

their wages, are all issues that are dealt with by Rockel. In addition, and of extreme importance, as they generally fall by the wayside in virtually all discussions of pre-colonial African communities, the roles and positions of women and children in the course of caravan safaris is also dealt with. Indeed, within the context of the safari, Rockel asserts that, “caravan women were pioneers who asserted a degree of female autonomy not available to most nineteenth-century East African women” (p. 128). The concept of joking relationships (*utani*), which existed between ethnic communities in east Africa, was developed by carriers in such a way as to ensure the security, sustenance, and survival of porters in an environment which was beset by all manner of instability (pp. 197–208). These issues and ways of doing became “the standards that were accepted by newcomers until the disruption of colonial conquest” (p. 65).

The imposition of colonial rule brought about structural changes in the relationship that had hitherto existed between labour and transport in central Africa. Rockel notes: “For Europeans, a way of life [as porters and those associated therewith] for hundreds of thousands, indeed millions, throughout sub-Saharan regions became a feature denoting ‘backwardness’, an anachronistic waste of labor, to be made redundant by modernization and investment in railways and then abolished as soon as possible by colonial governments” (p. 5).

Although the bulk of Rockel’s work concentrates on the geographical area that became known as German East Africa, Rockel has chosen not to cite any German archives; in addition, a number of the German publications referred to in the bibliography have been misspelled. Possibly, further research in German language sources will add to what is already a first-rate piece of work. It is unfortunate that the publishers have treated this excellent book so shoddily; a book of this quality deserves more respect. A number of picture and figure captions have been botched during layout, with whole lines missing (pp. 102, 106, 126, 224). Unfortunately this unwarranted butchering has even been carried over into the actual body of the text. As such chapters 7 and 8 end in mid-sentence, with the reader wondering what Rockel’s final words were.

Undoubtedly, many professional labour theorist’s will have qualms about Rockel’s work, and the extent to which the concept of “crew culture” obscures more than that it illuminates remains debatable. However, Rockel’s strength lies not in his ability to construct and deconstruct elegant theories relating to forms and categories of labour; instead, his strength lies in the hard labour of the historian’s craft in bringing together all manner of sources and references to reconstruct the daily “lived” lives of a very particular group of working people in Africa’s past. Indeed, Rockel’s work illuminates a hitherto completely overlooked aspect of African history, and as such his work will remain the touchstone for any professional interested in the relationship between labour and transport in Africa for many years to come.

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BANIVANUA-MAR, TRACEY. *Violence and Colonial Dialogue. The Australian-Pacific Indentured Labor Trade.* University of Hawai’i Press, Honolulu, Hawaii 2007. Ill. x, 270 pp. \$49.00; DOI: 10.1017/S0020859008083363

A little over a decade ago, succinctly summarizing key trends in colonial history, Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler might well have had a book like this in mind: “Colonialism has come

under new sorts of scrutiny as the production of what constitutes scientific, ethnographic and colonial knowledge has been given more sustained consideration. [...] It is clear that the colonial archives on which we are so dependent are themselves cultural artifacts, built on institutional structures that erased certain kinds of knowledge, secreted some and valorized others [...] We cannot just *do* colonial history on our given sources: what constitutes the archive itself, what is excluded from it, what nomenclatures signal at certain times are themselves internal to, and the very substance of, colonialism's cultural politics.¹

The subject of Dr Banivanua-Mar's book is the trade in Melanesian labour to coastal Queensland that underpinned the establishment of the sugar industry of north-eastern Australia during the last forty years of the nineteenth century. From c.1900 onward, Queensland sugar developed on virtually unique lines. Centralized milling, which had begun somewhat earlier, went hand-in-hand with *white* cane farming and an associated precocious take-up of mechanized field-work.

Prior to the early twentieth century, however, things had been very different. Plantation-style production by colonial European owner-manufacturers predominated, and was based almost exclusively on indentured migrant labour, brought under varying conditions from the Pacific islands to the north and east. Between the 1860s and the end of the century, when the labour trade was ended, to be followed by the enforced "repatriation" of the great majority of the industry's remaining black labour force, it is estimated that around 60,000 Melanesian islanders were transported to Queensland to work in the colony's sugar fields. They form a significant instance, that is to say, of the migrant indentured workforces of the late colonial world. Though numerically not on the same scale as their Indian and Chinese counterparts in locations as widespread as east Africa, the West Indies, Assam, Sumatra, and Malaysia, they clearly shared in a common (though far from homogeneous) history, *inter alia* of brutalization and premature death, as the account under review makes abundantly clear.

