

Te Akatea Conference 2014

Keynote Address

Wednesday 27 August 2014
1:15pm – 2:45pm

‘The Treaty of Waitangi: How we got it and how we killed it: A World-Systems Perspective’.

Introduction

Scope of the talk:

The nexus of British policy and commercial activity – a World Systems Perspective

When assessing the modus of British imperial expansion in 1819, Sir Stamford Raffles – who had established a British settlement in Singapore the same year – concluded that ‘...[o]ur object is not territory but trade, a great commercial emporium...whence we may extend our influence politically’. It was an ambiguous summation. Commercial, territorial, and political expansion might have been regarded nominally as separate pursuits, but as the latter part of the statement concedes, trade typically became the precursor to greater political and territorial aspirations. Throughout the 1820s, this ambiguity became apparent in the case of Britain’s relations with New Zealand. The eagerness of private British interests to expand their commercial activities in New Zealand was counterbalanced by dogged official British reluctance for political entanglement in territories where it had no existing presence or commitments. Most of the historiography on this era rightly reflects this dichotomy of private commercial enthusiasm for British imperial expansion set against a backdrop of general state hesitance and vacillation over any possible enlargement of the Empire in the South Pacific at this time.

There is room for both an extension of, and in part, a departure from that conventional representation. What I want to survey here is the evolving nature of both the commercial and official relationship between Britain and New Zealand in the three decades period preceding the Treaty of Waitangi in the specific context of the core-periphery construct – a framework that lies at the heart of the historical social scientist Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems theory. As a corollary to this theory, it is crucial to explore the role of the

neighbouring British colony of New South Wales during this time in its capacity as what Wallerstein categorised in his world-system as a semi-periphery state. The intention here is not to extend the analysis to an in-depth critique of Wallerstein's theory itself, but rather, to utilise aspects of it as a means of interpreting events in the period under review, and in the process develop an alternative explanation for the dynamics of British colonial policy relating to New Zealand in the 1820s. In taking this approach, I would like to build, to some extent, on Tony Ballantyne's recent revision of the '...old imperial history tradition...' of British empire-building. And although, as Ballantyne notes, the metropole-periphery binary is less reflective of the British Empire than the metaphor of a web, the specific theoretical model of a world-system in the form devised by Wallerstein adds the intermediary stage of a semi-periphery, which is a crucial departure from that binary construct.

Although Britain's official policy during the 1820s was ostensibly opposed to the extension of its political dominion to encompass New Zealand, the expansion of private commercial and other activities in the territory fostered New Zealand's growing economic dependence on New South Wales in particular, which in turn began to orient aspects of British policy (as directed principally by the colonial government in New South Wales) by the end of the 1820s in a way that anticipated a greater level of official British intervention in New Zealand in the following decade.

One of the themes that emerges from this analysis is that while private and state objectives in this period superficially appeared at odds with each other – and have typically been represented as such – in the context of world-systems theory, they were part of a single and systematic process: 'two sides of the same coin'. In Wallerstein's construction of a world-system (a system which he saw as encroaching rapidly into the non-European areas of the world by the nineteenth century), nations were classified as being either core, semi-periphery, or periphery states. In such a framework, the relationship between Britain, New South Wales and New Zealand in the 1820s can be described as one of core, semi-periphery, and periphery respectively. The systematic extension of European-based capitalism throughout the world at this time, and the ensuing dependency on the core that it produced among periphery territories, was presented by Wallerstein as being part of the culmination of three centuries of capitalist encroachment and exploitation, rather than the consequence

of an ad hoc and ostensibly hesitant approach (in this case by the British) to imperial enlargement, as has been the general portrayal by historians.

The utility of applying this world-systems theory to the history of New Zealand's relationship with Britain and its Empire in the 1820s rests with the potential it offers to revise, to some extent, the conventional view that it was private British commercial activity in New Zealand during this time that eventually compelled the British Government reluctantly to formulate policies on the territory in the following decade – policies that were initially a reaction to private capitalist expansion, and that almost inadvertently became a prelude to greater official intervention, leading eventually to annexation. Wallerstein's theory also provides a conceptual basis when accounting for the significance of New South Wales in this period as a semi-periphery state, mediating between the core and the periphery in a manner that advances the expansion of the capitalist world-system and entrenches the exploitation of the newly-established periphery territory.

At a more general level, the application of world-systems theory to New Zealand in this era illustrates the interpretive potential afforded by the employment of particular theoretical perspectives, and how such perspectives can broaden the understanding of various events – specifically in this case relating to the relationships between imperial powers, colonies, and unclaimed territories – in a way that offers a structuralist challenge to existing presumptions about the nature of British colonial policy development in this era.

It was during the nineteenth century, according to Wallerstein, that the European model of aggressive capitalism finally spread to its fullest extent, incorporating finally the entire world. The generation of unprecedented levels of capital by many European economies at this time resulted in a correspondingly unprecedented degree of commercial expansion into those territories on the periphery of this system – territories which were subsequently subject to exploitation by the capitalist core. He summarised this centuries-long process as 'a constant and patterned movement between groups of economic actors as to who...occup[ied] various positions in the hierarchy of production, profit, and consumption'.

