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## **Double Displacement: Indigenous Australians and Artefacts of the Wet Tropics**

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### **Abstract**

*The history of dispossession of Indigenous Australians as a result of government policies has been well documented. Going beyond this established literature, this paper explores connections between the displacement of Aboriginal people of the rainforest region of North Queensland to reserves and the ethnographic trade in museum artefacts. I provide an analysis of how Aboriginal people and some of their material products were historically sent along different trajectories. The paper sheds light on debates about the political and economic aspects of a history of displacement, circulation and emplacement that continues to produce inequalities today.*

**Keywords:** Queensland; Aboriginal Australians; Artefact collection; Displacement; Value Transformation; Anthropology

## Introduction

[[‘The policeman caught us and we walked from there to Kuranda. *We saw all the dilly bags and spears at the police station that the people had to leave behind.* We then went up to the mission and saw our mob there...’ (Cecil Brim in Collins 1981, 20–21; my emphasis)]]

Most members of Cecil Brim’s ‘mob’ were sent to Mona Mona mission, twenty five miles from Kuranda in North Queensland, but many were scattered during the police ‘round ups’ and some of his kin were eventually sent to other missions and government reserves, never to be seen by Cecil again. Indigenous Australians are among the many peoples across the globe who suffered displacement, first as a result of frontier violence following the push of the European invaders into their land and secondly through the implementation of government policies to remove them from their homelands and confine them to missions and government reserves. Focusing on the tropical rainforest region of North Queensland, this paper explores connections between the removal of Aboriginal people from their home places and a concurrent global ethnographic trade in museum artefacts during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In particular, I consider the role of state agents, such as the police force, in the appropriation of Aboriginal things. The products of Aboriginal physical, intellectual and reproductive labour, including their mummified bodies and skeletal remains, are today held in museum collections all over the world. My aim is a brief ‘historical ethnography’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992), of colonial displacement, circulation and emplacement that may help to shed light on some of the conditions and processes that continue to produce inequalities today.

## Displacement as a Spatiotemporalising Practice of Value Transformation

Displacement of both people and things can be defined as a process of movement or diversion out of place through the forceful intervention of one or more external agents. However, the place from which people and things get *displaced* is not necessarily a fixed geographic location. Place here, that is, the place in *displacement*, is also a spatiotemporal trajectory or pathway along which people and things have been travelling. Displacement involves the creation and reproduction of inequality through the employment of spatial practices that, on the one hand, may render people and things mobile, but on the other may also compel their containment or immobility. These spatial practices are also ‘temporalizing

practices' (Hodges 2008, 406 with reference to Munn 1992; see also Fabian 1983). As Hodges (2008, 406) writes, 'temporalizing practices are...a dimension of the exercise of power, as temporality is a hinge that connects subjects to wider social horizons, and control over pasts and futures that are temporalized also influence action in the present'.

Importantly, displacement entails a process of conversion of value. The spatiotemporal practices that displace people and things are at the same time *evaluative practices* that create and reproduce social inequality. Thus, it is important to understand the actual mechanisms by which people and things are evaluated. Anna Tsing (2013) provides an inspiring analysis of how value conversion is effected in practice in the context of a global commodity supply chain. While Tsing's focus is on global twenty first century supply chains, her analysis can fruitfully be applied to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century trade in artefacts. As Tsing (2009, 249) notes, '[s]upply chains are not new; they extend back in various forms as far as trade itself'.

According to Tsing (2013, 23), capitalist commodity value is created through the work of 'alienation assessment'. Her case study concerns the Matsutake supply chain. Matsutake is a wild gourmet mushroom much prized in Japan that is sorted again and again as it moves along the supply chain. Tsing defines the sorting of the mushroom for various markets as a form of 'alienation assessment'. In other words, the mushrooms are privatised and commodified through a process of assessment, or evaluative sorting, a process that erases their origins in non-capitalist social relations.

I suggest that Tsing's concept of 'alienation assessment' can also be fruitfully applied in the historical context of frontier North Queensland. Aboriginal people and their things were also subject to an alienating process of assessment, sorting, classification, typing, that worked to 'purify' them of their origins in non-capitalist social relations. Yet, just like the Matsutake mushroom, museum artefacts remain simultaneously non-capitalist (Henry, Otto and Wood 2013). Capitalist commoditization, as Tsing (2013, 38) notes, is never a pure form, but always interwoven with non-capitalist social relations, such as gift exchange, theft, and so on. Eventually most artefacts end up out of circulation, either locked up in private collections or held constipated in the bowels of public museums, guarded there as the inalienable patrimony of nation states, or valued as public goods bearing the knowledge of humankind.

