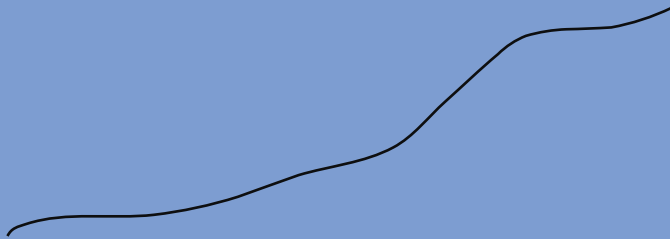


The sea brought you here
The sea brought you here

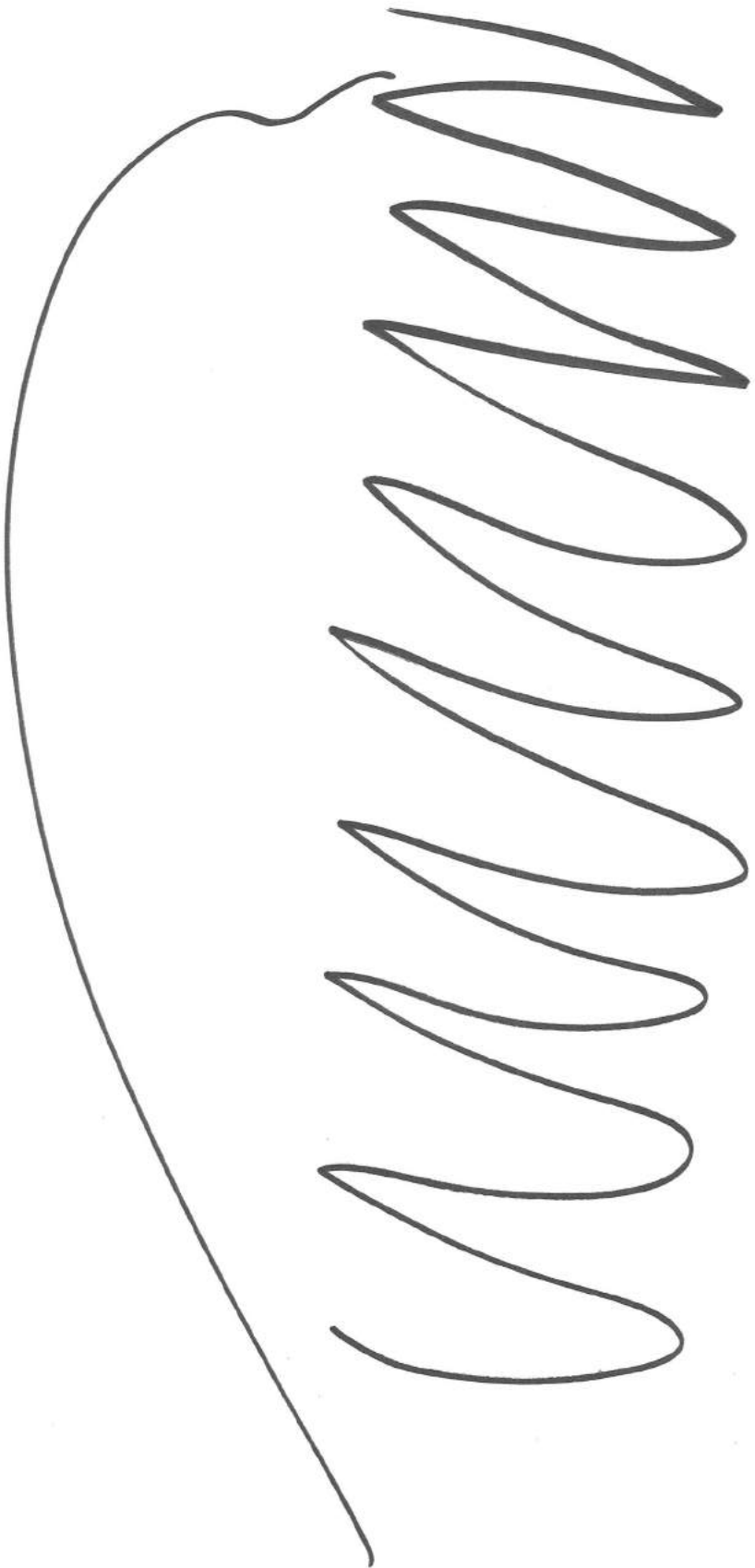


The sea brought you here

and now you must go back

your home calls you and,

See it in your heart &
eyes. You speak of home in your
daily tongue.



Contents

7—8

Foreword

Sophie Davis

11—15

A Pacific Diaspora: How Might We Trace The Movement?

Hanahiva Rose

21—26

A Transcript

28

quishile.shile.shila

Quishile Charan

35

untitled text

Salome Tanuvasa

38—44

Temporary Vanua: Decolonisation and Textile Making

Quishile Charan

49

Contributors

50

Colophon





Foreword

Born out of a shared Google drive folder—containing found photographs, phone snapshots, notes, sketches, texts and other work in progress—this publication accompanies the exhibition *Namesake* by Quishile Charan and Salome Tanuvasa at Enjoy Public Art Gallery (29 June – 22 July, 2017). While editing it, our hope was to preserve the intimacy and fragmentation of this collection of material from the artists that has become a kind of roadmap for their project.

