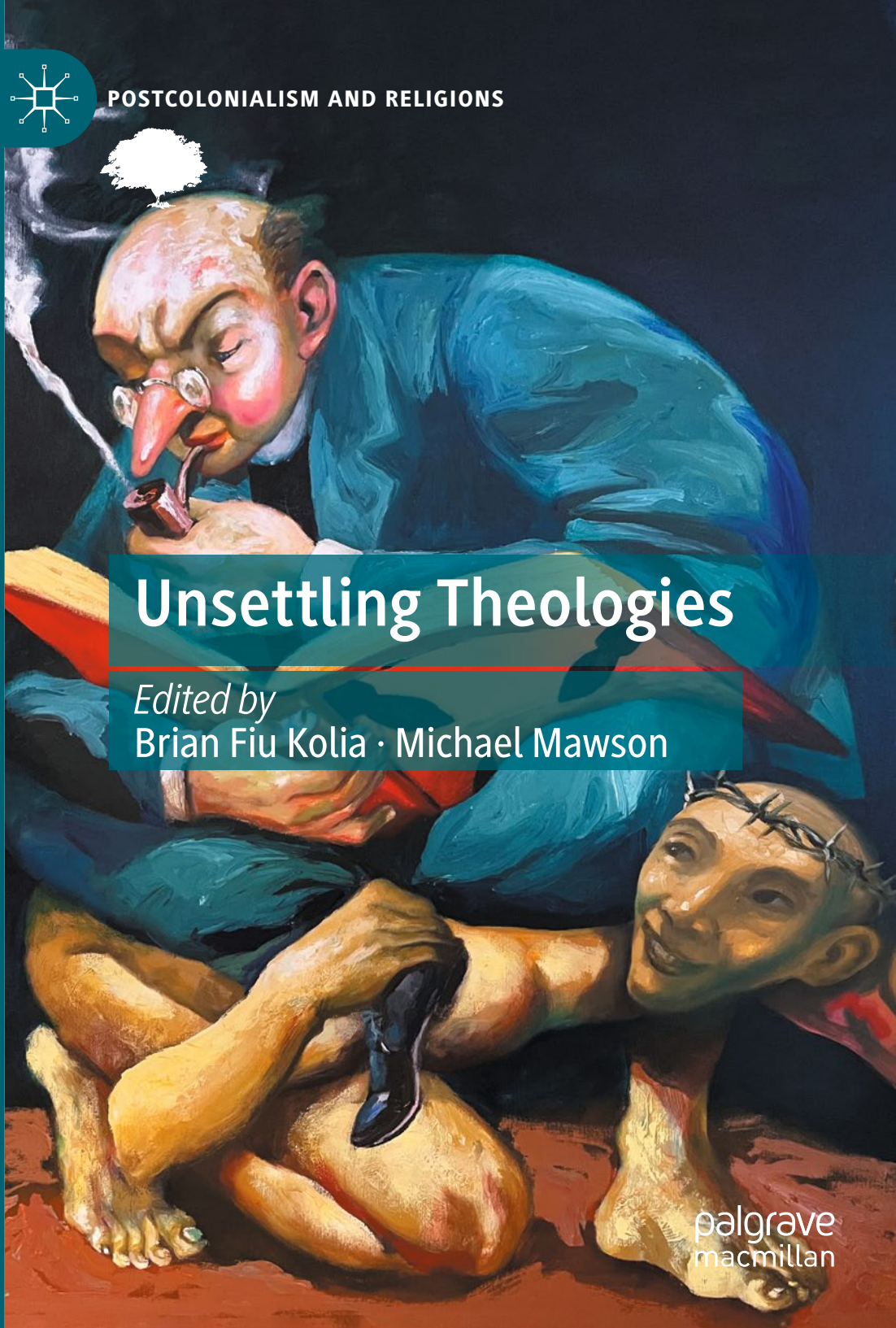
POSTCOLONIALISM AND RELIGIONS



Unsettling Theologies

Edited by
Brian Fiu Kolia · Michael Mawson

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Postcolonialism and Religions

The Postcolonialism and Religions series by its very name bridges the secular with the sacred through hybrid, interstitial, and contrapuntal inquiries. The series features the scholarship of indigenous scholars working at the intersections of postcolonial theories, theologies, and religions. The editors welcome authors around the world in an effort to move beyond and interrogate a historical North American and Euro-centric postcolonial studies disciplinary dominance. The series seeks to foster subaltern voices especially from Africa, Asia, Central and South America, and the liquid continent.

