

## The New Zealand Wars: Ngā Pakanga o Aotearoa

Vincent O'Malley

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Do we need another book on the wars or civil unrest that took place in New Zealand between iwi, and between Māori and Pākehā that have as many names as causes? Author, and historian, Vincent O'Malley seems to think so. This is his second book that covers the period. His first, *The Great War for New Zealand Waikato 1800 – 2000* (2016) was reviewed in Archifacts 2018 no 2.

O'Malley acknowledges and draws on the works of those that already have written in depth on the topic. He claims that Belich's *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict* (1986), which spawned a television series, remains the seminal work on the era. It is clear, however, that O'Malley's newest work will be another very important book for students, as well as those who seek to understand events that still have an impact on our society today.

It is an easy to read, concise book, covering many unrelated events happening in different parts of the country at the same time. One drawback of this conciseness is that, given the complicated subject, the coverage of events is sometimes too brief. For example, to deal with the Parihaka in a few pages seems very once over lightly dealing with a significant event, not only in Taranaki's but New Zealand's history as well as the concept of passive resistance, which is linked to global ideologies. O'Malley's referencing of other works on the topic enables readers to explore those issues and areas which are of most interest to them. It therefore acts as a guidebook, directing people to the most appropriate material for their specific needs.

The use of maps and images, often merely page fillers in 'history books' add greatly to the understanding of O'Malley's words. Even portraits are vital in reminding us that these events affected real people, and form a connection between events that happened many years ago and New Zealanders of today.

The main focus of the work, naturally, is to give an account of what happened where and why. As with most wars, there is no one cause and although it is convenient to call the events the Land Wars (as opposed to the earlier 'musket wars') there were many different reasons why certain iwi or hapu took up arms. O'Malley explores the personalities and reasons behind the events as separate actions.

Worth special comments are O'Malley's introduction and conclusion. The introduction gives an outline of what happened, but he also addresses the often confusing topic of what to call the events he is writing about. He poses the question, 'do names really matter?' He explains that what we call the events can apportion blame (the 'Maori Wars' infers Māori were the enemy, as in the 'Zulu Wars') and provide a single cause (the 'Land Wars'). O'Malley, like many before him, believes the 'New Zealand Wars' were to be the most comprehensive and fairest term to be used.

The conclusion explains concisely the effect the conflicts have had on Māori and Pākehā, and regional economies and stresses that some of those effects still are being felt. He mentions Rā Maumahara - a national day of commemoration for all those affected by the hostiles, which was established last year, unfortunately with very little promotion or explanation.

The only issues that I might have with the work was that it often comes from a viewpoint which champions or acts as an apologist for Māori. Wrongs were committed on both sides and both sides suffered. Although earlier books came from a very biased, 'pro-pākehā' standpoint, there is a fine line between being fair and taking the other's side. A few times I felt the fear and dispossession that settlers faced was played down.

This may affect those people's descendants which could in turn reawaken negative feelings.

The other issue is more a plea for historians to look at the entire country when discussing the New Zealand Wars. As mainlanders we are led to believe that the 'North Island Wars' didn't impact there. However, the Ngāi Tahu land claim is one of the longest running indigenous land claims in the world and affects large parts of the South Island. A heke to Ōmārama (North Otago) in 1879 asserted land rights of Waitaha. Land rights, and other disputes, did affect Māori and Pākehā in the South Island. It also reaped benefits by many North Islanders coming southwards to escape the hostilities. These factors are rarely mentioned in books on the New Zealand conflict.

I believe O'Malleys presentation of the wars is one of the clearest that has been published to date. With the Government's laudable decision to make New Zealand history compulsory this book will undoubtedly be a text book used to learn about a very uncomfortable part of our nation's history.

*Kathleen Stringer*