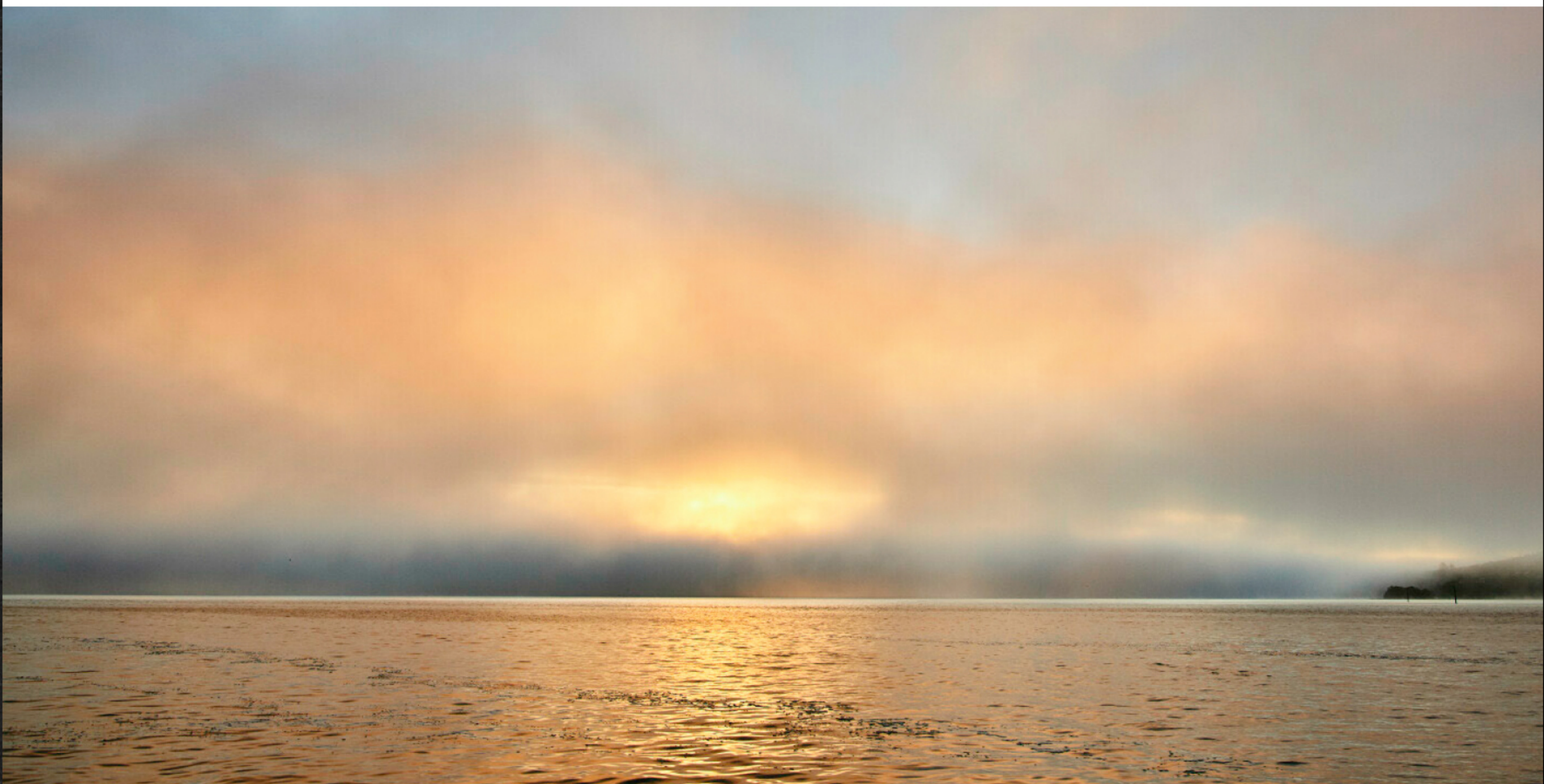


# BECOMING AOTEAROA

A **NEW** HISTORY  
OF NEW **ZEALAND**



**MICHAEL  
BELGRAVE**



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MASSEY UNIVERSITY PRESS

# CONTENTS

- Preface** 7
- Introduction:  
Is There an Us?** 12
- 1. Vikings of  
the Sunrise** 18
  - 2. The Mapmakers** 27
  - 3. Wooden Ships and  
Wooden Crosses** 36
  - 4. Muskets and  
Christianity** 46
  - 5. The Battle over  
Māori Sovereignty** 57
  - 6. White Savages,  
Chancers and  
Entrepreneurs** 68
  - 7. Agreement  
at Waitangi** 81
  - 8. Colonies  
of Towns** 100
  - 9. Possessing  
the Soil** 119
  - 10. Governor George  
Grey: One  
Country** 129
  - 11. Gold and Fleece** 140
  - 12. Looming Crisis** 148
  - 13. England's Not  
So Little War** 160
  - 14. Pai Mārire and  
Confiscation** 174
  - 15. Another Country:  
Beyond the  
Battlefield** 182
  - 16. The Great  
Expansion** 199
  - 17. Hard Times  
and Old-world  
Problems** 215
  - 18. Reimagining  
the New World** 230

- 19. Remaking the New World** 247
- 20. Dick Seddon's Dream** 268
- 21. Māori Landlords, Red Feds, Wobblies and Cossacks** 282
- 22. Fatal Adventure: New Zealand and the Great War** 294
- 23. The War at Home** 306
- 24. The Tango on Britain's Farm** 318
- 25. The Depression and Its Nemesis** 342
- 26. The Second World War** 361
- 27. When the War Was Over** 385
- 28. Paradise Shared** 397
- 29. Managing the Present, Planning the Future** 411
- 30. Protest and Performance** 431
- 31. The Road to 1984** 447
- 32. Come the Revolution** 460
- 33. National: Second Wind** 482
- 34. Finding a Third Way** 495
- 35. Becoming Aotearoa** 506
- Epilogue** 528
- Notes** 532
- Bibliography** 592
- Acknowledgements** 627
- About the Author** 628
- Index** 629



# PREFACE

**T**his history of Aotearoa New Zealand is a response to crisis: the massacre of 51 Muslim worshippers in Christchurch on 15 March 2019 and the ongoing uncertainty which has followed it.

