

# The Colonization of Aotearoa: A Historiography

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Since the coming of the first European settlers to Aotearoa and continuing until the mid 20th-century, literature on the Māori lacked representation by Māori themselves. Their story was told for them through the eyes of foreigners unfamiliar with and judgmental of their ways. During the mid 20th century, marginalized people from all around the world began to stand up to their oppressors. African Americans fought for civil rights in the United States, Gandhi led India's independence movement, and Hawaiians relentlessly defended the sacred island of Kaho'olawe against military abuse. It was a time that inspired a new generation of scholars and tasked them with the responsibility of rewriting the history books from an indigenous perspective concerned with telling the stories that had long been ignored.

One particularly unique facet of Māori historiography is the initiation of scholarship by the requests of elders. In Aotearoa, traditional Māori protocols have breached the academic sphere. Elders seek out scholars both Māori and Pākehā (New Zealander not of Māori descent) alike and place upon them the responsibility to write their histories because, in the past, the Māori histories lacked the Māori voice. A scholar receiving a request from an elder is a demonstration of trust and confidence to do the story justice. Receiving the request of an elder has become somewhat of a prerequisite for scholars who wish to be respected in Māori academia. Scholars like Keith Sinclair, Hazel Riseborough, and Harry Dansey are examples of those who have either been granted permission or have been chosen by elders to tell certain stories. These works that have emerged out of the wishes of elders are labors of love ultimately concerned with telling the story as it actually happened, and have become the histories that laid the foundation on which a Māori national history was built.

In John Stenhouse's journal article, "Churches, State and the New Zealand Wars: 1860-1872," he identifies three broad phases of historical writing on colonization and race relations in New Zealand. First, there was the generation of historians who emphasized the harmony of Māori and Pākehā relations. These scholars either ignored or downplayed the realities of the land wars and other grievances between Māori and Pākehā. They emphasized how New Zealand was a successful experiment of colonial domination wherein progress was consistent and ever increasing. The land wars were a mere hiccup in an otherwise steady campaign towards total British rule. The scholars belonging to this phase are John Beaglehole, A. J. Harrop, William Parker

Morrell, and Alexander Hare McLintock.<sup>1</sup>

The second phase, Stenhouse identifies, is the scholarship developed in the 1950s and 1960s by historians who argued that colonization was destructive of Māori society.<sup>2</sup> The most important and widely-read work produced during this phase was Keith Sinclair's *The Origins of the Maori Wars*. Sinclair emphasizes the influence of humanitarian Christians on easing tensions between Māori and Pākehā. Their strong influence resulted in better race relations when compared to other white settler colonies. Pākehā and Māori alike responded very well to Sinclair's conclusion that humanitarian Christians eased tensions between the two races. Sinclair is one of the most important scholars concerning New Zealand history, and he is often referenced by others who followed him. Sinclair's *Origins of the Maori Wars* and his *A History of New Zealand* are both classics of New Zealand history. These works, in addition to his work as a professor and historian, are concerned with the establishment of a New Zealand national identity independent from its colonial past.

Finally, scholars belonging to the third phase argue that the coming of the Pākehā was unequivocally harmful to Māori.<sup>3</sup> This generation of scholars was even more critical of Pākehā influence than previous scholars like Sinclair. They depict early British settlers and colonists as profoundly ethnocentric and outright racist towards Māori. In James Belich's *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict*, he does not exempt Sinclair's "humanitarian Christians" from fault. Belich depicts them as scarcely less prejudiced than other settlers and colonizers. He shuts down the false notion that the New Zealand wars of the 1860s were fought over land. Since the 1980s, Belich and other historians have argued that the wars were over sovereignty.<sup>4</sup> While Stenhouse separates Sinclair from the other revisionist scholars who followed him, other sources group him in with them and identify Sinclair's work as the beginning of the Māori national historical narrative.