In order to shed light on how things become artefacts and how displacement works to effect value transformation via various spatiotemporal practices, I describe in this paper the way rainforest Aboriginal people of North Queensland and some of their material products were historically sent along different spatial and temporal trajectories. This was realised not only through the intervention of the colonial state and its agents, particularly the colonial police force, but also through the market activities of ethnographic artefact collectors. The transformation of Aboriginal things and their entry into the ‘curio’ market, required the ‘separation of the material object from its material embeddedness: from sound, movement, smell, space, time and timing, and so forth’ (Fabian (2001, 137).

### **Displacement of People**

Although Aboriginal people along the North Queensland coast had begun to experience the devastating effects of European contact as early as the 1860s, particularly due to vessels plying the coast in search of Aboriginal labour for the *beche de mer* fishing industry, Europeans did not move into the interior of the rainforest region of North Queensland until the 1870s. They came mostly as timber-getters, prospectors and miners (Loos 1982, 93). European invasion of Aboriginal land in the Kuranda area, inland from Cairns, where Cecil Brim was born, rapidly intensified with the construction of the railway line during the late 1890s. Land was made available for selection by settlers eager to establish farms, cattle stations, and plantations. The Northern Protector of Aborigines, Walter Roth (1900, 2), concerned about the impact of selection on the Aboriginal population, noted in his official report to the government in 1900:

[[‘As each new block of country becomes taken up, the blacks are forcibly hunted off their water supplies and hunting grounds both in it and in its immediate neighbourhood. According to their own laws of trespass they are prevented from seeking fresh pastures, except at the cost of fighting...’]]

However, while some of the settlers forcibly hunted Aboriginal people off their selections, there were others who chose to ‘let in’ or harbour Aboriginal people in exchange for their labour. Thus, throughout the early twentieth century certain Aboriginal family groups continued to occupy the same camping places that they had prior to the arrival of the Europeans. For example, a Djabugay family group by the name of Banning was harboured by

a settler on his farm at Redlynch near Cairns and thus was able to escape reserve incarceration (Henry 2012, 185), while a Ngadjon-Jii family, who took the name of Raymont, lived worked on 'Raymonts' dairy farm from about 1918 near an area of remnant rainforest at Glen Allyn in the Atherton Tablelands (Pannell 2006, 66). Although in many cases such camps were actually situated in the very heart, or 'heartlands', of Aboriginal country, the fact that they had been encompassed by farms, stations, settlements and townships led to the classification of these dwelling places as 'fringe camps' by settler society (Henry 2012, 36).

According to May (1994, 44), '[f]rom the 1870s fringe camps were the best source of labour for squatters who did not have access to a local clan' on their stations, due to earlier 'dispersal of local blacks'. Fringe camps were also convenient places for collectors to procure Aboriginal tools, weapons and other things for the artefact trade. European collectors, such as the German anthropologist Hermann Klaatsch and the Swedish entomologist Eric Mjöberg, both of whom collected ethnographic things in the North Queensland rainforest during the early twentieth century, actively sought out Aboriginal camps where they might still be able to obtain things that had been produced independently of European influence or that evidenced continuity with 'pre-European Aboriginal material culture and rainforest use' (Ferrier 2006, 13). According to Erckenbrecht (2010, 102), Hermann Klaatsch, after visiting camps in the Mulgrave River area near Cairns in 1905, noted the deplorable conditions under which Aboriginal people were living and expressed regret at having 'deprived them of objects of which they seem to have very few left'. Eric Mjöberg, who collected in the area in 1913, also expressed concern about 'the dislocation, degradation and cultural upheaval forced upon the Aboriginal people by European settlement' (Ferrier 2006, 3). Mjöberg documented reluctance among Aboriginal people at Tully River to part with their objects, noting that they kept a close eye on him in the camp for fear that he would take something (Ferrier 2006, 12).

