

## On Place, Space and Mobility in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand



IT IS TIME TO REASSESS the historiography of colonial New Zealand in the wake of three decades of postcolonial historical writing. The brief sketch which follows of the four most significant variations of postcolonial history suggests that these traditions — when taken collectively — have fundamentally recast our understandings of the nature of colonization and its consequences. But these traditions of critical postcolonial reflection, I also suggest, have in addition worked to produce a rather static and flat view of the past built around a remarkably stable vision of the nation-state. There have been recent calls to rethink received versions of the national past, most especially in Giselle Byrnes's introduction to *The New Oxford History of New Zealand* that advocated the adoption of a more explicitly transnational approach to the history of these islands.<sup>1</sup> This article argues that a turn towards transnationalism in itself is only a partial response to the challenge of rethinking New Zealand's histories. Rather, I suggest here that historians need to grapple with questions of location, space and scale more generally; they need to think under and beyond as well as across the nation. I also argue that if this undertaking is to enrich our understandings of the changing social formations that have developed in these islands, this new work has to pay much closer attention to the relationship between economics and the cultural domain. One key tool for undertaking this, I suggest, is the question of circulation. I argue that taking circulation seriously will not only allow us to explore the dynamics through which specific places developed and the ways in which the nation-space took shape, but it will also allow us to think much more carefully about these islands' place in the much broader stories of the development of imperial regimes, global capitalism and modernity itself from 1769 onwards.

At the outset, it is useful to sketch quickly the main traditions of postcolonial historical writing that have developed in New Zealand. To define postcolonialism as a lineage of scholarship and critique that draws upon a canonical body of texts by literary critics and theorists such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha is restrictive and misleading; such a definition merely identifies one variant, albeit the most intellectually visible, of postcolonial intellectual work. Rather, following Ania Loomba, it is more useful to think of postcolonialism more broadly as creative, scholarly and political work designed to advance the 'contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism'.<sup>2</sup> Working with Loomba's formulation, it is possible to identify four main streams of postcolonial historical writing that have coalesced in New Zealand.

The first of these is a tradition of critical Maori writing that challenged the popular idea that New Zealand had exemplary 'race relations' and highlighted the continuing consequences of colonization. These critiques were part of the deep-seated cultural and political mobilization that is frequently identified as the 'Maori

cultural renaissance'. Ranginui Walker offered articulate and forceful assessments of New Zealand's past and its contemporary dilemmas in a long-running sequence of articles in *Listener*, arguments that were extended through his two most influential books, *Nga tau tohetohe* and *Ka whawhai tonu matou*.<sup>3</sup> Although it was not a work of historical scholarship, Donna Awatere's *Maori Sovereignty* (1984), which grew out of a series of articles she wrote for the feminist journal *Broadsheet*, catalogued what Awatere saw as the Pakeha cultural imperialism at the heart of New Zealand's history. In this withering polemic she argued that colonization was a systematic programme to undercut the 'Maori nation' and suggested that racism lay at the heart of both Pakeha identity and state practice. Maori, she argued, had been ensnared in a 'death machine' by the Pakeha colonizers.<sup>4</sup>

The second strand of work is a looser assemblage of critical revisionist scholarship primarily produced by Pakeha historians and anthropologists during the 1970s and 1980s, partially in response to the kinds of arguments developed by Walker, Awatere and other Maori writers. This historical work offered revisionist reassessments of the colonial past. It strove to explain Maori marginalization, expose the limits of the stereotypes produced of Maori during the colonial past, and reassess the position of Maori in the making of New Zealand. This approach tended to be grounded in the languages of liberalism and scholarship and was more moderate than the forcefully activist language of Walker and Awatere. This enabled the re-evaluations of New Zealand history developed in these texts to gain greater purchase amongst Pakeha, especially those on the political left and in the universities, professions and bureaucracy. Some key works here included Alan Ward's assessment of the development of racial amalgamation policies and their consequences; Paul Clark's re-evaluation of Pai Marire that attempted to overthrow received colonial images of savage and fanatical Hauhau; Judith Binney's reassessments of Te Kooti and Rua Kenana; and James Belich's landmark study of the New Zealand wars which deconstructed the Victorian interpretation of racial conflict by foregrounding the sophistication of Maori strategy and the depth of Maori agency.<sup>5</sup> Belich's work, of course, highlighted Pakeha racism, and by the mid-1980s this was an abiding concern of these revisionist histories of colonialism. While land loss and its consequences were significant themes in this new work, they emphasized Pakeha racism rather than imperial strategy or colonial capitalism as the main drive wheel for the colonization of New Zealand. Historians, inside and outside the universities, were effectively challenging Keith Sinclair's 1971 argument about the superiority of New Zealand's race relations.<sup>6</sup> This new scepticism about the historical pattern of Maori-Pakeha relationships found increasingly fertile soil in a political terrain energized by Maori activism and the prominence of anti-racist politics in the wake of the 1981 Springbok tour. A significant element of this reassessment of the colonial past was a concern to trace the connections between race and sexuality; overthrowing the legacies of Victorian New Zealand depended on casting off its legacies of social reserve and sexual repression as well as its racism. Echoing earlier indictments of Pakeha Puritanism developed by R. M. Chapman and Bill Pearson, historians now saw missionaries and colonists as transplanting a particularly noxious mix of sexual anxiety and racism to New Zealand during the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

