Settler Anxiety at the Outposts of Empire: Colonial Relations, Humanitarian Discourses, and the Imperial Press
By Kenton Storey. UBC Press, Vancouver 2016 (paperback 2018).
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Reviewed by Michael Belgrave

While New Zealand historians have sometimes been influenced by the new imperial history, this increasing body of work focusing on empire in its international and comparative dimensions has remained on the periphery of the country's historical imagination. This is even true in the study of nineteenth-century colonialism. Despite the central role of humanitarianism in New Zealand history, many historians have been more concerned with exploring Māori history in increasingly local settings than considering the broader pattern of imperial relationships. Tony Ballantyne's work is a leading exception, and a number of legal historians have explored issues of Aboriginal title, while sharing a limited subset of the concerns explored by the new imperial history. With a handful of notable exceptions, contribution to the new imperial history, whether in book or article form, has been more likely to be published elsewhere. Kenton Storey's comparative exploration of humanitarianism in the late 1850s in New Zealand and Vancouver Island is no exception. Although based on a University of Otago PhD, it has been published by the University of British Columbia Press. Storey provides a highly nuanced, detailed and thought-provoking exploration of the place of humanitarianism in print culture, in both settler societies, and its relationship to a metropolitan debate about imperial responsibility, in particular in the face of threats of violence. He compares the way print media responded to the threat of Indigenous violence in New Zealand and Vancouver Island in the late 1850s.

Storey focuses on humanitarianism in these two colonial settings, demonstrating how humanitarian ideas variously underpinned responses to Indigenous threats of violence. Storey argues that one of the major differences between the two outposts of empire was the different way that they were connected by print media both to the imperial world and to their own Indigenous populations. Vancouver Island remained very much on the periphery of metropolitan interest, while interest in New Zealand was persistent and extensive. And, it should be added, surprisingly well-informed. Storey demonstrates how the rhetoric of humanitarianism implanted itself very differently in colonial politics. New Zealand and British Columbia treated the lesson of the Indian mutiny very differently.

Writing about the first Taranaki war, Storey argues that debates about the war were constrained by a sense of "surveillance of both metropolitan Britons and local Māori" (149). In contrast, Vancouver Island was more tenuously linked to British consciousness, and as a result it was possible for a few voices to dominate metropolitan understandings of what was occurring in colonial relationships with the Indigenous world. For New Zealand, such a monopoly was impossible. On Vancouver Island, Storey demonstrates that there were many more guidebooks available, to provide an understanding for migrants of life in the gold rush in that part of Western Canada, but most were reliant on the considerable body of articles by journalist, politician and Vancouver Island booster, Donald Fraser. Debates about Indigenous violence in New Zealand were therefore more contested and more nuanced across the empire, than was the case for Vancouver Island.

At the same time, newspaper debates took place in Vancouver Island without any serious consideration of the impact on an Indigenous audience. In New Zealand the contrast is

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dramatic. Here, debates within humanitarianism about the best policies for dealing with Māori made their way through Australia to the United Kingdom. Metropolitan newspapers changed their minds about responsibility for the Waitara, reflecting the contested narratives on the events. Taking sides and even changing positions reflected the different political positions of the newspapers and their editors, both in New Zealand and in London. Newspaper writers were for the most part conscious of the impact of their rhetoric on Māori and of the risks of contributing to further outbreaks of violence. Storey's arguments about the global impact of debates on humanitarianism are convincing, although he never completely resolves the tension in his own argument between the influence of these international print networks and local circumstances.

New Zealand historians haven't engaged as directly as Storey, or other new imperial historians, in the contours of humanitarianism, concerned with its transformation from its place of influence in imperial policy in the first half of the nineteenth century to its replacement by harsher, more divisive and biologically driven models in the second half of the century. Quite simply, this didn't happen here. As Storey shows, such ideas, which effectively dehumanised Māori or First Nations peoples in Victoria, were evident in debates about race and colonial policy in the 1850s. But in New Zealand, they remained on the edge. Humanitarianism would remake itself to the extent that, even when the European population became predominant and after the threat of Indigenous violence waned from the 1870s, colonial policy still had to be justified for its impact on Māori, as it had in the 1850s. While the dominant political voices in this debate about Māori well-being were clearly European, Māori were never completely excluded from this debate. Their participation in Parliament, and the use of petitions alongside various forms of litigation, together with their engagement with print media, helped mitigate the impact of the most dehumanising rhetoric of race.

