Mobility, empire, colonisation

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This article examines the role of mobility in the operation of modern maritime empires and identifies some of the particular ways in which mobility was constituted as a ‘problem’ in debates over colonisation. After briefly mapping a range of ways in which different forms of mobility underwrote the processes of empire, the article turns to the colony of Otago. It sketches how arguments about the meaning of different types of movement played out in a specific colonial location where tensions over fixity and mobility stood at the heart of struggles over the meaning of both ‘empire’ and ‘community’.

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Mobility was the life-blood of empires, especially those world-spanning maritime orders that took shape from the fifteenth century. Pierre Chaunu, the pioneering French historian of the Atlantic, argued that the rapid expansion of European maritime activity and empire building initiated a process of ‘disenclavement’, as long-standing socio-geographic boundaries were prised open, forms of cross-cultural contact multiplied, and the isolation from distant markets and peoples that had long shaped many human societies came to an end.\(^2\) The role of empires in driving

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1. This article is an extended and revised version of a keynote address delivered at the 32nd Annual Australian Historical Association Conference, held at the University of Wollongong, 9–12 July 2013.
human interconnectedness and cultural transformation can be captured in a sequence of dates: if the frame is truly global, we might use 1492, 1498 and 1571 as key starting points; for Australia we might add 1606, 1688 and 1770; for New Zealand 1642 and 1769. In these moments of discovery (or rediscovery), connections were created which would reshape polities, economies and cultural formations, knitting together previously unrelated societies. Out of those initial experiences of encounter and the ‘thin ribbons of text’ they produced, new pathways and routes were created to link resource processing sites, ‘factories’, markets, mission stations, forts and ports. These created new possibilities for movement and depended on mobility in a variety of forms. The links were dynamic, as they thickened and multiplied, were reconfigured by political and economic change, and then sometimes atrophied as markets collapsed or resources were depleted. Their reach and pull was uneven, but they were capable of reshaping and recalibrating existing connections. The operation of these networks drew in new groups, creating novel assemblages that empowered some and disempowered and dispossessed many others. There were high stakes attached to the entanglements of empire.

These new linkages fashioned by various agents of European empires in the early modern period were oceanic, born out of maritime activity, and they enabled people from radically different cultures to meet directly. Mobility and connections, of course, had always been integral to empires, which were extensive economic, political and cultural formations. Empires functioned as highly uneven systems of exchange, mobility, appropriation and extraction, fashioned to enable the empire-building power to exploit the natural resources, manufactured goods or valued skills of the subordinated group. But these forms of economic traffic and cultural interdependence still elude the gaze of many historians. There is absolutely no doubt concerning the cultural and political importance of histories that explore the development of individual colonies or national communities. But the circumscribed geographic imaginaries and fixed vantage points that often frame such histories occlude or marginalise the importance of these linkages and the multiple forms of mobility that underwrote both the routine operation of empires and the production of nation-states. Neglecting mobility, exchange and various forms of connection allows national histories to offer their illusory stories of self-containment and cultural coherence.

Figure 1. This map represents Australasia as a common and interconnected space within a set of expansive global networks.

European early modern empire-building not only began to reshape commercial, political and cultural relationships at a global level, but as Chaunu’s notion of ‘disenclavement’ suggests, it also began to recalibrate the spatial range and scale of human interconnectedness. Whereas the great land-based empires that had repeatedly flourished, decayed and died within Eurasia were contiguous, the new maritime empires constructed by Europeans after 1492 were dispersed and truly global. Although these formations did not initially change the speed of human endeavour – which remained dependent on wind, water, and animal power until the advent of steam-power – they greatly stretched and extended the range of human activity, opening up both the possibility of face-to-face encounters between an array of previously unconnected peoples and the permanent planting of colonies oceans away from the seats of imperial power. In some cases, these new maritime empires substantially reordered existing patterns of mobility within and between those older Eurasian land-based empires, as new transit points, trading-posts, markets and bazaars, and centres of power shifted some lines of movement that had sustained long-distance trade, the travels of pilgrims, scholars and administrators, and the circulation of knowledge.

This essay explores some of the fundamental connections between mobility and empire in the cultural order that evolved out of one of these new European imperial formations: the modern British empire. It is not an exhaustive review of the manifold interdependencies between mobility, empire and colonisation, but is rather designed as a suggestive thought-piece that reflects on some key historiographical currents and analytical possibilities. In identifying some ways in which mobility enabled and shaped the operation of empire in general, I think we can then begin to think more specifically about the particular significance of mobility in the process of colonisation or settler colonialism. After offering some broad reflections on the ways in which mobility has figured in recent work on colonial and transnational history, I also sketch some of the ways in which an enlarged understanding of ‘mobility’, especially one which looks beyond ‘migration’, might sharpen our appreciation of how empire worked. In the second half of the essay, my discussions of motion and movement home in on colonial Otago, which was established in 1848 as a settlement ordered by Edward Gibbon Wakefield’s theory of systematic colonisation. This discussion demonstrates that mobility was simultaneously foundational to the enterprise of settlement but was also constituted by the colonists as a persistent problem and a fundamental challenge to the project of community formation.
Even if a clear focus on mobility has not emerged as a central problematic in Australian historical writing, several bodies of work have meant that it has certainly become a prominent and recurring analytical concern. Most explicitly, Georgine Clarsen’s work has stressed the particular significance of the automobile in shaping Australian modernities and in the tracing of Australia’s outline as a nation. More generally, she has been a consistent and powerful advocate for the value of mobility as an analytical concept that can ‘unsettle’ received readings of colonisation and colonial modernity.\(^4\) Questions of mobility loom large in Alan Mayne and Stephen Atkinson’s recent edited volume on inland Australia, which recovers some of the corridors and flows that have shaped and reshaped life in the semi-arid and arid interior.\(^5\) For the colonial period more generally, Nan Seuffert has demonstrated the ways in which the categories ‘settler’, ‘savage’ and ‘wanderer’ moulded conceptualisations of colonisation across Australasia and has underlined the importance of the regulation and policing of itinerant peoples for the articulation and consolidation of state power.\(^6\) Catharine Coleborne’s study of migration and mental health has highlighted the role of colonial institutions in regulating movement, and the emotional and social consequences of ‘failed’ mobility, in her work on colonial Victoria.\(^7\)

