

*Te Wai Pounamu, The Greenstone Island: A History of the Southern Maori during the European Colonization of New Zealand.* By Harry C. Evison. Aoraki Press, Wellington and Christchurch, 1993. xxii, 582 pp. NZ price: \$58.95.

THIS BOOK is a good example of the way historians are influenced when they become deeply involved in the proceedings of the Waitangi Tribunal. Because all evidence is subjected to fierce scrutiny the Tribunal has very high standards: the book, therefore, is thorough, scholarly and very well presented. In this respect it is a good deal better than much general history. It also has a clear focus on what interests the tribunal: whether there was injustice in the loss of Maori land or resources, following European settlement. To an outsider, this may seem too narrow a focus for a book claiming to be 'A History'. It might be argued that there is more to a people's development than the wrongs they have suffered. In his foreword, Tipene O'Regan anticipates this objection; 'For Ngai Tahu', he writes, 'their land claim . . . became their culture. The grievance of dispossession became our focus and a source of group identity.' It is not hard to see why. As Evison puts it (p.433) in 1840 Ngai Tahu had more land than any other tribe in New Zealand; by 1870, after 30 years of British government, there was hardly a tribe more poorly off. The former hunting and food gathering areas of Southern Maori were now the grazing and crop lands of a few relatively wealthy European men. Evison's brief, in assisting Ngai Tahu before the tribunal, must have been to question everything about the negotiations whereby the land was alienated. By the time he has ferreted through all the documents, only one Crown official involved in Maori matters, Edward Shortland, emerges with honour. The rest of them — Good Governor Grey, Edward Eyre, Henry Tacy Kemp, and even the ostensibly contrite Walter Mantell — have been reduced to, in Alexander Haig's useful phrase, 'duplicious bastards'. To reinforce his point, Evison comments (p.339), 'Habitual dishonesty in high places . . . was beyond Maori understanding.' All of this meticulously marshalled evidence must have played its part in the tribunal's conclusion on Ngai Tahu land claims, which Evison quotes: 'It cannot be disputed that, as a result of the Crown's numerous Treaty breaches, Ngai Tahu has suffered grievous economic loss . . . Ngai Tahu is plainly entitled to very substantial compensation' (p.490).

This impressive book reinforces one's respect for the Waitangi Tribunal and its procedures, and leaves one in no doubt about the need for Crown reparation for past wrongs. However, it is also clear that the tribunal requires for its purposes a special kind of history, which one might label 'grievance history' — the delineation of wrongs surviving from the past, which, once identified must be put right.

In a more general context of historical writing, however, one should not assume that major transitions occur solely because of the machinations of a few officials. They may facilitate change but where broader social and economic pressures are at work, the activities of a few negotiators are not a sufficient explanation. There is, therefore, a need for different kinds of history in different contexts. 'Grievance history' should not become general history; and in the general context we should not neglect aspects of our past which are not relevant for Waitangi Tribunal purposes. But equally an emphasis on social and economic explanations does not free us from the need to redress breaches of the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. Evison has well earned the grateful praise which Tipene O'Regan gives. Unfortunately the book is too solid for most general readers, and it is to be hoped that he can follow Claudia Orange's example and write an illustrated booklet to disseminate his findings among the public.

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