

## Reviews

*Histories, Power and Loss. Uses of the Past — A New Zealand Commentary.* Edited by Andrew Sharp and Paul McHugh. Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2001. NZ price: \$40.00. ISBN: 1-877242-20-9.

NEITHER THE TITLE, the turgid cover description, nor even the editors' introduction gives any real hint of the historiographic iconoclasm that, to my delight, actually lies embedded between the covers. In spite of its presentational lack of self-consciousness, this book is the most significant collection of essays to appear in New Zealand for quite some time. It is a notable signpost along New Zealand's historiographic journey.

By far the most important essay is by W.H. Oliver. In my opinion it is one of his best pieces of writing. Oliver expresses openly what many historians have been saying in private for many years now — though he does it so much more cogently. His focus, or rather target, is the 'presentism' of the Waitangi Tribunal's historical interpretation. That is, the propensity of the Tribunal to impose today's social policy ideals upon unsuspecting people in the past, conclude that they failed to live up to these ideals, and accordingly judge them, and notably the Crown, harshly. But Oliver also flips over this 'coin of culpability' (p.13) to reveal the idea of a 'retrospective utopia'. That is, not only was the Crown guilty of not implementing the 'true' (i.e. today's) interpretation of the Treaty, but that had it done so, we would today be living in a more perfect world. It is implausible, he notes, to suggest that the fledgling colonial state from the 1840s could have implemented 'interventionist policies, governmental planning and direction, a pervasive and efficient bureaucracy, supra-governmental audit and review, and a dominant ideology of biculturalism, all designed to support an autonomous Maori society, polity and economy.' Not only is this an unlikely 'scenario for an acceptable colonisation; it is hard to avoid the conclusion that [the Tribunal] considers it to have been entirely feasible — that it could have been, as well as should have been, the case' (p.17). Love or hate what Oliver says, the point is that he has said it, eloquently, openly, and it cannot remain ignored.

Another notable essay is Te Maire Tau's 'Matauranga Maori as an epistemology'. In one sense it is a very conservative argument — simply that traditional Maori knowledge is a separate way of knowing, that it exist as its own system, and that any attempts to interrogate it using the tools of Western learning (such as History) are inappropriate and will pervert or destroy it. Yet it is also part of Te Maire Tau's broader and very radical argument that matauranga Maori cannot equip Maori to be successful in the modern world. That requires the additional yet separate embracing of secular, global scholarship. It is a great pity that this second aspect is not actually discussed in detail here, but has appeared separately as 'The Death of Knowledge: Ghosts on the Plains', in the *New Zealand Journal of History*, 35, 2 (2001). As with Oliver's contribution, this is thinking beyond the square. It is the bold engagement with such issues that enriches our historiography. Simply to agree or not, is not the point.

The editors highlight Lyndsay Head's 'The pursuit of modernity in Maori society' as the most 'powerfully revisionist essay' in the book (p.6). Certainly the essay may be controversial, but this is not quite the same as being revisionist. Her basic premise is that 'the Treaty has become the straitjacket of Maori history' (p.99). Her particular subject is the range of Maori responses to aspects of colonization, particularly about the time of war in the 1860s. She is concerned that modern 'Treaty' interpretations set attempts at Maori 'autonomy' as the 'organising experience of nineteenth-century Maori experience'. Maori who opposed the British 'are admired', those that did not 'are occasionally

demonised but more frequently ignored' (p.97). Head proposes a broader consideration of Maori motivation, particularly their willingness to engage in the possibilities, as they saw them, of 'citizenship' and especially the material, administrative and intellectual benefits (economic/technological, governance, literacy, Christianity).

This is thoughtful analysis, but hardly revisionist. If anything it is quite retro, certainly to the times before Treaty syndrome in the 1980s. If she said then what she is saying now, nobody would have taken exception. And indeed her ideas are also very reminiscent of some nineteenth-century interpretations of Maori strategy, for example John Gorst's interpretation of the King Movement as an attempt at engagement with Pakeha systems rather than a rejection of them. What makes Head's article significant, and I think it is a very significant contribution, is perhaps less any novelty in her views and more in the fact that it is cause for us to reflect upon the extent to which New Zealand's historical paradigms have changed so much in the past 20 years.

I have perhaps unfairly selected only three articles for comment, but they are the standout ones for me. Other contributions from Andrew Sharp, J.G.A. Pocock, Angela Ballara, Judith Binney, Mark Francis and P.G. McHugh all make useful contributions, making this, collectively, a most stimulating publication.

I notice some editorial sloppiness. Oliver has the *New Zealand Journal of History* wrongly starting in 1972, and Angela Ballara refers to the *Journal of Pacific Studies* when in fact it should be *Journal of the Polynesian Society* (n.40).

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*Waitangi and Indigenous Rights: Revolution, Law and Legitimation.* By F.M. Brookfield. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2000. 253 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 1-86940-184-0.

AS DAVID BARAGWANATH STATES in the foreword: 'This is a timely book', no less so if this review is a little late. The book offers some expert and in-depth analysis into the very heart of what most people simply (often unquestioningly) assume is the legitimacy of our democratic constitution. Internationally the West is crusading for democracy as actively (and brutally) as it ever has, and issues of national self-determination are a major focus of international attention.

This work is so timely and contains such a wealth of legal knowledge and solid thought that a review of a few hundred words hardly does it justice. It is a highly detailed book, richly flavoured with case law and underpinned by an expert understanding of the legal process. Every page or two provokes such thought that reading it is slow going, though rewardingly so. The first part builds the concepts of revolution and legitimacy, and the second applies them to the experience of New Zealand.

This book works from a definition of revolution that is broad, in fact, probably too broad, embracing peaceable and gradual change. While interesting, the definition teases the reader a little — what, for example, becomes of the great, distinctive, sudden and violent revolutions of 1789 or 1917? If all but the absolute preservation of the status quo is revolution, does the word not begin to lose its meaning?

It is an unfortunate sounding example, but I have always thought Hitler's rise to power was a revolution in Germany, yet no one calls it such and Hitler himself, after the Munich Putsch of 1923, deliberately sought a constitutional path to power. Does this not bring us right to the issue? Brookfield may be right, the assumption of British sovereignty in 1840 may well have been more than Maori conceded in the Treaty and this is a useful field of debate in itself. Brookfield argues that the pre-1840 constitution (based on hapu/