



‘BLACKBIRDING’

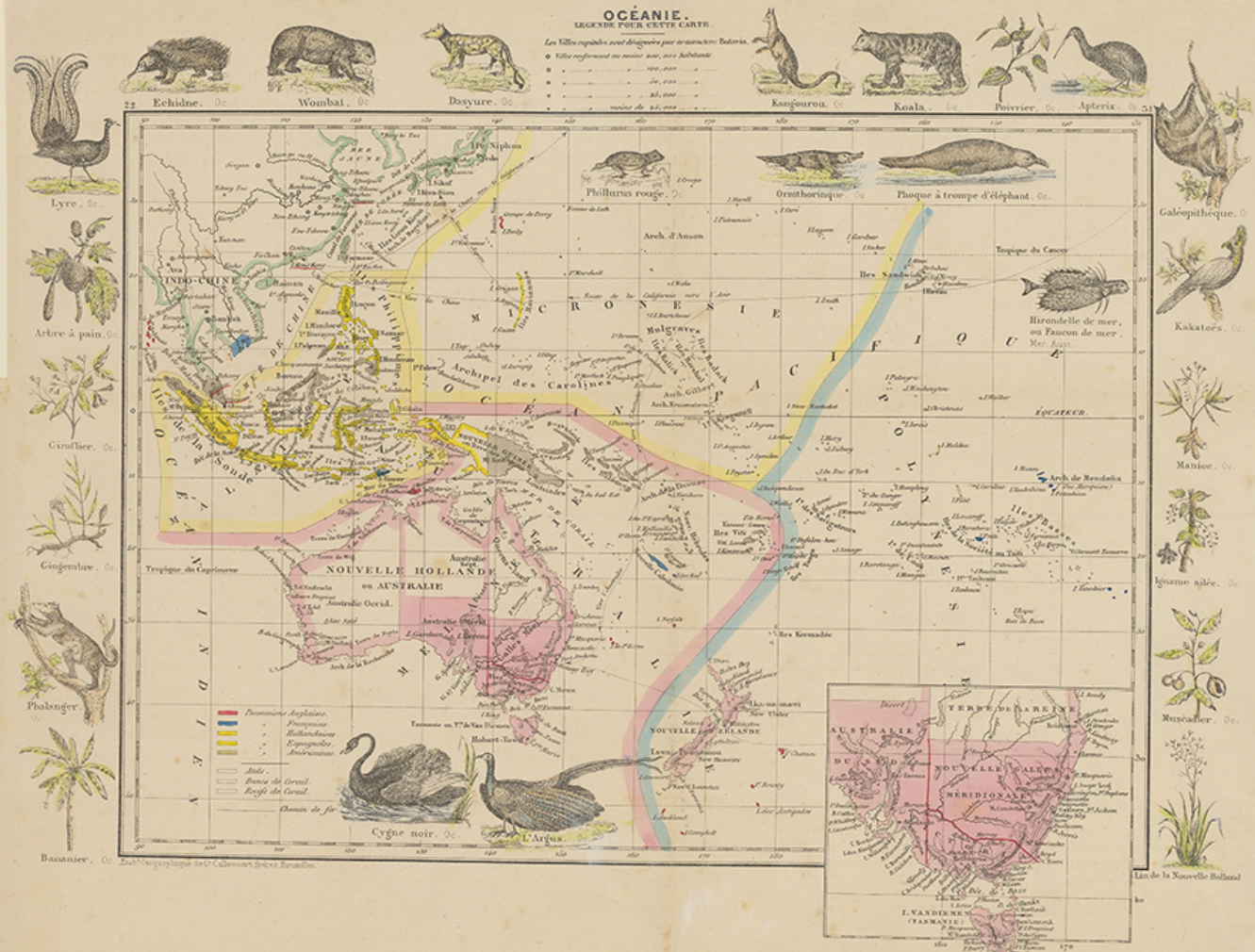
THROUGH THE EYES OF THE
COLONIAL LITERARY JOURNALISTS

Dr Willa McDonald
MCCALL

Literary Journalism



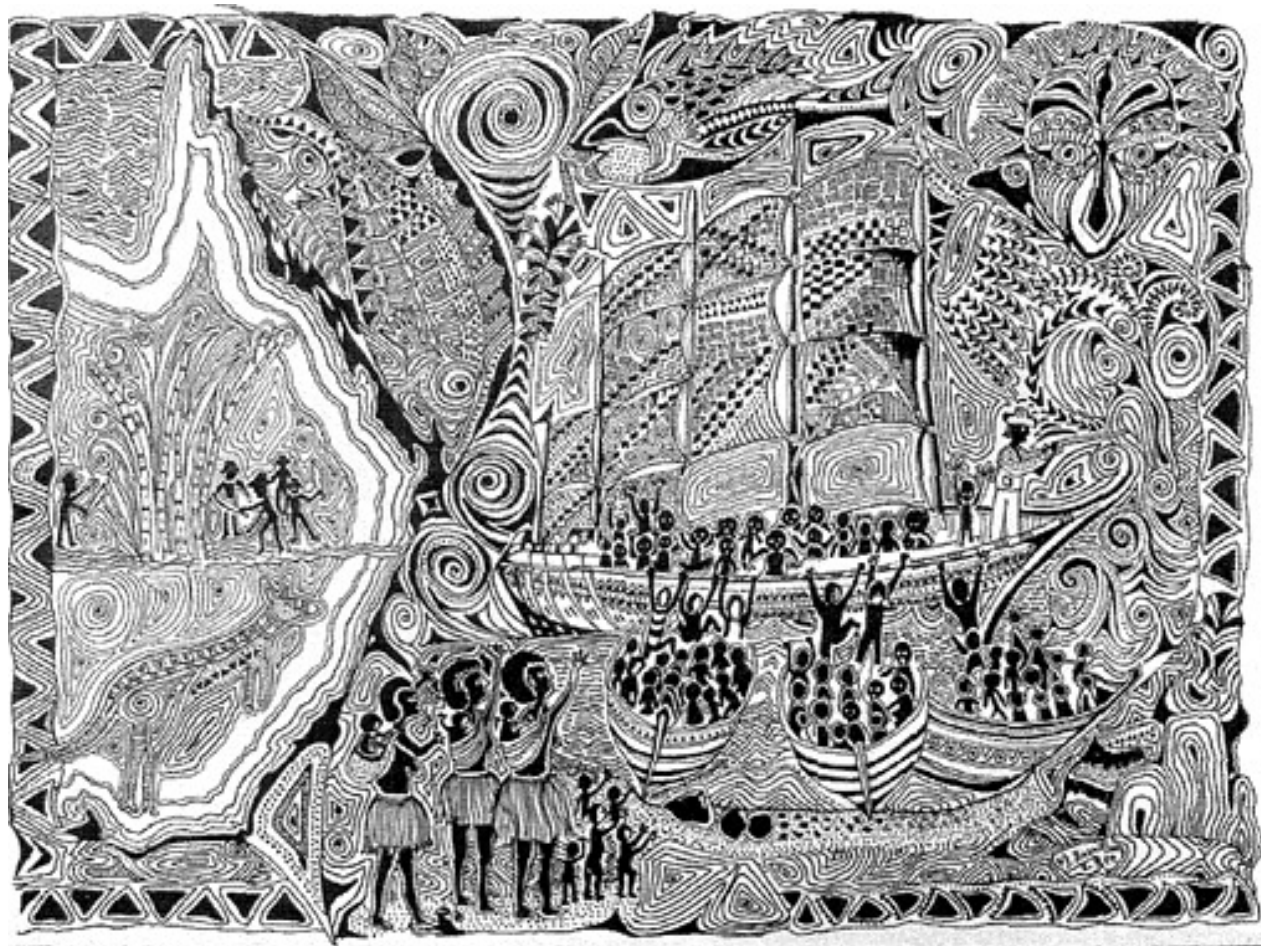
Photograph depicting blackbirding of indigenous South Pacific Island peoples, c. 1890.
National Library of Australia, nla.obj-136808374



Oceanie.
Bruxelles : Callewaert
freres :1869. Record No.
72543, John Oxley Library,
State Library of
Queensland.

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- Henry Britton (1873, *Argus*),
 - George “Chinese” Morrison (1882, *Leader/Age*),
 - John Stanley James (1883, *Argus*)
 - JD Melvin (1892, *Argus*)





Blackbirding by Michael
Basai,
born 1963, Matangi village,
Futuna Island, Southern
Vanuatu.

