

Maori Oral Narratives, Pakeha Written Texts

TWO FORMS OF TELLING HISTORY



THIS ESSAY is about two different forms of transmitting history, oral and written.¹ My beginning is Albert Wendt's theme, 'We are what we remember; society is what we remember'.² There have been two remembered histories of New Zealand since 1840: that of the colonizers, and that of the colonized. Their visions and goals were often different, creating memories which have been patterned by varying hopes and experiences. The Maori oral histories of these events have been largely suppressed histories, although they live in their own world. In the twentieth century it is the European written histories which have dominated. Mohe Tawhai accurately predicted, while considering whether or not to sign the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, that the sayings of the Maori would 'sink to the bottom like a stone', while the sayings of the Pakeha would 'float light, like the wood of the wau-tree, and always remain to be seen'.³

Maori forms of recording history were, and in some regions still are, primarily oral. Oral history is transmitted by narrative, by song (*waiata*), by proverb (*whakatauki*), and by genealogy (*whakapapa*). We who write down our histories in books transmit our chosen perceptions to readers rather than to listeners, but both forms are structured, interpretative, and combative. History is the shaping of the past by those living in the present. All histories derive from a particular time, a particular place, and a particular cultural heritage. The life of any good written history in Western European culture may itself be only ten to 15 years before its subject matter is liable to be reinterpreted by another generation of writers. The life of an oral narrative may be much longer — generations — but all its verifying details, its participants, and even its central mythic cell (its symbolic intent, sometimes expressed through parable) may have been altered. It will continue changing, and be changed, as surely as textual history. In these shifts, as in historical rewriting, oral accounts convey an inevitable subjectivity, as well as a new objectivity, which enables people to see the past, and the present, afresh.

People living in an oral tradition often come from the past into the present when they explain the present. The pivotal place where this is done in Maori society is the *marae* and its meeting-house. In the *korero* spoken on the *marae* and within the walls of the house, history is shaped. There is, then, a continuous dialectic between the past and the present, as the past is reordered and the present reinterpreted. The cycle of traditions about the people, land and events is dynamic, not static. For the Maori, the past is seen as that which lies before one, '*nga ra o mua*', the days in front. It is the wisdom and the experience of the ancestors which they are confronting and seeking to interpret. The words of the

ancestors exist still in memory, wrought into oral tradition, and they themselves can be encountered as they appear to the living in dreams. ‘Nga kupu a nga tipuna’ or ‘nga kupu tuku iho’, the words and phrases of the ancestors, take on new meanings in new contexts.

In listening to the voices of the colonized, rather than the observations and reports of those who were the colonizers, a gap in perceptions soon becomes apparent. As Gillian Chaplin and I talked about Rua Kenana and, subsequently, Te Kooti Arikirangi we came to understand this with ever greater awareness.⁴ The focus of attention is different; the sympathetic identifications are different; the encrustation of meaning around events is different. What for the Prime Minister in 1908, Sir Joseph Ward, was a minor, tricky political negotiation with a troublesome leader of Tuhoe, was for Rua a ‘Ceremony of Union’ between himself and the Crown, a ritual which had been formally enacted and had, therefore, fundamental obligations for both parties. The final assessment, or what it all meant, was inevitably different.

It is only relatively recently that Western-trained historians have come to realize that they have been perpetuating colonialist attitudes in their so-called objective histories. At the same time, these histories have served, to a considerable extent, to erase Maori memories and perceptions. As the great-granddaughter of the nineteenth-century prophet Te Kooti said about her ancestor:

I didn’t know anything about him. I used to hear how he was a rebel and all that, and I didn’t think I was connected to him. Because we weren’t encouraged to talk about Te Kooti and whatever he did, if he was a good man or bad man. We weren’t. This was at home. I was in Standard VI [in 1928], and we were asked to write about Te Kooti and, well, I didn’t *know*. I didn’t know anything about him. I went home and talked about it, and was told to forget it. ‘Don’t worry about it! It is over! Finished.’ I went back and told them [my parents] that my headmaster was threatening to strap me. Because I didn’t know anything about Te Kooti. And I asked them — *then*. My mother said, ‘Oh well, it is too late now’. And she started telling me who we were, who he was. My grandfather was there and she said, ‘That is his son sitting over there.’ I must have been about fifteen then.⁵

Her family history was suppressed because of shame. The overriding interpretation taught in Poverty Bay about her great-grandfather was, as she said, that he was an ‘arch-rebel’.⁶

But quite other traditions had survived in the oral narratives and the waiata of Te Kooti. They convey quite different perspectives; other ways of seeing. They are, among the Ringatu, who are the followers of Te Kooti, the main means of conveying their history. These oral traditions coexisted alongside the written accounts of the victors. It is they which carry the Ringatu understandings.

