

## Predicting the Past: Some Directions in Recent Māori Historiography

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In recent years, increasing numbers of Māori historians have been thinking about, and writing about, the nature and form of 'Māori history'. Is there such a thing? Should we Māori instead be talking about 'tribal history?' Or, is the issue altogether rather more complex. The purpose of this brief article is to examine and assess some of the recent Māori and Pākehā writings on this engaging subject.

The 1991 conference of the New Zealand Historical Association, convened in Christchurch, was an interesting one. Many Māori attended, and some contributed to a 'Ngāi Tahu Stream' which ran as a parallel conference offering, alongside several others. Those attending the conference were thus provided with an almost unbroken opportunity to consider the Waitangi Tribunal process, and the production of history within that process, as mediated through the experiences of the Ngāi Tahu people. The highlight of that stream, and of the conference, though, was Sir Tipene O'Regan's JC Beaglehole Memorial Lecture, *Old Myths and New Politics – Some Contemporary Uses of Traditional History*.

Whatever we might imagine Māori history or Māori historiography to be, one thing was clear from Sir Tipene's address. That, in this day and age, there were always harsh realities that bore very heavily upon the researching, writing and representing of Māori history. As Tipene put it, and he is here suggesting one

unavoidable outcome of the Tribunal process: 'the evidence of the conventional historian ... and the whakapapa of the Māori are presented for one purpose, that of a substantial result, achieved or denied, in terms of money, resources or property.'

Tipene O'Regan used the Bealehole address partly to 'chew the fat' as to the nature of Māori history. His primary context was the Tribunal process and its involvement with Ngāi Tahu. But, even in that context, many of the issues he raised (and later published in the *New Zealand Journal of History*) continue to influence how Māori history might be thought of. It was certainly all very interesting 'grist to the mill', so to speak.<sup>1</sup>

Take for example Tipene's contention that 'few things stand alone and (remain) unsullied without any direction or preceding shape ... the mode of (Māori history) presentation is (therefore) invariably driven by a purpose.' This was an interesting assertion – that Māori history is invariably purpose driven. So was his observation about the place of whakapapa; that 'in Māori tradition, one requires the skeletal framework of whakapapa to authenticate the historical tradition.'

The place of whakapapa and kinship groups within Māori history/tribal history is interesting, for sure. O'Regan seemed to have no doubt as to its centrality; and most Māori would agree. However, some troubles invariably arose, he said, when 'the traditional ways in which Māori managed their history, and their identifiable characteristics (were) different from those normally manipulated by the academic historian.' In other words, Māori and academic historians were often working at crossed purposes. From this, O'Regan concluded that Māori customary authentication, and Māori perceptions of post-Treaty history – Māori ways of writing history – were often 'savaged by the professional historian' as a result. And he said this in front of a huge lecture theatre full of professional historians.

Well, what did this all mean? Essentially, that O'Regan's address and subsequent published paper were a substantive musing from one of our leading Māori historians. Tipene reflected at length as to the complex contexts and nature of Māori history, where, among other things, some centrality is accorded to whakapapa. In recent years, many other Māori historians, and some Pākehā historians, have also contributed to this 'Māori history' debate. This suggests that a rethinking of New Zealand historiography is underway, especially one

mediated through a new sense of what 'Māori history' might be, especially as viewed by Māori.

Another one of our leading Māori historians is Professor Ranginui Walker of Ngati Awa. Ranginui has a view that is a little different from Tipene, I think. Ranginui has a more 'macro-view' of Māori history. He summed up some of his thoughts at the New Zealand Historical Association conference at Auckland University, in 1994. During a keynote address, Professor Walker spoke of the 'grand narrative of New Zealand history, which was derived from European traditions of historiography.' In that context, he then pointed to a 'counter-narrative of Māori history now emerging, which had hitherto been submerged by European expansionism and colonialism, dating from the 19th century.' Thereafter, Professor Walker spoke at length about the various forms of emerging Māori 'counter-narrative.'<sup>2</sup>

