Myth, Race, and Identity in New Zealand

This essay explores aspects of the collective identity of two peoples, Maori and Pakeha, the neo-Polynesians and neo-British of New Zealand. It deals in the interactions of myth and history, of race, tribe, and nation, of Europe and the Pacific, and of Us and Them. It does so in the conviction that New Zealand, an intersection between two cultures exceptionally prone to spawning reproductions of themselves, is a good place to study such matters. The paper is an exercise in the social history of ideas, as against their intellectual history. The latter can lapse into a kind of intellectual granny-hunting, debating which ancestor to make eponymous: was it Social Lamarckianism, Biological Spencerism, or Social Darwinism? The former pursues the lower and wider role of ideas as lenses on, and determinants of, history. This is a field in which testing is difficult: the paper is speculative; and caution is invoked if not delivered herein.

A key assumption is that socialized (widely-disseminated and culturally-valued) ideas can congeal into discernible knots or currents, without deliberate artifice or conspiracy. 'Myth' is a convenient label, though we should note that these ideas are not merely falsehoods to be debunked, nor texts to be deconstructed, but also important historical refractors and determinants. Modern myths can be seen as fluid cultural motifs, shifting according to time and context and layered such that acceptance of one element encourages, but does not absolutely require, acceptance of another. Each may derive cohesion through dissemination from a common source, but also from atheoretical thinkers with similar backgrounds who make similar choices from sets of options limited by a shared conceptual language. There is an element of convergent evolution as well as of shared descent. Occupying a space between theories and attitudes, myths can draw on the former, but sometimes do so eclectically and inconsistently, knotting strategically contradictory theories together to provide tactical legitimation. We find several works of mid-nineteenth century New Zealand ethnography simul-

taneously using monogenist, polygenist, and evolutionist racial theories. Myths interact with theories 'above' and attitudes 'below', but can lead as well as be led by them.

I look first at Pakeha constructions of Us and Them in the nineteenth century; then at their Maori equivalents; and finally at the new ideology which resolved tensions within and between the two in the period 1880s-1920s, the hinge of modern New Zealand history. For brevity I use some problematic terms. Collaborator is not intended pejoratively; savage refers to European stereotypes not real people; and tribe is used to mean all large Maori kin-groups: tribes, sub-tribes, and closely-related groups of both. The essay builds on Keith Sorrenson’s pioneering work on Pakeha constructions of Maori.

Europeans saw Pacific peoples through various lenses of preconception, and understanding racial optics is important for the study of contact. Between the benign yet distorting Noble Savage at one extreme, and folk ethnocentrism at the other, were three knots of race-related thought, centred on stereotypes of ‘Black’ (permanently inferior), ‘White’ (convertible), and ‘Grey’ (dying) Savages. The Black Savage, linked to Polygenist theory, asserted the fixity of racial characteristics; some upward movement for tribal peoples might be possible, but there was an irreducible core of difference and, usually, inferiority. This stereotype had more influence and persistence in New Zealand than some writers allow. The polygenist doctrine of the infertility of half-castes was often applied to Maori to the end of the nineteenth century; popular literature long alleged a Maori propensity to slough off the trappings of civilization and revert to barbarism at ‘the call of the pah’; the contemporary myth of the ‘Frozen Maori’, whose traditions cannot change while remaining Maori, arguably has homologies with the Black Savage stereotype. But the other two stereotypes are more central to this story.

The Grey or Dying Savage originated with perceptions of Amerindian depopulation in the sixteenth century, and was applied by early European observers to the peoples of the Pacific from the late eighteenth. Softer variants saw native decline as reversible and regrettable, a consequence of imbibing the vices rather than the virtues of Europe. Harder variants strengthened from the 1820s, and received apparent scientific legitimation from 1859. Organicist variants, in which peoples naturally flourished, aged and died like individuals, with or without European contact, were sometimes applied to Maori. By a law, the aboriginal Maori fades away before the white man, and was fading away, as


if to make room for the new denizens, before even they appeared. But Dying Maori died mainly through the Fatal Impact of Europe. The kernel of truth in the myth of Fatal Impact was that Europeans, scarred veterans of pox and pestilence, survived their own diseases much better than the epidemiological virgins of the Pacific. The kernel of myth in the truth was that, with differential immunity a mystery to them, Europeans sought metaphysical explanations of it, inexorable Laws of Nature or Providence. In New Zealand at least, this led to an exaggeration of native decline; empty villages were automatically attributed to the ravages of disease rather than a summer at the beach.

