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At the Margin of Empire: John Webster and Hokianga, 1841-1900

Jennifer Ashton

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Auckland
2012
Abstract

In recent years, settlers have largely disappeared from histories of the colonisation of New Zealand, at least in frontier settings. This has been the result of an unwillingness on the part of Pakeha academics to study people who were recast as colonisers following the rise of postcolonial discourses from the 1970s, as well as the Treaty of Waitangi claims settlement process which has re-constituted the Maori-Pakeha relationship as a relationship between Maori and the Crown in which settlers play little part. This thesis reintroduces settlers as central players in colonialism. But it does not seek to replace the binary of Crown-Maori with settler-Maori. Instead, it offers a reading of nineteenth-century New Zealand history that foregrounds daily interaction and personal entanglement between Maori and Pakeha as important sites of change. Its central figure is John Webster, a settler who came to New Zealand in 1841 and whose ideas of race, formed during his adolescence in Britain, coalesced in an imperial identity that dictated he should dominate the indigenous people with whom he came into contact. Webster spent most of the next 60 years in Hokianga, where he found his ambition to assert political dominance over his Maori neighbours continually thwarted. Hokianga escaped the full impact of the political forces usually associated with colonisation, such as war and confiscation, but its reliance on the international timber trade meant it did not escape economic change. It was in this arena that Webster made an impact. Looking at Webster’s experience at the centre Hokianga’s timber trade, and contrasting it with his political ambition to be seen as someone who could control Maori, provides a way of understanding how change came to Hokianga not through Pakeha political domination, or through watershed moments of violence and confrontation, but through a gradual shift in the economic balance of power based around personal connections and networks. It also offers a way of seeing the role empire played in this shift. Webster’s local impact was also based on global networks of trade. They connected Hokianga to the wider world and Maori and Pakeha to each other. His story contributes to New Zealand’s colonial historiography and to the wider historiography of empire by presenting a vision of colonial interaction that emphasises the role of connection rather than political domination and social separation, and which focuses on the power of the personal and quotidian in the global reach of empire.
Figure 1 John Webster, date unknown
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Finally, I would like to thank Catherine and the Baker-Wills family for introducing me to ‘Mr Webster’ in the first place, and for enabling me to spend valuable time at Hokianga.
## Abbreviations

<table>
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<tr>
<td>AJHR</td>
<td><em>Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives</em></td>
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<td>AL</td>
<td>Auckland Libraries</td>
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<td>ANZA</td>
<td>Archives New Zealand, Auckland</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANZW</td>
<td>Archives New Zealand, Wellington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATL</td>
<td>Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington</td>
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<tr>
<td>AWML</td>
<td>Auckland War Memorial Museum Library</td>
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<td>BPP</td>
<td>British Parliamentary Papers</td>
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<td>NZJH</td>
<td><em>New Zealand Journal of History</em></td>
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# List of Figures

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## Glossary

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<tr>
<td>Hapu</td>
<td>Kinship group, clan, tribe, subtribe. A section of a larger kinship group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iwi</td>
<td>Extended kinship group, tribe, a large group of people descended from a common ancestor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kainga</td>
<td>Village, settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pa</td>
<td>Fortified village or stockade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakeha</td>
<td>Settlers who came from Europe, and their descendants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rangatira</td>
<td>Chief, leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangatiratanga</td>
<td>Sovereignty, right to exercise authority, chiefly autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superfeet</td>
<td>Sections of timber one foot square and one inch thick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Reo Maori</td>
<td>The Maori language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tikanga Maori</td>
<td>Maori custom or practice</td>
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**Note:** This glossary defines terms not otherwise defined in the text.
There is a two-storey white house on the waterfront at Opononi, a small town in Hokianga, located on the north-west coast of New Zealand’s North Island. When it was first completed, around 120 years ago, it was described as the show palace of Hokianga, and it is not hard to understand why. Surrounded by a large garden of specimen plants, both native and exotic, and with an interior festooned with objects its owner, John Webster, had collected from locations across the world, it made a grand and optimistic statement about Webster’s place in Hokianga and Hokianga’s place in a burgeoning colonial enterprise. When I first saw the house in the late 1980s, it was less a show palace than a relic. It was shown to me as a 20-year-old university student by a friend, one of Webster’s great-great-granddaughters, during a mid-winter holiday. On a miserable June day we waited for the rain to stop before wandering along the road to the local shop to buy a newspaper. Half way there, she suggested we stop and have a look at something. We headed off the footpath and down into a ditch, making towards what looked like a dense forest of undergrowth. I struggled to imagine what could be of any interest back there, but when I looked past the tangle of weeds I saw a rundown but obviously large dwelling. I moved around to try to get a better view, but the mature trees and low scrub made it impossible to see the house completely unobscured. The general impression was clear, though. The white paint was peeling, the iron roof was rusting and the place had a look of almost total dereliction, not helped by the overcast sky and the general sense of melancholy that pervades a seaside town in winter. I came away with a feeling of sadness that something so grand had fallen into such decay, but also with a feeling of intrigue. Who, I wondered, would build something of that size in an unassuming town like this?

On the face of it the answer is straightforward. The builder, John Webster, had come to New Zealand from Scotland via Australia in 1841 to seek his fortune, and in that he succeeded. Through a mixture of commercial nous and a fortuitous marriage he became the leading timber trader in Hokianga at a time when demand for the area’s kauri timber was consistently high and when both domestic and international markets
were abundant. The mansion reflected his economic importance, while its contents, including weapons and other artefacts from Britain, Australia and the Pacific, as well as New Zealand, demonstrated his self-image as an adventurer roaming the edges of the British Empire. But if we look a little closer the answer to my question becomes more complex. Webster’s home reflected his expansive life and wealth, and his self-image, but it was also reflective of the nature of colonialism in Hokianga. The house might have been built with profits from the colonial timber trade, but securing that wealth had made Webster dependent on co-operation with Maori. Webster’s home was less a monument built on a solid foundation of imperial success than a structure resting on the shifting ground of Maori-Pakeha interaction.

This thesis considers Webster’s political and economic activities from the time of his arrival in the Hokianga in 1841 until his departure from the area in the early 1900s. Its purpose is to examine the nature of colonialism in an understudied region of New Zealand by considering the experience and impact of a settler who lived there for over 60 years, one who wielded significant economic power and who harboured political
ambitions, but whose life was often also marked by compromise and accommodation. Webster’s story is used as a window through which to view shifting relationships and social boundaries between Maori and Pakeha during the second half of the nineteenth century. It extends my question about who built the house to ask what type of person helped to construct colonialism in New Zealand. At its heart is the conviction that colonialism is an abiding force in New Zealand, and we need to understand its various subtleties, and the role played by all parties, including settlers.

The role of settlers like Webster in New Zealand’s colonial past has a chequered history. Like the house on the waterfront, settlers have sometimes been shown as confident in their place at the forefront of development, while at others they have almost completely disappeared from view. This uneven treatment has been the result of changes in historiographical fashion, which has in turn been influenced by wider political and social developments. If a study had been made of Webster’s life in the years preceding my first encounter with him, it might have emphasised his ‘pioneering’ role in a remote region of the country, or focused on his mercantile achievements. It may also have seen his status as a ‘settler’ as unproblematic, preferring to concentrate on the progressive nature of resource exploitation and the ‘opening up’ of the country.¹ But such a study might also have had to take into account a tradition in New Zealand history writing that portrayed the country’s pre-colonial and colonial history as contested. For example, the missionaries in Judith Binney’s The Legacy of Guilt, which first appeared in 1968, found themselves in an overwhelmingly Maori world, dependent on and in some cases entwined with the people who were supposed to be their flock. Alan Ward’s 1973 examination of the government’s ‘amalgamation’ policies of the nineteenth century sought to ‘explicate

¹ See, for example, R.C.J. Stone, Young Logan Campbell, Auckland, 1982, which discusses the political and mercantile role of one of Webster’s contemporaries and friends. For this type of study of Hokianga generally see, W.S. Davidson, ‘The Settlement of Hokianga, 1820-1920’, MA thesis, University of New Zealand, 1948. History writing that casts settlers in progressive, almost heroic terms has existed outside academic writing since the late nineteenth century and continues up to the present. For a discussion of this type of writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Fiona Hamilton, ‘Pioneering History: Negotiating Pakeha Collective Memory in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries’, NZJH, 36, 1, 2002, pp.66-81. For recent examples in popular history see Olive Harris, Remember the Hokianga: Stories of Our Pioneers, Waikanae, 2006; Myra Fulton, Okuru: The Place of No Return: The Story About the History of Early Settlers of South Westland in New Zealand, Takaka, 2004; Murray Moorhead, Pioneer Tales of Old New Plymouth, New Plymouth, 2005; Wayne Ryburn, Tall Spars, Steamers & Gum: A History of the Kaipara From Early European Settlement 1854-1947, Henderson, 1999; Russell Standish, Pioneer Traders of Taranaki, Tauranga, 2007.
the shared past’ of Maori and Pakeha while discussing the historical basis for ongoing Maori political aspirations. And in his essay in the 1981 edition of *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, Keith Sorrenson put Maori and Pakeha colonists and officials in the same analytical frame in order to trace the gradual shift in power from one to the other. All of these works recognised Maori as a force to be reckoned with and as an active presence during the nineteenth century that unsettled the idea of Pakeha ‘progress’. As Sorrenson put it, ‘nowhere, except in parts of the South Island, were Maoris [sic] inconsequential’.

In the 1980s this two-sided view of New Zealand’s past was pushed in a new direction following the mobilisation of Maori political concerns, often referred to as the ‘Maori renaissance’. Influenced by writers such as Ranginui Walker, some historians in that decade pointed to the racism of Pakeha settlers and government officials as being at the heart of colonisation. In *Proud to be White?*, Angela Ballara saw the racism of settlers as central to the marginalisation of Maori, and claimed that in the early days of settlement, ‘the average colonist assumed that he had to deal with an inferior and savage people’. In stark contrast to the doughty heroes of the pioneering histories, settlers in this analysis became, if not quite villains, then at least figures of oppression. One response to this was to stop studying settlers, at least in frontier settings. As Kerry Howe put it, ‘the pakeha frontier has historiographically become a location of avoidance’.

Another response to this politically driven concern was to instead emphasise the Maori experience of and response to colonisation. For example, in his revisionist history of the New Zealand Wars, James Belich looked at

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what he called the ‘Victorian interpretation of racial conflict’ which dictated that British soldiers should prevail against ‘native’ fighters, and offered an alternative reading of the wars that emphasised Maori agency.\textsuperscript{6}

The idea of Maori marginalisation rather than agency has been fundamental to another significant body of work that started in the 1980s, namely the material that has come out of the Treaty of Waitangi claims settlement process, which continues to be produced up to the time of writing. Most obviously, these works include the historical investigation reports produced both by the Waitangi Tribunal itself and by the Crown Forestry Rental Trust.\textsuperscript{7} These reports, described by Michael Belgrave, a former senior historian at the Waitangi Tribunal, as providing counter-narratives of colonisation,\textsuperscript{8} look closely at the impact of settlement on iwi throughout New Zealand in the years following the signing of the Treaty in 1840. They do so, however, from a particular point of view. Because they arise out of a process designed to assess grievances against the Crown in order to make a case for redress, they focus on the harm suffered by iwi at the hands of the Crown. The influence of these reports and the claims process they represent has been manifold: first, they have seen New Zealand history through the binary of coloniser and colonised, with an emphasis on loss of Maori power, material wealth and autonomy; secondly, they have emphasised the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi as the basis of the relationship between Maori and Pakeha; and thirdly, they have re-constituted the Maori-Pakeha relationship as a relationship between Maori and the Crown, as the two parties to the Treaty.\textsuperscript{9} This

\textsuperscript{6} James Belich, \textit{The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict}, Auckland, 1986.


\textsuperscript{8} Michael Belgrave, \textit{Historical Frictions: Maori Claims & Reinvented Histories}, Auckland, 2005, p.34.

\textsuperscript{9} Although strictly beyond the scope of the discussion here, the historical reports produced by the Waitangi Tribunal have been subject to debate among academic historians in terms of their status as history. See W.H. Oliver, ‘The Future Behind Us: The Waitangi Tribunal’s Retrospective Utopia’, in Andrew Sharp and Paul McHugh, eds, \textit{Histories, Power and Loss: Uses of the Past — A New Zealand Commentary}, Wellington, 2001, pp.9-29; Giselle Byrnes, \textit{The Waitangi Tribunal and New Zealand History}, Auckland, 2004; Jim McAloon, ‘By Which Standards?: History and the Waitangi Tribunal’, NZJH, 40, 2, 2006, pp.194-213; Giselle Byrnes, ‘By Which Standards?: History and the Waitangi
approach reflects claimants’ need to demonstrate harm suffered, and the government’s present-day approach to claims settlement, which dictates that restitution can only be sought from the Crown and not by lodging claims for privately owned land or other resources. As Tony Ballantyne points out, this makes the work of the Tribunal more palatable to the broader public, but it has also acted to downplay the role of colonial settlers, and therefore their descendants, as active players in the historical process of colonisation.\(^{10}\) As Belgrave put it, ‘The broad historical obsessions — class, capitalism, gender or racism — have little relevance as they are unable to compensate claimants for past injustices. The Crown has to be found, if not all knowing and all seeing, at least all responsible. This takes the heat off capitalists, patriarachs and red-necks, transferring responsibility for injustice to a distant and even impersonal abstraction, the Crown.’\(^{11}\) Colonists make brief appearances, during which they tend to be depicted as furthering the over-arching interests of the Crown, before once again disappearing from sight.\(^{12}\)

In attempting to demonstrate the injurious impact of Crown action on Maori, the work that has emerged from the claims process often also portrays colonisation as leading almost inevitably to the domination of Maori by Pakeha.\(^{13}\) While this approach successfully explains how the government’s military and legislative policies resulted in the passing of economic and political power from Maori to Pakeha, it leaves little room for exchange between individuals, let alone for the experience and impact of settlers to be critically examined. There is also a tendency to focus on the Treaty as a watershed moment of change, as the foundational moment in the nation’s history and the point from which all subsequent cross-cultural history flowed. This tendency extends into other areas of New Zealand history writing, where the Treaty is seen as the point at which Maori and Pakeha were thrown together before being driven apart.

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\(^{10}\) Tony Ballantyne, ‘On Place, Space and Mobility in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand’, NZJH, 45, 1, 2011, p.67, fn 9.


\(^{12}\) See, for example, the fleeting appearances made by John Webster in Stirling and Towers. The most astringent critic of this tendency has been Giselle Byrnes, who described settlers’ portrayal in Waitangi Tribunal reports as ‘stereotypical’ and ‘one-dimensional’. See Byrnes, *The Waitangi Tribunal and New Zealand History*, pp.122, 125.

\(^{13}\) Here I am referring to the reports referenced at footnote 6 rather than reports generally.
by war, confiscation and demographic ‘swamping’ from the 1860s. Early settlers are seen as initially economically reliant on Maori, although it was their agitation for land and growing numbers in the 1850s which set the scene for conflict and for the loss of Maori autonomy. Hazel Petrie’s study of Maori economic enterprise in the early colonial period pointed to growth in the number of Pakeha in the late 1850s as a reason for the decline of Maori ability to set the terms of trade. In his examination of New Zealand in the 1850s, Paul Moon emphasised increasing pressure on Maori from government land purchases and growing settler numbers as factors leading to the decline of chiefly authority and economic influence, the founding of the King Movement in 1858, and ultimately to war. And in his overview of Maori economies from 1840 to 1920, Paul Monin noted that ‘from 1840 until the late 1850s Maori exercised a significant measure of autonomy, owing to the limited resources of the infant colonial state; then in the early 1860s Europeans achieved dominance and the exercise of full sovereignty’.

According to this analysis the 1860s provide another watershed in the nation’s history as the point at which power shifted irrevocably in favour of Pakeha. As Belich put it, ‘the European conquests and confiscations of the 1860s in New Zealand broke a deal. They ruptured a system of interaction between Maori and Europeans in the North Island.’ In both his general history of New Zealand and his recent work on the spread of settler societies on a global scale, Belich sees this as opening the way for explosive settlement or settler booms, and as the point at which settlers really came to the fore, once the government had overcome significant Maori resistance and once

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14 This narrative is particularly apparent in general histories. See, for example, Michael King, The Penguin History of New Zealand, Auckland, 2003; Philippa Mein Smith, A Concise History of New Zealand, Melbourne, 2005. A notable exception is the recent New Oxford History of New Zealand which, unlike most general histories, adopts a thematic and analytical rather than chronological and narrative approach, and which deliberately eschews the telling of a national story at which the Treaty is often seen as being at the heart: Giselle Byrnes, ed., New Oxford History of New Zealand, Melbourne, 2009. 
settlers started to arrive in large numbers.\textsuperscript{19} The effect of this approach is to present settlers arriving from the 1860s onwards as inheritors of a conquered land. In some recent historiography, this empty frontier has been filled with European settlers, particularly those from Scotland and Ireland, who have been studied from the point of view of their ethnicity, community networks and role in the formation of colonial culture, in almost total isolation from the indigenous population.\textsuperscript{20} A similar approach is taken by writers belonging to the ‘British World’ school, again including Belich, who have refocused attention on ‘Britishness’ and the common ground shared by white inhabitants of British settler societies. As Katie Pickles writes, these works concentrate on ‘the migration of British people and economic and cultural institutions around the Dominions’, but ‘at the expense of complicating the ways we see the past’ by often avoiding the tensions that could exist between new arrivals and indigenous populations.\textsuperscript{21} In these studies, as in the reports produced for the Treaty claims process, settlers’ active role in the process of colonisation is downplayed. And while the Treaty reports focus on the experience of Maori, and these ‘ethnicity’ and ‘British World’ studies look at the cultural constructions of certain types of Britons, the shared result is the historiographical separation of Maori and Pakeha into separate spheres.

In contrast, settlers have been at the heart of another significant body of work on nineteenth-century New Zealand colonisation, namely that influenced by the idea of ‘cultural colonisation’ as developed by Peter Gibbons. Gibbons is perhaps New


Zealand’s most obvious exponent of a postcolonial approach, in that he focuses attention on the power of representation in the making of colonialism. He argued that colonists set out to make the new country ‘normal’ by imposing ‘congenial European practices, forms, and phenomena’ on the landscape, for example by sprinkling ‘imported names on the land to replace unknown or unpronounceable indigenous names’.22 As Ballantyne points out, according to this approach ‘colonization was reimagined as fundamentally a cultural project, rather than primarily a set of economic or political asymmetries’.23 Gibbons sees the written and printed word as particularly important in the dissemination of the new forms of knowledge that allowed colonists to claim and control the new land: ‘Writing and printing were crucial technologies in maintaining and extending the power of the settler society over the indigenous inhabitants.’24 As well as materials easily seen as the ‘sharp instruments’ of colonisation, such as laws and proclamations, Gibbons pointed to settlers’ memoirs and reminiscences as being infused with colonising force. In this Gibbons shares common ground with the area of Settlement Studies, which has risen out of the study of literary theory. In his recent work, The Settler’s Plot, Alex Calder described Settlement Studies as ‘a form of postcolonial inquiry interested in a distinct set of problems shared by nations founded on the settlement of a “new” — but already populated — world by modernising people from the “old” world.’25 Calder’s aim is to ‘connect the way stories take shape in these settings to the actual history of Pakeha settlement’,26 to look at how settlers have tried to make themselves at home by writing themselves into the landscape. For both Gibbons and Calder, settlers’ writing was a fundamental part of the colonial experience.

26 ibid., p.vii.
This thesis draws on these postcolonial discourses, as well as older traditions of two-way contestation in New Zealand historiography, to bring settlers out into the clear light of day and to place them back on the frontier in order to understand how they helped to construct colonialism. But while it acknowledges Gibbons’s work, it views colonialism as more than a cultural project. To borrow Ballantyne’s phrase, it attempts to ‘prize open the domain of culture and bring it into a productive new dialogue with economics, politics and the affective relations of everyday life’. It therefore examines the role settlers played in effecting economic and political change, and how these changes were inscribed on cultural and social practices, and on written representations of self. In doing so, it marries the economic and political issues found in the work generated for the Waitangi claims process with cultural concerns, and portrays settlers not only as producers of texts but as active players in the everyday mechanics of colonisation. It tells a story that differs from other histories of the nineteenth century by imagining colonisation not as a series of large-scale developments or turning points that either threw Maori and Pakeha together or drove them apart, but as something that took place on a daily basis and that was played out in the economic relationships that formed and the social boundaries that were redrawn in the course of everyday life. It therefore places settlers and their personal relationships with Maori as friends, customers and family members at the foreground of colonialism. In emphasising the role of settlers, it looks at the life experiences of one individual, John Webster, and tells a story that includes co-operation between Maori and Pakeha as well as growing Pakeha power. By highlighting issues of co-operation and accommodation this story complicates the binary of colonisers and colonised that has dominated much recent history writing and allows a more complex, non-lineal story of colonial interaction to be told, one that offers an understanding of the liminal space occupied by the house on the Opononi foreshore. Here, settlers are neither villains nor heroes, but participants in a dynamic process of interaction.

This approach, which attempts what Patricia Grimshaw called a close-grained analysis of the meaning of everyday encounters, plays down the importance of

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27 Ballantyne, ‘Culture and Colonization’, pp.16-17. Ballantyne was specifically discussing the cultural colonisation thesis and its limitations.

watershed moments, and decentres both the Treaty and the Crown. The Treaty is not absent from the story, but it does not frame it, on the basis that it was not always central to daily life and interaction. Similarly, the Crown is a player in the story told here, but not a dominant one. The thesis places particular emphasis on the period from the 1840s to the 1860s, in an attempt to challenge the prevailing view of this period as an obvious turning point in Pakeha gaining an upper hand politically, economically and demographically. This does not mean, however, that it presents colonisation in benign terms; like other studies it considers how the balance of power shifted from Maori to Pakeha over the study period. Indeed, its primary consideration is the ways in which Pakeha managed to shift power in their favour in Hokianga by the end of the nineteenth century. But in focusing on micro rather than macro processes, it emphasises the importance of soft economic power wielded by settlers as against harder political power wielded by the state. In doing so, it aims to contribute to New Zealand’s historiography of colonisation, and to the wider international historiography of colonial encounter which stresses the dynamic, contested nature of cultural interaction in the colonial context.²⁹ It takes a lead from studies of South Africa, Canada and Australia that have taken up the challenge laid down by postcolonialism, that have foregrounded the dynamics of power relations between colonised and colonisers while giving ‘attentiveness to the particularities of encounter’.³⁰

John Webster’s life offers a useful window through which to study micro processes because both economic and political change were inscribed on his daily interactions, and on his representations of himself. In short, he embodied colonial ambition in Hokianga. He came to the area as a young man formed by the ideas of moral and racial superiority prevalent in Britain during his adolescence, and like others of his generation he saw the outward spread of British power as the inevitable result of empire. What is more, in his writings he represented himself as someone personally


able to assert political control over indigenous people, in Australia and the Pacific as well as in New Zealand, and to gain influence with colonial officials on that basis. The difficulty with which he was able to maintain this self-fashioning in Hokianga illustrates the more general struggle Pakeha had in wresting political autonomy from Maori. At the same time, Webster’s role in Hokianga’s timber industry, first as a small-time trader and then as the area’s leading merchant, meant that he not only wielded significant power, but that he formed close personal relationships with Maori on whom he relied for timber supplies and who in turn became a market for his mercantile goods. These relationships were essential to his economic success, and they required him, often reluctantly, to outwardly moderate his ideas of racial superiority and learn new ways of conduct. He could not simply be a man of empire unwilling to bend to his new surroundings. But these close interactions, or conflicted intimacies, can also be seen as a conduit for the slow but significant shift in economic power which had taken place by the time of his retirement. The thesis argues that it was through co-operation rather than confrontation and political control that change took place. The thesis traces how and why the co-operative rules of economic engagement in the opening decades of the study period eventually broke down, how Webster’s personal connections to and conduct towards Maori changed over time and how the social boundaries between Maori and Pakeha more generally shifted. It looks closely at how these changes were reflected in the way Webster wrote about himself and presented himself to the world around him. In this way Webster’s self-image, his representations of himself and the ways in which these shaped his actions and relationships are central considerations.

In taking this approach the thesis aims to contribute to what has been termed the ‘new biography’. As David Nasaw put it, the aim of these works ‘is not simply to tell a

life story … but to deploy the individual in the study of the world outside that individual and to explore how the private informs the public and vice versa’. In this case Webster is deployed to trace the nature and progress of colonisation in Hokianga, but in such a way that allows those parts of his life not spent in New Zealand to shed light on his Hokianga experience. However, it does not seek to understand his inner life in the way that a traditional biography would, or to delve into the workings of his family or emotional life other than as a way of addressing the issues above. This new biographical approach has been particularly useful in exploring histories of empire, and has been used to take ‘the concrete experiences of individuals as [a] route into the complicated dynamics of colonial expansion and domination, thereby successfully maintaining a double focus on individuals and the larger structures that shape their lives’. This double focus means that the individual is not privileged over the context in which he or she lived, thereby potentially avoiding the danger of reinscribing European action as the driver of history.

The new biography also emphasises ‘the ways [its] subjects assume, discard, reconfigure, merge, and disassociate multiple identities and roles’. This idea needs to be treated with caution. J.G.A. Pocock has warned against perpetuating the idea that the construction of identity is a fragile and instantaneous process that is ‘dependent on an immediate context’, so that identity can be made as quickly as it is unmade. He argued that ‘[t]he possibility that identities may come into being over time, may be “invented” and assented to by humans involved in complex processes, or may be reinforced by their survival in changing circumstances, is not to be counted on but is too easily left out of account’. This thesis follows the lead of the new biography by presenting Webster as possessing and constructing multiple identities. However, while they are seen to be dependent on context, in that they develop in


33 Beth Fowkes Tobin, ‘Wampum Belts and Tomahawks on an Irish Estate: Constructing an Imperial Identity in the Late Eighteenth Century’, Biography, 33, 4, Fall 2010, pp.683-84.
response to particular circumstances and surroundings, they are also presented as being formed by complex historical processes, and as being tested and moulded by those processes. Chief amongst these ‘selves’ is what I have called his ‘imperial identity’, which was formed in Britain and which he took with him into the wider world. This identity allowed Webster to confidently view himself as a member of a morally and racially superior nation, and as someone who ought to enjoy ascendancy over the indigenous peoples with whom his travels brought him into contact. The counter to this was an identity formed in Hokianga which served the economic and social demands of his day-to-day dealings with Maori, and which undermined his expectations of superiority. The interplay and tension between these two identities are central to the portrayal of Webster given here, and are used to trace the shifting power relationships between Maori and Pakeha.

Webster’s Hokianga is a useful location in which to study these relationships because of the ways in which its history differs from that of other parts of New Zealand. It avoided the devastating effects of war and confiscation in the 1860s, as well as the arrival of overwhelming numbers of Pakeha that have been used to explain loss of Maori economic power and political autonomy. Unlike other areas of the country the Pakeha population remained small, at least until the 1880s, and largely reliant on Maori for their fortunes. This allowed for the possibility of close ongoing Maori-Pakeha interaction in a way that did not happen in other regions, and it means that the type of history that separates Maori and Pakeha into different spheres is harder to sustain. These differences have also contributed to Hokianga’s absence from the national story as a whole. In general histories Northland has been treated as the early scene of Maori-Pakeha contact from the time of the arrival of the mission stations and timber traders, especially from the 1820s, through to the signing of the Treaty until the end of the Northern War in 1846, at which point the story heads south to follow the growth of new settlements and war in Taranaki and Waikato. Hokianga sometimes reappears in 1898 at the time of the so-called Dog Tax War, which has been presented as the point at which Crown sovereignty was finally imposed over one of the last
outposts of Maori political autonomy. But the question of what was going on in the meantime to allow this apparent wresting of control to take place goes unanswered.

Hokianga has received attention in material produced as part of the Treaty claims process, in particular in the work of David Armstrong and Evan Subasic, and Bruce Stirling and Richard Towers on behalf of the Crown Forestry Rental Trust. But, again, this work focuses on the role of the Crown across Northland as a whole rather than the lives and experiences of Hokianga’s settler population and their relationships with Maori as sites of economic and political change. By taking the connections that formed between Maori and Pakeha in the pre-Treaty era as a starting point and following them through to the end of the century, this thesis demonstrates Hokianga’s particular response to colonisation, one which does not necessarily fit into the linear story of nation-building. In doing so it answers a call from historians such as Gibbons, Byrnes and Ballantyne to decentre the nation as a frame of analysis as a way of focusing attention on both the local and global forces that shaped lives. Ballantyne has called for historians to think ‘under the nation’ so that it can be ‘unsettled by critical studies that are framed around particular localities, districts or regions’ as a way of studying ‘human activity, human connections in relation to the special units in which they operated’.

This thesis therefore looks at the local Hokianga response to colonisation while also taking into consideration the global force of empire that was central to Webster’s personal formation, his presence in Hokianga and the nature of the colonial experience there. It is this thesis’s intention to understand the ways in which empire operated in Hokianga in the nineteenth century using John Webster’s experiences and identities as the focus of analysis. The concept of empire, which has experienced a historiographical resurgence in recent years, can be difficult to grasp hold of.

Traditionally seen as a ‘spoked wheel … where lines of communications, finance and personnel radiate out from London to each colony in the periphery’, it has been reimagined by the postcolonially influenced new imperial history as an interconnected, contested space where metropole and colony exist in the same analytical frame, or as ‘a “bundle of relationships” that brought disparate regions, communities and individuals into contact through systems of mobility and exchange’. These histories directly challenge the idea of European expansion, paramountcy and control found in imperial histories until at least the 1980s, and focus on empire as being culturally constructed.

Within New Zealand, James Belich’s reassessment of empire in the nineteenth century, to be found in Making Peoples, can be seen as forming a bridge from traditional imperial history to the new historiography. In arguing that local conditions played a crucial role in empire’s inability to gain a real hold after the formal annexation in 1840 while Maori continued to hold political power over much of the country until the 1860s, Belich can be seen as developing the idea that the success or failure of empire was determined at the periphery rather than at the core. For Belich, ‘real’ or ‘formal’ empire equated to what John Darwin called ‘the explicit transfer of sovereignty and, usually, the imposition of direct administrative control’, and his argument is centred on the means by which this was achieved. While this thesis supports Belich’s idea that Maori actively resisted political domination by the colonial government, and in the case of Hokianga were able to retain a level of political sovereignty, it seeks to go beyond Belich’s view of empire as political control and engages with the ideas of empire as being culturally constructed put forward by the new imperial history. It is influenced by David Lambert and Alan Lester’s idea that

40 ibid., p.1; Lambert and Lester, p.5.
empire was about the movement of ideas, capital, texts and people between sites. To this end, it will look at how the racial ideas, values, material goods and economic systems brought by Pakeha such as Webster drew Hokianga into wider systems of economic and political exchange, with Webster as a conduit through which empire came to Hokianga and by which Hokianga was connected to empire. It will examine how the presence of these ideas, goods and systems shaped or were reshaped by interaction between Maori and Pakeha, and whether, by the end of the study period, it is possible to talk of the social, economic and political integration of Hokianga into a Pakeha-dominated, colonial New Zealand. In doing so it will present Webster as a representative of particular British ideas and as a proponent of British paramountcy.

Therefore, for the purposes of this project, empire will be defined as the varying cultural, economic and political norms and systems brought to Hokianga by Pakeha. By using this definition, it is possible to see empire as having been present in Hokianga from the beginning of Pakeha settlement and Maori-Pakeha interaction, before the annexation of New Zealand in 1840 and before what Belich sees as its eventual imposition at the end of the nineteenth century. It will be considered as something that, at least initially, was reliant on the co-operation and participation of Maori leaders and their communities who chose to engage with various aspects of it for their own reasons. Finally, presenting empire primarily as a Pakeha construct allows it to become something which could be engaged with by Maori and reshaped through interaction, or which could disempower Maori socially, economically and politically. The definition allows for Maori and Pakeha to stand apart from each other when required and for Maori disengagement as well as engagement to be noted. It acknowledges that the two cultures often had conflicting and competing interests, and allows for sometimes unequal power relations to be recognised and for attention to be given to changing balances of social, economic and political power across the study period.

In examining these encounters, my work uses the concept of collaboration between Maori and the representatives of empire, both Webster and the government, to trace the changing nature of engagement. The use of the term collaboration allows for the

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43 Lambert and Lester, p.10.
close co-operation and accommodation between some Maori and Pakeha, particularly in the early decades of the study period, to be noted. The term also permits the breakdown of co-operation and a shift in relationships to be examined and explained. In other words, collaboration can be studied both for its presence and its absence. This would have been made more difficult if the thesis had adopted a concept found in international historiography that has been used to study places of cross-cultural contact, such as Richard White’s ‘middle ground’ or Mary Louise Pratt’s ‘contact zone’. Pratt’s ‘contact zone’ has been employed in a wide range of studies, and her application of the term to ‘the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations’ appears useful to this study. However, her argument that contact zones were characterised by ‘conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict’ seems to leave minimal room for co-operation and balanced interests. On the other hand, White uses the concept of creative misunderstanding to investigate accommodations reached between Native Americans and the French and British in the Great Lakes region. But while he discusses the political forces that caused the middle ground to break down, his argument, naturally, does not extend beyond this point to describe what came next. Therefore, while the ‘middle ground’ concept might have been useful for the opening chapters of this thesis, it ceases to be of use by the end. Similarly, the thesis does not take up Belich’s description of places like Hokianga where the pre-colonial interface between Maori and Pakeha survived beyond 1840 as a ‘hybrid world’. Instead it supports Damon Salesa’s assertion that making this world ‘hybrid’, particularly for the period before 1880, understates the degree to which it was dominated by Maori, and overstates the presence and importance of Pakeha.

For all these reasons, collaboration is seen as the most useful term to apply to the interaction between Maori and Pakeha in Hokianga. By focusing on situational,

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46 Pratt, p.6.


relational engagement it does not lock the thesis into attempting to describe the features of a particular type of zone or locale of interaction, and therefore allows the focus to be on change rather than constancy. It also allows the focus to be put on Webster’s personal relationships, and to foreground the ways in which the shifting nature of these relationships represented larger-scale changes in the power dynamic between the two cultures.

Using collaboration as a central theme brings with it a methodological problem: namely, how to incorporate Maori when you are writing a history of a Pakeha settler in what was for most of the nineteenth century an overwhelmingly Maori district without producing ‘another colonising history’? This has been a central concern throughout the course of the project, and it is something I continue to grapple with. The concern is motivated by an awareness of the work of writers such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who has pointed to the role academic research and writing have played in the process of colonisation. I do not have a definitive answer to this problem, but I can offer some thoughts to explain the approach I have taken, in the belief that avoiding tackling Pakeha stories with Maori characters is not a creative long-term option for New Zealand historiography. Webster’s life as a settler, trader and employer inevitably brought him into contact with Maori, and while he is the central figure in this project, the very nature of the topic it is studying, colonialism in Hokianga, means that Maori are a constant presence. Yet, I am not trying to, nor could I ever hope to, recreate ‘the Maori world of Hokianga’. In an earlier draft of this introduction, I included a section that attempted to provide an overview of key Maori concepts and political arrangements in Hokianga. However, I removed it on the basis that it seemed to package Maori into a small, neat, somewhat patronising box, before moving on to the main event. Instead, I have concluded that in the second decade of the twenty-first century these concepts are reasonably widely understood and have received sufficient treatment in a range of works, which I have relied on and referenced throughout the thesis. I have also tried to present Maori as a fundamental

part of the context in which Webster operated, as facts in his daily life. As mentioned earlier, throughout the thesis this context is examined so as to prevent him from being seen as the driver of history. This contextualisation has involved attempting to understand and explain the range of and reasons for Maori engagement with Webster, the Crown and other settlers in order to understand the changing nature of those relationships. In other words, I have tried to portray Maori as self-determining people motivated in different ways by a range of evolving factors, rather than as people caught in a world of easily packaged, static ‘key concepts’. Some of these historically based motivations might have been obvious to Webster; others would have escaped him, meaning that the history presented here is not written entirely from his point of view, and Maori are not presented as ‘people without history’. This approach does not escape the fact that Webster is the central figure in a story with Maori players, but it ensures that his does not drown out other voices.

Nevertheless, I need to provide readers with a few directions as they start out on the journey to nineteenth-century Hokianga, so they can commence from the same starting point as Webster and any other Pakeha who landed in Hokianga in 1841 and who had to understand certain arrangements of daily life. In broad terms, there exist within Hokianga two, often competing, iwi or tribes, Nga Puhi and Te Rarawa, with Nga Puhi being dominant on the southern shores of the river and Te Rarawa on the northern shores. Nga Puhi hapu included Te Popoto at Utakura at the head of the Hokianga River, whose leaders were Taonui and his cousin Raumati. Ngati Hao, under the leadership of brothers Patuone and Nene, inhabited the Waihou Valley. At Waima, Arama Karaka Pi and Mohi Tawhai led Te Mahurehure. The Ngati Korokoro hapu at Pakanae was led by Rangatira Moetara, and his Te Hikutu neighbours and allies included Te Moehau and Kaitoke of Whirinaki. Leadership on the north side of the river was predominantly in the hands of Papahia of Te Rarawa, whose hapu included Ngati Manawa at Motukauri, Ngaitupoto at Motukaraka, Kaitutae and Ngati Here, while Wharepapa led the Te Rarawa-affiliated Te Ihutai at Mangamuka. These iwi, hapu and rangatira were the leading players in a political landscape that Webster quickly had to learn to negotiate, they were voices he had to listen to, and they are fundamental to the context in which this thesis takes place.
The thesis contains eight chapters. Chapter one introduces Webster as a young man and places him in a Britain heavily influenced by ideas of imperial destiny, civilisation and savagery, and racial superiority. It looks at how Webster’s early life was shaped by these ideas and how they were reflected in his first encounters with indigenous peoples in Australia. Specifically it looks at how he used ideas of race to construct an imperial identity as someone who could dominate indigenous peoples and survive in the harsh environments demanded by the imperial project.

The second chapter looks at Webster’s arrival at Hokianga in 1841 and at this membership of a Pakeha community at Kohukohu. This small settlement acted as Hokianga’s most obvious outpost of economic empire, in that it connected the area to an international network of trade. Here, however, British expectations of dominance had to be tempered in order to secure vital economic relationships with Maori. This chapter looks at how, as a small-time trader, Webster had to negotiate rules of engagement with a culture different from his own, and at how he constructed a new identity that enabled him to operate effectively in a complex and multi-faceted environment.

In chapter three, I examine the Northern War that took place in 1845 between some factions of Nga Puhi on one side and the Crown and other Nga Puhi factions on the other. It discusses how political tensions between Maori and Pakeha in Hokianga in the early 1840s were set aside in order to face a common threat. In particular, it looks at Webster’s involvement in the war as part of a Maori contingent and considers what his decision to fight says about his relationship with Maori. It examines how, like other Pakeha residents of Hokianga, Webster had to accept his reliance on Maori, and the impact this had on his idea of himself as an imperial man.

Chapter four follows Webster on a trip through the Pacific in the early 1850s. It looks particularly at an episode in 1852 when he was involved in armed conflict with indigenous people of Guadalcanal and at the attitudes he expressed towards Pacific people. It contrasts the way in which he was able to portray himself as culturally and militarily superior to Melanesians with the more complicated situation he had encountered in Hokianga where such a portrayal could not be sustained.
Webster returned to Hokianga in 1855, and chapter five traces his subsequent marriage and rise to economic power through his inheritance of the timber export base at Kohukohu. It also examines how, despite a growing desire to redraw the social boundaries between his family and Maori, his new position went hand in hand with ongoing entanglement with and economic dependence on Maori communities. It looks at his role as Hokianga’s most prominent creditor, and at how this role, often founded on longstanding collaborative relationships, shifted economic power in Webster’s favour during the 1860s.

Chapter six centres on the paradox that lay at the heart of Webster’s political ambitions, and at the centre of his imperial identity: at the same time as he was trying to separate himself from Maori socially, he was seeking political influence on the basis of his connection to and ‘knowledge’ of the very people he was coming to despise. This chapter examines how during the 1860s Webster bolstered his imperial identity by portraying himself as a controller of Maori, and at how he sought political influence on this basis. It assesses how he conducted and presented himself in three specific arenas, asks whether his influence was authentic or illusionary and considers what these actions say about the balance of political power between Hokianga Maori and colonial society generally.

Chapter seven further develops the theme of shifting economic power in the early 1870s, as Webster was relinquishing his role as Hokianga’s timber baron, and as increasing numbers of new settlers were arriving in Hokianga. It examines how Webster largely welcomed these changes, which he saw as vindication of the progressive march of empire, even as they undermined his ability to position himself as an imperial man able to negotiate the dangers of a ‘native district’. However, it also looks at how Maori political autonomy was not swept aside in the 1870s and 1880s, and at how this fuelled anger and resentment in Webster, an anger no longer moderated by the close economic relationships that had characterised earlier years.

The final chapter looks at the so-called Dog Tax War of 1898. It examines how this event acted as a political response to mounting economic pressures placed on Maori and to the breakdown of the collaborative relationships that had existed in former years. It looks at Webster’s involvement in this episode and at how it provided him
with a final chance to exhibit his so-called influence over Maori. It uses the Dog Tax
War as a way of examining the distance that had grown between Maori and Pakeha, at
how this distance was founded on a breakdown of economic relationships rather than
on loss of Maori political power and at how these developments were reflected in
Webster’s self-fashioning.

Taken together, these chapters attempt to recreate the experience of the type of
individual who made empire happen on the ground in a settler society. His story is the
story of empire in Hokianga. It is not a story of unalloyed success, but it is one that
expands our understanding of how colonialism was constructed and how it was
inscribed on the lives of the individuals who lived it.
Chapter One

The Making of an Imperial Man¹

During the 23 years of his life before arriving in Hokianga, John Webster was shaped by a set of inter-connected ideas that prepared him to be a member of the British Empire as it spread its influence across the globe. In Webster’s case, these ideas were confirmed by his own experiences, first at home in Scotland and later in the Australian colonies. As a young man, he seemed confidently to view himself as a member of a morally and racially superior nation, and as someone who would enjoy ascendancy over the indigenous peoples with whom his travels brought him into contact. This confidence was reflected in an ‘imperial identity’ which he displayed on various stages throughout the course of his life, but which was formed during his early life in Britain. This chapter explores the formation of this identity and considers the ideas and self-image that Webster, as an imperial man, brought with him to New Zealand, and to his interaction with Maori.

John Webster was born in the Scottish town of Montrose in 1818, the second of seven children. Located on the south-east coast north of Dundee, Montrose had once distinguished itself as being the only urban centre to support Charles Edward Stuart against Hanoverian rule, mainly because of the profits to be made with sympathisers on the North Sea, particularly through smuggling.² In the eighteenth century its maritime outlook meant it was able to take advantage of some of the benefits of union with England, including limited involvement in the slave trade and textile export to London. By the opening decades of the nineteenth century, the town had settled into quiet prosperity, boasting the largest trading fleet of any similarly sized port in Scotland and regularly trading with northern Europe and the southern ports of Britain.³ On the strength of this affluence Montrose was also home to a merchant

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¹ This title is borrowed from Catherine Hall, Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867, Oxford, 2002, p.23.
class, which included the Websters. Both of John Webster’s parents’ families were merchants, and his father, Andrew, followed in these footsteps. Although little is known of Andrew Webster, he counted among those Scots who looked to take advantage of the global opportunities that the British Empire offered by becoming involved in a commercial venture in the West Indies. But he also seems to have come close to costing his family their position, given that four years before John’s birth he was sentenced to the tollbooth, or gaol, for non-payment of a £23.13/- debt.⁴

These misfortunes, however, did not prevent John and his brothers from receiving the type of education designed to prepare them for a life of commercial or military service. John went to the newly opened Montrose Academy, where he was taught writing, arithmetic, Latin and the sciences. In his later years, he recalled that some of his classmates had joined either the navy or the army and had gone to serve the empire in places such as India.⁵ His own future, however, lay in the commercial rather than the military department of the imperial project, and at the age of 14 he joined his older brother William in their uncle’s muslin manufacturing business in Glasgow, a city whose close involvement with the world of trade earned it the title ‘second city of empire’.

The Britain into which John Webster was born has been the subject of historiographical debate, particularly regarding the extent to which its subjects were immersed in ideas of empire and driven by a sense of outward-looking nationalism. Those historians who have seen empire as central to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British domestic life have argued that imperial values such as militarism and nationalism can be found in many facets of society.⁶ In her study of

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⁴ Royal Burgh of Montrose, Burgh Court Claims, etc., Series, II, 1724-1856, Angus Archives.
⁵ John Webster, Reminiscences of an Old Settler in Australia and New Zealand, Christchurch, 1908, pp.9-10.
⁶ These historians include those such as Linda Colley and C.A. Bayly who are inheritors of an older tradition in imperial history as well as historians such as Catherine Hall and Antoinette Burton who have been more overtly influenced by postcolonialism. While Linda Colley focused on the formation of a sense of Britishness at home, Hall and Burton count among those who have studied the metropole and colonies in the same analytical frame in order to highlight the power relationship between colonisers and the colonised, as well as looking at the impact of empire on the metropole. See, for example, Hall, Civilising Subjects; Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World, Cambridge, 2006; Catherine Hall, ‘Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain’, in Sarah Stockwell, ed., The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives, Oxford 2008, pp.199-217. See also Stephen Howe, ed., The New Imperial Histories Reader, Abingdon & New York, 2010, and the Studies in Imperialism series edited by John MacKenzie. For a recent study of
nascent British nationalism and its link to empire, Linda Colley argued that by the early nineteenth century Britain was driven by a sense of national pride based on its place on the world stage and an awareness of threats to its position from other nations. Having battled France for control of North America throughout the eighteenth century, by 1783 Britain had faced defeat at the hands of its former colonists and their French allies. Its response was to develop what she called ‘a far more consciously and officially constructed patriotism which stressed … the importance of empire [and] the value of military and naval achievement’ that transcended divisions of class, gender and age.\(^7\) Although they see imperially inflected nationalism as more passively than actively constructed, Hall and Rose argued that it was nonetheless ‘omnipresent in the everyday lives of “ordinary people”’ and that ‘Britain’s imperial role … shaped people’s identities as Britons’.\(^8\) In an earlier study of the British Empire’s global influence C.A. Bayly argued that over the 50 years following defeat in North America this nationalism became a cornerstone of the second British Empire as Britain entered a new imperial phase concentrated mainly on expansion into Asia and driven by a determination to gain global domination over the old enemy, France. Concerned less with the purely economic benefits that could be gained from trade and more with the ‘protection and glorification of Crown, Church, law and trade’\(^9\) against perceived external threats, the British Empire was entering what he called its ‘meridian’, the point at which nationalism and imperialism jointly reached maturity.\(^10\) This did not mean that Britain was bent on political intervention and annexation of overseas territories, but it did mean that it would extend its interests and ‘civilisation’ through influence where possible and annexation where necessary. For Colley, the Britons of this new imperial nation enjoyed a ‘sense of superior difference’\(^11\) when they compared themselves with inhabitants of other countries. Spared the supposed

\(^7\) Colley, pp.147, 374-75.
\(^8\) Hall and Rose, p.22. Hall has recently restated this belief in empire’s passive but pervasive impact on Britons: ‘It was nothing special, just ordinary, part of the world in which they lived.’ Hall, ‘Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain’, p.200.
\(^9\) C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830*, London, New York, 1989, p.102. Although an inheritor of an older tradition of imperial historiography, Bayly shared the postcolonialists’ desire to see empire as both central to domestic life and as a two-way process, arguing that ‘above all, empire must be seen not only as a critical phase in the history of the Americas, Asia or Africa but in the very creation of British nationalism itself’ and that in this ‘concepts of race, aristocracy, religion and patriotism emerge as of first-rate importance’. See p.15.
\(^10\) ibid., p.100.
\(^11\) Colley, p.377.
superstitions of Catholicism, they basked in the progressive blessings of Protestantism and the rule of law, and convinced themselves that the related ‘moral independency’ qualified them as the superiors of the peoples with whom imperialism brought them into contact. Indeed, ‘the massive empire … represented final and conclusive proof of Great Britain’s providential destiny’.  

Studies of empire have typically linked this patriotism with ideas of racial superiority and the development of a ‘clearer racial hierarchy’ in which ‘tribal peoples … represented the least developed of societies because they had failed to generate a commercial society or a recognisable state’.  

This hierarchy predated the systematic ideas of scientific, biological racism, and was based on anthropological ideas that were developing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the wake of contact with new populations, as well as drawing on older hierarchical explanations of life such as the Great Chain of Being. Although humanity was ‘understood to be a single family’, peoples were placed on a graduated scale at points from savagery at the lower end through to the high point of civilisation. Anglo-Saxons were at the top of this hierarchy, followed by Latin-influenced Europeans such as the French. Below them came the Asians, Polynesians, Africans, Native North Americans and Aboriginal Australians. In this view European, and particularly British, supremacy was made obvious by systems of government, commerce, law and Christian religion. Less-advanced peoples, on the other hand, could be identified by the lack of these systems of social organisation and by their subsistence lifestyles, as evidenced by the failure to cultivate land. At the very bottom were those people who lived as nomadic hunters.  

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12 ibid.
15 Brett Bowden, The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea, Chicago, 2009, p.63, chapter three. Bowden describes the four stages of development contained in Adam Smith’s The Wealth of Nations: the first being nomadic hunters, the second being shepherds who keep animals but who have no fixed abode, the third being those people who cultivate land and the fourth being commercial society. See also, Russell McGregor, Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939, Carlton, Vic, 1997, pp.2-5.
the benefits of civilisation were embraced. Those who did not progress could face extinction. These ‘definitions of difference were critical to empire building’ which was ‘legitimated on the grounds that Britons were suited to conquest and settlement, and would bring the benefits of their superior civilization to others’. Again according to Colley, together these ideas made for a potent brand of imperially inflected nationalism that was particularly attractive to ‘men and women living in or near towns with some access to print, and particularly those caught up in the mesh of the nation’s internal and foreign trade’. These people, however, actively participated in empire not only through a sense of patriotism but because they expected to profit from it in some way, either through commerce or employment. A number of writers have seen these ideas as having been particularly influential in Scotland. They argue that by the beginning of the nineteenth century the Scots had turned their backs on Jacobinism and had embraced the economic prosperity that union with England had brought. They became enthusiastic Britons, and Scotland became ‘the arsenal of the empire’, as thousands of Scots took up imperial postings or involved themselves in global commerce.

The idea that empire was central to lives of Britons and their sense of themselves has, however, been questioned by Bernard Porter, who argued that a genuine interest and involvement in empire was limited to only a small minority, and that ideas often seen as being central to imperial thought, including those of race, were multivariate and differed across class, region and political and religious affiliation. While Porter’s assertion drew criticism and sparked further debate, it nevertheless has implications

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17 Hall, ‘Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain’, p.203.
18 Colley, p.378.
19 ibid., p.379.
for a study of an individual born into Britain in the age of empire, particularly with
regard to how that person may have been influenced by imperial values and ideas and
the extent to which they forged an identity based on those concepts. Historians have
acknowledged that ‘tensions of empire’ meant there were always competing agendas
and doubts about the legitimacy of imperial expansion, including conflict about who
should pay for it and humanitarian concerns over the impact of colonisation on
indigenous people.²³ Therefore, a study of an individual as a product and agent of
empire, in this case John Webster, needs to take into account imperial influence in
their life. That Webster was both aware of and interested in empire seems evident
from the fact that from the time he went to live in Glasgow he was keen to take
advantage of opportunities for commercial gain and adventure at its outer limit. He
was not one of Porter’s oblivious stay-at-homes who showed no awareness of empire
and its role in the world, or the advantages it might offer. Instead, he was shaped by
imperial ideas, including those of race and civilisation, at a young age and those ideas
became the foundation of an imperial identity that he would use throughout his life to
test and measure himself against the indigenous people he encountered.²⁴ The
remainder of this chapter looks at the circumstances in which this identity was formed
and at the first occasion on which it was tested.

If the Scotland into which Webster was born was the heart of the British Empire then
the Glasgow in which he lived as a young man was the heartbeat. Like all new
arrivals who swelled the city’s population in the decades up to 1840 he was drawn by
the employment opportunities offered by the city’s specialisation in supplying
imperial markets, such as India and the Far East. Glasgow’s most important

and Commonwealth History, 36, 4, December 2008, pp.659-68. See also Hall and Rose, pp.16-17.
²³ For this term see Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in
a Bourgeois World, Berkeley, 1997. John Darwin has written that ‘Victorian Imperialists were drawn
from different interests and classes. They were driven by motives that were at times contradictory.
Rival visions of empire pulled them in different directions’: The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of
the British World-System 1830-1970, Cambridge, 2009, p.23. For a recent discussion of Britain’s plural
responses to empire from the mid-nineteenth century see Andrew Thompson, The Empire Strikes
Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century, Harlow, 2005, esp.
chapter 8. For studies of imperial dissenters see Mira Matikkata, Empire and Imperial Ambition:
Liberty, Englishness and Anti-Imperialism, London and New York, 2011; Gregory Claeys, Imperial
Sceptics: British Critics of Empire, 1850-1920, Cambridge, New York, 2010. Note, however, that these
works relate to the later Victorian period and beyond.
²⁴ For the idea of imperial identity see Hall, Civilising Subjects, p.65. For a similar application of the
term see Beth Fowkes Tobin, ‘Wampum Belts and Tomahawks on an Irish Estate: Constructing an
Imperial Identity in the Late Eighteenth Century’, Biography, 33, 4, 2010, pp. 680-713.
commercial connection was, however, with the West Indies, to which it sent goods needed on the sugar plantations. Like his father, Webster found employment in this Caribbean export trade. Until at least 1831, Glasgow’s economy was intimately linked with Caribbean slavery, and Webster’s arrival in Glasgow came only a year after the abolition of the institution which had led to fierce local debates between merchants and the evangelically inspired emancipationists over the right to subjugate supposedly inferior peoples. Until 1838 the sugar plantations continued operating under the system of apprenticeships which allowed planters to use forced labour, and the Glasgow into which Webster arrived was still actively engaged in this trade. For Webster, involvement in the Caribbean export trade opened up the opportunities for profit that empire could bring, and his decision to leave Scotland in 1838 may have been driven as much by a desire to seek those profits as by a sense of youthful adventure that an overseas journey to ‘those beautiful islands’ could satisfy. As Catherine Hall has said, ‘In the … 1830s, when opportunities for young men with only modest capital were limited, the empire beckoned as a source of riches, opportunities and adventure’.

However, his mother challenged his initial plan to go to the Caribbean. She ‘would not hear of it’, and pressed him to go to the new colonies in Australia instead. Mrs Webster’s objection to the West Indies may have been stemmed from her husband’s failures there, or perhaps the end of slavery had made the Caribbean a less attractive option for a young man in search of prosperity. Mrs Webster may also have been concerned for her son’s moral wellbeing. The Caribbean was looked on as a place where a respectable man’s morals could come to grief in an environment where the singular pursuit of fortune, the lack of settled family life and the enervating effects of

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26 Hall, Civilising Subjects, p.27. For a discussion of adventure narratives as tools in shaping nineteenth-century British men’s sense of manhood see Angela Woollacott, Gender and Empire, Houndmills, Basingstoke, New York, 2006, pp.59-80. Woollacott argues these narratives promoted the idea that, ‘By committing themselves to the imperial cause, English boys could have breathtakingly exciting adventures in all sorts of foreign places, prove their worth, become men honoured by all around them, and ultimately be rewarded with wealth, social status and happiness’. See p.63.

27 Webster, p.15.
a tropical climate had produced ‘a model of disorder, licentious sexuality, illegitimacy, [and] irregularity’. The decline of the economy following the abolition of the slave trade only reinforced this perception. Jamaica in particular ‘appeared in the British imagination as a place of disappointment and decay, its black population lazy, its planter class decadent and archaic’. It was not a place for respectable men. This idea of respectability was a powerful one in the early-to-mid nineteenth century, and it can be seen as being as central to the imperial project as the ideas of racial and national superiority. The cornerstones of respectability were present in the idea of ‘moral independency’ which had gained currency in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. This idea held that ‘the virtue of moral autonomy in the individual was … the basis of political liberty and of economic success’, and it was to be found in the writings of members of the Scottish Enlightenment such as Adam Smith, where ‘the notion of “self-command”, the avoidance of extremes — luxury, licentiousness and debt — is elevated to be the ideal pattern of life’. The importance of self-control was echoed in and reinforced by the concept of respectability that gripped Britain following the evangelical revival of the opening decades of the nineteenth century. Methodists and their evangelical Anglican counterparts stressed industry and sobriety as the central tenets of a Christian life. However, what started out as the teachings of an evangelical fringe at the beginning of the century had moved into the mainstream by the 1820s. These religious ideas converged with the tenets of political economy espoused by Adam Smith and his successors to produce an understanding that industry and virtue would be rewarded with success. The result was a change in manners, an expectation that a higher standard of behaviour would apply and an increasing emphasis on the importance of personal reputation. Respectable outward behaviour and self-control became part of the ‘grammar of difference’ that would separate middle-class and ‘decent’ members of the working class from the degenerate working class at home, and from the supposedly uncivilised races and nationalities abroad. As one historian of Victorian mores recently put it, ‘Placed by God in the vanguard of human progress and at the head of a growing empire, Britons should give

29 Hall, *Civilising Subjects*, p.72. For a discussion of the contemporary belief in the impact of climate on morals see Moloney, p.161.
32 For the term ‘grammar of difference’ see Hall, ‘Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain’, pp.203-204.
thanks in prayer and exhibit to the world the manners of a nation at the apogee of civilisation’.  

In sending her son to Australia rather than the West Indies Mrs Webster was perhaps directing him away from the economic and moral decline seen to be happening in the Caribbean and towards the respectable colonisation and development that was a cornerstone of the new wave of Australian settlement in the 1830s, particularly in South Australia. While New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land had been corrupted by the ‘convict stain’, settlement in South Australia was to be based on the Wakefieldian ideas of land sales and free passages for mixed-class settlers, thereby providing ‘new, and clean, blood’ to the new colony, and making it ‘a respectable place for the middle class’. At the same time, New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land were leaving the convict past behind and turning to pastoralism. In this environment, the British concepts of respectable self-control, civilised progress and racial superiority came together to confront the harshest of landscapes, and its inhabitants. This was a landscape that would test the fortitude of the British character and that would provide an opportunity to confirm the idea of their moral and racial superiority.

In the years before he left Scotland, then, John Webster had been made aware of the commercial possibilities of empire and had received the kind of education and practical experience that enabled him to take advantage of those possibilities. He had also been influenced by ideas of respectable conduct and self control that would, it was believed, enable him to face the physical and moral rigours that venturing into the empire’s outer reaches might involve. As will be seen in the following chapters these ideas became foundation stones upon which his identity as an imperial man was built, an identity that would articulate who he was, his place in the world and how he might relate to others. But they would be joined by another building block equally, if not more, important. When he left his homeland he also took with him ideas of race that allowed him to view himself as the superior of indigenous people. These ideas would

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34 That is, based on the ideas of Edward Gibbon Wakefield, whose theories of systematic colonisation and organised settlement were influential in both South Australia and New Zealand.
36 This is a paraphrase of Hall, ‘Culture and Identity in Imperial Britain’, p.205.
find new, heightened expression in the colonies of New South Wales and South Australia where non-British people could be encountered in the flesh rather than simply in the imagination.

When Webster arrived in Sydney in December 1838, he might not have been an ideal settler, in that he was a single rather than a married man interested in adventure rather than permanent settlement. However, his belief in the need to open up the country to development aligned him with other colonists and with colonial administrators, as did his ideas about the land’s existing inhabitants. The explorers, pastoralists and colonists who headed for the Australian territories viewed them as empty lands ripe for settlement and improvement. Aboriginals were either forgotten, or were seen as unknowable savages, as the Other, who would almost inevitably fall by the wayside in the face of civilisation.\(^\text{37}\) This fate was dictated by what the British saw as Aboriginals’ place at the bottom of the racial hierarchy, which in turn was the result of their perceived disinterest in the European norms of property ownership, fixed settlement and industry. To the British, owning, occupying and cultivating land were clear signifiers of law and civilisation; the apparent absence, to European eyes, of these signs of advancement rendered Aboriginals ‘savages living by the chase’.\(^\text{38}\) This view was compounded by the British reaction to Aboriginals’ physical appearance, which held that the blackness of their skin, the most obvious sign of their difference from Europeans, put them on the ‘lowest rung of the racial ladder’.\(^\text{39}\) While some colonists shared the evangelical missionaries’ belief that Aboriginals were human beings capable of ‘advancement’, others felt justified in concluding that they were savages so far removed from practising the tenets of industry and civilisation that their chances of surviving European settlement were negligible.


John Webster shared these latter ideas, and expressed them as he travelled thousands of miles as a member of a small party droving cattle on two separate trips from New South Wales to Adelaide between late 1838 and the beginning of 1841. These trips were his first experience of a non-European landscape and people, and they became the first arena in which his identity as a civilised, resilient and enterprising man of empire would be tested, and ultimately reinforced. Webster’s experiences clearly challenged the idea that the landscape was an empty one, but they also betrayed his belief in British superiority and the inevitability of British imperial success in that landscape, and against its inhabitants.

Shortly after arriving in Sydney Webster met members of the Howe family and went first to their station at Glenlee, two days’ journey from Sydney, and then on to the family’s Wygengolong property on the Murrumbidgee River in south-eastern New South Wales to await the start of an overland trip taking cattle to Adelaide. During much of his time in Australia he kept daily journals, which he published in 1908. Although it is not possible to discern how much of the published version was altered by Webster with the benefit of hindsight prior to publication, the detail of the observations suggests that much of the book was taken directly from journal entries made at the time. The account he left can be seen as part of what Edward Said called ‘the great cultural archive’ of empire. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said stressed the power of narrative in the imperial project, noting that ‘stories are at the heart of what explorers say about strange regions of the world’ and that in ‘narratives, histories, travel tales, and explorations [travellers’] consciousness was represented as the principal authority, an active point of energy that made sense not just of colonizing activities but of exotic geographies and peoples’.  

This point, along with the arguments put forward by Said in *Orientalism*, spurred a growth in the study of travel writing as a site of imperial power during the past two decades. Writers such as Mary Louise Pratt stressed travelogues’ ability to ‘produce’ foreign lands and to reduce indigenous people to exotic features of faraway locations, while Tim Youngs has written of travel writing’s power to ‘contribute to an ideology that helped promote ideas of Western, and specifically British, superiority’. Webster’s narrative of his

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Australian travels fits with these conclusions, confirming as it does his belief in his power to control his surroundings and subordinate its supposedly doomed inhabitants.

Webster began recording his impressions of Australia almost immediately. His first overland trip from Glenlee to Murrumbidgee, and then along the Murrumbidgee and Murray rivers to Adelaide, saw him acting as master of stores in a group of men consisting of ex-convict bullock drivers, two of the Howe brothers, an Irishman and two other Scotsmen. On the first section of the trip from Glenlee to Wyengolong stations, the party was also accompanied by a young Aboriginal who Webster called Tommy, who acted as Webster’s first direct contact with the indigenous people. The trip to Adelaide saw the party spend around four months travelling down the Murray River and across the desert towards Adelaide. Webster’s recollections of this trip were not extensive as a lack of paper meant he was unable to keep a journal, and the short published version was therefore written from memory. In contrast, he recorded the second overland trip, again from Glenlee to the Murrumbidgee River and on to Adelaide, in great detail. Acting once more as master of stores and travelling with 10 other men, Webster took part in one of the first expeditions by white overlanders along the upper reaches of the Murray River. Instead of striking west along the more-familiar Murrumbidgee, the party headed south at Gundagai overland to the Murray and then along the northern bank of the Murray to Adelaide.

