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Introduction

In May 1979 a Black theatre troupe called Keskidee along with a RasTafari band called Ras Messengers left the UK to undertake a tour of predominantly Māori and Pasifika communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Upon arrival in Auckland, the organizers of the tour drove the troupe almost immediately to the very tip of the North Island. There, at a small hamlet called Te Hāpua, Keskidee and Ras Messengers gathered outside a *marae* (traditional meeting place) of Ngāti Kuri, the local *tangata whenua* (people of the land). A *karanga* (call) was given, acknowledging the dead and welcoming the *manuhiri* (guests) onto the land. A *kaumātua* (elder) of Ngāti Kuri then proceeded to introduce his guests to the significance of the place where they now stood. He asked them to consider that, although they had the Queen of England living among them in London, Ngāti Kuri lived at ‘the spiritual departure place throughout the world’. The *kaumātua* concluded with the traditional greeting of *tātou tātou* – ‘everyone being one people’. Then Rufus Collins, director of Keskidee, responded on behalf of the visitors:

You talked of your ancestors, how they had taken part in our meeting, and I do agree with you because if it was not for them you would not be here. You talked of our ancestors, taking part and making a meeting some place and somewhere; the ancestors are meeting because we have met. I do agree with you.

But Collins also recalled the association made by the *kaumātua* between themselves and the Queen and politely refuted the association: ‘we are here *despite* the Queen.’¹

There are three aspects of this meeting that are noteworthy. First is the modality of the greeting. The Māori *kaumātua* does not treat these visitors as aliens or ‘others’ but as peoples who already share a relation that must be creatively retrieved because it is not just individuals who are meeting but their ancestors too. Second is the response to the greeting. Collins accepts the modality of relating provided by the *tangata whenua* (people of the land) and confirms, indeed, that the ancestors are meeting and that the Māori are no more ‘others’ to them as they are to Māori. Nevertheless, third, Collins also finds within this indigenous modality the resources with which to critically cultivate the relationship. Māori have often appealed to their partner, the Crown, to compel British settlers to honour in good faith Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) that many of the *rangatira* (chiefs) had signed in 1840. The *kaumātua* therefore recognized the auspicious provenance of the visitors – in terms of their proximity to the Queen – yet also sought to inform them of the different but equally significant provenance of the land on which they now stood. For Cape Rēinga was close by, which in many Māori cosmologies is the departing point for spirits to journey back to the homeland of Hawaiki. Nevertheless, the Queen had been no partner to the Black actors and musicians visiting from London; she was, rather, a symbol of (post)colonial oppression that had to be replaced. Following Collins’ comments, the Ras Messengers began the chant that rerouted the provenance of the troupe from the halls of Buckingham Palace to the highlands of Ethiopia: ‘Rastaman come from Mount Zion ...’²²

Despite the separations of oceans (Pacific, Atlantic), of geo-political position (peripheral Aotearoa NZ, metropolitan Britain), of race (brown, black), and of sociological hue (the indigenous, the descendants of enslaved), a deep relationship binds these groups, one that seems to belie a separated reality. This incommensurability between rich relationality and poor material connectivity provokes a set of questions. What cosmologies underpin this greeting at Te Hāpua? What techniques of relating enable it? What stories buttress it? What projects of self-determination accompany it, and how do

they inform a sensibility of global injustice over colonial rule? My book seeks to provide insights that might help answer these questions so that the greeting at Te Hāpua does not appear as a peculiar and arcane episode but rather becomes intelligible as part of a deep, global infrastructure of anti-colonial connectivity. I also hope that the book will help to cultivate the spiritual, ethical, intellectual and political sensibilities required to critically support, renew and extend this infrastructure. To my mind, this is the most urgent and challenging task of cultivating theory for a global age.

But in order to start the journey a prior question must first be addressed: why are engagements with meetings such as that which took place at Te Hāpua so rarely engaged with in academic inquiry? To answer, it will be instructive for us to consider a modality of relating that is quite different to that utilized at Te Hāpua.

