

CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY

# PROFESSORIAL LECTURE SERIES

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## **The Myths We Live By: Reframing History for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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**Professor Giselle Byrnes**

Pro Vice-Chancellor, Faculty of Law, Education, Business and Arts

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July 2012

Nitmiluk Lounge, Level 4, Parliament House



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# The myths we live by: reframing history for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

In 1990, the British Marxist historian Raphael Samuel – founder of the History Workshop movement, which is described as ‘history from below’ or the study of working-class life – published with Paul Thompson a small but important book entitled *The Myths We Live By* (1990). In this book, Samuel drew on a number of recorded life stories to offer a rare view of how memory and tradition are continually reshaped and recycled to make sense of the past from the perspective of the present. The case studies he drew on came from recent European history, as well as the legends of classical Greece and the traditional oral narratives and storytelling of native North Americans. Samuel argued that history was not dead and buried or indeed certain; but, rather, it was a living and mutable force in the present.<sup>1</sup>

This paper takes its cue from Samuel’s book in arguing that history – what we understand by ‘the totality of the past’ – is never fixed and stable, but is constantly subject to change, contingent upon the ways in which we re-read past events in the light of the present. Accordingly, the paper makes two key arguments about the nature of history. The first is that history is perspective; the second is that history is shaped by dominant interpretations. While it is true that historians are, in Marc Bloch’s term ‘servants of the dead’,<sup>2</sup> they are also deeply involved in the business of myth-making. This does not mean to suggest that *all* history is merely conspiracy or a series of untruths: rather, history is always a partial and one-sided view of events. It also means that some versions of history have come to be seen as more accurate and more ‘truthful’ than others.

In summary, ‘the myths we live by’ refers to history’s myth-making power and status – the ability of history and historians to weave stories that obscure as much as they purport to reveal. When we think

of ‘history’, we ought not to visualise a place or a distant past – but an approach and a perspective.

History is essentially the story of change over time; of what happened in the past, and why. When historians speak and write about the past, they typically think of history in two contexts: they use the term ‘history’ to refer to the past itself and also to what historians write about the past – what we call ‘historiography’. In other words, while ‘historiography’ is the process of debating and writing the past, ‘history’ is the end product.<sup>3</sup> History, it seems, is far more complex than perhaps we might have first realised.

That the past is always viewed through the lens of the present may seem to be obvious, but if we accept this suggestion, it means that stories of the past are always changing: that is, our present-day values and attitudes inform how we look back and review what has gone before. Moreover, the questions we put to the past are invariably shaped by our present. ‘History’ is, therefore, a constant conversation with the past. In addition, most historians no longer believe there is a gold standard of objectivity that ought to be respected and agree that the quest for objectivity is, as Peter Novick has so aptly described, ‘like nailing jelly to the wall’.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, we can *never* recreate the totality of the past – this is an actual impossibility – we can only work with those pieces that remain. While some stories are told, therefore, others are silenced. The question of *why* this is the case (the emphases and repetitions as well as the silences) has been and is a preoccupation of my generation of historians.

Amidst what may appear to be unbridled modern relativism, historians do still rely on facts. Perhaps the first historian to call attention to this, at least in the Western tradition, was Herodotus (484–425 BC) who wrote, among other topics, about the conflicts between the Greeks and the Persians. While Herodotus dabbled in what we now call ‘oral history’, he was nonetheless suspicious of hearsay and attempted to base his stories on evidence. He wrote not simply for powerful patrons but for a wide readership, drawing on a broad range of sources to inform his narratives. However, the rejection of storytelling in favour of honouring facts and appealing to the truth found in evidence is most often attributed to the German historian, the founder of ‘modern history’, Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886). Ranke’s own philosophy of

history and his reverence for the scientific method is keenly noted in his reflections on reading the novels of Sir Walter Scott:

I read these works with lively interest; but I also took objection to them. Among other things, I was offended by the way in which Charles the Bold and Louis XI were treated, which seemed ... to be completely contradictory to the historical evidence. I studied ... the contemporary reports ... and became convinced that a Charles or a Louis as they were pictured by Scott never existed. ... The comparison convinced me that historical sources themselves were more beautiful and in any case more interesting than romantic fiction. I turned away completely from fiction and resolved to avoid any invention and imagination in my work so as to keep strictly to the facts.<sup>5</sup>

