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Emplacing Christ: An Indigenous Australian Ethics of Placemaking across Borders¹

Ute Eickelkamp

Department of Anthropology, School for Social and Political Sciences, The University of Sydney

Abstract: Travelling from my old heimat, Germany, I joined in September 2015 a group of Anangu Pitjantjatjara Bible translators on a two-week long pilgrimage to the Holy Land. This journey offered further probing into Anangu attachments to place that, until then, I had only known through ethnographic research in their desert homelands in northern South Australia. In the present article I explore how and why the Anangu Christians forged links with biblically inscribed places to which they had no ancestral ties. What they did bring is a deep-seated sense of emotional connection with Jesus abiding in heaven, and here the pilgrimage was a chance to anchor this relationship in his land—to emplace Christ. Notable in this process of shifting the presence of Jesus from heaven to earth was the pilgrims' moral concern to keep separate the emplaced stories of their ancestral lands on one hand, and the grounded narratives of the Christian Scriptures on the other. In Jonathan Mair and Nicholas Evans' terms, their approach was one of 'incommensuration', a strategy to avoid moral conflict by refusing to make comparisons between religious traditions. My article may thus be read as an ethnographic contribution towards the understanding of an Australian Indigenous ethics of placemaking across borders.

Keywords: Australian Indigenous Christianity; Bible translation; Pilgrimage; Emplacement; Incommensuration

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‘As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people’ (Psalm 125, 2).

‘Before this trip, we learnt of things we could only imagine; now we can see with our own eyes and our hearts are touched’. (Katrina Tjitayi, September 2015, on the bus entering Jerusalem)

Introduction

‘Have you heard? We are going to Israel. Maybe you want to come along as our *malpa* [friend] and help us on this journey?’ Makinti Minutjukur, a member of the Pitjantjatjara Bible Translation Project and friend indeed, asked midway into my field trip. It was Easter 2015 and I had come again to conduct ethnographic research in her home community, Pukatja (Ernabella), on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in northern South Australia. Pursuing the question of whether ‘nature’ was becoming a meaningful concept in Anangu thought, I had been asking her and other women and men about the relationship between the Dreaming and Christianity. ‘God created everything’, was the starting point of numerous conversations, including with those in the majority who embrace the two ‘stories’, each embodying a moral law in its own right. Juxtaposed with one another, these two grand narratives in Anangu lives are generically referred to as *tjukurpa mantatja* (‘story of the land’) and *tjukurpa ilkaritja* (‘story of heaven’).

I want to suggest that the Anangu Bible translators’ study tour and pilgrimage to the Holy Land presents a special case of incommensuration. Jonathan Mair and Nicholas Evans (2015) recently introduced this notion in contradistinction from the older concept of incommensurability (originally of scientific theories, as developed by Feyerabend [1962] and Kuhn [1962]). Transposed to the religious and moral realms, the purpose is to identify cases of ‘ethics across borders’ where adherents, in order to enable interfaith dialogues, avoid making comparisons between their own beliefs and those of others. If the incommensurability of values and beliefs rests on comparison, incommensuration bypasses altogether the ethical problem of moral judgment that comparison entails. The Anangu pilgrims, however, did not perceive this journey as an interfaith encounter. They went as Christians seeking to meet the likeminded and affirm their connection with Christ. As I outline in the first section, the Anangu have been straddling the two religious traditions for several generations and identify with both. In their own homelands, they do not propose that Dreamings and Christianity have no common measure (in order to unravel why, one would need to consider here the problem of monotheism in relation to the non-theistic cosmology of the Dreaming), and conversion to Christianity in the strict sense is rare. Rather, at home, people compartmentalize the two traditions into different registers of conviction, practice and performance. Having positioned Christianity apart from the cultural practices of the Dreaming, individuals and families have long shown leadership and active participation in church matters at local, regional and national levels, not least through their Bible translation work. In that sense, the Anangu have indigenized Christianity. It was as pilgrims in the Holy Land that their orientation shifted

from compartmentalisation to incommensuration, since there, they would not articulate their long-held traditions at all. Any attempt on my part to encourage even the slightest gesture towards Anangu traditions, was met with anxious rejection—I think for fear of moral corruption through ‘mixing up’ sacred storylines or tracks.

The focus of the second section is on the perpetuation of active and embodied knowing of places at home and across the borders of faith and country. I here consider some of the colonialist complications of placemaking that the Anangu encounter as they forge memories and further inscriptions.

I show in the third section how the work of emplacing Christ in his homeland enabled the travelers to encounter his presence with heightened immediacy. Further enhanced through the empathic identification with Christ the sufferer, they thereby gained the moral right to envision themselves into these sacred foreign places. As I unravel through detailed accounts, the most powerful form of ‘witnessing’ story places are visionary experiences across geographical and, potentially, moral borders. However, neither the pilgrimage nor visionary experiences at home have opened the door for the Anangu to inscribe biblical events into their ancestral lands, let alone ‘displace’ ancestral narratives by transferring these into the Holy Land. Arguably, the processes of emplacement explored here are relevant beyond this specific ethnographic context; they offer clues at a more general level about how Indigenous people at home in Australia’s desert regions forge links with foreign places that bear religious inscriptions outside the Dreaming.

