

## On Being an Historian in Different Academic Settings\*

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It is a commonplace that individual universities are different from each other, whether in size, objectives, prestige, financial endowment, or that nebulous thing called 'culture'. These characteristics also differ between departments within the same university and between different campuses of the same university. My teaching career in tertiary education spanned a mere 17 years, about a quarter of my life. There was a solitary year in 1980, and then from 1984 through to 1999. There was also a year as a sessional tutor in Politics at Macquarie University in 1976 when I was a postgraduate student. What my teaching career lacked in duration was compensated by the variety of institutions within which I worked as a history lecture. Apart from Macquarie, I worked in three quite different institutions: a College of Advanced Education (1984-88); at Australia's first private university (1988-91); and a regional university with its main campus in Fiji (1980, 1992-99). This unusual diversity of employment circumstances prompts reflection on the different opportunities and restraints that confronted me at each institution.

My first tenurable job was at the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education (DDIAE) in Toowoomba (now the University of Southern Queensland), in the mid to late eighties. The institution was a product of the 1962 Martin Report, which resulted in a second strata of tertiary institutions in Australia known as Colleges of Advanced Education (CAE), and thus the creation of the binary system of higher education. When I arrived at DDIAE in 1984 it was impressed upon me that CAE's were *not* universities. Indeed, CAEs were in some ways superior in that university teaching was academic and theoretical, whereas CAEs were practical, applied, vocational, and altogether more useful and relevant. The mantra was 'equal but different': in reality, CAEs were a device

to increase student numbers at lower per capita costs (Treyvaud and McLaren, 1976).

I remember a heavy enough teaching load that included courses in 'Australian Systems of Government' (which I had tutored at Macquarie University), 'Revolutions: Russia and China', and 'Industry and Empire' (replaced the following year by 'Victorian Culture and Society'). The insights from the latter course did sometimes inform my existing research interests, something also noted by a colleague who lectured in another CAE in Queensland (Carment, 1979: 32). There really is a reciprocal relationship between teaching and research, or it can be made to be such (see Walker 2015). There was also teaching-into various courses, such as 'Race Relations: Australia, Malaysia and Fiji' and 'History and Society'. It was in the variety of teaching, and usually in courses outside my specialties, where I felt the sting. It was only in my third year at DDIAE that I managed to have the 'Revolutions' course substituted for one in 'Pacific History'. Of course, my situation was shared by most start-out academics in having to write up lectures in unfamiliar areas and trying to squeeze in research, not to mention the extra-curricular activities of helping to raise a family (two more children arrived during my time in Toowoomba), and all the time having to pay off a mortgage. Almost half a lifetime later I wonder where I found the energy in juggling the competing demands of family, teaching and research.

Research and writing were fitted around classroom duties, and there seemed little enough time for these pursuits. By the mid-1980s CAEs still saw themselves as overwhelmingly teaching institutions, but although they differentiated themselves from universities, they were gradually becoming more like universities in certain respects. They were now issuing degrees as well as diplomas. Their staffing profile was also changing. With the drying up of academic positions from the early- to mid-70s, young recruits with PhDs were settling for employment in CAEs and importing their scholarly expectations, including a commitment to research to the CAEs. Despite being ambivalent about research, DDIAE nonetheless had a Research Committee to dispense funding, a publishing outlet (the Darling Downs Institute Press) and generous provision for study leave. And this despite CAEs not having specific government funding for research.

My research did benefit from this changing dispensation. Surveying what I wrote during those 4½ years, I am surprised by its extent. The truth of the matter, however, is that much of it was a reworking of portions of my PhD thesis (on the history of 19th century Tuvalu). I was also switching my primary research interest towards the Pacific Islands labour trade

\* A shorter version was presented at the 94th annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Ottawa, 1 June 2015. The conversational tone has been retained.

(indentured servitude), which became the focus of my out-of-town archival research forays during the non-teaching times of the year. It takes a while to move into a new field; it was a full three years between the initial research and the eventual publication of my first (joint-authored) paper on the labour trade (Munro and Firth, 1987).