Western notions of history have, therefore, been heavily influenced by the necessity of truth, the respect for hard evidence (usually documentary) and the quest for objective analysis. In comparison, non-Western ways of seeing and recording history are much more inclusive. Judith Binney writes of the primacy of orality in the Maori historical tradition when she says:

We know that memory reconstitutes the past; it does not hold the details of human experience intact. Rather, individuals translate their experiences into stories, and some of the stories enter into communal consciousness. Further, narratives born of social and political crises are preserved in memory not so much as records of those times but tools by which to act in the present. When cast in predictive form, an 'orthodox' structuring for many oral societies, they may also change the present, and the future.<sup>6</sup>

The second argument in favour of the contingent nature of history and history-making is that, in the past, history has relied upon the creation and maintenance of dominant interpretations. Such interpretations of history have tended to subsume other voices and historical agents, typically those who did not have access to telling, recording and writing history. History is not only written by the victors but seen through their eyes, and interpreted accordingly. Further, while historians may identify with different tribes – cultural, social, political, and so on – they

essentially fall into one of two distinct groups: those who believe that people in the past were essentially the same as we in the present, and those who maintain they were fundamentally different. The Scottish historian and philosopher David Hume (1711–76) believed that all humans were constant throughout the ages; while others have taken their cue from L.P. Hartley’s frequently cited suggestion that ‘the past is a foreign country’. Into this latter group falls the American historian Robert Darnton, whose book *The Great Cat Massacre* (1985) argued that each era had a spirit, or a *zeitgeist* (cultural consciousness). Darnton’s book took the story of the wholesale massacre of cats (by printers’ apprentices in Paris in the 1730s) as evidence of the interplay between history and myth. He focused on a view of history from below to show that certain ‘events’ in history were often symbolic of other (larger) struggles: in this case, the massacre of cats was symbolic of the printers’ rebellion against their masters.<sup>7</sup>

It would be fair to say, too, that since the 1960s at least, historians have been concerned with the silences and the pieces in-between ‘Big History’: in other words, the lives of ordinary people, not just the rich and powerful. This has shifted the centre of gravity of historical inquiry, from a discipline focused largely on those *in* power, to one concerned with those *affected by* that power. Like most historians affected by this, ‘the social and cultural turn’, I am interested not only in those who have been written out of history – that is, those who have, for one reason or another, been sidelined by greater forces than they could control and were overwhelmed by the tides of time – but those whose stories were not considered worthy.

This paper draws on a number of significant examples of where these two key characteristics of history have been tested. For the most part, I intend to draw on the case studies and projects I know best: my own historical work. These examples are grounded in the history of an archipelago of islands lying 1500 kilometres to the south-east of Australia that came close to being part of the Australian federation in 1901 – New Zealand. I have always been fascinated by the past. I grew up surrounded by stories of my Irish Catholic forebears, keenly aware that my place in the world and the privileges I enjoyed were due in large part to my emigrant ancestors who had sought a better life in the New World. Although I did not realise it at the time, oral storytelling was second nature to my family. I recall, for instance, the

way in which my father told my sister and me imaginative bedtime stories – not read but composed on-the-spot, and every night we would eagerly look forward to another instalment. I studied History and English Literature at school, then university. My curiosity about the ways in which Maori history had been constructed and ‘fabricated’ by a group of late 19<sup>th</sup> Century amateur scholars formed the basis of my first forays into New Zealand history. I later learnt that many of these narratives had found their way into what we today call ‘traditional’ Maori oral histories, and have been presented before quasi-judicial bodies (such as the Waitangi Tribunal) as evidence of truth.

