Negotiating A Bicultural Past: An Historiographical ‘Revolution’ in 1980s Aotearoa/New Zealand

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**Introduction**

This paper analyses the evolution of the discourses of history in New Zealand during a decade of rapid social transformation that witnessed particularly intense historiographical activity. Its focus is upon the period between the publication of the first and the second editions of the *Oxford History of New Zealand* in 1981 and 1992, and upon a subject central to New Zealand’s development – race relations.¹ It is contended that the New Zealand historiography of race relations constitutes an exception in the context of settler countries’ narratives of national history, and modern developments of this exceptionalism are explained.

As well as providing an examination of the process of historiographical redescription of the past, the paper investigates the relationship between institutional/political developments and the emergence and progressive consolidation of a new interpretative orthodoxy of the history of race relations in New Zealand. Starting in the 1970s, and especially during the 1980s, the country witnessed what could be referred to as a ‘historiographical revolution’ on this subject. A process of comprehensive reappraisal was brought about by a group of scholars who profited from the intersection of exceptional circumstances: a historiographical tradition exploring the uniqueness of the New Zealand experience and the emergence of a perceived interethnic partnership, and a dramatically changing social and then political climate.

The most prominent and immediate factor stimulating historical research and history rewriting at this time was the political and public attention paid to race relations; in particular, to what is sometimes referred to as the ‘Waitangi process’, the overall process of legal, social, ethical and constitutional upgrading of the Treaty of Waitangi. In its turn, this process stimulated debates on the nature of the Maori-Pakeha relationship and promoted a redescription of national identity. By the 1980s, indeed, the general public seemed to be exceptionally interested in revisionist narratives of national history and in relatively sophisticated reflections on the bicultural nature of New Zealand society: history books were consistently among the best sellers in bookshops, a rare phenomenon in the history of the country.²


² J. Belich’s *The New Zealand Wars* and C. Orange’s *The Treaty of Waitangi* ‘were both prize-winning books which remained on the non-fiction best-seller list for many months. Indeed, publishers were quick to see a market for books’. G. W. Rice (ed.), *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, op. cit., p. ix.
Partly as a result of such developments, New Zealand now possesses a relatively ‘positive vision’ of its past, a valuable asset in an ethnically difficult and potentially explosive social landscape. Relatedly, it possesses a tradition of historical debate, and a general public that is, comparatively speaking, remarkably aware of historical realities. While the debate slowed down in the 1990s, and reaction against revisionism set in, the comprehensive process of redescription during the 1980s has not been in vain. New Zealand history, ‘unsettled’ after having been ‘established’ for over a century, has been ‘resettled’ on a sounder basis. This process is not yet finished.
From ‘Aotearoa and New Zealand’ to ‘Aotearoa/New Zealand’

The Aotearoa/New Zealand (‘the order can be reversed’, as J. G. A. Pocock has noted) historiography of race relations constitutes a remarkable exception among settler countries’ narratives of national history. It comprises, in general, a consolidated interpretative notion that the history of the country, as well as its historiography, represents – in some way or another - an outstanding example in the comparative context of the various ‘New Britains’. Within that paradigm, from the 1970s, and with a marked acceleration during the 1980s, the country has witnessed what could be referred to as a ‘historiographical revolution’.

This process of comprehensive reappraisal was brought about by a group of mainly younger scholars who took the advantage of profiting from a set of exceptional circumstances. Firstly, from engagement with a historiography traditionally interested in underlying themes related to a perceived interethnic partnership and singularity of the New Zealand experience and location; and secondly, from an actual ‘unique’ social and political climate at a point in time.

In the rapid social and political change which engulfed New Zealand from the late 1960s and which peaked in the 1980s, the most prominent and immediate factor stimulating historical research and history rewriting has been the political and public attention paid to race relations; in particular, to what is sometimes referred to as the ‘Waitangi process’, the overall process of

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3 These are taken from the titles of a book by A. H. Grey and a collective work by historians K Neumann, N Thomas and H Ericksen. The presence of ‘and’ in the first is an indication of the coexistence of two notions relating to the same geographical entity, a nominalistic dichotomy that also expresses the fact that these constructs represent a dialectical dialogue. While Grey’s book portrays the transformation of New Zealand’s environment brought about by ‘European invasion’ in positive terms, though, it relegates the role of Maori people as merely one of the many ‘natural’ factors that attempted – unsuccessfully - to prevent such transformation from taking place. Neumann, Thomas and Ericksen have opted for the more ambivalent ‘Aotearoa/New Zealand’ for reasons related to this. It is interesting to note that none of the two sets of authors chose to relate the Maori and the English names of the country through the mutually exclusive ‘or’. A. H. Grey, Aotearoa and New Zealand: A Historical Geography, Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 1994; K. Neumann, N. Thomas, H. Ericksen (eds.), Quicksands: Foundational Histories in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1999.


legal, social, ethical and constitutional upgrading of the Treaty of Waitangi.\textsuperscript{7} In its turn, this trend promoted the revisiting of related issues, such as that of national identity, and stimulated debates on the ultimate nature of relations between \textit{tangata whenua} (Maori) and Pakeha. The whole process should however be seen as a two-way one, in which historiographical developments were not only responding to a changing situation but also contributing to its development.

No doubt at least partly as a result of the various socio-economic and other transformations, by the 1980s the general public seemed to be exceptionally interested in revisionist narratives of national history, and in relatively sophisticated reflections on the ‘bicultural’ (or, often, ‘multicultural’) nature of New Zealand society. During the decade, as we have noted, history books were consistently among best sellers in New Zealand, but the process of widespread historiographical revision had begun in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{8} During that decade the emergence of a new kind of Maori militancy had underlined, among many other things, the inadequacy of the established interpretative pattern regarding race relations. Until then, ‘orthodoxy’ with regard to New Zealand history had been, in Jock Phillips’ words, ‘squeezed between a people wanting cosy myths and an international world of scholarship not interested in New Zealand’.\textsuperscript{9} This previous interpretation of the country’s past had enjoyed a remarkable degree of cohesion and public support. However, things now changed rapidly and radically, one of the most impressive aspects of the historiographical ‘revolution’.

The ‘orthodox’ tradition could be seen as having been definitively formed during the 1890s, with William Pember Reeves’ influential production of a general history of the country.\textsuperscript{10} While the New Zealand branch of the Gallipoli (where New Zealand identity was supposedly forged) and other mythologies were attached to it at a later stage, the interpretative framework of the orthodox narrative survived intact well into the 1970s; historians had meanwhile contented themselves with its general reproduction.\textsuperscript{11} New Zealand was deemed among other things to be harmonious and progressive in matters of race, gender and class. When a process


\textsuperscript{8} For an analysis of the evolution of the historiographical discourse during the 1970s, see my doctoral dissertation entitled \textit{Negotiating Indigenous Resistance in the South Pacific: Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand and Kanaky-New Caledonia, Three Cases in Historical Redescription}, PhD thesis, Griffith University, Brisbane, 2001, especially pp. 146-161.

\textsuperscript{9} J. Phillips, ‘Of Verandahs and Fish and Chips and Footie on Saturday Afternoon’, op. cit., p. 124.


\textsuperscript{11} See J. Phillips, ‘Of Verandahs and Fish and Chips and Footie on Saturday Afternoon’, op. cit., pp. 120-128.
of redescribing finally occurred, it was part of an overarching process involving much more than history. When traditional representations of national identity entered into crisis, in other words, it was in a context of a whole society, a whole ‘value system’, undergoing radical change - not just traditional narratives.

We will take one example of a contemporaneous ideological ‘readjustment’ on a ‘race’-related matter: the transformation of the status of the ‘national sport’, rugby union. Rugby had long been crucial to New Zealand self-representations – as significant, as Phillips has argued, as its historical representation. In fact, he argues, it performed a social function which had been the mandate of the ‘orthodox’ interpretation of the country’s history:

… there is one final role which this male stereotype in rugby and war played in New Zealand society during the twentieth century. It served as a way of maintaining certain important fictions about New Zealand, and so disguised tensions and conflicts that New Zealanders have preferred not to examine.

The original ‘myth’ or ‘stereotype’ of New Zealand rugby had initially been established at the time of the entrenching, during the first two decades of the twentieth century, of the historical ‘orthodoxy’ whose overturning this article is concerned with. This ‘set of images’ (as well as, again, the conventional interpretation of the country’s history) had ‘remained much the same for the next sixty years or so’. It is no surprise that, having been established at around the same period and having performed a similar role, both sets of images entered into major crisis during the same phase. By the end of the 1970s, the crisis in rugby was already in place, awaiting its climax as a result of the massive social disruptions surrounding protest at the 1981 Springbok Tour. The anti-‘ racist tour’ movement would upset much more than the New Zealand rugby establishment proper; and the movement had implications far beyond rugby for its participants and supporters.

