

‘EXTENDED BY IRON RUTHLESSNESS’: ANTHONY TROLLOPE, THE WAIKATO WAR, AND EMPIRE IN THE TEACHING OF NEW ZEALAND HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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TROLLOPE’S TRAVELS

‘It is indeed impossible’, wrote the famed British author Anthony Trollope in *Australia and New Zealand*, ‘to write even a fraction of a book about New Zealand’ that has no chapter on Māori, for ‘in our thoughts and conversations about New Zealand at home we take more heed of [them] and their battles than any other details concerning the colony.’ Trollope’s book was a by-product of an 1872 journey he and his wife took to see their son, who had taken up sheep farming in New South Wales. ‘[W]e do not forget’, he continued, ‘that within ten years from this date we had 10,000 British soldiers fighting in New Zealand, with by no means triumphant success’.

Trollope is right in recollecting that a decade earlier the newspapers were full of tumultuous events in the island colony, especially when British troops invaded Waikato to gain by force what had not been gained by negotiation:

The acquisition of the Valley of the Waikato, which contains excellent land, was a great thing done. The natives by the treaty of Waitangi, had been declared to be owners of the land, – and the difficulty of buying land from them was great. There was trouble in getting it from them unfairly; – more trouble in getting it fairly. But acquisition by war settled all this.

Empire saturates Trollope’s writing, often in sardonic ways that are consistent with his assessment of the Waikato campaign.

Trollope’s work is a useful point of entry for thinking about the persistent significance of the Waikato War and of the empire itself. Was the empire progressive or oppressive; a force for good or just force; a rule of law and order or a lawless rule? These questions lead us into debate over New Zealand’s external relations, which have been so powerfully shaped by the country’s experience of empire. New Zealand history has been rethought from the perspective of the iwi and hapū that opposed the Crown in the Waikato War – from the perspective of the defeated, not the victor. This essay revisits the country’s place in the empire and in the contemporary world, informed by awareness of the contested legacies of the Waikato War. After briefly surveying the place of empire in Trollope’s writing, it will address the theme in three ways. First, by considering the debates about empire that characterised the roughly ten years on either side of the Waikato War. Second, by assessing how the critique of empire is explored in the Aotearoa New Zealand Histories curriculum. Third, by considering the legacies of empire and anti-imperialism in New Zealand’s international relations through the Cold War and post-Cold War years.

TROLLOPE ON EMPIRE

Trollope was a public servant in Ireland for more than 15 years. Although he was an utterly 'Anglo'-Irishman, his first two novels, which had Irish settings, captured the colonial character of Irish life (his last incomplete novel, also set in Ireland, had an embittered tone absent from the earlier writing). Thirteen years on, *Framley Parsonage*, one of the popular Bassetshire novels which might be expected, Austen-style, to have an exclusively English focus, showed Trollope's gift for picking up the flavour of 'empire' conversations: 'We'll begin by explaining to them the benefits of civilization' ... '[But] we sent our felons to Australia, and they began the work for us. And as to America, we exterminated the people instead of civilizing them'. 'We did not exterminate the inhabitants of India' ... 'Nor have we attempted to Christianize them'.

George Walker at Suez and *The Bertrams* depict the middle-class traveller in an 'un-English, oriental and inconvenient' setting populated not just by Muslims, but by 'Oriental' Christians such as the Egyptian Copts. Modernity has replaced religion as the marker defining 'us' versus 'them'.

In *Phineas Finn* (ch. 36), 'the highest duty imposed upon us as a nation' is 'the management of India'. But the author immediately undercuts that, telling us that 'any allusion to our Eastern Empire will certainly empty [the House of Commons]!' The colonial service career of the father of the unhappy female protagonist in *He Knew He Was Right* is presented in negative and sceptical terms (his career has concluded in the inaptly named Mandarin Islands).

At the heart of the massive stock-market fraud perpetrated on the British investing public by the ultimate outsider-insider Augustus Melmotte in *The Way We Live Now* is a supposed South-Central Pacific and Mexican railway. Ferdinand Lopez, another outsider-insider, plays an analogous role in *The Prime Minister*, with 'exile' to Guatemala his expected fate.

And then there was Trollope's travel writing, which not only examined Australia and New Zealand but also the West Indies, the United States and Canada, and South Africa. This was full of wry comment and salutary insight, if not free from patriotic fervour. Trollope had little time for earnest slavery abolitionists, whilst in an affirming biography he argued that Lord Palmerston's handling of the rebellion in India was among his finest moments: 'India had been ours, and must be ours'.

