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Editorial

Introduction: Studies of Critical Settler Family History

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The critical study of one's own family history is a relatively new field that sits at the intersection of family genealogical research and scholarly research. While family historians/genealogists are primarily interested in their own family's story, critical family history work is more focused on using the author's family to explore the social context in which they lived, particularly the dynamics of power and inequality between social groups. The term 'critical family history', as it is used in social science research, comes from the American educational sociologist, Christine Sleeter. For Sleeter, this field of inquiry developed out of the intersection of her personal interest in her family history and her professional academic interests in class, gender, and racial inequalities and power relations (Sleeter 2020, p. 2). Describing her own processes of inquiry, Sleeter (2008, pp. 121–22) explains:

> The turning point informing my story came when I began to research the historic and cultural contexts of peoples' lives, asking (1) who else lived in the county or town; and (2) what political, economic, and social relationships existed among groups at that time. When I looked into those questions, family history research took a critical turn that plunged below the surface of remembered origins. My family's story was now situated within a historic context that I needed to investigate to understand it.

Most significantly, while this personal exploration is intrinsically interesting to the authors of critical family histories, it has wider social and political value also, as suggested by Sleeter's use of family history research as a pedagogical tool to encourage trainee teachers to see themselves as culturally and historically situated beings (Sleeter 2008, pp. 114–15). Within highly individualist western societies, starting with the personal context can be a powerful way to entice students and readers to think about the socially embedded nature of their lives, and to make what can appear as very abstract and distant aspects of history vividly present and of significance to us. As Carolyn Morris says (p. 4, this volume) about her own research into her family history, 'Colonization is no longer an abstract, reified, agentless force, but something people you call Pop, Grandad, Dad, and Uncle Pat and I were and are engaged in'. Connecting the material ways in which the past shapes our present also raises questions about the future. As Sleeter (2008, p. 122) suggests, critical family history can prompt the question 'Given who we are and where we came from, how do we proceed from here?'.

These personal and familial stories can also powerfully illustrate the complexity of the past. The sweeping dynamics of class, race, and gender are often shown to be more intricately interwoven and crosscutting than our simplified grand narratives of history suggest. For example, Sleeter has explored the workings of forms of privilege in her white American family within the context of colonialism, slavery, and racism (Sleeter 2014) as well as the messy intersectionality and mutability of categories such as class and race when viewed at close range in the lives of historical individuals and families (e.g., Sleeter 2008, 2011).

Critical family history work is also a powerful means to explore and explode powerful public and familial narratives that either ignore or justify the unjust power relations of the past (which often also continue into the present). As Richard Shaw observes in his paper in this Special Issue, family stories are our 'first histories', and hence important in providing

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us with 'our initial sense of our place in this world' (p. 2). Similarly, Victoria Freeman, also in this collection, notes:

> Family stories reinforce certain values and worldviews that affect how we view and interpret history. Families are also a major mode of transmission of settler attitudes about Indigenous peoples. To change one's view of this past can be to question one's very identity. (p. 7)

Critical family histories can pivot around and disrupt these narrated familial histories, exploring unanswered questions and puzzles, or discovering gaps, silences, and/or lies in the accounts, a decidedly unsettling practice that can disrupt the familial certainties of our early experience. Another aim of this field, then, is to explore the politics of forgetting—what is achieved for the family in the histories that are not remembered and recounted?

Critical family histories can expose the accrual of privilege, or of disadvantage and injustice. Both are important in highlighting the strands of power dynamics working across time to explain the social locations of different groups and communities. And, given the connection between the researcher and the research topic, both can be discomforting and provoke complex and difficult emotions. Uncovering the falsehood of familial myths or finding new previously forgotten elements of the family's past can be deeply unsettling to one's sense of place in the world, and as Freeman argues, one's self-identity. This theme of the emotions provoked by such explorations is another that can be developed in work such as critical family histories.

As a subset of this field, critical *settler* family history (CSFH) explores the roles of settler families in (and against) the work of colonialism. Given the centrality of families and home-making to the settler colonial project of taking over the homelands of Indigenous people and creating a 'new' society, CSFH is a highly appropriate method for exposing and undercutting the logics and dynamics of colonial violence wrapped in the seemingly benign practice of settlement. CSFH work focuses on the home-making of individual families, exposing the violence at its heart. While settler family historians—and popular history-makers in settler societies—often celebrate the pioneering exploits and spirit of early settlers, CSFH interrogates families' relationships with Indigenous communities and centres the ways in which the settler family's home-making is entwined with histories of Indigenous dispossession, and the various forms of violence against Indigenous communities involved in that process. Settler home-making is thus exposed as anything but benign.

