Why are Race Relations in New Zealand Better Than in South Africa, South Australia or South Dakota?*

IT IS NOT INTENDED in this paper to argue that the statement implied in the question in the title is true. Rather its correctness will be taken for granted. It seems to me accurate to say that race relations in New Zealand in the past half century have been as good as in any former European settlement colony and much happier than in Australia, South Africa or North America.

There is in New Zealand no apartheid, no social colour bar, no segregation in public transport or in living areas. Maoris get the same pay as white people for the same job. There is relatively little social prejudice against Maoris and even less open expression of prejudice. There is a very high degree of intermarriage: whatever their views, white people’s sisters and daughters do marry Maoris, and so do their sons and brothers. Though their incomes are not as high as those of many North American blacks, Maoris enjoy high incomes. I’m sure that many if not most Maoris would regard their real standard of living as higher than that of highly paid blacks living in Harlem.

This is not to imply that conditions of race relations in New Zealand are perfect. Though Maoris are found in most occupational groups, they are proportionately under-represented in executive and professional groups, and at universities. They are worse off in terms of most measurable indices of social status and prosperity. On average they earn less money, live in worse houses and have less income than Europeans. They enjoy worse health. They have a higher crime rate. Moreover rapid urbanisation has undoubtedly intensified the difficulties faced by Maoris in adapting to a European-dominated society. (Before World War II only 10% of Maoris lived in towns. Now 50% do, as compared with 74% of Europeans.)

* This article is based on a paper read at the University of Cambridge and elsewhere in 1968.
All that is suggested is that the Maoris live in a relatively favourable environment. It is proposed to ask why this is so. A century ago New Zealand was emerging from a decade of racial war, the Anglo-Maori wars. In 1863 three million acres of Maori land had been confiscated by the Crown (half of it to be returned later). Talk of ‘niggers’ had been common. New Zealand seemed a typical settlement colony. There was little on the surface to suggest that half a century later it would be very different from South Africa.

When one seeks an explanation for this change, for the present relatively favourable position, many parallels to aspects of the New Zealand situation come to mind. For instance there were North American Indian parallels. In Indiana in the early 19th century the Shawnee chief Tecumseh and his brother, the ‘Prophet’ sought to create an Indian confederation, like the Maori King movement, and to stop the alienation of land to the whites. But there are too few parallels to the New Zealand case to provide a basis for law-like statements roughly of the form, ‘whenever X occurs then Y occurs (or will probably occur)’, and thus to form a basis for a Humean or Hempelian explanation.

On the other hand to say that race relations in New Zealand are different from those in comparable former colonies of settlement because everything is different is not a very useful answer. Rather than stress the uniqueness, it seems more profitable to isolate a few facts or factors which may be relevant to an answer to our question.

I can think of nine historical factors which may contribute to an answer. It may be that, though none was alone sufficient, most or all were necessary conditions to produce the present situation.

Certain reasons are negative and likely to appeal to cynics and pessimists.

(1) The first of these is usually advanced by white South Africans and their supporters. The Maoris were outnumbered by 1860. Since 1870 they have never been regarded by the Europeans as an economic or a military threat. There is no fear in white attitudes towards the Maoris.

The weakness of this argument is that it seems to imply that to be weak and few is an advantage for a non-European people in their relations with the white nations. But the Australian Aborigines and the North American Indians appear to derive no benefit from their helplessness.

If a model of race relations were to be based on indigenous numbers, it would be necessary to postulate an optimum and minimum number. The Bantu were too many; the Australian Aborigines too few. Such a model is obviously much less complex than would be required.

(2) Until World War II most Maoris lived in remote rural districts where there were few Europeans. There was little racial contact — or friction. But again, this was and is true of the indigenous people of Australia and North America, whose present situation is much worse than that of the Maoris.