In Wallerstein's construction of this world-system, the 1800s was the culmination of the preceding four centuries of accelerating globalisation by selected European economies

(rather than a more immediate and spontaneous phenomenon), and was driven by the desire for the 'ceaseless' accumulation of capital by the European core. Among the consequences of this process of European capitalist enlargement was the emergence of a global capitalist system characterised by the *structural* exploitation of periphery nations. In the world-system, no allowance is given to colonial expansion occurring incidentally, or without an overarching policy, as is sometimes presented in the case of Britain's evolving policies on New Zealand in the two decades preceding the cession of sovereignty in 1840. On the contrary, every action and inaction, every policy or absence of policy, and every decision or failure to decide, is portrayed in the world-system model as leading inexorably to the increased and entrenched exploitation of periphery territories – the theory does not allow for an alternative outcome.

One of the key characteristics of the core-periphery relationship – that of its interconnectivity – was summarised by another world-systems theorist, Andre Gunder Frank, who emphasised the central role of an interconnected system of exploitation that was fundamental to the process of nations being drawn into the periphery of global capitalism:

...it is this exploitative relation which in chain-like fashion extends the link between the capitalist world and national metropolises to the regional centers (part of whose surplus they appropriate), and from these to local centers, and so on to large landowners or merchants who expropriate surplus from small peasants....

Wallerstein's theoretical framework of the world-system can be used as a way to re-contextualise conventional historical analyses of nation-states – positioning them in an historical setting that is necessarily global, with a span of several centuries, being part of a single division of labour encompassing the entire world, and with a single system of the control of capital. It is the predominance of this systematic nature of global capitalism and exploitation which is at the heart of the theory. To paraphrase Shakespeare, 'all the world's a system and all the nation-states merely players'.

However, Wallerstein avoided an over-simplified binary conception of the international core-periphery relationship by introducing the notion of a semi-periphery – a model which this article suggests has the potential to be applied to and to explain aspects of the evolving relationship between New Zealand, New South Wales, and Britain in the 1820s. While core nations, Wallerstein argued, typically possessed high-profit, high-wage, and high-technology economies with diversified production, and while periphery territories were represented as the opposite (low-wage, low-profit, and low-technology economies with little diversification of production), he admitted into his construct of the world-system the role of the semi-periphery state, which shared some traits of both core and periphery zones. The semi-periphery was partly a descriptive category in itself, and partly a device employed to analyse and describe change within the predominately two-tiered world-system. Additional distinctions were subsequently made by other world-systems theorists to account for the appearance of structural inequalities *within* nation-states, with the role of ethnicity, class, gender, and other divisions being given more prominence in analyses of the workings of the world-system in order to explain the existence of these internal structural inequalities.

In Wallerstein's analysis, one of the factors that propelled the expansion of European capitalism across the world in the nineteenth century was the requirement for the ascendant economies of the core to secure access to natural resources in peripheral zones, variously through formal or *de facto* annexation, wars of conquest, diplomatic activity, the introduction of new technologies, or by other means. It is argued here that the economic benefit Britain derived throughout the 1820s from extracting raw materials from New Zealand drew the latter into the world-system through the agency of New South Wales acting as a semi-periphery zone. However, militating against Wallerstein's longer-term prognosis of periphery nations usually existing permanently in an exploited and dependent state was the gradual overturning of New Zealand's status as a periphery nation following its annexation in 1840, after which time substantial British immigration led to the country becoming one of the Empire's so-called 'white colonies'. This transition highlighted the nexus of race and capitalist exploitation as part of the equation of dependency, and how shifts in the racial balance of a state can lead, in certain circumstances, to transitions in some core-periphery relationships.

Legislative Breaches of the Treaty

Almost from the time the Treaty was signed, the Crown breached its provisions. Some of this was a result of the confusion surrounding the text. Part of the problem lay with the text of the Treaty itself. For example, Article Two of the Treaty imposed the Crown's right of preemption, while Article Three asserted that Maori had the same rights and privileges as British subjects – including, presumably, the right to sell their land without restrictions such as the preemption provision. In 1844, the Crown temporarily suspended the preemption provision of the Treaty because it felt that it was unfair to Maori.

However, from the late 1840s, the Crown's desire to secure more land for the increasing numbers of settlers arriving in the colony resulted in many of the Treaty's provisions being breached.

Through wars of conquest, the Crown 'confiscated' millions of acres of Maori land, and later sold much of this land to settlers. What land the Crown did not alienate through war, it succeeded in acquiring through legislation, much of which was specifically designed to speed up the process of obtaining Maori land.

This process continued throughout the nineteenth century, and in more subtle ways into the twentieth century. The results of these deliberate breaches of the Treaty were startling. From a total of 66,400,000 acres of land that Maori possessed at the time of the signing of the Treaty in 1840, by the end of the century, the amount of land owned by Maori had been reduced to 11,079,486 acres. Continued pressures for Maori to sell their land, coupled with legislation that forced Maori land alienation, resulted in Maori land-holdings declining to around 3,000,000 acres by the early 1980s —less than 5 per cent of the land held just 150 years earlier.