The White, or Whitening, Savage stereotype, a product of monogenism, evangelism, humanitarianism, and ethnocentric measurement, ranked peoples according to their perceived similarities to Europeans, and assumed that some were eager and able to ascend this ladder with suitable help, though in practice seldom to the topmost rungs. Peoples like the Aboriginal Australians were never forgiven for their lack of interest in Europe; peoples like the Maori were congratulated for their interest. It was automatically taken to indicate that becoming as European-like as possible, as quickly as possible, was their heart’s desire. Adoption was regularly mistaken for adoption, and in some European eyes Maori developed a reputation for being the most convertible of all savages, despite such peccadilloes as cannibalism.

These stereotypes of indigenous peoples implied obvious roles for the associated Europeans — heirs to the Dying, bleaching agents to the Whitening. But the interaction of conceptions of Us and Them went further, through archetyping and anti-typing. Maori were sometimes archetyped or idealized, as with the Noble Savage and some Whitening Savages. Unable to bear the notion of his Whitening Maori eating rats, a New Zealand historian and humanitarian, Frederick Moss, described the Polynesian rat or kiore as ‘a kind of small rabbit’. ‘Natives’ were also anti-typed into living lessons on what not to be, to act as polar opposite to a European archetype, often very highly idealized. The European of contact literature is often archetyped, not real. Archetyping was sometimes used deliberately, to maintain what Europeans believed was a mystique of their own superiority in native minds. The New Zealand Censor, commenting on films suitable for Western Samoa in 1929, felt that ‘even a picture with the famous dog Rin Tin Tin would be questionable as the dog

8 Frederick J. Moss, School History of New Zealand, Auckland, 1889, p.5.
frequently fights and overcomes the villain — a white man'. Maintenance of the European archetype was generally less deliberate. Definitions of European crime and madness may have tightened in contact situations; levels of eccentricity or public debauchery acceptable before whites were not acceptable before blacks. Racial and social archetypes and anti-types interacted. Missionaries, for example, divided natives into convertible or unconvertible; and Europeans into agents of vice or virtue, Fatal Impact or Whitening. Savages and salvagers, was the missionary Us-ing and Them-ing matrix. Conceptions of Us and Them served each other, and shifted in response to each other.

European conceptions of Maori from 1820 to 1920 can be seen as a contest between White and Dying Savage myths, with the Black Savage making sporadic forays from the background. Both main stereotypes offered subordinating colonialism as their practical paradigm of ethnic relations, with and without long-term futures for Maori. Between 1840 and 1860, the Whitening Savage gained some ascendancy, helped by perceived Maori enthusiasm for Christianity, commerce and civilization. Embryonic New Zealand-British collective identity incorporated the notion that Pakeha were prime exponents of the alleged English genius for native-handling. From the outset, European New Zealand-ness consisted partly in having the ‘best blacks’ and in treating them best. Even in this period, however, the Dying Maori still acted to cushion the ideologically subversive reality of Maori parity with the settlers in war, economics, and politics — Maori successes could be dismissed as transitory. In the 1860s, large-scale conflict, perceived Maori rejection of the things and thoughts of Europe, and evidence of population decline encouraged a resurgence of the Dying Maori myth, which dominated to the mid-1880s, and remained strong to the 1900s.

