

Special Section on Settler-Colonial Mobilities

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Transfers seeks to broaden the geographical, empirical, and theoretical reach of mobilities scholarship. Our editorial team especially aims to foster innovative research from new locales that moves our field beyond the social sciences where the “new mobilities paradigm” was first articulated. This journal is part of a growing intellectual project that brings together theoretical developments and research agendas in the humanities and the social sciences. Our ambition is to bring critical mobilities frameworks into closer conversation with the humanities by encouraging empirical collaborations and conceptual transfers across diverse disciplinary fields. The articles presented in this special section forward those aims in several ways.

First, the articles in this special section present a small sample of research from a part of the world that we might broadly call settler-colonial Australasia and the oceanic spaces of connection that surround it. These articles provide insight into contemporary scholarship in a locale that has so far garnered little attention in our pages. Second, the historical perspective of these articles places them squarely within a humanities tradition. They were first presented at the 2013 Australian Historical Association annual conference, held at the University of Wollongong, which had the theme “Mobilities and Mobilisations in History.” Third, these four articles sit within the new intellectual project that is re-visioning this huge region through scholarship inspired by the “transnational turn.” Described as the most important development in the discipline of history this century,¹ transnational scholarship does not begin from the premise of national distinctiveness that has long provided the impetus for historians, especially those dealing with newly established nation-states. Rather, transnational approaches denaturalize the nation, thus rendering our historical imaginings less parochial by tracking the networked relationships and global circulation of entities and relationships across borders. In the case of the articles presented here, those movements flow between the metropole and its colonies, between colonial states, and across the borders of the Indigenous polities subsumed by and within settler states. Finally and most importantly, in offering critical reflection of settler-colonial historiography, each contribution also places mobility as a central term of analysis. The articles further our thinking about how historically specific material and symbolic movements—of people, animals, things, and ideas, in scales both large and small—have been the founding condition and grounds of possibility for



settler colonialism, the distinctive form of colonialism that is the focus of this section.

Settler-colonial formations are, after all, stridently mobile formations. They are self-styled “new” worlds that emerge out of the “old” worlds from which settlers traveled to claim sovereignty over Indigenous lands.² Settler worlding through the displacement and replacement of “natives” is, however, more than just a matter of the transportation of people, things, and ideas from the metropole, across “open” seas and onto Indigenous territories. Settler societies were constituted in, and continue to be structured by, ongoing processes of material, social, and cultural transformation that are predicated on—expressed through and measured by—motility and mobility. Foundational to settler colonialism are both the potential and actual capacities of settlers to roam as autonomous sovereign subjects around the world and across the territories they claim as their own—and conversely to circumscribe and control the mobilities of Indigenous peoples, to immobilize the former sovereign owners of those territories.

As the recent upsurge in theoretical debates on settler colonialism has highlighted, the practices, narratives, and experiences of settler colonialism are related to but not the same as those in colonies of exploitation.³ Settler colonists do not primarily move to exploit the labor of others or expand metropolitan markets, though they certainly seize any opportunities to do so. More fundamentally, settlers travel to stay. They move, in order to make a new home elsewhere. For every settler colony the key collective task is to create a sovereign polity that is different from (and avowedly superior to) both the Indigenous polities they seek to replace and the society of their origin. By material and symbolic means, settlers claim Indigenous lands as their own, reshaping Indigenous spaces into settler spaces and remaking themselves into the “new natives,” legitimately at home on somebody else’s land. Unlike “classic” colonies of exploitation, the kinds that are most often envisioned in the term “postcolonial,” there is no template for settler decolonization. When a settler colony achieves independence, settlers and more recent immigrants (those appellants who are obliged to apply to settlers for inclusion in the polity) are, of course, not forced to return “home”—either to the metropole or their other places of origin, which are increasingly no longer home to them. The colonized, furthermore, are not free to establish their own polity.

Precisely what decolonization might mean in the context of a settler society is a “wicked” problem, which has defied resolution. Just what needs to be done to move from a settler society to a *decolonized* settler-colonial polity (a “desettlerized” one?), has barely been imagined beyond a very weak notion of “reconciliation.” Progressive forces within settler societies have not moved far toward devising conceptual frameworks or finding a language adequate to narrating that passage.⁴ Even though the voices of Indigenous intellectuals and activists have been increasingly heard in national and international fo-

rums, in settler historiographies the realities of the past and their legacies in the present all too often continue to be sidestepped and elided. The histories that settlers tell themselves and the language of their narration continue to surreptitiously invert the very mobility that is foundational to the formation of their polity. In terms that have become commonsensical, the newcomers routinely portray themselves as the settled rather than be named as the restless nomads of colonial expansion, and it is all too easy for settlers not to recognize or respond to ongoing Indigenous geographies.

