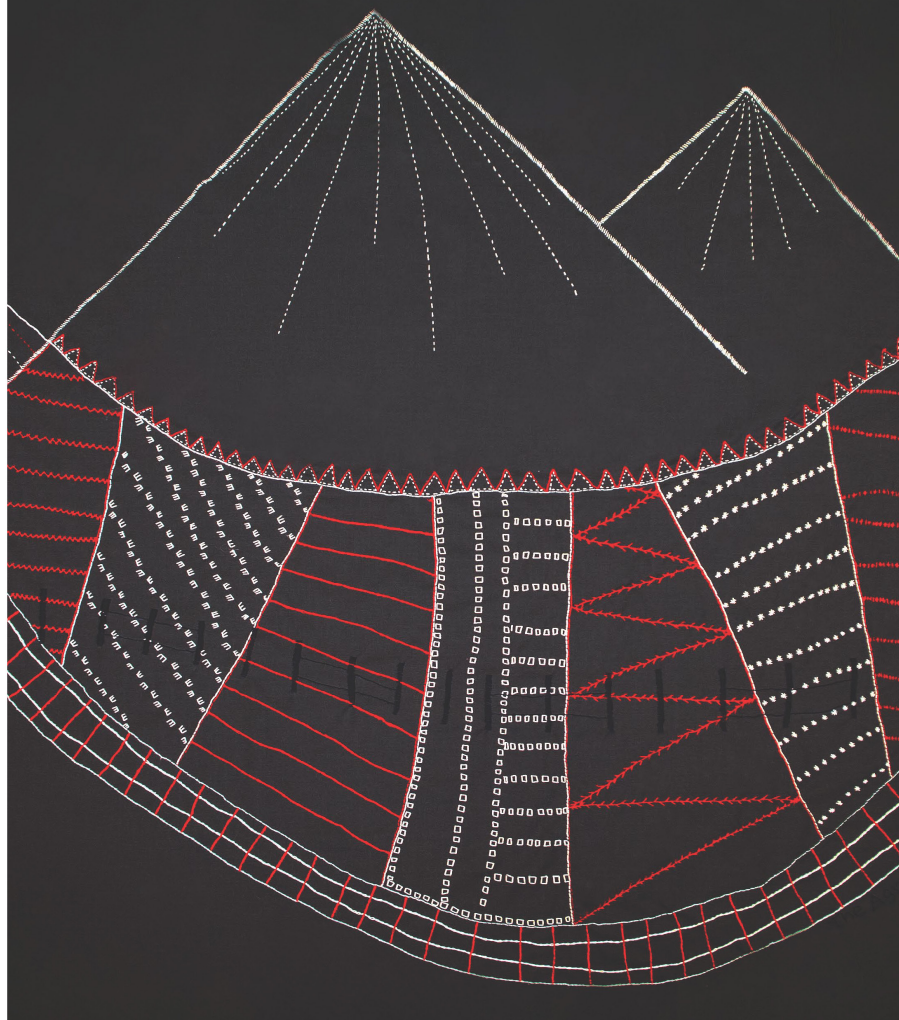


the unsettled

small stories of colonisation

RICHARD SHAW



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Should I try and pin it down or avoid
it on account of what might lie there?

– Diana Bridge, 'Deep Colour'

Decolonisation | is your job | not mine

– Debbie Broughton, 'The re-Taranaki-
fication of Te Aro Pā'

This book is for Ella Kahu and Trudie Cain, with whom I have exchanged many stories over the years. Some of them have been unsettling in a ‘Yup, I definitely needed to be told that’ kind of way; many have been about colonisation; each one has been a joy to listen to.

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Prologue

Footy on the Coast

THERE IS A PHOTO, A LITTLE DUSTY NOW, sitting on a shelf in my mother's house. It competes for space with the novels of Damon Runyon and Niall Williams, my father's favourite authors. Dad is dead now, gone these past 10 years. There are photos of him on the shelf, too.