In the days immediately after the 2019 massacre, many spoke of a loss of innocence, expressing profound shock that this could happen here. Mass killings, particularly mass shootings, and hate crimes of this scale were something that occurred elsewhere, in the United States, the Middle East, Europe — anywhere but here. This reminder that geographical isolation and small size provided no protection cut across something fundamental to many New Zealanders' understanding of themselves and of their country, no matter how long they had called it home.

Many who had recently arrived in New Zealand's Muslim communities expressed their own distress that something so hateful, so cold-blooded and violent could occur here. Despite often living with the daily evidence of prejudice and xenophobia, New Zealand Muslims, too, had believed that this country was a refuge from the worst of the outside world. The story of two of the victims, Khaled Mustafa and his son Hamza, is particularly telling. They fled the 'bloody chaos' of Syria only to die in their Christchurch mosque, a haven within a haven.<sup>1</sup> Coming to New Zealand had represented a chance to live in safety and freedom, but that confidence proved to be a deadly illusion.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern cast out the perpetrator, and the politics of hatred and violence, banishing them from New Zealand's shores as 'not us'. Over the following fortnight, her words and actions, and the popular and international response to them, helped to rebuild the smashed illusion that New Zealand was different. Rapid movement on gun control and the shaming of internet giants appeared to show determination and leadership that contrasted sharply with the 'thoughts and prayers' platitudes of the United States, with its entrenched gun lobby. It helped that the killer turned out to be an outsider acting alone, and was not, as first appeared, part of a Christchurch-based cell. Sharing the grief

of the victims and their families, joining with the Muslim community and with Christchurch in mourning the dead, allowed a reassertion that New Zealand's response was special.

After a fortnight of national grieving following the mosque attack, the prime minister set an agenda, not just for honouring the victims but also for change that went well beyond gun control. She argued that remembering the dead involved:

A responsibility to be the place that we wish to be. A place that is diverse, that is welcoming, that is kind and compassionate. Those values represent the very best of us. But even the ugliest of viruses can exist in places they are not welcome. Racism exists, but it is not welcome here. An assault on the freedom of any one of us who practises their faith or religion is not welcome here. Violence, and extremism in all its forms, is not welcome here . . .

Because we are not immune to the viruses of hate, of fear, of other. We never have been. But we can be the nation that discovers the cure.<sup>2</sup>

The idea of New Zealand as an exception among the nations, so shattered on 15 March, had risen once more.

But the suggestion that New Zealand was compassionate and inclusive did not go unchallenged for long. Before the National Memorial Day on 29 March, and even before the dead were buried, some voices reminded New Zealanders that all was not so harmonious, tolerant and welcoming. Anthropologist and historian Dame Anne Salmond argued that the killer's brand of white supremacy was simply an extreme version of something deeply ingrained in New Zealand's past. For Salmond, the Treaty of Waitangi promised a balance between Māori and Queen Victoria's people, but: 'This promise was utterly smashed by the incoming settler government, which proclaimed and practised white supremacy. One hundred and thirty-five years later, when the Waitangi Tribunal was set up, the New Zealand Government took a step away from this doctrine, although the promise of equality has yet to be amply fulfilled.'<sup>3</sup>

Lawyer Moana Jackson was another to make the link between the Christchurch killer and New Zealand's colonial experience. For him, the attack was 'a manifestation of the particular history of colonisation and its founding presumption that the so-called white people in Europe were inherently superior to everyone else'. The killer 'drew upon the shared ideas and history that still lurk in the shadows of every country that has been colonised'.<sup>4</sup>

Jackson made colonisation into the universal experience of racism and oppression, from 'Abo hunts' in colonial Australia to wars against Māori on this side of the Tasman. Suggesting that colonisation in New Zealand was in any



way different was to misremember the past. Salmond and Jackson's well-crafted statements challenged the idea of 'us', while also still imagining an 'us' that ought to be. Despite their eloquence, their message was no different from film director Taika Waititi's the year before the massacre: New Zealand is 'racist as fuck'.<sup>5</sup>

There is a very different view of New Zealand's past, one which emphasises shared experience and common values, a form of exceptionalism, the idea that New Zealand is distinct from other societies and the better for that. Michael King captured this collective identity in the concluding comments of his *Penguin History of New Zealand*: 'And most New Zealanders, whatever their cultural background, are good-hearted, practical, commonsensical and tolerant. Those qualities are part of the national cultural capital that has in the past saved the country from the worst excesses of chauvinism and racism seen in other parts of the world. They are as sound a basis as any for optimism about the country's future.'<sup>6</sup>

Although King did not whitewash the more unsavoury aspects of New Zealand's past, Jackson presented a much more troubling view, one in which white supremacy is fundamental to the global experience of colonisation, and in which white New Zealanders carry imprinted in their privilege a belief in their own superiority. For Jackson, white supremacy has thrived and is no less virulent now than it was in the 1860s. Yet despite this, Jackson and Salmond also described a future full of possibilities, if only Māori values and Māori worldviews were returned to their primacy over New Zealand's European past.<sup>7</sup>

+ + +

In the years since the Christchurch killings, and as this book was being written, the idea of an 'us' has been further tested by the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath. In early 2020, major world metropolises such as Milan and New York were being devastated by the arrival of a new coronavirus, dubbed Covid-19, which caused large-scale mortality and overwhelmed hospitals and medical care. New Zealand's isolation from the world gave it a brief respite, but by the end of February travellers from overseas had brought the disease here and voluntary attempts at isolation were already proving inadequate.

On 25 March, following the best medical advice available, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern closed the borders and put the country in a lockdown. New Zealand sanitised itself against the outside world, using distance as a cocoon, in ways made impossible elsewhere by geography, social habit or political culture. As she had over Christchurch, Ardern again defined the country and its people as compassionate and inclusive, 'a team of five million'.

