Settler colonial history, commemoration and white backlash: remembering the New Zealand Wars

Vincent O’Malley & Joanna Kidman

To cite this article: Vincent O’Malley & Joanna Kidman (2017): Settler colonial history, commemoration and white backlash: remembering the New Zealand Wars, Settler Colonial Studies, DOI: 10.1080/2201473X.2017.1279831

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2017.1279831

Published online: 22 Jan 2017.

Submit your article to this journal

View related articles

View Crossmark data
Settler colonial history, commemoration and white backlash: remembering the New Zealand Wars

Vincent O’Malley and Joanna Kidman

HistoryWorks, Wellington, New Zealand; School of Education, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

When students from a North Island secondary school began a petition to Parliament in 2014 seeking a national day of commemoration for the victims of the New Zealand Wars, they sparked a national debate about how, why and whether New Zealanders should remember the wars fought on their own shores. Although the petition attracted significant support, it also drew its share of criticism. This paper considers the subsequent debate through the lens of public submissions to Parliament on the petition. A particular focus is on the nearly three-quarters of submissions that opposed the petition. These are examined within the context of wider Pākehā (non-Māori) unease at the unravelling of settler colonial forms of national identity since the 1970s, and the emergence of more nuanced and diverse kinds of identification. For many Pākehā New Zealanders these developments were deeply troubling. The backlash that followed was one that harked back to what some Pākehā saw as simpler, more homogenous and harmonious times. By contrast, the young New Zealanders responsible for organising the petition highlighted the need for a more honest owning up to the nation’s settler colonial history.

KEYWORDS

New Zealand Wars; Māori; national identity; memory studies; youth activism

One day there will be a backlash – the fact that people like me who tend to be non political are protesting probably indicates that the backlash will come quite soon.¹

In 2014 a group of young students from a secondary school in a small town in the central North Island of New Zealand decided to start a petition to Parliament calling for a national day of memorial for the victims of the New Zealand Wars (1845–1872) fought between various indigenous Māori communities and the Crown in the mid-nineteenth century. From these modest origins has emerged a national debate about how, why and whether New Zealanders should remember the wars fought within New Zealand. This paper considers the ensuing debate through the lens of public submissions to Parliament on the petition. A particular focus is on the nearly three-quarters of submissions that rejected and opposed the petition. It situates these within wider Pākehā (non-Māori) unease at the unravelling of settler colonial forms of national identity since the 1970s, and the emergence of more contested and conflicted patterns of group identification.

CONTACT

Vincent O’Malley vincent.omalley@historyworks.co.nz HistoryWorks, PO Box 27-043, Wellington 6141, New Zealand

© 2017 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
As older myths and conceptions concerning New Zealand’s history began to be systematically dismantled, many Pākehā New Zealanders found these developments deeply troubling. The backlash that followed was one that harked back to what some Pākehā saw as simpler, more homogenous and harmonious times.

The Ōtorohanga College petition

During the summer of 2015 a group of young people and their supporters delivered a 12,000-signature petition to the New Zealand Parliament calling for a statutory day of recognition for the ‘New Zealand Land Wars’. They also called for this troubled period of New Zealand’s history to be officially included in the secondary school curriculum. The organisers were a group of Māori and Pākehā students from Ōtorohanga College, a rural secondary school in the Waikato district of New Zealand, who mounted the petition after a school visit early in 2014 to Ōrākau and Rangiaowhia, the sites of two particularly brutal clashes that took place 150 years earlier as part of the Waikato War (1863–1864). The largest and most significant of the New Zealand Wars, the Waikato conflict saw over 12,000 Imperial troops and their colonial allies attacking a heavily outnumbered civilian population bereft of the artillery and other advantages available to the invading force. Under these circumstances, the Waikato tribes and their allies, who had coalesced around a Māori King in 1858, giving rise to allegations of subverting British sovereignty, suffered heavy casualties, sometimes (as at Ōrākau and Rangiaowhia) in highly controversial circumstances. Rangiaowhia, for example, was considered a place of refuge for women, children and the elderly as a result of which the attack on the settlement, early on a Sunday morning in February 1864, was condemned by Waikato Māori as ‘kōhuru’ (murder). A hut deliberately torched by troops as its occupants were burnt alive added to the outrage.