Throughout the overland journeys Webster described the strangeness of the landscape through which he was passing and the local wildlife that filled the environment. His early impressions were of a foreign but fascinating country, and he went to great lengths to record the snakes, spiders, parrots, flying foxes, possums and kangaroos he saw all around him, as well the heat and dryness of a country where Christmas came at the wrong time of the year and where everything was ‘the opposite apparently of

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42 Webster refers to the upper section of the Murray River, before it is joined by the Murrumbidgee, as the Hume River, the name given to the river by Hamilton Hume in 1824 before the lower reaches, and eventually the whole river, became known as the Murray following its exploration by Charles Sturt in 1829. http://www.murrayriver.com.au/education/history/, accessed 18/07/2011.
Figure 3: Map of New South Wales and South Australia showing major rivers and settlements
that of the Old Country’. For Webster, this strangeness included the Aboriginal inhabitants, whose presence he had first briefly noted during his first stay at Glenlee when he became aware of hatchet marks on trees. Initially at least, Aboriginals were objects of fascination in much the same way as the wildlife; they were part of the new country to be described and recorded. On arriving for the first time at Wygengolong station he recounted:

There were natives all about, who interested me greatly. The full dress of the men consisted of a belt of possum or kangaroo skins and a wisp of long thin pieces of the same skin hanging down before and behind. They were all marked also with great marks on their arms and bodies. I was told that when they get of age a great corroboree is held, and a front tooth is knocked out by one of their head men or priests. At the same time these cuttings are made in their flesh, and some herb or something else is put in the wound which stands out in some cases half an inch from the body. I wonder if this has any occult meaning. All the men I saw had these marks, mostly on the shoulders and breasts.

This attitude towards the indigenous inhabitants of the land survived until the beginning of the second overland journey. After reaching Goulburn, Webster recorded:

Here we saw a number of the aborigines. The men were quite nude, but the females were clothed more or less having old possum rugs on their persons, some of which scarcely hid their nakedness. And these are primitive men and women naked without care and civilisation. None of the carving or gilding of life, no religious dogmas to bother or frighten them. A genuine child of nature with animal habits.

Webster’s early view of Aboriginals as uncivilised parts of a foreign and as-yet untamed landscape grew out of a situation in which direct contact with them was sporadic and rare, and where the contact he did have was limited by barriers of language and culture that rendered them unknowable. After attending what he took to be a ceremony at an Aboriginal camp, Webster recorded that ‘I went to the scene of the last night’s ceremonies, or whatever they may be called, and found the bark of the tall gums covered with strange hieroglyphics about the height of a man. I should have liked to understand the meaning of these strange marks, but I presume no white man

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43 Webster, p.63.  
44 ibid., p.73.  
45 ibid., pp.100-101.
will ever have that knowledge.’ More often, though, Aboriginals were seen at a distance, or were observed as the overland party passed by one of their camps. These circumstances of distant observation and unknowability allowed Webster to express the racial prejudices of the day, to see Aboriginals as uncivilised ‘children of nature’ and to confirm his own superiority, even as he expressed sympathy for what he assumed would be their fate:

Their existence in the present state can’t endure for many years. The white man from a far country has come to stay, and in time these unfortunate wild men of the woods will all disappear. As it is, the white man is occupying their hunting grounds and driving them back on hostile tribes where conflicts will further decimate them…. The restless treading of a more advanced race will tread them under, and they will live only in printed history in the future.  

There is also a sense in which Webster’s initial view of Aboriginals as fascinating but inherently non-threatening reflected his attitude to the land itself. Aboriginals became personifications of the landscape. In this Webster echoed the commonly held belief that Aboriginals ‘represented a natural, and not cultural presence within the landscape’. They were part of the natural environment, virtually akin to the flora and fauna, rather than being an indigenous population in possession of the land. Webster’s confident attitude towards them reflected his feeling of confidence within his new environment. On more than one occasion he admitted to enjoying the rough life he found there: ‘I rather like this life in the wilderness’; ‘Ours is a primitive sort of life. I am used to it now and like it.’ Here he can be seen as confirming his view of himself as a hardy adventurer confident of his ability to exist in and ultimately conquer the strange and uncivilised environment.

As the second overland journey continued, however, a change came over Webster’s view of the land, and his sense of confidence waned. As the party moved further away from the familiar territory of the Murrumbidgee River and south towards the Murray, Webster’s descriptions became filled with foreboding. In part this was a result of the increasing harshness of the physical conditions. At one point Webster recorded:

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46 ibid., p.117.
47 ibid., pp.101, 120.
48 Macneil, p.48.
49 Webster, pp.74, 101.
John Howe went ahead to ascertain where the river was, as we were again amongst sandy ridges, bad for the bullocks and cattle also…. A dense clouds [sic] of dust rose from the cattle and drays and covered everything. The sun looked like a fiery ball…. Slightly changing the direction of the cattle we found the river bank. The banks were steep and we had to draw the water up with long ropes… The cattle will have to go without water to-night. We managed to water our riding horses by drawing up water…. The cattle having had no water since yesterday, kept up lowing all night, and were very uneasy.50

Some time later he noted, ‘The country we now travelled over was very treacherous. It had been a swamp at no recent date. Great cracks several inches wide opened on the surface. The first dray sank up to the axle, and we had to unload the dray. It took two teams from the other drays to haul out the empty one.’51 This growing sense of physical danger went hand in hand with an increasing unease about the presence of the Aboriginals through whose land they were passing. Whereas Webster had previously described them as objects of interest, Aboriginal peoples were now seen as a lurking threat.52 Once again, his attitude towards the land corresponded to his attitude towards its inhabitants. Soon after the beginning of the second journey to Adelaide Webster commented, ‘It is just possible the natives may be following us for no good’, followed shortly afterwards by, ‘We must now look out as the blacks are about, and apparently not at all friendly’.53 Webster’s journal became filled with concerns about ‘the blacks’ following the party, sometimes seen and sometimes unseen, on the other side of the river. Rising smoke became evidence of signals being sent from one camp of Aboriginals to another about the overland party’s movements. Night watches became times of tension; cattle and belongings went missing. Most tellingly, the bullets that Webster had liberally expended on a wide variety of wildlife were now saved in case they had to be used on Aboriginals instead. On one occasion a group of Aboriginal men appeared on the opposite side of the river, one of whom began shouting. ‘He pointed to his mouth with one hand and rubbed his belly with the other. It was either a request for a bullock or a threat to eat us.’54 The man’s actions, like the meaning of the signals apparently being sent by smoke, remained indecipherable and unknowable to the overland party, but they loaded their guns and

50 ibid., p.131.
51 ibid., p.149.
52 For a discussion of the tendency of colonial European travel writers generally to portray indigenous adversaries as threatening ‘mobs’, see Thompson, Travel Writing, pp.140-41.
53 Webster., pp.129, 134.
54 ibid., p.142.
remained on edge, wondering if they would live to see South Australia. Not long afterwards lurking danger became direct threat as an attacking party crossed the river brandishing spears. In the fight that followed, at least six Aboriginal men were shot and killed. Verbal and physical skirmishing continued for the following weeks, during which several more Aboriginals were shot. Webster recorded one episode as follows:

We had scarcely watered the animals when a number of natives came shouting towards us.

A blank shot was fired, which made them halt, but they still made a fearful noise, and were joined by others. There must have been at least a hundred of them. They kept at some distance from us…. when the drays followed the cattle the blacks came after them…. I told Edward Howe to shoot one of them or we would have trouble. We fired a volley just as they came on, and one fell. The rest looked at him and fled.55

Two days later, on New Year’s Day, Webster recorded ‘how strange it is to spend the first day of a new year surrounded by wild men of the woods…. It has been my desire to see wild life, and my desire is satisfied. I will not regret this experience if I get out of it safely.’56 For Webster, the ‘wild men of the woods’ had gone from being a focus of fascination to a source of threat and fear, but they remained a way for him to define himself in the new land. His ultimate success in confronting Aboriginal men in combat allowed him to confirm his imperial identity as a member of a dominant race, while Aboriginals fulfilled the role as the inferior people who would be swept away, even though he expressed an apparently genuine regret at this necessity in the name of self-defence. This is not to argue that Webster’s portrayal of events should simply be taken at face value. In fact his account could just as easily fit into the historiography of Aboriginal resistance put forward by writers such as Henry Reynolds;57 the overlanding party’s fear and uncertainty undercuts the story’s power as one of dominance. However, in Webster’s account Aboriginals did not become individuals to be dealt with on a personal basis. Most of his experiences of them remained at a

55 ibid., p.163.
56 ibid., p.167.
57 See, for example, Henry Reynolds, The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia, Ringwood, Vic, 1982; Fate of a Free People, rev. edn, Camberwell, Vic, 2004; Bain Attwood and S.G. Foster, eds, Frontier Conflict: The Australian Experience, Canberra, 2003. When read in this light, elements of Webster’s story become explicable from an Aboriginal perspective. The tracking of the overland party, for instance, can be seen as a form of surveillance employed as part of resistance campaigns. See The Other Side of the Frontier, p.101.
distance, and when contact became direct, they became an unknowable feature of a
dangerous land to be faced down and conquered. In these circumstances of physical
separation, the ideas of empire and Webster’s identity as an imperial man, although
challenged, emerged intact.

Following J.G.A. Pocock’s caution against perpetuating ‘the premise that the Self can
only exist through its enmity for an Other’ and that the construction of identity is
fragile and instantaneous, the identity John Webster made for himself and which he
conveyed in his journals in Australia should not be viewed solely as a response to the
presence of an Aboriginal Other. To do so would be to reduce him to being the owner
of an essentialised, oppositional identity, rather than one that had developed over time
within a historical context, and which was capable of changing or surviving as that
c context altered. However, it is possible to assert that his experience in Australia, and
particularly his experience in relation to Aboriginals, when combined with the
intellectual and material milieu of the Britain into which he was born, served to
reinforce his idea of himself as a member of a dominant race, with all the assumptions
of power and authority that they entailed. At the same time, Webster could pride
himself on having maintained his identity as an adventurous but still respectable man.
He had tested himself in a wild and uncivilised environment and proved himself as an
example of controlled forbearance. Industry and courage, when combined with
mechanised weaponry, had won out in a forbidding environment.

The second overland journey ended at Adelaide in February 1841, having taken four
months and having covered an estimated 1302 miles. Webster’s time in Australia was
almost at an end. Between the first and second journeys he had received word that his
brother William had settled at Hokianga where he had established a sawmilling
enterprise. He decided to join his brother in New Zealand, and in April 1841 he set
out from Sydney for the Bay of Islands, from where he travelled overland to
Hokianga in May.

By the time John Webster arrived at Hokianga, then, he had been shaped by a
childhood and adolescence that had prepared him to be a member of an empire

59 ibid., p.308.
confident that its commercial, military and racial superiority made it fit to assume a
dominant place in the world, especially in relation to non-European peoples. These
ideas were reinforced by his experiences in Australia, where indigenous peoples
largely remained at a distance, and could be viewed as objects of fascination,
sympathy or danger rather than as individuals to be dealt with on a personal basis. His
experiences in Australia served to confirm rather than challenge his imperial identity
as a member of the supposedly dominant group in the cross-cultural dynamic.
Aboriginals remained the Other and Webster, in his own mind, remained the civilised,
adventurous imperial man. However, as will be seen in the following chapter, the
situation he faced in Hokianga differed significantly from that in New South Wales
and South Australia. Here, Webster would find his imperial identity challenged in an
environment where supremacy could not be assumed, and where physical separation
and distance would not be maintained.
Chapter Two

Kohukohu and the River Trade in the 1840s

In 1841 John Webster left Australia and arrived at the place that would become his home for most of the rest of his life: Hokianga, on the north-west coast of New Zealand’s North Island. There he joined a small number of Britons, mainly men, engaged in the timber industry, and after a short time he found himself based at the main export hub at Kohukohu. This small settlement acted as Hokianga’s most obvious outpost of economic empire, in that it connected the area’s Maori and Pakeha inhabitants to an international network of trade. By situating himself at Kohukohu Webster secured an income and came into the orbit of Hokianga’s most important timber merchant, George Russell, who by the mid-1840s had effectively monopolised the timber trade and had started to shift the balance of economic power away from the Maori rangatira who had dominated in the 1830s. Webster also joined a small group of middle-class gentlemen who provided him with companionship and who shared his ideas of race and civilisation, and who were liable to view their Maori neighbours through the racialised lens of savagery. But while this group enjoyed a measure of economic power and material comfort, largely thanks to their association with Russell, they also had to acknowledge that their prosperity depended on co-operation of and collaboration with Maori. In 1840s Hokianga ideas of empire had to be tempered in order to secure vital relationships. For Webster economic collaboration with Maori brought lessons in negotiating rules of engagement with a culture different from his own, and it brought a new identity that enabled him to operate effectively in a complex and multi-faceted environment.

This chapter examines the rise of Kohukohu as an outpost of empire and the beginnings of a shift in the balance of economic power in its favour. However, it also looks at the ways in which the imperial ambitions of its inhabitants, including Webster, were compromised in an environment dominated by their more numerous Maori neighbours, and at the accommodations they had to make to flourish in their new home. It then looks more closely at Webster’s life as a small-time trader in his own right, at the collaborative nature of the economic relationships he formed with
Maori and at the impact this collaboration had on his self-fashioning. Ultimately it argues that the reliance on Maori of Webster and other colonists in 1840s Hokianga demonstrated the limits rather than the extent of imperial penetration during this decade.

Kohukohu: Outpost of Empire

After leaving Sydney in April 1841, Webster sailed to the Bay of Islands and found a guide to take him overland to Hokianga, a timber-rich area which had seen the establishment of a small Pakeha community following the founding of a shipyard and trading station and the setting up of a Wesleyan mission, in 1827. In 1840 New Zealand had become a British colony, at least on paper, with the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, and for incoming settlers like Webster there was reason to believe that the country’s new status would bring an increase in trade and prosperity. Once at Hokianga, Webster joined his elder brother, William, who had established a saw mill there, and John stayed with William and helped establish his Hokianga enterprise, which included an orchard. Webster’s first impressions were of a place of ‘strange manners’ where gentlemen, missionaries, shipwrights and rough-talking, hard-drinking pit-sawyers rubbed alongside each other, where the representatives of God and Mammon were sometimes uneasy companions and where Maori were a constant presence. The brothers were based up the Wairere Creek, one of the smaller

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1 Although European settlers would not have used the term ‘Pakeha’ to describe themselves, this thesis employs it to reflect the fact that from the earliest days of settlement in Hokianga these people had a relationship with Maori.

2 Old Land Claim 27, repro 1563, ANZW; Old Land Claim 352, repro, 1516, ANZW; Old Land Claim 1032, repro 1508, ANZW; Jack Lee, *Hokianga*, Auckland 1987, p.48; Augustus Earle, *Narrative of a Residence in New Zealand*, E.H. McCormick, ed., Oxford, 1966, pp.25-27; J.M.R Owens, ‘The Wesleyan Mission to New Zealand 1819-1840, PhD Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1969, p.282; Edward Markham, *New Zealand or Recollections of it*, E.H. McCormick, ed., Wellington, 1963, fn 9, p.88. The first identifiable Pakeha settler at Hokianga was John Marmon, possibly as early as 1823. In 1827 he was joined by a small number of men who had formed part of an abortive New Zealand Company settlement scheme. This group included Thomas McLean, George Nimmo and Benjamin Nesbit, who eventually settled at Motukauri. However, Horeke was the first successfully organised attempt at Pakeha settlement and commerce. Messrs Deloitte and Stewart made an earlier purchase of land at Hokianga, in 1826, but it appears they did not settle there. The firm of Raine and Ramsay of Sydney, on the other hand, sent Captain Clark to establish and run the Horeke shipyard after the land had been purchased by their agent, Gordon Browne.

3 J. Webster, *Reminiscences of an Old Settler in Australia and New Zealand*, Christchurch, 1908, p.247. William had brought the mill with him from Britain, and it may have been one of the earliest to be established in the colony. Thomas E. Simpson, *Kauri to Radiata*, Auckland, 1973, p.247.

4 Webster, p.246.
tributaries flowing into the Hokianga River,⁵ which bisected the area, and they became part of the small community of Britons. Their most immediate Pakeha neighbours included the inhabitants of the timber-trading stations at Horeke and Kohukohu, as well as the Wesleyan Mission at Mangungu, while Maori communities and small groups of Pakeha sawyers could be found along both the Hokianga River itself and its numerous tributaries. The number of Pakeha in Hokianga in 1841 stood at around 200, ⁶ although when Resident Magistrate James Clendon completed his census of Hokianga’s European population in May 1846, he counted only 104 Pakeha residents,⁷ compared to a Maori population of 3,600.⁸ They included men such as sawyers George Nimmo, Thomas Poynton and Dennis Cochrane, as well John Martin, the river’s navigation pilot. A small number lived near the mouth of the river, among them William Young at Koutu and Frederick Maning at Onoke, as well as Peter Monro and Robert Hardiman on the north side of the river. Most Pakeha, though, lived further up the river where the best timber was located. These people were broadly divided into the sawyers living on the river’s upper tributaries, the remnants of Thomas McDonnell’s once-dominant timber operation at Horeke, the Wesleyan missionaries at Mangungu, and the settlers and traders gathered around George Russell’s export base at Kohukohu.

In the mid-1840s, Webster relocated from Wairere to Rangiora, slightly down river from Kohukohu, at one of the most strategically important places on the river, the Narrows. Here the river was, as the name suggests, at its narrowest, but also its deepest, offering good anchorage for the ships that came up the river to Kohukohu to load timber and provisions for foreign ports. The timber station at Kohukohu itself was owned by George Russell, who had been based there since 1837. As well as running his own small trading enterprise, Webster worked long hours acting as

⁵ Today the piece of water that bisects Hokianga is referred to as a harbour. However, in the nineteenth century it was consistently referred to by Pakeha as the Hokianga River. This thesis therefore uses the term ‘river’.
⁶ Lee, pp.113, 174. This figure is based on an estimation given by Ernst Dieffenbach following his visit to Hokianga in 1841. See also, Ernst Dieffenbach, Travels in New Zealand, with contributions to the geography, geology, botany, and natural history of that country, Christchurch, 1974, p.241.
⁷ Journal of J.R. Clendon 1839-1872, NZMS 476, AL. Clendon’s count is problematic in that it separated Europeans from ‘half-castes’. The 104 figure included only those who he designated Europeans. If the ‘half-caste’ population is added, the total number of people in the census is 140. Clendon added the proviso that his census only included those persons living under European law.
⁸ Lee, p.174. This figure is based on an estimate made by Reverend J. Hamlin in 1840, which Lee argues is realistic given a comparable census figure in 1878. See also J. Buller, Forty Years in New Zealand, London, 1878, p.146 for a similar estimate made in 1836.
Figure 4: Map of Hokianga River and main tributaries
Russell’s agent in gathering the squared or baulk kauri timber, making regular trips up the Mangamuka and Waima rivers to purchase timber from the sawyers stationed there, such as Cochrane, and then measuring and rafting the logs down to Rangiora. Webster was assisted by his younger brother George, who had recently arrived from Scotland, and ‘the boys’, three young Maori from the settlement of Tairutu further down the river by the name of Pera, Terea and Piko. Webster was now located at Hokianga’s economic hub and could benefit from a connection to Russell, one of Hokianga’s longest-standing and most successful Pakeha residents. He could also receive an education in the dynamics that underpinned the timber trade, a major arena of Maori and Pakeha interaction in Hokianga.

From modest beginnings, Russell’s Kohukohu operation had, by the middle of the 1840s, become the single most important commercial centre on the river. This position was partly based on his gaining the contract to supply kauri spars to the British Navy from Thomas McDonnell, his main competitor in the industry, and on his ability to ship squared timber to Sydney and Hobart, and to a lesser extent Papeete, Honolulu, Tahiti and Valparaiso. Russell’s success, however, was also inextricably bound up with the connections he had formed with Maori years before. By his own account, he had arrived in Hokianga in early 1831 to take possession of the Horeke shipyard for his then employer McDonnell, although it is possible he had first come to the river as early as 1828. Shortly after settling permanently at Hokianga, Russell married Hautonga Haira, a close relative of the Ngati Hao chief Nene. This marked the beginning of an ongoing connection between the two men, which at least in its formative stages can be categorised as a patron-client relationship.

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9 Piko, also known by Webster as ‘Hunchback’, seems to have been named after his physical abnormality, Piko meaning ‘curved’ or ‘bent’.
10 McDonnell was a volatile former naval lieutenant who had bought the Horeke establishment from Raine and Ramsay in 1830, and who built it into the largest land speculation, timber and mercantile trading business on the river in the 1830s. In 1835 he had even persuaded the governor of New South Wales to appoint him Additional British Resident. His turbulent relationships with both Maori and Pakeha, however, undermined his position, and the loss of the naval contract to Russell compounded his decline. Although still engaged in the timber trade, McDonnell’s situation in 1851 prompted John Jolliffe of the survey ship Pandora to say of him, ‘he has not prospered [since losing spar contract] and is now much reduced in circumstances’. J. Jolliffe, Diary, 14 November 1851, 1851-1856, Micro-MS-130-1, ATL. For more on McDonnell see, Lee, and E. Ramsden, Busby of Waitangi, Wellington and Dunedin, 1942.
When Russell first purchased land on his own account, in 1835, he did so from a group of chiefs that included Nene, and there can be little doubt Russell formed a close bond with Ngati Hao. He learned to speak te reo Maori and became conversant with elements of tikanga Maori. These were vital steps in the early years of Pakeha settlement when the number of white settlers was tiny, and when access to food, shelter and protection could only be gained by forming connections to Maori leaders, often through marriage. Enthusiasm for welcoming Pakeha was greatest in the timber-rich upper reaches of the Hokianga River dominated by chiefs of numerous, mainly Nga Puhi, hapu. As well as land and marriage partners, these chiefs also gave Pakeha traders the all-important labour needed to cut and drag timber to the water’s edge for floating to a saw pit, where it would be worked by European sawyers. The timber bases at Kohukohu, Horeke and Koutu were from the start dependent on the decisions made by individual rangatira and their hapu about the benefits of involving themselves with Pakeha and participating in the timber trade. But while on one hand patronage reflected an uneven balance of power, it also reflected a balance of mutual self-interest, or what Judith Binney called ‘a system of calculated co-operation’. For leaders such as Nene, traders like Russell provided access to economic wealth. The spars and planks destined for Sydney, Hobart, London and beyond were hewn by Maori, bought by Pakeha and shipped on European vessels. In return, local traders offered Maori material goods from Sydney, Hobart and other global ports, including blankets, clothing, axes, spades, knives, guns and powder, cooking utensils, pipes and tobacco. In turn access to those goods could be used to bolster mana. As Hazel

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12 Old Land Claim 247, repro 1505, ANZW. The other chiefs party to the 1835 grant included Taonui and Matangi.
13 For example, it is possible to interpret his involvement in what became known as the Battle of the Pork as an act of support for his Ngati Hao kinsmen. This episode in 1834 saw Russell lead a group of armed Pakeha, in alliance with Ngati Hao warriors including Nene’s older brother Patuone, against the Te Ihutai hapu following the plundering of a settler’s house on Ngati Hao land. In the ensuing fight, a pa was destroyed and goods removed in payment. See David Colquhoun, “‘Pakeha Maori’: the early life and times of Frederick Edward Maning”, MA thesis, The University of Auckland, 1984, p.30.
16 See, for example, the list of exports headed for Hokianga in Sydney Gazette, 13 June 1837, 12 September 1837.
17 The concept of mana is difficult to translate into English. However, for a way of equating it to power and authority see Angela Ballara, Iwi: The dynamics of Maori tribal organisation from c.1769 to c.1945, Wellington, 1998, pp.12-13, 193. See also, Cleve Barlow, Tikanga Whakaaro: Key Concepts in Maori Culture, Auckland, 1991, pp.60-62.
Petrie has said, ‘At its most pragmatic level, mana is about the control of resources’. Therefore, involvement in trade, whether through land sales or timber extraction, or even sometimes as an independent ship owner and operator, provided chiefs with the wealth to build and maintain mana with their own people within their own communities. In this way, trade with Pakeha was a new way of fulfilling an old and vital obligation. Ultimately, while in the 1830s the presence of Pakeha such as Russell had depended on independent decisions made by Maori leaders, the result was beneficial to both sides, and the timber industry had been vital as a site of collaboration for Maori and Pakeha where economic relationships had been cemented through marriage and personal allegiances.

The connections formed in the 1830s underpinned Russell’s even greater success in the 1840s. For example, the land deals he had entered into in the previous decade remained central to his power base. As well as becoming an active land seller, he continued to own forested land on the upper banks of the Hokianga River, along with the property on which his house stood at Kohukohu. He therefore retained access to timber and could use cash from land and timber sales to buy cutting licences from the government over land now in the hands of the Crown. This meant that Russell was better placed that most Pakeha in Hokianga to ride out the economic downturn that struck New Zealand in the early-to-mid-1840s. In fact, the hard economic times may have consolidated his position further, as he was perhaps better placed both financially and geographically than his dwindling number of competitors to take advantage of the reduced timber market. By the middle of the 1840s, Russell was so successful in securing local supplies that other parties wanting to purchase timber in Hokianga could face having to wait months for a profitable load to be gathered. In 1846 local trader Frederick Maning told his brother that ‘Mr Russell … has the timber

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19 In the period just prior to 1840 he disposed of blocks on the Hokianga, Waihou and Mangamuka rivers, and he held mortgages over a selection of other properties. Old Land Claim 247, repro 1505, ANZW; Old Land Claim 248, repro 1502, ANZW; Old Land Claim 318, repro 1545, ANZW.
20 Old Land Claim 399, repro 1597, ANZW; Old Land Claim 400, repro 1604, ANZW; Old Land Claim 401, repro 1601, ANZW; Old Land Claim 402, repro 1600, ANZW.
21 New Zealander, 27 October 1847, p.4.
22 His preference for selling his timber to another party who would arrange shipping, which meant someone else met the costs and risks of export, was probably also a factor in his success. F.E. Maning to A. Maning, 10 August 1847, Maning Papers, MS-Papers-0625, ATL.
trade almost entirely in his own hands’. 23 Crucially, Maning put this situation down to the fact that Russell ‘has been so long engaged in the trade and is connected with the natives who own the courie [sic] forests most ajacent [sic] to the water’. 24

Therefore, Russell’s place as Hokianga’s leading Pakeha timber merchant depended on a range of factors, from speculative land deals and a ready supply of cash, to geographical location at the prime anchorage on the river and connections with the sawyers of Mangamuka and Waima. Not the least important reason, however, was his ongoing relationships with Maori. Kinship connection with Ngati Hao had been crucial following his arrival in Hokianga in the 1830s, and these relationships remained central to his fortunes in the 1840s. The ties that had been forged with Ngati Hao, and in particular with Nene, through marriage and patronage survived and were vital to his ability to secure labour and timber owned by Maori. Moreover, Russell still relied on chiefly authority and the economic needs of Maori communities when it came to accessing a labour supply. As Maning explained to his brother in 1847, ‘after three months from this time [May] all the natives leave off the squaring for the purpose of puting [sic] in their crops at which they will be engaged till the summer is pretty well advanced after which time they [are] not able for want of a good stock of provisions to do much till the autumn when the regular season commences’. 25

The timber industry in the 1840s was a site of collaboration between Maori and Pakeha, as it had been in the 1830s. In this sense little had changed with the arrival of the new decade and the new colonial status. Kohukohu was Hokianga’s main link with international trading ports and it was empire’s primary economic foothold on the river, but that position was dependent on the willing participation of both parties and on a balance of mutual interests.

Yet it is also possible to see that the rise of Kohukohu as the centre of commercial activity marked a shift in the balance of economic power between Maori and Pakeha. Whereas in the 1830s Maori had sponsored rival Pakeha traders as a means of furthering the interests of their individual hapu, the concentration of the timber industry in the hands of George Russell largely removed this competitive advantage.

23 F.E. Maning to A.H. Maning, 24 November 1846, Maning Papers, MS-Papers-0625, ATL.
24 ibid.
25 F.E. Maning to A.H. Maning, 11 May 1847, Maning Papers, MS-Papers-0625, ATL.
Maori could, of course, continue to cut and sell timber in their own right independent of Russell’s operation. For example, in 1847 Papahurihia of Omanaia sold timber gathered at Motukaraka to trader Hastings Atkins. However, the decline in the lucrative Australian market for timber and goods and the expense and risk involved in export ultimately dissuaded a number of potential competitors, including Atkins, from becoming permanently involved in the trade. This had the effect of concentrating Hokianga’s timber purchasers, such as Brown & Campbell of Auckland, and the majority of Maori cutters and sellers at Kohukohu, of centralising economic power there and of establishing that settlement as a major centre of dependence for both Maori and Pakeha.

Positioning himself at this centre of economic power had important implications for John Webster, and his connection with Russell and Kohukohu became a vital thread running through his life. As Adrienne Puckey has noted, in the period following 1840 trade in New Zealand remained largely informal, and in this environment social connections were vital and the social networks that individuals forged became the ‘foundations for extending future opportunities’. By associating with George Russell, Webster not only found an employer, but he also forged a connection that would ultimately secure his fortune. In the short term, he had found a patron.

Following the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi and the consequent introduction of Crown pre-emption, Maori could no longer secure patron-client relationships with Pakeha through the sale of land. For John Webster and other Pakeha arriving after 1840, this meant that an established means of securing land and livelihood had been

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26 Maori Land Court, Northern Minute Book No 4, evidence of Wirimu Puriri, 7 February 1879, p.143.
27 Atkins was involved in the Hokianga timber trade throughout the 1840s and early 1850s. In 1850 and 1851, for example, he was granted a 12-month licence to cut timber on what had been Matthew Marriner’s old land claim at Rakaupara, near Kohukohu. Shortly afterwards, however, he seems to have shifted his area of interest to Kaipara. See Register of licences issued occupy crown land, depasture and cut timber, OLC 3/4, ANZW; Application for renewal of timber licence to Hastings Atkins, IA 1 50/2213, ANZW.
28 John Logan Campbell first went to Hokianga in search of timber in 1844 and bought timber from Russell. During the second half of the 1840s Brown and Campbell sent three vessels to London carrying spars from Hokianga: the William Hyde in 1845, the Hope in 1847 and the Indian in 1848. J.L. Campbell to father, 6 October 1846, 13 May 1847, Campbell Papers, MS 51, Box 3 item F14F, AWML; J. Webster to G.F. Russell, 12 November 1848, NZMS 4-19, AL; R.C.J. Stone, Young Logan Campbell, Auckland, 1982, p.134.
shut off. On the other hand, Russell was able to provide him with a home at Rangiora and an income that allowed Webster to gain independence from his brother William at Wairere. As discussed above, Russell himself was still reliant on the relationship he had formed with Nene in the 1830s, and it seems probable Webster would have come under this umbrella protection. However, the journal that Webster kept during the first half of 1847 demonstrates that it was to Russell more than to Nene, or any other particular chief, that he turned for practical and financial assistance. Moreover, the growing importance of Kohukohu as an economic centre for both Maori and Pakeha gave Russell the power to offer protection to men like Webster in his own right.

To an extent Kohukohu also provided Webster with emotional support in the absence of marriage. Unlike most other Pakeha men, Webster did not marry into a hapu soon after arrival, the other way in which he could have directly secured chiefly patronage. This seems to have been a deliberate choice on his part which might have reflected a reluctance to enter into a sexual relationship with a woman of another race. At Kohukohu, Webster was able to exercise this choice because his connection to Russell provided him with the material necessities of life that earlier settlers had received from chiefs. Moreover, the isolation that resulted from bachelorhood was, to some extent, ameliorated by the presence of a Pakeha peer group to which he could belong. Gathered around Russell was a group of settlers and traders, including men such as Matthew Marriner from Rakaupara between the Narrows and Kohukohu, Dr Smyth from Kohukohu itself, the family of Francis White situated at Mata on the other side of the river near Mangungu, and William Webster at Wairere. Visiting members of the group included Captains Parker and Young from the Heads, and Frederick Maning from Onoke, while members of the mission community, including Richard Hobbs and Dr Day, were also regular visitors. Together, these men provided each other with male companionship, joining together to form shooting parties and spending long evenings playing cards and talking, and wishing to replicate as far as possible the lifestyle they had known in Britain.

Perhaps the clearest embodiment of this desire for a British lifestyle was Russell’s house itself, the focus of this small community. To a visitor in 1851, a naval officer by the name of Theodore Morton Jones, Russell’s establishment was a model of English order and industry:
It is an extremely pretty place, the house substantial and roomy in the middle of a well-kept lawn: all the offices out houses etc are well built and in good order. A bell summoning the workmen at regular hours: in fact all the paraphernalia of a well-ordered factory. The gardens, which are very extensive, are laid out with great taste and neatness, and well stocked with the choicest flowers and fruit trees. Besides all the English fruits, grapes thrive exceedingly well.\(^{30}\)

Jones’s sentiments were echoed by his shipmate John Jolliffe, who described Russell’s home as ‘by far the most lovely little spot I have seen in New Zealand … the very picture of neatness, the gardens and orchards are very well and prettily laid out, with plenty of English fruit trees and English flowers, particularly roses of several sorts which flourish famously growing in high hedges and full of blossoms.’\(^{31}\) The replication of English order and flora was not accidental. As Peter Gibbons has argued, ‘colonists set out to make [their new] world normal, from their perspective, through the destruction of what they encounter … and the substitution of congenial European practices, forms, and phenomena’. These acts of ‘cultural colonisation’ included the planting of ‘deciduous oak trees, gorse hedges, orchards, flower gardens, vegetable gardens’, the purpose being to make the new land known to them and to transform the ‘the new world they are entering into a simulacrum of the old world they have come from’.\(^{32}\) Put crudely, Russell was trying to recreate England in Hokianga. In this way, Kohukohu became a focus not just of Pakeha economic power but of cultural ambition, and its most obvious outpost of empire.

Kohukohu also attempted to replicate the ‘grammars of difference’ and structures of the old world by maintaining a division between the educated and respectable gentlemen of capital and the supposedly dissolute sawyers and labourers employed at the rough end of the timber industry. This division was captured by Jolliffe, who, while being charmed by Kohukohu, was appalled by the dwellings of Pakeha sawyers at Rawene, saying, ‘On the point are two or three houses belonging to Europeans they are larger but certainly very little better in appearance than Maori huts and the white men themselves are as dirty and more savage looking than the New Zealanders’.\(^{33}\) In

\(^{31}\) J. Jolliffe, Diary, 10 October 1851, 1851-1856, Micro-MS-130-1, ATL.
\(^{32}\) Peter Gibbons, ‘Cultural Colonization and National Identity’, NZIH, 36, 1, 2002, pp.7-8. For a similar argument, see Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds, eds, Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity, Basingstoke, 2010, pp.4-5.
\(^{33}\) Jolliffe, Diary, 6 November 1851, 1851-1856, Micro-MS-130-1, ATL.
Clendon’s 1846 census there was a division between those men who were described as ‘sawyers’, ‘labourers’ and ‘carpenters’, and those who were described as ‘settlers’, ‘traders’ and ‘merchants’. Russell, the three Webster brothers, Maning, Marriner and Francis White, as well as McDonnell and William Young, were described as being among the latter group. Kohukohu, then, provided a centre at which those who considered themselves the elite of Hokianga’s Pakeha community could gather, among them John Webster. On the periphery were other long-term Hokianga residents who had important economic relations with George Russell and Kohukohu. These men included Dennis Cochrane at Mangamuka and Thomas Cassidy at Waima, along with Thomas Poynton and Christopher Harris, who oversaw the gangs of Maori and Pakeha sawyers who cut and squared the timber that Russell bought and then sold or shipped. However, these men do not appear to have been part of Russell’s inner circle, with little social contact having taken place between them, despite their importance in the timber supply chain, their semi-regular contact with Kohukohu and, in the case of Cochrane at least, their access to capital. In his 1847 journal, Webster recorded frequent trips to see Cochrane and Cassidy about timber, but at no stage did these business dealings translate into social interaction of the sort he enjoyed with Russell, Parker, Maning and the Whites. A possible explanation is that these men continued to be more closely integrated into Maori communities than the residents of Kohukohu, who wished to live a more European lifestyle. Certainly, Russell’s desire to give his children an English-style education in Auckland can be seen as a way of separating them from their Maori background, something which will be developed further in chapter five. And Webster’s decision not to form a relationship with a Maori woman can also be read as a manifestation of this wish for social separation. If this was in fact the case, then Webster would have had to accept that he was still in the minority among his Kohukohu associates, as men such as Maning, Smyth and Parker remained enmeshed in the relationships with Maori kin they had formed in the previous decade. All three were married to Maori women and had ‘half-caste’.

34 Journal of J.R. Clendon 1839-1872, NZMS 476, AL.
35 In 1847 Cochrane was, along with Russell, granted a licence to cut timber on government land at Hokianga, and he seems to have had access to capital to support a substantial operation. See New Zealander, 27 October 1847, p.4; Lee, p.281.
36 Salesa states that this term was used by Europeans in New Zealand from the 1820s to describe all racially mixed children, although it increasingly came to describe the children of Pakeha fathers and Maori mothers. See Damon Ieremia Salesa, Racial Crossings: Race, Intermarriage, and the Victorian British Empire, Oxford, 2011, p.82.
children with them, while in 1851 Webster’s brother William would marry a half caste woman named Hanapara Gillies. Smyth’s wife was the daughter of Te Ihutai chief Wharepapa, while Maning was established at Onoke with his wife Moengaroa, and, according to his biographer, during the 1840s became more closely involved with Maori society than he had been in the 1830s. The pattern established in the 1830s whereby the European norms of respectability were malleable enough to accommodate intermarriage between Maori and Pakeha survived into the 1840s. During the previous decade the ‘intimate frontiers of empire’ had been negotiated in an environment where placing strictures on relationships with non-white women was impractical. As well as securing access to land, marrying Maori women allowed Pakeha men to fill an emotional need in the absence of Pakeha women; and it was a reflection of the ways in which the ideas of empire were adjusted where they could not survive unaltered. This realisation extended across all classes of Pakeha men, and it survived into the 1840s. A gentleman could continue to be a gentleman regardless of a close connection with Maori kin. However, this status was harder to preserve if he maintained contact with degenerate Europeans. Therefore, Cochrane

37 D. Webster, ‘The Webster Branch’, unpublished pamphlet, p.12. Hanapara was also known as Annabella.
38 Colquhoun, p.76.
40 Most relationships between Pakeha men and Maori women were in the nature of common law marriage, or what in the North American context were called marriages à la façon du pays (by the custom of the country), which blended elements from both cultures. However, some couples did seek consecration from the Christian church through the Wesleyan mission if the woman had been baptised. In Russell’s case, neither of his relationships were consecrated by the church. See Wesleyan Mission Hokianga, Register of Baptisms and Marriages, Pt 2 (Marriages), NZMS 779/1, AL.
41 In a similar vein, Adele Perry has stated in relation to British Columbia that ‘Settlers made choices about their lives that confounded the politics of respectability and racial divisions upon which empire rested’. Adele Perry, ‘Whose World was British? Rethinking the “British World” from an Edge of Empire’, in Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw and Stuart Macintyre, eds, Britishness Abroad: Transnational Movements and Imperial Cultures, Melbourne, 2007, p.142.
may have struggled to be accepted into Kohukohu social life not because he associated with Maori, but because he associated with sawyers and labourers. It is probably also significant that Cochrane, Cassidy and Poynton were all Irish, and in the cases of Poynton and Cassidy, at least, Roman Catholic, while the gentlemen of Kohukohu were Protestant Englishmen and Scots. Kohukohu was attempting to maintain the social structure and divisions found within Britain, but that structure bent at the point where it met with Maori. This conclusion is reinforced by Jolliffe’s opinion of a gathering on board the *Pandora* in 1851. While the divisions between gentlemen and labourers had been easy enough for him to comprehend, the blurring of the boundaries between Maori and Pakeha were harder to fathom: ‘[Wesleyan Missionary] Mr Hobbs and his family, Mr Russell & his family and Mr & Mrs [William] Webster came on board for tiffin (it was dinner to them) in all about twenty in number Mrs Webster was half caste & Mr Russell’s children are all half caste the rest were English or European extraction, but altogether they formed as primitive and curious a group as I have seen in a long time.’ However, the curiosity that Jolliffe felt was not apparently shared by his Hokianga guests for whom such ‘mixed’ company had become a fact of life.

However, for Webster, accepting the practical social realities of his new surroundings was one thing; abandoning the ideologies that underpinned imperial thought and profoundly shaped his identity was another. He might have found his new home at Kohukohu to be a place where Maori patrons, kin and business partners came with the territory, but pre-existing, racialised ideas about savagery and civilisation still found purchase in this outpost of empire. In his journal of 1847, which was most probably written for his family in Scotland, Webster recorded his attendance at hahunga, ceremonies at which the bones of a recently deceased chief would be disinterred, cleaned and reburied. For Webster, these ceremonies stirred a mixture of fascination and horror, and although he may have given a heightened sense of these emotions for

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42 An exception was Maning, who was born in Ireland. He was, however, from a Protestant, Anglo-Irish family.
43 Jolliffe, Diary, 15 November 1851, 1851-1856, Micro-MS-130-1, ATL.
44 Webster’s racial attitudes towards Maori and Pacific Islanders (see chapter four) were the subject of a 1972 research essay. However, the essay limited its discussion to the extent to which the peoples he encountered fitted into the tropes of the ‘romantic savage’ or the ‘noble savage’. See Graeme Murdoch, ‘John Webster, Pacific Island ‘Wanderer’: A European Reaction to the South Pacific, 1838-1852’, MA Research Essay, The University of Auckland, 1972.
the benefit of his readers, the pejorative language he used to describe some of their elements betrays a distaste that was in all probability genuine:

22 February 1847
[I]n front of us a noisy crowd occupied in their various avocations made the scene quite enlivening there sat a cluster of old half-clad really savages in appearance discussing the various news they had heard. Wahines [women] occupied in cooking or ruriruring [quivering] a game which is calculated to raise the passions it is accompanied with a song or chant of immoral tendency with contortions of the countenance & body, quivering the hands &c. They are Children of Nature….

23 February 1847
[F]rom the vicinity of the tupapaku’s [corpses] there arose a cry so wild and mournful … clustered in front of the bodies were a number of females the most of them aged who were chanting a dirge they were apparently in the deepest grief the tears streaming from their eyes half naked with their dishevelled hair hanging about their faces or matted and twisted looking like snakes dangling from their heads they would stretch out their long bony arms over the bodies quiver their hands & apostrophizing the spirits then sink on the ground & lament in the wild & piteous tones … I cannot describe the sensations I felt on beholding this scene the females looked like inhabitants of another world or sorceresses met for some evil purpose…. we returned & had supper after which Motte [an English visitor] & I again went to see the ruriruri’s, some parties consisted of as many as thirty all sitting in a row quite naked one of them would begin a song which would be finished by some of the others @ the same time they were quivering their hand in a surprising manner with tossing of the head from side to side & made the most frightful distortions in their Countenances accompanied by most diabolical noises which it is utterly impossible to describe to make their appearance more hideous they had painted their faces in a most uncouth manner the moon shone bright on this group who were like demons for they bore little resemblance to humanity.

These entries convey Webster’s view of Maori, or at least these aspects of Maori cultural practice, as savage and uncivilised, a view in keeping with contemporary ideas of race and culture. While their obvious social organisation, fixed settlements and agriculture placed them higher up the European-contrived ladder of civilisation than Aboriginals, for Britons of Webster’s generation Maori were still ‘children of nature’ whose base urges set them below Europeans, and the sense of appalled fascination he conveyed in his narrative echoed that expressed by other European

45 J. Webster, Maori Journal, 23 February 1847, NZMS 116 & 117, AL. Hereafter ‘Maori Journal’.
commentators who continued to be ‘fascinated and revolted by the ‘residual “savagery” of the “New Zealanders”’. Maori may have been a better class of savage than Aboriginals, but they were savages nonetheless. Just like his accounts of Australia, his descriptions of the hahunga reflect his identity as a civilised man who was both drawn to and repelled by seemingly unknowable native practices, but who, in the end, knew barbarism when he saw it.

Therefore, Webster brought to Hokianga the ideas of civilised superiority he learned from a young age in Britain. By the mid-1840s he had joined the gentlemanly community at Kohukohu, who were attempting to create a microcosm of Britain in which the behaviours, prejudices and divisions of home were replicated. To an extent the growing economic importance of Kohukohu gave them reason to believe that they were gaining an upper hand in implementing these divisions. But like his new companions, Webster could ultimately not escape the fact that Kohukohu existed within an overwhelmingly Maori world, and that the community he had joined had been founded on and was still reliant on Maori co-operation for its economic power. The Pakeha inhabitants of Kohukohu might have wanted to live according to British norms, but their lives were instead characterised by adjustments and accommodations. For John Webster these adjustments were most clearly reflected in the collaboration with Maori that he participated in on an almost daily basis as a small-time mercantile trader.

**Webster and the river trade**

In the journal he kept during the first half of 1847, John Webster included a number of detailed ink drawings of the people and fauna he saw around him. One of these was of the head of a hawk, or kahu (figure 5).

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Another drawing showed the disembodied, tattooed head of a young Maori man (figure 6). The similarities between these two illustrations in content and composition are striking, and tend to suggest that Webster saw Maori as part of the landscape to be captured and recorded for posterity in much the same way as other exotic species. They are the work of an observer following in the ethnographic footsteps of earlier European travellers through the Pacific whose observations were used to form clearer ideas about the natural world and the hierarchy of human development.
But the journal also contained a drawing that suggested participation rather than observation (figure 7). This drawing showed Webster sitting outside a whare, or house, in a Maori community enjoying hospitality and possibly discussing terms of trade with his hosts. These contrasting images suggest that while Webster retained and continued to express the ideas of race that he had acquired in Britain and which had been confirmed in Australia, he also adapted and tempered his behaviour to meet the requirements of his new surroundings. They are clear indications of the two identities Webster maintained: the imperial man who was capable of viewing Maori as savage, and the small-time trader fluent in Maori and willing to accept Maori hospitality. This section discusses these apparently conflicting identities and considers what they say about the relative positions of Maori and Pakeha, and how the ideas of empire were reshaped and complicated in an environment where they could not go unchallenged.

Figure 7: Papahurihia’s whare at Omanaia, showing Webster on the left
Source: Maori Journal, NZMS 116, 117, Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries

As discussed in the previous section, Webster was willing to portray Maori as barbarous to this audience at home. Yet his view of Maori was not simple, clear-cut or uniformly negative. Instead it was complicated by the ties of personal acquaintance
and economic reliance. Ceremonial displays such as hahunga amplified his perception of fundamental and hierarchical differences between cultures and created an environment where his ideas of Maori savagery found purchase. The regular interactions that arose from trade, however, were more mundane and less likely to conform to ‘savage’ stereotypes. Even though these interactions fitted Webster’s racial views of Maori as being capable of commerce in a way that was supposedly beyond the capacity of Aboriginals, they still enabled less one-dimensional encounters to emerge from Webster’s journal. He had been invited to the hahunga described in the last section by Papahurihia of Omanaia, with whom he had formed a friendship earlier in the decade which had survived the two men taking part on opposite sides in the Northern War (see next chapter). Webster might have chosen not to take a Maori wife, but the relationships he formed with men like Papahurihia were central to his life and livelihood.

As a small-time trader Webster dealt with Maori the length of the river and beyond. People from Whirinaki, Herekino and Pakanae regularly called at Rangiora with potatoes, onions, pigs, kumara and, in the case of Whirinaki and Herekino, wheat. In return he supplied them with tobacco, pipes, calico and, occasionally, tomahawks, and in the process he came to know some of the most influential rangatira on the river, including Arama Karaka Pi of Waima, who called at Rangiora on at least one occasion. However, he found particular success with the people of Omanaia, thanks to his relationship with their leader, Papahurihia. He undertook regular trips up the Omanaia River to trade in potatoes and other produce, often staying the night and accepting Maori hospitably, or manaakitanga. Extending hospitality played an important role in Maori-Pakeha relations from the earliest days of contact, and as Petrie has noted ‘given that strategic alliances with foreigners were essential to the success of trade opportunities, chiefly responsibilities in connection with maintaining good relations included extending customary hospitality to Pākehā’. But manaakitanga involved more than merely offering the hand of welcome to strangers: leaders extended manaakitanga as a way of demonstrating their own mana. As quoted by Petrie, manaakitanga is ‘the process whereby mana (power, authority) is translated

47 Maori Journal, 21 June 1847.
For Papahurihia, cultivating a friendship and a working relationship with Webster provided a way to navigate through the prevailing economic downturn of the mid to late 1840s, and the hospitality he extended, including inviting Webster to occasions such as hahunga and hakari (feasts), secured this connection. For Webster trade with Omanaia was a way to supplement his income, and accepting Papahurihia’s hospitality became an essential part of securing that trade. Therefore, social occasions such as hahunga provided both parties with an opportunity to cement valuable relations. Moreover, Webster’s presence at them reveals that, instead of merely being a bystander recording interesting details for a British audience, he was a welcome guest who had important ties to Maori communities.

Maintaining these relationships, however, meant tempering pejorative views of Maori, at least in their presence. On those occasions when he travelled to and stayed in Maori communities, Webster had to learn appropriate ways of behaving and, at times, had to abide by Maori custom. For example, during a visit to Omanaia, Webster was greeted by way of hongi by an elderly man, although he confided to his journal that this was ‘a kindness I would have dispensed with’. However, as well as accepting Maori custom, Webster was also involved in negotiating new, collaborative ways of interacting with those Maori, such as Papahurihia, with whom he regularly dealt. On another visit to Omanaia, Webster stayed with Papahurihia and recorded the following exchange:

the fiery God [Papahurihia] said it was a pity I should be without a Wahine (wife)[. H]e said there was one there that wanted me[,] she is called Te Hunga daughter of a chief called Kaitoke[.] I told him I was tabooed he wahine tok u kei to wahi[. T]he Atua Wero [sic; Papahurihia] advised me to get tatoed on the seat of honour & thighs like himself[,] Kikihu his wife seconded the motion & offered to get me ngarahau the black colouring matter[,] Paora also seriously said he would do it well & make a Rangatira nui of me … they said they would take care of me untill I got well[,] I told them I had not time to lose.

49 ibid., p.139.
50 Maori Journal, 8 March 1847. Hongi is a form of greeting in which the parties’ noses are pressed together.
51 ibid., 16 February 1847. The phrase ‘he wahine tok u kei to wahi’ translates as ‘I have a woman [or a wife] at your place’. This implies that Webster was involved in a relationship with either a Maori or a Pakeha woman at Hokianga; however, no evidence can be found to support this claim. Another possibility is that his grammar is incorrect and he was actually trying to say that he had a wife at home.
Papahurihia’s probable intention in offering Webster both a wife and a moko, or tattoo, was to bond him to Papahurihia’s Te Hikutu hapu and to make it clear that Webster was ‘his Pakeha’, in an extension of the type of patron-client relationship that had existed since the late 1820s. It is not possible to say precisely why Webster refused his offer. He may have done so because he was not prepared to link himself permanently to a Maori community and set himself outside European norms through adopting extensive moko (tattoo), or ‘marks of transgression’;\(^\text{52}\) because he was unwilling to engage in an ongoing sexual relationship with a woman of another race; or because his membership of the Kohukohou community meant he did not need to rely on a Maori community for patronage. Papahurihia, meanwhile, may have been willing to accept this refusal in order to preserve the trading relationship with Webster, a sign of the increasing economic power of Pakeha, who in earlier years would have had little option but to accept a chief’s offer of a bride.

What is particularly telling is the reason Webster gave for not being able to accept the offer of a wife. In addition to dishonestly claiming to be already married, he used the concept of tapu to protect himself from an unwanted betrothal.\(^\text{53}\) On other occasions, Webster plainly stated that he did not see tapu as applying to him, as a Pakeha. At one point in his journal he wrote:

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\(^\text{52}\) See Joanna White, ‘Marks of Transgression’, in Nicholas Thomas, Anna Cole and Bronwen Douglas, eds, *Tattoo: Bodies, Art and Exchange in the Pacific and the West*, London, 2005, pp.72-89. In the early 1840s, Webster had submitted to a small ‘hae hae’ on his arm during his stint selling gum at Herekino but there too had refused more extensive, visible tattooing. Webster, *Reminiscences of an Old Settler*, p.258. For a discussion on tattoo as ‘a marker of the primitive’ in European thought, see, Heidi Gengenbach, ‘Tattooed Secrets: Women’s History in Magude District, Southern Mozambique’, in Ballantyne and Burton, *Bodies in Contact*, pp.253-73. See also Moloney, p.159 for Charles Darwin’s opinion that facial tattoo marked out Maori as savage while the lack of facial tattoo made Tahitians civilised in comparison.

\(^\text{53}\) Tapu was, and remains, a central feature of Maori spirituality. Its explanations have ranged from ‘prohibited’ to ‘set apart’ and ‘sacred. Although all things that have a personal, cultural or ancestral link possess varying grades and types of tapu, it is associated particularly with those people believed to be the ‘human mediums representing the gods’, namely tohunga, or priests, and rangatira. Tapu was the source of chiefly mana, and both rangatira and tohunga had the power to impose and lift tapu. The dead, in particular, were held to be tapu, and rituals were set in place to separate the dead from the living. At its most practical, tapu was a mechanism by which people’s behaviour towards each other and towards the environment could be controlled by restricting actions that could threaten the common good, but its role in Maori society, and its connection to mana, was, and is, fundamental. See P. Hohepa, ‘Kerikeri, Tapu, Wahi Tapu’, in Judith Binney, ed., *Te Kerikeri 1770-1850: The Meeting Pool*, Wellington, 2007, p.90; Angela Ballara, *Taua: ‘Musket Wars’, ‘Land Wars’, or Tikanga: Warfare in Maori Society in the Early Nineteenth Century*, Auckland, 2003, p.75.
I soon came to the settlement fine soil in the valley the Indian corn & kumaras looking well in some places … happening to cast my eyes towards a cluster of peach trees by the road side I was surprised & delighted to find them loaded with fruit I cast aside my bundle & shook the tree when they came tumbling about my head I soon eat my fill & put a lot in my bundle I soon discovered the reason of those trees being so loaded they grow amongst the remains of an old hut which rendered them sacred & no native would touch them many thanks to the tapu.54

Yet tapu seems to have played a central role in Webster rejecting the marriage offer and in Papahurihia accepting the reason for that refusal. A possible explanation is that this was an instance where, as Richard White has put it, the participants ‘had, of necessity, to attempt to understand the world and the reasoning of others and to assimilate enough of that reasoning to put it to their own purposes’.55 If Webster really had already been married, then he would have viewed any other relationship of that nature as bigamous and profane. In using the fact that he was ‘tabboed’ or ‘tapued’ as the reason not to accept Te Hunga as his wife, Webster was appealing to an understanding of sacredness as he saw it existing in Maori communities in order to avoid an attachment that would have been unacceptable in Pakeha culture. For his part, Papahurihia may have accepted the excuse, not because he shared Webster’s view of non-monogamous relationships, but because he was willing to alter his understanding of tapu to incorporate Pakeha ideas of social restriction and because he understood enough about Pakeha to know their spiritual beliefs differed from his own. In this way the concept of tapu that the two men agreed on did not belong exclusively to either culture. Instead this was a situation where the parties understood enough of other’s culture and the places where ideas might overlap to create a new, shared understanding and a mutually agreeable outcome which ultimately served the interests of both men.

In this collaborative environment of mutual need and balanced interests, the negotiation of new rules of engagement went hand in hand with the creation of a new identity. Among Maori, Webster could not simply be the imperial man who felt at home among the gentlemen of Kohukohu. He needed to conduct himself according to different mores, to understand enough of another culture to engage constructively

54 Maori Journal, 11 April 1847.
with it, and to be willing to create new ways of interacting as situations dictated. Fundamental to this understanding was his ability to speak Maori. At the most basic level, Webster’s knowledge of te reo Maori was a practical necessity: he could not have carried out his trading business without being able to converse with his customers and suppliers. This was captured in an episode during which he outdid his friend Motte in a trading deal at Omanaia:

[W]ent further up the river to the settlement of the Atua Wera found Mr Motte had gone up & landed … he was already showing off his articles of barter. He can’t talk Maori & has great difficulty in making them understand him[,] I went up to the Atua Wera’s place. We found him in the midst of his cultivation[,] I saluted him [in Maori] … had some talk with him about potatoes[,] He desired to see what sort of trade I had got[,] I told the Boys to bring the Box out of the Boat containing articles for barter consisting of print calico sheets tomahawks pipes tobacco etc etc[,] Everything underwent inspection and after arranging about the value of each article Papa called to his people to commence digging potatoes for Hone [John.] Motte joined us he has not been successful in getting a cargo.56

Here Webster’s proficiency in Maori gave him a way into Maori communities and allowed him to succeed where others failed.

There is also a sense in which he used his ability to speak the language as a way of confirming his identity as a man of empire. John White recorded how ‘in looking over a young friend’s journal the other day I saw a NZ word in every line I asked why he put them in “to puzzle my friends at home” was his answer’.57 Given that White and Webster exchanged material for each other’s journals, it is reasonable to assume that Webster was the ‘young friend’ to whom White was referring. If so, Webster’s desire to puzzle and amuse his family with the Maori words and phrases also reveals a desire to impress them with his mastery of strange and foreign lands. In this light, his use of the language can be seen as fitting into Gibbons’s definition of cultural colonisation in that he was co-opting Maori for his own purpose, and making it part of the way he ‘exoticized’ Maori in their own land.58

56 Maori Journal, 16 February 1847.
57 John White, Journal written at Mata recording his farming activities, reading and writing interests, knowledge of Maori life and beliefs and his friendship with the Hobbs family, 1 July 1847, qMS-2201, ATL.
Yet as Michael Reilly has noted, such use of another language also served to separate colonial diarists from their British audience, as they were no longer exactly like their friends in the old country. In his discussion of John White, Reilly described White’s experience in colonial Hokianga society, ‘where the English persona sometimes slipped and was replaced by another’. According to Reilly, one significant slip ‘can be observed in White’s usage of Maori words and phrases throughout his journal’.59 This is a slip also to be found in the writings of John Webster. Webster’s knowledge and use of the Maori language was therefore a cornerstone of his identity as Hone Wepiha, the Maori translation of his name, and an identity created to serve the economic and social demands of his day-to-day dealings with Maori. Stuart Hall has argued that ‘identities are never unified [but are] fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions’.60 By viewing identity as something multiple that results from complex processes taking place in daily life, it is possible to see how Webster could have moulded and moderated his behaviour, and his identity, to satisfy the rules and requirements of an environment where a bullish insistence on European cultural norms would ensure personal failure.

This is not to suggest that Webster in some way became Maori, or even Pakeha Maori. Men belonging to the latter category were among the earliest Pakeha inhabitants of New Zealand, and were characterised by a substantially different accommodation with Maori than that achieved by later arrivals. Often arriving alone, they effectively lived as members of hapu, abiding by Maori custom and accepting the dictates of their chiefs. They adopted moko and sometimes went to war alongside their Maori hosts. In Hokianga the man who most clearly fit this model was John Marmon, who may have arrived as early as 1823.61 Marmon came under the

61 The details of Marmon’s early years in New Zealand Hokianga are murky. Some accounts place him in New Zealand as early as 1817. Marmon himself claimed to be at the Bay of Islands until 1828 and then to have settled at Hokianga. However, he also claimed a close connection to Muriwai, who died that year. In addition, he claimed to have purchased land in at Waihou in 1827. See Old Land Claim 318, repro 1545, ANZW; Old Land Claim 27, repro 1563, ANZW; Trevor Bentley, Pakeha Maori: The extraordinary story of the Europeans who lived as Maori in early New Zealand, Auckland, 1999, p.28; Lee, p.47; Roger Wigglesworth, ‘Marmon, John - Biography’, Dictionary of New Zealand Biography.
protection of Muriwai of Te Popoto, then the most influential chief on the upper river; he married into the hapu and was largely absorbed into the community. By the late 1830s, though, as the number of Pakeha increased and the sense of isolation decreased, the phenomenon of the Pakeha Maori faded away. While Webster remained reliant on Maori in practical terms, he did not have to attempt the type of psychological transformation believed to have been undertaken by men such as John Marmon in the 1820s; he did not join himself to a Maori community through marriage, he did not submit to extensive moko and he did not live as a Maori according to Maori custom. Instead, he learned and participated in new ways of interacting with Maori. By the 1840s, those occasions when Maori and Pakeha came together socially and economically were characterised by give and take. Maori no longer expected Pakeha to live according to Maori custom; Pakeha had to conduct trade in te reo Maori and to temper ideas of civilisation and savagery. For both sides collaboration meant compromise, although it is important to note that, given the overwhelming demographic disparity between the parties, compromise for Maori was a matter of choice, while for Pakeha it was a matter of necessity. In this environment Webster was at once the imperial man at home in the European surroundings of Kohukohu, and the river trader willing to learn the new language and modes of behaviour.

This argument has implications for a study not just of John Webster but also for those individuals such as Frederick Maning, Webster’s friend of 40 years who arrived in the 1830s and who has previously been categorised as Pakeha Maori. While it is the case that Maning had close ties with his Te Hikutu kin, he was equally at home in the gentlemanly surroundings of Kohukohu. In his recent study of historiographical representations of Pakeha Maori, Trevor Bentley argued that, having crossed over to another culture and ‘entered the world of Maori’, Maning ‘could not be reintegrated with European society socially and emotionally without great difficulty’.


62 The role of isolation as a factor in transculturation is captured in the definition first put forward by Hallowell in 1963, which said that transculturites are persons who ‘are temporarily or permanently detached from one group, enter the web of social relations that constitute another society, and come under the influence of its customs, ideas and values to a greater or lesser degree’. A. Hallowell, quoted in H.E. Maude, Of Islands and Men: Studies in Pacific History, Melbourne, 1968, p.135.

heavily on Maning’s stylised and highly politicised presentation of himself in the text of his book *Old New Zealand*, Bentley has overstated the extent to which Maning was integrated into Maori society and understated the extent to which he remained part of the Pakeha community. Bentley rightly says that Maning ‘acquired a new name, language and kinspeople’. However, these new acquisitions were common among Pakeha who resided at Hokianga during the 1830s and 1840s and did not in themselves denote a crossing over into ‘the world of Maori’. They were more likely to indicate that the recipient’s daily dealings brought them into contact with Maori in social, economic and familial settings. In the collaborative world of 1840s Hokianga, rather than denoting culture-crossing, ownership of these dual and apparently conflicting identities was a part of life as a Pakeha.

The multi-layered nature of this environment, therefore, had implications for those men at Kohukohu like Webster who dreamed of extending the British world beyond George Russell’s garden gate. Just as they had since the 1830s, they had to accept that this world did not yet exist and that in its place was a world of compromise and complexity. This complexity is clearly seen in an episode that took place in May 1847 at Webster’s home at Rangiora. It involved the arrival of a taua muru, or plundering party, on Webster’s front lawn to settle a grievance between Pera, Terea and Piko, and a group of Te Rarawa men. On the face of it this was a straightforward affair that conformed to Maori custom. However, as discussed in the following section, a closer reading shows it to be complicated by the presence of Webster and other Pakeha. It became a forum where Webster’s identities as an imperial man and river trader co-existed, if uncomfortably, and it demonstrated that Hokianga was a place where empire and Maori met, interacted and compromised in multiple ways.

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(History), University of Waikato, 2007, pp.79-80. Bentley defines Pakeha Maori as those who lived with and as Maori. Specifically, he defines them as ‘all Europeans who lived among Maori permanently or temporarily as culture-crossers’ who were characterised by an ‘acceptance of Maori protocols and the subordination of their own interests to the tribe’ (p.16).

64 ibid. p.79. For a discussion of *Old New Zealand* as a reflection of Maning’s political concerns in the early 1860s see Colquhoun, pp.196-215.
65 George Russell, for example, was known to Maori as Piwakawaka, or fantail, apparently because of his diminutive stature and quick movements. The Wesleyan missionary William White was called Te Waiti, while Maning was known as Te Manene. Like Webster’s name, Hone Wepiha, the latter two were transliterations of English names, although Manene also means ‘stranger’ or ‘immigrant’. See http://www.maoridictionary.co.nz/.
‘Now was the savage sight’: Taua muru

On 24 May 1847, as he was drifting off to sleep, John Webster was woken by the sound of a war party landing on his front lawn. As he got out of bed and looked out from his verandah he was confronted by the sight of a group of armed Maori crowded inside the hut usually occupied by Pera, Terea and Piko. The party was conducting a taua muru, whose purpose was to plunder property in order to right a perceived wrong and restore mana. It was rooted in a disagreement about the theft of some of Piko’s belongings during an earlier visit to Webster’s property by the men who would eventually become the raiding party. When the alleged thieves returned some time later, Piko made off with their possessions and said he would hold on to them until his own goods were returned. A subsequent attempt to resolve the dispute saw some goods returned on each side, but only after verbal insults had been thrown and one of the visitors had threatened revenge. Over the next twelve hours there was a standoff between the two camps, punctuated by moments of direct armed confrontation. While Webster moved between the scene of the disturbance and the relative safety of his house, cutlasses were waved and pistol shots were threatened. Scuffles and ferocious yelling broke out and haka were performed, before the raiders departed with a box of Piko’s belongings.