The displacement of Aboriginal livelihoods and consequent increasing destitution of Aboriginal people led the colonial government to implement a policy of providing rations and blankets at designated distribution centres, including near the town of Kuranda. This policy heralded what is known as 'the protection era' in Australian government relations with Aboriginal people. By the end of the nineteenth century, the different Australian states had begun to introduce comprehensive legislation to govern Aboriginal people. The relevant legislation in Queensland was the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of*

*Opium Act 1897*. The Act introduced a regime of disciplinary control over Indigenous people that continues today in the form of state interventions and bureaucratic practices.

Significantly, the Act legalised the removal of Indigenous people from their home places and prohibited freedom of movement by confining them to special reserves, where their languages, cultural practices and beliefs were suppressed. The legislation also provided for control of conditions of employment, selection of marriage partners and the removal of children into dormitories under the supervision, custody, and care of reserve staff. The way this system was imposed at Mona Mona mission, where Cecil Brim was taken, has been well described by Finlayson (1991) and Bottoms (1999) (see also Henry 2012, 43-45). State control and transformation of Aboriginal people was to be achieved through ‘reaching into the body time of persons and coordinating it with values embedded in the “world time” of a wider constructed universe of power’ (Munn 1992, 109). By legitimising the regulation of Aboriginal peoples’ lives from birth to death as wards of the state, the *Aboriginals Protection Act* effectively constrained the socio-temporal capacity required by Aboriginal people to reproduce their relationships to kin and country, leaving many today with a deep sense of inter-generational loss.

Under the Act, the Commissioner of Police, William Edward Parry-Okeden, was appointed Chief Protector of Aboriginals for the whole of Queensland. Parry-Okeden had spent two months travelling around Cape York in 1896 investigating complaints about the activities of the Native Police force. According to Kowald (2002, 252–53) his *Report on the North Queensland Aborigines and the Native Police* (1897) was influential in passing the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897* (the ‘Act’). Under Parry-Okeden, Archibald Meston was appointed Southern Protector of Aboriginals and Walter E. Roth was appointed Northern Protector. According to Kahn (2008, 165) with regard to Roth: ‘Obtaining this job was influenced in part by his 1897 publication *Ethnological Studies among the North-West-Central Queensland Aborigines ...* In the preface he thanked Parry-Okeden for all the help he gave him in preparing the work for publication’.

The northern and southern protectorates were divided into numerous local protectorates administered by Local Protectors of Aboriginals who were mostly police officers. There were no avenues of appeal for Aboriginal people from the administrative decisions of these state officials. In addition to the government-run reserves, the Christian Churches were encouraged

to operate missions as officially recognised reserves. The Church was thus harnessed into the service of the State and missionaries became direct agents of the State, with Superintendents of missions also being appointed as Local Protectors under the Act.

In the Kuranda region it was not until 1914 that Aboriginal people began to be systematically relocated to missions and reserves. Mona Mona Mission was established about twenty kilometres northwest of Kuranda by the Seventh Day Adventist Church in 1913. However, most people from the Kuranda area continued to live in their own camps and move freely between them until 1916. The missionaries were not able to persuade them to join the mission voluntarily but the Chief Protector ordered that they be forcibly transferred there. Under the heading 'Offence, and Cause for Removal' the removal order records 'poor destitute Aboriginals, to be removed for their own good'<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, many of the people escaped police capture. In a letter dated 14 June 1916 to the Commissioner of Police, Senior Sergeant Kenny reported:

[[ 'the removal of the tribe has not been effected. Up to the present 36 of them have been removed. The others are scattered about the district and always evade capture as they do not care to go to the mission. The remainder will be rounded up as soon as possible'<sup>3</sup>. ']]

Some of the settlers in the Kuranda region, particularly those who relied on Aboriginal people to provide a cheap labour force, were against the Act (Henry 2012, 41). Dispossessed of their land, Aboriginal people had become a readily available source of labour for settler society. In the rainforest region Aboriginal women were employed as domestics and Aboriginal men were commonly employed as timber cutters to clear the rainforest and to work on farms, cattle stations and plantations. However, according to Graves (1993, 35) the level of employment on sugar plantations was low. He notes that:

[[ 'Aborigines did not prove altogether satisfactory as field workers. Although planters used powerful inducements, including payments in tobacco, alcohol and opium, Aborigines refused to work for extended periods on heavy manual tasks. Perhaps the most common plantation work by local tribesmen was ring-barking or felling trees and collecting firewood.' ]]

