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Jack Harrington

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Edward Gibbon Wakefield, the liberal political subject and the settler state

ABSTRACT

Modern citizenship, with its exclusions and disaggregated freedoms, has a distinct genealogy in the state-formation of settler societies. Ethnic tensions and indigenous rights-claiming in many Anglophone states are frequently traced to their beginnings as settler societies. This is not only a legacy of the rights-claiming discourses of settlers, traced in individual national histories. It owes much to the formal body of literature that justified settler states not primarily as the embodiment of a nation but for the government of transnational populations. Using the writings of Edward Gibbon Wakefield and his contemporaries, this article examines the settler as a problem in British liberal thought. Wakefield's unease about the settler as a political subject drew together three contemporary discourses, the critique of American society, post-Malthus thinking on poverty and the systematic colonization movement. For Wakefield, settler societies could only prosper through central planning, surveillance, and land price fixing, leading to class formation.

I

If the concept of citizenship continues to be regarded as uniquely European in origin, the intellectual history of European settler colonialism was one of transplanting that concept to outside of Europe and giving it a new purpose: to people the earth with a prosperous and well-governed population. The 'newness' of this purpose and its implications for the institution of modern citizenship are the central concerns of this article. The ideologically assertive settlers who comprised this 'Anglo-world' shared a political language that crossed the boundaries of individual modern settler states, spanned the British empire, incorporated the United States and even reached beyond the frontiers of formal empire.¹ Analysis on this scale can provide an intellectual history of the ways Anglophone settler state-formation in the 1830s and 1840s defined who could and who could not be a citizen and what citizenship comprised. Such a study provides a history of the legacies of inequality, racial hierarchy and

exclusion in the contemporary institution of citizenship as it is understood in the Anglophone world.

Any study of how the Anglophone settler as a political subject was conceived raises methodological questions about how we understand the historical constitution of contemporary citizenship. The conception of ‘citizenship’ as a set of formal civil and political rights conferred through membership of a polity is useful, if problematic, for reflecting on the longer history of settler rights-claims and racial hierarchies, border regimes and the entrenched but limited democratic representation that comprises the formation of settler states.² Methodologically, this article looks beyond this perspective to consider how the settler was conceived as a political subject.³ This term is used to convey not simply political participation but all of the ways in which people were or were not able to constitute themselves as being political in society. It provides a suitable medium for understanding the political belonging of the settler in the context of the indistinct, strained and multiple divisions between the metropole and emergent settler states. Moreover, it enables us to understand property rights and the franchise historically not simply as rights conferred on certain privileged types of people but also as tools of social engineering. In all, this approach enables an analysis of how Anglophone settler-societies were conceived in the traditions of British liberal thought and how such a conception provided intellectual foundations for the settler-state’s legal and political discourses of exclusion.

With reference to the ‘systematic colonization’ movement of the 1830s and 1840s and its most prolific theorist Edward Gibbon Wakefield, this article examines the central role of creating a society of independent, rights-bearing citizens in ensuring the prosperity of settler populations. The political subject that emerges is a vulnerable and precarious transmitter of European civilization that requires government regulation and surveillance to prosper. As Wakefield put it, ‘the barbarism of new countries [has] become my ruling idea.’⁴ Wakefield saw settler societies as a potential rather than an actual vehicle for European civilization. He approached them as a reformer or improver. This aspect of Wakefield’s argument provided an intellectual foundation for neo-European nation-building across the globe and for the marginalization of indigenous peoples that characterized the renewed white settler colonialism of the nineteenth century and beyond. Moreover, Wakefield’s unique position as a colonial

politician in Canada and New Zealand, an active colonial agent and a government adviser enables us to see the relationship of these theories to the business of establishing and governing settler colonies.

The next section provides conceptual context for the central argument of the article. That is, in settler societies a key feature of citizenship was that it imbued its possessors with a right to own, control and govern the land they occupied. This created a tension, one which Wakefield thought he had identified and could solve. What Wakefield's writings reveal is that 'race', 'nation', or even 'culture' were in themselves seen as inadequate for engendering responsible citizens.⁵ If citizens are the substance of an autonomous and prosperous polity, then the citizenly capacities and actions of a population must be ensured through social engineering. Crucially, it is the constitution of the settlers as political subjects capable of claiming and improving the land (of reinforcing territorial sovereignty), rather than their racial or cultural identity, that justifies the displacement and marginalization of indigenous peoples.⁶ This is the significance of the way the settler as a would-be citizen was conceived in Wakefield's vision of the expansion of settler societies and their eventual establishment as independent states.

The article will then elaborate how the works of Edward Gibbon Wakefield, a political economist, can be read for their framing of the settler and the analytical problems this approach creates. It locates Wakefield's negative view of the settler as a political subject at an intersection between the critique of American society in the travel literature of the time, the post-Malthus literature on poverty and over-population and the systematic colonization movement. In particular, it explains how Wakefield capitalized upon criticism of the leading theorist of systematic colonization in the 1820s, Robert Wilmot-Horton. An analysis of Wilmot-Horton's ideas reveals why and how Wakefield rejected organized emigration of the unemployed and the vision of colonial society that justified it. The next section draws together Wakefield's concept of the settler as a political subject, taking examples from his published oeuvre and unpublished correspondence. Prominence is given to those early texts that responded to existing discourses on colonization, *The Letter from Sydney* (1829) and *England and America* (1833). By attempting to build a new world that retained old world social divisions, Wakefield articulated an anxiety about the settler, one that

shaped humanitarian and governmental resistance to settler rights-claims in the decades preceding the granting of significant colonial autonomy in the 1850s.