Maori no doubt stereotyped and misread Europeans too. The explorers’ ships, floating villages populated solely by men, may have been taken for nomadic communities of homosexuals. Several early European visitors had their chests groped to establish if they were male or female, and were offered sexual hospitality in the form of boys. Maori also conceptually lumped Europeans and attached generic labels to them, notably the term Pakeha from 1814, and this mirrored back into the Pakeha self-image. Despite the heavy Pakeha emphasis on Englishness and Britishness, ‘European’ was often their local self-designation, and still is. Confrontation with a Maori Them increased the Pakeha sense of Us, and combined with other factors to reduce the sense of regional and ethnic difference among Pakeha, especially in the North Island where Maori were numerous. The wars of the 1860s stimulated Us-ing and Them-ing, as wars often

do, and weakened provincial governments in relation to the colonial one. Martial
mythology distinguished old British from New Zealand British in ways flattering
to the latter, foreshadowing the Anzac Legend.12
From the late 1830s to the early 1880s, propaganda designed to attract streams
of British migrants and money portrayed New Zealand as a latent paradise,
peculiarly destined to be brought to fruition by select British stock. As in other
colonies, it was asserted that New Zealand was uniquely well-placed to deliver
'progress without the price, paradise without the serpent, and Britain without the
Irish', and prophecies of a great future abounded.13 ‘The Britain of the South’ and
its variants was New Zealand’s most common by-name in the nineteenth
century, penetrating British as well as New Zealand conceptual language. Some
propagandists believed, or pretended to, that New Zealand’s future would exceed Britain’s. ‘It is not enough to call New Zealand the Britain of the
South... New Zealand is much superior to Britain... in predicting for it the most
brilliant future we know... that we are far, very far, below the inevitable truth.’14
The Pakeha population did explode from 500 to 500,000 in about 40 years, and
the economy grew to match, partly though sheep and gold, partly through its own
growth. From the 1860s, conflict and confidence in the future reduced the desire
and the need for the Whitening Savage; both nature and natives were inevitably
to be swept aside in the inevitable march to a Greater British manifest destiny.
Nemesis struck between about 1885 and 1901. Stagnation decimated growth
rates; Australian federation shrank New Zealand to a quarter of its former size
in local relativities; and economic, technological, and cultural shifts tightened
links with Britain — against the grain of expectations about the progressive
development of colonial nationalism. New Zealand was more subordinate to
Britain in the first quarter of the twentieth century than in the third quarter of the
nineteenth. My label for this many-faceted phenomenon is ‘recolonization’. The
subordination was largely voluntary; it was by no means supine; and it had
important benefits for New Zealand. The shift can be seen as from an American
model of the future, in which Britain is reproduced, even exceeded, with an
expectation of ultimate independence; to a Scots model of permanently close but
junior partnership, retaining some room for qualitative superiority in certain
spheres. Greater Britain, emphasizing both quality and quantity, gave way to
Better Britain, emphasizing quality alone.15
This transformation of Pakeha collective identity, 1880s-1920s, was effected
through the refurbishing of older axioms and the addition of new ones, and many
of both were race-related. They included renewed emphasis on a ‘myth of better
stock’ — the notion that the first settlers were the cream of the British
population; and a cult of climatic determinism, inverting modern attitudes to sun
and wind, whereby New Zealand’s temperate and bracing climate conduced to

in New Zealand History, Palmerston North, 1991, pp.130-1 and Making Peoples, Auckland, 1996,
esp. pp.242-3.
13 Belich, Making Peoples, ch.xii.
14 New Zealand Examiner, 19 March 1861.
15 Belich, Making Peoples, pp.302-6, 310, 446.
racial improvement. Newer racial reinforcements for Better British collective identity included a powerful ruralism, which insured against racial degeneracy; progressive social legislation and developments such as the Plunket Society, which ensured that more children would be made fit if not born fit; and substantial though sometimes ambiguous engagement with the international social purity and feminist movements, using at least the rhetoric of racial purity, racial improvement, and racial destiny. Recolonization also demanded racial homogeneity, for the security of sameness, and so that Britain could constantly be told that blood was thicker than water, or at least thicker than French lamb or Danish butter. That New Zealand was ‘98% British’ was a common slogan of recolonization. The New Zealand government was careful to ensure that its military contribution in World War One was proportionally greater than that of other dominions. War, like sport, was alleged to demonstrate New Zealanders’ sub-racial superiority, as well as racial loyalty, to old British. The game was to demonstrate New Zealand’s indissoluble links with Britain, while at the same time giving New Zealand distinctiveness, even qualitative though not quantitative superiority. Racial myths were key cards. The game was not easy; it took 40 years to win, and at the beginning of it, in the 1880s, Pakeha collective identity was in crisis. It is in this context that Pakeha intellectuals looked up, and saw the Maori passing by.

