‘Strange Disclosures’: The Story of the Criminal Forger and Absconder, Elias Rosenwax and his Capture in Levuka by ‘Evarama, the Native Fijian Policeman’, 1871

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It was as much the story of the criminal Elias Rosenwax as it was the tale of heroism featuring the Fijian policeman, ‘Evarama’, in 1871. The real-life event included all the literary elements necessary for a narrative of high adventure: a criminal, a chase, an exotic location, subterfuge, and the criminal’s eventual capture with the assistance of an unlikely hero in a thrilling climax. While the textual trace of this event remains all but forgotten, the extant nineteenth-century ephemera detailing the encounter endures as a cogent genre of literature. This paper explores the incident with a view to detailing Evarama’s major significance in the performance of Fijian identity during a period dominated by grand colonial narratives featuring highly stylized ethnographic displays of the ‘native’ *Other*. His cultural impact as a Fijian, his reification in popular culture as a celebrity, and his active engagement in the construction of his public persona counterpointed the static fashioning of Fijian identity so common in the era’s ethnographic exhibitions, public performances, photographic displays and anthropological presentations. Evarama’s popular presence in colonial culture makes it possible to identify the operation of a particular kind of fashioning of culture: individual expressions of racial identity as social performance—a practice of the public self.

Before examining Evarama’s interaction with aspects of Fijian material culture to construct not one, but a variety of identities—Fijian, ‘native’, constable, swimmer, diver, among others, we will begin with what Robert M. Kaplan has termed the ‘somewhat wistful, tale into crime ... of Polish-born pawnbroker, jeweler and merchant’ Elias Rosenwax (89). Alternately described in contemporary reports as ‘the Melbourne defaulter’, ‘the defaulting pawnbroker’, and ‘the levanting pawnbroker’, among many other sobriquets, the name Elias Rosenwax became for a time synonymous with capture, detention, and punishment.¹ One of the

¹ *Wanganui Herald*, Volume IV, Issue 1278, 20 November 1871, p. 2; *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 3046, 10 November 1871, p. 2; *Star*, Issue 1183, 2 December 1871, p. 3.

more humorous contemporary descriptions of his activities as a lawbreaker emerges in the 4 December 1871 issue of the *Illustrated Australian News* in an account beginning thus:

There are many ways of achieving celebrity, and like greatness sometimes it is thrust upon an unwilling recipient. Elias Rosenwax, a well-known citizen of Melbourne, in an evil hour bethought him of testing the climate of the Fijis, and previous to his departure to that land of promise he laded himself with the spoil of the Egyptians. On the 23rd September ... he left, without taking leave of his friends, having secured a passage in the *Eliza Firth*. On the 18th October the good folks of Levuka [Fiji] were startled by the fact that the steamship *Balelutha* had arrived, having on board Mr. Otto Berliner. (216)

Otto Berliner was, according to contemporaneous reports, a 'detective constable', 'the well-known detective' and member of Melbourne's 'private inquiry office'.² Berliner was director of the Australian Headquarters of the General Mercantile Agency and Private Inquiry bureau in Melbourne, 'the first office of the kind established in the colonies of Australia'.³ Its function was, among other things, to find people who did not necessarily want to be found.⁴ Rosenwax was one such candidate. Local reports claimed Rosenwax's creditors had subscribed an amount of £1000, thus underwriting the cost of chartering a steamer, *Balclutha*, to Fiji with Berliner on board. '[A]ided by a warrant and some stout assistants' Berliner embarked on a journey, the purposes of which the *Otago Daily Witness* on 18 October 1871 described as 'collaring Mr Rosenwax, gagging and handcuffing him, and bringing him and his booty back within the jurisdiction of our courts' (5).

Upon arriving in Fiji, Berliner, according to the 4 December 1871 issue of the *Illustrated Australian News*, 'at once went to Government House, and a cabinet meeting took place to hear all the particulars of the case ... the Government agreed to act with him, and a warrant was issued by special authority to the king in accordance with the constitution' (216). He then commandeered an open boat, and together with a complement of three Fijian members of the Levuka constabulary, eventually recaptured Rosenwax after an unsuccessful first attempt. During the initial endeavor Rosenwax was 'forcibly rescued from

2 *Auckland Star*, Volume IV, Issue 1038, 19 May 1873, p. 2; *Otago Witness*, Issue 1224, 15 May 1875, p. 17.

3 *Wanganui Chronicle*, Volume XX, Issue 3424, 26 July 1877, p. 2.