In July 1886 the *Graphic* magazine published a map of the world that accompanied an article by John Charles Ready Colomb on the status of British imperialism.³ The map, commissioned by the Imperial Federation League, has since become one of the most iconic cartographic representations of empire.⁴ Ready's article reflected the anxieties felt by British commentators at the time over the need to maintain the integrity of their empire in the face of increased imperial competition.⁵ For this purpose the map brings together the peoples who populate colonial territories – both settlers and non-settlers – and depicts them in cartoon relief around the peripheral areas of the map. They are all captured by the gaze of Britannica, the figure that is centrefold on the Greenwich meridian. In this depiction the peripheral figures, especially the colonized among them, can only understand themselves in mute relation to the imperial centre.⁶ And there is certainly no possibility of the colonized relating to each other across the global spaces, as in the greeting at Te Hāpua, and cultivating knowledge 'sideways' so as to possibly inform a decolonial project.

The pretensions of this cartographic gaze have been thoroughly protested in the Western academy by many intellectuals in their critical investigations of the key tropes of Western social theory: 'self/other',

‘master/slave(servant)’. Indeed, the turn towards theorizing representation, discourse and culture across the social sciences has been dependent upon and in a sense has breathed new life into these tropes. Before this turn, however, Jean-Paul Sartre had dared to do something different. As a French intellectual, Sartre engaged with the problem of colonialism by displacing himself from the centre of the world so as to witness a relationship between other selves. In his preface to Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, written in 1961, Sartre bid his fellow Europeans to enter the book with these words:

After a few steps in the night, you will see strangers gathered round a fire, draw closer, listen: they are discussing the fate they have in store for your trading posts, for the mercenaries who defend them. They will see you perhaps, but they will continue to talk among themselves without even lowering their voices. Their indifference strikes at our hearts ...⁷

Sartre’s attempt to displace the cartographic gaze rather than to dwell solely upon its operation was part of a political commitment to anti-colonial struggle for which Fanon, of course, had made the quintessential statement. But even though promoted by a white metropolitan intellectual, Sartre’s standpoint quickly disappeared from subsequent conversations of social theorists in the Western academy. The cartographic master tropes of the *Graphic* were quickly re-inhabited and, through them, these theorists returned to primarily intra-European controversies.⁸

Sartre’s provocation did, however, find a resonance in a group of largely Indian intellectuals who, in the early 1980s, sought to break the cartographic gaze of the *Graphic*’s imperial world map by proposing that those colonized peripheral figures – the subalterns – had lucid minds behind their fixed stare. Truth be told, the intellectuals of Subaltern Studies were influenced not by Sartre but mostly by E. P. Thompson’s approach to ‘history from below’ and its Gramscian sensitivities to culture and meaning as key sites of social struggle. Above all, though, Subaltern Studies was an intellectual response to the

popular-democratic movements that gained prominence for a period of time after the ousting of Indira Gandhi and her rule by state of emergency.⁹ Subaltern Studies sought to create a cognate space of democratization within the historiography of India, a practice of storytelling that had heretofore been dominated by the 'Cambridge School' and Marxism, both of which had produced elitist accounts wherein the peasantry were rendered an unreasoning or pre-political mass.¹⁰

Ranajit Guha's ground-breaking work on peasant rebellions argued that colonial elites might have dominated the hinterlands of India, but had not achieved hegemony over them.¹¹ Instead, the peasantry had engaged with colonial rule through their own forms of political consciousness, the seedbed of which lay in spiritual lore. In this sense, the consciousness of the peasantry could not be categorized as pre-political but rather as political in ways other-wise to the idealized version of secular European reason pronounced by colonial (and indeed native) elites.¹² Guha implored historians to listen to these 'small voices' of the past and, in their presence, to consider 'what kind of history would be written?'¹³ This historiographical intervention had contemporary political import. For if the peasantry had now become citizens then the register of political rationality also required democratization. In this movement the elitist profane logic of state and social interest would have to be disturbed and displaced by the 'small voices.'¹⁴