Kinship was the conceptual language of Maori social organization, not necessarily the thing itself. Scholars in New Zealand and elsewhere warn of the dangers of assuming that lineage was inflexible, and of static and reductionist conceptions of the tribe. It is useful to adapt Benedict Anderson and distinguish between actual groups, which regularly lived or operated together, imagined groups, which might link several actual ones through a shared collective identity, and zones in which community could or could not be imagined. Traditional and post-contact evidence suggests that the conventional taxonomy of extended family, sub-tribe, and tribe, whanau, hapu, and iwi, does not accommodate the most common form of large actual group, which fell between, or even outside, tribe and sub-tribe. I have found it helpful to think in terms of three zones, looking out from the Maori village: a kin zone (one large heterogeneous ‘tribe’ or a few closely-related ones) in which grouping was relatively easy; a neighbour zone, to which your kin-zone was connected by

regular interaction or distant but active kin-links, in which grouping was possible; and a stranger zone, with whom links were irregular, defunct, or nonexistent, and in which grouping was not conceivable.

This schema facilitates an attempt to explain the apparent capacity of Maori society rapidly to disseminate innovation, both before and after contact. Briefly, the process was driven by rivalry for mana or prestige between leaders and groups, encouraged by the fluidity of definitions of both. A crucial qualification is that this rivalry could be co-operative as well competitive. It proceeded through successive currencies of rivalry: greenstone tools, large canoes, vast fishing nets, and pa fortifications before contact; iron tools, muskets, chapels, and mills after it, as well as local partnerships with European individuals, stations, and settlements. Rivalry mattered most, but was pursued least ruthlessly, within the kin zone; it mattered least, but was pursued most ruthlessly, in the stranger zone. Triumphs against strangers were mere means to the end of rivalry with kin and neighbours. Actual and imagined grouping was affected by rivalry, and was itself a currency of it. It made for fission as well as fusion, but it is the latter that interests me here. Regular sharing of a large resource — greenstone ground, pa, or European settlement — by a group of groups encouraged them to institutionalize their co-operation, to imagine it as well as act it. This was especially so when the output of the resource — security in the case of a pa — was not easily divisible: it could not be cut up and taken away by the constituent sub-groups. Groups made pa; pa also made groups. Groups and chiefs who did best in the competition for successive currencies attracted more members and adherents. Group aggregation accelerated after contact. Fresh currencies of rivalry came thicker and faster; a more reliable economic surplus, derived from pigs and potatoes, funded an intensification of long-range interaction; and cheaper transport and participation in European interactive networks and communications infrastructures facilitated it. Some groups split up, loosened, or disappeared; others tightened, merged, or succeeded in imposing their names on whole kin zones, even neighbour zones. By the mid-nineteenth century, the whole of Maoridom was arguably a single neighbour zone; heterogeneous, diverse, and conflictual, but with most of its parts interacting positively or negatively, and perhaps with a vague sense of shared identity, even if only negative — a shared unEuropean-ness.

Let me now oversimplify Maori strategies of grouping among themselves, and of managing interaction with Pakeha, into three pairs. All Maori both resisted and 'collaborated' with Europe in various ways, but some emphasized one strategy more than the other in the shared aim of maintaining autonomy. Resisstance or collaboration could use two organizational shapes: tribal or pan-tribal. Pan-tribalism split in turn into two variants: inter-tribal movements (alliances or federations based on tribal building blocks); and supra-tribal movements, usually prophetic, which were to some extent subversive of tribalism, and sometimes of such things as traditional chieftainship as well. Resisters took the early lead in pan-tribalism with such inter-tribal organizations as the landholding and King Movements of the 1850s, and supra-tribal prophetic movements such as Kai Ngarara, Pai Marire and Ringatu, developing from the
1850s and 1860s. Collaborators made the pan-tribal running subsequently, with the inter-tribal Kotahitanga and Young Maori movements of the 1880s and 1890s, and with the supra-tribal Ratana Church from 1918. None of these organizations were pan-Maori in the sense that they embraced the whole of Maoridom, but they were trans-Maori — they knew no zonal boundaries — and for this even a vague sense of pan-Maori identity was useful. Using was encouraged by the rise of Them. Pakeha first became a serious threat to Maori independence in 1845, and from the 1880s, the balance of military, political, and economic power shifted decisively in their favour. While the tribe remained the bedrock of Maori cultural resilience, there was a definite, though by no means universal, emergence of a sense of Maoriness from 1850. It was a response to the European Them, but it was not European-led.  