II

The claims of the settlers to sovereignty lie at the root of those states that they succeeded to and those citizenship regimes that were constituted with them. The historical project of colonization, as it invokes race, as it reinterprets territoriality, as it constitutes a new kind of European political subject, must be understood beyond the confines of the history of individual nation states, postcolonial or not. As Andrea Smith notes there is a tendency to assume the ‘given-ness of settler states’ in discussion of contemporary indigenous politics.⁷ This is an effect of discourses about settlers themselves. The initial function of the settler is to physically displace indigenous peoples as the rightful occupier of the land, enabling the colonizer’s claim to territorial sovereignty.⁸ In this period claims by settlers against the metropole for the protection of their rights as British subjects further asserted the legitimacy of the settler state. An obvious example is the constitutional debate in the First New Zealand Parliament of 1854, articulated in terms of metropolitan protection of indigenous rights versus settler sovereignty.⁹ The teleology inherent in the narration of national histories asserts the claims to sovereignty of settler societies over indigenous populations and other claimants. To understand such claims and their contemporary relevance, one must trace their origins not only in the context of independent nation-building but also that of the universalizing claims of both empire and ‘Anglo-Saxon civilization’. This is a key reason for studying authors such as Wakefield who navigated between these scales and transcended national or proto-national contexts.

Central to this article is a distinction between the rights-claiming discourses of settlers themselves and the formal body of literature on the topic of systematic or planned colonization, meaning the selection and management of populations that could demonstrate citizenly capacity. The term referred to the selection and transportation of emigrants, together with the allocation and sale of lands in colonies through central planning and organization by or with the sanction of the state. The proportion of emigrants settled through systematic colonization was small, some 4% in its heyday of the 1830s and 1840s.¹⁰ Yet to dismiss the discourses it produced as mere rhetoric as James Belich does is to fail to integrate settler colonialism into the history of

mainstream political thought in a way that individual national histories can only ever do partially. That commentators as various as Robert Malthus, John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx wrote about systematic colonization is testament to its historic importance as a problem in nineteenth-century western political thought. A purely constitutional account, such as Belich provides, can underplay friction between government, settlers and other metropolitan agencies about what actions constitute or confirm rights claims. As Ann Laura Stoler has noted, colonization was not a hegemonic or unified project. To understand it historically in these terms is to overlook the class tensions and rival notions of civility that marked it.¹¹ Boosters of colonization such as Wakefield were not primarily defenders of settler rights; rather, they were promoters of settler society as a tool of social and economic improvement.¹²

In the literature on systematic colonization I discuss, the settler appears as a fragile and unreliable representative of the colonizer's ideal of civilization.¹³ As Wakefield wrote in a prospectus for the colonization of New Zealand, 'in general, a society transplanted from one of the densely-peopled countries of Europe, to one in which there was a wide extent of unoccupied land, has degenerated after its removal. Such a society commonly falls back into... that backward stage in the social progress when everyone, or nearly every one, is a cultivator on his own account.'¹⁴ Central planning became essential: 'mere colonization' was insufficient.¹⁵ Within the discourse of systematic colonization, the settler was often depicted as a figure that required surveillance in order to effectively carry out the aims of the metropolitan colonizing power.

The discourse on systematic colonization thus complicates the history of the settler as a claimant of political rights, as a would-be citizen of either the metropole or some newly emergent settler-state. Paradoxically, a sense of political belonging is evoked on the one hand by the proto-nation and on the other by claiming the rights of the metropolitan subject. As Alan Lester and others have argued, a major aspect of the settler's sense of common belonging comes from racial difference, from both indigenous peoples and slave or former slave population.¹⁶ Yet, such discourses contained contradictions. The discourse about settlers that Wakefield developed was not eulogistic. While it saw a necessity in representative government, it feared anomy, the tyranny of the majority and a general 'loss of civilization' in contrast to the

mother country. As a discourse rooted in political economy, it exposed the link between metropolitan discussions about the causes and effects of poverty on the one hand and the aspirations about European political institutions that underpin the project of settler colonialism on the other. Such a link, with all the tensions it implies, is the proper context in which to understand the settlers' own claims to rights as British subjects and their eventual independence. In other words, it is apposite to ask what function Britishness played in how settler societies viewed themselves as 'neo-Britains' or settlers as 'neo-Britons'?

Systematic colonization is a key moment in the history of liberal thought about societies outside of Europe and about what material elements made a prosperous, autonomous polity. The 1820s and 1830s, witnessed a discussion not about how societies could be improved through trade and industry but the limits of that improvement. Colonies of Britons were a kind of frontier for the liberal values of the metropole. Legally and politically, it was felt a society of Britons, wherever it was, must have legal protection of secure and transferrable property rights and a right to trial by one's peers. Such rights were best protected by a representative government.¹⁷ The American Revolution had demonstrated that the removal of such rights would be resisted and their protection would promote peace and economic prosperity. The defence of colonies on economic grounds now came with an assumption that such liberties must be secured. Lord Durham's report of 1839 on the unrest in Upper and Lower Canada can be read as an assertion of the suitability of British settler colonies as sites of liberal improvement heralding a prosperous commercial society.¹⁸ Thus Wakefield, much like Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*, concerned himself *inter alia* with the problem of how settlers could constitute themselves as political subjects in such a way that would make their society prosper.

It is primarily as a political economist, as a user of that language, that Wakefield has been and should be understood, as this best explains his understanding of the relationship between the political and civil rights of the citizen and the material prosperity of settler society.¹⁹ He saw himself as a significant contributor to a new phase in a debate about the benefits of colonies to their mother country that owes its immediate origins to Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776). Even the settler question principally concerned the best use of labour – not social improvement or

political order. Yet, this language carries a series of assumptions about the settler as a political being and the colony as a polity. It is not my intention to contribute to the established academic debate about the treatment of political questions in political economic thought.²⁰ Rather, I argue that the classical discussion of colonization deploys a series of competing understandings about the settler as a political subject that are central to how European thought constructs the European subject and the non-European other.

III

Wakefield is an important focal point for analysing the discourse of settler colonialism as a discourse about making citizens of a prosperous polity. From 1830 onwards, Wakefield wrote about and was actively involved in the politics of the major British settler colonies in southern Australia, Canada and New Zealand. He served as an elected representative in the last two settlements and co-authored Lord Durham's famous report, widely considered a blueprint for responsible government in the colonies. Prolific and influential, he wrote about the connections between settlers and their colonial metropole in a way that reveals the assumptions about race and entitlement to land that have made settler colonialism a discourse of exclusion.