I was never happy at DDIAE once the honeymoon period wore off. The place and I were a mismatch and I was forever attempting to get a university position. Such was my disenchantment that I had to be talked out of applying for an untenured tutorship in Political Science at the Australian National University. The problem in finding alternative employment in a tight job market was that I had the wrong combination of teaching and research specialties: there were no publications in Australian politics or in 19th century English social history, so no shortlistings for positions in those areas, and there were almost no job offerings in Pacific Islands history. In short, I was marooned at DDIAE where the bullying atmosphere, the generally poor quality of students (although there were definite signs of improvement by 1987), the pressures for grade inflation and the poor-relation status of the humanities were definite minuses. Another gripe was the location of History within a section of the School of Arts called the Communication Studies Programme, and having the bogus non-discipline Communication Studies ruling the roost. There was also the attitude in some quarters—usually enunciated by people with no scholarly record—that publications necessarily meant neglect of teaching duties. To top it off, I had a sense of intellectual isolation given that neither the locality nor the DDIAE Library catered for my interests (indentured labourers from the Pacific, maritime history, convict history), although I would hasten to add that the other historian at DDIAE, Maurice French, was a good friend and colleague, so I did have someone in my own discipline to relate to: we still keep in touch after all these years.

The real problems began in the second semester of 1986 when I was forced to do most of the teaching in a service course known as ‘Written and Oral Communication’, which was nicknamed ‘Rotten and Horrible’! Marking 130 short essays a fortnight (and at one point for three consecutive weeks) was a bone-breaker, resulting in a serious falling out with the powers that be. It was also claimed that I had agreed at my interview to divert into Australian History, which is simply not true. I checked this with three of the people on my selection committee and they have no recollection of any such undertaking on my part—precisely because it never happened. On that basis, I received no institutional endorsement for an Australian Research Council application for a project on labour in the phosphate extraction industries at Ocean Island and Nauru. This quarrel

over my ARC application broke out when I was on study leave at Flinders University and my complaint to the authorities at DDIAE was dismissed. I had to be persuaded to apply at all, and it will likely be a cause of astonishment that my (successful) application for \$30,000 not only lacked institutional backing but took a morning to prepare and to type up on a manual typewriter. Another episode, again during my study leave, was when my course on ‘Australian Systems of Government’ was disestablished. I was informed post facto. A staff member who thought I ought to be consulted was firmly told that my views didn’t matter. I was allocated a new course, again without my foreknowledge.

During my period of study leave in 1988 I received an out-of-the-blue offer of an appointment to Bond University, which was in the planning stages as Australia’s first private university. I accepted with alacrity. Having seen out the teaching year at DDIAE, I then packed my family into the car and drove to our new place of abode on the Gold Coast. Seven other academics in the Communications Studies Programme at DDIAE left at the same time, glad to be out of the place. It was an extraordinary mass exodus, and none of our remaining colleagues blamed us for going.

Bond University opened for teaching in 1989 and was already in bad odour with many Australian academics. Provocative comments in the media by the foundation Vice-Chancellor that the public universities had failed the Australian public and that ‘we at Bond’ would show them how to do it, did not go down well. The very idea of a private university was anathema, despite many of these same academic critics sending their children to private schools. All this, plus the fact that Alan Bond was in partnership with Chilean Telecom, and thus in cahoots with a repressive regime, was too much for academics with liberal sensibilities. Moreover, the University’s student recruitment advertisement on television, which was fronted by Don Watts, the Vice-Chancellor, was vomit-inducing, but typical of Bond University’s confrontational and gungo-ho approach:

Harvard, Yale, Princeton! If you have a degree from these universities people listen because even before you start your career you’ve made it. It is time the same opportunity was available in Australia. Well now it is at Bond University, Australia’s first private university. Here, dedicated students can complete a normal three year degree in two, and so be earning a year earlier. Facilities are world class. Our academic staff are more equipped and more motivated to share the knowledge and skills vital to success in today’s competitive world. Bond University is now calling for enrolments.