Brian Fiu Kolia • Michael Mawson
Editors

Unsettling Theologies

Memory, Identity, and Place

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Acknowledgments

This project grew out of relationships. It was inspired by some of the rich theological thinking and conversations that have been happening for some time in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and the Pacific. This volume aims to gather up some concrete reflections about theology and theological education from our friends and colleagues.

First and foremost, we thank and acknowledge all of the contributors for their mahi (work) writing and revising their chapters. Much of the thinking and writing of this project took place during the pandemic and successive lockdowns. It is a small miracle that this project even managed to come together! Thank you for your patience and perseverance with us as editors.

A number of these chapters were shared as papers at the United Theological College (UTC) Research Colloquium in 2021 and 2022. The UTC Colloquium and the research community provided opportunities for deep conversation and reflection. Thank you to all those who contributed to these discussions and helped shape this project.

The artist Emmanuel Garibay granted permission for use of the image of his striking painting, *The Theologian*, that appears on the cover. The Presbyterian Research Centre (Archives) of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand granted permission for the images that appear in Wayne Te Kaawa's chapter. Permission for images of artworks from Vernon Ah Kee's *Unwritten* series (appearing in Garry Deverell's chapter) was granted by the Milani Gallery. Permission for the use of an image from Warwick Thornton's *Stranded* (also appearing in Deverell's chapter) was granted by Anna Schwartz Gallery. Thank you.

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Finally, we thank our beautiful families for their love and patience—Tanaria, Elichai, Ruth, Lars, and Silas.

Brian Fiu Kolia Michael Mawson
December 2023

Praise for *Unsettling Theologies*

"This collection asks incisive and unsettling questions of the Christian tradition that will challenge any Western reader. Resisting the amnesia of modernity, the authors reckon with the past to highlight certain legacies of colonialism—neither absolving nor rejecting those who have been privileged by it. With generosity and attentiveness, the authors reimagine the future for diverse communities across the South Pacific."

—Meredith Lake, *Historian and Broadcaster*

"*Unsettling Theologies* by Michael Mawson and Brian Kolia is a profound and thought-provoking work that disrupts conventional theological discourse. It delves into the intricate intersections of memory, identity, and place, offering readers a fresh and innovative perspective. It also invites those in both the academy and the pew to challenge their preconceptions and engage in a deeper, more empathetic exploration of spirituality. This collection is a transformative and enlightening read."

—Nāsili Vaka'uta, *Trinity Methodist Theological College, New Zealand*

"This vibrant chorus of voices from the Moana/Pacific, Australia, and Aotearoa New Zealand makes an exciting and bold contribution to theology. This book unsettles expectations and asks new questions. It is likely to become a reference point in pioneering a future agenda for creative and more inclusive theological discussion."

—David Tombs, *University of Otago, New Zealand*

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Faafetai Aiava is Senior Lecturer and the Head of Department of Theology and Ethics at the Pacific Theological College, Fiji. He is also an ordained minister of the Congregational Christian Church, Samoa. Aiava is a first-generation diasporic Samoan, having been born in Samoa and raised in Aotearoa and Australia. He holds a PhD from Pacific Theological College, with his work focusing on colonization, pedagogy, contextual theology, trinitarian theology, relational theology, Pacific hermeneutics, diaspora, and migration.

Mark G. Brett is an Australian who was raised in Papua New Guinea, and who now lives on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people. He is Professor of Hebrew Bible at Whitley College, the University of Divinity, in Naarm/Melbourne. His books include *Decolonizing God: The Bible in the Tides of Empire* (2009), *Political Trauma and Healing: Biblical Ethics for a Postcolonial World* (2016), and a forthcoming work *Indigenous Rights and the Legacies of the Bible: From Moses to Mabo.*

Emily Colgan is a Pākehā (white) researcher in biblical studies from Aotearoa New Zealand. She lives in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland), under the shadow of Ōhinerua maunga (the mountain) where Ngāti Whātua-o-Ōrākei are mana whenua (the tribal authority). She is Manukura/Principal at St John's College/Hoani Tapu te Kaikauwhau i te Rongopai, Aotearoa New Zealand. She is the author of *Jeremiah: An Earth Bible Commentary* (forthcoming) and co-editor of *The Routledge Companion to Eve* (2023) and the multi-volume work, *Rape Culture, Gender Violence, and Religion* (2018).