In contrast, according to Dawn May (1983, 1994) Aboriginal labour was vital to the pioneer pastoral industry. Nevertheless, as May (1994, 65) notes:

[[‘By 1902, there was general consensus among the white population that both the cattle industry and the traditional Aboriginal lifestyle could not be accommodated on the same tracts of land. As far as the Europeans were concerned, the only solution was for the original occupants to be rounded up and placed on reserves until such time as their services were needed in the industry. The paradox was that while whites were declaring that Aborigines and cattle could not mix, the cattle industry could not exist without Aboriginal labour’.]]

The reserve system operated to regulate the use of Aboriginal labour by pastoralists and other settlers and to domesticate Aboriginal people into a compliant labour force. Once they were removed to missions or government reserves, by law Aboriginal people were not allowed to leave unless they were under work agreements or had been granted Certificates of Exemption from being ‘under the Act’. The Act required that Aboriginal people be employed under written agreements between the employer and employee made in the presence of a Justice of the Peace or a member of the police force. Inmates who chose to leave Mona Mona and other reserves without such agreements were arrested or, in the parlance of the day, ‘captured’ as ‘absconders’, ‘deserters’, or ‘escapees’. Punishment often meant being sent to a reserve even further removed from their homeland, family and friends.

While the Office of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals was succeeded by the Office of the Director of Native Affairs after the passing of *The Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act* and *The Torres Strait Islanders Preservation and Protection Act* in 1939, and there were numerous other amendments to the ‘protection’ legislation, ‘the Act’ effectively continued to operate in Queensland until well into the twentieth century and its effects continue to be felt today. Ironically, at the same time as this regime of restriction and confinement was rendering Aboriginal people immobile, their few material possessions were being made mobile, dispersed far and wide in a global, long distance traffic in ‘curios’.

### **Displacement of Things**

Jones (2007, 5) estimates that ‘as many as 250,000 Aboriginal artefacts dating from the colonial period’ may be held in Museums and collections around the world. Aboriginal things



were collected as embodied manifestations of a past that all humanity was presumed to have once shared. They confirmed ideas of progress and provided affirmation of the superiority of Western civilisation. In other words they were collected as artefacts of time, as objects that mediated access to the notion of social evolutionary time, but that also branded Aboriginal people as timeless, a people without history who were expected to soon die out (Griffiths 1996; McGregor 1997). Not only the collected things themselves, but also the people that made them and the places from which they were collected, were objectified and reified through this transformative process of collection, displacement and curation that created artefacts for display in the museums and drawing rooms of the Western middle class (Erckenbrecht et al. 2010, Henare 2005, Pearce 1999).

Peterson, Allen and Hamby (2008, 8) distinguish five periods of collecting in Australia on the basis of ‘a predominant motivation informing the collecting’:

[[‘The first can be called the period of unsystematic collecting, which stretches from first contact to c. 1880; the second, collecting under the influence of social evolutionary theory, from c. 1880 to c. 1920; the third, collecting under the influence of ‘before it is too late’, from c. 1920 to c. 1940; the fourth, research adjunct collecting, from c. 1940 to c. 1980; and the fifth, the dominance of secondary collecting, from c. 1980 to the present day.’]]

Here I mainly focus on the second and third periods in North Queensland – collecting under social evolutionary theory (1880–1920) and collecting under the influence of ‘before it is too late’ (1920–1940).

Collectors procured Aboriginal objects by various means, often by outright theft from camps and/or grave sites that they came across, or via settlers and police who had taken them from the camp sites from which Aboriginal people had been ‘dispersed’ (a word sometimes used at the time as a euphemism for massacre). As Loos (1982, 43) notes, the settlers often ‘deliberately destroyed or appropriated such important Aboriginal equipment as spears, fish nets, wallaby nets, rugs, and tomahawks which the Aborigines had been forced to abandon’.