(Discuss from the following):

Waste Lands Act 1854

Enabled the superintendent and council of any Province to recommend to the Governor the sale of Crown lands within its boundaries. This accelerated Maori alienation from the land.

Native Reserves Act 1856

Commissioners, appointed by the Government, were able to control Maori reserve land which was not “under active use”.

Native Land Act 1862

Overtly removed the Crown right of pre-emption. It also gave encouragement to the Native Land Court to redefine the status of Maori land, from being communal to being individually owned (and therefore transferable).

New Zealand Settlements Act 1863

Gave the Government the right to confiscate any Maori land where the Maori occupants were considered to be “in rebellion”.

Native Land Act 1867

Specific Maori owners had to be listed in the title. This failed to recognise tribal land.

Peace Preservation Bill 1879

One year’s hard labour was proposed for those Maori who refused to leave their abode after a Government order.

Maori Prisoners’ Act 1880

200 Maori arrested in Taranaki for preventing the surveying of confiscated land.

West Coast Settlement Act 1880

Maori could be arrested without a warrant if they hindered any surveying of land.

Native Reserves Act 1881

Control of Maori Reserve land is taken over by the Public Trustee.

Native Lands Administration Act 1886

Maori land control turned over to small groups of trustees with the right of sale.

Native Land Act 1887

Large scale direct purchase of Maori land enabled.

West Coast Settlement Reserves Act 1892

Allowed the Public Trustee to confiscate 81,000 hectares of “idle” Maori land.

Native Land Purchase and Acquisition Act 1893

This enabled the Crown to “acquire” any land it felt was suitable for settlement.

Advance to Settlers Act 1894

Low-interest loans made available to European settlers to buy Crown land.

Maori Land Settlement Act 1894

Maori land put under control of local councils with no Maori representation.

Tohunga Suppression Act 1908

Penalties imposed on Tohunga (Maori experts in areas such as medicine, history and so forth).

Native Health Act 1909

Maori no longer permitted to use the whangai system to adopt children.

Maori Affairs Act 1953

Some unoccupied Maori land was declared waste land and taken over by the Government.

Town and Country Planning Act 1953

Special restrictions imposed on Maori wishing to build on their land.

Maori Affairs Amendment Act 1967

Maori trustee had the right to request individuals to sell their land to the Crown. Land owned by fewer than four Maori people had to be put under one title.

Rating Act 1967

Maori freehold land subject to rates.

Maori Fisheries Act 1992

Maori ownership of fisheries limited to a maximum of ten per cent.

Maori Responses

As the Crown relentlessly pursued policies that openly breached the Treaty, Maori were far from passive about these incursions on the agreement they had viewed as a Kawenata [covenant] with the Crown. There were various reactions and responses to the breaches of the Treaty in the approximately 150 years since the Treaty was signed. These have included war, attempts at representation, and persistent lobbying. The following points represent a brief selection at some of the attempts made by various Maori groups to support the status of the Treaty.

1881

The settlement at Parihaka, which was established by Maori as a non-violent point of resistance to Crown actions, was occupied by British troops. Over a thousand occupants were evicted and many were arrested. A special law was passed allowing the leaders of the community to be imprisoned indefinitely.

1882

A delegation of Nga Puhi chiefs, led by Parore, petition the Queen over grievances under the Treaty

1877

Wi Parata v The Bishop of Wellington. This case determined that the Treaty of Waitangi, if unsupported by specific legislation, did not confer particular Maori land rights.

1884

Delegation led by the head of the King Movement, King Tawhiao, travelled to England, but was unable to get access or receive support for their grievances.

1884

Tawhiao petitioned Parliament to ban the sale of alcohol from territory administered by the King Movement. This represented an attempt to combine Maori authority with that of the Crown in a form of partnership.

1892

A hundred Maori chiefs attempt to unify all tribes under the Treaty. Separate Maori Parliament sessions were held until 1902 when its lack of interest and power led to its demise.

1890s

A Maori Rights Bill was introduced into Parliament in 1894 in order to seek to confirm the rights that had been articulated in the Treaty of Waitangi. When the Bill was tabled, the European members walked out of the House, and in 1896, Parliament rejected the Bill.

1900

James Carroll became the first Maori MP to enter Cabinet.

1900

The Maori Councils Act passed by Parliament. It promoted very limited self-development for Maori.

1924

Ratana took a deputation to England, but on the advice of the New Zealand Government, he was denied access to the King. Ratana saw the requirement to uphold the Treaty as part of his effort to rescue the 'doomed race' that he believed Maori were becoming.

1932

A petition tabled in Parliament by Tirikatene (based on Ratana's plan to have the Treaty ratified). However, the petition was held over for 13 years.

1975

The Land March united many Maori from different iwi around the country in an endeavour to pressure the Government to redress grievances arising from breaches of the Treaty. The March converged on Parliament during the third reading of the Treaty of Waitangi Bill.