

5th November 2012

Dispossession: Indigenous survival, land holding and loss in the midst of settler colonialism

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to ask you if, in principle, you would be willing to contribute to an edited volume, and perhaps take part in a one or two day workshop at the University of Sussex, UK on 4-5 July 2013, provisionally entitled *Dispossession: Indigenous survival, land holding and loss in the midst of settler colonialism*.

The edited collection and the symposium are focused on the experiences of communities of indigenous peoples in settler colonies (potentially including the USA) who managed to retain access to land and create viable farming communities through the early-mid nineteenth century, but who were very often subsequently persuaded, forced or obliged to abandon those enterprises and land holdings. We intend to analyse these communities in an interconnected and comparative way across various colonial sites within and beyond the British Empire during the long nineteenth century, teasing out both the trans-imperial/global, and the more locally generated relations, ideas and practices behind their stories.

The creation of communities such as Coranderk and Rumahyuck in Victoria, the Kat River settlement and Farmerfield in the Cape Colony, and Metlakatla in British Columbia (to give just a few examples) was often the result of circumspect collaboration between indigenous family groups and individual white missionaries and Protectors in a context of rapid and violent land alienation. These episodes of creation will be placed in relation to the trans-imperial humanitarian projects and networks that were intended to mitigate the worst effects of settler colonisation in the early nineteenth century. The demise of such settlements often has to be seen in the context of the increasing control of local and colonial government by settler communities and the relative decline in humanitarian political influence from the mid-nineteenth century. However, each community will be seen as a conjunction of both these larger scale processes and the personalities and behaviours of indigenous and colonial individuals who can be 'known' only through fine-grained, localised research. Our intention is that the volume will deal in the intimate family histories, the economic and legal histories and the trans-imperial political histories of these places as a set of unique but interconnected sites.

contact us

Alan Lester
Professor of Historical
Geography

Department of Geography
University of Sussex, Brighton
BN1 9SJ
United Kingdom

T +44(0) 1273 678473
F +44(0) 1273 673563
A.J.Lester@sussex.ac.uk
<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/geography/>

Both the edited book and the symposium are promised outcomes of a much broader-based Australian Research Council Linkage Grant led by Julie Evans at the University of Melbourne on which Zoë Laidlaw and I are international Partner Investigators. An outline of that wider project follows:

The 'Minutes of Evidence' project was funded by the Australian Research Council in May 2011 and has received substantial cash and in-kind support from nine partner organisations*. The project brings together leading Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists, researchers, education experts and Community members to promote new modes of publicly engaging with historical and structural injustice through creating 'meeting points' (in public spaces, schools, universities, and research) to share memories, understandings and possibilities in relation to the nation's past and present. The project formally began in November 2011.

At the heart of this collaboration is a verbatim theatre performance of an 1881 Victorian government inquiry into the Aboriginal station at Coranderrk, near Healesville. During the development of the project, 'Coranderrk: We Will Show the Country' was piloted at La Mama Courthouse and at Melba Hall, and on-Country in Healesville. The first public season of 'Coranderrk', co-written by Giordano Nanni and Andrea James and produced by Ilbijerri Theatre, was presented at La Mama Courthouse in November 2011. 'Coranderrk' was next performed during the City of Melbourne Indigenous Arts Festival, BMW Edge, February 11-12, 2012, and has just had a successful season in the Sydney Opera House. The Minutes of Evidence project is also preparing a 2013/14 regional tour of the production to Victorian secondary schools, and developing associated curriculum modules that will elaborate the history of Aboriginal Victoria, feed into the new national curriculum, and promote understanding of structural justice.

The socio-legal, criminological and historical research dimension of the project will also locate this episode of Victorian history in a broader narrative of historical and contemporary justice and injustice. Through its interdisciplinary and comparative methodology, researchers will connect a range of official responses to experiences and claims of injustice across time and space (from 19th-century colonial inquiries to contemporary truth and reconciliation commissions) by bringing together the concepts and understandings informing the currently discrete fields of transitional justice and settler colonial studies. The research aims to shed further light on the enduring legacies of past injustices, despite official responses ostensibly designed to redress them, to consider how notions of justice have been formulated, invoked and confronted, and to foster new ways of thinking about structural justice in the present. The project also offers a PhD scholarship for an Indigenous student to undertake research related to the project.

*The Minutes of Evidence project is housed in the School of Social and Political Sciences (SSPS), Faculty of Arts, University of Melbourne.

Chief Investigators: Julie Evans, Jennifer Balint, Nesam McMillan (SSPS), Patricia Grimshaw (SHPS), Jo Cruickshank (Deakin University)

Senior Research Associate: Giordano Nanni (SSPS).

Partner Organisations: VicHealth, Arts About Us Program; Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), Wannik Unit; Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI); Arts Victoria; The Koorie Heritage Trust; Ilbijerri Theatre Company; La Mama Theatre; Regional Arts Victoria; and the State Library of Victoria.

Partner Investigators: Rachael Maza (Ilbijerri); Liz Jones (La Mama); Jenny Bates (Koorie Heritage Trust); Erin Birch (DEECD).

International Partners: Alan Lester (University of Sussex), Zoë Laidlaw (Royal Holloway, University of London)

As the International Partners responsible for this edited collection, designed to contextualise Coranderrk in a more global perspective, Zoë and I would very much like you to consider submitting a chapter. There is plenty of scope for us to negotiate the precise nature and focus of each chapter although we are of course keen to ensure thematic coherence. Chapters do not have to subscribe to the grand narrative arc of land holding, successful farming and decline. Stories which complicate or undermine such generalisations are of particular interest to us.

Ideally Zoë and I would like to convene a workshop of all involved for one or two days at the University of Sussex on 4-5 July 2013, but there are certain constraints that we must alert you to. Unfortunately, as there are no funds allocated for this workshop, all that we are able to provide at Sussex is the conference venue and catering (although there may be one or two exceptions for travel and accommodation if absolutely necessary). We are therefore dependent, I am afraid, on participants being able to raise their own funds, or being in the UK in any case for research around the same time. If this rules out your participation in the workshop, we would of course still welcome your contribution to the book.

I would be grateful if you could let me know whether you are interested in both the edited collection and the workshop in principle at this stage.

Thanks and best wishes,

Alan