

New Zealand ‘Naturally’

ERNST DIEFFENBACH, ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINISM AND THE MID NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH COLONIZATION OF NEW ZEALAND



IN 1839, the New Zealand Company commissioned Ernst Dieffenbach to undertake ‘researches and observations’ as part of its first expedition to New Zealand. He was to provide an account of the country, its native inhabitants and natural resources with a view to future colonization by the Company, but the inclusion of a naturalist aboard the expedition’s flagship also gave it a scientific veneer, allying it to the voyages of European explorers like James Cook, rather than the more commercial ventures of men like Nathaniel Portlock, with which it arguably had more in common.² As Richard Grove has noted, Cook’s voyages played an important part in professionalizing the role of the scientist in colonial expansion,³ and Dieffenbach’s own work in New Zealand was to be of some influence in securing his status within the new discipline of ethnology. He was already acquainted with the scientific figures Charles Lyell, Richard Owen and Charles Darwin before he left New Zealand and Darwin may actually have encouraged him to take a position with the New Zealand Company.

During the 1840s, the Company exerted a strong influence on British metropolitan representations of New Zealand as a sponsor and producer of its own promotional material, as well as acting as a stimulus to publication by others. Of the nearly 200 items published between 1840 and 1850 listed in Arthur Thomson’s 1859 New Zealand bibliography,⁴ for example, fully one-third were either published by the Company or considered Company affairs in some substantive way, while the great majority of others devoted passages to Company activities. Such was its hold over metropolitan descriptions of the country during the early 1840s that, in 1842, Theophilus Heale complained it had succeeded in almost completely identifying itself with New Zealand: ‘the unsparing use of every species of puff, direct or indirect, public dinners, fêtes, advertisements of colonial cadetships, party periodicals — a continual supply of letters from colonists, accounts of their settlements by their settlers, honourable or otherwise — but all interested — and pamphlets, have taught the public to think of New Zealand only through the medium of the New Zealand Company’.⁵ Given the Company’s high public profile at this time, it is clearly important to understand the relationship between its objectives and the works Dieffenbach published on New Zealand. While he produced a number of reports for the Company during his time in the country, his most comprehensive work, the two volume *Travels in New Zealand* published in 1843 after his return to England,⁶ was not commissioned by the Company (although it may have sought to influence, perhaps even censor, what he wrote).⁷ Dieffenbach was clearly a writer of some complexity, subject to a number of influences. This paper

considers one that has been left largely untouched in reviews of his work to date: the impact of contemporary understandings of the relationship between environment and racial character. In doing so, it complements Pat Moloney's recent analysis of the anthropological, legal and moral underpinnings of early Victorian conceptions of Europeans and Māori,⁸ and reveals how Dieffenbach mobilized notions of environment, climate, skin colour and disease to suggest an ethno-biological basis for the European colonization of New Zealand, a scientific formulation that buttressed a range of other contemporary interests in the country, including the New Zealand Company's.

The Company fêted the departure of its flagship vessel, the *Tory*, in grand style, with a banquet for 130 distinguished guests at the *West India Dock Tavern* in Blackwall on 27 April 1839. William Hutt MP, one of several distinguished figures recruited as a company director, proposed the health of the Queen and declared the enterprise would redound to 'the glory of Her Majesty's reign'. More importantly, he averred, it would redeem from their savage existence, 'a people the most intelligent, the most energetic, the most capable, but, he must add, the most oppressed of the aboriginal inhabitants of the globe'.⁹ The idea that an intelligent, energetic, in a word, 'noble', race needed rescuing from the predations of escaped convicts, deserted sailors and the drunken crews of sealing and whaling vessels suited the Company. In the 1830s, it was one of the most frequently cited arguments in favour of colonizing New Zealand, along with a belief in Māori amenability to the civilizing influence of European presences. The latter also accounts for the Company making specific provision for Māori to own land in its settlements. It had fixed on a system of purchase by prospective emigrants and investors of 100 'country-acres' and one 'town-acre' each in its settlements, with selection by ballot following sale of the allotments, but in addition, 110 town-and-country sections were to be held by the Company for distribution to the principal Māori families, from whom the land was to be purchased in the first place. The Company believed large tracts of land could be purchased for a comparative trifle, and considered the real reward for Māori would be the civilizing effect of social and commercial intercourse with the new, European settlers. As the official instructions from the Company Directors to William Wakefield, its Port Nicholson agent, put it: 'Instead of a barren possession with which they have parted, they will have property in land intermixed with the property of civilized and industrious settlers, and made really valuable by that circumstance'.¹⁰ It was never intended Māori would occupy the land allotted within the Company's settlements, however. As the Company secretary, John Ward, informed the 1840 Parliamentary Select Committee on New Zealand, 'The natives are quite aware of the nature of the bargain they have made, that they have no rights remaining over the land'.¹¹ The Company and its enthusiasts also played down any suggestion Māori objected to occupation of their lands in favour of the view that they welcomed European settlement and actually hungered for the benefits of civilisation. As Ward enthused: 'They are offended that we do not colonize their country; and with good reason, for they see the substantial benefits that would accrue to them from the establishment of our laws and the rest of our civilization.'¹² The implication was that European settlement would proceed quickly and easily, with Māori

full and willing participants, a comforting message purveyed to prospective emigrants and investors that sanctioned the Company's profit-making scheme under the alluring guise of philanthropy, while playing on more anxious views of British encounters with native populations evident in the 1836 Parliamentary Committee on Aborigines and 1838 Lords Committee on New Zealand, as well as openly critical accounts by writers like Saxe Bannister, Charles Napier and William Howitt.¹³