But the one that was at the start of it all is of another man from another time. He is standing with a group of stern-looking, formidable men, gazing out across the years. In the centre, taller than the others, he is holding a ball. The man on his right has a bandaged head. They are all wearing big, heavy boots, laces wrapped tightly around their ankles. Behind them you can just see the hindquarters of a horse.

The photo was taken in 1881 at the Rāhotu Domain, just a few kilometres away from Parihaka pā. The men are members of the Armed Constabulary Coastal rugby team. The big man's name was Andrew Gilhooly. He was the captain of the team, and my great-grandfather.

I walked past that photo many times over the decades, looking at it without seeing it. Then Dad died, wheels fell off here and there, and things that I had not really seen before began to slide into focus. That photo was one of them. It is a



This is just a photo of some blokes ready to play footy, until you put the date (1881), the location (Rāhotu Domain) and the name of the group (the AC rugby team) together. Then it becomes something else entirely. *Richard Shaw*

small thing, this image, but it sits in the context of some very big things. The year, the place, the people — they hint at what is to come. But it took me until my mid-fifties to even start asking the right questions of the photo. What does it have to say about my past? How did I manage, for so long, to miss the story it so obviously tells? What does this all mean for me today? That last one, in particular, is giving me no end of trouble.

And as it turns out, I am not the only person in this country asking it. The circumstances that give rise to the query differ from person to person, as do the responses, but the question itself does not. Neither does it go away if you try to avoid it. It is always there. Waiting.

1.

Find the
Beginning

‘FIND THE BEGINNING’, ADVISES EMILY WILSON, in her beautiful translation of Homer’s *Odyssey*.¹

Good advice this, but I find it hard to follow, for there are many possible beginnings to this book. I might have gone with the mid-seventeenth century, when Oliver Cromwell’s marauding New Model Army confiscated land in the small Irish township of Ballynagreanagh in the east of County Limerick, beginning a process of impoverishment which will lead my great-grandfather, Andrew Gilhooly, to leave the village of his birth and set sail on his own odyssey 200 years later.²

Or I could have chosen 1843, the year in which Andrew’s father, Hugh, marries Mary Kennedy, whose family had been ushered onto the farm Andrew was born on by the muscle of the Irish Constabulary following the eviction of the previous tenant for non-payment of rent to an absentee English landlord.³ Or 1877, the year Andrew signed up for the first of what would be 13 years of military service, the first nine spent in the New Zealand Armed Constabulary (AC) and the balance out in the wind and cold at Port Chalmers, in Otago, where he was a bombardier in the artillery corps of New Zealand’s first permanent militia.

Instead, I have chosen 5 November 1881, the day on which my great-grandfather, a member of the AC's No. 3 Company, marched into Parihaka with 1588 other men and tore the place down. He was there for the invasion of the pā established in 1866 by Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi to provide refuge to those who had suffered other invasions; he was there for the destruction of people's homes and the ruination of their crops; he was there for the years of occupation, during which pass laws were enforced and the hunger bit.⁴ He was there, too, for the return, coming back to the Coast in the early 1890s to farm land that was part of the 'great knuckle' of Taranaki and that had been confiscated from mana whenua in 1865.⁵

The three farms Andrew Gilhooly and his wife, Kate Fleming, eventually ran enabled them to break with centuries of Irish penury and reinvent themselves as settlers, members of a tightly knit coastal Taranaki community that orbited around the Catholic church and the family farm. Dispossessed in their own land, they came to Aotearoa and turned themselves into New Zealanders. But they became these new things on land that the colonial state had taken from other people. What was a beginning for them was an ending for others.



