Introduction to the Conference proceedings

:: Encountering the Sacred: Ethnographic and Historical Narratives ::

Linda Rae Bennett

The papers in this collection seek out forms of narration that faithfully communicate experiences of encounter with the sacred. The authors use a number of terms more or less interchangeably: sacred, spirit, soul, the Divine, spirituality. It becomes clear through these essays that the specific terms are less relevant than the context of encounter. From a human perspective the sacred manifests in specific contexts. The terms cannot adequately be defined because the sacred is not a singular thing, and because contexts are so varied. The sacred manifests, in-dwells, inhabits, appears, withdraws, transforms, metamorphoses, communicates, and frequently overwhelms. Jinki Trevillian's words (this collection) neatly incorporate the paradoxical quality of sacred beings and encounters: that they are both very real and very elusive - here and not-here, visible and not - (or not-quite) visible, embodied and yet perhaps not confined to body.

The elusive quality of many of these encounters is matched by the power of encounter. A number of the essays discuss how power works its transformations, changing or defining contexts, and forming, heightening, or altering forever connections among people and between people, the Divine, and the living world. Spirituality and religion are inextricably located within wider political, cultural and economic contexts. They are historically situated and intimately bound up with the structural conditions of people's lives. The historical specificity of spirituality is a keen concern of the authors in this collection who variously situate their discussions in the politics of class struggle and daily conversion in India, national independence for East Timorese, in post-colonial relations for the indigenous peoples of Australia and New Zealand, and in the instability of the political and economic terrain of post-apartheid South Africa.

These essays provide a rich diversity of encounters, contexts and connections. They engage with the sacred within and across the realms of Animism, witchcraft, ancestor worship, the mythology of ancient Greece, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Australian Aboriginal and Maori religions. They delve into historical texts and oral accounts of the past, and look at the present to explore how spirituality
intersects with the processes of globalization and is invested in the syncretisation of world religions. Just as importantly, they look to the future, proposing new modes of spiritual commentary and academic practice that are compatible with the authors' ethical stances and political agendas. Through their writing, the contributors simultaneously explore both the personal and collective significance of spirituality, often infusing academic discourses with personal accounts, reflections, journal entries and other tools of spiritual biography.

This collection does not attempt to present a definitive methodology for academic thinking about the sacred. Rather, it demonstrates diverse and experimental modes of writing about and conceptualising spirituality from a cross-section of disciplinary perspectives, incorporating theoretical insights and critiques from anthropology, history, theology, philosophy, feminism, indigenous ethics and post-colonial studies. Although most of the contributors, if pressed, would align themselves somewhere within the bounds of ethnographic and historical practice, the eclectic nature of their epistemological underpinnings is a common feature of their work. The shared goals that have shaped the varied contributions include the desire to explore what lies between the secular and the sacred, and to examine the very salience of this division. The project of exploring spirituality as an inter-subjective process, which explicitly acknowledges encounters with the sacred as lived human experiences, was central to the Locations of Spirituality conference and remains in the conference proceedings. Avoiding the pitfalls of reductionism and universalism in representations of the sacred also underlies the unique approaches of the authors. Finally, the process of cross-cultural translation of the sacred is of key significance for the contributors who have encountered and written about spirituality in contexts that transgress their cultures and religions of origin. For these authors, their awareness of histories of colonisation, and the desire to avoid re-colonisation in their writing, is constantly present.

**Places, spaces and realms of encounter**

Locations of spirituality in the contemporary world are diverse and fluid. The cartography of this volume includes Australia, East Timor, India, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom. In exploring the significance of geography, the various authors highlight how spiritual encounters are located not merely within physically bounded regions, but also how they occur in different landscapes. This is most tangible for indigenous people living on their traditional land or country, whereby everyday life is shaped by constant relationships of spiritual and physical reciprocity between country including its flora and fauna, local dreaming and themselves (cf. Rose 2002). Essays by Jinki Trevillian and Minoru Hokari explore these intersections between country and spirituality for Aboriginal Australians in Cape York Peninsula and in Gurindji country in the Victoria River region, while Jo Diamond describes how for the Maori, the birth and growth of flora and fauna are dependent upon the union of the deities Hine-Ahu-One and Tane.