After the fiasco of the Springbok Tour saw the culmination of an anti-rugby trend, the centrality of the game as a suitable metaphor and expression of New Zealand values could

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13 J. Phillips, ‘Rugby, War and the Mythology of the New Zealand Male’, op. cit. p. 102. The author was writing this in 1984 just before the rapid transformation of New Zealand society. During the 1980s, matters that New Zealanders had preferred not to examine, would be subjected to intelligent historical inquiry, a process that would produce an all-inclusive new interpretation of the country’s past.
not, for a period, be sustained.\textsuperscript{16} Only at the end of the decade of the 1980s, after New
Zealand’s triumph in the World Cup and a process of thorough reformation, would rugby
regain much of its status within New Zealand society. And even then, such adjustments and
others had meant that its values and expressions had been deeply transformed; crucially,
professionalism, opposition to which was a central tenet of the previous set of images (the All
Blacks ‘were not hired men’), would be finally accepted. There were by-products of this and
other developments: traditional insistence on the ‘classlessness’ of the team, the ‘rural
pioneering background’ of the teams, the exemplary ‘modesty’ of rugby players, would all
become less prominent.\textsuperscript{17}

Such developments were paralleled in a strikingly parallel way in the historiographical sphere.
By the end of the 1980s, a fully-fledged historical revisionist interpretation would be ready to
fill the gap that recent rejections of traditional historical images had created. The new
imagery could be extraordinarily different from the previous ones, amounting generally to a
much more sophisticated interpretation (albeit - as we shall see - in many respects consonant
with the one that preceded it). By the end of the decade the most conspicuous symptoms of
the cultural crisis that had interacted with such developments seemed to be over, the
establishment of a new and widely accepted historical interpretation having constituted part of
a general process of reshaping national identity. The history of ‘New Zealand’, with
‘Aotearoa’ added on, was now the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

As noted, the 1980s had seen the maturation of a parallel trend that had been going on for at
least a decade: the emergence and consolidation of widespread attention being paid to Treaty
of Waitangi matters, and the beginnings of translation of this into systems to address race
relations problems. This was one keynote manifestation of the way in which the practical
reshaping of constitutional and legislative practices went hand in hand with the rewriting of
national history. These had been very interlinked processes, as was noted in 1990:

\begin{quote}
… trained historians were to be found in a host of new jobs which developed in the past
15 years - in the Waitangi Tribunal, in the \textit{Dictionary of New Zealand Biography}, and
the Historical Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs, in museums, in the Historic
Places Trust, in libraries and archives, which also began to establish professional
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16} For an examination on the impact of the different Springbok tours to New Zealand and specifically of the 1981
one, see M. Templeton, \textit{Human Rights and Sporting Contacts: New Zealand Attitudes to Race Relations in South
\textsuperscript{17} J. Phillips, ‘Rugby, War and the Mythology of the New Zealand Male’, op. cit. p. 90, 91.
credentials and established their own association. As New Zealand history entered the schools, teachers too entered the market for serious New Zealand history.\textsuperscript{18}

In such ways the ‘crippling gap between popular historians writing superficial truths for a local audience and serious historians looking to the scholarly community overseas’ had been comprehensively narrowed.\textsuperscript{19} In the Treaty of Waitangi studies field, at ‘the end of the 1980s the sales of Claudia Orange’s intellectually demanding book on the Treaty of Waitangi were on a scale previously only reached by rugby memoirs’.\textsuperscript{20}

During the 1990s, however, history books would be in a rather different position in New Zealand’s publishing landscape; in fact they sold considerably less than during the previous ‘revolutionary’ decade. Perhaps relatedly, after a bicultural identity based on a renovated vision of the nation’s past had been established, the debate abated - or in the case of Treaty matters it came to focus on the practicalities of settlement of grievances against the Crown, rather than on their historical nature. Generally speaking, while the legitimacy of Maori grievances had been generally accepted, and there were important institutions of state that were devoted to the determination and settlement of these, the historical debate slowed down.

This reflected, in a sense, Crown and Pakeha alarm at the implications of what were proving long-winded arrangements to settle historical grievances. There was even a tendency in parts of the state machinery - suggested as early as 1987 by the Treasury - to propose a pattern of settlement ‘on the cheap’ by a ‘one shot’, across-the-board payment to Maori that would put an end to the whole compensation process. This was actually done for a sector of Maori claims, those relating to commercial fishing. But the proposal for a ‘grand-slam’ settlement to cover all Waitangi claims had to be abandoned. Maori were generally suspicious of the Crown, and a 1994 Crown policy of a billion-dollar ‘fiscal cap’ on claims settlements was comprehensively rejected by Maori communities.\textsuperscript{21}

However, the idea of a wide-ranging, across-the-board settlement, albeit of different composition to that of Treasury’s aspirations, retained some appeal; such proposals had been endorsed by scholars engaged in the debate whose commitment and intellectual honesty could not be doubted, and who could see that a ‘fiscal cap’ of a billion dollars was unworkable. A

\textsuperscript{18} J. Phillips, ‘Of Verandahs and Fish and Chips and Footie on Saturday Afternoon’, op. cit., p. 128.
\textsuperscript{19} J. Phillips, ‘Of Verandahs and Fish and Chips and Footie on Saturday Afternoon’, op. cit., p. 128.
\textsuperscript{20} J. Phillips, ‘Of Verandahs and Fish and Chips and Footie on Saturday Afternoon’, op. cit., p. 128.
review article by James Belich that appeared in the *New Zealand Journal of History*, for example, analysed the situation as follows:

Nineteenth-century Maori land alienation might be said to fall into two categories: involuntary and voluntary. Involuntary cessions included confiscation and sales involving fraud, deceit, a minority of owners, legal chicanery, and undue pressure. Voluntary sales involved none of these things. In the North Island, before the 1860s, I believe voluntary sales may have been the norm. Maori wanted Pakeha neighbours for the economic benefits they would bring. To get them, they sold land cheaply. But economic and political partnership with the Pakeha communities, which such sales created, was part of the deal - a hundred little treaties. Once Pakeha power grew and Maori power diminished sufficiently, the former broke the deal. Tribes which lost both land and partnership in such transactions would now have difficulty in proving this before the Tribunal, so a whole dimension of injustice is beyond its ambit. Furthermore, this consideration suggests that virtually all Maori land alienation was either unjust to start with, if involuntary, or subsequently became unjust, if voluntary. It is a grand-slam problem. Why not a grand-slam solution?22

Over and above difficulties in the settlement of Treaty grievances – and there was rapid progress in the 1990s - the whole process of ‘Treaty partnership’ came under considerable stress and challenge. The end result of criticism of the various facets of the Treaty relationship has been a relative or absolute alienation of sections of public opinion, particularly as a result of what have been seen (misguidedly *per se*, and in terms of confusing settlement of historical grievances with matters of ongoing Crown-Maori relations) as excessive numbers of settlements and excessive quanta of settlement monies. Perhaps relatedly, most of the historical research carried out in this decade followed lines consistent with interpretative norms established during the 1980s. During the 1990s, then, considerable and particular attention was devoted to such ongoing themes as the economic relations between Pakeha and Maori worlds during the first half of nineteenth-century, or the political and ideological organisation of Maori communities during and in the aftermath of the Anglo-Maori wars.23 As we shall see, the 1980s had witnessed the historiographical ‘discovery’ of effective Maori armed resistance. The subsequent decade, while retaining its

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stress on resistance, tended to switch its focus to resistance practices that departed from the simple armed contestation of Pakeha supremacy. In sum, in the 1970s, and especially in the 1980s, a new understanding of nineteenth-century experiences became a scholarly underpinning for the country’s rediscovered bicultural nature.

One example of scholarly outcome of this process was a nearly complete revision of the value to be attributed to pre-annexation New Zealand. J. M. R. Owens thus suggested in the 1992 *Oxford History of New Zealand*:

… the achievements of the pre-1840 period, in economic development, race relations, social controls, and in search for a socially relevant religious outlook, were considerable. … [T]he social world of the pre-1840s left its legacy as an alternative tradition in New Zealand.24

A similar process of ‘historical rehabilitation’ could be detected in relation to the post-Treaty decade. Not only were the wars and their results revised in James Belich’s ground-breaking 1986 work, for example, rehabilitating and highly enhancing Maori organisational and martial abilities, so was the pre-war period of the colony:

[in some respects, the Treaty of Waitangi of 1840 is an artificial watershed. …Maori independence persisted, and in the North Island the situation until 1863 continued to be one of Maori predominance. …There were recessions and fluctuations, but generally Maori markets, primary production, and coastal and river transport underpinned the economy of the European settlements. These settlements in turn provided the Maori with markets for their own goods, and trading-centres for the distribution of European goods. These activities were less competitive than complementary: the Maori zone was the European hinterland, the European zone was the Maori entrepot. Economically the two were mutually dependent. Even the most staunch Maori opponents of British expansion, in the midst of the war period, found this situation satisfactory.25

The need for a ‘tradition’ to be used as a source of inspiration to cope with contemporary problems is not unusual in situations of contested, ambiguous or rapidly transforming national identities. In the case of New Zealand historical interpretation, such a tendency had always been present. What has happened in the period under scrutiny was not only the substitution of

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an obsolete tradition with a more scholarly one, but also one more in keeping with grappling with the issues of the times.