Ostensibly, this was a straightforward affair that followed the basic rules of taua muru and conformed to a recognisable pattern. Traditionally, taua muru was a means of dispute resolution which ‘punished offences, but [which] was not intended to provoke war.’ In appearance, taua muru could look very much like a full war party ‘with full sound effects and apparent fury: weapons were brandished, muskets were fired into the air, haka or war dances were performed in challenge, accompanied by blood-curdling yells and set to words which outlined the offence … so that the offenders were left in no doubt that they were considered to be the transgressors’. However, killing either did not occur or was very limited. In a wider sense, the raid was a continuation of tension between Te Rarawa and Nga Puhi, and it fitted into an ongoing pattern of conflict between the two tribes. The raiders were Te Rarawa from up the coast at Herekino who had come to Hokianga to work for Dennis Cochrane, while Pera, Terea, and Piko belonged to a hapu from southern Hokianga that was

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66 Maori Journal, 17 May 1847, 23 May 1847.
67 Ballara, Taua, pp.103-104.
affiliated to Nga Puhi. The act of plunder that took place on Webster’s lawn demonstrated many of these traditional components, yet there were significant ways in which this taua varied from a traditional course and incorporated new elements into the way it was conducted. Most of these new elements resulted from the involvement of Webster and the small number of other Pakeha drawn into the confrontation and demonstrate Maori willingness to adjust custom to accommodate Pakeha. But the accommodation was not one-sided. The episode also shows how a story fashioned for a British audience that attempted to cast Webster as a civilized man controlling a savage situation could break down under the weight of a more complex colonial reality.

From the outset when he looked down from his house and saw the taua below him, Webster tended to portray himself as a major player in the affair, as the director of events. After seeing the raiding party, he went into the sitting room to find his houseguest Mr Motte, his brother George, and Pera, Terea and Piko arming themselves. He apparently then took control of the situation:

I went into our sitting room & found Motte Geo & the boys loading guns & pistols, cutlasses & Bayonets were scattered about in all directions, Tatou ki raro I said (let us go below) I seized a cutlass Terea a gun & we two went down first. I stuck my cutlass in the earth unseen by the enemy close @ hand & Terea & I entered the hut confronting the party. Who are you and what want you here I asked, No answer, not a sound was heard, every man stood or sat still as statues leaning on their long spears their kakahu [garments or cloaks] drawn over their faces. I gave the fire a kick with my foot to make it blaze when I put my hand to two or 3 of their mats & drew them aside to see who they were I found them to be from Herekino.  

After a brief standoff, Webster led Terea and Piko up the hill to the house, and waited for the raiding party to make the first move. Things remained quiet during the night, but in the morning a scuffle broke out:

[W]e all rushed out I took a gun which I thrust in the verandah paling in case of the worst & be it understood if a gun had been fired by the other party I should immediately have supplied our lads with firearms instead of the spears & cutlasses. On our party coming out the taua commenced yelling quivering

68 Maori Journal, 25 May 1847.
their weapons &c. I rushed down to the hut where two of our lads were scuffling with a party who were dragging out the Boxes I lent a hand to prevent them from being taken out of the hut the main body of the Taua were outside defying the lads on the hill We pushed those in the hut outside & shut the door…. Now was the savage sight all our boys party were on the Brow @ the House just above the Taua Both parties yelled & made hideous faces & ran about like demons stripped almost naked, all the Herekino party made a feint of rushing forward I called to our party to Kokiri, to rush down but they were wary being all youths, two of the Taua now came forward with muskets & presented them @ our lads I rushed forward in front of them and said, Ka tangi to pu aianei ki konei koutou puranga ai (fire a shot and your party shall lie in a heap where you are) I told them I would on the first shot supply my lads with guns and not one of them should escape, this intimidated them a good deal, they danced a war dance and retreated to their canoe when our lads rushed with a yell to the waterside & danced in defiance.  

For his readers at least, Webster positioned himself as the hero, the civilized man who did not hesitate to take charge of a dangerous and incendiary situation characterised at times by almost semi-human savagery. Yet, after six years of living in close proximity to a large Maori population among whom he regularly traded, Webster may very well have recognised this as a conflict whose main purpose was to recover property and right a perceived wrong rather than cause physical harm. He might also have been aware that this was a Maori response to a Maori dispute, regardless of his desire to see and portray himself being the controller of events. At one point in his narrative he admitted as much when said that ‘Our party mustered 12 only not including Motte Geo & I, who as it is entirely a native quarrel cannot interfere more than by countenancing our lads’. Here at least he was willing to accept the limits of his power and influence. In addition, his eagerness to present himself as a man of action cowing the attackers was undermined by his comment that he in fact spent the majority of the twelve hours sitting ‘inside by the fire to await the upshot’. These admissions provide evidence of the ‘slippage’ of Webster’s apparently cast-iron imperial identity and suggest its, admittedly reluctant, replacement by someone willing to acknowledge the authority of tikanga Maori in this setting.

Yet one episode in the dispute also illustrates the limits of Maori willingness to force their own rules on to Pakeha. When the taua muru arrived Webster identified them as being from Herekino by drawing aside the garment from one of their faces. He notes, 

69 ibid.
70 ibid.
‘[t]his was a dangerous proceeding of mine to touch their garment or put my hand near their faces which are sacred. Had it been a native the insult would have been instantly resented, as it was they moved not when I touched them but their eyes glared like fire upon me’.  

Webster’s relationship with Herekino was a poor one, following a stint there trading gum in the early 1840s, and although it is not possible to identify who the Herekino party were, the fact that the taua took place on what he viewed as his property may have added a layer of complexity to that relationship. It is even possible that the taua was conducted partly in response to Webster’s own behaviour, given that it came not long after Webster had refused to go to Herekino to settle debts and had sent a message to his former host Pukeroa that he and his people were ‘a parcel of rogues’. Nevertheless, the raiders exercised restraint when Webster broke tapu by touching one of their heads. This restraint and the decision not to apply the rules of tapu to Webster was in keeping with the non-violent conduct of the taua as a whole, but it also reflects the raiders’ unwillingness to risk the economic loss they might suffer from attacking a white man and alienating other Pakeha, given that they had come to Hokianga to work in the timber trade.

This episode, then, reveals the ways in which Maori and Pakeha were willing to accommodate each other in an environment of mutual economic co-operation and interest. Here Webster was simply not able to maintain the façade of superiority in a situation where he was so obviously not dominant, and instead had to exercise the lessons he had learned as a small-time trader. Borrowing from Edward Said’s ideas of knowledge and hegemonic colonial power, Peter Gibbons has argued that ‘colonists’ memoirs and reminiscences … tell straightforward (sometimes simplistic) stories … recounting in moral or providential or racial terms … the circumstances under which settlers came to be dominant and the indigenous peoples subordinate, and making this outcome seem natural, conclusive and definitive’. However, Webster’s story of the
tau a is striking because it not a straightforward, simplistic narrative and cannot in the end sustain itself as a story of domination. In fact it was undermined as a story of superiority by the very thing that Said, and Gibbons, argued Europeans used to build hegemony: knowledge. It is certainly possible to argue that knowledge of Maori was central to Webster’s image of himself as an adventurous, daring man of empire. Yet he also knew that his ongoing prosperity relied on maintaining trading relations with his more numerous Maori neighbours, and possibly that the taua was likely to resolve itself despite his intervention. These realisations lay behind his confession that the taua was beyond his power to direct and control, despite it taking part on what he viewed as his property, and his veiled admission that withdrawal rather than attack was the order of the day. And it was these realisations that meant Webster’s portrait of cast-iron superiority could not survive the story intact.

This story can be contrasted with Webster’s portrayal of conflict with indigenous people in Australia. There, he had been a traveller passing through, recording his story with little understanding of his surroundings or his place in them. Aboriginals had remained at a distance before his violent encounter with them. This distance allowed them to remain marginal, problematic figures, and it allowed his story to be one of unalloyed domination where an imperial identity could remain intact. In New Zealand his story was complicated because it was characterised not by distance but by familiarity. It was characterised by the direct involvement by and knowledge of Maori. It was a story of empire’s limits rather than its power.75

Webster’s arrival at Hokianga and his initiation into the world of the timber industry and small-time trade placed him for the first time in a situation where he had to deal

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75 This conclusion supports the ‘dialogic’ view of colonial knowledge, as well as the view that its power had limits and was not all-encompassing. See, for example, C.A. Bayly, Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870, Cambridge, 1999. Bayly’s work, along with works in a similar vein, are discussed in Ballantyne, ‘Colonial Culture’, pp.187-89; Tony Ballantyne, ‘Culture and Colonization: Revisiting the Place of Writing in Colonial New Zealand’, Journal of New Zealand Studies, NS9, 2010, pp.6-7. See also, ‘Introduction’ in Jonathan Lamb, Vanessa Smith and Nicholas Thomas, eds, Exploration and Exchange: A South Seas Anthology 1680-1900, Chicago and London, 2000, where the authors use written accounts of European travellers to argue that ‘metropolitan aspirations foundered in many ways, on the high seas as well as on the reefs and beaches of the Pacific’ (p.xvi).
with a culture which was not his own, and which he viewed as inferior and savage. But these racialised views could not survive unchallenged in an environment of economic reliance on and social interaction with Maori. He might have believed that in coming to New Zealand he was coming to a place where Britain would now prevail, but instead the collaboration that had grown up during the 1830s largely continued into the 1840s. This collaboration with Maori, rooted in a balance of interests, meant negotiating rules of engagement and compromise, in the form of new modes of behaviour and new identities. For Webster and other Pakeha, compromise was still a matter of necessity rather than choice, and it revealed the extent to which empire had as yet failed to exert itself.
Chapter Three

Among the Queen’s People: The Northern War 1845-1846

In the autumn and winter of 1845, four years after his arrival in Hokianga, John Webster left his home on the river to join in a war against Nga Puhi leader Hone Heke. During his time at the battlefront he found himself involved in some of the most desperate engagements of what became known as the Northern War, and he witnessed two of its major battles. But he did not act as part of the British military response to Heke; instead, he was one of a group of Pakeha fighters who fought alongside Maori in Nene and other chiefs’ campaign against their Nga Puhi adversary. Fighting as part of Nene’s forces saw Webster accept Maori leadership and fight according to Maori tactics and strategy. On the face of it this subordinate position contradicted his idea of himself as someone who ought to be in control of Maori. However, it was also the case that Webster, along with other Pakeha, saw Nene as an ally of the Queen who was fighting to uphold their idea of empire against a rebel chief. On the other hand, Nene saw himself as fighting to his protect mana, autonomy and economic prosperity. These contradictory motivations allowed Maori and Pakeha to collaborate during the war, but the nature of that collaboration reveals much about the relative political positions of the two parties.

This chapter examines the political tensions that existed between Maori and Pakeha in 1840s Hokianga owing to their varying ideas of the role the Crown and empire ought to play in their communities and the reasons for these tensions being set aside in 1845. In particular, it looks at Webster’s involvement in the war and considers what his decision to fight says about his relationship with Maori. It argues that, like other Pakeha residents of Hokianga, he had to accept that political collaboration with and reliance upon Maori was the most effective means of furthering his vision of empire.

‘A new era has commenced’

In the autumn of 1845 John Webster found himself taking part in armed conflict in the countryside to the east of Hokianga. On either side of him in the shallow dugout from which he fired his gun were followers of Nene and his allies. On the other side of the field were those men and women who had chosen to join Hone Heke and Kawiti in
their war against the Crown, and against opposing factions of Nga Puhi. In an account published in his old age Webster provided a taste of the fighting as follows:

Only a few men appeared at one time in both sides to fire at. I learnt that there were several hundred in the field, but they were all concealed…. A man would fire at another on either side and immediately disappear to load his gun…. The near bullets were spitting past us as we lay in the holes exposing our heads only. I did not see a chance of firing for some time. At last some of Nene’s men had crossed a swamp lying below us, and got near a rise in the ground, where Heke’s pa was erected. At the same time some of Heke’s men appeared, approaching on the rising ground. Nene’s men got covered under the leaves of the korari (flax) and when they approached nearer fired at them.¹

This skirmishing was the first phase in a war that had started on 11 March when, as a sign of his displeasure with the new colonial government, Hone Heke had cut down the flagstaff at Kororareka in the Bay of Islands. Immediately afterwards, Heke and fellow chief Kawiti led a raid that resulted in the sacking of the town and the killing of British soldiers.² Nene and other Hokianga chiefs, including Mohi Tawhai and Arama Karaka Pi of Te Mahurehure and Taonui of Te Popoto, had then acted independently of the British military in taking up arms against Heke to prevent an advance on Hokianga, so that by the end of March they were building pa near Okaihau to check Heke’s movements west of Kaikohe.³ They were joined at various stages of the ensuing war by a group of Pakeha settlers from Hokianga, including Webster, Frederick Maning, John Marmon, Jack Leef, John White and Henry Monro. John Marmon and his wife joined Taonui sometime in early April, and they were joined a short time later by Frederick Maning and Jack Leef, who accompanied their Te Hikutu kin to the front line.⁴ All three of these men took part in the skirmishing between the two opposing Nga Puhi camps, although Maning and Leef seem to have stayed only for short periods of time. Webster, meanwhile, may have gone to the

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¹ John Webster, *Reminiscences of an Old Settler in Australia and New Zealand*, Christchurch, 1908, p.269.
² Now known as Russell, Kororareka was the largest settlement at the Bay of Islands.
⁴ John Logan Campbell recorded that on 14 April he accompanied Maning to the war front. He also recollected that this had not been Maning’s first visit to Nene’s camp. John Logan Campbell, *Reminiscences*, Campbell papers, MS 51, Box 2 item 1C, AWML, p.263. Maning’s early appearance at the front is confirmed by Marmon when he says that soon after his own arrival, ‘Mr Manning [sic], John Leaf [sic], and a number of Hikutu’s [sic] tribe came over’. ‘The Life and Adventures of John Marmon’, *Auckland Star*, supplement, 11 March 1882.
battlefront at the same time as Maning, Leef and Marmon, although his movements at this stage are unclear. Like Maning and Leef, though, he seems to have stayed for limited periods. In his memoir he recounted how ‘[f]or about a week I emptied my cartridge box, and always took up my position on the hill overlooking the pa’. These skirmishes were the main feature of the war for the first month, and the way they were conducted was heavily influenced by the kinship connections between the two sets of protagonists, most of whom were Nga Puhi. In his study of cross-cultural encounter between Maori and British forces during the Northern War, Ralph Johnson argued that the nature of the war was largely dictated by Nga Puhi, that the ‘structure of encounter adhered to established Nga Puhi rituals’. As Johnson pointed out ‘[t]he use of ambushes … was prohibited by mutual agreement in order to prevent the destructive consequences on Nga Puhi society which accompanied full-scale surprise warfare’. Fighting only occurred during the hours of daylight, and regular ceasefires took place to see to the wounded and the dead. These rules were laid down by the Nga Puhi war leaders, and they were adhered to by all combatants, including the settler-fighters. In addition, fighting followed an established pattern of challenge, or wero, and response. A hill named Taumata Kakaramu, half way between Nene’s pa and Heke’s, was used to issue a challenge, by way of musket fire. In substance, then, these skirmishes were affairs between Maori, shaped by Nga Puhi kinship ties and conducted according to Maori protocol. The Pakeha settler-fighters may have been participants, but they were taking part in a Maori-controlled and directed conflict.

This pattern is confirmed by Webster. He recounted how at dusk ‘[t]he two armies gathered together, for there was not a shot in anger after the sun had gone down’ and how a ‘compact had been made between Nene and Hewe [sic] that there should be no torohe [sic] on the roads (ambush) … and this was carried out most faithfully …

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5 Webster claimed to have been at Nene’s camp when they received news of Pomare’s arrest, an event that took place on 30 April. In addition, the details of skirmishing he provided seem to relate to manoeuvres that took place before the battle of Te Kahika in May rather than afterwards, as his narrative implies. For comparisons see the contemporary accounts of Robert Burrows and George Clarke Junior: Robert Burrows, Extracts from a Diary Kept by the Rev. R. Burrows During Heke’s War in the North, Auckland, 1886, 20 March 1845; George Clarke Junior to George Clarke, George Clarke, Letters and Journals, Vol. 7, qMS-0649, ATL.
6 Webster, Reminiscences, p.271.
7 Johnson, pp.149-53.
8 ibid., p.54.
9 Webster, Reminiscences, p.267.
between Nene and Heke’s forces, for they were of the Ngapuhi tribe’. This early skirmishing was Webster’s introduction to Maori warfare, and he quickly adapted to and accepted its rules.

This situation did not change with the arrival of British troops at Nene’s camp at Okaihau in the first week of May, escorted, hosted and, as Johnson persuasively argues, protected from ambush by Nene himself. On 8 May, the British forces attacked Heke’s pa, Te Kahika. They undertook this assault without direct combat support from Nene, Taonui or Mohi Tawhai. The rangatira withdrew to Taumata Kakaramu to observe proceedings, although Nene sent a small party of men to act as scouts for the troops under Colonel Hulme. A number of Pakeha were present that day and also acted as observers, although Webster was not one of them. They included Marmon, Maning and John White, the last of whom, along with Henry Monro, acted as one of Nene’s reserves and removed the wounded from the field as Nene covered the troops’ retreat. But these Pakeha remained under the direction of Nga Puhi, and acted as members of the non-combatant Nga Puhi contingent that day, rather than as active supporters of the British troops.

On the face of it, this willingness to abide by Maori rules of war and leadership does not fit comfortably with the expectations of political ascendency shared by Webster and other Pakeha, and which they had expressed loudly since New Zealand had officially become a British colony in 1840. This new colonial status had, for Pakeha, brought with it the expectation that the country would now be run according to British law, and few would have disagreed with missionary John Hobbs’s hopeful observation at the time that ‘a new era has commenced in New Zealand’.

When Webster stepped off the boat at the Bay of Islands in 1841, he would have shared the prevailing Pakeha understanding that Maori had handed over sovereignty of the country; in return they would receive the blessings of the law and would be loyal to the Queen who bestowed them. The reasons why, by 1845, these expectations of

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10 ibid., pp.259, 270.
11 This battle fought over this pa has been known by a number of names, including Puketutu, which is the name of a hill in the vicinity, and Okaihau. Here it is referred to as Te Kahika, as this is the name Webster gives the battle, as well as the pa.
12 J. White, Account of the Okaihau fight, fms-papers-0075-101, ATL.
13 Diary of John Hobbs, Vol. 5, 28 March 1840, John Hobbs Papers, MS 144, AWML.
control had turned into acceptance of Maori leadership on the battlefield are the subject of the remainder of this section.

It had not taken long for doubts to emerge about the extent to which the new governor could claim to be in control of the country, even as some of the mechanisms of government began to arrive in Hokianga. By the time of Webster’s arrival the district had already welcomed its own police magistrate, to be based at Horeke, to hear and resolve disputes between parties, both Maori and Pakeha. Pakeha began making use of the magistrate, and at times Maori also became involved in proceedings.\textsuperscript{14} However, while some Maori may have been willing to participate in Pakeha justice to settle disputes with Pakeha, they were less willing to allow British justice to mediate disputes in their own communities. Nene’s elder brother Patuone spoke for other rangatira when he said that ‘they preferred settling quarrels in their old way’, by which he meant that he saw no role for the resident magistrate in disputes where the parties were exclusively Maori.\textsuperscript{15}

Even in those cases involving both Maori and Pakeha it soon became apparent that the magistrate was entirely reliant on Maori willingness to co-operate with him. In 1847, Webster noted ruefully that ‘the natives here about are beyond the reach of the law’,\textsuperscript{16} but similar complaints had been made by members of his inner circle for at least the previous five years. Frederick Maning had initially tried to persuade Maori not to sign the Treaty, on the basis that British colonisation would degrade them,\textsuperscript{17} but by 1844 he was carping that ‘the Govr [Governor] pays his court to them [Maori] in the most disgracefull [sic] manner for the purpose of keeping them quiet they have committed robbrys [sic] assaults and batterys [sic] of all kinds there is no attempt to punish them and if the Govr can coin any excuse for them he will….\textsuperscript{18} Maning had at least some evidence for this claim. In August that year Police Magistrate Robert St Aubyn went

\textsuperscript{14} See, for example, William Woon, Journal 1830-1859, 23 November 1840, MS-Copy-Micro-0244, ATL.


\textsuperscript{16} J. Webster, Maori Journal, 1 February 1847, NZMS 116, AL.

\textsuperscript{17} Claudia Orange, \textit{The Treaty of Waitangi}, Wellington, 1987, p.64.

\textsuperscript{18} F.E. Maning to H. Maning, 7 June 1844, Maning Papers, ms-papers-0625, ATL.
to Waima to ‘reclaim’ a Maori woman, the wife of a settler named Inches, who had apparently ‘been forcibly carried from her home by the natives’. He was assisted by Thomas Cassidy and James Kelly, although he did not officially seek their help. Events took a turn for the worse when Hone Ri reportedly brandished a pistol at the police magistrate and was restrained by Kelly. Kelly claimed that Hone Ri then made his way to his property, plundering the house and killing a cow.¹⁹ When Kelly complained to the government, St Aubyn was told by the Colonial Secretary ‘to abstain as much as possible from interfering in cases connected with Native Women where any imprudent or hasty measure might lead to serious evils’.²⁰ This was a clear reflection of the sentiments expressed by Secretary of State Lord Stanley in a despatch to Governor FitzRoy which acknowledged that ‘it may be necessary to temper the strict application of the penalties of British law with much discretion and forbearance. Under the circumstances, indeed, I am afraid it may be inevitable to consider, before interfering with native customs, which are in themselves objectionable, how far the means of coercion at your disposal may render it prudent for you to take steps for that purpose’. Stanley expected, however, that over time ‘you may gradually wean the native tribes from their savage habits, render them submissive to British law, and incorporate them in the community of British subjects’.²¹ While this pragmatism made sense to colonial officials struggling with limited resources, settlers such as Maning saw the government’s lack of control over their Maori neighbours as an unacceptable sign of weakness.²²

A clue as to why this resentment at Maori autonomy turned to collaboration at the battlefront can be gleaned from the recollections of Webster and his fellow settler-fighters. Webster did not explicitly say why he left his home at Hokianga to put

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¹⁹ James Kelly reporting natives outrage on his property, IA 1 44/2367, ANZW. See also Protector of Aborigines to Colonial Secretary, Report of Visit to Northern District, 30 September 1844, IA 1 48/158, ANZW.
²⁰ Colonial Secretary to Police Magistrate Hokianga, 15 October 1844, Colonial Secretary to Resident and Police Magistrates, Outward Letterbook, 1840-44, IA 4 265, ANZW. In a separate communication, the Colonial Secretary stated, ‘I would recommend that no further instructions be given than the employment of caution, prudence and a mild indulgent demeanour towards the natives, and never to employ force except in resistance to attack’. Note by Andrew Sinclair, Colonial Secretary, Police Magistrate Hokianga Requesting instructions for his guidance, IA 1 44/1991, ANZW.
²¹ Copy of Despatch from Lord Stanley to Governor FitzRoy, 13 August 1844, BPP, 1843-45, p.151.
himself in danger; however, at the end of his account of the war he gave a hint when he stated, ‘I was then a young man, and the adventure and incidents of that stirring time were such as to be most congenial and exciting’. In this way, war with Hone Heke was another chance to experience the excitement he had sought when he left Scotland. He may also have shared the more political sentiments expressed by other settler-fighters. John Marmon recalled how he had met Police Magistrate Thomas Beckham near Nene’s camp at Okaihau. When Beckham expressed surprise at seeing Marmon, the latter replied ‘all white men [ought to] be here, with muskets in their hands’. In his account of the conflict, War in the North, Maning stated that ‘Walker’s [Nene’s] old pakeha friends gave him gunpowder, and rifles, and other things to enable him to fight Heke; and some of them came and stayed at the camp, and fought amongst his men, to show him that he was right in what he was doing, for Walker had not yet had any word from the Governor, and was fighting only on his own thought’. Privately, Maning said that ‘It is hoped by all here that the Gov may not come to terms till he had first gained some signal advantage otherwise there would be an end [to] his authority and no law could ever be enforced which might not please the natives’. These men, including Webster, were driven by a range of motives, but they were perhaps united by a desire to help gain the ‘signal advantage’ over Heke and his ‘rebel’ followers, something which they saw could be achieved by collaborating with Maori willing to support the government.

For Pakeha, war was necessary to protect themselves against what they saw as the imminent physical danger posed by Heke after the sacking of Kororareka, and to defend what their governor described as ‘the honour of our countrywomen, and the honour of our flag [which] are alike dear to every Briton’. Heke was seen as a rebel and a traitor who was reneging on his promise of loyalty under the Treaty. War was a matter of ‘supporting the honour and dignity of the British flag’ and of reasserting at least the idea of British control and prestige. But five years after the formal establishment of British government, Pakeha in Hokianga had to admit that their

23 Webster, Reminiscences, p.294.
25 F.E. Maning to A.H. Maning, 19 September 1845, Maning Papers, ms-papers-0625, ATL.
26 FitzRoy to Beckham, 12 July 1844, Robert Fitzroy Despatches to Thomas Beckham, Police Magistrate, Russell, 1844-45, GNZ MSS 245, AL.
27 Author unknown, Hone Heke’s War in the North, NZMS 131, AL. The author of this manuscript has been tentatively identified as a Hokianga settler.
safety depended on the protection offered by Maori. Recounting the lead-up to the war Webster remembered a conversation with Dr Day of the Wesleyan Mission: ‘He [Day] had heard of Heke’s act [at Kororareka], and said much would rest with Nene as to which side he would take. If he joined Heke (which he doubted) all the white inhabitants would have to leave.’

Even the bullish Maning admitted that any defence of Hokianga would have to rely on Maori. On 15 March 1845 he wrote to his brother Archibald that ‘the natives in this district are well disposed and ready to take up arms for the Government’. Maning also told his brother that ‘troops must be sent here quickly or the disaffection may spread very far’. Until then, he, like other Pakeha, would have to acknowledge the protection of Nene and his associates, and would have to rely on an agreement made between Nene and Heke not to fight at Hokianga.

Yet, it was also the case that Pakeha were willing to make this admission because they saw Maori who fought with the Crown as ‘fighting for us’. By this they meant more than Maori simply offering protection from imminent harm; they meant that Maori were fighting to uphold the Pakeha interpretation of empire and the Treaty, ‘as British Subjects’. In doing so, Webster and his fellow settlers were able to see Nene and his associates as allies in a common cause and to focus the resentment they had felt on to Heke and Kawiti. To them, Nene and other pro-government Maori were ‘the Queen’s people’, and this is the interpretation of events they took with them to the battlefront. The next section examines the extent to which this perception was in fact shared by Nene and other Hokianga Maori.

Nene and ‘the people of the Queen’

When Nene decided to take up arms against Hone Heke in 1845 and support the efforts of the governor, he was continuing a relationship with the Crown that dated back to 1835. That year he, along with some of Hokianga’s leading chiefs, including Taonui, Pi, Moetara, Patuone and Matangi, had signed the Declaration of Independence, which had been initiated by the Crown’s representative in New Zealand.

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28 Webster, Reminiscences, p.250.
29 F.E. Maning to A.H. Maning, 15 March 1845, Maning Papers, ms-papers-0625, ATL.
30 F.E. Maning to A.H. Maning, 14 June 1845, Maning Papers, ms-papers-0625, ATL. See also George Clarke Junior to George Clarke, 4 April 1845, George Clarke, Letters and Journals, Vol. 7, qMS-0649, ATL. In the opening month of the war Clarke, whose father was a former missionary who had been appointed Protector of Aborigines, referred to ‘these poor natives fighting our battles with their own relations and defending our flag when we could not ourselves’.
31 Hobbs to Dear Fathers and Brethren, n.d., John Hobbs Papers, Vol. 6, MS 144, AWML.
Zealand, British Resident James Busby, as a way of defusing apparent French interest in New Zealand. Its significance, though, lay in the ongoing relationship it expressed between Maori and the Crown. Article 4 of the declaration was addressed to King William IV, and entreated him to protect the country’s independence from ‘foreign’ rule. Maori were aware that Britain was at the time the world’s most powerful nation, and entering into an agreement with the king was another way of having their mana recognised, and it was an extension of the mana that could be gained from offering patronage to traders. When the Treaty of Waitangi came, rangatira like Nene saw collaboration with the Crown as a way of protecting the benefits of trade that interaction with settlers had brought. It was perhaps also the best way of leaving control of more troublesome Pakeha to the Queen while responsibility for their own people and land would still lie in their own hands. Like other signatories, Nene would have considered that the Maori-language version of the Treaty he signed guaranteed rangatiratanga and provided that the Queen and her governor would be allies, not rulers.

From the early 1840s, though, Nene had reason to doubt that expected benefits the new agreement offered would be realised. Much of this concern was linked to the government’s most controversial policy: Crown pre-emption. This policy was based on the Crown’s assumption that from 1840 it ‘acquired title to all land in New Zealand as a function of sovereignty, subject to pre-existing Maori and settler claims’. In practice, this meant that all land purchased by Pakeha from Maori before 1840 was now assumed to belong to the Crown unless the purchaser, by lodging a claim with the newly appointed land commissioners, could show that a bona fide purchase had been made. Any land not considered part of a bone fide purchase would be deemed ‘surplus land’ and would pass to the Crown. When compounded by the growing realisation that the terms of the Treaty prevented them from disposing of

32 Pi had been leader at Waima, a position now held by Mohi Tawhai and Arama Karaka Pi. Nene, Patuone, Matangi and Taonui did not sign the declaration immediately.
land to parties other than the Crown, this fundamental concern over land ownership became a reason for Maori to question the government’s undertaking that the Treaty would protect them from land sharks.

Another by-product of the land claim process was the apparent locking up of ‘surplus land’ which had once been available for timber milling. Once decisions on land claims began to be issued in 1843 timber on surplus land, now owned by the Crown, could in theory sit beyond the reach of both Pakeha merchants and Maori. This situation was compounded by the system of issuing scrip, which involved offering settlers the opportunity to exchange grants of land at Hokianga and elsewhere for allotments in the expanding towns, such as the new seat of government at Auckland. The scrip system had the double effect of enticing Pakeha to leave Hokianga and of seeing their land grants, and the timber on them, pass to the Crown. When coupled with a disastrous downturn in the Australian market, the overall effect was a loss of population and economic impetus.35

Frustration over increasing government ownership and control of the land and the timber which stood on it may also have provided the motivation for Nene to say at a meeting at Paroa in early 1845 that ‘if the Governor had been at Hokianga, he would have felled a spar in his presence, in order to see what would be done’.36

Nene and other chiefs may also have considered that the problem was not purely economic but was also political in nature. In other words, they may have perceived that the restrictions being placed on commerce, including customs duties, impeded not only their material well-being but also their sovereignty and their mana. There are signs of this in Nene’s challenge to cut down a spar in the governor’s presence ‘in order to see what would be done’. This challenge was as much about who had the right to control access to land and resources as it was about frustration over economic

35 After an initial increase following 1840, Hokianga’s Pakeha population steadily declined after 1842. In that year 263 Britons were recorded as living at Hokianga. In 1843 this number fell to 236 and by 1844 it stood at 179. ‘Return of British Population in New Zealand at the end of the following years’, BPP, 1835-42, p.205. For evidence of the economic hardship being experienced by Maori at this time see Protector of Aborigines to Colonial Secretary, Report of Visit to Northern District, 30 September 1844, IA 1 48/158, ANZW.

36 Henry Williams, Plain Facts Relative to the Late War in the Northern District, Auckland, 1847, p.13. Williams says that Nene’s anger was prompted by a ‘prohibition against cutting kauri timber’. However, the only such ordinance prohibiting cutting seems to be an earlier, revoked one of 1841. It seems likely, therefore, that his annoyance was directed at the Crown control of surplus land and its right to issue, or not issue, cutting rights, on land he considered still to be his.
loss. It was perhaps more than coincidence that Nene made this comment in January 1845, the same month that Hone Heke cut down the governor’s flagstaff at Kororareka for the second time. For both Nene and Heke, the years between 1840 and 1845 provided evidence that their sovereignty was being claimed by the governor, and as a result the authority which they held over the land was under threat. Moreover, this threat to sovereignty, when coupled with poverty, had implications for their mana. As discussed in the previous chapter, the ability to provide materially for the people was fundamental to the maintenance of chiefly mana. The economic difficulties of the mid-1840s cast a long shadow over the chiefs’ ability to meet this obligation at the same time as government action impinged on their control of resources. By 1845, then, Maori in Hokianga, and across the north, had reason to doubt the expectations of 1840 and their relationship with the Crown.

However, while Nene may have shared Heke’s concerns over sovereignty, his and other Hokianga chiefs’ approach to dealing with these concerns in 1845 was to attempt to reaffirm the alliance with the Crown they had fostered even before 1840. Just as they had in the 1830s, the rangatira who chose to support the Crown in 1845 did so for their own reasons and on their own terms, and they were again largely motivated by issues of mana. For Nene, in particular, issues of mana and the collaboration with the Crown appear to have become inseparable. As a Nga Puhi chief closely associated with convincing Maori to sign the Treaty, he had much to gain from seeing that the relationship between the Crown and his people prospered, and potentially much to lose if it was seen to be ‘all soap’, as Heke claimed.  

In September 1844 Nene was among a group of senior Nga Puhi chiefs who invited Governor FitzRoy to Waimate to discuss their concerns that troops were arriving to deal with the implications of raids Heke had made at the Bay in July. During the conference rangatira such as Mohi Tawhai and Patuone, as well as Nene, expressed their disapprobation at Heke’s actions. These chiefs, along with Taonui, saw it as their responsibility as Nga Puhi leaders to deal with Heke as a younger and less senior chief. Nene reportedly told FitzRoy ‘you may return your soldiers … we, the old folks, are well-disposed, and will make the young folks so also’. Moreover, they saw

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37 ibid., p.14.
the matter as being one that should be dealt with within existing tribal structures, with
taonui saying ‘when I heard of the guns and soldiers being landed, my heart was
dark; Ngapuhi live in peace, peace, peace … Ngapuhi speak all you have to say; hide
nothing; to meet as we have met, was the only way to effect a lasting peace to the
tribe.’38 when in March heke, in conjunction with kawiti, set in train the events that
led to the destruction of kororareka, the mana of the chiefs who had undertaken to
control him made more direct action unavoidable.39

In deciding whether to oppose heke, nene may also have paid attention to kinship
ties and historical grievances. The sometimes turbulent history between nene and
heke’s father-in-law hongi hika was raised during the war by heke when he claimed
that nene was fighting him to avenge the death of a relation who was killed ‘a long
time ago’.40 heke similarly claimed that mohi tawhai and arama karaka pi of
waima were fighting to avenge the death of waima chief pi at otuihu in 1837.

Historic and competing claims to land and resources were also put forward as reasons
for other hokianga chiefs’ opposition to heke, such as te popoto’s claim to land at
taiamai over which heke also claimed a right.41 Meanwhile, rangatira moetara of
ngati korokoro, despite having fostered a relationship with the crown since 1835,
wished to remain clear of the fight because of the supposedly neutral stance taken by
his kinsman pomare at the bay.42

However, to a large extent, chiefs’ decisions about which approach to take were a
continuation of their decisions about whether to collaborate with the british in the

38 Southern Cross, 7 September 1844, p.2.
39 For evidence of this see George Clarke Junior to George Clarke, 21 March 1845, George Clarke,
Letters and Journals, Vol. 7, qMS-0649, ATL. Clarke reported nene as saying that ‘he (nene) and
William hau had pledged their word to the governor that they would not allow heke to do as he
pleased’. See also Copy of despatch from lieutenant-governor grey to Lord stanley, BPP, 1846-47,
p.355 where taonui says ‘when I did get up to fight heke, it was not because I was directly asked to
do so by governor FitzRoy, but because we had said to him that we would assist in putting down evil’.
40 Heke to FitzRoy, 29 August 1845, BPP, 1846-47, p.310.
41 Taonui to George grey, 4 October 1846, governor’s letterbook from maori, 1846-47, MA 7 1*1,
ANZW.
42 For evidence of rangatira’s wish to remain neutral see, moetara to governor stating his intention to
remain neutral, 23 March 1845, maori affairs correspondence register, 1840-47, MA 2/1, ANZW.
Pomare’s stance during the war was confusing and a cause for concern among Pakeha. However,
although he was accused of providing guns to heke and briefly imprisoned in May 1845, he did not
take to the field in support of heke. rangatira’s connection to pomare was also a concern to Pakeha in
hokianga. See Police magistrate to Colonial secretary, 21 April 1845, Visit of Chief rangatira to
pomare, IA 1 45/737, ANZW.
1830s, judgments which had often been based on inter-hapu politics. So for a leader such as Nene, while historic grievances may have provided some justification for action, fighting Heke was primarily a way to defend the alliance with the Crown which he had fostered for over a decade and which he saw as the best way of protecting his mana, despite the doubts of the early 1840s. This was reflected in Nene’s message as reported by George Clarke Junior after a conversation in April 1845:

… the Governor will hear from natives who are not friendly to me that I am fighting for land or a great name or for favour or taking this opportunity of settling old quarrels amongst ourselves but tell the Governor that I am fighting only for the Government because I told Capt Hobson that we should live with Pakehas as brothers, that the Queen should be our mother and we her children and I also told Capt Fitzroy that if the natives were inclined to do mischief or interfered with Europeans I would use my influence to prevent it.43

Previous relations with the Crown and those hapu who supported it also propelled a leader like Wharepapa of Te Ihutai to fight alongside Heke. Although Wharepapa had supported Pakeha traders such as Frederick Maning in the 1830s, he had maintained his distance from the Crown as a way of differentiating himself from unfriendly hapu such as Ngati Hao whose leaders had signed the Declaration of Independence, and as a way of maintaining his authority. This approach continued into the 1840s. Joining Heke served the ongoing purposes of exerting his independence and settling scores with other upriver hapu. Meanwhile, although he had previously sought a relationship with the Crown by signing both the Declaration of Independence and the Treaty of Waitangi, leading Te Rarawa chief Papahia remained neutral, probably because of a reluctance to act in unison with his Nga Puhi rivals.44

43 George Clarke Junior to George Clarke, n.d. April 1845, George Clarke, Letters and Journals, Vol. 7, qMS-0649, ATL.
44 Papahia’s response was a cause of concern to the colonial government. Although he does ultimately seem to have remained neutral, his vacillating stance and the possibility that he might join Heke became the subject of debate. See, for example, Protector of Aborigines to Colonial Secretary, Report of Visit to Northern District, 30 September 1844, IA 1 48/158, ANZW; Journal of William Woon, 24 March 1845, MS-Copy-Micro-0244, ATL; Journal of J.R. Clendon, 24 April 1845, 1839-1872, NZMS 476, AL; George Clarke Junior to George Clarke Senior, 10 October 1845, George Clarke, Letters and Journals, Vol. 7, qMS-0649, ATL; New Zealander, 13 September 1845, p.2. There is a possibility that Papahia had joined Kawiti by the end of 1845 (see New Zealander, 13 December 1845), but I have been unable to corroborate this.
From March 1845, then, Nene in conjunction with Patuone and Repa of Ngati Hao, Taonui of Te Popoto, and Arama Karaka Pi and Mohi Tawhai of Te Mahurehure, with assistance from rangatира such as Moehau of Te Hikutu, faced down the threat posed by Heke, but they did so for their own reasons, and according to their own interpretations of the role empire should play in their communities. When in a letter to George Grey, Taonui described himself, Nene and their allies as ‘the people of the Queen’ he did not mean that he was fighting to bolster Crown sovereignty over himself and his people; instead he meant that he and other rangatира were fighting to maintain their sovereignty through collaboration with the government.⁴⁵

Keen to maintain the benefits of trade, they were also quick to offer protection to Pakeha settlers, and thereby protect the social and economic relationships that had built up over the past decade. In the middle of March 1845, just days after the sacking of Kororareka, Maori leaders held a meeting, which was also attended by Pakeha including Thomas McDonnell, George Russell, John Marmon, John Hobbs and John Webster, at which Nene ‘stated his determination to keep Heke from coming to Hokianga to disturb the district’.⁴⁶ At times such as this Pakeha would have taken heart from what they saw as Maori loyalty to the Crown as British subjects, while Maori would have welcomed those Pakeha as allies, and perhaps dependents, to be safeguarded. This fundamental misunderstanding of motives lay at the heart of Hokianga’s joint Maori and Pakeha response to Heke and Kawiti, and allowed them to come together to form an alliance in which they acted together to face a common threat. The clearest evidence of this local political collaboration, and of the relative positions of the two parties, was the inclusion of the settler-fighters in the ranks of Nene’s and Taonui’s warriors. While Webster and his companions viewed themselves as acting in conjunction with ‘loyal’ Maori against a rebel to the Crown, and therefore as defenders of their idea of imperial dominance, a close examination of their actions, and in particular those of Webster, confirms the extent to which they were actors in a Maori war. The next section examines Webster’s role in the war, and discusses the

⁴⁵ Taonui to George Grey, 4 October 1846, Governor’s Letterbook from Maori, 1846-47, MA 7 1*1, ANZW.
⁴⁶ Webster, Reminiscences, p.254. This meeting is also described by William Woon and John Marmon. See Journal of William Woon, 18 March 1845, MS-Copy-Micro-0244, ATL; ‘The Life and Adventures of John Marmon’, Auckland Star, supplement, 11 March 1882. Woon dates the meeting at 18 March 1845; Marmon dates it at 15 March 1845.
ways in which his portrayal of it reflected his and other Pakehas’ reliance on Maori and undermined his expectation of dominance.

‘Our people challenged Heke’: Webster at the battlefront
From autumn until mid-July 1845, Webster took an active part in the skirmishing described earlier and was then involved in the two major encounters with Heke and Kawiti that took place during that period, at Te Ahuahu and Ohaeawai. In fact, Webster took a more active role in the war than any Pakeha Hokianga resident other than John Marmon. He described his participation in the war in his autobiography *Reminiscences of an Old Settler in Australia and New Zealand*, published in 1908. Relying wholly on this source for information about Webster’s involvement in the conflict is problematic. The jumbled nature of the narrative and unevenness in the level of detail provided indicate that much of it was written from memory 60 years after the events it describes. However, this issue can be ameliorated by cross-matching the details Webster provides with other sources, including John Marmon’s description of the battle at Te Ahuahu and Major Cyprian Bridge’s account of the battle at Ohaeawai. Webster’s account can also be matched against, and supplemented by, Frederick Maning’s *History of the War in the North of New Zealand Against the Chief Heke*. This work has been described by James Belich as ‘by no means as fanciful as is sometimes assumed’. While the book reveals Maning’s political leanings at the time of publication in the early 1860s, its first drafts were prepared much earlier, with a preliminary version being completed in the mid-

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47 Webster admitted this in a letter to John Logan Campbell shortly after the book was published. He wrote, ‘I ought to have written it long ago when events were fresh in my memory. I have put the matter off too long so you must make every allowance for me.’ J. Webster to J.L. Campbell, 26 November 1908, Campbell papers, MS 51, Box 8, item 93B, AWML.
48 Diary of Major Cyprian Bridge, GNZ MSS 89, AL; ‘The Life and Adventures of John Marmon’, *Auckland Star*, supplement, 11 March 1882. Roger Wigglesworth, in his study of Marmon’s published recollections in the *New Zealand Herald*, the *Otago Witness* and the *Auckland Star*, argued that the accounts published by the *Herald* are most likely to be genuine accounts possibly based on interviews with Marmon. He claimed, based on both style and substance, that the *Star* and *Witness* versions are more likely to be partial fabrications. However, he also argued that the later instalments published in the *Star* are stylistically much closer to those in the *Herald* and are therefore more reliable. See Roger Wigglesworth, ‘The Myth and the Reality: A Study of the Adaptation of John Marmon (1800?-1880) with comments on his three newspaper autobiographies’, BA (Hons) research essay, Massey University, 1974, pp.73-80. Marmon’s account of the war can in turn be cross-checked against contemporary accounts provided by Colonel Despard, Major Bridge, Robert Burrows, Henry Williams and John Hobbs.
1850s. Moreover, while parts of it are fanciful, in particular the artifice of it being a first-hand account given to Maning by a Maori participant, much of it was written using the accounts of those who were present on the battlefields. These people included Maning himself who, as stated above, took part in early skirmishing and was witness to the assault on Te Kahika and the battle at Ohaeawai. He may also have had access to John White’s account of the attack on Te Kahika as well as eye witness statements from Maori fighters. One of the most compelling episodes in the book describes the battle at Te Ahuahu in June in which no British troops took part. Only two Pakeha were present that day, John Webster and John Marmon, and in later life Webster made it clear that he gave Maning ‘much of the information which [he] used in his story’. Webster also claimed that he had lent Maning his journals to enable Maning to write his book but that the journals were not returned. This would explain why Maning provides a more detailed description of Te Ahuahu, at which he was not present, than Webster does in his Reminiscences. It would also mean that the descriptions in War in the North, particularly that of Te Ahuahu, provide a reasonably accurate portrayal of Webster’s experience.

Webster began his description of the war by recounting a meeting with Nene in 1844. He claimed that this was the first time he had seen, let alone met, the Nga Puhi chief; however, this is difficult to accept. Webster had been living with his brother William at Wairere, a short distance from the mission station at Mangungu, and had been one of the mission’s semi-regular Sunday attendees. William in particular enjoyed a close association with the Mangungu missionaries. Nene himself had supported the mission since its founding and was a regular presence there, so it would seem unusual if Webster did not at least know him by sight, despite Nene’s sometimes extended visits to Kororareka. Webster says he sought the meeting ‘to find out what was his [Nene’s]

50 David Colquhoun, ““Pakeha Maori”: the early life and times of Frederick Edward Maning’, MA thesis, The University of Auckland, 1984, pp.190-94. In letters to his family, Maning said he began writing the book during the war itself. F.E. Maning to father, 18 September 1845, Maning Papers, ms-papers-0625, ATL.
51 Colquhoun, p.192.
53 Johnson believed Maning was present at Te Ahuahu, but there is no real evidence to indicate this. Maning wrote a letter to his brother two days after the battle and mentioned that it had taken place, but did not describe himself as having taken part. In 1908, in a letter to John Logan Campbell, Webster was adamant that Maning had not been present at Te Ahuahu. See Johnson, p.79; F.E. Maning to A.H. Maning, 14 June 1845, Maning Papers, ms-papers-0625, ATL; J. Webster to John Logan Campbell, 30 March 1908, Campbell papers, MS 51, Box 8, item 93B, AWML.
opinion regarding the cutting down of the flagstaff by Heke’. Nene replied that ‘he was going to Kororareka to see what he [Heke] meant about it next day’. Regardless of whether this episode was the result of long-term memory or dramatic licence, Webster used it to establish a connection between himself and one of the war’s major protagonists.

The same can be said for his first encounter with Hone Heke in March 1845, after the fall of Kororareka. Although on the face of it the idea of Webster having a face-to-face meeting with Heke seems almost fantastical, it was not outside the realms of possibility, given Webster’s friendly relationship with Papahurihia. As well as being a leader of the Te Hikutu people at Omanaia, Papahurihia was also the founder and spiritual leader of a sect that mixed elements of Judaism and traditional belief. During the Northern War he acted as Heke’s tohunga. It was through Papahurihia, or Te Atua Wera, that Webster claimed to have met Heke. Webster recounted:

Up to the present time Te Atua Wera had not joined Heke, and, as he was a friend of mine, I paid him a visit to ascertain his thought…. When I arrived at his settlement, he told me he expected a visit from Heke, for a messenger had arrived that morning from Heke to that effect…. I decided to remain and see the man now so celebrated…. The last to arrive was Heke himself, on a fine horse (looted). He wore as a garment a crimson robe with yellow border (it looked to me as if it had been a table-cloth, part of the loot of Kororareka).

After greeting Papahurihia, Heke apparently shook Webster’s hand. All three men then attended what Webster described as a ‘consultation of the air’, during which Papahurihia was to ‘divine the result of the first engagement with Her Majesty’s forces’. Webster’s version of this consultation has been accepted by one leading

54 Although Webster does not provide an exact date for this meeting, it seems that, if it indeed took place, it might have been around the time of the first flagstaff felling in July 1844. Webster, *Reminiscences*, p.249.
57 ibid.
historian as the basis of an analysis of Papahurihia’s spiritual leadership, and there seems little reason to doubt its veracity, at least in substance.\textsuperscript{58} Like the meeting with Nene, Webster’s encounter with Heke served to connect Webster to a central player in the war, and in doing so he wrote himself into the centre of the action.

After recounting his meeting with Heke, Webster’s recollection moved straight to his arrival at the front. As discussed earlier, he took a regular part in the challenge and response skirmishing between Heke’s and Nene’s men in April initiated from Taumata Kakaramu. He seems to have returned home in May and so missed the battle of Te Kahika. His involvement in the Nga Puhi war reached its climax in June 1845 when he took part in the battle of Te Ahuahu. At its heart this was a battle between factions of Nga Puhi over a piece of important, disputed territory which flared in the wake of the fluid situation created by the Northern War. As Belich has noted, Te Ahuahu has been largely expunged from the historiography of the war because no British forces were present.\textsuperscript{59} However, some contemporaries were in no doubt that what took place between Nene and Taonui’s forces and Heke’s men on 12 June was a major engagement. Maning, for example, told his brother that it was ‘the most severe fight that has been yet between the natives’,\textsuperscript{60} and in \textit{War in the North} he called it ‘the greatest battle in the war’.\textsuperscript{61} This assertion seems justified by the numbers of men involved, estimated to be between 400 and 500 on Heke’s side and 300 on Nene and Taonui’s, making it the largest battle involving Nga Puhi during the war.\textsuperscript{62} Maning also provided the most comprehensive description of this engagement. After abandoning Te Kahika, Heke had moved to his pa at Te Ahuahu. According to Maning’s version, when Heke left Te Ahuahu to go to Ohaeawai to gather food, Taonui had gone with 60 men and taken Te Ahuahu by surprise, driving out the remaining inhabitants. Nene, Mohi Tawhai and Wi Repa then joined Taonui and together the rangatira defended the pa against attack from Heke, who was determined

\textsuperscript{58} See Binney, ‘Papahurihia: Some Thoughts on Interpretation’, and ‘How Many Prophets?’
\textsuperscript{59} Belich, p.45. An exception is Johnson.
\textsuperscript{60} F.E Maning to A.H. Maning, 14 June 1845, Maning Papers, ms-papers-0625, ATL. See also Diary of Major Cyprian Bridge, 13 June 1845, GNZ MSS 89, AL; Journal of William Woon, 16 June 1845, MS-Copy-Micro-0244, ATL.
\textsuperscript{61} F.E. Maning, \textit{History of the War in the North of New Zealand Against the Chief Heke}, Auckland, 1862, p.304.
\textsuperscript{62} Belich, p.46; Johnson, p.80.
to regain it. Heke received support from Te Kahakaha, who had been a trusted ally of Hongi, as well as from Wharepapa of Te Ihutai. The battle began when:

an old slave-woman went out from the *pa* of Walker to pick up sticks for firewood. And there was a thick fog lying close to the ground; and before the old woman had gone far she saw a black line of something coming out of a cloud of fog, and as she was wondering what this might be, she suddenly perceived that it was a *taua* of armed men, and they had got within fifty fathoms of the pa, so she cried aloud the cry of alarm.63

Nene then went outside to engage Heke’s forces, leaving Taonui inside to defend the *pa*. However, when Taonui saw Te Kahakaha’s party range up on the opposite side of the *pa*, he too went outside to confront the enemy. Maning’s narrator stayed with Nene’s party. They ‘pressed Heke hard’ and drove him and his men back; however, Heke regrouped and responded with a charge of his own. Nene’s men then ‘got behind a stone wall of a kumara field, and fired at them behind the low wall, and drove them back, having killed and wounded several’. Another charge was repulsed and Heke fell back.

At this point the action moved to the other side of the field where Taonui was fighting Te Kahakaha and Wharepapa. Te Kahakaha had fallen back to join up with Heke, but his men had apparently taken this as a sign of retreat. To give them heart he advanced to the front but was mortally wounded. Heke went to Te Kahakaha’s assistance, but he too was wounded, and the battle came to an end.64

The basic details provided in Maning’s account are confirmed by Webster and Marmon, the only authors of published eye-witness accounts. Although short and somewhat confused, Marmon’s story confirmed that the defenders of Te Ahuahu divided into two parties, and that fighting took place along a wall, or fence, next to a kumara field.65 Similarly, Webster provided only a brief description of Te Ahuahu in his autobiography. Like other sections of the book, its scanty nature seems to indicate that it was written from memory, but what detail was provided did not conflict with either *War in the North* or Marmon’s account. Webster confirmed the dividing of the

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63 Maning, p.303.
64 ibid., pp.301-11.
defenders into forces led by Nene and Taonui and the multiple charges made by Heke’s men against Nene. He placed himself in the thick of the fighting, saying he followed Nene into the fray, and he attested to seeing Marmon through the smoke. He also confirmed that Marmon got behind a scoria wall and shot one of Heke’s men. Although it is possible that Webster’s recollections were jogged by, or even partly drawn from, the already-published versions of Maning and Marmon, he provided several details not included in either of those accounts, such as Marmon bringing the musket of the man he killed into camp.66 A close reading of all three accounts supports the idea that Webster, Marmon and Maning’s narrator accompanied Nene’s men out of the pa, took part in close fighting near the scoria wall and ultimately helped repulse Heke’s attacks. Given Maning’s absence from Te Ahuahu, Webster’s claim that the descriptions War in the North drew heavily on his journals and Webster’s subsequent recollections, it is reasonable to conclude that the experiences of Maning’s narrator were based on those of Webster himself, supplemented by Webster’s observations of Marmon and the recollections of Nga Puhi participants. It also seems clear that Webster was an active participant in what was a major, fierce engagement between the two branches of Nga Puhi, and that he was one of only two Pakeha present that day.

Webster’s final active involvement in the war came in July 1845 at the battle of Ohaeawai. Before he had been wounded at Te Ahuahu, Heke had been building a pa at Ohaeawai, along with Kawiti and Pene Taui, and this work continued in his absence. In late June British troops took up a position outside the by-now tightly fortified pa. They were joined by Nene, Mohi Tawhai, Arama Karaka Pi and Wi Repa, with Nene positioning himself on a hill overlooking the pa. While the British under Colonel Despard attempted to weaken the pa with artillery fire, Maori engaged in skirmishes outside the fortification’s walls, and Nene kept up sniping fire from the hill. Webster was part of Nene’s party and acted as one of the snipers. He was joined in this enterprise by Maning, with Marmon also being present. Just as at Te Kahika, Nene provided logistical support to the British forces under Colonel Despard, but when the troops finally attacked the pa on 1 July they did so without Nene’s direct involvement and against his explicit advice. Webster recounted how he, Maning and

66 Webster, Reminiscences, p.282.
Nene went to ‘interview’ Despard to try to prevent him from the planned attack on the strongest part of the pa, which they rightly assumed would end in disaster. According to Webster, Maning did most of the talking, and when Maning conveyed to Nene that Despard intended to attack anyway, Nene’s translated response was ‘you are a very stupid person’. The three men could only watch as the troops unsuccessfully attacked the pa, being driven back with heavy losses. This was effectively the final act in the war for five months. As Governor FitzRoy tried to arrange a face-saving peace, Nene and other rangatira planted their crops and Heke recovered from his injury.

The episode in which Webster claimed to have tried to dissuade Despard from attacking the pa is unusual in that it is one of the few occasions in his narrative where he tried to portray himself as a director of the action. Indeed, it may be significant that this episode involved an attempt to advise a British rather than a Maori leader. Unlike Marmon, whose recollections are full of claims that he was a vital advisor to both Maori and British leaders, Webster seems to have accepted his subordinate role among his Maori comrades and to have accepted Nene’s leadership. Although he began his story by establishing personal contact with two of the war’s main protagonists, Nene and Heke, the remainder of the story portrayed him as a foot soldier, a follower rather than a close advisor. For example, during the skirmishing in April he recounted how he ‘filled [his] cartridge box with twelve cartridges, and went with some of Nene’s people into the fray’. Similarly, in June when Nene’s party went to Ohaeawai, Webster described himself as one of Nene’s followers: ‘We started before daylight, and travelled for some miles. It had been my first journey in this direction. A number of men and women followed with potatoes and a few pigs for provisions.’ Webster looked upon Nene as his leader and, like others in the party, followed Nene’s instructions.

This feeling of belonging is reflected in the language Webster used to describe Maori. Like Marmon, he referred to Maori as ‘we’, ‘us’ and ‘our people’. For example, when describing the April skirmishing he recalled, ‘Next day our people challenged Heke’,

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67 ibid., p.288. After his autobiography was published, Webster confessed that Nene had actually called Despard an old woman ‘but I have let him off by saying he was a very stupid person’. J Webster to J.L. Campbell, 26 November 1908, Campbell papers, MS 51, Box 8, item 93B, AWML.
68 Webster, Reminiscences, p.268.
69 ibid., p.283.
and when describing Te Ahuahu he wrote, ‘More than once Heke’s men charged us, but we were in possession of a long scoria wall, and they had more than double the men killed that we had’. A question that arises from Webster’s participating in a Nga Puhi war, fighting according to Nga Puhi rules and tactics and closely associating himself with his pro-government Nga Puhi comrades, is whether he was acting as a Pakeha Maori, as has been claimed by some historians of the war. Johnson, for example, when talking about Maning, described Webster as ‘a fellow Pakeha Maori from the Hokianga who shared many of the events Maning recounts’. Similarly, Trevor Bentley said Webster was part of a ‘remnant’ group of Pakeha Toa, or Pakeha Maori fighters, who took to the field in 1845, the other members being Maning, Marmon, Leef and James Clendon. Both works make the assumption that their very presence among Maori warriors made these men Pakeha Toa. In the cases of Maning and Leef, this claim can perhaps be substantiated by evidence that they accompanied their Te Hikutu kin to the battlefield. When Maning had gone to the front in April he accompanied his wife Moengaroa’s brother, Hauraki. Once there, he was described by Marmon as undertaking a type of physical metamorphosis often associated with transculturites. Marmon recounted how ‘Mr Manning [sic] then went off with his people from Whirinaki. He had turned up his trousers to his knees, and rubbed his legs and arms with charcoal, so that no one would take him for a pakeha.’ Similarly, Marmon accompanied his Te Popoto kin, led by Taonui and Ruanui, to the front and fought alongside them at every major engagement of the war. An argument could therefore be mounted that these men were fulfilling obligations to their kin and fighting with Maori as Maori.

A similar argument can also be mounted for Webster. Unlike the other settler-fighters, Webster had not married a Maori woman and therefore lacked Maori kin. He had, however, been a member of a Pakeha community congregated near Mangungu that had lived under the patronage of Nene and Patuone since the first days of European settlement, and his later residence at Kohukohu also provided a connection to Nene through George Russell’s association with Ngati Hao. As discussed earlier, his claim

70 ibid., pp.271, 282.
71 Johnson, p.11.
72 Trevor Bentley, Pakeha Maori: The extraordinary lives of the Europeans who lived as Maori in early New Zealand, Auckland, 1999, p.89.
that he had not seen Nene until their meeting in 1844 seems improbable, and he would have been aware of the relationship that Mangungu, Wairere and Kohukohu had with Ngati Hao. Webster’s involvement in the war can perhaps be seen as an extension of a patron-client relationship, reflected in his readiness to follow Nene and accept his leadership. His involvement at Te Ahuahu in particular suggests his role as a Pakeha Maori, given that it was in essence a continuation of an ongoing Nga Puhi territorial dispute.

Yet, claiming that Webster and the other settler-fighters were acting as Pakeha Maori distorts the reason for their involvement and the nature of their relationship with the Nga Puhi participants. As discussed earlier, they were motivated to join in the war through a mixture of excitement and a desire to assert their ideas of empire, and can therefore be seen as representatives of Pakeha Hokianga. Collaborating with Maori and accepting Maori leadership was the most effective way of achieving their ends. In this way the participation of the settler-fighters in what was effectively a Nga Puhi war was a continuation of the pattern of collaboration that had existed in Hokianga since the 1830s. Pakeha found themselves relying on Maori and adapting their expectations of superiority to blend into a situation conducted according to tikanga Maori. Webster brought to the battlefront the same willingness to adapt to his surroundings that had shaped his identity as Hone Wepiha in his day-to-day dealings with Maori on the river.

Tellingly, however, this joint action grew out of a shared misunderstanding. When John Webster referred to Maori as ‘we’ and ‘our people’, he was reflecting an obvious sense of comradeship with the people alongside him in the trench. He was also, however, reflecting the Pakeha view that Nene and his allies were ‘fighting for us’; that the ‘people of the queen’ were all fighting for the same vision of empire against a foe that threatened that vision. This was true even at Te Ahuahu, which Webster would most likely have viewed as an extension of a war to punish the ‘rebel’ Heke, rather than as a continuation of an ongoing territorial dispute between factions of Nga Puhi. By viewing Nene as ‘one of us’, Webster was able, 60 years after the event, to acknowledge the subordinate role he had played and to say that the war ‘further
developed in me a love for the old native character at its best’. As an imperial man, he had to accept that he had become a subordinate to a ‘native’ leader, but he saw that leader as being on ‘our’ side.

Nevertheless, Webster’s experiences during the Northern War stood in marked contrast to his encounter with an indigenous enemy in Australia, and the differences between the two encounters say much about the new environment in which he found himself living. In Australia, Aboriginals stayed at a distance; they were not people to be dealt with on personal basis, but remained a nameless, unknowable group. Conflict with Aboriginal men became a way in which Webster confirmed his imperial identity, as his success in defeating them confirmed pre-existing ideas about racial strength and survival. In New Zealand during the Northern War, Maori, like Aboriginals, were an enemy to be faced down and fighting them was a way of testing himself in an ‘uncivilised’ environment. The sense of danger and excitement he had felt in Australia was replicated in New Zealand, and it reinforced his identity as an adventurer on the edge of empire. However, the Maori against whom Webster fought were not simply a nameless Other. He claimed to have met Heke and was a friend to Papahurihia, both of whom he fought against at Te Ahuahu. In addition, while Webster believed that barriers of language and culture had rendered Aboriginals unknowable to any white man, he not only comprehended the tactics and rules used in the Nga Puhi war but abided by them. Most importantly, Maori were not just an enemy to be defeated; they were now allies, comrades — and leaders. Unlike in Australia, Webster’s supremacy to indigenous people could not be assumed through physical separation and distance. Both as allies and enemies, Maori had to be acknowledged as the people upon whom Pakeha like Webster relied both for their protection and the securing of their political ends. Although this realisation was ameliorated by the assumption that those Maori shared those political ends, and to some extent by the idea that Maori did not languish at the bottom of the racial hierarchy as did Aboriginals, the difference between his experiences in Australia and New Zealand must have been striking for Webster. His experience in the Northern War clearly demonstrated the relative place he and other Pakeha held in Hokianga, regardless of the ideas of superiority they had brought with them, and must have

74 Webster, Reminiscences, p.294.
dented the imperial identity that had been forged in his adolescence and confirmed in Australia.

Pakeha were, in fact, left in little doubt as to Maori dominance both during and after the war. The engagement at Te Kahika, which was presented elsewhere as a victory for the British, was acknowledged by Hokianga settlers as the defeat it almost certainly was.\textsuperscript{75} This, when coupled with the heavy defeat at Ohaeawai, made obvious to them that the British could not deal successfully with Heke and Kawiti in their pa fortifications, and had them doubting the claim that the war had been won and Heke subdued after the final battle at Ruapekapeka. As Maning said in March 1846, two months after the supposed end of the conflict, ‘any one to read Despards despatching would think that we had thrashed the natives soundly whereas they really have had the best of it on several occasions I really begin to think that it is perhaps all a mistake about us beating the french at Waterloo I shall always for the rest of my life be cautious how I believe an account of a battle’.\textsuperscript{76} This cynicism would have only been increased by the new Governor, George Grey’s, assurances to his imperial masters that ‘the country which was recently the seat of rebellion and war is now in a state of complete tranquillity’, followed by the government’s effective withdrawal from the north.\textsuperscript{77} As Belich has argued, the Victorian interpretation of racial conflict dictated that the war be presented as a triumph of British military superiority. To the settlers of Hokianga such as interpretation was a palpable falsehood, however much they may have wanted to believe it. Just as they had had to accept the protection of Nene and his allies at the beginning of the war, they also had to acknowledge that the situation had changed little by war’s end. Early the following year Webster heard reports that Heke was again preparing for war.\textsuperscript{78} These reports were probably based more in rumour than fact, but they reflected an ongoing sense of threat and occasional alarm that existed among Pakeha in the north, who had little option but to accept that their vision of empire had not won the day. Instead, they would need to rely on maintaining the everyday economic and social relationships they had formed with their Maori

\textsuperscript{75} See, for example, F.E. Maning to A.H. Maning, 29 May 1845, Maning Papers, ms-papers-0625, ATL; Journal of William Woon, 9 May 1845, MS-Copy-Micro-0244, ATL; Author unknown, Hone Heke’s War in the North, NZMS 131, AL, pp.61-67.
\textsuperscript{76} F.E. Maning to A.H. Maning, 23 March 1846, Maning Papers, ms-papers-0625, ATL.
\textsuperscript{77} Copy of a Despatch from Grey to Stanley, 10 May 1846, BPP, 1846-47, p.468.
\textsuperscript{78} Webster, Maori Journal, 12 January 1847, NZMS 116, AL.
neighbours, and described in the previous chapter, in order to secure their fortunes, and their security.

