

THE MAORI AND THE CROWN
An Indigenous People's Struggle For Self-
Determination.
By Dora Alves.

Westport (Connecticut): Greenwood Publishing Group. 1999. xx. 178 pp. (B&W photos.)
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While it has generally come to be accepted that most Western settlement and colonization of non-European countries should more properly be seen as invasion, 'fatal impact' accounts have been largely discounted in light of overwhelming evidence of the tenacity and adaptability of societies and cultures. This book traces the course of the courageous determination of the Maori of Aotearoa (New Zealand) to maintain their heritage and autonomous identity during two centuries of intense and sustained 'impact' since the beginnings of European settlement.

To a reviewer forced to read many academic books in obscure and turgid prose, Alves's writing style is refreshingly readable, clear and jargon-free. Her account is well-researched but treads lightly on the pages, stating its position undogmatically yet persuasively. After briefly presenting current views on Maori migrations and pre-contact life, it moves through early contacts, missionization and British annexation. It explains how the Maori translation of the Treaty of Waitangi differed from its English original, encouraging a very different reading of it by the two sides. Thus the 'agreement,' which Britain brandished to validate its annexation of the whole country, was not merely contracted with a relatively few North Island chiefs, it was fundamentally counterfeit.

The ensuing period of extensive immigration resulted first in the 'Maori Wars,' a cynically heroic name for what was in fact the determined suppression, in some cases almost to the point of genocide, of indigenous people determinedly defending their land against ultimately overwhelming odds. The next 75 years are described here as 'the remorseless alienation of land, the pressure of land agents, and racial tension' (p34), with the Maori persistently but futilely attempting to petition the Crown with whom they had believed they had an honorable contract.

World War II was a watershed, altering many roles and expectations, and finally, in 1975 the independent Waitangi Tribunal was established to 'review the actions ... of the Crown.' It 'changed New Zealand attitudes, both Maori and Pakeha [European]' (p.57). Their subordination in their own land, with resultant loss of mana (spiritual potency), was always going to be an intolerable situation for the Maori. Their unflinching resolve, and (albeit belatedly) the willingness of some governments, to confront and attempt to redress the wrongs of the past, are the issues dealt with in the rest of the book. That attempts to deal with Maori claims to traditional land and fisheries, and access to health, education and employment opportunities, are difficult and as yet far from resolution, must not be allowed, the author concludes, to subvert the 'work of conciliation' (p.148). It is an aspiration other societies, including those of Canada and Australia, must also embrace.

In its broad outlines, the story recounted here could apply, with minor changes to specific details, to most of Britain's colonies, indeed to all colonized societies. Initial brief contacts with a few foreigners under indigenous hegemony had positive aspects, especially access to locally-relevant new technologies. Even the attack on indigenous belief systems by Christian missionaries was often able, similarly, to be buffered by syncretic absorption. But settlers' greed for land was always the most aggressive and inexorable force. Ultimately, it underpinned most of the racist, cultural and social denigration and exploitation that routinely accompanied colonization, and is described here.

It is unlikely that specialists will find much here that is not covered elsewhere. But it provides a succinct, careful and readable overview, and as such, contributes a valuable resource to non-specialist academics and interested lay readers alike.

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