

## Summary Review of *Te Paepae o Te Rātū: He whāinga takahanga waewae nō tuawhakarere*

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### Introduction

On 12 July 2022, Dr George Slim, Senior Advisor to the Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, forwarded me a copy of an intern report entitled *Te Paepae o Te Rātū: He whāinga takahanga waewae nō tuawhakarere* by Tanith Wirihana Te Waitohioterangi,<sup>1</sup> with a view to commenting 'on its relevancy and accuracy'. This review has been written to assist those interested in the accuracy of this report by providing an expert opinion on the historical statements that it contains, and the positions it advocates based on those statements.

*Te Paepae o Te Rātū: He whāinga takahanga waewae nō tuawhakarere* offers an imaginative interpretation of the encounter between James Cook and some of the *Endeavour's* crew, and members of Rongowhakaata in October 1769 – one that illustrates how a surviving oral history can contrast with a series of written eyewitness accounts. Although the detail in this oral history is relatively slender and selective, it is generally interpreted in this report as the primary source possessing any authority on the encounter. And although no evidence or analysis is provided in support of the claims that the written accounts of several of the eyewitnesses to this event are lacking in substance, their evidentiary value is nonetheless substantially diminished throughout this report.

Disagreements among historians on the interpretation of extant evidence, the significance of that evidence, and its relationship with other evidence, are common features in academic history-writing. However, the parameters of such disagreements are fairly well-defined, and it is within these that debates about events are usually carried out.<sup>2</sup> The author of this report, though, seems unaware of some of the accepted elements of the history he addresses. Thus, what appears to be asserted as a fact or a valid interpretation or historiographical re-evaluation of a past event is sometimes instead a claim that falls outside the range within which historical disagreements occur.

Errors can also appear in historical work, but these tend to be minor (such as immaterially mistaken dates), or less frequently, moderate (such as the error omission or misreading of a source). The most serious errors are those which involve a substantial misrepresentation of an event (or the significance of that event), the omission of sources or perspectives that would lend greater balance to the topic being addressed, the tendentious use of evidence, the use of false contingencies,<sup>3</sup> or the conflation of opinion or ideology with historical fact.<sup>4</sup> These are also examined in the context of the report's content.

### Summary Analysis

There are several historical claims and assertions made in this report which potentially undermine some of the arguments the author is endeavouring to make. Firstly, there are errors of historicity, such as the claim that Cook's expedition was governed by the so-called 'Doctrine of Discovery'. This is, admittedly, a popular misconception, but nonetheless one that is easily falsified.<sup>5</sup> There are also false conflations, with the author trying to make a connection, for example, between Cook's arrival in this location in 1769, and specific events that took place in the region a century later. This is an example of the post hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy, and is also an attempt to establish a causative relationship without taking into account the century of intervening variables.<sup>6</sup>

Another shortcoming with the report is the misrepresentation of events, and the omission of relevant evidence. This is most pronounced when the author attempts to apportion blame for the killings in the encounter between members of Rongowhakaata and Cook and his crew. He writes that when a waka crewed 'primarily by children and adolescents' came in the vicinity of the *Endeavour*, Cook 'shot at them leaving approximately four dead', and then abducted three children.<sup>7</sup> In this section of the report,

the author does not refer to the context provided in the eyewitness accounts by Cook and Joseph Banks – specifically, that the gunfire from some of those from the *Endeavour* was in response to them being attacked by local Māori.<sup>8</sup> This is a critical omission. Also, the claim that Cook shot at the assailants is wrong (those involved are named in the ship's journals). Likewise, the author's allegation that Cook abducted some Māori youths lacks context that the eyewitness evidence from the *Endeavour* offer. Banks and Cook gave direct accounts of the event which, if drawn on in this report, would have applied a substantially different complexion on events,<sup>9</sup> and removed some of the consequent bias in the report, and the ensuing misleading nature of its employment. There is also a problem in this example with the author's application of the term 'murder'. While it may have some emotional or rhetorical appeal, the specific definition of the term generally precludes acts of self-defence,<sup>10</sup> for which in the established conventions of history-writing, 'murder' is not used.

There are some places in the report where the language could be used with more precision, and where factual accuracy is deficient. The author asserts, for example, that in Māori society in 1769, 'the literal and the metaphorical were indistinguishable'.<sup>11</sup> However, in subsequent sections of the report, the author offers examples of contemporaneous literal and metaphorical interpretations of the world by Māori which are clearly distinguishable. The author's use of the colloquial phrase 'out of sync'<sup>12</sup> also lacks precision, and to that extent, undermines the exact meaning of the passage in which it appears. More concerning, though, the author makes some significant claims without any supporting evidence. He writes, in one case, that 'Sociopathy was also encouraged, if not an outright requirement for naval service'.<sup>13</sup> Yet, there is no authority provided for this statement, no clinical evidence, and no corroborating documentary testimony to support it. In other instances, the chronology does not align correctly. The author claims, for example, that Cook was part of a process of 'seizing...land in the name of the English regent'.<sup>14</sup> However, Cook had been dead for thirty-two years by the time the Regency commenced.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, during the Regency period, Britain did not seize any land in New Zealand at all.