To the 1880s, resistance, actual or threatened, violent or non-violent, was important in protecting autonomy, and it often took pan-tribal shapes. Collaboration in this period usually took tribal shapes. From the 1880s, armed resistance ceased to be viable. Collaboration therefore held less value for Pakeha, and both strategies sought to protect autonomy and identity with greatly reduced hands of cards. Groups from the resistance tradition tried disengagement: negatively controlling, though by no means eliminating, interaction with Pakeha. Collaborators now turned to pan-tribalism, and used engagement, positively controlling interaction by seeking a foothold in Pakeha political and ideological systems and using it to lever up Maori status and material conditions. They looked for something which would renew the value of collaboration in Pakeha eyes. This strategy converged with an older Maori policy of ethnic relations which had always competed with the European paradigm of subordinating colonialism: marriage alliance. When two unrelated Maori groups lived in long-term proximity, they often attempted to institutionalize close and peaceful relations through intermarriage: first a few chiefly pairings; then many lower ranking ones. Shared offspring might be joined by shared ancestors — a new emphasis on shared descent. Collective identities were not necessarily fused by this process, but rendered linked yet distinct, twinning rather than merging. This strategy had outmatched the European paradigm until the late 1830s, and competed with it with some success until the 1860s, but was in urgent need of refurbishing by the late-nineteenth century.

From the mid-nineteenth century, with momentum mounting from the 1880s, Pakeha scholars moved into the field of Maori history. The key group was led by S. Percy Smith, and the whole process might be called Smithing — forging a picture of the Maori past for Pakeha ideological purposes. One component was the Great Fleet — ‘The Great New Zealand Myth’ — and its precursors, which gave Maori a heroic and European-like history of exploration and settlement. From the more recent past came a laundered legend of the New Zealand Wars, which emphasized the courage and Christian chivalry of Maori resisters over and above their effectiveness. The wars were portrayed as minor squabbles, after
which the combatants kissed and made up. But the key motif of the Smithed version was the notion of the Aryan Maori.

In 1885, the Smithian Edward Tregear published a little book of this name. From crude philological and mythological comparisons, Tregear deduced that the Maori, like all Polynesians, were tanned Europeans, the forgotten wing of an ancient Indo-Aryan diaspora. Tregear’s thesis met instant ridicule; he tried to withdraw the book; and recent posterity has tended to treat it as a joke, or at best an intellectual curiosity. It was a joke, but the joke was on us, because it obscures the possibility that The Aryan Maori became the symbolic bible of Maori-Pakeha relations. Ideas of a shared Indo-European Aryan origin date back to the mid-eighteenth century, and were proselytized by Max Muller in the mid-nineteenth, as Tregear acknowledged. He did not acknowledge that Polynesian Aryanism, or something close to it, was postulated by several earlier writers. But the social history of ideas has its own darwinian tendencies: the fittest ideas survive best and fitness is defined as much by the needs of the moment as by intellectual merit or originality.

For Pakeha, the Aryan Maori legitimated European colonialism in New Zealand as family re-union. It populated a runeless and ruinless land with a respectably lengthy, romantic, and distinguishing, yet European-like, history. It overcame the Maori as an obstacle to the recolonial demand for racial homogeneity. ‘Owing to his exceptional characteristics’, announced a leading newspaper in 1901, ‘the Maori interferes in no way with our national homogeneity. His position is . . . unique.’ At least in the abstract, the idea of Maori Aryanism levered up Maori status in some European eyes.