Wakefield's critique of unplanned settler emigrations and what he called 'the evils of lawless British colonization' produced a vision of what was requisite for Britons to flourish in new societies.²¹ Wakefield's idea of settler society as a fragile carrier of European civilization and the planned society that would remedy it drew together two distinct discursive traditions that had developed by the 1820s. The first was a vision of the new world, largely inspired by the independent United States of America, that emphasized the freedom to prosper that a colony offered to Britons as citizens of an old country undergoing economic crisis.²² As will be seen, it was criticism of the United States and lessons to be gained from the history of failed colonies that helped Wakefield to imagine a new colonial society. The second was that of poverty relief through planned emigration, which had emerged during the economic and political unrest following the Napoleonic wars from 1815 onwards. Wakefield's response to both helps us to understand why he presented the settler as a political subject in the way that he did.

If the American Revolution exposed the political pitfalls faced by European states possessing colonies, it also hinted at the great promise of colonists as self-reliant trading partners. For contemporary advocates of colonization, the key to a colony's success was the ability of its people to improve and exploit the land. As Adam Smith had written in *The Wealth of Nations*, 'The colony of a civilized nation which takes possession either of a waste country, or of one so thinly inhabited that the natives easily give place to the new settlers, advances more rapidly to wealth and greatness than any other human society.'²³ The source of improvement and of order was not then the colonizing power as such, but the settlers as its agents and as people whose presence, whose actions assert that power. Smith, like Thomas Jefferson, saw the potential greatness of settler society in a community of numerous small landholders.²⁴

The onus on the settlers themselves, the central concern of this article, has political as well as economic significance and would become a key problem in the discourse of systematic colonization. Politically, American independence was a positive example of a flourishing society built on the protection of individual liberty and a cautionary tale about the metropolitan dominance of the executive branch of government.²⁵

Whereas British commentators routinely described their administration of India as 'government by the sword', political authority in the settler colonies had to lie not with a strong governor or entrenched social elites but with the settlers as political actors. Martial law or authoritarianism were seen as undesirable or temporary. Even those detractors whose works Wakefield's American writings most resemble, Basil Hall and Fanny Trollope, saw a proud sense of freedom as central to the American character.²⁶

This discourse of liberty and of an approach to equality would shape the movement for 'systematic colonization'. Planned transportation to the colonies promised a means of relieving the poverty and widespread political unrest following the end of the Napoleonic wars. As Wakefield later said of the 1820s,

... a maladministration of the English poor-law, and the increase of cottier tenures in Ireland, which have encouraged the growth of excessive numbers; the existence in short of a population superabundant in proportion to employment, or, at all events, a more humane disposition in the higher classes to

take an interest in the well-being of the common people, has gradually conquered a once-prevailing dislike to emigration.²⁷

The major advocate of systematic colonization in the 1820s was Robert Wilmot-Horton, an under-secretary at the Colonial Office and ardent social reformer. Horton proposed that the growing numbers of ‘paupers’ (meaning poor, able-bodied and unemployed) in Britain could be relieved by planned emigration to the colonies funded by loans secured against the parish poor-rates.²⁸ Unlike Wakefield, Horton not only hoped that the poor unemployed population could flourish in the colonies, his faith was sustained by the utopian strain in contemporary literature on North America. As he told Lord Palmerston in 1829, ‘I consider the United States as the type of the state of high promise and positive independence for the lower classes.’²⁹ In his notes he identified Fanny Butler’s *Journal* (1835), as a useful source. The extract he quoted began: ‘None need be born to vice for none are condemned to abject poverty.’³⁰ Given a plot of land, Horton hoped that the families sent out to the colonies would prosper as small-holders, making the most of the extensive, cheap, cultivable land. Planning was the key. As Horton once remarked of his critics, ‘To Emigration carried on without system without information and without assistance I am as much opposed as they can be.’³¹ As with Wakefield, the purpose of systematic colonization was to establish an optimal new society of Europeans informed by observations about how such polities had worked in the past.

It matters that Horton identified systematic colonization with the unemployed poor. Horton’s first efforts to publicize colonization were through government committees on the poor laws.³² Horton enlisted major authorities on poverty to his cause, notably James Mill, Thomas Malthus and Robert Owen. He organized two waves of emigration from Ireland to Canada in 1823 and 1825. Horton’s scheme belongs to the same moment intellectually as Robert Owen’s *Report to the County of New Lanark*, which proposed to provide work for the unemployed through planned farm communities where manual labour would replace horse-drawn ploughs.³³ Horton imagined a community of new world peasant proprietors. The utopian register of Horton’s plans was apparent to many contemporaries. Lord Palmerston, then Secretary of State for War, commented, ‘Nothing can be more charmingly seducing than your Picture of the back-settlements, it is a perfect Pays de Cockaigne, one longs

to sally forth with one's axe and one's hoe, chopping & burning & grubbing oneself from Pauperism into Competence.'³⁴ Owen too felt that Horton's vision of colonial society ignored human nature. Consistent with his writings, Owen criticized Horton for failing to account for the effect of one's surroundings on one's character: 'you are in error upon these subjects; and necessarily so from want of the extensive practical experience in the operations and general affairs of society without an intimate knowledge of which no man can be prepared to legislate successfully for the country in its present anomalous condition.'³⁵ This criticism of Horton's scheme is significant because when Wakefield came to plan colonization none could accuse him of disregarding the question of how settlers as individuals would act together to create an enduring colonial society.³⁶

By the time Wakefield wrote, the low numbers of willing migrants and the high cost of labour in the colonies combined with ongoing political unrest in Britain led many to see the policy as a failure. As an *Edinburgh Review* article of 1840 observed of the period, 'The remedy, with all its expenses and difficulties, was after all only a remedy for the day.'³⁷ Critics often saw it as an unwelcome and unnecessary interference. As Maria Edgeworth said to Horton regarding Irish emigration, 'I am quite sure that in this Country there is no Landlord who would give £3 a head to assist the emigration of his tenants... I feel we must also be content sometimes to let ill alone, and let it work out its own cure, lest the interference might be worse than the disease.'³⁸ It was generally felt that pauper transportation could only be a temporary cure. As a witness to the Poor Law Commission, Malthus had elaborated a common concern that planned emigration could only temporarily cure domestic unemployment.³⁹ Systematic colonization had also failed to produce sufficient numbers to solve problems of labour shortage in the colonies.⁴⁰