The initial hope was not to eliminate the virus, but rather to prevent the numbers of those severely ill from overwhelming New Zealand's hospitals. Ardern's daily televised appearances at the Beehive theatre with the director-general of health Ashley Bloomfield to share information about the progress of the pandemic in New Zealand carried the support of an overwhelming majority of New Zealanders. The first wave of Covid was eliminated, and New Zealand became a quarantined ark, cut off from the world, secure — but only in its isolation — and beating off smaller later incursions.

Labour was rewarded by a return to power with an unprecedented MMP majority at the election at the end of that year. During a summer tour the New Zealand band Six60 played to over 150,000 people, including at Eden Park, the first New Zealand band to perform there, where it played to a sell-out audience of 50,000. In nowhere else in the world at that time could this have happened safely. It was the high point of the common sense that New Zealand was different, that New Zealanders could work together against a dangerous enemy, in ways being shown to be impossible elsewhere, particularly in Western democracies.

By the end of 2021, however, New Zealand was another country. Covid had returned. Desperate to contain the virus until the vaccines available elsewhere were rolled out, the government imposed another gruelling lockdown, particularly extended in Auckland. The harmonious 'us' of 2020 shattered. Once vaccines were available, mandates were used to restrict the transmission of the Delta variant of the virus, forcing many of those who chose, for a variety of different reasons, not to be vaccinated to give up employment. Māori and Pacific support for the government waned as these communities felt shut out of vaccination programmes even though Māori and Pacific people remained most at risk.

The quarantine became an increasingly irksome barrier separating whānau and loved ones according to rules that were seen as arbitrary and unjust. Anti-science and anti-vaccination theories, passing effortlessly across borders through the internet, fostered protests, encouraged misinformation about vaccines, and promoted extremist fantasies. Opposition to vaccination mandates created a coalition of disaffection that led to the occupation of Parliament Grounds in early 2022 and mirrored a global campaign against previously tolerated restrictions.

The government thereafter pursued the normality that had already been embraced elsewhere. The prime minister, who had personified New Zealand's 2020 success, was now openly vilified, accused of crimes against humanity and threatened by extremists with trial and execution. Labour's support leaked away as the country descended into a malaise of inflation and division. Social disharmony underpinned political division by the end of 2023, when a new three-way MMP government adopted policies that exploited white anxieties about the place of

Māori in New Zealand's present and future. As this book neared completion, New Zealand had assumed many of the features of the malady affecting other democracies.

+ + +

A new history curriculum, another Ardern initiative, was developed during 2021 and 2022, when consensus prevailed. It provided for all children in their first 10 years of schooling to tackle, head-on, New Zealand's colonial past, Māori history and the way that different groups of immigrants have been welcomed or shunned. The curriculum, particularly as it has been reshaped for Māori language schools, acknowledges Māori ways of seeing and interpreting the past. These sit alongside the more conventional historical practice which largely informs this book.

The mosque shootings and the pandemic and its aftermath call for a reconsideration of where we have come from so that we might better understand where we are now. This became even more urgent as this book went to press, as political divisions over New Zealand's past threatened the local emergence of what have elsewhere become 'history wars', the use of conflicting narratives of the past in polarised political debates about the country's present and future.

History wars have already featured in the politics of Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. New Zealand has, until now, adhered to a consensus over the country's past, supported by the two main parties, through a common commitment to the Waitangi Tribunal's investigations and the Treaty settlements which have followed. In early 2024 the politics swirling around ideas of race and the interpretation of the Treaty of Waitangi were challenging this consensus, further eroding the notion of an inclusive 'us'.

Should New Zealand's history become more controversial, forces suggest that polarised views of New Zealand's past will not be as entrenched an indicator of social divisions as they are in history wars elsewhere. Claims that the Treaty of Waitangi did not specifically acknowledge Māori rights as indigenous rights are too ludicrous to recruit historians in their support. There is much that will divide historians, and their interpretation of the Treaty of Waitangi, but not that.

This history focuses on the reintroduction of these islands to the wider world from the beginning of the nineteenth century. In exploring the paradox of New Zealand's contested claims to exceptionalism, it considers how the past is always more complicated than the politics of the present would allow.

# INTRODUCTION:

## IS THERE AN US?

**W**riting national histories has become unfashionable, despite the success of Michael King's *Penguin History of New Zealand* more than two decades ago.<sup>1</sup> Instead, history has been a cloak divided — the history of Pākehā and the history of Māori, with Māori history becoming iwi and hapū history, and Pākehā history being split into the stories of women, of localities, of different communities. Stripped of the familiar contours of elections and prime ministers, political promises made and broken, the iconic role of the Liberals or the first Labour government, New Zealand history has become confusingly heterogeneous even as it has become more contextualised and, for those writing it, more interesting.

Telling the story of different lives, from their own perspectives, is rich and rewarding, and there exist superb histories of women, Māori, Pacific people, gay men and European migrants, most especially in Barbara Brookes' *A History of New Zealand Women* and Athol Anderson, Judith Binney and Aroha Harris's *Tangata Whenua*.<sup>2</sup> How all these often conflicted and conflicting stories are connected has become not only difficult to see, but also unnecessary. What did it matter if Johnsonville and Geraldine, as poet Denis Glover imagined them in 1936, had nothing in common?

The atomisation of New Zealand has been further encouraged by the increasing range of digital resources available about the nation's past. These range from the online *Te Ara — the Encyclopedia of New Zealand* and the rich

biographical stories from the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* to New Zealand History Nga Korero a Ipurangi o Aotearoa and Papers Past, the superb digitisation of New Zealand newspapers, magazines and journals and books. These resources, and others, allow us to open a singular window on a piece of New Zealand history — an event, a person, a movement, a conflict. However what they do not do is fit the pieces together to provide an overall picture that demonstrates the relationships between them and how these have altered. Even rich and rewarding histories, such as those of objects, can further atomise the experience of reading history, although as historians Bronwyn Labrum and Jock Phillips demonstrate, this does not have to be the case. Objects can be used to tell a bigger story.<sup>3</sup>

History as taught in schools, even when it is New Zealand history, has become a meal of tiny and unrelated portions, although the very comprehensive nature of the new compulsory curriculum could overcome this problem. A bifurcation of New Zealand history has also been supported through a bicultural approach, which separates Māori from non-Māori history without demonstrating common influences. What was happening in the Māori world, and to Māori, had parallels elsewhere in New Zealand society and was also driven by global economic, social and intellectual trends. Bicultural history emphasises continuity within specific communities, but often fails to explore the ways in which whakapapa has enriched and influenced those communities.