Yet, Aboriginal people were also active agents in the artefact trade in that from the earliest of encounters they began to exchange their objects as gifts, barter them for tobacco, food, clothing and other items and eventually sell them for money. For example, according to

Mjöberg (1918, 26), Aboriginal people living in a fringe camp near Kuranda in 1913, before they were removed to Mona Mona mission, were a curiosity to tourists who would ‘visit their camps in order to buy for just a few coins, a boomerang, a woven basket or some similar object’. At the same time, Mjöberg noted that Aboriginal people at Yarrabah mission, near Cairns, were mass-producing artefacts. He considered these to be ‘faked items later stated as genuine and traditional’. Sold to collectors they enter into a global value chain and eventually ‘find their way to the rest of the world and to different museums’ (cited in Ferrier 2006, 10). The relatively benign connotation of the term ‘collecting’ disguises the fraught nature of an activity that is mediated by political and economic relations and driven by ‘power and the market’ (Fabian 2001, 126; see also Penny 2002).

### **Inspectors as Collectors**

Government agents such as the Protectors of Aborigines were key agents in the collection and trade in Aboriginal artefacts. This includes Parry-Okeden, Commissioner of Police (1895–1905) who was also appointed Chief Protector of Aborigines (1898–1904). The Northern and Southern Protectors, Roth and Meston, were both keen artefact collectors but had very different approaches to the endeavour. According to McGregor (2013):

[[‘Meston believed that he was among the last who would be able to collect such items, for their makers would soon be extinct. He appreciated the aesthetic as well as the utilitarian qualities of the artefacts he collected, but made no attempt to scientifically analyse or categorise them in the manner of contemporaries such as Walter Roth. Rather, his collecting was guided by an autodidact’s assessment of which implements and weapons best exemplified the Aboriginal way of life and an entrepreneur’s eye for what might sell on the market.’]]

In a letter to the *Brisbane Courier* (19 January 1885, 6) Meston was accused by a man who had accompanied him on the initial survey of sugar-growing properties in 1882, of robbing Aboriginal people in the Lower Mulgrave area near Cairns of artefacts and weapons ‘without compunction’ and of getting ‘a pot shot at a Myall if he could find one’ (Taylor 2003). Walter Roth, on the other hand, was a scientist and a classic ethnographic collector. As Fuary (2013) notes:

[[‘In his writings Roth clearly sees himself as ‘the scientist’, set apart from Aboriginal people who he is studying, protecting and ministering to as a doctor. He was a meticulous collector, drawing many objects by hand and describing their manufacture in fine detail. Like many other scientists of his time, Roth collected and classified objects by type and included extensive lists and detailed descriptions in his publications.’]]

Local level police officers and reserve superintendents followed their superiors and also began to collect Aboriginal artefacts, some becoming avidly involved as nodes in the curio trade network. During the early period, when police and settlers hunted Aboriginal people off the land and dispersed them, Aboriginal tools, whether abandoned or confiscated, were often destroyed. Max Buchner, Director of the Museum in Munich, Germany witnessed a fight between two Aboriginal groups at Cooktown on 24 February 1889 in which spears and spearthrowers were used. The local police confiscated the weapons in order to destroy them but Buchner persuaded them not to and eventually the police gave him the weapons as a gift (Buchner 1919, as translated by Erckenbrecht 2008, 2). According to Erckenbrecht (2008, 3), one of these spearthrowers is still in the collection of the Munich museum. She also notes that according to Buchner’s description, the points of the spears were made from ‘stolen fence wire which, in his eyes, diminished the authenticity of the items’.

The interest of ethnographic collectors such as Buchner in Aboriginal things, led to recognition by local police officers of their value to collectors and local police officers began to save them for the artefact trade, some becoming keen collectors themselves. As Lindy Allen (2003, 33) writes:

[[‘Museums and collectors alike sourced artefacts from local police, police magistrates and local residents. D.J. Fitzgibbon, a police officer at Laura, forwarded fifteen bags, three fishing nets, six pearl shell necklaces, and other ‘native material and work’ at the request of Queensland Museum’s director, Dr R. Hamlyn Harris.’]]

Police officers were also urged to become amateur ethnographers and on-the-ground collectors of cultural data. For example, in 1900 local police officers were urged by the Commissioner of Police, Parry-Okeden, to collect information on Aboriginal culture, in response to a request for such assistance from the Anthropological Society of Australasia<sup>4</sup>.