[https://www.haidygeismar.com/Vanuatu/New/nawita
/busai/busaibody.htm](https://www.haidygeismar.com/Vanuatu/New/nawita/busai/busaibody.htm)

The Blackbirding Trade

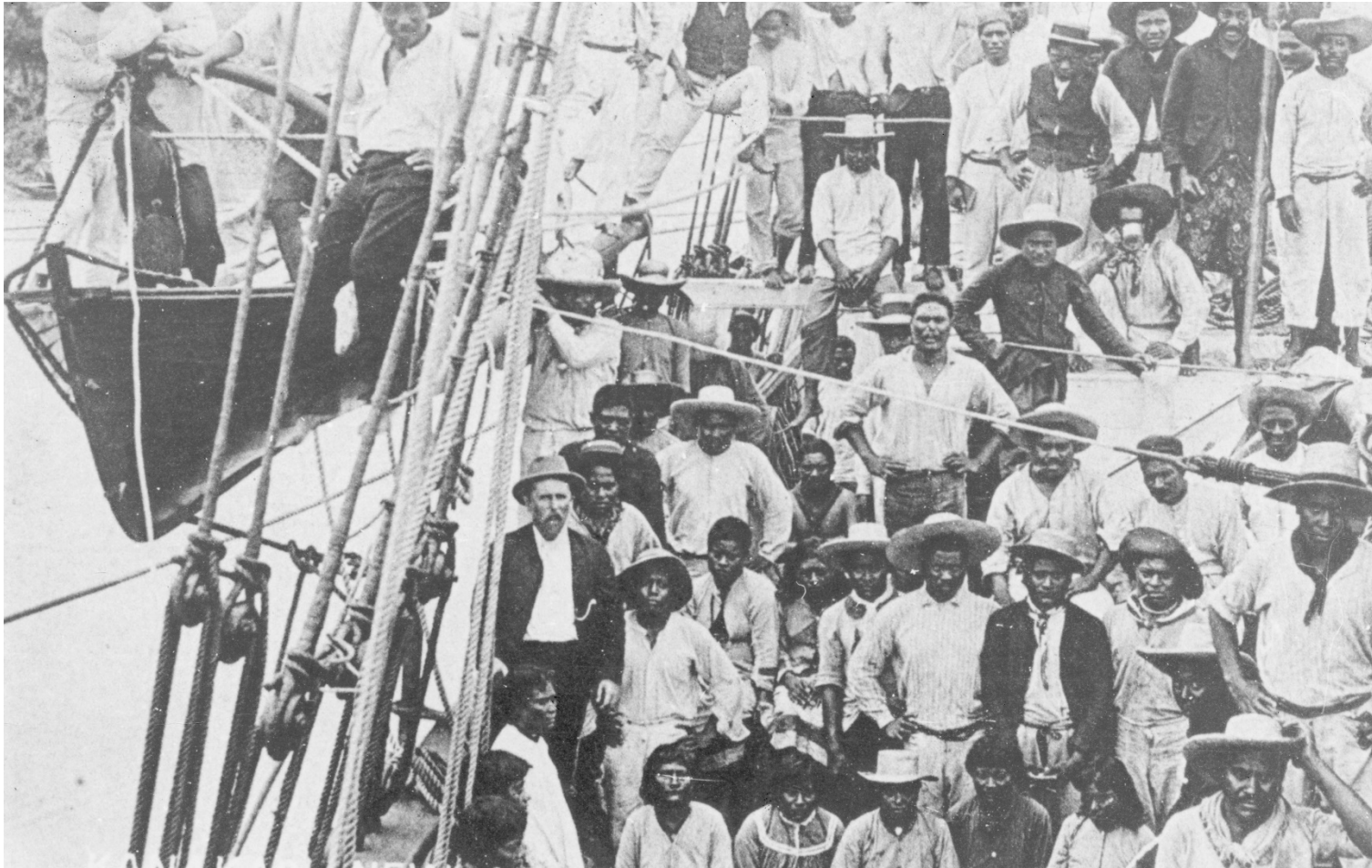




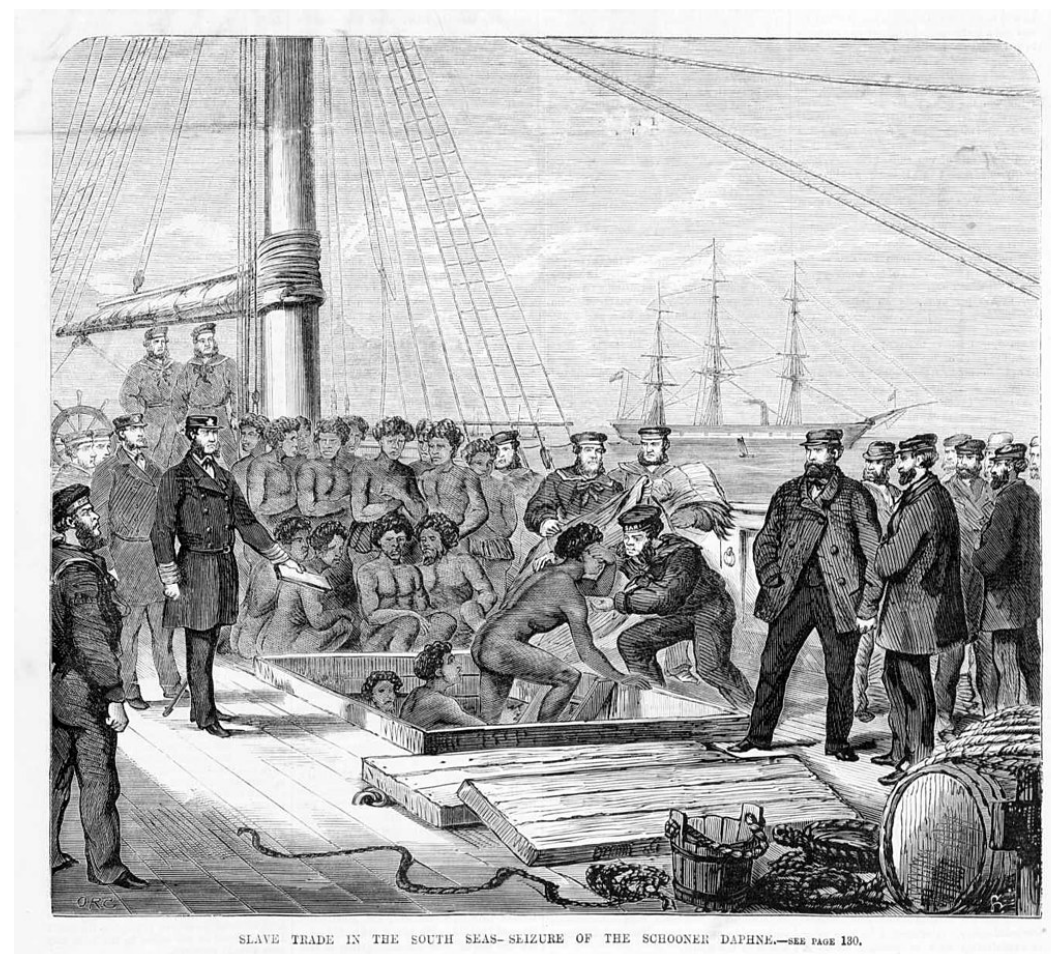
Pacific islander slave labourers on a Queensland pineapple plantation in the 1890s



Henry Britton



South Sea Islanders arriving by ship in Bundaberg, Queensland
John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland Neg or Image No: 18058.



In 1869 HMS Rosario seized the blackbirding schooner *Daphne* and freed its passengers. Samuel Calvert (1828-1913) and Oswald Rose Campbell (1820-1887) -National Library of Australia, State Library of Victoria.



About 60,000 Pacific Islanders were taken from their mainly Melanesian homelands to Australia in the 1800s to work on plantations. Photo: State Library of Queensland



THE SOUTH SEA LABOUR TRADE.

SOUTH SEA ISLAND TRADER: "Now gentlemen, give me a start. What shall we say for this 'ere coconut—and the nigger thrown in? Five pounds only bid for this coconut. Five pounds; five en'y; five—did I hear six? No advance; going at five; gone. Next nigger; I mean next coconut."

Phillip May,
 The South Sea Labour Trade,
The Bulletin, 1886

Had a long conversation with some of the natives this afternoon. They all speak Fijian, and as I have the command of a few Fijian phrases, and several hundred gestures, we get along very well. It is surprising how well one can do on this principle. Besides, as we see in everyday life, it is not necessary, in order to keep up a conversation that either party to it should understand the other. I had frequently questioned the islanders about the manner of their capture by the Carl, and their ideas of Fiji. It appeared to give them unbounded delight to explain how the Carl men chased them in their boats, fired at them if they did not stop, seized them by the hair of the head, dragged them from their canoes, bound their hands together, and bundled them by neck and crop into the hold of the ship. The whole thing seems to present itself to their minds in the aspect of an excellent joke, and they always laughed prodigiously during the recital, showing the rough usage in very animated pantomime...

