

**Katie Pickles, Catharine Coleborne, eds..** *New Zealand's Empire*. Studies in Imperialism Series. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015. 288 pp. \$105.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7190-9153-7.



**Reviewed by** Vincent O'Malley

**Published on** H-Empire (July, 2016)

**Commissioned by** Charles V. Reed (Elizabeth City State University)

This collection of essays, published as part of Manchester University Press's long-running and influential Studies in Imperialism series, sets out to challenge the notion of New Zealand as a periphery of empire. Exposing the country's own imperial ambitions, both internal and external, the book examines New Zealand's place within the British Empire. Despite its formal status as a colony until 1907 (and its belated adoption, in 1947, of the Statute of Westminster granting full independence), New Zealand was also a minor (sub-)imperial power in its own right, its administration of various Pacific islands and territories so inept that many islanders pleaded in vain for Britain to assume direct rule.

Building on recent analyses, such as Felicity Barnes's work *New Zealand's London: A Colony and Its Metropolis* (2012), editors Katie Pickles and Catharine Coleborne argue that attachment to empire was a distinctive element in the forging of a national identity. That stands in marked contrast to Australia, where assertions of independence from the "mother country" loomed larger

in the emerging national narrative. For many white New Zealanders at least, co-ownership of the empire was a vital part of their self-image through the first half of the twentieth century as (in James Belich's words) "better Britons."<sup>[1]</sup>

Pickles and Coleborne divide the work into four parts. The first, "Empire at Home," examines internal empire, which in practical terms meant the colonization and conquest of the indigenous Māori people of New Zealand. Like the remaining sections of the book, there is no attempt to provide any kind of overview of this topic, with each essay author apparently given free rein to write on their preferred aspect of this theme. The results can be both idiosyncratic and illuminating.

Kenton Storey's chapter examines the government-funded bilingual newspaper *Te Karere Maori* (*The Maori Messenger*), a vitally important propaganda weapon at a time (1855-60) when remarkably high literacy rates within Māori communities, combined with the oral transmission of its contents, gave the publication a wide reach.

Revealingly, he notes that the paper's circulation was doubled by the Native Department in 1860—precisely at the point when the Taranaki War (1860-61) saw British troops clash with Māori for the first time since the 1840s.

Mark Stocker tells the story of a carved wooden bust of Queen Victoria presented to the Te Arawa *iwi* (tribe) in the 1880s, and its subsequent appropriation by them as a symbol of indigenous loyalty (to the monarch but not necessarily her colonial governments). By the late twentieth century, that stance contained its own tensions as loyalty became conflated with collaboration, and this uneasiness manifested itself in the 1995 theft of the bust from its pedestal on the grounds of Papanui-Ouru *marae* (tribal meeting place), close to central Rotorua. Although subsequently returned, the bust is now only brought out on special occasions, including the Duke of York's 2007 visit to the *marae*. In this chapter especially, but at times elsewhere throughout the work, a glossary of Māori terms would have been particularly helpful for non-New Zealand readers.

Conal McCarthy's chapter describes the pivotal role of Peter Buck (Te Rangi Hiroa) and Apirana Ngata—both members of what came to be known as the Young Māori Party and successful politicians in their own right—in ethnographic fieldwork in New Zealand and across the Pacific. He argues that, in collusion with their European colleagues, these Māori scholars (Buck went on to become director of the Bishop Museum) “*invented* anthropology in New Zealand, employing it to advance their position”—one that was based neither on unqualified acceptance of assimilation or resistance to it but rather a more elaborate “dance of agency” (p. 56).

Part 2 (“Imperial Mobility”) traverses the trans-Tasman world, including Anna Johnston's exploration of imperial travel writing across the Australasian colonies. In Australia, she notes, Aborigines often went unnoticed, whereas Māori (who had forged their own lucrative tourist trade)

were almost impossible to ignore. There were other differences, including travelers' perceptions of the “boastfulness” and “self-glorification” of white Australians (p. 83), as opposed to the more loyal and respectable New Zealand colonists. Coleborne explores vagrancy laws within a trans-Tasman context (noting that under New Zealand legislation passed in 1866 anyone found to be consorting with Māori could be deemed a vagrant), while Molly Duggins turns to the botanical, considering the luxury bespoke “portable nurseries” that were fern albums (p. 106).