It's our philosophy to judge applicants on more than just their high school results. Discounted student loans are available through Westpac Finance, so that while you study the burden of education can remain purely academic.

To the contrary, the premise that Australians would recognise quality and be prepared to pay for it proved illusory. Bluntly, Bond University's market research was hopelessly awry, or else they ignored what the market was saying. Students stayed away; numbers were only bolstered by the university awarding scholarships and half scholarships. In the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, many of us had tiny class sizes, often less than a dozen. With my lectures written up and with so few students, I was able to concentrate on research. (In a case of *déjà vu*, however, I was directed to teach English as a Second Language in 1991 in order to increase my student numbers.) Not only was there plenty of time for research, there was *connected* time because in lieu of study leave we had two teaching semesters and a four month 'research semester' per year. As well as helping to edit two books on indentured labour, there were a couple of journal articles on Tasmanian history and a further nine articles on Pacific history, mostly the labour trade. I would never have had those opportunities at DDIAE, where an increased teaching load was in store for me. I would have had to relinquish my research grant and return the money to the Australian Research Council, and I could not have taken on the responsibility of co-editing the two books on indentured labour (Moore, Leckie and Munro, 1990; Lal, Munro and Beechert, 1993). I would be better off financially had I remained at DDIAE but it would have been a death to the academic soul.

But neither was it sweetness and light at Bond. The University's difficult financial situation and a lack of transparency with staff inevitably created tensions, both university-wide and within Humanities and Social Sciences. The university lurched from one crisis to the next. One of the lecturers recalls 'the Monty Pythonesque way in which policy is made up from moment to moment and as rapidly scrapped: there have been occasions when memos have declared previous memos "inoperative", or have assured us that the university would get over its little difficulties even if hard decisions (like sacking the recipients of the memos) had to be taken' (Sharkey 1991: 54). The tone of the place reflected the fantasies and foibles of the foundation Vice-Chancellor – a hail-fellow-well-met individual so long as you agreed with his ex-cathedra pronouncements. The financial situation did not improve. There were rolling redundancies of administrative, support and some teaching staff, and some highly publicised disputes with senior academics who felt very let down by unful-

filled promises. Bond was also apt to mount legal action against disaffected staff, and in one case unilaterally changed the terms of a redundancy agreement, telling the historian David Day to sign an additional clause that he would never make a public statement about the University. I was glad to leave at the beginning of 1992 for the University of the South Pacific's Laucala Bay Campus.

I had worked at USP as an Assistant Lecturer in 1980. Now I was returning as Head of the Department of History/Politics and replacing the person who had been beastly to me twelve years earlier. Within eight years I had moved from Lecturer to Associate Professor. Along with the University of West Indies, USP is one of the world's two regional (or inter-governmental) universities, owned and operated by several national governments. Founded in 1968, USP's brief was to train skilled manpower, to use the language of the time, to meet the needs of the decolonising Pacific. In 1980, some of that *first fine careless rapture*<sup>1</sup> was still evident. Caught in the flush of Fiji's independence from Britain, USP engaged with the issues of the day and was confident that it could make a difference and contribute to the process of economic development and nation-building. By 1992, student numbers had dramatically increased and the campus was more built-up, but USP had become self-satisfied and was entering the doldrums of middle-aged lassitude. I quickly developed a sense that an oligopoly comprising a number of senior academics from the Region had the place tied up the way they wanted it.