Meanwhile, at Ōrākau more than half of the defenders were killed, most after attempting to flee for their lives on foot when breaking out from their fortified position after three days without food, water or ammunition. Among their number were female prisoners bayoneted in cold blood. Survivors of the war retreated south to an area that became known as the ‘King Country’, leaving the government to confiscate over 1.2 million acres of more valuable land in Waikato. A once thriving Waikato Māori economy was destroyed almost overnight and generations of tribespeople condemned to lives of poverty as a result. Illness, disease and starvation were ever-present threats in the years immediately following the war. But the longer-term legacy of the conflict was no less painful for the Waikato tribes.

Yet this history was little known or acknowledged outside the descendants of those attacked. The story of the conflict is not widely taught in New Zealand schools; many of the historic sites have been obliterated to make way for roads and others that survive are not even signposted. When the sesquicentenary of the Waikato War was marked in 2013–2014 the occasion passed by most Pākehā New Zealanders largely unnoticed. That was perhaps not surprising given that, according to one estimate, government spending on the sesquicentenary was less than 1% of the equivalent budget earmarked for World War I centenary commemorations.

During the school tour, local Māori elders joined the group, which numbered 186 students aged between 15 and 18 years, teachers and community members, and recounted tribal memories of the violence that had been waged against their forebears. The trip had
been organised by teachers at the College, some of whom had strong associations with local iwi (Māori tribes) in the area. Their initiative in taking the students to these historical sites was also a relatively unusual one. Various versions of New Zealand history are taught in secondary schools but there is no formal requirement to do so and it is left largely to schools and individual teachers to decide what, if anything, will be included. As a result, in a high-autonomy and non-prescriptive curriculum environment, New Zealand history is infrequently taught in great detail and the more difficult and violent aspects of New Zealand’s colonial past are often omitted from school learning programmes. In this respect, the decision on the part of the Ōtorohanga College teachers to join forces with local Māori to talk to the students about the conflict was an original way of tackling some of the public silences surrounding those events. Most of the young people had little previous knowledge about what had taken place and the visit made a profound impression on them. As Leah Bell, one of the petition organisers, later wrote,

[t]he tragedy of the NZ land wars explain [sic] an important part of why we are, who we are, and how we came to be. […] Since that on-site history lesson, things have developed within our college that we never imagined, had never thought about, and probably believed were impossible. None of us know exactly how the idea of a petition to the House of Representatives for a remembrance day was born, as in whose idea it was, but on that day in Ōrākau we, along with others, were launched into action.

It was, Bell later recalled, ‘shocking to hear that there were massacres half an hour from where you live, not that long ago’.

In the weeks following the school visit, the young people began to organise the key objectives of the petition, which included a call for national day of remembrance for the New Zealand Wars and for the subject to be taught in schools; the latter was an idea the New Zealand Ministry of Education was to firmly oppose when the petition eventually reached a Parliamentary Select Committee. Three central aims behind the petition were identified when public submissions were called for, these being to ‘raise awareness of the Land Wars and how they relate to local history for schools and communities’; to introduce these ‘local histories into the New Zealand Curriculum as a course of study for all New Zealanders’ and to ‘memorialise those who gave their lives on New Zealand soil with a statutory day of recognition’. The petition quickly gained support from other young people in the region and news of the students’ activism spread more widely as the organisers, working closely with Māori tribal and local community groups, made astute use of social media, such as Facebook, and sought hard-copy signatures at community events. As the petition gathered momentum, several national and regional organisations, schools and communities also stepped forward in support. The petition became a rallying point for those seeking to promote greater public engagement with the wars fought in New Zealand and for broader awareness of the history underpinning the modern Treaty of Waitangi claims settlement process.

**Presenting the petition to parliament**

In December 2015, the Ōtorohanga College students, Waimarama Anderson, Leah Bell and others, along with a large contingent of supporters from around the country and flanked by television cameras and media crews, took the petition to Wellington where they
formally presented it to Parliament. The petition was passed to the Māori Affairs Committee for consideration and a call went out for public submissions. While the petition organisers’ actions were widely supported, a nationwide debate was sparked about how the New Zealand public remembers, and forgets, the devastating nineteenth-century assaults that were waged by the Crown against Māori people in the forging of the New Zealand nation.\(^{15}\)

A small but vocal response was swiftly mounted by individuals and organisations who lobbied and campaigned against the petition. While the number of people in this camp was modest in comparison with the petition’s 12,000 supporters, their heated opposition is an indication of deeper anxieties in New Zealand settler society that are triggered when public silences surrounding the violence at the heart of the colonial nation-building enterprise are broken. Blee and Creasap argue that conservative or right-wing social movements often coalesce when people perceive their relationship with the nation-state and their status within it as being under threat from other groups.\(^{16}\) In settler contexts, the politics of white backlash often become highly ethnicised as attempts are made to curtail the visibility of those who challenge cultural beliefs or public silences about the colonial past and it is for this reason that we explore the anatomy of this particular backlash.\(^{17}\)