Historians working on a range of themes have also suggested that thinking about movement offers important insights into the convict system. If Seuffert’s work has demonstrated that colonial authorities in Australia were persistently anxious about mobile peoples, there is also clear evidence that those transported to Australia were mobile over considerable distances within Britain prior to their transportation. One key line of argument forwarded in the rereading of the convict system offered in the controversial *Convict Workers: Reinterpreting Australia’s Past* (1988) was the importance of this mobility within the United Kingdom.
and Ireland in the accumulation of skills and experience that were subsequently deployed in the Australian colonies. It also suggested that such movement made the ‘psychic costs of migration’ to Australia more manageable.\(^8\) The regulation of mobility was integral to the convict system and it was an important factor in determining the shape of Australia’s early economic development.\(^9\) Of course, the convict labour was deployed in public works projects which were central in the construction of the infrastructure – dockyards, wharves and jetties, roads, bridges and culverts – that channelled movements of people, animals and goods across land and water.\(^10\) The trajectories and sociabilities that structured convict lives meant that they developed distinctive spatial sensibilities, which Grace Karskens has termed ‘nefarious geographies’.\(^11\) W. M. Robbins has demonstrated the ways in the colonial state attempted to the close down the unauthorised movements of convicts and ensure that ‘homeless’ convicts were housed in the Hyde Park Barracks. But as he makes clear, such initiatives were consistently challenged by those convicts who could not escape from the colony but instead elected to contest the spatial order articulated by the colonial authorities.\(^12\)

Other convicts, of course, did endeavour to escape from the colony and Paul Carter, Alan Atkinson and Grace Karskens have all explored the meanings of these endeavours, while Amanda Laugesen has drawn attention to the imprint of such desires on Australia’s colonial lexicon, with its ‘bolters’, ‘deserters’, ‘absconders’, and ‘bushrangers’.\(^13\) Clare Anderson has meanwhile explored the global dispersal of those who were


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successful in fleeing and who resettled not only in New Zealand and the islands of the Bass Strait, but who were scattered across the ports of the southern Pacific world, South America, Mauritius, Ceylon and Calcutta. In turn Kristyn Harman has reminded us that Khoisan and Māori as well as Aboriginal peoples were drawn into the convict system, which was used as an instrument not only to punish but to subdue communities that resisted British imperial authority. The convict system can, therefore, be usefully understood as a truly global order, which not only forcibly resettled a pool of labour from Britain and Ireland but which was embedded in the struggles over autonomy, including the liberty of movement, that British empire building set in train.

One of the key characteristics of the ‘new imperial history’ and post-colonial work on the British empire has been a growing interest in networks, connections and webs. As a result, a wide range of scholars from various scholarly and disciplinary locations have drawn new attention to various forms of cultural traffic that were integral to empires and colonialism. Questions of mobility, however, often remain an embedded element rather than a central and explicit analytical problematic in this recent scholarship on imperialism. Angela Woollacott’s influential To Try Her Fortune in London, for example, cast significant light on the growing possibilities enabled by the expanding ability of elite white women to travel, yet ‘mobility’ as an analytical concept was much less prominent in that work than race, gender, nationality, or modernity. Of course, Woollacott’s monograph was part of a wider cluster of studies that have examined the travels of individuals – both colonisers and colonised – from the colonies to Britain, but this scholarship as a whole has been more concerned with race, gender, and political claims than with mobility itself. In a different register, Catherine Hall’s and Julie

16 Nevertheless, important insights into the meaning and significance of mobility thread through the volume: Angela Woollacott, To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 30, 34, 48, 56, 61, 70, 107, 198.
Evans’s assessments of Edward Eyre have highlighted the importance of the trajectories of imperial officials whose careers took them across the empire, but again these works placed greater emphasis on the discourses and ideas that linked the empire rather than on the manifold forms of mobility that enabled people, texts, and objects to move. In recent years this kind of method has been elaborated: Alan Lester and David Lambert have stressed the importance of ‘imperial careering’ more generally in their Colonial Lives Across the Empire. Australian historians have been particularly prominent in developing this kind of approach, whether we are thinking of the volumes on transnational biographies edited by Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacott, Cassandra Pybus’s study of ‘black founders’, Marilyn Lake’s rehabilitation of Lowe Kong Meng, or Fiona Paisley’s work on the activist A. M. Fernando. In a different idiom, Penelope Edmonds’s comparative work on colonial urbanism has highlighted the ways in which imperial power produced racialised spatial regimes and offered very different opportunities for Indigenous and colonial mobilities. Such work has been central in the transnational turn that is discernible in recent Australian scholarship. This shift was clearly signalled by the Transnational History Symposium held at the Australian National University in 2004, which produced Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake’s 2005 collection, Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective.

This embrace of the possibilities of transnational analysis has opened up a range of new vantage points on the Australian past, calling the naturalness, stability and coherence of the nation and national history

21 Published by ANU E Press. Also see the reappraisals offered in the forum on national and transnational histories in History Australia 10, no. 3 (2013).
to question. Here, research on Australia’s north has been particularly compelling, as a body of new scholarship has built upon the pioneering work of an earlier generation of scholars on the links that stretched from the Kimberley and Arnhem Land across Torres Strait and the Timor and Arafura Seas, and on the histories of various communities of Asian origin with deep historical connections and a continuing presence in the north. Recent work has confirmed the particular importance of the trepang trade, which met the strong demand for the edible holothurian in Makassar and other Southeast Asian and Chinese markets. While the Macassan trepang trade to Arnhem Land was often funnelled through the Dutch East Indies, Makassar itself stood at the centre of an expansive set of networks that reached not only to Batavia, but also to the Sulu Sultanate, Malacca, Manila and other key market towns in peninsular and island Southeast Asia. The Macassan fleets that worked along the coasts of northern Australia were themselves multi-ethnic, comprising sailors from Makassar itself as well as Aru Islanders, Bajo (sea gypsies), Timorese and Chinese merchants. Their extensive dealings with Indigenous communities gave rise to a distinctive creole language and left a lasting imprint on Yolngu language, ritual and cosmology. In this way, northern Australia was incorporated into the overlapping merchant cycles, diasporic networks and maritime knowledges that James Francis Warren has identified as central to the operation of the expansive ‘Sulu Zone’ prior to and during its colonisation by Britain.

These and other circuits of movement linked specific places in northern Australia with particular locations in distant lands. The pearl divers from Japan, for example, who worked for many years on Thursday Island or at Broome, were recruited from a string of isolated coastal villages in the Japanese prefecture of Wakayama in Honshū. Men from those villages were recruited to work in particular northern communities and their ties to ‘home’ were maintained through practices such as the grouping of men from the same location in boarding houses named after their ancestral villages. Kinfolk of these mobile workers took advantage of the opportunities opened up by other migration pathways, which took them to Burma, the Philippines or Brazil. In turn, flows of goods, capital and stories of the world beyond returned to Wakayama from these men.