The Northern War, then, saw a continuation of the collaboration that had formed between Maori and Pakeha during the 1830s. During the war, Pakeha found themselves reliant on Maori for protection, while Maori were prepared to act to maintain relationships with the Crown and Pakeha for their own reasons and their own benefit. This collaboration was most clearly reflected in the actions of the settler-fighters who joined with Maori to face the threat Heke posed to their competing visions of empire. Men such as Webster fought among Maori and followed Maori leaders because Maori offered the most effective means of achieving their ends, both personally and politically. This experience, though, provided Webster with a lesson about the reliance which he and other Pakeha had on Maori, a reliance which continued even after the war was over.
Chapter Four

A Voyage through the Pacific 1849-1851

Between 1849 and 1851 John Webster was absent from New Zealand, seeking adventure across the Pacific. This was the same type of quest he had been on when he went to Australia in 1838, and which had taken him to New Zealand in 1841, only this time he would find himself among the people of modern-day Hawaii, Kiribati and the Solomon Islands. The accounts he left behind were revealing of his attitude towards the people he encountered and allow a comparison to be made between how he viewed them in relation to the Maori amongst whom he had been living in New Zealand. They also say much about his continued desire to see and portray himself as the adventurous, civilised imperial man in a potentially savage environment. This chapter examines Webster’s trip through the Pacific and considers why the stories he told about that journey were more straightforward tales of conquest than anything he had managed to write in New Zealand. Ultimately, this chapter argues that while his impulse to write himself into posterity as an adventurer and dominator of native populations had remained undimmed since 1838, the extent to which he was able to achieve this depended on the context in which he found himself and the relationship he had with those populations. In New Zealand the daily reality of interaction with Maori had undermined his ability to write one-sided stories; in the Pacific, as in Australia, where such a complex reality did not exist for him, he could again be the imperial hero.

There and back again: A voyage through the Pacific

In 1848, Webster left Hokianga to go to Auckland to work for Brown & Campbell, taking charge of the ‘native trade’ that was run out of their retail shop. That same year, however, gold was struck in California, and by November 1849 Webster had decided to join the thousands of prospectors ready to test their mettle and their luck on the goldfields. In February 1850, he left Auckland on board the Noble, a Brown & Campbell barque, for San Francisco, acting as supercargo for his Auckland employers and charged with disposing of the eight prefabricated houses, 142,000 feet of timber, 46,000 shingles and 2,500 bricks and other general goods that comprised the ship’s
cargo.¹ Also on board were six other passengers, including Allan K. Taylor, Samuel Vaile, Hugh Carleton, Walter Brodie and Baron Charles De Thierry.²

From the outset, the Noble’s voyage to California did not go well. Russell Stone writes that, ‘From the first day, the Noble encountered heavy gales by which she was driven off-course, first south then north. Soon the vessel sprang a heavy leak which contaminated the water supply, forced the crew to take to the pumps every two hours, and scared the passengers out of their wits.’³ Things hit a low point when the captain decided to land at Pitcairn Island to re-provision, giving his passengers permission to stay on shore overnight, although Webster decided to stay onboard. When a storm blew up, the captain took the vessel out to the safety of the open sea; when the wind did not abate, he decided to carry on to California, leaving his passengers marooned. Webster apparently objected to the captain’s decision but had little option but to accept it and carry on to San Francisco without his shipmates.⁴

His position did not improve greatly when he got to California. He had so much difficulty disposing of the cargo that Campbell was forced to follow him to San Francisco to ‘go and disentangle the problem’.⁵ He and Campbell stayed in California for a year, although little is known about how he occupied himself during that time, or what success he might have enjoyed. By the first half of 1851, however, he had decided to return to the Australasian colonies, and he found himself first mate on board the Wanderer, a schooner captained by Benjamin Boyd, for its trip to Sydney via the islands of the Pacific.

Boyd was an entrepreneur who had taken grand dreams of economic expansion with him to Australia in 1842, and he proceeded to put at least some of them into action.⁶

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¹ Southern Cross, 12 February 1850, p.3; Southern Cross, 15 February 1850, p.4; R.C.J. Stone, Young Logan Campbell, Auckland, 1982, p.168.
² These, mostly young, men went on to make up some of the elite of colonial society. Hugh Carleton became a Member of Parliament, as did Walter Brodie. Samuel Vaile became the president of the Auckland Chamber of Commerce and founded a real estate business which survives to this day. Allan Kerr Taylor became a successful Auckland businessman and built the landmark home of Alberton.
³ Stone, p.169.
⁴ Samuel Vaile, ‘Extracts from Samuel Vaile’s journal on Pitcairn Island’, 1850, NZMS 102, AL; Stone, p.169.
⁵ Stone, p.169.
⁶ His schemes included building harbours and coaling stations for a fleet of steamships at various points along the Australian coastline to facilitate better communication, and the founding of the
Not least among Boyd’s accomplishments was the development of 18 large pastoral units across New South Wales, to the extent that by May 1844 he had become one of the largest landholders and graziers in the colony.\(^7\) His perennial problem, though, was recruiting enough labour to keep his properties going. In 1847 he tried to solve the problem by bringing in workers from Tanna and Aneityam in Vanuatu and Lifou in the Loyalty Islands. Although most of these labourers returned to their homelands within a year, their use may have opened Boyd’s eyes to the possibilities of the Pacific and the role its people might play in the grand development schemes for the region he had apparently been espousing since before his arrival in New South Wales.\(^8\) For Boyd, the trip he and Webster began in June 1851 offered a chance to further his political aspiration to ‘form a Papuan Republic in the Pacific’ and to ‘lay the foundation of some sort of social and political organisation, on which the simple machinery of an independent state might be afterwards erected.’\(^9\) For Webster it provided an opportunity to pursue the adventure he had previously sought in Australia and New Zealand, to experience ‘strange scenes and romantic adventures’\(^10\) and to encounter and record ‘native’ populations. Over the months that followed these respective ambitions came together as both men used their Pacific experience to further their dreams of expansion and personal gratification.

After setting out from San Francisco, the \textit{Wanderer} made first for Hawaii and then to the islands of modern-day Kiribati and Banaba, before moving on to the Stewart Islands (Sikaiana, Tehaolei, Matuiloto and Matuavi), San Cristobal (Makira) and Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands group. It was at the last island that the trip came to a tragic end when Boyd disappeared on shore never to be seen again and Webster and the crew took their revenge on the islanders they held responsible for his death, after first surviving an attack on the \textit{Wanderer} itself. Webster recorded all of this in a journal, which he used as the basis for an account entitled \textit{The Last Cruise of the Australian Wool Company}. News of his planned ventures preceded him, and on arriving at Sydney in 1842 on board the \textit{Wanderer} he was welcomed by crowds of spectators. G. P. Walsh, ‘Boyd, Benjamin (1801-1851)’, \textit{Australian Dictionary of Biography Online Edition}, \url{http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A010129b.htm}, accessed 9 June 2010.

\(^7\) ibid.
\(^8\) ibid. See also Nicholas Thomas, \textit{Islanders: The Pacific in the Age of Empire}, New Haven and London, 2010, pp.212-13. Boyd was accused of kidnapping and slave-trading, although Thomas notes that there is no evidence to suggest that Boyd used violence to seize labourers.
\(^9\) J. Webster to S.B. Browning, c1889, letter enclosed in J. Webster, \textit{The Last Cruise of the Wanderer}, Sydney, 1863, GNZ 919 W37, AL, copy 2; Webster, \textit{The Last Cruise of the Wanderer}, p.ii.
\(^10\) Webster, \textit{The Last Cruise of the Wanderer}, p.ii.
Wanderer, published in 1863. The analysis which follows draws on both of these versions of events. In these accounts he recorded his views of people and cultures he encountered, often comparing these peoples both to each other and to his own cultural norms. In the process, he revealed his racial thinking and his engrained sense of civilised superiority in the midst of islanders living in what he took to be greater or lesser degrees of savagery. This thinking became most evident in his descriptions of the violence that followed Boyd’s disappearance as he sought to portray his and his crew’s successful raids on island communities as the result of technological and cultural dominance. The sections that follow look at Webster’s portrayal of the Pacific islanders he encountered and seek to understand his racial thinking, and consider how this mindset might have influenced his depiction of his attackers and himself in the violence on Guadalcanal.

‘These sable beauties’: Webster’s comparative ideas of race
Throughout both his published and unpublished accounts of the Pacific, Webster dedicated numerous pages and paragraphs to describing the people he met and observed. He was particularly vigilant in recording details of their dress, bodily ornamentation and tattooing, houses, tool and implements, weapons and art. He also commented regularly on their social structures, propensity for violence, interest in trade and treatment of children. In making and recording these types of observations, he followed in the footsteps of earlier European travellers through the Pacific, particularly those employed in scientific undertakings such as Reinhold and Georg Forster on board Cook’s second voyage 1772-75, as well as more recent voyagers such as Dumont d’Urville. He became part of the anthropological endeavour of classifying the peoples of the world and measuring their perceived degree of ‘civilisation’ against that of northern Europeans, and his writings therefore allow him to be placed within the developing, Eurocentric, intellectual context of the time.

This drive to capture the natural world, including its people, was clearly reflected in the large number of coloured drawings Webster made during the trip.11 Most of these

11 Approximately 80 drawings resulted from the trip. Eighteen of these, mainly landscapes, were then reworked by artist George French Angas for publication. Webster’s choice of Angas as reworker is in itself significant given Angas’s interest in ethnography. Bernard Smith has noted that although Angas may be classified as a picturesque painter of landscapes, ‘the purposes which his paintings came to serve were considerably wider than those normally served by picturesque paintings. In addition they became ethnographical documents of considerable value.’ Bernard Smith, European Vision and the
Drawings, later described as portraying ‘interesting subjects of scientific and geographical research’, were of flora and fauna, particularly birds, butterflies and insects (see figures 10 and 11). A smaller number featured the human inhabitants of the islands he visited, especially San Cristobal and Guadalcanal, along with their implements and belongings. There is a sense in these drawings that the islanders were being captured on paper as specimens of a natural world, in the same way as the birds and plants. Like draughtsmen on voyages of exploration before him, Webster paid particular attention to skin colour, hair styles, clothing and body ornamentation. At times his human subjects appeared not as fully formed individuals but as heads and torsos that highlighted a particular physical characteristic. Perhaps most telling was the drawing that portrayed a swallow, a land shell and a male and female inhabitant of San Cristobal one underneath the other, suggesting that all were features of the natural environment (see figure 9). Here Webster the artist was participating in the ‘collaboration in the business of recording the appearance of man and nature’ that reached its apex in the mid-nineteenth century, as well as in ‘an ambitious program of collecting and taxonomy intended “to contribute to the growth of knowledge in all branches of the natural sciences”’ of which ‘native’ societies were a part.

This ethnographical interest continued in his written account, which was often preoccupied with comparing one people with another and making judgements about their relative chances of, or success in, attaining an observable measure of what he took to be advancement. In this he was especially optimistic about the Hawaiians. In his published account he wrote that, ‘These 70 years [since the arrival of Cook] have seen the inhabitants of these islands emerge from a state of the most savage barbarism, to become a people who now take rank amongst the most civilized nations.

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\footnote{New Zealand, 17 November 1852, p.1.}

\footnote{For a similar point see Bernard Smith, \textit{Imagining the Pacific in the Wake of the Cook Voyages}, Melbourne, 1992, p.33. When discussing the pressure eighteenth-century artists were under to produce naturalistic portraits of Pacific people Smith writes: ‘Primitive peoples could be portrayed as though they were objects of natural history, seen as plants or animals to be classified.’ See also Thomas, \textit{In Oceania} where Thomas, discussing Angas’s work in the 1840s, writes that ‘indigenous life has itself arguably been reduced to the status of a collected item or exhibit’ and ‘it was now evident that exotic cultures were objects of scientific knowledge’ (pp.125, 128).}

\footnote{Smith, \textit{European Vision and the South Pacific}, p.339.}

Figure 8: ‘Natives, ornaments and weapons of San Christoval’

Source: PD 43(44), AWML
Figure 9: ‘Swallow of San Christoval, Land Shell and Natives of San Christoval’

Source: PD 43(37), AWML
Figure 10: Butterfly

Source: PD 43(26), AWML

Figure 11: ‘Birds of San Christoval’

Source: PD 43(50), AWML
of the world, and who bid far to do credit to civilization and to humanity.’\(^{16}\) He was also willing to see a clear connection between the Hawaiians and the Maori he had known in New Zealand: ‘I was particularly struck with the great resemblance between the Hawaiians and the New Zealanders. The Sandwich Island language is but a dialect of the Maori. The Hawaiians live under a model government and are making rapid strides in civilisation under the king, Kamehameha III, Sovereign of all the Sandwich Islands.’\(^{17}\) An inference could be made that, based on the linguistic and cultural similarities between the two people, where the Hawaiians went the Maori were capable of following, given the right guidance and government.

The other island peoples he encountered on the trip did not garner such outright approval, largely because they had not been under the same European influence as Hawaii and did not display the same level of centralised authority.\(^{18}\) However, he was willing to credit them with a capacity for commerce, domesticity and manufacturing skill that might one day see them join the Hawaiians in throwing off savagery, as the following comments made about the various islands of Kiribati demonstrate:

The canoes of these Islanders exhibit great ingenuity and skill in their construction…. These canoes sail fast, and, from their construction, cut their way almost in the wind’s eye.\(^{19}\)

... The houses are kept scrupulously clean, and no rubbish is suffered to remain in the neighbourhood. We saw several remarkably handsome women (wives of the principal men); they were of lighter color than the commonality.\(^{20}\)

The natives in canoes shortly approached. They resembled those of Nukunau [also known as Byron Island] in every particular. We bartered with them for

\(^{16}\) Webster, *The Last Cruise of the Wanderer*, p.4.  
\(^{17}\) ibid., p.7. See also J. Webster, Journal of the voyage of the “Wanderer” in the South Seas, 2 June 1851-1 Feb 1852, NZMS 118, AL, n.p.  
\(^{19}\) Webster, *The Last Cruise of the Wanderer*, p.28.  
\(^{20}\) ibid., p.29.
cocoa-nuts and fish, of which we obtained an abundant supply. The principal village is situated on the south-east end of the Island, and is called Mucha….

These natives were equally eager for tobacco; and would willingly part with mats and baskets, which would take them weeks to manufacture, for a piece about two inches long.21

…

The natives of Panapa [Banaba, or Ocean Island] resemble those of the adjacent islands in all their leading features; tattooing, however, is more general. Their canoes far surpassed any we had yet seen in beauty of workmanship.22

…

The houses in Panapa are remarkably clean… They are a fine and prepossessing race, of a light yellow or brown color, many with the ruddy glow of health on their cheeks. Some of the gentlemen are tattooed from head to foot, with transverse and waving lines.23

These excerpts seem to imply that Webster was willing to make a connection between the lightness of skin colour and the potential for ‘advancement’. Certainly he saw a correlation between attractiveness and lightness of skin. His comments can also be set against a background of developing theories of race that distinguished the lighter-skinned people of so-called Polynesia from those darker-skinned inhabitants of so-called Melanesia. Dumont d’Urville had created these geographical categories in 1832, and in the process ‘formally classified Oceanian people into “two distinct races” and mapped the racial geography of the region into its modern contours’.24 D’Urville’s theory held that Polynesians and Micronesians were physically, morally and politically superior to the ‘black races’ of Melanesia, reflecting the ‘harsher racial climate prevailing after 1800’ and foreshadowing the strict biological classifications of scientific Darwinism.25 Yet even though d’Urville’s categories had been in

21 ibid., p.33.
22 ibid., p.41.
23 ibid., p.47.
existence for 20 years at the time of Webster’s voyage, and for 30 years by the time
his journals were published, his ideas can be seen as reflecting what Bronwen
Douglas has identified as the eighteenth-century’s pragmatic approach to racial
classification based on observed experience rather than being pre-determined by rigid
metropolitan racial theory.26 Douglas has also argued that d’Urville’s ideas found
greater traction in France than they did in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century, again
something that is borne out by Webster’s account.27

When he arrived at what are now the Solomon Islands, he unfavourably contrasted the
appearance of the islanders with those people he had encountered earlier in the trip, as
the following two quotes demonstrate:

The natives themselves presented a striking contrast to the light-skinned
Polynesians. They were almost black, with woolly hair, and the countenance
characteristic of the Papuan negro. They were not prepossessing in their
appearance, neither were they confiding in their manners…28

…

These natives go generally naked; a few only, and those female, wore a girdle
of plaited leaves round their loins. They were not so well formed nor so
graceful as the brown-skinned Polynesians—a low projecting forehead gives a
disagreeable expression to their countenances. Their woolly hair, which is
naturally black, is discoloured by means of lime, which they probably use for
objects of cleanliness. Some, by this means, had hair of a bright yellow, and
varying from that colour to every other shade of brown and orange.29

Yet while he found these people’s blackness displeasing, he did not overtly connect
skin colour and the likelihood of ‘advancement’. At one point he noted that the
Polynesian members of the Wanderer’s crew looked down on the people of San
Cristobal:

26 ibid., p.6. See also Bronwen Douglas, ‘In the Event: Indigenous Countersigns and the Ethnohistory
of Voyaging’, in Margaret Jolly, S. Tcherekezoff and D. Tryon, eds, Oceanic Encounters: Exchange,
28 J. Webster, The Last Cruise of the Wanderer, p.65. See also J. Webster, Journal of the voyage of the
“Wanderer” in the South Seas, 2 June 1851-1 Feb 1852, NZMS 118, AL, n.p.
29 J. Webster, The Last Cruise of the Wanderer, p.66. See also J. Webster, Journal of the voyage of the
“Wanderer” in the South Seas, 2 June 1851-1 Feb 1852, NZMS 118, AL, n.p.
Our Islanders look with great contempt on these people, and consider them an inferior order of beings. Thus even these untutored Islanders look on a black race with aversion. With them it must be color alone, for they do not seem to be less capable of improvement than those who treat them with such contempt. Indeed, the natives of San Cristoval [sic] far excel the others in the arts. Their splendid canoes, their household utensils, their wooden vessels for holding their food, their fishing-nets, etc, are all superior to anything we had before seen.30

Therefore, while Webster assumed that the people he encountered were, for the time being, mostly living in greater or lesser states of savagery, and while he made judgments about the relative chances of ‘improvement’, he was more likely to make those judgments based on evidence of recognisable settlement and cultivation, domestic arrangement and manufacturing endeavour than he was purely on the basis of ‘race’ and colour. This is perhaps why, unlike d’Urville, he was more able to see a future for the inhabitants of San Cristobal than the Aboriginals he had encountered 20 years earlier, for whom contact with Europeans could mean only eventual decline.

Those islanders who Webster called ‘Papuans’, then, were not presented as a hopeless, beaten people who would have little option but to submit to and wither away in the face of Europeans. They were, in his mind, as capable of attaining a measure of civilisation as the Hawaiians or, for that matter, Maori. Yet, when violence came, the story he told resembled more closely the simple tale he had recounted in Australia than his more complicated accounts of conflict in New Zealand. The next section examines his version of events at Guadalcanal and looks at why, despite initially viewing Solomon Islanders in relatively positive terms, he was able to portray them as savages being overcome by the forces of civilisation when relations soured.

‘The white man’s fire’: Death and retribution at Guadalcanal
In October 1851 the Wanderer left San Cristobal and made for Guadalcanal. On arrival, Webster recorded the crew’s initial dealings with the islanders, which did not apparently differ greatly from the pattern established on earlier legs of the trip, whereby a tentative and weary reception was followed by a willingness to trade. This

30 J. Webster, The Last Cruise of the Wanderer, p.90. See also J. Webster, Journal of the voyage of the “Wanderer” in the South Seas, 2 June 1851-1 Feb 1852, NZMS 118, AL, n.p.
Figure 12: Map of the Solomon Islands, including Bougainville
apparent similarity with other islands might have led Boyd to believe that he could carry out regular shooting expeditions as he had elsewhere, without considering potential consequences.

On the morning of 15 October, Boyd and a companion Webster called Kapertania, from Banaba, went onshore to hunt for birds. Not long afterwards, shots were heard, which the crew took to be Boyd discharging his weapon at the island’s wildlife. According to Webster, the occupants of canoes which had gathered around the schooner began trying to entice the other crew members ashore, as well as calling to other people gathered on the beach. More canoes then began making their way out to the Wanderer, and Webster became alarmed at their seemingly hostile intent:

The waters of the bay and the shore now swarmed with natives, and their movements and cries were clearly indicative of their hostile intent. Ottiwell [a crew member] remarked that we had heard no shot lately from the shore. I sounded the gong for Mr Boyd. On hearing it the natives commenced shouting and jeering us as if in derision. … at the same moment a loud cry was heard from forward, and one of our crew came aft with his arm cut to the bone by a native weapon. On looking forward, I saw savages attempting to board us by the bowsprit, and numbers were ascending by the martingale.31

Anxious not to provoke a fight while Boyd was still ashore, Webster armed the crew while urging them not to fire. This approach was not to last.

Suddenly, a cry rose from the water; a cry, which once heard, could never be forgotten. It was as if a host of demons had been let loose. The air resounded with their yells and the sullen roaring of numerous war conchs. The next instant a shower of spears, arrows, stones, and other missiles, came whistling at us. For the moment we all sought the shelter of the bulwarks, to allow the first storm to pass. We then fired into the crowded canoes with murderous effect, as we had loaded our muskets with ten pistol bullets each. This, however, did not deter them from attempting to board, and it was not until many had been shot down, that they were driven from the after part of the vessel’s side. A moment of quiet elapsed, followed by another burst from the war conchs, and another fiendish yell, and on they came again. They boarded us forward…. Seeing that our crew was unable to keep them off, I went to their assistance, and fired at the savages with a double-barrelled gun. Their shields proved of no avail against the white man’s fire…. We now got a two pounder swivel gun loaded with grape to bear upon the nearest canoe; a

31 J. Webster, The Last Cruise of the Wanderer, pp.112-13. See also J. Webster, Journal of the voyage of the “Wanderer” in the South Seas, 2 June 1851-1 Feb. 1852, NZMS 118, AL, n.p.
volume of white smoke hid the object, and next moment, when it cleared away, the canoe was seen upset and the water slightly discoloured. This decided the battle.  

Thoughts now turned to Boyd, who Webster was convinced had been killed. The 
Wanderer’s first act of retribution was to fire grape into the village from which most of the canoes had launched.

Webster and other crew members then went onshore to look for Boyd ‘without the slightest hope of finding him alive’. While looking for Boyd, or his remains, was the stated reason for venturing on to the island, revenge soon took over as a prime motivator.

With some difficulty we effected a landing…. We left one of our number in charge of the boat, and advanced towards the village. On nearing the settlement, we were startled by the wild yells of the savages, who made their appearance in large numbers on the heights above. Their heads and spears bristling above the long grass of an old yam clearing. We fired several shots at them which increased their clamour, whilst they themselves hid their heads, but their cries and long spears still showed their presence. We left three of our Islanders to watch their movements, whilst we searched the houses... After ransacking the houses, we set them on fire, destroying at the same time several canoes…. We subsequently destroyed a taro cultivation, and cut down the banana-trees which grew close to the village.

During the destruction of their village, the inhabitants were very noisy, but their dread of our fire-arms operated so powerfully on them that they made no attempt at resistance. A handful of men in presence of hundreds of foes, were thus enabled to inflict a merited punishment on the latter.  

Webster was largely at a loss to explain what had prompted the attack on the 
Wanderer and Boyd’s disappearance, though he put it down to a desire to ‘get possession of the schooner, which, in their eyes, contained inexhaustible wealth in the shape of knives and tomahawks.’ While the real reason for the attack is unknown, it is possible to speculate that Boyd’s failure to seek permission before landing and shooting resources may have given offence, perhaps even to a breaking of tapu. None

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32 J. Webster, The Last Cruise of the Wanderer, pp.113-14. See also J. Webster, Journal of the voyage of the “Wanderer” in the South Seas, 2 June 1851-1 Feb. 1852, NZMS 118, AL, n.p.  
33 J. Webster, The Last Cruise of the Wanderer, pp.121-22. See also J. Webster, Journal of the voyage of the “Wanderer” in the South Seas, 2 June 1851-1 Feb. 1852, NZMS 119, AL, n.p.  
34 Webster, The Last Cruise of the Wanderer, p.118.
of this was apparent to Webster, however, who was willing to interpret the attack as an unjustified act of barbarity on the part of the islanders. This simple interpretation, probably based on misunderstanding, was matched by the one-sided nature of Webster’s portrayal of the crew’s actions. As can be seen from the quotations above, he was able to present the violent encounter as a case of technologically superior Europeans meting out justice to savages, who were portrayed in almost demonic, dehumanised tones.35

Webster’s portrayal of this episode fits what Peter Gibbons has called textual colonisation in that it presented Europeans as legitimate actors and indigenous people as problematic.36 He had offered similar interpretations of events in both his portrayal of conflict with Aboriginals in Australia and with Herekino Maori during the 1847 taua. As argued in chapter two, however, his ability to successfully portray himself as the dominator of those Maori who landed on his front lawn in 1847 was compromised by his basic understanding of the situation he found himself in and by the complexity of his daily life in Hokianga, both of which showed through in the story he told. In Australia and the Solomons, Webster was a tourist passing through, recording his stories with little understanding of his surroundings or his place in them. At Guadalcanal the one-sided nature of the story he told was also a reflection of the political situation on the island. While the people of the Solomons generally had a reputation for ferocity among European traders, some pockets, including Makira Bay on San Cristobal where the Wanderer had anchored, had by the 1850s become used to visits from whaling ships and interaction with sailors, even if no European settlements had been established. Guadalcanal, though, had stayed aloof, mainly because the treacherous nature of the coastline and the mountainous geography of the island dissuaded white visitors, so that the island largely remained a ‘no-go zone’.37 This meant that the basic understanding, or collaboration, that had been forged between European visitors and islanders in other places simply did not exist on Guadalcanal, making the violent conflict which Bennett says characterised many early exchanges in

35 For this tendency in colonial travel writing generally, see Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing*, Abingdon and New York, 2001, pp.141-42.
the Solomons more likely to occur. And the lack of a European presence may have acted to remove any sense of restraint that Webster and the Wanderer’s crew might have felt if their behaviour had been subjected to closer scrutiny on the ground. Ultimately, this lack of scrutiny, as well as the absence of familiarity and ongoing relationship with the people of Guadalcanal, was reflected in the simplistic nature of the tale Webster told, and allowed his desire to write himself into history as a European strongman to go unfettered.

Webster’s version of events suggests that this desire remained unchanged between 1839 and 1851, despite his experiences in New Zealand. We can also see that the tales of conflict he told over this period were not differentiated from each other by how he saw and judged his opponents in terms of a simple racial hierarchy. He was just as willing to portray Solomon Islanders as cowering savages as he was Aboriginals, despite his opinion of the former as being capable of advancement in a way that would elude the latter. And he was as likely to portray, or try to portray, Maori as being subject to his will as he was either of their Pacific neighbours. Instead, what set his stories apart were the contexts in which they were told. A straightforward reading of events in which islanders could remain indecipherable savages simply did not exist for him in New Zealand, where compromise and accommodation were the order of the day. His three stories can all be seen as attempts at textual colonisation, but their success as such depended on the writer’s ongoing relationships with the people being written about. Webster continued to want to see himself as the dominant man of empire, but in New Zealand complicated realities impinged on and undermined this self-fashioning.

‘An untried field for enterprise’: Pacific ambitions 1851-1859

Webster’s view of the Pacific as ‘a wide field of adventure’ survived the violence of Guadalcanal. Following Boyd’s disappearance he inherited his former captain’s share in a scheme to establish a ‘Papuan Republic’ or a ‘Confederation of Polynesia’. Most notably, he took over Boyd’s claim to the island of San Cristobal, or Makira, which had supposedly been ceded to Boyd during the Wanderer’s visit to the island by a

38 Bennett, p.22.
leader Webster called Isitado.\footnote{Significantly, in his published version Webster claimed in relation to the social structure of San Cristobal that, ‘There seems to be little authority possessed by any one. Isitado, alone, appeared to have some influence. Each family claims certain lands and trees, and they seem to live in harmony with each other.’ In his journal, however, he wrote that ‘there seems to be little authority possessed by anyone each family claim certain land & trees we have seen no quarrelling amongst themselves since we have been on the island’. The mention of Isitado as holding some extra measure of authority was probably included in the published version to add legitimacy to the ‘annexation’ of the islands to Boyd. See Webster, \textit{The Last Cruise of the Wanderer}, p.105; J. Webster, Journal of the voyage of the “Wanderer” in the South Seas, 2 June 1851-Feb. 1852, NZMS 118, AL, n.p.} In September 1853 Webster signed a deed ceding the north of the island to Charles St Julian, a Sydney journalist who seemed to share Boyd’s dreams of Pacific grandeur. That same year St Julian had become King Kamehameha III of Hawai‘i’s ‘commissioner to the independent states and tribes of Polynesia to encourage the development of governments on the constitutional pattern of Hawaii, with a view to forming a confederation under the auspices of the kingdom of Hawaii.’\footnote{St Julian, Charles James Herbert de Courcy (1819-1874), \url{http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/bios/A060091b.htm}, accessed 19 June 2010. See also, R.S. Kuykendall, \textit{Hawaiian Kingdom, 1874-1893: The Kalakaua Dynasty}, pp.305-308.} By this agreement he and Webster apparently became joint sovereign chiefs of Makira, until Webster ceded the remainder of the island to St Julian in August 1856. This second agreement provided for a single sovereign for the whole island, ‘[s]uch sovereignty to be vested in the said Charles St Julian … for ever to whom the whole of the rights of empire and of Domain hitherto vested in the said John Webster as such sovereign chief as aforesaid … are hereby absolutely ceded assigned and transferred and made over.’ It also provided that St Julian would become known as the Lord of Arossi and that ‘[t]he title of High chief of Makira is reserved to the said John Webster … but without any right whatever of sovereignty of Baronial jurisdiction or of Domain attached thereto … this title shall be held in perpetuity unless forfeited for Treason or hostility on the part of any such High Chief of Makira against the lawful Sovereign or Government of Arossi’.\footnote{Articles of Cession, 1 August 1856, Documents and letters concerning John Webster’s Island Possessions, NZMS 66, AL.}

Makira was not the only territory supposedly to come under Webster’s authority. He similarly claimed ownership of the Stewart Islands in the north-east Solomons group. In February 1855 he, via St Julian, offered the islands to the Hawaiian king, who apparently accepted the offer, although Webster expressed disappointment in later life that the king’s officials had not taken the offer seriously enough to do anything
practical about it.\textsuperscript{42} St Julian, with Webster’s support, hoped the islands were to be the first to become part of the Confederation of Polynesia.

Webster’s willingness to go along with these schemes and to apparently take seriously the ceding of entire islands to Boyd and himself and then to St Julian can be seen as continuation of the eighteenth-century European tradition of viewing the Pacific as a place where dreams and ambitions, even fantasies, could be realised. Studies of the Pacific have often discussed Europeans’ vision of the Pacific as a place of sexual freedom and expression,\textsuperscript{43} but it was also more generally seen as a place where, as Gavan Daws put it, European men could experience ‘self-expression, self-realization, self-justification, a feeling of being most powerfully and valuably alive’.\textsuperscript{44} Webster had, after all, joined the trip in search of ‘strange scenes and romantic adventures’. It can also be seen as symptomatic of the relatively one-dimensional view he had taken of the Pacific and its inhabitants during his travels: it was easier to imagine himself as high chief of an island of people he did not have to deal with on a daily basis, just as it was easier to represent them as barbarians in a fight he did not understand.

It is also possible that his interest in the schemes was driven as much by commercial opportunism as by self-aggrandising fantasy. At the time of his visit in 1851 he had noted San Cristobal’s potential as a site of economic activity and profit:

\textit{The Island of San Christoval [sic] is about seventy miles long, and quite a Terra Incognita to the civilized world. For beauty of scenery and natural resources, it cannot be surpassed. Its magnificent harbours, its pleasant climate and rich soil, combine to render it a spot, at no distant time, will be inhabited and cultivated by the Anglo-Saxon race. I consider it a splendid country for

\textsuperscript{42} J. Webster to R.J. Crichton, Department of Foreign Affairs, Honolulu, 4 October 1886, Documents and letters concerning John Webster’s Island Possessions, NZMS 66, AL. The people of the Stewart Islands have subsequently claimed to be Hawaiians and therefore US citizens on the basis that the islands were annexed by the Hawaiian king in 1856. See Report to the Chairman, Committee on Resources, House of Representatives, US Insular Areas, Application of the U.S. Constitution, November 1997, p.39, fn 2, \url{http://www.gao.gov/archive/1998/log98005.pdf}, accessed 19 June 2010.


\textsuperscript{44} Gavan Daws, \textit{A Dream of Islands: Voyages of Self-discovery in the South Seas}, New York & London, 1980, p.xii.
growing sugar, coffee, cotton, indigo, spices, and other productions of the Asiatic Islands.  

For Webster, the Pacific’s real drawcard might have been the opportunity to earn his fortune, particularly if nature and the inhabitants could be harnessed by European civilisation. Of course, it is also possible that his willingness to portray Hawaiians’ and Melanesians’ potential for advancement in a favourable light was a reflection of his own commercial ambitions for their homelands and of his wish to enlist the assistance of the Hawaiian monarchy in furthering those ambitions. He was apparently serious enough about his plans for Pacific expansion to hang on to them until 1855. Only after then did he cede his share of San Cristobal and the Stewart Islands and settle for holding the empty title of High Chief of Makira, as well as commander of St Julian’s Order of Arossi. By then he was back in New Zealand, where his economic future lay in the timber to be found in Hokianga’s kauri forest, rather than in unrealised coffee and cotton plantations of San Cristobal. He took back with him dreams of wealth, expansion and power, fuelled by a belief that the forces of civilisation would overcome the inertia of savagery in all parts of the Pacific, with himself in the vanguard. But this belief could only be preserved untarnished while it did not have to struggle with the complex daily reality of life, the very reality that awaited him on his return to Hokianga.

45 Webster, The Last Cruise of the Wanderer, pp.104-105. See also J. Webster, Journal of the voyage of the “Wanderer” in the South Seas, 2 June 1851-1 Feb. 1852, NZMS 118, AL, n.p.

46 This is suggested by at least one comparison between Webster’s journal and his published version of events. In his journal he described Hawaii as follows: ‘The Island of Hawaii is 300 miles in circumference and contains 4000 square miles the whole country is neither more nor less than a series of volcanoes the higher mountains are devoid of vegetation and are entirely composed of volcanic rock and ejected matter there is but a very small portion of the island capable of cultivation.’ By the time of publication, the portrayal had become more positive: ‘The Island of Hawaii is 300 miles in circumference, containing about 4000 square miles and a population of about 25,000. The island is neither more nor less than a series of volcanoes; the upland covered with a scanty bush, and the higher mountain being entirely destitute of vegetation. But the lowlands are rich, and capable of producing any thing.’ See Webster, The Last Cruise of the Wanderer, p.21; J. Webster, Journal of the voyage of the “Wanderer” in the South Seas, 2 June 1851-Feb. 1852, NZMS 118, AL, n.p.
Chapter Five

Hokianga’s Timber Baron: Kin and Commerce 1855-1870

During the 1850s and 1860s John Webster rose to be the most influential individual in Hokianga’s economy. He attained this position by building on the relationships and networks he had forged in the 1840s, by extending trade routes across the globe and, perhaps most importantly, by marrying into the Russell family and inheriting George Russell’s land, wealth and social position. His new-found role also saw him continue Russell’s attempt to redraw the racial boundaries of Kohukohu in order to conform to the norms of the new colonial society. However, he would find that deriving wealth and position from the timber industry meant he was unable to totally achieve the separation from the Maori world he sought, as the social, familial and personal relationships that had been formed between Maori and Pakeha and that had been pivotal to securing timber supplies continued to be vital to his success. This chapter examines Webster’s marriage and inheritance of George Russell’s mantle at Kohukohu, his rise to economic power and the nature of his ongoing entanglement with and dependence on Maori communities. It also examines how his continued involvement with Maori was central to him becoming Hokianga’s most prominent creditor. It ultimately argues it was this role, as creditor, often founded on longstanding collaborative relationships that gave Webster his real power and influence.

Marriage and kin

Following the misadventure in Guadalcanal and the eventual wreck of the Wanderer at Port Macquarie, New South Wales, in December 1851, Webster spent time on the Victorian goldfields before travelling to Britain for an extended visit. In August 1853 he returned to New Zealand, apparently having decided that his future lay there.\(^1\) He lived in Auckland during 1854, but by April 1855 he was back in Hokianga, and had married George Russell’s eldest daughter, Emily.

Webster’s interest in Emily predated his arrival back in New Zealand in 1853. In 1848 while in Auckland working for Brown & Campbell, he sent regular letters to George Russell, reporting on the social life of the young capital, responding to news from Hokianga and offering to perform any errand or chore that his Hokianga patron might want. From March 1849 he regularly closed his correspondence by sending his ‘best respects to Miss Russell’, who had returned from Melbourne that month, at one stage adding that ‘Should Miss Russell have any commission I can do for her or for yourself before I go [to California] I shall be always most happy’. His pursuance of this relationship upon his return to New Zealand culminated in his marriage to Emily on 12 April 1855 at George Russell’s home at Kohukohu.

It is unclear how Webster had been earning a living in Auckland before his marriage and what interests he may still have had there, but any plans he might have had to move his new wife to the capital were soon overtaken by family events. In June 1855 George Russell died. Webster moved into the Russell home at Kohukohu and assumed responsibility for the younger members of the Russell family, and for the running of his father-in-law’s business. Two days before his daughter’s wedding, George Russell had appointed John Webster and John Logan Campbell his executors. They were made trustees of Russell’s estate and given responsibility for managing and disposing of his property for the good of his five children. Russell also appointed the two men guardians of his four children still under the age of 21. As the man on the spot in Hokianga, and as a member of the family, Webster was better placed than his Auckland-based co-executor to fulfil the day-to-day responsibilities of managing Russell’s affairs, with the result that he inherited Russell’s social, economic and political role and influence. This section examines the ways in which Webster assumed Russell’s leadership of the Pakeha community at Kohukohu. In particular, by focusing on his marriage to Emily and questions of intimacy, it considers how Webster acted to further the social and cultural ambitions of empire started by Russell. Although Webster’s correspondence from 1855 onwards seldom mentions his

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2 See, for example, J. Webster to G.F. Russell, 13 June 1849, 6 September 1849, 2 October 1849, 15 January 1850, 23 January 1850, Letters from J. Webster to G.F. Russell, 1848-1850, NZMS 4-19, AL.
3 J. Webster to G.F. Russell, 25 November 1849, Letters from J. Webster to G.F. Russell, 1848-1850, NZMS 4-19, AL.
4 Wesleyan Mission Hokianga, Register of Baptisms and Marriages, NZMS 779/1 Pt 2 (Marriages), AL; Southern Cross, 24 April 1855, p.2. John Hobbs officiated at the ceremony.
5 G.F. Russell, Probate, BBAE 1568 Box 5 record 86, ANZA.
wife, and she therefore remains a shadowy figure, nonetheless the nature of his and Emily’s relationship was symptomatic of a growing separation between Maori and Pakeha communities in Hokianga and reflected Webster’s ambition to fit in with the new colonial order.

As discussed in chapter two, during the 1840s Kohukohu became Hokianga’s premier imperial outpost. As the main centre of timber export it plugged Hokianga into the international commercial grid. Moreover, it was the social centre for the Pakeha elite who wished to distinguish themselves from Europeans they considered too uneducated, too intemperate or too Irish to be their equals. It therefore acted as a centre for those ideas of gentlemanly respectability that lay at the heart of Victorian middle-class thinking and attempted to replicate class division found in Britain. Under Russell’s leadership there had also been signs that Kohukohu was also leading the way in a growing social separation between Maori and Pakeha. Although Russell had formed what Sylvia Van Kirk called the ‘tender ties’ of empire with Maori in the 1830s by entering into relationships with at least two women, with whom he had seven children, by the late 1840s and into the 1850s he was actively seeing to it that his family was raised in a way that disassociated them from their Maori family and exposed them as much as possible to Pakeha society. Writers such as Ann Laura Stoler have referred to familial and other personal relationships as the ‘transfer points’ in power relationships between indigenous peoples and colonisers. She has also noted that ‘it was in the domestic domain more than in the public sphere, where essential dispositions of … bourgeois morality, and racial attitude could be dangerously undone or securely made’. Russell’s changing attitude towards his

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7 Russell’s first relationship was with Hautonga Haira, with whom he had three children: Emily, William and Arthur. By 1837, following Hautonga’s death, he had entered another relationship, with Herina Tuku, with whom he had four further children: Ani, Caroline, Fanny and Frederick. Arthur died in 1848.
family and a desire to raise them according to European norms reflected a shift in the social relations between Maori and Pakeha and the intimate frontiers between them. Where Russell had once been willing to accept the compromises that collaboration with Maori had required by forming sexual relationships with Maori women and having children outside Christian wedlock, he was now seeking to redraw social boundaries with Maori, to free himself and his family from those compromises and to return to more conventional middle-class European norms of behaviour. The English domestic regularity that had been imposed on Kohukohu’s physical surroundings through gardens and buildings would now be brought to bear on its ‘half-caste’ inhabitants. Russell was able to pursue this course because of his economic position. His well-established role as the ‘Lion of the river’ and the centralisation of the timber industry at Kohukohu meant that he was to some extent freed from the social compromises that complete dependence on Maori had brought with it. He was also aided by two other things: the absence of his children’s late mothers who might have acted as active connections to Maori kin; and the fact that he could afford to pay for a vital tool he used in reshaping his family into the Pakeha middle-class ideal: education.

In the mid 1840s Emily, the eldest of his five children, went to Melbourne to live with a friend of her father’s and to receive her education, while two of her younger siblings, William and Caroline, were sent to Auckland for the same purpose. Shortly after Russell’s death in 1855, his youngest son, Frederick Nene, was being educated at a school in Kororareka. The education the children received was designed to see to their moral as well as their intellectual betterment, and to turn them into respectable members of the colonial elite. For example, Frederick was offered the chance to learn French and the violin; the latter in particular his teacher believed ‘has a good moral effect when the child is directed into the right idea of using it’. Judging by the opinion of visiting naval officer Theodore Morton Jones in 1851, the grooming had been a success. Morton Jones considered the Russell children ‘exceedingly well

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11 F. Gould to J. Webster, 18 September 1855, Russell Family Correspondence, NZMS 4-21, AL.
12 ibid. Emphasis in original.
brought up’, having benefited from ‘a good education’.\textsuperscript{13} Morton Jones’s portrayal of the Russell family can be compared with that of Maning’s household, which he described as being overrun with ‘semi civilized’ Maori relations who ‘had free access to the house, and look upon it almost as much their house as his’, while two of Maning’s children, Mary and Hauraki, were to be seen ‘in true Maori costume … as wild as young colts’.\textsuperscript{14} During the 1840s, Russell’s friends Maning and Edward Parker had continued to associate closely with their Maori kin without compromising their gentlemanly status at Kohukohu. Yet even Maning sent his eldest daughter, Maria, to Hobart for her education following the death of her mother, Moengaroa, in 1847, in much the same way and at much the same time as Russell had sent Emily to Melbourne. Maning’s biographer has speculated that this decision was in part motivated by a desire ‘to give at least one of his children a European education’.\textsuperscript{15} If this was in fact the case, then a concern to separate the next generation from the collaborative social world of earlier years can be identified in the leading men of Kohukohu by the beginning of the 1850s. By this stage, the shifting balance of economic power which had largely centralised the timber trade under Russell meant that the desire for separation of the Maori and Pakeha social worlds that had undermined Thomas McDonnell’s once-dominant operation at Horeke could be attempted more effectively by his successor at Kohukohu in the 1850s.

Webster’s interest in and marriage to Emily can be seen as another manifestation of this growing separation. As noted in chapter two, unlike the men who had arrived in Hokianga before him, Webster had not married a Maori woman and no evidence can be found of him engaging in sexual relationships with local women. Although during the 1840s he formulated an identity that enabled him to collaborate effectively with Maori, this identity was constructed in economic and wider social, rather than familial, settings. He seems to have remained aloof from the intimate frontiers of empire and was excluded from the direct kinship relationships experienced by other Pakeha. As discussed in chapter two, this exclusion may have been the result of the change in the nature of the Maori–Pakeha patronage relationship that followed the introduction of Crown pre-emption which saw rangatira unable to offer a combination

\textsuperscript{13} T. M. Jones, Private Journal, 1851–1856, qMS-1075, Vol. 1, ATL, p.65.
\textsuperscript{14} ibid., pp.57-58.
\textsuperscript{15} David Colquhoun, “‘Pakeha Maori’: the early life and times of Frederick Edward Maning”, MA thesis, The University of Auckland, 1984, p.83.
of land sales and marriage to Pakeha as a way of securing clients. It may also have reflected a personal decision on his part to avoid sexual relationships with Maori women. But there is sense in which his marriage to Emily was a new form of the pattern whereby clients attached themselves to their patrons by marriage. While there is no reason to doubt Webster’s marriage to Emily was the result of anything other than affection, it also acted to secure his connection to his Pakeha patron George Russell. In marrying Emily, he not only secured his economic fortunes, but he also entered a marriage that conformed closely to a respectable Victorian union. John and Emily’s marriage certificate recorded the parties’ occupations as ‘Gentleman’ and ‘Lady’, the acmes of respectability.\(^\text{16}\) Such a union can be contrasted with the marriage of Webster’s own brother, William, to Annabella (or Hanapera) Gillies, whose mother was of Ngati Toro and who was a distant cousin to Emily.\(^\text{17}\) When William and Annabella married in 1850, the marriage register described him as a ‘trader’ and her as a ‘half caste’. Little is known about Annabella’s background, but she had been a maid at the Mangungu mission station and remained closely aligned to her Maori relations, being bilingual all her life.\(^\text{18}\) Despite their shared whakapapa and status as daughters of Maori women, Emily and Annabella were separated by the nature of their family life and thereafter by the appellations applied to them. Emily’s upbringing and education enabled her to transcend the racial classification applied to ‘half caste’ women such as Annabella, to suppress her Maori background and to become a Pakeha ‘lady’. In the process, Webster secured a wife who enabled him to conform as closely as possible to a Victorian middle-class ideal, and to conform to the expectations of an evolving colonial society.

John and Emily’s marriage took place against a changing political landscape throughout the colony in the late 1850s. In that decade the ‘half caste’ children of Maori mothers and Pakeha fathers were reaching maturity and were becoming more visible on both national and local stages. At the same time, their position within New Zealand society was becoming more difficult as settler numbers increased, the founding of the King movement loomed at Waikato and suspicions among Pakeha

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\(^\text{16}\) Wesleyan Mission Hokianga, Register of Baptisms and Marriages, NZMS 779/1, Pt 2 (Marriages), AL.

\(^\text{17}\) D. Webster, ‘The Webster Branch’, unpublished pamphlet, p.3.

towards Maori throughout the country grew. Judith Binney has discussed how those men and women of joint Maori and Pakeha descent lived ‘in-between lives’ in the mid-nineteenth century. She considered how their status became more problematic following the outbreak of war in the mid-1860s and how the conflict forced them to make difficult decisions about where their allegiances lay, particularly as Pakeha were more likely to view them as Maori than Pakeha.19 The impact of the Taranaki and Waikato wars in Hokianga is discussed in more detail in the next chapter, but it can be noted here that, judging by the experience of Emily Russell and Annabella Gillies, these difficulties were being faced and choices were being made in the decade before the crisis of wartime.

In the Hokianga context, the political implications of alignment with one’s Maori family were also highlighted by a growing Pakeha conviction that Maori were a people in decline. James Belich has described how the idea of Maori being a declining race gained greater ascendancy from the 1860s as conflict and confidence in the colony’s destiny meant that ‘both nature and natives were inevitably to be swept aside in the inevitable march’ to the future.20 Again, however, these ideas can be found as having currency in the 1850s. In 1856 a board of enquiry was held into ‘subjects connected with the Native race’, primarily subjects relating to land tenure and the willingness of Maori to sell land to the government. The witnesses who appeared before the board, however, were also asked their opinions on the reason for an apparent decline in Maori numbers, on the basis that they were ‘experts’ in ‘native’ matters.21 John Webster was one of these witnesses. As part of a general statement about the condition of Maori in Hokianga, he claimed that he had noticed a substantial change in the condition of the ‘natives’ between his departure in 1849 and his recent arrival back in the district. Whereas before they had flocked to the Wesleyan mission chapels and schools, now the ‘schools were abandoned and the natives scattered’. In the absence of a magistrate, Maori had become ‘much more quarrelsome and ill behaved’. When questioned about Maori access to liquor, he replied, ‘The desire for spirits has increased lately. There had been no desire for spirits when I was in the country formerly. I have seen confirmed cases of drunkenness.’ Perhaps most

19 Binney, ‘“In-Between” Lives: studies from within a colonial society’. For a discussion of how the wars served to clarify and advance colonial racial taxonomies, see Salesa chapter five.
tellingly, he said, ‘I have observed a great decrease in the native population about Mr Young’s at Pakanae, and the vicinity. The natives often remark “By and bye the Europeans will have all the land, why then should we quarrel about it”’, seemingly endorsing the idea that a weakened race would be replaced by a stronger one. These statements aligned Webster with the ideas of a wider colonial society, which has been described as being typified by a disinclination to interact with Maori and a belief in their cultural inferiority. Increasingly, Webster and Maning were seeking to fit in with the respectable section of the new society whom they would have viewed as their equals, and this process involved disassociating themselves from the relationships and identities formed in earlier years. Both men sought to do this in part by arguing that it was Maori who had changed rather than themselves, and that the connections they had formed pre-dated this apparently sad decline.

In Webster’s case, this disassociation involved marrying a woman of mixed descent whose allegiances seemed to lie with the Pakeha world, following his father-in-law’s lead by redrawing social boundaries and then removing Maori influence from the upbringings of his young brothers- and sisters-in-law, and from the lives of his own children. When George Russell died, Webster took over responsibility for educating Frederick Nene Russell at Kororareka, and when he and Emily began a family in 1856, the children were sent away from Hokianga to boarding school for substantial periods of their childhoods. By the early 1860s Maning also seems to have sent his son, Hauraki, away to instil into him the ‘feelings and principles of a gentleman’ so that he could be given ‘a chance to make his way in a respectable course’. For both men in the 1850s, the desire to conform to the pressures of respectable colonial society and to live by the rules of gentlemanly conduct now meant distancing

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22 Board appointed to enquire into subjects connected with the Native race, No 4 Mr John Webster Hokianga, 4 April 1856, Verbatim evidence taken from 33 witnesses, G 51 1*1, ANZW.
24 Recollections of Miss Caroline Webster, Viva Voce Notes on Judge Maning, June 1946, P.D. Stratford private collection, Auckland. When asked to recall her memories of Maning, Caroline, Webster’s eldest child, said ‘Yes I can remember him but I never saw very much of him as I was away at boarding school much of the time’. See also J. Webster, Ledger Book 1874-1891, pp.126, 136, ET/JW 006, P.D. Stratford private collection, Auckland, for accounts showing the amounts paid for Webster’s younger children’s private education.
25 F.E. Maning to D. McLean, 24 February 1870, Donald McLean Papers, Inwards letters, F.E. Maning, MS-Papers-0032-0444, ATL.
themselves from old ties and ensuring that the next generation was bounded more to Pakeha society than to Maori.

But Webster’s growing social ambitions meant he did not just seek to distinguish himself from Maori. He was also keen to set himself and his wife, in-laws and children apart from other mixed-descent families, particularly those he saw as belonging to a different social class, such as the Leefs and the Harrises. Jack Leef and Christopher Harris were both sawyers who had, like George Russell, married Maori women and who now had ‘half caste’ children of the same generation as Emily. Leef and Harris were by no means on the bottom rung of Pakeha society in Hokianga, but neither had they been welcomed into the community of gentlemen at Kohukohu. Their status as labouring sawyers, even in Harris’s case a sawyer of some importance, precluded them from sharing the company of men such as Webster and Maning. When in the 1850s and 1860s the position of mixed-descent people became an increasingly political issue, pre-existing divisions of class were compounded by divisions of race. These divisions were further reinforced by the Crown’s policies, particularly in relation to land, as different mechanisms were put in place to settle claims by and allocate land to Maori and Pakeha. As Damon Salesa has argued, during the early colonial period ‘land was … the starkest and most striking example of the advent of a racial taxonomy’ that sought to distinguish ‘natives’ from Europeans.26 During the 1850s and 1860s clarifying land tenure became a critical issue in Hokianga, as in other parts of the colony, and increasingly it became a way in which Maori and Pakeha were differentiated from each other. Like the changing nature of intimate relationships, access to land and the nature of land tenure became transfer points in Maori–Pakeha relations and indicators of cultural and racial allegiance. Moreover, they became another point at which half-caste families needed to make decisions about how they were going to identify themselves. The next section examines how the mechanisms of land claim settlement and tenure put in place during this period acted to increasingly differentiate families such as the Harrises and Leefs from the Websters and Russells.

26 Salesa, p.124.
Land and loyalty

As discussed in chapter two, Pakeha access to land in the 1830s had been dependent on securing the patronage of a rangatira. This situation began to change, first, as Pakeha began to sell land to each other independent of the chiefs’ agreement, and then as the Crown introduced pre-emption, effectively putting an end to Maori securing relationships with Pakeha through offers of land. Despite this, it could be argued that until the late 1850s little changed in practical terms for Maori when it came to land tenure. Unlike their counterparts further south, and even at Mangonui, Hokianga rangatira did not sell swathes of land to the Crown for large-scale settlement during the 1840s and 1850s. Instead, much of the land that had been granted to settlers before 1840 remained unoccupied by Pakeha. Most of the original settlers had left for Auckland, and the Crown, which had nominally acquired the land through the payment of scrip to the Pakeha grantees, remained uninterested in the ‘surplus land’ it had acquired at Hokianga, preferring to put its efforts into developing settlements closer to Auckland. The result was that Hokianga Maori effectively retained use of the land that had supposedly passed to the Crown, while those Pakeha who remained in the area and involved themselves in the timber industry benefited from Maori accessing timber on those lands.

This situation began to change in the mid to late 1850s as the Crown became more interested in determining just how much surplus land it had available, and in better defining those areas of the country over which Crown grants had been issued following the Old Lands Claims Commission hearings in the early 1840s. In 1856 Francis Dillon Bell was appointed Old Land Claim Commissioner charged with reinvestigating the findings of the earlier commission. Bell called in most of the Crown grants that had been issued to those settlers who had not opted for scrip, and insisted on the grantees arranging for new surveys to be done. Then in 1859 he sent John White, Webster’s former neighbour, to supervise the investigation and survey of the scrip claims; that is, those areas of land for which scrip had been paid in the 1840s.

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and which the Crown now claimed to own. The reopening of these claims had the effect of reigniting old disputes, particularly in the timber-rich areas of Orira and Waihou, as claims that had been denied by the earlier commissioners resurfaced and boundaries were debated. The process also laid bare the different treatment meted out to Maori and Pakeha by the Crown when it came to determining land holdings. Those Pakeha who had been issued with grants in the 1840s were assumed to have ownership of the land and were merely required to prove by survey how large their blocks were so that a new grant could be issued, and disputes over boundaries generally went in their favour. On the other hand, Maori were understood to have agreed to the sale of land and were only required to point out the boundaries of the land they were assumed to have willingly given up. White dismissed disputes and complaints from rangatira on the grounds that he was not authorised to rehear the findings of the earlier commission but was simply there to confirm the boundaries and conduct surveys, and he was not above threatening Maori access to timber resources if they did not drop complaints. One of the few means Maori were offered to secure small areas of significance, such as urupa and cultivations, was to apply to the Crown for reserves to be set aside, but most applications were unsuccessful.

More success was to be found be pursuing claims on behalf of half-caste kin. At the end of Bell and White’s investigation there were still a small number of claims to be surveyed and settled. Eight of these claims were in the names of half-caste children and were pursued either by or in conjunction with those children’s Pakeha fathers or Maori kin. One such claim, situated on the Wairere Creek, belonged to Webster’s sister-in-law Annabella Webster, née Gillies. Maori had tried to secure an area of land, known as Arairiri, for Annabella and her children as early as 1858, and in 1860 Tipene Toro, Hone Tipene, Aperi, Hone Ri and Rihari Raumati confirmed their wish to gift land to her. When Bell’s Old Land Claims Commission did nothing to further

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29 For a comprehensive discussion of White’s activities while at Hokianga, see Stirling and Towers. See also, D. Moore, B. Rigby and M. Russell, Old Land Claims, Wellington, 1997, pp.125-44.
30 For details see Stirling and Towers, pp.1129-1283.
31 In actual fact, White went much further than this brief on several occasions, particularly where doing so would benefit his uncle William White, his father Francis White, or the Crown. See Moore et al, pp.134-44; Stirling and Towers, pp.1264-83.
32 Daily Journals kept by John White at Hokianga, Jan–Jul 1859, 16 March 1859, OLC 4/7, ANZW.
33 Stirling and Towers, pp.1296-1318.
the claim, the block was taken to the Native Land Court, established in 1865, with the result that Annabella Webster was granted the 63 acres in 1870.\(^{35}\)

Initially at least, it seems the Native Land Court provided Hokianga Maori with a way of securing Crown-derived rights to relatively small but important blocks of land that had been denied to them by Bell’s commission. Of 97 blocks brought before the court between 1865 and 1873 for which a size can be determined, 65 were smaller than 100 acres.\(^{36}\) Also of significance is the fact that some of these claims were made by or in conjunction with half-caste kin. For example, in 1869 John Leef’s three sons, John, George and William, were granted the 54-acre Matuku block at Whirinaki, while in 1873 George Harris, son of Christopher Harris, was granted a share in the 27-acre Onewa block at Waihou, along with Aporo, Pangari and five others. In the case of the Matuku block, the motivation for seeking a grant from the court may well have been based on family and community need, given that the survey plan showed a portion of the block was used for cultivation.\(^{37}\)

These cases indicate the extent to which some half-caste individuals had become enmeshed in Maori communities and gained the support of their Maori kin. They also demonstrate the ways in which the Crown processes put in place to secure access to land served to differentiate Maori and Pakeha, and highlight the distinction that can be drawn between those half-caste children and their families who aligned themselves with their Maori kin and those who identified with Pakeha. Here a comparison can be made between the children of John Leef and Christopher Harris, and the children of George Russell. While the Leefs and Harrises sought to secure rights to ancestral lands through the Native Land Court, Emily Russell and her siblings did not, nor did they seek to act in conjunction with Maori kin to further land claims as had their cousin Annabella Webster. Instead, they inherited the land their father had been granted as a Pakeha old land claimant at Kohukohou and Waihou and for which his estate received final land grants from Bell’s commission in 1862, an outcome overseen by Webster as Russell’s executor. Moreover, while securing land title can be taken as a sign of connection of some half-caste children to Maori kin, it can perhaps

\(^{35}\) AJHR, 1878, H-26, p.9.  
\(^{36}\) Compiled from \textit{Auckland Provincial Government Gazette} 1866-1874 and the Crown Grants Registers, ABWN 8090 series, ANZW.  
\(^{37}\) Plan of Matuku, ML 859.
be seen as a wedge that had been driven between the Russells and their wider Maori family. When John White undertook his investigations in 1859 he met with strong resistance from Nene and his brother Wiremu Waka Turau when he attempted to complete surveys at Waihou, including those over two blocks of land that had been claimed by Russell. The two blocks, known as Te Take and Te Ngaio, had been offered to Russell in 1835 and 1836 respectively by Nene, possibly as a confirmation of Russell’s position as Nene’s client and kinsman. Russell had subsequently sold them to Henry Jellicoe, but when Jellicoe died Russell claimed the land as mortgagee. These blocks became part of an increasingly bitter exchange between Nene and White over boundaries at Waihou, with White dismissing Nene’s ‘fairly fundamental challenge to the claim’ and leaving it to Webster and John Logan Campbell to pursue as executors. They eventually secured 837 acres for the Russell children as estate beneficiaries by way of Crown grant. These blocks were not the only ones in the Russell estate to be the focus of discontent. In November 1858, Webster wrote to John White saying that he had employed a party to survey the two portions of the Hutoia block but had ‘reason to believe that the natives who accompanied that party to point out the boundaries of the claims in question have not done so honestly but have pointed out false lines curtailing the land to a mere fraction of that specified in the deeds of purchase’. The tension that underscored this situation was made clear in his request that ‘you, as Agent for the Government in the survey of the Hokianga claims, will at your earliest convenience endeavour to get the true boundaries of the above claims specified & prevent the fraud evidently intended by the natives’.

Therefore, securing access to land became another way in which Webster sought to separate himself and his family both from Maori as well as from those half-caste families he believed belonged to a different social class. In this way the considerations of class that had separated Kohukohu’s inhabitants and associates from Pakeha sawyers and labourers in the 1840s were now undercut by a wish to distance themselves from Maori too. While a Pakeha gentleman could previously enjoy a close relationship with Maori kin without compromising his status, he was now more likely

38 Old Land Claim 247, repro 1505, ANZW; Old Land Claim 248, repro 1502, ANZW.
39 Stirling and Towers, p.1179.
41 John Webster to John White, 22 November 1858, Correspondence about Hokianga scrip claim surveys from John White, Feb–May 1859, 25 Aug 1865, OLC 4/6, ANZW.
to try to eschew those relationships and connections. An exception to this appears in the form of John Webster’s own brother, William, whose marriage to Annabella Gillies seems to have aligned him more closely with her kin and the community around the Mangungu mission station than with his own extended family at Kohukohu. However, despite his close connection to Kohukohu’s new leading man William had always been less interested in social and economic ambition, and while John’s wealth and influence increased, William remained happily associated with the mission station, while also working as his brother’s employee and then as interpreter for the Native Land Court. The importance of maintaining gentlemanly status was for him less pressing.

For John Webster, distinguishing himself and his family from Maori was fundamental to his colonial social aspirations, and he sought to make it a central part of his new role as the most economically influential person in Hokianga. During the second half of the 1850s and throughout the 1860s he came to dominate the Hokianga timber export trade and continued to build Kohukohu into the centre of that trade while at the same time expanding his mercantile interests in the district. He sought to establish economic dominance over those Maori communities that provided the bulk of his labour and mercantile customers and to use the wealth he made from the trade to reinforce his social ambitions and position. However, he was to find that wealth did not entirely free him from involvement in and reliance upon the Maori world, and that the separation he sought from his wife’s kin was not ultimately realisable. The next section examines Webster’s growing economic power and his role in the timber trade. It considers how this role still tied him to the collaborative relationships and networks with Maori and how his economic position continued to rely on the co-operation of very people he sought to distinguish himself from socially.

The new ‘Lion of the River’

When John Webster took over his late father-in-law and patron’s business, he assumed control of a substantial operation. When Russell died, he left approximately £1000 in cash, £250 in household and personal property, £500 worth of goods on hand in store, £2000 tied up in timber and a £500 half-share in the brig Victoria, in
partnership with Frederick Maning. Webster not only took over the day-to-day responsibility for managing this wealth, he also inherited Russell’s title of ‘merchant’. He was now the man in charge of Hokianga’s largest timber export venture.

