Tatakamotonga, Tongatapu. She is the daughter of the late Sioeli and ʻOtoʻota ʻIlaiū, based in Muʻa Tatakamotonga.

Romitesh Kant is a PhD candidate in the Department of Pacific Affairs, ANU, and an adjunct research fellow in the Centre for Human Security and Social Change at La Trobe University. His PhD research examines the symbiotic relationship of politics and masculinity in the Fijian national context.

Sarah Kirby is a research fellow at the Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne. A recent doctoral graduate of the Melbourne Conservatorium, her PhD research explored music at international exhibitions in the British Empire throughout the 1880s, and her first monograph, *Exhibitions, Music and the British Empire*, was published in 2022 (Boydell & Brewer). She was the 2022 Nancy Keesing Fellow at the State Library of New South Wales and is currently the associate editor of *Musicology Australia*. In 2023, she received the McCredie Musicological Award from the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

Kim Kruger is a lecturer and researcher with Moondani Balluk Academic Centre at Victoria University, Australia. She has a background in community development, community radio broadcasting and Indigenous arts management, including film, theatre, visual art and festivals. She is researching a PhD on Black Power at the intersection of Aboriginal and South Sea Islander political organisations and has worked in Professor Gary Foley's Aboriginal History Archive to increase the representation of women in the collection. She is a member of the Warrior Woman Lane Public Art working group, Creative Victoria's First Peoples' Directions Circle, OWP, Merri-bek First Nations Advisory Committee and the Ballerrt Mooroop working group.

Barbara Lemon is an Australian historian who has worked within tertiary, government and cultural sectors. She has published her work in books, journals, magazines and radio documentaries with a particular focus on the history of Australian women's philanthropy. Barbara has spent the last decade in senior library roles in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. She is currently Curatorial and Collection Research director at the National Library of Australia, and is responsible for commissioned collections in oral history, photography and web archiving.

Susan Lever is currently writing a biography of the poet A. D. Hope. Her previous books include *Creating Australian Television Drama: A Screenwriting History* (2020) and *David Foster: The Satirist of Australia* (2008).

David Lowe holds a chair in contemporary history at Deakin University. His research focuses on modern international history, including Australia in world affairs. He has written on Australia in the Cold War, Australian overseas embassies and the life of Minister for External Affairs Percy Spender, and, more recently, the history of the Colombo Plan for aid to South and South-East Asia. With Tony Joel, he is the editor of the Routledge series, 'Remembering the Modern World', and has co-authored two books in the series, *Remembering the Cold War* (2013) and *Remembering Independence* (2018).

Talei Luscia Mangioni is a Pacific studies PhD candidate and teacher at the School of Culture, History and Language, ANU. She is of mixed Fijian and Italian descent and currently lives and works on the unceded lands of the Bidjigal and Gadigal people. Her PhD research explores the critical and creative histories of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific movement from the 1970s onwards. Since 2019, she has worked with the *ADB*'s OWP as both a research officer and a member. She is secretary of the Australian Association for Pacific Studies and a member of Youngsolwara Pacific and ICAN Australia.

Melinda Mann is a Darumbal woman and South Sea Islander. She lives on her Darumbal homelands in Rockhampton, Queensland, and is a passionate advocate for Indigenous nation-building, Pacific sovereignties and regional and rural communities. She has a background in student services, learning design, school and tertiary education, community organising and academic research. Her lived experience as a Darumbal person living on Darumbal Country and in community with elders and others informs her worldview and her professional work. She works as a First Nations art officer and specialises in First Nations programming and governance. Melinda is currently the academic lead for the Jilbay First Nations Research Higher Degree Academy at CQUniversity. In 2019, she became the first Darumbal person to complete a doctor of philosophy at Central Queensland University. Her research interests are in First Nations education, community development and Traditional Owner–led research.

Theresa Meki is a Pacific research fellow in the Department of Pacific Affairs, ANU. Her research focuses on the gendered nature of political campaigning in PNG. She is interested in women's national representation in both politics and historical documentation. Her doctoral thesis, awarded in 2022, examined Oro women's campaign strategies in the Papua New Guinea 2017 National elections. In the last five years, she has worked on various DFAT-funded projects, including the Women in Leadership Support program and the Joint District Assessment and Political Context Analysis in PNG. She worked as a team leader (Oro Province) for two PNG National Election Domestic Observations (2017 and 2022). Prior to joining the Department of Pacific Affairs in 2015 as a postgraduate student, she worked on the *Pawa Meri* documentary film series as a field producer and research assistant.

Imelda Miller is the curator, First Nations Cultures—Pacific, at the Queensland Museum, Brisbane, Australia. She works with material culture and archival collections inside and outside of traditional museum environments and spaces to create access to collections for communities of origin. Her collaborative curatorial practice incorporates a combination of cultural practice, community engagement and community-led research and development. Her Australian South Sea Islander heritage drives her passion for creating awareness about Australian South Sea Islander history, heritage and identity.

Wendy Mocke is a Papua New Guinean interdisciplinary storyteller and a NIDA (National Institute of Dramatic Art) graduate who works across live performance and film as an actor, writer and visual artist. Her play *I Am Kegu* won the prestigious Griffin Award in 2023. One of her quests as a writer and artist is to make alive what is quiet and asleep in Melanesian stories and unpack the myriad of layers that is Black Pacific Islander identity.