Beyond the descendants of the specific family involved, critical settler family histories are an invitation to readers to reflect on their own family's imbrication in the power dynamics of their time and the ways in which these past dynamics continue to shape Indigenous–settler relations and social locations in the present. This is an important and discomforting practice for settler descendants who (like other dominant groups) prefer to forget how their dominance was secured. The histories, literatures, and private family narratives of settler societies are replete with forms of forgetting the past violence and with legitimising narratives that explain why settlers occupy the centres of their societies and Indigenous peoples the margins; the Indigenous people were heathen, they were savages (either irredeemable or civilisable), they were racially inferior and doomed to extinction, and each of these explanations and justifications works to disguise the agency and self-interest of the settler colonial forces involved. Against the work of forgetting, critical settler family histories are acts of disruptive/unsettling remembrance. In some cases, this remembering links the public forms of forgetting colonial violence to the ways in which these forms play out within individual families in the gaps, silences, and untruths of family stories passed down (or ignored) through the generations.

Critical settler family histories are as varied as families are themselves. Forms of privilege (racialised and/or class) are a central theme, as is the work of memories, forgetting, and silences. Gender dynamics and issues of sexuality may be significant for some, and inactions, or failures to act, may be as important as what one's ancestors actually did. Critical settler family histories can be located in rural or urban centres, and/or trace migrations and repeated practices of settler home-making. And they can range across

different eras of a society's past. Tracing the histories of individual ancestors and families results in intricate and complex accounts providing rich insights into the capillary and everyday workings of settler colonial power, and of the interface between the domestic and public spheres of settler society.

Various papers that could be called critical settler family histories have already been published, but this is the first collection of papers to explicitly engage with and respond to that term. The family histories gathered here are located across North America and Australasia. Some of the papers use the author's family as a springboard to focus specifically on the founding violence of settler colonialism. Others link these founding acts of settler violence to what then follows in the accrual of new identities, forms of privilege, and the practices of forgetting that hide both the violence and the accumulation of privileges over the generations that followed. For some, class, ethnicity, and/or gender crosscut the stories of settler power and privilege. Throughout the collection, land is a central focus—the possession (and dispossession) of land, relations to land, place-based feelings of belonging, and identity are all recurring themes.

Carolyn Morris combines CSFH and autoethnography to explore 'not-talking' and 'not-knowing' as strategies deployed within settler families to erase the history of colonialism and the dispossession of Indigenous people on which their own settled and secure lives depend. Morris writes about her memories of Māori growing up on the family farm in Taranaki in New Zealand, exploring what she knew and saw to highlight the accompanying 'not-talking' and 'not-knowing' that simultaneously invisibilised the history of Māori dispossession while noting ongoing Māori presence. In Morris's case, her extended family still farm in the area, allowing her to easily connect the colonial past and colonial present. She argues also for the value of autoethnographic work—and here an autoethnography of memory—as a method for revealing this kind of quotidian work of ongoing colonialism.

Rebecca Ream begins with her desire for distance from her family and any implication in their history. This paper is written largely as a poem, expressing the feeling and experience of the desire to deny history, and taking the reader through various stages of confrontation with both Ream's family's (colonial, classed, gendered, and violent) history and that of the wider settler colonial society. This confrontation occurs through her engagement with the colonial history of Christchurch and Canterbury in Aotearoa New Zealand, and with Donna Haraway's concept of compost. Haraway emphasises the deep materiality of our being, which is irrevocably mixed and entwined with (human and other-than-human) others, insisting that we 'stay with the trouble' of our impure and ethically compromised being as the foundation for our ability to act (response-ability). Following Haraway, Ream's love for the natural environment of her settler home is at the centre of this poetic exploration of Pākehā[1]/settler entanglement, inheritance, and response-ability in the 'muddle' of colonialism.

