(and, one might argue, not only haunt but still are present in many forms). In any event, what it could mean for a single hair sample to represent a/the "Aboriginal genome" is unclear.

On this point Kowal is clear: that there is, to date, no established Aboriginal genome, and no scientifically final account of Indigenous biological difference. There exists the *possibility* of meaningful Indigenous biological difference, and this should neither be completely discounted, nor taken as an explanatory postulate (as in health and social issues) where it seems that other factors must be recognized.

Chapter 6 tells of a statue of a collector created for a 2000 Museums Victoria (Melbourne) exhibition. This was meant as an ironic reversal of the colonial gaze that had long placed Indigenous people and objects on display. The statue was of Sir Baldwin Spencer, biologist, collector and ethnographer of central and northern Australia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was placed in a glass exhibition case along with household objects, labelled "Hunters and Collectors." At the decommissioning of the exhibition, Spencer wound up in a restricted underground keeping room, a move for which Kowal was unable to uncover any explanatory museum documentation validating its existence in the museum. Kowal writes interpretively of this, Spencer's "exile," as representative of a shift from critical "postcolonialism" to the more robustly "decolonizing" museum. In it, she suggests, there is no longer a public place for a collector-double like the Spencer statue, but he has nonetheless been reunited with objects he collected, and continues to exist as a ghostly presence.

Chapter 4, subtitled "Aboriginal Whiteness and Settler Belonging," describes a number of episodes of intense interest (late 19th, earlier 20th centuries) in what were reported as "white" Aborigines – probably albinos. A concept of Aboriginal "whiteness" was attributed by its (relatively few) exponents to a notion of ancient Aboriginal-Caucasian shared ancestry, variably linked to racial theorization of human populations and their spread. Views like this proposed some commonality (albeit at remote time depth) with the settler population, which functioned, Kowal maintains, as a strategy for managing settler disquiet concerning the expropriation and destruction of the continent's original inhabitants. As Kowal notes, this "strategy" was uncommon. However, it belongs/ed to a suite of racial concepts which were variously developed and deployed to justify expropriation, dislocation, and even extermination.

The book is sure, convincing and informative in its tracing of human biological "science" (as it was at various times) in relation to Indigenous Australia, and its interwoven tracing of transformations in practices, ethical considerations and changing awareness, which Kowal sees as having led towards decolonizing practice and thought in relevant institutions (like the NCIG, museums, institutes and governance frameworks that must take account of Indigenous difference in some ways).

The book is less critically penetrative in areas that necessarily go well beyond the practices and discourses of biological science. For example, Kowal mentions in an early chapter that some conservative Australian politicians have raised objections to claims for government benefits by Aborigines with "blond hair and blue eyes" who declare themselves to be Indigenous.

Such remarks, Kowal observes, are racist: Aboriginality cannot be (and is not governmentally) defined by DNA. These observations are apt as responses to the political instincts from which they arise. But they raise, as Kowal also in effect acknowledges, questions which are inscrutable and seemingly unanswerable in terms of scientific biological discourse. There must be a more thorough critical social – and societal – discourse on those questions.

For a book on what we are to make of Indigenous biological difference in the 21st century (and whether or not an Aboriginal reference genome can ever be established), one of the first observations one might make is that there has been enormous population mixture, more intensively in some parts of the continent than others. And further, that such admixture has social correlates and consequences – differentiating, for example, a typically remote and physiognomically distinctive Aboriginal population from others; whose mode of life, separation from and interaction with the "dominant" society is also distinctive. The questions that arise cannot be limited to identity postulates: e.g., one may take limited comfort in the recognition that Indigenous "identity" cannot be and is not defined strictly by DNA. In the social practices of distinguishing Indigenous from non-Indigenous, scientists have little power to govern the use of statements they accept as truthful; wider publics have ways of making science discourse meaningful that may have little close relationship to scientific findings. Many other things count: mode and context of life; appearance and behaviour as observed and taken account of by one's associates and by others. While all of these things intersect with biology and science, they require further exploration of the links between those and social being.

Francesca Merlan
(Francesca.Merlan@anu.edu.au)

Kray, Christine A.: Maya-British Conflict at the Edge of the Yucatecan Caste War. Denver: University Press of Colorado, 2023. 239 pp. ISBN 978-1-64642-564-8. Price: $ 30.95

The so-called "caste war" (guerra de castas) in Yucatan (1847–1901) was, alongside the Tupac Amaru uprising in the Peruvian highlands (1780–1783), the

most significant indigenous war in Latin America directed against the prevailing European influence after the catastrophe of the Spanish conquest. The extent of the existing analyses and writings on and about the Caste War corresponds to its significance for Yucatan in the second half of the 19th century. However, research concentrates on the Mexican part of the Yucatan peninsula, the center of the conflict.