None of this was part of the family lore I grew up with (although I did know many other stories about life on the Coast, including the drudgery of milking, the tedium of the Latin mass, and the fortunes of the Taranaki Ranfurly Shield-winning team of the 1950s, which my grandfather Hugh managed).⁶ All of it had long since tumbled out of my people's collective memory and fallen down into the dark, forgotten places all families have, replaced

on the shelf by our version of the settler story, the one that tells of leaving the old world for the new; that land for this; poverty for something better.⁷

Here are some other things I did not know, once upon a time. For a start, although I had a hazy sense that land had been confiscated from iwi in Taranaki in the mid-1860s, until I reached my fifties I had no idea just how much was taken — some 1,275,000 acres.⁸ Neither was I aware that it had been indiscriminately confiscated from ‘rebel’ and ‘loyal’ Māori alike (which may explain why, in each of the eight settlements it has negotiated in Taranaki, the Crown has acknowledged that ‘the confiscations were indiscriminate in extent and application, wrongful and unjust, and were in breach of the Treaty of Waitangi and its principles’). Ngāti Tama, for instance, lost 74,000 acres. In 1863 the Compensation Court returned 3458 of those acres (just 4.6 per cent of what had been taken) to a number of Ngāti Tama individuals; by 1880 legal title had still not been issued to this land, much of which had, in any event, been reclassified as Crown land in the intervening years.⁹

Neither did I know that the South Road that runs around the Taranaki coast (you’ll know it better as State Highway 45, or — if you must — as Surf Highway) was a military road built for the purposes of delivering an invasion force to Parihaka and opening up the land for settlement by Pākehā farmers. My great-grandfather was involved with that, too. The road was the last leg in an invasion infrastructure trifecta, along with the construction of the Cape Egmont lighthouse and the installation of the telegraph.¹⁰

I had no idea that the suppression of the press meant that it would take two years for full details of what took place at, and after, the invasion of Parihaka — including the forced

relocation of over 1500 people, the rape of women and the destruction of hundreds of acres of crops — to emerge in this country, or that it came to light only because of the insistence of the parliamentary opposition in London that papers to that effect be tabled in the House of Commons.¹¹

It had not occurred to me that Parihaka is not just an ‘invasion day story’.¹² The AC maintained an occupation force at the pā for nearly five years after the invasion; Major Forster Goring’s No. 3 Company — in which my great-grandfather served — finally upped sticks in March 1885. Pass laws restricting the movement of Māori into, out of and within Parihaka first imposed in 1881 were enforced for the duration of the occupation.

I had not heard of the 1882 Indemnity Act, which noted that although ‘certain measures adopted by the Government of New Zealand’ in the invasion and sacking of Parihaka ‘may have been in excess of legal powers’, it was found to be ‘expedient that the persons acting therein should be indemnified’, such that said persons (including my great-grandfather) ‘shall be and [are] hereby freed, acquitted, released, indemnified, and discharged of, from, and against all actions, suits, complaints, information, indictments, prosecutions, liabilities, and proceedings whatsoever’.

I did not realise that in 1882, when the Crown finally did get around to giving back some of the land it had taken two decades earlier, it did so in the form of native reserves that were administered not by the Māori owners of the land but by a Crown official, the Public Trustee, who was required to act for both the benefit of ‘the natives to whom such reserves belong’ and for ‘the promotion of settlement’. Unsurprisingly, the second of these imperatives took precedence, and by 1892 control was ebbing away from Māori owners as their land

was parcelled out to Pākehā farmers — including my great-grandparents — in leases granted in perpetuity. And for which Māori were ineligible to apply.

Nor did I know that many Māori landowners were charged an occupation licence to live on their own whenua, allowing the Public Trustee ‘to decide where on their land they could live and what rent they would have to pay for it’.¹³ The licence fee often exceeded the rents Pākehā farmers were charged to farm Māori land, such that people who owned land they could not live on sometimes found themselves in debt. In a letter written in 1909, the Public Trustee helpfully explains that the system was established to ‘encourage natives to abandon the communism of their kaingas and to encourage individual effort’.¹⁴

And I had no earthly notion that sitting behind the title to the farm purchased in 1921 by my great-grandmother, Kate Gilhooly, was an earlier title granted by the Māori Land Court to mana whenua in 1883.¹⁵ The first two names on that title were those of Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi.¹⁶



This seems like quite a lot of important stuff not to have known. I stumbled across these things in the process of researching and writing a book, *The Forgotten Coast*, which began as an effort to understand my relationship with my father but wound up as something much bigger.¹⁷ Now that I know them, I find that they cannot be unknown. Neither can I avoid the question they pose — How is it that this detail did not feature in the family lore? — or the conundrum they present — What do I do with the knowledge that my mother’s family established itself in this country on land the colonial state had taken from others?