As noted above, the fringe camps and ration distribution centres became prime targets for collectors who would especially time their visits to coincide with the government schedule for ration and blanket distribution. Evidence indicates that collecting was a competitive activity with collectors vying for access to the supply chain and the best sources of Aboriginal things. The curio trade was part of the world market, as Fabian (2001, 130) points out. Aboriginal things were valued because they were considered a limited resource, at threat of extinction. These things, although made in the present, were already considered things of the past. Yet, as Fabian (2001, 132) argues, ‘...this did not remove them from the sphere of markets and commodities. Scarcity, real or manufactured, increased demand (and of course production)’, as is evidenced by the many artefacts in museums that have no sign of wear and tear and that appear to have been specifically produced for the curio trade.

An example of the role that police inspectors played in the dispersal of Aboriginal artefacts is documented in the diary of the Hermann Klaatsch (Erckenbrecht 2010). Klaatsch was in the North Queensland rainforest region from 26 November 1904 to 31 January 1905 to collect artefacts. According to his diary, during this time a police inspector, by name of Durham, gave him a ‘colossal’ collection of ‘old things’, which he sent home to Germany. As Erckenbrecht (personal communication, May 2013; see also see also Erckenbrecht 2010, 102) notes:

[[‘...the collection has some very nice rainforest shields which are in the collection at Leipzig today. The collection also contains boomerangs, various kinds of dillybags, stone artefacts, great swords and forehead ornaments made out of shells. In his artefact list Klaatsch mentions explicitly that these artefacts were particularly old, stemming from the time of the first white settlers in the area and the battles with the local Aborigines in the 1870s. So they would be about 30 years old at that time...Unfortunately we don’t know how Inspector Durham got hold of these artefacts.’]]

Whatever the case, it is clear that police inspectors and other officers of the state played a significant role as brokers in the collection and distribution of Aboriginal artefacts. They were key agents in the displacement of both people and things. Yet, while in the case of people the displacement led to confinement or relatively constrained mobility via the management and control of Aboriginal labour, in the case of their things displacement meant diversion into a global transnational supply chain in artefacts.

### **Displacement, Value Conversion and Inequality**

The spatiotemporal movement of people and things is crucial to the creation and transformation of value as Nancy Munn (1986) has demonstrated in her ground-breaking study of the social life of Gawan canoes. Munn (1986) traced the transformation of the Gawan canoe from the moment of its production through its movement as an object of exchange in the 'arena of action' of the kula ring (1986, 8). It is through a series of transactions among kula exchange partners that value is produced as 'the relative extension of spacetime'. Munn defines value in the Gawan cultural context as 'the capacity to develop spatiotemporal relations that go beyond the self, or that expand the spatiotemporal control of an actor'. Thus, she argues, we may speak of 'relatively greater or lesser capacities to expand spacetime' and of 'negative value transformations' (the contraction of spacetime) as well as 'positive value transformations' (the expansion of spacetime) (Munn 1986, 11). Applying Munn's analysis to the historical ethnography of Aboriginal people in colonial Australia enables valuable comparative insights into how the ultimate conversion of Aboriginal things into artefacts was produced in this different ethnographic context.

Aboriginal things were transformed into artefacts through a process of collecting, sorting and resorting, labelling and relabelling, and trade and exchange by various agents, collectors, traders and curators as well as by Aboriginal people themselves. Through such transactions in Aboriginal things, collectors were able extend themselves in spacetime through their identification with the artefacts. However, this positive value transformation and expansion of spacetime was in turn founded on a negative value transformation, the severing of the subject-object relationship between Aboriginal people and their things and the contraction of the spacetime for Aboriginal people.

The confinement of Aboriginal people and restriction of their mobility were key state practices in the transformation of Aboriginal sociality and the creation of a cheap labour force for the colonial capitalist economy. Such value conversion required parting Aboriginal people from the places and things that were invested with ancestral powers and that were integral to their embodied senses of self. While Aboriginal people were rounded up, segregated and confined, their mobility regulated and their labour power harnessed, Aboriginal things were sent along a different spatiotemporal trajectory, appropriated for transformation into artefacts