...the material value of the body as labor supply, its
aesthetic value as object of artistic representation, its
ethical value as a mark of innocence or degradation, its
scientific value as evidence of racial value or inferiority, its
humanitarian value as the sign of suffering, its erotic value
as the object of desire



George Morrison



...a nice lad, who was ill with violent dysentery. I gave him a stiff dose of castor oil and chlorodyne. Two days later I repeated the dose, adding ostentatiously, as the captain was standing by, a little sulphate of zinc, to show him that my knowledge of *materia medica* was practically unlimited. 'The value of this prescription,' I remarked to the captain, 'is self-evident. The chlorodyne seeks to bind him up internally, the castor oil wrestles with the chlorodyne, when the zinc sulphate steps in, intent on dislodging them both. The dysentery, disgusted with the angry contention, makes haste to quit.' It turned out as I expected partly. The dysentery took its departure, but, worse luck, so did the boy.

...on her hand and left heel, the right leg being carried forward like a bowsprit. She was suffering from a diseased foot, more than half of the sole having rotted away. The woman was in a shocking state of filth and disease, yet she had been landed in Queensland only ten months before healthy and active.



Australian South Sea Islanders at Otmoor sugar plantation in Upper Coomera, Qld, ca 1889, John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.
Neg: 153896

I slept in one of these infernal holds with 50 islanders—we were licensed to carry 20 more—in a brigantine of 110 tons, and the atmosphere was so pestilential that no matter how cold it may have been on deck, the moment I turned in for my watch below, I became bathed in a horrible sickly sweat, as if I had had a malignant fever. It seems that no laborer can proceed to sea without a clearance from the health officer, but our vessel was owned by the health officer. His duty was to grant no certificate to any native, unless he was satisfied that he was strong and well enough to undergo the fatigue of the voyage. Three of our boys were hauled dead out of the hold within the first thirty-six hours, and four more were flung overboard before the schooner could reach their home.



Farm workers on a sugar plantation at Cairns in 1890,
carrying hoes and other farming equipment.
John Oxley Library, State library of Queensland.

John Stanley James (Julian Thomas)

John
Stanley
James



Outon spurned my advances. He would have nought to do with me, and gave an emphatic 'No' to everything I said...and then [Peter] tried his hand. The happy plantation life, the £18 clear at the end of 'three yams,' the easy existence on board ship, where he would have good ki-ki and excellent society, including that of 'plenty Mary belongs Malo.' Malo, be it noted, is the very Paphos of the Hebrides, and its women are renowned amongst the other islands for their beauty and amiability. Outon hesitated, and asked, 'You go place Nangaree stop?' 'Yes. I take you place where I leave Nangaree.' In the letter this was true, but in the spirit it might not be carried out, as the two boys would be always many miles apart on different plantations

Peter blarneyed away, soothing the boy, who would not assent as yet, but gave no denial. He would not touch anything from the trade-box, however; he knew that accepting ‘Hansel’ was like the recruiting sergeant’s shilling—it bound him. We passed the place where Outon met us; he looked at the shore; there was a struggle in his mind. Then ‘Jack,’ our stroke oar, said, ‘You no be frightened; Peeta good fellow man; he no fight, no swear at you; you get plenty ki-ki, good fellowship. Plenty boy belong a Vaté on board. All missionary boy. I missionary man. You stop along a them you all right.’ ‘Ship he go Townsville?’ asked Outon, who appeared to have been dubious as to our destination. ‘Ship he go Townsville. Good fellow captain; good fellow Government.’