4 Prior to the Rosenwax case, Berliner acted as the Australian representative of Sir Roger C. D. Tichborne on the Tichborne claimant case (1868). During the course of his career after the Rosenwax case, Berliner was involved with the Margaret Graham murder case (1873), as well as the attempted double murder and suicide at Melbourne's Opera House in 1880, among many other well-known criminal cases. See *Colonist*, Volume XI, Issue 1868, 14 April 1868, p. 4; *Bruce Herald*, Volume VI, Issue 473, 21 March 1873, p. 3; *Evening Post*, Volume XX, Issue 172, 26 July 1880, p. 2.

custody by a party' of cohorts, headed by Aaron Pinkins, and during the ensuing struggle one of the special constables was shot 'with a pistol loaded with powder and ball' (216).

Constable Evarama was the man responsible for escorting Elias Rosenwax back to Melbourne under warrant upon his re-capture. Under the custody of Evarama, Rosenwax 'was landed at Sandridge from the City of Melbourne steamer on Monday 6 November, at about six o'clock' (216). The massive crowd that gathered at the docks to witness Rosenwax's detention was evidence, not only of the high degree of justice-seeking among those merchants he had defrauded—characterised in one report as his 'creditors and other dupes'—but also of the public interest in the case as a real-life criminal scandal.⁵ It was here that Evarama first attracted considerable attention among colonial onlookers. A reporter for the *Argus* described Evarama thus: '[he] was picturesquely dressed in a turban and waistband, supplemented by a Rob Roy plaid shawl twisted round his body. He is a man of medium height, but of strong build, and looks as if he could display a considerable amount of activity'.⁶ The 'native Fijian policeman' also attracted particular interest as a witness in the ensuing court trial. The *Sydney Illustrated News* claimed that Evarama appeared 'a fine, muscular, well built, intelligent man, sufficiently able to make himself understood by Australians, and is a very good sample of the native inhabitants of the Fiji islands'.⁷

Media reports, such as the *Queenslander* 30 May 1874, claimed the Rosenwax case to be 'one of those dirty businesses about which nobody but Jews have any interest', but then went on to claim with a patent degree of interest that 'the "Rosenwax case" is talked about at each street corner with a variety of accents which compels one to listen' (10). With the degree of his crimes being discovered, the *South Australian* claimed Rosenwax reportedly 'bolted to the Fiji Islands with £7,000 worth of goods' (13 October 1871, p. 5). The *Evening Post* reported the absconder's estate was sequestered with a rule of *nisi* and while he was charged on two counts—larceny and obtaining goods by means of false pretences (22 November 1871, p. 2)—court reports at the time of his release from gaol reveal he was ultimately found guilty of 'fraudulent insolvency'.⁸ Rosenwax served three and a half years in prison.⁹ He was released from Melbourne Gaol in 1874.

5 *North Otago Times*, 17 October 1871, p. 2.

6 Melbourne *Argus*, 7 November 1871, p. 6.

7 *Sydney Illustrated News*, 20 February 1871.

8 Melbourne *Argus*, 25 April 1874, p. 4.

9 Infanticide, abortion, rape, murder, torture, armed robbery, theft, assault, conspiracy to commit a crime, negligence causing bodily harm, public drunkenness, larceny, forgery, housebreaking, shooting with intent to kill, embezzlement, unlawful and/or malicious wounding, slavery/carrying persons for the purposes of being dealt with as slaves, treason (see Treason-Felony Act) and obtaining property by false pretences, were among the number of crimes considered felonious offences during the period. For more information, see

The quest for Elias Rosenwax's extradition in effect constituted the establishment of a set of relationships between, to borrow from Nicholas Thomas (1989), 'objects and ethnographic facts' (47). Here, the object Rosenwax came to embody the reach of colonial law, and indeed, the greater expression of inter-colonial exchange agreements. His extradition was 'of interest' to colonials, including but not limited to Rosenwax's creditors, precisely because the objects involved the playing out of a crime occurring in 'real-time', and the site of Fiji as an ethnographic fact added to the exotic appeal of the narrative as all the more compelling. Within this dynamic discourse, the capture of Rosenwax came to embody the reach of colonial law, and indeed, the greater expression of inter-colonial exchange agreements. The case involved pushing the limits of legal processes of colonial law and order *beyond* the colonies, given that the extradition agreement brokered in relation to Rosenwax involved exchanges between men and structures of power: colonial and indigenous; white bureaucracy and Fijian lore; colonial jurisdiction and native law enforcers. Yes, the chase for Rosenwax was on, but with the involvement of the 'Fijian Native Policemen Evarama', ethnographic facts suddenly took on even greater interest as key symbols of inter-Pacific mechanisms of crime and punishment. Evarama's presence was in fact doubly significant. Not only was he the Fijian face of the expression of inter-colonial law enforcement, but his presence as envoy signaled in this instance a shift in power relations between Fiji and Australia that was preferential to the Fijians: 'For colonial forces it was, of course', claims Thomas, 'almost always possible to act without regard to indigenous relations; to refuse to recognise and displace indigenous sovereignty; or to ... acknowledge their [local leaders] roles while undermining them' (49). In fact, the *Otago Daily Witness* stated on 18 October 1871 that cases of this kind had found little in the form of satisfactory resolutions within the precepts of contemporary colonial law:

In regard to cases of this kind, where there is no law to meet the circumstances, it is very reasonably held that as law can lend no aid, neither can it interfere to prevent persons from helping themselves. (5)

The popularised narrative of this capture and extradition made for a fact-not-fiction adventure that paled in comparison to the fictionalised accounts of felony and retribution so often found in serialised form in newspapers of the day. An illustration printed in the *Illustrated Australian News* on 4 December 1871 details in high relief the real-life drama of the capture of Rosenwax (see <<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/printArticleJpg/60448593/3?print=n>>).

Police Criminal Statistics reports published by Adelaide's *South Australian Register*, 22 April 1874, p. 1, and other newspapers. For more on the Treason-Felony Act, see Melbourne *Argus*, 1 April 1868, p. 6 among many others.

The *Argus* reported on 29 March 1869 that the Australian Extradition Act only authorised the extradition of criminal offenders from one Australian colony to another, with a secondary caveat that the extradition of offenders only applied to offences committed within the colonies (1S). It could be argued that the Rosenwax case, at least in part, set a legal precedent. Yes, his capture in Fiji was essentially kidnap disguised as extradition, yet his repatriation was also a test case given credibility because the scope of his crimes lay within colonial boundaries. Provided that private creditors had the financial means to conceive and deploy an individualised mechanism for compensation, there remained a legal way to marshal justice, but in this instance, only with the provision that a respect of indigenous sovereignty be accorded. In the attempted extradition of Rosenwax, indigenous power could not be displaced, ignored, or otherwise undermined. Perhaps this was the case given the extradition order was the result of a private lobby, and funding, of a syndicate comprising his principal lenders. The plot hatched by Rosenwax's 'creditors and other dupes' thus represented the *modus operandi* 'helping themselves' in action.

If successful, the proposal had the potential not only to change the dynamics of colonial versus indigenous power, but revolutionise the significance of Fiji among reprobates as a destination of sanctuary. The success of the scheme in achieving such a mission is perhaps best illustrated by the report in the *Illustrated Australian News*, claiming that by virtue of the 'energetic action on the part of the Fijian Government, Levuka will henceforth be tabooed as a city of refuge for that particular class of criminal in Australia which delights in spending the fruits of its villainy at a distance from the scene of operations, and where prying eyes of the victims cannot penetrate' (216). Indeed, evidence exists that the Rosenwax case did influence mechanisms of crime, punishment, and colonial law and order in Fiji. In April 1872, reports claimed 'the readiness with which the Government [of Fiji] gave assistance to capture Rosenwax, in the face of the opposition of several influential residents of Fiji, was an evidence of their willingness to support law and order so far as they are able'.¹⁰

The claim was made in direct reference to another case involving two British 'aliens'. Daniel Sinclair had run down a canoe of Fijians his in cutter *Cambria*, captured and manacled two of the men in chains—Isoa and Massee from the Malacola community—and violently assaulted the captives abetted by his wife.¹¹ While the court found Sinclair guilty of unlawful assault, sentencing him to three months in prison and a £300 fine, his wife escaped any charge. The incident typified what the *Williamston Chronicle* characterised as trend 'among

¹⁰ *Williamstown Chronicle*, 13 April 1872, p. 5.

¹¹ The two Fijians, Isoa and Massee, later escaped their manacles after enduring violent assaults and killed the two men responsible for guarding them, named Pulford and Thorpe. For more details about the case, see *Queenslander*, 6 April 1872, p. 10 among others.

law-breaking Britons ... hovering about the islands ... to plead British birth as a reason for non-interference on the part of the Government of the country'.¹² The case motivated the sitting court judge at Levuka to declare 'Persons coming to Fiji must obey and be bound by the local laws, and ... not allowed to escape merely because they denied [the] courts authority'. The editorial concluded that 'whatever may be the shortcomings, past and present, of Thakombau's Ministers, it is to their credit that they instructed the Crown prosecutor to initiate proceedings against this 'alien'.