By the deadline in late April 2016, a total of 189 written submissions had been lodged; 49 supported the petition; 138 opposed it; and, two submissions were unclear or ambiguous.\(^{18}\) Those in favour of the petition generally used discourses of reconciliation and healing to make their case arguing that widespread ignorance about New Zealand’s colonial history has contributed significantly towards ongoing tensions between Māori and Pākehā New Zealanders in the present. Susan Healy, who identified herself as a Pākehā supporter of the petition, wrote of the colonisation of New Zealand,

> I think that there has been suppression of this history and it has brought harm to Pakeha and Maori and the nation as a whole. For all of us to have a respect for and awareness of the tangata whenua [indigenous people] of our area and awareness of their long relationships into the land, will build our sense of relationship to the land, and increase our sense of pride and identity through that relationship. Knowing the history of the struggles over land since colonisation is another means of embracing our history and working for true reconciliation.\(^{19}\)

Supporters of the petition also pointed out that the wars had had a major impact on the development of New Zealand and were therefore of historical importance. A national day of memorial, and teaching the history of these wars in schools, would from this perspective provide appropriate acknowledgement of the significance of these conflicts. In this way a renewed national identity would be forged through bicultural reconciliation.

**The petition’s opponents**

Those who opposed the petition, on the other hand, were unconvinced by this view of the past and expressed strongly worded concerns that New Zealand’s history was being radically rewritten to support the views of interest groups associated with the Treaty claims process:

> One reason for my opposition is the way documented and factual New Zealand’s [sic] history has been rewritten through the Treaty of Waitangi settlement process and historical
revisionism which is to support a particular ideology. The revisionist historiographies coming out of the Waitangi Tribunal include half-truths, misinformation and propaganda.20

Many of these submitters contended that revisionist histories were promulgated by groups within Māori society, described variously as ‘separatists’, ‘radicals’, ‘troublemakers’ and cultural ‘elites’, who they claimed were motivated by ‘greed’, ‘ignorance’, power or a desire to foment civil unrest. As one person wrote,

New Zealand is being ruined by the deceitful rewriting of history by elite Maori and those who seek to change the facts in exchange for money. It is driven by greed and nothing to do with the average person on the street. Someone needs to stop the lies.21

These opponents perceived the petition as being deeply divisive. Many within this group expressed a strong conviction that Māori historical narratives have been disproportionately favoured and indulged by successive governments and as a result Māori now hold the ‘whip hand’ of representational power. In this respect, they followed the line taken by many other conservative social movements that reject political explanations of civil disharmony and social break-down in favour of ‘reductive culturalist’ accounts.22 Lentin suggests that this is a form of culturalisation that eschews historical or political interpretations of social and political unrest and focuses instead on dissatisfaction with state ‘diversity’ initiatives or politics. As one opponent of the petition wrote,

Surely it is long overdue that we take a rational approach to how we spend our tax dollars and what we celebrate in public holidays? This constant and relentless barrage of demands by these people is blatantly obvious to all it seems but those in salaried positions in state-run departments. New Zealand is not a pluralistic society and there is no room for this continued lurch into apartheid.23

Many other opponents of the petition expressed similar views and were especially vocal about the possibility of future unrest. Their concerns centred on the belief that Māori ‘separatists’ were introducing historical narratives that promoted cultural values and practices that would undermine the possibility of a uniform or cohesive national culture and identity:

New Zealand’s history is increasingly losing touch with the facts (and qualified historians) and is increasingly based on activists’ opinions. This is very evident in the emotional language and creative stories now being used in the re-telling of the land wars history. Separatists seem to be using such stories to drive racial wedges between citizens and support more claims for race-related government hand-outs. It is not in New Zealand’s interests to give separatists any more airtime. As a nation, we need to stop supporting these constant and creative efforts to stir up trouble. Our country has done so much that is right, we need to start praising that. New Zealand needs to look to the future and commit to uniting and celebrating our country and all its citizens.24

These opponents of the petition sought to assert a ‘colour blind’ version of national identity that rejected what they saw as apartheid-style categorisation into Māori and Pākehā subgroups. It was time, they asserted, to stand together as one people and one nation (a call echoing the name of one of the leading anti-Treatyist organisations, the One New Zealand Foundation). In fact, a number of the petitions were couched in similar, and in some cases near identical language, reflecting an organised campaign on the part of prominent anti-Treaty advocates.25 While this helped to produce a greater
number of submissions against the petition than were received in its favour, the relatively
small number of petitions overall serves as a reminder of the marginal or fringe status of
these groups within New Zealand. Don Brash may have taken anti-Treatyism mainstream
with his 2004 Ōrewa speech (discussed below). But a decade or more later proponents of
the same views struggled to gain any real traction for their stance.

