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Nation Building in Distant Seas

A Work in Progress

Rt Hon Simon Upton

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I like the metaphor of a knowledge wave. It has a deliciously post-modern feel to it – Schumpeter on a surfboard. When the Trust ran its first forum in 2001, I was a little worried by the title it chose – *Catching the Knowledge Wave*. There was a hint that the New Zealand waka had to be paddled furiously to catch a wave that was rising ahead of us and would leave us behind unless we swiftly digitalised all our paddles.

We've been riding the knowledge wave from the outset. Our entire national history since 1840 has unfolded alongside the development of our modern globally connected society. So this year's focus on leadership raises a better question – how do we stay on board? I want to talk about the importance of nationhood to that challenge. I've chosen to relate my comments to two areas of risk that bear on how we experience our sense of nationhood. The first is the vulnerability that goes with small population size and geopolitical isolation – how do we stay connected and outward looking. The second is the risk that our national cohesion could founder over conflicting ideas about the basis of sovereign authority in New Zealand. The building of our nation is a work in progress. This address is about ensuring that it continues.

The vulnerability of being small and isolated

No other developed, first world nation combines our small population size with such geographical and geopolitical isolation. This fact alone makes comparisons with 'like' OECD economies problematic. There are any number of small rich countries adjacent to or part of densely populated continents. But none in our position. Australia is the next 'smallest' country – and there's nothing small about it physically or economically. And of course there are plenty of isolated countries that are small and poor. Uniquely, New Zealand appears to be a haven of Celtic rurality, Nordic efficiency and Californian hedonism parked at the end of the earth.

And isn't that just what the post-modern age is all about? Hasn't e-connectedness given the future to clever, responsive people wherever they are? Maybe. But it's also a fact

that many of the countries with which we like to compare ourselves have all been in the process of joining together in federations or associations that add to critical mass, not splinter it. Scale and depth do seem to matter. Exposure to new ideas and cultures, and the spur that provides to innovation happens most easily when people can move freely. The desire for flesh and blood contact is unabated. How else do we explain the desire of New Zealanders, especially young New Zealanders, to travel as they do?

Whether we are thinking of the federations that gave rise to the USA, Canada and Australia or the still unfolding construction of the European Union, confident nationalism has been combined with varying types of political integration that have made it easier for people to move.

New Zealand stands out as a remarkably unattached outlier. We had our chance to join Australia, of course, roughly a century ago and passed it up. Such was the reckless confidence that the security blanket of empire engendered in New Zealand minds. We thought we'd foot it equally with Australia in our relations with the metropolitan centre. Of course, that centre has now long vanished and we're left with an Australia that punches at a very much heavier weight. Yes, we have ANZCER. But as our demography and internal political preoccupations diverge the likelihood of federation has to my mind never been more distant. That's not to say it isn't talked about. It's one of the great *sotto voce* conversations frustrated New Zealanders indulge in when they're feeling particularly claustrophobic. But very few will own up to it publicly.

You can still go and live in Australia pretty easily, especially if you have the skills. Visa-free access to Australia remains, uniquely, available to New Zealanders (although as is made clear from time to time it is not immune from question). We may be as close to Australia as we're ever likely to be.

So if we can't easily dock our nation state into some sort of supra-national enterprise, what other devices can we activate to improve our human connectedness? One obvious solution is immigration. The required leadership on this subject is all about integrity

when it comes to informing New Zealanders about the facts. Politicians, business leaders, journalists and academics have a duty to see that New Zealanders understand the basic facts about the importance of immigration to New Zealand.

Very simply, net migration added the relatively modest figure of 180,900 people to New Zealand's population between 1960 and 2000. But the outflow of New Zealanders has been much bigger: 477,800 New Zealand citizens departed over that period. So inward migration by the citizens of other countries (658,700 of them) has been the way in which we have compensated for the outflow.¹ The numbers, year on year, are volatile. Fears of brain drains are not substantiated. But without inward migration we would certainly be very much the poorer.