His most serious competition came from Maning, who in the 1850s had managed to convince his brothers in Hobart to invest more heavily in the Hokianga timber trade. While Maning Brothers arranged purchasers for the timber, Maning himself oversaw the cutting of timber by both Maori and European workers, having gained a timber licence in 1854. Logs were then rafted to Onoke and shipped to destinations such as the Australian colonies, Mauritius and South America. Maning also operated independently of his brothers, sometimes shipping timber in conjunction with Russell and going into business with him to the extent of co-owning the Victoria. Despite Webster’s acquaintance with Maning that dated back to the early 1840s, the business partnership between Kohukohou and Onoke does not seem to have survived Webster taking over from Russell. In fact by the early 1860s commercial competition seems to have spilled over into their personal relationship, with Maning labelling Webster a ‘very little minded spitefull man’ who lost ‘no opportunity to injure or annoy me and sticks at nothing to accomplish this’, and Webster saying that ‘I have no dealings with Maning and never go near him’. By this stage Maning’s business fortunes appear to have been on the wane, with Webster noting that ‘Maning’s opposition can scarcely be dignified with the name. He has had but one vessel in two years and could not fill them.’ However, he was still concerned enough about the threat from Maning in September 1861 to insist that his brother George, his agent in Auckland, do all he could to secure rights to timber on land previously held by Francis White at Orira, now in the hands of White’s Sydney financier, a Mr Burdekin. He wrote to George that ‘Maning is the only party I am afraid of he has been offering cash for timber I hear but whether its only a ruse or Bona fide I know not’, and he stressed that it was ‘of the utmost importance to me that I possess the block … its only value should Mr

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42 G.F. Russell, Probate, BBAE 1568 Box 5 record 86, ANZA.
43 Register of licences issued to occupy crown land, depasture, cut timber, OLC 3/4, ANZW.
44 Colquhoun, p.140.
45 F.E. Maning to D. McLean, 18 August 1861, Donald McLean Papers, Inwards letters, F.E. Maning, MS-Papers-0032-0444, ATL [emphasis in original]; J. Webster to Webster and Patterson, 22 June 1863, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.
46 J. Webster to Webster and Patterson, 1 July 1861, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.
Maning compete or secure the purchase it would cause me much embarrassment & entail heavy loss, under these circumstances I am almost compelled to become a purchaser. 47 By 1863, though, Maning’s involvement in the timber trade seemed almost at an end. He was selling three-year-old timber, which Webster believed to be in poor condition, to anyone who would touch it. Webster eventually bought the best of it, saying that ‘I may observe that by thus securing Maning’s timber it effectively prevents our being opposed in the Melbourne market. No other port in New Zealand can ship timber of the Hokianga Class.’ 48 A year later Maning Brothers was in liquidation.

This effectively left Webster and the Kohukohu operation unchallenged in the Hokianga timber export business. Throughout the rest of the 1860s he dominated the Hokianga economic landscape. He exported timber to Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne, as well as to London, Liverpool, Calcutta, Bombay and Shanghai. Although the success of these ventures varied, they had the effect of once again giving Kohukohu the title of Hokianga’s window on the world, and its outpost of empire. 49 In 1862, his brother George estimated that during the past 12 months John had ‘sent away 3,600 loads of timber, squared and baulk; value in Hokianga £11,000’. He also estimated that Webster had averaged that amount for the previous three years. 50 In addition, Webster became a major importer of goods, primarily from Sydney. With his Sydney-based brother Alec acting as his agent, he brought in essential items such as flour, sugar, biscuit, rice, tobacco, blankets and clothing, as well as tools such as axes and spades used in felling timber, and luxury items such as shawls. 51 These goods would then either be distributed amongst his timber squarers in lieu of cash, or else they would be sold in his stores at Horeke and Taumatawiwi (Opononi). Until the mid-1860s he also used local coastal traders such as Robert

47 J. Webster to Webster and Patterson, 9 September 1861, 23 September 1861, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.
48 J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 17 August 1863, 31 October 1863, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.
49 See John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum for details of shipping ventures to these ports.
50 Evidence of G. Webster, Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Public Works Committee, Votes and Proceedings of the Auckland Provincial Council, Session 14, 1862, Appendix 5, p.32.
51 J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 23 September 1861, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.
Hardiman to bring in goods from Auckland. Hardiman ran a relatively regular service between Auckland and Hokianga in the schooner *Vivid* and later the cutter *Marwell*, taking kauri gum, wool, wheat, maize, pork, honey and passengers from Hokianga and returning with sugar, biscuit, flour, rice and a vast range of other sundry items. A similar service had also been provided by the *Naiad*, which Maning bought from Peter Monro in the mid-1850s, and the Webster-owned *Isabella*, before they were wrecked in 1858 and 1860 respectively. In 1866, however, Webster purchased the 216-ton barque *Lion*, and began ‘the first of a regular line of vessels, to be continued in the trade between this port [Hokianga] and Sydney’. Although vessels such as the *Herald* continued to ply the waters between Auckland and Hokianga and smaller, and therefore unrecorded, vessels probably did the same, the size of the *Lion* and the regularity of service seems to have given Webster a monopoly on the Trans-Tasman route and a constant supply of goods. He did not have the mercantile business all to himself, as others such as James Clendon, after his retirement as resident magistrate in 1867, acted as competitors. However, the fact that Webster was able to make the *Lion* pay for itself by supplying it with spars, sawn timber and kauri gum for the Sydney market and filling it with goods and produce for Hokianga gave him an advantage few others could match.

A regular and reliable supply of goods was also necessary for securing an equally regular supply of timber and, increasingly, kauri gum. As had been the system since the 1830s, Webster secured the labour necessary to gather these goods through advances to Maori, as well as to the Pakeha labourers he employed. Running such a system came with risks, compounded by the apparent decline of the timber trade itself. The letters he wrote to his brothers in the early 1860s documented the vagaries of the trade, as supplies of goods ran short, the rain necessary to bring down the logs for which advances had been made to labourers failed to materialise, salt-water worm

52 J. Webster to Webster and Patterson, 20 December 1861, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.
53 *Southern Cross*, 7 June 1861, p.2; 15 October 1861, p.3; 6 December 1861, p.5; 17 January 1862, p.3; 28 March 1862, p.3; 8 April 1862, p.5; *Daily Southern Cross*, 25 January 1867, p.4; 4 February 1867, p.3; 1 March 1867, p.4; 6 March 1867, p.4; 23 November 1867, p.2; 6 January 1868, p.2; 20 March 1868, p.2; 7 April 1868, p.2; 2 July 1868, p.2.
54 *Southern Cross*, 29 February 1856, p.2; 20 June 1856, p.2; 22 August 1856, p.2; 19 January 1858, p.2; 13 July 1858, p.3; 12 October 1860, p.2; 21 December 1860, p.2.
55 *Daily Southern Cross*, 31 May 1866, p.4.
56 For an indication of the large quantity of good brought in by the *Lion* see *Daily Southern Cross*, 8 January 1869, p.2.
ate away squared timber as it sat waiting for a ship and as timber-rich grounds became more scarce.\textsuperscript{57} In October 1862 he predicted that the Hokianga timber trade had only another two years to run before finally ‘closing up’.\textsuperscript{58} His pessimism seems to have been borne out by the fact that the number of loads he exported in 1869 stood at 2045, down from the 3600 George Webster claimed his brother was exporting in 1862.\textsuperscript{59} Yet he managed to weather these difficulties, in part by diversifying into wool and the increasingly popular gum industry, and by outlasting the competition. In the middle of the decade a newspaper report used three of his shipping ventures as evidence that there was reason to be optimistic about the future of the Hokianga export industry:

It will be seen from our Hokianga correspondent’s letter that the export trade of that thriving district is increasing steadily. The barque Lion is ready to start for Sydney with a full cargo of New Zealand produce, consisting of gum, timber, and spars. The brig Miranda is taking in cargo for London direct, and, besides spars and timber, will carry a considerable quantity of wool and gum. The brig Deva is likewise under charter to load spars and junk timber for Melbourne, so that it may be anticipated that the trade of this northern port will be large this season.\textsuperscript{60}

By the end of the 1860s it is possible to see that the economic dominance Kohukohu had begun to establish in the 1840s was complete. In the first quarter of 1869, four ships were recorded as clearing outwards for foreign ports; three of these were sent by Webster. In the third quarter of the year only one vessel was recorded, Webster’s barque the Lion.\textsuperscript{61} He was also possibly the single largest employer of labour in Hokianga. One contemporary report estimated that he had at one time employed as many as 700 Maori in the timber forests, although this figure cannot be confirmed.\textsuperscript{62} He did nevertheless employ large parties of Maori labour the length of the river, from

\textsuperscript{57} See, for example, J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 23 September 1861, 21 October 1861, 9 January 1862, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.
\textsuperscript{58} J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 6 October 1862, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum. See also, the evidence of Hugh Carleton and Frederick Maning, Minutes of Evidence Taken before the Public Works Committee, \textit{Votes and Proceedings of the Auckland Provincial Council}, Session 14, 1862, pp.10, 13. These men shared Webster’s pessimism about the future of the trade.
\textsuperscript{59} Adventures and shipments of timber, 1869–1876, NZMS 144, AL.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Daily Southern Cross}, 18 December 1866, p.4. The Miranda and the Deva are recorded in Webster’s ledgers as having been dispatched by him in January and February 1867 respectively. J. Webster, General Accounts Ledger, 1865–69, ET/JW 002, P.D. Stratford private collection, Auckland.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{New Zealand Gazette}, 1868, pp.288, 598; Adventures and shipments of timber, 1869–1876, NZMS 144, AL.
\textsuperscript{62} AJHR, 1870, A-7, p.9.
the heads, to Oir and beyond. In 1858 he employed Maori to fell 81 spars on scrip land at Oir, while in 1862 he recorded, ‘My workers are now within a few miles of Kirikiri [sic], beyond the line of the Waimate. It takes three days for them to pole their canoes up and as they have to make flat canoes on purpose to convey their food you may imagine the disadvantages under which they work.’ That same year he continually harassed his Auckland agents about purchasing cutting rights to timber on Burdekin’s land at Oir, partly as previously mentioned to nullify the threat from Maning, but also because ‘a numerous party of my best workers have been anxiously expecting to work the land in question’ and were ‘now idle from want of timber land to work’. These workers had been given advances of goods and he was now anxious to see a return on his investment.

While in these situations Webster paid Maori in goods for their labour only, on others he paid them for the timber itself, which they cut on their own account from their own land or from government land on which they were given permission to cut following Bell’s commission. In 1861 Webster bought McDonnell’s former block at Horeke, plus another 200 acres, for £250 on behalf of ‘Tipene and his tribe the owners of Wairere … for them to complete their block of land and in order to have a water frontage to the main river’. Tipene and his people repaid Webster the full £250 in timber. There are some indications, however, that by the 1860s Maori were exhausting the timber supplies on their own land, and on those areas of Crown land to which the government was willing to grant them access. Webster’s apparent desperation to secure cutting rights on Burdekin’s land was fuelled by the difficulties of finding easily accessible timber at Hokianga now that much of it had been felled. On more than one occasion he had had to employ Maori labourers to build canals to

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63 J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 6 February 1862, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum
64 Stirling and Towers, p.1189.
65 J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 12 July 1862, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.
67 In fact, Webster reserved the extra 200 acres for himself, in effect getting it at no cost, and possibly viewing this as a commission for his services. J. Webster to A.S. Webster, undated, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum; J. Webster to Webster and Patterson, 20 August 1861, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.
get timber out from difficult sites.\textsuperscript{68} While he had access to the kind of capital reserves needed to pay for these works or for cutting rights, or to buy land outright if necessary, Maori, for reasons that will be discussed more fully in the next section, did not. Faced with dwindling supplies of timber on their own land, they may have had little option but to become labourers for Webster. He indicated as much when he wrote that the unidentified workers he had lined up ready to cut timber on Burdekin’s land had cleared out the kauri on their own land and had no supplies left.\textsuperscript{69}

Webster’s sources of timber also extended to local Pakeha traders, including long-time operator Dennis Cochrane. In 1861 he bought all of Cochrane’s available timber to be turned into sawn flitches for China.\textsuperscript{70} In short, virtually all timber supply channels eventually led to Kohukohu. Together with the establishment of his own sawmill on the land he acquired at Horeke, Webster’s ability to draw on a regular supply of timber from Maori who owed him for the advances he had made, his access to timber supplies from Pakeha sawyers and his capacity to charter ships or export on his own account made him Hokianga’s most economically influential and powerful individual in the 1860s.

But Webster’s position at the top of Hokianga’s economic pile did not isolate him from his immediate surroundings. He may have wanted to see himself as socially apart from those Maori who provided the bulk of his labour force during this period, but by deriving his wealth from the timber trade, he virtually guaranteed that such separation was in some ways unachievable. As Bruce Stirling and Richard Towers have pointed out in their study of scrip claims, timber was as central to the Hokianga economy in the 1850s and 1860s as it had been in the 1830s.\textsuperscript{71} It continued to provide the impetus for economic activity in the area, and it remained the glue that held Maori and Pakeha together, just as it had provided the reason for Pakeha settlement and Maori engagement with Pakeha from the outset. It provided the stage on which collaborative relationships were formed, and these relationships continued to play out

\textsuperscript{68} J. Webster to F.D. Bell, 31 July 1858, OLC 1/519, part 2, ANZW; J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 15 July 1861, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.  
\textsuperscript{69} J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 9 January 1862, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.  
\textsuperscript{70} See, for example, J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 1 July 1861, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.  
\textsuperscript{71} Stirling and Towers, p.1184.
as the mutual reliance that had developed in the 1830s continued into the 1860s.
Webster, possibly to his chagrin, was still reliant on maintaining his personal
relationships with rangatira to secure supplies of labour, even as his economic power
reached its height.

An obvious sign of Webster’s limited ability to merely direct and control timber
activities was the ongoing need for him to accept that the cutting and dragging of logs
would come to a standstill during planting season. Some historians, including Roger
Wigglesworth and Judith Binney, have recorded contemporary accounts that as early
as the 1830s timber cutting was distracting Maori communities from the essential
work of planting crops, and that this was taken as a sign of loss of Maori autonomy
and enslavement to Pakeha traders and the demands of the industry. 72 Webster’s
correspondence in the early 1860s clearly records the opposite, as evidenced by the
following three comments to his brother Alec:

18 November 1861

Our timber operation is at a stand still the natives attending to their crops at
present.

16 December 1861

The natives are not actively engaged at timber just now their crops claiming
their attention.

4 October 1863

The natives are now about to begin potato planting and will consequently
cease timber squaring for a month or 6 weeks with the exception of timber
dragged out and now ready for delivery.

Instead, like the generation of timber traders before him, Webster planned his timber
operations around the agricultural demands of Maori communities. In addition, he
relied on the relationships he had built with rangatira in the 1840s to secure labour,
timber and gum. For example, in 1860 Arama Karaka Pi of Waima, who had been a

72 Judith Binney, ‘Two Communities 1820-1839’, in Judith Binney, Judith Bassett and Erik Olssen,
The People and the Land: Te Tangata me Te Whenua: An Illustrated History of New Zealand
1820–1920, Wellington, 1990, p.22; Roger Wigglesworth, ‘The New Zealand Timber and Flax Trade,
visitor to Rangiora in the 1840s, began organising his people to dig gum for Webster, with Webster recording that ‘Adam Clark [Arama Karaka Pi] is going into Gum extracting for me this season at &10 per ton. He intends to work out all the gum land at once inviting other tribes to assist.’ Following Arama Karaka Pi’s death in 1867, this role seems to have taken on by his widow, Hariata Rongo. The reciprocal relationship between Kohukohu and Waima is also evidenced by the fact that Webster acted as guarantor for a flour mill being built by Arama Karaka Pi in the early 1860s.

The 1860s also saw Webster continue his connection with Nene and Ngati Hao, despite Nene’s removal to the Bay of Islands. In 1860, for example, Webster gave a party of Nene’s people food to the value of £42 to open a stream at Mangataipa. And although Webster did not positively identify the workers he eventually used to cut timber on Burdekin’s land in 1863, it seems likely they were Ngati Hao. The 1280 acres that were granted to Burdekin had been part of a larger area of land under dispute during John White’s 1858 surveys. Along with other leaders, Nene sought to secure timber-cutting rights to government land in the Orira catchment when it became apparent that ownership of any land that was not given to Pakeha grantees would go to the Crown. Bell apparently gave the disaffected rangatira, including Nene, an unofficial undertaking that they would be given access to timber on Crown land in exchange for dropping land disputes. Webster confirmed as much when he wrote ‘I saw old Tamati Waka at the Bay. He told me [he] intended to commence cutting the kauri on Burdekin’s claim. It seems Governor Grey gave them written

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73 J. Webster to A.S Webster, 11 March 1861, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum. See also J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 20 December 1860, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.

74 John Webster to James Clendon, n.d., NZMS 705, series 8 box 1 item 2, AL. This letter appears to have been written between 1867, when Clendon reverted to being a merchant after his role as resident magistrate ended, and 1872, when he died. Hariata Rongo was the daughter of Hongi Hika and a former wife of Hone Heke.

75 Native Secretary’s Office to J. Webster, 30 April 1860, Native Department General English Outward Letterbook, 1858-1860, Micro 6542, ANZW. The mill survived at least until Arama Karaka’s death in 1867. However, the Daily Southern Cross correspondent who accompanied Governor Bowen’s visit to Hokianga in 1870 found it had fallen into disuse. Daily Southern Cross, 5 May 1870, p.4.

76 J. Webster, Day Book 1862-63, ET/JW 001, P.D. Stratford private collection, Auckland.

77 For a request from Nene that he be given access to timber at Umawera, see Nene to Bell [John White’s translation], 6 September 1859, Miscellaneous correspondence about Hokianga claims and their boundaries, 1858–1860, 1865, 1870, OLC 4/11, ANZW. For evidence of Bell’s intention to grant timber rights see Bell to Arama Karaka Pi, 14 September 1860, Miscellaneous correspondence about Hokianga claims and their boundaries, 1858–1860, 1865, 1870, OLC 4/11, ANZW.
permission to cut it as Waka had always claimed the timber separately. Bell admitted the claim when he made the last award to [Francis] White and told the natives he would reserve at least half of the timber for them.\textsuperscript{78} Whether Bell in fact was able to secure timber rights for Nene on Crown land remains unclear, but what is known is that in 1861 Nene sought permission from Burdekin to take timber from his land in return for a five percent royalty. Burdekin declined.\textsuperscript{79} Possibly in anticipation of Burdekin agreeing to the arrangement, and in a broad interpretation of Bell’s undertaking to grant timber rights, Nene appears to have sent a party of workers onto the block to begin cutting. This was suggested by Webster in September 1861 when he wrote that ‘The natives are working on the [Burdekin] Block at present only a small party merely as a native demonstration to see how far they can go. I abstain from advising them & it is uncertain who will ultimately become possessor of the timber.’\textsuperscript{80} When Burdekin refused to give permission to allow Nene to cut the timber himself, it is likely that the workforce turned out for the man who was fortunate enough to secure the sought-after rights: John Webster.

If this was in fact the case, then Webster benefited from Nene’s misfortune and his people’s need for income. However, such an arrangement can also be read as a continuation of the economic relationship that had formed between Nene and George Russell and which Webster inherited, whereby Russell provided timber export opportunities, while Nene and his people provided labour and logs. Like Russell before him, Webster was still reliant on securing Maori labour for his own success, and this could still require him to maintain personal connections with leaders. As argued in previous chapters, Russell and Nene’s business arrangement was initially cemented by the kinship relationship that existed between them, with Nene securing his role as Russell’s patron by allowing Russell to marry one of his female relatives. There is at least one sign that the personal as well as the economic aspect of this relationship continued into the 1860s, and that economic and personal connections were still intertwined. Later in life, Webster recounted how in 1866 Nene had given him a silver cup which George Grey had presented to Nene on behalf of Queen

\textsuperscript{78} J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 1 July 1861, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.  
\textsuperscript{79} Stirling and Towers, p.1215.  
\textsuperscript{80} J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 23 September 1861, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.

Stirling and Towers, p.1215.
Victoria in 1861. The story he tells suggests Webster inherited not only Russell’s economic ties to Maori communities and leaders, but his familial ties and social role as well.

About that time [mid 1860s] I had made a visit to Auckland and I always called on Nene. On this occasion he told me that the Queen’s present was a source of great grief to him for it was causing much dissipation amongst his friends and relatives and told me he was going to take the cup to Hokianga, and would I wait him at his own Kainga at Waihou. This I promised to do. A few weeks afterwards a message came to me from Nene saying he had arrived and would I go and see him at Waihou. I got into a boat with a crew, and pulled up to the settlement, and was welcomed in the usual way. The females waving their mats with the call of Haraemai Haeremai and the men dancing a haka. Nene had brought from Kororareka a tent and in it he sat with the principal members of his Hapu and the Cup of the Queen to Nene was produced from a green bag lined with Chamois Leather.

A discussion about the cup ensued, after which Webster returned home to be visited by Nene the following day:

Next day he came with a fleet of canoes but only himself and his half-brother Turau came to the house at Kohu Kohu where I then resided. Nene brought the Cup with Turau carrying it….

Of course Nene spoke in Maori. He said it was very kind of the Queen to recognise his services by sending him such a beautiful gift but he had no proper house to put it in. I gave a near relation of mine as a wife to your father in law. You have a fine house to display the Cup to Governors and other Rangitirapaheas but it has led my people into dissipation and I wish you to have it and after you your children ake ake.

In Webster’s version of events, Nene made it clear that he was gifting the cup to Webster because of the family connection between them, because Webster’s children would continue that connection, and because Webster had inherited Russell’s ‘fine house’ that would make a fitting repository for a cup that symbolised his political collaboration with empire. In this single act Nene brought together the political, economic and familial connections that lay at the heart of empire’s presence in Hokianga, and in doing so he singled out Webster as representative of those connections. For his part, in accepting the cup and all it represented, Webster may

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81 Undated memo (typescript), Webster family letters relating to Tamati Waka Nene, NZMS 1361, AL. Webster’s recollection includes a signed statement from Nene gifting the cup to Webster for safekeeping, dated 8 May 1866.
have had to acknowledge that the distance he had tried to put between himself and his family on one hand and Maori communities on the other was not as great as he had hoped. His marriage to Emily may have had all the hallmarks of Victorian conformity, but it also brought with it undeniable kinship connections with Maori that continued to be economically, as well as politically and socially, important to his success. Moreover, and no doubt to his chagrin, Webster found that maintaining his standing as Hokianga’s leading economic figure owed as much to his willingness to engage with Maori communities along the river, at Pakanae, Waima and Orira as well as Waihou, at least partly on their terms, as it did to securing international trade routes and clients. The relationships he had formed as Hone Wepiha in the 1840s with leaders such as Arama Karaka Pi and Papahuriha, as well as the connections and networks he inherited from George Russell, were as vital in the 1860s as they had been in earlier decades.

Yet, it was also the case that Webster had a financial hold over those communities that meant that their leaders and members were just as reliant on him for goods and income as he was on them for supplies of labour, timber and gum. When Webster inherited the Kohukohu operation from George Russell, he also took on responsibility for Russell’s debtors. Over the next decade, chasing those debts became an ongoing concern for him, and ultimately allowed him to secure access to land and timber that swung the balance of economic power in his favour. The next section examines the role of debt in the timber and gum industries in the 1850s and 1860s, and considers how it became the leading way in which Webster was able to gain an upper hand in his relationships with Maori communities.

The role of debt
Debt had always played a part in the economic relationships between Maori and Pakeha in Hokianga. In the 1830s economy in which cash was virtually unknown, the advancing of goods by Pakeha in return for Maori labour or timber supplies became a practical way of meeting the needs of both parties. To paraphrase Stirling and Towers, if timber was the weft of the Hokianga economy, then credit was the warp.\(^{82}\) For Maori, the benefit was a semi-regular supply of items that could sustain them through

\(^{82}\) Stirling and Towers, p.1085.
winter; for Pakeha traders, the arrangement meant an almost guaranteed supply of logs and workers, even if they had to wait some time between advance and delivery. Almost from the outset, though, the system led to Pakeha complaints of unpaid debts as timber went undelivered, or at least not delivered in the amounts demanded. In 1847 Webster himself was to be found chasing Pukeroa and his people at Herekino on behalf of Hastings Atkins for outstanding sums to be paid in gum. Also in the 1840s, the missionary William White attempted to claw back what he claimed were thousands of pounds of unpaid debts in the form of land grants.

By the 1860s, cash was becoming more commonplace, but traders like Webster were still making advances in goods to their workers, and complaints about non-payment were becoming more numerous and vociferous. In May 1864 a group of Hokianga settlers wrote to the Native Department expressing concern about ‘the state of natives, refusing to pay debts, etc’. The following month James Clendon, by now stationed at Hokianga as resident magistrate, convened a meeting of chiefs ‘to be held here on the 24th that they might hear the letter [from the Native Secretary] read’, the contents of which urged Maori to ‘extricate themselves from the disgraceful condition [of indebtedness] in which they allow themselves to remain’. Three years later, however, Clendon was still writing to his superiors about complaints of unpaid debts: ‘I regret to say that most of the old chiefs are in debt, some of them very heavily on account of their Tribes, and are but ill disposed to pay them — I have several times called a meeting of the Chiefs and Assessors relative to the claim of some creditor whose wants were pressing — They do not in the least degree deny their debts but seem lukewarm in enforcing payment on part of their people.’ But Clendon was not entirely sympathetic to the creditors’ plight given he then stated that ‘I consider that a great portion of the blame rests on the creditors themselves, who, being perfectly

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83 John Webster, Maori Journal, 13 January 1847, 29 January 1847, NZMS 116, AL.
85 Settlers at Hokianga to Native Department, 18 May 1864, Maori Affairs Inwards Correspondence Register, 1864-65, MA 2/6, ANZW. See also, F.E. Maning to George Grey, 9 May 1864, Grey New Zealand Letters, vol. 22, GLNZ M22, AL, and Colonial Secretary’s Office to R. Hardiman & ors, Native Department General English Outward Letterbook, 1863-64, Micro 6543, ANZW.
86 Native Secretary to Civil Commissioner, 3 June 1864, Civil Commissioner, Bay of Islands, Waimate, Inwards Correspondence, January-September 1864, BBiW 4808 3b, ANZA; Resident Magistrate Hokianga to Civil Commissioner, 20 June 1864, Civil Commissioner, Bay of Islands, Waimate, Inwards Correspondence, January-September 1864, BBiW 4808 3b, ANZA.
aware of the disposition of the Natives generally, make them advances in different articles they require far beyond their ability to liquidate’. 87

It seems unlikely that Webster would have agreed with Clendon’s view of things, given the regular complaints he and other traders, particularly Maning, made about the strain debtors put on their business prospects. The following extracts from Webster’s letters to his brother Alec give a taste of his frustration:

**16 December 1861**

It is very hard work reducing the debts. I mean to have all the principal men together to devise means of getting them to pay up a little better.

**12 July 1862**

The natives are still at work and I have this year to reduce the debt considerably every year the difficulties attending getting a supply of kauri timber increases.

**22 September 1862**

I am closing up with the natives as well as I can but it will be a tedious business, we will loose [sic] a good many debts by deaths this year.

**4 October 1863**

We will I am afraid have to submit ultimately to great losses in native debt but the longer we can carry on the present trades the lighter will be felt the loss. The debts are not again likely to increase but their diminution is wofully [sic] slow we calculate on a recovery of about £500 on this account for the present year.

Maning similarly complained about the difficulties involved in being a creditor: ‘I am endeavouring to get out of what is called “business” and as my native friends here owe me some few thousands of pounds my mental faculties are employed with the great question how best to coax, cajole, Bully or diplomatise them with the honest proceeding of paying their debts.’ 88

In 1864 the two men were indirectly criticised in the press by the Wesleyan missionary Rowse for impoverishing and ‘disheartening’ their Maori labourers by

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87 Resident Magistrate Hokianga to Native Minister, 16 April 1867, Resident Magistrate Hokianga, Letterbooks, 1862-63, 1866-67, qms-0473, ATL.
88 Maning to Grey, 28 February 1863, Grey New Zealand Letters, vol. 22, GLNZ M22, AL.
making them work for goods and clothing at extortionate prices and locking them into a cycle of debt.\textsuperscript{89} Maning responded by saying that any impoverishment Maori were experiencing was of their own making and that ‘the poverty and ill-health fast coming upon them from the ruinous use they are making of spirituous liquors, is the cause of the very marked change for the worse in the condition of the natives. There is no other cause.’ His general line was that their dealings with Pakeha traders were beneficial rather than detrimental to Maori, that the traders provided goods to their clients ‘at a price considerably lower than the same goods could be purchased by the natives for cash in Auckland at the same time at the retail shops’ and that both he and Webster had given their workers quantities of biscuit, sugar and rice for free on those occasions when crops had failed. According to Maning, the only party liable to lose out in the credit arrangement was the trader himself, claiming that ‘if all the debts due to me by the natives are paid, I shall then be just in the position I was when I began business 12 years ago’. Nevertheless, he claimed, he was willing to take this risk for the good of the community, saying that ‘the grand object of the “traders” in wishing to collect debts … is that if we can do so we shall then be able, having abundance of capital for the purpose, to develop the resources of the district largely and profitably, both to the natives and ourselves’.\textsuperscript{90}

Maning’s keenness to paint himself and Webster as selfless communal benefactors does not, however, bear close scrutiny. At one point he stated that ‘the profits in the trade have never depended on the high prices to be obtained from the natives for goods sold them, but on the chances of favourable sales of the timber in foreign countries’. What he failed to state was that the ability to send timber to those foreign ports was dependent on labour supplies secured by credit. And while he rightly claimed that the credit system allowed Maori to gain access to goods which had, by this time, become necessities rather than luxuries, his argument that those goods were offered at prices that did not serve the traders’ interests is not sustainable. In July 1862, Webster wrote to a budding trader at Whangaroa offering advice on how to run his business to best advantage:

\textsuperscript{89} \textit{New Zealander}, 21 July 1864, p.3. Rowse is identified as the writer of the anonymous letter in Colquhoun, p.181.
\textsuperscript{90} \textit{New Zealander}, 31 August 1864, p.3.
I observe that you are giving as much as 4/6 per 100 [superfeet] for squaring I presume you are giving trade & at a good profit[.] If you are paying cash you are giving far more than you ought to do & at the full value of the timber.

I explained to you when here that the Hokianga prices were quite fictitious & although I give in trade apparently 8/- & upwards the timber costs me in reality from 3/6 to 4/6 per hundred supfeet [sic].

The great secret in timber dealing where natives are concerned is to pay them in trade. Your success will depend on that system being carried out. Cash transactions will leave no profit as I find by experience. You may find a little opposition first in giving goods as payment but the natives will accept provided you have the necessities they require.

…

Make your profits out of trade and you may give as high as you please for squaring.91

At the very least, this letter undermines Maning’s claim that traders did not look to make a profit out of providing goods to Maori; in reality it confirms Rowse’s suspicion that traders such as Webster provided goods at overly high prices, thereby exacerbating levels of debt. This negative view was echoed by Brown & Campbell’s business partner James Mackelvie when he wrote ‘everybody tells us that Webster is exceedingly unpopular with the natives as he makes them pay thro the nose for everything £40 a ton for flour for instance’.92

By the mid-1860s, with Maning out of the timber business, Webster had in all probability become the single largest creditor in Hokianga. In a clear sign of Kohukohu’s economic reach, his debtors included many of Hokianga’s leading chiefs, from the length of the river and a range of hapu. Names such as Rangatira Moetara and Kaipo from the Heads; Papahurihia from Omania; Rahiri Raumati, Aperahama Taonui, Mohi Otene, Tamati Waka Nene, Wiremu Waka Turau, Patuone and Wiremu Hopihana from the upper reaches of the Hokianga all appear in Webster’s ledger books, and he corresponded with the people of Waima about recovering debts owed.93

It is no coincidence that many of these chiefs and their hapu were closely associated

91 J. Webster to A.B. Shepherd, 13 July 1862, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.
92 J. Mackelvie to W. Brown, 7 May 1866, Letterbook 1866-1868, Mackelvie Papers, NZMS 199, AL.
93 Letter from Hari Te Kuri, Taheke, to John Webster, 12 August 1867, T.M. Hocken papers, MS 1166, Hocken Library.
with the timber trade, and therefore with the credit arrangement at the heart of the industry. However, rangatira from the north side of the river who had initially been less involved in trade with Pakeha and the timber industry were now also among Webster’s debtors. Men such as Te Rarawa chiefs Wi Tana Papahia, Te Tai Papahia and Te Hira Ngaropo owed him money, and he corresponded with representatives of Te Ihutai at Kohukohu over recovery of debt. Webster’s role as one of Hokianga’s main sources of goods and credit is confirmed by the fact that in 1864 Clendon convened a meeting of chiefs to discuss the debts they owed to Webster and Webster alone. Of course it is possible to argue that the need to call such a meeting, and Webster’s ongoing complaints about the difficulties involved in calling in outstanding payments, indicated his and other traders’ limited powers of coercion over debtors. This argument is supported by an episode which took place in 1864 between Dennis Cochrane on one hand and Wiremu Hopihana on the other. Hopihana had apparently owed Cochrane approximately £40 for at least 12 months. When Cochrane took Hopihana to court to retrieve the amount owed, Hopihana claimed that he had paid it in timber ‘but was obliged to acknowledge that he had received cash for the said logs and had only returned a small portion which appeared to his credit. After two days investigation the court ordered him to pay £33.13.7 (the balance not being proven) and 12/- costs.’ As magistrate, Clendon recommended that Hopihana’s salary as a native assessor be debited until the debt was liquidated, ‘and that he should receive a severe letter of reprimand for his conduct’. A month later, however, Clendon was less sanguine about the case, lamenting that it was one of the worst he had seen, questioning the court’s ability to bring Hopihana to justice and concluding that ‘upon full consideration of the case I cannot recommend it being reopened’.

Countering this evidence, however, are the examples in Webster’s financial records of rangatira being held accountable for, and paying, debts owed by their people. In 1864, for example, a chief named Te Anga paid Webster more than £12 in cash to settle

94 Hone Wepiha [John Webster] to Moanaroa and all chiefs of Te Ihutai, 9 August 1869, Clendon House Archive, NZMS 705, box 2 folder 19, AL.
95 Resident Magistrate Hokianga to Civil Commissioner, 20 June 1864, Civil Commissioner, Bay of Islands, Waimate, Inwards Correspondence, January-September 1864, BBIW 4808 3b, ANZA.
96 Resident Magistrate Hokianga to Civil Commissioner, 23 December 1864, Civil Commissioner, Bay of Islands, Waimate, Inwards Correspondence, September-December 1864, BBIW 4808 4a, ANZA; Resident Magistrate Hokianga to Civil Commissioner, 24 January 1865, Civil Commissioner, Bay of Islands, Waimate, Inwards Correspondence, January-December 1865, BBIW 4808 4b, ANZA.
debts incurred by four men, while in the same year the apparently recalcitrant Wi Hopihana paid £2 on behalf of Tamati Te Arakau, £3 for Hone Tau and £4 for Hemi Te Kuri. Hazel Petrie has argued that in early colonial period some individuals within Maori society took advantage of the ‘apparent benefits offered by Pākehā systems’ and engaged with Pakeha on their own account, independent of chiefly authority, while chiefs still had to maintain their responsibility to provide for their people. Although Webster’s financial records provide debtors’ names, they do not readily allow the circumstances in which individuals became indebted to be identified. However, it is possible to speculate that some lower-ranking Maori were working for Webster and incurring debts to him independent of their leaders. When debts went unpaid, chiefs such as Wi Hopihana and Te Anga found themselves caught between the new-found independence of some of their people and their ongoing obligations as chiefs, and accepted the responsibility of debt repayment both for themselves and their people.

A clear connection between chiefs’ actions and the burden of responsibility that debts placed on them is seen in the decisions they made to sell land. In 1864 Te Tai Papahia wrote to James Clendon ‘requesting permission to sell a piece of land to Mr John Webster to enable them to pay their debts to him which have been owing for several years and amounting to several hundred pounds, and to suggest that the land should be purchased as they have not any other means of paying their debts’. Clendon noted that he had received a similar request from Aperahama Taonui of Te Popoto. Given that Crown pre-emption was still in place, these rangatira were, for the time being, prevented from selling directly to creditors as a means of liquidating debt. They could, however, sell land to the Crown for this purpose, and Clendon’s correspondence provides evidence that by the 1860s this was happening. In July 1864 he noted Nene’s decision to offer land to the government at Waihou and Okaihau in order to settle debts he owed to Maning. In a letter to George Clarke, the civil commissioner at Waimate, he suggested that ‘the payment for one side of Waihou belonging to Wiremu Hopihona Te Taonui and their tribes should be retained for Mr

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97 J. Webster, Day Book 1862-63[?], ET/JW 001, P.D. Stratford private collection, Auckland.
99 Resident Magistrate Hokianga to Civil Commissioner, 9 July 1864, Civil Commissioner, Bay of Islands, Waimate, Inwards Correspondence, January-September 1864, BBFW 4808 3b, ANZA.
John Webster to whom they have been indebted to the extent of upwards of seven hundred pounds for several years’.  

Generally speaking, though, the Crown’s interest in purchasing land at Hokianga remained minimal, as available money was spent on buying land closer to Auckland. But while the Crown was short of funds it was not short of ambition for land tenure reform throughout the country, driven by war in Waikato and Taranaki. The Crown’s response to Te Tai’s and Aperahama Taonui’s request to sell land directly to Webster had been to urge them to wait for the planned establishment of a land court ‘to which application may be referred’. David V. Williams has argued that the establishment of the Native Land Court in 1865 was the result not merely of the government’s desire to extend the system of individual land tenure to all New Zealand inhabitants, but to separate Maori from their land with the hope of promoting closer Pakeha settlement. The advice to Te Tai and Aperahama Taonui that they should use the court to sell land for debt liquidation bears out this assertion.

Men such as Maning and Webster publicly supported the court on the grounds that Crown grants would benefit Maori communities by freeing them from the economically stultifying ‘evil consequences of the Maori system of holding land in common’ and encouraging them to develop ‘waste’ land into economic units. In practice, the real benefit they saw the court as delivering was the individualisation of titles which could then be sold to Pakeha settlers to foster the type of ‘progress’ that will be discussed in more detail in chapter seven, or to free up cash for debt repayment. Together, the two men, who by now had resolved their personal differences, became driving forces behind the operation of the court in Hokianga. Maning’s role was the more obvious, following his appointment as a Native Land Court judge in November 1865. But an examination of the blocks brought before the

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100 Resident Magistrate Hokianga to Civil Commissioner, 4 July 1864, Civil Commissioner, Bay of Islands, Waiariki, Inwards Correspondence, January-September 1864, BBIW 4808 3b, ANZA.
101 Colonial Secretary’s Office to Civil Commissioner Waiariki, 4 August 1864, Native Department Outward Letterbook to Resident Magistrates and Civil Commissioners, 1863-1864, Micro 6621, ANZW.
103 Maning to Chief Judge Native Land Court, 21 April 1866, BBOP 4309 2a-12 1866/670, ANZA. See also, F.E. Maning to D. McLean, 17 May 1870, Donald McLean Papers, Inwards letters, F.E. Maning, MS-Papers-0032-0444, ATL.
court in its first five years of operation suggests that Webster was also an influential figure.

As noted earlier in this chapter most of the land blocks taken before the court in the early years of its operation were smaller than 100 acres, and it is likely that Crown grants were sought for these pieces of land as a way of securing rights to land that served an important communal or family purpose. A somewhat different pattern emerges when the remaining blocks, those over 100 acres, are examined. Of the 30 blocks in this category, 10 had been sold by 1876, while another three had been sold by 1886. There is evidence to suggest that these larger blocks were taken to the court for the purpose of sale and that the number of sales might have been greater if more purchasers had been available. For instance, in 1867 Patuone, Nene and Wiremu Hau, along with three other chiefs, received a Crown grant for the Waitaroto block and almost immediately offered it for sale. There were no bidders, although the block was later sold to the Crown in 1875.  

A motivation for sale is suggested when the names of those chiefs who received grants for these blocks is compared to the list of Webster’s debtors. Of the 81 chiefs who can be identified as receiving Crown grants for land blocks in excess of 100 acres between 1865 and 1870, 26, or just under one-third, also appear in Webster’s ledger books as debtors during the 1860s. The relationship between land sale and debt to Webster is most evident in the case of Ngati Hao. In 1865 Nene and his brother Wiremu Waka Turau, along with six other chiefs including Hohaia Whango, were given a Crown grant for the 565-acre Wahamarangai block at Waihou. This land subsequently passed to Webster, and in his ledgers Webster noted in 1866 that the accounts for both Wiremu Waka Turau and Hohaia Whango had been ‘settled at the Wahamarangai land’.  

A more speculative connection between debt to Webster and a desire to sell land can be gleaned by looking at the location of some of the earliest blocks taken to the Native Land Court. Four of the first 15 large blocks taken to the court during 1865-67 bounded land already owned by Webster at Waihou, Oria, Omanaia and Opononi, and the grantees for each of these blocks included chiefs who owed Webster money, including Nene, Papahuriha, Wiremu Hopihana, Aperahama

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104 Daily Southern Cross, 14 August 1867, p.4.
105 J. Webster, Day Book 1862-63[?], ET/JW 001, P.D. Stratford private collection, Auckland.
Taonui, Te Anga, Te Tai Papahia and Rangatira Moetara. Webster became the owner of only one of these pieces of land: Taumatawiwi at Opononi, which he bought in May 1866 from Te Anga, Te Tai and Rangatira Moetara, and where he built a new home on the waterfront. However, the location of the rest of them, two in the forest-rich upper reaches of the Hokianga and the other next to Webster’s farm at Herd’s Point on the Omanaia River, suggest the possibility that the blocks were initially taken to the court with the view to either selling them directly to Webster at a bargain rate, or selling them to the Crown so that Webster might reclaim his debt and then apply for cutting rights.

Of course, it is also possible to see the desire to take land to the Native Land Court as a continuation of other longstanding, complex trends, including inter-hapu rivalry, as well as a means of debt settlement. Maning’s correspondence as Native Land Court judge regularly recorded that the court was being used as a forum to thrash out disputed claims to land, such as the competing claims of Wiremu Pou and Pehikuru to land at Otaua, in much the same way as John White’s investigations had provided an arena in which disputes were revisited in the 1850s. Meanwhile, a chief such as Arama Karaka Pi may have been willing to support the court on the grounds that he had for some time seen survey as a way to settle disputed boundaries, and to ‘reduce intertribal and intratribal rivalries so that rangatira could better manage hapu lands, maintain rangatiratanga and avoid the rapid alienation of lands’. In addition to using the court as a forum to resolve disputes, some leaders may have also seen it as a new way of engaging with the Crown. It is telling that the overwhelming majority of land blocks taken before the court in its first five years of operation in Hokianga were

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106 The full list of vendors was Tamaho Te Anga, Te Tai Papahia, Rangatira Moetara, Te Tahaua Marupoa, all of whom were Webster’s debtors. Deed of Conveyance, Tamaho Te Anga et al to J. Webster 1866, ET/LT 002, P.D. Stratford private collection, Auckland. Construction of the house pre-dated the land purchase by at least five years, which suggests that Webster had a pre-existing interest in the land which was later formalised following the abolition of Crown pre-emption. See J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 1 July 1861, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.

107 Maning to Chief Judge Native Land Court, 21 April 1866, BBOP 4309 2a-12 1866/670, ANZA. See also Wiremu Pou to Civil Commissioner (translation), 26 October 1864, Civil Commissioner, Bay of Islands, Waimate, Inwards Correspondence, September-December 1864, BBIW 4808 4a, ANZA.

108 Arama Karaka Pi to Civil Commissioner, 21 November 1864, Civil Commissioner, Bay of Islands, Waimate, Inwards Correspondence, September-December 1864, BBIW 4808 4a, ANZA; R.A. Fairburn to Civil Commissioner, 16 May 1864, Civil Commissioner, Bay of Islands, Waimate, Inwards Correspondence, January-September 1864, BBIW 4808 3b, ANZA; Resident Magistrate Hokianga, Report of a meeting of natives at Waima Hokianga called on the 8th September 1863, Civil Commissioner, Bay of Islands, Waimate, Inwards Correspondence, August-December 1863, BBIW 4808 3a, ANZA; Williams, p.91.
on the south side of the river, where Nga Puhi leaders situated on timber-rich lands
had been amongst the earliest supporters of Pakeha settlement, and of the Crown. It is
perhaps also significant that two years before the introduction of the court, a meeting
convened by Arama Karaka Pi to settle boundary disputes with neighbouring hapu in
order to secure land deeds over his land at Waima ended with various leaders,
including Wiremu Waka Turau, restating their allegiance to the Queen and their
support for Pakeha.\textsuperscript{109} At this meeting issues of land tenure and political affiliation
were inseparable.

However, when external factors intervened, a desire to determine title and further
political affiliations could turn into a need to sell. As historians such as Angela
Ballara have argued, land alienation was the result of a combination of factors,
including the debts that had been incurred as a consequence of involvement with
Pakeha traders. As Ballara says of the situation in New Zealand as a whole, ‘colonial
society imported its economic system from the mother country, and it was the Maori
landowners’ entrenched involvement in this new economic order which inveigled
them into an inflationary spiral of trading, debt-incurrence, land-alienation, further
purchasing, further debts and further land sales or leases’.\textsuperscript{110} In Hokianga, it was those
chiefs on the south side of the river who had engaged most closely with empire who
were also most likely to take land to the Native Land Court in the first place and then
offer it for sale. Their longstanding collaboration with the Crown and with Pakeha
traders, dating back to the early 1830s, meant they were more deeply involved in the
emerging economy and more susceptible to the cycle of debt, more likely to engage
with mechanisms of the Crown as a way of settling inter-hapu political tensions and
therefore more likely to take land to the court. These factors taken together made
them more likely to lose land following the individualisation of title. That the actual
amount of land sold during the 1860s was not greater was the result of a lack of
interest in purchasing on the part of the government, a situation which, as will be seen
in chapter seven, changed in the 1870s.

\textsuperscript{109} Resident Magistrate Hokianga, Report of a meeting of natives at Waima Hokianga called on the 8th
September 1863, Civil Commissioner, Bay of Islands, Waimate, Inwards Correspondence, August-
December 1863, BBIW 4808 3a, ANZA.
\textsuperscript{110} Angela Ballara, ‘The Pursuit of Mana?: A Re-evaluation of the Process of Land Alienation by
The link between longstanding personal and commercial collaboration, debt and ultimately land loss is clearly reflected in the experience of John Webster. The personal connections he had formed with rangatira such as Papahurihia and Arama Karaka Pi through his small-time trading ventures in the 1840s had been extended by his marriage to Emily Russell and his subsequent inheritance of George Russell’s role, which consolidated his link to Ngati Hao and gave him access to the vital economic relationships which had existed between Russell and the hapu, and with Nene in particular. Meanwhile, his emergence as the most important trader on the river meant that he was able to attract and retain economic relationships with rangatira from other hapu the length of the river such as Rangatira Moetara, who had a long history of welcoming trade with and promoting settlement by Pakeha and who was now enmeshed in the new economic order that Webster represented. These personal and economic connections continued to be central to Webster’s commercial success, and they required him to demonstrate an ongoing willingness to bend to the demands of Maori communities. But they also became the conduit for indebtedness on the part of Maori and became a driving force behind attempts to sell individualised titles from 1865. In this way, the collaborative relationships and identities created in the 1830s, and which Webster had either formed himself in the 1840s or had inherited from earlier traders, became the means by which the balance of economic power between Maori and Pakeha most obviously shifted in this period. While Webster still found himself entangled with Maori kin and may have been frustrated by his inability to fully assert social separation and independence from them, it was through these relationships and entanglements that he gained an economic upper hand over Maori communities and their leaders. Paradoxically, Webster’s real influence came not by achieving independence from Maori but from maintaining familial and personal relationships with them, and it was these collaborative relationships that became the most important transfer points of economic power in the 1860s.
Chapter Six

War and Politics in the 1860s

Throughout the colony, the 1860s was a time of apprehension as war between the Crown and ‘rebel’ Maori raged in Taranaki and Waikato. In Hokianga these national tensions were compounded by the eruption of longstanding local disputes between competing hapu. For settlers like John Webster these events came as a direct challenge to the establishment of British law they fervently wished for and which they believed was part of the rightful order of things. But these same events presented Webster with an opportunity. While Maori remained to some extent beyond the pale of British authority, he was able to present himself as the man on the spot who could ‘muster’ and ‘deliver’ Nga Puhi support for the government. This was the central paradox that lay at the heart of Webster’s political ambitions, and at the centre of his evolving imperial identity: at the same time as he was expressing increasingly virulent opinions about Maori and trying to separate himself from them socially, any political influence he might have enjoyed depended on his connection to and ‘knowledge’ of the very people he was coming to despise.

The chapter looks at how, in a pattern that dated back to the 1840s, Webster bolstered his imperial identity by portraying himself as a controller and director of Maori, and at how he sought political influence on this basis. It examines his efforts in three specific arenas: during the wars in Waikato and Taranaki, through political institutions, and as an apparent participant in the arrest of Heremia Te Wake for murder in 1868. It considers how he conducted and presented himself in each of these arenas and asks whether his influence was authentic or illusory. Ultimately it seeks to understand how much political authority Webster really had and whether his political actions were as influential as his economic role. It also considers what these actions say about his relationship with Maori, and about the balance of political power between Hokianga Maori and Pakeha colonial society generally.
**War in the south**

The wars that began in Taranaki in 1860 following the disputed purchase of land at Waitara and which extended to Waikato in July 1863 were the earliest and most far reaching of the events to be examined in this chapter. Although they occurred some distance from Hokianga, they elicited strong local responses from both Maori and Pakeha. Pakeha settlers in Hokianga, as elsewhere in the country, saw them as a threat to the expansion of colonial society and to their dreams of national prosperity. Webster shared this view with his fellow settlers. He worried about the effect that war could have on his economic well-being and on the future of Pakeha settlement. At the same time, however, he saw it as an opportunity to bolster his reputation by demonstrating to the colonial powers his apparent influence over Maori. This section examines Webster’s response to war in the south and looks at how he attempted to use it to his political and personal advantage.

Webster’s initial reaction to war at Taranaki was to see it as a business risk. In 1860 he wrote to his brother Alec that ‘we have no news from the seat of war but there is general feeling of uneasiness amongst all classes’. He was particularly concerned about the prospect of Nga Puhi offering their services to the government and of that offer being accepted, thereby robbing him of his labour force. In 1861 he wrote that ‘Tamati Waka’s calling for volunteers to assist the Govt against Waikato under these circumstances our affairs look very gloomy here …. I will leave no stone unturned to prevent our labourers turning their axes into muskets and if the Govt insist upon having their services I will endeavour to get compensation or otherwise I think I will have influence enough over the natives to retain them in Hokianga. I have already made the stipulation with a number of chiefs that none of their people will volunteer who are in debt unless the Govt first of all guarantees the payment of such debts.’

This did not mean that he was not fully supportive of the government’s action against

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1 J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 7 November 1860, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.
2 J. Webster to A.S. Webster, n.d. 1861, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum. Webster’s reference to Waikato here seems to be an allusion to the involvement of some Kingitanga followers in the Taranaki war, given that war in Waikato itself was still two years away. It might also reflect Webster’s belief that the Waikato-based King movement was to blame for all armed action against the Crown.
Taranaki Maori and, later, the Waikato-based Kingitanga; he just wanted victory to come at no expense to himself. In fact, like growing numbers of settlers across the country, he was keen to see the so-called Maori rebels crushed, and the language he used in this regard became increasingly vehement and uncompromising. He expressed concern that ‘the present rebellion may end as did that of ’45 without any result but in leaving an indelible stain on the Character of our troops & nation’, and stated that he had ‘no faith in a permanent peace unless the Maoris get a second drubbing’. Here he can be seen as expressing a sentiment similar to that of Frederick Maning, who repeatedly wrote to Donald McLean and others that no peace would be had in New Zealand until Maori had been subjugated to the Pakeha will. In 1861, for example, he told McLean that war was ‘the price at which we must purchase security and the Queens [sic] supremacy in New Zealand’, and in 1863 he wrote to newspaper editor Hugh Lusk that ‘to call this a British Colony is a mere humbug, until the natives are conquered, & nothing but an aggressive war on our part can conquer them. As soon as we have men we should march into Waikato & seize the country, destroy all cultivations everywhere & all cattle & every means of subsistence.’

The hardening attitudes expressed by both men can be set against a global background of imperial politics and thought. Historians including Catherine Hall have pointed to events such as the ‘Indian Mutiny’ of 1857 and the rebellion in Jamaica in 1865 as watersheds in the development of racial thinking across the empire, in the metropole as well as at the peripheries. The dream of an empire of inclusion where the people of the world could be ‘improved’ by their interaction with the civilising forces of British society seemed distant and increasingly delusional as those very people sought to

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3 Kingitanga was a political movement which started in the 1850s, and which led to the appointment of a King in 1858. Its original aim was to prevent the alienation of land. It was, and still is, based in Waikato but drew support from other areas also.


5 J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 7 November 1860, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.

6 J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 19 August 1861, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.

7 F.E. Maning to D. McLean, 24 July 1861, Donald McLean Papers, Inwards letters, F.E. Maning, MS-Papers-0032-0444, ATL; F.E. Maning to H. Lusk, 18 July 1863, Grey New Zealand Letters, vol. 22, GLNZ M22, AL.
resist the arrival and mechanics of empire. The wars that took place in New Zealand also counted among the events that fuelled a changing view of indigenous peoples, who more and more went from being worthy of salvation to deserving of subjugation.

For Webster and Maning, these international changes in attitude were magnified by local conditions in Hokianga. As first Taranaki and then Waikato Maori violently resisted the imposition of British systems of rule, some Hokianga settlers were reminded that their concerns about the power of English law in their own backyard had not yet been resolved. Just as they had since the early 1840s, men such as Webster and Maning bemoaned the fact that Hokianga Maori often remained beyond the reach of the law. This view was exacerbated by serious fighting which took place in 1862 between factions led by Mangakahia chief Tirarau and Matiu of Otaua. The dispute threatened to engulf hapu throughout Hokianga, as Arama Karaka Pi left to settle the score with Tirarau, the man who had killed his father 20 years earlier, and Te Tai Papahia talked of going to join Tirarau. Meanwhile, the Pakeha authorities, such as Resident Magistrate Clendon, were at a loss to stop the conflict. In Webster’s mind, events such as this coalesced with those further south, so that ‘I can see no great difference between our northern natives and the southern rebels, they all equally ignore our laws except where their own ends are benefited and the day must come when Ngapuhi as well as Waikato must be brought to their proper level’. For him, the ineffectiveness of men like Clendon was mirrored in the apparent pandering of the recently returned Governor Grey to the leaders of the Kingitanga at the end of 1861: ‘The Governor is gone to Waikato which is rather a humiliating step and I almost hope he will be insulted by the hopeful aborigines. Kindness will never do with natives. We are waiting the issue of the grand experiment as to whether natives really

9 See Resident Magistrate Hokianga to Civil Commissioner Waimate, 14 May 1862, 29 May 1862, 9 June 1862, 11 July 1862, Resident Magistrate Hokianga, Letterbooks, 1862-63, 1866-67, qms-0473, ATL. See also, Ward, pp.139-40.
10 J. Webster to Webster & Patterson, 1 July 1861, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.
and truly desire law and order of their own accord. I for one don’t believe it and I have an opportunity of seeing behind the scenes.’

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, it was the apparent failure of Maori to adopt what Webster believed to be sufficient attributes of civilisation that in part led him to wishfully and incorrectly tell the 1856 Board of Enquiry into ‘subjects connected with the Native race’ that Maori were now in decline, and that prompted him to seek to separate himself from them socially. This same apparent failure fuelled his increasingly vehement resentment towards them in the 1860s as they continued to live to some degree according to their own mores. Paradoxically, though, at the same time as he sought to distance himself from people towards whom he expressed growing levels of anger, he also saw those people as allies in a joint Hokianga offer to take on the ‘rebels’ made to the government. The reason for this was that, while he might not have welcomed Maori as kin, he was willing to portray them as being subordinates under his sway for the advancement of his reputation in colonial political circles.

At some point in either 1860 or 1861, Webster seems to have had a change of heart about the advisability of Hokianga Maori becoming involved in the Taranaki war. Sometime before Grey’s reappointment as governor in late 1861, he and Maning went to Auckland in the company of various chiefs apparently to offer the services of those leaders and their people to the government in the war against Taranaki. In old age he recounted this trip to Thomas Hocken as follows:

I don’t know if you are aware that Maning and I offered the services of the Ngapuhi & Rarawa tribes to settle the Waikato question[..] Gore Browne during Weld’s ministry accepted their services & our tribes were eager for the fray[..] Sir George Grey’s advent upset all our plans[..] Our tribes would have saved the country millions of money & loss of European lives & done more than Cameron with his 10,000 men could do.12

He sent a similar account to John Logan Campbell in 1908:

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11 J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 16 December 1861, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.
12 J. Webster to T. Hocken, 15 August 1906, MS-0050, Hocken Library. There are several historical inaccuracies in this statement. The Waikato war did not begin until 1863, two years after the end of Gore Browne’s governorship, although again it is possible that Webster was referring to the King movement generally when he used the term ‘Waikato question’. Secondly, Weld did not become premier until 1865, although he was a key member of the Stafford ministry, which ended in July 1861 and with whom the Hokianga party probably dealt.
I had come [to Auckland for a ball given in Governor Gore Browne’s honour] from Hokianga with some native chiefs to offer the services of the Ngapuhi Tribes in order to quell the disturbance, for the Ngapuhi looked with contempt on the Waikato peoples & called them their leavings in 1859. Maning also came up & offered the services of the Rarawa Tribe.

I had an interview with Weld (who was the premier) & the Governor who was then anxious over the matter & was glad to have the assistance of the Ngapuhi warriors. The Government was to furnish steamers and take the contingents down both coasts. The plan would have saved an enormous expenditure & saved the country millions of money. The chiefs I had with me were “Nene” (Tamati Waka), Te Atua Wera, Wi Tana Papahia, & another Ngapuhi chief.13

A visit to Auckland is confirmed by Maning in a letter to McLean in August 1861, although he does not mention Webster as being a member of the party.14 Although Webster implies that the two men went to Auckland together, it seems more likely that they went separately in the company of different chiefs. In fact it was at this time that the two men had the serious falling out that led to Maning calling Webster a ‘very little minded spitefull man’ who lost ‘no opportunity to injure or annoy me and sticks at nothing to accomplish this… a “lowland loon” who has a great wish to be thought somebody’.15 It also seems probable that it was their shared and competing desire to promote themselves as the man capable of ‘calling out the natives’ that led to the breakdown in their friendship. Maning had always promoted himself as someone who understood the ‘Maori mind’ and who had a real understanding of the relationship between Maori and Pakeha, as evidenced by his writings, such as his book The War in the North. He had also prided himself as being someone the government turned to for advice on ‘native matters’, and he had been one of the recipients of Governor Gore Browne’s questionnaire on the advisability of allowing the settler government to administer Maori interests.16 More than this, he claimed to have real power over Maori. In May 1861 he wrote to McLean on the subject of the war and claimed that ‘the whole able bodied population of Hokianga and also the whole of the Rarawa along the north west coast as far as Mongonui [sic] are ready to turn out when called upon by the Governor to do so — I could turn out every mothers [sic] son of the

13 J. Webster to J.L. Campbell, 21 December 1908, Letters of John Webster to John Logan Campbell, Campbell papers, MS 51, Box 2, item 93B, AWML.
14 F.E. Maning to D. McLean, 18 August 1861, Donald McLean Papers, Inwards letters, F.E. Maning, MS-Papers-0032-0444, ATL.
15 ibid.
Hokianga scoundrels myself in eight hours’, and ‘there is no doubt in my mind whatever that without any delay the natives can be raised when wanted and I guarantee those under my immediate mesmerism’.\textsuperscript{17} McLean seems to have been disposed to believe Maning’s claims. In 1858 he had described Maning as ‘one of those highly intelligent men who is most liberal to the natives and spends largely among them giving them profuse feasts and at the same time keeping them at a good distance a man who … understands the native question most thoroughly’.\textsuperscript{18}

Webster, too, made claims about his ability to control Maori: in December 1862 he told Alec that ‘I still personally hold the natives together pretty well but for how long I can’t say’.\textsuperscript{19} His new position as George Russell’s successor also gave him the advantage of being more closely connected, both personally and professionally, to the upriver Hokianga chiefs most well known to the colonial authorities, such as Nene, Mohi Tawhai and Arama Karaka Pi. Maning, at this stage, was more closely aligned with younger Te Rarawa chiefs such as Te Tai Papahia and Te Hira Ngaropo, and it was these younger men whom he accompanied to Auckland. Maning’s decision to align himself with these chiefs, despite his long association with their rivals, Te Hikutu, perhaps reflected his declining status as a trader, as older Nga Puhi rangatira, more practised in the ways of the timber industry, associated more with Kohukohu than with Onoke.\textsuperscript{20} For their part the younger Te Rarawa chiefs, despite having the economic ties to Webster discussed in chapter five, may have been willing to accompany Maning as part of a political gesture to the government that differentiated them from older Nga Puhi chiefs. For Maning, though, the move backfired. As David Colquhoun argued, when it came to visiting Auckland and talking to the governor, Webster’s closer relationship with chiefs the government was more likely to take seriously meant that he ‘probably took over the role Maning wanted to play’.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{17} F.E. Maning to D. McLean, 27 May 1861, Donald McLean Papers, Inwards letters, F.E. Maning, MS-Papers-0032-0444, ATL.
\textsuperscript{18} Donald McLean Journal, 1858, MS-1209, ATL.
\textsuperscript{19} J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 19 December 1862, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.
\textsuperscript{20} In August 1861, just after his trip to Auckland, Maning wrote to McLean saying that he believed young chiefs like Te Tai Papahia had more influence in Hokianga than older rangatira such as Rangatira Moetara and Arama Karaka Pi. This letter, which was written out of anger following his treatment in Auckland, reflects his increasing distance from the older Nga Puhi chiefs and his desperation to still be seen as relevant by colonial officials. F.E. Maning to D. McLean, 18 August 1861, Donald McLean Papers, Inwards letters, F.E. Maning, MS-Papers-0032-0444, ATL.
\textsuperscript{21} Colquhoun, p.170.
Webster, Nene and other chiefs who had supported the government during the Northern War at least got in to see Weld and Gore Browne, men such as Te Tai Papahia, whose hapu had remained neutral and were therefore less trusted, were turned away.\textsuperscript{22} Maning’s tendency to see this as a personal slap in the face was compounded by Webster’s unabashed willingness to denigrate his former friend’s influence with Maori in the circles of power. Maning complained bitterly to McLean that Webster had made false representations to this effect, and based on Webster’s correspondence, Maning’s suspicions were not unfounded: ‘I hear Maning is in Auckland & no doubt he will be talking very tall, but if he induces the Governor to believe any of his nonsense for I hear he gives out in Auckland “that he can command the Ngapuhi” the whole thing will be a failure. Maning has no influence in the Hokianga it is the nature of the man to boast & he actually believes his own lies at least it seems so.’\textsuperscript{23}

Although, in the end, neither man could claim that he convinced the government to use Hokianga Maori against those hapu fighting the Crown, their attempts to do so and the resulting collapse of their friendship says much about how they saw themselves and how they wished to be seen by colonial society. While both men were increasingly anxious to distance themselves and their families on a personal level from Maori and to remove the obligations of kinship with Maori from their lives, they were equally keen to promote themselves to colonial authorities as men who ‘knew’ and ‘understood’ Maori. This was not to be seen as a relationship of equals, however, but as one of master and servant. Webster and Maning wanted to be viewed as men whose knowledge of Maori enabled them to control the people among whom they lived; it was this knowledge that would make them valuable in a Pakeha society still struggling to establish itself among its equally numerous and apparently troublesome Maori compatriots. And it was this fierce competition to be seen as Hokianga’s leading ‘knower’ of Maori, exacerbated by their rivalry in the timber trade and by their shared sense of self-importance and social ambition, that fractured their friendship.

\textsuperscript{22} F.E. Maning to D. McLean, 18 August 1861, Donald McLean Papers, Inwards letters, F.E. Maning, MS-Papers-0032-0444, ATL.