Still, any history of New Zealand is incomplete without mention of the Treaty of Waitangi. Consequently so, all scholarship on the history of New Zealand offers interpretations of the Treaty and explains how it had an enormous effect on the events following its existence. The Treaty is important because it marks a turning point when the British in Aotearoa were no longer, as John Stenhouse puts it, "dependent foreigners living in a Maori world largely under Maori terms"<sup>5</sup>. The Treaty of Waitangi was written during a turbulent time in New

<sup>1</sup> John Stenhouse, "Churches, State and the New Zealand Wars: 1860-1872," *Journal of Law and Religion* 13, no. 2 (1998): 484-485.

<sup>2</sup> Stenhouse, 485.

<sup>3</sup> Stenhouse, 486.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Denoon, et al., *A History of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 130.

<sup>5</sup> Stenhouse, 483.

Zealand's history and gave Britain the ability to enact colonization on the island. The authors of *Waitangi Revisited: Perspectives on the Treaty of Waitangi* present several perspectives that address the social, legal, and historical impact of the Treaty. However, the primary intent of the book is to bring to light contemporary issues on how the British have failed to uphold their commitments as stated in the Treaty. There are many different and contrasting views concerning the context surrounding the Treaty and, especially, the meaning of its text.

On one side, Māori argue that the English translation of the original Māori text did not accurately reflect the Māori meaning of specific keywords. For example, *kawanatanga* in Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Māori language version of the Treaty) means governance; however, it was translated into the English text as sovereignty. Another point Māori make is that while several chiefs did sign the Treaty, there were some who did not. Nonetheless, the British Crown declared that the Treaty applied to all tribes, whether they signed or not. In 1975, the Treaty of Waitangi Act was passed and with it came the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal, an organization committed to aiding Māori in processing claims relating to Crown actions, which breach the promises made in the Treaty.<sup>6</sup> Since the creation of the Waitangi Tribunal, several tribes have presented cases and have successfully received government compensation. The Waitangi Tribunal has helped several Māori tribes reclaim confiscated access to natural resources, which in turn, has strengthened their Māori pride and identity. Unfortunately, not everyone is pleased with the government owning up to their wrongdoings onto Māori.

On the other side of the Treaty debate are the several authors behind the book *Twisting the Treaty: A Tribal Grab for Wealth and Power*. This book received a lot of attention upon its publication because of its radical and demeaning view of past and present Māori. The authors argue that the Treaty was Britain's attempt to rescue the Māori from slavery, cannibalism, and inter-tribal warfare.<sup>7</sup> Whereas the common understanding among Māori today is that the Treaty was a way in which Britain could assume responsibility for the rowdiness of its citizens, who had settled in New Zealand. In *Twisting the Treaty*, the authors argue that in recent years, self-interested politicians, scholars, tribal leaders, and others have been perpetuating a fake history one which exaggerates the brutality of the colonizers and depicts Māori tribal leaders as victims. These academics challenge the conclusions of revisionist historians like Sinclair. However, their arguments are often weak and contradictory, and as a result, their work does not

receive anywhere near the same amount of respect and attention.

Building on Sinclair's foundation of a national history independent of its colonial past is historian Hazel Riseborough. Riseborough grew up in New Zealand; however, she did not learn of any Māori culture or language until she pursued it in college. She earned her degrees in Māori Studies and History from Massey University and later taught there as well. Riseborough has come to establish herself as one of the most well-respected Māori historians. Several scholars following her have referenced her work on Parihaka.

The events that occurred on the settlement of Parihaka on November 5, 1881, have been described by historians as the Parihaka affair, incident, invasion, and attack. Regardless of how the event has been labeled, it was indeed a day wherein the accumulation of grievances between Pākehā and Māori reached its height. It was on this day that government militia invaded Parihaka, imprisoned their chief, and robbed the people of valuable private possessions. Unfortunately, Parihaka was soon forgotten, disappearing from public memory after a mere few years. Twentieth-century history books tend to focus on the more aggressive resistance efforts like the King Movement, while Parihaka is only mentioned briefly or not at all. Hazel Riseborough's *Days of Darkness: Taranaki 1878-1884* is one of the most important works concerned with telling the story of Parihaka. Riseborough says it is disturbing that in school books Parihaka is a mere footnote or not there at all.