Such claims responded to an entrenched cultural viewpoint that Fiji was 'a sort of Australian Patmos—a place of refuge for all persons to whom Victoria was not a safe residence, owing to their peculiar notions about the laws of property'.¹³ Of the then capital Levuka, reports claimed that "'Sloped for Callao", and "Gone to Fiji", are synonymous terms with many people in Victoria and New South Wales, who have come to regard Levuka as the rendezvous for the scum of the Australian colonies'.¹⁴ The debate about Fiji's broader reputation as a location of asylum post-cession was even entered into by the celebrated novelist Anthony Trollope, who declared in a treatise published in the *Bruce Herald* on 14 January 1876: 'If England would not take it Fiji must become a mere nest of robbers and a curse to that side of the world—especially a curse to our Australasian colonies, which are comparatively near to it' (3).¹⁵

Some accounts, however, appeared ambivalent concerning the implications of the Rosenwax extradition case. The *Otago Daily Times*, while determining it 'satisfactory to find that Fiji is no longer to be the safe Alsatia of the Colonies', expressed 'grave doubts' concerning 'the legality of this capture ... [given] the summary "jumping" of absconding creditors, without a warrant or form of law, is a process capable of abuse, and which nothing but exceptional circumstances of the strongest nature could excuse' (11 December 1871, p. 2). Yet, from the point of view of cultural interest, these concerns essentially contributed to the drama and crisis of an already intriguing story. In fact, Berliner himself capitalised on the account's enduring interest. The chapter detailing the narrative of the Rosenwax case in the agency handbook published during his directorship of the Australian Headquarters of the General Mercantile Agency and Private Inquiry office was a highlight of the publication. The *Wanganui Chronicle* of 26 July 1877 stated that 'The capture of the defrauding pawnbroker, Rosenwax,

12 *Williamstown Chronicle*, 13 April 1872, p. 5.

13 *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 4031, 19 January 1875, p. 2.

14 *Williamstown Chronicle*, 13 April 1872, p. 5.

15 Also see Anthony Trollope (1941). The Fiji islands were ceded to Britain on 10 October 1874 by, according to Thomas Nichols (1989), 'a group of leading chiefs' (46). Trevor Sofield (2000) claims that 'After some 30 years of slaughter, the Great Council of Chiefs was formed and Fiji ceded to Britain to bring in "pax Britannica". Most Fijians think the Great Council of Chiefs has existed "since time immemorial"—but it first met only 124 years ago, in 1876. The Council was dominated by Polynesian high chiefs with the some Melanesians with lesser "royal" status than the kingly lines from Ma'afu and Tonga'.

in the Fijis, forms an interesting chapter full of incident and adventure, and proves how a skilful, determined officer can attain his legitimate ends, even when opposed by hostile influences and beset by obstacles of all kinds' (2).¹⁶

While some described him as 'a Hebrew pawnbroker', and of his deeds it was said 'he did something exceptionally disgraceful in business', the fact that Rosenwax 'levanted [to Fiji] only to be brought back by a subscription of the tribes [in the custody of Evarama]' was an aspect of the tale attracting the keenest interest.¹⁷ How it was that Evarama came to be the Fiji representative given the task of escorting Rosenwax back to Australia can only be guessed at. What is clear, however, is Evarama's patent significance in influencing contemporary attitudes to demonstrations of Fijian identity during the era, particularly as a counterpoint to those conceived in popular public displays featuring the ethnographic *other*. Yet his significance can be taken one step further. Evarama's public fashioning and engagement with contemporary colonial culture also confronted the question of agency in the public expression of the 'native' *other* identity.

While he was also known in contemporary reports as 'Erarama' and 'Everama' (among others) I have discovered only one single newspaper notice (*Argus*, 23 February 1872, p. 3) making reference to a full name (see <<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/printArticleJpg/5860010/6?print=n>>).¹⁸ The notice gives his surname as 'Valelova' which may or may not be correct.¹⁹

His popular credibility in press accounts as a 'good sample of the native inhabitants of the Fiji islands' comes at a significant time in the public image of Fiji both culturally and politically. Under Seru Epenisa Cakobau (King Thakombau [1815 – 1883]), Fiji had only recently instituted a provisional government (mid July 1871), and persistent insurrections plagued indigenous and colonial settlements alike. Arguably, the only other Fijian as proactively involved in

16 In fact, it is possible to argue that Berliner's profession was also given extra credibility considering that, in a report published by the *Wanganui Herald* on 20 November 1871, the Fijian Government had agreed to his 'being sworn in a member of the Fijian police in order that he might the more effectually prosecute the business of the arrest' (2). In fact the added reward for Berliner was, according to the *Grey River Argus*, that the Fijian Government 'will make him a magistrate in appreciation of his services' (20 November 1871, p. 2).

17 *Brisbane Queenslander*, 30 May 1874, p. 10.