Translating Christianity: Indigenisation and Compartmentalisation

For the Anangu, ownership of emplaced stories—those associated with ancestral land, as well as life histories and the social history of the settlement—is a moral right. Eighty years ago, this orientation connected to the cultural policy of the Presbyterian mission, which was exceptionally tolerant of local cultural practices that it neither condemned nor prohibited. Having taken up the sheep station Ernabella in 1937 (renamed Pukatja after a local ancestral site), the missionaries’ vision was to bring the ‘story of heaven’ to the people in the vernacular and to thus encourage faith by conviction. This was not merely a matter of language translation and cultural tolerance. In hindsight, the approach fostered the indigenisation of the missionisation process, in which the Anangu played a crucially active role. From the 1940s, White staff were required to learn the language, church services were held in Pitjantjatjara, Scottish psalms and English gospels were translated, while school education in the vernacular for younger children and a shared work life, all fostered a sense of ownership of the settlement that the Anangu were building with their own hands around a Dreaming site and spring. Baptism proceeded slowly and increasingly took place through Anangu church elders (Edwards 2005). Mission staff members, one of my Anangu mentors remembered, were appreciated as *Piranpa* (White) family, who had not come to the Anangu ‘for the money’ but to share their lives with them.

Nonetheless, the two cultural and social domains have always remained distinct, fostering a pattern of compartmentalisation in daily life as well as religious pursuits. With Reverend

William Edwards as superintendent (1958–1972), the missiology was oriented towards Bultmann's demythologisation of the New Testament that would make the truth of the Gospel accessible to all humanity, regardless of historically situated worldviews. Remembering his exegesis with Anangu preachers and church elders of Bible parables, Edwards (1967, 13; 2005, 133, 144) notes the great skill they showed in finding meaningful analogies between the ecological and cultural setting described in biblical passages and their own environment.² However, the Anangu did not accept a culturally syncretistic hermeneutic and would not go beyond an analogical approach to exegesis, which they sharply distinguish from Scriptural translation. They rejected, in written productions, hybridisation, as in, 'God is the Rainbow Serpent'.

I regard Anangu participation and leadership in Christian activities and in lingual translations of songs, psalms and Scripture as indigenisation. It is associated with, but distinguishable from, what Edwards (2005, 144; Pybus 2012, 311) called 'compartmentalisation'. The latter, for instance, helps explain why Pitjantjatjara language hymns and gospels, including those composed by Anangu Christians, are in the Western harmonic tradition and not in the traditional musical style identified with Dreamings. Although I know of two women who have noted similarities between their own customary practices and biblical accounts (for example, they compared the seventh day of divine rest after creation with the temporal rhythm of the custom to rest, *ulta*, after a few days of hunting), this would not be allowed to filter into the translation of Scripture. Similarly, it is evident that people let the two stories co-exist without mutual interference; for instance, artists working daily in the local art centre often listen to tape recorded gospel songs while painting Dreamings. However, even where they depict biblical incidents in the iconic Western Desert painting style, artists do not 'mix up' the two 'songlines' on canvas. Most Anangu active in the Christian and traditional ritual domain—often church elders who are also important ritual leaders—keep the two 'stories' separate, *maunta*. They operate in either one of the two parallel registers, as they deem morally appropriate in any given context.

Paul Eckert, who organized the study tour to the Holy Land, was principal coordinator of the Pitjantjatjara Bible Translation Project from its inception in 1978 until 2016. Between 1982 and 2002, he oversaw the translation of *Malatja* ('what comes after'), the 27 books of the New Testament. Comprehensive translation of the Old Testament began in 2011, following translations of select Gospels and other stories and epistles in the 1940s and 1960s, after a new generation of Christians whose grandparents had led the way, expressed the desire to have the entire book in their own language. 'It was in my heart all the time', Katrina Tjitayi, who is School Improvement Coordinator of the Anangu Education Services South Australia and an important culture broker, explained in a newspaper interview (Payne 2016, 5). Thirty people from Pukatja and Amata, another one of the major six settlements on the APY Lands, are members of the Old Testament translation project, with more people from Fregon wanting

² Writing of the Anangu church elders' ingenuity in drawing parallels between biblical settings and their home environment, Edwards emphasized that people turned towards the Christian faith during the grave social transformation from a self-sufficient hunter-gatherer life to one in settlements, so called remote communities. The livelihood of the mission depended on sheep, cattle and subsistence gardening, and the church elders referred to the introduced flora and fauna as now familiar counterparts in the crafting of parables.

to join. The completion of Australia's first traditional language Bible, *Tjukurpa Palya* (Good News) is well underway: 16 Old Testament Books are already translated and published together with the New Testament, the Book of Daniel was dedicated at Pukatja during the Easter service in 2016 as a separate generously illustrated publication, and drafts of Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Job, Psalms and Joel are being prepared by individuals at home and in regular workshops.