Namesake brings together work that explores the related ideas of lineage and displacement, developed within an atmosphere of friendship and close dialogue between both artists. Matriarchal family figures are central to these investigations. In Charan's case, she has produced textiles that pay tribute to her aaji (paternal grandmother), as both her own namesake and the person who first introduced Charan to the practice of textile making as an expansive knowledge system. Tanuvasa's work for this exhibition begins with a physical manifestation of her own family networks: her mother's Warwick 3B1 notebook containing phone numbers for relatives living in Vava'u and Tongatapu.

Charan's recent practice has focused on the production of large-scale textiles—lengths of fabric printed and dyed by hand with natural pigments

such as clay and haldi (turmeric), usually suspended from the roof to cascade through architectural environments. For *Namesake*, Charan has produced smaller and more intimate works with designs based on her aaji's likeness, dalo (taro) leaves and a red hibiscus flower. These works employ a variety of techniques including screen printing, hand embroidery, laser cuts and embellishment. Some have been dyed with pigment from kawakawa leaves. Draped over a makeshift clothesline in the gallery, this method of displaying Charan's textiles recalls an environment of learning and memory. As the artist describes, 'it is a direct reference to my aaji's clothesline in Nawaicoba, Nadi. What I have learnt over the years around textile making has happened in conversations surrounding that clothesline.' Of course, 'a line' doesn't simply refer to a place to dry our clothes, it can also mean a succession of people, an inheritance.

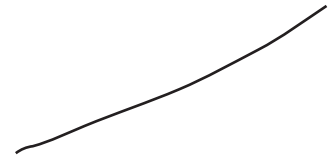
Responding to the handwritten notes and drawings accompanying the list of numbers in her mother's phonebook, Tanuvasa's work—including texts and drawings that resemble radio waves, wind, or currents in the water—infers movement and connection in relation to physical and technological environments. The title of this publication, *The sea*

brought you here, is drawn from one of these works. Tanuvasa also acknowledges the digital background for these conversations, where wireless service providers such as the multi-national Digicell have a very strong presence in the Pacific, capitalising on the high uptake of cell phone and data usage due to the high volume of communication between relatives living in and outside of the Islands across Aotearoa, Australia and the U.S. Her drawings respond to the environmental noises heard on long distance calls: from familiar interference and delays on the phone connection, to the specific sound of wind in the trees.

The sea brought you here includes new texts that elaborate on the concerns of both artists. Employing the metaphors of threads and waves, Hanahiva Rose connects the practices of Charan and Tanuvasa in her essay *A Pacific Diaspora: How Might We Trace the Movement?* while *Temporary Vanua: Decolonisation and Textile Making*, a revised text by Charan, contextualises her approach to working with textiles. Shorter snippets of text by Tanuvasa give insight to her working process. Finally, *A Transcript* records an informal conversation between two friends attempting to unpack the way the language of 'decolonisation' is currently being employed. Through different approaches, the conversations, images, works and research included in this publication reach out to broader social and political terrain, while necessarily safeguarding the intimacy and personal significance of what has been shared.

Hanahiva Rose

A Pacific Diaspora: How Might We Trace the Movement?



Space and time (a wave)

I'm not much good at talking on the phone. Speaking aloud can never be private enough and the impossibility of reverting to a whisper throws me off. That which isn't verbally articulated goes uncommunicated; a narrowing of the eyes or a clenching of the jaw cannot, in this instance, speak for itself. But there is something to be said for shared silence, expensive as it is in a long-distance call: it invokes a surrounding. Waves crashing, a gust of wind, a baby's cry, the daily rituals of a life. Silence—the right silence—imitates intimacy, which makes distance seem smaller than speech can.

It's nice to think of sound as it is carried by a transmission of waves: a reverberation between bodies in proximity; or, as necessary, over land and under sea by cables and wires; or between satellites. Long-distance, when the signal fails, the conversation drops. Silence, in that case, echoes.

For the Pacific diaspora, the movement of the tides is at once the loss and the link. In the ebb and flow of the waves that bind 'our sea of islands'¹—topographical, skybound, seasoned, earthly—distance becomes visible. In her drawings, Salome Tanuvasa has visualised them as one line, two, three. Tight curves or a single gesture, scooping.

Tanuvasa's waves make marks across otherwise untraversable histories. To delineate the space between there, then, here and now in terms of latitude and longitude is to quantify an impossible distance between what was and what cannot be again. A straight line tells us little, just as a fixed image of home untouched by time is an ideal impervious to the chronological forces of dispersal. Home becomes, in the act of leaving, imagined. Home becomes a place buoyed by waves.

The physicality of a mother's phonebook—something that has travelled the distance from there to here and survived—belongs of both places. Pen pressed to paper, it remembers the names, the numbers, the addresses, the prefix: +676 for Tonga; +61 for Australia; +1 for America. It gives weight to the transience of what it records. A mother's phonebook is a clue to an interior life we cannot know: of hushed conversations between sisters, numbers never called, and notes—a friend-of-a-friend has recently moved to the city, Auntie wants this specific bedset from this specific store, the school dentist is coming next week.

