



# Australia and New Zealand: Turning Shared Pasts into a Shared History

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## Abstract

Australia and New Zealand have a shared past, but not a shared history. A project at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand addresses this problem by exploring the relationship between the two countries on multiple levels – political, intellectual, cultural, social and economic – from the 1880s to 2000. It analyses the nature of Australia – New Zealand ties, where they are strongest and weakest, and how they have changed. The investigators are collaborating to address the deficits in knowledge about trans-Tasman relations – beyond foreign affairs – since the 1880s. This missing knowledge of trans-Tasman ties impoverishes both national stories and the quality of public commentary.

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Australia and New Zealand ignore each other when telling their national stories. A research project at the University of Canterbury aims to address this problem by exploring the Australia – New Zealand relationship on multiple levels – political, intellectual, cultural, social and economic – from the 1880s to 2000. Titled ‘Anzac Neighbours: 100 years of multiple ties between New Zealand and Australia’, this project by three University of Canterbury colleagues – two historians and a political scientist – has received a grant from the Royal Society of New Zealand’s Marsden Fund to hunt for an answer as to why the two Southern Hemisphere countries share various pasts but neglect their common history, and to disclose the continuing ties and flows between them. After all, there is a remarkable similarity in their flags, which share the same stubborn commitment to the Union Jack and the same reference to their common place, heavenly speaking, under the Southern Cross.

Together, Australia and New Zealand once wore the name ‘Australasia’, and the ‘Anzac Neighbours’ team seek to confirm the continued existence of this region even though the collective label has fallen into disuse. In part, this project is the offspring of the Blackwell History of the World volume, *A History of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific*, where Donald Denoon and Philippa Mein Smith found that they were, indeed, writing about a coherent region, even though it no longer had a name.<sup>1</sup> This Blackwell history argues that the naming of places is a political act.

Australasia emerged as a political and cultural entity with European settlement, and regional relations survive despite its submergence; if anything, Australasia has resurfaced as an idea as globalisation has gathered force. We can see this in the categories chosen for *History Compass*.

In a keynote address at the Australian Historical Association Conference in 2002, Donald Denoon argued that the Australasian dimension of their joint pasts is a 'repressed memory', which historians have airbrushed out of both Australian and New Zealand historiographies.<sup>2</sup> The term 'Australasia' was first used in the eighteenth century – even before Captain James Cook – by de Brosse in 1756, and entered the English language as referring to the lands south of Asia. By the late nineteenth century its purview had shrunk to the sphere of British influence in the South Pacific, and Australia and New Zealand were commonly referred to as 'the seven colonies of Australasia'. Historians since have erased this name and the connections associated with it from both Australian and New Zealand history, as if they wanted to forget that New Zealand and the Australian colonies were part of 'Australasia' before 1901. Yet this community of interests was 'real', as James Belich also recognises, even if it was a bit vague or fuzzy around the edges.<sup>3</sup> By 'fuzzy' we mean that contemporaries were unclear over whether the place and community called Australasia included 'all the colonies in the southern seas' – the British ones, that is – as well as New Zealand and the Australian continent.<sup>4</sup>

The problem is that neither country's historians have given due credit to the influence of the other, so the first task for a new historical approach to the study of both nations' stories together is to interweave historiographies that have evolved separately – as had to be done for the Blackwell history of Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific. For one hundred years, scholars on both sides of the Tasman Sea have produced national histories that ignore a shared past and neglect the historical parallels. From W. K. Hancock in 1930 through to the ten-volume 'slice' history written (and richly illustrated) for Australia's bicentenary in 1988, the Australian national story has excluded any mention of a common history with New Zealand.<sup>5</sup> This can be explained by a general historiographical shift from imperial to national history in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup>

The one exception is the debates in 1901 about whether New Zealand should join the Australian Commonwealth, and even the history of these has been treated separately on each side. It is only in the latest Australian literature that John Hirst, for example, relates Keith Sinclair's cultural interpretation from the 1980s that 'most New Zealanders did not want to become Australians' to the Australian national story, to support the case that sentiment dominated over business in the creation of Australia.<sup>7</sup> In the process, the book *The Sentimental Nation* opens up debate about cultural connections.