Ironically, given that Māori history is iwi-, hapū- and whānau-centred, it has proved to be the one area where a degree of national coherence has been maintained, through attaching Māori history to postcolonial history and institutionally through the work of the Waitangi Tribunal. New Zealand history became a case study of colonial exploitation and a history of survival, with the ideal world existing only in the past before the scourge of contact and the evils that flowed from it and perhaps in the hope of a Māori-centred and -empowered future.

The tribunal has sponsored this history, but it has also channelled it into a very narrow form of narrative, which demonstrates the impact of colonisation only as far as this can be explained through the Crown's inability to live up to the idealised promises made with the Treaty of Waitangi.<sup>4</sup> This is a history of resilience, of Māori survival, and one that allowed for the diversity of Māori experience, but it is not a holistic history of Māori experience and remains Crown- rather than Māori-centred in both form and content.

Yet, despite these differences, narratives of marginalisation and loss create a shared experience of being Māori. Together, they accentuate a significant gulf between Māori history and that of all those other groups who have arrived in New Zealand since 1840. Māori historians have escaped the methodological and conceptual straitjacket of tribunal history, using rich and surprisingly diverse

approaches to producing Māori-centred understandings of the past.<sup>5</sup>

It may seem, then, that New Zealand history has become irreversibly divided, riven into two overarching narratives. James Belich split the past into making Pākehā and making Māori, two parallel histories.<sup>6</sup> These are illustrated in the works of Anne Salmond and also in the magnificent *Tangata Whenua*, published in 2015.<sup>7</sup> What these approaches tend to downplay is the extent to which Māori have sought, since at least as early as 1840, to be part of the new, while retaining identities and futures that were still fundamentally Māori. Only Brookes' *A History of New Zealand Women* has consciously integrated the histories of Māori and non-Māori. *Becoming Aotearoa* shows the history of these islands as not the story of two worlds but as an attempt to create a new one in which, despite the differences, much was shared.<sup>8</sup>

This book looks at the spaces between these disparate stories, to explore both the places where the experience of living in these islands was shared, and the barriers that excluded some while the doors opened wide to others. *Becoming Aotearoa* argues that some key patterns in the country's nineteenth-century experience have helped to define New Zealand's history and make it distinct, including the role of Māori, and the role of the state in managing a series of social contracts with Māori, with immigrants, with women and with working people.

There are certainly distinct, if not necessarily exceptional, aspects to New Zealand's past. Māori transformation from Polynesian migrants into tangata whenua in a large and temperate archipelago is unique in itself. In the late eighteenth century New Zealand was, for Europeans, at the edge of the known world, inhabited, for those with Enlightenment ideas of history, by noble savages, whose present lives provided a window into the distant European past. But even before it was made a British colony in 1840, New Zealand had become a place projected into the future, an idealised community of saints or settlers.

By the end of the century, when there was such a thing as a New Zealand state, its experiments in the art of government, most notably its labour relations and women's franchise, renewed claims that it offered a glimpse into a common future for modern societies. Most of these ideas mobilised political and social debates elsewhere, but they would also resonate locally, so that a progressive image of New Zealand was preserved in professional histories until the 1970s and in popular histories to the present. Often emphasised was the idea of a working man's paradise, with occasional references to their wives, inhabited by settlers determined to be freer and more equal, as well as more prosperous. New Zealand was credited as being an early adopter of the rights of women, not just to vote, but also to be recognised in professions such as nursing and midwifery, and to be equally eligible for an education at secondary school, university or medical school.

The idea that New Zealand has the best race relations in the world also figured prominently until recent decades. The concept of New Zealand as a social leader would re-emerge over the twentieth century, with the country's role in the creation of the declaration of human rights, its anti-nuclear policies from the 1980s and, more recently, in Jacinda Ardern's Christchurch Call following the March 2019 killings.

A willingness to experiment is deeply rooted within New Zealand social and political experience, although it often occurred in brief spurts of hyperactivity, in the 1830s, the 1880s, the 1930s and the 1980s and 1990s, with long periods of incremental change in between. Historians have systematically hacked away at many of these claims. Some of these firsts and progressive self-images were unearned, others overstated or premature, and some just plain wrong, more spin than substance. But the fact that politicians felt the need to do something new, and to justify this in terms of New Zealand's commitment to the future, demonstrates a thoroughly entrenched trend.

New Zealand was created by an increasingly globalised economy powered by new means of communication — regular shipping routes, telegraph, steam ships and refrigeration — that allowed for the free passage of capital, goods, people and ideas on an unprecedented scale. Unsurprisingly, these forces created a nation-state that looked more and more like other similar nation-states emerging. At the time, New Zealand was also a new Britannia, a little America and an Australasian colony, but these overseas influences were tempered by local circumstance and transformed in the adoption, sometimes in small degrees, sometimes more dramatically.<sup>9</sup> Māori, and New Zealand's own specific geography and economic potential, localised these external influences, making New Zealand distinct from other settler societies. The debates about the future of New Zealand that emerged at its creation in the 1830s and 1840s have always shaped the country's present, and will continue to do so.

As historian W. H. Oliver commented over half a century ago, one of the most significant aspects of New Zealand's history was the central role played by the state, a role largely accepted and even encouraged by large sections of New Zealand's European population, and even by many hapū and iwi.<sup>10</sup> The government's direction was at its height from the 1930s to the 1970s, when the country's economy was highly protected. But the reach of government extended back into the 1860s to the 1840s, if we recognise the role of the New Zealand Company in its settlements. The state was responsible for large-scale immigration; for the acquisition and settlement of Māori land, before engaging in warfare against iwi defying its authority; for putting European settlers on the land; for managing labour relations.

