

**PIONEERS**

# Redemption and Resistance: Lessons in Non-violent Action from Early Aotearoa/New Zealand\*

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Submitted: July 2010

Accepted: September 2010

Published: November 2010

**Abstract**

This article provides a brief account of the non-violent resistance of two Maori chiefs, Te Whiti and Tohu, in 19<sup>th</sup> century New Zealand. Each example of non-violent or passive resistance is unique to its historical and cultural context, but at the same time there is tangible common ground between these and other examples, such as Martin Luther King and Gandhi. This article will also build a link between the politics of acts of resistance – in this case, resistance to the acquisition of Maori land by force – and faith-based justifications. In conclusion, it is suggested that, despite the apparent failure of resistance, because of the arrest and imprisonment of those who resist, resistance succeeds in a number of key ways.

**Keywords**

passive resistance, New Zealand, non-violence, redemption

**INTRODUCTION**

The aim of this article is to introduce international readers and students of peace activism to an example of passive, non-violent resistance that long predates familiar names such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King. This is not triumphalism, suggesting some kind of virtue in being early movers in this form of activism; rather the point is to see that all who have carried the torch of passive resistance are part of a long and global tradition. Indeed, the fact that passive resistance has flourished in very distant places at different times, suggests that there is a powerful and transcultural core to the idea and practice.

The article also suggests that there may be common threads in the religious traditions that have been the basis for various versions of passive resistance. While the

early leaders of this activism were heavily influenced by missionary Christianity, their faith and teaching was also shaped by the deep roots of Maori spirituality. The linkage of acts of resistance with a belief in redemption is explored – as indicated by the article title – in all its forms. Faith in redemption is also linked with a belief – as held by Gandhi and King – that “right” will prevail and that the source of oppression (colonialism, slavery etc.) will be overcome by the force of good.

The idea of “redemption” is used in this setting for two reasons. Firstly, the leaders of the passive resistance themselves tended to use language derived from a mix of Old Testament and traditional Maori spiritual sources, with the common theme of a hoped-for salvation from the oppression of colonial rule and the restoration of the Maori people to their rightful place. Secondly, from the perspec-

\* The name Aotearoa/New Zealand combines the Maori and English names, and is in increasing common and official usage. The name Aotearoa is popularly translated as “Land of the Long White Cloud” and probably goes back to early navigation by migrating peoples to New Zealand. See <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/1966/aotearoa/1>. New Zealand’s national anthem is now typically sung in both English and Maori – with each name appearing in the respective versions. I am grateful for the comments of the anonymous reviewer whose suggestions, I trust, have resulted in some greater clarity in this paper.



tive of contemporary observers of this example of passive resistance, it does not strain our interpretation to also see this as a precursor to current thinking on conflict transformation. That is, the expectation of those leading the acts of resistance was not only that land acquisition and occupation would end and the source of conflict removed, but also that the relationship between Maori and colonial settlers would be radically transformed. In the same way that conflict transformation theory and practice seek to look beyond settlement and resolution to a greater vision of changed perceptions and relations, so it seems that the Maori leaders of passive resistance adopted a sacramental language of redemption to express a comparable vision. Redemption was, in this sense, the language for conflict activists in 19<sup>th</sup> century New Zealand.

## HISTORY AND CONTEXT

*Parihaka* is the name of a village that carries a particular resonance in New Zealand's colonial history and contemporary Maori cultural renaissance. It was the first location of Maori passive resistance to the English colonists' forceful acquisition of land. Parihaka remains a Maori village, at the centre of the lands of one of the Maori tribes of the Taranaki region, on the west coast of New Zealand's North Island.<sup>1</sup> Yet while it is a *marae*, a meeting ground at the heart of one tribal territory, it has also acquired something of pan-Maori symbolism. It has become the location for annual peace and music festivals that go well beyond purely Maori participation and reflect more of the post-colonial and post-assimilationist integration that is still being shaped in New Zealand.