I'm not here to argue for any particular level of immigration. I would simply observe that we are a country built on immigration and it is hard to see how the infusion of new skills and new attitudes by people who want to secure themselves and their families can be anything other than beneficial. It is sobering to compare New Zealand's thus far robust fate with the 'failed' Dominion of Newfoundland. Newfoundland, like New Zealand, opted not to join the nearest available federation of British colonies. But the 20th century proved too tough for even that valiant island nation. After catastrophic losses at Gallipoli and on the Somme, followed by bankruptcy in the Depression, Newfoundland 'folded' into Canada in 1948. It is still shrinking – a population loss of 3% between 1991 and 1996, and 7% between 1996 and 2000.² This is what happens when no-one wants to come to your country and there's no influx to make up for the exodus.

My next contention may be more surprising: that we need to match an openness to immigration with a determination to keep every possible door open for New Zealanders wishing to leave. At a mundane level this is because exposure to bigger, more populous societies by having New Zealanders live and work in them is one of our best antidotes to parochialism. The right to work in Australia, the right of young kiwis to live and work for

two years in the UK and the various reciprocal student work permit schemes are all vital to our national state of mind.

Because this is a land of settlers and movers, not a place where people have been forever buried in some immemorial landscape. That is as fundamentally true of Maori as it is the rest of us. It's also worth remembering that, within the Anglo-Celtic fraction of Pakehadom, there are many who come from families that have been part of repeated colonisations and re-colonisations within and beyond the British Isles over the last 500 years. Why should they suddenly develop some immobility – in an era when it has never been easier to move, and move again?

The loss of New Zealanders abroad should not of itself be a concern. It's whether or not they return or, if they don't, how they continue to relate to their homeland that matters. The latter could turn out to be as important as anything else. Our diaspora is potentially a rich source of national advantage. It contains by definition the people outside of New Zealand most likely to take an interest in the country. Whether we look to them as a source of investment, intelligence, repeat tourism, philanthropy or just people who talk up the book of a small country in a populous world, they are both a conduit for promoting New Zealanders abroad and a valuable shield in the fight against national introspection. I applaud Initiatives like the KEA Trust, established after the last conference.

Here are two more things we could do to take a lead:

- Spend some scarce taxpayers' dollars finding out much more about who leaves, why, and where they go. We are a country with a high level of population churn by international standards. Australia takes this much more seriously than we do.³ Why not join forces in analysing the data? If it's good enough to educate and train people, surely it's worth knowing something about where that human capital is.
- More radically, can we re-think the boundaries of the New Zealand nation state in a way that takes account of contemporary, communications-rich reality: are there ways

in which off-shore kiwis can be given the opportunity to play a direct part in the political fabric of their country of birth?

In respect of this last point it's worth reflecting on the fact that there are estimated to be between 600,000 and 1 million kiwis living abroad, over 400,000 of them in Australia alone (including probably enough Maori to justify a whole extra Maori seat). The fact that they have left says nothing about their commitment to New Zealand. If it comes to important national issues – including some that might be the subject of referenda - can we and should we connect with the opinions and views of up to 20% of our population? In an age of e-connectedness and virtual everything, I think we should be prepared to be very lateral about the way we define our political community.

Finally, under the heading of maximising our connectedness, we need to ensure that the citizens and decision-makers of other countries know much more about us. We're trading on old fluencies – and they're not getting any deeper. Modest efforts have been made to improve our networks in some parts of the world, notably Asia, but the reality is that the pigeon-hole into which we are slotted, reflexively, differs little from that of twenty or thirty years ago.

Foreigners I talk to who know anything about us, think we're richer, greener and sleepier than in fact we are. Almost universally they assume that our prosperity, stability and global fluency is a much more effortlessly maintained thing than it is. New Zealand is a sort of southern hemisphere, Anglo-Saxon version of a socially and economically advanced Nordic economy – the sort of country that doesn't need any favours and whose visiting leaders aren't a priority to talk to.