Carved out of phone books and conversations, photographs and memories, the reality of here and the imaginary of there, in the non-space between silence and

¹ Epeli Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands", *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands* (Suva, Fiji: The University of the South Pacific, 1993), 2–16.

speech, Tanuvasa allows for a notion of home that rests within the movement of the tides—touching solid ground only for a moment before retreating once again.

History and memory (a thread)

Louise Bourgeois described the process of creating her fabric drawings as, “The repetitive motion of a line, to caress an object, the licking of wounds, the back and forth of a shuttle, the endless repetition of waves, rocking a person to sleep, cleaning someone you like, an endless gesture of love.”² The act of creation is one of weaving, knotting, stitching; of fine motor control and careful stillness and, as Bourgeois writes, of nurturing. Textiles work to their own careful logic of colours, textures, moods and secrets devised in a series of precise motions. In Quishille Charan’s work, the logic speaks to her employment of textiles as a site of inherited knowledge, strength and love.

Let’s begin with the colour: cloth stained by kawakawa. Kawakawa, native to Aotearoa, has many uses as rongoa: its twigs worn as an apron by the tohunga when performing incantations; the leaves taken as an infusion to treat chest problems; boiled and bathed in to ease arthritis; or chewed to relieve a toothache.³ Colonisation brought with it a whole new host of infectious diseases that tohunga were unprepared to treat, and as their practice became less effective their whare wānanga were dismantled. The Tohunga Suppression Act 1907 served to hasten that assimilation.

² Louise Bourgeois, *Louis Bourgeois*, ed. Frances Morris, Marie-Laure Bernadec (London: Tate Publishing, 2007).

³ Dr Rosemary Beresford and students of the Otago University School of Pharmacy, “Maori Rongoa: Medicinal Native Plants of New Zealand, “Rongoa New Zealand, last modified October, 2012, <http://rongoanz.blogspot.co.nz/files/2012/09/Rongoa-maori-bklet-Otago1.pdf>

Charan's use of kawakawa establishes a link between the inherited knowledge of textiles passed down by her Indo-Fijian aaji (father's mother) and her own practice as an artist in Aotearoa. As a network of interconnections, the careful rendering of an image on cloth grants a momentary collapse of space and time that allows the work be both representation *and* embodiment; encryption *and* experienced time. It is her aaji's love just so as much as it is of her aaji's love; it is a history of indentured women just as much as it is of that history; it speaks to this land and it speaks to Fiji.

Two localities are performed: Aotearoa in the kawakawa dyed cloth; and Fiji in three images: red hibiscus, green dalo, Aaji. But this is a work made of innumerable webs. Consider the hibiscus, native to both Fiji and India. Indo-Fijians are the descendants of indentured labourers, first brought to Fiji from India on coolie ships in 1879. This initial act of displacement, represented by a flower of many homes, complicates the work but also grants it a specificity that speaks exclusively to the history of the movement of Indo-Fijian women—first on the coolie ships, second in the exodus following the military coup of 1987.

A final, external thread is the clothesline. It is her aaji's clothesline in Nawaicoba, Nadi, that is the site of her inherited knowledge, Charan explains. Rope held taut between one end and the other, sagging under the weight of what it carries: the clothesline shoulders the burden. It performs the impossible task of airing out that which is made of sweat, tears and blood—'hanging it all out to dry'. The clothesline is a structure in conversation with the textiles it hangs, a reminder that memory exists in physical spaces and performed actions but that it can also transcend them. Memory can build a home where it must.

Personal and collective (a lineage)

The circumstances of departure complicate what we consider the parameters of home. Avtar Brah called home a “mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination”, describing the sense in which each subsequent generation of the diasporic identity builds an image of belonging based on a record of things carried and others left behind.⁴ Home may be where we’ve moved from. Home may be where we’ve never been. Home may be a place we can’t find, or the place we are in. Home is a fading tidemark. Home is a series of stitches.

This work by Tanuvasa and Charan explores how the relationship between place and belonging can be, in its multiplicities, manifested as material matter: as something that transmits; something that binds; something that connects. How many stories can be told along a single line; how many more in a tapestry—one seam bound to a thousand others? As artistic sites of interaction they allow observation and engagement but they do not impart belonging easily—they are too personal for that. They are recreations of homes built in the non-spaces of history and memory, sites of depth and inhabitation that materialise the presence of the diaspora along a series of threads binding their many places.

⁴ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 192.





Silk saris drying after being washed, Nawaicoba, Nadi, Fiji, March 2017.
Image courtesy of Quishile Charan.



My mother's backyard, home in Panmure, 2017.
Image courtesy of Salome Tanuvasa.

A Transcript

When we interrogate the frameworks and conventions of colonisation, we can resist them, dismantle them and rebuild frameworks and conventions that do not require oppression. This person writes and works anonymously in an effort to resist the connotations of authorship as a form of ownership and possession. They have provided the transcript of a conversation between old friends.

Oh is it all good if I eat during this?

(Laughs) Go for gold.

