Individualism versus Collectivism in New Zealand and the British Empire: Individual Rights and Biopolitics

A Symposium

Saturday 8 April 2017
9am - 5pm

History, Victoria University of Wellington – Te Whare Wānanga o Te Úpoko o Te Ika a Māui
Old Kirk 406 Wood Seminar Room

All welcome.
No registration fee but places limited.

Please register your interest in attending by 31 March, email to charlotte.macdonald@vuw.ac.nz

Programme overleaf.

Top: Employees of W W Corpe's butter & cheese factory, Makino, c.1900. Palmerston North.
Libraries and Community Services

Draft Programme

9.00-9.45  Anna Clark (University of Minnesota)
            Rage Against the Machine

9.45-10.15 Barbara Brookes (University of Otago)
            Nineteenth-Century Asylums: The liberty of the individual and the collective solution to ‘madness’

Chair: Charlotte Macdonald

10.15-10.30 Morning tea
10.30-11.00 Katrina Ford (University of Auckland/AUT)
            ‘Oblivious to their responsibilities’: collective individualism and public health in New Zealand in the late nineteenth century

11.00-11.30 James Keating (University of New South Wales)
            ‘Surely a little enquiry would have made the matter clear’: Britain, New Zealand, and the 1895 Contagious Diseases Act ‘Scandal’

Chair: tbc

11.30-11.35 short break
11.35-12.05 Raewyn Dalziel (University of Auckland)
            Understanding William and Mary Steadman Aldis: Sects and Sex

12.05-12.35 Hirini Kaa (University of Auckland)
            Te Toa Takitini: The Young Māori Party and Tribal Individualism

Chair: tbc

12.35-1.30 Lunch
1.30-2.00 Kate Hunter (Victoria University of Wellington)
            ‘My son is a New Zealander’: Competing collective identities in Australasia during the Great War

2.00-2.30 Hera Cook (University of Otago – Wellington Clinical School)
            What is Socialism without Collectivism?

2.30-3.00 Jane McCabe (University of Otago)
            An Intimate Trade: Family Farms and Inheritance Practice in Taieri and Hokianga

Chair: Jim McAloon

3.00-3.15 Afternoon tea
3.15-3.45 Richard Boast (Victoria University of Wellington)
            Individualism and Collectivism in Maori land policy in the 19th and 20th centuries

3.45-4.15 Katie Pickles (University of Canterbury)
            Collective Ferment in late 19th Century Christchurch and Beyond

4.15-4.45 Michael Belgrave (Massey University – Albany)
            Chiefs, gentlemen and the rabble: King Tāwhiao in London and threat of democracy.

Chair: tbc

4.45-5.00 Closing remarks
Anna Clark, Project Overview

In the nineteenth century, reformers often lamented that society was becoming too mechanical, that people were being treated like cogs in a machine, especially in the great new institutions of workhouses, schools and factories. These institutions can be characterized as a form of “biopolitics”, that is, the management of people and their bodies for greater social efficiency. In response, reformers and radicals asserted the importance of individual rights – but in complex and contradictory ways. How did these debates play out differently in colonial context? This project compares case studies in New Zealand, Ireland and India.

New Zealand was seen as a place where people could be free of mechanical society. Yet governments still wanted to manage the people – especially the Maori. Individualizing Maori land was part of a wider effort to “individualize” their families and culture (and appropriating their land). How did the project of individualizing the Maori shape white settlers’ self-image and political ideas? How did Maori movements respond to this project by creating new forms of collectivism? Why did some Maori around 1900 support individualization?

Politicians enacted the social reform measures of the 1890s in response to trade union and feminist agitation, but they also intended them to make New Zealand society more efficiently – and fend off socialism. In the process, feminists, individualists, trade unionist, utopian socialists, and government officials debated about local control of pub licensing, prostitution, protection of workers, hospitals, and contagious diseases in similar ways to their British counterparts – and may have influence them. British socialists denounced the aristocracy for controlling land, in New Zealand owners of the largest estates were seen as holding back opportunities for small-farm owning white settlers. How much was the “collective individualism” of New Zealand based on whiteness?

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