Our diplomats would no doubt bitterly contest this. After all, they loyally devote their lives to opening doors and talking up our book. But there's only so much a small foreign service comprised of generalists can do. And only so much time other countries will spend listening to them rehearsing self-serving arguments. So just buying a bigger Foreign Service isn't the answer. To be listened to we have to add value, and that

requires some investments that governments haven't, traditionally, been prepared to make.

So here's my proposal:

- establish several off-shore centres for NZ-related studies located in regions where we need to maintain fluency and gain intelligence.

I'd go for Brussels, Washington and Singapore to start with and a fourth somewhere in the troubled western Pacific to the north of us. Each centre should be planted deep within a prestigious university and support a handful of really bright people from academia, industry and government tackling issues of common interest to NZ and the host region.

How about some work on the true environmental impact of European agricultural subsidies (we can be sure they are not oblivious to the impact of New Zealand's own pastoral industries); or joint work with US researchers on failed or failing states in our own region? There are huge opportunities for collaboration with Asian researchers interested in the beginnings of the spread of the proto-Polynesian peoples through South East Asia and the Pacific over the last few thousand years – just as there are contemporary issues in biosecurity that are of vital trade and environmental concern.

The success of any such centres should be measured as much in the number of opinion leaders and decision-makers who crossed the threshold as in the number of papers published. If we're to be globally connected, we need forward positions – front line intellectual troops whom others want to talk to. The ideal outcome would be a world where European Commissioners or American think tank heads (who these days seem to have almost supplanted the official bureaucracy) come to us because of what they learn from us rather than reluctantly finding space in groaning agendas because we ask to be heard.

The vulnerability of a fractured political nation

Let me turn now to the other big area of vulnerability I nominated at the outset - the risk that our national cohesion could founder over the issue of sovereignty. This is the great minefield of contemporary New Zealand. I'd like to see more frank and open debate on this issue where there are sharply conflicting views. My brief thesis is that the project of the last 25 years, which has seen the most dramatic advances in Treaty-based discourse, jurisprudence, claims settlement and legislative reform, is at an impasse. And only some inspired leadership will find a way out of the extraordinarily sophisticated but unloved citadel we have built.

Try as I may, I can find little truly popular support for a new, treaty-based nationhood – if that is indeed what lies behind the intellectual scaffolding that has been erected by teams of lawyers, legislators and scholars. Twenty five years of erudition has produced something that is starting to resemble a constitutional glass bead game whose tenets and rules are so arcane that only an elite can understand them.

To get the feel for this work in progress, you can do no better than read *Histories, Power & Loss*, a remarkable collection of essays published two years ago on the evolving Treaty debate.⁴ It is a monument to the depth of the intellectual debate that has now placed in question the very way in which we understand New Zealand's nationhood. Whether it is Bill Oliver's description of historical enquiry as the basis for a utopian reconstruction of the past (a charge he levels at the Waitangi Tribunal), Paul McHugh's account of the rise and fall of the Anglo-Whig constitutional dream or Lyndsay Head's remarkable, linguistically-based deconstruction of what she terms the 'repackaging of perpetual innocence', we are confronted by a body of erudition that is, to my mind, simply stunning. The University of Auckland should be duly proud to be the home of its co-editor, Andrew Sharp.

But to return to the intellectual scaffolding I referred to, despite its complexity, there seems to be no coherent edifice behind it. In fact, there are a series of quite different – and in some cases – conflicting projects under way. More importantly, the distance between any of these projects and the public at large is huge. In this respect, I have to disagree with one of the contributors to *Histories, Power & Loss*, Paul McHugh, when he asserts that contemporary New Zealand political culture seems to have become accustomed to the view that Crown sovereignty is limited by the Treaty of Waitangi.⁵ This is not a political culture – or certainly not a *popular* political culture with which I am familiar. On the contrary, contemporary political culture seems to me split wide open on the extent to which the Treaty can and should speak into the future.