Shot! Alrighty, first question: decolonisation is an important kaupapa for heaps of people, especially on The Left. How do you decolonise? (Gosh.) Yeah, that's a shit question. Sorry—let's talk about decolonisation. What do you reckon?

You're all good! I was tryna figure out how to answer. It's interesting—decolonisation and The Left.

Yeah, it's mean as. I met some young people at this event where they talked about decolonisation. I don't know about you, but I was impressed. Heaps of Pākehā talking about 'decolonising our minds.'

Ugh. I don't know. I can't say I trust that.

'Cause they're white? I thought about that too.

(Laughs) Nah, not that. I've got a lot of thoughts about whiteness, but we can talk about it later. I meant how 'decolonisation' is used as

a term, how often it's misused. I've come across a lot of people on The Left who co-opt language, either to disguise or distract from some deeper held prejudices, or because they think they're supposed to be using that kind of language. How often are we taking the time to consider language and concept, what it addresses and what it doesn't? For a lot of people, decolonisation can serve as a useful stepping stone, but we have to ask who it serves in different circles. Is this something we really stand for? Or do we say it because we think we're supposed to?

Nah it's a good point, like, I actually don't know where it's from. First time I heard about decolonisation was on Facebook and then it was in protests and workshops and all that kinda stuff. So you don't support decol?

I'm not against it. It provides a term and concept that allows people to make sense of where the world is, where we are at the moment. I don't support the way a lot of us use it, activists, academics, artists—especially artists. There's no real indication of what that entails, what that looks like to us. From what I've seen, a lot of these people are talking about decolonisation without being able to recognise what colonisation looks like, how it manifests itself. 'Decolonise' is a verb referring to the removal of the colonial state. If you tell me you prioritise decolonisation, it should be applied. Not just in big protests and Facebook posts, but in everyday exchanges—in interactions with friends, family, colleagues, everybody. What we're seeing, or what I'm seeing a lot, is this word being used as a space filler. Because the movements and discussions we are having are static, we're not talking about actioning change—we're talking about how to make ourselves feel comfortable in a system, in a framework that isn't good enough.

Shit. Is that why you don't trust Pākehā?

What? Ha ha! No, I didn't say that. I was talking

The sea brought you here

about whiteness—a mode of understanding, the colonial framework developed out of the colonisation of indigenous peoples. I don't trust whiteness. It's a framework imposed on us in the process of colonisation, which means we're all capable of harbouring and exerting it without ever being conscious of it. Of course, 'whiteness', like all terms, has a context.

So what do you think the problem is? Or just one or two problems? No pressure. (Laughs)

Our language—the lack of a language we can use to communicate these ideas effectively. A bigger but still connected problem is the lack of reference for us to form a language. The thing with using 'decolonise' is that it doesn't denote a reference.

Oh, talk about that.

Ha. We take language for granted. All language refers to something, formed out of our understanding of an object, concept, et cetera. We write and speak without understanding the words we're using. We might learn the definitions, even the conventions, but if the references are foreign, we miss the nuances. Indigenous languages and concepts are constantly misappropriated by people in activist, academic and artist circles.

Those ones who tautoko everybody's kaupapas? (Laughs) You always talk about those groups. Why is that? Do you think they're the only ones who do it?

They're not the only people who do it, they're just groups I encounter a lot. It's not that surprising that this happens a lot in these groups, though. They're traditional pathways for people who want to affect change—change in how we live, how we think, how we express. That doesn't mean they'll recognise when they hold or act on colonial assumptions. It's a problem

when the way they action decolonisation begins and ends with appropriating the languages of colonised peoples. It reeks of entitlement. Think about the use, misuse of indigenous languages and concepts—what they think they refer to. Every time Halloween or whatever occasion to dress up comes up, there's this big outpour of think pieces, memes, whatever about cultural appropriation—"my culture is not a costume", et cetera. But this consideration rarely goes deeper than the exterior. I'm yet to see people regularly talking about the co-option or misappropriation of language or ritual, of the things that shape and define culture. We can talk about hair and clothing, but I think people greatly undervalue language along with the world that language comes from and the concepts it refers to.

That's legit. I need to think about that more, t-b-h. I don't want to say 'decolonise', but you work on this kind of stuff a lot. You go hard with the pro indigenous, anti colonial discourse. My next questions are about this and climate change. You wanna speak to that?

Gosh, okay. Well, the focus on colonisation and restoring, preserving, utilising indigenous frameworks is something that's always been in motion, in development. I've been really privileged in having access to people and resources who've taught me a lot about these areas. Knowledge passed down and around is what has built and sustained endurance and resistance against every form and manifestation of oppression. The state of the environment should matter to everybody because we rely on it to survive, as cheesy as that sounds. But I really don't think it's possible for indigenous people, indigenous communities to ignore the effects of climate change, especially here in the Pacific.