On that score, the Company and its employees appeared determined that their new adventure in British colonization was to proceed on different principles. Charles Heaphy, the young Company draughtsman, hoped that New Zealand would prove an exception to the rule that 'in all colonized countries the aboriginal inhabitants have suffered from their contact with Europeans, and . . . extermination follows the settlement of their country'.¹⁴ Dieffenbach also hoped for a happy conclusion to mixing of races under the Company system: 'It is pleasing to reflect that the first serious attempt will be made in New Zealand to civilize what has been termed a horde of savages, to amalgamate their interest with that of Europeans, and to make them participate in the hereditary immunities and privileges of British subjects.'¹⁵ Born in Giessen, a small town in the German Duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt, Dieffenbach enrolled in the faculty of medicine at the local university in 1828, but also developed a keen interest in science. As well as pursuing his medical studies, he became a pupil of the recently appointed chair of chemistry, Justus Liebig, a gifted scholar and, at the time of his appointment, the youngest professor in Germany. One of the founding fathers of organic chemistry, Liebig's ideas on artificial fertilizers stressed the importance of agriculture to population growth and warned of the dangers of failing to replace soil nutrients. As William Brock has shown, his ideas were of some influence in Britain,¹⁶ and we can also see their impact in Dieffenbach's responses to what he saw of European settlement in New Zealand.

Like a number of other students at the University, Dieffenbach was drawn into nationalist politics. He joined the outlawed *Burschenschaften* (Youth Association) and *Das Junge Deutschland* (Young Germany), and the evidence suggests he was involved in an abortive storming of the Frankfurt barracks in 1833 precipitating his forced flight and exile from the country of his birth. This attempt to seize a military command was part of a wider German movement for reform born of the turmoil of the Napoleonic Wars. The initial unification of German states under Napoleon's *Confédération du Rhin* had been unpicked by the 1815 Congress of Vienna and replaced by a loose association of principalities under a German Confederation. The reforms commenced under Napoleonic rule were rolled back by a new authoritarianism and constitutional particularism; but the struggle continued, led by writers and intellectuals, as well as students, and drawing on a strain of German philosophical idealism that profoundly influenced Dieffenbach.

Favouring subjectivity over reason, tradition over progressivism, and arguing for a historical basis to national difference, German idealism was very different from the empiricism of David Hume and Edmund Burke, or the curiously mechanical hedonism of Jeremy Bentham and Thomas Malthus. Friedrich Jacobi, Gotthold Lessing and Johann Herder offered explanations of human biology,

culture and belief that provided an organic rather than mechanical model for Dieffenbach's theorizing of race,¹⁷ while at the same time, as Jan Pieterse has suggested, the contemporary yearning after a German nation that did not yet exist made the German 'race' a focus of intense nationalism.¹⁸ This, in turn, pushed Christian Europe to the head of human history, making its superiority the logical product of favourable geography and climate. This was confirmed, for example, by Herder's attitude to the peoples of Africa. Although he considered humanity to constitute a single race, Herder placed Africans next to apes, argued they were sensually over-endowed and posited a connection between what he saw as their aberrant lips, breasts and sexual organs with the heat of Africa, a climate thereby shown to be too extreme for normal human development.¹⁹ Herder's belief that the individuality of each *volk* was the product of a dialectic between universal human nature, individual racial character and the specific environment within which each race developed, was evident in a paper Dieffenbach read on 31 January 1843 at the inaugural meeting of the London Ethnological Society, of which he was a founding member. *On the Study of Ethnology* proposed that the relative stability of racial types allowed the ethnologist to divide races into groups and sub-groups with the precision of the botanist, and to trace an 'Ethnological Map of the World' that demonstrated the natural geographical limits of each.²⁰

Careful attention to geographical details as well as racial and cultural had been characteristic of earlier writers like Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, Johann Blumenbach, George Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon and the American, Samuel Stanhope Smith, all of whom argued for the influence of environment on race,²¹ and all of whose writings were copiously referenced to works by European travellers in Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific. Smith, for example, included numerous footnotes to Johann Forster's *Observations made during a Voyage Round the World*, a product of Cook's second voyage and one of the most frequently cited sources on the Pacific well into the nineteenth century. Like Herder, Forster theorized racial and cultural variations were caused by environmental factors, identifying extremes of barbarism with the frozen and torrid regions of the globe, while the mild climate and island geography of the Pacific produced a happy mean between barbarism and over-refinement.²² More contemporaneously, Alexander von Humboldt had also linked human history to environment, arguing that human races and their cultures were ineluctably bound to the particular characteristics of the natural world in which they lived.²³