Trollope's writing about New Zealand – which got fictional treatment only in the short story *Catherine Carmichael* and at arm's length in the late novel *The Fixed Period* – and about the invasion of Waikato sits therefore in the context of writing about the British Empire and the global reach of British power. Both were realities, but sharply contested ones.

EMPIRE DEBATES, 1857–1867

In many stimulating monographs, contemporary scholars have drawn attention to linkages between episodes of unrest – and worse – in different parts of the British empire through these years. The episodes most often instanced are the Indian rebellion of 1857–58, the New Zealand Wars, and the short-lived but bloodily suppressed Morant Bay uprising in Jamaica in October 1865. We could add the intervention of Britain and other powers in China, culminating in the Treaties of Tientsin (Tianjin) which ‘opened’ China to foreign commerce. Tony Ballantyne’s writing on connections between the rebellion in India and the wars in New Zealand and Charlotte Macdonald’s research on the ‘garrison colony’ have reminded us of this imperial context to New Zealand’s colonial history. In her instructive *The 1857 Uprising and the British Empire*, Jill Bender tracks how the Indian rebellion became a point of reference for colonial authorities facing unrest in other parts of the empire, including New Zealand and Jamaica. In her study of Governor Edward Eyre of Jamaica (earlier, a Lieutenant-Governor in New Zealand), Julie Evans remarks that ‘for members of the European community in Jamaica, it was as though the revolution in Haiti, the slave rebellions in America, and the Sepoy uprising in India had all occurred at Morant Bay on 11 October 1865’.

Here I want to briefly touch on ways the way the Waikato War and Māori–Crown conflict generally – a contest about empire, as we can infer from Trollope’s strictures – was mirrored in other episodes of imperial unrest. While the *Daily Southern Cross* reported on 10 September 1858 that the commentary on India of a Mr Layard was a matter of ‘English libels on England’, the sympathetic *Nelson Examiner* reported Layard’s lecture in full a couple of weeks later. “‘We shall conquer India again’”, it reported Layard stating, “‘but when we have reconquered it, what shall we do with it?’” His answer was unequivocal: ‘You may have a Council, and must have a Council which shall control your Indian Government at home, but India itself must be governed in India [cheers].’ Some New Zealand readers would not have been convinced. Bender cites concerns that reportage of the unrest in India in the Māori-language press might stir rebellion in the colony.

‘There must be very few of his New Zealand friends’, wrote *The Press* in March 1866, ‘who can fail to be grieved at the position in which [former Lieutenant-Governor Eyre] is placed’. But the Auckland Baptist minister P.H. Cornford, who had served ten years in Jamaica, was one. His passionate denunciation of the suppression of the Morant Bay uprising, which was reported in the *Daily Southern Cross* under the heading ‘Baptists and Barbarities in Jamaica’, predictably elicited invective in the correspondence columns. ‘There is, unfortunately’, wrote one Joseph Sturge (likely pseudonymous – the late Joseph Sturge was a prominent Quaker and abolitionist) ‘a class of men professedly very religious, who, unaccountably enough, regard all their brethren endowed with a dark skin as angels, and who, still more unaccountably, regard as the opposite of angels all who are not of the same opinion on this subject as themselves.’

No commentator drew the connections between the Waikato War and other policies of imperial coercion as explicitly as Goldwin Smith, a passionately anti-clerical and anti-imperialist figure, who from 1858 to 1866 held the Regius Professorship of History at the University of Oxford. He was to be active in the Jamaica Committee, established in 1865 to seek the dismissal and prosecution of Governor Eyre, but two years earlier his eyes were on events in New Zealand:

We assume the right of intruding ourselves into the territory of these people on the ground that they are savages, and that we are civilised men. We then affect to deal with them as though they were as civilised and as capable of comprehending the real effect of all treaties and bargains as ourselves; and when they fly from a treaty or bargain, the consequences of which they find to be their ruin, we visit them with the penalties of war and confiscation.

The colony's Postmaster-General, Crosbie Ward, who was in London at the time seeking a loan, responded to Goldwin Smith, focusing primarily on the willingness of Māori to have settlers among them and the civilizing purposes of British settlement. Smith gave him short shrift. This time he placed Waikato in the imperial context:

We shall exterminate the Maoris for their land, and then we shall come down to prayers. Let Mr. Ward ... reckon up on the one side the number of people who have perished by our wars, mutinies, and bombardments in India, Burmah, China, Afghanistan, Japan, the Australian, New Zealand, and Cape Colonies; let him add to this number the Chinese, whom we have poisoned body and soul by our opium, or who will perish in the confusion which our opium wars, by ruining the native government, have produced. ... Let him then calculate how many of the heathens have, according to any credible estimate, been converted to Christianity in the scenes of our conquests. He will, I think, see some reason to doubt whether the conqueror's sword or the rifle of the exterminating colonist is the chosen instrument for christianising the world.