In the oral narrative forms what have survived are not so much directly political stories (although these do exist, particularly among men) but family myth-narratives. These are the histories which establish the particular relationship between Te Kooti and the family’s own ancestors. Maori history is structured around kin. Whanau (the extended family) and hapu (the functioning tribal unit) are the basic concerns of Maori history. It is the whanau which

gives identity to the individual, and the tipuna, the ancestors, are the source, in turn, of its mana. History is told in these terms. It is defined by family and by whakapapa. It is concerned with the holding and the transference of mana by successive generations.

To attempt to cross the frontiers of European history and to gather oral narrative histories requires, therefore, an understanding that the narratives will be structured for their own purposes. The people with whom I have talked in recent years are those who have grown up within the Ringatu tradition. This means that they have most commonly been brought up by their grandparents (or other close kin), who had lived with Te Kooti. 'These old people' had perhaps been prisoners with him on Wharekauri, one of the Chatham Islands, between 1866 and 1868, or had ridden to him to learn about the new faith when he was sheltering with Ngati Maniapoto in the King Country between 1872 and 1883. It is these tipuna who link the living individual into the myth-histories which surround Te Kooti.

I can tell my own story about my great-grandmother, because she was a follower of Te Kooti. Well, I come from the Bay of Plenty. That's how I know — my great-grandmother — she was a staunch follower of Te Kooti. When she was a young woman, they transported her with all the other Maoris around Gisborne to Chatham Islands. Whakarau they call them. My great-grandmother was one of the whakarau [the captives]. I remember her saying to me when I was a girl, oh, they were driven from Opotiki on the buggies to Poverty Bay, all the Ringatus in those days. Oh, it was sad. They were taken to the wharf, and Captain Porter⁷ was with the soldiers in those days, the red coats she calls them, 'nga hoia koti wherowhero — koti toto' — eh?⁸ And she calls, 'Captain, captain!' 'Hurry up, hurry up! Go on the boat. Go on the boat!' And Te Kooti called out to that fellow, Porter, 'When I come back (in Maori), when I come back I will slay you!' Which he did, when he did come back . . . They were there for about two years. Then she came back. . . . She was with him too, for a little while, at Te Kuiti [living in exile]. Then when her first husband died she went back to Torere. She brought us all up; four generations she brought up.

She was a makutu old lady, and I didn't realize it until I grew up and they told me that my great-grandmother had some mana. Some power. She could destroy, you know. You did something wrong against her, she just prayed. Some kind of prayer that she uses, and it reacts on to that person . . . That mana was given to her by Te Kooti. Te Kooti bestowed it upon her.⁹

This woman's focus here is that her own knowledge, and her right to speak, derives from her great-grandmother. Her account conveys an alternative history, the perspectives of the whakarau. It opens up other worlds of causation.

In a similar manner, her husband recounted the narrative of his grandfather, Te Hira Uetuku, and Te Kooti.

My grandfather, he went there [Te Kuiti], in 1878. There was a lot of confusion with this land, Mangatu. So they said over here, 'Go and see Te Kooti'. So he went to see Te Kooti, and when he got there — Te Kooti had a habit of misleading people to test you at all times to see how good your faith is. Well, he was going there and tell Te Kooti, 'Oh, what's going to happen to this land that belongs — that my great-grandfather has fought for? What's going to happen to it?' In other words, he's going there for his family in preserving and maintaining his rights to the land. So Te Kooti said to him, 'Well,

now that you're here, I see you people are very tired — here's a bottle of whisky.' And my grandfather — well, his friends all got that bottle of whisky, all had a drink, but my grandfather refused. My grandfather said, 'No. I came for a purpose and my mission is about the land. Mangatu.' Then, I think he put a curse on the ones that already had a drink of that bottle —

Heni: That's my family! My people! They're all dead now!