Christine A. Kray, Professor of Anthropology at Rochester Institute of Technology, is involved in research on the Maya in present-day Belize, among other topics. Her work "Maya-British conflict ..." fills a gap by describing and analyzing the effects of the war in Belize from its beginning in 1847 until 1872. The importance of the British in Belize territory in supplying arms to the insurgent *Kruso'ob* has often been pointed out. But the complicated network of various Maya groups within Belize and in relation to the British and the *Kruso'ob*, the Mexican government and, not least, the government in Campeche, has not yet been covered sufficiently.

Kray has based the course of the story on the interests of British companies in the exploitation of Belize's mahogany forests, in an era of increasing demographic pressure due to the immigration of Maya groups from Yucatan who wanted to escape what the author calls the "social war" and/or debt bondage. This pressure made the land issue in Belize increasingly urgent and provided the justification for specific actors to exclude others from rights to land. The supply of arms by the British to the *Kruso'ob* and the latter's raids on peaceful Mayas (*Pacificos*) added complicating elements.

The author analyzes this process under the perspective of land, labor and flight (12), whereby the arms trade should be added. She also perceives her work as an experiment in anthropological writing, in which she "... aligns style and theory" (13).

In the preface, the author explains the peculiarities of the spelling and pronunciation of Yucatec Maya, followed by an introduction to the geographical and socio-political context in which the story told takes place. Here, Kray also develops her theoretical approach, which outlines the interests of the various groups alongside the factors of land, labor (debt bondage) and flight. The Maya who migrated from Yucatan founded new village communities and derived claims to the resources used by them. Kray describes this dynamic with an approach of narrative, historical ethnography from the perspective of the actors' expectations of their future, not their cultural imprint in the past (15).

The book is divided into six chapters, which present a chronologically narrated sequence of history in the complex socio-political web mentioned before. The individual time periods described in the chapters follow a trend of increasing conflict, initially mainly among various Maya groups (*Pacificos del Sur, Pacificos de Icaiché, Kruso'ob*), later increasingly involving the loggers and traders, the British administration and the crown, as well as the state of Campeche, founded in 1862, and the Mexican national state. The author clearly shows how "external actors" instrumentalize the conflicts of the Maya groups for their respective goals, although the *Kruso'ob* are consistently strong enough to protect their interests against the British actors.

Contrary to her approach of not focusing too much on the past, Kray describes the early role of Belize in the late 18th and early 19th centuries as a refugee region for Maya displaced from northern Yucatan, resulting in small, multi-ethnic Maya villages. The British had been in the region since the early 18th century, and their presence was sanctioned by the Spanish crown in two treaties (1783 and 1786) for a territory called British Honduras.

It is important to note that the treaties only granted the British the use of a small part of the north-eastern part of what is now Belize. Mayan groups migrating from Yucatan assumed that they were entering uninhabited territory and could therefore lay claim to the land. This led to a fundamental conflict, as the British timber companies disregarded the presence of the Maya, but at the same time needed them as laborers and food suppliers, demonstrating the trinity of land, labor and flight. The following five chapters then develop the social drama surrounding the axes of this trinity, a drama that began in 1847 with the outbreak of the social or "caste" war, on the Yucatan Peninsula.

Initially, the roles among the actors were still clearly divided. The British, interested in exploiting the mahogany deposits and in trade (especially arms trading), acted neutrally. The rebellious Maya, above all the *Kruso'ob*, concentrated in this phase on their struggle and the establishment of a military society, the bond of which was the cult of the talking cross. The Maya groups in Belize lived in relative isolation but began early on to demand money and/or goods (including weapons) from the British timber companies in return for the exploitation of what they perceived as their land.

The situation became increasingly complicated with the influx of refugees from Yucatan – the main reasons being flight from exploitation by Yucatecan landowners and from military service, both demanded by the Yucatecan army and by the rebellious Maya. Conflicts of interest on the British side between timber traders and the army on the one hand and the governor on the other eventually led to conflict between the British side and the *Pacificos*, exacerbated by *Kruso'ob* raids on the *Pacificos*.