For readers who have not grown up with the strange festivals and traditions of English heritage, one of the strangest, and hardest to explain, is the annual "Guy Fawkes" celebration. In countries where it is celebrated – principally England, Australia and New Zealand – it usually takes the form of major fireworks displays on 5<sup>th</sup> November and, occasionally, the symbolic burning of an effigy of Guy Fawkes on large bonfires. The oddity of this celebration, now increasingly funded by civic authorities as a means of reducing the injuries and house fires resulting from private fireworks and bonfires, is that it commemorates the capture and execution – by burning at the stake – of a Catholic conspirator who had planted barrels of gunpowder under the Houses of Parliament in London.

This celebration is mentioned only because of a further connection with the emerging importance of Parihaka. In

recent years there has been increasing pressure to abandon the Guy Fawkes commemoration and instead commemorate a form of resistance to the government of the day – that is to mark the first example of passive resistance in New Zealand. While there is growing momentum for this change, we can also expect conservative resistance, not because of a symbolic preference to commemorate the foiling of a Catholic plot but because of an abiding reservation about the collective celebration of Maori history, especially those events in history which are reminders of our indigenously-colonial conflict.

Quite apart from any politically contentious shift to a "Parihaka Day", which is not likely to be seen as a vote-catcher, the symbolism of Parihaka remains powerful and is maintained with an annual Peace Festival and recent and thoughtful rewriting of that period of history. There is an important shift in new historiography, in that the period of conflict, in the 1860s and 1870s, is now written less in the dominant and colonial voice, and more with an understanding of the power and legitimacy of Maori resistance.

Parihaka was founded as a village and model settlement by Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi, who are described as both Maori chiefs and Maori prophets. The hierarchical structure of Maori society – which is still important in modern times – gives the two chiefs their status as leaders. But an important addition to that status is for them to be seen, in the context of conflict with the English colonists, as prophets. Here we see an indication of the overlay of Old Testament Christianity over traditional Maori norms, social structure and cosmology. In this cultural setting, at the least, passive resistance reflects a complex epistemology of Maori rejection of colonial rule based not only on the secular norms of autonomy of an indigenous people, but also on the moral ground – indeed, the moral high ground – of prophesy and millenarian faith.

The passive resistance of Te Whiti and Tohu stands out not only as an example on an international stage of this form of opposition, but also in sharp contrast to the very vigorous and armed resistance shown by the majority of Maori who faced the dispossession of their lands and undermining of their culture and autonomy.

For readers not familiar with New Zealand history, or with the period of land confiscation in the 1860s and 1870s, a very brief background may be helpful to provide a context for these acts of resistance.

The Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1840 between many – but not all – of the Maori chiefs and the representatives

<sup>1</sup> For a map, see <http://www.zoomin.co.nz/map/nz/south+taranaki/rahotu/-parihaka+pa-0/>



of the British Crown is one of New Zealand's most important constitutional documents. It is also one of the most contested. This is not the place to review the troubled 170-year history of the Treaty; but it can be noted that, while the intention was to settle the relationship between the Crown and the Maori, the process has been slow and still continues. Major obstacles to effective implementation of the Treaty are the facts that:

- Not all of the chiefs signed on behalf of their tribes, so many claimed then – and now – that they were not subject to its terms;
- There are two versions of the Treaty, in English and Maori, and they do not, even with a generous translation, say the same thing;
- There was disagreement from the outset as to whether, by signing the Treaty, the chiefs ceded sovereignty to the Crown or – as Maori argue – a less high-ranked institution;
- There was and is disagreement as to whether there was any deliberate cession of ownership of land;
- There was a core question in constitutional and international law as to whether a “Treaty” could be signed by chiefs who were not in any conventional sense representatives of a nation (this remains a major subject of discussion in those countries where negotiations continue between the State and “first nation” peoples).

There have been, after the 1930s, and then again from the 1970s, a number of attempts to resolve some of these questions in courts of law, with results ranging from the judicial assertion that the Treaty was a “mere nullity”<sup>2</sup> to a contemporary political and judicial view that the Treaty forms a core part of New Zealand's jurisprudence.