Ned: Te Kooti said, 'Oh well, I'll give you something — he mauri. He mauri mo te whenua.' Pertaining to some powers unknown to us. That he will preserve your rights to the land. So my grandfather never talk about this thing. But I hear a lot of others — outsiders — talking about it. 'Cos it is believed that it was part of the diamond that Te Kooti used — to go through the dense bush at Te Wera. And those that followed him saw it. It was in the form of a lamb: the diamond. Some say that it is a portion, or part of it, broken off from that, and given to my grandfather to bring back and plant it on Mt Maungahaumi[a]. That is the mauri, to hold and preserve the family in the years to come. It was told to Te Hira's father, old Pera Uetuku Tamanui. Te Kooti said to him, 'You can sell the rest of Mangatu, but don't ever sell the mountain. Hold the mountain. Because that mountain in days to come, well, your great-great-grandchildren will have a footing. It's better that than having no land.' So, Te Hira said to Te Kooti, 'Well, you can see my horse is used up. It's been a long ride from Mangatu to here, to Te Kuiti.' — Te Kuiti, by the way, is named to decipher things — for 'hei kuiti nga tikanga o te iwi Maori' — if any problems between the Maori people, well, Te Kuiti was the place for it. Hei kuiti nga tikanga o te iwi Maori. We have parliament members to decide things for the people, for the running of the country. Te Kuiti was named on that principle for the Maori people — so my grandfather said to him, 'Oh, you can see my horse is used up. He'll never do this trip.' So Te Kooti said to him, 'Well, you've got a mission and it's got to be fulfilled. Take my horse.' I believe my grandfather was the only one, apart from Te Kooti, rode that horse. The white horse. It took him only a day to come from Te Kuiti to Maungahaumia and back again, to fulfil his mission.¹⁰

This narrative establishes this family's relationship both to the prophet and to their land. It shows the Maori practice whereby history was, and still is among the Ringatu, conceived as an extension of mythology. Many of the narratives about Te Kooti endow him with super-human powers, which are believed to have been given to him by God. In this story Te Kooti tested Te Hira and, when he had proved himself, gave him the mauri, the diamond, to protect the tribal mountain. Te Kooti thus bestowed upon this family's tipuna his protection, and a portion of the diamond which is, in this narrative, identified with the sacrificial Lamb of God. The diamond therefore carries a multitude of meanings. It is not only an image of hidden wealth, or power to be recovered in 'the days to come'. It recreates the quintessential image for the Maori world, Te Ao Marama, the world of light and knowledge, and it specifically asserts through its biblical reference the salvation of the people in the 'days to come'.

The ancestors share in these divinely bestowed powers. The narratives tell of their mana, and also convey a predictive view of history which assures that the people's autonomy will be restored, as the wheel turns, and the past is renewed in the present.

The actual form of the narratives is like a fan. At the apex is the core narrative, which establishes the whanau's link to the prophet-leader, his teachings, and his particular Words for them. From this apex flows the history of the family, through two or three generations to the living. Some of the family histories are

similar and, indeed, they may share a 'core' narrative. But the ancestors about whom the history is told are always their own.

Genealogy is the backbone of all Maori history. Critical narratives may therefore be rearranged, in both time and place, around the appropriate ancestors. Maori oral narrative history is obviously concerned with its own leaders. They may not necessarily be those who have been particularly noticed in the European world. There will also be conflicts between narratives, as whakapapa and kin order their priorities and their truths. Maori history is agonistic, and old conflicts will be refought in words, as anyone who listens to whaikorero on the marae will know. It is, therefore, extremely difficult simply to insert an oral tradition into a written text which purports to deal with the same events.

For example, one of the favourite devices in all oral narrative traditions is the riddle. The riddle is a form of structuring, like the parable, which enables new meanings to be found in old stories. A riddle is a test for the listeners as well as for those in the story. In the story the task is usually set by those with access to knowledge which is ultra-human in its source. The answer will only be discovered by those with faith. Here is a riddle told concerning the successful escape of the whakarau from the Chatham Islands in 1868. In this story, the Archangel Michael sets a task for the prisoners:

And before, Te Kooti referred to this Angel, Michael, coming to rescue them. He said to them, 'Look, here's a stone! I want you people to eat it. If your faith is good, you can do it.' So I believe old Penehau put it in his throat — almost choke — couldn't get it down — too big! So, they had a session with one another. 'How we going to eat that stone?' Just saw old Pene trying to perform, how to swallow it — it won't work! So, all right: 'Let's all put it to God. Tell God to help us.' And when they went to sleep it was given to one of them in a dream. He woke up startled, and he said, 'I've got it! I've got it! I've got it!' And they all woke up and said, 'What? Oh, how to eat that stone.' And he got that stone and pounded it into dust. Got it all into dust and he gave you a bit. That's how we were told.