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and their income earned in Australia helped transform their families’
economic capacity and social standing. Similar patterns played out else-
where in Australia. In Woolgoolga in northern New South Wales Punjabi
workers, mainly from the Doaba region between the Beas and Satluj
rivers (especially between the cities of Ludhiana and Jalandhar), remitted
large proportions of their earnings to their families at ‘home’, allowing
them to enlarge their property holdings, to build pakka (baked brick)
houses, to enhance their economic standing and their izzat (reputation,
honour). Other such networks reached out from Victoria’s goldfields,
the Chinatowns of growing colonial cities, and from a host of ports, large
and small, that connected Australian communities to the Pacific world
and beyond. As a result, parts of the lands that English speakers came to
call ‘Australia’ were integrated into the spatial and cultural imaginaries
of Macassans, Punjabis, and the people of Guangdong and Wakayama
variously as Marege or Kayu Java, Telia, Xin Jin Shan or part of Nan’yō.

The history of the particular connections to southeast Asia and the
western Pacific which were so important to development of communities
across Australia’s north undermines the common view that the British
punctured the long isolation that had shaped Indigenous Australia. In
fact, in many ways British colonial power encouraged the isolation of the
north, constricted and redirected its commercial linkages, and forced the
reorientation of its political and economic life. Such histories suggest
that imagining Australia as isolated, and as having been fundamentally
shaped by a ‘tyranny of distance’, are approaches that reveal an essentially
European imaginary which sees the continent as globally marginal because
of its distance from Europe, and as ‘cut off’ because it is surrounded by
water. But being ‘girt by sea’ (to borrow a phrase from the national anthem)
is only isolating if oceans are understood as barriers. An important
sequence of scholarship on the Macassan trade has suggested that bodies
of water like Torres Strait and the Timor Sea were bridges that encouraged
movement and exchange rather than barriers. Macassan praus would


travel to Australia’s north coast with the northwest monsoon and work from a series of established processing sites, preparing and drying trepang before sailing back north.

Such readings echo a key line of argument in Pacific studies which, following Epeli Hau’ofa’s famous formulation that Oceania might be understood as a ‘Sea of Islands’ linked by deep and abiding connections, stresses the ubiquity and significance of maritime connections. Just as the native peoples of Oceania fashioned a host of circuits of mobility and cultural exchange long before any European was even aware of the ocean – which they termed ‘Pacific’ – British imperialism did not suddenly animate the north and draw its people into cross-cultural exchanges for the first time. In fact, the advent of the British empire around Torres Strait had almost the reverse effect. Colonial rule and the common impulse of British authorities to tie people to the land to make them legible and readily subject to state power constrained the mobility of both Indigenous peoples and those of Asian origin. Queensland Aboriginal policy eventually prevented Torres Strait Islanders from venturing into northern Australia, the same laws prevented Indigenous peoples from travelling overseas, and eventually the Macassans were evicted. At the same time, the appointment of customs officers policed regional trade and made it less profitable. Taken together, these initiatives led to some linkages becoming atrophied as they drained the key cross-cultural networks of their dynamism. But such legislation could not deny the consequences of history and it did not erase existing populations. Into the early 1900s, Asian labour remained of vital importance, local cultural formations continued to be heavily imprinted by their historical Asian connections and in many parts of the north, Asian and Indigenous populations continued to outnumber those of European ancestry until at least World War Two.

Thinking about the pattern of Australian history from the north produces an alternative set of temporal turning points and understandings of cultural landscapes from those that have been dominant in Australian historiography. Regina Ganter has observed, however, that the history of the Australian north, with its mobile populations, complex connections and long-standing multi-ethnic populations, sits uneasily with the ways in which Australian history primarily is written:


The fundamental commitment to Anglo-Celtic history seems beyond argument. Nor will it do to make allowances for the unique history of Broome, the unique history of Thursday Island, the peculiar history of Darwin, Derby, Wyndham, Cooktown, Cairns and any number of northern townships – how many exceptions does it take to break a rule?\\n
As I have suggested with regard to some very different contexts, it is vital to produce ‘perspectival histories’ of colonialism, accounts of the past that recognise the very different experiences produced out of the operation of particular networks and processes in specific locales and the divergent apprehensions of the world that are produced. Put simply, Australian history looks very different if it is narrated from Darwin, Sydney Cove, Norfolk Island, central Melbourne, Hobart, Fremantle or from the heart of inland Australia. One danger with some recent ‘transnational’ work, including some of the scholarship on the ‘British world’, is that it offers histories of cultural ‘flows’ which pay no attention to the ways in which they operate in various locales and do not grapple with the contingency of networks, the gaps and lumps within them, and the starkly divergent consequences that can arise from connections (or, conversely, a lack of connections).\\n
Even though this work on the Australian north has produced richly contextualised studies of colonialism that are attuned to both place and mobility, it seems to have little success in shifting the basic contours of the Australian national story. This continues to be plotted around a chronological sequence – like the dates I rehearsed at the outset of this essay – that is primarily defined in European terms; Anglo-Celtic actors and perspectives remain firmly planted at the centre of the national story. This remains the case in Cambridge University Press’s recent two volume history of Australia, which presents an authoritative rereading of the Australian past, whereby the basic narrative arc of Australian history and the identity of the nation itself have not been unsettled in any substantial way by the recent scholarship on the north, on Australia’s\\n
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various connections to Asia and the Pacific, or Australia’s entanglement with non-European world in general.\textsuperscript{32} This parallels the situation in New Zealand, where a growing body of work on the shifting patterns of New Zealand’s connections to Asia continues to sit outside the ‘mainstream’ of New Zealand historical scholarship and has largely failed to have any real impact on national narratives.\textsuperscript{33}

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This tradition of work on Australia’s north reminds us that many forms of geographic mobility sit uneasily within the framework of ‘migration’ that often functions as a kind of default category for ‘mobility’. Much work on migration does not always engage with mobility in a sustained way and instead prioritises questions of identity. The nature of Englishness, Scottishness, Irishness or Britishness, of Punjabi culture and identity or Gujarati identity, or of Chineseness continues to stand at the centre of recent work on migration and empire. Most importantly, such work often conceptualises mobility primarily through the lens of single-direction international migration, rather than the complex patterns of mobility (and stasis) that were frequently integral to an oceanic voyage between imperial sites.

Here, I want to press against a narrow reading that reduces mobility to migration, for migration as a rubric offers a narrow lens, capturing only one broad form of human mobility. Rather than assuming that imperial mobility is best understood through the lens of migration, this essay suggests that mobility in a variety of forms was central to the function of imperial power and the development of modern colonial societies. The empire was a messy blur of moving parts: it was underpinned by a dynamic and expansive, if patchy, mesh of transportation and communication networks; its economic functions were dependent on the movement of

\textsuperscript{32} In particular, there are excellent material and important arguments in Marilyn Lake’s chapter that places Australia firmly in the context of its regional and global connections. But addressing these crucial connections in one chapter alone tends to quarantine the implications of this work, which stresses both the porosity of national boundaries and the complex triangulations of Australian racial formations. ‘Colonial Australia and the Asia-Pacific Region’, in \textit{The Cambridge History of Australia}, ed. Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 535–59. On the ‘triangulation’ of race in Australia see Regina Ganter, \textit{Mixed Relations: Asian-Aboriginal contact in North Australia} (Crawley: University of Western Australia Press, 2006), 1–3.