In some respects, Dieffenbach can be seen as heir to this Enlightenment discourse on race, but reference to essentially eighteenth-century notions of the Pacific as *luxe et douceur* can obscure the complexity of the debates on race and civilization that informed his thinking. The survival of environmental explanations of racial difference into the mid nineteenth century was, rather, evidence of their capacity to provide a particular explanation of relations between Europeans and other races in the enlarging economy of colonization. For British expansion into Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand produced not only a set of registers of racial difference. Within those registers it also prioritized forms of European hegemony. This was exemplified in alternative appraisals of the influence of environment that discounted the civilizing effects

of tropical plenty. In contrast to Forster, for example, John Millar hypothesized that a balmy climate actually hampered human cultural development. Greater fertility in warmer countries, he reasoned, meant there was little need to cultivate the soil. Subject to fewer exertions, the inhabitants of those regions became indolent, 'addicted to sensual pleasure, and liable to all those infirmities which are nourished by idleness and sloth'. In a cold country, by contrast, everything must be obtained by labour. There, contending with a barren soil and severe seasons caused the inhabitants to become 'active and industrious, and [to] acquire those dispositions and talents which proceed from constant and vigorous exercise both of body and mind'.²⁴ This, of course, could be seen as the key to British energy and industry, but the argument equally favoured the temperate latitudes of New Zealand over those of the tropical Pacific, and formed the basis of a number of appraisals of Māori culture during the 1830s and 1840s, including Dieffenbach's.²⁵ Because New Zealand produced very little food that could be simply plucked and eaten, Dieffenbach argued, Māori had had to develop agriculture, while the cooler climate meant they must provide themselves with protective clothing and shelter.²⁶ All this required the exercise of mental, as well as what was identified in gendered terms by other writers as manly, physical energy. 'There is no effeminacy about them', the Reverend William Yate remarked approvingly, 'they are obliged to work, if they would eat: they have no yams, nor cocoas, nor bananas, growing without cultivation; and the very fern-root upon which they used, in former times, principally to feed, is not obtained without immense labour'.²⁷ Such assurances were an important element in colonial prospect-making, implying that conditions were already ripe there for the ready exercise of British industriousness and energy. As Robert Hay observed revealingly in 1832, Māori were 'as dogged and persevering amidst their fogs as the Briton is in his'.²⁸

In the great nineteenth-century relocation of European populations, however, fixing race and culture against co-ordinates of climate and topography produced some troubling side effects. The agues and bilious fevers encountered by European settlers in new lands, a subject much commented on in early and mid nineteenth-century descriptions of colonization, were often understood as forms of physiological adjustment to new geographies. Samuel Smith held that European emigrants to America had undergone a physical change, a tinge of sallowness indicating the climate's tendency to induce greater volumes of bile, a change remarked on by a number of English travellers.²⁹ According to other writers, worse was to be expected in the torrid regions of Africa, Australia and the Americas.³⁰ 'The children of white parents, in these hot regions, are of extreme nervous delicacy', Patrick Matthew pronounced dramatically, 'any sudden noise, such as a clap of thunder, frequently causing convulsions and instant death'. He insisted there was 'but a very small portion of the world where the rose-bloom is constantly domiciled on the cheek of beauty', discounting a large part of the United States and Canada, where 'pallor is universal', as well as Southern Europe, Italy, Spain, Asia and Africa. The withering effects of an arid climate were evident in the 'haggard walking skeletons' of the Australian Aborigines, he concluded, while the 'balmy mildness and moist air' of New Zealand demonstrated an opposite effect in 'the fine stately forms, smooth

polished skin, and rounded beauty' of its native population. How much more then 'must this delicious climate have a propitious effect upon the Caucasian British race, who are naturally suited to the climate'.³¹

In *Travels in New Zealand* Dieffenbach set forth a very similar biology of settlement, an order in which humankind was subject to the same natural laws as other species. 'With man as with plants and animals', he declared, 'each kind has its natural boundaries, within which it can live, and thrive, and attain its fullest vigour and beauty'.³² In this order, the success of European colonization depended critically on a choice of destination properly fitted to the colonizing race, a conclusion that actually controverted Herder's claim that causal connections between colonists' originary geography, climate and culture must always result in their degeneration.³³ Instead, Dieffenbach, like Matthew, portrayed New Zealand as a country untroubled by the forms of physical degeneration he ascribed to the unsuitable climate and geography of places such as the West Indies, Senegal and the Cape where European colonists had become 'decrepit, and degenerated from the strength and vigour of the stock from which they descended'. In convict societies like Australia, European settlers fared no better, Dieffenbach asserted. There, artificial wealth created by forced labour did not reflect the actual capacity of the country to support settlement and where again, 'Europeans undergo more or less alterations from the original stock'.³⁴ In New Zealand, by contrast, the geography and climate were naturally suited to the Anglo-Saxon race. The country's climate was not only 'peculiarly favourable to the vegetative powers', but also to the growth of European settlement. 'A humid and temperate atmosphere acts especially upon production', Dieffenbach pronounced, 'both as regards growth of the body and the numerical strength of families'. 'Nutrition and reproduction are in good order', he continued, attesting to the eupeptic as well as procreative powers of the climate. Indeed, Europeans invalidated by their duties in tropical outposts rapidly recovered in a country where the almost continual winds purified the atmosphere and prevented the accumulation of 'obnoxious exhalations'.³⁵