In sum, debate about the Waikato War was part of a larger ongoing debate about the justice or injustice of empire.

TEACHING EMPIRE IN TIMARU AND TĪRAU

If the outcome of the events of 1857 to 1867 reinforced the hegemony of empire – with India under British direct rule, the Māori population of the North Island soon to be overwhelmed by migrants and the famed Treaty to be declared a 'nullity', and an end to representative institutions in Jamaica – critics and criticism of the Empire nonetheless persisted.

The British Empire structured New Zealand's engagement with the world for nearly another century. It is plausible, therefore, to see the Waikato War and debate over the morality and legitimacy of the empire as two parts of the same story. Yet today there is relatively little awareness of this connection.

A key knowledge area in the new history curriculum for years 9–10 under ‘Whakapapa me te whanaungatanga’ (culture and identity) is ‘international conflicts’. Questions asked include:

How has our involvement in international conflicts changed over time? How does this reflect our changing view of Aotearoa New Zealand’s role in the world? What and who do we now remember and not remember? How does this shape our current ideas about national identity?

The curriculum document’s ‘second big idea’ is that ‘colonisation began as part of a worldwide imperial project’. The latter point is instructive, but the use of ‘began’ is not. It implies that at some point colonisation (more aptly termed ‘colonialism’, as the Royal Society of New Zealand expert advisory panel on the curriculum has argued) in New Zealand ceased to be part of a ‘worldwide imperial project’. But even a cursory examination of New Zealand history in the century following the Waikato War shows that was not the case.

Commemorations on Anzac Day and year-round acknowledgement of the heroism and sacrifices of New Zealand forces, whether tangata whenua, Pākehā or other groups, will be familiar to most students. In asking them to think about the conflicts which they also commemorate, whether in terms of participation (from patriotism to protest) or remembrance (‘what and who do we now remember and not remember?’), awareness of empire is fundamental.

Britain’s ‘worldwide imperial project’ provides the indispensable context for New Zealand participation in the South African War (1899–1902), the Gallipoli and Palestine campaigns in the First World War, the Mediterranean theatre in the Second World War, and the Malayan Emergency and Confrontation of 1948–66.

That would not have surprised Apirana Ngata who, as global conflict loomed in 1939, thundered on 25 July to his fellow MPs that they were part of ‘an Empire founded on blood and rapine! An Empire extended by iron ruthlessness, the treading down of primitive peoples! That is the Empire which is saying now to its latest rivals “you must not do it”’. Ngata was calling for more ‘iron ruthlessness’, but his rhetoric is nevertheless a window on a contested history, a contested empire.

The curriculum understands this in respect of Aotearoa–Pacific relations, which are justifiably given special attention at years 7–8. But the school students who are asked to reflect on the failings of New Zealand’s Samoa policy could be asked to ponder a year or two later why New Zealand soldiers were part of a force invading Ottoman Turkey in 1915. This was, after all, a country on the other side of the world with which New Zealand had no quarrel, and which until a few years before the war had been a British ally. They might ask why New Zealand forces participated in the ‘defence’ of Egypt in 1941–43 when most Egyptians did not want to be defended. They might draw connections between those Egyptians, other reluctant imperial subjects, and the fate of Waikato Māori.

ALLIANCE POLITICS AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH SINCE THE END OF EMPIRE

Formal empires spanning multiple continents and oceans were dismantled – often violently – in the decades after the Second World War. But, it is worth asking, could the newly independent states – the so-called ‘third’ world – in Asia and Africa and beyond carve out truly independent places in a global system dominated by US–Soviet competition, and in which informal hegemonies persisted, including in the Pacific?

What had once been a debate within the empire – what kinds of rule, what kinds of self-determination, what kinds of economic self-reliance – became campaigns by newly independent nations to give political and economic substance to their independence. Collectively, this was expressed in initiatives such as the Bandung conference (1955), the Non-Aligned Movement (1961–), the G77 of developing economies (1964–), and calls for a New International Economic Order (NIEO, 1974–).