and rendered mobile within a global supply chain through transaction, collection, the creation of inventories, handling, classification, and assessment (Henry, Otto and Wood 2013; Pearce 1999). Yet, curiously, their value as commodities in the curio market remained dependent on their origins in a non-capitalist mode of production. The artefacts that Aboriginal people produced for sale in fringe camps and reserves were not as highly valued by collectors as the ‘authentic’ tools that had actually been used in the context of a ‘traditional’ lifestyle. Moreover, just like the Matsutake mushroom which according to Tsing (2013, 37), is ‘a capitalist commodity that begins and ends its life as a gift’, Aboriginal things that have been ‘purified’ as commodities through collection and sorting, sometimes end up as gifts, given to family and friends or donated to museums. For example, Derwent Vallance, a young Englishman who settled in North Queensland 1898, sent a collection of objects he had collected from the Cairns region to his older sister Florence Walker in about 1903, asking her to ‘display them well’ as ‘they are really a very fine collection’ (Telegram from Derwent Vallance to Florence Walker, c.1900, copy held in British Museum). With the collection he sent his sister a catalogue that sorted and listed the items into types of artefact: 1 skull, 9 shields, 2 swords, 11 boomerangs, 1 porcupine spear, 1 eel spear, 3 stabbing spears, and so on. Against each type of item he listed their monetary value. Thirty years later, in 1933, Florence Walker gifted the collection to the British Museum noting in a letter that ‘of course we have not room to display them as my brother wished’ (Letter from Florence Walker, 12 March 1933, copy held in British Museum). Evidence of similar transactions in collections of artefacts and accompanying catalogues can be found in Museum archives all over the world. The collections are usually named after the collectors, not the original makers of the objects. While artefacts are not exactly branded commodities of the type that Foster (2008) has researched, his point about the politics of value is pertinent here: ‘A value chain on which hangs at one end a social relationship of exploitation approaching dehumanization might well include at the other end a relationship imagined as nothing less than love, a deep emotional attachment between a consumer’s singular personality and a distinctively branded commodity’ (Foster 2008, 20).

Displacement, whether it leads to increased mobility or immobility, globalised flows or localised confinement, effects value transformation by rupturing the non-capitalist relationship between people and things enabling each to be separately re-assessed and re-evaluated – a process that Tsing calls ‘alienation assessment’. In other words, displacement makes capitalist value and produces inequality partly through evaluative practices that work

to continuously reconfigure the relationships among people and between people and things. It is not just things that are subject to ‘alienation assessment’, but people too. Aboriginal people, uprooted from their land, were collected together, and classified according to racial categories. Confined first to fringe camps and later to reserves, people were also sorted and assessed according to their ability to meet the requirements of the rural capitalist economy, or in terms of how well they were able to assimilate the work values that the missions and reserves sought to instil. This form of assessment remains the case today with Aboriginal people categorised according to whether they live in urban, rural and remote communities, each deemed to require a different level of state intervention in order to incorporate people into the mainstream economy. As Ting (2013, 39) writes, ‘Translation between capitalist and non-capitalist forms of sociality is the work that makes capitalism a system’.

There is little in the history books to tell us what Aboriginal people might have felt at the time about the disappearance of their things, let alone their kin, ‘the disappeared’ who were abducted, killed or removed to reserves during the period of frontier violence and the so called protection era. Certainly, when Aboriginal people were ‘dispersed’, ‘rounded up’ or ‘herded’ on to the reserves and missions, they were forced to abandon many of the things that constituted their means of production. These things, like the very land itself, were things that defined them as persons, such as the shield that a young man would paint with ochre mixed with his own blood as part of his initiation into manhood or the ceremonial baskets that men wove and painted with totemic designs (Aaberge et al. 2014). If people and things are co-constitutive, then how might these absent things have impinged on Aboriginal life in the reserves and what has been the effect on the younger generations that have grown up without them? In what way do people define themselves today through these absences? (Bille et al 2010) and how to they reclaim themselves? But this is another story.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup>Correspondence Files, 1901–1944. Removals – removal of Kuranda Tribe to Mona, 1916. QSA A/69429 (16/3998/16).

<sup>3</sup> Memo/Letter from Senior Sergeant Henry Butler Kenny, District Inspector’s Office, Cairns to Commissioner of Police, Brisbane, 14 June 1916. In Correspondence Files, 1901–1944. Removals -removal of Kuranda Tribe to Mona Mona, 1916. QSA A/69429 (16/3998/16).

<sup>4</sup> Copy of a Circular Memorandum sent to Inspector Fitzgerald, Roma by W.E Parry-Okeden dated 31<sup>st</sup> March 1900. Held in the Queensland Police Museum, Roma Street, Brisbane.

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