The Subaltern Studies project soon ran into a series of problems laid out most famously by Gayatri Spivak via an engagement with the figure of the subaltern woman.¹⁵ Spivak's work posed a set of questions. Was it possible to recover the political consciousness of the subalterns as knowledge untainted by the exercise of power? To what extent was the notion of a 'resisting subject' itself a category born of European fantasies of their own mastery? And, in this respect, was the very attempt to represent the subaltern not also an act of epistemic domination akin to those undertaken by other elitist historians? In sum, did sympathetic ventriloquism induce the same affect as elitist silencing? Addressing these questions, Spivak carefully argued that Subaltern Studies was a politically necessary but necessarily irresolvable intellectual project.¹⁶

Yet she went further than this. Because the subaltern could not appear 'without the thought of the elite,' Spivak also proclaimed that the subaltern provided 'the model for a general theory of consciousness.' Specifically, she argued that 'the historical predicament of the colonial subaltern' could be considered the 'allegory of the predicament of *all* thought, *all* deliberative consciousness.'¹⁷ Philosophically, then, Spivak bade the subaltern to travel from the periphery to the centre, but only to become there the 'recalcitrant difference' that structured elite discourse.¹⁸ As the project was taken up in Western intellectual spaces, enabled by what I would call an opportunistic utilization of Spivak's sympathetic critique, Subaltern Studies was made to proffer less an opportunity to decolonize knowledge regimes and more another faculty through which to deconstruct knowledge of the Western self. As such, Subaltern Studies could interface with – even be collapsed into – the post-structuralist project (broadly conceived), a project that was also decidedly post-Sartre in its singular obsession with the modern (read colonizing European) subject.¹⁹

With these movements the peripheral figures on the *Graphic's* imperial world map, now encoded as subalterns, were once more emptied of epistemic authority so as to become the cipher through which to interpret the proclivities of Britannica – the self and master. Perhaps these incorporations were reflective of the general trajectories of the Western academy after the defeat of the Third World project and the apparent re-incorporation of troublesome populations back into neo-imperial orbits through neo-liberal governance. No doubt, the end of the Second World project (i.e. global communism) did nothing to arrest this movement; nor did the subsequent internationalization of the staff and student constituencies of Western universities through the globalization of elites rather than through the global democratization of life chances and the attendant decolonization of knowledge.

Nevertheless, the originating democratic impulse has remained seminal to Subaltern Studies. Dipesh Chakrabarty still hopes for a 'subaltern historiography that actually tries to learn from the subaltern,'²⁰ although in his own work he marks the subaltern as

only an epistemic limit to historical knowledge.²¹ Spivak, meanwhile, has always read Subaltern Studies as a political intervention, that is, as ‘a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible interest.’²² More recently, however, Spivak has focused on pedagogy, a move honed through her practitioner work with marginalized communities. She has given up her ‘apologetic formula’ for Subaltern Studies as the strategic use of essentialism, and has found instead, ‘a different one emerging from my own subaltern study: learning to learn from below.’ ‘This one’, Spivak suggests (and here I would recall the fate of Sartre’s intervention in the Western academy), ‘will have had few takers.’²³

I want to dwell on these (somewhat slim) openings in Subaltern Studies because to my mind the transmogrification of Subaltern Studies from an engaged democratic project into postcolonial critique has (unintentionally) serviced the colonial ‘fatal impact’ thesis.²⁴ This thesis rests on the assumption that indigenous cultures could not withstand or compete with the sophistication of European civilization: they would have to die or transform into substitute versions of the conquering culture. At the epistemic level I would argue that the category of the subaltern is part of this erasure. In his own way, even Gramsci, the immediate source of the category of the subaltern, is complicit in this erasure. He states that some social strata – especially the peasantry – seem to be incapable of developing their own intellectuals because in the very moment of their formation as intellectuals they cease to be ‘organic’ to that stratum.²⁵

But what if, in the pursuit of ‘epistemic justice,’²⁶ the democratic impulse of Subaltern Studies were to be separated from the very term ‘subaltern’? The seedbed of such a decolonial project would not, then, be found in academic discourse but in the living knowledge traditions of colonized peoples.²⁷ Maligned, ridiculed, attacked and disavowed by colonial forces, these traditions have nevertheless retained a tenacious thread of vitality that provides for the possibility of a retrieval of thought and action that addresses global injustices in ways otherwise to the colonial science of the gaze. Crucially, these projects have refused – and more often than not ignored – the injunctions of the

fatal impact thesis. Their ethos of living other-wise is expressed by Bob Marley in the following verse: 'we refuse to be what you wanted us to be, we are what we are, that's the way it's going to be'.²⁸