Experiences of locating the spiritual within particular
landscapes are also prevalent for people who do not continuously reside within those landscapes. Many of us take great pleasure and solace from being immersed within the sanctity of natural environments as a refuge from the relative harshness of civic spaces. It is increasingly common for people who reside in urban environments to articulate their experiences of being in the bush or natural landscapes as opportunities for transcendence and connection with a sense of the Divine. Recently, there has been a growing consciousness of the spiritual significance of belonging to particular geographical location among non-indigenous peoples (See Read 2000). In this collection, the authors demonstrate the significance of the local (as a familiar locale) in shaping their personal subjectivities and spiritual experiences. Fiona Crockford's essay delves into the complex and dynamic relationships between identity, political struggle, and homeland for exiled Timorese youth, many of whom had/have yet to cross the ocean that separates them from both their real and imagined home. Other contributors, including Trevillian, Hokari and Bennett describe the ways in which their encounters with the sacred have occurred in adopted landscapes and cultures, and how this has been instrumental in developing and sustaining spiritual connections with those peoples and places.

In addition to its geographical locations, spirituality is also situated within a vast variety of socially and culturally located spaces, including both those that are specifically designated as sacred and those which are not. People engage in spiritual practices with regularity in spaces that are publicly recognised as sacred, such as mosques, churches, synagogues, shrines, temples and so on. They also regularly visit sacred cities and sites of religious significance, for instance, the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca or the Hindu pilgrimage to the river Ganges. In this era of globalisation, characterised by ever-increasing border-crossings, the exclusivity of sacred spaces is constantly challenged by the pluralistic nature of contemporary spiritual practices and by the syncretic nature of evolving world religions.

Spiritual encounters also occur in spaces that are not defined as sacred, spaces that are aligned more closely with the profane and with scientific rationality. The presence of the spiritual defies confinement to pre-designated spaces, times and practices. Its mutability challenges the structured nature of formalised religion and continuously denies rational claims to a singular scientific truth - even in highly secularised societies. This is highlighted in Linda Bennett's paper, which explores the transgression of a spiritual rite of passage into the secular domain of an operating theatre in Eastern Indonesia. The birth of a child is inarguably a deeply spiritual event bringing forth another life into the universe. Regardless of the ever-increasing medicalisation of childbirth, its very nature defies the delineation between the sacred and profane. In her paper, Jennifer Badsteubner follows a related trajectory, exploring the ways in which the body and blood in particular, are increasingly medicalised? and yet remain central in the practice and experience of witchcraft.

Spirituality exists for many of us in realms that lie beyond what can be seen or empirically verified. It is present for many in
their dreams, in the subconscious life, experienced via intuition or through embodied ways of knowing. Minoru Hokari's experience of cross-cultural dreaming is a case in point. These locations of spirituality, while not physically tangible are still intimately connected with the lived experiences of human beings, and thus are real to those who live them. Other spiritual realms that lie further afar include the numerous conceptions of the afterlife or that which dwells beyond mortal human existence. Such locations and states of being include heaven or paradise, hell, enlightenment and reincarnation or union of one's soul with the universe (nirvana). The question of death and its consequences is central to John Docker's discussion of the varied philosophies on the afterlife proposed by Spinoza, Socrates and Jesus. Whilst these realms are not experienced per se by the living (except perhaps for those who have near-death experiences), they have an enormous impact upon the ways in which people understand their spiritual destiny and accordingly how they live their lives. Bennett also engages with the notion of soul travel among the Sasak Muslims of Eastern Indonesia.

Spiritual locations, or perhaps even destinations, that we associate with the afterlife have enormous bearing on the spiritual significance of death, on people's preparation for death and on the relationships between the living and the dead. Despite the growing rejection of formal religions in predominantly secular societies (see Boer's paper) in favour of more individuated modes of spirituality, the fundamental questions of how to understand and prepare for death and what lies beyond death, remain paramount. The essays in this collection leave us with little doubt that the locations and scripts provided by formal religions concerning birth, death and the afterlife remain highly salient in the current era.