Karl Neuenfeldt is a music researcher, musician, songwriter and music producer. He was a member of a two-time ARIA award-winning production team for the late Torres Strait Islander singer-songwriter Henry 'Seaman' Dan, as well as co-producing collaborative CD/DVD projects with Indigenous communities in far north Queensland. In 2009, he was awarded the Sound Heritage award by the National Film and Sound Archive. He trained academically in anthropology (MA, Simon Fraser University, Canada), cultural studies (PhD, Curtin University) and cultural history (PhD, Murdoch University), and publishes mainly on music-based topics. As a musician, he owns far too many ukuleles.

Stuart Piggin co-authored the prize-winning two-volume history of Australian Evangelical Christians, *The Fountain of Public Prosperity* (2018) and *Attending to the National Soul* (2020). Acclaimed a 'masterwork', they are 'the fullest account' of the impact of Christianity on Australian history. As director of the Centre for the History of Christian Thought and Experience at Macquarie University from 2005 to 2016, he supervised 28 doctoral candidates, working principally on areas of Australian religious history and on the application of Classical and Christian thought to the modern world. He is the founding president of the Evangelical History Association of Australia and a fellow of the Religious History Association of Australia.

Pauline Reynolds is a Norfolk Islander of Pitcairn-Hitiaurevareva, Tahitian and European descent. A Pacific scholar and *tapa* maker, she collaborates with museums and curatorial teams around the world. She was the artistic director of the *'Ahu-ngā wairua o Hina* project with Te Papa Tongarewa Museum and Te Fare Iamanaha (Museum of Tahiti and the Islands) and works with the Norfolk Island Museum on preservation and repatriation projects. She is currently writing a book about the Tahitian Chief Mourner's Regalia collected by Cook and a biography of Pitcairn writer, Rosalind Amelia Young. An adjunct fellow at Macquarie University, she is a founding member of the Pacific 'Ahu Sistas collective.

Katerina Teaiwa is a professor of Pacific studies at ANU and author of a landmark book on phosphate mining in the Pacific, *Consuming Ocean Island: Stories of People and Phosphate from Banaba* (Indiana University Press, 2015). An interdisciplinary scholar and artist of Banaban, I-Kiribati and African American heritage, Teaiwa has presented her research via visual, material and performing arts in her touring exhibition, *Project Banaba* (2017–). She has been a powerful advocate for Pacific arts, culture and the environment, consulting for the Australian Museum, South Pacific Commission, UNESCO, European Union, AUSAID and the Australian

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. She is chair of the *ADB*'s OWP, editor of a leading journal for Pacific studies, *The Contemporary Pacific* and vice-president of the Australian Association for Pacific Studies. She has won several educational awards and two national teaching awards, including the overall University Teacher of the Year 2021 from Universities Australia.

James Walter is emeritus professor of politics at Monash University. He has published widely on Australian politics, political ideas, political history, biography and leadership.

Amy Way is a lecturer in history at Griffith University, Brisbane. With expertise in Australian history, Aboriginal history and intellectual history, she specialises in the history of human antiquity and deep time in Australia. Amy is a collaborating scholar with the Research Centre for Deep History at ANU, and a visiting fellow with the New Earth Histories Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, Sydney.

Camellia Webb-Gannon is a senior lecturer in the Faculty of the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Wollongong. She carries out collaborative research on decolonisation and the arts with a focus on West Papua and New Caledonia. Her other research interests include justice, place-making and activist anthropology.

Peter Woodley studied economics and history at ANU before embarking on a career in the Australian public service, where he was involved in health policy. In 2021, he completed a PhD, again at ANU, in Australian rural history. A book based on the thesis, *'We are a farming class': Dubbo's Hinterland, 1870–1950* (ANU Press), was published in 2025. He is a research editor with the *ADB* and has taught history at ANU and the University of New England. His interests include public and local history, as well as biography.

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Contact Details

All correspondence should be addressed to the Editor, *Australian Journal of Biography and History*, National Centre of Biography, School of History, RSSS, 146 Ellery Crescent, Canberra, ACT, 2600, or Malcolm.Allbrook@anu.edu.au.

WARNING: Readers are notified that this publication contains the names and images of deceased persons.

About the Journal

The *Australian Journal of Biography and History* is an initiative of the National Centre of Biography (NCB) in the Research School of Social Sciences at The Australian National University. The NCB was established in 2008 to extend the work of the Australian Dictionary of Biography and to serve as a focus for the study of life writing in Australia, supporting innovative research and writing to the highest standards in the field, nationally and internationally. The *Australian Journal of Biography and History* seeks to promote the study of biography in Australia. Articles that appear in the journal are lively, engaging and provocative, and are intended to appeal to the current popular and scholarly interest in biography, memoir and autobiography. They recount interesting and telling life stories and engage critically with issues and problems in historiography and life writing. The journal publishes peer-reviewed articles on Australian historical biography, including biographical studies, studies relating to theory and methodology, and the associated genres of autobiography, life writing, memoir, collective biography and prosopography. We are especially interested in articles that explore the way in which biography and its associated genres can illuminate themes in Australian history, including women in Australian society, family history, transnational networks and mobilities, and Indigenous history.

Submission Details

Please send article submissions or abstracts to the Editor, Dr Malcolm Allbrook, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University. Email: Malcolm.Allbrook@anu.edu.au.

Articles should be in the range of 5,000 to 8,000 words (excluding footnotes), although longer submissions may be considered after consultation with the Editor.

Style and referencing: please use footnotes in Chicago style, and follow Australian spelling.