Acceptance of an Aryan origin for the Maori was never universal, and it was sometimes expressed cautiously or indirectly, but it was widespread. While Tregear’s methods were criticized, writes his biographer, Kerry Howe, ‘there was widespread acceptance of the notion of Aryan origins for Maoridom’. Keith Sinclair confirmed that ‘it was widely believed that the Maoris were a “branch of the Caucasian race”’. By the 1900s, there was ‘a general consensus

25 Howe, p.64.
26 Sinclair, A Destiny Apart, pp.197–9.
of opinion that the Maori ... are a Polynesian, that is originally an Aryan race'.

A 'revised edition' of A.H. Reed's immensely popular *Story of New Zealand* informed young readers as late as 1974 that Maori were descended from 'a people called Aryans', as was 'our own Anglo-Saxon race'. Even Sherlock Holmes was on the job. On an 1890s visit, his creator, Arthur Conan Doyle, was delighted to find that New Zealand scholars had 'worked out the very fact that I had surmised, that the Maoris are practically of the same stock as Europeans'.

Indirect acceptance of Maori Aryanism took the form of the notion of 'better blacks'. In Egypt in 1915, New Zealand troops were officially warned that Egyptians were 'lower on the human scale' than the Maori, who were 'very different to the ordinary coloured race'. In the 1920s, the populist tabloid *Truth* pulled no punches over 'noisome and noxious niggers' and almost choked on its own Sinophobia, yet was sympathetic towards some Maori grievances, and was seldom anti-Maori. 'Better blacks' were associated with New Zealand by the world — rather more, ironically, than Better Britons. Young British readers were informed that 'no finer coloured race exists in the world'. Australians discovered in school textbooks that Maori were 'a far superior race to the Australian blacks'.

The Aryan Maori was the apotheosis of the Whitening Maori myth-complex; yet it synthesized with its antithesis, the Dying Maori. The Smithian drive to collect and re-invent Maori tradition was hastened by the belief that Maori would soon die out, which Tregear himself accepted. That Maori Aryanism was to be posthumous reduced its conceptual risks for Pakeha, and so facilitated its initial acceptance. Now residual legatees of the Dying Maori by kinship as well as geographic succession, Pakeha groomed and Smithed their prospective estate with care from the 1890s. Popular culture freely co-opted Maori symbols, initially with little sense of their having living owners. Pakeha hockey teams and children were given Maori names; Maori motifs featured large in public competitions to design national emblems; 'kia ora' was advocated as a Pakeha greeting; and 'Maorilanders' became a populist by-name for European New Zealanders. Pakeha musicians and artists in the decades around 1900 were fascinated by Maori subjects, as was the country's leading woman photographer, Margaret Matilda White. 'Her fascination with Maoridom led to her most

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34 Howe, p.65.
disturbing image; a self-portrait with a moko painted on her chin.\textsuperscript{35} In the midst of this premature popular taking-up of the inheritance, and the equally premature scholarly embalming process, the Maori Mummy woke up.

From about 1900, evidence that the Maori were not dying out after all strengthened, and from the 1910s it became difficult to deny. Pakeha had now to cope with an Aryan Maori present as well as a past. This did not sweep away denigratory racialism by any means. The indelibly different Black Savage still held some sway; a noble Maori past and an ignoble present could be reconciled through the mechanism of racial decline, with modern Maori seen as degenerate vestiges of noble forebears. Above all, full assimilation and cultural extinction could replace physical extinction. Many commentators looked forward to a time when Maori would exist only as a ‘golden tinge’ on the skins of their Pakeha cousins. But this required inter-marriage and assimilation. While assimilation was formal policy to the 1960s, in practice Aryanism also generated potential levers for the maintenance of Maori identity. When superior natives, and the superior treatment of natives, were key ways in which you portrayed New Zealand to the world, and told the difference between Australian Britons and New Zealand ones, living proof was useful. Despite persistent racial prejudice and discrimination that varied regionally and according to other factors, New Zealand did deliver this proof. Maori had been guaranteed four seats in the colonial parliament in 1867, a century before Aboriginal Australians achieved full citizenship. There were Maori members of the executive from the 1870s, and acting Prime Ministers from 1909. Conservative governments of the 1920s and 1930s, even in the midst of economic depression, were persuaded to pump hundreds of thousands of pounds into Maori rural development, and to make at least nominal reparation for unjust land dealings in the previous century.