**Bodies, beings and relationality**

In many senses, spirituality can be thought of as a fundamentally human phenomenon. Despite its engagement with realms beyond the physical, the actual practices and experiences of spirituality occur through people. We are thus a prime location for spirituality, for it is people who believe, who feel, who search for spiritual meaning or peace and suffer due to a lack of it. In particular, our bodies are constant sites of spiritual experience, it is with our bodies that we meditate, pray and connect with the divine. The embodied rhythms of life have many spiritual dimensions, often most tangible during extreme or heightened experiences such as pregnancy, birth, severe illness, trauma, sexual union, physical deprivation and death. It is often the case that the more significance one attributes to a life event, the more significant it will be in spiritual terms, and the body looms large in terms of determining and experiencing major life events. Bodies appear to be being rediscovered as key sites for spiritual experience, as locations from which flow the affirmation of truths and ways of knowing that lie outside of scientific rationality. The centrality of the body in spiritual encounter is explored at length by Jennifer Badsteubner (this collection), in her analysis of blood theft and contamination in post-apartheid South Africa.

The relationships between the body and spirituality in terms of
healing practices are extremely diverse, reflecting the integration of local knowledge and environments in the evolution of healing practices across cultures (see Connor and Samuel 2001). Regardless of the popularity of bio-medicine in contemporary times, the healing methods of people known as traditional healers, medicine women and men, sorcerers, exorcists, mediums etc. continue to have salience for the ill and spiritually disturbed. Drawing upon her experiences as an apprentice healer in Cape Town, Jennifer Badsteubner explicitly addresses this theme in relation to the cure of those afflicted by witchcraft. It is precisely because so many people do not regard themselves as purely organic, scientifically explicable beings, but rather as possessing an essence of self or something akin to a soul, that they seek forms of healing that connect with those aspects of their well-being that cannot be fully restored by bio-medicine alone.

This affirmation of the embodiment and fundamental humanity of spirituality may appear somewhat sacrilegious due to its focus on humans, as opposed to god/s as the locus of spirituality, yet it need not be understood as such - for many monotheistic believers perceive God to dwell within them. It also runs the risk of appearing to position humans as spiritually superior to other life forms, which is not my intent. Rather, this observation needs also to be understood in light of another, which is that human spirituality is also highly relational. Spiritual identity and practice is innately concerned with one’s relationship to the self, often involving the integration of different aspects of self in response to the desire to form a coherent identity. Answering humanity's common questions: Who are we? Why are we here? What is our purpose or destiny in life? involve spiritual reflection and are critical in the formation of personal subjectivity. In this collection, many of the contributors have responded to these questions, through the process of exploring how their intellectual practices and identities have merged with spiritual aspects of their work and life experience. This is true both for those contributors who discuss their experiences and understandings of spirituality from cross-cultural standpoints, as well as those who seek to illuminate spirituality in the context of their cultures of origin.

Our relationships with others, both personal and societal, are mediated by and located within the realm of spiritual dialogue. Colloquialisms of biblical origin such as, love thy neighbour, are a prime example of the centrality of relationality in religious discourse. Reciprocity remains a key feature of the spiritual practices and/or obligations of people across the globe, whereby relationships of mutual exchange or obligation are central to how people understand themselves as spiritually and ethically competent. The enmeshment of spirituality with political obligations, academic practice and personal ethics is eloquently articulated by Jo Diamond when she expands on the Maori notion of hinengaro. She offers her own re/interpretation of the term as a mode of academic practice that involves rigorous engagement and is open to change, furtherance and proactive involvement where women are not missing or forgotten politically, physically or spiritually.

Human relationships with god/s and goddesses, ancestors, benevolent and malevolent immortal entities and other animate
beings are all mediums for the expression and location of spirituality. Non-human actors in our spiritual lives often require communication, appeasement, acknowledgement and worship through our spiritual practices (see Hokari's discussion of the Obon ritual). People frequently pray or ask for the fulfillment of myriad desires such as protection, forgiveness, guidance and inner peace. This is illustrated in Bennett's paper, through the example of communal prayer in preparation for childbirth.

Elsewhere, Deborah Bird Rose (2005) has described a form of dialogue, or calling out, to her Aboriginal ancestors whom she acknowledges as an active listening presence in the country she seeks permission to inhabit. [1] These kinds of spiritual dialogues are innately relational, depending upon belief in and connection with some other being. Hence, the varied locations of spirituality continuously spill out crossing not only geographical and temporal planes, but also expanding through relational planes that extend into and connect both the physical and metaphysical realms.