\textsuperscript{33} The key entry points into this work are: Henry Johnson and Brian Moloughney eds., \textit{Asia in the Making of New Zealand} (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2006); Sekhar Bandyopadhyay ed., \textit{India in New Zealand: Local Identities, Global Relations} (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2010); and Ballantyne, \textit{Webs of Empire}. 
workers, goods, commodities and capital in a variety of directions; and its institutions worked across vast distances. Some of the movement was fast, purposeful, focused and efficient; other forms of mobility operated across shorter distances or functioned more slowly or less regularly; many types of movement in particular localities operated at a small scale: Tim Creswell has repeatedly reminded us of the centrality of such micro-mobilities in everyday life.\footnote{Tim Cresswell, On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World (London: Routledge, 2006) and Tim Cresswell, ‘Towards a Politics of Mobility’, Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 28, no. 1 (2010): 17–31. Another key figure in the so-called ‘mobilities turn’ is John Urry and he has offered an introductory volume: John Urry, Mobilities (Cambridge: Polity, 2007).}

By their very nature, modern empires were extended realms of political, economic, and cultural action and, as such, motion and movement were their very lifeblood. At a fundamental level, the governance of the empire was dependent on mobility. It relied on the ability to move governors, clerks and imperial functionaries from metropole to colony, and from colony to colony. Its coercive instruments – army, navy, police – needed to be deployed and redeployed to extend imperial sovereignty, open up markets, enable ‘settlement’, suppress rebellion and symbolically display the realities of colonial power. Meanwhile, the whole system was underpinned by the shuffling and shuttling of paper.\footnote{Tony Ballantyne, ‘Indien und die Globalisierung Kolonialen Wissens’, in Von Käfern, Märkten und Menschen: Kolonialismus und Wissen in der Moderne, ed. Rebekka Habermas and Alexandra Przyrembel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 115.} John Stuart Mill asserted in the early 1850s that writing was central to imperial power:

That the whole Government of India is carried on in writing. All the orders given, and all the acts of the executive officers, are reported in writing, and the whole of the original correspondence is sent to the Home Government; so that there is no single act done in India, the whole of the reasons for which are not placed on record.\footnote{Second Report from the Select Committee on Indian Territories; together with the minutes of evidence, and appendix (1852–3), 479.}

All those memos, reports, proclamations and minutes moved across vast distances, from small offices or tents at the very edge of empire to larger administrative centres in colonial cities, to the East India Company or the India Office, and to the Colonial Office or the Foreign Office in London. These mobile inscriptions were often attempts to persuade, control and direct; arguments in material form that were physically moved across the
empire and fundamentally shaped its development. That paper moved quicker and quicker from the 1840s, as clipper ships, steam power, rail links and telegraph networks greatly accelerated the movement of news, intelligence and opinion. Paper was so central to British authority in India that it was referred to as ‘kaghazi raj’ – rule by paper.

Here, I am gesturing towards the importance of the mobility of things – especially texts. Rather than thinking about texts as ‘words’ or ‘ideas’, they might be understood as material forms, designed typically to be mobile, to be shared, to be sent, to be stored and retrieved; they were accumulated, ordered, combined, compared and disseminated. Paper’s distinctive materiality – its lightness, portability and plasticity – was integral to this dispersed order and it functioned as a key ‘space-binding’ technology. The construction of an order that connected paper, writing and political power made ‘dominance at a distance feasible’ and was fundamental to the routines of colonial government, law, politics and commerce.

The British empire’s economic system was also utterly dependent on the movement of goods, commodities, labour and capital. Of course, within a maritime empire, vessels, shipping infrastructure (wharves, jetties, warehouses and so on), sailors and a host of specialised workers and maritime technologies were absolutely foundational to operating across the ocean and to the coastal linkages that were vital to littoral colonial settlements. Yet although ships and maritime frontiers are prominent

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39 The distinctions between time-binding and space-binding media (and the attendant political orders they support) were explored in Harold A. Innis, The Bias of Communication (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951) and Empire and Communications (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950).

in the writing of early Australian colonial history, like its neighbouring New Zealand historiography it quickly ‘dries out’ and the culture of the ships and sea are quite marginal in academic historiography (while retaining a popular audience). \(^41\) On land, the early operation of imperial agents and the beginnings of colonial economic development were highly dependent on indigenous routes, knowledge, skill and labour until there were sufficient colonists to secure demographic, military and economic domination. As that domination was produced, those indigenous resources were typically turned to serve colonial interests, while the cultural work of exploration, surveying and ‘pioneering’ tried to overwrite indigenous cultural maps and histories. \(^42\) In the case of Australasia, mobility was integral to sealing, whaling and the provisioning trades. \(^43\) It also underpinned the intricate biological exchanges set in train by empire, which saw animals (alive and dead), plants, seeds and pathogens moving along the pathways and sea-lanes of empire. These trades, like that in sea otter pelts in the northern Pacific, were important extractive activities that pushed beyond formal frontiers of British sovereignty but which also operated in parallel with the activities of South Asian, Southeast Asian and Pacific peoples drawn into servicing the demands of the major entrepôts and markets of Asia, such as Guangzhou or Canton. The work of James Broadbent, Suzanne Rickard and Margaret Steven has highlighted the ways these connections imprinted the material culture of early New South Wales, while Brian Moloughney and I have stressed the economic and cultural significance of trade with Asia in moulding the development of southern New Zealand. \(^44\)

Such networks were reconfigured with time, but I think it important to note that alongside the thick networks and high volume of traffic that linked colonies to Britain, important connections to Asia persisted. Some important recent Australian work has highlighted such networks; Sophia

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\(^42\) In the Australian context, see Dale Kerwin, *Aboriginal Dreaming Paths and Trading Routes: the Colonisation of the Australian Economic Landscape* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010). Thanks to Samia Khatun for pointing me to Kerwin’s work.


