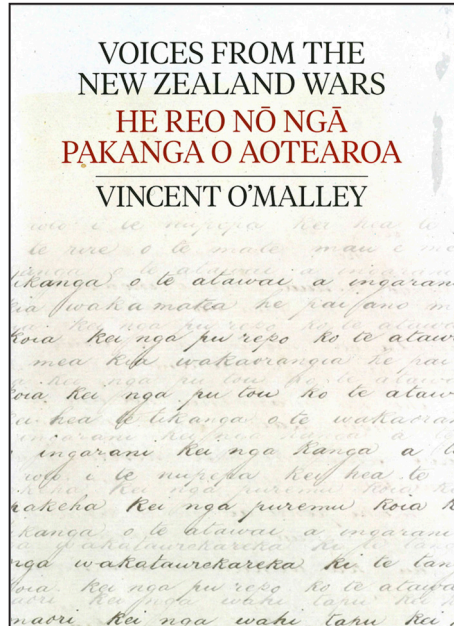


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Multiple voices shed new light on New Zealand Wars

Voices from the New Zealand Wars. He Reo nō ngā pakanga o Aotearoa, by Vincent O'Malley. Wellington, NZ: Bridget Williams Books. 2021, 420 pages. ISBN 9781988587790.

HISTORY and journalism are two very closely linked art forms. Journalism has often been described as the first draft of history, especially war, although veteran BBC journalist John Simpson is credited with saying that it is more like some rough notes scribbled on the back of a napkin that is then thrown out of the window while the restaurant is under fire. When enough time has passed we can discover which news reports about a war were right and we can take stock of the whole field of literature that has arisen around it, from newspaper and journal articles to diaries and other manuscripts. The different voices all contribute to our understanding of an event. Even if they are sometimes wrong about details or argue from points of view with which we may disagree, they provide nuance and understanding of how people responded to momentous events. Bridget Williams Books has published a highly readable and highly recom-



mended collection of memoirs, letters, journals, diaries official accounts and newspaper reports covering what we now call the New Zealand Wars, which ranged from 1845 and 1872.

Drawing on sources in both English and Te Reo, many of which have not been published before, this book provides a wide spectrum of views that will help readers form a picture of the many inter-related conflicts that made up the wars.

It is well worth noting the opposition to the wars from within the ranks of the Pākehā elite, many of whom saw government policy as being deliberately designed to provoke war and give them an excuse to exterminate the Māori. Some, such as former Chief Justice Sir William Martin, saw dangerous precedents in the British government's treatment of its nearest colonial subjects, the

Irish, arguing that the brooding sense of injustice that prevailed in Ireland over the seizure of land would be duplicated in New Zealand.

Such a sense of injustice was recorded in a letter to the government signed by 256 people from Poverty Bay who suddenly found their land confiscated, two years after the fighting had stopped, or as they eloquently put it ‘the blood [had] long since become dry’. Their petition, in which they asked the Assembly to give heed to their troubles, was to no avail.

Some politicians were racked with guilt. Here is Canterbury politician Henry Sewell:

I cannot express my sense of indignation at the wrong done to these unhappy people whose doom may now said to be sealed, for of course they will resist and resistance will be treated as rebellion and bring with it confiscation of their lands and final extermination. I write this with shame and remorse at having been instrumental in placing power in the hands of men whose first act is thus grossly to abuse it.

Journalists, too, could be equally partisan, as evidenced by journalist Samuel Crombie-Brown’s account of the attack on Parihaka, which he described as an outrage.

These were wars of sovereignty and it is important that Māori voices are heard. Unlike the situation in Australia where there is no surviving written record of a contemporary Aboriginal view of the Frontier Wars, Māori were able

to record their experiences, often afterwards at the request of the government.

Thus it is possible to see the development of Māori views on the growing conflicts with the colonial forces and to hear their descriptions of important events.

As an example, Hori Ngatai gives a remarkable account of his part in the Māori victory in the battle of Gate Pa, probably the best known single event of the war. The version given is a translation of answers given to questions by Gilbert Ma and has obviously been edited into a narrative, but it still provides a vivid insight into what happened and how the Māori, having defeated the British, were able to withdraw and regroup during the night.

Voices is a remarkable book and one that should be widely read. It is beautifully produced and illustrated with more than 150 pictures.

Highly recommended.