These were interesting views. Looking at things at a macro-level, we can certainly agree that there has been a 'grand narrative' of New Zealand history. In 1990, for example, in a *New Zealand Journal of History* article, Jock Phillips searched around inside the grand narrative, and amongst those scholars that had produced it. Dr Phillips was essentially looking for expressions of 'Pakehatanga'. He was disappointed with what he found. Phillips was looking, he said, for some evidence in writing or scholarship to support, among other things, the construction of a Pākehā dimension within the new, forthcoming National Museum of New Zealand.<sup>3</sup>

Erik Olssen later argued, also in the *Journal of History*, that this grand narrative was dominated by two paradigms. The first marked New Zealand out as outpost of empire. The second was more inward looking, a paradigm with nation-building as primary focus and controlling device. This focus and device, nation building, exerted a strong influence over much subsequent history writing, said Olssen.<sup>4</sup>

It even survived, according to some reviewers, to haunt the 1981 *Oxford History of New Zealand*. Here, the metaphor of a growing and maturing person, or nation, is particularly evident. This 'maturing organic person/nation' was the device around which the nation's history was told, in that Oxford Volume. This was a problem evident with the first edition, and it was not entirely solved by the second. The difficulty with such a metaphor was that Māori were invariably presented as having stood 'against' the maturing nation. And, at some point in that maturing process, Māori actually disappeared from the story, once their

opposition was over; they were then seen as assimilated into the 'maturing nation'.<sup>5</sup>

In the second volume, then, Professor Walker was added as a writer. He provided a detailed history of Māori since the 1940s. This was provided to rectify the fact that, in the earlier edition, Māori people had largely disappeared – i.e. from the volume, not from history.<sup>6</sup>

We can then arguably point to a 'grand narrative' which has dominated New Zealand history, until recent times. Ranginui Walker has argued this way; and further, has suggested that, alongside this grand narrative, there is an emerging Māori 'counter-narrative.' If that is so, then the question arises – where does the counter-narrative come from?

The 'counter-narrative', it seems to me, does arise *partly in response* to issues of expansionist and colonial domination, as Ranginui asserts. I say *partly in response*, though, because histories of Māori people, it seems to me, are always worthy of telling for their own sake, of course. They are not always told in response to anything. Nor are they always constructed to serve ends beyond merely the telling of interesting stories.

In fact, histories told for their own sake dominate the Māori historical record. It is not entirely uncommon to find amongst Māori people the view that historiography is a study of only marginal value and interest. The view of some, like me, that 'all history is historiography' you will find is much contested by Māori. This would suggest that some Māori historians share the feeling of many in the mainstream, as observed recently (in another context) by Keith Jenkins, that 'students should stop looking at what historians say and concentrate on what actually happened; they should do some proper history.'<sup>7</sup>

However, Professor Walker was correct. For many Māori, grand colonial narrative in New Zealand last century certainly provides an inescapable context through which our submerged histories can and need to be told; histories of a continuing Māori interface with new settlers and the new state, and with all of the vestiges of colonisation. Such a record provides an important context for important Māori or tribal histories to be told.

Some Māori then do argue that the colonial encounter must continue as the fulcrum around which Māori history acquires meaning. Some of these historians argue that 'pan-Māori' histories provide a preferred site for critical

enquiry and understanding of the shared Māori past. Accordingly, they stress the importance of our encounter histories. One such Māori historian is Buddy Mikaere of Ngati Pukenga. Buddy has recently written that 'we cannot exist in a splendid pre-1769 isolation because the material, traditional or otherwise, is not there in sufficient quantity to permit it.' Our history, says Buddy, has therefore become a history of contact and will increasingly be so.<sup>8</sup>

In recent years, the Waitangi Tribunal has provided an important forum through which many of these histories have been mediated into the historical record. As a result, the Tribunal has long provided, according to Keith Sorrenson, also of Ngati Pukenga, the potential for major revisions to occur in the way that New Zealanders view their history.<sup>9</sup> Professor Sorrenson has long been a Tribunal member. When he was writing, in 1989, such 'radical reinterpretations of New Zealand history' were a realistically expected outcome, despite the reservations of some historians also working within the Tribunal process, like Alan Ward.