In his analysis of the nineteenth and twentieth-century nationalist discourse on Pakeha-Maori relations, Belich notes two of the old myth-traditions:

[O]ne component [of this tradition-establishing process] was the Great Fleet - ‘The Great New Zealand Myth’ - and its precursors, which gave Maori a heroic and European-like history of exploration and settlement. From the more recent past came a laundered legend of the New Zealand Wars, which emphasized the courage and Christian chivalry of Maori resisters over and above their effectiveness. The wars were portrayed as minor squabbles, after which the combatants kissed and made up.26

A ‘third element’ of this tradition he depicts as the ‘Aryan Maori’ myth. Its importance, resilience and circulation has been, according to Belich’s analysis, thoroughly underestimated:

[F]or Pakeha, the Aryan Maori legitimated European colonialism in New Zealand as a family re-union. It populated a runeless and ruinless land with a respectably lengthy, romantic, and distinguishing, yet European-like, history. It overcame the Maori as an obstacle to the recolonial demand for racial homogeneity.27

These ideological constructions, which had been used to build a sense of national identity based on ‘superior natives and superior treatment of natives’, a sense of national identity capable of telling (for example) ‘the difference between Australian Britons and New Zealand ones’, eventually came to a crisis and were rejected in our period.28

Their function though, the necessities for which they had been elaborated in the first place, had not disappeared. And so the gap was eventually filled with a new vision. It was the scholar who during the 1980s had contributed the most in the process of demolition of the old traditions who proposed, a decade later, the most elaborated version so far of a new national

28 J. Belich, ‘Myth, Race and identity in New Zealand’, op cit., p. 19. It is worth noting that, despite exposing its ideological nature, Belich does acknowledge the overall positivity of such a mythology: ‘New Zealand Aryanism did have benign effects. The superiority of New Zealand settler-native relations was real as well as mythical’; J. Belich, ‘Myth, Race and identity in New Zealand’, op cit., p. 20.
A process of historiographical reinterpretation ‘by substitution’ of orthodoxies might, then, be deemed to have occurred since revisionism commenced.

Such a process has interacted with the resurgence of *iwi* authorities, *runanga* and other organised Maori formations, and the intensifying of their relationships with the state. While tribal authorities have in recent years acquired enlarged responsibilities, often procuring legal and other accountability along the way, interpretation of their historical experience has also been transformed. Previously, strong distinctions had typically been made between both ‘collaborationist’ and ‘resisting’, and ‘traditional’ and newly established, *iwi*. The new interpretative trend was instead stressing autonomous decision-making and independent patterns of evolution. Indigenous communities not existing or still forming before colonisation had been unacceptable to the pre-1980s historical discourse, which saw Maori institutions as incapable of evolution. The notion of the ‘traditional’ Maori ‘froze’ cultural practices in the books, dismissing the possibility of evolution of identities and allegiances. The capacity of *iwi* in the past, ‘traditional’ or of recent formation, ‘collaborationist’ or resisting, was thoroughly enhanced by revisionist accounts. As Paul McHugh later commented:

… it should not be forgotten that history is on their side: apart from the land sales made by the weakened Ngai Tahu during the mid-nineteenth century and the problems of the early transactions during the late 1830s and early 1840s, the Maori tribes have no history of significant asset-loss or depletion. The substantial losses of land that occurred in the century after the Treaty of Waitangi were substantially a result of statutory appropriation or individualization rather than any lack of managerial expertise on the part of the tribe.\(^{30}\)

The tribal institutions of Maoridom, historical and contemporary, had weakened under colonisation but eventually recovered some of their powers; they are now engaged in recovering the institutional status and autonomy that Maori leaderships have so consistently advocated throughout history.\(^{31}\) Their rehabilitation has been accompanied by processes of historical rehabilitation, including of the *iwi* which had collaborated with Pakeha forces – and


which had received an initial considerable boost in Belich’s analysis of *kupapa* behaviour, effectiveness and agendas. *Iwi* and *hapu* which had at a later stage acceded to pressures by state administrations were also rehabilitated in the historical reinterpretation, and their strategic approach to cope with assimilationist and dispossessionary practices highlighted.32

Such process amounted to such a comprehensive pattern of rehabilitation of the tribe that - in Maori academic I. H. Kawharu’s words in 1989 - ‘the concept of tribe and tribal authority is now enjoying a resurgence of acceptability’.33 This was a dramatic inversion from what was perceived in the period of the Maori migrations to the urban areas in the 1950s and 1960s, when ‘tribe’ was considered an anachronism and Maori authority defined by Pakeha-imposed structures.

The intertwined relationship of history, nation, state, Treaty, tribe and ethnic relations might be one explanation for Aotearoa/New Zealand’s frequently observed uniqueness. Pocock has recently commented on ‘the point of bifurcation from which New Zealand and Australian history begins to become as profoundly different, as in many ways they are’:

> [I]t can be argued that the Treaty of Waitangi and the intellectual preparation for it have had the effect of conceding the Maori presence in the universe of *jus gentium*, whereas the effect of *terra nullius* has been the refusal of such a presence to Aboriginal peoples, deemed unable to appropriate lands or make war and peace, and thus obliging them, even today, to seek remedies in the universe of *jus naturale*, which has no history. This argument in several ways entails ideal simplifications. The admission of Maori to *jus gentium* was imperfect and often denied, and did not prevent Maori from suffering manifold injustices within that universe. To write Aboriginal history as if it had been governed by the *terra nullius* judgment and by nothing else would certainly be inadequate… However, the argument does permit the contention that, in virtue of Waitangi, Aotearoa/New Zealand history has, as Aboriginal/Australian history perhaps has not, occurred in a universe of *jus gentium*, where wars and treaties are recognized components of history*.34

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33 For a brief survey of this process of tribal administrative empowerment, see I. H. Kawharu (ed.), *Waitangi*, op. cit., pp. xi-xvi.
The exceptionality of the past and the rapidity of the ‘historiographical revolution’ have both had great impact on the ideological construction of Aotearoa/New Zealand:

The rewriting of New Zealand/Aotearoa history … appears to have become established, and since it is unlikely that history can be written with finality, it must continue to be practiced, and to happen, as well as be rewritten. This is a remarkable characteristic of that polity as it now finds itself.35

New Zealand historians have thus performed a sort of ‘national duty’, producing an historical vision more in line with contemporary necessities and developments, and in turn influencing them. Historians have, as already noted, performed something comparable to what rugby footballers had done during the second half of the 1980s: fill a gap after a major crisis, after a collective process of concern. A renovated, rhetorical image and ideology of national identity needed to find backing and authority in a newly organised or ‘discovered’ historical tradition of racial cooperation, Maori organisational capacity and shared responsibility. Thus, among the newly ‘discovered’ aspects of Maori history, is a long tradition of active Maori autonomous and non-hegemonised involvement with the political institutions of the state, alongside achievements in war, trade and so forth. Contemporary images of contested partnership between Maori and Pakeha can now be examined in the light of a new reading of history, and vice versa.

This is not at all to say that the kind of history that has been produced is unprofessional or non-‘objective’ because it looks at the past with eyes concerned with the present. On the contrary, it is the previous version of the nation’s history that at a certain point in time had ceased to fulfil its professional role, insofar as it was looking at the past with eyes of the past. Bicultural eyes, aware of the complexities of the ‘old New Zealand’ racial interface, are better able to penetrate into the country’s past than are those glazed by long engagement with an outmoded historical mythology.36

New Zealanders now proudly possess, at least at an ideological level, a ‘positive’ vision of their past, a valuable asset in an ethnically difficult – and, some might say, potentially explosive - social landscape. That the general public is, relatively speaking, remarkably aware of historical realities, reflects a tradition of historical debate that was accelerated by the

36 For comments about the existence and resilience of ‘Old New Zealand’ see J. Belich, Making Peoples, op. cit., and especially part two.
revisionists. The 1980s were an ‘exciting few years’ in which ‘New Zealanders [were] starting to talk about history books and buy them with the enthusiasm which ten years [before were] reserved for novels’.37 It is true that the 1990s, in these respects, did not continue the debate at the same intensity, but the ‘historiographical revolution’ had not been in vain. The history of separate ‘New Zealand’ and ‘Aotearoa’ histories became the history of New Zealand and Aotearoa and has ended up as the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand. It became ‘unsettled’ after nearly a century of being ‘settled’.38 Despite a certain waning in debate, this process is not over yet. It could still be abandoned, or - and there are signs that this could still occur –reversed. But all the signs are that, as the new history - encapsulated in say Belich’s work - rests on a sound basis for ongoing debate as to the appropriate ‘resettling’ of the nation’s past, the writing of New Zealand/Aotearoa history will have a significant and vigorous future.