Several submitters argued that the petition was based on factually inaccurate versions
of history and that the conflicts of the nineteenth century were more a matter of the
Crown quelling tribal rebellions that threatened the rule of law. As one submitter wrote
(employing language echoed in many other submissions):

A ‘land wars’ day in New Zealand would be a misnomer and inappropriate. A more apt name
would be ‘tribal rebellions day’ signifying how those tribes fighting the Crown were in rebel-
lion, refusing to recognise the Crown’s sovereignty, as ceded by the chiefs under the Treaty of
Waitangi. It would be both inappropriate and a travesty to memorialise those in rebellion
against the Crown as recognised under the Treaty.26

Ironically, many historians tend to also reject or question the ‘land wars’ label as an out-
dated one, preferring to follow the lead of James Belich (and, much earlier, James
Cowan) in describing these conflicts as the New Zealand Wars, since land was only one
of the factors behind the wars.27 But this is one of the few points of (coincidental)
common ground, with the anti-petition submitters steadfastly rejecting the last 50
years’ historiography as unreliable and tendentious ‘revisionism’. And so, the idea that
Māori did not cede sovereignty under the Treaty, but rather understood the Crown to
have been granted a more limited ‘kāwanatanga’ (governance) role is ignored, as is the
notion that there was no rebellion against the Crown.28 Although an official commission
of inquiry had partly endorsed this latter view as early as 1927 (concluding, e.g. that Tar-
anaki Māori ‘were treated as rebels and war declared against them before they had
engaged in rebellion of any kind’),29 anti-Treatyism of the kind reflected in the submissions
opposing the petition is grounded in a selective reading of a small number of sources and
not on a comprehensive grasp of the wider history.30 That kind of selectivity is helpful in
this instance, given the difficulty involved in branding an early twentieth-century royal
commission of inquiry as part of a ‘politically correct’ campaign of historical revisionism.

A number of the submitters were themselves confused about the battles waged during
the colonial era, with several mixing up the Musket Wars that took place between 1818
and the 1830s with the later New Zealand Wars.31 Their confusion over the nature of
the conflicts ironically served to highlight the need for precisely the kind of changes to
the education curriculum that the petitioners were calling for (although an analysis of bio-
graphical information contained in the anti-petition submissions suggests that a dispro-
portionately large number came from older Pākehā males).32

Others drew on a familiar, if discredited, rationale for settler colonial actions in the nine-
teenth century, creating a false equivalence between the New Zealand Wars and the
earlier supposed conquest of mainland Moriori by ethnically distinct Māori colonisers.33
Benevolent settler colonisation was also a focus of some of the submissions, again con-
trasting this with pre-contact Māori society. In this regard, several submitters made a
point of mentioning Māori cannibalism.34 According to one submission:

When Europeans arrived and settled in this country they brought with them 2 thousand years
of knowledge and culture. They found one of the worst, most savage and primitive tribal mob
of cannibals ever seen anywhere. Indeed, these tribal misfits were still beating each other over the head well into the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{35}

Objections were also raised on what might be described as practical grounds. Some submitters feared that creation of a national day of commemoration would open up fresh wounds and grievances, giving rise to a further round of calls for compensation and settlement. Others argued that Waitangi Day or Anzac Day was the appropriate time to acknowledge the New Zealand Wars or pointed to the cost and inconvenience involved in creating another public holiday. And some submitters argued that it was time to look forward, rather than living in the past.\textsuperscript{36} A variant on this involved highlighting the difficulties involved in establishing precisely what had happened during the New Zealand Wars when there were so many contrary accounts of particular events, while others accused those in favour of the petition of in effect being guilty of the sin of presentism for wanting to impose the values and standards of today on another era.\textsuperscript{37}