The Forgotten Coast developed into an attempt to get my head around these troubling facets of my family history. It became a vehicle for ending my forgetting. The book included stories about others: my formidable great-grandmother Kate; a great-uncle, Dick, who nailed three degrees at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome in under two years and then came home to die of TB; and my father, Bob. But it was the stuff about Andrew, the invasion and the three Gilhooly farms that really got people going.

It kicked off late on Friday 16 July 2021, when the online journal *The Conversation* ran a short article I wrote about some of the discoveries at the heart of *The Forgotten Coast*.¹⁸ The experience of writing for *The Conversation* generally goes like this: other media outlets will pick your piece up; reader numbers will spike over a 24-hour period (or sometimes not get off the ground at all); there might be a quick exchange of views via a comments page; and then interest rapidly dies away. This time things were different.

Within minutes the number of people who had read the article started ticking over — and then kept on climbing, so that by the end of the weekend it had received over 100,000 views. Then two unusual things occurred: the readership figures continued to mount and I began receiving a lot of email traffic. After a week the former sat close to 170,000 and the latter was well over 100 (containing, in total, close to 20,000 words, which is about the size of an Honours research paper).¹⁹

The metrics are not the point. The real significance lies in the content and tone of those emails. Some were short and others lengthy; a number were furious and a handful deeply offensive; a few were disparaging but most were reflective and humbling to read. None of them was humdrum.

It won't surprise anyone that some people were not much taken with what I had to say. I had simply tried to put into words the unease I felt about my great-grandfather's role in the colonial treatment meted out to Taranaki Māori, but what I thought was an attempt at making sense of my own circumstances others saw as something entirely different. Some readers objected to 'academics like you . . . whipping the country with the same old tired guilty stick that all woke people are wielding at the moment', took issue with 'being made to feel like a second class citizen in my own country', and would appreciate it if I 'stop[ped] beating up on the white man for a change'.

Those are some of the more considered contributions. More common were pithy observations such as: 'You are despicable', 'Worst article I have ever read in my life' and 'Appalling drivel and incredibly racist to boot.' The prize for Best in Class for this category, however, goes to the admirably succinct: 'I fell asleep.'

Two of these messages stand out. Both contain spelling errors and other oddities that the pedant in me is tempted to correct — but I've opted not to, because the mistakes tell you something about care, attention and intent, and if I correct them that stuff gets lost. The first of these communications informs me that 'You and the lot you represent in that article aren't welcome in New Zealand any more — and yes, it IS New Zealand. Not Aoteroa. I really fear for impressionable youngsters if you're putting out that dribble. Get a life, little imp.' I'm not sure who I represent but I can categorically say that 'imp' is not something I am often called.

The person who wrote the second didn't bother with arcane language and went straight for the profanity playbook in

characterising me as ‘just a useless DICK filling young peoples heads with garbage to look good to your fellow racists i bet you cant even change a car tyre DICK, snowflakes like you are a curse on this country . . . who really is only qualified to work at kfc.’ This one also came with pictures.



W. B. Yeats’s poem ‘The Second Coming’ is a thing of beauty, all slouchy beasts and collapsing centres. There is a line I think of when I stand back and try to understand the correspondence I received in July 2021. When the dread beast is lumbering towards Jerusalem, Yeats writes, ‘The best lack all conviction, while the worst | Are full of passionate intensity.’ In my less generous moments I feel as if some of the messages I got were consistent with the second of those observations.

But I part company with Yeats on the convictions of the best, because I also heard from plenty of Pākehā whose stories are not dissimilar to my own: people who have long wondered about the history lying beneath the land they grew up on, and whose disposition towards the ongoing legacy of the colonisation of this country is quite different from that countenanced by proponents of the ‘imp’ school of thought.