(3) Although the first sentence of (2) above is correct, it is also true that the Maoris could not indefinitely retreat before the frontier of white settlement. New Zealand was too small for that. After the Taranaki and Waikato wars many Maoris did retreat into Ngatimaniapoto and other lands behind the aukati, the boundary of the Maori King country. But they stayed in splendid isolation (still trading with the Europeans) only until the mid-eighteen-eighties, when the Ngatimaniapoto agreed to railway construction. Te Whiti's 'resistance' movement in Taranaki also collapsed in the eighties under government pressure. Thus the Maoris had to face up to adapting to the European culture. They could not ignore it.

The model of race relations suggested by this argument embodies a combination of circumstances. The Maoris could not ignore the Europeans. But, living in rural districts, the pressures on them after the Anglo-Maori wars were not relentless and severe. Thus they had time to adapt — time symbolised in Sir James Carroll's policy of taihoa, by and by, later on, take it easy. Thus there was time, on the Maori side, for the wounds of war to heal a little. By then the Europeans had become accustomed to the presence of a Maori minority (there were other changing attitudes too, to be mentioned presently) and were willing and able to accept Maoris in the towns. There had been time for a degree of reconciliation.

(4) A factor which is probably very important is that the settlers did not need the Maoris as a source of cheap labour. (Slavery was illegal when New Zealand was annexed.) Before 1860 in the North Island the Maoris produced most of the Europeans' food and food exports, but on their own communal lands. They have always provided some casual rural labour, shearing and road gangs. But Maori labour was not a necessity on sheep farms or family dairy farms. Europeans wanted Maori land, not labour. This meant that, once separated from their lands, the Maoris could be tolerated and ignored. But it also meant that they were not exploited as people, as human beings, and, again, that there was little daily contact and friction.

This situation seems also to have existed in Australia and North America. Almost certainly, had there been a plantation economy in New Zealand, the Maoris, like the Malays and Fijians, would have proven unwilling or intractable. Imported indentured labour would have been necessary.

(5) Dr Erich Geiringer some years ago pointed out that there is among the Europeans no feeling of sexual rivalry about or jealousy towards Maori males, as Europeans often feel towards Negroes in Africa and U.S.A. The absence of this kind of fear is important. There was among the early settlers, especially women, a justified hostility to the relative sexual complaisance of Maori girls, a feeling not altogether passed away today. European males were often criticised by Maoris for making use of Maori girls. But Maoris do not seem to object strongly to mixed marriages. Europeans object less today than formerly — and such marriages go back to the beginnings of settlement.

3 'The prick of conscience', Digest, V, 3 (October 1960), 33.
It is difficult to suggest an explanation for the absence of European sexual fear of Maori men. But there is no real or imagined difference in sexual organs or practices to cause jealousy.

In New Guinea I was once asked whether the fact that Maoris are brown, not black, is a circumstance relevant to our racial relations. It probably is. Polynesians look more like Europeans than do Africans or Papuans, but less so than many Indians (from India).

There are positive elements in racial relationships, too, which may cheer optimists.

(6) Almost all known human societies have practised warfare, but the British and Maoris were notable in valuing military prowess. J. W. Fortesque wrote in his History of the British Army, that the British soldier found the Maoris 'on the whole the grandest native enemy that he had ever encountered', even bearing in mind the Gurkha, Sikh and Zulu. Some New Zealand folklore concerns not inaccurate stories of Maori chivalry and courage, though a century ago the settlers, as opposed to British soldiers, thought more often of cruelty and cannibalism. Maori courage in World Wars I and II, Korea and Vietnam (like Maori prowess at rugby) has added to the European stereotype of the Maori an unusual feature in 'white' attitudes to 'coloured' people — pride. The author often noticed during World War II that though the crude 'Kiwi' might speak of 'bloody Maoris', he would willingly fight any non-New Zealand European who criticised Maoris.

This factor should not be dismissed out of hand. Nevertheless the Zulu and some American Indians were equally warlike without notable benefit. This may be because the Maoris' military prowess was only one of a number of alleged merits.