It was largely responsible for building the country's infrastructure, for railways, ports, roads and electricity generation. It provided a myriad of small supports to farmers, from rabbit boards to catchment authorities. It dabbled in shipping, banking and insurance. In an age where the free market was king across the British Empire and the United States, the primary driver for this apparently centralised system of control, development and care was not some commitment to socialism, but the pragmatic reality of raising capital for infrastructure in a small country distant from its markets. And even when government stirred to call itself socialist, state enterprises were often run with extensive private-sector involvement.

Small communities, isolated from each other, and the dispersed nature of New Zealand's main settlements from Auckland in the north to Dunedin in the south, made for a clamorous demand for state support, immigrants, roads and bridges, drainage schemes and railways. The centrality of the state was sustained by a series of commonly understood rights and responsibilities, a sense of a social contract between government and communities and between government and families. The Treaty of Waitangi introduced a sense of the Crown's responsibility to iwi and hapū and provided the liberal notions of rights in a constitutional structure that would recognise and sustain them.

From 1840, Māori looked to the Crown for a recognition of tribal mana and took seriously the legal structures of Parliament and the courts to ameliorate the impact of colonisation. With few exceptions, from the 1840s to the present, Māori have sought participation in the state, seeking recognition of Māori difference and cultural self-determination alongside social equality.

The American historian David Fisher has suggested that the United States was driven by notions of freedom, whereas New Zealand was more concerned with the idea of fairness.<sup>11</sup> It is a useful comparison and one that highlights the extent to which the law, and liberal notions of rights, gave substance to this quest for fairness. The contractual relationships of colonisation made it possible for New Zealand society to be covered by what may be referred to broadly as a series of social compacts, based on the centrality of the state and the rule of law, as historian John Martin has argued for labour relations.<sup>12</sup> The place of the Treaty of Waitangi as a social compact, or covenant, is the most clearly understood, but also significant were the government's responsibility to workers, to the introduction of industrial conciliation and arbitration in 1894 and to full employment in the decades after the Second World War.

If the Treaty introduced liberal ideas of rights and responsibilities and the Crown's relationship to Māori, the New Zealand Company did the same, not just in the determination of settlers for self-government, but also in the contractual relationship between the company and its labourers, and the promises of



guaranteed employment. Eight hours' work, eight hours' sleep and eight hours' play was not simply a statement of worker rights; it defined a contractual relationship between employer and employee. The dominant role of assisted migration schemes in the great expansion of New Zealand's white population from the late 1860s was, again, based on contracts. That assisted migration focused on family groups — parents with young children — reinforced the state's responsibility to immigrants as family units.

When the economy collapsed in the 1880s, as it did worldwide, new ideas about socialism, the rights of women, the nature of the family and the role of the state challenged and restated earlier assumptions of state responsibility. Then, through the 1890s, the Liberals reformed the relationship between the state and Māori, the state and working people, the state and women in the family, the state and the environment and the economy, and even attempted to reshape the relationship between the New Zealand state and the South Pacific world.

In sustaining these social relationships after the First World War, the government finally closed the door on the open movement of people that had been so essential to the colony's nineteenth-century growth. An increasing sense of biological and British exclusiveness sustained these social contracts right through to the 1970s, when they were challenged by new social movements, by the second wave of feminism and the changing nature of the family, by a new environmental awareness and by the revival of Māori protest. Consumerism, and irritation by both employers and trade unions with an almost century-old system of negotiating wages and conditions, also helped to erode the emphasis on the collectives of tribe, family, community and work.

In the 1980s, a new generation of politicians, born during or after the Second World War, reconnected New Zealand to the world, unilaterally dismantled the protected economy and opened the door to migrants that had begun closing a century earlier. These economic reformers saw themselves as revolutionaries, stripping away decades of state overreach and dependency. We are now sufficiently distant from these reforms to assess their durability and the extent to which they achieved their objectives of removing the state from the central position it has occupied since the early days of colonisation.

Through these changes, the one constant has been the relationship between the state and Māori as *tangata whenua*. The social compact of the late nineteenth century has been reset and now rests again on the Treaty of Waitangi and the idea of rights that has been fundamental to it. As has always been the case, what that means in practice remains contested. The age-old problem of the world's impact on New Zealand continues to be the story of these islands and is the underlying story in what follows.

# 1

# VIKINGS OF THE SUNRISE

**T**he islands of the Pacific were the last places on earth to be occupied by humans, completing a migration out of Africa that began almost two million years before. The Polynesian voyagers who started this exploration of the Pacific some 3000 years ago became highly sophisticated navigators. Their double-hulled canoes were equipped for ocean travel and their knowledge of navigation took them deliberately from one island group to the next until they eventually occupied the huge Polynesian triangle from Hawai'i in the north to Rapa Nui Easter Island in the east and New Zealand in the south. Their voyaging extended to the coast of South America.

The great Māori anthropologist Sir Peter Buck, who later wrote as Te Rangi Hīroa and who spent much of his career at the Bishop Museum in Hawai'i, described these voyagers as Vikings of the Sunrise.<sup>1</sup>

Māori remain justifiably proud of the skill of these ancestors and remember their feats in oral histories handed down from generation to generation. In 1898, Charles Goldie and Louis Steele produced a grand historical painting, *The Arrival of the Maoris in New Zealand*, which depicted emaciated and starving sailors, desperate to reach an unknown and unexpected land just visible on the horizon.<sup>2</sup> The work provoked Māori anger as perhaps no other. Europeans brought up on the undoubted abilities of Magellan, Tasman and Cook had difficulty appreciating these earlier explorers. They dismissed Māori as a Stone Age civilisation, bereft of science and incapable of such feats. As late as the 1950s, one anthropologist

illustrated a book with a completely black page and the caption 'Polynesians navigating by the stars on a cloudy night'.<sup>3</sup>

We now know conclusively that the Māori oral histories were correct.<sup>4</sup> Not only did those early navigators launch themselves into the unknown with the knowledge to find new lands and return home, but also the peopling of the Pacific could not have been achieved in any other way.<sup>5</sup> The effectiveness of Polynesian ocean-going waka has been demonstrated in recent decades through the voyages undertaken by the late Sir Hector Busby, whose double-hulled *Te Aurere* sailed over 30,000 kilometres across the Pacific. The sciences of navigation, genetics and archaeology have clearly put paid to any argument that Māori came here accidentally and without purpose.