The contrasts between my situation at Bond and USP were striking. I now had a respectable teaching load on top of administrative duties, including ex-officio membership of several School and university-wide committees. I continued writing but on a diminished scale. In my six years as Head of Department I wrote journal articles on subjects as disparate as the historiography of the indentured labour and of Pacific Islands history generally, on educational issues, as well as an autobiographical essay. It later dawned on me that none of this was archivally-based, although a couple involved extensive interviewing. (On visits to Australia my library research was to collect teaching materials.) I also guest edited two special issues of the in-house *Journal of Pacific Studies* and co-edited a book on Pacific Islander pastors (Munro and Thornley, 1996). By USP

<sup>1</sup> From from the second verse of 'Home Thoughts from Abroad', a poem by Robert Browning (1812–89):

*That's the wise thrush: he sings each song twice over,  
Lest you should think he never could re-capture  
The first fine careless rapture!*

standards, it was a solid output. All the same, it is not a good look: there is nothing wrong for an historian to engage in reflective and historiographic writing, *providing* it does not predominate one's publications. What I should have done was to put Fridays (my non-teaching day) aside for archival research at the National Archives of Fiji. That might have resulted, say, in a short monograph on post-WWII reconstruction in Fiji. It is a foregone opportunity that I very much regret.

USP had an indifferent research culture. It is not as though research was disparaged or institutionally discouraged—far from it—but the habit of research across the campus varied enormously, as did the overall quality of scholarship. Those who were going to do research did so, often to a high standard; those who set their sights lower dragged down the average. At the end of the day, there were just too many research-inactive academics. A sure fire way of getting rid of a nuisance in the staff room was to enquire about the progress of that person's research. As USP's most distinguished graduate has lamented, the institution has reneged on its obligation 'to produce [the] enduring, fundamental scholarship which [it] was so centrally located to produce.... So much potential, so little of it realised' (Lal 2001: 102-03).

In the insular world of USP, moreover, there was an attitude in some quarters that publications that concerned the world beyond the Pacific Islands didn't 'count' as much, if at all. I didn't have to worry about that because my research was Pacific-oriented. My particular 'problem', I felt, was that research in the social sciences at USP was concerned with the contemporary Pacific, and I did have a sense of being the odd man out. I used to say half-jokingly that I was 'a 19th century man'. That was ameliorated when I was asked to help with a book on the spectacular 1995 collapse of the National Bank of Fiji and was metaphorically dragged into the twentieth century, where my subsequent research has remained. Even so, we three co-authors of the NBF book had to act circumspectly, given that so many cabinet ministers and other prominent personages were involved one way or another in the bank's collapse. We worked almost entirely from the public record and conducted very few interviews. Quite simply, we did not want the authorities to use our research as a pretext to revoke our work permits, on the spurious grounds that we were interfering with the political process, or some such. So we kept a low profile and engaged in largely undercover investigative research. It is the old story: governments want 'relevant' research so long as it does not probe too deeply into their affairs or expose their shortcomings. It is inconceivable that an ethics committee, had one existed then at USP, would have given its blessing to our work (Grynberg, Munro and White, 2002).

In late-1996 my contract at USP was not renewed, largely because the Vice-Chancellor had it in for me. I had no respect for him any more, I dare say, than he had for me. He was a Samoan of high chiefly rank and burdened with the pretensions accompanying that station in life. He ran the university in authoritarian style as though it were a Samoan village. His pronounced dislike of academics was, I suspect, an insecurity stemming from the fact that we were bright and he knew in his heart that he was not. In some ways I was my own worst enemy. I did not help my cause by publicly criticising him for attacking my academic freedom, and my attempts to raise student standards were counter-productive. I was too tough on students, who voted with their feet, and the falling enrolments in my classes were of justifiable concern. That was a handy pretext to beat me across the head and I was constantly being undermined by senior administration, who then complained about my performance. The constant harassment—anything to show me up in a bad light—was nothing so dramatic as being hung out to dry, but the denigration was frequent enough to grind me down. Members of the department were often impatient at my cautious approach; but my successor agreed that his own diffidence stemmed from trying to anticipate and then get around what obstacles would likely be thrown in our paths by central administration.