For the British side, the cost of defense and administration exceeded the resources of the colony administered by the Legislative Assembly. "Consequently, the

Legislative Assembly voted to dissolve itself so that British Honduras could be transformed into a Crown Colony (which it was in 1871). The settlers in effect sacrificed a degree of self-governance in exchange for imperial protection" (172). The founding of the Crown Colony had no influence on the constantly deteriorating relations between the British and the *Pacificos*. The latter raided the settlement of Orange Walk at the end of August 1872, but were repulsed by the British, ending the last major conflict between the British and Maya groups and consolidating British supremacy.

Kray describes the history of the socio-political processes in Belize in the period from 1847 to 1872 in rich detail, sometimes entertainingly. She has based her narrative on her postulated analytical perspective of land, labor and flight (and the non-postulated perspective of the arms trade). However, the larger contexts, such as the interests of the crown, the nation state of Mexico, or the states of Yucatan and Campeche, remain underexposed. The postulated unity of "style and theory" is also not always clear, especially as theoretical aspects are sometimes weakly developed in the presentation of events. Despite this objection, however, Kray's work is an important contribution to the history of the Caste War and closes a research gap that has existed for too long. It also has the great advantage of being a real pleasure to read.

Harald Moßbrucker
(hmossbrucker@hotmail.com)

Lang, Maria-Katharina (ed.): Staub & Seide. Steppen- und Seidenstraßen / Dust & Silk. Steppe and Silk Roads. Wien: Weltmuseum Wien, 2021. 200 pp. ISBN 978-3-99020-224-1. Preis: € 25,00

The exhibition "Staub & Seide. Steppen- und Seidenstraßen / Dust & Silk. Steppe and Silk Roads)" took place at the Weltmuseum in Vienna between 16.12.2021 and 03.05.2022. The accompanying publication, in English and German, is a masterful journey of the past and the present of the Silk Roads. Not only does it present the exhibition material, including over 200 objects from the collections of the Weltmuseum and other international institutions, but it also carefully explores connections between these historical routes and the "New Silk Roads," drawing out different perspectives and narratives by juxtaposing historical material with contemporary art. It also examines the explorers who brought this material into European collections.

The volume correctly asserts that there has never been such a thing as the Silk Roads, neither today nor in the past, but rather it was a changing network of routes, by land and sea, that resulted in the interaction of vast regions of Eurasia, with different levels of connectivity and exchange over time.

The volume eloquently presents the background to the exhibition, by Maria-Katharina Lang, before embarking on a mixture of short articles. There are thematic pieces, some of which act as a vehicle for contextualising the exhibition material, while others explore contemporary or artistic impacts. The range of these short papers, many just a page or two, some three to four, is extremely impressive. The breadth of topics covered is immense, and yet the quality of informed presentation is excellent and a great credit to the editors.

The more descriptive and informative papers set out concisely the significance of the material from the exhibition. All the pieces show balance and scale. I was impressed by them all, and in picking out a few I am merely seeking to reflect the range of the publication. For example, the amazing fabric from Stralsund Panni Tartarici, an astonishing 14th century garment that provides an insight into Central Asia and European silk art, or the stunning fragments of Ilkhanid architectural tiles from the Viennese Collections. The piece on the Bazaar reflected the sense of exchange and that this took place on many different levels. The article on fragments of the Buyanquli Khan Mausoleum drew in the scale of surviving architecture, but also its loss and the significant issues around Soviet-era restoration. The paper on Wild Apples highlights important issues about the movement of species and crops, as well as people and ideas, which transformed Eurasia. It also expertly brings into play the German botanist, Johann Carl Sievers, who, in the late 18th century, did much to develop our understanding of the spread of domesticated apples. He was followed by the pioneering work of Nikolai Ivanovich Vavilov, who tragically died under Stalinist persecution, but helped to put the fragile and endangered wild apple forests of the Tian Shan on the map. The article on Objects from Xinjiang does not hide from issues around the "pacification" of this so-called "province of unrest", to its credit. The material culture is stunning, but the paper largely, correctly, focuses on the repression of the contemporary society. As they eloquently argue, "the 'objects from Xinjiang' stand in the exhibition as silent witnesses to homogenisation and diversity" (158). The piece on Tea is well conceived, and portrays a significant element of intra-regional exchange, oft subsumed under the soubriquet of the Silk Roads.

There are many excellent pieces on explorers, collectors and artists. The article on Fieldwork Notes beautifully captures the chance of "what enters collections" and the way it is expressed. There is a great piece on Lene Schneider-Kainer, a Viennese painter and illustrator, who embarked on a journey following Marco Polo in 1926 – an amazing journey with stunning artistic consequences. The article on fragments of Samarkand explores both the mythical and the present, and the vital