Norfolk Island’s past has suffered much misrepresentation and misunderstanding over the years, particularly in relation to the penal settlement in operation between 1825 and 1855. Sadly, *Dark Paradise* is another in a long line of narratives of questionable accuracy. The cover blurb claims that Norfolk Island is ‘exposed like never before’, while elsewhere the author notes that he hoped to write the ‘definitive history’ of Norfolk Island’s ‘horrific past (and present)’. These are surprising assertions. *Dark Paradise* contains little that is new or has not been written about at length by others, as well as plenty which is either incorrect, based on limited research, or relies on dubious sources.

*Dark Paradise* takes the traditional approach of separating Norfolk Island’s history into three distinct periods: the 1788 to 1814 settlement, founded as an adjunct to the new convict-colony of New South Wales; the 1825 to 1855 penal settlement which is largely responsible for Norfolk Island’s grim reputation; and from 1856 onwards, when the descendants of the *Bounty* mutineers—an event weaved in alongside tales of Norfolk Island—arrived from Pitcairn Island. There then follows an account of the Melanesian mission, Norfolk Island’s modern history (including the terrible murder of Janelle Patton in 2002), and its currently, dire financial predicament. The book ends with an odd, rather gratuitous attack on today’s Norfolk Islanders.

This is an unoriginal, derivative book. There is little or no evidence of any original research in *Dark Paradise* and it is instead a synthesis of prior works, which has implications for its accuracy and credibility. The interweaving of narratives of Norfolk Island, the *Bounty* mutiny, and of Pitcairn Island is not new either, as it as an approach taken by both Frank Clune in *The Norfolk Island Story* (1967), and Peter Clarke in *Hell and Paradise* (1986); *Dark Paradise* is particularly reminiscent of Clune’s book in its apocalyptic style. Even the title harks back to the tired ‘hell-in-paradise’ trope used by writers with such monotonous regularity since the 1820s that it has been sapped of any meaning.

*Dark Paradise* moves at a good pace—particularly when recounting the familiar tale of the *Bounty* mutiny—though the prose sometimes veers into the purple. But it is in the account of the convict period that the flaws in *Dark Paradise* reveal themselves most starkly. Macklin’s account is simply a rehearsal of the old, tired, sensationalist narrative, very much in the mould of what the historian Ian Duffield described as the ‘video nasty’ interpretation of penal settlement history, replete with gore, sodomy, and gothic violence. In an author’s note, Macklin writes that:

> Some places on this earth are redolent of a terrible evil, from Auschwitz, to Srebrenica, to the killing fields of Cambodia. They are dark places, bred of shadows, obscenities and wrongful deaths […] There is another. It is brilliantly disguised in the garments of paradise in the South Pacific. It is Norfolk Island.

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This is nonsense. Though it is not the first time Norfolk Island has been described thus—in 1992, Jan Morris ludicrously suggested the penal settlement was of 'Auschwitzian horror'—such hyperbolic comparisons are as misplaced, as they are offensive to the victims of genocide.

Macklin relies heavily upon Margaret Hazzard’s *Punishment Short of Death* (1984) and Robert Hughes’s *The Fatal Shore* (1987), despite these works’ frequently questionable historical accuracy. The remainder of the secondary reading is limited. In terms of primary sources, none of the extensive British and Australian archival holdings have been used, which is a serious failing because they present a much more complex picture than the episodic account presented in *Dark Paradise*, and call into question various parts of the narrative. Like most authors writing on Norfolk Island, Macklin has not looked at any of the thousands of convict conduct records held by the Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office, which are vital to understanding how convicts lived and were punished (and which have been freely available online since 2008). Neither contemporary newspapers have been consulted, nor the vast unpublished correspondence of the Van Diemonian Convict Department, nor the many large bundles of correspondence between Norfolk Island’s commandants and the Colonial Secretary’s Department in State Archives New South Wales. Readers will look in vain for details of who the convicts were, how they lived and worked, why they were detained at the Island and for how long (an average of just over three years, incidentally), the true extent of their punishment, how the settlement was administered, how the convicts resisted authority, and so on.

When contemporary accounts are cited in *Dark Paradise*, the quotations are generally recycled from other secondary sources. For instance, the diary of Aaron Price is referred to, but the examples are taken from Hazzard rather than the manuscript, while the narrative of convict Laurence Frayne is referenced as ‘transcribed and quoted by Robert Hughes in *The Fatal Shore*’ (p.339). Macklin cites quotations from official correspondence of the 1820s held in volumes of the *Historical Records of Australia*, but the examples are taken from Hazzard rather than the *HRA* volumes themselves (p.339). The originals really should be consulted when citing primary sources, and this failure of basic historical method has led directly to *Dark Paradise*’s lazy repetition of many errors.