On one side there are those who are committed to parallel (and in some respects even separate) sovereignties. Whether they ground their argument in the Treaty's guarantee of *rangatiratanga* or an assertion of some pre-existing and unbroken sovereignty, the power of the challenge to present arrangements is largely the same. On the other wing there is a large rump that insists on a unitary state in which the Treaty's future role ranges from negligible to non-existent. A somewhat sparsely settled middle ground hopes for some accommodation or partnership that can be made to work. The only common thread in contemporary political culture seems to be growing complexity.

Let me first say something about how we should confront the issue of where sovereign power resides. I see three approaches out there – denial, evasion or constructive engagement. The first two may seem like straw men but they are heavily subscribed. Confronted with the argument that the Treaty creates some special constitutional space for Maori, a common – perhaps the overwhelming - reflex is to deny any such thing. Notwithstanding considerable judicial commentary to the contrary, many New Zealanders will simply deny any space for Maori beyond common citizenship. Sovereignty in their book means one man, one vote. Whatever *rangatiratanga* means, it cannot limit majoritarian democracy.

No-one should doubt the huge political appeal of this position. It results, in part, from one generation of politicians over-selling the significance of the settlements made to claims before the Waitangi Tribunal. New Zealanders have a fairly strong attachment to the notion of property and respect for fair dealing. So it's no surprise that compensation was politically saleable. But the *quid pro quo*, unwisely offered, was that these settlements would see an end to the Treaty being raised as a source of contention. Anyone with the briefest acquaintance of Treaty history knew that that was unlikely.

Be that as it may, the argument lent new force to those whose instinct was to deny any contemporary constitutional significance to the Treaty. Denial may be a tactic that works well on the hustings, but it will not deter those who regard the Treaty as a living document. The stronger the denial, the more potent the point at issue. Those who regard ancient documents as irrelevant today, should reflect on the large number of New Zealanders who still cite Magna Carta to reinforce alleged arguments about rights.

Then there is evasion, by which I mean avoiding outright rejection (or acknowledgement) of the challenge to sovereignty. It's a tactic that's a bit like answering a question that hasn't been asked. An evasive strategy doesn't necessarily involve bad faith. There may be times when if people aren't ready to engage, discretion *is* the better part of valour. Equally, the successive resort to expedients without an idea of how they may or may not relate to the unanswered question can in time create even more difficulties than it seeks to defer.

This I fear has been the Crown's strategy for some time now. And lest I seem coy about what or whom I have in mind, let me turn the accusation against myself. I was responsible for putting broad treaty references in several very significant pieces of legislation. One of them goes to the heart of this debate - the Resource Management Act. In that legislation we required all those exercising powers under the Act to take into account the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. I am quite sure that none of us knew what we meant when we signed up to that formula. We were aware, of course, of the judicial pronouncements of the preceding decade; and of the Crown's attempts to

calibrate its own dealings with Maori through some principles developed for the purpose. But given the extraordinarily wide reach of the Act, handing its implementation over to local councils with no clear guidance on how those principles might intersect with the claimed rangatiratanga of any particular group amounted to a legislative evasion.

Now, as I say, that may have not been a wholly bad thing in terms of acknowledging the significance of the issue but at the same time avoiding a premature attempt to 'close' on it. But as time has passed and ordinary citizens have had to live with the consequences of Parliament's evasion, hostility to this manifestation of the Treaty has grown. And of course the absence of legislative clarity has implicitly left matters to the courts at a later date.

There are those who would argue that the Courts are not such a bad place to pursue this process. Judges in our system certainly aren't driven by the venal pursuit of office. And they have the time – at least in the remote higher echelons – to think long and hard, something the crises of the moment don't often permit our legislators. Alex Frame makes as beguiling a case as any for the development of a 'New Zealand common law' to take up some of the responsibility for 'uncovering' values and practices that are formative of our own institutions.⁶ This clearly has something going for it. But the courts can never claim to act with the authority of the people as a whole (a point Frame is quick to admit).