Garry Worete Deverell is a trawloolway man from northern lutruwita (Tasmania), an Anglican priest, and a founding Lecturer and Research Fellow within the School of Indigenous Studies at the University of Divinity, Melbourne. He is the author of *The Bonds of Freedom: Vows, Sacraments and the Formation of the Christian Self* (2008) and *Gondwana Theology: A Trawloolway Man Reflects on Christian Faith* (2018).

Jione Havea is co-parent for a polycultural daughter, native pastor (Methodist Church, Tonga), and senior research fellow with Trinity Theological College (Aotearoa New Zealand) and with the Centre for Religion, Ethics, and Society (Charles Sturt University, Australia). An activist on the ground and in meeting-rooms and classrooms, Havea pushes back at bullies, suckers, and shitstems, in and around sacred texts and cultures.

Brian Fiu Kolia is Lecturer in Old Testament Studies at Malua Theological College and an ordained minister of the Congregational Christian Church, Samoa. He is an Australian-born Samoan whose roots go back to the villages of Sili Savaii, Satapuala, Tufutafoe and Faleaseela. He holds a PhD from the University of Divinity and is author of the forthcoming *Maota Tau Ave: Towards a Diasporic Australian-Samoan Understanding of Wisdom in Ecclesiastes* (2024). More importantly, he is a husband to Tanaria and father to Elichai.

Therese Lautua is a Tomokanga Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Auckland/ Waipapa Taumata Rau and completed her PhD in Theology at the same institution. Proudly from South Auckland, New Zealand, her cultural heritage spans across the villages of Lalolmanu, Amaile, Samusu, Poutasi in Samoa, as well as Ireland and Switzerland. Lautua loves the challenge of being a wife, mother, and serving her local Catholic parish and community.

Michael Mawson is a Pākehā (white) theologian and the Maclaurin Goodfellow Associate Professor at the University of Auckland/ Waipapa Taumata Rau. He is also Research Fellow at the University of the Free State, South Africa. He is the author of *Christ Existing as Community: Bonhoeffer's Ecclesiology* (2018) and co-editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (2019). His current research focuses on theology and aging, decolonization, and liberation theologies.

Andrew Picard is a Pākehā (white) theologian who lives in Te Kawerau ā Maki rohe, Tāmaki Makaurau, Aotearoa New Zealand. He is Director of Carey Graduate School and Lecturer in Public and Systematic Theology at Carey Baptist College, Aotearoa New Zealand. He is co-editor of *T&T Clark Handbook of Colin Gunton* (2021) and co-editor of *Theology and the Experience of Disability: Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Voices Down Under* (2016).

Te Aroha Rountree is Senior Lecturer in Māori/Moana Studies at Trinity Methodist Theological College, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. Her research areas include Tangata Whenua theology and Tikanga Māori. She is from Ngai Tuteāuru and Ngā Puhi.

Maina Talia is a theologian and activist from Vaitupu, Tuvalu. He holds a PhD from Charles Sturt University, with his work focusing on Indigenous methodologies and climate justice. He is the former Co-chair of Global Indigenous Forum on Climate Change (GIFCC) representing the Pacific islands.

Wayne Te Kaawa is from Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Awa and Tūhoe people. He holds a PhD in Theology from Otago University and his research areas include Māori and Indigenous theology. He is Lecturer of Māori Theology at the University of Otago and a Presbyterian Minister.

Naomi Wolfe is a trawloolway woman with Jewish German and Irish heritage. She is lecturer in history at Australian Catholic University. She is also Director of Academic Programs, NAIITS College—the first Indigenous postgraduate theological college in Australia. NAIITS: An Indigenous Learning Community is an international learning community of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples from around the world. Naomi has a commitment and interest in decolonizing the disciplines of theology and history.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Brian Fiu Kolia and Michael Mawson

The cover of our book features a painting by the Filipino artist Emmanuel Garibay, *The Theologian*, which hangs in the dining hall of the United Theological College in Paramatta, Australia. As with many of Garibay's paintings (see Pattenden 2023), *The Theologian* is disturbing and unsettling. It portrays a white, well-dressed theologian sitting comfortably on the back of a brown, Indigenous Jesus, recognisable from his crown of thorns. In contrast to the theologian, Jesus is barefoot and naked, thin, crouching, and close to the ground.