As Dieffenbach catalogued his progress through the country, almost every landscape he encountered was considered in terms of its suitability for European settlement or use. The alluvial land near Ranganui harbour was 'for the most part fit for immediate cultivation'. Kaitaia was 'a desirable place for a provincial town'. The harbour at Whangaroa was spacious and deep enough 'for the largest fleet', while a great system of water communication was promised, involving the canalization of the Waikato River and the joining of Lake Taupō with the Wanganui and Manawatu Rivers which, Dieffenbach asserted, 'take their rise in the same mountain as the Waikato'.³⁶ With comments like these, it would be easy to dismiss Dieffenbach as simply another propagandist of Company interests, but this was far from the case. New Zealand was not a place in which to make a 'rapid fortune' and he excoriated speculators who looked to the country for 'a speedy acquisition of wealth'.³⁷ He pointed out that many parts of the North Island had little to attract European settlers. Wellington, the Company's principal settlement, possessed little cultivable land and Dieffenbach warned that consequently progress would be slow.³⁸ He bemoaned the reckless destruction of native timber by Europeans and stressed the need to shepherd the

country's resources in evident debt to Liebig's theories on land use. Burning the forest cover might have little impact in the Mississippi, the Rhine or Danube, Dieffenbach observed, but in New Zealand the country's fertility was a product of a very thin layer of vegetable mould. When vegetation had been burned off, the next growth sprang up less vigorously than the last. 'Large districts of New Zealand have in this manner been rendered very poor', he concluded.³⁹

Company promoters, by contrast, were generally far less equivocal. Ward, for example, went so far as to enlist Biblical allusions to make his case, asserting that New Zealand was peculiarly fitted by nature for the abundant production of 'those three articles, which have always been regarded as the especial sign of the plenty, wealth, and luxury of a country — corn, wine, and oil'. In 1842, Heaphy evoked a similar set of associations, enthusing that all but the snowy summits of the country were suitable for 'vine and olive'. The 'magnificent fertility' of the country was reported in the *New Zealand Journal*, the Company's semi-official mouthpiece in London, while Henry Petre assured his readers that even inferior land in Wellington produced 'excellent wheat and barley'.⁴⁰ No matter how high-blown such writing was compared to Dieffenbach's, however, it inevitably formed the wider context within which his work was understood. The *Times*, for example, recommended *Travels in New Zealand* to potential investors for its 'valuable information both with respect to the natural resources of the country . . . and the causes by which they have been hitherto paralyzed', and he was quoted by later writers as much to illustrate or sanction processes of European incursion as to describe the natural resources of the country.⁴¹

In the preface to *Travels in New Zealand*, Dieffenbach claimed his two volumes gave 'unvarnished descriptions' of the country and its inhabitants, but this eye-witness account was inevitably filtered through the literary conventions of his day. Like other European travel writers, he utilized by then familiar linguistic formulations of the visual prospect to describe the country. The gorge of the Hutt River was 'truly picturesque'. Landforms on the coast south of Mōkau were like castles. The Hauraki Gulf was beautiful and luxuriant, while Lake Rotomahana was one of the 'grandest views' he had ever seen. Alternating with sometimes lengthy roll calls of 'stratified yellow argillaceous slate', 'epacris parviflora', 'columba spadicea' and genera of balaenae,⁴³ the language of the landscape prospect effectively framed and structured his catalogue of the country's natural features. In illustrating the volumes, it was also to be expected that the lithographer would have recourse to the conventions of his trade and, in that respect, the illustrations resolutely refute Dieffenbach's assertion of truth, bearing instead the 'varnish' of a painterly rhetoric. Structurally, they resemble any number of late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century European landscape prospects,⁴⁴ but the contemporary focus on environment, climate, skin colour and disease constituted an important set of reference points against which these depictions of New Zealand would have been understood. More like assemblages of signs, they carefully staged Māori figures, botanical and geological details to present what was, in 1843, still a largely unfamiliar prospect. Presented as a topographical view, for example, *View of Taupo from Te Rapa* [figure 1] was a landscape of attributes, presenting geology, flora and fauna in their typical forms. The tiny Māori figures arrayed with the strange spider-like flax plants,

blasted trees and rugged land forms rendered racial difference as part of the landscape, something that both inhered and emerged from it, while in *Rua Pahu and Tongariro* [figure 2] the hard, barren terrain reinforced Dieffenbach's contention that the very nature of New Zealand disposed Māori to civilization. No fruit-laden palm trees graced this shoreline. Indeed, its resolute ruggedness appeared to deny their very possibility.



Figure 1: After Joseph Merrett, *View of Taupo from Te Rapa*, lithograph, L. Haghe, in Dieffenbach, *Travels in New Zealand*, I, frontispiece (by permission of Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa).



Figure 2: After Joseph Merrett, *Rua Pahu and Tongariro*, lithograph, L. Haghe, in Dieffenbach, *Travels in New Zealand*, I, op. p.331 (by permission of Alexander Turnbull Library, National Library of New Zealand, Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa).

In his first report to the New Zealand Company directors, Dieffenbach gave a relatively positive appraisal of Māori, describing them as clever, hospitable, cheerful and capable of great exertion.²⁴ In 1841, in *New Zealand and the New Zealanders*, a report to the Aboriginal Protection Society, he expanded this view, describing Māori as ‘endowed with uncommonly good intellectual faculties; they are an agricultural nation, with fixed domicile, and have reached the farthest point of civilization which they possibly could, without the aid of other nations’.⁴⁶ If Māori were higher up the ladder of civilization than other races and capable of future improvement, the key to this process as Dieffenbach saw it in 1841, was greater intercourse with more civilized Europeans. By the time he published *Travels in New Zealand*, however, his ideas had become more complex and conditional. He now described Māori as ‘a people in a state of nature’, blighted by contact with civilization: ‘The hospitable savage is changed into a reckoning and deliberating merchant; the encumbrance of our clothing in a warm climate makes him stiff and helpless; and our complicated food soon renders him unhealthy.’⁴⁷