Questions about when and how Māori arrived, and where they came from, have also been largely resolved. In the nineteenth century, European speculation about such matters reflected European ideas about race. Some argued that Māori were a lost tribe of Israel, a conjecture that placed them within a biblical framework of history as understood by European missionaries.<sup>6</sup> More secular speculations at the end of the century saw Māori as Aryans, part of the Indo-European family of nations. In one of the most fanciful interpretations, philologist Edward Tregear argued that te reo Māori was the original Aryan language, preserved in the isolation of the South Pacific.<sup>7</sup> In studying Māori, Europeans were exploring their own past.

Amateurs like Tregear, dabbling in ethnology, ethnography and philology, were also listening to Māori oral histories. Far from condemning these as unreliable and mythological, many regarded them as worthy historical narratives, particularly those describing the waka — *Tainui*, *Te Arawa*, *Kurahaupō*, *Takitimu*, *Aotea*, *Mātaatua* and others — which arrived in Aotearoa and provided the historical origins of the majority of iwi. In his 1913–15 *The Lore of the Wharewananga*, Stephenson Percy Smith, a co-founder of the Polynesian Society and surveyor general, working with Hoani Turi Te Whatahoro Jury of Ngāti Kahungunu, codified these canoe tradition genealogies and connected them with the stories of earlier navigators, Toi and Kupe.<sup>8</sup>

By allotting each generation 25 years, adding up the number of generations back to the founding waka, putting them all together and dividing by 25, Smith came up with the year 1350 CE as the date when a great fleet of seven Māori canoes arrived in New Zealand. That year of origin remained standard in the anthropological and historical literature until the 1960s, when more critical anthropologists lampooned Smith's method and questioned the extent to which he had appropriated whakapapa for his grand scheme. The great fleet and the year 1350 were dismissed as the 'great New Zealand myth'.<sup>9</sup>

This opened the way for new speculation. At the fringes of this debate various fanciful explanations were incubated, competing in their absurdity. Māori had come through Central America. Māori had been visited by unknown Portuguese or Spanish voyagers. Māori had their origins in the ancient city of Ur. The old myths of Israelites and Aryans still hovered in the background. Although many of these ideas can be dismissed as driven by a desire to ascribe Māori and Polynesian skills and knowledge to outside influences, they have proved popular with Māori and European alike.

Another earlier idea, supported by Stephenson Percy Smith, was that when Māori arrived, they found an existing and inferior population — either darker or lighter-skinned, depending on the source — whom they conquered and destroyed. Accounts of earlier visitors, which do exist in Māori traditions, have long been explained by different waves of migrants from the same Polynesian origins. Despite evidence that there were no earlier inhabitants, the myth persists, largely because it allows Europeans to argue that they, like Māori before them, could colonise others in order to settle New Zealand.

Strangely, we have come full circle. Although individual visitors may have come to New Zealand before about 1250 CE, they did not stay or settle, and left no reminders of their arrival or departure other than oral traditions and place names associated with earlier Polynesian explorers, most notably Kupe and Toi. Eight hundred years ago, these islands were yet to experience sustained human habitation. Somewhere in the following century, waka arrived, bringing with them the settlers who would become Māori, the ordinary people, the tangata whenua, the people of the land.

We also know that, another century later, these Māori communities had become established across both main islands in numbers that could not be explained by the arrival of a single canoe, or even a small number of canoes; there is just too much evidence of occupation and settlement for it to be caused by the natural increase of a handful of immigrants. Māori came in the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries and they came in numbers, including some 200 adult females. Polynesians also ventured to the Auckland and Rēkohu Chatham Islands, Raoul Island, the Kermadecs and Norfolk Island. In explaining how Māori voyaged here, when and in what numbers, carbon dating, archaeology and linguistics have vindicated Māori oral tradition.

Some of this new confidence has been made possible by reworking Smith's crude calculations. Taking a larger series of canoe traditions, and applying more sophisticated understanding of the biological generation, mathematician Charles Pearce has been able to demonstrate canoes arriving between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries and tailing off completely after that.<sup>10</sup> Many European

commentators were aware of how consistent, detailed and extensive these ancient narratives were, but wanted to create a national story, to turn iwi into Māori, and in so doing crushed locally important histories.

In the middle of the twentieth century, as history attempted to distinguish itself more clearly from folklore, these oral histories, recorded by amateur European scholars, lost academic credibility. Anthropologists saw meaning in these traditions, but as guides to the present, not as history. It is only since the latter part of the twentieth century that historians have been able to accept these traditions as historical narratives, even if they do incorporate legendary heroes and mythical canoes. Arrival as a result of deliberate voyaging confirmed not only the efficacy of Māori science, but also the value of Māori oral tradition.

## NEW LANDS

These new and uninhabited islands were very different from the tropical homelands. Polynesians were primarily gardeners and fishers, relying on warm tropical rains to grow taro, breadfruit, coconut, arrowroot, sugar cane and bananas, depending on which island groups they came from. In southern waters, however, none of these foods could be found. Of the crops Māori brought with them, only a few survived, the most significant being the kūmara (sweet potato). But even the kūmara required new and time-consuming cultivation techniques to survive New Zealand's frosts before it could provide edible crops beyond the Te Tai Tokerau Northland coast.

Other crops, such as taro and mulberry, could only be cultivated in the northern half of the North Island, Te Ika-a-Māui, and primarily close to the coast. Māori also brought kurī (Polynesian dogs) and kiore (rats). Apart from two species of bat, which had been blown across from Australia, there were no land mammals. Plentiful fish species and seals, whales and dolphins provided food, as did the birdlife which, with few predators, was prolific.

