

## Post-Colonialism and the Reinterpretation of New Zealand's Colonial Narrative: Heke's War\*

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**ABSTRACT:** Post-colonialism has provided a useful mindset by which contemporary historians can challenge previously held notions of national history, or see better how the national narrative can be considered from a perspective other than that of a grand imperial story of nation building. This paper reveals how post-colonialism enriches, and can often provide, a more accurate, balanced and nuanced comprehension of the accepted version of past events. It specifically demonstrates how post-colonialism has also opened a window whereby the Māori's own story of the New Zealand Wars challenges the imperial version. The imperial vision, one which glorified and exaggerated British military prowess, had downplayed Māori strategic thinking and falsified the historic record. This is evident in the way in which the first of the New Zealand Wars, Heke's War or the Northern War of 1845-46, has usually been interpreted. In this case, and generally, post-colonialism can create a new collective understanding of the past, one that contributes to improving the race relations between different peoples and the lands they inhabit.

**KEYWORDS:** Post-Colonialism, New Zealand Wars, Māori, Ngāpuhi, Hōne Heke

### *Introduction*

In an earlier paper, published in this journal, I had explored the post-colonial re-interpretation of the 'Wairua Massacre', as an example of how, in the context of *Aotearoa*/New Zealand, such a re-examination of significant historical events can not only result in a more nuanced history but also, further an understanding and reconciliation between the descendants of the settlers, (or to use the Māori word and generally accepted term in New Zealand *Pākehā*, meaning 'foreigner'), and the Indigenous peoples, the Māori.<sup>1</sup> In this present paper, I look at a further

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Piper, 'Post-colonialism and the reinterpretation of New Zealand's colonial narrative: The Wairua massacre', *Australian Folklore*, no. 28, Nov. 2013, pp. 80-92.

example, the first of the New Zealand Wars, also known as Heke's War or the Northern War of 1845-46. This particular case study has been selected since it demonstrates well how colonial rhetoric has impelled, and prejudiced, the interpretations of earlier generations of researchers. It also well exemplifies how, within the discipline of history, the rise of post-colonialism has seen a blossoming of new ways to construe past events. Post-colonialism is now accepted as a valid ideology, routinely accorded to colonised peoples (previously perceived as victims but now possessing agency), that has energised historians to revise earlier narratives and their meaning. These new understandings both enrich the national narrative and also provide the alternative stories to reconcile much contested history. It is not the intent of this new paper to repeat the theoretical context of this subject. Readers interested in this background are directed to the earlier paper. Rather, this paper will focus on the impact that post-colonialism has had on the historical interpretation of the New Zealand Wars (formerly referred to as 'the Māori Wars').

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### *The New Zealand Wars*

The New Zealand Wars were a series of conflicts that took place between the British and Māori tribes of the North Island of New Zealand between 1845 and 1872.<sup>2</sup> On the one side were regular imperial British forces and various local colonial militia, as well as 'friendly' *kūpapa* or 'Queenite Māori'. These forces were opposing the rebellious and 'Kingitie Māori' on the other side. Not all Māori fell into the categories of rebel and loyal. Some *hapū* (a sub-tribal grouping) were neutral and various *hapū* also changed allegiances according to changing circumstances. As with frontier violence between settlers and indigenous peoples in other colonised lands, there has been a significant revision of the accepted history of the New Zealand hostilities between the Māori and Pākehā.

The time of the New Zealand Wars—a momentous epoch in New Zealand's history—have had, and continue to have, significant ramifications, especially for race relations in that country. The scale of the confrontation is in keeping with our traditional understanding of hostilities normally associated with a full-blown war as opposed to limited insurrection. This is especially the case for those conflicts that date from

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<sup>2</sup> One historian of the New Zealand Wars, Matthew Wright, has made the perceptive observation that: 'Māori were still fighting [albeit with a different strategy] for what they had lost into the twenty-first century, and in this sense the New Zealand Wars were indeed wars without end.' (Matthew Wright, *Two Peoples, One Land: The New Zealand Wars*, Auckland, Reed Publishing, 2006, p. 254).

the mid-1840s. In terms of their magnitude, James Belich, one of the leading New Zealand Wars revisionist historians, has written:

In proportion to New Zealand's population at the time, they were large in scale—some 18,000 British troops were mobilized for the biggest campaign. These forces opposed a people who, for most of the war period, did not number more than 60,000 men, women, and children: 18,000 troops were to Māori manpower what fifty million were to contemporary Indian manpower. The Māori resistance against such odds was remarkable, and its story is worth telling in itself.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, Matthew Wright has noted that:

At the height of the fighting in 1863-64 the British required over 10,000 regulars, plus local volunteer and militia forces, to tackle Māori forces that at most amounted to no more than 3000-4000 combatants.<sup>4</sup>

The sheer numerical imbalance was further compounded, since Māori society never had a permanent warrior class. For their 'military force was a vital part of the labour force; economically it could not be spared for more than a few weeks' and thus Māori capacity to mount a sustained war was severely compromised.<sup>5</sup> In essence, Māori warriors represented a part-time force taking on professional full-time troops.

However, this story was not always perceived in these terms. Post-colonialism has, though, created the environment under which Belich and others have been able to reconsider the narrative from a perspective other than that of a grand imperial story of nation building necessitating the suppression of all resistance. Post-colonialism has also opened a window whereby the Māori story of the Wars challenges the imperial version. The imperial vision has glorified and exaggerated British military prowess, downplayed Māori strategic thinking, and falsified the historic record. This is evident in the way in which the first of the New Zealand Wars has been interpreted.

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### *The Northern War or Heke's War*

The first of the New Zealand Wars took place in and about the Bay of Islands (in what is today the province of Northland), between March 1845

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<sup>3</sup> James Belich, *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict*, Auckland, Penguin Books, 1986, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Wright, *Two Peoples, One Land*, p. 253.

<sup>5</sup> Belich, *The New Zealand Wars*, p. 22.

and January 1846. This war consisted of a series of battles and three separate and major British military expeditions to assail Māori fortresses located inland in heavily forested and rugged terrain. These campaigns can be named after the particular *pā* (Māori fortifications) that were their target:

- Puketutu (3 to 12 May 1845);
- Ohaeawai (16 June to 15 July 1845); and,
- Ruapekapeka (7 December 1845 to 16 January 1846).

They were fought between, on the one side, an alliance of British forces and ‘loyal’ Māori, and, on the other, the ‘rebel’ Māori. That is, this confrontation was not a simple British/Māori war, but was rather one much complicated by internal Māori divisions and loyalties.

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#### *Enter Hōne Heke*

The war itself was instigated by a series of provocative acts by a Ngāpuhi chieftain Hōne Wiremu Heke Pokai, more commonly referred to as Hōne or John Heke, a missionary educated leader who was the nephew and son-in-law of Hongi Hika, the great Ngāpuhi paramount chief who had established the pre-eminence of the Ngāpuhi in the northern half of the North Island in the early phase of the Musket Wars (a period of inter-tribal warfare that was most intense between 1818 and the early- to mid-1830s). The Ngāpuhi and Heke were, alike, significant players in early colonial New Zealand in the 1840s. However, the tribe was not unified behind Heke. It was divided between *hapū* who were supportive of Heke, and *hapū* who disagreed with his stance. The pro-government Ngāpuhi chieftain, Tāmāti Wāka Nene, opposed Heke’s aggression being directed at the imperial regime. Wāka Nene, like Heke, and the other notable Māori leaders involved in the Northern War, such as Heke ally, the Ngāti Hine chief Te Ruki Kawiti, were all men of high status and possessors of that most important of Māori attributes—*mana* (authority, influence, prestige). In many respects, the Northern War of the mid-1840s was truly a Māori War, in that it both overlaid an internal Ngāpuhi dispute and released simmering tensions between the various *hapū* of the larger tribe.

Heke had triggered the war after a succession of belligerent actions at the important Bay of Islands’ settlement, and former principal port, Kororāreka (the modern day Russell). Early in July 1844, Heke oversaw the plundering of some settler homes and then had instructed some of his men to chop down the settlement’s flagstaff on Maiki Hill overlooking the



Figure 1. Map of the Northern War, Hōne Heke and Tamati Waka Nene.<sup>6</sup>

township, one which flew the Union Jack. This was intended to be a provocative act as well as one of defiance against imperial rule; and it was interpreted as such by the British authorities. Heke was not hostile to