18 *Sydney Illustrated News*, 20 February 1871. 'Evarama' was also known in contemporary reports as 'Erarama', 'Everama', 'Erromana', and 'Erromona.' Discussions with Paul Geraghty, Associate Professor of Linguistics, University of the South Pacific, suggest that 'Evarama' was likely an Anglicised misspelling of a Fijian word. Anecdotal reports after giving an abbreviated reading of this paper at the First Fiji Literary Festival (Fiji National University, Nadi, 2-8 October 2011), suggest that 'Evarama' may also have been a Fijian version of 'Abraham'.

19 The name given as 'Valelova' may be accurate. Paul Geraghty suggests another possibility is that it is a misspelling of a more common Fijian surname, such as 'Volavola'.

the public construction of his identity during this period was Cakobau, 'King Thakombau', of Fiji. The numerous illustrations of Seru Epenisa Cakobau of Fiji during this period attest to his visibility in contemporary colonial culture.²⁰

In the aftermath of one insurgence, the *North Otago Times* of 11 August 1871 claimed the dismembered hand, reputedly of the Lovoni chief killed in the fighting between Thakombau's militia and Lovoni rebels, was presented to ethnological collector, W. C. Gardenhire, 'as an addition to his extensive collection of Fijian Curiosities' (2).

Everywhere in venues for public entertainments during the 1870s—theatres, assembly rooms, Mechanics' Institutions, halls, photographic studios and saloon bars—there were attractions such as Gardenhire's capitalising on the widespread interest in Fijian material culture and identity among white colonials. Yet rather than static displays, Gardenhire took the ethnographic character of his arrangements one step further: he included living Fijians. He assembled and took his so-called 'Fijian Curiosities' to the United States, no doubt to exploit the ethnographical market in exotic 'others' created by the American showman, Phineas Taylor Barnum. Gardenhire reportedly sequestered for the spectacle, according to the *Auckland Star*, 'three Fijian servants', 'two chiefs', and 'one dwarf 3ft. 4 in. high' (29 June 1871, p. 2). The latter Fijian earned the moniker; 'the General'.²¹ 'The General' reportedly entertained audiences 'by playing on a flute through his nose'.²²

James W. Shettel reported that 'Four Wild Fiji Cannibals' were captives of War ransomed from King Thakombau by Barnum at a cost of \$15,000 (44). A report appearing in Australia via the *Pall Mall Gazette* proclaimed that Barnum obtained the Fijians by depositing the money with the American consul 'as security for their return in August 1874, to the king of a hostile tribe who had captured them. On their return they [were] to be killed and eaten'. There exists an Original carte-de-visite photograph of the 'Fiji Cannibals Imported by PT Barnum for his Great Show (Mathew Brady studio, New York, c. 1872)'.²³ Robert Bogdan claims that it was later discovered that the 'Fijian' woman appearing in the photograph was 'actually a native of Virginia and, prior to joining the show, had been the domestic servant of a gentleman who resided in Baltimore' (183).

20 See, for instance, The *Australasian Sketcher*, 14 March, 1883; *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 25 November 1871, p. 9.

21 See *Evening Post*, Volume VIII, Issue 292, 13 January 1873, p. 2. The 'General' died at the Pennsylvania Hotel, apparently, according to the *York Daily* (Penn.) sometime around 15 May 1872. The only apparently accurate detail in the highly sensationalised account was that the Fijian had died. Also see *Evening Post*, Volume VIII, Issue 292, 13 January 1873, p. 2.

22 *Pall Mall Gazette* via *Launceston Examiner*, 28 May 1872, p. 3.

23 See online at: 'Sideshow world', "Sideshow WorldTM" John Robinson © <<http://www.sideshowworld.com/13-TGOD/2007/TGOD-Barnum'sCannibals.html>>, or at: 'Luminous Lint; for connoisseurs of fine photography', © Luminous-Lint 2012 <<http://www.luminous-lint.com/s01/image/2035066143955209901244/>>.

Dana Seitler examines the high popularity of photographic illustrations during the late nineteenth century (*fin de siècle*) and claims such texts 'illustrate what Henry James has called an "American scene"—a world preoccupied with observation, supervision, and the intrigues of a new technology' (71). Yet in the Australian colonial scene, the rite of being photographed had become less of a rite and more of a privilege reserved for those subjects offering viewers voyeuristic pleasures of the *Other* within the greater scheme of grand colonial narratives.

