The ubiquity of 25 April 1915 in Australian military history obscures the fact that colonial forces participated in three foreign wars during the nineteenth century. The Boer War elicits some recognition, but who remembers that colonial troops went to New Zealand in 1863 to fight against the Māori? Or that a New South Wales contingent fought in the Sudan in 1885? Sam Hutchinson’s *Settlers, War, and Empire in the Press* defies the ‘retroactive muting of Australian military history prior to 1915’ (p.83), by using colonial troops’ involvement in overseas conflicts to conduct a nuanced and sophisticated examination of the settler colonial psyche.

Military campaigns are to historiography what weddings are to families—the prospect of blood sacrifice brings loyalties and tensions into relief like little else. War demands profound consideration of what Hutchinson calls ‘ideas of community belonging’ (p.84)—who and what are worth dying for? The spectre of death also stimulates the rhetorical nerve; a phenomenon that Hutchinson is deeply attuned to. He uses Australian and British newspaper responses to the military campaigns as ‘a cultural palimpsest’ (p. 189), to illuminate the affective character of nineteenth century settler colonialism. His sensitive reading and articulate prose afford rich insights into the ways that newspaper rhetoric served the shifting forms of nineteenth century settler colonialism.

The Waikato War (1863-64) occurred at a particular moment in imperial history, during which Britain felt comparatively confident about its security within Europe. This confidence meant that Britain was more inclined to be skeptical about the value of its empire and reluctant to bear the enormous costs of imperial defence. Such official attitudes were echoed in criticism in the elite British press of the expense and conduct of the white New Zealanders’ campaign against the Maori. The Australian press, in contrast, reflected the self-interest of the Australian colonists, who wanted to see ‘the material and ethical bases of British settler land possession upheld across the empire’, and the repudiation of rival ‘native’ systems of land tenure (p. 44).

European geo-politics changed significantly in the decade that separated the Waikato War from the Sudan crisis of 1885. Competition for trade and colonies had intensified, and the recently unified German nation was challenging Britain’s long-establish naval supremacy. The security and economic benefits of empire led to the creation of a ‘high imperial moment’ (p.88), buttressed by monarchical pomp, the extravagant rhetoric of British race patriotism and the romanticisation of war. New South Wales’ offer of 770 troops to assist in the rescue of General Gordon in the
Sudan was reported by the bulk of the Australian and British press as a demonstration of its commitment to empire.

The high imperial moment coincided with an outpouring of nationalist feeling among the Australian colonies. The federation movement had fizzled after an upsurge in the early 1880s, but a radical brand of nationalism had coalesced around the *Bulletin* magazine. The Sudan crisis followed a striking demonstration of the fact that British and Australians interests sometimes diverged. In a climate of escalating concern about German and French influence in the Pacific region, Queensland had seized the north-eastern sector of New Guinea, only to have the annexation cancelled by the British government. Hutchinson conceives the *Bulletin’s* opposition to the New South Wales contingent as a kind of displaced morality: ‘The illegitimacy at the root of settler society is sharply articulated by the *Bulletin*, only removed to the safety of a different setting’ (p. 131).

Opposition to the Boer War was less easily dismissed, coming as it did from a range of respectable citizens that included the Victorian parliamentarian Henry Bournes Higgins and the Sydney University professor of history, Arnold Wood. While notions of British racial supremacy had been rocked by the unexpectedly strong martial performance of the Boers, efforts continued to justify the conquest in racial terms. The *Argus* concluded that the ‘Boer is a vanishing quantity. In one sense he is an aboriginal, to be put up with because he is disappearing’ (p. 177).

Hutchinson’s interest in the affective nature of media responses to settler colonialism has strong contemporary resonance, given the ‘attention economy’ in which digital media operates. If Victorian-era jingoism facilitated Australian participation in nineteenth century wars, the structurally-reinforced partisanship of the contemporary media environment is cause for concern. In a striking sentence, Hutchinson warns that: ‘The descendants of the settlers that form the subject of this book still enter foreign wars out of a sense of communal loyalty, still work hard to re-narrate Australian history and origins, still debate their national position vis-vis Aboriginal people, still are preoccupied with external approval, and still contest these matters in the media’ (p. 195).

The Indigenous dispossession hovers like a ghost over Hutchinson’s analysis of press responses to overseas wars. At the heart of *Settlers, War, and Empire in the Press* is an assertion that settler colonial rhetoric, refracted through overseas military campaigns, served to shore up the act of dispossession, to paper over the contradiction between the liberal democratic experiment that was taking place in the Australian colonies and the near-destruction of a race of people. Whether Hutchinson’s argument represents the imposition of a twenty-first century conscience over a nineteenth century sensibility, I am not sure.

Dr Carolyn Holbrook

*Deakin University*