Professor Allan Ward has expressed some reservations about historians appearing in 'litigation', within forums of contest like the Waitangi Tribunal. Ward was wary of historians appearing in this context as supposed experts, within a fundamentally legal process dominated by, among other things, legal burdens of proof. These burdens of proof were not necessarily applicable to historical research. However, to be fair to Professor Ward, we should put that around the other way – it was the process which placed an unfair burden or expectation on the perceived expertise of historians, to especially talk about anything other than the past. And, to complicate matters, the Tribunal had to deal with Māori forms of evidence coming up against non-Māori forms (and disciplinary expectations) of historical evidence. For example, one issue addressed was – how 'reliable' was oral testimony?<sup>10</sup>

In that context, therefore – where legal notions of proof came up against Māori/non-Māori historical notions of proof – Ward has provided a detailed and interesting assessment of what should constitute an acceptable degree of 'historical proof', pertaining to forums like the Waitangi Tribunal.<sup>11</sup>

Whether the Tribunal has allowed Māori to tell their stories is a moot point. Michael Belgrave has recently argued that the Tribunal process itself has, if anything, stifled the opportunity for Māori history to flourish, by severely constraining its forms and contexts of representation, and even presentation.<sup>12</sup>

Colonisation provides ample room for an 'inescapable context' within which Māori history can be positioned. Yet colonisation was far from a unified discourse, as many have pointed out. In some parts of the country, last century, for example, local officials were reasonably aware of important differences like tribal distinctions. However, at higher levels, tribes were invariably represented as inherently uniform with common traditions and common sources of motivation. This again diminished the significance of particular tribal distinctions within the encounter context. Māori people, in the end, often attained most relevance, as they had had at the beginning, as an integral component of a primordial and hostile terrain. As with the land itself, Māori people presented as an organic barrier to the colonising aspirations of new settlers.<sup>13</sup>

There is, then, this inescapable context of colonisation, within which a lot of Māori history is located. This is what many Māori historians prefer to write - that Māori people are essentially defined in history by those shared struggles which arose last century, in the face of colonisation.

However, there is another 'inescapable context' within which Māori histories should be told, one which may well reside within Professor Walker's notion of a 'counter narrative' of Māori history. However, it is a context that is not, in the first instance at least, concerned with matters of state, race relations or interface with colonisation.

This second, but by no means secondary, inescapable context is more concerned with Māori utilising the 'customary ways' in which our old people - Māori - organised all of their knowledge, including their knowledge of the past. Such a direction necessarily involves a rethinking of, or a recapturing of, those 'customary ways' of organising knowledge. In other words, seeking to describe Māori historical frameworks that incorporate a certain range of Māori processes, principles and controlling devices. In the first instance, they certainly need to be recaptured in such a way as to ensure that they retain their tribal and historically specific integrity. How are we to do this? To begin, we might look back to the last century.

It is now recognised by most New Zealand historians that throughout the nineteenth century, tribes and hapu all over New Zealand sought to defend and sustain their independence of identity, and the independence of their activity. They did this primarily by asserting a sense of self and validity, founded on customary historical frameworks and processes, whenever the opportunity to do

so arose – on the eve of battle, hui-a-iwi, land-selling gatherings, Native Land Court hearings. Māori had always so asserted, of course, across earlier centuries, well prior to the arrival of Tasman and Cook.

It is now generally agreed, then, that such assertions by Māori were strongly maintained after 1840, in the face of substantial colonial change. What distinguishes most Māori historians at this point, from those historians in the mainstream, is, I think, a question of controlling devices and paradigms, and even purposes for presenting histories of this period.