Heni: That's the sharing. That's right. 'Cos my great-grandmother ate that stone.

Ned: 'Cause Te Kooti said, 'You people got to swallow that stone.' But they couldn't find an answer. But in a dream, after their prayers, the Lord blessed them. This particular person was given the understanding. Everyone of them had a bit. So they were rescued [from Wharekauri].¹¹

In this manner, the understanding of the mystery, the solving of the riddle, gave the prisoners their deliverance.

The systems of explanation which are embedded in the narrative traditions create the mental world which the people inhabit. Their decisions and actions — their 'history' — are all influenced by their systems of belief. Rua Kenana's first wife, Pinepine Te Rika, became a tapu woman. She became tapu from about 1905, the time when she, according to the oral narrative traditions of the Ihairaira, the followers of Rua, climbed the sacred mountain of the Tuhoe, Maungapohatu. She later told people of her experiences on the mountain, and this narrative has become a part of the oral tradition of the next generation: Ana, ka moe au i te tama a Pinepine ia Te Whatu, ana, ka korero mai te mama ki au ana, i

te raua pikinga ki Maungapohatu, te maunga. Penei noa te whanau i o te rori ne, he kohu hoki. E toru pea ana okiokinga ka eke raua ki runa i te papatahi i runa. Ka korero mai a Pinepine; i te mea naku ka korero mai ki ahau, kare a korero ki etehi . . . Ko te mea ke ra hoki, ko te taimana. Koia ke ra hoki te piki a Tai raua ko Mami ki reira. Na ra e korero mai ana a Mami ki au, ana, na Te Atua tonu a Tai i tono kia haere ki reira, kia piki, mana e arahi, ana, ka kite ia i Te Karaiti raua ko tana tuahine i reira, i te maunga ra.

Well, I married the son of Pinepine, Te Whatu, and his mother told me when they climbed Maungapohatu, the mountain. The road was only this wide, and foggy. She must have rested about three times before they reached the flat on the top. Pinepine said she would not relate this to any other person but me . . . It was that thing, that diamond, that was the reason. That was the reason Tai [Rua] and Mami [Pinepine] climbed up there. Mami was telling me that it was God indeed who sent Tai to go there, to go to the top. He must take the lead. Then it was s/he saw Christ with his (Christ's) sister there, on that mountain.¹²

From this moment Pinepine was set apart. She could not cook food for herself, because cooked food violates the state of tapu, or the state of being under the influence of the gods. Te Puhi said Pinepine was, for a time, always carried outside the pa for her meals, and her hands were always washed before leaving. She had to be fed with feeding sticks, or from her own ratao (platter of leaves) by Marumaru, her female companion. Pinepine was tapu because she had seen what Rua had seen: the hidden diamond. The diamond is, again, the mauri whenua, the guardian of the land and the people, the Tuhoe, and it is the symbol of their hidden mana. In some narratives it is said to have been placed there by Te Kooti; in others it has always been there. But it was Te Kooti who covered it with his shawl ('horo'), or, alternatively, the tartan rug that is particularly associated with him. As a tapu woman, Pinepine also lived apart from her husband, unlike all Rua's other wives. Equally, she was seen as King Solomon's wife, Pharaoh's daughter, who lived apart in her own house.¹³ Pinepine, then, lived in a world which was ordered by a framework of thought that was both Maori and scriptural in its origins, and which can be explained only by reference to the narrative of the vision on the mountain. Pinepine died in 1954.

Te Kooti created this body of thought, and the actions it has successively generated. He was not the only Maori leader to possess and transmit such a world view. All the major prophet leaders of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have created histories which are predictive in the telling, and hermeneutic in their systems of resolution. For the Ringatu, however, it is Te Kooti who is critical and, indeed, he created a faith which has endured. The old Ringatu matakite (seer) and tohunga (reader of signs) Eria Raukura, who came from inland Poverty Bay, explained that it was on Wharekauri, where both he and Te Kooti were imprisoned from 1866 to 1868, that the two traditions were joined in a revelation by the angel Michael to Te Kooti. The Maori lineage he stated as deriving from the spiritual encounter of the ancestors with Io, when they arrived at Aotearoa. These were 'the things of the past', 'nga mea a muri nei', which were joined with 'the first things', 'nga mea tuatahi', or the prophetic sayings from Abraham until Christ. 'Te hononga', Eria called

it,¹⁴ or the marriage of two predictive views of history, and of two perceptions of the present as a cyclic renewal of the past. All the Ringatu explanations of history derive from this conjunction of thought. They assert an overarching interpretation of events in a testimonial form of telling history: that is, where the predictive words of the prophet-leader, or ‘nga kupu whakaari’, are fulfilled in other, apparently discrete events. The events give testimony to the words. This predictive form of telling history is found particularly in oral societies, and it infused the Bible. As Walter Ong has commented, the orality of the ‘mindset’ in the biblical texts is overwhelming.¹⁵