That leaves constructive political engagement – the 'obvious' way forward which is really extremely difficult. It is difficult because, in our ruthlessly pared down constitutional model, there is no obvious place to commence – and continue – a conversation on how we should broach constitutional questions. While the political reality may be that nuclear level power resides in Parliament (and no-one should under-estimate the potency of popular democracy), it is not a forum equipped for building a consensus. Indeed, the revolving door of political office in our uni-cameral system makes institutional or political memory over much more than three or four terms of Parliament hard to come by.

The truth is that the Treaty is shipwrecked between three bodies – Parliament, the Courts and the Waitangi Tribunal, none of which can claim, simultaneously, the authority, the legitimacy and the public respect needed to point the way forward. So my first practical proposal is very simple. We must -

- carve out a space and find the people who can bring this debate back in touch with the public at large and propose solutions that an overwhelming majority of New Zealanders not only feel they can live with, but solutions that will come to be actively grasped as the basis of our nationhood.

This will require true leadership. Rather than continue down a path of retrospective constitutionalism in the rarefied atmosphere of the courts and academia, we need to confront some prospective constitutionalism. No-one should conclude from this, that I am calling for some sort of Constitutional Convention. Constitutions can be built around small-‘c’ conventions and understandings that are worked through. We need a place where those understandings can be developed. But I am deeply sceptical about self-conscious acts of one-shot constitution building.

So I’m not here to offer a blueprint. But I feel obliged to state the deep pre-judgements (Burke would have called them prejudices) that I bring to this debate since we will only move forward in an environment of complete openness. Very briefly, the only workable and peaceable future I can see is one that hangs onto the nation state we know as New Zealand – a sovereign entity whose affairs and international relations are conducted on the basis of some shared convictions that enjoy democratic endorsement by the people as a whole.

On the other hand, I think it absurd to deny that Maori, as a result of the Treaty, enjoy a special status as a result of its undertakings. That status is not exhausted by simple land rights (which evaporate the day the last land claim is settled) or participating citizenship under Article III. It doesn’t seem to me particularly radical to acknowledge that a people who have been here for 800 years will have particular associations in and of this land.

And, as we showed during the Ngai Tahu settlement, they can be accommodated by specific acknowledgement on title deeds and on the face of the Resource Management Act. By linking Ngai Tahu's claimed rangatiratanga to specific resources, we moved away from the RMA's sweeping sword of Damocles approach to a more manageable specification of the interests we were seeking to acknowledge.

With that approach in mind, I can't find it in me to get as upset as some people about *taniwha*. Whilst I think the beasties should know their place, their existence in the Maori world is no different from any number of folk or religious manifestations in cultures around the world including the deepest recesses of Britain and the wider European continent. Most societies find ways of acknowledging hallowed places usually by the creation of some sort of property right or special status. The Ngai Tahu Act may be a model for coming to grips with these things in a way that escapes the proceduralism and abstraction of the RMA.

But I can't see that one can go much beyond that approach. We can't legislate for the indefinable, the unknown or the illimitable. If we are not to live in a divided society the steps we take to protect cultural specificity have to be comprehensible to *both* sides. And I can't see how schemes for parallel or co-ordinate sovereignties can work, nor the alternative vision of little statelets carved out of the nation. Whatever special status the Treaty affords Maori, it has to leave space for the evolution and development of a nation that is in any case rapidly changing its make up. In the last 20 years, over 200,000 migrants have arrived from Asia alone. They bring with them no memory – either of Treaty denial or Treaty rights. But, along with other arrivals, theirs are skills we need to balance our outflow (which, let's remember, includes some importantly 'globalised' Maori).