<sup>6</sup> The locations blow up map in the upper right hand corner is a 'Map of the Northern War, New Zealand, showing the locations pa and the dates of major engagements', from James Cowan, *The New Zealand Wars: A History of the Maori Campaigns and the Pioneering Period*, vol. 1, Wellington, Government Printer, 1922, p. 9, reproduced in Danny Keenan, 'New Zealand Wars: Northern Wars, 1845–1846', *Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/map/36896/map-of-the-northern-war>, accessed 16 May 2017. The image of Hōne Heke (lower right corner) comes from: New Zealand Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 'Hōne Heke', updated 14-Mar-2016, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/people/hone-heke>, accessed 16 May 2017. The image of Tamati Waka Nene (upper left corner) is a cropped image from an original painting of the Chief by Gottfried Lindauer, in 1890. The image taken from: <https://au.pinterest.com/mscellanist/gottfried-lindauer/> accessed 16 May 2017.

*Pākehā* in general, for he wanted good relations with *Pākehā* because it advantaged his people economically and enhanced his *mana*; however, he had become opposed to imperial rule as embodied in the Governor and his colonial administration. This he had come to realise was a direct threat to his chiefly authority, and to the continued and undisputed Māori possession of their lands.

The flagstaff at Kororāreka was reinstated and again was subsequently felled, personally by Heke, on 10 January 1845. This was an act he repeated on 19 January, the British having once again re-erected their symbolic representation of hegemony over all the lands and peoples of New Zealand. At this juncture, Governor FitzRoy ordered that the flagstaff be guarded by a small garrison. Nevertheless, Heke again assaulted the flagstaff on 11 March in a coordinated attack with his ally Kawiti, as well as warriors of the Kapotai *hapū* (traditional allies of Kawiti). This raid saw a substantial engagement between rebel Māori forces and the imperial troops. It also resulted in the township of Kororāreka being sacked and burnt, its populace evacuated, and much of northern New Zealand, and, in particular, Auckland, becoming desperately fearful of widespread Māori insurrection. This was, in effect, the first engagement of the Northern War.

Following the destruction at Kororāreka, something which went beyond anything intended by Heke, he retreated to his *pā*, Te Kahika at Puketutu. The Governor then had ordered his forces to prepared for battle and in early May they moved against Puketutu. Kawiti supported Heke, and Nene the government troops in this battle. The Battle of Puketutu took place on 8 May 1845. Although sustaining losses, the government force eventually took the *pā*, the Māori having abandoned it. This was, nevertheless, an indecisive fight. Seven days later government forces had a win, when imperial troops and pro-government Māori then destroyed the Kapotai's *pā* at the Waikare Inlet. Following the battle at Puketutu, Heke had retreated to another of his *pā* at Te Ahuahu. Nene pursued him there and, in a further battle, one that clearly exposes that this Northern War encompassed an internal Ngāpuhi conflict within the wider confrontation, pro-government Māori forces, without any imperial support, inflicted a substantial defeat on rebel Māori. Heke was to be severely wounded and effectively put out of action for some six months while he recuperated. Many pre-revisionist histories either completely ignore this significant battle, or, if noted, diminish its importance by relegating it to a trifling affair, such as in Harold Miller's account which refers to this episode of the war as merely 'a brush with loyal natives' or Edgar Holt's 'skirmish with Waka Nene's men'.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Harold Miller, *New Zealand*, London, Hutchinson's University Library, 1950, p. 35; and, Edgar Holt, *The Strangest War: The Story of the Māori Wars 1860-1872*, London, Putnam and Company, 1962, p. 88.

With the threat of Heke averted, the government turned its attention to Kawiti. They besieged him and his supporters at his *pā* at Ohaeawai. Here a larger battle was to be fought between 24 June and 11 July 1845. This action again failed to deliver the knockout blow that the government and settlers were anticipating. Even at the time, it was generally perceived as a poor victory once the *pā* was taken. The government forces, which outnumbered Kawiti's men six-to-one, sustained heavy casualties and once again the rebel Māori leadership and their supporters were able to evade capture.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, calling this battle 'a victory' was very much stretching the truth. In the final assault on the *pā*, the British lost forty men killed and seventy wounded.<sup>9</sup> This significant level of casualties effectively compelled the imperial forces to withdraw.