Language, text and spiritual communication

Spirituality is located also in language: in text and in oral form. Spiritual beliefs, religious ideologies and dogmas are readily transmitted through language, often via keys texts such as the Quran or the Bible, through sermons or the teachings of our gurus or elders, and by the telling and retelling of myths and legends. The retelling and interpretation of myths is a keen concern for contributors to this book. Crockford speaks of East Timor's origin myth, Trevillian refers to ghost stories and the mythological character of Old Man Crocodile, while Diamond explores the power and representation of female Maori deities. Docker also engages with the gods of Greek mythology, and Boer proposes the discernment of myth as a methodology with utopian possibilities.

The role of language in transmitting spiritual knowledge and experience occurs at the interpersonal and societal levels. In her essay, Debjani Ganguly illustrates the significance of highly emotive language as a method for invoking spiritual response as employed by the father of dalit Buddhism, Ambedkar. Fluency in more than one language has enabled several of the contributors in this book to construct narratives that speak to and of spirituality in cross-cultural contexts. The lived experience of speaking a local/indigenous language, a shared language, can enhance the depth of cross-cultural experience in relation to spiritual encounters. The embeddedness of spirituality in language is highly apparent in Jo Diamond's essay, in which she provides extensive translation and interpretation of key Maori concepts to provide the reader with a foundation for appreciating the cultural specificity of Maori spirituality, identity and social organisation. Speech, singing, percussion, chanting, and prayer all possess the potential to invoke rapture and connection, to assist us in our transitions into ritual states and to facilitate transcendence. Fiona Crockford's paper investigates the importance of ritual noise for the East Timorese who have sought to express the gravity of the spiritual and human rights abuses they have endured through the making of ritualised and politicized noise. Speaking aloud Shahadah (the declaration of Islamic faith) is another example of the centrality of language to spiritual experience,
explored by Bennett in this collection. While language is clearly instrumental in the expression of spiritual experience and the transmission of divine knowledge, the essays included in this proceedings allude also to the inexplicable elements of spirituality, those that escape linguistic translation. The exclusivity and secrecy surrounding many forms of spiritual knowledge, particularly for indigenous peoples, maintains the potency, accuracy and value of that knowledge as cultural capital. [2] Such knowledge and experiences remain embedded in the body, in memory and in states of consciousness, which cannot - and I would argue do not - need to be explicitly shared via language.

**Writings of the sacred**

In her essay, Jennifer Badstuebner probes a darker side of spirituality drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Cape Town South Africa during which she researched witchcraft. Her essay concentrates on the connections between blood, witchcraft, and the violence of post-apartheid society. In particular, she argues that rumours of blood theft are related to local understandings of climbing mortality rates for young women and that these stories highlight their gendered vulnerability in poor urban townships. Badstuebener speaks of the innate ambiguity of contemporary witchcraft in which the routine boundaries of space, time and body become blurred. She provides a detailed commentary on the centrality of the body in the experience and cure of witchcraft, drawing our attention to the body as one of the only social constants for poor South Africans in an era of insecurity, enforced mobility and poverty.

The narrative of The Red Taxi serves as a vehicle for Badstuebner’s demonstration of the enactment of witchcraft and murder, and its multifarious connections with blood, sexuality, social change, HIV/AIDS, gendered violence and economic exchange. Through her narration of the blood theft which occurs in the red taxi, she humanises and grounds the experience of witchcraft in the body. Her contribution becomes increasingly embodied and intimate as she shares her experience of possible contamination and affliction through her own blood. Badstuebner leaves us with no doubt that blood stories stemming from the realms of both the biomedical and the occult serve as diverse registers of social imagination developing around the transformations of history, tradition, epidemiology and the porous flow of globalisation. It follows that her final assertion is that engagement with spiritualities of any kind in a post-secular age must prove to be as flexible as those spiritualities which survive.

In my paper, I reflect upon my experience of bearing witness to Allah (God) in the context of performing Shahadah (the Muslim rite of passage for entering the faith) for my adopted niece Aisha (a pseudonym). This experience was my first spiritual encounter within the bio-medical realm. It occurred in the context of a caesarean birth, and destabilised forever any previous notion that I had held of the exclusivity of the sacred and profane. This witnessing of a birth forms the nexus of my exploration of the highly syncretic and flexible nature of Islam as practiced by the Sasak of Lombok in Eastern Indonesia. I describe how childbirth is culturally constructed as embodying
the potential for both life and death, and reveal the significance of religious fatalism for the Sasak in relation to the risks associated with birth.