A third significant body of work began to take shape after the Treaty of Waitangi (Amendment) Act of 1985 granted the Tribunal the power to inquire retrospectively into Maori historical claims against the Crown. The place of historical work in the Tribunal has been widely dissected and debated, but here it is worth underscoring that, as it has developed, this tradition of postcolonial scholarship is particularly notable for three reasons. First, it has valued Maori oral tradition and historical practices as evidence that must be assessed in adjudications on historical Crown actions; in other words, it has adopted a strategy that has consciously challenged the privileging of written documents that has frequently been at the heart of Western historical practice.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, this juridical history is narrowly framed as an enquiry into the actions of the Crown that contravened the Treaty. This approach has put the state at the centre of both Maori and national history, while simultaneously reframing the colonial state through the abstract formulation of the Crown.<sup>9</sup> Thirdly, the Tribunal has played a part in the shaping of a new discourse on the 'principles of the Treaty', and these have subsequently fed back into the historical scholarship of the Tribunal. This has created a kind of interpretive feedback loop where past actions are adjudged by an idealized late-twentieth-century codification of a set of rather messy texts and negotiations concluded at a variety of sites in 1840.<sup>10</sup> Suffice it to say that even as principles provide a valuable blueprint for organizing relationships between the state and iwi Maori today, they fail to illuminate the realpolitik of empire-building where treaties functioned as important instruments to legitimize imperial intrusion and to lever new lands and resources.<sup>11</sup>

The final substantial cluster of research that we can think of as constituting postcolonial historical writing in New Zealand is a body of work largely produced by University-based historians on 'cultural colonization'.<sup>12</sup> This scholarly tradition is closest to the postcolonialism that developed out of the work of Edward Said on the place of textual representation in empire-building and identity formation. In the New Zealand context, this work has focused on the ways in which colonization rested on assertions of cultural superiority, the appropriation of Maori culture and the control of landscape, flora and fauna. While this approach has been particularly developed through Michael Reilly's work on colonial collectors, Giselle Byrnes's studies of surveying and toponyms, and Chris Hilliard's work on the colonial culture of writing, it was Peter Gibbons who played a key role in developing this way of seeing the past.<sup>13</sup> In an arc of articles across two decades, Gibbons developed two key arguments. First, he suggested that colonization was not a chronologically demarcated process that ended at some point around 1900; rather, Gibbons stressed that colonization was an ongoing process that continues to shape the nation-building process until today.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, Gibbons drew new attention to the manifold and strong connections between cultural production and the processes of colonization. He suggested that colonization could be understood as a sequence of processes where exploration, invasion, occupation, appropriation and nation-building depended on the creation of cultural asymmetries as well as political and economic inequalities. In other words, Gibbons reimaged colonialism as a cultural project where power rested in the point of the pen as well as the end of a musket. In this view, books, maps and museums were as much instruments of domination as courts and prisons.<sup>15</sup>

Taken collectively, these four traditions of postcolonial writing have transformed our understandings of the colonial past here in New Zealand. In sum, they have all suggested that colonial domination was a cultural as well as a political project and, as such, they have tended to offer cultural explanations of colonization. In fact, all of these traditions have placed 'race' — culturally understood — at the heart of their interpretations of colonialism. There has been some interest in the intersections between race and gender — as well as a small body of work on the ways in which race and religion intersected in the nineteenth century — but, generally, race has been privileged and other markers of difference, especially class, have been pushed aside.<sup>16</sup> All too often this new scholarship has been framed around a rather essentialized and undifferentiated opposition between Maori and Pakeha, underplaying, ironing out or simply ignoring the complex fissures on either side of the racial divide — as well as occluding those groups who simply do not fit into this neat dichotomy.

These approaches to the past have also produced one other consequence: they have all consolidated the primacy of the nation as the key unit of analysis. Treaty-focused historiography has framed the period following 1840 around iwi-state relationships. Of course this reflects the vital role that the Tribunal has played in the nation's political economy, functioning as an outlet through which the state can manage the historical grievances of Maori iwi. But the sheer weight of this research, which is frequently ordered around a narrative of resource loss, means that we know comparatively little about the broader functioning of Maori economic life, even though recent works by Hazel Petrie and Michael Stevens offer some significant insights.<sup>17</sup> But it has not only been in the Tribunal historiography where the nation-state has assumed centre stage in our historiography of colonialism. Even though the critical revisionist work of the 1970s and 1980s challenged the optimistic tone of the established tradition of national history, it cemented rather than questioned the analytical primacy of the nation. In fact, this work can be read as reaching towards a kind of decolonized vision of national history where the primacy attached to Britain in both the imperial history tradition and in early Anglocentric writings of historians of New Zealand like Condliffe and Morrell were fully and finally rejected. Ironically this meant that J. G. A. Pocock's call for thinking about New Zealand as part of an extended archipelagic British history — first articulated in Christchurch in 1973 — was made at the very moment when New Zealand historians turned their backs on both Britain and the empire.<sup>18</sup>

In a similar vein, scholars who have explored the dynamics of cultural colonization have been preoccupied with the colonial past as the foundation of the modern bicultural nation. This narrative framing has tended to abstract the colony from its broader imperial contexts and from its significant connections to Australia, the Pacific, Asia and the Americas. In fact, what really occurred within academic historiography in the 1970s and 1980s was an inward turn. The authority of national history quarantined New Zealand research on colonialism from some key international debates so that, for example, there was no engagement by New Zealand historians with the influential 'gentlemanly capitalism' thesis of empire-building forwarded by Peter Cain and Tony Hopkins.<sup>19</sup> Only recently has this inwardness begun to be prized open. In addition to some of the essays in