What was New Zealand’s stance? Through the Cold War, colonial independence movements were often suspected of enabling the expansion of international communism. New Zealand governments hewed close to Britain, the former imperial power, and the United States, the new hegemonic power, and chose not to participate in most third-world initiatives. There were exceptions, but they were idiosyncratic. Robert Muldoon, as prime minister from 1975 to 1984, was a passionate advocate for the NIEO, but he was opposed to the African quest to decolonise white-ruled South Africa. Others were passionate about ending the role of nuclear weapons in the defence of New Zealand, but for most such a stance did not extend to a broader political, anti-colonial solidarity with third-world countries.

Parallel questions have arisen in the twenty first century. It is not hard to detect an anti-colonial legacy of the Waikato War in New Zealand’s adherence to the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Similarly, in the opposition to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and China’s suppression of Uyghur, Tibetan and Hong Kong rights.

But beyond such stances, there are inconsistencies. In a recent op-ed, ‘How New Zealand helped to shape racist world order’, published by Stuff on 18 November 2022, international relations scholar Nina Hall pointed to the fear by successive New Zealand governments of too rapid decolonisation in the Pacific. Despite the present government having Māori foreign and defence ministers, some of its statements on diplomatic initiatives by states such as Kiribati and Solomon Islands have a paternalist tone at odds with support for Pacific autonomy.

The war in Ukraine has triggered a revival of ‘the West’ as shorthand for the United States and its allies who are backing Ukraine. ‘Global West’ is also heard, acknowledging the role of Asia-Pacific states in that coalition. New Zealand is manifestly and justifiably part of this ‘axis of outrage’.

New Zealand's alignment has been crafted in value terms: 'New Zealand has publicly stated that it will stand committed to liberal international values, US-led Western security commitments and in opposition to authoritarianism at home and abroad', in the words of security analyst Paul Buchanan. But in the context of New Zealand's colonial history, can 'liberal international values' be deployed without reflection?

The Global South, as the third world is now most frequently identified, is not part of the 'axis of outrage', in part because of a sense that there are numerous other global matters to be angry about. A line can be drawn between Goldwin Smith's 'I do not question that every step of this process of spoliation has been duly consecrated by legal and diplomatic formalities' and the skepticism many Global South countries have about the organization and procedures of the contemporary international economic order. This has been heightened in recent years by challenges in securing favourable pathways on the interrelated issues of climate change, vaccine diplomacy, indebtedness and food security.

New Zealand is receptive to those concerns, but commentator Geoffrey Miller noted of Prime Minister Ardern's General Assembly of the United Nations address in September 2022 that 'a notable omission ... was any mention of the word "food", which stood out as a major theme in addresses from many countries in the Global South.'

This omission can be placed in the context of United Nations history. Debate on how to give effect to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 produced 18 years later not a single document but two: a covenant on civil and political rights (ICCPR), and another on economic, social and cultural rights (ICESCR). This compromise was partly a product of Cold War rivalries but also reflected differences between a developed world focused on individual freedom and a developing world focused on collective survival. It is not fanciful to draw lines from this contrast back to the rival stances of the combatants in the Waikato War.

The resort to notions of Western or liberal values overlooks the importance of advancing both elements in human rights discourse. That many authoritarian governments in the Global South stigmatize human rights as 'Western' only underlines this.

Nor are the two strands mutually exclusive. It is true that many Global South governments have problematic dealings with their indigenous populations. But most also have a plethora of organizations voicing indigenous concerns. The political vigour of the contemporary Māori world is mirrored throughout the Global South. It is also visible in the advances the large Latin American countries and most southern African states have made in LGBTQI++ and environmental rights. And it is on show in Indonesia's generation-old democracy, and in the persistence in India of vigorously contested elections, thriving civil society organizations and an occasionally courageous Supreme Court, despite an ever-more hegemonic ruling political party.

TROLLOPE'S FAREWELL

Anthony Trollope's strictures on the Waikato War did him no harm in the colony. *Australia and New Zealand* was published in 1873, including an edition 'for circulation in the Australasian colonies only.' Notices in the New Zealand press were favourable, if slight. A decade is a lifetime in a colony a generation old, and all the talk, at least in political and press circles, was of loans, migrants, railways, roads, ports and burgeoning towns. So it was elsewhere in the empire. Māori? 'They are certainly more highly gifted than other savage nations I have seen. ... But in regard to their future, – there is hardly a place for hope', Trollope concluded.

But history proved the error of that prediction, and the divided tale of the Waikato War remains as relevant to Aotearoa New Zealand in the 2020s as it was when Trollope inspected these islands 150 years ago. It remains, therefore, a compelling means for students to grasp New Zealand's legacies of acceptance of and resistance to empire, and to understand and analyse New Zealand's places in the world.

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