Although seeing the Australian press as an important mediator between New Zealand and London, Storey makes no comment on the way that Māori were treated in Australian newspapers, as compared with the treatment by those same papers of Aboriginal Australians. Such a topic is worthy of a thesis in itself. Storey places just a little too much emphasis on these structural relationships for defining the way that the rhetoric falls. But the Australian newspapers, which presumably exercised some editorial capacity in covering New Zealand, should have been faced with similar imperatives in presenting their relationships with Aboriginal peoples. Clearly this was not the case. Australian newspapers made dramatic distinctions between the ways that they discussed Māori and the ways that they discussed their own Indigenous populations. One interesting note in this difference is significant. When Australian newspapers discussed Māori, they named people, whether as heroes or villains, but they named them. Aboriginal people are rarely so humanised. It is true that humanitarianism in Australia was influencing policy debates about the treatment of Aboriginal peoples, but far more at the margins than its role in the debates taking place in New Zealand. In the end, despite the shared language of humanitarianism, differences between these colonial settings were determined by differences on the ground.

The nature of the violence is also important. For Vancouver Island and Australia, violence between Indigenous people and settlers was endemic but informal and on the edge of settlement. For politicians wanting to evict Aboriginal people, exaggerating the threat of violence or the health risk projected onto these communities was useful. In New Zealand, such violence was much rarer, and perceived as a far more serious threat to British sovereignty. Imperial troops focused the minds of imperial newspapers. They inevitably accorded some

degree of respect to Māori military capacity. However, debate was constrained by the need to keep the rest of the Māori population onside.

The major weakness of Storey's approach is the almost-inevitable result of ensuring that a tight comparative study can be located within both the detailed historiographies of the two societies and the expanding theoretical literature of the new imperial history. The territory on either side of these events remains largely unexplored, or with little but a few sketchy lines on the map. Storey is well aware of the place of the Treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand history before the late 1850s, and draws some points of continuity between conflict over humanitarianism in the 1840s and that of the late 1850s. Compared with the highly detailed coverage of the latter period, these lines of argument remain underdeveloped, as they must. However, as a result, he tends to explain humanitarianism in relation to the Taranaki war as a self-contained response to the events of the time, reflecting concerns about promoting the colony in the United Kingdom, rather than in terms of deeply felt fissures within New Zealand political society.

In stopping at the end of the Taranaki war, Storey avoids dealing with Governor George Grey's invasion of the Waikato, an event far more challenging to humanitarian opinion than Governor Thomas Gore Browne's willingness to go to war over the Waitara Purchase. The Waitara certainly did see a number of missionaries break away from the position taken by Selwyn and Hatfield and irreparably divided the Brownes from others in the humanitarian camp. Nonetheless, as Storey shows, the ability of the Anglicans opposing Browne to complicate and contest the governor's actions helped complicate public opinion not only in New Zealand, but also in Australia and the United Kingdom. In 1863, this humanitarian support had evaporated, as Anglicans like Selwyn saw the Kīngitanga as a threat to the Queen's sovereignty. In 1859, they could support Wiremu Kīngi as a wronged subject of Her Majesty, but to stand behind Pōtatau was a step too far. The Kīngitanga challenged the whole idea that the empire, combining Christianity and civilisation under the Crown, was essential to the well-being of Māori. Yet the Kīngitanga would have its European supporters, who also debated the rights and wrongs of action against it in the imperial press. The differences between the two humanitarian responses are significant.

Storey explains the extent to which the colonial voices aligned themselves with Indigenous political positions, or even defended Indigenous violence, through the need, or the perceived need, to maintain colonial reputations elsewhere in the empire, particular among prospective migrants. In the end, there is something too impersonal in this explanation. Storey acknowledges that Māori participation in civil society, the ability to know what was occurring in colonial newspapers, was a key part of a colonial rhetoric which often downplayed the threat of violence and recognised Indigenous humanity. However, this needs to be taken one step further. Those who defended Māori, particularly Māori engaged in acts of violence, didn't just know the Māori world better; they were coming to the defence of Māori they knew well. Settlers and colonial officials took uncomfortable political stances because of the personal relationships they had with Indigenous leaders.

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