Pacific history tackled a more regionalist agenda in the early work of C. Hartley Grattan, but this reflected an interested American's perspective,

which saw the Pacific as a region that included the large rim countries and treated Australia and New Zealand as its southwestern quadrant.<sup>8</sup> The kind of Pacific history that evolved out of the Australian National University tradition under New Zealander J. W. Davidson after the Second World War concentrated on the oceanic islands and their contact histories. It left persistent boundaries between Pacific, Australian and New Zealand history, despite the direct explanatory relevance of New Zealand to an understanding of relations between indigenous peoples and new immigrant settlers, and of Australia to the experience of Papua New Guinea.

There have been some attempts to make Australasian comparisons, such as Kerry Howe's 1977 *Race Relations in Australia and New Zealand: a Comparative Survey*, Simon Ville's *Rural Entrepreneurs* about the stock and station agent industry, and other thematic studies that share an interest in colonialism.<sup>9</sup> Our co-investigator Shaun Goldfinch is the author of a political science monograph that compares the refashioning of the two countries' economic policies.<sup>10</sup> His thesis complements that in the Blackwell history, that identities in our region are created and transformed locally, though often shaped by ideas generated elsewhere: Goldfinch highlights institutional density as an influence. Environmentalists, too, have no difficulty in seeing Australasia as a region; for instance, Tim Flannery in his 'future eaters' thesis, and Jared Diamond in *Guns, Germs and Steel*.<sup>11</sup> It is historians who prefer the boundaries of the sovereign nation-state, producing separate Australian and New Zealand books, or separate chapters for books that supposedly discuss the two settler societies together. As A. G. Hopkins reflected at the end of the twentieth century, 'the tradition of arranging history so that it fits within national borders surely needs to be revised', with the passing of the age of empires.<sup>12</sup>

It may seem odd to the rest of the world, which is accustomed to considering Australia and New Zealand together, but polite, mutual ignorance is the norm in local historical and opinion-making circles. The well-regarded *End of Certainty: the Story of the 1980s*, by Australian journalist Paul Kelly, talks of 'the Australian Settlement' (in capitals) that endured for eight decades after Federation.<sup>13</sup> Its five planks – White Australia, arbitration, protection, 'state paternalism' and 'imperial benevolence' – are represented as unique and distinctively Australian. From the 'foundation idea' of White Australia to its 'bedrock ideology' of protection, arbitration is assumed to be an Australian institution based upon an Australian idea, the 'fair go' principle.<sup>14</sup> John Rickard, in his 1988 cultural history of Australia, likewise claims arbitration as a distinctive Australian institution, expressive of the national psyche.<sup>15</sup> In 2002, the concluding volume from the Australian National University's 'Reshaping Australian Institutions' Project reiterated that Australia was unusual for its system of tariff protection that underpinned the 'Australian Settlement'.<sup>16</sup> Yet the New Zealand historian Erik Olssen and others have demonstrated that these 'experiments' are as central to New Zealand as to Australian history.<sup>17</sup> Even

the social scientist Francis Castles describes industrial conciliation and arbitration as 'this most peculiar of Australian institutions', yet he argued in notable earlier work that the core concepts of the 'wage earners' welfare state' and the politics of 'domestic defence' also applied to New Zealand.<sup>18</sup>

At the July 2002 conference in Brisbane of the Australian Historical Association – the umbrella organisation for historians in Australia – an occasional whiff of condescension floated in the air as Kiwi papers were welcomed and Australian scholars expressed polite wonder at the richness and diversity of New Zealand historical scholarship. It was as though New Zealand continued to be marginal to the core business of Australian history. Again in September, a major international conference of the Association for Canadian Studies in Australia and New Zealand (ACSANZ) met in Canberra on the subject of possible converging futures, without a mention of New Zealand in either the conference's title or its agenda.<sup>19</sup> The continuing ignorance of New Zealand fictional literature in Australia compared to that from India or Canada is a phenomenon that regularly draws bemused comments from reviewers.

New Zealanders are just as guilty. They have absorbed the myth that New Zealand's 'Better Britons' are superior to the Australian Britons. New Zealanders lacked the taint of convictism, they were moulded by a vigorous, cooler climate, and they enjoyed relations with a superior type of 'native'.<sup>20</sup> New Zealand scholars have underwritten this tale of separate histories. The country's nationalist historian Keith Sinclair chose to focus primarily on the nineteenth century when writing for his edited collection *Tasman Relations*. He stridently demonstrated New Zealand's 'destiny apart', especially in respect to the country's allegedly better race relations.<sup>21</sup> Closer to our time, the *New Zealand Journal of History* chose to shape its millennium edition of 2000 around New Zealand in the Pacific as the theme for the twenty-first century. Remarkably, Australia was omitted entirely.<sup>22</sup> A string of recent publications with 'Australia and New Zealand' in their titles purport to bring the two countries' historical experiences together, but continue to address shared issues separately and do not go far beyond the making of comparisons.<sup>23</sup> Bob Catley, an Australian who was until recently Professor of Politics at the University of Otago, attempted to address the age-old question of whether New Zealand and Australia have a united future, but his analysis tends to the polemic.<sup>24</sup> Finally, James Belich in his latest grand synthesis of New Zealand history, *Paradise Reforged*, re-emphasises British at the expense of Australian connections, and argues that New Zealand departed its 'old, Tasman world' in 1901 for a re-colonial relationship with Britain.<sup>25</sup>