Still, Riseborough's inspiration to tell the Parihaka story came from her participation in the centennial remembrance of the invasion, wherein she stood amid a sea of hurting people. It was at that moment she realized something very powerful had happened there 100 years earlier. In her preface of *Days of Darkness*, she recalls that day, "The grief of the people was palpable and I wondered at the gap between the reality and the meager accounts in the history books used in schools and universities."<sup>8</sup>

Pākehā scholars wrongly labeled Parihaka as a "communist village".<sup>9</sup> This and other racial sentiments plague New Zealand scholarship as a result of racist views during the 1950s, when Māori began to enter into the urban landscape and became more visible in the presence of the white population.<sup>10</sup> Racist sentiments are apparent in the scholarship that attempts to challenge the legitimacy of those scholars, like Sinclair, who sought to create a new national history of New Zealand, one where colonial powers are not the focus.

According to Riseborough, most sources fail to portray Parihaka's chief and leader, Te Whiti accurately. Because he practiced non-violent forms of resistance,

<sup>6</sup> Michael Belgrave, et al., *Waitangi Revisited: Perspectives on the Treaty of Waitangi* (South Melbourne, Vic.: Oxford University Press, 2005), 35.

<sup>7</sup> John Robinson, et al., *Twisting the Treaty: A Tribal Grab for Wealth and Power* (Wellington: Tross Publishing, 2013), 51.

<sup>8</sup> Hazel Riseborough, *Days of Darkness: Taranaki 1878-1884* (Auckland: Allen and Unwin New Zealand Limited, 1989), ix.

<sup>9</sup> Riseborough, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Belgrave, 16.

he is often inaccurately labeled as a passive leader by both Pākehā and Māori scholars. Te Whiti's refusal to participate in more aggressive acts of resistance could account for this "passive" labeling of him by Māori scholars. However, Te Whiti actively engaged in resistance efforts for many years, which ultimately led to his imprisonment. The passive label of Te Whiti also contributes to the perception of him as more of a religious rather than political leader.<sup>11</sup> In *Days of Darkness*, Riseborough describes Te Whiti as foremost a political leader, whereas scholars like Patricia Berwick continue to perpetuate the popular narrative of Te Whiti as a religious leader.

Patricia Berwick is a lesser-known scholar; her work *Power, Prejudice, Parihaka: Unbridled Power* is centered around the arrests of Te Whiti and other Māori leaders on November 5, 1881. Unlike Riseborough, Berwick provides in-depth analysis of several individuals involved in the Parihaka affair. While Berwick acknowledges that the Māori were victims of the Pākehā takeover, he is more sympathetic towards the Pākehā involved than are Riseborough and Sinclair. Berwick presents the story with close attention to the motivations of particular individuals on either side and their justifications for their actions.

Other scholars who have published work on Parihaka are Harry Dansey and Dick Scott. Harry Dansey is one of few Māori to publish work on Parihaka.<sup>12</sup> He was tasked with the responsibility to do so by tribal elders. Dick Scott, a Pākehā scholar, managed to come into possession of treasured collections of oral histories of Parihaka, given to him by Māori elders. Unfortunately, he was not a linguist nor a Māori scholar. His insensitivities towards these *taonga* (treasures) are apparent in his work; consequently, his interpretations and conclusions have largely been dismissed.

Scholars belonging to the first phase of historical writing on colonization and race relations in New Zealand, as identified by Stenhouse, were concerned with establishing a national history of New Zealand, which praised British colonization and failed to portray the Māori accurately. The harm of this nationalist history was realized in the mid-to-late twentieth century. New Zealand and Pacific historiography as a whole during the 1960s and later was concerned with indigenous agency.<sup>13</sup> These revisionist scholars established a Māori national history independent of its colonial past.

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<sup>11</sup> Riseborough, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Riseborough, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Denoon, 5.