For Wakefield, if the object was to create an economically prosperous polity, the wrong kind of people had been attracted to the colonies. The National Colonization Society, which Wakefield helped to found, established in 1830, imagined a new society built on the principles of the old country. An early meeting of the Society resolved:

That it is desirable to relieve the Excess of Population in proportion to employment existing in this country, and, at the same time, to

supply the urgent demand for labour in the Colonies, by a well regulated system of Emigration. That the most efficacious mode of carrying onto effect these purposes of the Society is- 1. By a selection of Emigrants whereby the greatest amount of procreative power would emigrate at the least expense that is in the least number of persons. 2. By Concentration of Colonists; whereby through divisions of labour and consequent accumulation of wealth, the great amount of employment for emigrants would be secured. 3. By the Sale of unappropriated Land, whereby Emigration might be conducted free of cost to the State.’⁴¹

This contained the essence of Wakefield’s vision of systematic colonization. ‘The greatest amount of procreative power’ as the Society’s prospectus explained meant young married couples – to ensure the natural increase of the population. The second element targeted high labour costs and lack of capital investment in the colonies⁴². The third was an alternative to various systems of funding the colonists, including Horton’s. Together these three principles were intended to create a settler society that was self-sustaining and profitable to the mother country but also capable of creating an optimal European polity. Land, in Wakefield’s view, was too plentiful in the colonies; Horton’s systematic colonization created a society that could not sustain itself. Labourers soon became landowners, driving up the cost of labour and preventing the improvement of the land. Wakefield thought that the steady supply of cheap wage labour could be maintained by keeping land prices at a high ‘sufficient price.’ Artificial prices would also encourage the formation of different social classes, promoting the settlement of professionals as well as farmers. In *Capital*, Marx criticized Wakefield for creating a system for ‘the manufacture of wage-labourers.’⁴³ Crucially, the entire process would be overseen by the metropolitan government and paid for through taxation in the colony. In other words the settler’s presence was potentially unruly and required a very visible hand in the market. It is this aspect of Wakefield’s thought that will now be considered.

III

Wakefield’s vision of the means of establishing a new colonial order went beyond the original aim of establishing a new colony, and its success depended on the ability of the settler to become a productive member of the colony as a polity. It retained

Horton's belief in systematic colonization at the expense of its core assumption: that mass-pauper emigration could enable a colony to prosper. Both Horton and Wakefield had seen proof of their schemes in the history of the United States, but where the former saw promise the later discerned a cautionary tale of rural egalitarianism. Wakefield continually returned to the problem of the individual settler's weakness as a bearer of civilization. As he wrote, 'The work of colonizing a desert bears a curious resemblance to that of transplanting full-grown trees. In neither case is it the ultimate object merely to remove; in both cases it is to establish; ... in the latter case, the immediate object is to remove, not people merely, but society. In both cases equally, success depends upon attention to details.'⁴⁴ To read Wakefield primarily as a contributor to political economy and principally as an author is to underestimate the great task of 'transplanting' not people but society that he set himself, evident in his care for urban planning, his minute control of emigration and his careful selection of settler causes to champion against the metropolitan government.

For Wakefield, the keystone of successful colonization was central government regulation of who could own land. Crucially, Wakefield could not detach the political economic case for his scheme from a consideration of how the polity would order itself. As he observed in first book, the *Letter from Sydney*, 'In all new countries the government alone has the power to dispose of waste land.' He went on to ask, 'Does it not follow that the government might, by restricting the amount of grants, establish and maintain the most desirable proportion between people and territory?'

Wakefield's triumphant conclusion was that 'Every new government, therefore, possesses the power to civilize its subjects'.⁴⁵ This statement contains the double kernel of Wakefield's thriving colony: effective land distribution and a prosperous and improving society. Wakefield was not content with the society of peasant proprietors imagined by Horton and on display in larger swathes of the contemporary Anglo-phone settler world. As will be discussed below, price-setting was a necessary intervention to encourage class-formation.

While his major writings treat land price control as the fountainhead of societal development in a fledgling colonial society, his work to promote the New Zealand Company reveals a concern to carefully select the population. In a typical letter to John Robert Godley, the Company's agent in Canterbury, he wrote: 'The first body of

colonists... was made up by infinite painstaking. I could show you in detail that nine out of ten of them were nursed in becoming colonists, by educating them into a knowledge of the subject and a taste for the enterprise. If we had taken a quarter of the pains to rouse and cultivate mere speculation in land, the sale might have been very much greater. We deliberately discouraged what has heretofore been the mainspring of colonizing enterprise. We did this for the sake of the *goodness* of colonization.’⁴⁶ Wakefield’s correspondence frequently alludes to the suitability of individual colonists, both before and after their arrival. Wakefield’s surveillance of colonial societies as they formed, most evident in the various New Zealand settlements, demonstrates the primacy of planning and control in his vision of colonial society.

Wakefield’s writings continually examine how individuals within colonial society can combine politically in a way that will allow that society to prosper. Wakefield saw the social homogeneity of the colonies of his own time as the ultimate cause of their failure to develop. ‘I conclude,’ he noted in the *Letter*, ‘that the Australians will hate their parent country more bitterly, and at an earlier period, than did the British Colonists in America, because they will have greater facilities for growing up poor, ignorant, and democratical.’⁴⁷ Distance from the metropole weakened bonds that would not be easily restored by affiliation to the new colony. In a letter to his agent Godley complaining of his settlers’ lack of loyalty, he wrote: ‘the ingratitude of the colonist if not proverbial, is an old story. Penn and Baltimore felt it deeply... Knowing how this colonial state of mind is caused, I do not quarrel with it... The feeling or want of feeling is a natural product of being engaged in the acquisition of a new country and a new nationality.’⁴⁸ Wakefield like Basil Hall before him saw loose national bonds as a troubling but expected symptom of settler emigration, but this was not the worst symptom of distance from the metropole.