The oral narratives which surround Te Kooti are concerned with the future, restored, autonomy of the people in their land. They assert that Te Kooti’s powers were derived from God, and they demonstrate how he shared his powers, his mana atua, with those who followed him. He gave them taonga — precious objects and precious knowledge. These powers are temporary, and are held only in trust. They can be used for good, or for ill; that is their burden. So ‘history’ constantly tests the leaders, and the people: and that is what the narratives are about. They assert the separate nature of the authority of the Maori leaders from that of colonizers. The Maori mana preceded the colonizers, and the narratives state that it is upheld by God, through his prophets.

An account given by one of Rua’s followers tells how the divinely bestowed power of Te Kooti was transferred to his successor. This mana was held for a while, in trust, with the chiefly leader and tohunga of Waimana, Te Whiu Maraki:

Te Kooti had this thing of God. And he said to this old man, Kuku — Te Whiu — ‘I’ll give you something to keep in your hand. Keep it for safe.’ And Te Whiu says, ‘What is that?’ ‘Oh, the life of the whole of the Waimana people. Something to look after them.’ Te Whiu says, ‘All right. I’ll have it.’ So he gave that thing to Te Whiu. And when Rua came, trying to be God, when he came from Maungapohatu out to Waimana, well, the day they left Maungapohatu, he told a man to go and run ahead of him and get Te Whiu to give this thing that Te Kooti gave him. So this man rode down to Waimana, and he went to Te Whiu and asked him for that thing. Te Whiu said, ‘No, he won’t have it. I’m going to keep it for myself.’ So this man rode back and met Rua at Tawhana, that night, and Rua says to him, ‘Well, how you got on?’ ‘Oh, he won’t let you have it. That’s his own keep.’ ‘Oh.’ So — Rua says to this man, ‘Tomorrow morning, you ride out ahead of us in to Waimana and tell him to give you this.’ So, next morning he went. The rest of the people came after. When they got to Matahi, they met there. Rua asked him, ‘Well, what is it?’ ‘He won’t give it to you. You’re not the Son of God.’ So Rua says, ‘Oh well, I’ll go in myself tonight.’ And then, that very night, this old man told his daughters and his son, Te Maipi, ‘That thing has gone out of my hand. That’s the man all right — coming. Rua.’ So in the morning we all gather up to Tataiahape and wait for him. ‘That’s the man. This thing in my hand has gone. He’s got it now.’ In the morning, this man Rua used to send before him, he came up and was waiting for Rua to tell him what to do that morning. When Rua came, he said, ‘It’s all right. Let your horse go. I’ve been there last night. I got it in my hand.’ So he had it . . . That thing — he got it from Te Whiu. It’s got a bit of a share for the people. That’s my way of thinking.¹⁶

In the Maori oral histories the tribal or family heroes are unique, yet the stories may be similar. This similarity is evident in the discrete accounts of

Te Hira Uetuku of Ngariki, the ancient hapu of Maungahaumia, and of Rua, whose mother (from whom he traced his descent) was from Tamakai-moana of Maungapohatu. At the heart of each narrative is the diamond; and at the heart of each is the protection Te Kooti bestows upon the people. But the tipuna are their own, and each narrative is a statement of *their* mana.

You might ask further about Eria Raukura, as I once did of a Tuhoe elder. He replied angrily, 'Eria! What do you want to bring him in for? He's from Waimaha [on the other side of the Urewera ranges]. He'll makutu you!'¹⁷ Eria, and the narratives which placed him as a matakite were local, and I was on the wrong side of the mountains. At Tataiahape in the Waimana valley, where I was, Eria was a threatening force because he had broken from Rua. Eria had been baptized by Te Kooti in 1881 as the leading tohunga to teach the faith, and was, therefore, a major figure in Ringatu history. He had originally endorsed Rua as Te Kooti's successor, and he died only in 1938. But despite being part-Tuhoe, he 'belongs' to the Gisborne side: so do not ask about him in the Bay of Plenty.