Photographic displays publicised as 'Panoramas of Fiji' often included a lecture, given by an expatriate resident white settler, or, more commonly, a member of the clergy. Presentations by 'Fijian Chiefs' appearing in traditional costume typically incorporated traditional dances complementing philanthropic lectures; 'the scenes are enlarged photographs, and are therefore faithful representations of beautiful spots in this "isle of the sea", while the effects are well worked'.²⁴ During the above performance a 'number of Fijians, among them a cannibal chief named Narcoe, appeared in native dress, or rather undress, and performed a number of Fijian dances, remarkable chiefly', according to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, for 'curious pantomimes and posturing' (4 September 1879, p. 5).

Narcoe belonged to a Fijian troupe mobilised as a representative ensemble for performances in the Colonial Exhibition of 1879. In their presentation in the Garden Palace grounds, Sydney, individuals of the ensemble 'circulated handbills, in which', observed the Melbourne *Argus* 'the public are informed, in the first place, that one of the chiefs is the "great Narcoe, who has eaten many human beings"' (29 December 1879, p. 7). The reporter appeared to divine the spectacle for what it was, 'got up by an astute agent simply as an advertisement'. Robert William Dixon and Veronica Kelly offer an interesting reading of the presentation as largely ambiguous; on the one hand an attempt to showcase the success of missionary efforts in taming 'the noble savage'; and on the other, an implicitly manipulative act, in which the 'presentation skilfully exploited, through dress and behaviour, their audiences' pleasure in vicarious fear of *the other*' (244).

Images of Evarama²⁵ become a significant element of the texts narrating his presence in Colonial culture. And as texts telling stories, Evarama's arrangement in static displays contrasted in many ways with his dynamic movements and accomplishments in real-life. What is interesting about these images of Evarama is his positioning with a firearm. While the weapon appears to be a long-rifle, or Musket Rifle, the fact that it includes a bayonet-point suggests it of the type

24 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 September 1879, p. 2.

25 See, for instance, *Illustrated Australian News for Home Readers*, 4 December 1871, p. 216. Images accompanying this article can be viewed in the web version at <<http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-May-2012/anae.html>>.

favoured by mariners serving on early war-ships, such as HMS Barracouta—a long Enfield rifle—which were, according to the *Queenslander* of 30 January 1875, firearms that ‘converted into breech-loaders on the Snyder [sic] principle’ (8). These firearms were made of wood, hand-forged metal and brass. John Macdonald notes the weapon’s single-shot action had a rate of fire of 10 rounds per minute, and its effective range was over half a kilometre (232). The rifle was longer than most rifles of the era and with a fitted bayonet, the weapon extended to almost 173cm and its weight increased to almost 5 kg.

Yet while it is possible to mount these rifles ‘for the ordinary bayonet’, the fact that the one held by Evarama is thus fitted suggests a deliberately posed portrait in which the semiotic appeal of the bayoneted weapon no doubt contributed to its intended semiotic currency as perhaps threatening, but more likely informative. Accounts such as that of the *Queenslander* publicised that Fijians were well armed, commonly with Snider-Enfields and other rifles, and that they were ‘naturally first-class marksmen, and most careful of their rifle, and preserving in mastering its use [sic]’ (8).²⁶

Any threat of menace is clearly undone however in a reading of Evarama’s body language from above the shoulders. His chin is lowered and the corners of his mouth turned downward, matching the creases lining his forehead suggesting anxiety and perhaps even embarrassment. His eyes, gazing toward some distant point to his left suggest an emotional attitude akin to a plea, his shoulders are hunched yet his hands appear to be gripping the bayonet blade with considerable force. These cues are patently at odds with the stance of his lower-body, his left foot placed forward and the impressive proportions of his calves. Yet given the strangeness of the context, with its mechanised implements and stylised constraints, Evarama’s discomfort is justifiable, if not unsurprising. Moreover, the fact that he merited such an illustration offers a clear marker of his prominence, and together with this visibility, what makes Evarama, ‘the Native Fijian Policeman’, especially interesting is the trajectory of his story subsequent to his rise to fame as the man responsible for the extradition to Australia of the absconder Rosenwax.

Some reports in Australia and New Zealand took as given the fact that their readership understood who ‘Evarama’ was, but even if they did not, accounts situating him within the broader narrative of the Rosenwax case assured his public recognition. The *Otago Witness* was only one of a number of newspapers running the line: ‘A Fijian constable, who escorted Rosenwax to Melbourne, has been distinguishing himself by swimming and diving feats’.²⁷ Evarama first achieved significant celebrity by confounding Victorians of the 1870s

²⁶ Also see *Launceston Examiner*, 12 April 1882.