Nineteen-ninety-seven was a very difficult year as head of department in the context that I was on my way out but had to deal with a mutinous crew. With my fall from grace and favour, I became painfully aware who my real friends were. It was not good for one's sense of self-worth and I wish I had known at the time the saying, 'Before you diagnose yourself with depression or low self-esteem, first make sure you are not, in fact, just surrounded by assholes'. I did reapply for my old job at the end of 1997 but it went to Scott MacWilliam. Midway through 1998, an appointment as Temporary Lecturer kept me going for the next 18 months. The Vice-Chancellor most reluctantly approved re-hiring me and only because there was simply no one else on hand to teach the courses. He was nothing if not vindictive. Any apprehensions of tensions between myself and Scott were dispelled when we quickly struck up a lasting friendship.

Once I ceased to be a head of department, my writing increased dramatically, and on a wide variety of subjects. It was as though a heavily-laden aircraft, having ditched its cargo, was soaring ever onwards and upwards—and this in addition to writing my share of the book on the collapse of the National Bank of Fiji. For some reason I was suddenly able to write quickly and fluently. On the teaching front, I taught the 'Contemporary History' course (basically 20th century European history) during my

last year and loved being back with first-year students for the first time in eight years. It was energising, and I wish I had done this earlier. In retrospect, the best single thing to come out of USP was that teaching the 2nd year 'Theory and Method of History' course for eight years was pivotal to my becoming a biographer and thus shaping my professional identity—another case of the symbiotic relationship between teaching and research.

I left Fiji at the beginning of 2000 and never secured another academic job, although not through lack of trying. It was always going to be difficult to be considered for a position in European history, given my limited teaching experience and lack of publications in the area. But it was vastly annoying that positions in Pacific history went to people with fewer publications and much less teaching experience than myself. At the same time, I am now glad to have missed out on jobs that would have relocated me to places I didn't really want to go, or where I would soon after have been made redundant, or where I would have landed myself in a potential earthquake zone. I was tided over for nine months by a couple of paid fellowships but life as a contract historian was precarious and the family finances even more so at times. I was on the dole for a while and in 2002-03, I made my bow to necessity and worked in a shop for over a year at \$10 per hour. But I maintained my academic interests. During that time of working behind a counter, I helped to edit a book on Pacific Islands historiography (Munro and Lal, 2009). The lifesaver came in early 2005 when I became the New Zealand researcher for a major project on suicide (20th century history of suicide) under the direction of John C. Weaver of McMaster University in Canada, who became a very close friend (Weaver 2009, 2014). That tided me over, with a one-year break, until 2012. Then I became a pensioner, although still continuing to research and write.

To what extent was I the author of my own setbacks? It's a question I have often asked myself, given that I left my three places of academic abode on a sour note. I am not a good institution man, as the saying goes. I am essentially an individualist (not the same thing as a loner) and would find the top-down management of today's corporate universities, and the intrusiveness and the discontents that this entails, most unpalatable. I have never gone along with institutional hype, finding it a complete embarrassment. I want no truck with grade inflation and plagiarism. If push comes to shove I would prefer to engage in research than in teaching or administration. I know that I am sometimes tactless (often without meaning to be, but it just comes out). I am the first to admit that I have the capacity to make enemies as well as friends. All this is acknowledged.

At the same time, I have been a free and ardent spirit on the research front, venturing where fancy has beckoned. I have never abandoned the idea that curiosity-driven research produces the best results and that the choice of research subjects is up to the individual alone. Along the way I have produced a solid enough corpus of work on a variety of topics, and to that extent I suppose I have been moderately successful. I wouldn't claim any more given that higher honours have not come my way: I am not in possession of an honorary doctorate, I've never been invited to give a keynote address at a conference, I've only written one 'big book', none of my books or journal articles have been nominated for (much less received) a prize, and neither am I the recipient of any national honours. But I do remain an active citizen of the Republic of Letters and I set particular store in helping start-out scholars with their research and their career advancement. Besides, you don't have to be one of the greats of a profession to make a contribution. So long as you give it your best shot, that's enough.