\textsuperscript{23} J. Webster to W. Aitken, 15 July 1861, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum. Emphasis in original.
Webster’s eagerness to portray himself as an important link to and controller of Maori was given free rein on those occasions when government officials came to Hokianga. From the late 1850s Kohukohu became a destination for governors and native secretaries on their visits to the north, and Webster acted as a conduit to those chiefs the government saw as being loyal and of use. In 1858 Donald McLean spent Christmas Day with the Webster family at Kohukohu, and during his stay he received visits from Arama Karaka Pi, Taonui and Aperahama Taonui in their capacities not only as chiefs but also as government assessors. On that occasion Webster’s efforts to impress McLean with his influence over Maori worked. McLean described his host as ‘a pleasing well informed kind hearted person who had great influence with the natives and deservedly so as he appears to treat them with firmness and justice in his dealings which are very extensive’.  

Earlier that year Webster had welcomed Governor Gore Browne to Kohukohu with a 17-gun salute, before a meeting with chiefs at Mangungu the next day. And in 1861 he hosted a party that included Governor George Grey, General Duncan Cameron and the colonial secretary. This occasion, in particular, allowed him to display himself to officials as a man with connections to influential Maori, as recorded by the Southern Cross:

The following morning the party proceeded on horseback to Hokianga, when on one of the tributary creeks of that noble river, they were met by J. Webster, Esq., and a fleet of boats manned by fine crews of Natives and Half-castes. They, then proceeded to Mr Webster’s beautiful residence, the very beau ideal of a colonial home, standing on a jutting headland, embosomed in the greenest and most lovely foliage, and approached through hedgerows or roses, geraniums, and other bright flowers of spring. A salute from two big guns, followed by a feu-de-joie from some 200 fowling pieces and other arms, announced his Excellency’s arrival, and the whole party, amounting to some twenty in number, became Mr Webster’s guests during their stay on the river….business was postponed till the Tuesday morning, when His Excellency proceeded to Herd’s Point, about two miles lower down the river. Here at least 1,500 Natives were assembled, and on his Excellency’s boat approaching the shore, a mock war-dance was executed with all the vigour, noise and gesture, which usually accompany that remarkable species of welcome. … Very full explanations given by his Excellency evoked much

24 Donald McLean Papers, Diary and notebook, 25 December 1858 & 28 December 1858, MS-1209, ATL.
25 ibid., 25 December 1858.
26 Southern Cross, 22 January 1858, p.2.
discussion, led by Arama Karaka and other principal chiefs. Towards sunset the meeting broke up, and his Excellency’s party returned to Mr Webster’s.  

Webster used these occasions to parade his wealth and his influence in the district to dignitaries, employing the guns he had acquired from McDonnell’s Horeke property and his ‘beautiful residence’ to make his point. He also seems to have given government officials and other visitors the impression that he had effectively summoned the boats of ‘natives and half-castes’ that helped welcome them. This allowed Kohukohu to become not only a pleasant place to lay one’s head but a vital entry point to Maori communities and leaders, and its owner to become a man of political importance.

In a way, Webster’s desire that Kohukohu should be a meeting place for Pakeha government and some factions of Maori leadership was fulfilled, in that his house provided a focal point for interaction between leaders from both sides. But those gatherings were not the result of his ‘summoning’ Maori, in the same way that leaders such as Nene had not offered their services to the government during wartime because they had been ‘mustered’ by Webster. The meetings that took place at Hokianga between the government and Maori were instead a continuation of the relationship that had existed between some leaders and government representatives since even before the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. Men like Donald McLean went to Hokianga to reaffirm connections with rangatira such as Nene that dated back 30 years to the days of James Busby and the Declaration of Independence. In return, rangatira met with the government to confirm relationships with the Crown that had been strained by more than a decade of neglect following the government’s withdrawal from the north after 1846 and then by the Bell surveys in the late 1850s. Throughout the 1860s, the desire to collaborate with the Crown and Pakeha that had motivated many Hokianga leaders for decades persisted, with men such as Mohi Tawhai continuing to push for towns to be established and more settlers to come to Hokianga in the hope of securing economic gains for his people and others assuring the government of their ongoing support. This was also a large part of the reason

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27 *Southern Cross*, 19 November 1861, p.4.
28 See, for example, Mr Gorst’s notes on speeches made by the Governor at Kororareka, etc, 1861, MA 1 1861/150, ANZW; Mohi Tawhai to Grey, 20 May 1863, G 13 54, ANZW; Aperahama Taonui and others to Grey, 28 May 1863, G 13 64, ANZW; Aperahama Taonui and Penetana Papahuriria to Civil Commissioner Waimate, 5 June 1865, Civil Commissioner, Bay of Islands, Waimate, Inwards
why men such as Nene, Rangatira Moetara, Arama Karaka Pi and Aperahama Taonui, whose relationships with the British Crown dated back to the 1830s, offered themselves as native assessors to assist the resident magistrate to dispense the Queen’s justice in Maori communities. When war broke out in the south, these same leaders may have been willing to go so far as offering their assistance to the government. It has to be noted that the evidence for this offer is slight. In their correspondence with the government, these men often supported the Crown’s actions but undertook to ‘remain quiet’, and it is possible that this was also the tenor of their face-to-face meetings in Auckland, although Webster’s initial anxiety at Nene gathering volunteers in 1861 seems genuine enough, and in June 1863 he talked about a meeting that had taken place during which Nga Puhi had ‘offered their services to the Government’ in the upcoming war in Waikato. If the offer was made, then there was probably more to it than merely a commitment to the Crown. As had been the case during the Northern War, longstanding political tensions played a part in the decision to support the Crown’s actions. The decision made by Nga Puhi leaders like Nene not to support let alone join the Kingitanga when it formed in 1858 was motivated not just by their differing attitudes towards and experiences of Pakeha, but also by their experience of each other. Animosity still existed between Nga Puhi and Waikato hapu following the wars of the 1820s. Hokianga Nga Puhi had been among up to 3000 warriors who had joined Hongi Hika on his five-month-long raid into Waikato in 1822, and they had played a part in defeating Waikato hapu at the battle of Matakitaki. Waikato had also been the site of the death of Pomare, kin to Hokianga leaders such as Rangatira Moetara.

Correspondence, January-December 1865, BBIW 4808 4b, ANZA; Tamati Waka Nene to Queen Victoria, 6 March 1861 (translation), MA 1 1861/22, ANZW; Resident Magistrate Hokianga to Civil Commissioner Waimate, 6 May 1865, Civil Commissioner, Bay of Islands, Waimate, Inwards Correspondence, January-December 1865, BBIW 4808 4b, ANZA; Southern Cross, 19 November 1861, p.4; Te Karere Maori, 28 September 1863, vol. 3, no 8, pp.9-10; Daily Southern Cross, 5 November 1863, p.4.

30 See, for example, Tamati Waka Nene to Queen Victoria, 6 March 1861 (translation), MA 1 1861/22, ANZW; Te Karere Maori, 28 September 1863, vol. 3, no 8, pp.9-10.
31 J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 13 June 1863, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum. W.B. White, Resident Magistrate at Mangonui, wrote to Grey mentioning a similar meeting to be held at Waima in August 1863. See AJHR, 1863, E-3A, p.6.
It was this mixture of motives that led Nene and Arama Karaka Pi to attend the Kohimarama Conference in 1860, organised by the government to discuss the actions of the Kingitanga and the Crown’s actions at Waitara, \(^{33}\) and ultimately to their apparent willingness to support the government militarily. While it is unclear whether the government ever seriously considered using Nga Puhi in Taranaki and Waikato, it would almost certainly have viewed such an offer in terms of those leaders’ loyalty to the Crown, rather than through the lens of ongoing inter-tribal politics. \(^{34}\) Webster had inherited from George Russell the relationships that made men such as Nene willing to collaborate with Pakeha both economically and politically, and it was his good fortune that the government continued to see these men as among the most important in the north. These connections allowed Webster to present himself to government officials as fostering loyalty to the Crown among leading men without the details of inter-tribal history becoming a complicating factor in the minds of those he was trying to impress with his apparent influence.

In reality, the situation was more complicated. Differing interests led Pakeha and some Maori in Hokianga to oppose the Taranaki Maori and the Kingitanga in the 1860s, in the same way as they had prompted a joint but not unitary response to Heke in 1845. Just as inter-tribal politics as well as a desire to collaborate with the Crown had motivated some Maori to fight Heke in the Northern War, so inter-tribal history and an ongoing desire for that Crown relationship caused Nene, Mohi Tawhai, Arama Karaki Pi and others to oppose the King. Webster might have been able to take advantage of their position by presenting himself as their Pakeha patron, but just as they had done in 1845, they backed the Crown for their own reasons. Moreover, while he might have wanted Kohukohu to be the place where he could demonstrate his mastery over Maori, it was instead a place where those Maori with whom Webster was more closely associated demonstrated their continued desire to collaborate with the Crown. Just as it had almost from the arrival of Hokianga’s first Pakeha inhabitants, Kohukohu was a place where empire met Maori allies, and its owner would have fulfilled a role as a contact point between the parties. But it was not a

\(^{33}\) The course and outcome of this conference is discussed in Orange, pp.145-50.

\(^{34}\) For evidence of this attitude see, for example, Acting Native Secretary to Civil Commissioner, Waimate, 30 June 1863, Civil Commissioner, Bay of Islands, Waimate, Inwards Correspondence, April-August 1863, BBIW 4808 2b, ANZA, wherein the writer thanks George Clarke for ‘reporting that the Natives in your District continue in the most peaceful and loyal disposition towards the Government’. 
place of political domination of one party over the other, much less a place where one man had established political ascendancy over rangatira. As he had clearly demonstrated to his brother Alec when he expressed concern that ‘Tamati Waka’s calling for volunteers to assist the Govt against Waikato’ might threaten his business interests, Webster’s fantasy of playing master to Nene’s servant remained just that.

**On the national stage: Runanga and Parliament**

During the 1860s Webster had the opportunity to exercise influence through two political institutions: the District Runanga set up by Grey’s administration, and Parliament. It is probable that he saw involvement in both these institutions as a means by which to further settler interests, as well as forums in which to display his knowledge of Maori and thereby exert influence. This section examines his efforts to achieve these ends, firstly by looking at his attitude towards and then membership of the District Runanga, and then his attempts to get firstly Frederick Maning and then Frederick Russell elected to Parliament.

Shortly after his return to New Zealand in the second half of 1861, George Grey went about setting up what came to be known as the runanga system, or the ‘new institutions’, firstly as a way of weaning Maori away from the Kingitanga and by extending what Alan Ward has called ‘amalgamation’ under the colonial umbrella to all Maori. It was envisaged as a two-tier system, whereby village runanga under the direction of resident magistrates and a District Runanga of chiefs under civil commissioners would make by-laws, mainly relating to issues such as stock trespass, fencing and sanitation. They would also become a forum for dispute resolution and, most importantly from the government’s point of view, the settling of land boundary issues with an eye to freeing up land for alienation. Land was, however, still to be held communally on a tribal basis, rather than individually as favoured by many settlers. This was just one of the objections many Pakeha had towards the scheme. As Ward put it, the runanga system was ‘the first time comprehensive machinery was … set in motion to involve Maori in a substantial measure of legislative, judicial and administrative authority in their own districts’. 35 although as Vincent O’Malley has

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persuasively argued, the ‘extension of English law into what were perceived to be ungovernable Māori districts remained the priority throughout’.

To settlers such as Webster this system looked suspiciously like Maori self-government, and this in itself was anathema. As he had since the 1840s, he belonged to that section of public opinion which held that Maori should be made subject to British justice, not be allowed to maintain a separate authority. His poor opinion of the system was compounded by the appointment of George Clarke as civil commissioner for the Bay of Islands District Runanga, to be based at Waimate, and to a lesser extent by James Clendon’s appointment as Hokianga’s first resident magistrate in 17 years, in 1862. Clarke was a former Church Missionary Society missionary who had been protector of aborigines at Waimate during the 1840s. Like others associated with the CMS, he was viewed by some settlers as being overly indulgent towards Maori interests, and was disliked for this reason. Webster expressed his own low estimation of Clarke, and Clendon, some months after the first meeting of the District Runanga had taken place:

I don’t like the look of things here we are to be completely pest ridden. Clark [sic] of Waimate is at the head of affairs and his amiable relations are scrambling quarrelling for offices worse we could not have been picked out to initiate the new system of Sir Geo Grey’s. I prophecy [sic] a complete failure. Clendon is in the background …. Mr Clendon would have lost his situation had Sir Geo Grey not interfered. The Waimate people wanting all the loaves & fishes. They will soon be quarrelling amongst themselves to their own disgrace.

Despite his prophecy of failure, the first meeting of the runanga had gone reasonably smoothly. The appointed chiefs, who included Nene, Wiremu Hau, Rangatira Moetara, Arama Karaka Pi and Aperahama Taonui, discussed standing orders, offices and salaries. They also passed motions stating that ‘this Runanga will exert its influence to put a stop to all Maori tauas, and that all differences and disputes shall be adjusted by the Magistrates and Native assessors’ and that ‘as far as possible, all the

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37 J. Webster to Webster & Patterson, 27 November 1861, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.
proceedings in this district shall be conducted according to English law.’. In at least one case there was cause for optimism that this would in fact be the case. In 1862 a clash between Makarena of Te Hikutu and Te Tai Papahia over land at Whirinaki threatened to become violent when the latter arrived with 150 warriors in an attempt to stop Makarena from building a pa on the disputed ground. When Resident Magistrate Clendon intervened, both parties agreed to go to the runanga, which decided that the land belonged to Te Tai. According to Clendon, ‘Te Tai and his party at once consented to submit to the law although from the repeated insults of Makarena they have determined to drive him off the place’. But that same year another conflict took a different course. As mentioned earlier, 1862 saw the eruption of a long-standing dispute between factions led by Tirarau and Matiu. The parties refused to take the matter to the runanga, and George Clarke was instructed by the native secretary’s office that it ‘must on no account be brought by you before the runanga unless Tirarau and his party should fully consent to its investigation there; and I am to request that you will as much as possible discourage even the discussion of it there’, presumably because doing so would exacerbate an already dangerous situation which the government would struggle to control. Things became even bleaker when one of the runanga members, Arama Karaka Pi, took 100 men and left to join Matiu. Only the intervention of Grey and a number of neutral chiefs allowed the matter to be settled by arbitration. The *Daily Southern Cross* used this episode to ridicule Grey’s new institutions and the peace they were supposed to deliver, while for Webster it was probably evidence that his prediction of doom for the runanga was coming true.

Yet in 1863 he accepted an appointment to the runanga as a ‘European Gentlem[an] understanding the Maori language’ as provided for under new regulations. Given his jaundiced view of the institution and the people running it, it has to asked why he was willing to become a member. One possibility is that he believed that it was better for someone who would represent settler interests to be appointed, rather than seeing the

38 AJHR, 1862, E-9, pp.5-16.
39 Resident Magistrate Hokianga to Civil Commissioner Waimate, 2 May 1862, Resident Magistrate Hokianga, Letterbooks, 1862-63, 1866-67, qms-0473, ATL.
40 Native Secretary’s Office to Civil Commissioner Waimate, 26 February 1862, Civil Commissioner, Bay of Islands, Waimate, Inwards Correspondence, Feb-June 1862, BBIW 4808 1b, ANZA.
41 Ward, p.139.
42 *Daily Southern Cross*, 24 May 1862, p.3.
43 William Kemp, President of Bay of Islands District Runanga, to John Webster, 8 September 1863, NZMS 67, AL.
position go to yet another member of the CMS community, given that Henry Williams and John King, both former missionaries, were among the other appointees.\textsuperscript{44} It is also likely that he saw it as providing him with another opportunity to cement a reputation as a man of influence in ‘native matters’. His feud with Maning was still in full swing, with his former friend suffering the embarrassment not only of having been turned away by the governor during his 1861 visit to Auckland, but also having to publicly defend himself against accusations of illegally trading in gunpowder with Maori.\textsuperscript{45}

Under normal circumstances Maning might have been a natural choice for the job with the runanga, but the downturn in his political fortunes gave Webster the chance to gain ascendancy as the man who understood the ‘Maori mind’ and who would therefore be useful to the government.

No information can be found about what role Webster played in the proceedings of the runanga. It sat five times between 1861 and 1865, and he received invitations to attend the sittings in 1863, 1864 and 1865.\textsuperscript{46} In the end, though, his prediction of failure proved to be correct and the District Runanga system was abandoned at the end of 1865. But its failure was not necessarily the result of its inability to deliver peace to the frontier as the settler press claimed. Instead, as Ward has argued, Maori made ‘intelligent but selective use of the new modes of social control’ it introduced, sometimes using its mechanisms and sometimes not, depending on the circumstances and the parties involved.\textsuperscript{47} In fact, as O’Malley has argued its real failure might have been that it provided Maori with a way of enforcing their customary laws with the support of the Crown instead of enforcing British law, as planned.\textsuperscript{48} Ultimately it was shut down because the payment of salaries to the officers it supported, the civil commissioners, assessors and constables, proved too expensive for a government in retrenchment mode, because it failed to deliver the Crown’s strategic objectives, and because new institutions, in particular the Native Land Court, were being introduced to deliver speedier resolution to the all-important matter of land alienation.

\textsuperscript{45} Colquhoun, pp.165-67.
\textsuperscript{46} William Kemp, President of Bay of Islands District Runanga, to John Webster, 8 September 1863, n.d. February 1864, 6 February 1865, NZMS 67, AL.
\textsuperscript{47} Ward, p.140.
\textsuperscript{48} O’Malley, p.26.
Webster probably saw the end of the runanga as a victory for settler interests, but it also denied him an avenue through which he could promote himself as a man of influence to the colonial government. Here again was the paradox that lay at the heart of his political ambitions: he wanted Maori to be brought under the Pakeha umbrella, but any political importance he might have had relied on them remaining outside it, so that he could play the role of the man capable of ‘delivering’ and explaining Maori to the authorities. With the end of the runanga he would have to find other ways of achieving this. The most immediate solution was to seek it via another institution: Parliament.

At some point between 1863 and the beginning of 1865 Webster and Maning mended their broken friendship. In fact they had patched things up to such an extent that Webster effectively acted as campaign manager in Maning’s bid to be elected Member of the House of Representatives for the Bay of Islands in 1865. No doubt one of the things that enabled them to overcome their differences was the dedication they both felt to furthering settler interests in the north. Maning obviously relied heavily on Webster’s advice during the campaign, and at one point wrote to him saying, ‘I make no apology for the trouble I give you we are all rowing in the same boat in this matter and I am the servant of the people i.e. the Settlers damn all “other people”.’ 49 He campaigned for greater attention to be given to bringing ‘progress’ to the north and against the proposed property and income tax, which he claimed was solely for the purpose of allowing Cantabrian members to beautify their homes. 50

Maning’s competition came from the sitting member, Hugh Carleton, who supported the tax that Maning hated so much. But, as Maning’s biographer points out, the main plank of his campaign, and the central point on which he could distinguish himself from Carleton, was the issue of race relations. Carleton was Henry Williams’s son-in-law, and Maning took pleasure in painting him as a member of the ‘missionary mob’ who ‘did not take what he saw as a sufficiently firm line against the rebels in the south or in enforcing European law in the north’. 51 In 1864 Maning had written to Donald McLean saying that if he chose to stand he had little doubt that most settlers

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49 F.E Maning to J. Webster, 11 February 1865, F.E. Maning Papers, 1865-1906, MS-Papers-0247, ATL.  
50 ibid; Colquhoun, p.184.  
51 Colquhoun, p.184.
would vote for him and against a man whose interest was ‘merely that of the missionaries and not wholly that even’. He was also sure that ‘on native questions there are few if any but yourself who can give me any information’, and that he could bring this expertise to bear in the house, while recognising that he would have to battle ‘the theorists who by volumes of mere words think to browbeat those who really understand the subject and conceal at the same time their own ignorance or worse’. 52

It was this desire to see a harder line taken in matters relating to Maori, and particularly the use of force to suppress rebellion and impose order where necessary, that saw Webster become actively engaged in Maning’s campaign. Both men believed that if the government would not act in accordance with what they saw as the best interests of settlers and the rule of law, then the government itself should be changed by populating it with men like themselves. Crucially, they also saw their supposedly superior understanding of Maori and ‘native matters’ as the issue that would deliver them to power and give them influence on the national political stage.

In the end, though, Maning’s campaign came to nothing. Before election day, he decided to accept a position as judge on the newly established Native Land Court, where he believed, possibly correctly, that he could have more influence over ‘native matters’. The decision, though, handed the election to Carleton. Webster’s reaction has not survived, although given Maning’s promise that he would ‘knock off certificates [of title] like a steam engine’ and his comment that ‘the more I see how much my being in the position offering will place our creditors in our power’, 53 Webster might have seen the economic benefits of Maning’s choice, even if the ambition to have those interest represented in Parliament was still unfulfilled.

Several years later, though, Webster might have seen another chance to have his ideas represented at a national level. In 1867 four Maori seats were established in the lower house of the New Zealand Parliament, including the seat of Northern Maori. To Webster, the idea of Maori having the right to separate parliamentary representation

52 F.E. Maning to D. McLean, 23 June 1864, Donald McLean Papers, Inwards letters, F.E. Maning, MS-Papers-0032-0444, ATL.
53 Colquhoun, p.186.
was a ludicrous and dangerous indulgence, and in August 1868 he wrote to Maning saying that Maori were fundamentally unfit to be members of the House of Representatives. It is perhaps more than a coincidence, then, that the first member for Northern Maori was Webster’s own brother-in-law, Frederick Nene Russell, who was elected against the wishes of most of his constituents. The man most favoured to fulfil the role was Aperahama Taonui, but he had declined nomination on the grounds that ‘what are these four to do among so many Pakehas; where will their voices be as compared with the Pakeha voices?… It will not do.’ When it came to voting, Taonui’s absence had a marked effect, with the Daily Southern Cross noting that ‘the natives generally seemed to take little interest in the matter…. There was, therefore, but a small attendance at Mr. Barstow’s on the day of the election. Mr. Frederick Russell, a half-caste, a son of Mr. Russell of Hokianga, was proposed by a native named Rawiri Faru [sic], seconded by Pori; and, there being no other candidate proposed, Mr. Russell was elected.’ Although there is no direct evidence linking Webster to Russell’s nomination and election, it is possible he saw his brother-in-law as an antidote to the prospect of a Maori member of the house, and as someone over whom he could have influence. Russell, who was still only in his mid-twenties, had been raised in the same Pakeha-centred manner as his elder sister Emily, and he had been groomed for a role in the colonial bureaucracy in the same way as Maning’s son Hauraki. Webster may have viewed the young man as someone who, while qualifying for a Maori seat, would better represent a settler point of view on race relations. The first impression Russell made on the settler press seemed to confirm this, with one paper describing him as ‘a half-caste, [who] has received a very fair education; he may, indeed, be almost called an Englishman, as I understand that he cannot even speak the Maori language’. Furthermore, Russell seems to have shared Webster’s opinion of Maori as problematic, judging by a comment he wrote to Webster in 1873: ‘the Natives appear to be very quiet at present, but how long it is likely to last is hard

54 J. Webster to F.E. Maning, 10 August 1868, Donald McLean Papers, Inward letters - Surnames, Web-Wee, 1853-1876y, MS-Papers-0032-0627, ATL.
56 Daily Southern Cross, 2 May 1868, p.5.
57 Nelson Examiner and New Zealand Chronicle, 22 August 1868, p.3. The assertion that Russell could not speak Maori is doubtful.
to say.’ Again, however, Webster was to be disappointed. Russell’s term in the house lasted only two years, after which he joined McLean’s Native Department, and his time as an MHR was marked by inactivity; his only real achievement was being elected in the first place. When he did act, it appears he was more likely to vote with the supposedly Maori-friendly Stafford government, rather than against it.

The failed effort to get Maning into Parliament and the ineffectiveness of Frederick Nene Russell thwarted any ambitions Webster might have had of influencing ‘native matters’ on a national political, institutional stage. In the 1870s he dabbled with the idea of standing for Parliament himself to further the interests Maning would have represented in the 1870s, although nothing came of it. But he would continue to press for the issues that mattered to him, such as the extension of law and order in the north, and he would also continue to represent himself as a man who understood how this should and could be achieved, even if the opportunity to do so through formal political institutions would never present itself again.

The arrest of Te Wake

In 1868, Webster’s desire to see law and order come to the north was undermined by the murder of Nuku, for which Te Rarawa man Heremia Te Wake was held responsible, and by the events which followed. This episode acted as a serious challenge to the government’s ability to establish any kind of control over Maori, and the authorities’ apparent impotence drew scorn from Webster and other settlers. But once again, this supposed weakness gave Webster an opportunity to present himself as someone able to control the otherwise uncontrollable. This section examines how he used this episode to further construct his imperial identity as a controller of Maori, the veracity of the claims he made about himself and the government, and the impact of this event on his view of himself and his Maori neighbours.

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58 F.N. Russell to J. Webster, 27 August 1873, Russell Family Correspondence, NZMS 4-21, AL.
59 Otago Witness, 1 October 1870, p.3.
60 F.E. Maning to J. Webster, 17 November 1871, F.E. Maning Papers, 1865-1906, MS-Papers-0247, ATL; F.E. Maning to D. McLean, 2 May 1873, Donald McLean Papers, Inwards letters, F.E. Maning, MS-Papers-0032-0445, ATL; S. Von Sturmer to D. McLean, 27 May 1873, Donald McLean Papers, Inward letters, Spencer von Sturmer, MS-Papers-0032-0594, ATL.
Speaking of New Zealand generally, Ward has argued that ‘by the late 1860s the problem of enforcement of the law had eased. Largely because the Resident Magistrate worked with Maori Assessors and police, acceptance of their decisions, in petty matters at least, was general.’\textsuperscript{61} There is evidence to suggest that this generalisation also held true in Hokianga. In the months leading up to his retirement from the position of resident magistrate in 1867, James Clendon wrote optimistically to the Native Minister that ‘[several] years since scarcely a week passed over without a Taua between one of other of the Tribes — Now, with the assistance of the Assessors and the influence of the principal chiefs these Tauas are scarcely heard of — All differences being settled either before or during my visit amongst them’.\textsuperscript{62} Clendon’s optimism is borne out by at least two episodes he reported on during the mid-1860s. Just as his predecessors had since the 1840s, Clendon became involved in disputes involving both Maori and Pakeha, such as occurred in 1865 when John Marmon complained that Maori at Mangamuka were illegally killing his cattle, while they responded that the cattle were, in fact, wild.\textsuperscript{63} However, he was also now being called in to arbitrate in cases where both parties were Maori. In July 1864, for instance, he was informed of a fight that had taken place between two men he referred to as ‘Toma and Te Taui Whakaroa’ of Whirinaki. They had been at Waima digging gum and, along with others, had gone to Rawene to sell their haul, where they got into an argument, apparently provoked by Toma, over cooking utensils. Te Taui defended himself, the result being that Toma fell and later died of a head injury. Te Taui was bailed and Clendon summoned witnesses to give evidence. Eventually, Te Taui was discharged for want of evidence and on the grounds of ‘so long a time having elapsed without another word being raised in favour of Tomo or against Te Taui’.\textsuperscript{64} In cases like this, it seemed that Maori communities were now willing to submit to European forms of dispute resolution.

\textsuperscript{61} Ward, p.206.
\textsuperscript{62} Resident Magistrate Hokianga, to Native Minister, Wellington, 8 Jan 1867, Resident Magistrate Hokianga, Letterbooks, 1862-63, 1866-67, qms-0473, ATL.
\textsuperscript{63} Resident Magistrate Hokianga to Civil Commissioner Waiate, 24 January 1865, Civil Commissioner, Bay of Islands, Waimate, Inwards Correspondence, January-December 1865, BBIW 4808 4b, ANZA.
\textsuperscript{64} Resident Magistrate Hokianga to Civil Commissioner Waiate, 9 July 1864 and 12 Sept 1864, Civil Commissioner, Bay of Islands, Waimate, Inwards Correspondence, January-September 1864, BBIW 4808 3b, ANZA.
But Clendon’s optimism was only partly justified. The quote from Ward above contains a qualifier: Maori were willing to accept Pakeha justice ‘in petty matters at least’. While an accidental death such as Toma’s might not have been petty, it lacked the inflammatory capability of long-standing inter-hapu disputes over land which still existed in the north in the late 1860s, and which it was asserted at the time had cost more than 10 lives in the two years preceding 1868. Moreover, Clendon’s ability to deal with something as reasonably straightforward as Toma’s demise was still dependent on witnesses’ co-operation, something that could be less forthcoming in instances of serious inter-hapu dispute. This was just the situation the Crown encountered when trouble erupted in Hokianga in March 1868 following the shooting of a man named Nuku.

The fighting that broke out that month was the latest chapter in a long-running series of disputes between Nga Puhi-affiliated hapu and those affiliated with Te Rarawa. According to witnesses before the Native Land Court in 1885, disputed land at Whirinaki had been a particular focus of tension. Both Te Rarawa and Nga Puhi hapu at the head of the river claimed descent from Kairewa. Te Rarawa claimed the land through their descent from Kairewa’s sons Tamatea and Taonui, while Nga Puhi hapu such as Ngati Korokoro, Ngati Manu and Te Hikutu, claimed from another of Kairewa’s sons, Tuteauru. According to one witness, ‘The families of Tamatea and Taonui have had several quarrels with those of Tuteauru: - they were sometimes actual fights — the first was at Ruatangata, the second on Paoneone: both these occurred before 1840.’ The dispute over the Whirinaki land was also part of wider cross-river tensions between the two groups. For example, in 1833, Te Hikutu became embroiled in a battle between their Ngati Korokoro allies and Ngati Manawa at Motukauri, with hostilities apparently being ended by an agreement negotiated by Mohi Tawhai that ‘Ngati Korokoro would remain on the south, and Ngatimanawa on the north’. Then at the end of 1848 hostilities broke out between Te Rarawa and Te

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65 Report by Mr Mackay Relative to the Surrender of Te Wake, etc, AJHR, 1869, A-16, p.7.
66 See the Whirinaki Block case in Maori Land Court, Northern Minute Book No 7, 11 November 1885.
67 ibid, evidence of Mere Peka Tui, 4 December 1885, p.307.
68 This battle, which was grounded in ancestral claims by Ngati Korokoro to land at Motukaraka, was triggered when James Clendon arrived at Motukauri to load timber, apparently at the invitation of Muriwhenua of Ngati Manawa. The ship, however, subsequently ran aground. According to one Te Rarawa account, Moetara then enlisted Te Hikutu to plunder Clendon’s ship, the Fortitude, which they did along with some Ngati Manawa people. Moetara used Ngati Manawa’s involvement as an excuse
Hikutu, ostensibly over timber and shark fishing rights, but possibly as a result of the
rise of Te Rarawa chief Te Tai Papahia and his desire to stamp his mark on the
ongoing debate. What began as a dispute over the cutting of a tree on disputed land
by a Te Hikutu chief escalated into a threat by Te Tai to prevent Te Hikutu from shark
fishing on the river during the coming season. The tension erupted on 25 December
1848 outside Frederick Maning’s house at Onoke, with shots being fired by both
parties. More recently, in 1862, Te Tai had led his 150 warriors to Whirinaki to
prevent Makarena of Te Hikutu from building a pa on disputed ground.

The tensions that flared in 1868 were part of this wider political landscape, but they
were particularly focused on the disputed land at Whirinaki. Hostilities recommenced
after people on the north side of the river decided to survey the land in order that it
could be taken before the Native Land Court, while those on the south, possibly Te
Hikutu or Ngati Kuri, objected to this move. An attempt to settle the argument
failed, the result being that the Te Rarawa/Ngati Manawa people, led by Te Tai
Papahia, built a pa at one end of the block, and Nga Puhi affiliates built one at the
other end. Things came to a head over Te Rarawa’s decision to close a road through
the block. Nga Puhi-affiliated Nuku apparently attempted to break the blockade of the
road and was allegedly shot by Te Wake of Ngati Manawa. The incident prompted a
visit from the government’s man in charge of native affairs, JC Richmond, along with
resident magistrates Barstow, from the Bay of Islands, and Williams, from Waimate.
A peace was arranged and Te Wake surrendered himself ‘expecting a reprimand, but
[he] escaped when it became apparent he was going to be tried and probably
convicted’. War now seemed unavoidable as Te Rarawa withdrew to the north side
of the river and erected a pa at Te Karaka, while Nga Puhi leaders such as Mohi
Tawhai, who had previously attempted to negotiate peace, swung in behind their allies
to attack them on Motukauri. See H. Tate, Karanga Hokianga, Kohukohu, 1986 pp.92-96. See also
Edward Markham, New Zealand or Recollections of it, E.H. McCormick, ed., Wellington, 1963, pp.89-
90, fn 17.

Te Tai had possibly lived at Whirinaki for part of his youth. See Tate, p.80.

Maning to father, 25 December 1848, Maning Papers, MS-Papers-0688, ATL.

Both Mackay and the court proceedings reported in the Daily Southern Cross name Ihipera, wife of
John Hardiman, as the instigator of the decision to survey. AJHR,1869, A-16, p.3; Daily Southern
Cross, 8 September 1868, p.3; 10 September 1868, p.4.

Clendon had by this time retired as Resident Magistrate at Hokianga and not been replaced following
the repeal of the Native Circuit Courts Act, which had re-established the position in 1862.

S. Oliver, ‘Te Wake, Heremia - Biography’, Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara - the
Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 1 September 2010, URL:
and based themselves at Onoke. Shots were fired across the strait between the two armed camps.

In June Civil Commissioner James Mackay arrived, accompanied by chiefs, assessors and police from Waikato and Thames. Mackay’s first task was to negotiate a ceasefire, to which Mohi Tawhai as a Nga Puhi representative apparently agreed, claiming that ‘he was glad to see the law and the Government stepping in to make peace and maintain the order in that district’. Mackay had more trouble convincing Te Rarawa to follow suit: he reported they had initially told him that ‘the Government had no right to interfere in their quarrels; and if they did, the result would be they would attack the European settlers’. He eventually got Te Rarawa to agree to the truce, but they flatly refused to surrender Te Wake. Further negotiations followed, the result of which was that Te Rarawa leaders, including Te Tai Papahia, agreed to hand over Te Wake, so long as Nga Puhi agreed not to ‘interfere about’ Te Wake. Te Wake was eventually delivered to Mackay by Te Tai Papahia after some fierce objection from people at Motukauri. Mackay recorded: ‘I at once made him a prisoner, handed him over to the Native police, and told him that as long as he behaved himself he would be well treated, but on the first sign of treachery or escape he would be shot without mercy’.74

Mackay’s words turned out to be more wishful thinking than a statement of fact. Te Wake was indeed taken to Auckland, put on trial and in September 1868 found guilty of murder. In an apparent victory for British justice, he was sentenced to death, although this was commuted to life imprisonment in Mt Eden gaol. In March 1869, however, he escaped, and by the middle of the month he was back with his people in Hokianga.75 He was later pardoned.

From the outset Webster and Maning doubted the government’s ability to deal with the fracas. Early on Maning wrote the following to Webster:

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74 For accounts of this episode see AJHR, 1869, A-16, pp.3-9; Evidence of Heta Haniora and Mere Peka Tui, Maori Land Court, Northern Minute Book No 7, 16 November 1885 and 4 December 1885; Daily Southern Cross, 20 April 1868, pp.2-3; 4 June 1868, p.2, 3 July 1868, p.3; 8-11 September 1868; Oliver.
75 Daily Southern Cross, 4 March 1869, p.3; 22 March 1869, p.3.
I find there is nothing in the mail at all to shew [sic] that the government intends to take the slightest notice of the murder of Nuku …. Of course if the government do nothing there is an end for ever of any expectation of law being ever enforced in our time and we must live like poor devils as we are at the mercy of the natives. I wish I could leave the country at once and so get rid of the feeling of shame over our pitiful condition. If the Govt would have done anything I would have been ready to run my risk for the sake of the chance of seeing the law respected and established but as no news has come as far as I know I have concluded nothing will be done so from this out for ever I shall not advise the government again on any point whatever …. In fact I see you and I must in future just do as the rest and submit to live subject to every ruffian Maori who choses [sic] to impose upon us…. How ever the govt can after this pretence for a moment to have any authority atall [sic] is a thing I can’t understand I am ashamed to be a Pakeha.76

Their opinion of Her Majesty’s officials sank lower after Te Wake escaped Barstow and Williams’s custody:

I expect fully Mr Richmond will be writing to us for advice now he sees what we told him is true if he does he will having lost through the maulding imbecility of his agents get a modified advice from me -- “there is a tide in the affairs of men” — he lost the … the golden opportunity when the Rarawa men and chiefs were in our hands, absolutely and utterly in our power now they have thanks to Barstow and Williams escaped and can fortify themselves so that it will cost an awfull [sic] lot of money to beat them — certainly we can ravage their country utterly at the least and perhaps kill a great lot of them but after what we saw the other day on a small scale how are we to have any common confidence in anything being done properly — I shall not therefore take any great responsibility in giving advice unless I know first clearly to what length in men and money and resolution the cost will go.77

This was the ongoing tenor of their correspondence: that the government was out of its depth and lacked both the conviction and the power to intervene, and that only they, with their inside knowledge and influence, could properly advise the government and bring the situation under control.

Both men left behind versions of the episode in which they placed themselves at the centre of events, and which portrayed them as controlling developments. In Maning’s case it was left to his daughter Maria to tell his story:

FE Maning was absent at the time [of Nuku’s killing] upon the more conventional occupation of his later years as Judge in the [Native Land Court]. A messenger appraising him of the state of things, in the bosom of his own family as it were, with his usual rapidity of travel he arrived on the scene of

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76 F.E. Maning to J. Webster, undated, F.E. Maning Papers, 1865-1906, MS-Papers-0247, ATL.
77 F.E. Maning to J. Webster, 27 April 1868, F.E. Maning Papers, 1865-1906, MS-Papers-0247, ATL.
action … so as to impress the people with the power of the law about which they had been told so much & yet knew practically so little. His anxiety was relieved to find that in spite of the provocation & that the aggrieved were already under arms, his son Hauraki though only a youth, had managed to restrain them until his arrival… The place for gathering was upon the beach where the strangers with Mr Mackay, FE Maning, J Webster & others were already standing when the first detachment arrived …. Should if moral force be insufficient to induce the delivery by his people of Te Wake to justice for the death of Nuku they were quite able to arrange the matter for themselves after their old custom but they have patiently waited to see the power of the Kawanatanga & it was here a thousand salutations to the Queen.  

Webster provided his version to Thomas Hocken in 1906: 

About forty years ago a large party of armed Rawas came across the river and seized a block of land in the centre of Whirinaki belonging to Maning’s tribe the Hikutu Maning & I mustered the Ngapuhi & ultimately surrounded them the Rawas had erected a pah in the centre of the Hikutu cultivation the Govt was appraised of the facts & ultimately sent the Govt boat Luna with a supply of arms & ammunition Richmond the then Native Minister came across & I took him up to the now besieged pah while the shooting on both sides was going on I offered to take him into the Rawas pah but he refused as he said he might be shot However I ultimately prevailed on him to go I put my handkerchief on a stick & told our people to stop firing & advanced All the natives in the Pah knew me & we were admitted The interior was honey combed & the maories took us underground to see the chief leader Te Tae Richmond gave an address which I interpreted Meanwhile one of the Ngapuhi chiefs Mohi Tawhai arrived & was also admitted It was agreed that the Rawas should return & give up their claim On this being made Rawas a half caste named Te Wake [said] here have I been living liked a kiore (rat) underground I must have utu! I will shoot the first man that passes of the Hikutu the Hikutu chief named Nuku after hearing peace was made was passing along when he was shot dead by Te Wake Mohi Tawhai jumped up thinking his life also in danger but was pulled down by Te Tae Here was another difficulty Mr Richmond demanded the murderers to be given up Edward Williams and Mr Barstow who had come with Richmond took charge of Te Wake & he appeared before them next morning & evidence was given Meanwhile the desire to [indecipherable] into the ti tree to obey the dictates of nature They allowed him to do so when he started off with an insulting observation & fled, no one could follow him as he was swift of foot, The Taua or war party of the Rawas had left meanwhile for their canoes & ere long we heard a burst of firing announcing that Te Wake had arrived before they left The fighting continued for some time after & with losses on both sides our people crossed the river & fought the Rawas One of my boats crew was shot dead He had gone with the old warrior Mohi Tawhai against my wishes The

78 ‘A Feud’, Maria Amina Maning papers, NZMS 390, AL.
fighting continued for some time when the Govt sent up some chiefs & Mr Mckay who persuaded the Rarawa to give Te Wake up.\textsuperscript{79}

It is possible to see Webster’s version of events in particular as the product of a faulty memory brought on by old age, misattribution or confabulation,\textsuperscript{80} in that it contained glaring factual errors, most obviously that Richmond was present in Hokianga when Nuku was killed. However, there is also evidence produced at the time which suggests that Webster and Maning saw themselves as having been directly involved. Following Te Wake’s escape from prison in Auckland, Maning wrote to Webster:

\begin{quote}
The Wake I suppose is by this time a neighbour of yours. All our desperate work wasted, and the rascally Rarawa laughing at us! Well, never mind, we did our part, it no fault of ours if he got off, but you won’t see me trying to take murderers alive again.\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

Maning’s claim to involvement is easier to corroborate; in fact, given that Nga Puhi built their pa at Onoke, it would have been difficult for him to avoid. In May he wrote to Webster asking for more nails: ‘I am fortifying and will have my castle snug enough by tonight.’\textsuperscript{82} Mackay also made special mention of Maning in his report to the Native Minister:

\begin{quote}
I should be wanting in my duty if I did not here express my sense of the services rendered to the Government by Mr Maning, Judge of the Native Lands Court, for the great assistance he rendered by restraining the Ngapuhi from committing any breach of the peace during my visit. I also take this opportunity of expressing my gratitude for the steps which he took in making preparations to succour myself and party, if required, when there was a probability of our being killed by the Rarawa during our stay at Te Karaka.\textsuperscript{83}
\end{quote}

The extent of Webster’s involvement is more difficult to ascertain. Mackay makes no mention of him in his report, and the only other person to identify him as being present during the stand-off is Maria Maning, presumably from a written or oral account given to her by her father. Webster’s own somewhat confused account contains specific details that indicate he had knowledge of the events that led up to

\textsuperscript{79} J. Webster to T.M Hocken, 25 n.d. 1906, F.E. Maning Papers, 1865-1906, MS-Papers-0247, ATL.
\textsuperscript{80} For a discussion of misattribution see Daniel L. Schacter, \textit{The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers}, Boston, 2001, ch.4. For a discussion of confabulation, which can be defined as fabricating experiences in order to compensate for memory loss, see William Hirstein, \textit{Brain Fiction: Self-deception and the Riddle of Confabulation}, Cambridge, Mass., 2005.
\textsuperscript{81} F.E. Maning to J. Webster, 21 March 1869, F.E Maning Correspondence, 1868?-1882, NZMS 4-22, A.L. Maning was writing from Auckland.
\textsuperscript{82} F.E. Maning to J. Webster, 9 May 1868, F.E. Maning Papers, 1865-1906, MS-Papers-0247, ATL.
\textsuperscript{83} AJHR, 1869, A-16, p.8.
Nuku’s death, such as Mohi Tawhai arriving to attempt to make peace, Te Wake’s
verbal outburst and the shooting of a Nga Puhi man on a raid against Te Rarawa. All
of these details were also reported in other sources, suggesting either that he was
present to witness events, that he was connected to people who were present or that he
was an assiduous reader of both Mackay’s report and the Daily Southern Cross.

But even if we accept that he was present at some of the significant moments in the
stand-off was it really possible that he had ‘mustered the Ngapuhi & ultimately
surrounded’ Te Rarawa, or indeed that Maning had restrained ‘the Ngapuhi from
committing any breach’ during Mackay’s visit? An answer becomes apparent if we
compare events in 1868 with those in 1848-49. As mentioned above, the dispute that
erupted in 1848 was also centred on claims to land at Whirinaki. The opposing camps
were led by Warerarera of Te Hikutu and Papahia of Te Rarawa, although Te Tai
Papahia seems to have played a leading role too. Early on, Maning’s home at Onoke
became the scene of confrontation. On 25 December 1848 he wrote to his father: ‘at
the present moment as I am writing this within two hundred yards of my house a party
of 300 natives armed with muskets … are firing away as hard as they can at another
party of about equal numbers who are in canoes on the river, and who are returning
the complement as fast as they can … a stranger would think to look at them and hear
the uproar that they were determined to exterminate each other and yet the whole
matter is by the natives considered as a matter of form.’ In February 1849, Maning
and Reverend John Hobbs accompanied Nene on a peace-making trip, first to
Whirinaki and then to the north side of the river. Long discussions were held with
both Te Rarawa and Te Hikutu, but negotiations apparently broke down when Hikutu
refused to accept Te Tai’s prohibition on shark fishing. A month earlier, W.B.
White, resident magistrate at Mangonui, had travelled to Hokianga in the company of
leading Te Rarawa chief Puhipi to try to negotiate a settlement. Like Maning and
Hobbs, White had crossed the river to talk to both parties, but he too left without a
peace deal having been reached. Then in March Hobbs recorded that ‘I am thankful
to hear that the Whirinaki natives and Papahia’s people visited by Waka’s [Nene’s]

84 See AJHR, 1869, A-16, p.8 and Daily Southern Cross, 8-11 September 1868.
85 F.E. Maning to father, 25 December 1848, Maning Papers, MS-Papers-0688, ATL.
87 W.B. White, Sub-Inspector of Police Mangonui, to Commissioner of Police, 10 January 1849, IA 1
49/167, ANZW.
party and myself have now made peace’ without explaining how this outcome had been achieved. The most likely explanation, however, is that resolution was reached thanks to senior chiefs such as Nene and Puhipi acting as peacemakers, in keeping with the tradition described by Angela Ballara, rather than through the efforts of Pakeha who had already left the field.

The same pattern was replicated in 1868, at least to begin with. Initially both sides participated in mock fighting that saw them firing harmlessly at each other in a display typical of the threatened, rather than actual violence, of a taua staged between related hapu. Mohi Tawhai’s appearance at Te Tai’s pa was most likely the result of his desire to act as peacemaker, in the same way as he had in 1833. Both in course and attempted resolution, then, the early phase of the dispute followed a clear, traditional pattern. There is nothing to suggest that Pakeha like Webster and Maning had any more influence on the nature and course of events in 1868 than they had in 1848-49.

However, this seems to have changed with the death of Nuku and another Nga Puhi man during a raid on Te Karaka. At this point, when full-scale war threatened, the parties were ultimately willing to accept the meaningful involvement of the government, in a way they do not seem to have been, or needed to, in 1849. This willingness was always more apparent among the Nga Puhi faction, with Mohi Tawhai, as mentioned above, apparently saying he was glad to see the government intervening, while some Te Rarawa responded by saying the Crown had no role to play in a dispute between Maori. To an extent these responses reflected the long-standing positions of the two groups in Hokianga, whereby Nga Puhi had, on the whole, been more successful than Te Rarawa in pursuing relationships with the Crown and convincing the Crown of their ‘loyalty’. In more recent years, though, leaders such as Te Tai had made efforts to cement connections to the government, possibly as a way of ensuring that any economic benefits arising from collaboration came their way as well. It had after all been Te Tai who had agreed to take the dispute with Makarena to the District Runanga in 1862, and he had gone with Maning on the trip to see the governor in 1861. In the end he was able to overcome others’ resistance to negotiating with Mackay for Te Wake’s surrender, possibly to maintain a

89 Ballara, Taua, pp.159-62.
relationship with the Crown. \(^90\) This represented an acceptance that Pakeha justice could play a role in Maori communities, something that Webster, Maning and their fellow settlers had been demanding for years. However, it is important to recognise that, just as Clendon had been reliant on witnesses’ willingness to give evidence in the fight between Tomo and Te Taui and the runanga had been reliant on Te Tai and Makarena’s desire to settle their differences through negotiation, so Mackay was reliant on Te Tai’s willingness to surrender Te Wake. Mackay acknowledged the limits of his power when he commented, rather bitterly, that seeing as ‘no decisive action had been heretofore taken to uphold the supremacy of the law, it is not much to be wondered at that we [the government] are looked on with contempt, and the bulk of the Native population think it would be an easy matter to drive us from the North altogether’. \(^91\)

Mackay’s view, though, was overly pessimistic. He was right that the government still had no real power to impose itself in Hokianga, but the ultimate willingness of both Nga Puhi and Te Rarawa leaders to accept his intervention marked a wider acceptance of the role the Crown could play in dispute resolution. Whereas in the 1840s the Crown was seen as having a role to play only in disputes between Maori and Pakeha, or where Pakeha became entangled in Maori disputes, it could now assist in inter-hapu quarrels. The reasons for this change of heart were perhaps manifold and may have included a growing familiarity with Pakeha laws, officials and institutions, particularly following the introduction of the runanga and its associated offices, as suggested by Ward. \(^92\) Maori were willing to engage, or collaborate, with the Crown for their own reasons and on their own terms, and in this case the Crown was willing to respond accordingly.

In the end, the Crown’s role was not as small or their own so great as Webster and Maning wished to believe, but it was still an involvement dependent on Maori cooperation. Neither the government nor individual Pakeha could direct the course of events. Of course it is possible that Webster and Maning might still have played a part

\(^90\) See, for example, Recommending that a complimentary letter be addressed to the Rarawa chief Te Tai, MA 1 60/44, ANZW, where it is recommended that Te Tai be sent a letter thanking him for his ‘steady loyalty’ to the governor.
\(^91\) AJHR, 1869, A-16, p.7.
\(^92\) Ward, pp.206, 222.
in calming tensions. Maning’s relationship with Te Tai stretched back at least a decade, and Webster had an economic connection to him that had seen him apply to sell land to Webster in order to clear debts (see chapter five). It is also possible that Webster’s position as owner of Kohukohu, empire’s entrepôt in Hokianga, gave him some influence as a middle-man moving between government officials and Maori. Ultimately, though, the real test of their power over the parties, or lack thereof, was demonstrated by the fact that when Te Wake escaped to Hokianga from Auckland gaol, they were powerless to do anything about it, in the absence of the government’s will to revisit the issue and Te Rarawa’s co-operation. Instead, they were left raging against their impotent position, as this quote from Maning to Webster captures:

The law is a sham, the Government is a sham, the parliament is a sham[.] We are talking nonsense to one another and making believe [to] each other[. Everything and everybody is a sham, and we shall live in a dreamland until we fairly conquer the rebel natives (meaning all of them) and when we are absolute masters in the country it will be time enough to talk of technical law, or civilised justice. But shall we ever be masters I don’t believe it. And yet we ought to be.93

This harsh reality was at odds with the self-aggrandising version of events both men constructed for themselves and others. Webster might have been able to tell a convincing tale of mastery in Australia and the Solomons where he was in little danger of contradiction, but he must have known that the political situation in Hokianga undermined the role he wished to be seen as playing. This realisation lay at the heart of the increasingly virulent anger he expressed towards Maori in the 1870s, which will be explored in the next chapter.

Throughout the 1860s John Webster sought political influence in a variety of arenas on the basis of his supposed ability to ‘summon’ and ‘deliver’ Maori. Just as it had been in Australia, the Pacific and Hokianga since the 1840s, Webster’s imperial identity in the 1860s was in part founded on a belief that he could master and direct indigenous people, or at least portray himself as such. In reality this was not the case, and Webster’s political influence remained illusory. It was chiefs such as Nene, not Webster, who made realistic offers of material support to the government during the Waikato and Taranaki wars; both his attempts to secure an effective representative in

93 F.E. Maning to J. Webster, 21 March 1869, F.E Maning Correspondence, 1868?-1882, NZMS 4-22, AL.
Parliament failed; and that it was the government acting in concert with Maori, not Webster and Maning, who secured Te Wake’s surrender.

Instead of relying on men such as Webster, political collaboration between Maori and Pakeha, and particularly between Maori and the Crown, was a matter of negotiation, as Maori chose on some occasions to engage with Pakeha institutions and officials, while the Crown admitted the limits of its influence on others.

The realisation that his political influence was not what he hoped it to be, when set against a background of his hardening racial attitudes throughout the colony and internationally, led Webster to express increasing resentment towards Maori. As argued in the previous chapter, and contrary to at least some of his ambitions, his real influence was economic, and founded in the enduring daily interactions and relationships that had been formed by way of economic collaboration, rather than in still-unrealised dreams of dominance at a time when Maori political autonomy persisted. In 1858 Donald McLean had described Webster as a man ‘who had great influence with the natives’ whose dealings with Maori were ‘extensive’. He had also, however, noted that ‘a person who expends £5 or £6000 a year among the Natives must greatly improve them’. McLean’s benevolent view of Webster’s impact is debatable, but he was right in asserting that it was Webster’s economic role that gave him power and influence with his neighbours.

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94 Donald McLean Papers, Diary and notebook, 25 December 1858, MS-1209, ATL.
Chapter Seven

Hokianga Old and New: 1870-1890

The 1870s and 1880s were years of change in Hokianga. The roots of this change lay in the shifting economic relationship between Maori and Pakeha which saw European traders like Webster consolidate the power they had gained in the 1850s and 1860s. For Maori the results of this shift were ongoing debt, a move to wage labour, land alienation and the ultimate loss of their position as equal partners in the timber industry. Land alienation in particular opened the way for more Pakeha settlers to come to Hokianga, which exacerbated the growing exclusion of Maori from the timber forests, previously the site of Maori-Pakeha economic collaboration. The arrival of these new settlers also altered the demographic face of Hokianga and suggested that the district was heading in the same direction as the rest of the country, where Pakeha were a majority. John Webster by and large welcomed these developments, and saw the expected overwhelming of the Maori population as vindication for his ideas of European racial superiority and Maori decline. But in the end Maori were not swept aside; instead, they held their ground both demographically and politically. This left Hokianga more than ever caught between two worlds: one on the cusp of modernity and the other still beyond the Queen’s law. This in-between state fuelled anger and resentment in Webster, an anger no longer moderated by the close economic relationships that had characterised earlier years.

This chapter examines the change that took place in Hokianga during these two decades. It begins by looking at the shift in the balance of economic power taking place in the early 1870s, as Webster was relinquishing his role as Hokianga’s timber baron. It then looks at how this shift led to the opening up of the district to increasing numbers of new settlers, the impact of these new arrivals and Webster’s response to them. The third section examines how the arrival of these people took place against a background of hardening racial thinking, shared by Webster, which predicted the end of Maori, while the final section looks at how this expectation went unfulfilled and the impact this had. Ultimately, this chapter argues that while Pakeha were gaining an economic upper hand, political dominance still eluded them, and it was this tension that fuelled Webster’s increasing expressions of anger.
Retirement of the timber baron

In the early 1870s Webster began making a concerted effort to get out of the timber business. From late December 1869 advertisements began appearing in the *Daily Southern Cross* newspaper offering his ‘extensive and well known business’ for sale. Included in the offer were Webster’s house, boats, stores and warehouses, and sawmill.\(^1\) His plan was to move to the new house he had built at the Heads, at the settlement that would increasingly become known as Opononi. Work on the house had begun at least a decade earlier, partly on the advice of his doctor who believed that the damp air at Kohukohu was having an adverse effect on Webster’s lungs, and as a retreat from long hours spent in the timber business which were taking their toll on him both mentally and physically.\(^2\) However, it would take him until 1874 to finally find a purchaser for the business and move permanently to Opononi. In the meantime he continued to fulfil the role of Hokianga’s leading timber baron, all the while becoming increasingly frustrated at his inability to escape the demands that the business brought with it. This section explores the nature of those demands and in particular the changing nature of his relationship with the men he employed.

His difficulties were to some extent based on the belief that the Hokianga timber supply was running out, so that it was only prudent to get out while there was still something to sell. His wish to be free from the mental demands of what he saw as a declining trade was closely related to a desire to be free from his debtors and his reliance on Maori labour, who he increasingly characterised as indolent and untrustworthy, and as the source of his troubles. The desire to separate himself and his family socially from Maori that had begun in the 1850s now also extended to a wish to be free from economic reliance. This was clearly summed up in a letter Webster received from Maning in 1874:

> I think if you were at Taumata Wiwi [the Opononi house] you would find sufficient employment of an agreeable nature to disperse the blue Devils who seem to be mobbing you. If you confine your business as much as possible to

\(^1\) *Daily Southern Cross*, 31 December 1869, p.2.
\(^2\) J. Webster to A.S. Webster, 1 July 1861, John Webster letterbooks, 1860-1863, Omapere Museum.
Pakeha labour I think … you might enjoy a relaxation from the turmoil attending a continual residence at the Kohu Kohu.\(^3\)

Webster does not seem to have needed Maning to tell him that Pakeha labour could be the answer to his perceived problems. A visitor to Kohukohu in 1870 noted that ‘at one time the enterprising proprietor employed as many as 700 natives in squaring timber. That labour has now been, to a large extent, superseded by Europeans — particularly Canadians.’\(^4\) To an extent this observation is confirmed by Webster’s business ledgers, which record amounts of goods being advanced to ‘Dixon’s Party — Canadians’ or ‘Sackville and Dixon’ in return for timber supplies.\(^5\) At the same time, Webster was increasingly receiving gum instead of timber from Maori in return for goods. This seems to be evidence that the retreat of Maori from the timber industry into gum that Pat Hohepa identified as taking place in Hokianga by the end of the nineteenth century had begun by the early 1870s.\(^6\) It also suggests that the freedom from reliance on Maori labour that Webster sought was within his grasp and that the timber industry was ceasing to be a site of Maori-Pakeha collaboration.

However, Spencer Von Sturmer, Hokianga’s new resident magistrate and Webster’s close friend, continually noted in his annual reports to the Native Department in the 1870s that Maori remained heavily involved in the timber as well as the gum industry. In 1875, for example, he wrote that ‘a considerable number of young men are constantly employed in the forests squaring timber; and owing to the high price of kauri gum, a large number have been engaged digging that article and preparing it for the market’.\(^7\) The ongoing involvement of Maori in the timber industry, and Webster’s resulting continued reliance on their labour, is confirmed by his bitter complaints to Donald McLean in 1874 that contractors who had arrived in Hokianga to cut railway sleepers had ‘induced nearly all my [Maori] timber squarers to abandon their legitimate work & go sleeper splitting price £5 per 100’. He bemoaned the fact that they took up this work despite getting better wages from him, and that while they were away splitting sleepers his felled logs were rotting in the bush and their debts

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\(^3\) F.E. Maning to J. Webster, n.d. 1874, F.E. Maning Correspondence, 1868?–1882, NZMS 4-22, AL.

\(^4\) ‘Blue devils’ is a term for depression or despondency.

\(^5\) J. Webster, Day Book Accounts Ledger 1869-1874, ET/JW 004, P.D. Stratford Private Collection, Auckland.


\(^7\) AJHR, 1875, G-1, p.4.
were going unpaid. He also told McLean that ‘you must not labor under the impression that the Hokianga natives are ever in want of work. Every able bodied man can get employment from me & can earn easily at hewing timber from 40/ to 60/ a week[. N]evertheless they are all in debt & in consequence of their increased dishonesty and & unsteady habits they are unlikely to make any effort to relieve themselves & I must cease to employ them.’

The social and political background against which Webster was increasingly liable to portray Maori as lazy and unreliable will be explored later in this chapter. At this point it is important to note two things about Webster’s comments to McLean. First, they indicate that the relationship between Webster and Maori was more than ever one of employer and employee, with Maori increasingly being used as waged labourers whose employment could end if Webster was able to find an alternative source, or if Maori could find another way to make a living. Secondly, debt continued to lie at the heart of Webster’s relationship with his workers.

Along with the insecure and expendable nature of waged employment, the growing tendency to pay for labour in cash is significant in that, as Adrienne Puckey has argued, the emergence of a formalised cash economy particularly after the 1860s acted to disadvantage Maori. Inexperience with and a shortage of money meant they lacked the ability to control the means of exchange, and the need to earn money was driven by an equal need to pay debts and increasingly to pay the government in the form of taxes and survey fees. Working for traders like Webster gave Maori one way of earning cash needed to pay these costs. Meanwhile, paying workers in cash gave Webster a new way to control the terms of trade, especially when they were also reliant on him for basic goods. Although he does not spell it out, it seems clear from Webster’s letter that workers were expected to repay their debts to him via the wages he paid in cash, meaning that he had them caught in a cycle of cash-based debit and credit.

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8 J. Webster to D. McLean, 14 February 1874, Donald McLean Papers, Inward letters - Surnames, Web-Wee, 1853–1876y, MS-Papers-0032-0627, ATL.
Conversion to wage labour in the bush was linked to widespread levels of debt in other ways too, particularly through land alienation. As argued in chapter five, debt to traders like Webster became an important factor in land alienation in the 1860s. When forested blocks of land were sold into Pakeha hands, Maori potentially lost access to forests they had previously harvested in their own right and turned to wage labour instead. In the 1870s the rate of land alienation in Hokianga accelerated as government land purchase officers, operating against the backdrop of the large-scale Vogel immigration and public works schemes, began to take a serious interest in the area. From this point it was not uncommon for large blocks of land to be taken to the Native Land Court and then immediately sold to the Crown once ownership had been determined, the negotiations for sale having taken place up to 12 months earlier and a deposit already having been paid.\textsuperscript{10} For example, Waoku Blocks No 1 and 2, which amounted to 17,650 acres and 8,017 acres respectively, were both sold to the Crown in late April 1875, title having been investigated only a matter of days earlier. Both blocks were covered in forest. A similar situation occurred with the forested Omahuta blocks at the head of the Mangamuka River, which amounted to over 7,500 acres, and the smaller 915 acre Okaka block located on the Utakura River.\textsuperscript{11} Von Sturmer repeatedly told his Native Department superiors that sales, particularly those to the Crown, were taking place because Maori wished to entice more Pakeha settlers to come to Hokianga so that they could benefit from the trade that those settlers would bring,\textsuperscript{12} a motive encouraged and promoted by government officials such as Donald McLean. While this might have been the case for blocks such as the massive 27,000 acre block at Waimamaku, where the land was reasonably level and suitable for settlement, it does not adequately explain the sale of hilly bush land in the upper reaches of the river. On a visit to Otaua in 1872 to see the Waoku blocks, Colonel McDonnell reported to the government land purchase agent that ‘It is all forest land, comprising kauri, totara, rimu, matai, and other useful timber’ and that ‘the country might be suitable for Canadians or Nova Scotians, but not for emigrants fresh from the Home country’.\textsuperscript{13} The Crown’s eventual decision to purchase what clearly wasn’t prime settlement land can be put down to a desire to stop land speculators from

\textsuperscript{10} AJHR, 1857, Session I, G-7, pp.15-16, 23.
\textsuperscript{11} Index to Crown Purchase Deeds, series 8104, ANZW.
\textsuperscript{12} See, for example, AJHR, 1873, G-1, p.3; AJHR, 1874, G-2, p.2; AJHR, 1876, G-1, p.19.
\textsuperscript{13} AJHR, 1875, Session I, G-7, p.1. McDonnell made a similar recommendation regarding the forested Omahuta blocks, which he described as containing kauri of a ‘first-rate quality’.
getting access to timber needed for ‘public purposes’ and possibly a belief that the land could be broken in and settled later on.\(^{14}\) For the vendors it seems likely that a pressing need for money was the prime motivator and that, as Angela Ballara has argued, by the 1870s shortage of money overrode other motivations, even including the longstanding desire for a relationship with the Crown, as a reason to sell.\(^{15}\) The upshot was that between 1874 and 1877 alone the Crown gazetted ownership of almost 200,000 acres in Hokianga under the Immigration and Public Works Act.\(^{16}\) At least 21,000 of these acres were sold by men whose names appeared on Webster’s debtors list. Of course, it is possible that Maori retained access to the forests on blocks such as these in the years before they were settled or on-sold by the Crown, just as they had done following the first Old Land Claims Commission. But there is also evidence to suggest that they were increasingly losing control of the timber that remained even on those blocks still in their possession, with Von Sturmer noting in 1885 that the new owners of Webster’s sawmill had ‘just completed the purchase from the Mangamuka natives of all the Kauri on the Mangamuka River for a mere trifle’\(^{17}\).

In addition, and as Ian Pool has shown, the combination of land loss and a turn to wage labour in the timber industry may have left Maori with less opportunity to cultivate food. In a vicious cycle, as more time went into earning wages, so less time was available to grow crops, which in turn meant replacing subsistence production with cash purchases of food, something which itself was ‘dependent on some form of wage employment, or else on the men working on the kauri gumfields or in some similar type of exploitative industry’.\(^{18}\) A decline in crop production was noted by Von Sturmer in his comments to the Native Department. In 1875 he wrote that potato, kumara and maize crops had been very good and a large amount of land was under

\(^{14}\) The government land purchase agent dispatched McDonnell to Hokianga to ‘pay on other blocks on which I fear competition’, while the agent himself had been sent to Auckland province on the understanding that ‘there are several considerable blocks of forest land to the North of Auckland which it is desirable that the Government should procure for public purposes’. AJHR, 1875, Session I, G-7, pp.7, 14.