²⁷ *Otago Witness*, Issue 1050, 13 January 1872, p. 5.

with what the *Illustrated Sydney News* of 20 February 1871 claimed were his 'astonishing' swimming feats. Newspapers of the day promoted his appearances in tournaments under headings claiming 'Fiji versus Victoria'. A far more accurate claim, however, would have been 'Fijian [singular] versus Victorians [plural]', because a close examination of the list of competitors reveals that Evarama was the only Fijian, and that he alone would singlehandedly race against up to four white-Anglo Australian competitors for 'the championship of the colony' title. Perhaps it was the patent imbalance in the ratio of competitors that attracted hundreds of onlookers to such events.

Evarama also garnered much success as an expert diver. *Melbourne Age* reported that 'the Fiji constable, Evarama, who came to Melbourne in charge of Rosenwax, was on Thursday evening a competitor in a swimming match at Hegarty's Baths, St. Kilda, against Mr Stabach. They had a swim of 60 yards up and down, the Fijian winning easily. Time, 1 min. 15 sec. Evarama then dived 10 fathoms 35 yards in two minutes, and was loudly cheered'.²⁸ Another venue staging a number of Evarama's feats was the old ship's hull of a 200 tonne Swedish whaling brig, the *Nancy*, converted by Captain William Kenney.²⁹ Both venues were as much bathing centres as they were grand theatres for aquatic spectacles.³⁰

The complexity of such presentations as performances of identity evolved from the very early demonstrations of 'Fiji' and 'Fijian' displays organised as public spectacles by agents and theatre managers. This is what makes Evarama's public expression particularly unique. Arguably, there was no other lay-individual invested in actively creating his own fashioning as Fijian during the period. On 20 February 1871, for instance, the *Sydney Illustrated News* reported that Evarama's 'presence created some excitement in Melbourne when he was seen promenading Collins-street in his national garb'. The report is telling not only for the imagery his constitutional must have inspired, but also given the more subtle reading that Evarama appeared free to represent himself, both as a private individual, and as an object of public curiosity, and even a source of entertainment. Evarama draws distinctions from his Fijian contemporaries because he did not appear bound to the instructions of an agent. Significantly, then, unlike the static miscellany of ensembles attributed to ethnologists such as W. C. Gardenhire, or the ostensibly *faux* amalgamations of Fijian identity conceived by the entrepreneur P. T. Barnum, among many other agents and managers, Evarama's public opportunities were not limited to those sourced on his behalf by a third party. Nor was his behaviour limited to the constraints

28 *Melbourne Age*, via *Southland Times*, Issue 1525, 16 January 1872, p. 3.

29 For an image, see 'Kennedy's [sic] Bathing Ship for Gentlemen, St Kilda, Melbourne, [ca. 1869-ca. 1871]'. State Library of Victoria; Accession No: H1839; Image No: is000990. Online at: <<http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/imagestudio/gid/slv-pic-aaa86294>>.

30 For an image, See *Australasian Sketcher with Pen and Pencil*, 10 April 1880, p. 52.

of gesturing identity such presentations fabricated. In this sense, his freedom to involve himself in the proactive construction of his public persona was exceptional. Thus, while elsewhere public attractions featuring 'Fiji' and 'Fijian' representations were almost exclusively assembled and promoted by Anglo-European colonial men, we see in Evarama's self-styling as iconically Fijian a wholly unique public expression of identity. Even at the time of his arrival aboard the steamer the *City of Melbourne*, a number of reports noted Evarama's unique appearance and manner: 'His hair is woolly but his features are not at all negro-like, and have an intelligent and rather pensive expression. He spoke only a few words of English, and his behaviour was quiet, and unobtrusive'.³¹

Within this dynamic discourse it is possible to identify the operation of another kind of fashioning of culture; that of individual expressions of racial identity as social performance—a practice of the public self.³² The commodification of aspects of traditional Fijian culture for public performance was a process of hybridising local and regional Fijian rites as public entertainment. Within the prevailing narrative of colonisation, Evarama contributed a no less potent discourse of both individualism and racial identity. All around him forms of Fijian social and cultural life were becoming increasingly diversified—hybridised—as they split from previous traditions and amalgamated into new ones; constituting what Jan Nederveen Pieterse terms a 'global mélange'. Rather than concentrating attention on the specifics of Pieterse's thesis, the reference to his work is offered specifically to accord with his main argument, that is, cultural hybridity is not defined by and limited to modernity, but rather is a deeply-rooted phenomenon traversing human history. What makes this concept of an emerging global mélange all the more compelling as a discourse of change is Evarama's figurative voice. Evarama's active presence, while emerging within the grand narrative of colonialism, agitated and indeed fractured the integrity of the ethnographic displays that stylised the Fijian *other* contained by an idealised and unchanging past. In fact, it is highly likely that Evarama understood precisely the power of the public presentation of self as a marker of racial identity:

A Fine Head of Hair.—An amusing incident (says the "Herald") occurred in the Supreme Court during the progress of the trial of the man Rosenwax, charged with robbery, The Fijian constable, Evarama, who was sent from Fiji in charge of the absconder, was in Court, and looking curiously at his Honor, Mr Justice Molesworth, asked—"Is him King of Melbourne?" He was informed that the learned judge had not

31 *Melbourne Argus*, 7 November 1871, p. 6.

