

# Rage against the machine: Biopolitics, Individualism and Collectivism in 19<sup>th</sup> Century New Zealand and the British Empire

## A Symposium

8 April 2017

History, Victoria University of Wellington – Te Whare Wānanga o Te Ūpoko o Te Ika a Māui

Old Kirk 406 Wood Seminar Room

Discussion is invited around the subject of Fulbright Scholar Anna Clark's current comparative research project on individualism vs collectivism. Responses to the themes, topics and questions posed by the project are warmly invited. See over for more information.



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

*Lower: Mrs Brent and Ida at tea. c.1890-97. Cameron, J G :Negatives of the Cameron and Haggitt families. Ref: 1/2-024950-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22797851>*

Please register your interest in attending by 20 March, email to [charlotte.macdonald@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:charlotte.macdonald@vuw.ac.nz)

*See over for details ...*

Anna Clark, *Rage against the machine: Biopolitics, Individualism, and Collectivism in 19<sup>th</sup> Century New Zealand and the British Empire*

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 measure of the 1890s in response to trade union and feminist agitation, but they also intended them to manage New Zealand society more efficiently—and fend off socialism. In the process, feminists, individualists, trade unionists, 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 influenced them. British socialists denounced the aristocracy for controlling land, in New Zealand owners of the large 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?

**Anna Clark is Professor of History of History, University of Minnesota and Fulbright Scholar 2017, Victoria University of Wellington**

Her publications include: *Alternative Histories of the Self* (Bloomsbury, forthcoming, 2017); ‘James Hinton and Victorian Individuality: Polygamy and the Sacrifice of the Self’ *Victorian Studies*, 54 35-61, 2011; with Aaron Windel. ‘The Early Roots of Liberal Imperialism: "The science of a legislator" in eighteenth-century India’, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 14 online, 2013. [Link](#); *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class*, University of California Press, 1995; *Desire: The History of European Sexuality*. Routledge, 2008; *Scandal: The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution*. Princeton University Press, 2004; ‘Wild Workhouse Girls in 19th Century Ireland’, *Journal of Social History*, 39 389-409, 2005.

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