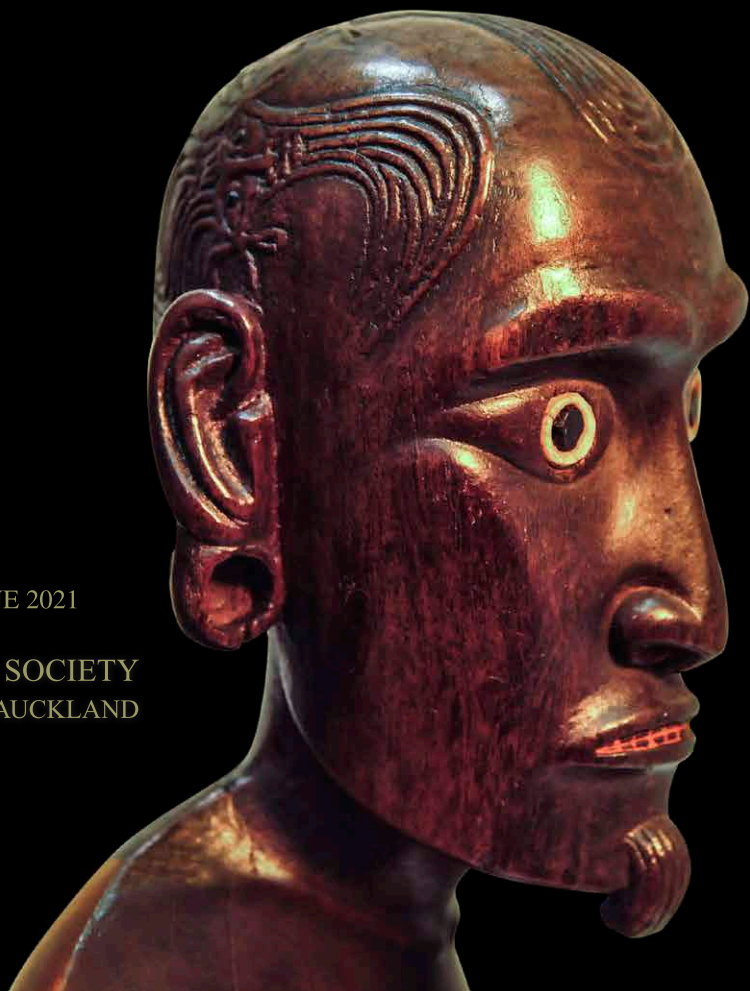


JPS

The Journal
of the
Polynesian Society

VOLUME 130 No.2 JUNE 2021

THE POLYNESIAN SOCIETY
THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
NEW ZEALAND



REVIEW

O'MALLEY, Vincent: *The New Zealand Wars/Ngā Pakanga o Aotearoa*. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2019. 272 pp., illus., maps, notes. NZ\$39.95 (softcover).

ROWAN LIGHT

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Historians, it seems, are on the cusp of a New Zealand Wars boom. The nineteenth-century conflicts—remembered for generations by Māori communities—have recently coalesced into a new national day of commemoration, Rā Maumahara, and a central topic of the proposed compulsory Aotearoa New Zealand histories school curriculum. A logical flow-on effect of these developments is a rise in documentaries and publications to inform newfound public interest and begin the work of translating difficult histories into public remembrance.

Vincent O'Malley's *The New Zealand Wars/Ngā Pakanga o Aotearoa* neatly fits into this trend. It is a text intended for general readership, especially suitable for secondary school teachers and their students, and non-specialist academics wanting to familiarise themselves with a topic of growing public debate.

Ngā Pakanga builds on key themes of the author's magisterial *The Great War for New Zealand: Waikato 1800–2000*, also published by Bridget Williams Books, in 2016. O'Malley draws on many of the themes of this larger work to present a general history well suited to shape public engagement with these wars and conflicts.

In *Ngā Pakanga*, the synonymy of “general” and “national” in New Zealand historiography remains firmly in place. O'Malley's approach is “national” in both the sense of a broad geographic spread and in the author's insistence that the wars were crucial to the creation of a national society. The heart of the conflict, through O'Malley's lens, is the practical and violent working out of the relationship between *kāwanatanga* ‘Crown governance’ and *rangatiratanga* ‘indigenous sovereignty’. The book has a repeated focus on national symbols (it is significant that the cover image is of a red ensign) recognisable to Pākehā ‘New Zealand European’ audiences. As well as reflecting his career as a Waitangi Tribunal researcher, O'Malley's approach allows him to cast a wide net as to what is—and what is not—part of the frontier of colonial violence.

This national lens is also strategic. O'Malley clearly believes the way to establish these wars in the national imagination is to treat them according to the conventions of Anzac Day and the commemoration of World War I battles, signifying “national foundations”, and a new history curriculum that privileges “the evolution of a national identity with cultural plurality” (in the words of education minister Chris Hipkins.) In a particularly powerful comparison, O'Malley shows that the loss of life among Tūranga (Gisborne) Māori over the course of the land disputes (1860–1869) was, per capita, ten to thirty times than that of New Zealand soldiers during the world wars.

The structure of the book, therefore, is a tightly coiled chronology. The introduction consists of a detailed overview of the migration patterns that shaped the settler state which arose from the ruins of the war—particularly the influx of some 18,000 imperial troops and their families, over 3,600 of whom would become settlers in government land schemes. This introduction—drawing on recent social histories of the war—allows O'Malley to place the conflict in global context, which will make it useful for international scholars. O'Malley also points to key historical interpretations of the wars since James Cowan's 1922–1923 official histories, although in a curious omission, he fails to cite Danny Keenan's *Wars Without End*, which provides a valuable Māori perspective.

The book follows a fairly standard overview of the wars—from the Northern War (1845–1846) to the prophetic resistance of Te Kooti Arikirangi (1868–1872). Each chapter opens with a useful summary. Generally, O'Malley successfully straddles the line between the simple and the simplistic. Some of the most traumatic moments of the wars, such as the Crown raid on the unfortified supply village of Rangiaowhia which ended in the massacre of non-combatants, are dealt with briskly but delicately. “Aftermath” captures O'Malley's oeuvre on the remembrance of the wars, with Māori memory contrasted with Pākehā silence. O'Malley asserts, rather tritely, that “it was easier [for Pākehā] just to forget” (p. 254), but it fits the author's purpose. Creating shared public understandings of the wars will allow greater complexity to be addressed in local places.

Ngā Pakanga is not a book that substantially expands our knowledge of the wars. Rather, its contribution lies in packaging these stories in publicly accessible ways. To this end, the book is richly illustrated and well formatted: Bridget Williams Books continues to be a leading publisher of impactful and beautiful scholarship. Image researcher Melanie Lovell-Smith deserves some credit for the lavish figures of objects, documents, and pictures assembled alongside O'Malley's narrative.

The publication is rounded off with appendices—timelines, maps, and substantive endnotes, although no index—that will be helpful to readers seeking to build a foundational knowledge of the wars. Importantly, much of this material goes beyond typical imagery reproduced in popular texts to provide the reader with a vision of the wars firmly embedded in a New Zealand landscape. Overall, *Ngā Pakanga* confirms O'Malley as one of New Zealand's leading public historians.