Māori had been debased, wearing European blankets, ‘which keep the skin in a continual state of irritation, and harbour vermin and dirt far more than the native mats’. They ate unwholesome European food and ‘[i]nstead of being constantly in bodily exercise, they became readers, an occupation very much suited to their natural indolence’.⁴⁸ Of all the measures that might be contemplated for their improvement, he now suggested the most beneficial would be to leave them undisturbed in their existing cultivations, enjoying their traditional manners and customs. In his own village, Dieffenbach insisted, a Māori ‘lives in the midst of his kindred and is respected; nor are his means of subsistence so precarious as amongst the colonists; he is convinced that what he grows, and the manner in which he grows it, are the fittest for him, and the best adapted to his means, when compared with what he sees the Europeans doing, with all their vaunted intellect, as they have not the advantage of knowing, as he does, the nature of the soil and the climate of the country’.⁴⁹

This equation of intimate Māori knowledge of the local landscape with racial and cultural survival was clearly indebted to theories of writers such as Miller, Humboldt and Herder. Like Herder, Dieffenbach believed language was the most enduring expression of a race, something that sprang from both a race’s natural and historic environments, and something that consequently embodied the nation. From this perspective, Dieffenbach’s call to preserve the Māori language was an inevitable concomitant of his interest in preserving the Māori race. Rather than being a backdrop to the naturalist’s world as writers like Mary Louise Pratt have suggested,⁵⁰ for Dieffenbach, such concerns brought urgency to establishing relationships between Māori and European that would recognize and accommodate racial difference.⁵¹ In their desires, emotions and intellectual faculties, he argued, the two races were really no different and there could be no question of one being innately inferior, while the other must necessarily supersede it. Europeans consequently found themselves at a great moral crossroads and a forced surrender of the Polynesian world to the European would show far greater moral weakness on the part of Europeans than any deficiency on the part of the natives of the Pacific.⁵² ‘It may be’, Dieffenbach

hazarded, 'that it is one of Nature's eternal laws that some races of men, like the different kinds of organic beings, plants, and animals, stand in opposition to each other; that is to say, where one race begins to spread and increase, the other, which is perhaps less vigorous and less durable, dies off'.⁵³ This idea of 'fatal impact', however, clearly did not find favour with Dieffenbach, and a large part of the second volume of *Travels in New Zealand* was absorbed with proposals to minimize the damaging effects of Māori-European contacts.

Growing uncertainties over land ownership demanded Māori title be established in law, he urged, and that Māori land owners be protected 'against the cupidity of the Europeans'. In this, Māori rights should take precedence, although on highly conditional terms. Individual tribes might settle in any area they desired, but a carefully measured allocation of land by the new Government would be made according to the numbers of each tribe. 'Ten acres of *arable* land', Dieffenbach decreed, 'must be regarded as sufficient for all reasonable wants of an individual'. All other land would be ceded to those Europeans who had originally bought it, providing sales were shown to be fair, or sold to the Government in exchange for 'articles as will be of permanent and increasing value to them [Māori], and will raise their conditions as peasants'.⁵⁴ Local administration of justice should also be left to Māori, with the principal men of each tribe invested as magistrates, provided with a dwelling in the main village and furnished with European domestic comforts. Around this figure, the tribe would assemble and, with proper guidance, Dieffenbach asserted, give themselves over to labouring for European settlers, building roads and improving the surrounding countryside.⁵⁵

For Dieffenbach, Māori presences and Māori futures were clearly interwoven with those of Europeans, and although no apologist for the New Zealand Company, he clearly recognized that the tide of British settlement was not to be turned back. While this did not prevent discomfort on his part regarding the impact of European contacts on Māori, it was nevertheless European expertise he had in mind to open and rework this landscape, and to bring civilization and Christianity to its native population. In fact, in the very first sentence of *Travels in New Zealand* Dieffenbach announced the inevitability of European colonization of the islands, and it is therefore inaccurate to describe him as 'strongly anti-colonialist in sentiment'.⁵⁶ Were this the case, it is doubtful he would have accepted a post with the New Zealand Company, no matter how idealized his view of its objectives or the attractions of an expenses-paid voyage to the other end of the globe.

In this context, it is also important to consider the wider conceptual frame within which Dieffenbach situated his writing on New Zealand. The objects of natural history were captured at the colonial periphery, but given meaning in a metropolitan context. Journeying back to the metropolis with their samples, measurements and drawings, nineteenth-century naturalists placed these in relation to pre-existing taxonomies to render distant prospects intelligible to a European audience. In this way, Dieffenbach's 'natural' New Zealand can be seen to be both sanctioned and confirmed by a body of referents already established through the constant, systematic updating of the European catalogue of natural phenomena from which his conceptualization of New Zealand derived its logic.