Without going into the extensive details of the process of negotiations and mediations still under way in New Zealand, we can say that the grounds for the claims which are the subject of negotiations fall broadly into two categories. Firstly, there are claims arising from the historical injustices involved in the land confiscations of the 1860s, and secondly, there are claims against the allocation of resources (fisheries, marine farming, forestry, and the contentious issue of the foreshore and seabed) based on the principle and policy of Maori entitlements as the indigenous “partners” in the bicultural political and eco-

nomic arrangements. Both of these are, on the face of it, matters for negotiation and settlement, but there is also a major sub-agenda. The basis for the claims is not solely the fact of historical wrongdoing but also the status of the claimants as a people who have sovereignty over resources, land and their own lives, and who were wrongfully deprived of it.<sup>3</sup>

## RESISTANCE

In the years after the signing of the Treaty, there was relatively peaceful coexistence through to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thereafter, the rapidly increasing settler population led to a growing demand for land. The shadow of the Treaty's various interpretations meant that there was an abiding lack of certainty as to the status of Maori ownership of and sovereignty over their land. Added to that was a colonial indifference to the niceties of legal interpretation and a perception that the authority of the colonial government prevailed – along with its military power.

In 1863 The Suppression of Rebellion Act was passed, stating that any Maori fighting to retain their land were rebels and therefore could be detained indefinitely without trial. Three million acres of prime arable land were seized from Maori owners in the Taranaki region, on the West Coast of the North Island. This was the trigger for the start of the Land Wars.<sup>4</sup>

Te Whiti and Tohu took no part in these wars. Instead, when his own village was destroyed by fire in 1865, Te Whiti founded Parihaka as a model village and seat of Maori passive resistance to the colonial land-grab. Both Te Whiti and Tohu believed that the Maori and the European settlers could live in peaceful coexistence – but not on the basis of Maori submission to European. Te Whiti also insisted that there should be no selling of land to – and certainly no confiscations by – settlers.<sup>5</sup>

Over the next decade, Parihaka became the centre and symbol of Maori passive resistance to land acquisition. The conflict was exacerbated by the colonial government's plan, in 1878, to undertake surveys of land, including that still owned by Maori, before selling it off in parcels to settlers newly arriving from England. At the same time, the colonial and political attitude was perhaps exemplified by the comment of a Member of Parliament, Major Harry Atkin-

2 *Wi Parata v. Bishop of Wellington* (1877) 3 NZ Jur (NS) (SC) 72, per Prendergast, J.

3 The preceding summary of the Treaty process was taken from Ian Macduff (2008). “Negociar la memoria, la historia y la ciudadanía: comentario y estudio de caso Nueva Zelanda”.

4 It is worth noting that at least through to the 1970s, these wars were typically referred to as the “Maori Wars”. The change in name was a mark of the radical shift in perception of this period of colonial history, and the result of new accounts of the period, many of them written by Maori scholars.

5 For an excellent history of this period of land acquisition, see Richard Boast (2008), *Buying the Land, Selling the Land*.



son who hoped, if war broke out, that the Maori would be exterminated.

When the surveying began, Te Whiti and his followers embarked on an active (rather than passive) form of non-violent resistance: as soon as surveyors' pegs were in place, Maori would remove them. This story is still recounted at gatherings at Parihaka with considerable pleasure – the pleasure of simple, effective and annoying disruption of the plans of others. But Maori unease grew as the surveying continued with little sign of the promised Maori reserves of land being set aside. The surveyors also trampled Maori crops and showed almost complete disregard for the integrity of Maori settlements.

In further actions – perhaps showing some nice Biblical parallels of “swords to ploughshares” parables – Te Whiti's followers ploughed the fields of the settlers who had already begun farming on confiscated or purchased<sup>6</sup> land.<sup>7</sup> The immediate consequence of this activity was that a number of Te Whiti's followers were arrested, removed to the South Island, and held without trial.

In 1880, the Native Minister, Bryce, insisted that a road was built north towards Parihaka. Te Whiti's first response was to offer beer and hospitality to the road builders and to attempt to dissuade them from going ahead. Bryce, however, maintained his stance. He also ordered that it be built through the heart of cultivated fields, while refusing to fence the road off from those fields, thus allowing wandering livestock to destroy crops. In response, Te Whiti ordered that fences should be erected and the road blocked. The fences were immediately demolished by the road builders – and immediately reconstructed. As a result of this protest, 420 ploughmen and 216 fencers were arrested.