### A New Zealand Wars day

Prior to the Māori Affairs Committee reporting back on the petition organised by the Ōtorohanga College students, the government decided to jump the gun and make its own announcement. On 19 August 2016, New Zealand’s then Deputy Prime Minister, Bill English, announced that a national day of remembrance would be set in place. In a speech to Waikato-Tainui on the day that the Crown returned a portion of the Rangiriri battle site back into Māori ownership, English told those assembled that,

> The time [has come] to recognise our own conflict, our own war, our own fallen, because there is no doubt at Rangiriri ordinary people lost their lives fighting for principle in just the same way as New Zealand soldiers who lost their lives fighting on battlefields on the other side of the world.\textsuperscript{38}

It was soon clarified that this would not be a public holiday and that the selection of the day would be a matter for negotiation with iwi leaders from those tribes involved in the New Zealand Wars in the nineteenth century. Mindful of avoiding the focus on a single war or battle, tribal representatives indicated their preference for a date that is not the anniversary of any particular engagement but rather would be set aside to remember all of the conflicts within New Zealand.\textsuperscript{39} This would not displace local commemorations of significant events, such as Parihaka Day (5 November), marking the anniversary of the 1881 invasion by the Armed Constabulary of the Taranaki settlement of Parihaka, where prophets Te Whiti-o-Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi had led a campaign of non-violent resistance to land confiscations.\textsuperscript{40} In October 2016 it was announced that 28 October had been selected as the date for the national day of commemoration.\textsuperscript{41} As iwi representatives had previously signalled, it did not mark the anniversary of any battle. Instead, this was the date in 1835 when northern rangatira (chiefs) had first signed the document known as the Declaration of Independence (or in Māori as He Whakaputanga), asserting the sovereign authority of Māori over New Zealand. In this way, the date serves as a reminder of the autonomy and authority that Māori fought to protect during the New Zealand Wars.\textsuperscript{42}

The backlash has continued, although opponents of the petition have struggled to gain widespread support for their views. In 2016 a new organisation known as ‘Hobson’s
The Pākehā backlash

For much of the twentieth century, European New Zealanders (Pākehā) liked to boast that they lived in a nation with the greatest ‘race relations’ in the world. That view was reinforced in school text books such as the widely distributed Our Country’s Story (1963), which claimed that there was ‘no country in the world where two races of different colour live together with more goodwill towards each other’. Reconciling such a viewpoint with the grim reality of state-directed invasion of Māori communities, followed by sweeping land confiscations, in the mid-nineteenth century required a degree of national myth-making. From the early twentieth century, New Zealanders were encouraged to believe that the heroism and chivalry both sides were said to have demonstrated during the New Zealand Wars had eventually provided the basis for better, rather than worse, relations between Māori and Pākehā. As the journalist James Cowan wrote in his hugely influential 1922 history of the wars, these had ‘ended with a strong mutual respect, tinged with a real affection, which would never have existed but for this ordeal by battle’. And so, somewhat perversely, with the benefit of hindsight many Pākehā in the first half of the twentieth century saw the New Zealand Wars as a cause for celebration, even appropriating heavily mythologised versions of them as part of the national narrative.

But as historians and Māori activists started to cast these wars in an altogether more negative light by the 1970s, this older myth became much more difficult to sustain. Now that it was no longer acceptable to celebrate the wars, many Pākehā became distinctly nervous whenever these were mentioned. An ‘uncomfortable silence’ instead descended over the topic, at least within mainstream Pākehā circles, and when this was challenged in ways that middle New Zealand deemed disquieting, significant controversy often resulted. James Belich’s groundbreaking work on the New Zealand Wars – highlighting Māori military achievements and the Victorian-era legacy that consistently downplayed this – was acclaimed by fellow scholars when first published in 1986. But the response to a five-part documentary series based on the book that screened on New Zealand television in 1998 was much more mixed. Belich had struck a raw nerve, exposing the underbelly of local settler colonialism in a primetime slot and to a huge audience. Not all viewers were grateful for the history lesson, with some condemning the series as politically correct ‘nonsense’ that sought to denigrate their Pākehā forbears while exaggerating Māori military genius and nobility. As one author of a letter to the editor of a local newspaper commented, ‘It was not until seeing this programme that I realised that, last century, all the Europeans were wicked, or stupid or cowards, or all of those. Similarly, that the Maori were noble and clever and brave.’