The final confrontation took place five months later at Ruapekapeka—the so-called 'Bat's Nest'. By this time, the far more ruthless George Grey had replaced FitzRoy as governor, and Heke had recovered sufficiently from his wounds to support Kawiti in what was, from their perspective, a 'last stand'. The battle had raged from 27 December 1845 until 11 January 1846, when the *pā* was taken. This was the final battle in the Northern War, and while earlier histories paint it as a resounding British victory, subsequent interpretations view it at best as a stalemate and at worst a British defeat. Belich has succinctly summarised the established colonial interpretation:

The orthodox view of the Northern War, a view common to virtually all twentieth-century works, is that the first stages were grossly mishandled by Governor Robert FitzRoy and his military commanders. The situation was then saved by the arrival of a new Governor, George Grey, who brought the war to a triumphant conclusion and secured a permanent peace through generous treatment of the defeated rebels.<sup>10</sup>

It is, nevertheless, arguable that the British did not win this Northern War. Kawiti and Heke remained free and retained their lands. Grey took no reprisals against rebel Māori, in part to honour earlier overtures made by FitzRoy, but chiefly because of unrest in southern and western parts of the North Island which dictated his attention be turned to them. As a result, 'the north settled to a peace that was never broken', and to this day, Northland remains a stronghold of Māori land ownership.<sup>11</sup> In what was truly a case of the pen being mightier than the sword, the British victory in this first New Zealand War 'came in history books, [as one] won by the

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<sup>8</sup> James Belich, *'I Shall Not Die' Titokowaru's War New Zealand, 1868-9*, Wellington, Allen & Unwin New Zealand in association with the Port Nicholson Press, 1989, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Holt, *The Strangest War*, p. 89.

<sup>10</sup> Belich, *The New Zealand Wars*, p. 29.

<sup>11</sup> J.B. Condliffe and W.T. Airey, *A Short History of New Zealand*, 7th edn, Christchurch, Whitcombe and Tombs, 1954, p. 71.

pen where the sword had failed'.<sup>12</sup> For, despite what the history books of the past have said, this first war was not a British victory. One recent historical examination has concluded that 'after Ruapekapeka, peace was established in the Bay of Islands, albeit largely a peace on Māori terms'.<sup>13</sup> As Philippa Mein Smith, has argued:

Governor Grey failed to capture or crush Heke and Kawiti who, on balance, outwitted and refused to be intimidated or cowered by the imperial military. ... The resisters showed who commanded the north, however, not just through military strategy. Heke and Kawiti made peace first with Nene, their kin, before they made peace with Grey.<sup>14</sup>

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### *Colonial Historiography*

Arthur Douglas' 1909 narrative of the Northern War provides a good example of a colonial interpretation. Its tone is one of adulation of Grey's role, it is pro-British in its sentiment, and it underplays the significant contribution made by pro-government Māori forces. It is also factually flawed and not set within a temporal framework. In his account, Douglas commences with 'Hōne Heke cutting down the flagstaff on which the English flag was flying at Kororāreka and plundering the place'.<sup>15</sup> While it is true that the Heke's plundering of Kororāreka is perceived as the first incident leading to the subsequent war, Heke did not personally cut down the flagpole at this time, and it was not flying the English ensign, but, rather, the Union Jack. As well, Douglas has Heke as paramount chief of the Ngāpuhi, when he was only the leader of some *hapū* of the tribe. In Douglas' account, the flagstaff is only felled three times, when it was cut down on no fewer than four occasions. In the attack on Kororāreka, which resulted it being sacked, no mention is made of the significant roles played by Kawiti and the Māori loyal to him. Of this incident, the reader is told that '[s]ome fierce fighting took place', in which British officers 'behaved with great courage', that Kororāreka was 'burnt' (with the inference that rebel Māori were responsible for this arson) and that this 'was a great blow to British prestige'.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> James Belich, 'The war that Britain lost', episode 1, *The New Zealand Wars*, DVD, directed by Tainui Stephens, Auckland, Landmark Productions, 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Jeff Hopkins-Weise, *Blood Brothers: The ANZAC Genesis*, Kent Town, South Australia, Wakefield Press, 2009, p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> Philippa Mein Smith, *A Concise History of New Zealand*, Port Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 65.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur P. Douglas, *The Dominion of New Zealand*, London, Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1909, p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> Douglas, *The Dominion of New Zealand*, p. 41.