My biggest problems with the better-known organisations that supposedly lead the

environmental fight is that they still serve a colonial structure, and that becomes pretty evident in the way they overlook indigenous people. The worst is when they spout stuff about humans being horrible because we all destroy the earth. That rhetoric assumes the colonial relationship with land, water and air is inherent in us all, ignoring the bonds of life recognised and upheld by indigenous peoples, ignoring that this state of coexistence was forcefully removed from the indigenous framework by our colonisers. There's a way these organisations talk about the environment. They care about the environment, flora and fauna, but when they say "our lives depend on this", they're talking generations ahead. When we, native to these islands, say that our lives depend on these lands and waters and the air that blows above it, we can barely promise the next generation that we will exist as indigenous people. I don't know whether these groups ignore it or they just can't fathom it, but we have nowhere else to go. When your entire framework is borne of settlers and your history is a timeline of settling on conquered lands, moving elsewhere is an option. We are not bonded to land the same way.

Indigenous—the friendlier colonial word for native. The words we speak, the songs we sing, the food we make, the houses we build, the rituals we perform—all of this we have kept for hundreds of years, thousands of years. The languages of these lands speak only to these lands. These settler colonial environmentalists don't see the richness of life in land and water. They don't understand that it's a part of us, and us a part of it. When it is lost, so are we. I said before that all language requires reference. When we're talking about communities whose entire life systems are formed in direct reference and relation to natural environment and circumstance, climate change and climate justice is a matter of survival.

What if all the islanders just moved to Aotearoa?

If we lose our lands, we lose ourselves, we lose our people. There are bonds that have connected us across generations, since we first came to be. To lose the environment that birthed us is to sever those connections forever. We might have a long history of interaction and exchange across these waters, but settling here has harmed our people in ways we don't always see. We use pretty words to make us feel better about our colonisation by romanticising the homeland and its people with the same colonial nostalgia of our oppressors. We tell ourselves we are the same, but this land is as foreign to me as mine is to you. Our tree of life grows coconuts and it doesn't even grow in this soil.

quishile
 shile
 shila

I have half a broken name, maybe it's all broken
Kushaal is the happy one
it is a name given to a baby boy
squished inside is Aaji's name – shila
Character or conduct
the two were turned into
QUISHILE – K U S H E E L

How can someone who doesn't know you name you perfectly?
or know of the connections you would form
or is it that in his naming of me he cosmically forged a bond to Aaji
the umbilical cord was always attached to her

My last name Charan
 God's feet
it is a male's name and broken too

when they recruited my ancestors at the ports of Calcutta
they broke their names in half
one half for a first name
a second half for a last name

some time ago.....
we lost the first half
now I bear two broken names
one for Aaji
the other for the girmitiyas

my birthing started as a namesake

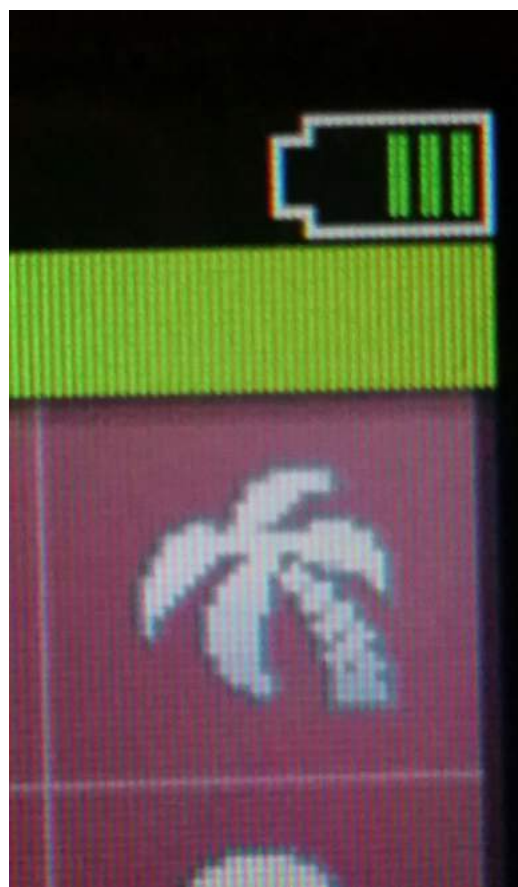
Somewhere between conception
the womb
the birth
knowledge was transferred
the memories are still alive
they sing:

“do not forget us”



Aaji in Nadi receiving an award for contribution to a craft programme, date unknown. Image courtesy of Quishile Charan.

Left: My mother's phone, home in Panmure, 2016.
Image courtesy of Salome Tanuvasa.



Right: Nokia palm tree in Mum's phone, 2017.
Image courtesy of Salome Tanuvasa.



*I have always questioned your decision to move—
and I would visualise Tonga as the place called
home. I would always ask you questions about the
way life was growing up in the Islands. I would
think of the land and the temperature. I would ask
about the type of food and plants that grew there.
I'm always learning about home, the language, the
culture, my family. I hope to strengthen that bond
and continue that knowledge. Ofa atu.*

light

the wind feels

and it touches your skin as it did to me.

maybe this breeze

came from Ta'oa?