Loy-Wilson has recovered the importance of salesmanship, commercial encounters and everyday forms of print culture in creating important but previously overlooked bonds between China and Australia.\footnote{Sophia Loy-Wilson, “The Smiling Professions: Salesmanship and Promotional Culture in Australia and China 1929–1939” (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2012).} For an earlier period, Samia Khatun has reconstructed a set of connections and networks that seem more surprising given the narrative arc of much historical writing in Australia. She has recovered a circuit of camel tracks, trains and ships that linked the Australian interior to the ports of British India and the Indian Ocean trading world: these networks were dependent on the labour and movement of Aboriginal traders and travellers, Indian lascars, Muslim merchants and pedlars, and Bengali camel men.\footnote{Samia Khatun, ‘Camels, Ships and Trains: Translation Across the “Indian Archipelago,” 1860–1930’ (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2012).}

Here again, we might note the centrality of paper’s mobility: information flows (through newspaper reports, letters and business correspondence) were central in shaping economic decision-making. Most transactions that saw goods and capital move across the empire were framed by and enacted through paper instruments: mortgages, invoices and requisitions, bill of sale receipts and ledger books. Paper was also indispensable in the development of the instruments issued by insurance companies; it was increasingly central as a medium of exchange in the form of paper currency; and it underpinned the hundi and hawala systems that allowed for the remittance of funds throughout colonial South Africa, the Indian Ocean, Islamic world and Horn of Africa. If we return to whaling, I have shown the ways in which the mobile inscriptions produced by writing were central in the management of activity in southern New Zealand from Port Jackson and in enabling a return flow of information about the size, quality and movements of whales, the supply of Māori labour, and the relations between various kin and tribal groups that framed the operation of shore-whaling in the 1830s and 1840s.

At a fundamental level, regulation of the mobility of indigenous and colonised communities was central to the operation of colonial power. Metis bands travelling out from Red River following bison and engaging in cross-border trade, ‘travel-happy Samoans’, nomadic tribal people and adivasis in India, and mobile Aboriginal communities were hard
for colonial states to ‘see’, control and police. While cross-cultural encounters reshaped many indigenous pathways, it would be a mistake to imagine that British colonialism suddenly animated non-white communities, a point that Damon Salesa has made to good effect. Recent work has shown that ‘mobility in its ubiquity is fundamental to any understanding of African social life’ in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods, stressing that it has long been embedded in everyday life and was not necessarily the result of political turmoil or social upheaval. One of the key features of British rule in South Africa was the drive to control the movement of Africans, regulating the labour market and firmly connecting black servants and domestic workers to white households from the time of the Caledon Code of 1809 which required all ‘Hottentots’ (Khoikhoi) to have ‘a fixed place of abode’. Wayne Dooling has shown that the provisions of this legislation were exploited by colonists who also effectively deployed it as a tool to legitimate the dispossession, dispersal and destruction of Bushmen populations of the Cape. African social historians have shown, however, the limits of such projects in the long term, highlighting the growing prevalence and importance of the ability of colonised women to move, exploit economic opportunities, and maintain connections to home and kin, even within South Africa. At one level, it is possible to read this as an extension of the deep-seated and highly-structured forms of mobility that were integral to African economic life and political formations in

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48 Salesa, ““Travel Happy” Samoa”.


51 Ibid., 52.

the three centuries before the onset of formal European colonialism. A rich vein of recent African social history has explored the polyvalent significance of mobility, including its role in establishing claims to land and hunting resources, shaping cultural memory and social space, entangling doctors, nurses and midwives in African social situations, and inflecting the distinctive forms of colonial urbanism that took shape across the continent. Steamers, trains and buses – but especially bicycles – were key elements in colonial modernities fashioned by Africans on the move.

In South Asia – long imagined by textually-focused Orientalists as stable and even timeless – colonial power confronted a highly mobile society. Pilgrims, religious teachers, mendicants, merchants and castes that specialised in transportation (such as the Vanjaras) often moved significant distances through established social circuits. A continental military market promoted high degrees of mobility as both common soldiers and military specialists of various types – such as Afghani horsemen – were drawn into the service of the armies of regional states and small kingdoms, as well as the East India Company’s expanding military establishment. Most importantly perhaps, substantial communities of semi-nomadic peoples were a key feature of the South Asian cultural landscape. These people inhabited the deserts, broken hill chains and the terai (the swampy marshlands and forests between the northern plains of India and the foothills of the Himalaya). Within these distinct environments, they developed socio-economic orders based around mobility, which the power of sedentary states found difficult to penetrate and corral.

In the early nineteenth century, the East India Company state worked hard to fix these people to the land. In part this was a drive to make them legible to the state but most importantly it reflected a desire to transform them into sedentary agriculturalists who might not only produce more

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for colonial markets but also make reliable contributions to the state’s revenue. This process of sedentarisation was also driven by significant anxieties concerning the dangers that these mobile peoples posed to state authority.58 Such concerns animated one of the most sensational disciplinary projects of British colonialism – the drive to suppress the thags, the bands of thieves and murderers whose practices the British often saw as the result of a hereditary culture and devotional excesses that made themselves manifest through ritual murder.59 This undertaking was an exercise in policing mobility. The state sought to break up these groups of wandering criminals to make travel, trade and property safe. While British writings on thags may have been inflected by Orientalist essentialising, attacks on travellers and raids on property were a very real problem in early nineteenth-century India, when the long-standing tensions between the mobile and sedentary elements of South Asian cultural formations deepened.60 Providing security of movement was a key British priority but this had some unexpected consequences. Colonialism ultimately amplified some existing forms of mobility, expanding and consolidating Hindu pilgrimage and facilitating increased numbers of Indian Muslims to undertake Hajj; and it enabled unexpected mobilities, such as the movement of anti-colonial reformists and pioneering nationalists. Those anti-colonial agents frequently drew on ideas and arguments that circulated widely through print culture.61 An important body of recent scholarship on the print trades, colonial newspapers and the imperial book market has pointed to a powerful traffic in ideas across the empire which effectively fashioned what Isabel Hofmeyr has called an ‘imperial commons’, a common storehouse of information, news and arguments that could be appropriated, recycled and repurposed to meet the needs of particular locales and communities.62

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60 This tension between settled and non-settled peoples was long-standing and had plagued earlier powers: Shail Mayaram, Against History, Against State: Counterperspectives from the Margins (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 84–6.

61 Ballantyne and Burton, Empires and the Reach of the Global.

If we turn to the particular connections between mobility and settler colonialism, there is no better analytical starting place than the great contradiction at the heart of colonisation: that ‘settlers’ were typically unsettled and mobility was their defining characteristic. I think this requires us to rethink how we write about the histories of empire and colonialism in Australasia, particularly when we also consider the manner in which national history writing has marginalised mobile communities and naturalised the nation-state itself.