To my mind, constitutional re-engineering simply won't work if tries to erect some complicated dual sovereignty. Our Chief Justice has recently made a thoughtful contribution on this subject in which she describes what one might term the radical view on sovereignty as engaging in a 'sterile debate'.⁷ Alex Frame has referred to it

delightfully as “divisive sky geometry”.⁸ Unsurprisingly, I concur with them. But describing such arguments as sterile or divisive doesn't dispose of them. Nationalism in its recidivist forms can be an all-consuming drug. It is only going to be open to influence if an equally powerful national or supra-national narrative is at work.

This is where I believe we have a problem that will require remarkable leadership. We have a dysfunctional national story or ‘narrative’. Very simply, the story that powered the nation for roughly a century from the 1880s and was unselfconsciously extemporised by leaders from Seddon to Holyoake has crashed. It was ‘our’ settler version of a story of Anglo-American exceptionalism, filled with breathless ‘firsts’ – first to this, first to that, a model of egalitarian and progressive nation building. It was the story of a nation that believed itself to be effortlessly and naturally engaged in the wider world – Gallipoli, North Africa and Italy, there in San Francisco at the inception of the United Nations. It found a place for Maori in that story – subordinate and sometimes patronising but not without real admiration too (the Maori Battalion was an undeniable intervention in global history).

But of course the Empire that fuelled it (and the economic stimulus that went with it) has evaporated. That in itself has been navigable. Much more damaging to my mind has been the deconstructive role of post-colonial theory. I do not say that because there was no colonial baggage to be jettisoned – far from it. Rather, it is the corrosive effect of an analysis that has failed to transform the positive elements of that colonial heritage and singularly failed to build some of the confidence of that narrative into a new hybrid nation.

The very same process of imperial retreat and the deconstruction of its mythologies have had an equally disabling but very different effect on Maori discourse. In terms of global connectedness, Maori were as dependent on Empire and the Crown as the settlers were. Culturally, they have been much less disabled by its collapse. There is plenty of room for Maori to sustain a strong culture. (The material for a benevolent Pakeha nationalism is harder to identify.)

The problem arises elsewhere. Decolonisation has allowed Maori to force the re-writing of history to reveal the marginalisation and loss they faced at the hands of settlers. But by focusing in the post-colonial era on the failings of the Crown, Maori are left opposed to a political entity that has ceased to exist - except as the embodiment of the People in Parliament. As a friend remarked to me, Maori and Pakeha have ended up backing towards a wall to keep some distance between them, for fear of what might otherwise dissolve them. The only problem is that we're backing into the same wall. In an encounter as intimate as this, the only available solutions are ones everyone can sign up to.

That would be easier to do if we possessed a much stronger national narrative. This is not fashionable in many quarters. When Marxism still had a respectable following, its adherents used to worry that nationalism was a distraction from the universal realities of class in the global division of labour. A not dissimilar scepticism lurks in the bosom of contemporary liberals who see in nationalist sentiment a barrier to the free exchange of goods and people. And of course nationalism of a virulently ethnic or racist form has caused countless horrors.

But we are not living in some post-modern, post-national space. Nation states remain the basis for functioning (or failing) legal codes on which people depend for the maintenance of civility. And ours either functions or fails depending on whether we – either the 3.9 million on-shore or possibly the 4.9 million measured globally – can agree that there is an enterprise worth preserving. If it's to be a common one, then there has to be some shared hybrid pride in our national enterprise. On this score I'd like to focus on just one priority for action –

- a reappraisal of the way we teach history.

If you care to take a look at the social studies and history curricula, which cover the entire school-based encounter, young New Zealanders have with the story of their nation, two things rapidly become apparent. First, there is no guarantee that coverage of

the story will be complete. Secondly, there is a strong sense that New Zealand's story is a very local one with only attenuated links to a wider narrative. Let me expand.