Temporary Vanua:

Decolonisation and Textile Making

Quishile Charan

Art, or rather creating, was the tool of survival for my ancestors. It gave us the strength to envision a future. As a young Indo-Fijian female now living away from Fiji, creating remains my tool of spirituality, emotion, survival and resistance. There is a colonial framework embedded within our written histories in which Fiji and its people are dormant—as if the past is dead and we are not beings living in post-colonial and neo-colonial states. Such frameworks are written to veil us in colonial shame. And yet, we continue to bear the emotions felt by our ancestors, the pain suffered. We carry the weight of these histories every day. Threaded carefully over centuries, the fabric of colonisation built the Western imperial state on the backs of *girmitiyas*¹ and others alike. Still buried in our skin is a dirty word: *coolie*.² We were owned, indebted to an empire that exploited our bodies, freedoms, labour and the right to be human. We were told that ‘human’ was a title only given to the ‘civilised,’ that we did not belong to a physical place—not to Mother India, not to Fiji. We saw first-hand what power is and how it controls others, and we started understanding it as a series of violent acts. When you belong to a people who are landless, what could the process of physically unveiling colonial shame through re-claiming histories look like?

Adornment and its development within my artistic practice began as a response to the insidious nature of racism, both explicit and in the form of micro-aggressions. I have grown up

¹ The word ‘Girmitiyas’ is based on the word for the agreement that indentured Indian labourers signed before they were transported to Fiji between 1833–1920 to provide labour in sugar cane plantations. It is commonly used in Fiji as the name of the indentured ancestors.

² A colonial term used by the British to describe labourers from South Asia, South East Asia or China. It is now considered a derogatory term to descendants of indentured labour due to the harsh Indian Indentured System.

in environments where my histories have been dictated to me, trapping me in an endless cycle of colonial control where I am told how I should think and feel as a woman of colour. I am constantly reminded that I am only valid when it befits the coloniser. Western anthropological and sociological frameworks of history have been used to displace me from traditional knowledge systems, giving authorship of the narrative of indentured labour³ to those who are not its descendants. Fear and humiliation have caused an intergenerational silencing mechanism. The desire to reclaim my histories within these power dynamics is central to my practice of textile making.

As a young woman I couldn't understand what it meant to be Indo-Fijian. My identity had been warped by external voices that had come to define who I was. Reading my own histories through the pages of a white man's words, a coloniser's voice was telling me to be ashamed of our stories. Our men were referred to as being no better than animals, violent and savage. Our women, whores and uncivilised. When the story of your community and people is only told as something shameful, you begin to believe it. In all directions, in every academic text and historical reference, it was as if an underlining tone disclosed, "THIS. IS. YOUR. LEGACY."

Buried in my wardrobe is a small wooden box that has been filled with Kodak moments over the years, hoarded for safekeeping. As I was going through the process of reclaiming my identity, I made a decision to scan and digitise these memories, piecing together parts of my life lost due to trauma. In this photo box I found a catalogue of my life, my home, and something I had been endlessly searching for—the assertion that domineering white voices do not define who I am. My legacy lay in the images of my family, in their achievements, and in their happiness. None of this could have been made possible without the girmitiyas, without my ancestors.

Art, in combination with traditional and grassroots knowledge systems, can be one of the many answers to the question of how

³ Indentured labour was a system of bonded labour that was established after the British Empire's abolishment of slavery in 1833. This new system was made with the hope of regulating the abuses and ill treatment of slavery, while also providing capital for settlers in new colonies throughout the empire. Recruiters used many methods to gain a labour force, some workers were kidnapped, lied to, or came of their own accord. Labourers described the brutal experiences of indenture as *narak* (the Hindustani equivalent of hell), due to the harsh conditions on plantations and in the coolie lines. Sixty thousand woman, men and children came to Fiji from a wider one million Indian indentured labourers who were sent to other colonies such as the Caribbean, Trinidad, Guyana, Jamaica, South Africa, Mauritius, Natal and Suriname.

to continually weaponise ourselves against the ever-changing face of colonisation. I have been raised by very strong female figures who fiercely re-defined what textiles can be. One of these women is my aaji.⁴ She lives in Nawaicoba and over her many years she has interacted with many different programmes including craft, sewing, embroidery, weaving and jewellery-making. Half of my wardrobe comes directly from her hands or from the saris and salwar she has passed down to me. Her sense of making and creating by hand was instilled in me from birth. The days that we are apart, I can hear the mechanical sounds of her sewing machine plunging its needle and thread into fabric. She always has a project, whether it be making dresses for my cousin or sewing chair covers for my fua and fuffa.⁵ During Aaji's life, her mother would have passed down these traditions like holy scripture. This became her form of freedom, a site of independence, a place of making when women were tucked away in the domestic realm. For me, these traditions are a way to have a voice.

As I get older, the moments of physical and oral exchange between generations have served as a source of boundless love and knowledge. When Aaji pulls out her salwar and sari for me, each one comes with a story and in return I give my own, stitching memories together through tradition. My graduation sari, gifted from my fua and brought back from India, serves as the representation of my strength. The night my fua gave it to me, she wrapped it carefully over my body, explaining each fold, each drape. Her fingers moved swiftly over the deep red fabric and gold thread that overlapped the black mesh. Her face filled with joy as she said, "Now I will be with you at your graduation, here with this sari."

When I was young, my mother bought me a plastic sewing machine. It was child-sized with a pink and white exterior—a simple but effective model. In the bedroom I shared with my younger sister in our state house in Tauranga, I spent hours and hours cutting and unravelling cloth, stripping it down and building it into abstract forms of clothing. It was my only escape from poverty, racism and heartache, from fleeing a homeland, leaving

⁴ Paternal grandmother.