Douglas continues his narrative by noting the British intent to 'follow Heke up, and make an end of the matter'.<sup>17</sup> He then states that the 'English were badly beaten in attacks on two pahs, Okaihau and Ohaeawai'.<sup>18</sup> It would appear that he has confused Heke's Puketutu pā Te Kahika with that of the pro-government Nene's pā Okaihau. Similarly, he does not acknowledge that Ohaeawai was Kawiti's pā and that Heke was not involved at all in this battle. He is correct, however, in that these first battles involving pā were British defeats. No mention is made of the significant battle at Te Ahuahu fought by opposing factions of Ngāpuhi and which represented the only clear-cut government victory in the war. Governor FitzRoy is presented as weak and ineffectual in his handling of this phase of the war. Blame for the British defeats and responsibility for continuing unrest are squarely laid on FitzRoy. His replacement, Grey, is extolled as an achiever, 'energetic', 'capable' and 'a man capable of great determination and courage'.<sup>19</sup> This virtuous interpretation of Grey is at odds with many later interpretations which, while recognising his positive attributes, also note a darker far more ruthless and morally questionable character. In summarising the remainder of the northern campaign, once Grey assumed command, Douglas states that:

Having made up his mind that the war must be ended, and the mastery of the Europeans asserted, he decided to do so at once. Taking with him a strong force of sailors and soldiers ... and accompanied by a strong force of friendly natives, he attacked a pah belonging to Kawiti, the ally and fellow-insurgent of Heke. Having once commenced he did not leave off until he had done what he came for, and after some days' fighting he took the pah, with but a small loss.<sup>20</sup>

He then goes on to state, in keeping with a colonial perspective, that: 'This ended the war and showed the natives that they were not invincible.'<sup>21</sup>

In this summary, the fact that pro-government Māori were involved is acknowledged, but no rationale is given for their involvement beyond their being friendly. British losses are described as minimal when in fact they suffered at least forty-five casualties. The implication that the display of British military might at Ruapekapeka had conclusively demonstrated to the Māori that they could not win a confrontation with imperial forces beggars belief. At best, Ruapekapeka was a draw, something the works of post-colonial historians demonstrate very clearly.

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17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Before examining how those same post-colonial historians have interpreted this final battle of the Northern War, it is worth looking at how other pre-revisionist historians recorded this event. The later British immigrant, A.H. Reed had stated that:

On Sunday, 11th January, 1846, the defenders, thinking there would be no fighting that day, went outside the pa to hold a service. Their absence was discovered, and the English, rushing in, took the pa by surprise. The Maoris had no chance and were thoroughly defeated.<sup>22</sup>

This account perpetuated a myth of Māori chivalry and a falsehood that the Māori, both out of respect of European religion and their own conversion to Christianity, would not fight on a Sunday. It also maintained the fabrication that the Māori were ‘thoroughly defeated’ in the Northern War. A.W. Shrimpton also repeats this perspective, concluding that government action at Ruapekapeka was a ‘decisive’ blow, that it ‘convinced the rebels of the futility of resistance’, and, that it had ‘brought the northern rebels to their knees’.<sup>23</sup> Just how he reaches these conclusions is a little odd, given he had stated that:

Heke, who had recovered from his wound, arrived with seventy men and urged the defenders to retire to the bush where the big guns [cannon and mortar which were used to pound the defences of the pa] could not follow. Only Katiwi and a few men remained.<sup>24</sup>

Miller repeats Shrimpton’s analysis stating that ‘catching the chiefs by surprise on a Sunday morning, while they were holding a religious service, he stormed the fort without difficulty and ‘the war in the north’ was over.’<sup>25</sup>

Likewise, Edgar Holt, in a much more balanced analysis, nevertheless concludes that the battle at Ruapekapeka was a ‘striking success’.<sup>26</sup> Certainly the imperial soldiers who fought at Ruapekapeka considered it a victory. In 1847, for example, on the anniversary of the capture of the *pā*, ‘Army and Naval Officers stationed in Wellington, New Zealand, celebrated with a dinner at Barrett’s Hotel.’<sup>27</sup> A similar event, organised by enlisted men of the 99th Regiment that took part in the siege of Ruapekapeka, occurred in Hobart in 1852. These troops had previously

<sup>22</sup> A.H. Reed, *The Story of New Zealand*, 2nd edn, Wellington, A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1946, pp. 239-240.

<sup>23</sup> Shrimpton, A.W. ‘The Crown Colony Period (1840-1853)’, in *Maori and Pakeha: A History of New Zealand*, A.W. Shrimpton and Alan E. Mulgan (eds), Auckland, Whitcombe and Tombs, c.1921, pp. 137 & 138.