When it comes to the vital issues of source selection, there are some unusual decisions made by the author throughout this report. In one example, he places great weight on the advice given to Cook by Lord Morton<sup>16</sup> on how the *Endeavour's* expedition should be carried out.<sup>17</sup> However, Morton's comments were self-described as mere 'hints'. For whatever reason, the author does not engage in any significant way with the much more detailed instructions to Cook from the Admiralty, which were binding on the expedition.<sup>18</sup> One of the challenges with such selective employment of sources is that it can detract from a balanced representation, and thus diminish the impartiality with which events are represented. Perhaps more concerning, still, is the dependence on non-academic sources for some of the more egregious claims in the report. Newspaper articles containing unsubstantiated allegations are given the same weight as more serious forms of scholarship. The inability to discriminate between the reliability of various categories of sources undermines some of the credibility of the report.

While it is legitimate for historians to establish particular lines of argument in their work, the presumption behind this is that those arguments will be evidence-based, and will also account for any conflicting evidence. However, there is a distinction between assuming a particular historiographical position and betraying bias. The author's description of Cook's officers, for example, as a 'gang',<sup>19</sup> is plainly pejorative, which is indicative of bias.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, when Cook makes landfall, instead of walking, he is accused of 'trespassing'<sup>21</sup> – a monocultural perspective that bypasses the cross-cultural nature of this encounter. The author also accuses Cook of being 'tyrannical and violent, and the personification of the worst excesses of colonisation'.<sup>22</sup> Not only does this reveal a serious lack of awareness of the nature of colonisation in this era in other territories, but it does not even apply the objective measures of colonisation to this particular example. Cook did not secure territorial possession of New Zealand, he did not conquer any territory, he did not assert British jurisdiction over the country, he did not attempt to eliminate its indigenous population, and he did not establish it as a British trading base. The accusation of 'the worst excesses of colonisation' applied to Cook's actions in New Zealand thus fall directly into the category of bias.

Finally, the author appears not to have come to terms with issues that arise from a presentist depiction of historical events.<sup>23</sup> This is a rudimentary methodological error. The accusation that Cook was at the forefront of 'racial profiling', for example, applies a modern term to a historical period in which the prevailing values differed substantially. This is not a comment on the rectitude or otherwise of those values, but an illustration of the risks of interpreting past events by current standards and values.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> T. W. Te Waitohioterangi, *Te Paepae o Te Rātū: He whāinga takahanga waewae nō tuawhakarere*, Intern Project produced with the Office of the Prime Minister’s Chief Science Advisor (Wellington, 2022).
- <sup>2</sup> D. Keenan, “Predicting the past: some directions in recent Māori historiography,” *Te Pouhere Kōrero: Māori History, Māori People* 1, no. 1 (1999): 24-35; R. P. Boast, “The Waitangi Tribunal in the Context of New Zealand’s Political Culture and Historiography,” *Journal of the History of International Law/Revue d’histoire du droit international* 18, no. 2-3 (2016): 339-361; B. M. Gough, “Maori and Pakeha in New Zealand Historiography: Preoccupations and Progressions,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 15, no. 4 (1983): 337-341; G. M. Byrnes, “Jackals of the Crown? Historians and the Treaty Claims Process in New Zealand,” *The Public Historian* 20, no. 2 (1998): 9-23.
- <sup>3</sup> S. Marks, “False contingency,” *Current Legal Problems* 62, no. 1 (2009): 1.
- <sup>4</sup> I. S. Lustick, “History, historiography, and political science: Multiple historical records and the problem of selection bias,” *American Political Science Review* (1996): 605, 610; J. Fedor, ““Historical Falsification” as a Master Trope in the Official Discourse on History Education in Putin’s Russia,” *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society* 13, no. 1 (2021): 107-135; S. A. Crane, “Memory, distortion, and history in the museum,” *History and Theory* 36, no. 4 (1997): 44-63.
- <sup>5</sup> There are several reasons why the Doctrine of Discovery cannot be applied to, or used to characterise British intervention in New Zealand: The inherent aversion to Catholicism that was symptomatic of the British government and ruling classes in this period. Anything that even had a semblance of papal influence was shunned; The Doctrine was devised for a specific region, of which New Zealand was not a part, for a colonising power which never had any territorial claim to New Zealand, and at a time when New Zealand’s existence was unknown to Europe; Even for Catholic nations in Europe, the 1493 Bull had carried little authority at the time, and by the eighteenth century was no longer adhered to at all; By the time Britain first became aware of New Zealand, in the mid-seventeenth century, the Doctrine had effectively been in abeyance for around 150 years (partly due to its supersession by the Treaty of Tordesillas); There is no mention of the Doctrine of Discovery in any British Government document relating to New Zealand’s colonisation, and neither did its precepts form part of British policy in this period; More than three centuries had elapsed from when the doctrine was formulated to when Britain began to develop a distinct policy on New Zealand. Over that time, the nature of European imperialism had altered dramatically, and precepts devised in fifteenth-century Rome had little bearing on the nature of British colonisation being devised in nineteenth-century London; In the approximately two years leading up to New Zealand’s cession of sovereignty in 1840 via the Treaty of Waitangi, British policy on the territory was developed on principles that contravene the central tenets of the Doctrine of Discovery. This is especially important because it negates the argument that somehow, the general sentiment of the Doctrine embedded itself in British colonial policy in the nineteenth century as a precursor to New Zealand’s colonisation; The Doctrine of Discovery was explicitly based on the desire by the Catholic Church to proselytise. However, British intervention in New Zealand from the late-eighteenth century was largely secular in its motives. See P. Moon, “The Historicity of the Doctrine of Discovery in New Zealand’s Colonisation,” *Te Kaharoa* 15, no. 1 (2022): 1-39.
- <sup>6</sup> N. Altman and M. Krzywinski, “Points of Significance: Association, correlation and causation,” *Nature methods* 12, no. 10 (2015): 899-900; R. Moreck and B. Yeung, “Economics, history, and causation,” *Business History Review* 85, no. 1 (2011): 39-63; J. Mahoney, “Strategies of causal assessment in comparative historical analysis,” in J. Mahoney and D. Rueschemeyer, eds., *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 337-72.
- <sup>7</sup> Te Waitohioterangi, 3.
- <sup>8</sup> This event arose from a confrontation between a party from the *Endeavour* and a group of local Māori. Banks wrote ‘I fired my musquet which was loaded with small shot, leveling it between his shoulders who was not 15 yards from me. On the shot striking him he ceased his cry but instead of quitting his prize continued to wave it over his head retreating as gently as before’. Cook noted in his journal that when being attacked by Māori, ‘the Coxswain of the pinnace who had the charge of the Boats, seeing this fire’d two musquets over their heads, the first made them stop and look round them, but the 2<sup>d</sup> they took no notice off upon which a third was fired and killed one of them upon the spot just as he was going to dart his spear at the boat’. J. Banks, “Journal kept during the first voyage of Captain Cook in H M S Endeavour from Poverty Bay to Batavia, 9<sup>th</sup> October, 1769, to 10<sup>th</sup> October 1770,” Auckland Libraries Heritage Collections, ref GMS\_51\_035, 9 October 1769; J. Cook, Daily Journal Entry, 9 October 1769. Cook Journal transcript, National Library of Australia.
- <sup>9</sup> Banks noted in his journal that the combatants that the Endeavour’s crew captured were ‘expecting no doubt instant death’. Instead, however, ‘they recovered their spirits in a very short time....As soon as they came onboard we offered them bread to eat of which they almost devoured a large quantity, in the mean time they had Cloaths given them; this good usage had such an effect that they seemed to have intirely forgot everything