Increasingly, Māori historians are now preferring to work within their own Māori framework preferences. Many tribal historians work and publish beyond the reach of the historiography. They generally assume a different vantage point in compiling accounts of their tribal past. Such tribal historians have long continued to work closely with their tribes, recording with great diligence people, places and events of significance to those hapu and tribes. Much of the record and presentation of tribal history is specifically narrative and highly detailed. It comprises primarily connections of people, but also places and events which over time have aggregated into the tribe's essentially narrative record. Tribal histories of this kind are gathered because tribes and hapu, and families, deem them a valuable and important record, and, as an intellectual exercise, they are realised because of their own intrinsic value to the tribes.

Some tribal historians, however, operate more closely to the issues generated by mainstream scholarship, or an evolving Māori historiography. It is a common view amongst these historians (and the focus of no small debate) that such tribal histories as described above represent the only valid form of tribal and Māori recall of the past. Essentially, they say that there is no such thing as 'Māori history', only 'tribal history'. Charles Royal of Ngati Raukawa is one of many Māori who argue this way. According to Charles, 'one should always be mindful that Māori history is tribal history.' Before the arrival of the Pākehā, he argues, 'there was no such person as a "Māori"'. People were identified by their tribal and sub-tribal affiliations and traditions.'<sup>14</sup>

Joe Pere of Rongowhakaata has supported this view, arguing that nineteenth century Pākehā writers of New Zealand history failed to identify and recognise the importance of the tribal group, and the eponymous ancestor. Such writers, said Joe, 'chose to ignore such a phenomenon' and instead concentrated on a form of 'so-called Māori history which did not ... give me or my people any mana or identity.'<sup>15</sup>

And recently, Tipene O'Regan has suggested that, when researching their histories, Māori historians must remember that 'Māori history only makes sense when it is related to its own boundaries. It is in grave danger of becoming a quaint colouring-in of the Pākehā landscape when it is deprived of its own, basically-tribal framework.'<sup>16</sup>

There is much to be said for these views, given that, in the end, such tribal historians centralise the tribe as the basis of study. They locate their research and published work within a vast field of primarily oral historical material, or certainly they rely on various forms of tribal archive. Tribal historians operate within traditional boundaries and frameworks, set by tribal imperatives, the sheer extent of which cannot be easily appreciated by 'outsiders'. Therefore, Māori writers conducting research and presenting material of this kind require a constant respect for customary conventions which constrain all Māori writers who are always, according to Monty Soutar 'perceptively aware of (their) tribal readership'.<sup>17</sup> A great deal of tribal research can also be said to be deeply personal, as Charles Royal has earlier suggested, a fact which further provides clear distinctions and justifications.

Māori historians then are seeking to establish an historiography of processes and frameworks which are appropriate to new representations of Māori in history. My own view is that the term 'Māori history' has some value because clearly there are shared histories of Māori people. The history of Māori political representation after 1867 is one example. But, to the extent that such a term aggregates Māori people, and denies complexity and difference, then it must be seen as secondary to those histories that are centred upon the tribe and hapu. Equally, it is my view that, while we cannot of course diminish, and nor should we, the impact of 'expansionism and colonisation' on our people, I do think these have had their day as the controlling devices of our 'Māori histories'. However, once removed as controlling devices – expansionism and colonisation – what other devices can we put in their place?

To provide an answer, I want to conclude by looking at what Māori people were doing during the immediate years after the land wars of last century. During that period, after 1865, tribes and hapu were often compelled to engage each other, or the Crown, in forums like the Compensation Courts. This was especially so in Taranaki. There, the issue was the defence of land against irretrievable loss.

So, in defence of their land, tribes and hapu asserted, firstly, their independence of identity and political activity. This independence was asserted from a certain,

longstanding sense of self and validity. This was a sense which came directly from, among other things, whakapapa. Whakapapa was the primary customary historical framework. However, whakapapa was rather more than just an 'abstract' organising device for Māori knowledge. Whakapapa was also firmly anchored into the landscape, the very landscape over which tribes were now engaged, with each other, or with the Crown. It was a tragic process. My reading of this time is that the tribes and hapu were as much, if not more, asserting their mana, as they were defending their lands.