This backlash against revisionist accounts of New Zealand history fuelled responses to (and reflected) wider public unease at developments since the 1970s, including the...
establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975 as a permanent commission of inquiry charged with investigating Māori claims under the Treaty of Waitangi and its empowerment a decade latter to consider historical claims dating back to 1840. Critics came to dub this the ‘grievance industry’ or the ‘Treaty gravy train’, a process they believed was aimed at securing taxpayer money for tribal groups through spurious claims invented with the assistance of historians and lawyers. The Tribunal has been forthright in its approach to the past. In its 1985 Manukau Report, for example, the Tribunal concluded that ‘all sources agree that the Tainui people of the Waikato never rebelled but were attacked by British troops in direct violation of Article II of the Treaty of Waitangi’.53 Although many Pākehā came to at least accept (even if grudgingly) the necessity for such a claims process when confronted with the Waitangi Tribunal’s stark findings, for the hardcore who rejected it outright, support for their stance was to be found in an alternate view of the nation’s past. This ‘anti-Treatyist’ viewpoint claimed to uncover the true or suppressed history of Māori and Pākehā relations.54

Far from having valid historical claims against the New Zealand Crown, Māori had, these critics argued, actually received special treatment.55 In this conception, the settlement of New Zealand was almost uniquely benevolent, and those who challenged such a view only needed to look across the Tasman Sea to Australia, where the Aboriginal population had by contrast been treated appallingly.56 This served to underline the supposedly virtuous nature of settler colonialism in New Zealand – a view notoriously reinforced in an article that asked why ‘race relations’ in New Zealand were better than in South Africa, South Australia or South Dakota.57 From this stance, Māori who queried their status as the beneficiaries of benevolent colonialism were simply being ungrateful, or denying the facts of history, especially when their ‘miserable’ and ‘barbaric’ lives prior to British intervention were contrasted with the enlightened and kind treatment they received afterwards, in effect (as these writers believed) lifting Māori out of their wretched pre-contact existences. British settler colonialism, they maintained, ‘saved Maori, not only from themselves, but from some other less humane coloniser’.58

The notion of Māori as privileged has gained support from other quarters and at times has been adopted by politicians intent on running populist, dog-whistle campaigns. In January 2004 the then leader of New Zealand’s National Party delivered a blistering speech to members of the Ōrewa Rotary Club in which the official leader of the Opposition attacked what he characterised as race-based privileges for Māori, combined with a ‘Treaty grievance industry’ constructed on the basis of a distorted and politically correct version of the nation’s history. Don Brash’s call for ‘one law for all’ struck a chord with many disgruntled voters, and National, previously languishing in the polls, recorded an immediate and dramatic leap in support in the aftermath of the Ōrewa speech. Soon, a rattled Labour government was promising its own crackdown on any policies that supposedly ‘privileged’ Maori, even though they more or less consistently ranked near the bottom of a broad range of socio-economic indicators.59 In the context of the time that kind of inconvenient empirical evidence mattered less than the perception that Māori were a uniquely privileged people.

For many Pākehā New Zealanders an emphasis on historical Māori grievances, and even on ethnic or racial differences, cut across an imagined national identity that was both harmonious and homogenous (in much the same way that, as Paulette Regan has shown, exposure of the true horrors of Canada’s residential school system on First Nation
communities cut across foundational myths as to the peaceful settlement of that country).\textsuperscript{60} And that was reflected in the ongoing resistance of many non-Māori New Zealanders to even identify or accept being labelled as Pākehā (a long running myth had it that the term originally meant ‘white pig’ or ‘bugger off’).\textsuperscript{61} Even statisticians came under pressure from those insisting that ‘we’re all New Zealanders’. In the 2006 census a ‘New Zealander’ category was added to the ethnicity question, even though this is not a meaningful ethnic category (in previous censuses respondents who had written in ‘New Zealander’ under the ‘Other’ category were classed as ‘New Zealand European’, Pākehā not having made its way into the forms either, except fleetingly in 1996).\textsuperscript{62}

For some Pākehā, deliberately mispronouncing Māori place names is almost a point of honour. Politicians courting a particular segment of the voting populace sometimes appear to do likewise in order to signal their own alignment with its values. Television and radio newsreaders attempting to articulate Māori place names correctly have historically generated considerable correspondence to newspaper editors in recent decades.\textsuperscript{63} And proposals in 2009 to correct the meaningless city name ‘Wanganui’ – a legacy of early settler efforts to commit the local Māori pronunciation of the place name to paper – were met with such an outcry from those who argued that the misspelling was the way they had always spelt it that the government opted for a compromise solution allowing both this and the linguistically correct ‘Whanganui’ to be used according to preference (before in 2015 eventually ruling that the latter was the sole correct and official name).\textsuperscript{64}