*The New Oxford History of New Zealand* (such as those by David Capie and Damon Salesa), a cluster of writings on the connections between Asia and New Zealand in the nineteenth century, and Lyndon Fraser's and Angela McCarthy's work on Celtic migration, have begun to provide a skeletal frame for our understanding of New Zealand's place in the nineteenth-century world.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, while research on local and regional history has continued to be strong, it generally lacks the authority of texts that address national questions. A great deal of popular historical writing is local history, but it frequently lacks an analytical edge. Of course, there have been some very rich academic studies of local social formations, including Erik Olssen's work on Caversham and Rollo Arnold's work on Kaponga.<sup>21</sup> The tendency has been, however, to read these local studies as microcosms of the nation, and their representativeness has been subject to strong debate. Most importantly, Miles Fairburn has repeatedly asserted that the social history of colonial New Zealand should be grounded in the nation as an analytical unit. This position of course prioritizes the nation over the actual site of research; it means that Olssen's Caversham or Daley's Taradale or my own recent work on Gore is only significant when it can illuminate the 'national pattern'.<sup>22</sup>

Critical of the calls for a more disaggregated approach to colonial social history made by historians such as Raewyn Dalziel and Clyde Griffen in response to his *Ideal Society and its Enemies* (1989), Miles Fairburn argued that it really was the national pattern that mattered and that there was little substantial regional variation throughout the colony.<sup>23</sup> In an essay he co-wrote with Stephen Haslett, Fairburn used a limited body of quantitative data to argue that there was nothing unique about Wellington's social pattern — it replicated the broader New Zealand patterns and these patterns had the same causes. The idea of 'considerable regional variations', Fairburn and Haslett contended, was an 'untenable historiographic convention'.<sup>24</sup> Since then, it is notable that the questions of the national versus the local have not deeply concerned New Zealand historians, certainly not in the way in which questions of race, gender or national identity have attracted critical interest. While there have been some excellent pieces of work produced that focus on specific localities — such as Caroline Daley's work on Taradale or Pamela Wood's study of hygiene in colonial Dunedin — these have rarely kindled a debate on questions of place or space in New Zealand history (which is not so surprising in Wood's case, as she explicitly offered Dunedin as a microcosm of New Zealand).<sup>25</sup> Most importantly, these kind of local studies become readily assimilated into a national history. Regardless of the author's intentions, other historians tend to use such localized studies in a fairly unreflective manner to make generalizations about an aggregated New Zealand, or they are regarded as a brief backdrop to the emergence of a coherent national identity, the main plot line of the drama of national and frequently nationalistic histories.<sup>26</sup>

In the remainder of this article I wish to offer some ways to press against the ascendancy of an aggregated and naturalized national history. An important starting point for this is an insistence on the fundamentally constructed and artificial nature of 'New Zealand'. It is true that some historians already gesture towards this; Peter Gibbons has been the most forceful when he noted in 2003 that New Zealand was and is 'a discursive construction, a shorthand device for referring to a

multiplicity of places, peoples, products, practices and histories'.<sup>27</sup> Yet the nation-state has frequently been deployed anachronistically. At one level the uncritical use of 'New Zealand' has persisted because of a lack of other easy options; there are stylistic and analytical difficulties with other ways of framing the story of the nation built in this particular South Pacific archipelago. However, the primacy attached to the nation in the post-World War II period has reflected the desire of successive generations of New Zealand historians to make the past speak to our political and cultural present, especially as they have been preoccupied by the 'search for national identity' and have sought to reconstruct how the processes of 'making peoples' produced racial identities, at least those of Maori and Pakeha.<sup>28</sup>

This deep concern with the lineages of our contemporary identities has reified the nation. Historians tend to use 'New Zealand' as an unproblematic analytical referent without sufficient emphasis on the nation's limits or its constantly-in-process status. The nation-state's consolidation was and is dependent on projecting and actualizing a nation-space. This was driven forward by the state as various government officials, agencies and departments produced a sophisticated apparatus of maps, atlases and charts that documented the geography of the nation and projected it as a coherent and clearly defined unit. This project was reinforced by the state's creation of a symbolic repertoire including currency, stamps, a coat of arms, a flag and a national anthem. This was a messy and frequently *ad hoc* process, where developing international conventions, inter-colonial exchanges, local popular initiatives, and the continued weight of British initiative and opinion were strong. Once fixed upon, these were not simply empty symbols but articulations of state power — power that was exercised through legislation and the operation of the legal system. The *New Zealand Gazette* and the printing of various proclamations were central instruments for the state to articulate its policies and power to the public. These laws, of course, not only asserted the paramountcy of the state and its monopoly on the deployment of coercive power, but they were also designed to regularize the function of the political process and to standardize the operation of the market and key social institutions like schools, hospitals and prisons, as well as producing a standardized national time.

Perhaps because there has been relatively little work on the culture of the state historians have tended to treat the actual geographical unit of New Zealand as a given. This was certainly the case in the *Frontier of Dreams* television series and its companion volume, a large-format national history. While the first chapter opened by cautiously referring to the 'land we call New Zealand', the remainder of that chapter and the volume as a whole deploys 'New Zealand' unproblematically, using it as a designation for the fragments of land that sheared off Gondwanaland around 200 million years ago. This created a tension between a geological and geographic narrative that emphasized dynamism and the anachronistically stabilising use of the modern term for these islands.<sup>29</sup> Of course, how the appellation 'New Zealand' was attached to these islands and became the commonly used term — at least in Europe — is a long and complex story that involves Dutch, French and British exploration, cartography and imperial intrusion. Ultimately the name 'New Zealand' became authoritative in a European context because of its constant reiteration in print culture and on cartographic artefacts like maps, atlases

and globes. It was given real political shape with Lieutenant Governor Hobson's proclamation of British sovereignty over 'the Southern Islands of New Zealand commonly called the "Middle Island," and "Stewart's Island", and the Island, commonly called "the Northern Island"' on 19 June 1840.<sup>30</sup>