\(^{16}\) AJHR, 1877, C-8, pp.1-2. Includes blocks north at Mitimiti and south at Waipoua.

\(^{17}\) S. Von Sturmer to J. Webster, 13 June 1885, S. Von Sturmer letters to J. Webster, 1875-1909, NZMS 745, AL.

cultivation; by 1883 he was commenting that only ‘a very limited portion’ of land owned by Maori was under cultivation, and that ‘considerable supplies of oats, maize and potatoes are annually imported from the south; whereas twenty-five years ago large quantities of these articles were exported to Auckland and Australia’. A move away from food production and an increased reliance on purchased goods may have worked to Webster’s advantage, as from 1875 he concentrated his business efforts on the mercantile trade. In this way, too, land alienation, a shift to wage labour and the need for cash to pay for goods exacerbated Maori dependence on and indebtedness to Pakeha businessmen such as Webster.

The central role which debt continued to play in Webster’s relationship with Maori through this period is further illustrated by his attempts, with the help of the obliging Von Sturmer, to chase defaulters through the courts and even have them imprisoned. For example, in 1879 he pushed for the arrest and imprisonment of Wi Puaha Kere, who owed him £12.17.8, although he would not have pursued the course of action if he had known that he would have to pay for the defendant’s transportation to Mt Eden Gaol in Auckland. This hard-line approach reflected a growing anger and frustration towards those who owed him money, despite the fact that, as had been the case in previous decades, debt continued to be a factor in his ability to secure a reasonably regular labour supply before 1874 and kept customers coming to his mercantile shop after that date. His attitude is clear from the empathetic tone of this comment from Maning:

The Bishop will confirm and pray a long time before he will show the natives the propriety of paying their debts — I wonder what effect a sermon on the text ‘render unto Caesar that which is Caesars, and unto John Webster that which is John Webster’s’ would have? Not much, I believe.

By the time he sold Kohukohu in 1874, then, Webster had not succeeded in ending his economic reliance on and interaction with Maori, but he left behind a legacy of

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19 AJHR, 1875, G-1, p.4; AJHR, 1883, G-1A, p.2.
20 Resident Magistrate Hokianga to J. Webster, 15 October 1879; Resident Magistrate Hokianga to Resident Magistrate Waimate, 21 October 1879; Resident Magistrate Hokianga to Superintendent Armed Constabulary Auckland, 21 November 1879; Hokianga Magistrate’s Office, Letterbooks, 1879–1884, qMS-0984, ATL.
21 F.E. Maning to J. Webster, 29 April 1882, F.E. Maning Correspondence, 1868?–1882, NZMS 4-22, AL.
domination in the timber industry that led directly to high levels of indebtedness and contributed to significant land alienation that continued throughout this period. These developments had their roots in the collaborative economic relationships that had formed in the 1830s when the patterns of advancing goods in return for labour and logs had first been used, but by the 1870s and into the 1880s the balance of economic power had shifted to Pakeha, and in particular to men like Webster who controlled access to trade routes, capital and credit. While he remained at Kohukohu, he was still reliant on Maori, and they were able to frustrate him by picking and choosing for whom they worked, but control of the all-important timber resource had shifted irrevocably to him and his Pakeha successors.

Webster sold the timber business to A.C Yarborough and A.S. Andrewes, who in 1881 took over Hokianga’s first power mill which had been built by Greenfield and Stewart in 1879. In 1889, though, they sold out to the much larger Kauri Timber Company. During this time the developments that had started under Webster accelerated, particularly the selling and clearing of large blocks of timber land left in Maori hands. Although the timber industry continued to be a site of Maori-Pakeha interaction, the nature of the relationship between Maori and Pakeha traders had changed. The mutual and equal economic benefit that had been the basis of the relationships formed and maintained up to the 1850s and to some extent into the 1860s was breaking down as Maori increasingly lost control of forests and found themselves to be replaceable wage earners. Of course, timber wasn’t the only means by which Maori were able to earn a living and not all Maori found themselves working as waged labourers. Those who secured road-making contracts or took to the gum fields could count themselves as independent workers, although gum workers too were reliant on credit and the prices willing to be paid by gum store owners. In her studies of the far north, Puckey convincingly argued that the families who took this route were not beaten into economic submission and found ways of living in the shadow, or informal, economy. But the timber industry had been and still was the mainstay of Hokianga’s economy, and it had been an opportunity for Maori to share equal power with Pakeha within the developing, formal economy. That equality was effectively now at an end. These developments were compounded by the arrival of new settlers in Hokianga who provided increased competition for land and work.
New Hokianga

Webster’s departure from Kohukohu and permanent move to Opononi came following the sale to Andrewes and Yarborough. Once at the Heads, he began farming the 700 acres he had acquired through his purchases from William Young in the 1850s and from Te Anga, Rangatira Moetara and others in 1866. He also concentrated his efforts on his existing mercantile shop and gum store at what would become the Opononi wharf.

At the same time as Webster’s life was taking on a new complexion, so too was the face of Hokianga itself as growing numbers of Pakeha moved to the area and as the government committed money to constructing infrastructure links, in particular roads. In September 1870 a recent visitor to Hokianga provided the following description to the readers of the Auckland’s *Daily Southern Cross*: ‘The population all along the banks of the Hokianga river, for twenty miles from its mouth, consists chiefly of Maoris and half-castes, of which there are hundreds. We were informed that there are only three or four pure bred white women in the whole district. To call this place a British settlement at present is simply absurd, and the sooner an infusion of new blood is made the better for the present and future prosperity of this district of the colony.’

A month later another correspondent described life at Hokianga in these unflattering terms: ‘We verily sojourn here (it can hardly be called living) on the very bounds of civilisation! How easy would it be to open up this splendid district, with a climate unrivalled, I believe, in the Southern Hemisphere, and that by bi-monthly or at least monthly steam communication with your harbour of the Manukau?’ Webster would have agreed with both these summations, and like the correspondents he expressed a wish for what he termed ‘progress’ to come to Hokianga. In 1871 he wrote to Donald McLean saying that ‘The opening up of the country by roads & the introduction of settlers is of vital importance to the safety as well as progress of the north & money is better spent road making than in fighting’. This statement was made against the background of renewed conflict in the lower North Island, and it reflected Webster’s concern that these disturbances could spread throughout the country, including into the north. The introduction of settlers and greater contact with the rest of New Zealand.

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22 *Daily Southern Cross*, 20 September 1870, p.3.
23 *Daily Southern Cross*, 29 October 1870, p.3.
24 J. Webster to D. McLean, 21 January 1871, Donald McLean Papers, Inward letters - Surnames, Web-Wee, 1853–1876y, MS-Papers-0032-0627, ATL.
Zealand would, he believed, lessen this threat, and would provide him and other mercantile traders with a greater pool of customers. It might also help to bring the mechanisms of colonial authority to Hokianga, something he had been wanting for the previous 30 years. And of course the introduction of this type of progressive modernisation to the outer limits, even on a small scale, was a hallmark of the triumph of empire and imperial thought. This conviction was behind a petition signed by Webster and 27 other settlers in 1875 asking the Auckland Provincial Government to build a wharf at Rawene. It motivated Webster’s comments to McLean about the need for roads, and it was behind repeated complaints made in the settler press about the provincial government’s neglect of the north and even a threat to cede from the Auckland province. These concerns were expressed at a time when the rest of the country seemed to be ‘going ahead’, with Vogel’s public works and immigration schemes bringing unprecedented numbers of settlers to the colony, which only served to remind Hokianga’s Pakeha population that they were still living in an overwhelmingly ‘native district’ which they saw as being at odds with much of the rest of New Zealand.

By the mid-1870s there were signs that the agitation was paying off. By the time the wharf petition was signed the provincial government was sending a steamer to Hokianga on a monthly basis (although it would take another decade before the service became weekly), and Von Sturmer’s annual reports regularly commented that Maori men were taking up the opportunity to work on road-making gangs. By 1873 a road was being built from Kaikohe to Taheke and then on to Waima, while another road was going in from Omanaia to Whirinaki and on to Waimamaku ‘thus opening up a considerable extent of valuable land, affording easy means of communication between the various settlements both to European and Native’. In the early 1890s Hokianga had over 200 miles of road, stretching from Waimamaku to Omanaia.

26 Petition that a Wharf be Constructed at Herd’s Point, 1875, ACFM A1627 8180 32, ANZA.
Construction of the wharf didn’t start until 1881; Webster’s sons won the contract to build it. Hokianga County Council to J. & A. Webster, 15 March 1881; Hokianga County Council Outward Correspondence 1879-1885, ZAAP A473 20141 1a, ANZA.
27 See, for example, Daily Southern Cross, 8 March 1867, p.5; 30 March 1867, p.5; 9 April 1867, p.4; 10 January 1868, p.3.
28 See, for example, AJHR, 1873, G-1, p.2; AJHR, 1878, G-1, p.2; AJHR, 1879, G-1, p.2; AJHR, 1881, G-8, p.2.
29 AJHR, 1873, G-1, p.2.
Rawene to Kaikohe and Horeke to Okaihau. These developments were complemented by the construction of railways north of Auckland, which had brought the sleeper contractors who Webster complained about to Hokianga, even though the railway was never extended to Hokianga. This ‘opening up’ of the north was a painfully slow undertaking, and it is important not to overstate the achievements made during this period. The Hokianga County Council in the 1880s continually complained to central government that the district never seemed to be in line for the infrastructure funding it felt it deserved. Meanwhile, in 1890 residents were still petitioning for the district to be connected to Auckland by road, and in a letter that captured the frustration of many residents Colonel Noakes complained in 1891 to the county council that its decision not to connect his Onoke property to the road network ‘means paralysis of my efforts to develop the resources of my land, already cramped and stifled by its isolation from the road system’. However, the process of improving infrastructure and communication was underway, and it was matched by the arrival of the Crown’s land purchase officer in the mid-1870s. Although they bought large tracts of forest land, they also bought blocks at Waimamaku, Punikitere and Pakanae that would be suitable for farming settlements.

As a result of this activity the Pakeha population of Hokianga slowly but steadily increased during the 1870s. At the beginning of the decade Pakeha still numbered around 100, the level it had been at since the retreat of settlers to Auckland in the 1840s. By 1878 the Pakeha population was estimated to be 419, a number which included 133 people identified as ‘half castes living as Europeans’. In the mid-

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30 Minutes of meeting of Hokianga County Council, 27 January 1893, Hokianga County Council minute book 1887-1893, ZAAP A473 20382 1, ANZA.
31 See, for example, Chairman Hokianga County Council to R. Hobbs MHR, 5 December 1883, ZAAP A473 20141 1a, ANZA; Chairman Hokianga County Council to Minister of Public Works, 26 February 1884, ZAAP A473 20141 1a, ANZA.
32 For example, see Jack Lee, Hokianga, Auckland, 1987, pp.206-207. Petition to form road to north from Auckland, ZAAP 22311 1/a, ANZA.
33 Noakes to Chairman Hokianga County Council, 5 May 1891, Inwards correspondence Hokianga County Council 1891, ZAAP A473 20245 1, ANZA.
34 Results of the Census of New Zealand, 1878, p.10. This is the estimate recorded for Hokianga County. Census counts for both Maori and Pakeha populations during this period are inherently problematic, particularly with regard to the counting of ‘half castes’. These people were included in the Pakeha or Maori total on the basis of whether they were ‘living as Europeans’ or ‘living as Maori’. But the decision as to who to record in each category was left to census enumerators, who were given ‘no direction … of how to distinguish the two ways of living’. In addition, the counting of Maori was done on a loose basis that could involve enumerators recording information after interviewing selected informants. For this reason, while the overall trend of an increase in the Pakeha population in Hokianga
1880s, this population growth accelerated further as the Crown land finally began to be sold or leased, and as special settlements were established at Punakitere and Waimamaku, and on disputed land at Motukaraka. Hokianga’s two main towns were also beginning to flourish. By 1885 Kohukohu, which had previously comprised a small number of dwellings centred around Webster’s, and then Yarborough’s, house, had been surveyed and a government township laid out, while a decade earlier in 1875 Rawene had become the seat of local government and the home to the new Hokianga County Council. These developments meant that by 1891 the estimated Pakeha population had grown to 1494, even though the settlers on the newly available Crown lands often abandoned their blocks because of the difficulty of the terrain. Those who remained, however, especially at Motukaraka, were paid by the government to clear their land of timber and supplemented their incomes by building roads to the settlement and working at the Kohukohu mill, thereby squeezing out Maori labour even further. Few Maori, for example, were being employed at the mill in the 1880s. It seemed at last that the situation which prevailed in some other parts of the country, particularly near the main towns, where Pakeha outnumbered Maori and where Pakeha commerce had eclipsed Maori enterprise, had arrived in Hokianga.

The changes occurring in Hokianga throughout this period drew comment from Webster and Von Sturmer. In 1885, Von Sturmer wrote to Webster, who was overseas at the time, that ‘A goodly number of people are here land hunting, I think the “Land Hunger” will soon commence’. One of the advantages to be gained from this, as far as the two men were concerned, was that an increase in Pakeha numbers would swing the demographic balance of power in the district towards them and away from Maori. In 1883 Von Sturmer noted that, ‘Lots of new comers [are] arriving in Auckland, some of them ought to come our way — It’s the only thing now that can do real good to the district both to open up the land and settle the natives — for good and all for I

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is clear, the exact numbers for both populations can only be referred to as estimates. For more information see Kate Riddell, “‘Improving’ the Maori: Counting the Ideology of Intermarriage”, NZJH, 34, 1, 2000, pp.81-85; Pool, p.18.

35 Results of the Census of New Zealand, 1891, p.9. Includes 102 people identified as half castes living as Europeans.

36 S. Von Sturmer to J. Webster, 14 March 1882, S. Von Sturmer letters to J. Webster, 1875-1909, NZMS 745, AL.

37 S. Von Sturmer to J. Webster, 13 June 1885, S. Von Sturmer letters to J. Webster, 1875-1909, NZMS 745, AL.
fancy this is the most populous native district in New Zealand’. 38 But there was a downside to these changes, too. In September 1886, Von Sturmer commented to Webster that ‘Pakehas are here in shoals …. Like you I feel almost a stranger in Hokianga there seem [sic] such a crowd of new faces.’ 39 Webster might have wanted these settlers to come, but he obviously felt outnumbered by them. More importantly, he also felt that he differed from them in some fundamental ways. He had for the past four decades promoted himself as a man who could survive and flourish on the edges of civilisation and had tried to gain political influence on that basis. Webster and Maning believed these new arrivals knew little of the world they had inhabited, and this became a point of differentiation between them. Maning, for example, complained that:

Jackson is tormenting me to go with him to the Lakes [at Rotorua] on Christmas [with his brother-in-law] … but you know they have neither of them lived in the world that we have and which will never be seen again, and it is lost labour even to try to make them imagine it. If you were of the party we would be alright and could talk in good English on matters and things incomprehensible to the modern pakehas but far more interesting to us than their civilised knowledge and learning which, by the bye, we have to the full as much as they. 40

This new Hokianga that was beginning to emerge was not entirely a place to which they felt they belonged, or wished to belong. As Maning put it, ‘little did I think … I should ever see here towns, and villages, banks and insurance offices, prime ministers and bishops, and hear sermons preached and see men hung, and all the other plagues of civilisation’. 41 Here again was the paradox that lay at the core of Webster’s imperial identity: he had agitated for progress but the trappings of settlement struck at the heart of his image as a man capable of dealing with the outer limits of ‘civilisation’. If his agitation succeeded, he and people like him in the imperial vanguard would, by definition, become redundant to the civilising project, and this would bring a resentment of its own. The corollary to this was a tendency to look back at the ‘good old times’. This was not necessarily a new phenomenon; as early as

38 S. Von Sturmer to J. Webster, 23 May 1883, S. Von Sturmer letters to J. Webster, 1875-1909, NZMS 745, AL.
39 S. Von Sturmer to J. Webster, 14 September 1886, S. Von Sturmer letters to J. Webster, 1875-1909, NZMS 745, AL.
40 F.E. Maning to J. Webster, 30 November 1880, F.E. Maning Correspondence, 1868?–1882, NZMS 4-22, AL. Jackson appears to be Samuel Jackson of the law firm Jackson Russell.
the beginning of the 1860s Maning was lamenting the loss of ‘the “good old times” — before Governors were invented, and law, and justice, and all that’. But from the 1870s it became a constant refrain among the older settlers such as Webster, as signs of Pakeha advancement became more obvious, and as Maori were seen to be in decline. The next section looks at this phenomenon, and in particular at the way in which it reflected Pakeha ideas about the inevitability of their success and Maori failure.

Looking back to the ‘good old times’

The growing tendency of men like Webster to look back to the early years of Pakeha settlement in nostalgic terms was closely related to what was seen as the passing of the frontier life and all the dangers and excitements that came with it. As stated, this was linked to the encroachment of the trappings of ‘civilisation’ during this period. But it was also part of a wider movement that lamented the passing of the ‘old Maori gentlemen’ at a time when Maori were seen to be in terminal demographic decline. During the 1870s and 1880s, concerns about Maori degeneracy that Webster and others like him had expressed to the enquiry into ‘subjects connected with the Native race’ in 1856 grew more persistent as Maori were seen to be either drinking themselves to death or succumbing to European-introduced diseases. In the early 1870s Von Sturmer for one was in no doubt as to the direction in which Hokianga Maori were heading:

I may mention that the Natives freely acknowledge the bad effects of drunkenness, and are most anxious that some means may be devised for the purpose of staying the increase, and if possible of decreasing the effects of this great evil amongst them. But still, I am sorry to say that large sums of money are expended by them in drink, as there is scarcely a Native meeting held at which there is not a very great quantity of spirits consumed.

With regard to the physical condition of the Natives, I am inclined to believe that they are slowly but steadily decreasing in numbers; and from my own observations made during the past two years, and which are doubtless very imperfect, I should estimate the annual number of deaths to exceed the number of births by about a thirtieth. This is in a great measure to be accounted for by the absence of proper attention to the sick, and not from any want of will or natural affection, but from ignorance ….The principal complaints from which they appear to suffer are gastric and low fever, asthma, and diseases of the

chest. Fever has been very prevalent during the early part of the season, and from the effects of which many deaths have occurred.\(^{43}\)

By the end of the decade his view was even more pessimistic:

> In closing this report, I am sorry I cannot give a more satisfactory account of the state of the Natives under my charge, and can only hope that, as time passes and the Maoris become better acquainted with European habits and customs, and more alive to the advantages to be derived from a careful attention to the laws of health, a vast improvement will be visible both in this district and throughout the colony. On the other hand, if they still persist in living in their present condition, there can be only one future before them — extinction as a people — and that at no very distant period.\(^{44}\)

The decline of Maori was sometimes seen in moral as well as physical terms, and in both senses the new generation were unfavourably compared to the ‘gentlemen’ who had gone before. In 1868, for example, the presiding judge in Te Wake’s murder trial told the jury that ‘The only witness whose testimony on behalf of the prosecution in this case I value is that of Moses Tawhai, because, gentlemen, my experience has taught me that these old chiefs — the men of the old school — are far more to be believed than the younger men — the Maoris of the present generation’.\(^{45}\) That same year, Webster wrote to McLean that ‘The old Maori gentleman is dead or dying out and the next generation will be only fit for hewing wood and drawing water for the Pakeha’.\(^{46}\) These sentiments were repeated each time one of the ‘old chiefs’ died, as when Von Sturmer noted the deaths of Te Tai Papahia and Te Whata Te Tahua with the comment that ‘both were fine representatives of the old Rangatira Maori. I may be prejudiced, but I am inclined to believe that the rising generation is not physically equal to that which is fast passing away’.\(^{47}\)

This tendency to see Maori as being in decline can be set against a background of evolving racial thinking in the dawning age of scientific racism. The long-held belief that some ‘races’ were more capable of advancement than others now had scientific endorsement, and Maori were increasingly seen as failing the test. Moreover, as

\(^{43}\) AJHR, 1873, G-1, p.2.
\(^{44}\) AJHR, 1880, G-4, p.3.
\(^{45}\) *Daily Southern Cross*, 11 September 1868, p.4.
\(^{46}\) J. Webster to D. McLean 1868, 10 August 1868, Donald McLean Papers, Inward letters - Surnames, Web-Wee, 1853–1876y, MS-Papers-0032-0627, ATL.
\(^{47}\) AJHR, 1873, G-1, p.2. Emphasis in original.
Robert Young has noted, the idea of degeneracy had long-standing foundations in the biblically based idea that humankind had been born pure but in certain circumstances had degenerated into savagery. In the era of scientific racism, the concept of degeneracy gained greater force and focussed particularly on the biological and moral degradation thought to be found among those of mixed descent, although in New Zealand degeneracy seems to have been applied to Maori as a whole, rather than specifically to ‘half-castes’. As Young has also argued, scientific theories of race had ‘deliberately popular appeal’ and were ‘used as a way of substantiating convictions that preceded scientific enquiry’. This meant that Pakeha such as Webster could co-opt science as a way of legitimising ideas of Maori degeneracy that they had been expressing since at least the mid-1850s and which, as argued in chapter six, were developing in conjunction with wider imperial ideas of racial difference, particularly following the Indian Mutiny in 1857 and the New Zealand Wars of the 1860s. To many Pakeha it increasingly became inevitable that Maori would simply melt away in the face of colonial expansion, unable to cope with European disease and incapable of resisting the temptations of alcohol. In both popular and intellectual Pakeha circles, Maori came to be talked of as a dying race. The ‘old Maori gentlemen’ belonged to a time that pre-dated this decline and the degeneracy that apparently accompanied it.

To an extent, nineteenth-century Pakeha could be forgiven for seeing Maori as having a short lease on the future. Ian Pool, for example, estimates that the Maori population fell by up to 50% in the years between 1840 and 1891. In the Hokianga context, Von Sturmer estimated in 1886 that the Maori population which had been 2570 in 1878 now stood at 219 less than that number, having fallen from 2796 in 1874.

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49 ibid., pp.92, 93.
50 Pool, p.59.
51 AJHR, 1886, G-12, p.2.
James Belich has argued that even allowing for the undoubted impact of European illnesses in Maori communities, colonial officials, and some later historians, latched on to ‘inexorable Laws of Nature or Providence’ and exaggerated Maori decline: ‘empty villages were automatically attributed to the ravages of disease rather than a summer at the beach.’\(^{53}\) In light of this assertion it is possible that Von Sturmer’s confession to Webster was more accurate than he wanted to publicly admit, and that while Hokianga Maori might not have been taking beach holidays they may very well have been going to Kaipara to dig gum.\(^{54}\) This seems even more likely when it is remembered that, by Pool’s reckoning, the decline of the Maori population nationally had slowed by the mid-1880s and that Northland Maori were recovering more quickly than iwi further south.\(^{55}\)

Nevertheless, the idea of the dying Maori took on a greater momentum so that by the 1880s Maori were being studied and their artefacts collected by ethnographers eager to salvage what was seen to be ‘traditional’ Maori culture before it was contaminated and compromised by the new generation and then lost altogether. This was vital because losing these ‘authentic’ objects would leave a gap in the ‘evolutionary “history of mankind”’. In her study of the Auckland and Canterbury museums, Fiona Cameron argued that ‘collecting Maori material culture was primarily driven by global concerns for the loss of traditional cultures due to the perceived inevitable processes of natural selection. These narratives of demise and death had by this period become a motivational force for indigenous collecting initiatives on a global scale.’\(^{56}\)

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century the Auckland Institute and Museum
started collecting Maori artefacts on a large scale, and the institution took part in a process whereby Maori material culture was ‘collected, laundered and embalmed by Pakeha servants to prepare it for use in posthumously providing New Zealand with a rich past, runes and ruins’. 57 One of the institute’s members and contributors was John Webster, who joined in 1872. Over the following 38 years Webster donated a range of objects to the museum, including fish hooks and sinkers, stone implements, kiwi feather kits and a block of greenstone that had reputedly belonged to Ngati Toa chief Te Rauparaha. 58

The institute’s desire to ‘better understand the Maori race’ before they perished from the earth extended to its hosting lectures on the origins of Maori as a people, particularly from the mid-1880s. Here, too, Webster was willing to play a part. Although he never presented a paper to the institute, his opinion was sought by collector Thomas Hocken, founder of Dunedin’s Hocken Library. In 1890, Webster wrote a letter to Hocken where he set out some thoughts about the genesis of Maori. He speculated about the timing of the arrival of Maori in New Zealand and the possibility that the country was already inhabited by an earlier, now extinct, group of people. He concluded that:

Many people are fond of speculating about the whence of the Maori[.] The inherited belief that there was but one cradle of the human race sets them speculating as to how they got where they are from some distant corner of the globe where they think they must or ought have come from[.] It is likely the Polynesians have sprung from a root of their own like many other races & [we] cannot penetrate the obscurity. 59

Webster’s interest in ethnographical theories and his enthusiasm for the work of the Auckland Institute was underpinned by his growing interest in scientific ideas of race, including Darwin’s evolutionary theories. By the early twentieth century he was a seasoned convert, saying to Logan Campbell that ‘I am a firm believer in Darwins

58 The most significant donations were made by George Webster in 1926, 14 years after his father’s death. The institute’s annual report contained the following: ‘A most valuable acquisition was the gift by Mr Geo Webster of an elaborately carved old feeding funnel, a handsome waka huia and a large greenstone tiki discovered in a cave in 1840 by the late Mr John Webster, and of two greenstone adzes found some time later. The feeding funnel is certainly one of the finest known, and the other articles are of high merit.’ Auckland Institute and Museum Annual Reports, 1873-74; 1909-10; 1926-27, p.11, AWML.
59 J. Webster to T.M. Hocken, 9 August 1890, T.M. Hocken Correspondence, MS-0451/006, Hocken Library.
[sic] theory for it is the most reasonable of all beliefs’. He also confided to his friend that he had lost faith in Christianity, saying that ‘I for one can never believe that these [Christian] doctrines have a shadow of truth in them’ and ‘[s]cience will be preached from the pulpits ere long for there is wisdom’. Young has noted that from the mid-nineteenth century ideas of race ‘offered a fundamental principle of explanation from natural laws as an alternative to Christian doctrine …. The new racialism could be described, therefore, as the overdetermined product of the conjuncture of a loss of belief in Biblical explanation and its replacement by apparently authoritative scientific laws’. Although Webster’s confessions to Campbell were made in the early twentieth century, signs that he was willing to subscribe to emerging scientific theories as a way of confirming his and other Pakehas’ difference from Maori can be found in his assertion to Hocken that Maori and other Polynesians sprang ‘from a root of their own’, as well as in correspondence dating from much earlier. In 1868, for example, he had told Donald McLean that Maori ‘are of a different clay to us’, perhaps suggesting a sympathy with contemporary ideas of polygenesis. More broadly, his willingness to adopt the new scientifically endorsed thinking aligned him with an intellectual movement within New Zealand colonial society, and with imperial thought across the globe, that saw the triumph of the European over the indigenous as virtually inevitable and unavoidable. Moreover, his involvement with the Auckland Institute and Museum, an institution increasingly organised around this belief, helped him to further his imperial reputation as a ‘knower’ of Maori. He could claim to have known the ‘old chiefs’ in the ‘good old times’ before moral and physical degeneracy set in, and he could provide material evidence of the ‘traditional’ way of life that these men and their people had led, thereby legitimating his authority. In this way, Maori became like the other indigenous people Webster had encountered earlier in life in Australia and the Pacific Islands, whom he had described and painted and whose artefacts he had collected, in that they had become ‘exoticised’ in their own country. This was apparently the apotheosis in the process of cultural

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60 J. Webster to J.L. Campbell, n.d., Letters of John Webster to John Logan Campbell, Campbell papers, MS 51, box 2, item 93B, AWML.
61 J. Webster to J.L. Campbell, 13 October 1906, 31 October 1908, Letters of John Webster to John Logan Campbell, Campbell papers, MS 51, box 2, item 93B, AWML.
62 Young, p.120.
63 J. Webster to D. McLean, 10 August 1868, Donald McLean Papers, Inward letters - Surnames, Wee, 1853–1876y, MS-Papers-0032-0627, ATL.
colonisation as described by Peter Gibbons, as Maori were cast as marginal figures to be ‘salvaged’ from cultural oblivion by settlers.64

Yet, as James Belich points out, the idea of Maori as a dying race was a myth, or as John Stenhouse has said, wish-fulfilment on the part of Pakeha.65 Belich argues that the idea of Maori as being doomed began to gain momentum in the 1860s when ‘large-scale conflict, perceived Maori rejection of the things and thoughts of Europe, and evidence of population decline encouraged a resurgence of the Dying Maori myth, which dominated to the mid-1880s, and remained strong to the 1900s’.66 In other words, the idea that a turbulent Maori population had a short lease on life comforted Pakeha who would otherwise have felt even more unnerved by the political turmoil of the period. As Maori appeared increasingly ungrateful for the so-called blessings of Europe, so they slid down the ranks of the peoples capable of salvation. Again according to Belich, ‘a noble Maori past and an ignoble present could be reconciled through the mechanism of racial decline’.67 The comforting thought of Maori decline would also have helped Pakeha society cope with the disturbances of the 1870s and 1880s, which included the escape of Te Kooti into the King Country in 1872 and Te Whiti and Tohu’s resistance campaign at Parihaka culminating in the destruction of the settlement in 1881.

For Webster, these reminders of Maori survival and resistance were played out on a daily basis on his doorstep as Maori demographically held their ground against the growing numbers of Pakeha, even as the populations moved closer to parity towards the end of this period. As the next section shows, the reality of Hokianga life undermined any wish he had to see Maori as being in terminal decline, and the failure of New Hokianga to completely replace the old, along with continued suggestions of Maori political autonomy, led to a further feeling of frustration and fuelled expressions of racism. These realisations, together with the breakdown of the collaborative economic relationships of former years, also led to a conviction that Hokianga was stuck between Pakeha progress and Maori moral decay, so that the

64 Gibbons, pp.13-14.
67 ibid, p.19.
‘good old times’ became increasingly contrasted with a new reality that was neither one thing nor the other, but certainly no place for a man who wanted either to be the daring controller of the wild savage, or a wealthy and respected member of a triumphant colonial society.

‘Not a fit residence for folks who knew the old times’

By 1891 the estimated Pakeha population in New Zealand had reached 668,651, while the estimated Maori population had declined to 41,993. By the same year in Hokianga, Pakeha were estimated at 1494 and Maori 2355. While the influx of Pakeha to Hokianga during this period had changed the demographic face of the district from one of Maori dominance to something closer to equilibrium, and while by the end of the 1880s even the editors of the settler press would struggle to say that Hokianga was beyond the reach of ‘civilisation’, it was still atypical of much of the rest of the colony and remained one of the few places where Pakeha were in the minority. It was even atypical of Northland as a whole, where Maori accounted for an estimated 30% of the population in 1891. This can at least in part be put down to the delay between the government purchasing land for settlement in the mid-1870s and the establishment of those settlements in the mid-1880s, as well as the sometimes tortuous rate at which roads were built connecting the district to the rest of the province and beyond. In effect it meant that Hokianga avoided the ‘swamping tides’ of settlers that Belich has argued swung the political and economic balance in favour of Pakeha in the second half of the nineteenth century, and which Petrie points to as the ultimate reason for loss of Maori economic power after the 1850s.

It also meant that the idea of Maori being a minority in terminal decline which could be sustained in some other parts of the country was much harder to swallow in Hokianga. For Webster, whose affiliation with the Auckland Institute and personal views aligned him with the salvage ethnographers of this period, the demographic

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68 Results of the Census of New Zealand 1891, p.1, Appendix C, p.xlv. The Pakeha population given includes 42,093 people identified as half castes living as Europeans. The Maori population figure given includes ‘half castes living as Maori’.
69 Results of the Census of New Zealand 1891, p.9, Appendix C, p.xlvii.
71 Pool, Appendix 1, p.245.
realities of daily life led to a sense of resentment that Hokianga was lagging behind the rest of the country and a feeling that it was Maori refusal to melt away that was to blame. In the late 1860s, in the same letter to McLean in which he had lamented the passing of the ‘old Maori gentlemen’ he had said that he now wished Nga Puhi had gone south to fight Waikato earlier that decade as ‘we would have weakened our foes north and south’. By 1883, he was writing to Von Sturmer that ‘as long as a native lives they will give trouble’.

This latter statement was made at a time when evidence of ongoing Maori strength and defiance of Pakeha rule had come in the form of another outbreak of inter-hapu violence and an apparent rejection of British law and order. In 1868, in the aftermath of the Te Wake episode, Webster had complained that Maori ‘don’t want our laws or schools or justice or anything in that line, whatever might be stated in any report to the contrary’. A decade later he and Von Sturmer had grounds to believe that nothing had changed. In 1879 a longstanding dispute between Ngai Tu and Ngai Te Wake over land situated between Otaua and nearby Mataraua erupted into violence when Ngai Tu starting arranging for survey lines to be cut following their apparent sale of a portion of the land to Pakeha against the wishes of Ngai Te Wake. Four men were killed and another three injured. When Von Sturmer returned from visiting Australia in September he went to Mataraua, where he was ‘informed I should meet Maihi Paraone Kawiti, Kerei Mangonui, and other leading chiefs, who had gone thither to act as mediators between the two parties’. The chiefs told him that a ceasefire had been arranged and that he shouldn’t visit the warring parties ‘as my presence might tend to reopen a discussion on the cause of the trouble, and lead to fresh complications. I therefore proceeded at once [home] to Hokianga.’ Von Sturmer then reported that:

on the 4th September the trouble was finally settled by both sides consenting to hand over the disputed ground to Maihi Paraone Kawiti and Kerei Mangonui, on the understanding that no further action should be taken by the Government.

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73 J. Webster to D. McLean, 10 August 1868, Donald McLean Papers, Inward letters - Surnames, Web-Wee, 1853–1876y, MS-Papers-0032-0627, ATL.
74 S. Von Sturmer to J. Webster, 3 October 1883, S. Von Sturmer letters to J. Webster, 1875-1909, NZMS 745, AL. Von Sturmer is quoting Webster back to himself.
75 J. Webster to D. McLean, 10 August 1868, Donald McLean Papers, Inward letters - Surnames, Web-Wee, 1853–1876y, MS-Papers-0032-0627, ATL.
in the matter. This being agreed to, they returned to their respective kaingas, considering the affair finally settled.

I have since informed some of the ringleaders that I considered it highly probable that the Government would take proceedings against them for this serious breach of the peace, and have endeavoured to ascertain the feelings of disinterested chiefs on the same subject. In each case I am advised not to push the matter at present; and that, as no European was in any way offended or injured, there is not much harm done, as each of the parties engaged lost an equal number of men, and they seem to think that any attempt at a forcible arrest of the parties might lead to serious trouble.  

The dispute seems to have flared again two years later, and Von Sturmer wrote to Webster that ‘the natives at Otaua have been having one of their periodical shines and one of Komene’s sons Aperahama is shot through both thighs’. Despite his annual reports to his superiors being full of examples of Maori using his court to settle interpersonal disagreements, Von Sturmer must have realised that he was in the same position as James MacKay had been over 10 years earlier. While Maori were willing to use Pakeha justice systems to resolve petty personal matters, inter-hapu political issues could still be resolved using traditional means of mediation. Chiefs might choose to involve colonial officials if doing so was expeditious, but if this was not the case then there was still little that men like Von Sturmer could do about it. It may have been this realisation that led Von Sturmer to write bitterly to Webster following the flare up in 1881 that ‘if they had all been killed it would have been clean gain to the country’. This comment was an echo from 10 years earlier when Maning had written in similarly resentful tones to Webster following Te Wake’s escape from Mt Eden Gaol, and it reflected the ongoing reality that individual Pakeha, no matter what their position or self-perception, had no significant political power over Maori.

Resentment that Pakeha political domination still had not been achieved was further enflamed by the economic situation in which Webster found himself. As discussed earlier in this chapter, in the early 1870s before he sold his timber business, Webster still relied on debt as a means of securing labour and resented the difficulty with which repayment was sometimes extracted. Debt continued to be a factor in his

76 AJHR, 1879, G-9, pp.1-3.
77 S. Von Sturmer to J. Webster, 2 August 1881, S. Von Sturmer letters to J. Webster, 1875-1909, NZMS 745, AL.
78 S. Von Sturmer to J. Webster, 2 August 1881, S. Von Sturmer letters to J. Webster, 1875-1909, NZMS 745, AL.
mercantile business after 1874, as evidenced by his willingness to pursue non-payers through the courts in subsequent years. The sense of frustration over what he termed repudiation of debt which dated back to at least the early 1860s, and his continued reliance on Maori labour and clients, conflated with racial thinking about the degeneracy of Maori as a people, so that he was increasingly willing to portray them as lazy, indolent and untrustworthy. When this was added to the belief that supposedly inferior Maori were still beyond the pale of European law, the result was increasing expressions of racism. Throughout these years he sent letters to and received correspondence from Maning and Von Sturmer, his two closest friends, that frequently expressed anger and frustration towards Maori. Although few of Webster’s letters survive, those the other two men sent to him make it clear that all three shared similar views. At the beginning of this period, Maning wrote the following to Webster, as a like-minded individual and confidant:

Every month and year makes the Pakeha stronger and the Maori weaker we bide our time … I have observed that we think very much alike but in public and to all the politicians I keep my real thoughts to myself because I have always thought it might be possible that I should live long enough to see a time come when my ideas on the matter may be sufficiently popular and practicable to give me the chance I look for and then I will make a good show or spoil a tremendous [indecipherable] at it with your help … it is a melancholy farce to hear persons gravely talking of the good disposition of the natives in the north when the slightest attempt to enforce the law or the supremacy of the government of the European race would at once lead to plunder and massacre as bad as has ever occurred in any part of the island … The instinct of self preservation prompts barbarism to perpetuate its own horrible existence by horrible means and this is the cause of all the wars and murders we have witnessed barbarians struggling by barbarous means to destroy its mortal foe which is civilisation…. [we are] tax paying British subjects, whose lives and properties are in the hands and at the mercy of the most unmerciful[sic] and grasping savages the world ever knew, who commit as ordinary acts deeds of horror, which would be utterly incredible to every other people if it were not that it is a miserable fact that they have proved the truth on our marrow and bones…. I tell you what Webster if it were not for our being case hardened by the lives we have led, and for our own outrageous audacity we would not be here now … I do believe that the Maori race will be extinguished because they do not now fit into the present state of things now existing on the globe — and because the land they live in is an island and in a temperate latitude they must go. They did very well long ages ago to eat black fellows who were created before them, and were only a sort of rudimental Papuan sort of effort — now the Maories are out of date themselves and their time being come they must go[.] But whether they will get their [indecipherable] by disease, war or by drinking is more than any one
can say … as long as ever they can raise five hundred men in one place they
will be a danger, an impediment, and a torment to themselves and every one
else.  

These sentiments recurred throughout the next two decades, first among all three men,
and then between Webster and Von Sturmer following Maning’s death in 1883. As
noted earlier, Von Sturmer had told Webster that Hokianga needed to be ‘opened up’
to ‘settle the natives for good and all’, while Webster had told Von Sturmer that ‘as
long as a native lives they will give trouble’. Stenhouse has argued that some New
Zealand historians have over-emphasised the racism of Victorian Pakeha and under-
emphasised the extent to which ‘older traditions of racial equality and
humanitarianism’ survived. He contends that, while the dying race theory was
generally accepted within Pakeha society, it was often accompanied by feelings of
‘regret’ and ‘benevolence’ towards the doomed Maori. If Stenhouse’s argument is
correct, then the lack of these sentiments in the correspondence between Webster and
his friends places them outside the mainstream of racial thinking and at the extreme
der end of the colonial racism spectrum. It must be noted that all three men espoused
deply conservative views on a range of political issues, in addition to race. Webster,
for instance, opposed Home Rule in Ireland on the basis that the Irish were incapable
of ruling themselves, doubted the wisdom of women’s suffrage and voiced concern
over the rise of the ‘socialist proletariat’. However, race was the most persistent
theme of their correspondence, and it elicited the most vehement reaction.

As well as being fuelled by these economic and political factors Webster’s racism was
exacerbated by the changed nature of his personal relationships. As the older
generation of rangatira began to die, the personal connections Webster had formed in
the early years of settlement were broken. Among those leaders closest to Webster,
Papahurihia died in 1875 and Nene in 1871, while Arama Karaka Pi had passed away
in 1867. As argued in previous chapters, Webster’s connection to these men had been

79 F.E. Maning to J. Webster, n.d., F.E. Maning Papers, 1865–1906, MS-Papers-0247, ATL.
80 S. Von Sturmer to J. Webster, 23 May 1883, S. Von Sturmer letters to J. Webster, 1875-1909,
NZMS 745, AL.
81 S. Von Sturmer to J. Webster, 3 October 1883, S. Von Sturmer letters to J. Webster, 1875-1909,
NZMS 745, AL.
82 Stenhouse, pp.135, 140.
83 See, for example, T. Denniston to J. Webster, 25 September 1893 & 8 December 1893, NZMS 4-18,
AL; J. Webster to J.L. Campbell, 23 October 1907, Campbell papers, MS 51, box 2, item 93B, AWML.

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a close combination of the personal and the economic. As the economic balance of power that had been at the heart of their association to each other broke down, and as the older rangatira were replaced by a younger generation, Webster had less need to form bonds with the new men, especially following the sale to Andrewes and Yarborough in 1874. The type of collaborative relationship Webster had formed with Papahurihia in the 1840s which had given rise to new rules of cultural engagement and which had been underpinned by mutual economic power and benefit was now at an end. Instead, Webster not only wanted but expected Maori to conform to Pakeha conventions. Those who did not, particularly those members of the new generation who were seen as unworthy successors to their fathers’ positions, became objects of contempt.

One particular target was Hone Mohi Tawhai, who inherited his father’s leadership role at Waima. Tawhai was member of the House of Representative for Northern Maori from 1879 to 1884, and he took this and other opportunities to object to those policies he saw as damaging to Maori. For example, he opposed legislation designed to alienate Maori land and supported a bill that would have replaced the Native Land Court with committees. 84 At the same time that Tawhai was raising concerns about the government’s policies towards Maori, another future member for Northern Maori, Hirini Taiwhanga, was petitioning Queen Victoria, who he saw as the sole authority concerned with the Treaty of Waitangi, ‘asking, principally, for a royal commission to investigate and take steps to amend any laws that contravened the principles of the treaty’. 85 These sentiments reflected an ongoing desire on the part of northern Maori for a close collaborative relationship with the Crown, but they also demonstrated a frustration that the New Zealand government was betraying the spirit and the essence of that relationship, something that will be examined further in the next chapter.

To Webster, Maning and Von Sturmer this challenging of government policy and Pakeha authority was abhorrent. Von Sturmer described Hone Mohi Tawhai to

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Webster as ‘a brute’, while Maning wrote to Webster that ‘Hirini Taiwhanga is a good example of what is called an “educated” native, giving them knowledge is as harmful, and ought to be made as criminal, as giving them rifles and gun powder ….

The old unsophisticated cannibals we could get on well with, but the Hirini Taiwhanga generation which have sprung up are unbearable. Hirini and Johnny Moses [Hone Mohi Tawhai] are first rate representatives of Young New Zealand and most diabolical specimens of the human race. Men such as Hone Mohi Tawhai and Hirini Taiwhanga were perceived as a problem because they failed to either adopt Pakeha lifeways or die away. In 1886 Von Sturmer wrote that Maori ‘can have no hope of permanency unless, having cast aside their old habits and modes of life, they adopt those of their European neighbours in their entirety, as at present, mixed up with the new habits and ideas (and those not of the best) which they have acquired from us, they still retain some of the very worst of their own old customs’.

The political activities and concerns of Tawhai and Taiwhanga flew in the face of this reasoning and suggested a significant degree of agency. To Webster and company this new generation seemed to embody the worst of everything. They were semi-civilised, had thrown away the education they had been given, fomented ungrateful unrest and, perhaps worst of all, called into question the idea of racial determinism. The best one could do was to distance oneself and one’s family from them, something made easier by reduced economic dependence.

Webster’s desire to separate from Maori socially that had accelerated in the 1850s and 1860s was given full expression in the 1870s and 1880s. By 1880 his and Emily’s family comprised three daughters, Caroline, Florence and Ella, and five sons, named George, Alexander, John, Montrose and Boyd. The redefinition of his family as acmes of Pakeha respectability is reflected in the correspondence with Von Sturmer:

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86 S. Von Sturmer to J. Webster, 23 May 1883, S. Von Sturmer letters to J. Webster, 1875-1909, NZMS 745, AL.
87 F.E. Maning to J. Webster, 3 September 1882, F.E. Maning Correspondence, 1868?–1882, NZMS 4-22, AL.
88 AJHR, 1886, G-12, p.3.
89 A similar argument is made by Riddell, p.83.
90 In fact, by this date John and Emily had had 11 children, but three of them (Fairlie, Florence and Benjamin) had already died in infancy or childhood.
3 October 1883
A great deal of sickness amongst native children and many deaths at the different settlements in the river, bad food, and cold the cause, but as you say as long as a native lives they will give trouble — Mrs Von and self send kindest love to you and Yours.  

22 October 1887
Give all our kindest love to Mrs Webster and tell her we often think of the happy old days in Hokianga — when we lived as one family.

While Maori were a troublesome people in decline, the wealthy, middle-class Websters, including Emily, had apparently transcended their mixed descent and become a respectable Pakeha family no different from the Von Sturmers. On the other hand, Maning saw his children’s seeming inability to overcome the ‘handicap’ of their mixed race as a reason for their bad behaviour towards him and his increasingly acrimonious relationship with them:

28 February 1880
The brood of half caste fiends I have the misfortune to be father to I believe will at last drive me mad[. T]hey have nearly so already.

5 March 1880
The frightful conduct of that brood of half castes who each in their own particular way have done all they could to drive me mad [. Susan has been] worse than [a] Maori devil.

Maning’s particular opprobrium was reserved for his daughter Mary, who had married George Hardiman, the mixed-descent son of the sawyer Robert Hardiman from the north side of the river. Even allowing for the difficulties caused by Maning and his daughter’s combative personalities, it seems part of the reason for the breakdown of his and Mary’s relationship was her decision to marry a half-caste man of a lower social class. Maning disapproved of the union from the start, allegedly firing a canon over the couple’s heads as they returned to the north side of river after announcing

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91 S. Von Sturmer to J. Webster, 3 October 1883, S. Von Sturmer letters to J. Webster, 1875-1909, NZMS 745, AL.
92 S. Von Sturmer to J. Webster, 22 October 1887, S. Von Sturmer letters to J. Webster, 1875-1909, NZMS 745, AL.
93 F.E. Maning to S. Von Sturmer, 28 February 1880, Micro 561, ATL.
94 F.E. Maning to S. Von Sturmer, 5 March 1880, Micro 561, ATL.
their engagement. When in the early 1880s she started entering his home at Onoke and removing items she believed were hers and then apparently spreading rumours about Maning’s poor treatment of his ill daughter Susan, Maning left for Auckland leaving his employee George Leef, son of John Leef, in charge. Maning obviously trusted George Leef but wasn’t above resorting to the rhetoric of race when the younger Leef disappointed him. When in 1881 George sought Maning’s help in gaining a government pension and position which Maning did not believe he deserved, Maning wrote to Webster ‘I believe the whole Maori race are going madder than ever with conceit and insolence …. Did ever wild lunatics in a mad house indulge such dreams and such cool impudence as we have led the Maoris to indulge in because simply we are afraid to tell them what dirt they are and show them their proper position and put them there in the kennel.’ Webster and Maning continued to see those mixed-descent families from whom they had sought to separate themselves on the conjoint grounds of class and race in the 1860s as less than their equals, and in this period the impudence and ingratitude they saw in Maori such as Hone Mohi Tawhai was also applied to those half-caste individuals who they looked down on socially. Moreover, the degeneracy they associated with Maori generally also applied to those half-caste children who rejected their parents’ social values. The well-behaved, middle-class Websters were Pakeha; the ill-behaved, ungentlemanly Hardimans and Leefs were Maori.

The desire to expunge Maori influence from Pakeha families was shared by other settlers too. Ten years earlier one of Webster and Maning’s contemporaries had laid down in his will that his daughter marry a European husband and his son marry ‘a respectable European or half caste woman’ or else lose their inheritance.

But the wish to escape the past and implement a new social order in Hokianga was still only a pipe dream. Maning’s complaint that the new generation of Maori, such as Hone Mohi Tawhai, had inherited the worst of all traits also applied to Hokianga itself. In 1882 he told Webster that:

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96 F.E. Maning to J. Webster, 9 July 181, F.E. Maning Correspondence, 1868–1882, NZMS 4-22, AL.
97 BBAE 1587, Box 13 record 379, ANZA. Anonymity retained at family’s request.
Hokianga is not now a fit residence for folks who knew the old times, either a quite civilised or perfectly savage place will do for us — but half and half of those conditions don’t mix satisfactorily.\textsuperscript{98}

According to this view, Hokianga was a kind of half-way house between the fully civilised and the savage. In the latter, the good old times, Webster and Maning could have continued to exercise their imperial identities and portray themselves as directors of savages; in the former they could have congratulated themselves at having tamed and defeated barbarity and had their racial thinking vindicated. As it stood, neither of these claims could be made. By the 1880s Hokianga was populated with enough ‘new faces’ to end its status as an outpost on the edge of the civilised European world, but it was still a place where Maori were the demographic majority and where the Queen’s law and institutions still had to accept their limits. This inability to be one thing or the other, neither daring imperial man of empire nor citizen of a district fully integrated into a modern colony, underscored and motivated much of the vitriol Webster and his friends expressed to each other in this period.

Change had indeed come to Hokianga in the form of new settlers and new infrastructure which linked the district more directly to the rest of the country. It had been made possible by the purchasing of large blocks of land, particularly by the government in the mid-1870s, which in turn was both a result and an accelerator of a shift in the economic balance of power towards Pakeha. But there was constancy as well as change. The district remained distinct from much of the rest of New Zealand, and even from the rest of Northland, in its demographic make-up, and it was still possible for Maori to retain political autonomy rather than accept Pakeha law. These two contrasting Hokiangas sat uncomfortably alongside each other during this period, drawing an embittered and frustrated response from Webster and his associates.

\textsuperscript{98} F.E. Maning to J. Webster, 3 September 1882, F.E. Maning Correspondence, 1868?–1882, NZMS 4-22, AL.
Chapter Eight
Towards the Dog Tax War: 1880s-1900

The late 1880s and 1890s saw a bedding-in of the shift in economic power relations between Maori and Pakeha in Hokianga. As timber resources increasingly passed to Pakeha, Maori retreated into the gum industry to try to meet the requirements of the growing cash economy, and to pay the rate demands being presented by the new county council. Concern over these mounting pressures drew a variety of political responses, ranging from attempts to reengage with the Crown, to religiously influenced movements that rejected Pakeha ways. In the midst of all this, John Webster had settled in to retirement at Opononi and had largely handed the running of his remaining commercial enterprises over to his sons, but he did not remain untouched by changing economic and social arrangements. At Opononi he had built a home that surpassed Kohukohu in grandeur but which lacked its economic importance. The relative unimportance of his new residence was a sign of the times; its marginality reflected the economic and political distance that had grown between Maori and Pakeha. Yet in a pattern that had existed nearly all his life, Webster still saw himself as being able to direct and influence his Maori neighbours. In 1898, though, both his and the Crown’s belief in their ability to control events was challenged by armed resistance to the dog tax, centred at Waima. This episode directly confronted both Webster’s imperial identity and the Crown’s political ambitions.

The first section of this chapter looks at the economic and demographic developments taking place in Hokianga at this time. It examines how these changes put pressure on Maori and how they elicited political responses that showed the extent to which the formerly collaborative relationship between Maori and the Crown had shifted. The second section examines Webster’s life at this time and considers how it reflected this shift. The final section looks at the dog tax war as a manifestation of Maori economic concern and political mobilisation that provided Webster with a final opportunity to exhibit his so-called influence over Maori but which actually demonstrated the limits of both his and the Crown’s martial power. This chapter argues that the real shift that had taken place, the real source of influence for both Webster and the Crown, was
economic, and was to be found in the marginalisation of Maori rather than in shows of force.

‘A spirit of unrest’: Economic struggle and political response 1880s-1890s

During the 1890s the economic and demographic patterns which had begun to form during the 1870s and 1880s became clearer, and the face of Hokianga continued to change accordingly. Pakeha settlements continued to spring up, including one on the Waoku plateau on a piece of land purchased in 1875 and described by the government’s land purchase officer as being fit for only the hardiest colonists.¹ This prediction proved to be right, as by 1902 only one of the 33 or so settlers who took up land there in 1894 had stuck it out.² Nevertheless, the Pakeha population of Hokianga County steadily grew. The 1896 census recorded 1909 Pakeha, while it had the Maori population sitting at 1839. Hokianga was still unlike the rest of the country, where nationally the Pakeha population outnumbered Maori by almost 18 to 1, but the estimated populations had seemingly equalised, and those new arrivals continued to mean greater competition for resources.³

Nowhere was this pressure more evident than in the timber industry, which seems to have employed relatively few Maori by the 1890s. In 1895 James C. Clendon, the Stipendiary Magistrate for the Bay of Islands, noted instances of Maori participation in timber felling and cutting ‘are few as compared with their former occupation in this way’, noting that Maori were more likely to be found on the gumfield than in the timber forest. As far as Clendon was concerned this was a lifestyle choice: ‘The labour [cutting timber] being hard is now generally left for their European neighbours, whilst they betake themselves to the easier and, to them, more congenial work of collecting kauri-gum.’⁴ A more accurate explanation is that Maori were losing out in the job market as Pakeha employers chose to employ Pakeha labourers, just as

¹ AJHR, 1875, Session I, G-7, p.2.
³ *Results of the Census of New Zealand 1896*, pp.1, 9, Appendix B, p.xlii. The Pakeha estimate included 72 half castes, while the Maori estimate included 93 half castes. It has to be noted that, in addition to the methodological issues related to the census noted in footnote 34, chapter 7, the 1896 census was particularly problematic in that it significantly under-enumerated the Maori population nationally. See Kate Riddell, “‘Improving the Maori’: Counting the Ideology of Intermarriage”, NZJH, 34, 1, 2000, p.81; Ian Pool, *Te Iwi Maori: A New Zealand Population Past, Present & Projected*, Auckland, 1991, p.71.
Webster had employed Canadians in the 1870s, a trend which was exacerbated by the downturn of the 1880s. Evidence of this can be found in a petition sent by employees of the Kauri Timber Company’s Kohukohu mill to the Hokianga County Council during the mill’s temporary closure in 1895. Of the 17 hands who applied to the council for work on roads while the mill was closed, none had a Maori name, nor did a photo of 18 mill workers taken around the same time show any Maori workers.  

The Kauri Timber Company was an Australian syndicate that took advantage of the 1880s slump to buy up 28 mills throughout New Zealand, including Andrewes and Yarborough’s struggling operation at Kohukohu, which was bought in 1889. Over the following 15 years the Hokianga timber industry hit its peak performance. By 1901 another mill had been established at Koutu, and by 1905 a mill was operating at Waimamaku which produced 2.5 million superfeet per year.  

The arrival of the company in Hokianga and the capital it drew on meant that power in the timber industry was now consolidated in its hands and away from both smaller Pakeha operators and Maori, something which worked to disadvantage Maori workers even further.

In response to these changes, some Maori moved to protect the economic resources they had left, which could mean non-cooperation with Pakeha traders and contractors. In August 1895 council contractor J. Deverell wrote to the chairman of the Hokianga County Council complaining of the difficulties he faced in getting timber to build culverts at Omanaia and to repair the Rawene wharf: ‘It is impossible to get puriri for it as the Natives wont [sic] let me have it now.’ Direct action also took place on the gumfields aimed at asserting and protecting economic interests. In July 1893, the *Northern Luminary* reported that Maori at Mangamuka had blocked the road to the Omahuta gumfield, which ran over a piece of their land. The newspaper claimed that ‘the reason put forward by the natives for their proceeding is that they object to the European storekeepers, who have stores on the field doing their own packing, insisting that the work must be given to Mangamuka Natives’.

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7 J. Deverell to Hokianga County Council, 4 August 1895, Hokianga County Council Inwards Correspondence 1895, ZAAP A473 20245 3a, ANZA.

8 *Northern Luminary*, 1 July 1893, p.2.
The action taken at Omahuta highlights the need Maori now had to earn wages in order to survive and participate in the new economy, and to meet the financial demands increasingly being put on them and their land. The dismantling of the provincial government system in 1875 and its replacement by a system of county councils meant that the cost of infrastructure development and maintenance now fell at a genuinely local level. In Hokianga, this meant that the burden of paying for the roads and bridges so badly needed in the district fell on all landowners, Maori and Pakeha. In 1882, all Maori land that was less than five miles from a public road was made liable to rates.\(^9\) This included land held on a customary basis that was not under production and therefore not generating an income with which rates could be paid. In the case of land held on this basis, owners had three months to pay rates. If this was not done, the Colonial Treasurer would meet the cost, which would be recovered when the land was leased or sold.\(^10\) Although this provision was repealed by Parliament in 1888, on the basis that it acted as a disincentive to individualisation of title and put an unbearable financial burden on the Treasury, it created a debt against the land that added further pressure to Maori owners.\(^11\) Moreover, the provision fuelled resentment in the minds of Maori who saw an inequity in the fact that they were rated on land that was not generating an income, while Pakeha settlers were given financial assistance to break in their blocks.

In addition to lobbying to extend rates to Maori land, local bodies also sought to introduce a range of other taxes to fund costly infrastructure projects. Hokianga County Council levied a wheel tax from the beginning of 1898, while a dog tax of 2/6 had been introduced from early 1892. The dog tax will be discussed in greater detail in the third section of this chapter. All these measures increased the need for cash and produced disquiet among Maori across New Zealand generally, including in Hokianga.


\(^10\) Stirling, pp.135-36.

\(^11\) Ibid., p.158.
Disquiet was compounded in the 1890s by the government’s land policy. The Liberal government viewed the opening up and settling of the land as one of the cornerstones of its agenda. ‘Idle’ Maori land stood in the way of this agenda being realised. Part of the answer to this perceived problem came with the passing of a new Native Land Court Act in 1894, which reinstated the Crown’s pre-emptive right to purchase that had been removed in the 1860s. On the face of it, the move appeared to offer protection to Maori vendors, but in fact it had the opposite effect. As David Armstrong and Evan Subasic put it, ‘In short there was no market. The evidence suggests that Crown purchase agents were quick to take advantage of Maori indebtedness, mounting rate liabilities and interest generating survey liens to beat down opposition’. 12

These combined pressures to earn cash in order to pay rates and other debts and thereby avoid the need to sell land became central concerns during this period. They also became a recurring theme in the relationship between Maori and the Crown as the realisation that the economic benefits that many Maori had expected to flow from collaboration with both the Crown and settlers had failed to materialise. As argued in the previous chapter, there had been an expectation that land sales would bring new settlers and towns that would boost trade. From the 1880s, however, it was clear that while to some extent the settlers had come the benefits to Maori had not. At the same time, there was a growing feeling that the imposition of rates and taxes on assets such as land and dogs struck at the heart of the political autonomy, or rangatiratanga, and the protection of resources that had apparently been guaranteed by the Treaty of Waitangi.

These two concerns, land alienation and taxes, were at the forefront of issues raised at a meeting held between various rangatira and Premier Richard Seddon at Waima in 1894. Leaders expressed concern about the purpose of the government’s land policies. Seddon defended settler land acquisition in the name of progress:

We have said that a large proportion of the [Maori-owned] land is suitable for settling people upon, and there is a rapidly-increasing demand for land for settlement purposes. Progress is retarded. — I say that settlement is kept back,

12 Armstrong and Subasic, p.86.
to the detriment of the Natives themselves…. Keep as much as you think will
be wanted for yourselves and children, but do not think of keeping the country
in an unproductive condition; that is what everybody complains of.\(^{13}\)

When discussion moved to the dog tax and the financial burden of rates on land, the
premier again stressed the need for Maori to open up land to settlement: ‘I am sorry
the Natives have not more money to enable them to pay their rates; but they keep the
land locked up…. You cannot escape paying the dog-tax any more than the Europeans
…. The law must be supreme. It is the law of the Queen and the law of the country.’\(^{14}\)

These exchanges show how the tenor of meetings between Maori leaders and Crown
officials had changed during the past 30 years. Although Seddon had been welcomed
by men such as Hapakuku Moetara of Ngati Korokoro with the words ‘Salutations to
the Premier…. My heart is glad to see you here to-day …. We welcome you…. We
wish you long life and happiness’, which seemed to conjure up the collaborative spirit
of times past, other leaders were more circumspect. One speaker noted that ‘In days
gone by we always had a visit from the Governor; but this time he has not come’,
echoing a feeling that the bond between the government and northern Maori had been
stretched to breaking.\(^{15}\) For his part, Seddon took the opportunity simply to restate
government policy, rather than to shore up support among northern chiefs. Armstrong
and Subasic have argued that the reason for this was that the Crown’s policy
objectives ‘no longer required a close political engagement with northern Maori,
whose own political and economic aspirations were fast dropping from the Crown’s
agenda’.\(^{16}\) As will be seen in the third section of this chapter, this did not mean that
the Crown had imposed its political will on the north, but it had achieved enough of
its aims through other means that it had stopped seeing the support of northern Maori
as being important within the national context.

Maori responses to concerns over land and tax were manifold, and often tried to recall
the Crown to the collaborative relationship which Maori saw as having been
embodied in the Treaty of Waitangi, and which they now saw as breaking down. One
such response was led by Hirini Taiwhanga, who along with other northern chiefs

\(^{13}\) AJHR, 1895, G-1, pp.28, 33.
\(^{14}\) ibid., pp.32, 33.
\(^{15}\) ibid., p.23.
\(^{16}\) Armstrong and Subasic, p.62.
travelled to London in 1882 in the hope of personally petitioning Queen Victoria about their concerns, which centred on land laws and confiscation, as well as the harsh treatment government forces had meted out to the pacifist community at Parihaka in 1881. In particular they asked for a royal commission to investigate and amend any laws that contravened the principles of the Treaty and for permission to establish a Maori parliament which would prevent the New Zealand government from further breaching the Treaty. The deputation failed in its ambition to meet Victoria, and the chiefs were told to seek redress from the New Zealand government.

However, while the plea for their own parliament was rejected by the government, Maori leaders across the north responded positively to the idea of regional meetings, with the result that gatherings were held throughout the 1880s at Waitangi, as well as at Orakei in Auckland. In 1883, Spencer Von Sturmer noted that ‘large meetings are held in many instances to discuss land questions and the much-talked-of Treaty of Waitangi. Considerable interest is taken in the proceedings of Parliament, which they watch with some suspicion, appearing to think that each Act passed by the Legislature is an encroachment upon some Native right or privilege.’ Almost a decade later, his successor as Resident Magistrate, H.W. Bishop, wrote that:

A very large meeting was lately held at Waitangi, in the Bay of Islands…. These meetings have become annual affairs. They involve a great deal of talk, and a vast consumption of food. They foster and encourage a spirit of unrest amongst the Maoris, and result invariably in nothing practical being done. This last meeting was no exception to the rule. The same subjects come up year after year for discussion, and chief among these is the matter of the enforcement of the Dog Tax Registration.

Like other Pakeha officials, Bishop saw these gatherings as a waste of time, breath and food, but their purpose was both more defined and more positive than that assessment allowed. Their general intent was to end legislation that underpinned land alienation, to challenge the imposition of taxes and to push for the establishment of separate political institutions. The Waitangi parliaments also became forums where Maori leaders could lobby Pakeha politicians, such as Frederick Whittaker in 1889 and Native Minister Alfred Cadman in 1892. Although the ministers’ replies were

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17 Taiwhanga received support from some Hokianga chiefs, including Aperahama Taonui.
18 AJHR, 1883, G-1A, p.3.
19 AJHR, 1892, G-3, p.1.
20 New Zealand Herald (NZH), 23 April 1892, p.5; Armstrong and Subasic, p.1093.
no more encouraging of Maori aspirations than Seddon’s was to be in 1894, the meetings showed an ongoing willingness to engage with the Crown. In this way, although deeply concerned by its actions, leaders still saw sought a collaborative, constructive relationship the government.