⁵ Paternal uncle and aunt.

behind my family, and being abandoned by my father. At the time I didn't understand that I was enacting a mode of healing, a form of expression that could embody my despair as well as my hopes, my longings and memories of home. During this time, the need to create a space for myself, to be heard and to be recognised as "Quishile" —an individual with agency—came to the fore.

To undertake labour that is seen to belong within the domestic realm has also been a way to reclaim other forms of labour that have characterised my life—one being the history of indentured labour. One chain = twenty-two yards = 2011.68cm. An average workload in the sugarcane fields was eight chains.⁶ When I look at the labour through numbers and measurements, I start to envision what life could have been like for the girmitiyas. To better understand our position in the world today, we must begin to unravel time itself, each moment and each act of violence and its roots. I think about when our ancestors were left barren, when our identities were formed around vicious stereotypes of labourers, workers and money-grabbers. I think about when we were compared with Indigenous Fijians and told we were loveless, unfaithful, and lacking tradition, that we did not have the capacity to have culture.⁷ When I look at these numbers, these *chains*, I can feel the labour: my heels crack, my hands toughen, my body wanting to break, wanting so desperately to give in.

The work I am undertaking is a simple gesture of making space, of making a voice for our wider community. I see being born Indo-Fijian as a political act, a form of resistance. I see textiles as a site of healing.⁸ To narrate our histories through natural pigments and textile ink is to physically reclaim them. My textiles—their unspoken stories, unspoken words, unseen emotions—are a form to re-indigenise temporality, to talk of how we as a people are not attached to one land but attached to an emotional vanua,⁹ carrying our belonging through relationships to each other and our families. Our homes are created through the connections we carry to family, to tradition, to our ancestors, to the emotional homeland Fiji, and to the ancestral homeland India. It is about

⁶ Brij V. Lal, *Chalo Jahaji: On a Journey through Indenture in Fiji* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2013), 176.

⁷ Stephanie Sienkiewicz, "Ethnic relations in Fiji: Peaceful coexistence and the recent shift in the ethnic balance," (undergraduate thesis, Union College, 2000), 100.

⁸ Keri Lawson-Te Aho, "The Healing is in the Pain: Revisiting and Re-narrating Trauma Histories as a Starting Point for Healing," *Psychology & Developing Societies* 26, no. 2 (2014): 185.

⁹ The vanua is something immensely beautiful, vanua being the source of life. It is the bond of the family, the indigenous peoples who are the inner part of the land and place.

using this platform to reveal the violence of forced and multiple migrations to a larger audience as it continues to affect Indo-Fijian and other Indo-diaspora communities.

Modes of traditional textile making among the Pacific Islands are a way of carrying the Gods with you, to carry home and cherish the lands that have given life. The concept of belonging to land has been withheld for generations as a tool to dehumanise us and keep us quiet. Through years of disconnection, a symbolic notion was upheld that we as a people do not belong to a land. The physiological effect of denying a person a place to call home is rooted in imperialism's desire for control, embedding itself into the language, economy, social relations and cultural life of colonial societies.¹⁰ I carry my land with me—an ancestral land, a homeland and a host country. I am cut from earth that is found somewhere in the kalapani,¹¹ born the day my ancestors stepped foot in Fiji. My motherland is transitional because I do not belong to a physical place—I live between the gaps of space. An arts practice becomes my own way to create dialogue around these emotions, to assert my voice.

Through textiles I aim to create this transitional land—a form that can be carried to spaces that feel detached. Drawing on methods of both masi and sari design, I stamp the carved textile blocks into the fabric to rewrite our histories with our voice. The textiles I make are foremost for Indo-Fijians but are also a gesture to iTaukei¹² to acknowledge their indigenous struggles. To build unification instead of widening the gap dictated to us by external voices, to converge our two histories in order to rewrite them with our own hands. The intergenerational trauma that we have experienced presents a starting point for our own authorship, to show that we are capable of creating our own histories, knowledge and societies.¹³ We as a people were abused by an intentionally crippling system that devoured time and people. The relaying of traditional modes of knowledge through both oral and visual techniques is to reconstitute a space that can embody the complexities of our histories, to traverse language, identity and grief.

¹⁰ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed books, 1999), 30.

¹¹ Meaning 'black water'.

¹² Indigenous Fijian.

¹³ Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 30–32.

So much about one's bond to a spiritual entity is left unspoken. We as a community need to continue to rebuild the foundations set in place by our ancestors. Our connection to Fiji will always be an emotional homeland, but we cannot own this land. Vanua is not to be owned. This will always be home, but we are not indigenous here. This is our strength, our power, for our spiritual entity is tied to more than just a singular vanua or whenua. We live among temporality. This has been our form of survival. Our ancestors fostered a new culture in the coolie lines, to survive during plantation times and create a sense of belonging, not to land but to a community experiencing the same trauma. As climate change affects the islands, our future generations may need to make the journey across the kalapani to a new homeland. We will need to help and guide other Pasifika communities through the oncoming changes. For we, over the past hundred and thirty-eight years, have become equipped with the tools of knowledge to survive in these in-between spaces.