(7) The pakeha, who claim to be descended from 'selected' British stock (and to be definitely non-Aus.) take pride in the superiority of their Maori compatriots over Aborigines or other (supposedly inferior) races. I have heard South Africans argue in favour of this view. It is not new. In 1868, in Greater Britain, C. W. Dilke noted that nothing would persuade the rougher class of Queensland settlers that the "black-fellow" and his "jin" were human. In contrast, the English did not regard the Maoris with 'contempt'. They might under-rate the Maoris' capacity for receiving European civilisation, 'but never do they affect to think them less than men'. He thought this a tribute to 'the superiority in virtue, intelligence, and nobility of mind' of the Maori over the Red Indian or Australian black.

Such observations were common a century or so ago. A Fellow of Trinity, B. A. Heywood, saw some Maoris at Otaki and wrote, in 1863, 'Except for their colour and tatooeing, I should have thought the men were English from their size and look.' (In a word, superior.) A geologist,

6 A Vacation Trip at the Antipodes ... in 1861-1862, London, 1863, p. 207.
J. C. Crawford, thought the Maoris were superior to Europeans in intelligence in some ways but, alas, the race seemed to be doomed. Anthony Trollope, shared this view — ‘At the touch of the higher race, they are poisoned and melt away.’ Alas! For they were ‘in their savage condition, as we found them, the most civilised.’ They were more intelligent than the Australian Aborigines and more sagacious than the Negro.

Though they express the form of racism often called ‘social darwinism’, some of these statements preceded the publication in 1871 of Darwin’s *Descent of Man*, from which this doctrine is usually traced. There is no doubt that such views were widely held and believed among Europeans in New Zealand, and therefore likely to influence other attitudes and behaviour towards Maoris.

Here the ice is thin. But was there any truth in the settlers’ opinion, widely shared abroad, that the Maoris were, certainly not a noble savage, but a superior kind of savage? An answer may be approached by discarding social darwinism and inventing some concept of ‘social distance’. Maori society was not as different from British as that of the Australian Aborigine or Papuan. Cook found this — the Aborigine wanted nothing Cook had and would give Cook nothing he had. The Maoris were organised for war and agriculture. They had their chiefs and priests and generals and commoners (and slaves). They learned to barter and trade with incredible speed. They had their houses and their forts.

They were not, however, in this respect very different from some Africans and American Indians. Technologically the Inca were far nearer to Eurasians. Little good it did them.

(8) The factor to which I attach most weight is Anglo-Saxon attitudes at the time New Zealand was annexed.

New Zealand became British territory after the foundation of the great mission societies and the emancipation of the slaves; after the House of Commons Committee on Aborigines in British Settlements had reported; after the foundation of the Aborigines Protection Society.

It is, of course, true that Queensland, British Columbia and Natal, were effectively occupied at the same time. But in those cases what occurred was the expansion of a settler frontier, not the establishment of a new settlement bringing fresh ideas from Britain. In New Zealand the 2000 or so pre-1840 settlers, almost all in areas remote from the post-1840 towns, were swamped.

Evangelical experiments in native policy occurred in Victoria and Cape Colony too, but other attitudes to the native peoples had already hardened; Bushmen and Aborigines had been shot and Bantu fought. New Zealand was the only new settlement colony in the mid-century with no established settler opinion on natives to oppose that of the British government and the missions.

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7 *Recollections of Travel in New Zealand and Australia*, London, 1880, pp. 354-5.
8 *Australia and New Zealand*, London, 1873, 1, 6; II, 302, 480, 488.
9 It might be held that South Australia was also, in part, an exception. See R. D. Rowley, "And some fell upon Stoney places": Some thoughts on why Missions to the Australian continent have been less successful than Missions to the Melanesians*, *Journal de la Société des Océanistes*, XXV (1969), 138.
From the Treaty of Waitangi itself, to the Protectorate Department to Governor Grey's hospitals and subsidies to Maori schools, the days of settlement, 1840-60, were marked by a number of experiments in trying to improve racial relations in a colony. That they were inadequate and usually unsuccessful goes without saying. But with the experiments went something more important, a new and better attitude to 'aborigines'. There was a hope and some determination that the Maoris should not suffer from colonisation, as happened in all other similar colonies. This was the spirit informing the official instructions to Hobson, which expressed fear that the process of settlement would repeat 'the same process of War and spoliation, under which uncivilized Tribes have almost invariably disappeared as often as they have been brought into the immediate vicinity of Emigrants from the Nations of Christendom.' The British government hoped to 'mitigate, and, if possible, to avert these disasters . . . .' It is for this reason, as an act symbolic of this new spirit in race relations, that the Treaty of Waitangi merits the importance traditionally attached to it by New Zealanders.

