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Conclusion: A Transcultural Challenge

In November 2014 I held a 'reunion' of descendants in Dunedin to bring together many of the families who had been part of my research. I began the three-day event by providing brief introductions for everyone who was there, and then delighted in moving to the side while more than seventy descendants enthusiastically shared their stories and experiences with each other. The publication of this book represents another landmark in our narrative journeys, but this is a living history. We all continue to engage intermittently with our family stories and with each other. I regularly receive new contacts through my research website, and have met many more families and seen many more files than I could include here. Every single family has contributed to this book; all have enhanced my understanding of the scheme, of the diverse circumstances that preceded Kalimpong, and of the processes by which we have recovered their family stories. Bringing the living into this study was the decision that enabled my exploration of the making and unmaking of the Kalimpong history.

This collective approach has heightened the meanings attached to the legacy of the scheme. Our reunion was a happy occasion but it was also an opportunity to ponder the difficult pathways of the Kalimpong settlers and the irrevocable losses incurred down the generations. They have transferred the feeling of a 'Kalimpong family' to us, somehow, and certainly the Homes did become a kind of origin place for the emigrants – especially those who did not remember what came before. But while it is a space we share a common history with, let me be clear: we do not come from Kalimpong, it is not our home, it is not our origin. The Homes was a stopping point. Our South Asian grandmothers (or great-grandmothers) were shut out of its territory, and our tea-planting grandfathers (or great-grandfathers) were too afraid to go there. Our paternal line traces to Britain, with families that sprawled across the empire. On the maternal side, it is impossible to generalize about our ancestry given the prolonged period of upheavals and migrations of people into and around northeast India. Even if we have some details about Her, in order to draw a line that connects us, we need to know – or at least be able to imagine – where it goes beyond that.

Looking in the other direction, to the New Zealand future, I have traced distinct regional developments along community lines between north and south. The drift northwards is difficult to fully explain. It is partly due to the pattern of placements; certainly the warmer climates of the north would appeal; and perhaps the presence of Māori and Indians in greater numbers has had an effect. This regional distinction was apparent at the reunion too, with only one Dunedin family (apart from mine) present and one other from the South Island. The rest came from all over the North Island. And so I want to return to the story of my grandmother, Lorna, as a way of acknowledging the earlier settlers and the Dunedin origins of the scheme that had completely dropped off the Homes radar by the time three nurses – graduates from Kalimpong – were placed there in the 1960s. One of the women told me that she had no idea that others from Kalimpong had been placed in Dunedin, until one afternoon when she was walking home, up a hill (as tends to be the case there), with many bags of shopping, and a passing motorist stopped to offer her a ride. She was startled to discover within a couple of minutes of chatting that he had come from Kalimpong too, many years before.

When I look at photographs of Lorna now I see something different than before (Figure C.1). There is a world in the background that I could not see before, and this changes the way she appears in the scene. This reimagining calls to mind Sara Ahmed's work, especially her attention to direction, orientation, the powerful language of backwards and forwards and the benefit of inverting our perspectives.¹ I look at images of Lorna now and I think, how did she keep it

Figure C.1 Lorna Peters at home in Pine Hill, Dunedin, c. 1970. Author's collection.

all in? How did she never talk about it? And then I remember that Dad says she did talk about the mountains, and the heat of the summer, and the borders of the countries. But there was so much more.

The Peters's photographs from India look different now too, part of a story that has coherence where before we had to leap from imagined exotic origins to a humble Pine Hill destiny, with nothing in between. There is a photograph of the SS *Janus*, Lorna's ship to New Zealand. Dad remembers it being on the sideboard when he was growing up, and not knowing who the names written on the back belonged to. I look at them now and they are so familiar it is hard to believe they ever lost their meaning. They are the names of the five others from Kalimpong in Lorna's group, and over the years she had written in what I realize now are the dates of their deaths, beginning with her brother George, in 1947, who died due to an anaesthetic while undergoing a routine operation, and followed by Dora Moller in 1953. Lorna must have been in touch with others from Kalimpong, or perhaps was kept informed by her good friend Mae Sinclair, the 1912 emigrant who was her 'best friend'.

Like other families, my engagement with Lorna's story has continued over the years of this project. While I have not pursued any further research myself, the 'discovery' of my family by Peters relative in England has supplied much new information, including the letters Egerton wrote from Assam to his Aunt Caroline that I cited in the early chapters. Most importantly, my British cousin several times removed had also found that most elusive thing – Lorna's mother's name. She was Jhapri Gurkhali.

Names are important. From Jhapri Gurkhali to Lorna Peters feels like a leap of more than one generation. I am unsure how I might bridge that gulf between them. This gulf was created because our histories have crossed not just oceans and nations, but also cultures and ethnicities. These multiple crossings have affected our attempts to recover and reconstruct our stories. It is difficult to contemplate tapping into community histories in northeast India. It is so far away. Yet I am heartened by Michael Rothberg's reminder that *memory* is 'not afraid to traverse sacrosanct borders of ethnicity and era'.² We do have the capacity to make meaning of the meandering internal sense of our histories, even if we have to face structures and walls at every turn in order to make a story to pass on to the next generation.