What is particularly striking in this painting is that that the theologian seems entirely oblivious of the person beneath him. Smoking a pipe and peering through spectacles, he is immersed in reading a large, beautifully bound book. Unlike Jesus, who despite his heavy load still extends a hand

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outward, the theologian is hunched over, closed in on himself. The book that he is reading seems to be more important than where he is sitting. Indeed, the theologian seems unaware of the burden and violence of his activity. His context seems to have no significance for his theological musings. Garibay's painting introduces and depicts a number of the themes which are central to this book: *Unsettling Theologies: Memory, Identity, and Place*. The painting raises questions of how we can attend to and unsettle theologians and theologies that suppress native voices, overlook the marginalised other, and colonise Indigenous bodies.

In a recent report on the dynamics and impacts of white supremacy, racism, and colonisation, the Human Rights Commission of Aotearoa New Zealand provides a definition of colonisation: 'The systematic appropriation, seizure and exploitation of Indigenous lands and natural resources by settler colonies. Colonial processes undermine and disempower Indigenous self-determination, leadership, and political structures' (Te Kāhui Tika Tangata, 2020, 21). The report makes specific note of the role of Christianity in these colonial processes: 'Colonisation employed Christianity and Western institutions to subjugate Indigenous spiritual beliefs and knowledge systems and dismantle first peoples' societies, culture, social cohesion, and families' (21).

In Australia, Aotearoa, and Pasifika, Christianity has been integrally connected to colonisation. Colonisation was central to how the Christian faith arrived at this end of the world and also to its subsequent spread and development. Christianity in turn has largely accepted and operated within enclosures and boundaries set by colonialism.[1] If colonisation has been aptly described as the attempt to replace one house (*whare/fale*) with another (Ross 2020, 23–24), Christianity has been living comfortably inside the new colonial villa.

It is also significant that most theology and theological education in this part of the world makes limited reference to these connections between Christianity and colonisation. As with Garibay's painting, most scholars choose to immerse themselves in texts or focus their attention elsewhere. Most theological scholarship that is being produced here makes

[1] As the editors of another recent book put it, 'Christian theologies came—uninvited, unwelcomed—in the arms of white European (pākehā, palangi) traders and missionaries whose drives interlocked with the missions of explorers and flagbearers (read: land-grabbers, colonizers) for their white European Crowns' (Havea et al. 2022, 1).

little or no mention of local contexts, histories, and struggles.[2] It is instead orientated to debates and trends in European or American scholarship.

The chapters of *Unsettling Theologies* respond to this situation. Many of the chapters attend to specific ways that Christianity has been and still is bound up with white supremacy, racism, and colonisation.[3] Some of the chapters draw attention to problems and limitations of mainstream theological education and scholarship. Other chapters begin to present and perform ways in which things could be different. In all of these ways, the chapters of *Unsettling Theologies* aim to contribute to wider work of decolonisation (Elkington et al. 2020).

If this collection as a whole aims to unsettle or contest a longstanding alliance of Christianity and colonisation, the subtitle indicates some specific sites of intervention: *memory, identity, and place*. First, this collection aims to recover lost memories and forgotten truths. Many of the chapters revisit the past and draw attention to neglected histories and stories. They do so in order to create new possibilities for the present. Second, *Unsettling Theologies* provides reflections on how theology and theological thinking intersect with identity or ways of being. How can theology and theological thinking help us to understand who we in our own communities and relationships with one another? Finally, many of the chapters seek to perform and demonstrate ways in which theology is deeply connected to place. Theological reflection is neither abstract nor universal; it emerges from local communities and peoples struggling to survive, understand themselves, and find a way forward.

On this basis *Unsettling Theologies* includes contributions from scholars from a range of backgrounds and positionalities. The collection features constructive, creative work being undertaken by Indigenous theologians from around Australia, Aotearoa, and Pasifika. It includes scholarship by Aboriginal, Māori, Tongan, Samoan, and Tuvaluan theologians, many of whom have been recovering and drawing on Indigenous wisdoms to challenge and expand traditional understandings of Christianity. The chapters of *Unsettling Theologies* display innovative ways of reading biblical texts, storytelling, distinctive forms of practice and worship, and surprising ways

[2] There are, of course, notable exceptions. In theological scholarship from colleges in the Pacific, there has a strong focus on developing contextual theologies. For more on Pacific contextual theologies, see Havea 2021.