Hobson's proclamation and the maps of the early nineteenth century remind us that what made up New Zealand was not necessarily self-evident. In many of these maps the Chatham Islands do not feature. Of course, when they were 'discovered' in 1791 by the Vancouver Expedition and claimed for Great Britain, they were not imagined as part of 'New Zealand' at all. It was through a ramshackle sequence of imperial statutes and colonial legislation that various off-shore islands — from the Chathams to the Three Kings, from the Kermadecs to the subantarctic islands — were incorporated into the political territory of New Zealand.<sup>31</sup> This reminds us that the nation-space is the product of complex legal processes that have frequently reshaped the spatial and legal boundaries of the nation. Indeed, Marston and Skegg have noted that New Zealand's Parliament has tended to 'define the spatial ambit of New Zealand in different ways in order to fit the purpose of a particular piece of legislation'.<sup>32</sup> Even in our contemporary moment, the geographic boundaries of New Zealand are not necessarily fixed or stable: it was only in 2008 that the United Nations Commission for the Limits of the Continental Shelf confirmed New Zealand's sovereign rights to 1.7m square kilometres beyond the 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone.<sup>33</sup>

As this brief discussion suggests, New Zealand can be understood as both an artefact of the cultures of European empire-building and a territorialized legal entity that was the product of a complex set of imperial, international and national statutes and laws. As Matthew Henry has shown, by the early twentieth century the nation's borders were selectively reinforced and reinscribed through immigration law and the operation of a passport and permit system, a system that itself was part of the growing international regulation of human mobility by states and a mechanism that was central to the production of citizenship across the globe.<sup>34</sup> Henry's arguments about how borders were imagined and policed could be a useful starting point for a deeper historical account of the constitution of national boundaries post-1840. Key studies by Radhika Mongia, Craig Robertson and Adam McKeown of the technologies and routines of governance that instituted global borders and sharpened definitions of territorial sovereignty could also energize work on the legal production and reproduction of the nation-space.<sup>35</sup>

Thinking about the regulation of human movement reminds us that nations were given shape by communication and transportation networks. These fashioned the pathways that regularized human movement within the nation, as they connected distinctive regions into larger systems of mobility and exchange, and enabled the consolidation of national markets and information flows.<sup>36</sup> In the New Zealand context, communication technologies and transportation networks were fundamental to the assertion and operation of state power and the consolidation of the nation-space. Colonial development proceeded from the scattered coastal settlements that developed around whaling stations, missionary communities, timber-processing sites and pioneering merchants. Even with the progress of systematic colonization along Wakefieldian lines in the 1840s and 1850s, colonial

New Zealand was an essentially littoral society in 1860; all major settlements had direct access to the ocean and the sea was the highway that connected these outposts. Ports were the key clearing houses for imports, exports and inter-regional trade. They were transit points for migrants and maritime workers, key sites for information exchange and the heartbeat of the colonial economy. The sea connected each of the key centres of colonization with their hinterlands as well as with Australia, Britain and beyond. Given the continued dominance of sail power and the vagaries of a temperate maritime climate, into the 1880s travel could be slow and services irregular.<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, it was the development of the networks on the land that enabled more extensive colonization and the filling out of the nation-space. The construction of bridges and the extension of road, rail and telegraphic networks were central in connecting the coastal enclaves that constituted the initial bridgeheads of British colonization. Roading developed slowly given the scattered nature of settlement, the challenges posed by extensive river networks and the cost of road-building and the provision of ferries, fords and bridges.<sup>38</sup> Even though coastal shipping provided key connections for the colonial economy around 1880, roads and railways were particularly important in 'opening up' the interior, allowing colonists to extend the pastoral frontier and access valued resources, especially timber, in inland districts.

Of course, railway construction was particularly important to the expansion of state power and the consolidation of the nation-space. Rail enabled much faster travel, services ran regularly, and the pulling power of steam locomotives meant that larger loads of passengers, materials and commodities could be moved swiftly between significant urban centres within the nation. It was not coincidental that Julius Vogel drove forward the massive state-sponsored public works projects of the 1870s and was the architect of the abolition of provincial governments in 1876. But even as these transitions certainly invested new power and authority in the central government, these expanding networks were not all-encompassing, and the gaps and fragilities of these networks had material and cultural outcomes. The difficult coastline and slow extension of road and rail networks meant that the Catlins, for example, were relatively isolated, and colonists in the district repeatedly stressed the underdevelopment that resulted from this lack of infrastructure.<sup>39</sup> Further north, Nelson lost its status as a key colonial port as it was swiftly eclipsed by Lyttelton and Port Chalmers and it remained relatively isolated because of the underdevelopment of its overland connections.<sup>40</sup> The weakness of such connections had real political consequences. Hawke's Bay separated from Wellington in 1858, and in 1869 Marlborough ceded from Nelson as a consequence of the poor transportation linkages and divergent visions of the importance of infrastructure.<sup>41</sup> Connections to the outlying islands were dependent on the weather and irregular shipping timetables, and remained very patchy well into the twentieth century. In comparative terms linkages to New Zealand's new colonial holdings in the Pacific were more regular and efficient, but taken collectively the sinews linking these outlying islands and colonial holdings to the North and South Islands were thin and loose at the start of World War I.<sup>42</sup> These connections were not subject to the 'time-space convergence' produced by the telegraph, railways and steamships that Eric Pawson has suggested were central in the consolidation of 'New Zealand' as a political and cultural space between 1880 and 1940.<sup>43</sup>

In light of this discussion it is clear that Gibbons was correct to note that 'New Zealand' might be a useful 'shorthand device', but we must be careful not to overestimate the speed or extent of its consolidation or simply equate it with the North, South and Stewart Islands.<sup>44</sup> The other danger with an uncritical use of 'New Zealand' as a primary analytical unit or site of argument is that it is an imaginative abstraction that moves us away from the specific places where people have lived and built their homes and the very particular locations where the consequences of state policy or circuits of mobility have played out. Ultimately, the uncritical deployment of 'New Zealand' as an analytical device can blind us to the ways in which the processes of colonization and inter-colonial exchanges naturalized the nation.