**Writing History During the ‘Quiet Revolution’**

During the 1980s New Zealand was rapidly transformed. First, there was the social and cultural turbulence that began in the 1960s, escalated in the 1970s, and culminated in the 1980s in Treaty and race relations matters. Then, the activity of the fourth Labour Government radically reshaped the economic infrastructure of the country from 1984 to 1990. During its term of office very few aspects of what had previously been an overarching welfare state remained intact or unchallenged. Changes were not confined to the economic or political spheres, narrowly defined; wide ranging reforms included the upgrading of what had been until then a more or less non-empowered institution, the Waitangi Tribunal. The Tribunal’s jurisdiction was substantially enhanced, in 1985, so that it was now able to hear Maori grievances stretching back to 1840, and its size and funding was accordingly increased.\(^{40}\)

The *State Owned Enterprises Act 1986*, generally identified as a turning point of constitutional significance, made explicit reference to the Treaty in a way that – in some interpretations - *de facto* upgraded it into a constitutionally binding document.\(^{41}\) This quasi-constitutional outcome had not come about abruptly. It was the logical conclusion of a trend that had started during the 1970s in response to increasing Maori activism and demands, and (relatedly) to growing anxieties in respect of ethnic divisions. But in the intense developments of the 1980s, it was the Waitangi Tribunal that became the focus of an intense debate – one that came to focus on its role, authority and functions.\(^{42}\) History came to prominence. Even the pre-1985 Tribunal – despite its post-1975 mandate - could not ignore the historical relationships between Crown and Maori, and the history profession was now increasingly coming to focus on reinterpreting these. In fact, political and legal grappling with the issue of Maori grievances, and historical redescription, were proceeding along parallel, radically revising lines.

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The historical vision in this decade was to be comprehensively ‘re-organised’ - to use M. P. K. Sorrenson’s definition - or ‘unsettled’ (to follow the title and theme of Alan Ward’s most recent book).\(^{43}\) The emergent historical narratives would be more in tune with the new political and cultural climate, and would respond to the demands brought about by different ways of conceiving the country’s national identity.\(^{44}\) As we have noted, this was a two way process: New Zealand’s new historiography, while certainly influenced by the changing political, social and economical contexts, was also an active factor in this transformation. A sustained historical debate stimulated new and comprehensive visions of the national record, and strongly informed a number of transformations in the socio-political world of the 1970s and 1980s.

The net result of this revisionist activity, a shift of emphasis as well as a shift in themes, was that historical judgements were entirely upturned. While the historical literature of previous decades that was related to Maori topics had concentrated on what was perceived to be gradual Maori assimilation to European norms, during the 1980s a new stress was being placed on pre-Treaty decades and the two decades or so thereafter. Such a phase, revisionist narratives were suggesting, had been characterised by a relatively long period of economic cooperation and non-competitive ‘sharing’ of resources between the two races. What had been seen as a phase of ‘chaotic’ lack of ‘order’, then as an unruly early frontier, was being reinterpreted as a period of racial cooperation.\(^{45}\)

The wars of the 1860s and the colonial practices of the rest of the century were now represented as a crucial departure from this tradition of cooperation. What had been interpreted as a mainly ‘positive’ phase in the history of a relatively successful assimilation, then, was now acknowledged to be a period of political, economic, and cultural pressure on Maori that violated the previous cooperative endeavours. Identifying a new ‘positive’ phase (pre-1860) in the history of Pakeha-Maori relations was not only an interpretative matter involving the appraisal of nineteenth century New Zealand; on the historiographical plane it was the end result of the definitive failure of the assimilationist practices that had been deployed until the mid-1970s. The perspective of ‘we are all one people’ was being abandoned, and with it the search for the fully assimilated New Zealander of Maori origin;


biculturalism had entered the horizon of what could be defined as the ‘New Zealand mentality’.

Reassessing the Maori-Pakeha relation implied, then, a thorough redescription of the whole of the New Zealand identity, a redescription that also and necessarily involved the self-identification of white New Zealanders. Michael King’s 1985 Being Pakeha, while autobiographical rather than historical, represented nonetheless a thoughtful reflection on race relations that necessarily involved history - an original examination of what could be termed ‘Pakehatanga’, the nature and substance of white New Zealand identity and culture. Maori and Pakeha were seen as confronting and mirroring each other, in cultural debate as well as in the wider society. King’s conclusion was that the definition of the one required the recognition of ‘the other’. The book analysed the many pitfalls and problems of what ‘being Pakeha’ meant at that particular moment in time.

For King, ‘Maoritanga’ represented a much more coherent definition and workable set of cultural assets. Maoridom seemed indeed to be working better than Pakehatanga. The cultural assets the Maori heritage represented could be said to define New Zealand, and yet had been mostly unused in wider society, apart from the (usually misleading) borrowings of a colonial and post-colonial past and present. New Zealand was, according to the author, in desperate need of a better and clearer definition of what to be a ‘New Zealander’ was. The country’s identity was going through a crisis because Pakehatanga was in deep crisis. The very fact that in order to define this concept the author needed to deploy a neologism borrowed from the Maori language was indicative of the kind of solution the author was proposing. When it came to self-identification, Maori were interpreted to be somewhat better off than their Pakeha counterparts. While this conclusion was debatable (and indeed would be debated), King’s line of thought and that of others had a considerable impact on the general public; as a result of such contributions, the notion that New Zealand was going through an identity crisis became an established notion.

The following year, 1986, witnessed several key historiographical developments. Angela Ballara’s Proud to be White? provided a more historical and comprehensive survey of racial prejudice in New Zealand than Being Pakeha had set out to do. The existence, resilience

and dissemination of prejudice were analysed, and contrasted with the mythology of the exceptionally good record that white New Zealand was said to have in its racial attitudes towards Maori. While this myth was seen as having always informed interethnic intercourse in the country, its nature was here shown to be mostly fictional. Ballara’s denunciation of the stereotypes attributed to Maori indicated why ‘New Zealanders need[ed] this book’.48

Such stereotypes had survived practically intact, only slightly transformed by more recent developments. Given that the interpretation of race relations (and their history) had been informed so much by stereotypical images, a coherent historical work of demystification had been required. In her effort to ‘trace the permutations of Eurocentric racial prejudice’, Ballara was dealing with one of the most subtle weapons white New Zealand had always deployed in its continuous attempt to build an homogenous ('ideal', to use Miles Fairburn’s definition of New Zealand’s social experiment) society.49 While the ‘ideal society’ demanded the definitive assimilation of any distinct Maori identity, the survival, evolution, and, ultimately, consolidation of autonomous identity for Maori was a crucial notion in Ballara’s line of thought - ‘all the cultural ‘differences’ that make them Maori and not brown European’ were seen as essential in any appreciation of New Zealand history.50

Accepting biculturalism, as it was often proposed in this period of historical rethinking, implied in effect acknowledging Maori autonomous contribution to national history. It also required the definitive abandonment of the official view connected with the mythology of the ‘one people’. To be sure, the fact that two distinct peoples were the founding elements of the country had never of course been challenged; yet only from the 1970s was the teleological prospect of a homogeneous society beginning to disappear. By showing how the Pakeha approach had always been flawed in its hierarchical assumption of European superiority, the ongoing review of European ethnocentric discourse thereby promoted biculturalism - which was adopted as policy by both the major parties in the1980s.