The effects of translating, writing, and emotional immersion in the Bible reach far beyond evangelical intent. Members spread the translated Word in the vernacular before it is even in print, Eckert explained (Payne 2016, 6). Furthermore, the workshops are valuable social events, in which relationships between families are strengthened and grievances aired, while fostering technical interpretation and intercultural skills. Importantly, the complex translation process contributes to English language learning, conceptual work and Pitjantjatjara language maintenance across the generations, as well as being a source for building emotional support for children. 'We go to the old people and look for words', Tjitayi observed, adding about children and youth: 'They are losing some words. They are speaking in different ways. But we want them to be strong in reading and writing and for them to learn the language' (Payne 2016, 6). Rather than furthering cultural assimilation, from the vantage of Anangu Christians the translation project, with its reach into processes of lingual, social and emotional identity formation, appears as a project of indigenisation.

Knowing and Inscribing Places: Colonialist Complications

The travelers went to Israel as Christians seeking to affirm their calling as Bible translators by renewing their spiritual connection to Jesus Christ, and to thus garner further guidance, enlightenment and strength for their work. Following Schutz (1966; after James 1904), one could say 'knowledge by acquaintance' was to be converted into the 'knowledge about' that is characterized by clarity, determinateness, and consistency, here with the proviso that real in-sight which brings spiritual enlightenment hinges on being 'touched'. This was the message of a comment by Katrina Tjitayi upon entering Jerusalem for the first time: 'Before this trip, we learnt of things we could only imagine; now we can see with our own eyes and our hearts are touched.' True and abiding understanding must enter the body and be lodged and 'carried in one's heart and soul'—*kurunta kanyiningi*. Conversely, the desire to see with your own eyes, to behold and feel for places, and to thus take the stories these places embody into the soul, reveals the wish to be 'absorbed' into the sacred history and thus be recognized by God. This mode of active embodied knowing has been described for other Australian Indigenous contexts. For instance, in her phenomenological exegesis of knowing through bodily interaction with the land in the Yolngu life-world, Franca Tamisari uses Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'visibility as a-being-there' (1998, 256). Captured here is the important experience of seeing or witnessing, in the sense of actively structuring the world through moving, perceiving and orienting in it, and of being 'watched' by the ancestors who made places through their own active being there.

Memories, Emplaced

Life historical memories play a crucial role in placemaking. They form the stuff of emotional attachment to places, present one kind of intangible culture heritage, and inform political perspectives on belonging. In the APY Lands, our excursions away from the settlement usually occasioned fond childhood memories of being ‘in the bush’ shepherding with close family members. ‘This burnt tree trunk by the side of the road over there—it was a big gum tree and we used to play in its shade and climb up’, my companions commented as we drove past. A woman in her late 70s recalled long walks with her parents, her endurance of thirst and hunger, amidst the enjoyment of freedom customarily afforded children (Eickelkamp 2016). Such memories securely anchor a person’s knowing of how things used to be, during the mission as well as prior to its establishment, including through listening to the stories the grandparents told in Pitjantjatjara or Yankunytjatjara. Family life, marriage rules, social etiquette, forms of play, shelters, tools and weapons, edible flora and fauna, preparation and consumption of introduced foods (tea, flour, sugar, bullock), hunting and gathering, and work for the mission are all forms of cultural knowledge that is acquired and sustained through intergenerational embedded learning. They are also placemaking processes outside the ritual domain and the esoteric realm of ancestral knowledge, namely through the conversion of memories of lived experience into narratives, that is, into ‘knowledge about’. This knowing is foundational to a sense of belonging and nourishes a lifelong compassion for places because of those who lived, learned and taught there. Put differently, memories of ‘having been there’ become intangible social property, what Jeremy Becket (1965) called ‘beats’, meaning that family-embedded movements along kin-residing camps intersect with and even become ancestral stories over time. To thus inhabit their world in the co-presence of significant others, past and present, signals historical mindedness in relation to particular persons, to other Aboriginal groups and *vis-à-vis* White people. To remember means practicing a politics of identity that cannot be severed from the land.

Cautious Inscription

Notwithstanding the movement of people and the associated ongoing process of mythopoesis (cf. Kolig 1980, 123), the lingual and ‘totemic’ identity of country deriving from the Dreamings’ emplaced generative power is deemed ‘everlasting’ and inalienable. In other words, there is a cultural disinclination to what Glenn Bowman (1992) called ‘interpretational imperialism’—sacred stories should not be superimposed on a landscape already thus inscribed.³ ‘Landscape’ is in fact a misleading term; it has little to do with the Indigenous notion of country as replete with transformed or imprinted ancestral bodies whose life force abides at their resting places. This is what demands caution: country and skin are co-extensive mediums of ancestral inscription, as is most clearly expressed in ritual scarring and body painting (Biddle 2007, 60). To make marks on these pregnant surfaces requires

³ In his analysis of Medieval Christian pilgrim narratives of Jerusalem and Palestine, Bowman identified an overriding pattern of narrative usurpation: ‘Pilgrims familiarised the alien territories their texts traversed by constantly “riveting” the landscape of Palestine to the mythical ground of Christian scriptures’ (Bowman 1992: 156).

knowledge and care, and even an inadvertently made patterned mark, especially on unfamiliar ground, is problematic: I heard of a child being told to stop dragging a stick behind her as this was ‘drawing’ lines in the sand, potentially prodding an ancestral response (Gertrude Stotz, personal communication).