Of course, it is true that since 1769, New Zealand has developed within a context of the growing emergence of the nation-state as a key structure to govern economic and political life at a global level. But this was not a quick or easy triumph; many scholars have demonstrated the profoundly uneven and arrhythmic calcification of modern nation-states across the globe. This was a story, of course, that was entangled with the struggles inherent in empire-building and colonialism; Judith Binney's recent work on Te Urewera is a powerful reminder of some of the long-term consequences of the struggle to secure state sovereignty in the face of opposition from social and political orders established long before the onset of colonialism.<sup>45</sup> So while Caroline Daley's assertion that 'New Zealand was born modern' should stimulate new debate over the nature of colonial cultural sensibilities, we must not think New Zealand was born complete or fully formed in 1840.

One strategy for reassessing the consolidation of the nation-state is the important arguments sketched by W. H. Oliver and Jane Thomson in the early 1970s. In their work on the East Coast they suggested that from the 1890s a gradual and uneven 'nationalisation of provincial life' unfolded, where the isolation and particularities of the Gisborne region were slowly eroded by the growing significance of the state and the stronger pull of national politics.<sup>46</sup> This was an important argument that recognized the real depth and weight of intra-regional connections and regional affiliations of various kinds, while simultaneously recognizing how the growth of state capacity built new connections between the citizenry and the machinery of governance. But this line of analysis — which would have been grounded in a careful consideration of the interfaces between local, regional and national markets, the integrative work of communication and transportation networks, the growing significance of national media, and the intersections between local and national politics — has not been pursued with any commitment by New Zealand historians. In the 1970s and 1980s, historians were increasingly preoccupied with thinking about the nation through the lens of identity, rather than thinking carefully about its structural moorings or the social processes that the nation was produced out of. Oliver and Thomson's argument might provide a useful starting point for future work that is committed to exploring the rather uneven development of national structures and for evaluating the persistence of regional and local traditions that are not easily assimilated into the national imaginary.

My own work on intellectual life in colonial Gore suggested another way in which we might denaturalize the nation and challenge the priority of national histories: it stressed the importance of thinking under the nation and taking place seriously.<sup>47</sup> The turn towards cultural analysis in humanities scholarship has frequently emphasized community and the production of imagined collectives including race and nation, a shift that has frequently occluded the specificities of geography, producing what the geographer John A. Agnew has identified as a broad 'devaluation of place' in scholarly analysis.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, the primacy of textual criticism and questions of cross-cultural representation in academic history writing has tended to produce readings of the colonial past that underplay the importance of locality and its broad cultural significance. Of course, as Gavin McLean has recently reminded us, there has been a long-established and enduring tradition of writing local histories, a tradition that tends to be underestimated by university-based historians.<sup>49</sup> It is certainly true that much of this tradition is convention-bound and provides a shallow sense of the broader contexts that influenced local development, but these works have engaged readers because they offer a rendering of the past that is not only accessible but that conveys a connectedness to place, a sense that readers typically share with the author.

Local histories often invoke an image of a fixed and stable closed place, defined by a strong sense of distinctiveness and community. They stress the development of local institutions and celebrate the contributions of founders, pioneers and heroes. Often written by and for a certain social grouping that has been prominent in the place's historical development and social life, they stress a coherent identity. Conventional local history narratives place a heavy emphasis on institutional development, narrating the foundation and growth of institutions and organizations: schools, churches, libraries, museums and athenaeums, lodges of various kinds, sports clubs, literary societies and various voluntary organizations. Framing local history as the development of local institutions, however, produces a picture of the locality that tends to emphasize stability and fixity, especially once towns reach a certain level of maturity. But such an image is fundamentally misleading, producing a partial image of life in the locality and encouraging a vision of the past that is enclosed, self-contained and coherent.

But, while places are unique, their character and the sense of place that inhabitants have are rarely as seamless as local historians would have us believe. Among those who settled or moved through a location there was a multiplicity of relationships to place. My recent essay on Gore hinted at this, as it highlighted the centrality of conflict in shaping community life in the 1880s and 1890s and the ways in which members of the Salvation Army or residents of Chinese origin had at best an angular relationship to the population of the town as a whole, its buildings and institutions, and the flows that actually make life in the locale. Charting these kinds of divergent positionings in the processes of community formation not only allows historians to explore how communities emerged out of social conflict but also underscores the value of perspectival histories that are committed to recovering the divergent angles of social vision possessed by specific groups.