The social studies curriculum, containing as it does the only *compulsory* brush with history, goes as far as the fourth form. It is at the same time intuitively appealing and hugely complex.⁹ There is no prescribed minimum that every New Zealand child will encounter that puts him or her in touch with their national roots and their national story. True, there is a broad outline of the range of material they *should* encounter (indeed, it is described in the curriculum as “Essential Learning about New Zealand Society”). But *which* elements will be encountered, *how* they will be dealt with and *how* they are stitched together is left to the ingenuity and tastes of hard-working teachers who are assumed to be incredibly resourceful and, implicitly, hugely well-read themselves.

An exploration of some of the teaching units that have been developed reveals a toothsome smorgasbord with plenty of New Zealand content (how boats, trains, cars and planes have changed New Zealand communities, the 1918 'flu epidemic, Tangata Whenua as early innovators) plus a smattering of off-shore histories (the ancient Egyptians seem to have a good advocate somewhere).¹⁰

But the pedagogical aim lies elsewhere. It is to expose students to 'elements' of New Zealand culture, society and history (summarised as 5 strands) through the use of three techniques (called 'processes') – inquiry, values exploration and social decision making. Through this it is hoped to develop in citizens the skills needed “to enable them to participate responsibly in society”. I'm not going to argue that this won't make for interesting and enquiring students. But it does seem entirely possible that children can leave school without any comprehensive knowledge of the basic narrative of our nation. The 'elements' are nowhere stitched together – it's like one of those re-arrangeable pieces of art and you don't even have to use all the bits.

The secondary curriculum is compulsory – provided, that is, you choose to study history. But even here we steer away from narrative coherence. Indeed, we only step back

gingerly from the present: form five gets to look at seven twentieth century historical themes “which are important and interesting to New Zealanders today”. Form six ventures into “some of the factors that have shaped today’s world” (such as industrialisation and imperialism) and, daringly, demands “more historical insight” as well as crossing into the distant past – the nineteenth century. There is almost a sense of anti-climax in the seventh form when we finally risk all and opt for compulsory areas of study “which cover an extended period of time and demand a higher level of thinking”. The choice is between New Zealand in the Nineteenth Century and England between 1558 and 1667.

Nowhere is there a sense that there is a big meta-narrative against which our contemporary debates *may* be able to be understood. I say ‘may’ because I am under no illusions that history is a pageant to which we can turn like some giant wiring diagram. Who would deny the syllabus’ grave injunction that “students will discover that while the past cannot be changed, the way it is viewed can and does change in the light of new evidence, new concerns in society, and differing perspectives”? But it is surely another thing to read the past solely in terms of the present, bearing in mind the risks of imposing current passions retrospectively on our unsuspecting forbears.

I would argue that there are two big meta-narratives that every New Zealander should have some feel for – the coming of the Maori and the coming of the British (along with other Europeans). We are both settler peoples. We arrived in historic time. And the consequences of our arrivals and interactions continue to play out today. If there is a period in our history that should be highlighted – and placed in a wider context that simply cannot be confined to these shores - it is the period between 1770 to 1850. In European terms this spans the high point of the age of scientific discovery to the first wave of reaction against modernity and the industrial revolution. It straddles the changing mental universe from enlightenment to romanticism. In its exposure to Northwest European civilisation, Maoridom encountered a culture whose religion, values and mental universe were undergoing profound, indeed revolutionary change. Their own

response was no less profound. It is in the alchemy of this period – a period still radioactive in its implications for the present – that a modern nation was born.

Of course, I do not for a moment suggest that we simply shift the start line back to the second half of the 18th century. The story of how the people of Polynesia spread through the Pacific and how one strand reached these shores is fascinating work in progress. In addition to the indispensable oral record Maori and the indigenous peoples of the Pacific have nurtured, we now have fascinating archaeological, palaeo-climatic and genetic strands to wind into the story that stretch back almost to the end of the last Ice Age. On the European side there is not just the Anglo-Celtic narrative but the wider civilisational trail leading out of the classical world. And – given the long overdue end to a Eurocentric account of the rise of civilisations – there are broad outlines of Asian history that, given our evolving demography, become equally urgent.