To stress the restlessness of the ‘settlers’ is no new insight: the idea that settlers were anything but settled has a long lineage and stood at the heart of some particularly influential traditions of thought about the nature of colonial societies. We can find such arguments in a whole range of cultural locations – newspapers, pamphlets, parliamentary debates and travel literature. One striking example of such a text is a volume entitled *Excursions in North America*, first published in 1806. The author suggested that New World societies had regressed because colonists were thinly scattered over the land and as a result, the bonds of sociability that sustain civilisation had not developed. Many American colonists wanted to ‘retire to the uncultivated parts of the country, and obtain a grant of a certain portion of land’. They were restless and fickle people, who built only basic houses, undertook limited cultivation and relied on hunting. The centrality of mobility to the lives they were fashioning meant that they typically ‘quit the spot on which they have bestowed some labour, before it is completely clean, and remove further into the forest, where they can live unrestrained by law or good manners’. As a result these Europeans were degraded, becoming ‘kind of savages’, who were ‘hostile to the Indians, and to their more civilized countrymen, who succeed them’.63 This general argument was demonstrated through reference to a ‘settler’ encountered at Limestone, Ohio. The author explained to her readers that a ‘settler’ is ‘one in search of uncultivated land, where he may choose a spot for himself, on the borders of the savage tribes’. In this case, the settler was headed for the Missouri River hoping to prosper through ‘the multitude of bison, beavers, and elks, and the fertility of soil’.64 The settler was a practical man, travelling alone in his canoe, armed with a carbine, tomahawk and knife, and carrying a pair of beaver traps. Beyond a single blanket, the settler carried nothing else – relying on his hunting skills to supply him with food and pelts for trading. ‘[T]his wandering,

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64 Ibid., 151.
unsettled life, gives these people a distaste to a fixed home: they are no sooner settled, but they dispose of their land to other settlers, who are more civilized, and then set out again to explore uninhabited regions.\textsuperscript{65}

While this life exhibited a kind of manly independence, it did not promote progress; the ‘wretched log-houses’ and neglected cultivations attested to the ways in which these settlers were degenerating, as they enjoyed the pleasure of hunting and moved away from a cash economy and commerce to the simple exchange of articles.\textsuperscript{66}

The author of this text was Priscilla Wakefield, an influential Quaker social reformer, pioneering female author on botany, travel and manners, and grandmother of Edward Gibbon Wakefield. Her work harnessed the conventions of travel writing for educative purposes. Although Priscilla travelled little and had never been beyond Britain’s shores, her reading enabled her to produce a sequence of imaginary travel narratives, most of which followed family groups on journeys within Britain, Europe, America and Asia. These narratives used the empire as the basis for significant criticism of both British society and colonial development, anticipating many of the arguments that her grandson would make about the dangers of large land grants and the importance of ‘concentration’ to the cultivation of ‘civilization’ in the colonies. But mobility was not only a problem for Priscilla Wakefield because it was central to colonial development, but because it also posed a threat to government authority. Throughout her work mobility, when not the province of elite European travellers, was dangerous and destabilising: her volume on Africa is full of ‘wandering hordes’ and mobile tribes that raid sedentary communities, plunder traders and parties of travellers, and whose depredations combined with their inability to engage in cultivation to produce useless wastelands.\textsuperscript{67}

Her narrator in the \textit{Traveller in Asia} marvels at the Great Wall as ‘one of the most stupendous efforts of human industry’, reminding us that Wakefield did not see civilisation as solely a European accomplishment.\textsuperscript{68} Beyond the wall, Wakefield’s travellers ‘recede from the establishments of civilised life’, traversing long distances without seeing ‘the vestige of a town, or even a house’. While the Tartars of the central grasslands and other nomadic peoples from further north were

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 152.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 152–3.

\textsuperscript{67} Priscilla Wakefield, \textit{The Traveller in Africa: Containing Some Account of the Antiquities, Natural Curiosities, and Inhabitants of Such Parts} (London: Darton, Harvey & Darton, 1814), 78, 100–1, 293.

\textsuperscript{68} Priscilla Wakefield, \textit{The Traveller in Asia: Or, A Visit to the Most Celebrated Parts of the East} (London: Darton, Harvey and Darton, 1817), 229.
excellent horseman as well as being hospitable, they were also fractious, ‘superstitious, ignorant, coarse in their domestic habits’.  

The fear of cultural decline that supposedly arose from unrestricted mobility stood at the heart of Edward Gibbon Wakefield’s influential arguments about empire. In his important imaginary travel narrative-cum-reformist tract, *A Letter from Sydney* (1829) Wakefield suggested that colonists in New South Wales were swiftly becoming ‘a Tartar people’. A colonial economy built around pastoralism and the provision of large land grants meant that the colonists were dispersed across the colonial landscape, making little impression upon it; the growth of towns was retarded; and the emergence of the social bonds integral to ‘civilisation’ were arrested. Ultimately, civilisation would founder and Britain would not be able to govern the colonists: ‘our grand-children will assert their independence’ and they ‘will govern, or rather, misgovern themselves’. 

Wakefield offered a theory which he believed would reconstruct the colonies of settlement, making the British empire as a whole into an ordered and functioning system rather than a ‘miserable mess’. Fixing the price of colonial land would be the key to reordering colonial development: set at a ‘sufficient price’ it would still offer the prospect of social advancement while effectively tying labourers to their employers until they earnt sufficient capital to purchase land of their own. Wakefield did not see himself as a utopian but as a reformer: he was hoping to redirect the population flows out of Britain that had accelerated since 1815 and to replace haphazard emigration with systematic colonisation, imposing a new order on the mobility of Britons in order to uplift it and make it efficient and useful. As I have recently argued, these arguments were themselves mobile and they moved across the globe through the newspapers, pamphlets and speeches. Wakefield’s writings had a significant impact in Canada, South Australia and especially New Zealand, but they also had some purchase in the United States of America where debates over land, markets and migration remained central in nineteenth-century politics. His ideas were debated in Ceylon, India and South Africa. Beyond the empire, they were pivotal in reframing Brazilian Intellectuals. 

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69 Ibid., 232.
71 Tony Ballantyne, ‘Remaking the Empire from Newgate: Wakefield’s *A Letter From Sydney*’, in *Creating an Imperial Commons*.
land law in 1850. Wakefield’s models continued to have currency in France for several decades and were prominent in French reflections on colonialism at the turn of the twentieth century.

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These themes can be explored by reference to one colonial project that was explicitly guided by Wakefield’s work. The settlement of Otago was established in 1848 by the Otago Association, a colonising body growing out of the Lay Association of the Free Church of Scotland which took Wakefield’s scheme of systematic colonisation as a template for its work. The creation of the colony was enabled by the Ōtākou purchase of 1844. In this agreement Tuhawaiki, Karetai and Taiaroa, the leading chiefs of the Kāi Tahu iwi (tribe), agreed to the sale of 400,000 acres in return for cash payments and the creation of three reserves totalling around 9500 acres that were set aside for the sole use of the tribe. This clearly delimited block offered the fledgling Otago colony enough space for colonists to establish a sound base of commercial agriculture without opening up so much land that the pioneering colonists would immediately disperse.

