GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

In modern times it has become increasingly obvious that to understand the larger issues of imperialism/colonialism, it is necessary to understand the local. The older 'macro' approaches often floated free of real places and specific people, concentrating as they did on the 'official mind' or on economic or demographic flows which were often divorced from what actually happened 'on the ground'. So far as the British experience is concerned, it has become increasingly obvious that we need to abandon the portmanteau 'Briton' and examine the varied and sometimes contrasting specific ethnicities of the British and Hibernian Isles – Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English. Moreover, we have increasingly seen the welcome development of insights being shared across the disciplines. The complexities of imperialism can indeed only be understood when ideas are pooled from anthropology, art history, environmental issues, the history of science, economics and, as in this case, historical geography. Moreover, the breaking down of imperial history into the national 'stories' of individual territories has also run its course. We have to examine comparative themes and interactions, notably between the so-called (and very diverse) 'metropole' and colonial territories.

The authors of this book offer some very valuable insights into the stage currently reached in the historiography and historical geography of the British Empire, not least in their critical appraisal of the writings of 'postcolonial' scholars, as well as in their analysis of different approaches to the concept of 'diaspora'. They also present new interpretations of the now long-standing theme of European settlement history by considering both Irish and Scots migrants and the manner in which they imaginatively re-conceptualised the cultural and religious, familial and economic, environmental and meteorological characteristics of place both in their origins and in their destinations. In doing so, they constructed family backgrounds in terms of home villages, towns and landscapes while adopting new colonial identities in the unfamiliar spaces in which they located themselves. Key components of such imaginative linkages included religion, literature (oral and written), genealogies and a whole variety of cultural forms, including dance, music and sports. The authors examine the spatial manifestations of these processes (including architecture and various iconic and visual memorials) in the vast pastoral landscapes of southern Australia, mainly in Victoria, as well as in towns and smaller communities where

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settlers often attempted to impose familiar forms – or the semblance of such forms – on highly unfamiliar places.

But the development of such multi-layered identities did not take place suddenly in the colonial setting. As the authors demonstrate, the developing transformation of such identities took place on ship-board voyages as well as in initial contacts with indigenous peoples. If that constitutes one end of the experience, the other is to be found in graveyards, where death acted as something more than the 'great leveler', offering opportunities for commemoration (through gravestones, for example) which sometimes continued to express myths of ethnic origin. To arrive at their stimulating conclusions, Proudfoot and Hall make innovative use of a wide variety of valuable sources, including diaries, letters, the local press and much else, the analysis of which offers insights into ways in which such studies can press forward.

They conclude that the emergence of fresh colonial identities was a complex and multi-layered process, contingent on a whole variety of experiences. Some of these contained echoes of the past mixed with new forms stimulated by the present. These developments were also highly interactive, as between different peoples, places, experiences and environments. Although it is no place of this book to do so, it is interesting and important to carry such developments forward into the era of swifter travel, when people who continued to cling to ethnic origins often sought cultural reinvigoration from returns to 'home' while never abandoning their new diasporic personas. As these ways of 'replugging' into past identities continued, we see the 'jigsaw' of ethnic attributes and affiliations beginning to form and re-form through successive generations. While far from universal, there are indeed continuing processes here that require to be understood. To use a culinary metaphor, the 'melting pot' contains many elements that are far from 'liquidised' into the whole. We are, in other words, dealing with constantly changing and developing phenomena. This book points the way to the manner in which further comparative studies can be developed, as well as constituting a foundation for these continuing generational studies.

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