On the other hand, there is a rich ethnographic corpus reporting the superimposition of exogenous ‘travel heroes’ onto the matrix of localized narratives that make up country— Captain Cook, the Queen of England and other powerful figures associated with colonisation all have been emplaced in the cultural landscape of Indigenous Australia (see Rumsey 1995). The thrust of such indigenisation is to empower Aboriginal people by claiming as their own life-changing events these arrivals of others, including, in some instances, of biblical persons. The Anangu have not inscribed retrospectively biblical events in the local landscape in the way other groups have, for example their eastern neighbours, the Arrernte people at Ntaria (Hermannsburg), with whom they have longstanding ritual, family and evangelical connections through the former Lutheran Finke River Mission. I have not encountered biblical stories of forgotten pre-colonial events that can be ‘retrieved’ from the countryside (Povinelli 1993, 33) by discovering their traces: no *impatye Jesuake* (Jesus’s footprint) that people at Ntaria have identified on a rock in the bed of the Finke River, no account of Noah’s flood having occurred in local creeks, no local stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments (cf. Austin-Broos 2009, 41). The Anangu Bible translators did not transfer (sacred or mundane) narratives emplaced elsewhere.

This does not mean, however, that Jesus is not among them. Some have related to me eyewitness reports of Jesus walking with the old ‘bush people’ to the West. Others dreamt of Jesus’s presence or recounted transitory apparitions of the Savior in the shape of angels or a pillar of light hovering above the community. A group of women showed me the small cross that appeared four decades ago in the bark of a prominent tree next to a grave, marking a shift from traditional burials to Christian funerals, and many see the world as a whole to be God’s creation. The statement, ‘God created everything’, was never merely a confession of faith. Rather, it demanded recognition of their special status as custodians of God-given Dreamings and traditional landowners. In other words, it signaled the Anangu’s perception that the Bible is entangled with the history of colonisation, as well as with their status as marginal subjects in a settler society.

To further illustrate such colonialist entanglements: In interviews about the idea of ‘nature’, people used the term *paluntja*, ‘the made’, to refer to ‘increase’ rituals performed in order to make things grow, and which now also means creation according to Genesis 1 and 2.⁴ Both registers imply human responsibilities of ‘looking after’ the land, as if God had decreed the traditional task for the Anangu. Another significant term is *ilytji*, ‘the bush’, also used to translate the biblical ‘wilderness’. The bush or wilderness harbor ambivalent moral connotations as a space for reflection and dreaming, as well as of danger, condemnation or abandonment. More commonly heard because of its anti-colonialist connotations is the Yankunytjatjara noun *manta* (*pana* in Pitjantjatjara), meaning ground, dirt, or land with

⁴ In the thicket of colonialist entanglements, those few who have renounced the Dreaming translate the ‘story of the land’, *tjukurpa mantatja*, as ‘God’s creation’.

which the Anangu identify collectively as owners. ‘This *manta* is our university’, one of the most senior church leaders said to explain what he perceived as a competition between the Western education system and their own land-based cosmology. Equally important are the political connotations of juxtaposing the ‘two laws’, which are made explicit in contexts of engaging the state. For example, a former land rights campaigner in his seventies, reminded community members during a meeting about a new government initiative to empower remote Indigenous communities across Central Australia: ‘We worship the Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act, it is our Bible’—a non-negotiable covenant, so to speak.

The Anangu are acutely aware of their status as colonized subjects and younger adults today think of the successful land rights campaign run by their parents and grandparents as a political victory and turning point, while the transmission of colonialist stories past and present continues. ‘Whitefella gave us that Word, about how that Word made the world, but they took our land and tricked us’, a very senior Christian explained about the double-edged sword that the ‘story of heaven’ is in the context of political marginalisation in a settler society.⁵ In ethnographic interviews, the assimilation era is regularly evoked through narratives of the Stolen Generations, and ongoing struggles with the far-reaching control of the state over their lives are plain.

Pilgrims to the Holy Land

In this third section, I describe how a group of Anangu Pitjantjatjara Bible translators, thirteen women and two men in their thirties, forties and fifties, with various links to the Uniting Church of Australia, responded to the Holy Land which they had only known through Bible study, ministerial training, local church services, interdenominational conventions in Australia’s regional and urban centres (including by the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples and Hill Song Church), and stories transmitted within families since ‘mission times’ (1937–1972).⁶ Paul Eckert organized the study tour with American Wycliffe Bible Translators, who in turn hired a historian, a Messianic Jew, as tour guide. Also on board were an SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics) contingent of Indigenous Bible translation consultants from Papua New Guinea and a man from Ghana, together with a handful of long-familiar White supporters from the Uniting Church. Traveling from Germany, I joined the party in Tel Aviv on a hot September evening. This was not going to

⁵ However, if the establishment of Christian missions cannot be divorced from the colonisation of the continent – the statement is in reference to this larger historical reality – it is also the case that the Presbyterians and later members of the Uniting Church at Ernabella were instrumental in the shift towards self-administration. It is indicative that, from the 1960s, Reverend ‘Bill’ Edwards played a strong supporting role during the decentralisation movement that saw Anangu families establish small outstations on their homelands, and in the land rights campaign that secured freehold title over the APY Lands and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. He remained a personal friend and mentor with open doors to his home until the end of his life in 2015. The Anangu obtained freehold title over 103,000 square kilometers of their traditional homelands in 1981, held in trust by APY, the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Council. Despite several amendments to the Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act, the Anangu continue to exert considerable control over access to and management of the entire area.

