Cleansing the Colony: Transporting Convicts from New Zealand to Van Diemen's Land
By Kristyn Harman
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Reviewed by Kenton Storey

Serendipitous is how Kristyn Harman describes the discovery of the "Register of indents for convicts transported to Van Diemen's Land, 25 Nov 1847—22 Feb 1853," at Archives New Zealand in 2013. This tome of legal documents details much of New Zealand's short-lived history of transportation, whereby at least 110 convicts were exiled to Van Diemen's Land. Remarkably to Harman, at the time of her discovery only three previous researchers had written about this unique record set. I myself am not so surprised at this lack of attention. I can imagine a good number of historians viewed the records, marvelled at New Zealand's foundational connections with Van Diemen's Land, and then returned the volume to be re-shelved. Why? Because only a historian like Harman stood a chance of reckoning with this source. *Cleansing the Colony: Transporting Convicts from New Zealand to Van Diemen's Land* is Harman's second monograph and her second take on an aspect of the British convict system; her first, *Aboriginal Convicts: Australian, Khoisan, and Māori Exiles*, addresses Indigenous histories of transportation for colonial Australasia and New Zealand. So the serendipity is in fact doubled. It is to our good fortune that Harman found the "Register of indents" *and* was equipped to perceive its value and explore its implications for the histories of New Zealand and Van Diemen's Land.

Cleansing the Colony is primarily a study of the lived experience of transportation for New Zealand's convicts. Through these narratives of crime and punishment, Harman reflects on the role of transportation in the initiation of New Zealand's judiciary and the colony's mythic origins as a Better Britain. In chapter one, Harman tells the story of William Phelps Pickering, the first person sentenced to transportation in New Zealand in October 1841; in Auckland, Pickering had "dishonestly tried to pass himself off as a full-time agent for the Sydney Banking Corporation," (28) was charged with "[o]btaining valuable security under false pretences," (193) and "sentenced to transportation for seven years." (31) In chapter two, Harman details the circumstances of Pickering's twelve shipmates aboard the *Portenia* who were all sent to Van Diemen's Land in May 1843. Chapters three and four describe the convict system at work, showing how the first batch of New Zealand convicts were initially processed upon their arrival to Van Diemen's Land and then progressed through five stages of probation. Subsequent chapters address the experiences of specific demographic groups of convicts: the "Parkhurst Boys", military servicemen, Indigenous Māori, and the sole female convict, Margaret Reardon.

Two themes permeate this book: (1) how "transportation was a widespread global practice" (14) long entrenched across the British Empire by the time New Zealand exiled its first convicts and (2), how "[r]ather than transportation being imposed as a punishment by British mandate or external forces, there was an impetus from within New Zealand to cleanse and purify these islands." (14) To illustrate the first theme, Harman details the lived experiences of prisoners from New Zealand within the established convict system, including descriptions of the facilities in which convicts were housed, their toil, and the disciplinary regime governing their lives. These narrative accounts of penal reform are sobering reading and a sense of desperation permeates the

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archival traces which Harman chronicles, as the majority of convicts struggled to achieve their certificates of freedom without incurring additional punishments of hard labour or solitary confinement. Interestingly, Pickering proved the exception to the rule. After serving a shortened probationary period, he was able to return to New Zealand in 1847 and establish himself as a wealthy gentleman, successfully re-integrating into colonial society.

A second theme of the book relates to the efforts of colonial authorities to "cleanse" or purify New Zealand via transportation. Harman reflects on this theme particularly in chapter five, which details the experience of the Parkhurst Boys. As Harman explains, these were former inmates at the Parkhurst Prison at the Isle of Wight, an institution created in 1838 to house juvenile delinquents. Rather than being sent overseas to Australasia as convicts, the British government despatched shiploads of recently freed Parkhurst inmates to New South Wales and New Zealand as free emigrants. Drawing primarily on newspaper accounts, Harman shows how settlers in New Zealand were outraged by the arrival of these so called free "apprentices." The prevalent notion was that the Parkhurst boys would disrupt the colony through their innate criminality and contaminate the morality of local Māori. Here the reader is drawn to consider mid-nineteenth century attitudes concerning the causation of crime and the connections between criminality and character. Today, it is not difficult to feel sympathy for the Parkhurst Boys, interpreting their criminality as a consequence of poverty and desperation, especially when we read about a boy such as George Bottomley, who was found guilty of larceny and sentenced to transportation to the Isle of Wight for seven years for stealing a piece of bacon (96). Yet to some settlers the Parkhurst Boys were synonymous with "the baneful effects of 'Convictism.'" (93) This judgement associated both criminality and poverty as innate character flaws and sought to maintain New Zealand's reputation as a destination for 'respectable' and moneyed colonists.

My favourite chapters of *Cleansing the Colony* relate to how, following the British declaration of sovereignty over New Zealand in 1840, Māori became viewed as British subjects and obliged to comply with colonial laws. While chapter seven details the circumstances of how Māori began to appear before the courts, sometimes in the aftermath of armed conflicts with settlers, chapter eight focuses on the experiences of five Māori prisoners exiled to Van Diemen's Land in 1846 with life sentences for the crime of "rebellion." (193) Surprisingly, given the tragic experience of Indigenous Vandemonians, the Māori convicts were given preferential treatment in Van Diemen's Land, admired as both warriors and as "naïve 'children of nature.'" (145) Here Harman reveals how both British humanitarian ideals and perceptions of the superior status of Māori within the hierarchy of races impacted the experiences of Māori convicts. This section closes with an evocative account of how a delegation of kāumatua from Whanganui came to Tasmania in 1988 to repatriate the remains of Hōhepa Te Umuroa, one of the five Māori prisoners who had died at a probation station at Darlington on Maria Island in June 1847.

Cleansing the Colony is a rare scholarly book which will actually appeal to non-specialist readers. Not only is Harman an engaging writer, but her book successfully accomplishes its stated ambitions to employ the "Register of indents" to tell a unique story of New Zealand's experience of transportation and early connections with Van Diemen's Land. Worth emphasising is that Harman does not weigh the text down by rehashing historiographical debates or lambasting rival scholarly interpretations; the book references relevant key works and steers the reader to

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significant historiographical themes, but the focus always remains on the experiences of New Zealand's convicts, the shape of the convict system in Van Diemen's Land, and what New Zealand's experience of transportation tells us about British colonialism in the mid-nineteenth century. There is a quiet confidence to *Cleansing the Colony* which shines through. The book is a pleasure to read and certainly worth recommending to readers with an interest in New Zealand history and lecturers seeking a monograph to engage students regarding New Zealand's foundation.

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