Critical work in geography offers something of a counter-narrative to this kind of popular writing about the local. Places are not simply fixed places on a map inhabited by a unique, singular and stable community, with some distinctive history internal to themselves. Rather, as Doreen Massey has argued, places are 'constructed at a particular constellation of social relations meeting and veering together at a particular locus'.<sup>50</sup> In other words, each place is unique not only because of its particular topography and demography but because it sits at a specific point where a unique set of networks, movements and exchanges intersect. Places are constantly being remade by the work and changing shape of these convergences. This kind of vision is a useful way of progressing Felix Driver and Raphael Samuel's call to re-vision what local history might be, as they posed the question: 'Can we write local histories which acknowledge that places are not so much singular points as constellations, the product of all sorts of social relations which cut across particular locations in a multiplicity of ways?'<sup>51</sup>

We might return to Gore, a significant provincial town and service centre in eastern Southland, as a case study to tease out the possibility of such perspectives. The strong tradition of local and regional history relating to Gore emphasizes the development of local institutions and the important contributions that pioneers, founding families and local notables made to the development of the town. In fact, it is a work on Gore that Chris Hilliard uses to demonstrate how the long lists of names and institutions and potted biographies that are the stock in trade of local history emphasize the primacy of commemoration and celebration within the genre.<sup>52</sup> One of the things missing from these works is the constant swirl of people and things moving in and out of a place. These connections and movements actually *made* places. Gore demonstrates this clearly. Although the Southland Provincial Council, going back to at least 1862, had plans to create a town near the 'Long Ford' over the Mataura River, Gore only emerged as a substantial settlement as the result of the construction of new transport networks in the 1870s. A small number of colonists had settled the area in the late 1850s, led by the pastoralists Alexander McNab and Peter McKellar. The discovery of gold in the Waikaka and Nokomai rivers in 1862 increased the significance of the river crossing and the associated settlement, which became a staging point for miners travelling west. At the same time, an accommodation house and ferry service were established by Daniel Morton, and in the following year Cobb and Co set up stables in the town to serve its expanding services that linked both Invercargill and Dunedin to the goldfields. As the traffic of prospectors declined in the mid-1860s, the fledgling settlement diminished; in fact, between 1865 and 1874 Gore primarily existed as a transit point on the Invercargill to Dunedin postal route.

It was the expansion of the railway northwards from Invercargill in 1875 that gave rise to Gore as a permanent settlement. In real terms, Gore was the direct product of this rail connection, and in this regard it echoes the small North Island towns that sprang up around the construction of the main trunk line, explored in an early article by Peter Gibbons.<sup>53</sup> After the arrival of crews working on the railway, small stores, hotels, lodging houses and entrepreneurs offering services settled in Gore. The businesses built by these colonists ensured that Gore became an important stopping point on the Invercargill–Dunedin line, and by the end of the

1870s it had emerged as the key service centre in eastern Southland. The regularity of the Dunedin–Invercargill service meant that mail to and from these main points north and south moved in and out of Gore three times a day. These rail networks ensured that communities to the north and east, like Waikaka, Pukerau, Clinton, Kelso and Waipahi, and Edendale and Wyndham to the south, viewed Gore as their primary commercial and service centre. Another important set of linkages ran out to the west to the ‘Elbow’ (near Lumsden), which enjoyed a daily mail service from Gore. Roads and rail lines linked Mandeville, Riversdale, Balfour, Waikaia and Lumsden into Gore’s western orbit. As the junction point for these networks Gore became larger and more significant in the economic and cultural landscape; its population expanded five-fold between 1885 and 1905, when it reached 3500.

With this growth, the town offered an array of services and developed capacity for small-scale processing and manufacturing. By the middle of the 1890s it boasted several hotels, a good range of shops (including bakers, butchers, bookshops, chemists and draperies), legal and banking facilities, and also a wide variety of skilled tradesmen including blacksmiths, boot makers, watchmakers, saddlers, coachbuilders, printers, a sail-maker and cordial manufacturers. Each of these enterprises drew materials, workers and customers from the rail and road connections that converged on the town, and in turn they used these routes to distribute their goods. The money, things and the news their workers and customers carried with them pulsed in and out of the town on a daily basis. These flows were the lifeblood of local institutions and associations. But while clubs and societies were central to the development of intellectual life and civic culture in the district, in the 1880s and 1890s they were not stable. The movement of young men within and beyond the district meant that there was a high turnover of membership and that institutional life tended to develop around a few key families who were firmly rooted in the district and committed to fostering associational culture.<sup>54</sup>

In New Zealand, our existing historical scholarship underplays the significance of these communication structures and patterns of movement. Local histories tend to see transport and communication as simply elements of the internal development of a particular settlement, while national histories tend to treat them as forces simply connecting places.<sup>55</sup> I am suggesting here that we place much greater importance on the role of transport and communications in dictating the contours of the colonial economy, in shaping the rhythms and routines of colonial cultural life, and in shaping the specific social formations that emerged in each locale and district. Places like Gore, or Greymouth or Greytown for that matter, were produced out of the confluence of trajectories and pathways where people become entangled in the dense and fluid webs of social relations that take shape in a very real material environment, a landscape that itself influenced the nature and timing of institutional development and the broader patterns of economic activity and cultural development.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, 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 —

they changed, they were dependent on time. In this view, places are not the static, local antithesis of an inherently mobile imperial system or global network. They are, to an extent, always global as they are products of their intersection with long-distance networks created by empires and other transnational complexes.<sup>57</sup> Massey suggests that through the work of connections and mobility places are constantly made and remade, shaped and reshaped: they are ‘moments in process’.<sup>58</sup> If anyone should think that this is an obtuse formulation, then they might think through the events in Otago in June and July 1861. The massive inundation of miners attracted by news of payable gold fundamentally transformed the Otago colony: in 1858 less than 1800 colonists lived in Otago, but by end of the 1860s more than 15,000 lived in Dunedin alone. This surge of population drove colonization west beyond the Taieri; it was gold that finally dragged the colonists into the largely ‘unknown’ interior. The arrival of these miners propelled Dunedin’s commercial and civic development, and they gave rise to significant networks that firmly linked southern New Zealand to the Australian colonies, primarily Victoria, and after 1865 Guangdong.<sup>59</sup>