Different histories, then different heroes. In the oral form of telling history, the narrative *belongs* to the narrator. This can be seen most clearly when the narrator tells the story as events in which he or she participated, but which occurred before the narrator was born. Paora Tuhaere, the nineteenth-century Ngati Whatua chief, told Percy Smith: 'My home was Muriwhenua, it was my permanent residence because my ancestor lived there. Later I left Muriwhenua because of this murder [which he had described]. Then I tried to revenge myself and Hokianga's people were defeated and I took possession of the old country [Hokianga]. Because of this battle the whole of Hokianga was finally taken by me . . . and I lived in the country because all the people had been killed.'¹⁸ All these events occur-red long before Tuhaere was born.

This form of narration was common in the accounts given orally in the Maori Land Court in the nineteenth century. While I have not encountered people describing and inhabiting a past before they were born, I have encountered the personal presence of the narrator in events in which they were not physically involved. The accidental shooting in 1925 of Henare, Rua's only son by his rangatira wife, Te Akakura Ru, when Henare was about 15 years old, shattered the whole community. It has been described to me by several people. Sometimes, they were the only person who witnessed the accident. The event has become a part of the life of the narrator. This is not merely dramatic emphasis, nor for the sake of telling a good story. It is what has been aridly called the 'kinship I',¹⁹ and it reaches not only into the past but into the future as well: 'Thus it is that I am born in you'. To be a Maori, as the Ngati Rereahu elder Henare Tuwhangai observed in the 1985 documentary programme on 'Te Maori', is to share the world with the tipuna and the whanau. Consequently, history is told in these terms.

The oral histories will cluster around the immediate ancestors of the living whanau. Most of the ancestral stories recorded by Elsdon Best from Tuhoe at the beginning of this century have now passed out of local tradition.²⁰ The focus of the whanau ancestors has moved down the whakapapa. Thus the old stories drop out, or are reworked around the different ancestors. The whanau

is effectively the two or three generations back from the present family: a time span that most people can recall. A few of the narratives will, however, pass into the wider 'oral tradition'. They will, in turn, evolve. Thus the story of Rua and Pinepine on Maungapohatu has passed into Tuhoe oral tradition and is known among all Iharaira families. But when Te Puhi narrated it, she still emphasized that she knew the history only because Pinepine, her mother-in-law, had told her. Her identification of her source, Pinepine, was her means of stating the veracity of the narrative. Other versions, also stated as deriving from Pinepine, have already developed significant differences. *Whaitiri*, the early Tuhoe ancestress and deity of lightning, is present in Heta Rua's version of this narrative,²¹ as well as in Te Puhi's. But it is only in Te Puhi's account that Christ is also present with his 'sister' ('*tuahine*'), *Whaitiri*, on the mountain top.

That oral narrative histories are not the prerogative of the men and the formal oratorical domain is already evident. In Maori society, women are important purveyors of family history and its values. The inner strength of the *whanau* derives from the women. As Heni Sunderland of the Rongowhakaata people commented, 'Without a doubt, it is the women who have the strengths. Within the extended family and out onto the *marae* as a *whanau* as a whole, you will find it is we, the women, who are the ones who really motivate our men. They wouldn't like me saying that, but I do think that.'²² The women are also usually the composers of the *ori*, the lullabies written for children by which they are taught the history of the *whanau* and the *hapu*. It is the women, therefore, who are the first conveyors of history.

For them, the experience of childlessness, or *wharengaro* — the house destroyed — is to be most feared. A high post-neonatal infant mortality has occurred with a remorseless frequency among Maori families for much of this century. Its occurrence is often attributed to a fault, and it may also be seen as having been predicted for the family. Ancestral history will be searched for an explanation. The solution, it follows, must be sought in faith and ritual. As one woman explained:

My first one was what you call a premature. Just lived a week. I was riding horses and that, not knowing how it goes. What to expect. The first one is hard . . . I had John, my second one, right on here, right on this corner [of the meeting-house] . . . He was seven months old when he died — at Maungapohatu. Then the old people had to go around, saying something about it, eh, losing your kids. Quite a few of us, as they said. That's the *wharengaro*, losing your child. It goes in the family. A *wharengaro* is a family that doesn't conceive. What child they have, it dies.