Other responses, however, were rooted more in separation than engagement. In Hokianga, one such response came in the form of what Pakeha pejoratively called ‘hauhauism’. During the 1880s prophetic movements led by three different women, Maria Pangari, Ani Karo and Remana Hi, emerged in the upper reaches of the river, at Waihou. At least two of these movements, those led by Ani Karo and Remana Hi, have been interpreted as being motivated by social and political discontent. Ani Karo had travelled to Parihaka and spent time with its prophet, Te Whiti, after the destruction of the settlement in 1881, and she took Te Whiti’s teachings back with her to Waihou. Although little is known about the movement, it seems it shared some elements with Parihaka, including resistance to land alienation and rejection of the Sunday Sabbath. During an absence from Hokianga Ani Karo found that another woman, Remana Hi, was attempting to take over the movement. The groups splintered and faced off against each other. From the beginning Remana Hi (who, like Maria Pangari, was a daughter of the old chief Aporo Pangari) caused Pakeha authorities more concern than either of the other two Waihou prophets. Like Ani Karo, Remana Hi had links to Parihaka, but the new sect shut itself off from outsiders and retreated to an exclusive settlement known as Mt Zion, where they dressed entirely in white and formulated a religion which rejected the New Testament and the Christian Sabbath. Rumours of ‘preposterous rites and ceremonies’ also emerged, including stories of the new prophet claiming to be able to raise the dead, as well as of cannibalism. Although these claims were based in speculation rather than fact, events took a turn for the worse in July 1887 when a settler named Hearn was detained when he strayed into the sacred area at the heart of the sect’s settlement.

\[\text{21} \text{ For examples of the use of this term in the popular press to describe the groups at Waihou see }\]
\[\text{Northern Luminary, 10 April 1880, p.3; 14 June 1887, p.3; 18 June 1889, p.2. See also AJHR, 1889, G-3, p.2; AJHR, 1888, G-5, p.2 for descriptions of the followers as ‘fanatics’.}\]
\[\text{22} \text{ Bronwyn Elsmore, }\text{Mana from Heaven: A Century of Maori Prophets in New Zealand, Auckland, 1999, p.275.}\]
\[\text{23} \text{ ibid., p.276.}\]
\[\text{24} \text{ Northern Luminary, 14 June 1887, p.3; Elsmore, pp.276-77.}\]
Police authorities already concerned by the group’s odd behaviour and similarities to Parihaka used this as an excuse to arrest the leaders, including Remana Hi.\textsuperscript{25}

Following her return to Hokianga, Remana Hi told the district constable that ‘God was waiting to come down and endow them with a knowledge of all things’ and that ‘she also expected Te Whiti whom she had “spiritually married” to come to Hokianga’.\textsuperscript{26} In her study of Maori prophetic movements, Bronwyn Elsmore argued that ‘the reason behind these beliefs appears to be the very depressed situation of the people at this time. Their link with Taranaki had reinforced in this Northland people the idea that they were socially disadvantaged by the loss of their land to European settlement.’\textsuperscript{27} There are certainly elements in these movements that suggest a concern over social conditions, such as Ani Karo’s focus on land alienation. While the prophets set about creating their own communities which consciously rejected Christian teachings, and thereby sought disengagement from Pakeha ways, it was this concern with social and economic conditions that linked them to other, more mainstream, movements, such as the Waitangi parliaments.

Armstrong and Subasic have argued that while the social and economic conditions in which Maori were living by the 1890s partly fuelled protest during this period, the real driver was concern at the loss of political power and autonomy. This, however, seems like a false distinction. It is more likely that anxiety over loss of economic influence went hand in hand with concern about political autonomy. After all, one of the prime reasons for pursuing a relationship with the Crown had been an expectation that it would bring trade, settlers and prosperity, thereby securing autonomy. When these benefits failed to arrive and the people suffered materially, political action, either through engagement or disengagement, was seen as the answer.\textsuperscript{28} Nowhere was this more obvious than in the protests over the dog tax, which simmered across Northland, and indeed throughout the country, during this period, before erupting in

\textsuperscript{26} Elsmore, pp.279-80.
\textsuperscript{27} ibid., p.280.
Hokianga in 1898. The events which ultimately became known as the Dog Tax War combined elements of economic hardship, prophetic belief and direct action. They were the result of an altered balance of power and shifting relationships to be seen throughout Hokianga, including at John Webster’s new home and economic base at Opononi.

‘A proper retreat for an old adventurer’: Opononi 1880s-1900

By the 1880s, John Webster had settled into retirement at Opononi, although the onset of old age brought with it a variety of troubles and sorrows. The move from Kohukohu may have cured the mysterious chest condition which had partly driven him down-river, but he was increasingly prone to attacks of ‘La Grippe’ and other ailments. Following the loss of Maning to cancer in 1883 and Emily to the same illness in 1887, he kept himself busy by travelling when possible to Auckland and beyond to Rotorua, for the good of his health. When at home at Opononi, he continued to oversee the running of the ‘Opononi Estate’, which comprised a 700-acre sheep farm, as well as operating a general store, which also traded in gum. Webster’s store was located next to the Opononi wharf, and was described by one correspondent as ‘the most substantially built and best fitted up that I have seen north of Auckland’. As mentioned earlier, though, the trade itself was largely carried out on the gumfields, with stores being carried up to the fields and the gum packed out. In this operation Webster was assisted by two of his four sons, George and Monty, while Alex busied himself farming, fruit-growing and fish-curing at Pakanae, as well as securing road-building contracts. The most prominent of the next Webster generation was the eldest son, George, who, as well as helping his father, went into business with J. Marriner, trading in timber, gum and mercantile goods, despite Webster senior’s concern that George was ‘scarcely cut out for business’.

A significant amount of Webster’s time, though, was devoted to extending and caring for his house on the Opononi waterfront. He added a second storey and cultivated a garden filled with exotic plants of all sizes and descriptions. The result was that by the

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29 La grippe is an archaic term for influenza.
30 NZH, 18 April 1892, p.3.
31 J. Webster to T.M. Hocken, 10 February 1909, Letters and Papers relating to Dr T.M. Hocken, MS-1570/001, Hocken Library.
early 1890s, the Opononi house was the ‘show palace’ of the Hokianga, as this florid description attests:

The homestead of Mr. John Webster is the most beautiful place on the Hokianga River…. [It is] a Hokiangan Paradise — a place which might be coveted by Lotus-eaters, a land in which it always seemeth to be afternoon…. The two-storeyed mansion of Opononi fronts the harbour, and there, embowered in flowers, fruit and foliage, the septuagenarian philosopher looks out from ‘the loopholes of retreat’ on the busy world beyond …. Flanking the main entrance of the mansion are two Maori figures, quaintly carved, which, with protruding tongues, and staring eyes keep watch and ward, while hard by is a seat cut out of the solid trunk of a tree, the side lines of which artistically depict a lizard or a Maori mythological reptile…. Going into the balcony, there can be seen on the walls the corselets and mailed breastplates worn by Life Guardsmen at Waterloo, and along the jaloused verandahs groups of Maori weapons of war, and every description of spear, and shield, and poisoned arrow used by the natives of the South Pacific. Over the verandahs trail the beautiful bougainvilleas and geraniums 15 feet in height. The hybiscus [sic], koromīko, tree ferns and Queensland palms, are all around, while a specimen of pisonia, a cutting from the only one known, in Whangape, flourishes apace. The mansion is flanked by bits of native bush, and orchards. In the latter are to be seen growing in perfection grapes, apples, peaches, oranges, bananas, lemons, dates, almonds, and other semi-tropical fruits.32

In 1909 Webster estimated that he had spent an impressive £5000 on the house and grounds.33 But, as the correspondent for the New Zealand Herald noted, the house was more than an outlet for Webster’s green thumb and a demonstration of his wealth; it also acted as a repository for the artifacts he had collected over the course of his life. In this way it became a display case of empire and his own personal expression of the type of salvage ethnography that hit its peak during this period, and of which Webster had already shown himself to be a fan. It included items and mementos from each part of his life, from his childhood in post-Napoleonic Britain, to the South Pacific and the Middle East, to which he had travelled in 1885. And, of course, the house also displayed his connection to and knowledge of Maori. These items sat cheek by jowl with not only native flora but with items from across the world, effectively making them exotic in their own backyard. The house had become a physical embodiment of the ‘strange scenes and romantic adventures’ that had

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32 NZH, 18 April 1892, p.3.
33 J. Webster to T.M. Hocken, 10 February 1909, Letters and Papers relating to Dr T.M. Hocken, MS-1570/001, Hocken Library.
motivated Webster to leave Scotland and which had taken him to places like Guadalcanal in younger years, and New Zealand was presented as just such a strange and wondrous place. Moreover, the contents of his home and its surroundings confirmed his self-image as one of what journalist and amateur historian James Cowan called ‘pioneers of enterprise, self-reliance and cool courage’.\textsuperscript{34} It was this sense of daring and adventure that Cowan emphasised when in 1936 he remembered his meeting with Webster 38 years earlier:

> The garden, sheltered by tall and spreading pohutukawa trees, was filled with trees and plants from many lands. Bananas ripened there, under the Hokianga sun, in that garden of repose within the fort-like beachfront wall. Those old ship’s guns in the embrasures, the yellow sands, the murmurous wash of the tide, brought a touch of the sea-warrior’s life and a salty suggestion of Kingsley’s ‘Last Buccaneer.’ A proper retreat for an old adventurer, and a writer, too — Robert Louis Stevenson would have delighted in such a home, with its parapeted garden plantation bathed in the golden light and the sound of the trampling surf at the Heads borne on the western breeze. As you walked up to the broad verandah, you would have seen tuatara lizards, those spiney relics of a lost world, blinking from great sea-shells of the tropic islands. Those guns gave the proper spirit to the place.\textsuperscript{35}

Chris Hilliard has pointed out Cowan’s tendency to over-emphasise the adventurous nature of nineteenth-century New Zealand: ‘Adventure dominates his narrative structures to the point where it becomes a free-floating literary commodity independent of the characters.’\textsuperscript{36} However, there seems little doubt that Webster would have approved of this description of himself, or of his comparison to Robert Louis Stevenson, given his propensity to play up his role as the adventurous imperial man in his own writings, and the house he built served to reinforce this image for his neighbours and visitors.

Among those visitors were Hokianga’s respectable Pakeha, as Opononi became a gathering place for them just as Kohukohu had been since the 1840s. Among the house’s many facilities were a dance floor, a tennis court and an area set aside for

\textsuperscript{34} James Cowan, ‘Famous — New Zealanders — No. 43 — John Webster, of Hokianga. — The Adventures of a Pioneer’, \textit{The New Zealand Railways Magazine}, 11, 7, 1 October 1936, p.17.\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p.19.\textsuperscript{36} Chris Hilliard, ‘James Cowan and the Frontiers of New Zealand History’, \textit{NZJH}, 31, 2, 1997, p.224. Hilliard’s article focuses specifically on Cowan’s historical works rather than on his journalism. However, his comments about Cowan’s preoccupation with the idea of an adventurous New Zealand past are relevant to Cowan’s article about Webster, whose past Cowan sought to document.
Figure 13: ‘John Webster’s garden, Opononi’

Source: Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries
Figure 14: ‘John Webster’s garden, Opononi’

Source: Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries
lawn bowls. In her popular history of Hokianga Jean Irvine recounted that Opononi was ‘the scene of many social gatherings in the eighties and nineties, when families travelled many miles down the harbour to dances or tennis parties at Webster’s, sometimes with the ball gowns of the girls safely stowed in hampers’. \(^{37}\) Opononi also followed in Kohukohu’s footsteps by being a landing place for premiers and governors. In 1894 Webster welcomed Premier Richard Seddon and his party to lunch, while the following year he hosted the governor, Lord Glasgow, for several days leading up to Christmas. This visit also involved Webster letting off a 17-gun salute and ‘a large number of natives [giving] a dance of welcome’. \(^{38}\) All of this suggests that Opononi had inherited Kohukohu’s status as an important political meeting place for Maori and Pakeha, with Webster acting as a conduit between the parties as he had done in the 1860s. But there were significant differences. As noted earlier, the nature of the meetings between Maori and representatives of the Crown had changed by this period, with governors and premiers less interested in shoring up support and confirming political alliances with Maori than in earlier years. Visits were now opportunities to become familiar with the country’s outer geography and reiterate government policy rather than chances to reaffirm collaborative relationships with ‘loyal’ chiefs. And staying with John Webster was now less about securing access to those chiefs than about viewing his curios and enjoying a degree of comfort on a long trip.

The relative political unimportance of Opononi in the 1880s and 1890s compared to Kohukohu in the 1850s and 1860s was also a reflection of its owner’s changed economic role and position. Whereas in earlier decades Webster had enjoyed a measure of political importance because of Kohukohu’s status as Hokianga’s leading outpost of economic empire, with the attendant relationships that connected him to rangatira and therefore made him valuable to Crown officials, and vice versa, these economic relationships simply did not exist at Opononi. Following his retirement from the timber industry, he was no longer in a position to play the role of political go-between that had been fulfilled by timber merchants; indeed, following the change in the balance of power in that industry in favour of Pakeha, this role had ceased to exist in real terms. Instead, Opononi can be seen as a ‘show palace’ in more ways than

\(^{37}\) Irvine, p.39.  
\(^{38}\) Star, 24 December 1894, p.3.
one. While it had all of Kohukohu’s grandeur, and provided a haven for Pakeha respectability, it lacked Kohukohu’s former practical economic and political importance.

As well as being reflected in his Opononi house, the nature and extent of the economic and political changes that had taken place in Webster’s life, and in Hokianga more generally, were also demonstrated in his personal correspondence, his use of language and the way he chose to identify himself. In his declining years Webster kept up regular communication with John Logan Campbell in Auckland, one of his few remaining contemporaries. While this correspondence documented the trials of age, it also captured Webster’s view of himself as an authority on things Maori and as someone who differed from more recent Pakeha arrivals. When Campbell was in the process of gifting Cornwall Park and Maungakiekie/One Tree Hill to the city of Auckland, Webster wrote to him offering advice on what the mountain ought to be known as: ‘What is really wanted is a name that wont [sic] be easily corrupted by the pakeha pronouncing it (as most maori [sic] names are) …. The name [Maungakiekie] is not easily pronounced & would certainly be corrupted by the white man.’ He also speculated on the origins of the Maori ‘race’, believing them to be closely associated with the Malays, and bemoaned the ‘puny & listless’ nature of modern-day Maori, ‘not like warriors of the olden time with their bodies blue with mako (tatoo [sic]) aue (alas)’. This was a continuation of the harking back to the ‘good old times’ and of the ethnographic belief in imminent Maori demise that had taken hold in the 1870s, as well as being part of Webster’s ongoing construction of an imperial identity which set him apart from feeble modern-day Pakeha. But what is most striking about the letters is the form of valediction they employed. Most ended with a sign-off such as ‘To hoa aroha’ (your dear friend) or ‘Na to hoa aroha tonu’ (from your friend always), and all were signed by ‘Hone Wepiha’. This Maori form of his name had first been used during his interaction with men such as Papahurihia in the 1840s when, as argued in chapter two, it had underpinned a real economic relationship characterised by mutual benefit. In that context the use of Maori as the language of communication signified the collaborative nature of the relationship and

39 J. Webster to J.L. Campbell, 20 January 1904, Letters of John Webster to John Logan Campbell, Campbell papers, MS 51, Box 8, item 93B, AWML.
40 J. Webster to J.L. Campbell, 11 September 1901 & 28 October 1905, Letters of John Webster to John Logan Campbell, Campbell papers, MS 51, Box 8, item 93B, AWML.
the compromises that a man of empire had been willing to make to secure trade. Of course, at that time Webster had also employed the Maori language to ‘puzzle his friends at home’, but fundamentally the name Hone Wepiha had a practical application rather than simply being a source of amusement. But its use in his letters to Campbell 60 years later was more nostalgic than functional. His use of Maori here signalled a desire to revisit the ‘good old times’ with a friend who had been there with him, and in this way it acted as a bond between two elderly men who viewed themselves as being different from other Pakeha. It also seems reminiscent of a tendency among the wider Pakeha population at this time to co-opt Maori motifs, on the basis that the dying race wouldn’t be needing them anymore. So, for example, as James Belich puts it, ‘from the 1890s … Pakeha hockey teams and children were given Maori names; “Kia ora” was advocated as a Pakeha greeting; and “Maorilanders” became a populist by-name for European New Zealanders’. In this way, Webster’s letters denote nostalgia not only for his own past but for an idealised version of New Zealand’s frontier history, which he saw as moving further into the ether.

Of course, the situation was, again, not quite this straightforward in Hokianga, where the Maori language was not gasping its last breath. Te Reo Maori might have been a novelty in the homes of Auckland, but on the streets of Rawene it was still heard on a daily basis. And it was still being used as a language of trade. In the 1890s Webster’s son George wrote to Maori in Te Reo, signing himself ‘Hori Wepiha’. This could be taken as a sign that nothing had really changed in the 50 years since his father had first been known as Hone Wepiha, that the economic relationship in what could still be called a ‘native district’ remained equal and the Websters were still making cultural compromises to secure vital relationships with Maori. However, what George’s letters actually reveal is the extent to which the economic relationship had changed, with debt recovery being a common theme running through them. Instead

42 See, for example, Hori Wepiha to Pekana, 16 March 1892, G.F. Webster Letterbook, 1889-1893, micro-ms-0929, ATL; Hori Wepiha to Pekana and Rika, 20 April 1892, G.F. Webster Letterbook, 1889-1893, micro-ms-0929, ATL; Hori Perereki Wepiha to Tatau, 25 June 1892, G.F. Webster, Letterbook, 1889-1893, micro-ms-0929, ATL; Hori Wepiha to Ngawini, 15 October 1892, G.F. Webster Letterbook, 1889-1893, micro-ms-0929, ATL; Hori Pereriki Wepiha to Manu, 27 June 1893, G.F. Webster Letterbook, 1889-1893, micro-ms-0929, ATL. Translated by Jane McRae.
of being a sign of equality and compromise, the use of Maori in this context was a pragmatic tool for communicating with indebted customers. The names Hone Wepiha in the 1840s and Hori Wepiha in the 1890s both underpinned an economic relationship, but that relationship had fundamentally altered.

It would, though, be going too far to say that all of John Webster’s connections with Maori communities were at an end and that the divisions between him and Maori had become insurmountable. The realities of life in Hokianga alone made this impossible, and there are indications that he maintained personal ties to and was respected by those individuals who provided a link to the relationships of the past. In early 1902 he was invited to the ceremonies that followed the death of Hapakuku Moetara, son of Rangatira Moetara, and he was reported as having joined the other elderly chiefs of Hokianga in paying tribute to the deceased.\footnote{He Kupu Whakamarama, 1 January 1902, vol 47, p.8.} This suggests that he was seen in some quarters as possessing personal mana, but it is also likely that this was based on his former role as economic leader rather than on the reality of his life at the turn of the century. His attendance at this particular event was probably also connected to the fact that Hapakuku Moetara’s daughter was married to Emily’s nephew Frederick Russell, thereby linking Webster to Moetara by marriage and indicating the ongoing personal entanglements of daily life.

By the 1890s, then, Webster had largely lost the economic and political importance he had enjoyed in former years. Instead, he focused on building his home at Opononi, which became his very own imperial display case, containing mementoes gathered over the past 50 years and surrounded by exotic vegetation from across the world. Away from the more complex daily realities and frustrations that had characterised earlier decades, and which had underpinned the virulent racism of the 1870s, he was able to give full expression to a less complicated, nostalgic view of himself and the past. But while Opononi offered a pleasant and interesting gathering place for respectable Pakeha and politicians, it lacked Kohukohu’s former practical importance, something which reflected not only its owner’s changed circumstances but the situation in Hokianga more generally. While the district remained a place of interaction between Maori and Pakeha where Maori continued to be a language of
trade, the collaborative political and economic relationships that had given Kohukohu its status as Hokianga’s meeting place for Maori and Pakeha had largely broken down following the shift in the balance of power in the timber industry and the government’s changed attitude to alliances with rangatira. It was this climate of altered relationships which gave rise to the serious episode explored in the next section, and which gave John Webster one final opportunity to exercise the imperial identity so clearly on display at Opononi.

‘I may call you all my disobedient children’: The Dog Tax War 1898

As discussed in the first section of this chapter, the dog tax had been a bone of contention between Maori and government, both local and central, since it had first appeared on the statute books in 1880. In Hokianga, as elsewhere in the country, the prospect of being taxed for owning dogs brought a vehement response. In Northland, the result of this outcry was that only Mongonui and Hobson county councils made serious attempts to impose the tax, and even those efforts were largely abandoned after 1884.44 Spencer Von Sturmer summed up his attitude with the following comments:

I am of opinion that in a District such as Mongonui were [sic] there is a comparatively small European and large native population, it would be far preferable to suspend the Act than to attempt to enforce it, as though many of the Natives might pay the fees the great majority would fail to do so, and doubtless ill-advised Europeans would attempt to enforce the law, which would probably cause a considerable amount of ill feeling on the part of the Natives. At the large meeting at Waitangi Bay of Islands, ‘The Dog Tax’ was one of the subjects brought under the notice of the Hon the Native Minister as a serious grievance, and I am informed by Natives who were present that hopes were held out to them that the Act might be suspended in these Northern Districts.45

Von Sturmer has been credited with foresight for not enforcing the tax in Hokianga in the 1880s.46 In reality, he was articulating the same opinion he had expressed on the subject of Maori political autonomy on other occasions, such as the fighting at Otaua

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44 Armstrong and Subasic, pp.1330-333.
45 Resident Magistrate Hokianga to Colonial Secretary’s Office, 8 April 1881, Hokianga Magistrate’s Office, Letterbooks, 1879-1884, qMS-0984, ATL.
described in the previous chapter. Von Sturmer knew there was little chance of imposing the Crown’s will in the district, and it was wiser to be pragmatic, no matter how much one might dislike it.

Nevertheless, this did not prevent county councils throughout the north, including Hokianga County, from reintroducing the tax in the early 1890s, ostensibly to control marauding packs of dogs, but also as a way of making up revenue shortfalls. In December 1891, the Hokianga County Council voted in favour of reintroducing the tax from January 1892. Owners needed to pay 2/6 to register a dog, in return for which they would be issued with a collar. George Webster, as a member of the council, voted for the measure, and also acted as Opononi’s dog registration officer.\(^47\) It is telling, though, that the council did not take this step until it was sure that other councils in the region would be following suit, on the basis that there would be strength in numbers.\(^48\) Even so, the introduction of the charge unleashed protest, which was at least partly based on a belief that the government had earlier given an assurance that the tax would not be levied in Northland.\(^49\) In Hokianga, meetings were held where leaders encouraged their people not to pay the tax. By July a group of people, including ‘several leading natives’, had been summoned to appear before the Resident Magistrate’s Court at Rawene for failing to register their dogs.\(^50\) The *New Zealand Herald* noted that ‘the fines were promptly paid, though the costs were heavy’.\(^51\) The newspaper believed that this signalled the end of active resistance to the tax, something Armstrong and Subasic in their study of the dog tax are willing to accept.\(^52\) However, abandoning the tactic of non-payment did not mean that leaders acquiesced, as their complaints to Seddon in 1894 demonstrate.

Active resistance did carry on, though, at Kaikohe, and it was near there that a new movement appeared that would ultimately bring the issue, and Hokianga, to national

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\(^47\) Minutes of meeting Hokianga County Council, 19 December 1891 & 2 February 1892, Hokianga County Council Minute Book 1887-1893, ZAAP A473 20382 1, ANZA.

\(^48\) See Minutes of meeting Hokianga County Council, 6 June 1891 and 17 October 1891, Hokianga County Council minute book 1887-1893, ZAAP A473 20382 1, ANZA. See also Clerk Whangaroa County Council to Chairman Hokianga County Council, 26 May 1891, ZAAP A473 22148 1 ak, ANZA.

\(^49\) Armstrong and Subasic, pp.1338-44.

\(^50\) NZH, 11 July 1892, p.5; 22 August 1892, p.6.

\(^51\) NZH, 11 July 1892, p.5.

\(^52\) ibid.; Armstrong and Subasic, p.1345.
attention. Sometime around 1895 many of the members of a new movement, known as Te Huihui or Whiowhio, which had started out in Hokianga, moved to the Hauturu gumfield, between Waima and Kaikohe. Like earlier spiritual movements centred at Waihou, Te Huihui was both religious and political in orientation. According to Angela Ballara, ‘meetings were held on the 16th of each month at Taheke, Omanaia, or Waima, initially for religious purposes. Each meeting opened with prayers, and there were sometimes three or four prayer sessions in the night. The people would then discuss political matters.’ Among these matters were seasonal restrictions on the hunting of native birds, the land tax, the wheel and dog taxes, which the group increasingly opposed. Again according to Ballara, ‘they wanted the right to live as Maori without interference, and to make use of their traditional resources’. These aims aligned them with other political movements of the time, but they were set apart by their spiritual beliefs. The group’s religious leader, and the man Pakeha viewed as being the driving force behind its political activities, was Hone Toia, whose mother was of Te Mahurehure. As a younger man Toia had spent time at Parihaka and had been influenced by the ideas of Te Whiti. The movement he now led also drew on the practices of Papahurihia during the 1830s and 1840s. In a description reminiscent of Webster’s account of Te Atua Wera’s ‘séance’ in 1845, a missionary told how Te Huihui ‘gathered in the runanga house, and waited in perfect silence until the ghostly visitor proclaimed his presence by whistling’.

For this reason Te Huihui became associated in Pakeha minds with Hauhauism, and distrust towards them grew accordingly. The local Hokianga constable, McGilp, for example, emphasised Toia’s ‘“fanatic” tendencies’, while by 1896 correspondence from other officials, such as the stipendiary magistrate and the Member of the House of Representatives for the Bay of Islands, increasingly painted Te Huihui as ‘disaffected fanatics’. Concern centred on the belief that Toia and his followers were arming themselves with guns. Things came to a head in March 1896 when Stipendiary Magistrate Clendon demanded that all arms held by Te Huihui, who by then were residing at Mangatoa, be surrendered, which led to the giving up of 14 firearms.

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54 ibid.
55 Elsmore, p.305.
56 Armstrong and Subasic, pp.1362, 1366.
57 ibid., pp.1367-368.
But this did not signal the end of the authorities’ concern about Hone Toia and his people, as the group increasingly came to be known for their resistance to the dog tax. In 1896 a number of men from the group were arrested and sent to Mt Eden Gaol in Auckland for non-payment.\textsuperscript{58} There were multiple reasons for resistance, but as with other movements’ opposition to the tax, they were a mixture of the political and the economic. Hone Toia has been quoted as saying that ‘if dogs were to be taxed, men would be next’,\textsuperscript{59} and at the Supreme Court trial that followed events in 1898 Toia’s counsel stated that he and the members of Te Huihui ‘still clung with the energy of despair to the provisions of the Treaty of Waitangi, which they honestly and genuinely believed was intended to secure to them absolute immunity from taxation of their lands and their personal belongings’.\textsuperscript{60} These statements aligned Te Huihui with movements such as the Waitangi parliaments, which also emphasised autonomous political rights, although it is reasonable to say that Te Huihui sought to reject the law rather than seek collaboration with and concessions from the Crown. These political concerns were underpinned, though, by a dire economic position. After moving from Omanaia and Waima to Hauturu, Te Huihui were dependent on the meagre earnings to be found on the gumfields. Moreover, one of the movement’s prime concerns was ‘the cessation of passing through the Native Land Court the tribal lands and … the cessation of sales of land to the Government’.\textsuperscript{61} This anxiety over land alienation was seen in Toia’s letter to the government in 1896, after the handing over of firearms, proposing that he and his people would in future cooperate with the Pakeha authorities on the proviso that their lands would not be taken to pay taxes.\textsuperscript{62} Here, again, economic concerns about loss of resources and growing levels of poverty lay behind political action.

The group’s opposition to the dog tax continued into 1898, at which point the tactic of passive resistance which had seen them accept imprisonment was replaced by direct

\textsuperscript{58} See NZH, 13 May 1898, p.2; NZH, 21 May 1898, p.3; Armstrong and Subasic, p.1373. The police witnesses giving evidence to the Supreme Court trial of those arrested after the Dog Tax War claimed that 13 men had been imprisoned in Auckland. Armstrong and Subasic, however, relying on Constable McGilp’s report of the episodes, say the number was in fact three.


\textsuperscript{60} NZH, 9 July 1898, p.3.

\textsuperscript{61} ibid.

\textsuperscript{62} Armstrong and Subasic, pp.1369-370.
action. This change of course was driven by the police’s decision to stop collecting the tax on behalf of the county councils, and the subsequent appointment by the Hokianga County Council of Henry Menzies as tax collector in June 1897. Menzies had a tense and difficult relationship with Te Huihui. In February 1898 he visited Hauturu and found that inhabitants with dogs ‘refused to pay’. He then issued summonses for the next court sitting to be held at Rawene, on 6 April. On the appointed day Hone Toia went to court and successfully asked for the cases to be adjourned until 11 May so that a meeting could be arranged to talk about whether or not to pay the tax. That meeting was held on 28 April, and was attended by between 150 and 300 Maori, not all of whom were Te Huihui, as well as by William Seon, the acting council chairman, Menzies, and constables McGilp and Beazley. Speeches delivered by Te Huihui leaders Romana te Pehanga, Hone Mete and Hone Toia made it clear that the tax would not be paid. Seon recounted that ‘Romana, speaking for the natives, said they would not pay the tax, they would not stop shooting pigeons, and would have nothing further to do with the European laws. He (Romana) and the other Maoris would die on account of these European taxes and laws.’ This decision was apparently prompted by a threat laid down at some stage before the meeting by Menzies, who was reported to have told Te Huihui that if they refused to pay the tax they would ‘be sent to Siberia; that they would be frozen to death, and that their bones would snap’.

Following the meeting the situation rapidly deteriorated. Later that day Hone Toia told Seon that he and some of his people would be going armed to Rawene the next day to challenge the law, although settlers would not be harmed. Meanwhile, an alarmed Constable McGilp telegraphed the postmaster in Rawene telling him to evacuate women and children from the town. He also telegraphed Police Inspector Hickson in Auckland and Clendon in Russell. On arriving the next day, Clendon viewed the evacuation to Kohukohu as an overreaction, but he changed his mind on

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63 NZH, 5 July 1898, p.3.
64 NZH, 21 May 1898, p.3.
65 NZH, 5 July 1898, p.3; Armstrong and Subasic, p.1376.
66 NZH, 21 May 1898, p.3.
67 NZH, 6 July 1898, p.3. For a similar account of Menzies’s threat see Armstrong and Subasic, p.1377. Armstrong and Subasic also claim that the threat may have had the backing of the Hokianga County Council.
68 NZH, 21 May 1898, p.3.
69 NZH, 23 May 1898, p.6.
receiving a copy of a telegram signed by Toia apparently threatening to shed blood.\textsuperscript{70} The next morning, 1 May, Inspector Hickson arrived from Auckland with six constables; he was followed by a detachment of 30 troops from Auckland who arrived at Rawene on the \textit{Gairloch} on 2 May, and then by the main contingent of 90 troops commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Newall from Wellington, who arrived on board the \textit{Hinemoa}. As rumours spread that members of Te Huihui were hiding in the hills above Rawene the stage seemed set for an armed showdown. It was at this point that John Webster got on his horse and rode from Opononi to the scene of events.

Following his arrival Newall was met by a contingent of ‘friendly’ chiefs, who asked the colonel to hold off taking any action until they had had a final chance to visit the ‘disaffected Maoris’, who by now were based at the Te Mahurehure settlement of Waima. This group included Pene Taui, Re Te Tai, Hapakuku Moetara and Heremia Te Wake. The \textit{New Zealand Herald} reported that ‘after various statements had been made by the friendly rangatiras, it was decided, after a private consultation, that the friendly chiefs, accompanied by Mr. Webster, an old Hokianga resident, should proceed to Waima to endeavour to bring about a peaceful settlement’.\textsuperscript{71} However, while the newspaper saw Webster as accompanying two of these chiefs, Re Te Tai and Hapakuku Moetara, Webster himself saw things the other way around. On 3 May, the three men, plus George Webster, left Rawene for Te Huihui’s camp at Waima. Webster left behind an account that, as in the past, painted him as the orchestrator of events and the man capable of smoothing troubled intercultural waters. Once at Waima the party was welcomed with what Webster called ‘the Taki ceremony’ or challenge.\textsuperscript{72} In a clear signal that he viewed himself as the group’s leader he wrote that he ‘asked my three [sic] native chiefs’ to accept the challenge on his behalf.\textsuperscript{73} After the welcome, Te Huihui leaders such as Romana stated their determination not to pay the dog tax but also said that they ‘had no quarrel with the settlers and would

\textsuperscript{70} Armstrong and Subasic, pp.1380-381.
\textsuperscript{71} NZH, 4 May 1898, p.5. See also Report of Lieutenant Colonel Newall, Rawene, 12 May 1898, AD 1 1899/3191, ANZW, p.4.
\textsuperscript{72} Also known as wero, the ceremony involves a warrior placing ‘a token on the ground in front of the leader of the visiting group… to determine whether the visitors come as friend or foe. If they come in peace, the leader of the group will pick up the token and the warriors will proceed to lead the visitors onto the marae.’ Cleve Barlow, \textit{Tikanga Whakaaro: Key Concepts in Māori Culture}, Oxford, 1991, p.164.
\textsuperscript{73} J. Webster, Memo of visit to the Hauhaus at their camp at Waima, Tuesday 3\textsuperscript{rd} May, micro-ms-0929, ATL.
not interfere with them, their wives or children but they would fight the soldiers or any who carried arms against them’. In response Webster set out why he was there, presenting himself as a moderating figure, and as someone who had both the ear of the government and influence with the people to whom he was speaking:

I have come to hear from your own mouths what all the trouble is about. The soldiers of the Queen are now here to support the law. They have not come to kill men but to protect the settlers and have the laws of the Queen respected. I asked the Colonel commanding the troops to give me this day to visit you which he consented to and I hope to carry back to him tidings of peace. I may call you all my disobedient children. Your fathers and grandfathers were my friends and we never had any trouble of this kind in the old days.

He later reinforced this impression by saying:

For many years while I was amongst your fathers and grandfathers who are no longer with us we had peace. I said, you are now paddling in a canoe which will soon be amongst the breakers. Return to the Pakeha boat which alone offers security in a rough sea. The day is now passing, what answer am I to convey to the Col in command of the Queen’s soldiers who would now be here only that I requested a days grace that I might see you and hear from your mouth what your intentions are.

Webster then ended his account by giving the clear impression that his rhetoric had worked, that he had brought Toia and the others to their senses:

Hone Toia before I left was a different man, more subdued and there seemed a feeling amongst the party that this had gone too far and were relenting. Hone as I got on my horse said, dont [sic] be surprised if you see me at Rawene shaking hands with the soldiers chief.

The reality of the situation was quite different. News of the meeting and Toia’s response was actually taken back to Newall the following day by Hapakuku Moetara and Re Te Tai, at which point it became clear that he would relent only on his own terms.

On their return to Rawene, Hapakuku Moetara and Re Te Tai reported that Te Huihui would ‘submit provided they were allowed to retain their arms, and were not

\[\text{\textsuperscript{77}}\text{Report of Lieutenant Colonel Newall, Rawene, 12 May 1898, AD 1 1899/3191, ANZW, pp.5-6; NZH, 5 May 1898, p.5.}\]
incarcerated for their offences’ and on condition that the government ‘forego the taxes that are burdening us’. Newall was in no mood to compromise and replied that only an unconditional surrender would suffice. The next day he moved his troops forward to Omanaia. They were accompanied by a group of five local men, including Seon and Webster. The party was met there by a group of chiefs, including Re Te Tai, Hapakuku Moetara, Heremia Te Wake and Pene Taui, who had gone to Waima to tell Toia of Newall’s demand for a full surrender. They brought back with them a letter from Toia asking that Newall stop his advance until the MHR for Northern Maori, Hone Heke Ngapua, with whom both Toia and Newall had been in contact, arrived. Newall’s response was that he would not push on to Waima that day but would go as far as the Waikaramihi schoolhouse. As they moved forward, two shots were fired over the heads of the Auckland contingent; two Maori men then galloped past the troops, heading towards Waima. Newall assumed that Toia had received his message and had sent the two men to abort a planned ambush but that they had failed to stop the first shots being fired. Another explanation is that the shots were fired as a warning to Te Huihui men that the troops were advancing.

Webster was witness to these events, and while he did not leave behind a first-hand account, he became the central figure in the version later provided by James Cowan, who had accompanied the party as correspondent for the Auckland Star:

So he [Webster] and one of his sons saddled up and joined Colonel Newall’s column on the march over the hills to the valley of discontent…. The Maoris were in cover in the bush somewhere ahead, on the hill of the Puku-o-te-Hau, so we heard, but not a Maori was to be seen. ‘Will they fire on us?’ was the question everyone asked, or thought. ‘Absurd,’ said some knowing ones. Wise old John Webster did not say much, but he did not dismiss the idea as ridiculous. ‘You never know,’ he said to me, ‘these Mahurehure have always

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78 NZH, 5 May 1898, p.5; Report of Lieutenant Colonel Newall, Rawene, 12 May 1898, AD 1 1899/3191, ANZW, p.6.
79 NZH, 6 May 1898, p.5; Auckland Star, 6 May 1898, p.5.
80 Report of Lieutenant Colonel Newall, Rawene, 12 May 1898, AD 1 1899/3191, ANZW, pp.10-11. Armstrong and Subasic point out that Newall was being disingenuous in making this concession. In fact, logistical problems meant he could not have made it to Waima that day anyway. Armstrong and Subasic, pp.1386-387.
81 Report of Lieutenant Colonel Newall, Rawene, 12 May 1898, AD 1 1899/3191, ANZW, p.13; NZH, 6 May 1898, p.5.
82 NZH, 6 May 1898, p.5.
been a touchy people; they still have the old warrior spirit, and they resent any injustice.’

Then the two shots rang out:

Bang! A thunderous crash it made— then another, loaded with ball, too, made a noise like a young cannon…. ‘Now we’re in for it!’ said John Webster to me, quietly, and I declare he was smiling in his cool, wise old way. Well, the Maoris were not likely to fire at their old friend—but you never know. And what of the hapless riflemen with us, targets for the hidden Maoris? Not a sign of them but those bangs at us from the fern above the road-cutting. The next few moments would tell.

Like Webster’s account of his meeting with Te Huihui, this story paints him as an insider, one of the few people on the ground who really understood what was unfolding in the Waima valley. It was the same type of image that Webster had been using to depict his relationship with Maori since the 1840s, but his ability to really control events was no more evident in 1898 that it had been in 1847 or 1868. The next paragraph in Cowan’s account read as follows:

But not another shot was fired. A mounted Maori messenger, at peril of his life—for many a rifle was pointed at him by ‘rattled’ recruits in Newall’s column—came galloping along, Hone Toia’s messenger. He was shouting to the hidden Maoris not to fire. ‘No fighting—no fighting! Hone Heke is here! Don’t fire!’

Here, instead, was the real key to resolving the dispute. Hone Heke had arrived late on 5 May and went immediately to Waima to talk with Toia and Te Huihui. According to the New Zealand Herald he ‘strongly advised them to cease from further wrongdoing…. He reasoned, rebuked, and pleaded in turn with the natives, and received a patient hearing, every Maori present listening intently to his words, which were spoken with considerable feeling.’ Nothing was decided that night, but Heke arranged to hold another talk with Te Huihui the next day, and Newall undertook to stay at the schoolhouse until midday to give the MHR a chance to end the standoff.

The next morning Heke, accompanied by Hopakuku Moetara, Re Te Tai, Pene Taui and Heremia Te Wake, returned to meet with Te Huihui. The Herald’s correspondent, who had gone with Heke and the chiefs, reported that:

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84 ibid.
85 ibid.
86 NZH, 7 May 1898, p.5.
He [Heke] asked them to consider carefully what the result of their conduct would be. He was much affected while speaking, and his delivery was impressive .... Somewhat to the surprise of all, Hone Toia … rose and said that he and his followers had decided not to defy the law. They would submit and be peaceful, and were willing to give up their arms. 87

Heke then led Toia and around 100 Te Huihui to Newall’s position, where they gave up 14 firearms. Five of the leaders, including Toia, Romana, Wiremu Te Makara, Rakene Pahi and Hone Mete, were then arrested; on 8 May this number grew to 16. 88

Several months later the Northern Luminary wryly commented that ‘It is astonishing to note how many people claim to have settled the dog tax question with the natives at Rawene. An M.H.R., several interpreters, the police and soldiers, and at least four sky pilots and glory-hallelujah-men.’ 89 The newspaper could have added Webster to its list of people who claimed to have at least influenced the outcome of the dispute. However, while he had witnessed events his influence was minimal at best. Instead, it had been Hapakuku Moetara and Re Te Tai who had acted as go-betweens for Newall and Toia, and they had been present at the meetings where the terms of surrender had been negotiated by Hone Heke. In reality, the dispute had been resolved by largely traditional means; that is, by the intervention and influence of men of rank, even if Heke’s status as a MHR was a variation on the past. In this way, the Dog Tax War shares much in common with earlier disputes, such as the Te Wake affair of 1868. In fact, it is notable that there was an overlap between the parties involved in these two conflicts. In 1868 Mohi Tawhai of Te Mahurehure had gone to Whirinaki to try to arrange peace between Nuku’s people and the Te Rarawa contingent and Te Tai Papahaia, Re Te Tai’s father. Now, leaders who had been involved in disputes settled by Te Mahurehure went to Waima to intervene in a standoff involving people from Te Mahurehure. To this extent, the events of 1898 can be read as a continuation in an existing pattern of dispute resolution, with Pakeha like Webster playing little part despite their claims to the contrary.

Of course there were differences between this and these earlier disputes, the most obvious being that one of the protagonists was the Crown rather than another hapu. But if Webster’s claim to have influenced the outcome of the affair can be shown to

87 ibid.
88 ibid.; NZH, 10 May 1898, p.6.
89 Northern Luminary, 30 July 1898, p.2.
have had no real weight, can the same be said of the claim that the Dog Tax War was the point at which the Crown finally gained political ascendancy in the north? In other words is the narrative of empire and colonialism put forward on behalf of the Crown any more convincing than that advanced by Webster? In recent historiography the Dog Tax War has taken on an importance as the moment when ‘substantive sovereignty had apparently been imposed throughout the Far North’.  

90 This view, first put forward by Richard Hill, was endorsed by James Belich when he argued that the Dog Tax War was the ‘decisive event’ in bringing what he called ‘formal empire’ or Crown sovereignty to the north.  

91 It has also been adopted by Armstrong and Subasic in their study of resistance to the dog tax. They argued that ‘Hill’s argument that the events which transpired in Hokianga in May 1898 represented a “closing in of the state upon Maori attempts to retain some self-determination”, is essentially a correct one, even though the “dog tax war” was simply the most dramatic manifestation of this process, which had begun well before 1898’.  

92 Writing within the framework of a Treaty settlement process which sets out to demonstrate the Crown’s responsibility for wresting political autonomy from Maori as a basis of restitution, they also state that following 1898 ‘Government authority now enveloped Northland more fully than ever before’.  

93 Certainly there is evidence to support this view. Once under arrest, Toia and the other prisoners were taken to Rawene courthouse and then shipped to Auckland to await trial, first before a stipendiary magistrate at the end of May, and then before the Supreme Court in July. They were charged with intending to levy war against the Queen, conspiracy to prevent the collection of taxes by force and intimidation, and being members of an unlawful assembly. They initially pleaded not guilty, but on the fourth day of the Supreme Court trial they pleaded guilty to conspiring to oppose the dog tax by force and unlawful assembly; the court then stayed proceedings on the charge of intention to levy war. The five leaders were sentenced to 18 months’ imprisonment with hard labour; the remaining 11 were fined £10 and were required to

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90 Hill, p.137.  
92 Armstrong and Subasic, p.1375.  
93 ibid., p.1394.  
94 NZH, 24 May 1898, p.3.
provide a surety of £25 to keep the peace for 12 months. The fact that the government was able to arrest and incarcerate the leaders of the ‘rebellion’ can perhaps be taken as a clear sign of authority, or formal empire, having been established. It also has to be acknowledged that, even though Heke negotiated the surrender along traditional lines, Newall’s forces had the firepower and apparently the determination and political backing to fight and beat Te Huihui if it had come to that.

However, it is interesting to note that the Crown had also succeeded in incarcerating Te Wake in 1869, but was shown in the aftermath to lack the political will to push its case against him once he escaped from prison. A similar scenario can be seen as existing after 1898. Certainly, the members of the Hokianga County Council did not feel that the arrest and removal to Auckland of Hone Toia and the other leaders was enough to end matters. In June 1898 they wrote to Premier Seddon that:

… we submit that we have no sort of belief that because after a large expenditure the natives have been brought to trial, leaving 40 or 50 of their fellows amongst us who are some of the worst characters, and many sympathisers, and after some shot guns & a rifle or two have been seized the difficulties are disposed off and all dangers at an end. We do not believe this, and we think it more than likely that in the course of the next few years there will be more serious trouble. We are of opinion that the government should be brought more in touch with the natives than they appear to be at present. We are also of opinion that the Police force should be increased in the district, that the administration of the law should be more efficient, and that more equal justice should be shown to Europeans & Natives.

These concerns had perhaps been fuelled by news circulating in the district that ‘the Maoris are still disinclined to pay [overdue taxes], and it is stated that they have had several koreros, at which the matter of taxation has been discussed’. One such meeting had taken place at Waima, where the participants apparently ‘unanimously decided not to pay the tax, and to go to gaol if the cases were proceeded with’.

The council dealt with its fears by attempting to assert its authority over the defaulters via the courts. After several adjournments, requested by Hone Heke, nearly 40 cases were heard by Clendon in August 1898, with a 5 shilling fine being imposed on each case.

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95 NZH, 8 July 1898, p.3; 9 July 1898, p.3.
96 Chairman and Councillors Hokianga County Council to Premier, 10 June 1898, ZAAP A 473 22148 1, ANZA.
97 Northern Luminary, 9 July 1898, p.2.
98 NZH, 13 May 1898, p.5.
defendant in addition to costs. The council’s nervousness might be gleaned in a letter from Inspector Hickson in Auckland offering to reinstate the practice of police collecting the dog tax ‘in places where the natives resist payment to private persons’. By September, though, the council was changing tack by deferring the serving of at least three further summonses. That month also saw it writing to the Minister of Justice asking for the fines to be waived and for court costs only to be imposed. Their stated reasons for this change of heart were a belief that ‘those Natives will give no further trouble and also that they are settling down to their former peaceful habits of life’ and the gratitude they felt to the ‘friendly chiefs’ and Hone Heke, who had asked for the fines to be remitted. The government replied that it was willing to waive the fines so long as the defaulters kept the peace for 12 months. Armstrong and Subasic note that ‘the Government eventually acquiesced to the plan agreed to by the Northern chiefs and the County Council and the following three years saw a corresponding soap-opera over the exact amount of expenses involved and the timelines in which to pay them’. The issue was finally settled, not by the defaulters being made to pay the outstanding amount, but by the whole matter of dog tax collection being handed to the newly created Maori Councils. According to Armstrong and Subasic, ‘rather than facing continual tests of authority over a seemingly innocuous matter, the Government decided to hand over the enforcement of one of the more hated pieces of legislation by Maori to Maori themselves’. They put this change in policy down to the fact that ‘with the Te Huihui political threat well and truly spent, the Government was now content to sweep the dog-tax under the carpet’. By this analysis, turning a blind eye to the unpaid fines and handing the issue over to Maori Councils were decisions made by a government that could afford to be magnanimous because it had gained political ascendancy. But if these decisions are compared to similar ones made in the wake of episodes such as the arrest and

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99 Armstrong and Subasic, pp.1397-398. See also Hone Heke to County Clerk Hokianga County Council, 20 June 1898, ZAAP A473 22148 1cb, ANZA; Hone Heke to Clerk and Registrar Hokianga County Council, ZAAP A473 22148 1, ANZA.
100 Inspector of Police to Chairman Hokianga County Council, 24 August 1898, ZAAP A473 22148 1, ANZA.
101 Clerk of Court Rawene to Clerk Hokianga County Council, ZAAP A473 22148 1, ANZA.
102 Chairman Hokianga County Council to Minister of Justice, 10 September 1898, ZAAP A473 22148 1, ANZA.
103 Under-secretary, Department of Justice to Chairman Hokianga County Council, 14 October 1898, ZAAP A473 22148 1, ANZA.
104 Armstrong and Subasic, pp.1398-399.
105 Ibid., pp.1399-1400.
subsequent escape of Te Wake, or even the so-called defeat of Hone Heke in 1845, it is possible to argue the aftermath of the Dog Tax War represented another tactical retreat on the part of the government. The Crown had given Newall sufficient force to confront and defeat Te Huihui, but what happened after the surrender showed that following up a show of force with real administrative control was still easier said than done. Most Maori had decided not to actively oppose the dog tax almost a decade earlier, but when resistance was given the government still saw retreat as the most effective strategy. This suggests that sovereignty, or real empire, still proved elusive when challenged, and that the Crown’s ability to control events was no more concrete than Webster’s.

There had, though, been substantial change in the north by the end of the century, even if it had not come in the form of ‘real’ empire. The collaborative relationship that had formed between the Crown and Hokianga Maori, particularly those Nga Puhi-affiliated hapu on the south side of the river, even before the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi had broken down to the point where premiers and governors no longer saw those hapu as allies. Instead, theirs were voices that could increasingly be ignored because their co-operation was no longer seen as being of real value. In large part this was because the government did not see a need to maintain allies in the north now that the threat from Waikato had been substantially quelled. But it was also because northern Maori themselves were seen as less of a potential threat. This change in relationship had not primarily taken place through the imposition of irresistible systems of British law and administration, or even through demographic dominance of Pakeha over Maori. Instead it had largely happened through the loss of Maori economic power and the passing of vital resources to Pakeha. In this way one government agency, the Native Land Court, stood apart in importance given that it drove the land alienation that lay at the heart of marginalisation. But the work of the court was built on foundations laid by men like Webster who had wrested control of resources from Maori through debt. Webster’s efforts at portraying himself as a man able to ‘summon’ and control Maori political action might have been no more convincing in 1898 than they had been 50 years earlier, but he had had an impact on the district in which he lived. That impact had not come through political control but through economic dominance. In this way Webster and the Crown had something in common: both parties had seen their relationships with Maori shift as
the reliance and collaboration of earlier years were replaced by economic ascendancy, and both therefore saw themselves as freed from dependency. Indeed, much of the independence from Maori support that the Crown had achieved relied on Pakeha economic agents like Webster. This, rather than tall tales of courage in the face of savagery and a collection of interesting artefacts stored in an imperial showcase, was Webster’s real legacy.
Epilogue

In February 1909 John Webster wrote to Thomas Hocken in Dunedin saying that he hoped to go and live with his family in Auckland. Four of Webster’s children, George, Caroline, Florence and John Croom, had left Hokianga to live in Devonport, on Auckland’s North Shore, and Webster, now aged 90, believed he would get better medical attention in the city. Sometime between the date of that letter and the middle of 1912 Webster’s wish came true, and he spent his final years with his children at Cheltenham Terrace in Devonport.

According to a newspaper report, one day in 1912 Webster sustained a fractured leg when he fell from a bus.¹ He never recovered from his injuries and died some weeks later, on 30 May, aged 93.

He is buried in the Presbyterian cemetery at the base of Mt Victoria in Devonport, alongside his wife, Emily.

¹ Observer, 8 June 1912, p.4.
Conclusion

Over the summer months, Opononi attracts large numbers of visitors, many from around Northland, but some from further afield. If you come on a hot January day, you can see crowds gathered around the general store and the hotel enjoying ice creams, cold drinks, and fish and chips in equal measure. They come to swim in the calm water of the harbour, fish off the wharf and perhaps take a trip over to the huge sand hills that provide the town’s panoramic backdrop. If they are unfamiliar with the area they might also go into the new visitor information centre to be found just over the road from the beach. Once inside they might wander into the side room, take a seat and watch a film about Hokianga’s most famous historical character: Opo the dolphin. The film tells the story of how Opo arrived in the harbour during the summer of 1955-56 and won the hearts of locals and visitors by playing in the shallows, balancing beach balls on her nose and letting children ride on her back. Although it ends on the sad note of Opo’s untimely death, it is by and large a simple, uncomplicated, joyful story that shows Hokianga as a summer playground to be enjoyed by all. But the observant visitor might also have noticed that looming behind the visitors’ centre is a ramshackle white house, Webster’s former home. Now that most of the trees and undergrowth have been cleared away, the peeling paint and rusting roof are there for all to see, although it is doubtful many visitors give the house more than a cursory look, preferring to focus on more attractive scenery. Appearance isn’t the only thing that sets these two buildings apart, though. While the stories told inside the visitors’ centre are widely known and undemanding, the story of the old white house is more obscure, less straightforward and perhaps also, like the building itself, less attractive. But as this thesis has demonstrated, it is one that speaks to the contested and ambiguous nature of Hokianga’s history.

No doubt John Webster would have liked the idea that he would one day be the central figure in a written history. The history he would have wanted told would have fitted well inside the visitors’ centre: it would have been celebratory, progressive and triumphant. It would have been an account of Hokianga’s development, of its ‘opening up’ and its successful absorption into the national story, with him as one of the area’s leading pioneers. He would have been disappointed with the direction this
thesis has taken and the account of him it has given. Perhaps he would be comforted, though, by the fact that, while the preceding chapters have not told a story of imperial triumph and political domination, they have shown him to have had a significant impact on the area in which he spent most of his life, just not necessarily in the ways he would have foretold.

The imperial identity he brought with him from Britain, and which dictated that he and his fellow Britons would assert their authority over Maori, was frustrated in Hokianga. The urge to represent himself as a director of Maori remained undimmed between 1841 and 1898. But as this thesis has demonstrated, a critical analysis of events shows that he never enjoyed the type of control he wanted, while Maori, on the other hand, retained a degree of political autonomy. The reliance that he and other Pakeha had on Maori during the Northern War, his admission that he was unable to control the course of the taua that landed on his front lawn in 1847 and his frustration and anger following the escape of Te Wake in 1868 all point to the ongoing limits of his power. That the situation had not completely altered by the end of the century is
clearly seen in his optimistic portrayal of himself as a central player in the Dog Tax War and the extent to which this portrayal was wishful thinking, at the same time as Maori were vital players in resolution of the dispute. This realisation of limited power undermines not only Webster’s self-fashioned imperial identity but also the narrative about the colonisation of the north that places the Crown in a dominant political position by the time of the Dog Tax War. In simple terms, even at the end of the nineteenth century Hokianga Maori remained beyond the pale of the Crown’s, and Webster’s, direct control.

Webster’s real impact lay where he least expected it: in compromise and collaboration. The identity he fashioned in the 1840s as Hone Wepiha reflected his need to secure vital economic and personal relationships in a new environment. It is no coincidence that it was this identity and these connections that underwent the greatest amount of change across the study period, given that it was in the economic rather than the political sphere that a real shift in power took place. As a small-time trader in the 1840s Webster had accepted the need to learn to speak Maori and to adjust his behaviour in Maori communities in order to communicate effectively and gain favour with his suppliers and customers. In doing so he formed connections to men such as Papahurihia that were and would remain vital to his success. By 1855 when he married Emily Russell and then assumed control of his father-in-law’s timber operation at Kohukohu, he might have hoped that his new position of power would free him and his family from some of this dependence on Maori, enabling him to fit more easily into the new colonial elite. He found instead that he had inherited not only power but a network of kin and other personal connections the length of the river that was still at the heart of the timber industry. But it was through these very connections that he began to gain an upper hand, as they became the conduit for debt accumulation and then land sales. Debt became a core reason for Maori willingness to sell land in the 1870s, which in turn attracted increasing numbers of settlers in the 1880s and 1890s. The changing face of Hokianga led to growing competition and separation between Maori and Pakeha, a distance that was reflected in Webster’s life, too, particularly following the deaths of his former associates. Whereas once the name Hone Wepiha had held real meaning, by the 1890s it was a piece of nostalgia, a way for Webster to look back on a romanticised past and a means by which to distinguish
himself from the new Pakeha arrivals. It no longer underpinned a vital economic relationship; the ground had shifted too far for that.

Webster might have built his house at Opononi partly to convince visiting governors and premiers of his mastery over ‘the natives’, as evidenced by his impressive collection of artefacts. But what really gave the house significance was the fact that it was built with money gained from the timber industry, the arena in which he had played his most important role, that of agent of economic change. The grandeur of the house reflected the extent to which he had come to dominate the most important economic activity in the area. Webster, like his predecessor Russell and his contemporary Maning played a central role in shifting the balance of economic power in Hokianga, and it was in the economic sphere that colonialism made its greatest impact in the area. This impact had not come through sudden ruptures and violent confrontation, as in places like Waikato and Taranaki where confiscation opened the way for mass immigration. And although Hokianga did experience an influx of settlers during the 1880s and 1890s, they never arrived in the overwhelming numbers experienced around the main centres and in the South Island. The Crown, which had played a vital role in wresting control of land from Maori further south, largely ignored the north between 1846 and 1875. Yet when the land purchasing officers came calling in the 1870s, rangatira were prepared to sell substantial areas of land, in many cases to settle debts. Land sales went hand-in-hand with a move to wage labour and the demands of a growing cash economy. Hokianga had escaped the full impact of major forces usually held accountable for swinging power in favour of Pakeha, but it had happened all the same, even in the absence of real administrative control by the government. The foundations of the shift can be found in the conflicted intimacies of everyday life that played out from the 1830s, as Maori and Pakeha wrestled with each other and negotiated the relationships at the heart of both family life and the timber industry. It can also be seen in the hardening racial attitudes that affected all of New Zealand, including the north, in the wake of the wars of the 1860s, and which made Webster more determined to redraw the social boundaries between himself, his family and Maori. In Hokianga, personal relationships acted as transfer points of power, and the shift in that power was inscribed on John Webster’s life.
Focusing on daily interaction between Maori and Pakeha as a mechanism of change places settlers back at the heart of colonialism, and highlights a largely forgotten narrative in New Zealand historiography. Rather than portraying settlers as inheritors of land made available to them by government action, the tale told here has been one in which settlers played a vital role in shaping ongoing change in a colonial frontier context; they were active participants in the process of colonisation rather than just recipients of its rewards. But it has also been one that challenges the oppositional categories of coloniser and colonised, given that collaboration and interdependence lie at its heart. In Hokianga, Maori and Pakeha did not stand apart from each other operating in separate spheres, but instead became entwined in each other’s lives, at least until the 1880s onwards. For this reason, Webster’s story does not fit easily into those discourses which place the Treaty at the centre of relations between Maori and Pakeha in the nineteenth century. The binary approach to New Zealand’s past does not allow the micro processes of interaction and change that were at the heart of daily life to come into play. Nor does it support the pervasive notion that Pakeha came to dominate in all spheres by century-end. In Hokianga, colonisation was not a linear process of domination; political control did not necessarily go hand in hand with economic influence.

The events of Webster’s life, removed from the visitor centre narrative of progress and retold in a more complex framework of ambivalence and compromise, allow us to re-imagine nineteenth-century New Zealand as a dynamic arena in which individuals from different cultures came together, interacted, collaborated and initiated shifts in the balance of power. His story demands that we look below the level of the nation, the Crown and the claimant, to see how the mechanics of colonialism took place on a personal, relational level. It is the type of narrative that has faded from view in recent historiography, but which is crucial to fully understanding how those who have gone before us helped shape our colonial inheritance.

The significance of Webster’s life, however, extends beyond Hokianga and New Zealand. His is not just a New Zealand story that provides another, differently shaped building block to understanding a national narrative. His is also an imperial story; it is a reminder that New Zealand’s history extends beyond our shores and across the
globe. Webster was a mobile product of empire. He was formed in Britain by ideas and ambitions that were tested, validated or compromised in a number of locations and stages across the world, in Australia, the Pacific and New Zealand. He was an enthusiastic proponent of British power and a supporter of settler interests, as well as a representative of a type of middle-class respectability and moral autonomy that signified Britain’s supposed place at the ‘apogee of civilisation’.¹ In many ways, he was the type of Briton who ought to fit into the historiography of the British World, a white settler in a far flung colony who shared many of the attitudes and goals of his fellow settlers in other colonies. But nested within his sense of Britishness was an imperial identity that could only find its fullest expression in environments where he came into contact not with fellow settlers but with indigenous peoples. The centrality of this identity meant that Webster led a life that differed from the Britons found in some international studies of settler societies;² however, it also meant that his story does not fit easily in the kind of postcolonial discourse favoured by Edward Said, or Peter Gibbons. He was not a dominator of indigenous people as the ideas of race at the heart of imperial thinking determined he ought to be. The British world in which he lived was closer, in fact, to a British fantasy world where, in many ways, domination remained illusory.

However, Webster’s story also demonstrates the ways in which empire did make an impact. As argued, his power in Hokianga was economic, but his position was in part due to his ability to access timber and commodity markets across the globe. Webster’s life can be viewed as a network of connections: to Maori on the river, and to merchants in Melbourne, Sydney, Hobart, Calcutta, London and Shanghai. The timber industry was a global enterprise; it plugged Hokianga into the world of international exchange, and it was a conduit by which cultural change took place as dealings between traders and customers evolved to become regulated employer-employee relationships. His role as trader and employer put Webster at the forefront of this process. In this way, Webster was the kind of person who enabled empire to gain traction at its edges. Like the governors, missionaries and mercenaries in David

Lambert and Alan Lester’s edited collection of essay on colonial lives, he was at the vanguard of empire; he was one of the people who ‘made the British empire’.\(^3\) Doing so, however, required him to construct a kind of functional Britishness that enabled him to operate in his new surroundings, and which involved compromise and accommodation of those ideas of empire he otherwise held dear.

Studying the individual lives of people like Webster at the margins allows us to see how empire happened on the ground and how individuals acted as its foot soldiers. Its mechanics altered from location to location, but empire and the people who served it were also shaped by global forces. Recognising this allows us to challenge historiographical discourses that emphasise domination and disempowerment and to see the importance of the complexities of the everyday encounters that lay at the heart of individual experience, and empire itself. Empire was long-lived and global, but in order to be a success it also needed to be quotidien, local and personal. Telling these personal stories would expand and support the work of historians such as Patricia Grimshaw and Lynette Russell who have provided us with histories of empire that ‘move beyond indigenous peoples as victims [and] explore the interactions between indigenous peoples and settlers’.\(^4\)

Perhaps it is no coincidence that the type of history to be found in Webster’s life and in Hokianga more generally has fallen from historiographical view in New Zealand. The fact that Hokianga, and the north in general, failed to experience many of what have been seen as the main drivers of colonisation means that it has not easily fitted into the national story. Moreover, if we see Webster’s story as not just a New Zealand narrative but a wider imperial one, then its place within a national trajectory becomes even more ambiguous. Webster’s story allows us to ‘train our sights on cross-border movements and exchanges’,\(^5\) and Hokianga thereby becomes not just a piece in the New Zealand puzzle but a player in an international system of trade. It becomes a way


for New Zealand historians to re-imagine the component parts of the country, and its inhabitants, as players of a wider world. Indeed, perhaps it was Hokianga’s vital global connection and the influence this connection had which means its story is at odds with one focused on nation-building.

However, the north is a forgotten part of New Zealand in other ways, too, which are also the result of its history. Despite its close proximity to Auckland, New Zealand’s largest city, the north did not prosper during the twentieth century. Its dependence on extractive industries haunted it for decades, as first the timber and then the gum ran out by 1920. Hokianga, like the rest of Northland, tried to replace resource extraction with dairy farming, but the closure of the dairy factory at Motukaraka in 1958 came as a serious blow to the local industry, and little in the way of other economic activity arrived to supplement it. Well into the century the region continued to deserve its reputation as ‘the roadless north’, and even though Hokianga could still rely on the river as its main highway, the lack of investment in infrastructure set it apart from areas further south and further compromised growth. The results of this stagnation are still clear to see. A report prepared in 2010 shows that Northland experiences some of the highest rates of unemployment and lowest income levels in the country. This was not the future that John Webster foresaw when he looked out from his balcony at Opononi at the river below him. And while he cannot be held accountable for all that followed, the roots of Hokianga’s economic woes lie in its over-reliance on a finite industry which he at one time dominated, and the local population’s ongoing lack of capital, which can be traced directly back to the nineteenth century. For this reason, the dilapidated house at Opononi provides a fitting tribute to the area’s colonial past, and perhaps even to Webster himself.

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