The mind of the settler, deprived of varied company and bent only on agricultural pursuits would languish to the detriment of society in the colony. ‘We are in a barbarous condition,’ he said of Australia in the *Letter*, ‘like that of every people scattered over a territory immense in proportion to their numbers; every man is obliged to occupy himself with questions of daily bread; there is neither leisure nor reward for the investigation of abstract truth; money-getting is the universal object;

taste, science, morals, manners, abstract politics, are subjects of little interest, unless they happen to bear upon the wool question.⁴⁹ If dispersal was the great cause of high labour costs, its main effect politically was the erosion of the individual's capacity to participate in the life of the polity. In his *Principles of Political Economy*, John Stuart Mill would later approve of Wakefield's scheme, noting artificial prices acted as a 'check on the tendency of a population of colonists to disperse so widely as to adopt the tastes and inclinations of savage life.'⁵⁰ Wakefield had thus established that the social and political benefits of civilization derived from urban settlement.

When Wakefield came to describe the political incapacity of contemporary settlers, he resorted to the tropes of superstition and barbarism. Both had a strong lineage in eighteenth century discourse about modern European society, ascribing the limits of the mind to the way society was shaped by the environment (rather than an inherited biological disposition). The histories of David Hume, Edward Gibbon and William Robertson (to only name the most prominent British historians of the eighteenth century) saw barbarism and superstition as the hallmark of modern European society's 'others' (whether that be 'the orient' or medieval Europe).⁵¹ Wakefield uses them in the same way, to imply an unacceptable deviation from political progress. As he wrote in *England and America*, 'above two-thirds of the inhabitants of America pass the greater part of their lives in comparative loneliness... It is a state of existence... quite incomprehensible by those who have always lived in towns; but the Englishman, who shall conceive what it is, will be at no loss to account for many American habits and customs, besides that peculiar kind of superstition which displeases English travellers.'⁵² In eighteenth century discourse, the superstition trope has important political consequences because it makes individuals vulnerable to demagoguery.⁵³ The lack of political judgment stemming from dependency is a *leitmotif* of Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, just as it was a common argument against the widening of the franchise.⁵⁴ In this sense, the new society of America was an excessive expression of a vulnerability to political populism that the greater social stratification and political inequality of the old world was better able to check.

Wakefield used the religious customs of the United States as an example of its peoples' lack of intellectual independence. As he wrote, 'A wandering preacher in America does not create, but only supplies, a demand for his services; visiting thinly-

peopled districts, not with a view to delude the scattered inhabitants, but because he knows that they already long for his presence, that they are waiting for a dose of superstitious terror.’ Wakefield’s source for this is, as with so much of *England and America*, was Trollope’s *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832). As Trollope observed of the charismatic power of preachers, ‘My residence in the country has shewn me that a religious tyranny may be exerted very effectually without the aid of the government, in a way much more oppressive than the paying of tithe, and without obtaining any of the salutary decorum, which I presume no one will deny is the result of an established mode of worship.’⁵⁵ Trollope’s emphasis here reminds us that it is the dispersed, egalitarian nature of settler society that endangers the independence of its citizens.

The low population density of colonies also added to the tension between the global vision of the colonizer and the sentimental parochialism of the settler. As Wakefield wrote, ‘Nearly all people born in dispersed colonies, are fanatically proud of their own wild country, and love to disparage the rest of the world. This narrowness of mind, arising from ignorance, seems proper to the barbarous conquerors of China; but, in colonies planted by the most civilized nations, it is a degenerate sentiment, a step backwards from civilization to Barbarism.’⁵⁶ The use of the trope of oriental despotism reminds us that Wakefield advocated colonization as the spread of an essentialized European civilization. The China analogy, as in much contemporary economic writing, was intended to invoke a stationary society.⁵⁷ Wakefield used ‘the orient’ as an extreme comparator to sharpen the contrast between the potential fecundity and freedom of ‘advanced’, commercial societies and the subservience and stagnation of older types.

The settler’s inability to retain the trappings of civilization is an illuminating starting point for assessing Wakefield’s vision of indigenous peoples. Wakefield’s relative silence on this issue in the context of Canada and South Australia and his vacillating policy on the Maoris confirm that his position on indigenous land rights was always secondary and expedient to the success of the settlers.⁵⁸ Wakefield certainly saw systematic colonization as a means of controlling the worst effects of settlers on indigenous societies. As he wrote in a prospectus for New Zealand, ‘the common effect... of *mere* colonization has been to exterminate the aboriginal race. This,

however, is not a plan of mere colonization: it has for its object to civilize as well as to colonize.⁵⁹ During the constitutional crisis of the early 1850s, Wakefield's vague plans for assimilation gave way to support for settler claims in the face of criticism from the Aboriginal Protection Society⁶⁰. As in other parts of the British empire, as in French Algeria, government was called upon to curb settler rights in the interests of honouring landholding agreements with indigenous peoples and preventing squatting and other forms of unauthorized European expansion.⁶¹ In Wakefield's vision, indigenous peoples had the potential to disrupt the advance of settler society to the extent that they represented an alternative social order.

The case for intervention in relations between settlers and indigenous peoples stemmed from the need to impose order on the population. This is made plain in *New Zealand*, which contains a history of European settler colonialism. In this account, the barbarity of the settler did not simply lead to a stagnating society of uncultivated lands and minds. Writing of the few European settlers and ship's crews that visited New Zealand before formal British sovereignty was declared, he observed, 'Imagine that the laws were suspended in England for a month! By imagining this, it will be understood that the runaway convicts are not the only class of British subjects who prove a curse to the natives.'⁶² Not only in his polemical literature but also in his correspondence (notably regarding squatters in Maori land), Wakefield saw that direct relations between Europeans and Maoris, unmediated by government control, would further the tendency to civilizational decline inherent in making new settlements.

Wakefield's settler was a paradoxical figure in the story of imperial expansion: a representative and harbinger of superior civilization, deprived of that material culture and those political structures that ultimately made the individual civilized.