The work of colonial travellers – ethnographers, amateur scientists and land surveyors – and their constructions of new cultural and physical landscapes, previously neglected in history, was the subject of my doctoral thesis. The resulting book, *Boundary Markers: Land Surveying and the Colonisation of New Zealand* (2001), set out to correct this omission. It also took the idea of perspective further, suggesting that the land surveyors constructed both cultural and physical landscapes in their colonising efforts. In studying the surveyors’ field-books and records (which included both visual and documentary representations), I was struck by how this group of colonists had been so influential in the making of the colony, and yet they were almost invisible in the published historical record. The paradox was that while the dominant story of New Zealand had written them out of history, the surveyors themselves had been engaged in writing themselves into history. Their legacy lives on in placenames that survive as historical artefacts from another era. In almost every part of the modern New Zealand landscape, surveyors’ names and descriptors can be found in geographical features, placenames, suburbs and even streets.<sup>8</sup>

The way in which perspective shapes the past was the subject of my next project. In the mid-1990s, with a freshly minted PhD, I was employed by the Waitangi Tribunal, a permanent commission of inquiry established in 1975 to investigate whether the Crown had failed to discharge its responsibilities towards its Maori partner as per the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi. The context of this work was very different in two key ways. First, the facts really mattered, so there was little time or tolerance for theoretical musings. Second, I was exposed to ‘history-in-the-flesh’. By this I mean not only were other worldviews at play in the claims settlement process, but history was owned and



lived by people living in the present. This experience also taught me that history was volatile and that descendants not only cared about how history was written and interpreted, but had much to lose (and to gain) from such perspectives.

Working for the Tribunal, which itself sat within a New Zealand public service culture, illuminated to me the highly political nature of history in a modern settler society. Indeed, it was during these years when the ‘large’ Treaty settlements were struck between Maori and the Crown that history began to gain public notoriety; since then, history has taken on a new political and economic relevance. When I left the Tribunal and took up a university position, I published with Oxford University Press, *The Waitangi Tribunal and New Zealand History* (2004), a book that analysed the published reports of the Tribunal and its public recommendations to government, in an effort to see how history and historical method were employed as part of a legalised process of finding fact, fault and culpability.

The intersections between past and present continued to inform my teaching and research – on colonial settler histories, the history of Maori-Pakeha relations, the Treaty of Waitangi and comparative colonial history. In studying the Tribunal’s oeuvre, I had noted its numerous references to the ‘New Zealand nation’.<sup>9</sup> The Tribunal, especially in its reports from the mid-1990s, had emphasised how Maori views of history challenged the idea of a harmonious and homogeneous New Zealand nation–state. Indeed, a common theme in the Tribunal’s reports was that the Maori nation had its own histories, traditions of remembering and ways of knowing; and if given full recognition, these ‘alternative’ histories threatened to undermine the legitimacy of the colonial settler state (and, therefore, the current political and constitutional arrangements). As I wrote and spoke about the Tribunal’s appeals to ‘national identity’ I began to reflect on how this idea might have been played out against a broader canvas: what was the role of national identity in terms of the history of New Zealand?

The opportunity to tackle this question head-on arose when my publisher approached me to produce a new *Oxford History of New Zealand*.<sup>10</sup> This project began with the question: how had New Zealand history been written in the past? I discovered that in general histories of New Zealand (and there have been many), ‘the nation’, along with

appeals to an indeterminate, and often ill-defined ‘national identity’, have been the dominant themes. According to this interpretation, the story of New Zealand was told as a progressive narrative, where growth, development, self-reliance and coming-of-age loom large. This approach tended to be celebratory and self-congratulatory; the story of a fledgling colony that developed through infancy and childhood, overcoming adversity and challenge, into a mature, vibrant and independent nation. The ‘New Ox’ as it came to be known, set out to test this dominant view, which had assumed mythic status.

The project, which resulted in the book being published in 2009, wrote against two dominant themes advanced by general histories of New Zealand over the previous century. First, it questioned the assumption that the ‘story of New Zealand’ could adequately be explained as a quest for ‘national identity’: a narrative that depicted the history of New Zealand in terms of progressive and evolutionary development, from Polynesian homeland to colonial outpost to independent nation-state. *The New Oxford History of New Zealand* argued against national identity and proposed that history and identity are more likely to have been made (and remade) along the lines of culture, community, family, class, religion, sexuality and gender, among other factors, and that these have been more important than ideas of evolving nationhood and appeals to national exceptionalism. The book called attention to tribal, regional, class, gender, rural and urban distinctions and perspectives. Second, it questioned the notion that New Zealand’s history is unique, distinct, and even exceptional, and considered the ways in which events in New Zealand ought to be understood as a part of trends, practices and structures that have their origins beyond New Zealand shores.<sup>11</sup> It questioned the extent to which certain aspects of New Zealand life – culture, political activity, economic and social trends – are, and always have been, part of a much larger canvas. It also argued, after historian Peter Gibbons, that national identity was just another way of describing ongoing cultural colonisation.<sup>12</sup>