The key point I would like to stress is that these narratives should be able to provide the basis for a much better sense of what it is to be a New Zealander – members of at least two rapidly hybridising diasporas whose collective human experience and memory should be both exhilarating and liberating. Rather than gingerly serving up little morsels of historical time together with the implements for their delicate dissection and deconstruction, we should rehabilitate a cultural and civilisational sweep within which we can find the antidotes to contemporary obsessions.

Let me stress that what I have in mind is no Panglossian or saccharine confection. Our past – like that of most people – is filled with conflict and many of the issues worth dwelling on lack the sense of resolution we'd all like. But that's the way it was and is, and we should be confident enough to lay out the foundations of our national enterprise.

New Zealand's greatest living historian – J G A Pocock – has spoken of the need for a treaty between histories. As he wisely notes, ours is not yet a nation in which codes of conduct are so fully shared that they are in no need of interpretation or explanation. They are still at the stage of being contested. But without being clear that our histories

have evolved in real historic time and become inextricably entangled, we delude ourselves. As Pocock says: "Aotearoa New Zealand is not situated in narrow seas, a constellation of off-shore islands offered absorption into a continental empire of the market."¹ Whether we like it or not, we have to live with our history in distant seas and with one another – and compared with most colonial societies we have done so tolerably well. But if a wider cross-section of New Zealanders is to take up this debate and do it with integrity, they will need a better story line than is presently on offer.

If we don't try to challenge ourselves in this way, the Anglo-Celtic fraction of this country risks falling out of the orbit of being a dynamic settler culture forever moving between the centre and the periphery and back into the orbit of a lost white tribe. Equally, Maori risk allowing the gut-wrenching dark side of their barely 230 year encounter with modernity to overwhelm the equally compelling tale of another settler/explorer people who in coming to Aotearoa risked everything and then doubled their bets when challenged by later arrivals.

A crucial element of leadership in New Zealand must involve learning how to recount our national story in a way that everyone can own and in a way that can enfold those who arrive here. Otherwise we risk becoming incomprehensible both to one another and to the rest of the world. And those who might have thought of joining us will be left shaking their heads and asking how we could have allowed ourselves to become so complicated and so dysfunctional. Healthy views of history are histories that people with no part in them can acquire and make their own. Histories that are pathological are histories no-one seeks to own, except those who invented them. The leadership challenge for all of us, is to develop a national story that we can all recount. Our generation cannot re-write, let alone re-live the past. But it contains more than enough goodwill and trust to give us confidence in building our nation's future.

¹ Bedford, R, 2001: *Reflections on the Spatial Odysseys of New Zealanders*, *New Zealand Geographer* 57 (1) 2001, 49 at page 51.

² *Globe & Mail*, 12 March 2002, citing census data published by Statistics Canada.

³ See, for instance, Hugo, D. Rudd, D. and Harris, K. *Emigration from Australia: Economic Implications*, Information Paper #77, Committee for the Economic Development of Australia (CEDA), 2001.

⁴ Sharp, A. & McHugh, P. *Histories, Power & Loss*, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2001.

⁵ Ibid. at p.210

⁶ Frame, A. *Grey & Iwikau, A Journey into Custom*, Victoria University Press, 2002, at p.67.

⁷ Elias, Rt Hon Dame Sian, *Maori and the New Zealand Legal System*, Australian Law Journal, Vol 76, 620 at p. 624

⁸ Frame, A. (2002) Ibid. p.75

⁹ See *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum*, Ministry of Education, Wellington.

¹⁰ These can be explored at: http://www.tki.org.nz/r/socialscience/curriculum/SSOL/years1-3_e.php and following.

¹¹ Pocock, J G A, in *Histories, Power and Loss* (2001), 75-95 at p.94.