Ng reo o ng niupepa: M ori language newspapers 1855-1863

Paterson, Lachlan


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Abstract:
By 1855, most Mori still lived in a tribal setting, with little official Pkeh interference. This would have been as they expected, exercising their tino rangatiratanga, the chiefly rights guaranteed by the Treaty of Waitangi. However, their world was changing. In an effort to gain Pkeh goods, many Mori had entered the market economy. Most had converted to Christianity. Many could read and write. Some sold land to accommodate the increasing number of Pkeh settlers. These trends gratified the government. It envisaged a New Zealand society dominated by Pkeh, in which European mores would be norm, and where its sovereignty, gained through the Treaty, would be more substantive rather than nominal.

At this time, the government pursued the policy of iwi kotahi (one people) or "amalgamation". The policy included the aim of elevating Mori socially and economically by extending to them the benefits of European civilisation. It sought to encourage Mori to give up their "waste" lands for Pkeh settlement, and for Mori to accept the rule of English law, and government authority. Ultimately the two races would become one society - a Pkeh-style society. The government used newspapers for disseminating its message to Mori, publishing the bi-lingual Maori Messenger - Te Karere Maori from January 1855 to September 1863.

This thesis investigates the government’s newspaper, plus other Mori language newspapers appearing within the period, printed by government agents, evangelical Pkeh, the Wesleyan Church, and the rival Mori government, the Kngitanga. The thesis not only looks at the impact of newspapers upon Mori society and political issues to Mori, including the first Taranaki War, the Kohimarama Conference, and the impending all-out war with the Kngitanga in Waikato.

Using the newspapers as its major source, this thesis seeks to show how Mori might have understood the issues, and where possible, to allow them to respond in their own voices. We are fortunate that for almost a year the Kngitanga was able to publish its own views in Te Hokioi, thus allowing the anti-government Mori voice to articulate its stand. However, Mori opinion was hardly unitary. The Pkeh-run Mori language newspapers, through reports, reported speeches, and their correspondence columns, provide another set of Mori opinions, which show a variety of opinions on political and social issues. Many histories of this period focus on the tensions and conflicts between Crown and Mori, thus marginalising pro-government Mori, the waverers, and those who merely wanted to keep trouble from their door. This thesis endeavours to illuminate the whole colonial discourse as it appeared in the Mori language newspaper, providing a wide range of opinions as possible.

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