⁶ A pilgrim, who also acted as language interpreter, had visited Israel before.

be any other fieldtrip: being German, with a Protestant family background from which anthropology had offered an escape, I too had embarked on a pilgrimage of sorts.

Feeling-with

Throughout the journey across the width and breadth of the country, the pilgrims wanted to experience what was already in place. Thus, one of the younger travellers, a woman who had spent lengthy periods of time at Christian colleges in the United States, explained to me that what the Anangu were seeking was a spiritual and experiential relationship with God: ‘The Jews interpret all the time—we want to feel it!’ To love (*mukuringanyi*) and care (*kanyini*, *atunymananyi*) and to feel compassion (*kakulyarani*) are primary moral values identified with both traditional and Christian life, and which most people ‘work for’ within families and the church. Love and compassion across borders made for the moral ground of the pilgrimage.

At a few occasions, this foundational empathy extended beyond the parameters of faith. Although never made a central issue, there were moments when the travelers did perceive an affinity with the Bedouins’ traditional culture as well as with their experience of marginality and pressures to assimilate. Amidst those places of old (which are young compared with the rock art galleries and other traces of human occupation in Central Australia), along roads we were travelling by bus in splendid isolation from the heat and political reality outside, we saw the dusty shantytowns of ‘unassimilated’ Bedouins in the Judean hills. In a flash of identification that, for a moment, seemed to catapult her out of the safe haven of our shared equality before God, one of my friends pointed to an old shepherd climbing a hill with his flock of sheep. With an air of pity, she asked me, ‘*Ngaltutjara* [poor thing], could that be us?’

Pivotal to their ethics across borders was the identification of the Anangu Christians with Christ, the humanized sufferer. Nobody is blind to the socioeconomic stresses that engulf most families. Ill health and social malaise coalesce in bodies and souls that live with poverty, malnutrition, diabetes, cognitive disabilities, domestic violence, and other deprivations, leaving little scope to escape ever-worsening life conditions. Such impossibilities for a better life in the here and now and into the foreseeable future, are partially explained to derive from a moral failure on the part of ‘government’ not lending sufficient support to the Anangu. They are also perceived as reflecting a moral crisis within the Anangu domain.

It is fitting to draw a parallel with the early Christian community in Palestine, about whose attachment to the adopted Son, Erich Fromm writes: ‘they could identify with Him because He was a suffering human like themselves’ (1963, 35). Indeed, the central meaning of *kakulyarani*, the word one of the senior Bible translators used to gloss ‘compassion’, is to suffer-with, to break down by being overcome with emotion. This was graphically foregrounded by the adult daughter of a leading former land rights activist, when she shared with me the cherished memory of watching Mel Gibson’s *The Passions of Christ* with her dying father. ‘We used to sit at home and watch it on video, over and over again, sobbing and crying. But every time they stabbed that sword into the body of Jesus, I felt a little bit of my own pain was taken away.’ It was almost as if the daughter, through the displacement of her

father's pain onto Jesus in the visual and visceral co-witnessing, was scarring herself emotionally in anticipation of the father's looming passing, in order to assure him of her love and remembrance (cf. Tamisari 1998, 255–56). On this journey to the Holy Land too, sympathetic identification and remembrance that would bring relief from emotional pain played a major role. Much more than mere pedagogical support for the translation project that would help the Anangu understand the geographical, social, political and cultural dimension of the biblical events, this was a pilgrimage and journey of *mukulya*, of love and hope. In other words, feeling-with or attachment through identification was crucial in opening up the translators' inner vision for and thus comprehension of the Word. How else could they forge a sense of belonging to places they had never seen before and that did not embody their own life histories yet?

Rightfulness

The pilgrims took as established fact the Christian view of Palestine as the biblical 'Holy Land', unaware of the long history of translation through European eyes. Our tour guides continued the long-established pattern of approaching the events in the Old Testament as inevitably leading to the life of Christ, and the land as the 'repository of Christian sacrality' (Bowman 1992: 156). Consisting of linguistic, archaeological and scriptural information, their narrative was intended to give evidence of the historical veracity of biblical incidents. The Anangu pilgrims, however, needed no such evidence. Their efforts were directed towards familiarizing themselves with the movements of the ancient Israelites they knew from maps and biblical accounts, and, more importantly, to experience Jesus's ministry that seemed to emanate from the sites of his life and work in Galilee. Their hope was that the Holy Spirit would receive them as guests and give tangible signs that would affirm their calling as translators of Scripture: 'I am waiting for a sign from him that he has chosen me to do this translation work', a younger man said when I asked why he had come. Once assured of their rightful presence as visitors and 'received' by the Holy Land, the pilgrim translators would enable their own participation in his Living Word, which meant they would bring back memories to Central Australia, tell *their* story and thus 'make' history.