Such assertions of identity and mana dominate Māori activity throughout the last century. Such assertions were strongly maintained across the colonial era and well beyond. I have often had the sense, when working with Compensation Court material for example, that the issue of mana overrides issues of land retention, though of course the two were always one and the same. Whilst you had your land, you had your mana. But if you lost your land, what then? The view amongst kaumatua from Taranaki is that, if you lost the land, your mana remained intact while you retained the sense of the land.

Where does this all lead? Put simply, histories of land loss invariably draw heavily for points of reference upon the Māori-settler contact histories of the last century. But histories of 'mana retained' draw heavily from histories structured by devices like whakapapa. So, different issues now arise because the structuring device, or paradigm, has changed. I should say that much of what I have to say here relates to my own home district of Taranaki, which is the area of my tribal descent. This is because there is a general convention within Māori historical scholarship, it seems to me, that you write about your own home area, or that you position what you have to say within your own descent precedence and practices, and history.

In looking then at Taranaki during the last century, we see that many Māori have argued that the sense of mana whenua – authority, power and validation on the land possessed by the old people – did not depart from the tribes of Taranaki, even after the land had been removed from their effective collective control. I would argue that mana whenua endured as the basis of Taranaki tribal mana on the land; and it endured as an extension of the validating historical processes which provided for the ongoing construction of our own histories, and the ongoing enhancement of the mana of our people.

Quite a number of Māori historians these days, then, are less concerned with historical issues of the last century, as defined by Māori-settler contact, or

colonisation. Now, the focus has changed. Māori historians are more concerned with showing how the tribes and hapu maintained and asserted their mana, across the colonial era, through concepts like, for example, mana whenua.

Here is one example of this changed focus. This example deals with Māori people after the Land Wars. It is true, as Claudia Orange has argued, that, after the 1860s, 'runanga and traditional gatherings increased in frequency ... providing opportunities for extended debates'.<sup>18</sup> Alan Ward is also correct when he observes those years, that 'as the Native Department records show, the cessation of fighting was accompanied by an upsurge of (Māori) determination to come to grips with the Pākehā world, and to succeed in it.'<sup>19</sup>

In our view, such an upsurge in determination was not necessarily a matter of coming to grips with the 'now apparently unshakable Pākehā world'. Rather, it was a demonstration of that which had long motivated tribes and hapu – continuing assertions of validity based upon the legitimacy of their descent, and the validity of their ongoing political and social activities, all of which were anchored into longstanding (if now contested) landscape.

Such a sense of mana whenua in fact provided increased impetus for tribes and hapu as they sought the restoration of tribal lands into their collective ownership. And, such assertions by Māori last century were in part the product of historical processes that were inherent to the tribes, with origins much earlier than the nineteenth century.

These are the processes which Māori Historians are seeking to examine, describe and then apply as valid within the mainstream of New Zealand historiography, across the colonial era up to 1900 and beyond – inherent and ancient processes which we would maintain were not overridden by new factors introduced into the Māori intellectual domain after 1800.

Such frameworks provide a preferred theoretical model through which tribal histories can be seen to have been constructed; and through which the activities of our people last century, in the face of colonisation, may be better understood. To describe the nature of these older and customary ways of organising knowledge of the past is complex. How to do it is a task that will continue to challenge Māori historians.

But we do not have to look far for clues. Such approaches are of course very much in evidence today. One need only sit on a marae to hear what Peter Buck

called the 'high standards of speech and oratory' issuing forth. Whilst such presentations of oratory on the Marae might appear as wholly intuitive, astute listeners are aware of and are indeed appreciative of the context and contest that unfolds. Here are the oral exchanges, for the most part benevolent, facts merging with feint, all though presented within given frameworks of tribal knowledge and historical construction, as tribal validity and mana are strongly asserted across the Marae, from the old people. It is such a protocol as the simple powhiri which, in the end, reminds us that it is the paepae which serves as the controlling site for such Māori histories.

As I see it, understanding New Zealand's historiography, where it has been, and the ground over which it is yet to traverse, and knowing the influence that Māori historians can have, forms an important part of the process of shaping a Māori and perhaps a new New Zealand historiography.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Tipene O'Regan, 'Old Myths and New Politics – Some Contemporary Uses of Traditional History' in *New Zealand Journal of History*, 26:1, pp.5-27, 1992.