Initially, and perhaps for a good deal longer than once appreciated, Māori could hunt moa and sea mammals. One of the earliest places of settlement, and the country's oldest known inhabited site, was the Wairau Bar in Marlborough on the north-eastern coast of Te Waipounamu the South Island.<sup>11</sup> A large area settled from around 1280 CE,<sup>12</sup> it contains evidence of the manufacture of argillite adzes, the bones of thousands of moa, 1600 tonnes of seashells and a wide variety of bird, dolphin and seal remains. This was a sophisticated community, fashioning ornaments from moa bones, serpentine and marine ivory in styles that kept alive memories of Eastern Polynesia.

There is extensive evidence of trade in both main islands. Tūhua Mayor

Island obsidian, with its sharp cutting flakes, can be found throughout the country from this early period. Some of those buried at Wairau were brought up on diets quite different from the protein-rich food at the Wairau Bar, perhaps from those further north, or even from Eastern Polynesia itself. Settlements, perhaps occupied by several hundred inhabitants, were established in different locations and thrived briefly until their larger resources were hunted out, and then abandoned.

Compared with their island homelands, this new place was vast, and able to absorb and nurture an increasing population quickly.<sup>13</sup> Gradually, human occupation pushed many easily obtainable foods either to extinction or to the more isolated and remote parts of the country. Moa, with nine species spread through both islands, could range in weight from 28 to 250 kilograms. Without natural predators, the big flightless birds fell easy prey to early hunters. Kurī and kiore may well have also played a part in reducing the numbers of moa, which were largely hunted to extinction by 1400 CE. Colonies of breeding seals, once plentiful throughout both islands, were, from the sixteenth century, largely confined to Raukawa Moana Cook Strait and further south. Other species disappeared completely. The pouakai or giant New Zealand eagle had, thanks to feasting on moa, grown to the largest of its kind ever recorded, with a wingspan of up to 3 metres. With the moa under threat and much of its habitat destroyed by fires, so went the eagle, gone as early as the beginning of the fifteenth century. On the Chatham Islands, 10 species of birds were hunted to extinction or their habitat destroyed. On the mainland, 32 species of birds went the same way.<sup>14</sup>

Human habitation dramatically changed landscapes, particularly through the increasing frequency of bushfires, destroying habitats for some species and creating scrubland and bracken fernland, which were more suitable for others. The fires were both deliberate and accidental, and as the population increased, so did the frequency. Weka and brown quail thrived in these new landscapes, as did tī kōuka (cabbage trees). The rhizomes of tī kōuka were steamed in earth ovens, its leaves were used for clothing, cords and ropes and the plant also had medicinal properties. Aruhe (fern root) was beaten and cooked. Open land was also more suitable for gardening.

Climate change was at least as important in transforming the landscape.<sup>15</sup> The Southern Alps in the South Island and the Tararua and Ruahine ranges in the North Island divided the country climatically between the moist Tasman rains and the drier east coast. From the beginning of the sixteenth until the nineteenth century, temperatures dropped as the world experienced a Little Ice Age, and there were strong, wet, westerly flows. These conditions made for a harder life and more tenuous survival the further south Māori lived.<sup>16</sup> Nor should we

discount more dramatic influences on climate and the environment. The Kaharoa ash cloud from Mount Tarawera in 1315 CE, just as Māori were arriving, covered much of the eastern North Island, and the volcanic Rangitoto Island in Tīkapa Moana Hauraki Gulf rose from the sea around a century later. Tsunamis may have also influenced where Māori lived.<sup>17</sup>

## CREATING DIVERSE ECONOMIES

With an abundance of easily obtained foods, and a large area to colonise, the Māori population grew steadily over the first two centuries and, because it was highly mobile, extended through both main islands. As moa and sea mammals declined in sustainable numbers, population growth may have declined, even halted for a time, until new economies were established. Because of the differences in climate, there was no single transition. As the population increased, it became concentrated in the northern half of the North Island, along the coast and on the edges of rivers, swamps and inland lakes, where there was access to safe, rich fisheries and good agricultural land.

The South Island, which had once sustained a substantial proportion of the Māori population, became less important; without moa, and with falling temperatures, life became harsher. The movement of people and commodities across both islands declined as communities relied more on local tools and resources than those traded from a distance.<sup>18</sup> However, high-quality artefacts made from West Coast pounamu remained prized possessions and did find their way north, made and traded by Te Waipounamu communities.

Different fisheries developed in different areas, depending on local species.<sup>19</sup> The collective organisation of whānau and hapū, family and coalitions of family groups, was well suited to maximising harvesting when species were abundant, and drying fish to be distributed for lean times during winter. In parts of Tai Tokerau Northland, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland and Te Moana-a-Toi Bay of Plenty, settled agriculture was complemented by extensive fishing, particularly the harvesting of shellfish. In harbours, such as Rangaunu in the Far North and Kāwhia on the west coast, hapū gathered to harvest the sharks that schooled in late summer.

In the Bay of Plenty, whānau with nets that, when tied together, could be kilometres long, took abundant harvests of kahawai as they schooled along the coast. Along major rivers such as the Whanganui, pā were constructed to catch tuna (eels) as a collective enterprise. Those participating in these seasonal hunts were linked by whakapapa. While they were together they shared their learning and their gossip, arranged marriages and allowed romances to blossom, and competed with

one other in the exchange of local delicacies, crafting taonga and storytelling.