Since the publication of W. Pember Reeves' *State Experiments in Australia and New Zealand* and T. A. Coghlan's *Statistical Account of the Seven Colonies of Australasia* in 1902, few scholars have been bold enough to discuss both countries together as a continuing community of interests.<sup>26</sup> The problem

is that, a century later, there remains a significant gap in vital knowledge of the sustained nature of shared experiments in the twentieth century, the extent of continuing trans-Tasman ties and interactions, and their impact on both nations' respective identities. Historians always write for their generation, so it is unsurprising that we should want to fill this gap at the very moment that scholars internationally are seeking historical explanations that focus on interactions, transnational flows and transfers, the stuff of globalisation, to use the current term.

In New Zealand, the tide is gradually flowing towards a renewed interest in the importance of what are now its closest ties, with Australia. At the University of Canterbury, the New Zealand Historical Association conference in December 2001 ran a dedicated panel discussion on the teaching of Australian history in New Zealand. At the Australian Historical Association conference in July 2002, participants enthusiastically sought ways of better understanding Australia and New Zealand's shared histories, and Jill Roe, President of the AHA, used her welcoming address to call for a new CIR agreement with New Zealand: her term for Closer Intellectual Relations.

One highlight of this trend was the publication in May 2002 of the New Zealand parliamentary report on the country's economic and trade relationship with Australia, which foreshadows the twentieth anniversary of the free trade agreement known as CER (Closer Economic Relations) in 2003.<sup>27</sup> This report shows a refreshing lack of romanticism in assessing the real nature of the Australia – New Zealand relationship. In summing up the contemptuous familiarity with which New Zealanders and Australians sometimes treat one another, the New Zealand select committee quoted Simon Upton, who is currently at the OECD:

The truth may be, however, that the one-liners paper over a serious awkwardness that has grown, not narrowed, over the years. Australia is a big country that has to be taken seriously. We are, well ... in another league shall we say. But that shouldn't prevent a serious engagement. In fact, from New Zealand's point of view, it makes it even more imperative. Yet in my time as a parliamentarian, I had far more extensive contact with North American, Asian and European politicians, writers and business people than I did with Australians. It was assumed that Australia was a place you went on sporting missions or winter holidays and that all that inherited fluency would take care of itself. Well it doesn't.

The report concluded it is time that New Zealand made a twenty-year investment to build a generation of New Zealanders 'whose fluency with Australia extends beyond good-natured insults and cut-price weekends in Sydney'.<sup>28</sup>

The New Zealand government's response to this report, in October 2002, puts the onus back on universities to do something about this deficit in knowledge and understanding. The government agrees that it 'is vital that this most important of New Zealand's external relationships is

underpinned by rigorous analysis', and declares itself ready to encourage New Zealand tertiary institutions 'to increase their research capability and effectiveness on trans-Tasman issues in collaboration with Australian counterparts'.<sup>29</sup> It intends to discuss with the Australian government how that country might support these objectives. Such sentiments raise a fundamental problem with research on the trans-Tasman relationship. Australians will not take the initiative; New Zealand will have to do it. The trans-Tasman relationship is not on Australian radar screens because geopolitics dictate that Australia will always look to the United States as its logical comparator.

This brings us back to the 'Anzac Neighbours' research project, designed to capture this critical moment. Our team has been funded to carry out a three-year, multidisciplinary study of the trans-Tasman relationship on a series of fronts, during what we call the 'long twentieth century' – from the 1880s to the end of the twentieth century. We are starting from the premise that, whatever singular historical paths Australia and New Zealand took, these are undercut by continuing exchanges at levels of institutional organisation and public policy, and through mutual professional, intellectual and cultural influences. The 'Australian Settlement' was in fact a shared Antipodean settlement, centred on ethnic solidarity of the 'white races', oriented against aliens (especially blacks and Asians) and assuming that indigenous peoples were to die out or amalgamate with settler society. It was also a gender-based settlement, rendering women dependent on the state and with labour policies oriented towards male breadwinners. In this context, both countries were tied early into global economic strategies because they came late to European settlement and were isolated from their imperial founder, Britain.