[3] Of course, colonisation has not been monolithic; it has morphed into different forms in different times and places. There are significant differences across the contexts that our authors engage.

of being Christian. By providing a sampling of this rich scholarship, *Unsettling Theologies* invites readers to go further and deeper in engaging these voices and ideas.

This collection also features work by some white theologians who are committed to the work of decolonisation. White theologians too have responsibilities for identifying and naming ways in which their commitments and beliefs have been and continue to be complicit in colonisation and racism. White theologians hold responsibilities for divesting power and rethinking their commitments in order to make room for others. *Unsettling Theologies* includes chapters by scholars who have been grappling with these challenges.

We have organised *Unsettling Theologies* into three parts. The first part, 'Unsettling Whiteness', includes four chapters that examine ways in which European colonisation and racism have impacted theology and Christian identity. In the opening chapter, Te Aroha Rountree provides an account of 'Jesus as savage' over against the civilising logics and history of missionary Christianity. Rountree reflects on how Jesus as savage can support ongoing Māori struggle and resistance: 'Jesus the savage is an ally and accomplice in calling out historical inaccuracies and theological inequities, joining ongoing resistance against colonial oppression and injustice' (Rountree 2024, 12).

In the next chapter, Garry Worete Deverell reflects on artworks by two prominent Aboriginal artists: Vernon Ah Kee and Warwick Thornton. Deverell reflects on artworks in which Ah Kee and Thornton subvert Western representations of Jesus Christ. Drawing on these reflections, he pursues a theology that emphasises life and hope, rather than suffering and victimhood: 'Ultimately we need a God who can help us move beyond being victims into a space where we can experience liberation and justice, we need a God who can share with us a founded hope for that better future' (Deverell 2024, 33).

Michael Mawson's chapter proposes that in the aftermath of colonisation at least two different Christologies or images of Christ are required. First, he outlines some of the creative, constructive work currently being done by Indigenous theologians, focusing on Lee Miena Skye and Wayne Te Kaawa. Second, Mawson suggests the need for a *theologia crucis* for white Christians, an image of Christ that can interrupt settler strategies for avoiding responsibility and ignoring Indigenous challenges.

In the last chapter of this part, Naomi Wolfe reflects on some concrete ways that we might begin to decolonise theological institutions in the

Australian context. Drawing on her extensive experience working in colleges and universities, Wolfe indicates some of the barriers that have prevented Aboriginal students from succeeding in theological education. Moreover, she identifies and suggests practical steps that institutions can take in order to begin making their spaces more accessible.

The second part of this collection, 'Dismantling Colonial Systems', consists of five chapters that seek to dismantle colonial systems by focusing on specific historical moments and events. In Chap. 6, Brian Kolia revisits an *ifoga* ceremony conducted in August 2021 in which Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern officially apologised for the Dawn Raids of the 1970s. In these raids, the New Zealand Government systematically scapegoated and targeted Pasifika peoples. Kolia reflects on some limitations of this recent *ifoga* ceremony, questioning whether it was, in fact, a genuine *ifoga*.

In the next chapter, Therese Lautua reflects on the pressures and challenges that are faced by diasporic Pacific youth. Organising her reflections around an episode of the popular podcast *The Uso Table Talk*, Lautua examines ways in which Pacific churches can inhibit the flourishing and relational wellbeing of youth. In addition, she reflects on how these spaces can be decolonised and made more life-giving: 'How can we begin this slow work of listening and building community? How can we unsettle theologies and systems based on a colonial mindset?' (Lautua 2024, 102).

In Chap. 8, Andrew Picard reflects on the entanglements of education, Christianity, and colonialism in Aotearoa by exploring one specific friendship and partnership between nineteenth-century missionary Robert Maunsell and the influential Governor George Grey. Picard draws attention to some of the distorted theological assumptions and beliefs shared by Maunsell and Grey. He shows how these assumptions helped facilitate a civilising mission and agenda over several decades that contributed to the legacy of structural educational injustice for Māori.

In a wide-ranging article, Mark Brett explores implications of the notion of spiritual sovereignty in Australia in the wake of the recognition of native title in the 1992 *Mabo* vs. *Queensland* decision. Engaging a range of legal decisions and commentaries, Brett draws out differences in white and Aboriginal ways of belonging in Australia. In light of these reflections, he concludes by calling on churches to acknowledge and respond to their past failures to affirm Indigenous sovereignty: 'In the past, the churches in Australia may not have harboured questions about the legitimacy of their land grants, but that is no longer the case … The churches have an

opportunity to regain the proper shape and consistency that has been lost by appropriating the benefits of colonial injustices' (Brett 2024, 149).