Wakefield's underlying suspicion about the settler's susceptibility to political atavism is central to his thought. What, in Wakefield's view, would save the settler from this fate? If the loss of civilization was a danger, it was one that certain peoples, or to use his language 'races' were more susceptible to than others. While 'race' was steadily accruing the meanings that it would have later in the century, for Wakefield as for John Stuart Mill, it had a meaning closer to 'nation.' In Wakefield's view the success of colonization depended on the superiority of the 'British' or Anglo-Saxon race. As he wrote in the *Art of Colonization*:

I doubt whether a purely Milesian-Irish or Celtic-French colony, however well it should be governed, would be anything like as good a customer of its mother-country, as a purely English or Lowland Scotch colony... The United States of America, which have been chiefly colonized by English blood, are the best customers a mother-country ever had.⁶³

Wakefield's deployment of race is an important dimension of his view of what constituted a model prosperous colony. When he came to present the bulk of the French population of Lower Canada as an uneducated, obstreperous peasantry, he noted that the majority had come from Brittany – which is to say they were 'Celtic.'⁶⁴ His use of phrases such as 'Celtic French' or 'Milesian-Irish', reminds us of the extent to which white national identities were fragmented, overlapping and highly politicized in the period he wrote. As has been widely noted the connexion between ideas of race and a permanent underclass of the rural poor was a key feature of much British writing about the Irish in the colonies in this period.⁶⁵ While Peter Mandler has suggested environmental rather than biological explanations of racial difference were far more prevalent than is assumed in the Victorian era, the evidence must always remain ambiguous and Wakefield is a case in point. In spite of the institutional and religious explanations for the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon found in the Durham Report and a few other instances, his explanations are never detailed or closely grounded in a particular tradition. Certainly, this vagueness supports Catherine Hall's observation that the biological racism so prominent in the 1860s merely elaborated a well-established language. Moreover, while colour was a prominent marker of eligibility for rights in much settler discourse, Wakefield's preference for the Anglo-Saxon was more exacting in terms of racial or national homogeneity. The supposed failure of Irish pauper immigration to the United States and Canada is a good example of this⁶⁶. The sort of social engineering necessary to systematic colonization revealed a belief that the kinds of institutional freedoms that Britons and neo-Britons could benefit from depended on a historic national precedent. This is consistent with his desire to export and entrench social hierarchies in the colonies.

For Wakefield, like Tocqueville, settler societies required widespread political participation to survive.⁶⁷ The political structure should limit the powers of the executive branch of government (the metropole-appointed governor) and nurture local

government and associations of citizens.⁶⁸ Significantly, the Durham report of 1839 suggested that British history itself proved the folly of separating executive and legislative power: ‘This entire separation of the legislative and executive powers of a state is the natural error of governments desirous of being free from the check of representative institutions. Since the revolution of 1688, the stability of the English constitution has been secured by that wise principle of our Government which has vested the direction of the national policy, and the distribution of patronage, in the leaders of the Parliamentary majority.’⁶⁹ Crucially the sanction for this system was the stability and efficacy of old institutions (which should therefore be transplanted to the new society of the colony). The report goes on to note: ‘There seems, indeed, to be an idea, that the character of representative institutions ought to be thus modified in colonies; ... that the officers of Government should be nominated by the Crown, without any reference to the wishes of the community, whose interests are intrusted to their keeping... But, if there be such a necessity, it is quite clear that a representative government in a colony must be a mockery, and a source of confusion.’⁷⁰ The report distinguished responsible government (where the executive is formed by members of the colony), from mere ‘representative government’ where the substantive executive power resides in an appointee of the metropole. Wakefield felt that the latter fomented resentment and had actually been a cause of the revolt in Upper Canada.⁷¹ During the constitutional debate in the First New Zealand Parliament of 1854, Wakefield defended the principles of responsible government clutching a copy of the Report in his hand. ‘Not so very long ago’ he said, ‘it was the fashion in England, and especially in Downing Street, to say that the British Constitution is all very well for the people at home who understand it, but it is totally unfit for the purpose of colonial government. Instead of contraverting that doctrine, I will state a fact. It is that now, in every one of the colonies of England which enjoys full presentation, which has a house of representatives without admixture of nominees, which is occupied entirely or chiefly by people of the British race, the British constitution, including ministerial responsibility is in full force.’⁷² The Durham report and the New Zealand constitutional debate of 1854 were flashpoints in the history of metropole-colony relations that exposed the importance of political independence for the colony. While distance from the metropole was an argument in favour of local representative government, the emphasis here was on government according to British standards because this was the only government appropriate for Britons.

A key feature of a transplanted British society was a balance between males and females. Younger couples were desirable colonists not only for their ‘procreative power’. They had the right mentality for a colony. ‘The natural time of marriage... is one when the mind is most disposed to hope, to ambition, to undertakings which require decision and energy of purpose.’⁷³ Crucially, Wakefield felt this would provide a moral spur to action absent in the male-dominated society so typical of new colonies: ‘Each female would have a special protector from the moment of her departure from home. No man would have any excuse for dissolute habits.’⁷⁴ This statement, which first appeared in *England and America* and was quoted in many of his later publications, marks a crucial difference between the old and new societies that Wakefield imagined. Harriet Martineau would also take up this aspect of Wakefield’s thought.⁷⁵ A flourishing colony depended on the established social structures of the old society mixed with a disproportionate dose of the vitality of youth.

Social inequality was the most significant aspect of life in the mother country which free migration to the settler colonies would not guarantee. As he wrote, ‘a sufficient price [for land]... makes the colony as attractive as possible, both to capitalists and to labourers; and not merely to these, but also, by bestowing on the colony the better attributes of an old society, to those who have a distaste for the primitive condition of new colonies heretofore.’⁷⁶ This was essential to avoid the lack of cultural and scientific achievement that the history of the United States seemed to portend: ‘Literary men, men of science, philosophers, do not emigrate to new countries where their acquirements would be neither rewarded nor admired.’⁷⁷ Even celebrators of American democracy such as Tocqueville noted the disagreeable plainness of American manners brought about by social equality. In *Capital*, Marx agreed with Wakefield’s premise that abundance of land had made it possible for most people to own capital. They differed in their conclusions. ‘Think of the horror!’ Marx sarcastically observed, ‘The excellent capitalist has imported bodily from Europe, with his own good money, his own competitors! ... In ancient civilized countries the labourer, though free, is by a law of Nature dependent on capitalists; in colonies this dependence must be created by artificial means.’⁷⁸ Marx’s critique affirmed Wakefield’s premise, that the large estates, urbanization and capital concentration that

engendered modern capitalist society would not naturally occur under conditions of unplanned emigration to new colonies.