In analysing my role in this rite of passage I also consider how traditional power relations, of gender, of religion, and of the hierarchy between bio-medical/lay persons, were destabilised to allow the spiritual needs of the infant to prevail. The impact of this encounter upon my spiritual identity and practice was immeasurable, as it enabled me for the first time to truly comprehend the significance of being born a Muslim, and the centrality of love for family, Allah and one's place in the world (or home) to the spiritual identities and lives of the Sasak. Thus, I establish how this spiritual encounter created the possibility of gaining a far deeper emic perspective as an anthropologist, and cemented my belonging within a specific location and community. This underlies my final proposition, which is that because human spirituality is both personal and shared, it provides us with a unique bridge between the self and other, a bridge that encompasses great potential for us to comprehend the differences and commonalities that exist across cultures.

Roland Boer's essay, addresses the relationship between secularism and post-secularism, the utopian potential of religion and the discernment of myth as a methodology for exploring those utopian possibilities. Boer examines the distinction between secularism and post-secularism first as a temporal distinction, and then as a critique of secularism. He then proposes an alternative approach to viewing post-secularism as a new awareness of the innate contradiction of the division between secularism and post-secularism, which is their mutual dependence on Christianity. He extends this critique to contemporary distinctions between religion and spirituality and problematises modes of spirituality that focus on the private individual at the expense of any collective agenda. Boer then elaborates on the construction of his utopian project - the desire to locate a shared language of spiritual experiences that is sensitive to social, political and cultural difference, and moves beyond the mutually exclusive world-views of religions.

In the later part of his essay, Boer draws our attention to myth as a language common to both religion and spirituality. Following the approach of Ernst Bloch (1972) he treats myth as neither purely false consciousness, nor as a positive force without qualification, but rather he is concerned with revealing the dual objectives of seeking out the purpose of myth and distinguishing between types of myth. To demonstrate this methodology, Boer explores the narrative of Cain and Abel from the Hebrew Bible, discerning how it instructs on the issues of acceptable sacrifice and the nature of Yahweh (God). What he conveys is an inversion of traditional readings in which utopian possibility is extracted from a edystopian, bloodthirsty image of God. Boer's example supports his assertion that the discernment of myth is a process that enables the identification of myths, or elements within them, that are oppressive and those that are liberating. While Jo Diamond's exploration of Maori mythology follows her own, gendered and indigenously grounded methodology, Boer's
goals in the interpretation of myth are remarkably similar to her practice, both in their political intent and outcomes.

In her paper, Fiona Crockford invokes the ocean as a medium through which to explore the movements of East Timorese and herself between the secular and the sacred, the locations of homeland and Diaspora, the nexus of traditional and evolving Timorese identities, of belonging, and of the relationality between the researched and herself, the researcher. She raises the innately political nature of Timorese spirituality in the legacy of colonial domination, first by Portugal and most recently by Indonesia (although many would now argue Australia is in close danger of imposing a new era of colonial economic exploitation of East Timor). Crockford examines the significance of the symbolic colonial domination of the East Timorese through religious iconography, referring to the Indonesian Government's gift of the statue of Kristus Raja (Christ the Lord) in 1996. Her analysis examines the insidiousness of the notion of the gift of the coloniser to the colonised.

Crockford extends her dialogue on Timorese spirituality to incorporate the island's origin myth and the significance of the crocodile as a mythical being and as a living animal. In a similar vein to Trevillian's discussion of Old Man Crocodile on Cape York Peninsula, Crockford reveals the dualistic nature of Grandfather Crocodile, who is both revered and feared by the Timorese. In theorising the ways in which myth, local cosmology and Catholicism coexist and inform contemporary Timorese spiritualities, she also highlights the significance of ritual reciprocity between the Timorese and the animal and plant inhabitants of their natural world. Her paper powerfully supports her methodological conclusions that binary understandings of spirituality are inadequate for understanding the complex relationships she has encountered in researching the evolving identities and spiritualities of the Timorese. She draws upon her primary metaphor of the sea to demonstrate an alternative, more fluid way of writing about spirituality.