The translators accept the biblical view that God diversified language, territory and society (the stories of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 and Pentecost in Acts) as well as the covenant. If the pilgrims had come in the knowledge that, in the eyes of God, all believers are equal, they also recognized the inalienable identity of the twelve tribes with the land they had come to see and experience. In an emotionally charged reenactment of the biblical events shown in a movie at the Shilo visitors centre, Joshua tells his people: 'In order to inherit the land given to you by God, you must settle, build and sow. Connect to the land and it will connect to you as well.' Although the Anangu had left their Dreamings at home, they appreciated this call to connect with land from within their morally endorsed entitlement as traditional owners. How could they not hear this from within their deep sense of belonging to *manta* in name, flesh and spirit? Why should they disconnect from the relationship they experience with ancestrally enlivened sites that react to people's presence as either relative or stranger? At the same time, their identity as traditional owners is never entirely divorced from

the history of colonisation. Thus, when Joshua speaks of settling, building, and sowing as a means of conquest and homemaking, the Anangu experience of life on the mission and the ethic of industriousness it embodied was a real point of connection. Memories of long months spent in sheep camps near wells and bores, of shearing, fencing, building, spinning, dying wool, weaving, growing vegetable gardens and later establishing a date and poultry farm, running a bakery, and learning to work as nurses, teachers and domestics (Eickelkamp 1999; Tjitayi and Lewis 2013), are all part of the Anangu cultural history. As such, memories are politically and morally salient.

Placemaking through Memories and Witnessing

Changes to the social and natural environment foreground the significance of anchoring the self in place through time and across far-reaching transformations. Memories that enhance the sense of continuity of being as well as moral coherence are key to this process; they are made in relation to present circumstances, and, as Melinda Hinkson (2014, 13) emphasises for Warlpiri drawings on paper made in the 1950s and 1960s, with an eye to the future. Her inquiry into modes of seeing the world showed how acts of remembering country—in dance and song, and in drawings on paper—helped the forcibly relocated Warlpiri community to keep their ancestral connections intact, as they were settling into new country hundreds of kilometres away and for generations to come. As I illustrate, the chance to make memories for the future was a factor in people's decision to embark on the pilgrimage. They were going to make new connections and generate stories to tell back home, thereby strengthening their capacity as Bible translators and potentially their standing in the local church. Most importantly, they were to retrieve prophetic visions that cast the pilgrimage as a return journey. In the context of Australian desert communities, the pilgrimage presents a paradigmatic case of placemaking through memories across geographical, temporal and ethical borders.

Not surprisingly, the pilgrims substantiated their links to biblical sites in ways that reflect traditional techniques of emplacement. They sang, walked, viscerally imbibed places through seeing, touching and eating native foods, and they recalled and read out the relevant Bible passages, which attested to their prior knowing of the 'storyline'. These techniques are in accord with customary protocol and prerequisite of visiting places; they open a person's *kurun* (spirit) to the presence of sites that are thus internalized, and which in turn enhances a person's right to represent (paint, talk about, interpret, translate) emplaced events. Moreover, proper behaviour makes country receptive to the visitors, and I surmise this, together with their trust in the Savior and feeling of being close to God, encouraged the women and men to bring their own current concerns to the foreign land. For instance, they prayed for sick or jailed family members at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, and among the ruins at Capernaum where Jesus had healed a paralyzed man (Mark 2: 4). There were sights roughly familiar to the pilgrims from their own desert homelands, like the Engedi caves where David hid from King Saul, or a large grinding stone for wheat at Beer-Sheva, while eating Peter's Fish and learning of the native medicinal and food plants enabled further connections. One woman bought a kitchen prayer hanging and a tea towel imprinted with such plants for her kitchen at

home in Pukatja. This association of home, food and physical survival on one hand, and longing for spiritual nurturance and salvation on the other, was even more succinctly articulated by a woman who did not come along on this journey, when she told me at Pukatja: 'I'm waiting for Jesus like I was waiting as a child for father to return home with meat'.

From the vantage of the Christian women I have come to know closely, the life-historical orientation to place both facilitated and challenged their relating to the biblically inscribed places of the Holy Land. To be able to form attachments to particular sites that people knew through the written Word was the principal reason for the study tour. Being witness to places that thereby become part of the self was further cemented through copious digital recording, from the airport in Tel Aviv all the way to Golgotha. At every site, the women and men held up their iPads and mobile phones to film what was in front of their eyes as well as their own seeing, while adding running commentary. They were compiling 'proof' to be brought home and disseminated among family like the Bible verses that travel out of translation workshops into networks of kin before their appearance in print. Human and camera eyes were peeking down Machpelah Cave at Hebron that Abraham bought to bury his wife Sarah, staring into the dark of Abraham's well outside the ancient city walls of Beer-Sheva, catching a glimpse of the Herodian mountain hideout Masada, overlooking the valley where David fought Goliath, capturing the beauty of the synagogues of Jesus' ministry in Nazareth and Capernaum, and of the valleys he walked and along the hills he climbed, beholding the places where he healed the sick and the Judean wilderness of his temptation, and witnessing the pilgrims' baptism in the Sea of Galilee that had fed the disciples and tested their trust.

