REVIEWS

The Making of New Zealanders. By Ron Palenski. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2012. 382pp. NZ price: $45. ISBN 9781869407261.

This is an interesting book which makes a bold case for the existence of national identity in New Zealand's past – as a real, living and embodied force that has shaped (and by implication continues to shape) the lives of New Zealanders since European colonization commenced. This identity, as author, sports writer and now historian Ron Palenski argues, was itself autochthonous and indigenous, created in and of New Zealand and New Zealanders, and has been particularly evident from the last third of the nineteenth century. No doubt *The Making of New Zealanders* (with Spencer Levine's quirky cover featuring various colonial cultural icons) will be welcomed by readers who find comfort in the national identity thesis: the idea that New Zealand – and New Zealanders – can lay claim to a distinctive essence and collective sense of self that sets our little country and its peoples apart from the rest of the world. This is not surprising. Almost every country seeks a cohesive narrative that serves to bind its peoples together; after all, this is the mission of nationalist history. And in the nineteenth century, too, national solidarity achieved through stories of becoming was the objective of much history writing.

Recently, historians of New Zealand – including the author of this review – have interrogated the strong nationalist bent of much New Zealand history and historiography. Taking inspiration from the work of New Zealand historian Peter Gibbons and the postcolonial impulse of the 'new' imperial history, many of those who contributed to *The New Oxford History of New Zealand* (2009) challenged the narrative of New Zealand's past as one of evolving national identity. Drawing on a range of subjects, timeframes and sources of evidence, these historians argued that New Zealand trends, practices and attitudes – of which national identity was one – problematized rather than reified the New Zealand nation state. We suggested that national identity was more rhetoric than reality and needed to be contextualized against a much less insular canvas than had been undertaken previously, at least within the genre of New Zealand national history writing. Palenski engages very briefly with this counter-narrative, summarized in this book as the idea that 'national identity is a wholly white male construct and therefore flawed because it excluded women and Māori' (p.305), by arguing that national identity benefited women (the female franchise) and that Māori had a stake in this project because they contributed to its construction (war and sport).

At first blush, it is not entirely clear how Palenski's book, based on his 2010 doctoral thesis, takes the debate around national identity forwards. Given that the narrative is primarily concerned with events post-Treaty, that the historical experiences of those Sinclair (in *A Destiny Apart*) aptly termed 'the peripheral majority' – that is, women, Māori and children, and to this we could add labourers, migrants and 'others' – are not addressed, and that the text sidesteps the cultural and social turn that has shaped much international and local historical scholarship over the past two decades, what does this book contribute? In one sense this book gestures a return to the concerns of 'big history', with a consequent focus on the sway held by political and economic historical narratives. While *The Making of New Zealanders* (surely an allusion to Belich's *Making Peoples*?) purports to tell our story, it is never really clear who the 'New Zealanders' are; but we do know who they are not. What this book does achieve, however, is to put the national identity debate front and centre of our historical consciousness and for that contribution alone, regardless of its other novelties, we should welcome this addition to the conversation around New Zealand's place, sense of self and historical trajectory.

Palenski's thesis relies on a number of central pillars; each one is described as an expression of an emergent or fully blown national identity. The making of a singular communications

network in the late nineteenth century, the telegraph lines that threaded together the disparate dotted settlements, and then the forging of a singular time zone across the colony (the introduction of New Zealand Mean Time in 1868), fused the six little colonies of New Zealand together as one. Palenski also suggests that this common time zone especially helped to distinguish New Zealand from the Australian colonies, though noticeably the existence of separate time zones across the Tasman has not prevented claims to a singular national identity in this country.

Palenski points to the key role played by the press in mid- to late nineteenth-century New Zealand (specifically increased networking between newspapers in the colony) in consolidating the existence of national identity. This was accompanied by a decrease in the dependence on imported news items and a parallel increase in the prominence of local news stories. Hard on the heels of tighter communications came the explicit symbols of national identity; the kiwi, moa and Māori were, Palenski argues, stitched into literature, visual and literary emblems (and the national anthem) as exemplars of commonly held views of a shared national consciousness. Many of these works 'celebrated' the distinctive Indigenous culture as 'New Zealand's unofficial symbols came from the country's flora and fauna and from Māori – symbols which were provably distinctive to New Zealand and could not possibly have been confused with anywhere else' (p.105). Peter Gibbons's argument that the unauthorized incorporation of Māori signs, symbols and motifs into the new colonizing lexicon was in fact a form of cultural vandalism is all too quickly dismissed here; this glossing over is surprising given the contemporary relevance of indigenous claims to intellectual property ownership of cultural products and ideas, not only in New Zealand but further afield.