Like its relative, Better Britonism, Maori Aryanism was symbolized in the Pakeha popular mind by war and sport. Pakeha celebrated the achievements of Maori battalions in both world wars. When a visiting South African rugby team complained in 1921 about having to play blacks, with the ‘spectacle of thousands of Europeans frantically cheering on band of coloured men to defeat own race’ adding insult to injury, they received an indignant response from New Zealand rugby officialdom — not a sub-culture noted for its enlightenment. The Maori ‘should not be looked upon as nothing better than a kaffir’.\textsuperscript{36} Maori battalions and Maori rugby, like Maori schools and Maori seats in Parliament, clearly contradicted the formal policy of assimilation, yet became accepted and even applauded by Pakeha. Rates of intermarriage require further research, but one category of mixed-bloods seems to have suddenly rocketed in the decade 1911-21, out of all proportion to increases in either Maori or Pakeha populations, and at a time when


the surplus of Pakeha males was diminishing towards normalcy. The social taboo against white man-black woman marriages, weak to the 1860s, may have weakened again from about 1900. The taboo against white woman-black man matches, an inner sanctum of racial prejudice, remained quite strong, but seems to have been less strong than in comparable societies at this time. New Zealand Aryanism did have benign effects. The superiority of New Zealand settler-native relations was real as well as mythical. I suggest that this was partly due to the strength of racial ideas, not their weakness.

New Zealand Aryanism played roles outside Maori origins. Trademarks of New Zealand consumer goods used swastika motifs from the 1910s to the 1930s, including a line of agricultural tools which superimposed the swastika over ‘Kia Ora’, until it was replaced in 1939 with the profile of a goat. More significant is the possible role of Aryanism in New Zealand Sinophobia, which strengthened greatly in the 1880s — well after the gold rushes with which it is usually associated — and remained very strong to the 1930s. New Zealand may have emphasized its few Chinese as anti-types to replace natives who could not be used as negative referents. Immigration policy in general was arguably more Aryanist than white. Aryanism had a flexible embrace, but median definitions included most northern and western Europeans, and excluded most southern and eastern ones. This definition very accurately describes New Zealand’s preferred immigrants to the 1970s. Aryanism also facilitated New Zealand’s need to accommodate its numerous Scots, Welsh and Irish. Celts were not Anglo-Saxons but they were Aryans. Tregear’s narrowest definition consisted of the Maori and ‘his Norse and Celtic brothers’. Indeed, the inventions of New Zealand and Scotland have intriguing analogies: Lowlander/Pakeha firmly linked to, yet clearly distinct from, England, using the cultural co-option of romantic and martial Highlanders/Maori to facilitate the distinguishing without damaging the linking.

An intriguing feature of New Zealand Aryanism is the possibility of Maori participation in it. There had always been some Maori agency in the formation of European images of Them. The young, far-travelled Northland chief Ruatara,

42 Tregear, p.90.
Samuel Marsden’s co-adjutor in bringing Christianity and European agriculture to New Zealand, was the first personification of the Whitening Maori, a hero of missionary literature. There was an element of deliberation in Ruatara’s contribution to the image of his people in the European mind, such as the implication that Maori worshipped a supreme god, and repeated assertions that they were prime prospects for conversion. The legacy of Ruatara persisted. New Zealand’s first professional historian, the Arawa scholar Te Rangikaheke, was paid by Governor Grey in the late 1840s to record Maori tradition. Apart from giving his own tribe precedence, Te Rangikaheke deliberately neatened legend into a form he rightly considered to be digestible for a Pakeha audience. Grey subsumed and further laundered the work under his own name in his Polynesian Mythology, but this magnified its effect. Official sponsorship of Whitening representations of the Maori extended to Maori artists, scholars, and cultural groups, as well as to Pakeha image-makers.