<sup>24</sup> Shrimpton, ‘The Crown Colony Period (1840-1853)’, p. 137.

<sup>25</sup> Miller, *New Zealand*, p. 36.

<sup>26</sup> Holt, *The Strangest War*, p. 98.

<sup>27</sup> Hopkins-Weise, *Blood Brothers*, p. 60.

erected Australia's first war memorial in the grounds of Anglesea Barracks in remembrance of the twenty-five members of their regiment who died in the first phase of the New Zealand Wars.<sup>28</sup>

Foremost amongst the revisionist historians has been James Belich who first presented a new history of the conflict between Māori and Pākehā in his aptly titled 1986 book, *The New Zealand Wars*.<sup>29</sup> His subsequent works, *'I Shall Not Die': Titokowaru's War* and the widely acclaimed general history of New Zealand, *Making Peoples: A History of New Zealanders*, have further refined his original thesis.<sup>30</sup> His explanation of what took place at Ruapekapeka and throughout the northern campaign, accepts some, but not all, of the previously repeated particulars, but differs significantly in reasoning and judgement.<sup>31</sup> While not painting Ruapekapeka as a resounding Māori success, Belich clearly articulates it as a 'limited victory for Heke and Kawiti' and by placing it within the broader context of the overall Northern War, he demonstrates why this is so, and why this Northern War was a British defeat.<sup>32</sup>

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#### *The False Māori Bastions*

Belich emphasises that it was the Māori rebels who directed the course of the war and, in particular, how their stratagem of purpose built *pā* in distant and inaccessible locations provided them with the tactical advantage they needed to win. He notes that the British, in their desire for a decisive and absolute victory had allowed the Māori to take this lead, while they were apparently content to follow, not endeavouring to devise any effective alternative strategy to counter Māori manoeuvring. As Belich argues, the Māori tactic of building their *pā* inland in rugged and remote heavily bushed country effectively meant that British naval advantage, and in particular the heavy complements of guns that warships carried, could not be brought to bear on their defences.

The *pā* that were utilised in the three main campaigns of the Northern War were not traditionally sited. They did not protect economic resources such as crops and horticultural lands, nor did they hold any tribal assets, food stores or equipment, and they were well away from the non-combatant population (women, children and aged men). From a Māori

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<sup>28</sup> Hopkins-Weise, *Blood Brothers*, pp. 60, 61.

<sup>29</sup> Belich, *The New Zealand Wars*.

<sup>30</sup> Belich, 'I Shall Not Die'; and, James Belich, *Making Peoples: A History of New Zealanders From Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century*, Auckland, Penguin Books, 1996.

<sup>31</sup> For Belich's detailed re-examination of the Battle of Ruapekapeka see Belich, *The New Zealand Wars*, pp. 58-70.

<sup>32</sup> Belich, *The New Zealand Wars*, p. 29.

perspective, these *pā* served one function and one function only, to act as a target, to draw the government forces to them at great cost to the imperial regime. Once this function had been served they were relatively valueless to the Māori, and so could be easily abandoned, thereby allowing the Māori to live, repeat the process, and fight yet another day on their own terms. This strategy was advantageous to the Māori for two reasons. Firstly, it was extremely taxing on the imperial and colonial governments in terms of the sheer cost expended in logistics, in organising and paying for the manpower and equipment employed, in the many months involved in cutting roads through dense bushland, and in hauling artillery and supplies to the battlefields. It utilised imperial soldiers who at that time were required elsewhere in defence of empire, and it cost much in terms of British lives lost. These were not insignificant costs, they were considerable when compared to the costs Māori expended in the construction of these *pā* and their defence. Secondly, the nature of this warfare meant that there were hiatuses in the war, periods when little or no combat was engaged in. These lulls in fighting enabled the Māori, who only ever had a part-time military force, to tend to their crops and continue with other essential economic activities. While the war placed considerable stress on the Māori economic system, the strategy of isolated and inaccessible *pā* meant that the Māori were able to construct new defensive *pā*, as well as maintain their economic base. If the British had instead targeted the Māori economy, and in particular their crops and horticultural lands, in a ‘scorch and burn campaign’, they would undoubtedly have won the war.