In her chapter, Emily Colgan focuses on a dichotomy between wilderness and gardens found in biblical texts such as Jeremiah 17: 5–8. In addition, Colgan explores how this dichotomy—with its negative construal of wilderness—was appropriated by British settlers in nineteenth-century New Zealand in ways that facilitated the large-scale destruction of perceived wilderness. What could happen if we were to free wilderness from this dichotomy? 'Free of the proverbial polarity that constrains understandings of wilderness, this land becomes the habitat of the עַרְעָר (shrub) and, by extension, the dwelling place of additional, other-than-human communities' (Colgan 2024, 167).

The final part of this collection is 'Un-silencing Alter-Native Theologies'. Here, we end in the way Tongans and Samoans end their festivities by way of *taoalunga* or *taualuga* respectively. These Pasifika terms refer to the final dance which is given to the guest(s) of honour. However—and this is the meaning we want to emphasise—these words also point to Pasifika architecture, where the tip of the roof on top of the *fale* (house), known as the *taualuga*, is the final part of the structure. The *taualuga* closes off the whole *fale* and signals the completion of building. The four chapters of this section close off the *fale* by recovering native voices or presenting some Indigenous styles of thinking. Faafetai Aiava, for example, explores and reflects on hermeneutics. Aiava suggests that many of standard hermeneutical approaches to biblical studies in the Pacific 'have philosophical underpinnings that serve the colonial interests of dominant cultures' (Aiava 2024, 175). In response, he highlights some of the more dynamic, relational ways of reading and being that have emerged from Pasifika contexts.

In Chap. 12, Wayne Te Kaawa outlines a group research project that involved identifying 'unnamed natives' from photographs held at the archives of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. By recovering the names and identities of the people in the photographs, their descendants were able to claim history and stabilise identity. 'For a small Māori community', Te Kaawa reflects, 'this project became a way of reconnecting with our ancestors and telling stories of their historical, cultural, and spiritual connections to place' (Te Kaawa 2024, 190).

In Chap. 13, Maina Talia mobilises the concept of *tuakoi* (neighbour) for a public theology that facilitates climate justice. For Talia, this concept of *tuakoi* both draws from Indigenous wisdoms of Tuvalu and makes

ethical claims that extend beyond this horizon. As Talia puts it, this concept helps with 'lifting the discussions that happen on the islands towards the horizon of the political and economic world beyond' (Talia 2024, 219).

Finally, Jione Havea presents a '*māfana* economics', which privileges 'reciprocal relations and responsibilities' rather than 'products and monetary values' (Havea 2024, 228). Drawing insights from Leslie Boseto and 'Epeli Hau'ofa, Havea contests economic practices and systems that depend on and support colonial powers. Instead, he draws attention to innovative ways in which Pasifika peoples actively forge connections through their shared labour and exchanges.

Going back to Garibay's painting, several questions emerge: How do we find a way forward? Do we remove this white theologian from the picture? Can we flip the positions of the white theologian and the brown Christ? Do we add more bodies to the brown and Indigenous Christ, helping him carry the oblivious white theologian? We hope that these chapters will help bring to light the colonialism that marks the white theologian and unsettle his obliviousness. Indeed, we hope that these chapters can push back at any theological thinking that is placing weight on the back of the brown, Indigenous Christ. We hope that you will be enriched and troubled by these chapters and challenges. And we hope that you will join us as we continue on this journey.

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PART I

Unsettling Whiteness

CHAPTER 2

Jesus Christ, Once Was a Savage! Selective Memory, Staged Identity, and Stolen Spaces

Te Aroha Rountree

The title of this chapter proclaims that Jesus Christ is one of us. Jesus Christ was once a savage. In addition, my claim is that Jesus *is* one of us and speaks of our reconciliation as colonised tangata whenua (people of the land). This title proclaims Jesus as a savage, someone who identifies with our collective memory as tangata whenua, who is embodied in our identity as Māori and as Christians, and who is distinguished by our theological interactions in sacred places and spaces, both physical and metaphorical. The reclamation of the term 'savage', therefore, is an attempt to liberate us from the negative connotations of this language and stereotype. By taking a 'savage' approach, this chapter aims to unsettle histories and

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