In James Belich’s thorough and influential revision of Maori-Pakeha conflict, race relations, contrary to previous interpretations, were not comparatively better than other settler societies and had never been so. What was truly exceptional in the history of the country was what he identified as the ‘Maori achievement’:

50 A. Ballara, Proud to be White?, op. cit., pp. 6, 4.
At the beginning of the New Zealand wars, the Maoris seemed impossibly outmatched by the British in military technology, organisation for war, and simple numbers. In the end, it required 18,000 British troops, together with careful preparation and logistical organisation, to defeat them - and even then they were able to delay and limit the enemy victory. After Imperial troops were withdrawn, [Maori guerrilla leader] Titokowaru came within an ace of success against vastly superior colonial forces, a result which might have reversed the decision of the Waikato War. Prior to this, the Maoris blocked the British in two wars, and regularly defeated forces several times their own numbers - forces which were not trapped or surprised, but which actually chose to give battle.51

The Maori achievement had been a military accomplishment, yet in Belich’s argument its impact on the pattern of New Zealand race relations was emphasised. For its impact on both the general public and the academic world, and because it shifted decisively the focus of historiographical attention from the Pakeha to the Maori, *The New Zealand Wars* represented a turning point in the nation’s historical mind, and its importance cannot be overstated.52

In 1983, only three years before *The New Zealand Wars* had appeared, the ‘classic’ *The New Zealand Wars*, by J. Cowan, had been reprinted. The relation between the two works is significant. While the first one had been firstly published in 1922 and had long represented the reference textbook on the subject - the ‘orthodox’ interpretation of the wars - the second was key to a crucial new development in revisionist historiography. Even symbolically, the substitution process was underlined by the fact that the two works shared the same title. Belich’s revisionism was going to literally replace the previous interpretation.53

It should be noted that Belich did not challenge the interpretative tradition stressing New Zealand’s exceptionality. Rather, the uniqueness of the New Zealand case was enhanced and reactualised by the identification of the causes that had determined this exceptionality.54 In a phase in which New Zealanders were urgently reminded of how their economic destinies depended on world markets, the historical debate stressed the unequivocal uniqueness of its historical evolution. History had in a sense become the last resort on which to exercise the traditional national theme of isolation. While it had been, in Sinclair’s case, a sort of

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defensive reaction in a progressively more difficult world, Belich had recognised that history could form part of proactive engagement in present-day concerns.55

The New Zealand Wars was also significant because, perhaps for the first time since J. C. Beaglehole’s work on Captain James Cook’s explorations, an historical work dedicated to a New Zealand topic aroused significant interest outside the country. Highlighting the ‘Maori achievement’ went beyond New Zealand and contributed to the ongoing modern worldwide reflection on the nature of the ‘colonial mind’. A North American edition of The New Zealand Wars was published with a slightly different title, the secondary part of the title – The Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict - being promoted to the status of title in order to place the emphasis on the global implications of the book.56

While its reflection on New Zealand’s nineteenth century racial conflicts was cast in the wider context of ‘settler’ conflicts with indigenous peoples, in the narrower context of New Zealand’s historical interpretation Belich’s 1986 work represented much more than just a reinterpretation of nineteenth century racial conflict. By deconstructing the Victorian and Pakeha frame of mind and by showing how it had informed previous narratives, the book went beyond a thorough critique of the sources. Its positively demystifying nature was in this respect unequivocal: it was the flagship of a movement by which an historiographical orthodoxy that had contented itself to rearticulate for decades a set of historical assumptions was now confronted in a way that could not be ignored.

Many of Belich’s historical conclusions were in complete conflict with previously accepted notions; Maori warriors had performed extraordinarily, not only tactically, but also - and most of all - in strategic innovation, planning and coordination. As a consequence, military outcomes and subsequent peace terms were the result of a contested situation. Moreover, Maori people had fully lost their autonomy not after the defeats of the 1860s-70s but at a later stage of their historical experience. In Belich’s narrative, traditional references praising Maori tactical skills were replaced with a highly flattering assessment of their strategic capacities.57

57 The terminology deployed by Belich is here particularly telling: throughout his text, Maori leaders and military effort are referred to in specifically military terms such as ‘general’, ‘chief of staff’, and ‘chain of command’. A comparison with a much older, albeit similarly demystifying work is particularly interesting. Dee Brown’s 1970 Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee had represented the first case of a new approach to the history of indigenous conflict with European forces with its use of ‘chief’ and ‘little chief’ to indicate the rank of the military
As a result of Belich’s reappraisal, the images of a nineteenth century definition of racial relations that stressed fixity and European hegemony were replaced with the acknowledgment of extended racial conflict and continuous redefinition of local balances of power; in a sense, a series of wars of local sovereignties. The image of a once and for all pacified nation was reshaped into slowly and progressively shifting patterns of ethnic relations, one that were constantly reworked. The New Zealand wars ceased, then, to be seen as the events in which a reactionary resistance against the unity of the nation was finally defeated. What had been interpreted as a sort of New Zealand war of secession - a unity versus fragmentation struggle - changed completely in value and significance. Rather than the historical moment in which the unity of the country had been achieved, the New Zealand wars were now seen as a precondition for a long-term preservation of biculturalism.

Whilst Belich’s narrative of nineteenth century New Zealand concentrated on the ‘Maori achievement’, Richard Hill’s contribution to the ‘History of Policing in New Zealand’ series focussed on another ‘achievement’: the establishment, in a brief span of time, of an outstandingly ordered society out of an extremely unruly frontier. The first volume of what would become a trilogy on the subject of policing - a topic that would inevitably deal with how the Crown responded to Maori insurgency and evasion of notional British control – also appeared in 1986. The role of state administrations, metropolitan and local, and of their policing powers, was here scrutinised in depth, and their alleged ‘neutrality’ in relation to categories such as class and race thoroughly challenged. The result was a detailed, archival-based unravelling of the process of progressive ‘normalisation’ of what had originally been a remarkably ‘uncontrollable’ frontier. This process, in fact, constituted an unprecedented example of a ‘normalising’ achievement: during these decades New Zealand was radically transformed from one extreme to the other of the ‘normalisation’ scale, eventually becoming what has been defined as a ‘policeman’s paradise’.

personnel involved in the various campaigns against American Indians. Brown’s and Belich’s approaches, while diverging, are based on the same necessity to remove the distance between European and indigenous forces (a distance otherwise implicit in any colonial discourse). While in Brown’s text the stress is on an Indian point of observation, in Belich’s work the emphasis is laid on Maori finer capacity. See D. Brown, Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970.


Hill’s work was, by definition, state-centred, reinterpreting New Zealand’s past in terms of the imperatives of the Crown’s control of both races. At the start ‘the policing strategy in the colony of New Zealand was that of imposing order upon a population - both Maori and Pakeha - that was perceived by the state to be turbulent and untamed’. By 1867, however, ‘state officials assessed that the backbone of military resistance by insurrectionist Maori in the North Island had been definitively broken’. The ‘period of order-imposition could now be supplanted gradually by a more benign socio-racial control strategy. In general terms, both races’ modes of behaviour were increasingly unacceptable to the state’. By 1886, the country was deemed to be pacified. Hill’s works, therefore, represent a close overview of the ‘overall trend in New Zealand from social and racial instability towards the stability and orderliness which observers were commenting upon so frequently by the turn of the century’.

When it came to Maori matters, the ‘policing of the New Zealand colonial frontier’ (and also, at a later stage, the policing of the New Zealand state while the administration was solidly securing itself and its apparatuses - the subject of the second volume of the series), implied a desired subordination to Pakeha mores, values and behaviours. However, while successive administrations had consistently tried to incorporate and co-opt ‘friendly’ Maori, including within the context of the police and military forces, this had obviously not created a veritable climate of participation. Taking part in Pakeha military and policing campaigns and related institutions did not and could not mean by itself Maori incorporation within Pakeha structures of the state. Nonetheless, in Hill’s narration, recourse to *kupapa* (‘friendly Maori’) help is presented not just as a tactical device to cope with Maori defiance, but rather as a sign of a continuous attempt to recognise and utilise existing forms of Maori social and political institutions. But Hill’s conclusion is explicit: no matter how large a part of the normalising achievement had been secured through Maori allies, ‘ethnocentrism on the part of the Pakeha, together with the settlers’ overwhelming desire for land, precluded any genuine approach to biracial sharing of state power’. Maori were, by 1886, generally acting in accord with the wishes of state; as a collectivity they posed no real danger to the settler society.

A history depicting ‘a gradual and uneven (in both location and time) shift in the prevailing control mechanisms from the overtly coercive extreme of the continuum towards covertly

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coercive and then hegemonic modes’ had been published within days of the ‘Maori achievement’ being made known to the wide public.\(^{65}\) How it is possible that an effective deployment of policing and normalising strategies coexisted with relative but continuous and unbroken Maori autonomy as claimed by Belich? The apparent contradiction between a ‘repressive achievement’ such as the one depicted in the ‘History of Policing in New Zealand’ series, and a ‘resistance achievement’ such as the one narrated in The New Zealand Wars, needs to be explained. Which had been the case: an outstanding resistance, or an exceptional normalisation?