The sale undoubtedly constrained the material base and future prospects of the tribe. The economic order of Kāi Tahu was mobile and dispersed, as they had developed economic practices attuned to a cool climate where key Polynesian plants did not grow. Their economy was based around the seasonal exploitation of a host of food plants, birds, fresh and saltwater fish, and shellfish from many different sites across the tribe’s territory (māhika kai). Technological innovation developed to allow many of these food items to be preserved for future use as well as for trade and exchange. Given the large area of land under the tribe’s control, the importance of marriage in creating connections between far-flung kin groups, and the centrality of mobility to Kāi Tahu life, these rights were diffuse, layered and focused on particular places connected to certain resources.


75 For example, people from Ōtākou moved in whānau (family) groups for the later spring and summer into the interior, eeling and catching birds from a network of sites, where these items would be processed and preserved: Edward Ellison, Submission to Waitangi Tribunal Wai-27, C12, Hocken Collections, Dunedin.
Central to the colonial order in the south was a disjuncture between the understandings of property and usage rights between colonial officials and Kai Tahu chiefs. The colonial state did not recognise māhika kai practices – eeling, capturing birds, fishing – as establishing property rights, and neither it nor the Otago Association, which oversaw the foundation and early development of the colony, sought to alienate those rights in its negotiations for land. This reflected a conscious decision of the colonial state to discount the significance of food processing sites such as eel weirs, and a more general assumption that as such sites were used seasonally, they lacked the continuous occupation and labour inputs needed to secure a valid cultural claim to ownership. But by way of contrast, colonists believed that their property rights were exclusive and as such enabled them to restrict access to streams, swamps and riverbanks that had traditionally been rich sources of food and resources for Kāi Tahu. The drainage works that colonists undertook on the Taieri river system from the early 1850s adjusted the flow of maka (creeks) and reclaimed as much land from repo (swamps) as possible. Drainage was absolutely essential to the growth of colonial settlement on the Taieri plain (just southwest of Dunedin) and in the transformation of that region’s ecology from being the foundation of a seasonal water-based economic system into a highly productive site of early colonial agricultural and pastoral activity based on family farms.76

From the outset, questions of mobility were laced into the fundamental debates around the operation of the colonial economy and its social development. From the 1850s, ‘waste lands’ – those lands purchased by the colonial authorities, not belonging to Māori and not yet purchased by colonists – were hotly debated. The main issue here was how such lands should be developed. This was not simply an economic issue but opened up fundamental debates over the organisation of colonial life. Here again, questions of mobility were critical as the ‘disposal’ of ‘waste lands’ would open up the interior, enabling colonists to push out beyond the narrow coastal enclave of early settlement. Essentially, this was a contest between two competing visions of the economic future: one stressed the primacy of pastoralism, to which Wakefield and many of Otago’s pioneering leaders were opposed, while the other was the plan of the dominant Otago Association, which championed the smaller scale mixed

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family farm. It was not only a clash between big and small capital, but also a dispute over the cultural consequences of large landholdings seen to have been typical of the colonial development in New South Wales and Victoria. In Otago many church leaders, politicians and journalists who were sympathetic to the original vision of the settlement as a structured and orderly Free Church colony reworked arguments about the evils of pastoralism that had been sharpened in contests over the rights of squatters in the Australian colonies. Critiques of pastoralism in Otago stressed the deleterious effects of dispersed settlement and underdevelopment that resulted from sheep runs. From the early 1850s travellers and journalists reported on an interior almost devoid of organised settlement, with a few houses miles apart, and scattered flocks of sheep roaming vast acreages. The colony could only escape the inequalities of the old world if large tracts of land did not fall into the hands of a few and was instead closely settled by agriculturalists and small farmers securely knitted together by social ties. Dunedin’s Daily Telegraph neatly summarised this position in 1864: ‘no new country can ever attain greatness except that its inhabitants become wedded to the soil’. Almost a decade later, the Otago Witness argued that ‘[t]he settlement of people on the soil is believed to be the one thing needful to make a new country prosper and cause its population to increase steadily. If this can be accomplished everything else that is required to make a country great and prosperous will follow.’

These questions remained important in the 1870s because the contours of the settlement – which hugged the coast, reflecting the limited resources and knowledge of the colonists – had been blown open by the discovery of gold in 1861. Complementing the mobility of squatters who pushed into the interior in the 1850s, gold tugged colonists inland. The announcement of payable discoveries had a swift impact, as colonists from the coast were joined by ‘the Victorian hordes’ who swiftly arrived from Melbourne, in many cases on steamships that had recently been put on that route by local capitalists such as James Macandrew as well by

78 The Victorian antecedents were particularly stressed because influential Victorian pastoralists like ‘Big’ or ‘Moneyed’ W. J. T. Clarke held runs in Otago.
79 Some colonial opinion-makers articulated a fear that pastoralism would restage the Highland clearances which ‘transformed tracts of country into huge sheep walks and deer parks’. Tuapeka Times, 31 October 1868.
80 Daily Telegraph, 10 March 1864.
81 Otago Witness, 6 December 1873.
large Victorian concerns such as McMeckan, Blackwood & Co. The arrival of men (and very few women) from the Australian colonies elicited considerable anxiety: they were seen as a threat to the balance of class interests and the Presbyterian ethos that moulded the settlement. But they were also mobile and the gold rush redistributed the population, drawing many men away from agricultural work and labour in the towns. The miners’ movement across the landscape was frequently irregular, spasmodic and guided by the latest ‘news’, rumours and gossip. Typically, these men travelled alone or in all-male groups and many colonists worried that nascent goldfield communities were devoid of the civilising effects of wives and children. Some established colonists, particularly those with close connections to the Presbyterian institutions that stood at the heart of early Otago’s culture, were also concerned that goldseekers were propelled by a self-seeking hunger for individual wealth rather than from a deeper social and moral investment in building a stable community where prosperity arose out of industriousness.

In the medium-term, such anxieties proved to be largely misplaced. Many miners did remain mobile: in time, they moved on to other New Zealand fields, travelled to take up work in towns and cities further north, returned to Australia or sought opportunities further afield. But a significant number stopped moving and stayed. As their mobility over long distances came to end, many of these men proved themselves effective institution-builders, establishing Mechanics’ Institutes, Athenaeums, churches, schools, and clubs and associations of various kinds which knotted people together. These men effectively colonised the interior, creating a mesh of social connections, and building settlements that necessitated and were sustained by an increasingly extensive and intensive system of transportation routes and services and communication networks. Out of the helter-skelter days of the early rush, where men chased rumours and parties criss-crossed the landscape with little direction, mature colonial communities supported by substantial infrastructure took shape: mobility remained central to the life of this new frontier of settlement but it was generally of a structured kind, regulated by the clock and the regular services of coaches and then trains. After the gold rushes, those who settled in these towns quickly exhibited a distrust of swagmen, tramps and vagrants, groups who were tightly policed under the terms of the 1866 Vagrants Act.82 Within colonial

82 For an idiosyncratic reading of these groups, see Miles Fairburn, ‘Vagrants, “Folk Devils” and Nineteenth-Century New Zealand as a Bondless Society’, Historical Studies 21, no. 85 (1985): 495–514.
Otago these men were typically part of a seasonal labour force integral to colonial development. In certain types of mobile seasonal work – such as shearing and oystering – Kāi Tahu were particularly prominent and in the case of muttonbirding, this annual harvest on the islands of Foveaux Strait was the sole province of Kāi Tahu whānau (families).  