What I've said thus far concerns opportunities and constraints in different institutional settings: the struggles at dreadful DDIAE; the opportunities for research at Bond; the hassles and ultimate disappointments at USP. But some of it is more in the realm of contingency. One of the themes often omitted in discussions of academics' lives is the role of luck. The brutal fact is that I was damn lucky to have had an academic career at all. Were it not for my PhD supervisor (Stewart Firth, who supported me through thick and thin) and were it not for the linguist Peter Mühlhäusler (who was instrumental in my appointments at DDIAE and Bond University) I would almost certainly have ended up on the academic scrap heap. Without first getting the job at DDIAE, I would not have landed on my feet at Bond, and from there to a more senior position at USP. Without the backing of Richard Hill, who recommended me to John Weaver and much else besides, the 2000s would have been lean years. Above all, I am well out of USP, which did me the greatest of favours in letting me go, although this was not their punitive intention. It was a grievous blow at the time and there is no denying that it took a while to pick myself up, dust myself down, and get on with life. Ultimately, however, I was the lucky victim of an effort to inflict terminal damage on my career.

I am also well out of Fiji. Had I been reappointed when I applied for my old job, I would have become increasingly unhappy and disenchanted with both the university and the direction of Fiji's national politics. More importantly, my wife and children have prospered in ways they would never have done in Fiji. The thing is, I would never have left the place of

my own volition unless secure alternative employment was in the offing. Concern over long-term security would have kept me at USP, and all the while I would have been wishing to be elsewhere. I often said that I liked living in Suva but disliked working at USP. After the 2000 coup, I would have disliked Suva as well and become increasingly negative in my outlook.

While I harbour little resentment toward USP and don't care a jot about Bond University, the same cannot be said for DDIAE. It was a stepping-stone to better things and to that extent it served its purpose. Thirty years later, I still regard DDIAE as *le trou du diable* (the devil's hole). Neither am I alone in harbouring adverse feelings about the institution. Michael Sharkey, with whom I overlapped in 1984, has said that 'the insufferable work conditions' at DDIAE resulted in 'the most industrially hideous job I've ever had' (Sharkey 1991: 11, 55). What I cannot get over is the eagerness and the alacrity with which the majority of DDIAE academics, in 1988, discarded shibboleths and sacred cows about the virtues of being a College of Advanced Education. For reasons of prestige and the prospect of more money, they rushed headlong into the prospect of university status. The newly imposed National Unified System of tertiary education was embraced in a manner that had to be seen to be believed. It was in complete contradiction of the mantra that CAEs were 'different but equal'. The ideological dogma of yesterday suddenly became a heresy. Naturally, nothing about this change of heart gets mentioned in the flimsy official history of the institution (Clarke and McDonald 2007: 21). It provides a reminder of Alf Conlon's Law of Social Institutions: that 'Every ... institution comes to the level of the society in which it is and bears no essential relationship to the expressed ideals of the people who founded it' (quoted in Foster & Varghese, 1996: 112). I was openly critical at the time and even after all these years I remain contemptuous of the hypocrisy and self-interest of it all.

I realise that some of my strictures against CAEs generally may be unfair, in that I am viewing them through the prism of DDIAE. In commenting on this paper, David Carment, who lectured in History at the Capricornia Institute of Advanced Education (now Central Queensland University) between 1977 and 1981, told me: 'I was more fortunate during my CAE career. Capricornia had serious problems but I had many good students there.... I also got heavily involved in regional history research and the National Trust. CIAE's leadership, though, was at best indifferent'. Carment moved to Darwin Community College in 1983. He remarks that although 'notionally a CAE, the Darwin Community College /Institute of Technology operated, at least in higher education, more like a

small university with research strongly encouraged'. All the same, the heavier teaching loads and the limited prospects of promotion placed definite restrictions on the career advancement and the scholarly output of academics at CAEs vis-à-vis their counterparts in universities. I have not come across a better brief description of the effects of the so-called Dawkins revolution', as it was called after its instigator John Dawkins, the federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training:

At a stroke, [they] effectively levelled the playing field, as it were, in two ways: they bestowed on the CAEs the right to rebadge as 'universities' without changing anything about their internal structure, intellectual culture, teaching and research priorities, or managerial style. Many of these institutions renamed themselves accordingly. This might not in itself have been of any great consequence, beyond devaluing in the eyes of many the prestige associated with the label 'university', but for the other strand of the Dawkins' changes, whereby the administration of the entire tertiary sector, including the institutions' internal arrangements, was to reflect the CAEs' 'top-down' managerialist culture (Mitchell, Wilson and Archer, 2015: xi; see also Croucher and others, 2013).