Putting the question so baldly disguises that these two interpretations not only coexist but also actually serve to reinforce one another. It was basically, in fact, a matter of emphasis: whereas Hill was interested in the transition from ‘turbulence’ to ‘stability’ (and stressed the proactive role of policing in both promoting and supervising this trend), Belich emphasised this stabilising trend as being the result of a post-warfare accommodation; in short, he was concerned mainly with the ‘other side’ of the stability equation. The accommodation that resulted from the Maori achievement portrayed by Belich gave Maori communities a degree of autonomy acceptable to them given the circumstances they faced. In turn, basing their existence and vitality on this autonomy, Maori communities could continue to scale down their contestation and contribute to the emergence of stability – to the trend that has been illustrated by Hill. Maori structures and institutions did not collapse under the stress brought about by Pakeha encroachment, but rather they bent.\(^{66}\)

Conversely, policing, as explicated by Hill, was deployed in a way flexible enough to leave - at least temporarily - room for different understandings. The adaptability displayed by both sides of the colonial frontier becomes the interpretative key to incorporate both Belich’s and Hill’s notions of resistance achievement and repressive achievement. The idea that Maori resilience, as well as the state’s policing efficiency, should be jointly responsible for such a marked trend towards stability does not seem inappropriate. It is reasonable to presume that the fact that Maori society did not collapse, and rather its institutions provided considerable parts of the Maori population with a recognisable and viable ideological and practical alternative, would have promoted order and stability rather than conflict and racial disorder. Paradoxically, then, the extraordinary resistance of the Maori can be used as one explanation

\(^{65}\) R. S. Hill, Policing the Colonial Frontier, op. cit., p. 10.

\(^{66}\) That Hill’s policing interpretations did not preclude – on the contrary – the ongoing Maori adherence to the search for an autonomous existence, can be seen in condensed form in S. R. Hill, and V. O’Malley, The Maori Quest for Rangatiratanga/Autonomy, Treaty of Waitangi Research Unit, Wellington, 2000.
for the stability that New Zealand increasingly enjoyed during the last third of the century: ‘[t]he colony’s white population was subdued, the Maori subjugated; ‘order and tranquillity’, by and large, prevailed.’

Whether this situation had been brought about by a resistance or a repressive achievement - or both, as I would suggest – what had emerged was a long and solid tradition of racial partnership (as well as a racist and assimilationist one). By the mid-1980s, reflections on this partnership had been shifting from the repetitive claim of an ‘exceptionally’ positive record, towards an emphasis upon the continuous capacity of Crown/Pakeha and Maori for finding room for political accommodation. In such an analytical context, the interpretative categories with which the Treaty was being examined were also undergoing a process of reorganisation. The Treaty was being transformed in narratives such as Claudia Orange’s: rather than a once and for all event to be celebrated (but, also to be forgotten with regard to its contemporary implications), it could be seen as a living and contemporary institution for racial partnership.

Orange’s 1987 work *The Treaty of Waitangi* filled a historiographical gap, a mysterious blank zone: what had happened to the Treaty in the period between its ‘solemn’ signing and before its re-establishment as a suitable basis for inter-ethnic relationship? For decades, state and judicial authorities had scarcely acknowledged the Treaty as a valid instrument of any sort - nor even a worthy artefact of national history, with the original manuscripts damaged by water and nibbled by rats in the basement of Government Buildings until rescued after a researcher came across them in 1911. For Orange, the historical evolution of the Treaty was contextualised in the history of Maori-Pakeha relations. In this reading, the Treaty emerged as a living and (as with most constitutional documents) constantly changing instrument, a document whose value had not been fixed. Its role, after a long period of neglect – by the Crown and Pakeha - had been gradually re-established and rehabilitated, through a long process of historical revision and legal reinterpretations. It had, however, always showed important signs of vitality, at least the Maori understanding of it:

… [t]hrough the treaty… Maori found a union of purpose. In the 1890s the kotahitanga or Maori parliaments were established to complement the Wellington parliament. As they began to falter, however, Young Maori Party leaders fought to secure Maori aspirations by working within the government, a trend followed by Ratana-Labour MPs and other Maori in the twentieth century. Their fight continues for a degree of

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autonomy, for a fairer share in the nation’s decision-making, for land, fishery and other rights under the treaty.69

Most importantly, the Treaty had now finally been recognised, with its plurality of interpretations among Maori and Pakeha. Orange’s work had included (or tried to include) Maori perceptions in her historical narrative. Maori activism and demands were chronicled, with their constant reference to the Treaty and its spirit; recent constitutional developments were shown as narrowing the gap between the Maori and the Pakeha understandings.

*The Treaty of Waitangi* also performed another important role: while the Treaty was being in effect incorporated into the constitutional framework of the country, the document was now being supplied with a detailed and updated history. Previous relevant works, concentrating on the actual nature of inter-racial balances of power, had therefore tended to lay a stress on local histories and narratives of conflict as opposed to the overarching political, social and legal history of race and Crown/Maori relations. Now, as a result of this earlier historiographical neglect, a single work had become the standard reference for historical reflections on the Treaty.

Other aspects of Maori history, as well as the Treaty, still needed to be revisited in New Zealand historiography. *I Shall Not Die*, by James Belich, pursued the general interpretative line of the author’s *The New Zealand Wars*, although specifically dedicated to one major episode of nineteenth century racial confrontation.70 Furthermore, the book dealt with a more controversial and sensitive topic than the system of armed confrontation that had been characteristic of mainstream warfare in the colony to that date. The historical figure of Titokowaru, religious prophet and guerrilla leader, had always presented interpretative thorns for the historian. He had previously been depicted as the epitome of Maori ‘treachery’, his prophetic utterances and activities scorned and depicted in terms of ‘regression to savagery’, and his followers’ determination always described as a ‘blood craving’.

As an historical phenomenon, in fact, even though it had effectively prevented European encroachment, Maori armed resistance during the Titokowaru period had always been scorned by contemporaries and historians alike - who preferred the allegedly ‘chivalrous’ resistances of the Waikato, and the northern and ‘southern’ tribes which had fought in the 1840s. Titokowaru’s campaigns had generally not even been included in the main narratives of

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conflict that had been published in the previous decades. For Belich, however, this uncompromising champion of his people was very far from the traditional leaders who had hitherto emerged in the anti-European resistance. His system of guerrilla warfare, for example, was obviously distant from normal Maori military strategies, and from Victorian understandings of military behaviour.

The racial confrontations of the later 1860s-early 1870s were much less approachable through the conventional terms - of ‘chivalrous’ conflict between colonial and Maori forces on the New Zealand ‘frontier’ - than the fighting that had come before. The ‘romantic’ race war images displayed in traditional interpretations of the country’s history, then, had to be abandoned if any genuine reappraisal of Titokowaru’s campaigns was to be made. And such a reassessment had to be put forward if the more general process of ‘recovery’ of Maori strategies and effectiveness in resistance was to prevail. Titokowaru’s strategies and actions, then, needed to be properly depicted in all their consistency and coherence of design. They were no longer to be reducible to the ill-fated rearguard resistance that Maori warriors were depicted to be waging during the Waikato war, culminating in the ‘glorious defeat’ at Orakau. Belich’s rehabilitation of Titokowaru’s figure went hand in hand, then, with addressing broader interpretations in the previous literature. ‘Treachery’ had to be turned into strategic vision, ‘bloodthirstiness’ and ‘blasphemous prophecy’ became reinterpreted as determined and coherent responses to the new necessities brought about by fresh developments.

Both these tasks were performed in Belich’s 1989 book. Titokowaru joined the innovative Maori leaders, and his syncretic prophecies and movement took their places in the history of successful Maori efforts to adjust to the European invasion of their land. The author’s solution to the interpretative problem of explaining New Zealand’s exceptionality - nineteenth-century Maori resistance and the ‘Maori achievement’ – banished the concept of ‘dark’ figures or unaccounted phases which had previously been ignored or generally disregarded. In I Shall Not Die Belich performed a similar task to the one he had carried out in The New Zealand Wars: he mixed discovery and analysis of new evidence, reanalysis of old evidence, and criticism of the previous historical literature. Maori resistances, and this plural should be underlined, needed to be recovered in their full variety. The new historiography of the 1980s saw its task as rehabilitating the plurality of Maori resisters and their methods. That necessarily included, at the two extremes of Maori conduct, Titokowaru’s followers as well as kupapa.
Hazel Riseborough’s 1989 book *Days of Darkness* also dedicated itself to Maori resistance during the 1870s.\(^{71}\) It relates the shift in strategic approach that Maori opposition to European expansion was starting to display in the aftermath of the phase of armed conflict that had characterised the 1860s. Passive resistance as displayed by the followers of Te Whiti at Parihaka – in fact, ‘very active resistance, although pacific in nature’ - represented a very dangerous challenge to the real, perceived, and imagined prospects of Pakeha supremacy.\(^{72}\)

As the colonial government was quick to realise, the issues at stake during the Parihaka confrontation went far beyond the Parihaka block and Te Whiti’s following. In Riseborough’s analysis, Parihaka-ite passive resistance - and government over-reaction in handling that episode - emerge as one of the crucial moments in the history of Maori resistance, a moment in which a totally new strategy of action was devised. Indeed, the ‘Parihaka affair’ projects a strategic resistance beyond the end of the phase of open and armed challenge.