Many of these messages are punchy: a favourite is the suggestion that ‘Pākehā feeling exhausted by debate around historic injustice might consider how those who are still living with that injustice might feel’. Quite a few are funny. Two women get in touch, one an Anglican whose ‘first marriage was to a Roman Catholic, although (obviously) he was somewhat lapsed’, and the other who tells me that her farming grandfather ‘always said the kids were brought in with the cows’.

Someone wrote about ‘the Irish Catholics on Mum’s side and the dodgy land deals on Dad’s’. I heard from an elderly man who thought there might very well be something in what I had to say but who I suspect really wanted to tell me that as a youngster he had ‘won many athletic medals’, even though ‘Dad was the one who set all the race records’. And from someone who ‘grew up on confiscated land in Hamilton, oblivious to the fact that “Grey Street” was not a reference to a colour’.

Sometimes the humour feels a bit uneasy, as when I hear about ‘an old Kaponga identity, a dairy farmer, who told me that when he was young they were sometimes told they should look for a nice Māori wife as this would safeguard their leases for them’. Or about the great-great-grandfather who ‘was a bit of a bloodthirsty old codger and no one really liked him, although interestingly enough his father was a prison guard in Tasmania who fought his colleagues to stop the hunting of Indigenous Australians’. Or about the time George Grey visited Arowhenua in Te Wai Pounamu South Island in 1867 to discuss land issues with mana whenua and the welcoming band played Handel’s chorus ‘See, the Conquering Hero Comes’.²⁰

Wry but affectionate judgement is sometimes passed: there is a reference to forebears arriving in Aotearoa with ‘their Rule Britannia sensibilities’, and another to a ‘mysterious great-grandfather (a practised liar) who migrated from Scotland in the 1870s as a farm hand and somehow ended up as a landowner’.

There is poignancy: ‘In 1860, an Irish soldier in the 65th Regiment married a young girl, an Irish (?) “settler”, in the Catholic chapel erected in New Plymouth for the soldiers. Nine months later she died in childbirth and he disappeared from the historical record. The child survived and became my great-grandmother.’ There is insight: ‘I’m drawn to the fact that due

to my ancestor's actions I am lucky enough to know my family history, whilst the other result of his actions is that I have many Māori friends who don't know their family history as they were lost or displaced.' And there is reflection: 'We speak of how "lucky we are" to have this family land without acknowledging an ignorance of or the forgetting to look for the story behind the one we have conveniently told ourselves.'

Through it all runs an intimate honesty. The work of a brother, a GP, is characterised as 'mopping up the misery of 180 years of colonisation'. A woman speaks of her 'paternal grandfather [who] was a strike-breaker in the 1951 waterside dispute', and about whom she carries regret and sorrow. There is a bloke whose wife's family were 'sent on to Ōpōtiki after Völkner's murder to be part of "pacifying" the district. For pacify read invade. Flourishing farmlands, crops, possessions, villages looted and land confiscated. [He] is given his promised 50 acres but drowns a few months later, leaving [her] and seven kids. But [she] survives, and has 79 grandchildren, including quite a few Māori grandchildren.'

Above all, there is a gentle, insistent questioning. People want to get their heads around the knotty stuff. Want to end their own forgetting. Many of them ask: 'What should we do now?'



It strikes me, then, that the best do not lack conviction at all. There are other Pākehā like me out there who have no wish to maintain a personal silence on the matter of our colonial history and would much prefer to get stuck into making sense of things we find complex and troubling. Who have chosen not to cleave only to those bits of our families' (and nation's)

histories that reflect well on us, and who understand that we need also to find ways of living with those episodes that bring discomfort and unease. No ‘slipping through the back door of the world’ for this lot.²¹

