

# Book Review

**Joce Jesson**

**The University of Auckland**

Belich, James (2009).

*Replenishing the Earth: The settler revolution and the rise of the Angloworld, 1783-1939.*

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One of the fallouts from the global recession has been the reconsideration of various national or sovereignty questions and their relevance to education. These ideas are becoming of particular concern in the ‘settler societies’, the old dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, as they contemplate what globalisation means as a goal for education. What does the concept of nation mean in the context of the Global Knowledge Economy? How should we relate to the indigenous people? Should land that was acquired through often dubious means, be able to be owned by those who are now seen as foreigners? How do we construct a new idea of a national citizen through education? And the almost infamous immigration question: who is to be considered acceptable as part of our educated multicultural society?

The ideals of British liberalism with its support for multiculturalism, and education as progress and opportunity, are part of the identity for all of these settler societies. The concepts of rights, trade and culture as part of some sort of ‘Anglobalised’ identity are curiously intertwined with a deep history. James Belich’s *Replenishing the Earth* provides a comprehensive and provocative foundation from which to understand that history and its impacts. Those teaching educational histories will find much in this volume to help students think about the relevance of history in understanding national and supranational influences on education policy and practice across geographical contexts. Ideas of periodisation, culture, continuity and change are illustrated, helping readers consider why the education system with which they are used to dealing, is so similar or so different from others around the world.

James Belich is well known to many in New Zealand. He has taken on the mantle of the popular historian, is widely published, and is currently Professor of History at the Stout Research Centre of Victoria University in Wellington. We remember him from 1998 on television, striding across the landscape, hands flailing, flamboyantly narrating the story of the New Zealand Wars that was based on his doctorate at Oxford (Belich, 1986), and that has since been re-published both as book (Belich, 1998) and DVD (Stevens, 1999). In *Replenishing the Earth* Belich shifts his sights from New Zealand to consider wider understandings and implications of British imperialism. The delivery is equally expansive, the metaphor vibrant and exaggerated, creating an equally flamboyant narration of a much larger story.

Locating his story of the ‘Anglo-world’ and its British and American ‘settler revolutions’ that took place between between 1783 and 1939 as the final of three successive forms of European-driven transformation, Belich suggests that it was the mass export of settlers rather than the preceding trade networks and imperial conquests that was most consequential in transforming a society. Importantly, Belich problematises simplistic interpretations of imperialism by the way that he distinguishes empire from settlement. As he explained in a television interview, “settlement is basically the attempt to reproduce your own society at a distance. Empire is the attempt to subjugate someone else’s. So empire is the control of other peoples, settlement’s the reproduction of your own people in new forms at a distance” (Belich, 2009). Thus for Belich, it was explosive colonisation, following on from the incremental slow growth of settlers that occurred often in close relationship with the indigenous peoples until the early nineteenth century, through which the

new society was formed. The incoming settlers brought their culture with them rather than adapt to that of existing inhabitants. The Eastern United States seaboard became a new Anglo metropolis, separate from that of Britain, and settlement was extended to what Belich calls the West, first the American West and then the British West, comprising the settler dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

Explosive colonisation, Belich argues, was marked by continuing patterns of boom and bust. It “always ended with a bang, usually a big one, and the third type of colonization [recolonisation] emerged. With the bust, grand dreams of great independent futures faded, growth slowed, and export rescue eventually took hold” (179). As the new economies developed dependence on the export of staples to Britain or, in the case of the American West, the urban American East, links with what Belich describes as the oldlands were strengthened, replacing growth as the economic goal, and undermining ideals of equality and independence in the colonial newlands. The infrastructure of railways, ships and canals was further developed across huge distances to supply the long-range export of cotton, wood, wool, grain, meat and sugar. The flow of capital and manufactured goods (along with culture) from the metropolis enabled exports to expand. Shared collective identities were strengthened and economic re-integration of the oldland and the newland occurred, with the latter being recolonised as the Anglo-Wests. America’s push for independence created only “a short-lived rift” with Britain, Belich explains, and despite the geographical fragmentation of Britain and the dominions, ultimately the United States and ‘Greater Britain’ became “an organic unity” (50; 51) as the leading superpowers and the spearheads of major global change for some 200 years.

Decolonisation, as a conscious push for independence, came only in the mid-twentieth century. This is much later than is usually thought, and is entangled with the real rather than the nominal independence of the dominions. In many ways this is still unfolding, and as with colonisation, education is central to shaping attitudes and understandings of identity and citizenship. Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders continue to debate their national identities and how these identities relate to their British inheritance. They continue to worry about their newer and more diverse migrant populations and what citizenship means in the cosmopolitan world. For countries like New Zealand, the effect of such events as Britain’s entry into the European Economic Community of 1973, one explanatory factor for the introduction of neoliberal politics in the 1980s, has been to sharpen their focus on their role in the global economy, which, as the Global Knowledge Economy, is now ever more closely tied to education.

Belich’s work is intriguing. Less attention is paid to issues examined elsewhere—British colonisation was not always successful; the history of violence, enslavement and other atrocities associated with Anglo-World settlerdom; shifts in attitude towards settlement and what it meant to be a settler. Most significant of all, though, he provides fresh perspectives on this expansionary era and the complex relationships that shaped major social transformations. He suggests that “the rhythmic reconceptualization of the economic and cultural contours of settler histories . . . can usefully reframe other aspects of that history” (551). This has interesting possibilities for our interpretations of education, past, present and future.

## References

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