This interpretation is a significant departure from earlier explanations of the Northern War, as well as of other campaigns in the New Zealand Wars. Nineteenth century historians accounted for Māori military success in terms of imperial leadership failures rather than Indigenous agency and stratagems. British blunders, not Māori strategic planning, organisation and alliance, were the reason for any British military setbacks. Belich has observed:

From W. P. Reeves [1926]—‘even their fiercest fighting leaders ... scarcely deserve the name of generals’; through James Hight—‘they lacked enterprise, perseverance in a single line of action, and knowledge of the broader principles of campaigning’; to Keith Sinclair—‘throughout the wars the Maoris adopted no comprehensive or co-ordinated strategy’—we hear the same story. These misconceptions persist into the *Oxford History of New Zealand*, published in 1981. ‘British discipline and British artillery had proved too much for Maori warriors, and they failed to realize the dangers of continuing to meet the British on their terms, in the field. To the grenade, the rifle, and the Armstrong gun, the sap and the redoubt, they had no ultimate answer.’<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Belich, *The New Zealand Wars*, p. 17.

Drawing on the work of one of the foremost post-colonialism theorists, Edward Said, it is this received New Zealand historical wisdom that the revisionist post-colonial historians have challenged. In his 1978 seminal publication *Orientalism*, Said drew attention to the binary division in the world between the oriental and the occident, or between the East and West.<sup>34</sup> He argued that the consistent portrayal of easterners by a set of negative traits—inferior, backward, irrational and unrefined—had meant that westerners were able to construct an ‘other’, an identity which allowed them to create for themselves an homogeneous opposing identity as superior, progressive, rational and sophisticated. Just such a dichotomy is evident in even a cursory review of the histories of the New Zealand Wars written before and after the emergence of post-colonialism. This bias is most evident in respect of the Northern War where Belich has argued that ‘Maori successes arose ... from radical adaption of the Maori military system’, not imprudent British mistakes as earlier histories had portrayed this war.<sup>35</sup>

Belich’s argument draws on considerably more primary evidence than previous historians. Using perceptions and various accounts of the events, that soon after the Battle of Ruapekapeka were to be stifled, he develops new arguments and interpretations. For example, he argues that it was the Māori who forced the peace, and that there were no subsequent reprisals because the rebel Māori had not suffered the number of losses previously attributed to it. The rebel force was essentially intact, and a viable military threat still capable of inflicting considerable damage on European interests. The Māori warriors had escaped once again and were quite capable of assailing the government force. Perhaps this is why, Belich argues, they beat a very hasty retreat after capturing Ruapekapeka. But what was it they had captured?—Nothing more than an empty *pā*. Perhaps Heke or Kawiti, or both, had heard of Shakespeare’s insightful *Henry the IV*, for certainly these chiefs operated by the maxim that the better part of valour was discretion!

Belich also puts paid to the thesis that the *pā* was empty when assaulted because the rebels were attending Sunday prayers outside the fort. This he argues is a fabrication. He makes an alternative and compelling case that the rebels had in fact been in the process of abandoning the *pā* since the heavy bombardment from recently arrived big guns was rendering the *pā* vulnerable, and, in any case, its function had been served. He also raises other points to support his hypothesis that Māori won at Ruapekapeka and thus, as it was the last battle of the Northern War, had won the entire campaign. He notes, for example, that Heke retained and indeed enhanced

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<sup>34</sup> Said, Edward, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London, Penguin, 1995 (1978).

<sup>35</sup> Belich, *The New Zealand Wars*, p. 29.

his mana. Most telling, however, is that the flagstaff at Kororāreka was not re-erected until 1858, eight years after Heke's death.

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### *Convenient Fabrications and Present-day Relevance*

More scholars are now coming to recognise that the underlining assumptions of colonialism—superiority, racism, imperialism and chauvinism—are attitudes still widely held in New Zealand. Countering this mind-set has become the goal of many post-colonial writers as they seek to redress both inequalities in the past, but also in the present, by exposing and deconstructing the power relations and their social, political and economic consequences. Increasingly, questions are being asked which relate to the representation of both the colonised and the colonising peoples; and, in this New Zealand differs little from other settler societies. As such, New Zealand post-colonial historians are concerned with reconstructing a new narrative which is inclusive of the complex heterogeneity of the relationships which existed, and still exist, between Māori and Pākehā New Zealanders. They strive to 'reveal or point to suppressed, defeated, or negated histories and stories', such as the accuracy of the hitherto standard New Zealand Wars' narrative.<sup>36</sup>