So my family all got together. And that's why I got my third one. Old Tuhua, he was the eldest on my mother's side, in that family. He's the eldest of the *Pari* family — the *Te Rika*'s. There was another family that had lost about, how many? — four, five kids. That's why I said it comes in our *Te Rika* family. It was all done in the one time, same time. These two families got together at the same time. Got all to agree to one thing. You have got to be all of one mind, not one pulling one way, one pulling the other. Tuhua came down, and they asked him. It was 1944. Each one had to get an offering, a *koha*, for their own family. He looked through the line of the family. It's always there; it's like a curse. And once you understand, then you get kids.²³

In this very personal account (here abridged), the interpretation and the human actions are derived from a larger frame of understanding which is essentially Maori. It rests on the perceived conjunction between the past and the present, and between the ancestors and the living.

The oral, myth–narrative tradition, encrusting meaning around events, has clearly survived to the present day. It has survived most particularly among people who were brought up in the small rural communities, which retained their own cultural and religious identity for much of this century. But it has also survived in other environments. The Maramatanga tradition within the Roman Catholic church, developed in the 1920s and 1930s and revived again in the 1960s, also retains systems of historical explanation which stem from a cosmology where the spirits of the dead, the wairua, are considered to be the media of communication between God and man. These ancestral spirits explain and direct ‘history’ for the living.²⁴ The Maramatanga faith is centred in Levin, north-east of Wellington, and Ohakune. Its followers are active in Maori affairs at a national level. They ‘are not marginal individuals, alienated from the mainstream of Maori society. Their ready access to all important currents, their central and pivotal positions cannot be ignored.’²⁵ They are considered important within the Kingitanga, and within the Ratana movement. Their iconography and their religious beliefs form a system whereby they manage to keep the Pakeha domination at bay.

This brings me back to the central problem for a Western historian. First, Maori oral history is not merely another source of information, nor even of perception. The purposes of the oral narrative tradition are to establish meaning for events, and to give a validation for the family’s and the group’s particular claims to mana and knowledge. Some pivotal family histories may develop as the hapu’s structured histories. They will be told, for a purpose, on the marae. An awareness of the structuring of the oral narratives also makes one very aware of the responsibilities engendered in recording oral history.

The primary responsibility must be to those with whom you have talked. It is *their* history. In the areas in which I have worked, individuals and families have allowed me to record some of it, because they share my view that recording is important. Maori history can then be communicated to Maori who no longer have access to it. I write here with an awareness of the positive responses among the Tuhoe and other Maori to a written history, based to a considerable extent on oral accounts, of Rua.²⁶ Secondly, the transmitting of Maori perceptions allows the colonizers to see the perspectives of the colonized — a necessary step so that the dominant culture changes its attitudes about its possession of ‘truth’.

The integrity of the various oral histories has to be retained when they are transmitted in a written form. These accounts are focused quite differently from the linear history, or diachronic order, of the European historical tradition. Anthropologists have mostly tried to maintain the integrity of such world views by a synchronic approach. For the historian this is an inadequate approach, as it is for the anthropologist wrestling with the problems of cultural transformation. The contradictions in what constitutes history — oral and written — cannot be resolved. We cannot translate other histories into our own. We can merely

juxtapose them.²⁷ The structures and the events have been bonded, culturally, in time and place. We need to remember, too, that the European forms of writing history can be considered to be just as subjective in their criteria of what is important and what is relevant as the oral forms.

Maori oral narrative histories convey what is seen to be the essence of human experience to the people who are living. As the Samoan historian Malama Maleisea has commented, if there *were* a truth, there would be no histories.²⁸ Or equally, as the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe put it, in his evocative novel about the colonization of his country, *Things Fall Apart*, 'There is no story that is not true . . . The world has no end, and what is good among one people is an abomination with others.'²⁹ He was writing of the coming of the whites to the Igbo of Nigeria.

To incorporate Maori oral traditions into written history, then, is not a task to be undertaken easily. Yet there is currently much demand for 'Maori' history from the community. If it is to be undertaken it must be with the awareness that its concerns are probably different. The primary structuring of the recent Maori oral history is family history. But if family and genealogy, whanau and whakapapa, order Maori history, so notions of causation and consequence — which transform chronicle into explanatory history — are equally cultural. In the Ringatu Maori world, they are derived from a very ancient cosmological framework, one where divine forces intervene in this world. Witi Ihimaera's novel *The Matriarch* evokes this powerful conjunction of myth with history.³⁰ Such a view is not unique to the Ringatu. The lineage of prophetic tradition and the acceptance of the power of matakite infuses all the major Maori movements, religious and political. The old cosmogonic traditions have been interwoven with the biblical hermeneutic traditions of telling history by a succession of Maori prophet-leaders in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, of whom Te Kooti was only one of the more important. Today, all Maori movements trace their descent from this lineage of the prophets. The ideology which these narratives convey offers solutions to the problems that Maori still face in their own land. The 'telling of history', whether it be oral or written, is not and never has been neutral. It is always the reflection of the priorities of the narrators and their perceptions of their world.