Greg Dening's contribution connects us with the religious institutions and traditions of Christianity, as well as providing a commentary on the universality of human spirituality. He follows his engagement with Christianity from both within the Church and from a place of temporary exile, examining the nexus between spiritual practice or divinity, and our embodied, material existence. He shares with us Cardin's assertion that, 'we have the right and duty to become passionate about the things of the earth.' Through his reflexive discussion of his spiritual growth, explorations and a period of spiritual trauma, Dening shares his insights on the notions of believing and spiritual location. He convincingly illustrates his observation that all humanity is believing through a powerful narrative on his own believing self.

In her essay, Jo Diamond discusses wairua (a Maori notion of spirit and spirituality) in relation to Maori women, their knowledge, representation, social positioning and deification in Maori cosmology. Her chapter is dense with ethnographic and historical detail of Maori cosmology and experience, encompassing a sophisticated political critique of how female
Maori identity and spirituality sit within and resist patriarchal and colonialist discourses. Diamond introduces us to three key female Maori deities: Hine-Ahu-One, the female element of creation in Maori culture; Hine-Titama, responsible for the birthing of humanity; and Hinenutepo, associated with death and the afterlife. She explores in turn the artistic representation of each of these deities in paintings by the famous Maori artist Robyn Kahukiwa, explaining how the three deities form and inform an over-arching cosmology relating to life and death. She discusses the strategic politics among contemporary Maori women who emphasise this trio of deities in their cosmology and spiritual practice, describing this choice as a form of strategic essentialism.

Drawing upon her personal narrative of the death and bereavement of her female kin, Jo Diamond also generously shares her knowledge of Maori funeral rites (tangihanga), and specifically the roles of women in these rites. She describes the centrality of women in mourning practices and the importance of calling and ritual songs, adding another example of the practice of ritual noise, also discussed by Fiona Crockford. Diamond critiques other works on Maori funeral rites, noting the failure to acknowledge the genuine pain and loss expressed in tangihanga and the lack of a gendered analysis of the roles performed. Her alternative analysis of tangihanga addresses these gaps, and offers a critical conceptualisation of the links between spiritual participation for Maori women and their gender status.

John Docker engages the Western philosophical thinkers Spinoza, Socrates and Jesus (primarily as he is represented in the gospel of Matthew) in his contribution. His focus is their varied and overlapping conceptions of death and the afterlife. Docker draws out the parallels in Spinoza's and Socrates' conceptions of life after death for the philosopher, in which both equate blessedness with intellectual enlightenment. It follows that both thinkers did not fear death, and Docker narrates accounts of their apparent calmness and acceptance of death. Despite this acceptance, Docker also reveals that both figures were accused of heresy and/or impiety to the god/s, which would seem to contradict their shared faith in a positive conception of the afterlife. In his investigation of historical narratives on Spinoza and Socrates, Docker also traces the linkages between politics, philosophy and religion that were embedded in their lives and thought.

Docker proceeds to examine the notion of the afterlife as proposed by Jesus, which underlies his own critique of monotheism. His primary concern is monotheism's binary division of the world based upon those considered worthy of a heavenly afterlife, and those who are condemned to descend into hell. He argues that this core distinction has continued to evolve into further distinctions and sub-distinctions between different faiths that rely upon exclusion and condemnation. Docker proposes that Jesus' death was necessary to cement this distinction, and that knowing this led Jesus to be like Spinoza and Socrates in his submission towards his death. He notes also that all three thinkers believed the soul to outlive the body. In conclusion, Docker praises philosophers who look back to the gods and goddesses of polytheistic mythology, and
seek more subtle and less binary ways of conceiving of mortality, enlightenment and the afterlife.

Debjani Ganguly's essay explores the nexus between religion, history and politics in the context of dalit Buddhist conversions that originated in India in the 1970s. Ganguly challenges what she refers to as secular/modernist/historicist readings of the dalit conversion, revealing an alternative mode of analysis she refers to as a phenomenology of faith. She applies this phenomenological approach to three key points in her analysis of the dalit conversion process and experiences, beginning with her examination of the seemingly contradictory way in which Ambedkar (the father of Dalit Buddhism) employed a highly mythographic register while attempting to secularise the life worlds-of his dalit followers. Her analysis of the transformative power of language, when the political and spiritual become fused in public discourse, mirrors Crockford's discussion of ritual noise in East Timor (this volume).

