In today’s world indigenous issues have moved to centre stage. In increasingly significant locales, such as Latin America, indigenous militancy has acquired greater visibility. The impact of indigenous activism, which is often opposed to neoliberal restructuring, has also increased. Of course, indigenous grievances have been expressed in the past; yet, almost by definition, this has been in a context of much more topical struggles – their demands have been typically marginalised, invisible, peripheral and ancillary. Times appear to be changing. In spite of diplomatic efforts by members of the United States administration, including a sponsored visit to Washington in November 2005, Ecuador’s caretaker President, Alfredo Palacio, did not sign the ALCA Treaty (Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas/Free Trade Area of the Americas). Both Palacio and George W. Bush were aware that another indigenous levantamiento (uprising) would most likely follow. This is one example of how indigenous peoples are shaping government policy. In Bolivia an indigenous person was elected as President. This unprecedented occurrence was testimony to the capacity of mobilising constituencies beyond the limits of traditional indigenous politics. While this development – at least in the case of Bolivia – has roots in the early 1970s with the development of katarismo and indianismo, which followed Fausto Reinaga’s criticism of mestizaje
as a national ideology and his placing of colonialism and the Indian question at the centre of public agendas, indigenous renaissances in many other places have had a long and often contested history (Reinaga 1969).

In terms of scholarly focus, a similar process emphasising the crucial role of indigenous legitimacies also seems underway. Despite a longstanding tradition of nationally insulated fields of academic enquire, in recent years an unprecedented number of publications have reflected on the divide between settler colonial formations and indigenous communities. As a result, a formerly neglected area of comparative historical and political scholarship has witnessed a remarkable revival (Havemann 1999; Ivison et al. 2000; Langton et al. 2004; Hocking 2005). This review focuses on two such contributions, one presenting an argument for an indigenous ontology as an antidote to imperial and neo-imperial unilateral responses, and another concentrating on the various trajectories of twentieth century experiences of settler colonial expansion and their demise. Makere Stewart-Harawira’s *The new imperial order* and Caroline Elkins and Susan Pedersen’s *Settler colonialism in the twentieth century* contribute to a revival of inclusive and comparative analysis. Most importantly, these books subvert received popular historical narratives: it is indigeneity’s coherent and comprehensive critique of existing global political trends that appears as truly and topically transnational, while it is settler colonial legacies that, instead of epitomising modernity’s progress, emerge as fragmented and localised.

Starting from an analysis of current crises, and explicitly referring to Leopold Senghor’s interpretation of ‘negritude’ as ‘a humanism of the twentieth century’ (248), Stewart-Harawira convincingly postulates an indigenous ontology as a humanism for what she perceives as troubled times urgently requiring new approaches. Quoting Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s influential work on *Empire*, she argues for this humanism as a counterpoint to contemporary imperial unilateralisms and other homogenising impulses of modernity (Hardt et al. 2000). Stewart-Harawira emphasises the universalising qualities of a shared indigenous worldview, ‘broad sets of ontologies that define [indigenous] relationships to all other life forms and to the cosmos’ (18–19).

This is an approach that allows her to deploy *kaupapa* Maori (a methodology emphasising a self-conscious identification as a Maori researcher) as capable of making sense of global trends and at the same time responding to large-scale challenges by retrieving and repositioning traditional indigenous forms of knowledge. In the end, *The new imperial order* strategically upsets the perception that indigenous contributions are generally more comfortable with biography, family, community and local histories and other circumscribed concerns. Stewart-Harawira does not refrain from an appraisal of global historical trends; her indigenism/humanism is capable of contrasting globalisation *on its own ground* and not only by reaffirming the critical role of localised practices. Independent of possible concerns regarding the actual viability of an ‘ecosophical indigenous world view as a contribution toward a new ontology for world order’ (25), her book is a remarkable and necessary contribution.

*Settler colonialism in the twentieth century* is also engaged in subverting received assumptions. For example, it proves beyond doubt that settler ‘frontiers’ were not ‘closed’ at the turn of the twentieth century with the emergence of an international system of national white settler colonial polities. By recovering a long tradition of settler colonial projects – a tradition that actually developed throughout the last century and an institutional form that survived the initial wave of decolonisation – Elkins and Pedersen are able to present a coherent typology of settler colonial endeavours and a viable framework for comparative analysis based on an appraisal of settler
incorporation into colonial governance and institutionalisation of settler privilege. Their analysis takes into consideration ‘crucial and often interlocking issues like land alienation, labour supply, market conditions, legal codes and political rights’, and their conclusion distinguishes between British and French experiences in Africa, where ‘issues pertaining to land, economy, law, and justice came to be largely structured around the needs and demands of the settlers’, and locales like Korea, Manchuria, Abyssinia and Eastern Europe, where centralised colonial states ‘were never substantially captured and redirected by settler interests’ (135–136).

The very possibility of comparing different processes of settler colonial expansion is in itself a major and welcome development in the analysis of settler colonial formations. Yet, Elkins and Pedersen strategically limit their focus to the twentieth century and to the specific geopolitical areas of Asia and Africa. Their work deals with a number of locales where the role of the institutions of the colonising state was dominant, and to regimes that were eventually defeated, either in World Wars or by extended indigenous insurgesencies that ultimately forced a review of settler control and political monopoly. While they insist on the continuing legacies of settler colonial experiences, their focus is not on the present and their narrative neatly concludes with a section dedicated to postcolonial aftermaths. An exception to this pattern is the inclusion of a remarkable chapter by Gershon Shafir dedicated to the early colonisation of Israel/Palestine, a case, however, that does not seem to be fully integrated in Elkins and Pedersen’s framework of analysis – it does not even appear in the comparative table they present in their introduction! As a result of these exclusions, and despite their reference to Patrick Wolfe’s work on the structures of settler colonial forms, an inclusive and analytical approach remains somewhat underdeveloped (Wolfe 1999). Moreover, an emphasis on the role of the State prevents an analysis of settler colonial forms on the ‘frontier’: the very setting of settler colonial expansion and a circumstance where, by definition, the institutions of the state have not yet been suitably established.

In Australia, reflections on postcolonial conditions are remarkably lacking, criticism of neoliberal orders has been effectively silenced, and the state of historical debate remains extraordinarily parochial. Thanks to an enthusiastic press, for example, we are now discussing whether the British occupation of the country was determined in accordance to a perception of Australia as *terra nullius* that discounted Indigenous legitimacies or, on the contrary, whether the British merely discounted Indigenous legitimacies and occupied the country *without referring to* *terra nullius* – how more narcissistic could this be? These debates fail to consider the importance of settler colonial formations and their trajectories on the one hand, and the possibility of philosophical approaches aware of Indigenous contributions on the other.¹ Concurrently, an awareness of overseas intellectual shifts may contribute to the realisation that an acknowledgment of indigenous sovereignties might be a way forward for all and a more significant development than the prospect of a ‘practical reconciliation’ which appears to be limited to Aboriginal Australians.

**ENDNOTES**

¹ Recent Australian exceptions to these silences should be mentioned: A. Dirk Moses (2004); Stephen Muecke (2004); and Deborah Bird Rose (2004).
REFERENCES