Palenski tackles the issue of New Zealand exceptionality (that is, was New Zealand really different?) and answers in the affirmative. To the usual list of distinctive traits (geography and physical isolation, Māori representation in parliament from 1867, the female franchise from 1893 and the socially progressive reforms which characterized the Liberal years in power) he adds that ours was not a penal colony. All this, he argues, contributed to a type of exceptionalism, not quite in the Fairburnian style, but idiosyncratic nonetheless. Much space is also devoted in this book to sport and war (the South African war in particular) and the ways in which each of these not only helped shape national identity, but were evidence of a tacit pre-existing identity of the nation that found its most public and painful expressions in these arenas. Given Palenski's interest in sports, and especially rugby union, it is not surprising that we read of this in some detail.

I have two main concerns about this book. The first is that for all the emphasis regarding the distinctive element Māori provided to New Zealand's national identity, Māori people, their communities, histories and perspectives on the past are accorded scant attention. It is as if they are only viewed through the prism of the collective national consciousness. This can be the only explanation for statements such as the following: 'The Māori, as with other strands of nationalism, were a point of positive difference between New Zealand and, especially, the Australian colonies; as much a distinctive part of New Zealand as its mountains and rivers' (p.8). Palenksi clearly sees the acquisition and ownership of national identity as a self-conscious act, as 'the process of identifying oneself with a nation state in the sense of belonging and allegiance' (p.304). Perhaps because this was a European nation state framed by a European sensibility, Māori simply did not elect to subscribe this identity.

My second anxiety is that much of the argument focuses on defining New Zealand national identity not by what it is, but by what it is not. Taking a cue from British historian Linda Colley, Palenski argues throughout this book that New Zealanders are not Australians. The debates around Australian Federation, for instance, singled out New Zealand's discrete sense of itself; our rejection of the invitation was resounding and clear: it was a way of New Zealanders saying they were not Australian. That New Zealand was not a penal colony has already been noted, but, as this book argues, we were also not British, which we went to great

lengths to affirm through successive military campaigns and sporting encounters, both on and off New Zealand soil.

The Making of New Zealanders is a valuable contribution but must be read with with some qualifications and one important caveat. Palenski defines national identity as tangible, real and identifiable, but then goes on to suggest that historians should put to one side differences of interpretation regarding this national identity. He enlists Arthur Marwick's aphorism that concentrating on the differences of interpretation of the past misses 'the main purpose of historical study: deepened understanding of the past' (p.306). If this is meant to suggest that defining or critiquing national identity is off-limits, and that we should accept it and move on, then I would question the purpose of history. Surely, the historian has a responsibility not to be just a cipher, time-traveller or a conduit to the past, but should always place a critical lens on the past in order to better understand ourselves, our present and (dare I say) even our future.

GISELLE BYRNES

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Poenamo Revisited. By John Logan Campbell with essay and notes by R.C.J. Stone. Godwit/ Random House, Auckland, 2012, 664pp. NZ price: $45. ISBN 9781869797980.

This handsomely produced book, enhanced by the reproduction of numerous paintings and photographs of early Auckland, was reissued to commemorate the centenary of John Logan Campbell's death. First published in 1881, *Poenamo* has long been considered a 'New Zealand classic'. What the reader-cum-historian should make of this curious mixture of exotic travelogue and playful reminiscence is discussed below, but it certainly is a good read. Campbell provides an interesting if sometimes mischievous account of how a young man of 'good family' moved across the globe to make even more money and secure greater fame in a rapidly developing colony. After establishing that he had connections with the 'baronets' of the Highlands, Campbell reveals that his father, like himself, was trained as a surgeon in Edinburgh. Such upbringing and training guaranteed young John a comfortable livelihood, but lured by a sense of adventure he set off on the *Palmyra* to try his luck in Australia, possibly as a sheep squatter. By accident he met one William Brown in Adelaide, who persuaded Campbell to give up squatting and instead join him as a trader in the proposed new colony of New Zealand.

Initially the two Scottish would-be entrepreneurs with modest capital settled at Waiau or Coromandel, but soon moved to Motukorea (Brown's Island). There they waited to see if rumours that Governor Hobson would move the capital to Auckland were true. Even before Auckland was officially established in September 1840, they made good money from trading with local Māori iwi, especially Ngāti Whatua, Ngāti Paoa and Ngāti Tamaterā. Once Hobson made the move south from the Bay of Islands, Campbell and Brown prospered from being the earliest traders and merchants in Auckland.

Campbell described this world as a kind of unspoilt Arcadia leaching out extensive Māori gardening and pā building in the area. At the same time he deliberately raised the profile of the indigenous people, whom he genuinely admired for their hard work, enjoyment of trade, and enthusiastic engagement with capitalism. The dual Māori/Pākehā economy, revealed in more recent research carried out by the likes of Manuka Henare, Paul Monin, Vincent O'Malley and Hazel Petrie, helped Campbell and Brown make rapid fortunes. Campbell also commented on Māori custom in much the same mode as Frederick Maning in *Old New Zealand: A Tale of the Good Old Times* (1863). Yet despite his admiration and some understanding of Māori beliefs