As historians we mainly access these flows of people through various written sources. Our archives — colonial newspapers, pamphlets, diaries and letters — give us fleeting glimpses of particular moments and vectors of movement. But we can productively reread colonial sources through the lens of mobility and circulation, rather than reducing individual sources to a kind of metonym where a particular source is simply equated with its place of production. The *Mataura Ensign* or the *Southern Standard*, for example, can be mined for information on the local institutions and politics in Gore, but a careful reading of these papers with a more flexible understanding of place produces an awareness of the constant movement of people, things and goods. Massey’s argument that places were produced by the intersection of the trajectories of various groups across the landscape accords with newspapers that reported on the movement of shearing gangs and itinerant rural workers, followed touring lecturers and showmen, informed readers of visiting professionals of various types from surgeon dentists to clairvoyants, phrenologists to midwives, and dissected the sequences of public speeches across the district that were a stock in trade of political candidates.<sup>60</sup> Reconstructing these trajectories or following the path of one or more of these mobile people is an obvious strategy if we want to know more about how this kind of cultural traffic worked and what its effects were.

Newspapers were an important vehicle that brought the world to the district. They carried stories of local people who travelled within the empire and beyond, but they were also replete with international news that was not only of general interest to local readers but was directly relevant to heated local debates over issues like women’s suffrage or the public standing of the Salvation Army.<sup>61</sup> In fact both the *Southern Standard* and the *Mataura Ensign* record the unending to-ing and fro-ing of local life: people coming to town for livestock markets and auctions; men and women travelling for balls, dances, soirees; groups of people gathering for sports matches, clan gatherings and the meetings of lodges; audiences congregating for lectures, lantern slide shows, recitations and debates; individuals and families travelling to see circuses, exhibitions, agricultural shows, and public

displays; and groups of colonists setting out on picnics and excursions of various types.<sup>62</sup> And the advertisement column — the key to the financial success of any colonial paper — perhaps provides the strongest and most consistent record of the unceasing motion that made the economic and social life of the district. Advertisements for lost dogs, wandering livestock and missing friends, as well as the lists of imported seeds that drove forward the ecological transformation of the district, and the imported wares of the local tea merchants, outfitters, drapers and millineries, capture the movements, large and small, that were the stuff of daily life.<sup>63</sup> In a similar way diaries such as that produced by a young Herries Beattie in Gore in the mid-1890s or the journals of Mary Cranstoun of Edendale record the exchange of news, books and labour between families in the district, and give hints at patterns of cultural consumption, as well as documenting travels across Southland and beyond.<sup>64</sup>

Placing these complex patterns of mobility and circulation under sustained scrutiny might produce some very useful reassessments of the past. Here we have to fight against one key concept that frames our understandings of the colonial past. We typically talk and write of ‘settlers’ rather than colonists, yet the Anglo-Celtic colonists of New Zealand were anything but settled. They were highly mobile individuals who travelled great distances within an empire that had fashioned a truly global network of transport routes. As I have argued here, many colonists remained mobile after they arrived in New Zealand and the circulation of people, money, goods and news was the lifeblood of colonial life.

One starting point for thinking through circulation is Damon Salesa’s argument that colonialism in the Pacific reshaped and redirected the ‘circuitry’ of mobility and social relations within Pacific communities. Salesa argues that Samoan patterns of exchange and mobility were dynamic long before contact with intruding European powers and that Samoans, like other Pacific peoples, actively continued to shape their patterns of movement even as they moved through colonial circuits in the early twentieth century.<sup>65</sup> In the New Zealand case, we can also see how cross-cultural contact and colonization reshaped established Maori patterns of movement and slowly created a new circuitry on the land and along the coasts. Although many images of ‘traditional’ Maori society stress its deeply grounded nature as identity was tied to specific *awa*, *maunga* and *rohe*, in fact movement was a key aspect of the lifeways of *whanau*, *hapu* and *iwi* before Cook’s arrival. *Whanau* and sometimes *hapu* and *iwi* did travel long distances: people travelled to visit kin, to harvest and exchange particular foodstuffs, and to wage war. Some *iwi* — or at least *iwi* in the making — migrated long distances. For example, key groups of *Ngai Tahu* embarked on a long sequence of movement from their original homeland on the east coast of *Te Ika a Maui* that took them to *Heretaunga*, before pushing into *Te Wai Pounamu* in the early eighteenth century.<sup>66</sup> The assertion of *Ngai Tahu* dominance in the south was a long and complex process involving further migration, war and intermarriage with *Ngati Mamoe* (who had also migrated south from *Te Ika a Maui*) and *Waitaha*. As *Ngai Tahu Whanui* emerged out of this process, they fashioned a socio-economic system that was dependent on mobility and exchange; they fashioned complex circuits across the landscape, down the rivers and along the coasts that allowed them to exploit the riches from a host of *mahika kai* (food workings) sites.<sup>67</sup>

The intrusion of imperial agents from 1769 and the formal colonization in 1840 were powerful forces that helped reorganize patterns of movement and the dynamics of community formation in the Maori world. The period between the mid-1810s and 1840 witnessed an intensification and stretching of Maori patterns of movement. There was significant movement as many Maori communities attempted to gain access to new crops, animals, tools and weapons from the sites where Europeans traded, such as Tamaki, Kawhia, Korarareka, Mahia, Kapiti and Otakou. These engagements were important catalysts for a new sequence of military campaigns, migrations and settlements. The recently consolidated Ngapuhi iwi, which enjoyed a significant military advantage thanks to their precocious adoption of muskets, launched a sequence of devastating raids to the East Cape, Auckland, Coromandel and Rotorua between 1819 and 1823. Ngati Toa were also at the heart of the ensuing transformations. After a decisive defeat at the hands of Waikato and Maniapoto, Ngati Toa migrated from their tribal home around Kawhia to the Kapiti region in 1821–22. After asserting their authority over the region in the wake of the battle at Waiorua in 1824, Ngati Toa then launched a sequence of long-distance raids into the South Island from 1831. And four years later, Ngati Mutunga and Ngati Tama, displaced from northern Taranaki, travelled to the Chatham Islands, enslaving, killing and asserting their dominance over the Moriori people. These campaigns, migrations and displacements rewrote the demographic and political map of Te Ika a Maui, Te Wai Pounamu and Rekohu.