I’ve heard from former police inspectors and lay preachers (and from one person who has been both); from a group of middle-aged friends who meet online fortnightly to ‘collectively work through books (*White Fragility*, *Me and White Supremacy*), and share thought-provoking articles, podcasts, films, interviews, etc., as we come across them’; and from two sisters who were part of the campaign to change the name of a small town in south Taranaki from Maxwell to Pākaraka.²² (And with good reason. On 27 November 1868 the Kai Iwi Cavalry — a local militia group led by the future native minister John Bryce — ran into a group of children of Ngaa Rauru Kiitahi and other Taranaki iwi at Handley’s Woolshed, near Waitōtara. The cavalry fired at the children, the oldest of whom was 10, then attacked them with sabres. Two children were killed and others wounded. Until recently the town was named after the cavalry’s sergeant, George Maxwell.)²³

People have got in touch from rural New Zealand and urban Aotearoa. They have been curt, wise, forthcoming, sometimes cagey and, yes, occasionally abusive. I’ve heard from artists and activists, current nuns and former priests, chairs of boards of trustees, farmers, librarians, Māori, men with degrees and women who left school without anything, men who left school with nothing and women with PhDs, middle managers, mums and dads (together and apart), parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, people with partners and those who live alone, some who call themselves Pākehā and others who prefer European (but no one who opts for Kiwi), twins, teachers,

teenagers, trampers, working people and retired people, widows and widowers, young people and old, the lot. I've also exchanged views with at least one novelist, a Danish seaman, an award-winning scientist, a bus driver, a hunter, a mechanic, a psychotherapist and a mother/daughter combo — and with someone who badly wants to renounce his New Zealand citizenship but isn't being allowed to do so (for reasons I simply could not follow, but which he assures me are available for all to see on his 'Webb-site').

I have come to this party late, but many of these folk are well on their way. We do not always agree with each other. But whether or not we are in accord, the message I have received from this vast and varied correspondence is that there are many people in Aotearoa New Zealand who reject the lazy tropes about the civilising effects of colonisation, and who want instead to be part of a more honest conversation about the past from which we have emerged and the future we might yet reach.

This book is a contribution to that discussion.



'You'll write your one story many ways,' says a writing teacher in Elizabeth Strout's novel *My Name Is Lucy Barton*.²⁴ What she means, I think, is that each of us has only one biography but as time passes we tell that story in different ways. *The Unsettled* is not a sequel to *The Forgotten Coast*. It is less biographical, for a start, and its roots lie not in one place but in many. Dick remains on the Coast, as does my father.

But Andrew, who was at the centre of that earlier book, has made the leap across into this one. The conundrums created by his participation in the invasion of Parihaka and

subsequent farming of confiscated land — and those which confront the other people you will encounter here — are what propel this narrative.

Nor is this book a history of colonisation (although it contains quite a few stories about it), a scholarly exposé or an attempt to offer advice. Its purpose is to reflect on some gnarly questions that people in this country are increasingly asking themselves. Why have parts of some Pākehā people's pasts been forgotten? What happens if those forgotten accounts, when dragged from the depths of memory, reveal family histories that are entangled in the violence of the colonisation of this place? How do descendants of settler-colonial families deal with these kinds of backstories? What do we do with that awareness, and how do we talk about it? So many questions that could so comfortably remain rhetorical, but that the people whose accounts inform this book have directly confronted.

To end the forgetting, of course, you must find a beginning. *The Unsettled* is also about the process of recovering these lost elements, what that experience can lead to and what might then be done with often unsettling discoveries. It is really a book about excavation.

Those doing the digging are ordinary people. Probably not all that different from the ones you work with, live next door to or go to church with; the sort you might bump into at the dairy or chew the fat with while waiting for the kids to come barrelling out of school. Probably quite a bit like the ones you love and share your life with.

You will hear their voices alongside mine as we wander 'up and down the hills and dales' of what is a challenging conversation.²⁵ Some nip in for a quick word, then disappear; others linger and get stuck into a sustained discussion. A number

have asked not to be named, but some want to stand in public alongside their words. Aidan, for instance, who is 21, works in the agribusiness/rural banking sector in Ōtepoti Dunedin and has family in Taranaki. Dorothy and David, she once a teacher and he a civil engineer, are now both up to their necks in local and family histories. Gillian is of Clan MacBain, Clan Cameron, Clan Lyon and Clan Grant, and is a writer of many forms (among them a student newspaper, a feminist magazine and novels). Jane was brought up on a farm leased from Māori at Puniho, just south of Ōkato, as was her younger brother Tim, although both have long since moved away (Tim taking with him the memory of once ‘having pāua and porridge for breakfast’ at a mate’s place, which wasn’t standard fare at home).