Anxieties about mobility also focused on the groups of Cantonese miners who had been invited to Otago by the Chamber of Commerce in 1865 in the hope that they might work through the fields and tailings that white miners had left behind. These Cantonese men further stretched the extensive networks that Chinese miners and other mobile workers had established during the nineteenth century, as large numbers of men poured out of Guangdong through Canton and Hong Kong, key nodes in the trans-Pacific world constructed by British imperial activity. These men maintained familial connections through remittances and also through benevolent societies, which had strong linkages to their place of origin, such as the Poon Fah Association of the Panyu and Hua migrants established in Otago in 1869. The labour and small-scale mobilities of these Chinese workers plugged into the more extensive networks of merchants and moneymen. These ranged from the humble storekeepers, who supplied the men with tea, rice and various Chinese foodstuffs and medicine in the isolated locations where they worked, to substantial merchants like Dunedin’s Choie Sew Hoy. The movement of Cantonese men into Otago and New Zealand more generally was largely unregulated in the 1860s and 1870s, reflecting a period in which the ascendancy of liberal ideas that stressed the primacy of the freedom of movement supported a laissez-faire approach to mobility among imperial authorities. As Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds observed of the arrival of the influential merchant and pamphleteer Lowe Kong Meng in Melbourne in 1853, ‘no one asked for papers or passport or proof of naturalisation’. In fact, the fifth article of the Convention of Peking

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83 Michael Stevens, ‘Muttonbirds and Modernity in Murihiku: Continuity and Change in Kāi Tahu Knowledge’ (University of Otago, PhD thesis, 2010).
86 Ibid., i, 93–5.
signed by Britain and China in 1860 promised Chinese subjects freedom of movement within the British empire.

By the 1880s, however, there was growing anxiety about these Chinese colonists. New Zealanders were prominent in global Anglophone debates – which themselves were underpinned by the circulation of newspapers, pamphlets and tracts on questions of race, civilisation and nationhood – over the regulation of migration and the need to implement and police strict border regimes to secure the interests of the colonists and fledgling colonial nations. In New Zealand the mobility of these Cantonese men was used as a key line of argument in the project of instituting tight border controls and producing a clearly bounded national community which included the colonists and Māori but not Chinese migrants. In debates over the Asiatic Restriction Bill (1896), William Whitehouse Collins, a Christchurch freethinker, supported the closing of the borders to Chinese migrants because of the mobile, transnational nature of their movement. Chinese men, he argued, simply wanted to make as much money in New Zealand as they could and then ‘get away’: they were not invested in the nation, its institutions or citizenship.\(^89\) In the same debate A.W. Hogg, a powerful spokesman for rural working-class interests, argued that the Chinese ‘come like an army of locusts, and get all they possibly can’, before leaving. He suggested that their lack of commitment to New Zealand was embodied in the anxiety of Chinese to ensure that funerary customs were maintained and the bones of the dead were returned to China.\(^90\)

These debates remind us that the policing of movement was central to the creation of nation-states and national spaces. Radhika Mongia has argued that fledgling states elaborated new bureaucratic regimes and worked hard to consolidate new visions of the nation in response to the ‘threat’ of the expanded mobility of transnational Asian communities in the late-nineteenth century. National frontiers of settler colonies took shape ‘not prior to but within the context of “raced-migration”’, particularly the movement of non-European peoples to Europe and its settler colonies. These flows were part of a hyperactive form of long-distance mobility and in the case of men from Guangdong, these were part of large and complex circuits that also saw flows of Chinese labour ending up on the frontiers of Manchuria and throughout Southeast Asia.\(^91\) We need to balance an

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90 Ibid., 312.
appreciation that the mobility of Asians was a major global catalyst – a point at the heart of the story of Lake and Reynolds’s *Drawing the Global Colour Line* – with Curthoys’ observation that Asian migration ‘happened *within* rather than *after* a history of colonisation’. A fundamental contradiction that emerged in the so-called settler colonies was a desire to stem some of the flows of people and goods that the empire enabled and which had been central to colonial development. Here, mobility was racialised in stark ways: white settlers – who typically remained mobile – were engines of progress, while non-whites, but specifically Chinese, imperilled colonial development.

If mobility was central in the constitution of colonial space, it was also integral to the making and remaking of place. I have argued in my work on the provincial town of Gore that

> we might think of places as knot-like conjunctures where the ceaseless small-scale mobilities of life in the location interlocked into the more extensive networks that enabled the regular movement of people, things and words in and out of the location. The shape of the knots shifted – as new networks developed, old linkages declined and the relative significance of various connections oscillated.

Exploring the relationships between stasis, the routinised and defined mobilities of everyday colonial life (such as the movement of scheduled shipping services, coaches and trains, and the movement to and from work, the marketplace and places of worship), and less regular or more extensive movements of people, animals, goods, ideas and capital is essential if we are to understand community formation and place-making.

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93 Restricting mobility was never *simply* racialised, but questions of cultural difference stood at the heart of both restrictive legislation and schemes that encouraged certain ‘types’ to migrate to the colonies. For a recent reading that has questioned the weight attached to race and restriction, see Alison Bashford, ‘Immigration Restriction: Rethinking Period and Place from Settler Colonies to Postcolonial Nations’, *Journal of Global History* 9, no. 1 (2014): 26–48.

94 Ballantyne, ‘On Place, Space and Mobility’, 61–2.

Thinking through mobility in these kinds of ways offers crucial insights into the extended domains created by empire. It prompts us to reconstruct the connective cultural traffic moving across vast distances and through localised circuits. It directs our attention to the structure of networks, and the impact of transportation and communication technologies. It facilitates thinking about different forms of human connection, apprehensions of space and time, and the collision between, and co-existence of, different epistemologies, social systems and forms of economic organisation. It enables us to see, think and write about dynamics that operated across the contemporary national boundaries that we frequently take for granted. And taking movement seriously directs our focus to those ‘micro-mobilities’ that operated on a small scale in specific locations. Thus the history of mobility invites us to escape the placeless and abstracted analytical viewpoints that often underpin national histories. But it also allows us to reimagine the possibilities of writing new national histories that are more nimble, and porous, as well as better attuned to the shifting patterns of motion that have shaped human experience.

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