Perhaps the most serious example is the chapter on Joseph Foveaux’s Lieutenant-Governorship (1800–1804). Foveaux is presented as a man with a ‘sadistic lust to humiliate and inflict untold agony on the men and women under his control’, who from ‘the moment he landed [...] initiated a regime of shocking cruelty’ (pp.92–3) dominated by the lash, who permitted the sexual abuse of female prisoners, and who ordered that if strangers landed on Norfolk Island then Irish convicts were to be burned alive inside a building. These are serious claims, though the chapter relies as evidence almost entirely on the so-called *Recollections of 13 years Residence in Norfolk Island and Van Diemans [sic] Land*, supposedly written by one Robert Jones in 1823, who was gaoler at Norfolk Island in the early 1800s. Or rather, it relies on the transcript of the document in Hazzard’s *Punishment Short of Death*.

Macklin’s uncritical reliance on this document is the more surprising, since the research of Reg Wright showed in 1998 that the document is an ‘imaginative [work] of fiction’, which could not have been written by Jones, is not a reliable account of the period, and does not

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prove that Foveaux ‘was a cruel man’.\(^5\) (Foveaux may have been corrupt, but that is an entirely different argument). Wright established that the historical Jones died in 1818, and concluded that the *Recollections* were most likely produced about 1850 or even later, and were probably adapted from the Irish convict Joseph Holt’s *Memoirs*. The *Recollections* are riddled with chronological and factual errors. For instance, the document conflates stories from the first and second settlements, the latter of which ‘Jones’ could not have known about. The 80-cell gaol as described by ‘Jones’ did not exist during his time at Norfolk Island, and the watercolour opposite the manuscript’s title page—dated 1823—shows buildings which were not built until decades after Jones left Norfolk Island, and after his death: the entrance to the New Gaol, on which work began in 1836 and was completed in 1847, and the Prisoners’ Barracks in the background, which was constructed between 1828 and 1835.\(^6\) Had the original been consulted, the error of relying on the *Recollections* could have been avoided: the document’s record in the State Library of New South Wales catalogue makes it quite clear that not only did Jones not write it, but that it should not be trusted.\(^7\) This entire chapter about Foveaux’s ‘sadism’, and the basis for much later argument, is thus undermined.

Elsewhere, *Dark Paradise*’s account of the convict period is similarly reliant upon received interpretations. Commandants James Morisset and John Price are dismissed as mentally-ill sadists despite the ill-advisedness of pronouncing, without much evidence, upon the psychological state of the long-dead. The recollections of Foster Fyans are quoted from liberally, despite their being highly unreliable (it is with Fyans that the ‘suicide lottery’ myth originated, a story which took hold in the popular imagination after being repeated in *The Fatal Shore*).\(^8\) Reverend Thomas Rogers’s writings are taken as an authoritative account of Commandant Price’s term of office, despite Rogers seeing barely six months of this seven-year period and his being a heavily biased witness. The works of Alexander Maconochie are assumed to be disinterested historical accounts rather than what they are: propaganda for his system of convict discipline. The archives show that Maconochie’s administration (1840–44) is more problematic than presented in *Dark Paradise* and a series of hagiographical accounts: though the overall rate of corporal punishment fell, Maconochie ordered floggings of up to 300 lashes, and convicts flogged during his administration received an average of about 83 lashes per beating.

*Dark Paradise* gives an exaggerated picture of the extent of flogging. A painstaking analysis of the convicts’ punishment records puts to the lie the claim in *Dark Paradise* that there were years in which ‘no fewer than 20,000 lashes [were inflicted] upon the bleeding backs of

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the men’ (p.204). Nor should the grotesque punishment of men like William Riley and Michael Burns, who endured over 1,000 and 2,000 lashes respectively, be taken as anything other than exceptional: only a handful suffered such astonishing treatment and, at most a quarter of the 6,458 men detained at Norfolk Island were flogged. The evidence for the tortures alleged on pages 204 and 205 is also far less clear than is presented. The penal settlement at Norfolk Island was a brutal enough place without the need for such embellishments.

The so-called ‘Ring’ are described by Macklin as a ‘group of ruthless, incorrigible old hands [who] dominated the lumber yard where the prisoners “broke in” new arrivals with anal rape if they resisted their advances’ (p.201), but the evidence for this assertion is not there. The claim that the Ring ‘had ruled in the prison’s shadows ever since Foveaux’ is equally fanciful: one might wonder how such a group could have originated at the turn of 1800s, endured when the Island was abandoned for a decade, and then taken root after resettlement in 1825 despite none of the convicts from the first settlement being present during the second.