Joe was with the New Zealand Police for over 30 years, the last 16 as an inspector, and resigned to become a lay pastoral leader after walking the Camino de Santiago. John, who lives in Kaipara, has tramped all of Tītokowaru’s battle sites, and has a good friend who is a descendant of Robert Parris, the civil commissioner in Taranaki whom we meet a little further on, for he has a part to play in the construction of the road down which my great-grandfather and his AC comrades walked into infamy in 1881.

Justine, who is ‘of both Pākehā and Māori descent, but raised within a Pākehā context’, moved around a lot as a child and now manages a team involved in environmental projects in Māngere; her mum, Win, who lives in Kapanga Coromandel, spent a working life attending to people’s various medical, spiritual or dental requirements. Kiaran, who hails from Levin but grew up on a farm in Kaponga, has spent most of his life in the motor trade (including driving mini-buses around Europe in the summer of 1969). Marguerite was raised in Kaiapoi and,

following a stint in corporate America (and a PhD), has lived in Sydney, but her roots on this side of the Ditch reach back to her grandmother, who crocheted altar cloths for St Peter's Anglican Church in Temuka.

Susan once lived in Montreal amongst Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, French, Czechs, Hungarians, Austrians and Greeks but is now, at 81, retired in West Auckland. Another Susan, who I will call Susan Elizabeth, is a nun with the Congregation of Our Lady of the Missions: she, too, has a doctorate, and is in the throes of completing a history of her order in Burma.



I would like to explain why I have used the word 'unsettled' in the title of this book. As far as I can tell, David, Gillian, Jane and the rest are all perfectly well-adjusted people: they are settled, in the conventional sense of the word. But two things are going on in this story, and for them, that are decidedly unsettling.

The first is that they are disturbed by aspects of their families' histories in Aotearoa. I suspect many of us are, if we allow ourselves to stop and think about it. There are fragments of our pasts — Win's 'unsaid, difficult things' — that we glimpse out of the corners of our eyes but do not fully apprehend; things that are hinted at and which make us uneasy, and that jar with the vigorous, uncomplicatedly positive pioneer stories we Pākehā grow up with.

We grapple with these in ways which differ in their particulars and intensity but which are similar in intent. Confronting our family's past — asking questions of the narratives through which our people explain themselves to each other — is an unavoidably unsettling thing to do, and

liable to get us into trouble if we do not tread carefully.

For it is the job of these intimate family stories to put shape around a particular group of people, to create a sense of how and where they fit in the world. American literary scholar Jonathan Gottschall would say that we are creatures of stories, which is another way of saying that these things really do matter.²⁶ People are invested in their family stories, and with good reason, and so it is no small nor easy thing to start prodding them. Sometimes it is dangerous, and nearly always it is disturbing. To have things that did not feature in the accounts we grew up with slouch into view can be unnerving — the more so when they concern matters that go to the heart of the colonial past and present of the country we live in.

This suggests the second sense in which the term ‘unsettled’ describes what happens in these pages. And that is that my collaborators are also conscious of the *unsettling* effects the arrival of their settler families in this land have had on those who were here before.

Not all of them have histories that are as directly implicated in colonial violence as mine is. Nevertheless, the thread connecting us all is an awareness that in some way each of our lives is what it is because at some point someone, somewhere, benefited from colonisation. As Gillian puts it: ‘This is how we’ve become who we are now.’ For some, that legacy is decidedly uncomfortable.

We are figuring out, too, that the consequences of injustices perpetrated in the past tend to endure and accumulate. Land has not been returned, taonga are still lost, futures remain forgone. Consigning these losses to times long gone is simply a way of avoiding acknowledging that many things that were done then continue to have ramifications now. It amounts to