V

My reading of Wakefield has shown that the growth of settler colonialism prompted new understandings of the role of the citizen and the state in those societies. In part this was necessitated by the physical situation, beyond the confines of the ‘mother country’. While the political subject under settler colonialism has been contingent upon concepts of race and class associated with nationalism or imperialism, it also reveals unique assumptions about the political capacities of the individual settler compared to the refined citizen of the metropole. Wakefield’s importance lies in the fact that he built the sovereignty of settler states not on an assertion of their vitality and strength but on a fear of their fragility. Settler society at its best was new not in kind but scale. Wakefield reveals the insecurity about European civilization that underpinned settler state formation in the 1850s and 1860s.

At the same time, Wakefield’s shifting position in the power relations of settler colonialism provides an important insight into how the disparate sources that constituted the colonizer sanctioned the detrimental implications of settler sovereignty discourses (meaning at worst genocide of indigenous peoples).⁷⁹ As Lauren Benton, among others, has demonstrated the degree to which the operation of imperial power is comprehensible in terms of the action of ‘the state’ is made uncertain by the delegated authority of colonial entities, including chartered bodies such as the New Zealand Company, the law courts and the army.⁸⁰ In spite of its relative failure in peopling the colonies, ‘systematic colonization’ constituted a discourse of the colonizer, distinct from the discourse of the settler and the pragmatism of the Colonial Office, at least in the early Victorian era.⁸¹

These observations have two main implications. Firstly they show that promoting national sovereignty for settler societies was seen as a method of imposing western order and civilization on those people who were supposed to deliver it. After all, Wakefield is considered as a founding figure in three different countries. While the discourse of Anglophone settlers demanded their rights to the privileges of British

subjects, Wakefield thought that these settlers could not be civilized without such rights. Crucially, Wakefield insisted that the proper exercise of those rights also required grounding in the historical conditions that created them. If exclusion of racially unsuitable subjects was essential for the prosperity of Anglophone society, so too was the enforced inclusion of those who would constitute it. If property rights and legal capacity have been central to liberal discourses of exclusion of indigenous peoples, so too has the supposed the fragility of western notions of civilization and order. Anxieties about the strength of western civilization justified Britain as a colonizing metropolitan authority in approving the sovereign territorial claims of its settler states. Analysis of figures such as Wakefield provides a transnational, historically contingent way of understanding settler-state formation. As such it undermines the 'given-ness' of those settler claims that underpin the states that emerged from the nineteenth century Anglophone colonies. It does so by exposing the integral role that the institution of citizenship has played in the rapid spread and entrenchment of settler states.

¹ The distinction between settler colonialism and imperialism in general is made in Z. Laidlaw 'Breaking Britannia's Bounds? Law, Settlers, and Space in Britain's Imperial Historiography.' *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (2012), p. 817; J. Belich, *Replenishing the Earth. The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

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³ E F. Isin, *Citizens Without Frontiers* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 108-111.

⁴ E. G. Wakefield, *A Letter from Sydney* (London: J. Cross, 1829), p. iii.

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- ⁷ A. Smith, 'Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy'. *Global Dialogue* Vol. 12, No. 2 (2010) [Accessed on 1 May 2013 at: <http://www.worlddialogue.org/content.php?id=488>].
- ⁸ L. Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A theoretical overview* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) p. 55; R. Nichols and J. Singh (Eds.), *Freedom and Democracy in an Imperial Context*, p.1.
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- ¹⁰ J. Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, p.459.
- ¹¹ A. L. Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the colonial order of things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 40.
- ¹² R. Grant, *Representations of British Emigration, Colonisation and Settlement: Imagining Empire, 1800-1860* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 18.
- ¹³ The settler is therefore distinct from Albert Memmi's figure of the colonialist who operates as an officially employed member of the colonial bureaucracy, carrying out the mission of the colonizer; *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (London: Earthscan, 1990), p. 137.
- ¹⁴ E. G. Wakefield & J. Ward, *The British colonization of New Zealand: being an account of the principles, objects and plans of the New Zealand Association* (London: Parker & Son, 1837), p. 7.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- ¹⁶ A. Lester, 'Race and Citizenship.'
- ¹⁷ J. Belich, 'How much did institutions matter? Cloning Britain in New Zealand' in J. P. Greene (ed), *Exclusionary Empire: English Liberties Overseas, 1600-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- ¹⁸ J. Ajzenstat and P. J. Smith (eds.), *Canada's Origins: Liberal, Tory, or Republican?* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1995).
- ¹⁹ A. Shaw, *Great Britain and the Colonies, 1815-65* (London: Methuen, 1970); D. Winch, *Classical Political Economy and Colonies* (London: Bell and Sons, 1965).
- ²⁰ M. Milgate and S. C. Stimson, *After Adam Smith: a century of transformation in politics and political economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 6, 109.
- ²¹ E.G. Wakefield, *New Zealand*, p. 34.
- ²² R. Grant, *Representations of British Emigration*, pp. 46-7.
- ²³ A. Smith, *Wealth of Nations, Books IV-V* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 22
- ²⁴ K. O'Brien, 'Colonial Emigration, Public Policy and Tory Romanticism, 1783-1830' in *Lineages of Empire: The Historical Roots of British Imperialist Thought*, ed. D. Kelly, (Oxford: Oxford, 2009), p. 69.
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- ²⁶ B. Hall, *Travels in North America, Volume 1*, (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1827), p. 14; F. Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 216.
- ²⁷ E.G. Wakefield & J. Ward, *New Zealand*, p. 6.