In Australian historical narratives the national past was initially conceived of as an offshoot of British history. There was a sense of cultural lack in which Anglo-Australians were largely portrayed as transplanted Britons who had only set down shallow roots on the continent.⁵ Independent national histories began to emerge in the late 1950s and are thus little more than half a century old. Partly in reaction to metropolitan condescension, the first avowedly nationalist histories produced emphatically territorial, or land-based, perspectives that tracked the emergence of an exemplary egalitarian, prosperous, and racially exclusive nation-state.⁶ Australia was imagined as a “workers’ paradise” for white men, one that was animated by the fear of being swamped by Asian migration from the north and Indian migration from the west. They were heroic narratives, structured around hardy settlers who “battled”—not against native people defending their territories—but against a heartbreakingly hostile environment in a “remote” part of the world. That nationalist, terrestrial focus became so naturalized and commonsensical that, as E. H. Stanner pointed out in his seminal radio lectures of 1968, the newcomers’ dispossession of Aboriginal peoples largely disappeared from academic historical analysis for the greater part of the twentieth century. The brutal realities of Aboriginal dispossession, which could barely be ignored in the nineteenth century, had by the mid-twentieth century become a “cult of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale.”⁷ Only in the past few decades have transnational histories that place settler colonialism in its broader global context come to the fore.

Nationalist perspectives on territorial consolidation and national becoming have been transformed in response to the insistence and critiques of Aboriginal peoples. Indigenous conceptions of Oceania as a “sea of islands,” for example, envision the Pacific Ocean not as a boundary or a limit, nor as empty space that belongs to no one, but as a fully acculturated place. Historical scholarship has increasingly characterized the ocean as an enabling medium of mobility and connection.⁸ In some senses, this transformation in thinking about the Pacific, and in recent years about the Indian Ocean as well, may be seen as a parallel move to Paul Gilroy’s analysis of the connective power of the Atlantic in the production of black countercultures of modernity.⁹

Frances Steel’s contribution to our special section, “The ‘Missing Link’: Space, Race, and Transoceanic Ties in the Settler-Colonial Pacific,” well demon-

strates this new scholarship in Pacific histories. In her analysis, the ocean is conceived as a bridge or a series of routes that extend across great distances to connect the “Pacific Rim,” the five continents that encircle it. Movements across the Pacific Ocean have long been represented in epic terms, certainly in Indigenous narrative traditions but also in Western stories of oceanic exploration during the high period of European empire building and the search for the Great South Land. Recent postcolonial histories have self-consciously returned to and extended that vision of the Pacific as a cultured place created through mobilities of all kinds, a dynamic zone where worlds meet and collide across the contact zones of beaches and shipping terminals.¹⁰

Steel follows the fraught and contested emergence of settlers’ transoceanic lines of steamship movement across the Pacific between Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Canada in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century. For Australian settlers on the Eastern Seaboard, the bulk of the population, this represented a turning away from the Indian Ocean, which had previously provided the route to the imperial home of England. Simultaneously, it was a concomitant westward turn to the Pacific for Canadians, especially once a single gauge trans-Canadian railway was completed. These revised orientations to and within the British settler empire in the Pacific constituted a new oceanic frontier, which not only reflected and shaped emerging economic and political regimes but also created new cultural practices and fostered new affective ties. Those fragile steamship lines worked to bind the Pacific Rim into a closeness, which as Steel carefully tracks did not simply “emerge” or unfold through some internal logic or deterministic process but were actively created by particular historical actors in the contingent and messy negotiations, ideologies, and material realities of settlers’ maritime mobilities at that specific historical conjuncture.

