

*New Zealand's London: a Colony and its Metropolis*

By Felicity Barnes

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Reviewed by Anna Davin

This excellent study of the historical relationship between New Zealand and London makes a contribution to cultural studies and to the histories of empire and national identity. It breaks new ground both in its exploration of sources and in its theoretical analysis, and offers a new perspective on New Zealand history.

The author argues that from the late nineteenth century the nature of the relationship began to change as colony and metropolis became city and hinterland. The shift was both economic and cultural. Technological change was a major driver on both fronts. Steamships and refrigeration made it possible to transport dairy products and meat halfway round the world at a time when rising living standards in Britain and especially London led to increasing demand. New and evolving forms of communication were also involved in the transformation. In the twentieth as in the nineteenth century New Zealand and London were at opposite ends of the earth, but improved travel and communication decreased the imaginative distance while New Zealand gained confidence in its own political and cultural identity. Twentieth-century New Zealanders visiting London, Barnes argues, were no longer 'symbols of otherness' from the colonial periphery, but instead were '“Britons” at home in their colonial metropolis', returning to discover their heritage. Both 'Britishness' ('invented as much as it was inherited') and New Zealand's national identity were being reconstructed, as 'London, “city of empire”, became a joint New Zealand possession and ... New Zealand considered itself to be a farming hinterland of the metropolis and a distant colony no longer.

Moving back and forth in time and space, Barnes traces these developments by close readings of a range of sources. The first chapter, 'New Zealand's London', uses travel diaries, memoirs and guides to identify an imagined geography by which 'New Zealanders could become Londoners, members of the metropolis, and partners in empire as they incorporated London within their cultural landscape'. Chapter two ('At Home in London') follows by establishing a physical geography. It starts with New Zealand House – 'a place where New Zealand's appropriation of London was physically and imaginatively embodied' – which during and after the First World War was located on the Strand along with other similar 'dominion houses' (Canada, South Africa, and Australia. This chapter makes good use of the *Handbook for New Zealand Visitors in London*, initially produced by the High Commission to assist soldiers on leave in the First World War, in which over 100,000 New Zealand troops took part. 'Soldier-tourists' on leave or between postings needed accommodation (the New Zealand Soldiers' Club recorded 67,483 bed nights in 1918 alone) and food, provided in canteens and clubs set up by New Zealand voluntary organizations. The *Handbook*, whose postwar editions were aimed at the general visitor, listed New Zealand-run establishments such as tea-rooms and included a map with a sightseeing route. This did not include Smithfield market, the principal destination for New Zealand meat, or Tooley St's refrigerated warehouses which handled its dairy produce: visitors were 'to view their relationship with the metropolis via the family bonds of empire, not the cold calculus of economics'.

In chapter three ('A "New" New Zealand') Barnes charts the shift from colonial backwardness (anachronistic pioneers and Maori) to the modern and analyses concomitant changes in the depiction of New Zealand over the first decades of the century, noting too the construction of 'dear old England' and the appropriation of its history and heritage. This was also a gendered transition, she argues (following Anne McClintock in *Imperial Leather*):

Women are associated with the past, and men, 'by contrast, represent the progressive agent of national modernity'. New Zealand as masculine nation, 'hard and sinewy', was a modern reaction to the romantic mistiness of Maoriland. Romance retreated into rural England.

The literary emphasis continues in chapter four ('New Zealand Writers in London'), which examines London's impact on New Zealand through its high cultural life and its attraction for aspiring New Zealand writers. 'Being "London literate", the by-product of high cultural dependence on the metropole, could make the capital more accessible', though not all aspirants succeeded in making their way.

Chapters five and six turn to the changing economic relationship between the two countries. 'London's Farm' examines the culture of trade exhibitions, tourist publicity and advertising through which 'from 1882, butter, meat and cheese, along with wool, would come to stand for New Zealand'. 'Produced by Britons for British Homes' uses primary-produce advertising to show how mass consumption of New Zealand produce in the metropolis came – through the converging influences of marketing innovation, producer boards and the rise of 'imperial preference' – to be 'complemented by the mass marketing of New Zealand as farm'. At the same time, to sell its produce at Home, 'New Zealand used the latest forms of commodity displays to make itself Homelike'. (These included film and also amazing butter sculptures, which are illustrated.)

New Zealand's farming influence, according to Barnes, was 'as much metropolitan fantasy as hinterland reality'. In the following chapters mid twentieth-century sources and expressions of the fantasy are examined. Chapter seven ('London's Hinterland') explores the contribution of the press to the shaping and sustaining of links with the metropolis and chapter eight ('Home Movies: London on Film') that of film; while chapter nine (London's Legacy: New Zealand on Television, 1960-89') deals with the effects of television on 'the gradual and equivocal disassembling of this long cultural relationship'. The Epilogue provides a striking discussion of the 'enduring bonds' between London and New Zealand, with reference to the 2006 Memorial to New Zealand war dead, in Hyde Park. Barnes suggests that 'enduring' is not the right word: 'London's presence in New Zealand cultural landscape was not set in stone or etched in bronze, but reflected the changing conditions of contemporary New Zealand life, not just its colonial past'. She goes on to argue the need to understand 'lingering legacies'. 'Reconnecting New Zealand with its metropolis, as Home and hinterland, not as a servile colony to an imperial centre, changes the story'. This is true, as she points out, for relationships between London and other dominions, and she also notes the complication that New Zealanders whose origins were not English – Scots for instance – might see things differently. (My own Irish New Zealand parents were drawn as writers to literary London, but at the same time held to an Irish as well as a New Zealand identity.)

*New Zealand's London* is an ambitious book, tackling large questions across two hemispheres and a long century. Felicity Barnes pulls it off. She keeps a firm grasp of her structuring themes of time and space and draws on her extensive and often innovatory research with intelligence and verve, producing memorable stories and vignettes. The plentiful illustrations augment the text and are fascinating in their own right. Her book is very readable and I hope it will have many readers.