So, what was the ‘dominant interpretation’ we were writing against? It might be argued that the writing of ‘New Zealand’ and its invention as an historical subject began with Captain James Cook’s journals, which described his three famous expeditions to the Pacific Ocean between 1768 and 1779: that is when New Zealand was first visualised, mapped, named and textualised within a new, and particularly British, colonising idiom, or ‘the literature of invasion’.<sup>13</sup> While a

number of texts may be described as ‘general histories’, from A.S. Thomson’s *Story of New Zealand* (1859) onwards, William Pember Reeves’ *Aotearoa: Long White Cloud* (1898) signalled a marked shift in perspective and style that set the tone for subsequent narratives addressing the entire history of New Zealand. Reeves’ text celebrated New Zealand’s youthful exuberance, fashioned for it a suitable Maori heritage, and emphasised the many ‘firsts’ to which New Zealand could lay claim: including women’s suffrage, labour emancipation and social innovation. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, ‘history’ in New Zealand was not only dominated by British history, it was British history. Nonetheless, some ‘amateurs’ explored the history of Pakeha New Zealanders, especially the history of military conflict, pioneer memoirs and the founding settlers. When Maori were mentioned, it was usually to create a ‘prehistory’ for New Zealand: if the country had no prior ‘history’, then one had to be invented. Typically, Maori society was romanticised, and stories of inter-tribal warfare recited in detail; but almost always, Maori were written as *belonging to* history, in the past rather than the present tense.

‘Non-academic history’ flourished during the period following World War One. According to Erik Olssen, through the 1920s, historians of New Zealand ‘conceptualised New Zealand’s emergent nationality in evolutionary terms; but whereas some stressed the importance of the British heritage, sometimes evoked by metaphors of racial character, others placed more emphasis on the environment and the process of natural selection’.<sup>14</sup> Yet, progress and the quest for independence, underlined by the search for a ‘national character’ typified these texts.<sup>15</sup> However, despite the dominance of Empire in these histories, these historians examined New Zealand history within the framework of British colonial policy, rather than simply imperial patriotism, and they produced a range of broad general histories.<sup>16</sup> While different from British history, New Zealand histories of the inter-war period were nonetheless a story of European endeavour in which Maori occurred as inconveniences, stage hands or curtain-raisers to the main drama of European settlement. Between 1925 and 1945, too, history as a taught subject in New Zealand secondary schools focused overwhelmingly on British imperial and European history. New Zealand history was not to arrive until a much later date.<sup>17</sup>

During the 1940s, general histories of New Zealand proliferated – but they largely looked to the role of the state in New Zealand. The

1940 Centennial, which commemorated ‘one hundred crowded years’ since the assertion of British sovereignty in New Zealand, occasioned a number of state-sponsored volumes addressing aspects of New Zealand’s settler history.<sup>18</sup> In the immediate post-war period, amateur history flourished, with the appearance of a handful of short histories.<sup>19</sup> History-writing in the 1950s then witnessed a significant shift: the appearance of ‘New Zealand history’. This was part of a larger intellectual project, where the chief prophet was Keith Sinclair. In 1959, Sinclair’s *A History of New Zealand* was published, followed a year later by W.H. Oliver’s *The Story of New Zealand*.<sup>20</sup> Both texts were significant in terms of signalling that New Zealand history had developed, yet they sported distinctly different themes and emphases. In a sense, Sinclair and Oliver ‘legitimised’ New Zealand history, by popularising it and making it a subject worthy of scholarly inquiry.<sup>21</sup> Yet this was still conceptualised within a British model and was largely concentrated on the period following European settlement. In the school curriculum, too, New Zealand national history was unable to establish itself as a discrete sub-discipline, but was taught as part of British imperial history.<sup>22</sup> The new consensus – that the nation was the natural focus for historical inquiry and that it could be understood in terms of its own history – assumed a natural dominance.<sup>23</sup> While it is true that in the 1980s New Zealand history tentatively shifted toward exploring 20<sup>th</sup> Century historical experiences, ‘the nation’ remained the dominant lens through which stories were interpreted.<sup>24</sup>