Our project asks why an Australasian model of state development, including continuous, interactive flows both ways across the Tasman in public policy and cultural relations, evolved in distinctive ways during the twentieth century, and why this model was abandoned in tandem towards the end of that century. After examining the literature, we have established a set of propositions that we believe are at the heart of the relationship, and which require testing for their validity or otherwise. These are:

- That the 'Tasman world' that thrived at the end of the nineteenth century did not end with federation of the Australian colonies.
- That there have been significant linkages in the 'Antipodean response' to the restructurings of the world economy that have taken place during the crises of the 1890s, 1930s and 1980s.
- That the way in which ideas and policies have transferred across the Tasman has been historically conditioned by the 'density' of institutional and cultural factors on each side.
- That, in the construction of their separate national identities, New Zealanders and Australians influenced each other's to a greater degree, through common stories, than has been historically conceded (such

stories including the Anzac legend, sporting contests, migration experiences and intermarriage).

- That gender and race dynamics have been mutually informed and influenced by historical transfers of people and ideas since the days of colonial interaction in the nineteenth century, and through a common Anglo-Celtic ancestry.

This trans-Tasman project will not re-tell the well-known story of the defence relationship or differences in each country's foreign policy, although these will be necessary background. Instead, the project will focus on cultural relations since the 1880s, and on issues of public policy transfer and private commercial networks. Research has already begun into the flows of organisational and intellectual energy across the Tasman, in public services, educational and scientific institutions, and in government and private commercial sectors. Whether we are right that Australasia continued despite the separate paths – and names – taken by Australia and New Zealand from 1901 remains to be seen. Discovering where ties were weak is just as significant for the process of explanation as discovering where and why they were strong. Size and remoteness suggest that New Zealand will be the larger beneficiary of this research, but the hope is that both Australian and New Zealand histories will be the richer for more awareness of each other and their exchange of people and ideas.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> D. Denoon and P. Mein Smith, with M. Wyndham, *A History of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific*, The Blackwell History of the World (Oxford, Blackwell, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> D. Denoon, 'Alternative Australias', Keynote session, AHA conference, Brisbane, 3 July 2002; see also his Eldershaw Lecture, 'Re-membering Australasia', Hobart, Tasmania, 12 May 2002.

<sup>3</sup> J. Belich, *Paradise Reforged: a History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000* (Auckland, Allen Lane, 2001), pp. 46–7.

<sup>4</sup> New Zealand Federation Commission, Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives, Report A-4, 1901, pp. 558, 682.

<sup>5</sup> W. K. Hancock, *Australia* (London, Ernest Benn, 1930); A. D. Gilbert *et al.* (eds), *Australians: a Historical Library*, 11 vols (Sydney, Fairfax, Syme and Weldon Associates, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, S. Macintyre, 'Australia and the Empire', pp. 163–81, and J. Belich, 'Colonization and history in New Zealand', pp. 182–93, in *Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 5, *Historiography*, ed. R. W. Winks (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> J. Hirst, *The Sentimental Nation: the Making of the Australian Commonwealth* (Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2000); K. Sinclair, 'Why New Zealanders are not Australians: New Zealand and the Australian Federal Movement, 1881–1901', in *Tasman Relations: New Zealand and Australia, 1788–1988*, ed. K. Sinclair (Auckland, Auckland University Press, 1987), pp. 90–103.

<sup>8</sup> C. H. Grattan, *The Southwest Pacific Since 1900: a Modern History; Australia, New Zealand, the Islands, Antarctica* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1963).