32 Evarama's celebrity occurred coincidentally with a significant development in the formalisation of Anglo-European theatre performance in Fiji. In June 1871, a small purpose-built theatre had been erected in Levuka. This was Fiji's first theatre.

yet arrived at the enviable position of Molesworth *Rex* Melbourne, but he was the Judge. "Oh" then replied Evarama, looking at his Honor on the bench, and closely observing his wig, "Him have a fine head of hair." (*Wanganui Herald*, V 1379, 26 January 1872, p. 2)

While the tone of the piece implies that Evarama misunderstands the significance of dress and power in relation to the context of a colonial Court of Law, a subversive reading could suggest that he understood precisely the semiotic currency of individualistic efforts to create specific impressions in the minds of others within the greater scheme of collective endeavour. For the better part of a year, Evarama had been narrating, through his body, physical inscriptions of race and masculinity for the interpretation of Anglo-colonials.

He had, after all, by this time become a literary event as much as a self-fashioned emblem of Fijian identity. The difference between what Colonials saw of 'Fijian' identity in the context of the ethnographical displays of Gardenhire and others, and Evarama's private and public performances was thus immense. He had effectively not only reformulated a popular conception of 'native Fijian' material culture, but had also substituted a number of vital constituents in the grand colonial discourse of the Fijian *other*. He was neither a 'cannibal' nor a 'cannibal chief' as others such as 'Narcoe' were promoted to be. Evarama neither performed nor feigned aggression or noble 'savagery'—the twin norms so commonplace in the discourse of contemporary reports of Fijians and the stylised character of the 'noble savage' contrived in ethnological displays. Neither had he been sold into enforced servitude, as Thakombau had done when expelling his captured Lovoni rebels (to W. C. Gardenhire). Nor, for that matter, had he been further commodified in other transactions brokered between commercial agents, as Gardenhire had done with his 'Fiji curiosities' (in his transaction with P. T. Barnum).³³ Evarama's agency as a Fijian man with a profession, a popular reputation and a public presence likely threw into question the representation of Fijian material culture normalised in both professional and amateur ethnographical displays of the period.

Just as the narrative of Elias Rosenwax emerged and developed in a cultural climate affirming an enduring interest in Fiji—and attempted to ratify the question of law reform between inter-Pacific colonies—so too did the narrative of Evarama, 'native Fijian policeman', emerge and develop in a diplomatic climate of insurgence, political unrest and imposed change in Fiji. Where in the Rosenwax story the man ultimately becomes an example of the reach of colonial law and order, aspects of the narrative of Evarama offer somewhat ambivalent

33 For more on W. C. Gardenhire's relationship with P. T. Barnum, see Jeff Berglund, *Cannibal Fictions: American Explorations of Colonialism, Race, Gender, and Sexuality*. Madison, Wisconsin: U of Wisconsin P, 2006.

readings contrary to the grand narratives of colonialism, particularly with respect to implicit discourses of power in ethnological displays of the period. While the narratives of both men illustrated the intersections of various mechanisms of colonial power, Evarama in fact deployed aspects of Fijian material culture to construct, not one, but a variety of identities: Fijian, 'native', constable, swimmer, diver, among others.

As exposition, the extant texts detailing the story of Elias Rosenwax indeed offer insight into the significance of an unlikely figure, Evarama, within the broader context of grand colonial narratives.³⁴ Yet as a form of cultural production, the surviving narrative sheds significant light on the deeply entrenched complexities of inter-racial contact during the early 1870s. Unlike Rosenwax, who while attempting to escape his criminal past was ultimately defined by it, Evarama's demonstrations of self went beyond the realm of law to become unique expressions of his popular and cultural negotiations of Australian colonial society, *as a Fijian*. In the early 1870s, ethnological exhibits represented a key forum attempting to articulate particular values that, within the grander narrative of Australian colonialism, recreated cultures through oppressor-subject relationships. Here, fee-paying visitors observed stylised displays of the native *other* as static, manufactured re-creations. Meanwhile, a real-life Fijian swam in competitive races, plunged to remarkable depths in feats of aquatic endurance, and walked the streets of Melbourne in full native garb.

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34 The notice of Rosenwax's death appears in Perth *West Australian*, 5 April 1905, p. 1.

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