NOTES

Originally published in the *New Zealand Journal of History*, 21, 1 (1987), pp.16–28.

1 A version of this paper was first given as a talk to the Friends of the Alexander Turnbull Library in October 1985.

2 Opening address, Pacific History Conference, Suva, July 1985.

3 *Great Britain Parliamentary Papers*, 1845, XXXIII (108), p.10.

4 See the introductions to Judith Binney, Gillian Chaplin, Craig Wallace, *Mihaia: The Prophet Rua Kenana and his Community at Maungapohatu*, Wellington and Auckland, 1979, and Judith Binney, Gillian Chaplin, Nga Morehu: *The Survivors*, Auckland, 1986.

5 Conversation with Hei Ariki Algie, Manutuke, 26 November 1983. It will be noticed that this quotation (and others which follow) differ slightly from the versions cited in either *Nga Morehu* or in *Mihaia*. In *Nga Morehu*, in particular, the narrative thrust was maintained in the transcription and editing of several interviews from different occasions; the quotation here is from the original transcript. One of the problems of transmitting oral accounts in written form are the decisions which have to be taken about removing repetitions, false starts, and diversions, which, if all were retained or indicated, would leave the accounts prolix, discursive and punctuated with multiple deletion marks.

6 See for example W. Hugh Ross, *Te Kooti Rikirangi: General and Prophet*, Auckland, 1966, p.1. To an extent this view of Te Kooti is revived in Maurice Shadbolt's novel *Season of the Jew*, London and Auckland, 1986. At the same time, Shadbolt portrays a deeply critical view of many of the colonists and the militia leadership at Poverty Bay, and of the corrupting influence of the pursuit of vengeance by both Pakeha and Maori.

7 There is a confusion in this narrative between Captain Thomas Porter and Captain Reginald Biggs, both of whom were instrumental in having Te Kooti sent into exile. Te Kooti subsequently killed Biggs in reprisal.

8 'the soldiers with the red coats — bloody coats'.

9 Conversation with Heni Brown, Whatatutu, 14 February 1982.

10 Conversation with Ned and Heni Brown, Whatatutu, 14 February 1982.

11 Conversation with Ned and Heni Brown, 14 February 1982.

12 Conversation in Maori with Te Puhī Tatu, Maungapohatu, 22 January 1978. Transcription and translation by Rangī Motu.

13 The scriptural text from which this identity was taken is I Kings 7:8.

14 Paora Delamere, Poutikanga of the Haahi Ringatu, Manuscript Notebook, n.d., private collection, pp.34–35.

15 *Orality and Literacy*, London and New York, 1982, p.75.

16 Conversation with Hillman Rua, Rotorua, 21 May 1978.

17 Conversation with Horopapera Tatu, Tataiahape, 27 January 1978.

18 cit. J. Prytz Johansen, *The Maori and his Religion in its Non-Ritualistic Aspects*, Copenhagen, 1954, p.36.

19 *ibid.*

20 Jeffrey Sissons, 'Te Mana o Te Waimana. Tuhoe History of the Tauranga Valley', PhD thesis, University of Auckland, 1984, p.165.

21 Told on two occasions, 18 May 1978 and 23 May 1982, and cited in Judith Binney, 'Myth and Explanation in the Ringatu Tradition', *The Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 93, 4 (1984), pp.359–60.

22 Gisborne, 11 May 1984.

23 Conversation with Miria Rua, Tuapo, 7 May 1984.

24 Karen Sinclair, 'Maramatanga: Ideology and Social Process among the Maori of New Zealand', PhD thesis, Brown University, 1976, p.215.

25 *ibid.*, p.166.

26 *Mihaia*, 1979, 2nd ed., 1990.

27 Sissons comments intelligently on these dilemmas in his Tuhoe history, pp.169, 418.

28 Pacific Studies Conference, University of Auckland, August 1985.

29 London, 1984, p.99.

30 Auckland, 1986.