Within conventional historiography, the post-war phase of Maori-settler relations had, supposedly, been characterised by Maori ‘apathy’ and ‘sense of defeat’ - not by a new and effective strategic approach. In this sense, *Days of Darkness* is consistent with that of Belich’s works on the guerrilla wars: both stressed the effectiveness of resistance, the coherence of strategic approach, and most of all the consistency of Maori agendas. Riseborough consistently queries conventional notions of conflict over land, and highlights instead the ‘question of mana’, or, on the European side, the ideological risks and implications of workable and sustained Maori autonomy:

... [w]hen the people at Parihaka appeared to thrive in their isolation from the European world, when they refused to be subordinated according to the edicts of social Darwinism, the very laws of nature were perceived to be under attack.\(^{73}\)

What was at stake for Maori people was the existence and practicability of a viable alternative to the now-failed strategy of armed resistance, an alternative that ‘threw the government into confusion and which enhanced their sense of identity’:

... [i]nstead of murdering Europeans they planted melons, and they were pouri when the settlers formed committees and pressured the government to provide them with arms.

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\(^{71}\) H. Riseborough, *Days of Darkness*, op. cit. There was in effect a popular precursor by Dick Scott, *The Parihaka Story*, later reissued as *Ask That Mountain*.

\(^{72}\) H. Riseborough, *Days of Darkness*, op. cit., p. 3.

Instead of attacking the armed constabulary they willingly suffered arrest and went to prison. This was a new kind of warfare, and one the government found discomforting and financially embarrassing. ...It was not greed for land but cultural arrogance that drove [the government]. They had the Waimate plains, the land the Taranaki settlers had always coveted, but even after they had surveyed and sold all but a few reserves in the seaward Parihaka block, they continued their efforts to destroy Te Whiti’s mana, a symbol, in their eyes, of mana motuhake, of Maori identity, separateness, independence.74

All these are crucial to latter-day Maori political activism. While Riseborough’s book was projecting such concerns through a later nineteenth-century struggle, it also provided analysis of a legacy of effective passive resistance, one that would be utilised ever since those times. Parihaka’s modernity was accentuated, its history becoming in Riseborough’s interpretation the first of the new Maori struggles, rather than the last of the old. Days of Darkness represented, therefore, an interesting exercise in ‘inversion’ of conventional historical notions. ‘Desperation’ and overall irrationality of approach had allegedly and traditionally been the main characteristics displayed by Parihaka Maori. In Riseborough’s narrative, however, those who were depicted as ‘irrational’ were the government personnel:

… [t]he dichotomous Mr Fox spoke now as commissioner, now as politician; now highlighting the legitimate grievances of the Maori, now voting in favour of their imprisonment for daring to protest those grievances. Fox agreed with no one, in the end not even with himself.75

When it came to ‘desperation’, this was for Riseborough more to be found in government attempts to rule out political protest as an explanation for Maori actions: there ‘was a sense of desperation about the way the government emphasized the fanaticism of the west coast people, a desperation to mask the real cause of the disturbances, to ignore the legitimacy of the grievances’.76 Rather than ‘revisionist’ history, this work would be better defined by the adjective ‘inversionist’. Everything the previous historical tradition had suggested (including the eventual assertion of mana by Pakeha authorities) was disputed, beginning with the final outcome of the confrontation: in the end ‘Te Whiti’s mana triumphed and his stand was

75 H. Riseborough, Days of Darkness, op. cit., p. 218.
76 H. Riseborough, Days of Darkness, op. cit., p. 219.
wholly vindicated when the confiscation he had challenged so long and so tenaciously was shown to be invalid’.77

*Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End*, by Maori author Ranginui Walker, also stressed the unbroken continuity connecting nineteenth century struggles and contemporary ones.78 In this work, the main analytical category through which the history of Maori-Pakeha relations is analysed was land. Shifting political balances, intra-Maori differences and contrasts, different historical phases and changing struggles were all examined using this interpretative category. In Walker’s narrative, differing Maori requests had all been variations of a substantially consistent demand: Maori sovereignty and Maori control of Maori rights through Maori control of land.

If ‘protest’ rather than ‘accommodation’ or ‘partnership’ was to be emphasised, as Walker suggested, the rejection of the ‘ideology of one people’ (including Belich’s renovated version, which stressed a pattern in which the Maori achievement parallels the Pakeha one without altering New Zealand’s ‘positive’ record) acquired a stronger significance. In fact, while ‘the ideology of one people functioned to hide the relationship of Pakeha dominance and Maori subjection’, ‘Maori and Pakeha lived discrete lives’ - there was no common ground for a struggle that superseded ethnic differences.79

In Walker’s narrative the ‘one people’ ideology, then, was polemically rejected – as was its abridged ‘left wing’ version of the ‘one working class’ as expressed in the long alliance between Maori politics and New Zealand Labour. Walker interpreted this alliance as a mere tactical expedient, since proletarianisation:

… of the Maori by expropriation of their resources did not necessarily, as Ratana suggested to the leader of the Labour Party, make the Maori natural allies of the working class. The liaison with Labour was an attempt to find a political niche for Maori people in the new nation, as other niches had been explored by chiefs consorting with the Governor, Kotahitanga and Kauhanganui seeking devolution of power, and the educated elite participating in mainstream politics.80

77 *Days of Darkness*, op. cit., p. 224.
Not only had Maori protest and fightback been consistent throughout history, not only had Maori consistently demanded the same set of objectives, even Maori collaboration with colonial authorities, where it existed, had been devised in order to obtain the same continuous set of goals. The distance between ‘resistors’ and ‘collaborators’ was, then, obliterated, no matter which period of Maori history was to be taken into consideration, or what typology of behaviour was analysed: Maori consistently mobilised and fought for such matters as cultural conservation and sovereignty and, most of all, for land. Walker’s examination, blurring the distinction between Maori ‘collaboration’ and Maori ‘resistance’, was therefore resonant of Belich’s in relation to kupapa participation in the wars on the Pakeha side.

For both authors the Maori-Pakeha contradiction/dialectic became the overarching interpretative category of New Zealand’s history. Walker’s solution to this contradiction was a ‘postcolonial’ New Zealand in which the Treaty, constantly upheld by Maori throughout history in ‘more than a century of recourse to it as their Magna Charta’, becomes the practical instrument of decolonisation. The author then went on to recognise in the ‘constitutional’ developments of the 1980s a turning point ‘from which there is no retreat’.\(^81\) The turning point had been twofold: while the historiography of Maori-Pakeha relations had comprehensively transformed itself during the 1980s, Walker’s contribution was to acknowledge the fact that the same decade had also witnessed a turning point in the political history of this relationship. The successive Acts of Parliament with which the Treaty had been elevated ‘in a few years from a ‘simple nullity’ to the level of a constitutional instrument in the renegotiation of the relationship between Maori and Pakeha’ delineated the possibility of a truly new start for both main races in New Zealand.\(^82\) Echoing previous insights by Pakeha scholars, then, Walker saw historiographical revision as supporting the political transformation, and vice versa.

The Maori-Pakeha contradiction was also the main interpretative category of Ann Salmond’s impressive work on early contacts between Europeans and Maori.\(^83\) Two Worlds, published in 1991, represented a serious attempt towards an ‘ethnology’ of first encounters in New Zealand/Aotearoa, an anthropological inquiry capable of dealing with both actors of ‘first encounters’:

\(^{82}\) R. Walker, *Ka Whawai Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End*, op. cit., p. 266.  
... it became plain that the explorers themselves were an ethnographic problem. It was at that point that the study of Te Ao Tawhito (the ancient Maori world) became a study of ‘Two Worlds’, and the idea of a mirror-image ethnography - in which each side saw the other through a haze of their own reflections - began to develop.84

The metaphorical image of two worlds, mirroring each other but without coming to a common understanding, was the very starting point of both Salmond’s research and the whole New Zealand experience:

... [f]rom one contemporary perspective they [the first encounters] were simply puzzling, extraordinary interludes in the life of various tribal communities. The ships - floating islands, mythological ‘birds’ or canoes full of tupua or ‘goblins’ - came into this bay or that, shot local people or presented them with strange gifts, were welcomed or pelted with rocks, and after a short time went away again and were largely forgotten. ...From another contemporary vantage-point, however, that of their seventeenth and eighteenth-century European chroniclers, the same encounters were simply episodes in the story of Europe’s discovery of the world - more voyages to add to the great collections of ‘Voyages’ that had already been made.85

The first perspective stressed the exceptionality of episodes that would be soon forgotten; the second emphasised the ‘normality’ of episodes that would then be, rather than forgotten, chronicled and added to an ever-expanding collection. The ‘normal’ reaction to the first encounter - for Maori and Europeans alike - was to proceed in opposite directions. The creation of ‘one nation’ out of such an irredeemable divergence of responses would require much more than just the juxtaposition of one worldview with the other, or the imposition of the European upon the Maori. A better understanding of the country’s historical developments, flowing from such logic, demanded a complex exercise in reflected vision, and in the ‘ethnology’ of history. Salmond’s proposal moved exactly in this direction, and responded to a characteristic of New Zealand’s history that had so far eluded the historical literature. The author was beginning from scratch, from the foundation of the Maori-Pakeha relation: both the absolute distance in understandings and the importance of the interpretative issues raised by first encounters and the way they informed successive descriptions, images, developments and negotiations.