The pilgrims, for whom sleeping on country is a significant element in becoming receptive to dreams (cf. Poirier 2003), relished an overnight stay in open tents near the Bedouin community Kfar HaNokolim. Awaking to the vista of the wilderness of Paran, one woman commented, 'Memory *paluru* [this one], like Abraham in a tent', while another explained, as she was recording herself on her iPad, that this is how Abraham had lived, in these tents built from camel skin. Their own memories of sleeping in traditional bush shelters, *wiltja*, throughout the mission era and well into the 1970s, when these slowly began to be replaced by government housing, intermingled with the act of envisioning Abraham in his tent. The camel skin added a further layer of connection; while the Anangu never used animal skins as building material for shelters, introduced and now feral camels have long been a familiar sight in their traditional homelands. These forms of embedding the self notwithstanding, the challenge remained of how to create life historical links to sites that belonged to others with whom there existed only the kinship as members of the global Christian family. To properly enplace their concrete selves it became necessary to have already been there.

On a day in Jerusalem, the group had divided into those fit to wade in the dark through the water of Hezekiel's tunnel and those who, like me, preferred to walk in the open towards the site held to be King David's grave. A couple of hundred metres before reaching the site, one of the women called us to stop. She sat down at the fence along the narrow track high above Kidron Valley, visibly shaken. Her older sister and I squatted down with her, and as she was catching her breath, we learnt that she had already been along this path. She had suddenly recognized the track when a memory of walking with us, dressed exactly as we were on this

day, had returned to her mind: ‘Before the trip, back home in Pukatja, I was resting half asleep, half awake. That’s when I had this vision. I already went here with you in my vision!’

I too was moved; not only did this oneiric inclusion seem to rest on the recognition of our shared experiences over years of ethnographic fieldwork, it also gave me a better place in the intersubjective space of the group of pilgrims. More to the point, I sensed the emotional safety that this technique of retrospection affords—to have been at a particular site in a vision or dream before the visit means that the prophetic experience can be drawn upon as memory, thereby turning the foreign into the already familiar. Here, acts of remembering are not only a looking back, they are a coming back.

Emplacing Christ

The significance of envisioning the self into place cannot be overstated; it potentially transcends the importance of being there in the flesh. Such envisioning enables acts of remembering without the temporal borders of the everyday, and across the borders of interiority and exteriority, self and land. Inspired by Hinkson’s analysis of Warlpiri ways of seeing the world in drawings, I want to similarly highlight the temporality of emplacement, and, concomitantly, the spatiality of remembering, through the lens of a dream travel to the Holy Land by one of the most senior Bible translators.

My ‘sister’ is afraid of flying and has never traveled by plane. For her, joining the pilgrims on their long overseas flight was not an option. When I expressed pity to her, she shook her head and said, ‘I’ve already been to Israel’. She proceeded to tell (in English) a dream she had many years ago when Eckert first tried to organize a Bible study tour and invited her to come along.

...In my dream, I went to Darwin [a major northern town] with my husband, but we came back home because I wasn’t ready. In Darwin, there was a plane waiting to take us to Israel, but when I looked into the direction of the plane, I saw that the gate was locked, I saw the padlock. Later on, I was preparing myself again to go. They came in a bus to pick me up; they stopped at the gate to the farm [where she lives]. I was ready, all dressed up, but one shoe was missing. I called out to them, ‘I only got one shoe!’ And they drove off. The third time, I was completely ready, in mind and spirit. I don’t know how I got there, but I was in Darwin then. When I looked over to the gate, it was unlocked and the plane was there. There were many of us and we walked over to the airplane; it was small like the Flying Doctor’s plane. All of us got in, I’m not sure if it was people or angels, and we never took off along the runway. Instead, we went up like in a helicopter, but it was quiet. ‘We are now out of Australia’, the pilot said. I was sitting behind him and wanted to see my fellow travelers. So I turned around, but looked in vain—there was no-one there. And I was wondering where they got off, because we never landed anywhere! When I looked up I could see the stars clearly, as if the plane was open. Then I saw that the pilot’s hair was long and very white, and his clothes too. I only ever saw him from the back. ‘We are now in Israel’, he said. We gently glided down and landed in a street (no plane, no parachute), with people walking everywhere. The two of us started walking, following a red arrow on the ground

pointing the way. We kept going and came to a river. The water was very clear. I thought, ‘how am I going to get across to the other side?’ The arrow was going up a hill beyond the river. I kept looking at the water to see where I could cross. The one gently blew on the water, and it parted. We went through the dry patch of the creek bed and followed the arrow. When I looked back, the river was running again, the gap had closed. And when we came to the area where Jesus went to heaven, I saw, astounded, two very large footprints on the ground, for me to see. I realized, this is the footprint of Jesus. The one said to me, ‘You remember that red arrow we’ve been following? That’s when Jesus died for all of us. That’s the blood of Jesus. And the river is coming from the throne of God.’ And the one told me, ‘He went from here up to heaven, and he will be coming back to this same area, and people will be coming here from the four corners of the world. And when Jesus returns to this place and his foot touches that rock, it will split into two and each half will move to one side.’

Checking with me over the dictation, my ‘sister’ offered interpretative comments. The ascent of Jesus in her dream is a vision of Acts 1–4, where it is said Jesus will return in exactly the same way and at the same place where he left his disciples. According to her, the dream reflects how the Bible is the Living Word in her mind and soul. This is the foundation or the deeper message: God wanted her to see the place where Jesus will return.