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that had happned, put on chearfull and lively countenances and askd and answerd questions with a great deal of curiosity'. They were all soon returned to their community. Banks, *ibid*.

- <sup>10</sup> J. M. Purver, "The Language of Murder," in *University of California Los Angeles Law Review* 14 (1966): 1306-1311; J. Black, "Murder: the state of the art," *American Literary History* 12, no. 4 (2000): 780-793; G. Anscombe, "War and Murder," in C. A. J. Coady and I. Primoratz, eds., *Military Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2017), 257-274.
- <sup>11</sup> Te Waitohioterangi, 6.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 6.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. Georhe III was king at the time in question
- <sup>15</sup> R. W. Davis, *A Political History of the House of Lords, 1811-1846* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2022).
- <sup>16</sup> Te Waitohioterangi, 18-19.
- <sup>17</sup> Morton, 'Hints Offered to the Consideration of Captain Cooke, Mr. Bankes, Doctor Solander and Other Gentlemen Who Go upon the Expedition on Board the Endeavour. Chiswick', in John Cawte Beaglehole (ed), *The Journals of Captain James Cook on His Voyages of Discovery, Voyage of the Endeavour 1768-1771* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1955).
- <sup>18</sup> *Secret Instructions for Lieutenant James Cook Appointed to Command His Majesty's Bark the Endeavour 30 July 1768*, National Library of Australia, ref. NLA MS2; T. Combe and B. Buchan, "Among 'Savage and Brutal Nations': Instructing Identity and Science in the Pacific," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 45, no. 1 (2022): 29-41; H. B. Carter, "The Royal Society and the voyage of HMS Endeavour 1768-71," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 49, no. 2 (1995): 245-260.
- <sup>19</sup> Te Waitohioterangi, 24.
- <sup>20</sup> C. B. McCullagh, "Bias in historical description, interpretation, and explanation," *History and Theory* 39, no. 1 (2000): 39-66. Ian S. Lustick, "History, historiography, and political science: Multiple historical records and the problem of selection bias," *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 3 (1996): 605-618.
- <sup>21</sup> Te Waitohioterangi, 24.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.
- <sup>23</sup> C. Spoerhase, "Presentism and precursorship in intellectual history," *Culture, Theory & Critique* 49, no. 1 (2008): 49-72; O. Moro-Abadia, "Thinking about 'Presentism' from a Historian's Perspective: Herbert Butterfield and Hélène Metzger," *History of Science* 47, no. 1 (2009): 55-77.