Settler mobilities operate at all scales, from the circulations of ships across oceanic space to the small-scale movements of specific people in particular places, through and across Indigenous landscapes whose structures and meanings can remain conveniently invisible to the newcomers. Samia Khatun’s contribution to our special section, “Beyond Blank Spaces: Five Tracks to Late Nineteenth-Century Beltana,” offers a nuanced analysis of motion and place via the intersection of Aboriginal and settler mobilities in the northern deserts of South Australia. Her analysis proceeds from a particular location, a highly significant conjunction of material and symbolic lines of travel for the traditional landowners and increasingly for the newcomers as well. Over millennia, that place was a hub for Indigenous journeys that extended through the numerous national territories that stretched across the length of the continent. When newcomers arrived, with their plants, animals, and technologies, in the middle of the nineteenth century it also became a sheep station and was given a new name. Beltana developed as both a ration station for the dispossessed landowners and a launching place for settler mobilities into the

arid lands beyond. The station became a camel depot, a new home to people and animals who had traveled from northern regions of the Indian subcontinent. Cameleers and camels continued to be crucial to inland exploration, transport, and the consolidation of colonial settlement for the next seventy years, well into the 1930s. By the 1870s, a decade after the first camels arrived, Beltana became a relay station on the transcontinental telegraph line, part of a global system of communication that afforded the rapid movement of symbols from Adelaide to Europe. Only a decade later, its role as a multimodal hub of travel and communication was further extended when it also became a stop on the thread of narrow gauge railway line that settlers hoped would one day link Adelaide to the center of the continent.

Khatun employs a critical mobilities perspective, which places settler and Indigenous mobilities into the same analytic frame. This she proffers as a political move against settler historiographies, stories that to the present day perpetuate the colonial project of erasing Aboriginal geographies and Aboriginal settlement. Indigenous sovereignty, however, has never been ceded—at that location or in any other part of Australia. As she tracks the complex, interwoven trajectories of mobility created by Aboriginal people and newcomers at that locale, Khatun recuperates the ongoing reality of Indigenous spatialities, which have survived into the present and incorporated the new materialities and socialities that settler colonialism brought. She portrays Aboriginal and settler place-making as dynamic processes shaped through a plethora of interconnected mobilities, always present and always undergoing change.

If Steel and Khatun have emphasized the ways that mobilities have been foundational to Australian settlement, Catharine Coleborne in her “Mobility Stopped in Its Tracks: Institutional Narratives and the Mobile in the Australian and New Zealand Colonial World, 1870s–1900s,” considers how mobility was simultaneously experienced as a challenge to settler communities. Recent work has drawn attention to the ways that stasis is both the necessary other and the desired endpoint of the foundational mobilities that brought populations across the world to create settler societies. Stadiac theories of human development, particularly those propounded by Scottish Enlightenment thinkers like Adam Smith, designated European forms of settlement as a higher stage of civilization than the purportedly random movements of nomadic peoples. Such sociocultural evolutionary thinking provided a powerful justification and structuring principal for colonial ideologies well into the twentieth century. As Coleborne reveals, mobile populations of various kinds—the insane, the vagrant, the destitute, the restless, and of course the “nomadic” Indigenous populations and racialized “others” that composed heterogeneous settler societies—were subjected to and the targets of official regimes of surveillance and institutionalization.¹¹

Coleborne traces how the insane and destitute of the colonial Australasian world posed a threat to the imagined social order of settler societies. These

were polities that felt compelled by the circumstances of their foundation to project themselves as exemplary societies in-the-making, destined to be superior to the “old world” they grew out of. Teasing together fragmentary sources—particularly surviving institutional case records from Auckland and Melbourne—Coleborne presents us with rare glimpses into the lives of those whose mobility took them around the world before they were suddenly immobilized. Her analysis highlights the restlessness of colonial life, painting a picture of a society in which movement, in spite of its settlerist commitments, remained a defining characteristic. She renders the mobilities and fixities of these subjects of official surveillance and containment briefly visible, textually anchored by the circumstances of their institutional confinement. In this microhistory, Coleborne evokes the larger anxieties that irregular mobilities—across the globe and through other similar institutions—represented to the settler project at that historical moment.

Nadia Rhook, in “‘Turban-clad’ British Subjects: Tracking the Circuits of Mobility, Visibility, and Sexuality in Settler Nation-Making,” continues the exploration of stigmatized mobilities into and through the spaces of the settler-colonial state, this time at the turn of the twentieth century. Rhook’s analysis draws attention to the interdependencies of oceanic and terrestrial (im) mobilities in the pressing project of creating a white settler nation. Her focus is on settler anxieties about and efforts to restrict the mobilities of racialized “others,” entrepreneurial Indian hawkers who were made visible in public spaces by their turbans and the circular patterns of their movement. Most alarming for white observers was not just the presence of male Indian bodies in public places, but their proximity to the domestic spaces of their rural female customers. At a moment when Australians were preparing to found a federated polity that was to be exclusively governed and populated by white Australian Britons, turbaned Indian hawkers served as a touchstone for settlers’ entwined anxieties about mobility, immigration, gender, sexuality, and racial purity.