What I have learnt over my twenty-two years of living has brought me closer to finding home, to finding self-love and the understanding that my power is in taking back ownership of my histories. I wear these with pride because the girmitiyas birthed me. For years, colonial ideologies have buried lived experiences under the guise of academia, separating people from their own histories in a ploy to forget. The cloth is a form of communication, a grassroots language of grief, pain and healing absorbed into flora and fauna, the environment that has cradled us, given us shelter and protection. Trapped in the memories of haldi-drenched soil,¹⁴ home is found only in places where temporary space forms itself. Each metre of cloth produced has become an offering, a symbolic mode of labour on my own body to represent the bodies of many. The pounding and rubbing of clay to cloth for hours and days becomes a repetitive action to find myself.

Somewhere in the pigment my histories were hidden, and I had to re-discover myself, I had to learn that being an Indo-Fijian woman was something made from pure strength. To encase the Artspace stairwell with thirty-one metres of my textiles was a way to protest and produce a metaphysical place of belonging, building a foundation that rejects colonial shame. To lay down fifty kilos of fresh haldi in an art gallery sitting on Karangahape Road, where

¹⁴ Spice also called turmeric.

Pasifika people have endured sufferings like the Dawn Raids, was an offering of solidarity—a small gesture to cleanse the colonial past and offer further protection.¹⁵ Creation becomes the tool to continue to dismantle the post-colonial state of being. Here sits the cloth of indenture, the language of labour, adorning space to create the beginning of healing, to start to unravel narak¹⁶ from the spirit.

This essay is a revision of a paper originally presented at the Commemoration of Centennial of Abolition of Indian Indentureship (CCAI): An International Conference, March 2017, Girit Centre, Lautoka, Fiji.

¹⁵ Quishile Charan, *Salty Tears and Sugarcane Fields*, 2016, cotton, haldi (turmeric), mud, rope, wood, textile, ink. Exhibited as part of the group show *New Perspectives*, Artspace, Auckland, 2016.

¹⁶ Narak is the Hindustani equivalent of hell. This word was commonly used by the giritiyas to describe indentured labour.



Quishile Charan, *Temporary Vanua*, 2016. Install for the Commemoration of Centennial of Abolition of Indian Indentureship (CCAI): An International Conference, March 2017, Girit Centre, Lautoka, Fiji.



Quishile Charan, *Temporary Vanua*, 2016, cotton, textile ink, rope, bamboo, clay, 3100cm x 150cm. Exhibited as part of the group show *Turn of a Wheel*, Malcolm Smith Gallery, 2017. Image courtesy of Bronte Perry.

Here I am.





Contributors

Quishile Charan is an emerging artist of Indo-Fijian heritage living and working in Aotearoa New Zealand. Charan uses traditional modes of textile making to reflect upon the landscape of indentured labour and its ongoing post-colonial effects on the Indo-Fijian community. Recent projects include: *A Turn of a Wheel* (group), Malcolm Smith Gallery, Auckland (2017); *New Perspectives* (group), Artspace, Auckland (2017); *Samundar and Haldi*, Objectspace, Auckland (2016). Charan holds an honours degree in Fine Arts from the Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland.

Sophie Davis is Curator and Manager of Enjoy Public Art Gallery. She has a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Graphic Design from the Ilam School of Art and a Masters in Art History and Theory from the University of Canterbury. From 2014–2016, Sophie was a co-director of North Projects, an artist-run initiative in Ōtautahi Christchurch.

Hanahiva Rose (Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Toa) is a student and writer based in Te Whanganui-a-Tara.

Salome Tanuvasa is a Samoan-Tongan artist based in Auckland. Tanuvasa completed her Masters in Fine Arts at the Elam School of Fine Arts in 2014, followed by a Diploma in Secondary Teaching. Salome was the Artspace/Tautai Education Intern in 2016 and now is the Education Manager at Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts. Her art practice looks at ideas of home and the multiple connections of a place that can inform the characteristics of a person.

The sea brought you here

Published on the occasion of the exhibition:

Namesake

Quishile Charan and Salome Tanuvasa

29 June — 22 July, 2017

Edited by Louise Rutledge and Sophie Davis

Design: Josephine Jelicich

Proofreading: Gabrielle Amodeo

Text: Quishile Charan, Sophie Davis, Hanahiva Rose,

Salome Tanuvasa, unattributed

Illustrations throughout by Salome Tanuvasa

Edition of 150

ISBN 978-0-473-39998-6

Risograph printing by Pivot print—

Binding: Adprint, Wellington

Typefaces: Churchward Samoa, Courier New, Wendlin,

Univers 55, Fournier

Paper: Colourplan, ECO100 & Silk Gloss

© Images and texts copyright Enjoy Public Art Gallery and the artists. All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced without permission.

Enjoy Public Art Gallery

Level 1/147 Cuba St

Wellington, 6011

Aotearoa New Zealand

www.enjoy.org.nz

enjoy@enjoy.org.nz

This publication and exhibition were made possible through the support of Creative New Zealand.



ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND TOI AOTEAROA