Banivanua-Mar readily acknowledges that hers is far from being the first work in a field in which a number of scholars have been active since the 1970s and earlier. Rightly, however, she claims to make a distinctive contribution. She does so by subjecting the whole field of Melanesian labour to a rigorous and stimulating re-reading. In the best traditions of *Subaltern Studies* (the influences of Chakrabarty, Guha *et al.* are explicitly in evidence), *Violence and Colonial Dialogue* sets about excavating the voices of the dispossessed through intensive and highly productive exploration of court records and other archive material, which late nineteenth-century Queensland appears to have thrown up in abundance. Most striking of all, Banivanua-Mar takes very seriously indeed Gyan Prakash's admonition to shake loose colonialism's history "from the domination of categories and ideas it produced".²

She therefore embarks (in chapter 1) on a dissection of the colonial construction of the "Melanesian" that will surely become obligatory reading on the subject. This leads her on to a wider consideration of the phenomenon she calls "Melanesianism", and she gently chides even the most enlightened of modern scholars of the labour trade for the extent to

1. Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda", in *idem* (eds), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, CA, 1997), pp. 1–56, 17–18.

2. Gyan Prakash, "Introduction: After Colonialism", in Gyan Prakash (ed.), *After Colonialism: Imperial History and Postcolonial Displacements* (Princeton, NJ, 1995), pp. 3–20, 5–6.

which, however unwittingly, they have tended to “inherit, reference and perpetuate colonial [forms of] knowledge” (p.16). “Melanesianism” suffers, needless to say, from the same defects as does the “Orientalism” which is its avowed inspiration. *Inter alia*, it has the potential to conflate far too many and different voices, and to demonstrate a profound disinterest in the subtleties of time and place. All the same, Banivanua-Mar is generally far too good an historian for this to become an issue.

One of the most convincing aspects of *Violence and Colonial Dialogue* is its determination to place Melanesian labour firmly within the context of the late colonial history of north-eastern Australia in general. As Banivanua-Mar makes abundantly clear (chapter 3), the fraught location in which Pacific Islander or *kanaka* labourers, as they came to be called, found themselves. Northern Queensland in the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s was the scene of a particularly nasty frontier war between incoming white settlers and the indigenous blacks they sought to dispossess. The *kanakas*, likewise blacks, were hence very ambiguously situated. Docile “boys” on the plantation, they were easily constructed as “savage” adults once off it. As such, they were perceived as a menace to the white colonial project on which “Australia” came increasingly to be legitimated.

Globally, it seems unlikely that many of the indentured, migrant workforces of the late colonial world were so uniquely situated, as were the *kanakas*, in a frontier conflict that was not only on-going but which left a long-lasting impression on the region’s late colonial society. The dice were indeed heavily loaded against the chances of their being allowed to form permanent communities, as did, for example, their Indian counterparts in Malaya, Fiji, and the West Indies. Accordingly, Banivanua-Mar pays particular attention to the cultural factors underlying the early twentieth-century “cleansing” of Queensland of the great bulk of the sugar industry’s erstwhile *kanaka* workforce. Again, this is a history that points up the unusual, if not unique, character of the Australian experience of indentured labour, which was the extent to which the state, c. 1900 onward, sought to eradicate the permanent communities that indenture left in its wake.

The most provocative of the book’s richly explored theses concerns violence. Banivanua-Mar would not, of course, be the first historian to argue that systematic violence lay at the heart of the colonial enterprise. Jan Breman, for example, generated a significant controversy on this score some decades back in relation to plantation development on the east coast of the Indonesian island of Sumatra. Banivanua-Mar takes this line of argument even further, however, in asserting that such violence was not only characteristic of the “frontier” phase of development but also of “mature” colonialism itself. What she describes as “the siege mentality of [...] tropical settler colonialism” and the violence that it enshrined extended into the heart of the late colonial enterprise (p. 10).

The argument about violence and the positioning of the state vis-à-vis the disciplining of labour is treated at length in chapter 10. Her position, if I have understood it correctly, remains problematic, nonetheless. The historical record of the violent subjugation of labour on north Queensland’s plantations is indeed a dismal one. While acknowledging the work of her predecessors in uncovering much of the dreadful story, Banivanua-Mar still contrives, on the basis of painstaking research, and a careful attention to what Prakash termed “the cracks of the colonial archaeology of knowledge”,³ to add a great deal to our sum of knowledge and to the depth of our understanding.

3. Gyan Prakash, “Postcolonial Criticism and Indian Historiography”, in Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (eds), *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives* (Minneapolis, MN, 1997), pp. 491–500, 492–493.

What she seems less willing to engage with, however, is the extent to which migrant indentured labour was associated globally with an arguably *unique* degree of overt violence, not least because of the complete or partial absence of the more commonplace and institutionalized sanctions available to bosses and overseers in their efforts to discipline labour. This defect in her argument would matter less if she did not use it as the basis for bold claims, *à la* Fanon (the obligatory quote from whom appears on p. 7), that “violence and colonialism were naturally intertwined and co-dependent, and colonialism *was* violence” (p. 10 – her emphasis). Such crude reductionism belies the real historical concern that she demonstrates elsewhere in this important book. For make no mistake, after Banivanua-Mar, the colonial/imperial space of late nineteenth-century Queensland will never be quite the same again.

G. Roger Knight