Rhook’s analysis traces the relationship between the flows of Indian men and settler imaginings of racialized and sexualized violence—across the Indian Ocean, from the Indian Mutiny of 1857 to a southern Australian colony, and between the capital cities and rural spaces of nineteenth-century Australia. Turbans, which in the metropole were seen as a symbol of the loyalty of Sikh soldiers toward their British colonial masters, became forty years later in a settler colony emblematic of sexual and physical threat to apparently vulnerable women and children, and a challenge to settler notions of ordered space that should be firmly under the control of white men. White settler nationalism in Australia and beyond, Rhook concludes, rested on the real and imagined control of the mobilities of subaltern, colored people across land and sea.

We present these four articles and the Commentary to the special section, “Breathing Fresh Air into Mobility Studies from Down Under” by Clapperton Mavhunga as contributions to the project of rereading settler-colonial formations through practices and representations of movement, circulation, moorings, and stasis. Moving across and dwelling within spaces and representing those movements were essential to actualizing the settler state. But mobilities are also key to the more subtle and never-quite-finished cultural processes of settler formation: of making and remaking landscapes, of imagining national spaces and the links between them, and of forging the subjectivities of people who dwell in and pass through those spaces.

As historian Tony Ballantyne recently put it, when it comes to connections between mobility and settler colonialism, there is no better starting point than the “great contradiction at the heart of colonisation: that ‘settlers’ were typically unsettled and mobility was their defining characteristic.”¹² Steel, Khatun, Coleborne, and Rhook have here employed critical mobility perspectives to draw out the processual: the dynamic and constantly in-processes status of the historical phenomena that we try to narrate. The angle of vision on settler mobilities revealed here have so far been most influential in Australian scholarship, where theoretical re-visionings of settler colonialism have reanimated intellectual and political debates. We look forward to further scholarship from other locations—the United States, Canada, South America, Africa, Asia, the Middle East—indeed all other contexts where a critical mobilities perspective can provide new understandings of the past, present, and future of those colonial formations that were created through the movement and stasis of nomads who convinced themselves and the world they should be called “settlers.”

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Notes

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- national-history; <accessed 11 September 2015> Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake, eds., *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective* (Canberra: ANU E-Press, 2005).
2. Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Georgine Clarsen and Lorenzo Veracini, "Settler Colonial Automobilities: A Distinct Constellation of Automobile Cultures?" *History Compass* 10, no. 12 (2012): 889–900.
 3. See, for example, the journal *Settler Colonial Studies*, <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rset20#.VZH7GBOqqk/>. < accessed 11 September 2015>
 4. Lorenzo Veracini, "Settler Colonialism and Decolonisation," *Borderlands e-journal* 6, no.2 (2007), http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol6no2_2007/veracini_settler.htm < accessed 11 September 2015>.
 5. Ann Curthoys, "We've Just Started Marking National Histories and You Want Us to Stop Already?" in *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation*, ed. A. Burton, 70–89 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
 6. Russel Ward's hugely influential *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1958) is a seminal work in this Australian national historiography. For an analysis of his influence, see the special edition of *Journal of Australian Cultural History* 10, no. 2 (2008).
 7. Ann Curthoys, "Stanner and the Historians," in *An Appreciation of Difference: W.E.H. Stanner and Aboriginal Australia*, ed. Melinda Hinkson, 233–258 (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2008).
 8. Epeli Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," *Contemporary Pacific* 6, no. 1 (1994): 148–161; Damon T Salesa. "'Travel-happy' Samoa: Colonialism, Samoan Migration and a 'Brown Pacific,'" *New Zealand Journal of History* 37, no. 2 (2003): 171–188.
 9. Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
 10. David Armitage and Alison Bashford, eds., *Pacific Histories: Ocean, Land, People* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Matt Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds: A History of Seas, Peoples and Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Greg Denning, *Beach Crossings: Voyaging across Times, Cultures and Self* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2004).
 11. Nan Seuffert, "Civilisation, Settlers and Wanderers: Law, Politics and Mobility in Nineteenth Century New Zealand and Australia," *Law Text Culture* 15 (2011): 10–44.
 12. Tony Ballantyne, "Mobility, Empire, Colonisation," *History Australia* 11, no. 2 (2014): 7–37, here: 36.