In part 3 (“New Zealand's Pacific Empire”), the book explores more conventional forms of empire and imperialism through New Zealand's engagement with its Pacific neighbors and related aspects. Patricia O'Brien examines the troubled history of New Zealand's administration of Samoa (so bad that in 2002 Prime Minister Helen Clark issued a formal apology to the people of Samoa). In 1918, New Zealand authorities allowed a ship carrying the influenza virus to dock at Apia, resulting in the deaths of more than 20 percent of Samoa's population. Then, in 1929, New Zealand police opened fire on a crowd of nonviolent Mau movement protesters who were marching through Apia, killing as many as eleven Samoans in what became known as Black Saturday. As O'Brien notes, the Mau protestors modelled their movement on New Zealand's indigenous pacifist resistance movement at Parihaka and there were other interesting parallels (not least in the familiar accusation that scheming Europeans were behind the Samoans' “imaginary” grievances).

Frances Steel's focus is on the soft power imperialism of tourism and its links with trade and commerce, more especially through the New Zealand-owned Union Steam Ship Company. Adrian Muckle examines French perceptions of New Zealand's role in the Pacific. He notes that New Zealand's decolonization proposals in the wake of World War II troubled French officials concerned about a possible domino effect throughout the

francophone Pacific. The war brought as many as two million Americans to the Pacific, more than doubling the population on some islands and leaving behind a lasting legacy in the many thousands of babies of indigenous women fathered by Americans. As Judith Bennett comments in her chapter on this topic, although fraternization was generally encouraged as a way of relieving boredom, mixed marriages were forbidden by American authorities unless the mothers could be proven to have at least 51 percent “white blood.”

The final section of the book (“Inside and Outside Empire”) considers internal and external perceptions of New Zealand from the twentieth century to today. Michael Dawson charts an evolving national identity through the three Empire/Commonwealth Games staged in New Zealand (in 1950, 1974, and 1990—the latter coinciding with the sesquicentenary of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi). Rosemary Baird and Philippa Mein Smith argue the case for Australia as New Zealand’s “western frontier” (or “west island”), highlighting the entangled histories of the two nations through an oral history of recent migrants across the Tasman. Pickles turns south, outlining the important place of Antarctica in national identity. As Pickles argues, not only did New Zealand offer a gateway to the continent, but its exploration also provided an outlet for an “increasingly separate imperialist mentality” in which Antarctica came to form part of New Zealand’s empire (p. 232).

In the last chapter, Giselle Byrnes examines apology, remorse, and reconciliation in more recent times. While the apology to Samoans is mentioned, along with another to the Chinese for a poll tax imposed on migrants from that country after 1881, her primary focus is the process of delivering redress to Māori for historical breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi. As Byrnes notes, in New Zealand this is referred to not as a form of reconciliation but instead “settlement,” implying closure and finality in preference to anything more ambiguous (and less finite). Although Byrnes does

not mention it, across the Tasman large numbers of white Australians spontaneously said “sorry” to the Aboriginal peoples. In New Zealand, the expectation is that everything is left to “the Crown.”[2] New Zealand may be ahead of the game when it comes to settlement. But bigger questions about reconciliation and future relationships may still lie ahead.

*New Zealand’s Empire* is hardly the final word on the nation’s imperial entanglements, whether internal or external, but neither does it purport to provide that. While it does not offer a comprehensive introduction to the topic, the book rewards its readers with a series of original, varied, and sometimes intriguing essays into particular dimensions. Read alongside other recent works, the book complicates and challenges older stereotypes of New Zealand as a simple outpost of empire. In doing so, the editors succeed in their stated aim of opening up discussion as to how New Zealand’s own empire might be conceived.

#### Notes

[1]. James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2001), 76-85.

[2]. Danielle Celermajer and Joanna Kidman, “Embedding the Apology in the Nation’s Identity,” *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 121 (2013): 219-242.

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**Citation:** Vincent O'Malley. Review of Pickles, Katie; Coleborne, Catharine, eds. *New Zealand's Empire*. H-Empire, H-Net Reviews. July, 2016.

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