But there was more. His interest in ‘learning’ was not divorced from a range of other interests in the country. For Dieffenbach, natural history was equipped to probe the distant prospect, essay the potential of new lands and provide a scientific basis for colonization, and here the discourses of natural history and colonisation combined with enormous prospective power: ‘In a time pregnant with the universal desire to search for employment, and to open a new field for exertion, foreign and unoccupied countries, previous to colonization, should be explored with a view of making ourselves acquainted with their soil and natural productions. Natural history and the affiliated sciences should, in that case, be merely the helpmates to noble enterprise; and even more than that — they should guide and lead it.’⁵⁷ Guiding and leading the ‘noble enterprise’ as Dieffenbach described it, therefore involved more than the simple cataloguing of racial difference. Racial typologies provided a set of technical reference points against which to manage relations between colonizers and colonized. ‘How to Legislate for the Natives of New Zealand?’, as Dieffenbach put it,⁵⁸ was a question that would preoccupy British and New Zealand administrators right up to the present day, although their answers have overwhelmingly presupposed forms of European authority over Māori, who have been cast as subjects of European encounter and whose futures have been deemed open to European superintendence.

Nevertheless, we must recognize the contingent nature of Dieffenbach’s relationships with both the New Zealand landscape and Māori. *Travels in New Zealand* discloses the extent to which mid nineteenth-century non-Māori visitors to New Zealand were dependent on Māori knowledge of local landscapes, Māori hospitality and Māori labour for their progress, a cross-cultural relationship actually reinforced by Dieffenbach’s own exposition on the Māori language. Along with translations of Māori songs, proverbs, letters, nursery rhymes and passages from the Bible, the second volume of *Travels in New Zealand* includes a sizeable grammar and dictionary, as well as a comprehensive collection of ‘specimen’ sentences. These suggest an attempt by Dieffenbach, albeit a partial one, to elucidate the history and character of Māori through their language, but as Dieffenbach himself acknowledged, this was a language undergoing enormous change. New ideas, new conceptions and new words were pouring in, and his specimen sentences were, therefore, indicative more of changing relations arising from greater European presences than they were of a pure Māori culture. In that respect, they offer an insight into the raw matter of Dieffenbach’s own travels, as well as a generalized lexicography of European and Maori contact, looking backward to the salvage of what Dieffenbach took to be an endangered culture, and forward to the emergence of new Māori-European contacts.

Dieffenbach’s writing constituted one particular appraisal of New Zealand within a wider literature on that country, but its importance lay in being the first popular subjection of the country to a form of scientific scrutiny. During ensuing years, the logic of science was to feature as an important aspect in the making of New Zealand prospects, one that could provide a powerful bond between metropolis and colony. Recent writings on colonization have begun to explore the relationship between metropolis and colony in ways that collapse what has been seen as two separate fields into a form of imperial circuit.⁵⁹ Part of that circuit

was a belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority, a belief that was, of course, nothing new. It had been explicit in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century theories of Henry Kames, Charles White, Johann Blumenbach and William Lawrence,⁶⁰ but the erosion of more philanthropic outlooks on race characterized by writers like Howitt, Bannister and Napier, along with the growing systematization of racial investigation during the 1840s and 1850s, resulted in a new vigour and new scientific legitimacy for such claims.⁶¹ Māori, for example, were made the subject of an increasingly circumscribed ethnological investigation, situated within conjectural explanations of racial origin in which they were almost always subordinate to the Caucasian or Anglo-Saxon race, or, indeed, added to a growing list of 'disappearing' races. The two processes were, of course, not unconnected. This expanding form of official intervention in Māori lifeways produced this kind of scrutiny, and the growing record of Māori culture was irreducibly coupled with the exercise of power. It was no coincidence that one of the most avid students of Māori customs, George Grey, for example, also avidly sought to secure Māori submission to European orders. Another 'philo-Māori', Edward Shortland, author of *Traditions and Superstitions of the New Zealanders*, was a police magistrate and sub-protector of Aborigines, while Arthur Thomson derived much of the Māori material in his *Story of New Zealand* from the Colonial Secretary, Andrew Sinclair, the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Walter Mantell, and the Chief Land Purchase Commissioner, Donald McLean.⁶²

By the 1850s many British commentators saw the disappearance of native populations as a *fait accompli*, lamentable perhaps, but a form of providentialism that helped explain European expansion. The Anglo-Saxonism of writers like Thomas Carlyle, Robert Knox and the ethnologist Charles Smith represented racial destiny as working itself out across space as well as time.⁶³ As the American historian Paul Kramer has noted: 'Its rise in England was identified as only one stage in a relentless Western movement that had begun in India, had stretched into the German forests, and was playing itself out in the United States and the British Empire's settlement colonies'.⁶⁴ This understanding of Anglo-Saxon destiny forged ties between settler and Briton that were far more than simply historical. The intellectual, political and social connections to which they looked were additionally grounded in the immutable facts of biology. In the case of New Zealand, the country was increasingly represented as a putative 'Britain of the South', a shift accompanied by ever more emphatic declarations of the country's suitability for the 'Anglo-Saxon', the 'British race' or the 'English constitution'.⁶⁵

By the 1850s, a new model of racial difference based on immutable, biological fact, rather than the more mutable (and therefore arguably more benign) environmental determinism had come to dominate appraisals of the country and its native inhabitants, bringing them ineluctably into a widening conceptual framework sustaining British colonization, emigration and empire-making. While the force of environmental determinism may have abated, however, there was nevertheless a certain continuity in the later, 'Britain of the South' image of New Zealand that was in accord with Dieffenbach's earlier assertion of the suitability of the country for Anglo-Saxon settlement. Although the argument

was now largely premised on a fundamentally different ontology of racial difference, the conclusion, as far as both the country and its native inhabitants were concerned, was fundamentally the same.