<sup>9</sup> Monographs include K. R. Howe, *Race Relations in Australia and New Zealand: a Comparative Survey 1770s–1970s* (Auckland, Methuen, 1977); H. R. Jackson, *Churches and People in Australia and New Zealand 1860–1930* (Wellington, Allen & Unwin, 1987); W. D. Borrie, *The European Peopling of Australasia: a Demographic History, 1788–1988* (Canberra, Australian National University, 1994); S. P. Ville, *The Rural Entrepreneurs: a History of the Stock and Station Agent Industry in Australia and New Zealand* (New York and Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2000). Edited collections include F. Castles, R. Gerritsen and J. Vowles (eds), *The Great Experiment: Labour*

- Parties and Public Policy Transformation in Australia and New Zealand* (Auckland, Allen & Unwin, 1996); K. Neumann, N. Thomas and H. Ericksen (eds), *Quicksands: Foundational Histories in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand* (Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 1999); B. Attwood and F. Magowan (eds), *Telling Stories: Indigenous History and Memory in Australia and New Zealand* (Wellington and Sydney, Bridget Williams, 2001).
- <sup>10</sup> S. Goldfinch, *Remaking New Zealand and Australian Economic Policy: Ideas, Institutions and Policy Communities* (Wellington and Washington, DC, Victoria University Press, 2000).
- <sup>11</sup> T. F. Flannery, *The Future Eaters: an Ecological History of the Australasian Lands and People* (Chatswood, Reed, 1994); J. M. Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: a Short History of Everybody for the Last 13,000 Years* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1997).
- <sup>12</sup> A. G. Hopkins, 'Viewpoint: back to the future: from national history to imperial history', *Past and Present*, 164, August 1999, p. 243.
- <sup>13</sup> P. Kelly, *The End of Certainty: the Story of the 1980s* (St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1994), p. 1.
- <sup>14</sup> Kelly, *The End of Certainty*; see also B. Birrell, *Federation: the Secret Story* (Sydney, Duffy and Snellgrove, 2001).
- <sup>15</sup> J. Rickard, *Australia: a Cultural History*, 2nd edn (New York, Longman, 1996), ch. 6.
- <sup>16</sup> G. Brennan and F. G. Castles (eds), *Australia Reshaped: 200 Years of Institutional Transformation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 11.
- <sup>17</sup> E. Olssen, *Building the New World: Work, Politics and Society in Caversham 1880s–1920s* (Auckland, Auckland University Press, 1995); J. Holt, *Compulsory Arbitration in New Zealand: the First Forty Years* (Auckland, Auckland University Press, 1986).
- <sup>18</sup> Castles, in Brennan and Castles, p. 26; cf. F. G. Castles, *The Working Class and Welfare* (Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1985); and his *Australian Public Policy and Economic Vulnerability* (Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1988).
- <sup>19</sup> ACSANZ 2002, *Converging Futures? Canada and Australia in a New Millennium*, National Convention Centre, Canberra, 12–15 September 2002.
- <sup>20</sup> P. Mein Smith, 'New Zealand Federation Commissioners in Australia: one past, two historiographies', *Australian Historical Studies*, in press; see also Belich, *Paradise Reforged*.
- <sup>21</sup> Sinclair (ed.), *Tasman Relations*; and his 'Why are race relations in New Zealand better than in South Africa, South Australia or South Dakota?', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 5 (2), October 1971, pp. 121–7.
- <sup>22</sup> *New Zealand Journal of History*, 34 (1), April 2000. See Editorial Introduction.
- <sup>23</sup> Attwood and Magowan, *Telling Stories*; Neumann, Thomas and Ericksen, *Quicksands*. T. Brabazon, *Tracking the Jack: a Retracing of the Antipodes* (Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 2000) is a cultural studies text that sees Australia and New Zealand as a combined Antipodean space. Yet Brabazon does not deal with them as interactive spaces and notes that the trans-Tasman relationship is 'astonishingly under-defined' (p. 161). There is a cartoon history from a New Zealand viewpoint: I. F. Grant, *The Other Side of the Ditch: a Cartoon Century in the New Zealand – Australia Relationship* (Wellington, New Zealand Cartoon Archive, in association with Tandem Press, 2001).
- <sup>24</sup> B. Catley, *Waltzing with Matilda: Should New Zealand Join Australia?* (Wellington, Dark Horse, 2001).
- <sup>25</sup> Belich, *Paradise Reforged*, pp. 46–52.
- <sup>26</sup> W. P. Reeves, *State Experiments in Australia and New Zealand*, 2 vols (London, Grant Richards, 1902); T. A. Coghlan, *A Statistical Account of the Seven Colonies of Australasia, 1901–1902*, 9th issue (Sydney, Government of the State of New South Wales, 1902).
- <sup>27</sup> Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee, *Inquiry into New Zealand's Economic and Trade Relationship with Australia* (Wellington, 2002).
- <sup>28</sup> Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee, p. 12.
- <sup>29</sup> Government Response to Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee (October 2002).