In light of these decolonial projects, the category of the subaltern becomes singularly unhelpful, if not meaningless. For the colonized figures on the periphery of the *Graphic's* world map have always named and re-named themselves as, for example, 'sufferers',²⁹ Black Israelites, Ethiopians, RasTafari, Tūhoe, Ngāti Kuri, Māori, Ham and Shem. And, heretically, these peoples have often determined the meaning of Britannica on her behalf as they cultivate useful understandings of their relationships to power. This is precisely what Reitu Harris, president of the predominantly Māori Black Power gang, does when he states that 'to me the word "Pākehā" no longer stands for "European" ... it stands for a type of person who ... when it rains, will rush for shelter themselves and not care about others getting wet'.³⁰

In this respect it is not possible to speak of a 'decolonial project' in the abstract, that is, as an academic enterprise separated from living knowledge traditions. For instance, Kaupapa Māori is a knowledge framework that, while utilized academically in Māori Studies, has a constituency, purview and knowledge base that encompasses the wider Māori world (*Te Ao Māori*). Kaupapa Māori is a critical project of self-determination at the level of knowledge cultivation, and frames intellectual priorities and working practices through *mātauranga* Māori (Māori knowledge systems).³¹ Kaupapa Māori and other grounded decolonial projects of epistemic justice undermine the fatal impact thesis in so far as they refuse the colonial conceit that European knowledge traditions hold supreme interpretative authority over the varied cosmologies and cultures of humanity.

The disciples of anthropology and sociology have long claimed that Western academia institutionally embodies modern self-reflexivity, that is, a superior ability to critically examine oneself as well as – and in relation to – others. Social scientific interpretations of reality, because critical, are assumed to be more mobile and hence more universalizable than particular context-specific 'lay' interpretations. Poststructural/

postcolonial justifications for fixating upon the gaze of Britannica implicitly reproduce the assumption that a qualitative difference exists between interpreters: the lay/subaltern/colonized practitioner is unknowable to herself but, thank God, at least the academic/expert/modern subject is knowable to himself at the limit of his experience.³² However, if we mark the fatal impact thesis as a fantasy, then we must at least consider that self-reflexivity (personal and institutional) is in no way a unique product of modernity but is rather, in the basic sense of the word, traditional. And if self-reflexivity is institutionally traditional, then even the interpretative superiority of Western academia must be radically questioned. In this decolonial apprehension, there can exist in principle only a *quantitative* difference between the representations made by academics and those made by practitioners – a difference predicated upon the infrastructural power to disseminate knowledge of others.

So by this reasoning I remind myself that entering academia is not a fatal impact, a transmogrification of my being into a modern reflexive self, but rather, a problematic mapping of the legacies of collective struggles and their living knowledge traditions onto an institution of privilege. It is my decision as to whether I wish to cash in that privilege wisely by contributing to a decolonization of knowledge regimes with a liberatory intent, instead of passively deferring to the valorization of Britannica. I choose, then, to return us to Te Hāpua and a greeting, not between subaltern A and subaltern B, but between Keskidee, Ras Messengers and Ngāti Kuri (the people of that land). I cannot speak for Sartre or his people, but I notice that he follows me back to the campfires. There I ask to fold myself into this greeting at Te Hāpua, on the terms given by the greeters, terms that in at least some way I am already invested in. Through these terms I critically contribute to the support, renewal and extension of a global infrastructure of anti-colonial connectivity. Hence the title of this book, *The Black Pacific*, which is both a provocation and a problem.