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NOTES

1 Extract from Dieffenbach's contract with the Company, quoted in Gerda Bell, *Ernest Dieffenbach: Rebel and Humanist*, Palmerston North, 1976, pp.29–30. Bell's remains the only substantive biography of Dieffenbach.

2 Nathaniel Portlock, *Voyage round the World . . . in 1785, 1786, 1787, and 1788*, London, 1789. Portlock's voyage to the north-west American coast was prosecuted under the auspices of the King George's Sound Company with the express intention of initiating a lucrative trade in fur from America to China.

3 Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860*, Cambridge, 1995, p.310.

4 Arthur Thomson, *The Story of New Zealand: Past and Present – Savage and Civilized*, London, 1859, II, pp.346–62.

5 Theophilus Heale, *New Zealand and the New Zealand Company*, London, 1842, p.9.

6 Ernst Dieffenbach, *Travels in New Zealand*, 2 vols, London, 1843.

7 The journal of John Barnicoat, a company employee, recorded on 9 February 1843 that Dieffenbach was threatened with legal action if he published anything unfavourable to Company interests. Bell, p.85.

8 Pat Moloney, 'Savagery and Civilization: Early Victorian Notions', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 35, 2 (2001), pp.153–76.

9 Quoted in Patricia Burns, *Fatal Success: A History of the New Zealand Company*, ed., Henry Richardson, Auckland, 1989, pp.86–87.

10 John Ward, *Information Relative to New Zealand: Compiled for the Use of Colonists*, London, 1842, pp.120–1.

11 Great Britain, House of Commons, *Report from the Select Committee on New Zealand*, London, 1840, p.75.

12 Ward, *Information Relative to New Zealand*, p.79.

13 See Saxe Bannister, *Humane Policy; or, Justice to the Aborigines of New Settlements*, London, 1830; Charles Napier, *Colonization: Particularly Southern Australia*, London, 1835; William Howitt, *Colonization and Christianity: A Popular History of the Treatment of Natives by the Europeans in all Their Colonies*, London, 1838.

14 Charles Heaphy, *Narrative of a Residence in Various Parts of New Zealand*, London, 1842, p.66.

15 Dieffenbach, *Travels in New Zealand*, I, pp.19–20.

16 William Brock, *Justus Von Liebi: The Chemical Gatekeeper*, Cambridge, 1997.

17 On German philosophical idealism, see Hugh Nisbet, ed., *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Winckelmann, Lessing, Hamann, Herder, Schiller, Goethe*, Cambridge, 1985; Maurice Olander, 'The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century', MA thesis, University of Cambridge, 1992, particularly chapters 2, 3, pp.21–50; or Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins, eds, *The Age of German Idealism*, London, 1993.

18 Jan Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture*, New Haven and London, 1992, pp.47–49.

19 Johann Herder, *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, Riga and Leipzig, 1784–1791. First English edition: *Outlines of a Philosophy of the History of Man*, trans. T. Churchill, London, 1800.

20 Ernst Dieffenbach, *On the Study of Ethnology*, London, 1843, p.8. This was not a new idea. Samuel Smith had outlined the contours of such a map in 1789 in *Essay on the Causes and Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species*, London, 1789, pp.39–42, and James Cowles Prichard actually produced a set in 1843, *Six Ethnographical Maps*, London, 1843.

21 Charles Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, trans. Thomas Nugent, London, 1750; Johan Friedrich Blumenbach, *De generis humani varietate nativa liber*, Goettingae, 1781; Smith, *Essay on the Causes and Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species*; George Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Natural History, General and Particular*, trans. William Smellie, new edition by William Wood, London and York, 1812.

22 Johann Forster, *Observations Made During a Voyage Round the World*, London, 1778, p.361.

23 Alexander von Humboldt, *Examen Critique de L'Histoire de la Géographie du Nouveau*

Continent [Critical Examination of the History of the Geography of the New Continent], Paris, 1836–1839.

24 John Millar, *Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*, London, 1806, pp.8–9.

25 See, also, George Craik, *The New Zealanders*, London, 1830, p.382; John Nicholas, *Narrative of a Voyage to New Zealand*, London, 1817, I, pp.15, 16; Joel Polack, *Manners and Customs of the New Zealanders*, London, 1840, I, pp.6, 188.

26 Dieffenbach, *Travels in New Zealand*, II, pp.139–40.

27 William Yate, *Account of New Zealand*, London, 1835, p.106.

28 Robert Hay, 'Notices of New Zealand. From original documents in the Colonial Office', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, II (1831–32), pp.133–6.

29 Smith, pp.38, 43. Other examples include Morris Birkbeck, *Journey in America*, London, 1818, pp.116–17; Henry Fearon, *Sketches of America*, London, 1818, p.169; William Faux, *Memorable Days in America*, London, 1823, pp.312, 315, 389.

30 For example, Robert Gourlay, *Statistical Account of Upper Canada*, London, 1822, I, p.144; Robert Dawson, *The Present State of Australia*, London, 1830, p.324; James Cowles Prichard, *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind*, 4th edn, London, 1837–1845, I, pp.117–118; 'Public Health and Mortality', *Quarterly Review*, 66, 131 (1840) p.146.

31 Patrick Matthew, *Emigration Fields. North America, the Cape, Australia, and New Zealand*, Edinburgh and London, 1839, pp.19–24, 219–20.