Certain dream elements, the return of Jesus to the place from which he departed this world, specifically his feet touching the rock that splits and drifts apart, correspond to the Old Testament prophecy of Christ’s return to the Mount of Olives in Zechariah (14: 4). However, although the main message is to see and thus be given knowledge of the location of Jesus’s return, the dreamer does not refer to the place names, Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. While cautious not to emplace herself in a land whose ‘earthly owners’ she does not know, she did not mention the names because for her, the site of the second coming is ground zero, the alpha and omega of all places and all humanity. Emplacement thus takes on yet another temporal dimension, one in which divine presence has already arrived: ‘Time is here’, she had stated in English. Other elements of the manifest dream, the two large footprints on the ground near a river that are recognized in the dream as a manifestation of divine power, echo the Arrernte inscription of Jesus’s footprint on a rock in the bed of the Finke River. This oneiric account of walking in the footprints of Jesus epitomizes the centrality of visibility as a-being-there with a temporal and moral twist: the dreamer is moving along the path of righteousness toward eternity, assured she will not be lost. As memory for a future in the temporal and spatial beyond, the dream brings back into view *tjukurpa ilkaritja*, the ‘story of heaven’.

Conclusions

Given its magnitude and the complexity of textual history, Bible translation is a daunting task. From the viewpoint of the faithful, it is a divine calling. For Indigenous Australian Christians, it can provoke the far-reaching political question of their identity as colonized subjects. For the Anangu I have worked with as an ethnographer, translating the Bible is all

of these. In addition, it is a way of emplacing Christ in the self, and to thus indigenize Christianity, which people's identification with Jesus's suffering underscores further.

Of special interest for this discussion of an Australian Indigenous case of ethics across borders is that the pilgrimage to the Holy Land enabled the Anangu Christians to 'walk in the footsteps' of Jesus and his disciples, in the way they trace ancestral paths, *iwara*: by visiting geographical sites in the sequence of songlines, and by envisioning the travel routes in song and reenactments in ceremonial dance. To visit the sites of Jesus's life and teaching, as well as the Old Testament places, meant that his abiding presence 'above' (*katu*) in the vaguely located realm of heaven (*ilkari*, also meaning 'sky') was to take on another dimension in the concrete here on earth. The pilgrims could effect an identity of place and text by seeing the land with their own eyes, by standing on sites of biblical incidents and reading out relevant Scripture passages, by singing to places, praying, dreaming of and thinking about the story.

From my comparative perspective, but not their own, the pilgrimage allowed the travelers to make tangible the biblical 'storyline' in the way the path-site configuration of Dreaming tracks in the land objectifies ancestral lives and events. However, the Anangu pilgrims left their Dreamings at home, and any allusion to these on my part was perceived to be, literally, out of place and morally offensive: '*Wanti* [leave it]! It's wrong, we are in the land of Jesus', the women told me. Importantly, with one or two exceptions, they did not travel as a converted people who had rejected the reality of their traditional cosmology, and their great respect for the Holy Land as such derives at least in part precisely from their traditional perception of sacred sites. More to the point, by emplacing Christ in his country, the pilgrims were acting in accord with a centrally important moral lore of their own: you shall not bring your sacred stories into the territory of others unless invited to do so (cf. Morton 2005, 198). The convergence of sacrality, story, land and people is of course not alien to the Christian imagination. To the contrary, it is pivotal to the figuring of the Holy Land as such, as expressed in Psalm 125, 2: 'As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people.' Going to Jerusalem would cement the Anangu's identity as 'his people', without compromising the morality of their land-based traditions.

Given the chance to visit the places where Jesus was born, lived, taught, died and left this world, meant that the Anangu interpreters could transform their knowledge of the 'story of heaven', the Bible, into knowledge of his 'story of the land'. The Holy Land became a 'beat' of sorts, as the travelers could anchor their relationship with Jesus in his country. But such demanded caution. Located outside the Indigenous domain, emplacing their connection with Christ taxed the moral imagination and identity of the pilgrims in ways that differed from the dilemma of being caught between 'two laws', traditional beliefs and Christianity, that Austin-Broos (1994, 136) described for the Arrernte people at Ntaria. Although intimately familiar with biblical stories, a foreknowledge which, in traditional terms, granted them a right to set foot in the Holy Land, they were careful not to bring their own ancestral stories with them. I suggested this was a conflict avoidance strategy of incommensuration, but one grounded in the customary orientation of respect towards the sacrality – and indeed moral integrity – of story places.

While some draw insightful parallels between traditional cultural elements and biblical practices, at home in the desert, the Anangu Christians who shared their work and ideas with me tended to keep the two stories or tracks separate. Following Edwards, I referred to this as compartmentalisation. Yet the human-land-ancestor connection that is sustained through the living body inevitably enters the picture; it manifests in dreams of even the staunchest critics of syncretism. Visibility as a-being-there is the defining epistemic and ontological mode. It helps explain why, for the Pitjantjatjara Bible translators, the question of how to ground the Living Word is crucial, which the journey to the Holy Land seemed to offer. Once there, the pilgrims needed to connect to the land and retrieve places from the scriptural space through being there in active participation. They were not mere sightseeing tourists who could tolerate externality; rather, they needed to envision themselves into stories and places.

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