*The New Oxford History of New Zealand* argued that there were serious weaknesses in this ‘dominant interpretation’ of New Zealand history; most notably that it did not take into account the diversity of lived historical experiences and it paid too little attention to plurality and difference. In general, these histories do not problematise Pakeha historical experiences, but instead consider them as normal, natural and innate. General histories that focus on the ‘progressive’ story of New Zealand and take the quest for national identity and the development of national maturity as their central themes necessarily exclude other narratives and alternative histories. In addition, claims to exclusivity mean that while some individuals and groups are included in the narrative, others are hidden or simply left out.

These general histories were also out of step with historical research. Entirely new areas of research have been opened up (in New Zealand and Australia, and further afield) in social and cultural history,

resulting in new interpretations of health, welfare, leisure, spatial and environmental histories. The proliferation of these narratives reveals in part our contemporary concerns and politics. There have also been monumental shifts in historical methodology, practice and representation: paramount among these has been the need to situate Indigenous histories and gendered histories within cultural as well as historical paradigms. Furthermore, ‘history’ has also been the subject of criticism; and arguments regarding the inherently ‘Western’ nature of historicising and understanding the past are highly relevant in New Zealand. Dipesh Chakrabarty has recently asked if there are experiences of the past that ‘history’ – as understood in the Westernised, academic sense – simply cannot describe. He argues that while minority histories are usually incorporated into larger historical narratives, ‘other’ pasts whose notions of historicity are outside the realm of Western thinking and beyond the reach of Western concepts, remain marginalised because their stories cannot be incorporated into the overarching narrative.<sup>25</sup>

The first edition of *The Oxford History of New Zealand* was published in 1981; the second edition, which was an update on the first, with the same suite of authors but a new editor, appeared in 1992.<sup>26</sup> I made the deliberate decision to invite a new generation of historians – Maori and Pakeha, men and women – to reflect on new topics. Through an advisory board, I involved authors of the previous two editions. While my decision early on to focus on ‘new voices’ was unpopular among some of the ‘first fleters’, the original authors, it was a gamble that paid off. The new book falls into six main sections, with each section addressing a central theme. Authors in each section were invited to consider a particular topic in relation to that theme and discuss it in the broadest chronological context. Thus, some chapters range over three centuries, while others, because of their subject matter, are specific to, say, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Chapters showcased new research that explored transnational, comparative and indigenous paradigms beyond the limits of the nation–state, with the aim of setting the agenda for future historical research imperatives. The 28 authors were asked to be less concerned with how New Zealand affected the world – a major theme of many general histories of New Zealand – and to be more interested in how the world affected New Zealand. Above all, the book argues

and demonstrates the need for a general reinterpretation of the ‘big picture’.

The book examines the fundamental platforms upon which previous narratives were based; assumptions such as ‘national identity’, ‘biculturalism’, ‘state welfare’, and so on (the major essentialist narratives), and presents these assumed truths not as ‘real’ truths but as ideological constructions. In other words, it works to expose these ‘assumed truths’ or fundamental ‘givens’ about New Zealand *as myths* rather than reality. In general terms, the book adopts a deconstructive reading of New Zealand’s history, which had not been attempted before on such a large scale. Deconstruction, or ‘reading against the grain’, is a powerful tool for unmasking hidden assumptions and for exposing the way these assumptions have rendered people invisible and accorded their experiences little value. Chapters in the book also take a slightly broader geographical definition of what constitutes ‘New Zealand’ interests, locating New Zealand in wider Pacific and Australasian contexts.