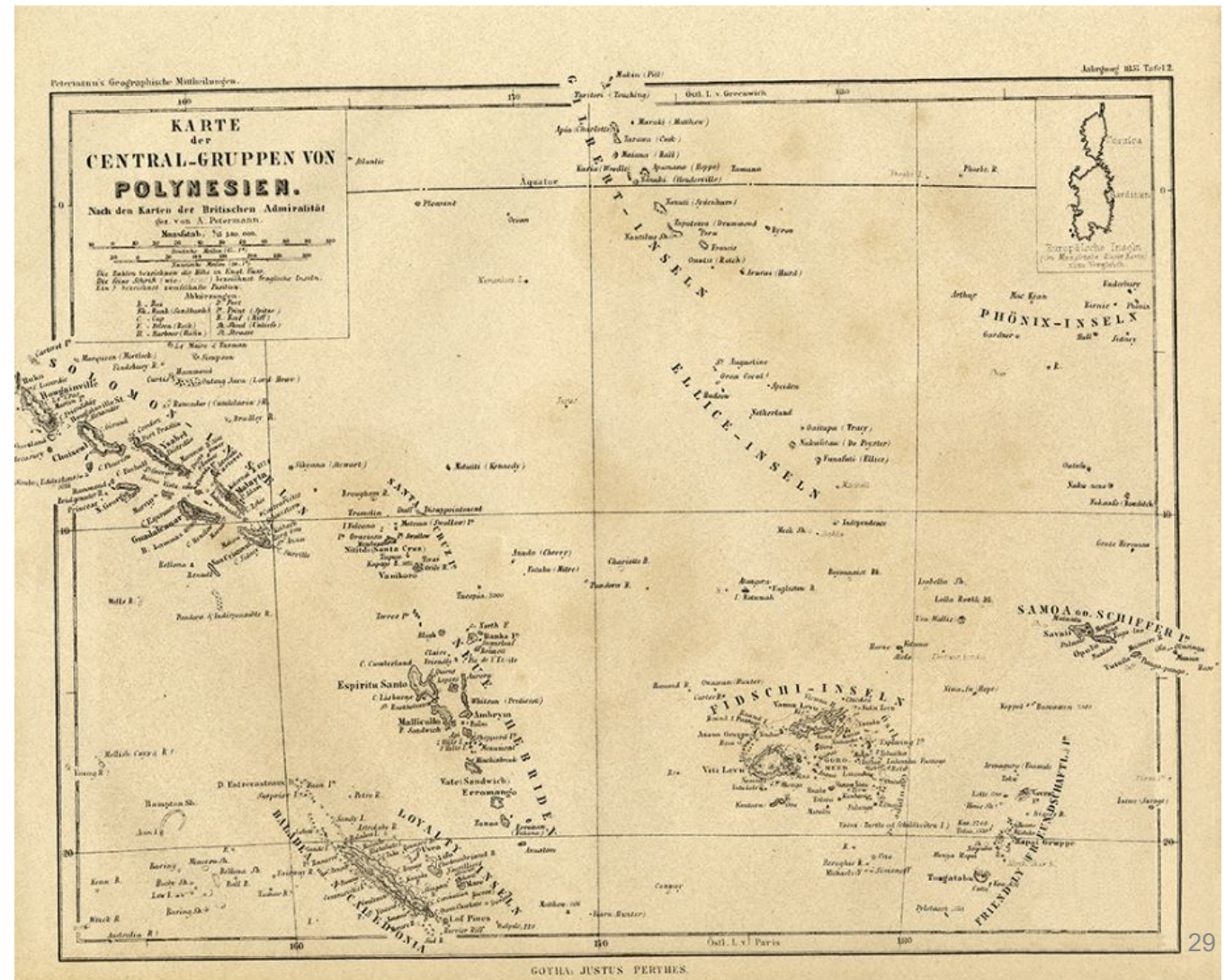
‘You go along a me to Melbourne?’ I asked. A decisive ‘No!’ was the reply. ‘You go along a me to Townsville?’ asked Peter. A nod, and then a ‘yes,’ and the boy was fairly recruited. I expected the arguments of our native boatman clinched the matter. Missionaries, I suppose, would call him a decoy. But there was nothing but argument used; he was neither coerced nor bribed, not a stick of tobacco even being given. I only hope that he would meet his friend Nangaree in Queensland. Outon was instructed that when he went on board ‘Government’ would ask him if he wanted to go to Queensland, and he would say ‘Yes.’ This, I suppose, was the usual caution given by recruiters; but Outon plainly knew his own mind, and could express himself in English. And so our only recruit in Aneitium was caught,—a stray bird secured by chance...



State Library of Queensland, Set 72157634466371491, ID 9205000816,
Australian South Sea Islanders hoeing a cane field in the Herbert River
region, Queensland, 1902



1857 Karte der Central-Gruppen von Polynesien:
Nach den Karten der Britishen Admiralität.
Augustus Petermann 1822-1878. Gotha Germany
: Justus Perthes :1857.
Record No: 788003, John Oxley Library, State
Library of Queensland.





South Sea Islanders labourers loading cut sugar cane
into a wagon, Queensland, n.d.
John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland. Neg: 16964



Sheet music for "White Australia (Australia the White Man's Land)," composed by W.E. Naunton with words by Naunton and H.J.W. Gyles, 1910.

Composer: W. E. Naunton, Composer: H. J. W. Gyles Museums Victoria³¹