Her other two key points of discussion relate to the permeability of religious boundaries. Ganguly reveals a two-way historical process, whereby the dalit founding father Ambedkar and the Buddha have both been absorbed into modern Hinduism, and at the same time the Bhakti idiom and Hindu modes of worship have persisted in the daily religious practice of many dalits. In her concluding discussion, Ganguly rejects the translation of particular non-secular experiences into universal sociological categories, proposing instead a reading that acknowledges how individuals engage in a range of practices from their habitus? practices sedimented over time and ones they are oriented to in their day-to-day living ? that enables them to connect with the divine.

In his paper, Minoru Hokari guides us through his childhood connections with the sacred in Japan as a prelude to exploring the evolution of his spirituality through cross-cultural encounters. Hokari discusses the nature of contemporary Japanese secularism, noting that the political climate remains highly suspicious of spirituality as both a private practice and as a field of academic enquiry. He then proceeds to describe how his spiritual identity, secular orientation and historical practice were transformed through encounters with the Gurindji people, their country and dreaming, in the Victoria River region of Northern Australia. Hokari shares his experience of dreaming, and the Gurindji interpretation of this dreaming as a resurgence of his spiritual memory or connection with Gurindji country. Thus, Hokari describes how this experience was firmly located within, and interdependent with, the geographical and spiritual landscape of the Gurindji.

For the remainder of his essay, Hokari explores the ways in which his encounters in Gurindji country led him to challenge the secularism of Aboriginal historiography. He calls for the re-enchantment of history through the widening of disciplinary boundaries to incorporate indigenous historians, non-human actors as historical agents, and radical oral history as a legitimate methodology. Hokari proposes that radical oral history requires the destabilisation of the traditional historian-informant binary. This requires the acknowledgement that all people maintain historical practices and the recognition that
academic historians should not hold a monopoly over interpretations of the past. In closing, Hokari reflects upon the ways in which his encounters with Gurindji country and dreaming have opened up both his intellectual willingness to engage with spirituality and his spiritual persona. Despite what Hokari understood as a primarily secular upbringing in the regional city of Niigata, Japan, he returned with a passionate conviction to the Buddhist practice of meditation in the final months of his life, a choice that both stemmed from and was wholly supported by his Japanese roots, family and friends. [3]

Jinki Trevillian's essay raises the compelling question: What is history if not a way of dealing with our ghosts and ancestors? She proceeds to answer this question by elucidating different interpretations of ghosts within Aboriginal histories of colonisation, and in reference to her own intimate dialogue with ghosts. Trevillian's contribution incorporates excerpts of spiritual autobiography, which contextualise her inter-personal and cross-cultural exchanges with her old people — her Pormpuraaw teachers from Cape York country. Trevillian leads us through a variety of sites, from the place of her conception in Cairns, the location of her childhood in northern New South Wales and to Pormpuraaw country on Cape York Peninsula. By doing so, she establishes the centrality of locale to her own identity, and traces the connections between different locations and spiritual encounters that coalesce in shaping her spirituality.

Trevillian's essay demonstrates the utility of oral histories in the production of historical knowledge, a project that mirrors Minoru Hokari's central argument in this collection. In the latter part of her essay, she introduces us to the character of Old Man Crocodile, who is a powerful presence both seen and unseen? here and not here? She draws parallels between the duality of the crocodile and the ambivalent presence of the ghosts who also dwell in Cape York country. Her explorations of duality explicitly resist the imposition of fixed dichotomies in a remarkably similar way to the writing of Crockford, who also illuminates the significance of the crocodile for the East Timorese. Trevillian's writing positions the non-human characters of Old Man Crocodile and the ghosts of white settlers as central actors in her spiritual encounters, and as legitimate historical agents in her academic project of documenting Pormpuraaw spirituality.

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Endnotes

[1] A version of this paper was presented by Rose at the Locations of Spirituality Conference in Canberra in October 2002.

Minoru's spiritual mentor who played a central role in his spiritual development both before and during his illness is Tadayuki Murasato.

**Bibliography**