My current research continues this conversation with the past/present relationship from a rather different perspective. This project explores the idea of apology – that is, the process of ‘saying sorry’ – and considers how this has been historically defined, interpreted and applied in a range of historical and political contexts since the end of World War Two. This project tests the idea that, in addition to naked political expediency, apologies on behalf of nation–states have been – and are – underwritten by a discourse of religiosity and motivated by a desire to seek atonement and, thus, redemption. It examines the historical meanings of apology in local and international contexts and asks: Why have some nation–states felt obliged to apologise for past actions and wrongdoings? What has motivated the need to atone for the past in the present? And why are certain historical acts, policies and practices – once commonplace and considered acceptable – now condemned, and seen as unlawful, unjust and even immoral? Is the act of making apology necessary in order to absolve the sins of the past and move forwards into the future? And finally, does this preoccupation with ‘moving on’ from past events reveal a particular Western linear view of history?

While this project addresses historical experiences in Australia and New Zealand, there are, of course, resonances in other jurisdictions.<sup>27</sup>

The ostensible quest by Western nations to address ‘historical injustices’, is part of a specific modern moment. The issues raised with regard to Australia and New Zealand may, therefore, be contextualised not only against a local regional backdrop, but also against an international milieu that relevantly includes ‘the global spread of reparations politics’, as well as transnational cooperation among Indigenous peoples in claims for political and legal rights.<sup>28</sup> At another level, this project engages with the subtle differences between memory and history, exploring how liberal democratic societies process, prioritise and politicise ‘new’ historical information.

The debate around the dominance of nationhood and national identity has found expression here in Australia, too. As the Australian historian Marilyn Lake has observed, the writing of history is ‘complicit with, and constrained by, modern nation-building’.<sup>29</sup> Despite federation and the comparatively fragmented Australian national story, for many historians of Australia, the nation has been central in the ‘knowing’ and writing of Australian history.

Australia’s own ‘history wars’ – the debate over how we remember the succession of attacks on Aboriginal communities and the forced child removal policy – engage with nationhood, too. These debates have invoked political and methodological questions regarding the work of historians and the probity of writing history.<sup>30</sup> It would be fair to say that since Professor W.E.H. Stanner identified and coined the phrase the ‘Great Australian Silence’ in 1968, a new strand of Australian historiography has emerged, particularly focusing on reclaiming the historical experiences of Indigenous Australians.<sup>31</sup> Historians, media commentators and, of course, politicians continue to debate this subject. For example, Stephen Gray has critiqued the ‘policy of good intentions’ in the history of the Northern Territory and how this has been manifest even in recent history.<sup>32</sup>

If history is so complex, and potentially problematic, then why do we do it? And why does it matter? It is often suggested that history is useful because it allows us to learn from the past. However, there is little evidence of this happening. Moreover, if there were lessons from history, we would be able to tease out patterns and structures that would allow us to predict the future. But the future remains elusive, murky and unpredictable – and because of this, it remains exciting. While it is possible to draw broad lessons from the past, the idea

that history is ‘our collective classroom’ is therefore problematic. A further claim is that history can provide us with an identity. This can be empowering, but also a cause for conflict if we only lay claim to the past for identity’s sake. We need only look to the wars of religion in the Middle East or indeed Northern Ireland to see the truth of this adage. Finally, it is often said that history shows us essential human truths, threads of the human condition that connect us to our ancestors, and vice versa. Again, while this may be accurate *in part*, history has also shown us the danger of reducing people in the past to groups with identifiable and fixed characteristics, whether based on race, gender or religion. Richard Evans’ work around the scholarship of ‘holocaust denial’, mostly notably his *Telling Lies about Hitler* (2002), demonstrates the dangers of distorting historical evidence to deny identity.<sup>33</sup>

There are other reasons for studying, reading and writing history. The first is for sheer enjoyment and the pleasure of time travel. Far from latter-day escapism, there is delight in visiting the past, if only to be grateful for that which we now take for granted; modern analgesics and anaesthetics come to mind! The second is that studying history allows us to see ourselves much better, to know ourselves in a different context. Looking at people in the past forces us to reflect on our present condition, put our own world into a wider perspective and ultimately to think differently about ourselves. Looking at history also underscores our humanity; as the melancholy Jaques reminds us in Act II Scene VII of Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*:

All the world’s a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players:  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts

In closing, it seems appropriate here to cite a writer whose work has informed a good deal of reflection on the politics of history in my own country, New Zealand. Some years ago, the historian Michael King



reflected on what history means for us now and I think his advice merits our attention:

It seems to me ... that History with a capital H *does* have something more to offer society than simply chastisement for our inevitable failures to live up to ideals and expectations. ... knowledge and understanding of the past give[s] the present a new sense of purpose, possibility and dignity. What [this means] ... is that the historian has at least the *potential* to absorb the past, identify in it what is of continuing importance by way of values and experience, and then to communicate these things to a contemporary audience by way of saying: 'This is what we've done that we can be proud of – or *not* proud of; these are the values of our forebears that provide helpful signposts for future directions and behavior. In this way, good history absorbs the past, but at the same time creates new orientations for the present and foreshadows the future'.<sup>34</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 R. Samuel and P. Thompson, eds, *The Myths We Live By*, Routledge, London and New York, 1990.
- 2 Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1992.
- 3 John H. Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, pp. 5–6.
- 4 Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988.
- 5 Von Ranke, cited in Arnold, p. 35.
- 6 Judith Binney, 'History and memory: the wood of the Whau-Tree 1766–2005', in Giselle Byrnes, ed., *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2004, p. 75.
- 7 Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, Vintage, New York, 1985.
- 8 Giselle Byrnes, *Boundary Markers: Land Surveying and the Colonisation of New Zealand*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2001.
- 9 See, for instance, Waitangi Tribunal, *Kaupapa Tuatahi: The Taranaki Report*, Wellington, 1996.
- 10 The first edition of *The Oxford History of New Zealand* was published in 1981; the second edition in 1992. See W.H. Oliver and B.R. Williams, eds, *The Oxford*

*History of New Zealand*, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1981; G. Rice, ed., *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 2nd edition, 1992.

- 11 On exceptionalism in the New Zealand context, see M. Fairburn, 'Is there a good case for New Zealand exceptionalism?', in T. Ballantyne and B. Moloughney, eds, *Disputed Histories: Imagining New Zealand's Pasts*, Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2006, pp. 143–67.
- 12 P. Gibbons, 'Cultural Colonization and National Identity', *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2002, p. 14; P. Gibbons, 'The far side of the search for identity: reconsidering New Zealand history', *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2003, pp. 38–49.
- 13 P. Gibbons, 'Non-fiction', in T. Sturm, ed., *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English*, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1991, see esp. pp. 27–104, pp. 52–3.
- 14 E. Olssen, 'Where to from here? Reflections on the twentieth-century historiography of nineteenth century New Zealand', *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1992, p. 57.
- 15 The key texts from this period include A.W. Shrimpton and Alan Mulgan, *Maori and Pakeha: A History of New Zealand*, Whitcombe and Tombs, Auckland, 1921; J.B. Condliffe and W.T.G. Airey, *A Short History of New Zealand*, Whitcombe and Tombs, Christchurch, 1925; A.J. Harrop, *England and New Zealand: From Tasman to the Taranaki War*, Methuen, London, 1926; J.R. Elder, *New Zealand: An Outline History*, Oxford University Press, London, 1928; and J.C. Beaglehole, *New Zealand: A Short History*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1936.
- 16 Chris Hilliard, 'Stories of Becoming: the Centennial Surveys and the Colonisation of New Zealand', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 33, 1 (1999), pp. 3–19.
- 17 See further A. Derbyshire, *Anyone's But Our Own: The Teaching of New Zealand History in New Zealand Secondary Schools, 1925–2000*, Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 2004.
- 18 J. Cowan, *Settlers and Pioneers*, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1940; W.G. McClymont, *The Exploration of New Zealand*, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1940; E.H. McCormick, *Letters and Art in New Zealand*, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1940; New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs Centennial Branch, *Making New Zealand: Pictorial Surveys of a Century*, Department of Internal Affairs Centennial Branch, Wellington, 1939–1940; New Zealand Department of Tourism and Publicity, *New Zealand Centennial 1840–1940*, New Zealand Government Department of Tourism and Publicity, Wellington, 1940; H.M. Simpson, *The Women of New Zealand*, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1940; L. Webb, *Government in New Zealand*, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1940; F.L. Wood, *New Zealand in the World*, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1940. Other 'general history' texts also made their appearance during these years, of which Alan Mulgan's *From Track to*

*Highway: A Short History of New Zealand* (1944) and A.H. Reed's *The Story of New Zealand* (1948) are perhaps the most notable. New Zealand, it seemed, was becoming a plausible subject; even if it was embedded in a larger imperial story.