<sup>2</sup>Ranginui Walker, Keynote Address, New Zealand Historical Association Conference, Auckland, December 1994.

<sup>3</sup>Jock Phillips, 'Of Verandahs and Fish and Chips and Footie on Saturday Afternoon. Reflections on 100 Years of New Zealand Historiography', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 24:2, pp. 118-134, 1990.

<sup>4</sup>Erik Olssen, 'Where To From Here? Reflections on the Twentieth Century Historiography of Nineteenth-Century New Zealand', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 26:1, pp. 54-77, 1992.

<sup>5</sup>Martin John Blythe, 'From Māoriland to Aotearoa. Images of the Māori in New Zealand Film and Television', PhD thesis in Film Theatre, University of California, p. 36. 1988.

<sup>6</sup>Ranginui J. Walker, 'Māori People Since 1950' in Geoffrey W. Rice (ed.), *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Auckland: Oxford University Press, pp. 498-519, 1992.

<sup>7</sup>Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History*, London: Routledge, p.34, 1991.

<sup>8</sup>Buddy Mikaere, 'The Role of the Māori History Association of Aotearoa', paper presented to the Māori Historians Hui, Rongopai, Gisborne, 27 November 1992.

<sup>9</sup>M.P.K. Sorrenson, 'Towards a Radical Reinterpretation of New Zealand History: the Role of the Waitangi Tribunal' in I.H. Kawharu (ed.), *Waitangi. Māori and Pākehā Perspectives of the Treaty of Waitangi*, Auckland: Oxford University Press, pp. 158-178, 1989.

<sup>10</sup>I have briefly discussed some of the issues relating to Māori history and oral sources elsewhere. See Danny Keenan, 'By Word of Mouth ... The Past from the Paepae', in *Historical News*, pp. 4-7, October, 1994. See also the work of Monty Soutar and Charles Royal listed in these endnotes.

<sup>11</sup>Alan Ward, 'History and Historians Before the Waitangi Tribunal. Some Reflections on the Ngāi Tahu Claim', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 24:2, pp.150-165.

<sup>12</sup>Michael Belgrave, 'New Zealand Historiography and the Claims Process', paper presented to the Department of History, Massey University, August 1994.

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<sup>13</sup>I have also briefly discussed elsewhere some of the problems that occurred, last century, once aggregated perceptions of Māori people replaced local recognitions of diversity. This was especially evident in the way census material was interpreted. See Danny Keenan, 'Incontrovertible Evidence, Notwithstanding Estimates' in *He Pukenga Korero. A Journal of Māori Studies*, Massey University, Palmerston North, 1:1, pp. 44-49, (1995).

<sup>14</sup>Te Ahukaramu Charles Royal, *Te Haurapa. An Introduction to Researching Tribal Histories and Traditions*, Wellington: Bridget Williams, p. 9, 1992.

<sup>15</sup>Joe Pere, 'Hitori Māori' in Colin Davis and Peter Lineham (eds), *The Future of the Past. Themes in New Zealand History*, Department of History, Massey University, pp. 35-36, 1991.

<sup>16</sup>This is a direct quote from a review published by Tipene O'Regan of the book *Māori Dunedin* by Maarire Goodall and George Griffiths, Dunedin, 1980. Unfortunately, the reference for this review could not be located, at the time of publication. However, O'Regan's point is important, and is worth quoting here.

<sup>17</sup>Monty Soutar, 'A Framework for Analysing Written Iwi Histories' in *He Pukenga Korero*, 2:1, pp. 43-57, 1996.

<sup>18</sup>Claudia Orange, *The Treaty of Waitangi*, Wellington: Allen and Unwin, 1987, p. 190.

<sup>19</sup>Alan Ward, *A Show of Justice*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, p. 264, 1973.<sup>1</sup>Personal Communication, MA Student and Kai-whina, 27.11.98