The term 'Black Pacific' has, in the main, been used to refer to the variable and shifting nature of African-American and North-Pacific

Asian ties of kinship, politics and ideology against the backdrop of US imperial ambitions in the region.³³ 'Black Pacific', of course, is a comparative remix of 'Black Atlantic',³⁴ a term popularized by Paul Gilroy in his endeavour to recast Western modernity by reference to the double consciousness of Diaspora Africans living in North American society.³⁵ And yet in some ways Gilroy's seminal work reproduces the cartographic imagination of the *Graphic's* imperial world map: continental Africa is hardly treated as agential within modernity; it sits mostly silent besides the vocal Americas where its progeny have taken on life as 'moderns'.³⁶ Likewise, the dominant cartographic imaginary of the Black Pacific tends to focus on its Rim and less so on the 'sea of islands' composed of a dazzling array of related peoples, languages, cultures and polities.³⁷ Here the question arises as to whether the indigenous peoples of this vast Oceanic region are to be muted in the analysis of global interconnections. (I will now follow Epeli Hau'ofa in preferring the term Oceania rather than Pacific.³⁸)

With these challenges in mind, Teresia Teaiwa's warnings on analogical reasoning are extremely valuable.³⁹ Teaiwa notes that while, in the early twentieth century, Oceania was a region of intense interest for ethnographic and anthropological inquiry it subsequently lost much of its value for Western academia. More recently, scholars of the region have tried to reinject value through analogy, i.e. the 'Caribbeanization' or 'Africanization' of the Pacific. The title of this book was enthusiastically suggested to me by my publishing company no doubt for such purposes of valorization. Nevertheless, I agreed to this title because it has a purchase beyond the market and besides analogy. The peoples and projects that we will walk with in this book have in various ways identified Black and its inferences to Africa – both continental and diasporic – as a key site of struggle for indigenous self-determination in Aotearoa NZ and, to some extent, Oceania at large. Less an analogy, these engagements reference Black (and African) as part of a global infrastructure of anti-colonial connectivity. I follow these sensibilities and join this book with cognate intellectual enterprises.⁴⁰

The fundamental aim of this book is to redeem the possibilities of anti-colonial solidarity between colonized and (post)colonized peoples on terms other than those laid out by colonial science. This will entail a wilful movement across various academic fields of study guided not by abstract concerns for interdisciplinarity but by the analytical imperatives of this redemption. And for the same reason, this aim will necessitate a plural register of argumentation spanning the social scientific, narrational, poetic and personal.

The most important purpose of this book is to retrieve the relationship between African and Māori anti-colonial struggles as a space that supports spiritual, intellectual and political commitments to *mana motuhake*, a central term for the following investigations, which in Te Reo (the Māori language) can be glossed as ‘self-determination’. Such retrieval is especially important for a society – Aotearoa NZ – which tries to bury its living colonial frontier under a worldly ‘multiculturalism’, thereby stifling the spirit of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty), signed in 1840 between many *rangatira* (chiefs) and Queen Victoria, and additionally, whitewashing imperial legacies in Oceania. A second purpose is to strengthen the confidence of peoples of African heritage as to the global (and never marginal) importance of our anti-colonial struggles and ongoing decolonial projects. A third purpose is to underline the fact that European colonization has depended upon an interlocking super-exploitation of labour and super-dispossession of land organized along lines of race.⁴¹ Hence, the exorcism of racial inequality requires the cultivation of spiritual, philosophical and political standpoints that reach across these lines to rebind the various descendant communities who have and continue to suffer from such exploitation and dispossession. A fourth purpose is to build a political commitment among intellectuals to what I would call ‘deep relation’, that is, a commitment to leave behind current academic endorsements of privileged narcissism.

In the next chapter I shall elucidate a decolonial science adequate to the task of cultivating knowledge of deep relation between peoples who, like Keskidee, Ras Messengers and Ngāti Kuri, appear on the

imperial world map to be irrevocably distant and disconnected subalterns. A science of deep relation allows us to reason and walk some way with Black Power and young Māori warriors, with Panthers of the Polynesian type, with Black liberation theologians as they encounter indigenous struggles and spirituality, with Black thespians and RasTafari musicians as they attempt to catalyse the soul powers of Oceania, with the RasTafari of the House of Shem, with prophetic movements that chant down Babylon but that are indigenous to Oceania, and with all the peoples and projects who seek to heal the wounds suffered at the hands of Cook and Columbus.