- 19 See for example Harold Miller, *New Zealand*, Hutchinson's University Library, London, second edition, 1951; W.P. Morrell and D.O.W. Hall, *A History of New Zealand Life*, Whitcombe and Tombs, Christchurch, 1957.
- 20 K. Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, Penguin, Auckland, 1959; W.H. Oliver, *The Story of New Zealand*, Faber, London, 1960, 2nd edition, 1963.
- 21 Olssen, 'Where to from here?', pp. 57–60.
- 22 Derbyshire, 'Anyone's But Our Own', p. 11.
- 23 Olssen, 'Where to from here?', p. 60.
- 24 Sinclair and Oliver's legacy was not just in the general histories they wrote, but in their roles as university teachers. They encouraged a new generation of scholars to re-examine aspects of New Zealand's past. The work of Raewyn Dalziel, Judith Binney, Ann Parsonson and others was crucial here.
- 25 D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2000, p. 6.
- 26 Oliver and Williams, eds, *The Oxford History of New Zealand*; G. Rice, ed., *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, 1981.
- 27 See Paul Havemann, ed., *Indigenous Peoples' Rights in Australia, Canada and New Zealand*, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1999, pp. 1–12; Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices*, Norton, New York, 2000; R. Brooks, *When Sorry Isn't Enough: The Controversy Over Apologies and Reparations For Human Injustice*, New York University Press, New York and London, 1999; Emma Wethey, *The Politics of Apology: Issues Arising from State Apologies to Indigenous Peoples for Historical Injustice in Australasia and North America*, unpublished M Phil thesis, Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge University, 2002.
- 28 J. Torpey, 'Making the whole what has been smashed: reflections on reparations', *The Journal of Modern History*, Chicago, 73, 2 (2001), pp. 333–58. There are also analogies with Holocaust revisionist narratives. See Lawrence Douglas, *The Memory of Judgment: Making Law and History In the Trials of the Holocaust*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2001; Donald Bloxham, *Genocide On Trial: War Crimes and the Formation of Holocaust History and Memory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001; Henry Rousso, *The Haunting Past: History, Memory and Justice in Contemporary France*, trans. Ralph Schoolcraft, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2002; Richard J. Evans, 'History, memory and the law: the historian as expert witness', *History and Theory*, vol. 41, no. 3 (2002), pp. 326–45.
- 29 M. Lake, 'White man's country: the trans-national history of a national project', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 34, no. 122, 2003, pp. 346–63.

- <sup>30</sup> Stuart Macintyre, with Anna Clark, *The History Wars*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2003. See also Henry Reynolds, *Why Weren't We Told?*, Viking, Ringwood, 1999; Robert Manne, ed., *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2003; A. Dirk Moses, *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History*, Berghahn Books, New York, 2004; Bain Attwood, *Telling The Truth About Aboriginal History*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2005.
- <sup>31</sup> W.E.H. Stanner, 'After the Dreaming', in W.E.H. Stanner, *White Man Got No Dreaming: Essays 1938–1973*, Australian National University Press, 1979, pp.198–248. In the 1980s, historians such as Henry Reynolds attempted to correct what they saw as a highly selective dominant historical interpretation that had misrepresented or ignored Indigenous Australian history.
- <sup>32</sup> Stephen Gray, *The Protectors: a Journey Through Whitefella Past*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2011, pp. 13ff.
- <sup>33</sup> Richard J. Evans, *Telling Lies About Hitler The Holocaust, History and the David Irving Trial*, Verso, London, 2002.
- <sup>34</sup> Michael King, *Tread Softly For You Tread on My Life: New and Collected Writings*, Cape Catley Ltd, Auckland, 2001, p. 8.

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Professor Giselle Byrnes is Pro Vice-Chancellor of the Faculty of Law, Education, Business and Arts at Charles Darwin University. Before joining Charles Darwin University, she was Pro Vice-Chancellor (Postgraduate) at the University of Waikato in New Zealand, Professor of History and Director of the Public History Research Unit.

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