The rest of the collection more directly engages with the particulars of the histories of the authors' families. Paula Byrne explores her ancestors' involvement in 'punitive raids' against Aboriginal encampments in nineteenth century northern New South Wales in Australia. She sets out to understand how these violent and seemingly indefensible raids made sense to those involved. Through a close reading of newspapers, diaries, and journals of the time, as well as a consideration of the ways that Irish social relations and practices informed the orientations of her Byrne ancestors and their landlords, Byrne argues that 'volunteering' in these raids was understood as a practice of citizenship. She also highlights the split, 'good' and 'bad', stereotyping of Aboriginal people and how this contributed to the sense amongst those involved that their actions were justified—they were not against all Aboriginal people, only those deemed law breakers. Rather than taking a common critical stance of simply condemning the actions of these ancestors, Byrne argues for the need to understand them, not to make excuses for them, but to grieve for her/our connection to them as a first step towards 'a just peace' with Aboriginal Australia (p. 3). This detailed account powerfully illustrates the embeddedness of rural settler Australia in a larger imperial project of the time, as well as the complexity of relations between

settler and Aboriginal communities, including intermarriage and friendships involving individuals who could, at the same time, participate in violent raids against their Aboriginal neighbours.

Richard Shaw's paper begins with his exploration of the history of his great-grandfather's involvement in the military campaign against the pacifist community of Parihaka in Taranaki, New Zealand, in the 1880s, and the family's subsequent acquisition of three farms in the area. Shaw aptly describes this acquisition of land as part of an 'argricultural campaign', the military language emphasising the violence underpinning establishment of the settler 'family farm' in Taranaki (and by extension, across the settler world). This paper is primarily an intervention to 'end the forgetting' and explores in some detail what forgetting this founding violence has enabled for his family—and for settlers more broadly. His great-grandfather began life as a poor Catholic Irish tenant farmer and ended as a well-off and respected member of the settler community. Settlement—and forgetting—thus enabled both an extraordinary economic transformation and a transformation of identity (from Irish to British to New Zealander). These transformations have cascaded down the generations as forms of economic and ontological privilege, conferring descendants with a secure sense of 'roots' in the soil of the Taranaki coast.

Bronwyn Davies' paper theorises the encounter between Aboriginal Australians and the British who arrived on the First Fleet to found the convict colony of New South Wales, drawing on reports in the journal of her ancestor, David Collins, Judge Advocate and Secretary to the Governor. Davies theorises this encounter between previously completely distinct civilisations through the lens of Badiou's concept of the event. Her analysis, tracing the refusal of the newcomers to abandon their self-certainty and belief in their own superior judgement, effectively illustrates Lorenzo Veracini's (2010, p. 86) argument that settler colonisation is a non-encounter. Davies concludes by highlighting some of the ways in which colonial violence continues in the Australian present and argues for the need for settler responsiveness to face the interconnected issues of climate change and justice for Indigenous people.

Sue Pyke focuses on her family's links to the cattle industry in Central Queensland in Australia. Her paper, 'Reading the entrails: the extractive work of a fence' powerfully expresses the violence, both historical and ongoing, of agricultural colonial settlement. 'Fences' here refers to the posts and barbed wire that cut up the land, prohibiting the normal lives and movement of Aboriginal communities and animals, and to those—her settler ancestors—who buy and sell stolen goods. 'Extraction' also points in more than one direction: to the violence imposed on Aboriginal communities by the establishment of the cattle industry; to the ongoing violence of an economy built on environmental degradation and the lives of animals; to the work of her mother's 'romancing' stories of the family's lives here; and finally, to the extractive work of her writing itself and the privilege of her capacity to tell this story.

Gender, class, race, and relationship to place are all at the heart of Morgan Johnson's paper. With her great-great-grandmother as a starting point, Johnson explores the role British Home Children played in the colonisation of Canada. Johnson's great-great-grandmother was a 'Barnardo's girl', one of the 'surplus' children—some orphans, some not—'adopted' by Canadian families in the late 1800s. A number of studies of Home Children have centred on the abuse and trauma many suffered at the hands of their new families, where 'adoption' acted as a screen for the unpaid labour children were forced to perform. Others have celebrated their role as 'nation builders', overcoming the odds to contribute to the development of the country. It is this latter narrative that Johnson overturns with her argument that Home children were a 'tool of [colonial] domestication', providing gendered labour that furthered the social reproduction and expansion of settler society across Canada. Johnson writes against a 'refusal to inherit "histories of ignorance"' about her own family's access to land, beginning and ending with her family's cottage on one of Ontario's many lakes in juxtaposition to the difficulty Indigenous people have had in holding on to, let alone expanding, their own land holdings.