The only contemporary mention of a ‘ring’ by anyone who visited or was stationed at Norfolk Island in this context occurred in Robert Pringle Stuart’s 1846 report, where he remarked on how some convicts openly defied their superiors (a far from rare occurrence at Norfolk Island, or elsewhere in convict Australia). The ‘Ring’, as described in Dark Paradise, only exists in the short stories of William Astley (aka ‘Price Warung’), in which the group is a sinister alternative power imbued with satanic rituals. Macklin has followed Hazzard’s example: she claimed that the ‘Ring’ was ‘no imaginary notion but actual fact’, but then ascribed an ‘oath of brotherhood’ supposedly taken by Ringers as evidence of its existence, when said oath originates with one of Astley’s satirical tales! (And as if to prove the ludicrousness of the ‘oath’, Astley writes that after chanting each verse, the Ringers sucked each other’s blood).

Dark Paradise could also have done with closer proof-reading and fact-checking. The referencing system is inconsistent: some quotations are given endnotes, but many others are not; Jones’s Recollections is simply referenced as ‘Recollections’, with no indication of its author or provenance. ‘Extremest’ is misspelt ‘extremist’ (p.127). Convict James Ledwick’s surname is given as ‘Ledgwick’ (p.146). Catholic priest John McEncroe’s surname is misspelled ‘McEnroe’ (p.175). ‘Denison’ is misspelled in places (pp.223–4, 340), but correctly in others. Aaron Price was never a ‘turnkey’ (p.126) at Norfolk Island. Historian Merval Hoare is referred to as ‘Melvyn’ (pp.276 and 346). The order forbidding use of the plough was not given by Commandant Joseph Anderson (pp.169–70), but by Governor Richard Bourke of New South Wales in 1832, despite Anderson’s predecessor, Morisset, protesting that the measure was ‘very detrimental to the progress of agriculture on this Island’. William Castleton’s death would not ‘otherwise be lost

10 John West, in his History of Tasmania 1852 (Sydney, 1982), p.296, is the only other contemporary to mention a ‘ring’ at Norfolk Island, but he never visited the place and most likely relied upon Stuart’s report.
12 This man’s name is given as ‘Ledwick’ and ‘Ledwich’ in the archives, with the former being the most common spelling.
13 Morisset to NSW Colonial Secretary, 24 April 1832, NRS905 4/2243, State Records New South Wales (SRNSW).
to history’ if it had not been recorded by Reverend Thomas Atkins (p.171): all convict deaths had to be reported to headquarters and a forty-page report of a board of inquiry is at State Records New South Wales.\footnote{Anderson to NSW Colonial Secretary, 11 January 1837, NRS905, 4/2368.3, SRNSW.}

Alexander Maconochie is said to have been released from captivity as a prisoner-of-war in 1814, and then to have ‘served in the American War of Independence’ (p. 186). Macklin claims that ‘love blossomed’ between a ‘convict usually unnamed but said to be one David Ankers’ and Mary Ann Maconochie (p.203), but there was never a convict called ‘David Ankers’ at Norfolk Island, nor transported to Australia for that matter. ‘Ankers’ is a character in Norval Morris’s fictionalised account of Maconochie’s administration (not the first time fiction has become ‘fact’ in Norfolk Island’s history).\footnote{Norval Morris, Maconochie’s Gentlemen: The Story of Norfolk Island and the Roots of Modern Prison Reform (Oxford, 2003), p.161.} The convict in question was more likely Charles Sandys Packer, a musician and composer from Reading, transported for life to Norfolk Island for forgery by the Mangles in 1840.\footnote{CON33/1/51, 14120, Male Convict Conduct Registers, Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office.} These errors are of varying seriousness, but it is all rather sloppy, and points to a lack of care and familiarity with the source material. This list could, unfortunately, go on.

One always hesitates before submitting a critical review. But there is indeed a real need for a nuanced, accurate account of Norfolk Island’s past, one which escapes the melodramatic paradigm and derivative method which has shaped writing about the Island’s history for much too long, and which appreciates and uses the available, rich primary sources. Unfortunately, despite its grandiose claims, \textit{Dark Paradise} cannot be recommended as a reliable or complete history of Norfolk Island. Let us be clear: Norfolk Island’s penal settlement was a harsh, brutal place, perhaps rivalled only for brutality in convict Australia by Macquarie Harbour. But the sensationalist narrative only trivialises the genuine suffering of the convicts detained at Norfolk Island (none of whom, incidentally, are mentioned by name in \textit{Dark Paradise}, beyond well-known characters such as Martin Cash, Laurence Frayne, and William Westwood).

The poor treatment of the convict period, the reliance on secondary sources, and the failure to explore the archives means that \textit{Dark Paradise} serves only to perpetuate misconceptions about Norfolk Island’s past, and Australian history more generally.

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