32 Dieffenbach, *Travels in New Zealand*, I, p.2.

33 Herder, *Origins of Philosophy of the History of Man*, p.204.

34 Dieffenbach, *Travels in New Zealand*, I, pp.2, 3, 183.

35 *ibid.*, pp.175, 181–3.

36 *ibid.*, pp.219, 221–2, 236, 333, 335.

37 *ibid.*, p.5; Ernst Dieffenbach, *New Zealand and the New Zealanders*, London, 1841, p.iv.

38 Dieffenbach, *Travels in New Zealand*, I, pp.9–12, 190, 209.

39 *ibid.*, pp.227–8, 367–8.

40 Ward, *Information Relative to New Zealand*, p.49; Heaphy, p.26; *New Zealand Journal*, 8 May 1841; Henry Petre, *An Account of the Settlements of the New Zealand Company*, London, 1842, p.30.

41 *The Times*, 6 April 1844. Later writers who referred to or quoted Dieffenbach include William Fox, *The Six Colonies of New Zealand*, London, 1851, pp.51–52; W. Tyrone Power, *Sketches in New Zealand with Pen and Pencil*, London, 1849, pp.275–7, 279–80; Michael Russell, *Polynesia: A History of the South Sea Islands*, 2nd ed., London, 1852, p.433; William Swainson, *New Zealand and its Colonization*, London, 1859, pp.86–87; Thomson, II, pp.8, 200; Sarah Tucker, *The Southern Cross and Southern Crown*, London, 1855, pp.4(n), 7(n), 12(n), 202.

42 Dieffenbach, *Travels in New Zealand*, I, pp.76, 168–9, 276–7, 381.

43 *ibid.*, pp.26, 27, 29, 42–48.

44 See, for example, Paul Sandby, *XII Views in Aquatinta . . . in South-Wales*, London, 1775; Thomas Horne, *The Lakes of Lancashire, Westmoreland, and Cumberland*, London, 1816; William Daniell, *A Voyage Round Great Britain*, London, 1814–25.

45 'First Report to the New Zealand Company, on the Physical Condition and Natural History of Queen Charlotte's Sound, Cloudy Bay, Tory Channel, Port Nicholson, and the Surrounding Country', in John Ward, *Supplementary Information Relevant to New Zealand*, London, 1840, pp.107–9.

46 Dieffenbach, *New Zealand and the New Zealanders*, pp.27–28.

47 Dieffenbach, *Travels in New Zealand*, I, p.263, II, p.110.

48 Dieffenbach, *Travels in New Zealand*, II, pp.18–20.

49 *ibid.*, pp.152–3.

50 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London, 1992, p.52.

51 See, in particular, Dieffenbach, *New Zealand and the New Zealanders*, pp.24–30.

52 Dieffenbach, *Travels in New Zealand*, II, p.138.

53 *ibid.*, pp.14–15.

54 *ibid.*, pp.144, 149 (original emphasis), 151. This stark proposal would have resulted in Māori title being reduced to as little as 2% of the area of the country.

55 *ibid.*, pp.155–6.

56 Grove, p.481, n.7.

57 Dieffenbach, *Travels in New Zealand*, I, p.iv.

58 Dieffenbach, *Travels in New Zealand*, II, p.135.

59 A small sample would include Julie Codell and Dianne Sachko Macleod, eds, *Orientalism Transposed: The Impact of the Colonies on British Culture*, Aldershot, 1998; Antoinette Burton, ed., *Gender, Sexuality, and Colonial Modernities*, London, 1999; Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867*, Cambridge, 2002; Shearer West, ed., *The Victorians and Race*, Aldershot, 1996.

60 Henry Kames, *Sketches of the History of Man*, London and Edinburgh, 1778; Charles White, *An Account of the Regular Gradation in Man*, London, 1799; Johann Friedrich Blumenbach *A Manual of Comparative Anatomy*, trans., Johann Friedrich Blumenbach with additional notes by William Lawrence, London, 1827.

61 On the eclipse of the philanthropic interest, see Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-century South Africa and Britain*, London, 2001; or Andrew Banks, 'Losing Faith in the Civilizing Mission: The Premature Decline of Humanitarian Liberalism at the Cape, 1840–60', in Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern, eds, *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600–1850*, Philadelphia, 1999, pp.364–83.

62 On Arthur Thomson, see Michael Belgrave, 'Thomson, Arthur Saunders 1816–1860', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, URL: <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/> (updated 22 April 2002).

63 Thomas Carlyle, *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question*, London, 1853; Robert Knox, *The Races of Men: a Fragment*, London, 1850; Charles Smith, *The Natural History of the Human Species*, London, 1859.

64 Paul Kramer, 'Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and United States Empires, 1880–1910', *Journal of American History*, 88, 4 (2002), p.1322.

65 See, for example, Fox, p.16; Godfrey Mundy, *Our Antipodes: or, Residence and Rambles in the Australasian Colonies*, London, 1852, II, pp.105–7, 244; Richard Taylor, *Te Ika a Maui, or New Zealand and its Inhabitants*, London, 1855, p.253; Edward Fitton, *New Zealand: Its Present Condition, Prospects and Resources*, London, 1856, p.202; Charles Hursthouse, *New Zealand, or Zealandia, the Britain of the South*, London, 1857, I, pp.101–2; Thomson, II, p.309; William Swainson, *New Zealand and its Colonization*, London, 1859, pp.236–7, 273, 278.