The Waikato and Waipā river basins, rich in ducks and tuna, could support a sizeable population. Tainui also crossed to west coast harbours to exchange their inland foods for the kai moana of their kin on the coast. In the thermal areas of the central North Island, steam and hot water could be used for warmth and cooking. Inland economies, beyond the large river systems and lakes, were very different again. Ngāi Tūhoe, for example, ranged extensively over a very large area, taking tuna and inland species of fish and crayfish and especially birds. Similar vast seasonal migrations for hunting and gathering, such as fishing for barracuda at Ōtākou, sustained Ngāi Tahu and Ngāti Māmoe, who had migrated to the far south, where a reliance on gardening was impossible.<sup>20</sup> Here, they constructed reed rafts for crossing the many southern rivers, and developed heavy flax clothing to keep out the cold. Foraging included summer visits to the Tītī Islands for muttonbirds.<sup>21</sup>

From the fifteenth century, fortified pā proliferated, reflecting the growing needs of communities to defend themselves, and their precious crops and preserved kai moana, from both close and distant neighbours.<sup>22</sup> Many pā were small defending villages, while some, such as Māngere, Maungakiekie One Tree Hill and Maungawhau Mount Eden in Tāmaki Makaurau, or Pouērua in Northland, were massive earthworks, statements of power and mana. These defensive constructions, many built centuries ago, are New Zealand's equivalent of medieval castles and similar symbols of warfare and violence.

They also meant security, as competition for mana and resources increased. Tāmaki Makaurau, with its two rich harbours, the Waitematā and the Manukau, and their great pā, was still subject to invasion and dislocation by Ngāti Whātua from the north. Warfare and insecurity were leading to new, larger alliances across kinship groups, a process that would continue after the arrival of Europeans. This was also becoming a more hierarchical society, with distinct and visible differences between rangatira and the rest.<sup>23</sup>

Pressure on space led to some large migrations or heke to the south, where new opportunities were accompanied by greater safety from attack by other tribes. The longest of these heke were those of Ngāi Tahu, Ngāti Māmoe and Ngāti Wairangi from parts of Hawke's Bay to further reaches of Te Waipounamu and Rakiura Stewart Island.<sup>24</sup> Ngāti Awa moved from the Far North to Manukau and the Bay of Plenty, while Rangitāne, Ngāi Tara, Ngāti Apa and Ngāti Tūmatakōkiri were among those to cross the strait to Te Waipounamu.

From this period, too, whakapapa became more detailed, more finely tuned to the complexities of new social relationships. Until that time, ancestral lines from waka of origin were only sparsely detailed, providing little more than



connection to the pre-migration past or the status of descent from waka captains or navigators. The Tainui whakapapa, for instance, was greatly enriched by tales of war and conquest, marriages and alliances. These were testimonies to contested territories and resources, punctuated by frequent battles and peacemaking marriages and alliances.

Burials at the Wairau Bar demonstrate that even the earliest migrants had different grades of status: some individuals were interred with more taonga than others. As the population grew after 1500 CE, society became more hierarchical and chiefly authority intensified as competition for resources increased in the face of a harsher climate.

## **WHAKAPAPA AND THE LAND**

After 10 or 12 generations since arrival, whakapapa became not only narratives of identity and relationships: they also defined legal rights to resources and legitimised mana. Whakapapa said who you were, how you related to those around you, who to trust and who to fear, where you could fish and where you could hunt. In some more densely populated areas, whakapapa became extremely specific, defining the identities and rights of small groups, even individuals, while connecting them to both close and distant kin. They were the oral equivalent of deeds of title, baptismal registers and contracts in the European world.

Although many of the narratives were held in common, much was also contested. Depending on the whakapapa, a battle was won or lost, an ancestor was captured or escaped, or the same land could be discovered, taken or gifted in marriage. Ngāti Whātua and Marutūāhu developed completely different whakapapa narratives for their relationship with Tāmaki. For Ngāti Whātua, Tāmaki was seen from the Kaipara and the Manukau harbours, while for Marutūāhu, Tāmaki was part of Tīkapa Moana, the Hauraki Gulf.<sup>25</sup> Those whose claims rested on more ancient rights, emphasised those; more recent arrivals focused on conquest, and the assimilation of earlier populations. Although they were close to each other, they coexisted with few incidents of violence.

Many of these differences would be aired before the Native Land Court (later the Maori Land Court) from the 1860s, when contested whakapapa were used to defend different associations with lands and waters — and continue to be aired today before the Waitangi Tribunal or in Treaty settlements and, even closer to the present, in litigation over the foreshore and seabed.<sup>26</sup> These disparities and complexities should not be dismissed as a limitation of oral recollection and the transmission of historical memory. Contested whakapapa reflected the shared and overlapping nature of customary rights and the intricacy of kinship connections

between whānau, hapū and iwi. Like all histories, written or oral, they have been and still can be interpreted in ways that reflect the needs of the time and of the people recounting them.

Colonists brought with them surveying and title boundaries, notions of exclusive title to land, and systems of ownership designed for buying and selling. None of these were necessary in the pre-contact world, but from 1840 they would be imposed on Māori customary title to land, influencing or confusing older Māori understandings of the human landscape. In the world created between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, relationships with land were defined by whakapapa, by networks of personal relationships, rather than by the land as an owned commodity. By the end of the nineteenth century, Māori land came to mean Maori Land Court title, Crown grants, memorials of ownership and lists of owners. But these old whakapapa-based relationships with land have been retained, covering both lands lost to colonisation and those still in Māori title.

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In little over half a millennium, Māori migrants had made the most of initial opportunities to settle and expand across the land, and adjusted to such crises as resource decline and climate change. They had adapted to the requirements of these temperate islands, to the much more seasonal rhythms of gardening and hunting and gathering. They brought institutions such as marae with them but created a culture distinct from that of their Eastern Polynesian origins while remaining true to its beliefs.

They had developed a material culture, modified for local resources, rich in finely crafted taonga, from weapons, personal adornments and clothing to finely carved houses and waka taua (war canoes). They had both moulded the landscape and been shaped by it. When new technology was needed, they had invented it, using the resources that were readily available.

This sophisticated Māori world had also recorded its own histories, etched them in memory and in waiata and in the moko of chiefly lines and elaborately carved whareniui. As connections with the rest of Polynesia had become unnecessary, double-hulled waka were discarded as redundant, but the memories of the journeys remained. The Māori world was always changing to deal with new circumstances and there was no single time that could be regarded as traditional. But it was a self-contained world, and nothing would challenge it more than being reconnected with other worlds, with Europe, with Asia and Africa and the Americas and even with the rest of Polynesia, as the descendants of ancient navigators encountered new navigators, and the new peoples who followed them.