Meanwhile, many Pākehā have called for Waitangi Day, the national holiday on 6 February each year marking the signing in 1840 of the Treaty of Waitangi between the British Crown and Māori chiefs, to be replaced by Anzac Day as the national day. Whereas Anzac Day is perceived as a straightforward celebration of heroic sacrifice and other desirable national traits, the Waitangi anniversary is seen by many Pākehā as divisive, complicating efforts to celebrate the nation through awkward reminders of a more troubled past. As Sarah Maddison has noted in relation to Australia, the collective guilt that awareness of such a past conjures can lead some members of the dominant group to forms of outright denial. In this way, ‘a seemingly unproblematic desire to feel good about the group or nation to which one belongs can lead to the development of explanations and justifications for immoral and unjust actions in the past’.\textsuperscript{65}

Although New Zealand has not experienced its own, full-blown ‘history wars’, for Pākehā troubled by reminders of past internal conflicts, proposals to memorialise these in various ways, including a national day of commemoration, constituted yet another front on which it was necessary to push back against the assault on older, simpler and more rosy conceptions of national identity. Enough is enough, they declared.

**Forging new national identities**

Although the number of people actively opposing the petition was small, their views can be seen to carry more weight than this might otherwise imply. References to Māori cannibalism, and to the ‘primitive’ nature of pre-contact Māori society, in some of the submissions could be seen as representative of the extreme end of a Pākehā backlash against developments in New Zealand society over the past 40 years that have seen Māori viewpoints and interests accommodated to a limited extent after more than a century of marginalisation and dispossession.\textsuperscript{66} If many New Zealanders have welcomed
this trend, and supported moves such as the payment of limited redress to Māori tribes in compensation for historical land losses and other breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi, for others these actions have been deeply discomforting.\textsuperscript{67} While 55\% of respondents to a 2011 survey agreed with the statement that the Treaty of Waitangi ‘is New Zealand’s founding document’, for example, 21\% disagreed and a further 24\% gave a neutral opinion (on a sliding scale of one to five).\textsuperscript{68} For some (but certainly not all) older Pākehā brought up to believe that they lived in a land of racial harmony, the movement towards recognition of Māori interests has been especially troubling. In this respect the petition organised by the Ōtorohanga College students could be seen at least in part as pitting Māori and Pākehā youth against older white (and predominantly male) New Zealanders. In their lifetimes, many of the latter had witnessed a period of bewildering change in New Zealand society generally, as old certainties and consensus gave way to a time of conflict and turmoil.\textsuperscript{69} In these circumstances, it was hardly surprising if some yearned for a return to the imagined simpler days of their own youth. By contrast, today’s young people, more comfortably bicultural and accepting of diversity and difference, highlight the emergence of new and more nuanced national identities based in part on an honest reappraisal of the realities of settler colonialism in nineteenth-century New Zealand. Unsettling settler colonial narratives of the past, both within New Zealand and elsewhere, requires a ‘deeper historical consciousness’ that confronts those realities.\textsuperscript{70} The Ōtorohanga College students remind us that young people may be agents for that change provided they can gain some exposure to the history that often lies hidden beneath the comforting myths.

Notes


2. In the interests of full disclosure, the authors of this paper were both signatories to the Ōtorohanga College petition but did not make submissions on it.


12. The Ministry of Education opposed the petition’s aim of requiring that the ‘New Zealand Land Wars’ be incorporated into the school curriculum noting that the National Curriculum ‘sets the direction for schools and kura [Maori immersion schools] and provides them with guidance as they design their own curriculum […] Requiring schools and kura to teach a specific subject would be contrary to the spirit and underlying principles of the National Curriculum and would erode the autonomy of Boards of Trustees to determine the content and context of their teaching and learning programmes.’ Ministry of Education (New Zealand), Submission to Māori Affairs Committee, Petition of Waimarama Anderson and Leah Bell (Wellington: New Zealand Parliament). Posted May 4, 2016, https://www.parliament.nz/resource/en-NZ/51SCMA_EVI_51DBHOH_PET68056_1_A499701/dc8abddd17013eeecbd1ccdd0a3701247d0a0c56 (accessed October 13, 2016).