Where contact with agents working at the frontiers of the British empire before 1840 encouraged substantial movement and migration, the consolidation of British rule not only reduced Maori mobility but also calcified takewa and rohe. Patterns of movement and migration began to stabilize around 1840, not simply because, as Dorothy Ulrich suggested, an ‘equilibrium’ had been reached in the Maori system of warfare, but also because colonization and the assertion of British sovereignty began to quickly reshape the circuitry of the islands.<sup>68</sup> Under colonial rule tribal boundaries that had only taken shape in the previous couple of decades were now seen as durable and ‘traditional’. Moreover, systematic colonization closed off some possibilities for moving across the landscape and created a new geography of roads, markets, towns and ports that Maori swiftly adjusted to. These increasingly provided a material matrix that shaped the socio-economic position of hapu, a highly influential set of circuits that defined the prospects of communities even as they defined themselves in relationship to awa (rivers) and maunga (mountains).

Thinking through circulation not only illuminates the transformation of the Maori world as colonization progressed, but it also encourages us to think in a more sustained manner about the relationship between colonization and capitalism. Our recent historiography has understood colonization through a very narrow, albeit extremely important, economic lens: that of Maori land loss. But, as Gibbons has suggested, it is time to think much more broadly about how international trade networks, imperial markets and inter-colonial networks shaped the development of this particular colonial economy.<sup>69</sup> Obviously there is a great deal of scope here for new quantitative work about patterns of production, consumption and distribution, but there is also a pressing need to explore the cultural dynamics of markets and the meanings of consumption. The work of Frances Steel and Felicity

Barnes on the role of commodity exports in shaping visions of New Zealand is an important start here.<sup>70</sup> Their work, like James Belich's recolonization thesis, has primarily illuminated New Zealand's relationship to Britain, but the significance of other interconnections remains unexplored, although there have been some exploratory assessments of the significance of commercial linkages to India and China.<sup>71</sup> New Zealand's colonial development was significantly conditioned by the 'open economy' that took shape in Britain between 1750 and 1850, an economy that, as Joel Mokyr has shown, was grounded in the democratization and diversification of consumption and the great value attached to news, information and knowledge.<sup>72</sup> Colonies like New Zealand were heirs to these traditions as well as being significant markets for the outputs of British innovation.

The broader culture of colonial capitalism certainly requires further, and more imaginative, historical analysis. The development of banking institutions, book-keeping practices, cultures of consumption, the profile of key professions and ideas about work and the market all require sustained analysis if we are to understand the depth of the transformations wrought by colonization and the processes through which these islands were incorporated into the developing global capitalist order.<sup>73</sup> Thinking through economic practices is crucial because it will enable us to see some important institutional structures and economic routines as foundational to the development of the colony as a whole, rather than seeing them as technical or arcane elements of business history. A commitment to rematerializing the linkages between colonialism and capitalism is necessary if we are to avoid the crippling line of argument developed by Nicholas Dirks which treats colonialism as a cultural formation that floats free of the exigencies of capitalism, underplaying the significant conjunctures between local forces and imperial impulses in shaping colonial societies.<sup>74</sup> A failure to recognize the centrality of capitalism in shaping the processes of building empire and colonial cultures has made it hard for postcolonial critics to countenance the highly uneven economic consequences of empire-building or even explain why colonialism occurred in the first place.<sup>75</sup>

There are real analytical benefits if we put questions related to mobility and circulation at the heart of our work on the culture of colonization. Fairburn's concern with transience as a key structural condition for the creation of an atomized society remains a paradigm-shifting contribution to our historiography. Yet his work only captured part of the social problem and the analytical challenge for historians of nineteenth-century New Zealand. Colonies were part of empires, which were extended and highly uneven systems of appropriation, circulation and exchange. Empires depended upon their ability to move capital, commodities, soldiers, colonists, merchants and information across space. Circulation was their lifeblood and mobility was a key condition for their very existence. In the colonies, local community leaders and politicians who invested in building New Zealand as a productive and settled colony had to grapple with the challenge of building enduring communities out of this vortex of movement. Too often we have seen the anxious politics of the 1880s and 1890s simply through the lens of race — in anti-Chinese agitation — or class — the persistent anxieties attached to 'swag men'.<sup>76</sup> Rather, the deep challenge that faced the project of nation-building was the need to secure the stability and naturalness of the nation in the persistence

of local and provincial loyalties, as well as the challenges posed by an age of restless mobility. The architects of the nation-state had to create a stable society in the face of extension and acceleration of movement, both within and across the nation. Nation-building coincided with an age of massive migration, not just out of Western Europe but also out of India and China, and it proceeded hand-in-hand with attempts to regulate, regularize and filter those great flows of people.<sup>77</sup> The divergence between the fixity celebrated by nation-builders and the hyperactive movement that was at the heart of the economy and culture of nineteenth-century New Zealand seems like a very productive starting point for exploring the tensions at the heart of the colonial order of things.

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## NOTES

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