Key Maori contributors to the Aryan Maori myth and its allies were leaders of the Young Maori movement: James Carroll, Maui Pomare, Apirana Ngata, and Peter Buck, all of whom became knights and cabinet ministers between the 1890s and the 1940s. In 1899, Carroll suggested that the teachings of the 1860s Maori scholar Te Matorohanga be edited and copied for preservation. They were eventually transmuted into the Lore of the Whare-wananga, by Percy Smith, a core text of Smithianism. But before this they passed from pre-contact tradition through mediating Maori minds including Te Matorohanga, Te Whatahoro Jury, and a 1907 committee of Maori elders, also instigated by Carroll. Ngata and Buck, the leading Maori intellectuals of their day, had scholarly doubts about aspects of the Smithed and Carrolled version. But at least in practice they accepted its main lines, and helped legitimate and proselytize them. Both explicitly endorsed the idea of an Aryan Polynesian origin, which also lurks behind the title of the renowned anthropologist Buck’s popular book, The Vikings of the Sunrise.

Aryanism, like the Great Fleet, merged or at least funnelled Maori history and could be useful to pan-tribalism. The Young Maori were enthusiasts for what they repeatedly called ‘racial consciousness’ and unity among Maori, while sometimes acknowledging that it needed to be built from refurbished tribal

bricks. It was they who organized the Maori battalions and the unification of Maori rugby, delicately negotiating their way past assimilationist Pakeha hesitations about separatism. Ngata helped establish the Prince of Wales Rugby Cup for competition between the four quarters of Maoridom in 1928, in accordance with the wishes of the late James Carroll. He hoped it would be ‘a strong cementing influence’, bonding tribes, as well as improving Maori rugby.\(^48\) When the Maori battalion was dispersed among Pakeha units in 1916, its Maori backers threatened to stop recruitment, and set up such an outcry that the decision was reversed.\(^49\) Sport and war, like shared myths of origin, bonded Maori as they did Pakeha. Tribalism remained strong, of course; as did inter-tribal and supra-tribal entities from the resistance tradition. But in various campaigns stretching from the 1900s, Ngata in particular sought to reconcile differences and reduce antagonisms. Many foundered on the rock of tribalism, but some succeeded, and they culminated in 1950 in the celebration of the sixth centenary of the arrival of the Great Fleet.

All these measures were also explicitly intended to augment Maori status in the Pakeha mind — not for its own sake, but as a point of leverage, renewing the value of Maori for Pakeha. The aim was, in Ngata’s words, ‘influencing Pakeha opinion to a more kindly attitude and respect towards the Maori’.\(^50\) Buck felt that Pakeha ‘have not given due credit to the part played by the Maori himself in bringing about the post he now occupies’.\(^51\) He was quite right. Stubborn tribal resilience in both nineteenth and twentieth centuries, pan-tribal military resistance in the nineteenth, and pan-tribal ideological ‘collaboration’ in the twentieth were keys to the survival of Maori identity and cultural autonomy. Their success was imperfect but substantial. Aryanism and its associated myths bonded Maori and linked, distinguished, and enhanced them in relation to Pakeha, just as Better Britonism and Aryanism served Pakeha in relation to Britain. There were Maori precedents too. After all, sharing ancestors as well as descendants was a feature of the ancient diplomacy of marriage alliance.

Brief summary over-neatens this story and gives too great an impression of ideological conspiracy. I am also aware of the dangers of inverting the traditional exaggeration of the native as victim into an exaggeration of the native as agent. Yet unconscious or semi-conscious systems do congeal in the social history of ideas; and their concourse can sometimes be more important than their discourse. Racial mythology could archetype as well as anti-type; include as well as exclude; and persist without its labels once they became unfashionable. Contact was not a single encounter, in which European and non-European conceptions of Us and Them remained static, but an ongoing ricochet — as much in the dimension of thoughts as in the dimensions of things and acts.

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48 Buck-Ngata Correspondence, I, p.127.  
51 Buck-Ngata Correspondence, II, pp.11–12.