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84 A. Salmond, *Two Worlds: The first Meetings Between Maori and Europeans 1642-1772*, op cit., p. 15.
The Phasing Out of the Historiographical Revolution

What would prove to be Sir Keith Sinclair’s last contribution to historiography was published in 1991. 86 There was a symmetry here. His career as historian had started during the 1950s with a (then) groundbreaking research into the causes of Anglo-Maori confrontations. Now, his concluding work was dedicated to the aftermath of these conflicts, the historiographical focus having - as we have already noted - by the late 1980s shifted away from the wars of the 1860s to concentrate instead on the post wars years. 87 In spite of the author’s claim that ‘this monograph [had] no ‘thesis’, in the sense of a central argument, except to say that Maori reactions to the wars varied greatly’, there was a theme that related to perceptions of the status of the kupapa Maori:

… [s]ome Maori radicals regard the kupapa as ‘Uncle Toms’, but many of the best-known Maori leaders were neutral or ‘friendly’. They have almost been written out of history. They are now written back. ...Despite the growth of the historical literature, some important aspects have still been neglected. The kupapa are largely ignored in our general histories. There is virtually nothing published about the Maori committees of the period or about the early Maori Members of the two Houses of Parliament. Almost nothing has been published about Tawhiao and there is only one article about the teachings of Te Whiti and Tohu. The Repudiation movement receives only brief mention in the published literature. All of those topics, among others, are addressed here. 88

The historian, in fact, was commenting on, and claiming to redress, aspects of the ‘historiographical revolution’ of the past decade: in his opinion racial conflict has been overrated against collaboration. The ideology of the one people, rejected by recent historians, was, in Sinclair’s analysis, supported by the long tradition of honourable Maori participation in national life. Indeed, some of the main images of the previous historical interpretation were re-proposed, almost unchanged, as if the process of historical revision of the 1980s had never occurred. For him, the victory was European, with no degree of success conceded to the overt resistors. While Maori had enjoyed a remarkable degree of success, this was to be

attributed to the activity and foresight of kupapa leaders, able to understand that the ultimate interest of their people rested in collaboration with Europeans.

Sinclair argued the extraneousness of the New Zealand Wars to the country’s race relations history, referring to such conflicts as the ‘Anglo-Maori wars’, a term ‘few writers have used [but] which has the merit of implying that the Maori were fighting an imperial war, against the British army, and not against the settlers’. In his vision ‘[t]here were relatively few instances of fighting between New Zealand-born Pakeha and Maori... Many books give the wrong impression that the fighting was between settlers and Maori’.  

By recovering kupapa contribution, and by downgrading settlers’ participation in the wars, Kinds of Peace restated a central notion of the pre-1980s New Zealand ‘orthodoxy’: the wars had been only an episode. Moreover they were an episode in which the forebears of what would become the New Zealand nation - the settlers and the kupapa (but not the rebels) - had in fact fought gallantly on the same side, as they would later at Gallipoli. Sinclair’s approach, therefore, dramatically contrasted with Belich’s reading of the wars as a turning point from which the biculturalism of the New Zealand experience would evolve. For Sinclair, the 1860s had merely been a parenthesis, a hiatus in which settlers were following imperial interests, and in which at least half of the Maori universe had participated in the repression of the rebellion.

With the historiographical revolutionists already under attack, their last major incursion came perhaps that same year, 1991, with D. I. Pool’s authoritative contribution on the demography of Maori people. This book challenged the alleged ‘collapse’ of Maori numbers after contact with Pakeha, and contested a set of apparent realities which had previously supplied the basis for Maori demographic history. While the fact that the Maori people had not become extinct came of course eventually to be accepted by the totality of commentators, an image had been constructed around the proposition that Maori people had once been on the brink of extinction but were saved by Pakeha moderation - a last remnant of the myth of the ‘dying Maori’. Pool’s work convincingly reduced accepted estimates of the ‘original’ size

89 K. Sinclair, Kinds of Peace, op. cit., p. 14. ; Hill, among others, had previously used the term to stress that these wars constituted a byproduct of the imperial expansion of the British Crown. See R. S. Hill, Policing the Colonial Frontier, op cit.
90 K. Sinclair, Kinds of Peace, op. cit., p. 15
92 For a brief exposition of such a theme see J. Belich, ‘Myth, Race and identity in New Zealand’, op. cit.; for an interesting discussion on the reasons why these ‘evidence’ has typically been accepted, see J. Belich, Making Peoples, op. cit., and especially, pp. 173-178.
of the Maori population - not a minor reconsideration, since it challenged the very basis of conventional interpretations of Maori depopulation as a result of colonial impact.\footnote{This was a process that had some parallelism in other historiographies of indigenous peoples. See, for the Australian case and the Mesoamerican one, N. Butlin, \textit{Our Original Aggression: Aboriginal Populations of South East Australia, 1788-1850}, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1983; and T. Todorov, \textit{La conquête de l’Amérique: La question de l’autre}, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982.} A reduced impact of intertribal warfare (the ‘chaotic’ 1830s that had demanded British annexation were now seen as not so chaotic), and a comparison with other colonial encounters that had produced higher levels of indigenous mortality, were other themes of Pool’s argument. \textit{Te Iwi Maori} proposed a demographic pattern that was certainly not as ‘catastrophic’ as the ones that had been proposed beforehand.

Most of all, Pool’s analysis identified land alienation as the key factor in the population decrease. With no ‘fatal contact’ in New Zealand, therefore, any notion of intrinsic European superiority had been laid to rest. In Pool’s narrative, the demographic turning point was identified in the health care programme that, during the first decades of the twentieth century, had reduced mortality rates and raised the demographic line from its slightly descending curve. This programme had been delivered to the Maori people by the political leadership of the Young Maori Party:

Maori population’s viability was permanently assured from the first decade of the twentieth century by a very special health-care programme. Insufficient recognition is given to the contribution of this rather unique undertaking, very much in advance of its time ... While the Public Health Act 1900 provided the vehicle for this, the drive, the skills and the determination were Maori ... Thus Maori benefited perhaps more from their own efforts than from those of the state.\footnote{D. I. Pool, \textit{The Maori Population of New Zealand, 1769-1971}, op. cit., p. 239.}

So, Maori health and status (even when considered solely in demographic terms) owed little to Pakeha ‘enlightenment’, leniency or goodwill. Shifting the accent from European forethought to Maori action was also a blow against the ideology of the ‘best race relations of the world’. Demography, once the principal site of the mythology of the ‘dying Maori’, was now an interpretative tool to sustain Maori action and agency.

Capping an extraordinary decade of historical re-writing, the second edition of the \textit{Oxford History of New Zealand} was, as already noted, a considerably different book from its predecessor.\footnote{G. W. Rice (ed.), \textit{The Oxford History of New Zealand}, op. cit.} Apart from obvious additions concerning the history of the 1980s, this work...
displayed and synthesised a number of the interpretative achievements of an intense period of historical writing and, most of all, rewriting. It noted that historiographical energy was now coming from new sources:

… [m]uch new scholarship in Maori history has been generated by the work of the Waitangi Tribunal: evidence in support of the Ngai Tahu claim, for example, fills several meters of library shelf space. The 1980s also saw a new generation of Maori graduates emerging from the universities, often with theses or research essays based on tribal histories or oral sources.96

The publication of this new edition of The Oxford History of New Zealand marked in a sense – although partially - the completion of the country’s ‘historiographical revolution’. In this volume some of the ‘revisionist’ history created during the previous two decades was now elaborated, collected, and synthesised in a coherent form.

During the following decade the ‘new’ New Zealand historiography, after completing its ‘victory’ in both the academies and the institutions of state, would face a reaction from sectors of the public which were unconvinced by the newly established rhetoric of racial partnership based on the Treaty. Indeed, the distance between an academic environment which had comprehensively rearticulated its interpretation along revisionist lines, and a general public that was still struggling to come to terms with the ‘Maori Renaissance’, was growing. Relatedly, the anti-revisionist tendency among historians would make its presence strongly felt in the incoming decade.97 Such a ‘reaction’, after a ‘revolutionary’ period, proposed historical interpretations explicitly countering the interpretative trend of the 1980s, and was often strongly anti-intellectual in purpose: it was mainly proposed by untrained and unprofessional historians, and such literature would sell a great deal in an incoming decade of growing anxiety, political unrest and economic uncertainty. But the impact of the revisionists could not be eradicated; their works had become, in many ways, standard opinion about the past in New Zealand. The unsettling of the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand had led to a resettling on a sounder basis.

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References