In New Zealand, there has never been a denial of the wars that were fought between the Pākehā and the Māori. They form part of that nation's foundation mythology. However, the traditional foundation narrative plays down the significance of nineteenth-century conflict and particularly Māori success in it. This story has also sought to foster a fabrication that, in the aftermath of the New Zealand Wars, Māori and Pākehā 'kissed and made up', leading to a harmonious society, relatively free of interracial troubles and race relations, the envy of other settler societies. The rise in Māori activism from the 1970s onwards, in conjunction with revisionist post-colonial history, has worked to shatter this illusion in New Zealand. The new history has, as one historian has put it, 'successfully demolished many of the race-relations myths of mid-twentieth century' New Zealand.<sup>37</sup>

The revisionist post-colonial interpretation of the events of the New Zealand Wars is important beyond being an attempt to ensure the historical record more accurately reflects what took place. The significance for contemporary New Zealand is that the revised history is an integral component of the policy implementation of New Zealand's Waitangi Tribunal. Established in 1975, this quasi-judicial government

<sup>36</sup> Prasentjit Duara, 'Postcolonial history', in *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza (eds), Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2007, p. 417.

<sup>37</sup> Wright, *Two Peoples, One Land*, p. 10.

instrumentality has been tasked with investigating Māori claims of breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi. The Treaty, signed in early 1840 by over 500 Māori Chiefs (including Hōne Heke, the first to sign the document) and the British Crown, is the basis upon which Britain claimed sovereignty over New Zealand. The Treaty included clauses guaranteeing Māori certain rights in respect of their lands and the resources associated with them, as well as the rights and privileges of British subjects and the protection of the Crown.

Arguably, the rights that the Treaty bestowed upon Māori were violated. It has been the Tribunal's responsibility to negotiate settlements as part of the process of redressing past wrongs between Māori and Pākehā. It has, over four decades, sought to verify and so rewrite much of Māori-Pākehā history, and it has played a pivotal role in establishing new relations in terms of the control of land and resources as it seeks a new settlement to the old, and previously little acknowledged, problems stemming from inter-racial conflicts dating from the early 1840s.<sup>38</sup>

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#### *A Final Perspective*

The activities of the Tribunal are confronting for many Pākehā New Zealanders. The re-writing of the contested history of the past, in a post-colonial context, has caused, and continues to cause, great angst in New Zealand. On a positive note, however, the activities of the Tribunal have gone beyond just a re-writing of history. They have also sought a course by which New Zealanders, both Māori and Pākehā, can now, and so much more successfully, chart a way to redress past wrongs and to better live together, thus endeavouring to enhance the still much to be desired national harmony in race relations.

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<sup>38</sup> To explore this subject further see Giselle Byrnes, *The Waitangi Tribunal and New Zealand History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004; Giselle Byrnes, 'Past the last post? Time, causation and treaty claims history', *Law Text Culture*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2003, pp. 252-276; Ewan Morris, 'History never repeats? The Waitangi Tribunal and New Zealand history', *History Compass*, vol. 1, 2003, pp. 1-13; Claudia Orange, *The Treaty of Waitangi*, Wellington, Allen & Unwin, 1987; I.H. Kawharu (ed.), *Waitangi: Maori and Pakeha Perspectives of the Treaty of Waitangi*, Auckland, Oxford University Press, 1989; and, Alan Ward, *An Unsettled History: Treaty Claims in New Zealand Today*, Wellington, Bridget Williams, 1999.

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*Kyle Lockwood's Black, White and Blue Silver Fern, which was selected by the first referendum (but unsuccessful in the second).*

## New Zealand's 2015-2016 flag referendums

In 2016, New Zealand held two referendums to consider adopting a new flag. The first referendum, held late in 2015, allowed voters to select their preferred option from five potential designs. Those options had been previously selected by a government appointed Flag Consideration Panel. The second referendum, in March 2016, asked voters to choose between the current New Zealand flag and Kyle Lockwood's Silver Fern design.

Generally, the media presented the referendums as being a potentially career-defining project for the then Prime Minister, John Key. While he initially campaigned for change, Key did not put his full political force behind either flag in run up to the second referendum. In the second referendum 56.73% of voters elected to keep the current flag.

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