14. A Facebook page about the petition was set up at: https://www.facebook.com/NZLandWars and a webpage about the petition was also placed on the Ōtorohanga College website (http://www.otocoll.school.nz/landwarspetition.html). At the same time, one of the students blogged about the campaign on the New Zealand Human Rights website (https://www.hrc.co.nz/news/petition-remember-nz-land-wars/)


18. Submissions to the Māori Affairs committee of the New Zealand Parliament are published online by date at: https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/sc/scl/m%C4%81ori-affairs/tab/submissionsandadvice. Submissions concerning the petition of Waimarama Anderson and Leah Bell are dated May 4, 2016.


32. Of the 138 submissions lodged against the petition, three were made on behalf of organisations (including the Ministry of Education), a further three were made jointly by males and females, and the gender of eight more submitters was unknown. Of the balance, 108 came from males and 16 from females.

33. The Moriori are the indigenous people of Rēkohu (the Chatham Islands). A popular myth concerning the Moriori has it that they were a distinct group of Melanesian (or mixed Melanesian-Polynesian) people who had occupied mainland New Zealand first before being all but wiped out (save for a small remnant on the Chatham Islands) by invading Māori from Polynesia. Although the theory had been largely discredited in academic circles by the 1920s it endures to this day in much popular thought as a way of legitimising the European settlement of New Zealand. See Peter Clayworth, “‘An Indolent and Chilly Folk’: The Development of the Idea of the ‘Moriori Myth’” (PhD diss., University of Otago, 2001); Jacinta Blank, ‘Imagining Moriori: A History of Ideas of a People in the Twentieth Century’ (MA diss, University of Canterbury, 2007).


42. However, some critics have expressed concerns that selecting this date to mark the New Zealand Wars might end up overshadowing the Declaration of Independence. Heeni Brown, ‘Taurua Opposes Date for New Zealand Wars Commemorations’, http://www.maoritelevision.com/news/regional/taurua-opposes-date-new-zealand-wars-commemorations (accessed December 15, 2016).


54. Hill, Anti-Treatyism and Anti-Scholarship.


suggest that Sinclair, one of New Zealand’s leading historians in his lifetime, could be considered an anti-Treatyist. However, his work failed to keep step with the new historiography of New Zealand settler colonialism that had begun to emerge by the 1970s. See Vincent O’Malley, ‘Unsettling New Zealand History: The Revisionism of Sinclair and Ward’, in Texts and Contexts: Reflections in Pacific Islands Historiography, ed. Doug Munro and Brij V. Lal (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006), 154–65.


60. Paulette Regan, Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).


67. Treaty of Waitangi settlements are typically no more than a few cents in the dollar relative to the value of what was lost. In the case of the Waikato-Tainui settlement in respect of the invasion and confiscation of Waikato in the 1860s, the settlement equalled 1.4% of the estimated value of the confiscated lands. O’Malley, The Great War for New Zealand, 598.

68. UMR Research, Treaty of Waitangi UMR Omnibus Results (Wellington: UMR Research, 2011), 7.

69. In 1984 the incoming fourth Labour government embarked on a programme of radical economic restructuring (known as Rogernomics after then Finance Minister Roger Douglas). This saw the heavily regulated New Zealand economy opened up to free market reforms, including a floating currency, elimination of most tariffs and subsidies, the privatisation of many Crown agencies, the reduction of top tax rates, and dismantling of many aspects of the former ‘cradle to grave’ welfare state introduced by the first Labour government in the 1930s. Unemployment skyrocketed as a result, and food banks made a return for the first time since the Great Depression. It was during this same period (in 1985) that the Waitangi Tribunal was given a mandate to investigate historical Māori claims under the Treaty of Waitangi dating back to 1840. A New Zealand ‘politics of nostalgia’ based on a return to the supposed
golden era of the 1950s included not just smiling, happy Māori but also full employment and an absence of poverty.

70. Paulette Y.L. Regan, ‘Unsettling the Settler Within: Canada’s Peacemaker Myth, Reconciliation, and Transformative Pathways to Decolonization’ (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2006), 3.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Vincent O’Malley (BA (Hons), PhD) has written and published extensively on the history of Māori and Pākehā relations in the nineteenth century. He was the 2014 J D Stout Research Fellow at Victoria University of Wellington, where he worked on his new history of the Waikato War (The Great War for New Zealand: Waikato 1800-2000, Bridget Williams Books, 2016), and is currently a partner in HistoryWorks, a Wellington-based research consultancy.

Joanna Kidman is an indigenous Māori sociologist with tribal affiliations to Ngāti Maniapoto and Ngāti Raukawa. She works in the field of indigenous studies at Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand where she is a co-Director of He Parekereke, Institute for Research and Development in Māori and Pacific Education.