If Christine Sleeter coined the term 'critical family history', Victoria Freeman (2000) is arguably also a founder of this field; her book *Distant Relations: How my Ancestors Colonized North America* traces the relations between colonial settlers and Indigenous communities in the various North American communities her ancestors lived in from the 1600s onwards. In the paper included in this Special Issue, Freeman reflects on the writing of that book (the challenges and questions that prompted it and the ethical dilemmas of writing it), and on the ongoing value of CSFH writing in contemporary times over two decades later. She acknowledges that critical settler family histories are privileged histories, noting the 'great inequality in who has access to family memory and especially written records' (p. 10), and that such work centres 'white voices and perspectives' and may deflect attention from the complicity of later migrant and non-white migrant communities with ongoing structural colonialism. However, she argues for the continuing value of such work to challenge non-Indigenous Canadians to reflect on and acknowledge their own relationship to colonialism, in both the past and present. And, as with Christine Sleeter, she reflects on the value of CSFH as a pedagogical tool for exploring the persistent impacts of colonialism with university students, sharing an assignment she uses with her own classes to do so.

Like Victoria Freeman, Ashley (Woody) Doane is a descendant of settler colonisers in New England in the USA, although his family has stayed in the region since the 1600s. This allows him to locate his family history in the long sweep of colonial settler relations of domination over both Indigenous and Black populations in New England. The paper centres the general history of the settler colonial communities, with only a brief mention of his own family stories, but this approach supports his central point—that all settler families and descendants are implicated as beneficiaries of the structures of indigenous erasure and the slave economy, whatever their own personal involvement or status may have been. Doane argues also that settler colonialism and slavery involved similar strategies of elimination and the narration of the myth of a 'free, white New England' (p. 16) based on forgetting the histories of violence and domination against both Indigenous and Black Americans. As with other contributors to this Special Issue, he also highlights the value of CSFH, which he says 'forces us to connect the dots' (p. 3), linking the past and present and personalising history.

The Special Issue closes with Hugh Campbell and William Kainana Cuthers' story of their shared settler ancestor, Dennett Hersee Heather, and the Waikato land he and his second (Māori) wife, Unaiki te Watarauhi, farmed. Separately researching their (on Hugh's side, settler; on William's, Indigenous) family histories, the authors found each other, reconnecting the severed sides of this Māori-Pākehā family—and their Cook Island branches. Connecting the Māori, Pākehā, and Cook Island strands of this family revealed rich insights into the effects of a significant moment in New Zealand's history: the invasion of the Waikato by Crown forces in 1863 that resulted in a war pivotal to the securing of Pākehā political and economic hegemony and the destruction of Māori collective ways of life and economic and political power. This assertion of settler hegemony also destroyed a shared Māori–Pākehā world, exemplified here by Dennett and Unaiki's family and farm. Campbell and Cuthers illuminate the impact of the war on mixed Māori-Pākehā families torn apart as a consequence, each side over generations losing sight of the other, leaving gaps and puzzles in the oral histories of the families on both sides. In addition, they highlight the limitations of western notions of family and methods of family research, with their reliance on archival records. Both Campbell and Cuthers use these methods, but Cuthers also brings an indigenous orientation to family ('whānau' in the Māori language) as wider networks of kin[2], and it is this crucial insight that enables him to solve the mystery of Unaiki's origins that adds significant elements to their understanding of the place of the family/whānau and farm in relation to the Waikato conflict. Finally, they argue that the reconnecting of the Māori, Pākehā, and Cook Islands descendants of Dennett Heather that has resulted from their research is in itself a decolonising project that enables new sets of relations towards the rebuilding of a shared world.

Together these papers provide a rich introduction to the field of critical settler family history and the diversity of approaches scholars in the field can take as well as the range of themes they can explore. The papers provide insights into the ways that concrete and particular family stories can illuminate much larger societal dynamics, and the ways in which CSFH connects past and present. The authors of these papers argue for the value of this form of research, while also pointing to its limitations. Throughout, the violence and injustice of settler colonialism is foregrounded, and arguments are made for how we might put these histories to work in the service of a better future and as a small step towards the rebuilding/repair of settler social relations with Indigenous communities. It is an enormous pleasure for me to offer this Special Issue to the readers of Genealogy as the first of its kind.

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Notes

1 'Pākehā' is a Māori term commonly used to describe white New Zealanders.

2 For more on this see the Special Issue on 'Indigenous Perspectives on Genealogical Research' edited by Tahu Kukutai and Nepia Mahuika, *Genealogy* 2021 5(3).

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