Universities reflect the societies of which they are part: or as historian J.C. Beaglehole said, 'A university is not an abstraction; it is an institution and part of a social system' (Beaglehole, 1937: 373). I was at DDIAE during the time of the systemically corrupt Bjelke-Petersen regime, which indirectly impinged on the institution. The whole climate of State politics encouraged the excesses of the DDIAE Director, Lindsay Barker, which percolated downward. It was a despotic 'never apologise, never explain' set-up. I had an early warning of the tenor of the place at my first School of Arts staff meeting. The chairman put in a late arrival without offering a quick apology. When his unpunctuality was pointed out, he rounded on the staff member in question and invited him to withdraw the remark. An abiding memory of DDIAE is that I never actually met Lindsay Barker in my 4½ years at the place. He was a remote tyrant, almost unseen on campus, and yet during the 1970s he was gregarious and affable, greeting staff members and actually talking to people (Thompson, n.d.). I have no idea why he became so reclusive, but by the mid-80s he was a hidden menace. I was on the committee of the Staff Association and our President frankly remarked that the high rate of membership was little other than 'an insurance policy against Lindsay'. The fact that about half the staff were untenured as a matter of policy only

strengthen Barker's hand, in similar fashion to the three-year rolling contracts at USP.

Bond University, by contrast, slotted into the hedonistic atmosphere of the Gold Coast. More than that, the mindset from above was that of an explicitly business model. The ironic thing is that Bond was a badly run business. At USP, by contrast again, the racial divisions in the wider society, or what was referred to as 'the race thing', permeated the university. It was something I greatly disliked and never learned to cope with. Despite being touted as a regional university, the student body at USP was in fact highly tribal. The 'race thing' also manifested itself in the appointment of academic staff, with blatant preference accorded to people from within the wider region. What this has ultimately meant is that USP has employed too many of its own graduates who, being brought up in a slack system, have gone on to perpetuate it. I recall a meeting of the School of Social and Economic Development in 1992 when a Fijian academic declared, 'It is our university'—meaning that USP 'belonged' to academics from within the region, and by extension that expatriate academics were there on sufferance and had second class citizenship.

Different opportunities and constraints presented themselves at the three academic institutions where I worked. Now happily in formal retirement, I work from home with my beloved dog for company. Archives New Zealand and the National Library of New Zealand are on tap, less than a ten minute walk from my apartment. I have a support group of academics from Victoria University of Wellington who congregate at the Bristol Hotel on Friday evenings, and I attend the history seminars on campus that happen to interest me. As well, I am involved with journals, currently a member of the editorial board of Canberra-based e-journal *Using Lives* and an associate editor of the New York-based *Journal of Labor and Society*. The advantages of the internet and having an adjunct appointment at the University of Queensland (and thus access to library databases and e-journals) have enabled me to remain an active researcher, if at a slower and less stressful pace than full time employment requires; and I feel that I have plenty of writing left in me. In a somewhat similar context, the great Pacific historian Harry Maude said, 'What more could one ask from the Fates?' (Maude, 1968: xiii). I haven't been so blessed by any stretch of the imagination. I also realise that there is often a small window of opportunity from the time we enter honourable retirement to the onset of illness and disability, if we are that lucky. In his autobiography, the historian of anthropology George Stocking uses such ominous phrases as 'further steps down a pyramid of deterioration', 'tumbling into the abyss of nothingness' and 'accepting the terminal realities of life'

(Stocking 2010: 79, 202–03, 210). But these are in the indeterminate future. In the meanwhile I can say that my life of the mind hasn't turned out too badly, and a lot better than might have been the case.

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