- ²⁸ Horton remains under-researched. For a discussion of Wilmot-Horton's activities in the 1820s see R.N. Ghosh, 'The Colonization Controversy: R.J. Wilmot-Horton and the Classical Economists,' A. Shaw (ed.), *Great Britain and its Colonies*, pp. 111-117; Donald Winch, *Classical Political Economy*, pp. 151-169.
- ²⁹ R. Wilmot-Horton, 'Answers to Lord Palmerston's Questions', 5 December 1829 in D3155/WH 2856, Wilmot-Horton Papers, Derbyshire Records Office, UK (hereafter DRO).
- ³⁰ R. Wilmot-Horton, 'Extract from Mr Butler's journal' n.d. in D3155/WH 2865, DRO.
- ³¹ Letter from R. Wilmot-Horton to J. Thomson, 29 January 1831 in D3155/WH3019, DRO.
- ³² R. N. Ghosh, op. cit.
- ³³ R. Owen, *Report to the County of New Lanark* (Glasgow: Constable & Co, 1821), p. 14.
- ³⁴ Lord Palmerston to R. Wilmot-Horton, 24 February 1826 in D3155/WH 2864, DRO.
- ³⁵ R. Owen to R. Wilmot-Horton, 24 January 1831 in D3155/WH 2854, DRO.
- ³⁶ K. O'Brien correctly notes that Wakefield deliberately disguised his intellectual debt to Horton. However, while Horton was concerned that prospective emigrants should be selected for likelihood to work well and thrive in the colony, Wakefield was dramatically more exacting; 'Colonial Emigration', p.165.
- ³⁷ 'New theory of colonization', *Edinburgh Review* (1840), Vol. 71, p. 525.
- ³⁸ M. Edgworth to Robert Wilmot-Horton, 4 September 1826 in D3155/WH2793, DRO.
- ³⁹ E. Kittrell, 'The development of the Theory of Colonisation in English Classical Political Economy' in A. Shaw (ed.), *Great Britain*, p. 59.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Handbill dated 12 May 1830, ROOC244, held at the National Cooperative Archives, UK.
- ⁴² D. Winch, *Classical Political Economy*, p. 90.
- ⁴³ H. Pappé, 'Wakefield and Marx' in A. Shaw (ed.), *Great Britain*, p. 200.
- ⁴⁴ E. G. Wakefield, *The British Province of South Australia* (London: Knight, 1835), p. 5.
- ⁴⁵ E. G. Wakefield, *A Letter from Sydney*, p. 175.
- ⁴⁶ E. G. Wakefield to J.R. Godley, 7 June 1851, Item 82 in Wakefield Papers, facsimile of papers held at Canterbury Museum, held at the University of Edinburgh Library, UK (hereafter 'Canterbury MS').
- ⁴⁷ E.G. Wakefield, *A Letter from Sydney*, p. 68.
- ⁴⁸ E.G. Wakefield to J. R. Godley, 7 June 1851, Item 82, Canterbury MS.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 53.
- ⁵⁰ Quoted in A. Shaw, *Great Britain and the Colonies*, p. 23. Duncan Bell has illustrated the importance of 'colonies' as a problem in nineteenth century political thought, though more could have been said of the implications of the fear of civilizational degeneration; see 'John Stuart Mill on Colonies', *Political Theory*, 38(1) (2010), pp. 34-64.
- ⁵¹ See for example the famous introductory preface on medieval Europe in W. Robertson, *History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles* (London: Routledge, 1996 [1769]).
- ⁵² E.G. Wakefield, *England and America* (London: Richard Bentley, 1833), p. 323.

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- ⁵³ A prominent nineteenth century relic of this approach is James Mill's *History of British India* with its admonition of political power of entrenched 'priestcraft'; on this aspect of the historic link between citizenship and orientalism see J. Harrington, 'Orientalism, political subjectivity and the birth of citizenship between 1780 and 1830', *Citizenship Studies*, Vol. 16, Issue 5-6 (2012), pp. 573-586
- ⁵⁴ For the European context see J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 14-15, 119.
- ⁵⁵ F. Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, p. 85.
- ⁵⁶ E.G. Wakefield, *England and America*, p. 326.
- ⁵⁷ M. Milgate & S.C. Stimson, *After Adam Smith* p. 191.
- ⁵⁸ E. Olssen, 'Mr. Wakefield and New Zealand as an Experiment in Post-Enlightenment Experimental Practice' in *New Zealand Journal of History* 31 (2) (1997), p. 213.
- ⁵⁹ E.G. Wakefield, *New Zealand*, p. 42.
- ⁶⁰ Evans et al, *Unequal Rights*, p.76.
- ⁶¹ J. Ruedy, *Modern Algeria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) p. 73.
- ⁶² E.G. Wakefield, *New Zealand*, p. 30,
- ⁶³ E.G. Wakefield, *A View of the Art of Colonization* (London: John W. Parker, 1849), p. 84.
- ⁶⁴ E.G. Wakefield, *Art of Colonization*, op. cit.
- ⁶⁵ P. Brantlinger, *Victorian Literature and the Postcolonial*, p. 36.
- ⁶⁶ E.G. Wakefield, *Art of Colonization*, p. 87.
- ⁶⁷ A. Shaw, *Great Britain*, p. 56.
- ⁶⁸ J. P. Greene, *Exclusionary Empire*, p. 19.
- ⁶⁹ J. G. Lambton, *Report on the Affairs of British North America [The Durham Report]* (House of Commons: London, 1839), Vol.2, p. 79.
- ⁷⁰ *The Durham Report*, p. 88
- ⁷¹ *Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle*, 2 June 1854, p 2 [Accessed on 20 January 2013 at: <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast>].
- ⁷² P. Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in 19th Century Pacific Rim Cities* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), p. 65.
- ⁷³ E.G. Wakefield, *South Australia*, p. 109.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- ⁷⁵ C. Hall, 'Imperial Careering at Home: Harriet Martineau on Empire' in A Lambert and A. Lester (Eds.) *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire. Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century*, (2006) pp. 335 - 35.
- ⁷⁶ E.G. Wakefield, *England and America*, p. xx.
- ⁷⁷ E.G. Wakefield, *A Letter from Sydney*, p. 240.
- ⁷⁸ K. Marx, *Capital: a critique of political economy* (London: C.H Kerr & Co., 1915), p. 844.
- ⁷⁹ D. A. Moses, *Empire, Colony and genocide* (London: Berghahn Books, 2008), p. xv.
- ⁸⁰ L. Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 195.
- ⁸¹ A. Shaw, *Great Britain*, p. 19.