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BOOK REVIEW

Shaw, Richard. 2024. *The Unsettled: Small Stories of Colonisation*

Auckland: Massey University Press
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Reviewed by Steve Taylor

A few years ago, I booked myself in for a spiritual retreat. The five-day experience offered a focus on land and place and the opportunity to hike parts of Rakiura National Park, a nature reserve park located on Rakiura/Stewart Island at the bottom of Aotearoa, New Zealand.

A few hours into a day walk, I encountered a sign "Māori Land. Access courtesy of landowners." A Google search once the retreat ended revealed that this particular part of Rakiura National Park was owned by indigenous people, who had generously agreed to allow walking across their land.

The words of the sign have left me pondering my hermeneutical location. The walk I had made was a privilege. The beauty, birdsong and access were a gift courtesy of another.

The single sign is part of a larger story. I read, write and work as a New Zealand Pākeha. I am part of a history that has been unavoidably and powerfully shaped by my ancestors' actions as they migrated from Great Britain to Aotearoa New Zealand during the nineteenth century. How do I respond to what is privilege? Can the systems that support local Christian communities today be disentangled from the actions of my ancestors, who profoundly reshaped Aotearoa New Zealand? What does it mean for me to write and think about the development and transformation of local Christian communities "courtesy" of another?

The Unsettled, by Richard Shaw, provides an excellent resource for exploring these questions. The book opens with a photograph of Shaw's great-grandfather surrounded by his rugby team, the Armed Constabulary Coastal Rugby team. The

date is 1881, and the photograph was taken a few kilometres from the Parihaka Pā, which the Armed Constabulary invaded in 1881. Around 1,600 men were imprisoned without trial. Women were raped. Houses were torn down and crops were destroyed. Then, in the years that followed, Shaw's great-grandfather became the owner of three farms in the area.

Richard Shaw describes growing up with stories of milking and rugby, but never of his great-grandfather's involvement in the invasion of Parihaka and his acquiring confiscated land. The farms of the family were part of the 1,275,000 acres that the Crown confiscated during the mid-1860s (Waitangi Tribunal, 1996).[1] *The Unsettled* explores why some stories fall out of collective memory and what it might mean to ask the right questions about our ancestors' histories.

Asking questions about the past involves encounters with pioneer stories. How did migrants acquire the land they did? Richard Shaw's questions about what it means to remember rightly and live justly are significant for those writing about the development and transformation of local Christian communities on lands with long settler histories.

Shaw works with small stories as a research methodology. Shaw interviews people wrestling with their origin stories, which Shaw calls "secular creation stories". These stories are woven through *The Unsettled*'s nine chapters.

Shaw also researches his own small story and the lives of his Irish ancestors. He ponders how those oppressed by patterns of colonization in Ireland became implementers of these patterns in Aotearoa New Zealand. He tracks the way that law, transport, communication and the forming of local constabularies were used to generate wealth. He asks why indigenous voices are silenced – "whited out" – by the processes of colonizations.

Shaw makes no explicit claims to be doing theology. He writes as a Professor of Politics at Massey University. However, theological themes are present in *The Unsettled*. There is the language of bearing witness, defined as the courage to take "a public position … a decidedly active thing to do" (171). There is a discussion of religious murals that hung in Taranaki churches, including cross-cultural motifs in works painted by

1 For a summary, see Tom Bennion. "Review. The Taranaki Report: Kaupapaptuatahi Muru me te raupatu. The Muru and Raupatu of the Taranaki land and people by the Waitangi Tribunal." Waikato Law Review 23 4 (2), 180-189. http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/WkoLawRw/1996/23.pdf.

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Michael Smithers (126–7). There are several uses of the phrase "touch the hem of the unknown garment" (178, 192) a phrase with origins in a Gospel story in Matt. 9.20-22 and Luke 8.43-48. Shaw uses the phrase to advocate for new forms of community in which future ways of being emerge "from and in concert with memories of past ways of doing" (178). Shaw concludes with a concluding experience of sitting with two nuns and realizing that their story of service to God could be applied fruitfully to the future facing Pākeha in Aotearoa New Zealand. These motifs – of witness, crossing cultures and new ways of being – are instructive starting points for those pondering doing faith on "Māori Land" by courtesy of prior landowners.

There is a growing body of theologians writing about settler colonial theology. Writing about Aotearoa New Zealand from English shores, Richard Davis argues that settler colonial theology is a more just framing than decolonial or post-colonial theology. Davis points out how "de-" and "post-", when attached to "colonial", imply a moving beyond colonialism. The reality is that colonizers are always walking on land with history, among traditional owners with stories of dispossession and injustice. For Davis (2022), the phrase "settler colonial" allows the settler to "face their own complicity in narratives of ongoing colonisation and aim at their undoing". For South African theologian Steven Theo Savides (2022: 1) we are all "implicated as witness to, participant in, and beneficiary of settler colonial systems". This requires identity work that respects the significance of the past, even in the present, and constructs new structures of relationship. Writing from the United States, Enns and Myers (2021: 10) call for settler "response-ability". They challenge settlers to respond to their small stories by investigating how settler colonialism structures our current relationships.

These voices are raising themes that those of us writing and thinking about the development and transformation of local Christian communities need to heed. While making no explicit theological claims, *The Unsettled* offers important resources for those willing to name their privilege and justly name the legacies of colonization. The focus on small stories provides ways for individuals to examine their genealogies. The motifs – of witness, crossing cultures and new ways of being – are stepping stones for a public theology that takes "response-ability".

About the Reviewer

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