This is not to say that the government knew how to 'protect' or 'elevate' aborigines; or understood the forces, whether of virus infections or psychological malaises which destroyed indigenous peoples in colonial territories. It did not.

Nor is it to attribute any special merit to the New Zealand settlers. The uneducated — and some of the educated — spoke carelessly of 'niggers'. But many of the educated men who held power and influence hoped for something better — a colony where Christian principles would prevail. Certainly they expected the Maoris to 'amalgamate', but they believed that God had created all nations of one blood. Nor was their aim ever quite forgotten, except with regard to 'development', 'progress' — profit, which meant Maori lands. During the wars the Maoris were given four seats in Parliament to be occupied by Maoris — they were given 'one man one vote' twenty years before the Europeans. When the Maoris were supposedly dying out, in the mid-nineties, the Minister of Education, William Pember Reeves, saw a 'ray of hope' in improved Maori school attendance.

In New Zealand this attitude towards Maoris was part of a cultural lag. When in Britain free trade scepticism about empire was spreading in the 1860s, the colonists were expansionist. When social darwinism brought notions of racial superiority, whether Slav, Nordic, Anglo-Saxon, or Mediterranean, to Europe and the U.S.A. in the late nineteenth century, European New Zealanders continued their now traditional attitudes towards Maoris. They believed in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxons, but never accepted any notion of inherent Maori inferiority. The 'Yellow Peril' loomed larger in their minds, but this was a fear compounded as much of feelings of inferiority as of superiority. In this same period, in

Kenya for example, doctrines of social darwinism were appealed to as a justification for governing African ‘child races’.\textsuperscript{12}

If social darwinism was applied to the Maoris it was merely to reinforce the belief that they were superior to other ‘natives’; or the ‘survival of the fittest’ was seen as an explanation of the supposed fact that they were dying out. At least the assumption suggested no reason to consciously exploit them. (James Carroll’s policy of \textit{taihoa} could have a different meaning to cynical whites.)

To emphasize the influence of ideology, to stress the power of hope, may be unfashionable. But in New Zealand it is hard to ignore. The humanitarian imperial ideology at the time New Zealand was annexed seems the only factor distinguishing it from other settlement colonies.

(9) This paper has largely stressed European attitudes and actions. But there are always at least two people in a racial situation, as early writers realised when they stressed Maori intelligence, courage and other qualities. The Maori contribution to improving race relations by about the end of the century was of major importance. After the Anglo-Maori wars the government did little, except in education, to extend the ‘civilising’ policies of the pre-1860 decades. The initiative passed to Maori leadership.

The rise of a European-educated Maori leadership in the eighteen-nineties was in part a result of missionary idealism, for most of them had attended an Anglican Maori boys high school. Their opportunity came partly because of the existence of the four Maori electorates. But they derived their support from the Maori ‘parliaments’ and ‘unity’ (\textit{Kotahitanga}) movements.

The appearance of educated indigenous leadership was not a circumstance unique to New Zealand, but it was very important.

\textbf{Conclusion}

No one could pretend to isolate every factor relevant to the kind of question considered here. So this paper may be regarded as a ‘basis for discussion’.

If I am justified in stressing the importance of evangelical attitudes, the explanation of the relatively favourable situation of modern Maoris is one which would appeal to Collingwood rather than to Hume or Hempel. At least the ‘thought side’ of the events of New Zealand history, the motivation of governments and individuals, cannot be dismissed.

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