Despite those arrests and the deaths in prison of many of those arrested, the protests continued and, in 1881, the government responded by sending 1,500 troops to quell the ‘rebellion’. The troops were met by around 200 young boys who performed the haka – the challenge that is still used today on ceremonial and sporting occasions. Following that line of ‘welcomers’, the troops were met by a group of young girls skipping. Around 2,500 villagers, who had baked bread for the troops, sat awaiting their arrival. Te

Whiti's invocation to his followers was “If war comes, what can we do but look on and laugh?” Te Whiti and Tohu were both arrested and imprisoned until 1883. Their trial was aborted, by legislative act, as politicians feared that they would not be found guilty. Parihaka was demolished, and the remaining inhabitants were driven away by the troops.

While this confrontation was taking place on the west coast, scenes of violence – and violent resistance – were taking place elsewhere. On the east coast, for example, in the area around Gisborne, emissaries of a new Maori religion – Pai Mariri – led the resistance against acquisition of Maori land, from 1865. The government's response to these ‘acts of rebellion’ was to attack the Pai Mariri defensive position where some 800 people were living, including around 300 women and children. As a result of that attack, around 70 Maori were killed.<sup>8</sup>

In 1883, after the British Governor of New Zealand had pleaded Te Whiti and Tohu's case before Parliament in London, the two leaders were released and returned to the remains of Parihaka. They rebuilt the village, again with a view to it being a model village and, built in a mix of Maori and European styles, an example of possible peaceful co-existence.

The conflict also saw the emergence of a significant difference in response and strategy between Maori leaders. On the one hand, Te Whiti and Tohu persisted with their non-violent strategy, and on the other, leaders such as Titokowharu and Te Kooti advocated armed resistance.<sup>9</sup> In both cases, however, the visions of the leaders were based on a mix of Maori sovereignty, traditional Maori spiritual beliefs (especially related to the sanctity of land) and Old Testament prophesies of redemption, liberation and salvation, in this case salvation from the scourge of colonial invasion.

## REDEMPTION

Three interlinked belief systems underpin these acts of resistance. First, there is the deep Maori spiritual tradition which – to risk simplification of a rich cosmology – rests

6 It should be noted that the “purchases” of Maori land do not all withstand contemporary and historical legal scrutiny. In addition, a ‘sale’ assumes a title to sell, which was not consistent with Maori concepts of land ownership.

7 “Maori protested but, true to a new policy of peace, did not resort to arms. Despite every provocation and dire consequence, they maintained peaceful roles. Protest came after no less than 12 years, when, with the whole of their lands confiscated and their habitations given over to settlers, they were still waiting for promised reserves. The protest that then came took the form not of arms but of ploughing settler land. The weapon was the tool of peace – the ploughshare. Protest ploughing soon spread throughout Taranaki.”

Waitangi Tribunal's Taranaki Claim Report, §1.4, <http://twm.co.nz/tar3.html>

8 See the Executive Summary of the Waitangi Tribunal Report, in which they reach the clear conclusion that the acts of the colonial government and troops were illegal, and the actions of the Maori were not ‘rebellion’. <http://www.waitangi-tribunal.govt.nz/scripts/reports/reports/814/0E7FB456-C4FE-4305-91EB-2EC15B12A9D0.pdf>

9 As a personal aside, when I was taught rudimentary New Zealand history at school – some years before the new histories were written – the only Maori leaders we heard of were those who led the armed rebellion. The peaceful leaders did not feature in those school lessons.



on the belief in the unity of all things. The key elements of this are:

- 1) The belief that all living things are descended from gods.
- 2) The corresponding belief that all living things are imbued with life force; essence, *mana*.
- 3) The significance of place – for example, of one's river or mountain. All Maori who still claim a strong link to their *iwi* (tribe) of origin, will also claim their *turan-gawaewae*, that is, the place where they are entitled to stand and be heard. This factor is of particular relevance to the historical resistance to land sale and confiscation and to contemporary claims for compensation and rectification. It was not so much a matter that the land was taken from the people, but that people were taken from their land. We can also note that the Maori word *whenua* means not only 'land' or 'place', but also 'placenta' – and the tradition was that the afterbirth was buried on the land to which the individual could trace his or her ancestry.
- 4) The core concepts of *tapu* and *noa* – meaning, respectively, that which is sacred and restricted, and that which is blessed or has had the restriction lifted. All aspects of traditional Maori life and cosmology were invested with one or other of these.
- 5) Reciprocity not only in the sense of a return of obligations but also in the larger sense of the importance of a balance and order in relations. It is important precisely because it is a way of maintaining or restoring a balance.

In conjunction, we can see some of the origins of non-violent resistance as a strategy that restores the imbalance created by violence. A strategy that seeks to preserve the sacred from the profane and that reflects the centrality of the land, seeing it not only as a place where people live but, in a very tangible sense, as the place to which they belong. This vision imbues the actions of the resisters with the *mana* and life force of standing their ground.

Second, the period of confiscation and resistance coincides with the emergence of millenarian movements, grounded in a vision of redemption and liberation, drawing not only on those Maori spiritual traditions but also on Old Testament prophecies. Among the 'prophets' of this Maori millenarianism was Te Ua Haumene, who has been described as the founder of the Maori non-violent resistance movement, along with the Maori king, Tawhiao, also known as Matutaera. Te Whiti and Titokowharu also be-

came prophets in this line of resistance – the former taking the non-violent path, the latter more willing to engage in armed resistance.<sup>10</sup> In the same way that Dr Martin Luther King could say a century later that he had a dream of the redemption and liberation of his people, so too these Maori leaders had a vision of their liberation from the yoke of colonial rule – and a vision of the potential of peaceful coexistence.

Third, as mentioned before, there is a strong overlay of Old Testament theology in these 19<sup>th</sup> century Maori resistance movements, the main one being Pai Mariri, the faith founded by Te Ua. The name Pai Mariri means "goodness and peace"; and the Church emerged directly from the conflict over land and settlement, in the 1860s. Te Ua's Church was named Hauhau because Te Hau – "the breath of God" – carried word of deliverance to the faithful.

However, though founded on the principles of goodness and faith, in the face of acts of colonial land-grabbing the movement was quickly subverted by more violent elements. As the prophets of Hauhau travelled through North Island they rapidly became drawn into the conflict and, in accounts of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the name of Hauhau became synonymous with armed violence.

It was this subversion of the peaceful aspirations and visions that led Te Whiti and Tohu to take the path of non-violent resistance – though still retaining the vision of redemption.<sup>11</sup>

"When the war ended, Te Whiti was already formulating his own doctrines. Although he cloaked these in mysticism, the fundamental ideas were relatively simple. His first assumption was that the Maoris should be left alone to work out their salvation in their own way. This was not so much an assumption as a proven fact, as had been shown by the experience of the Waikato missions before the war. As a second assumption, Te Whiti accepted the Maori Land League's principle that no land should be sold to Europeans. In this connection he asserted that, because the Government had done nothing about the lands confiscated in south Taranaki, that policy had been abandoned. Te Whiti's third assumption concerned the attitude which Maoris should take against encroachments by Europeans. He argued, quite correctly, that, as direct negotiation and rebellion had failed, the Maoris should meet further incursions peacefully, by civil disobedience, and by passive obstruction. As a policy, passive obstruction

<sup>10</sup> See James Belich (1989), *I Shall Not Die: Titokowharu's War; New Zealand, 1868-1869*.

<sup>11</sup> Encyclopedia of New Zealand.



appealed to the Maoris' sense of humour and proved very difficult for the Government to counteract. To these assumptions Te Whiti added a peculiar myth, which was based partly upon his studies of the Bible and partly the teachings of Hauhauism. This looked forward to a special 'Day of Reckoning' when all the Europeans would voluntarily leave the country."

In another curious twist of theological syncretism, Te Whiti also identified with the Jewish people and their struggle for liberation (recall this is well before the events of the modern Middle East). The identification was such that the source of Maori migration in the Pacific, a thousand years earlier than Hawaiki, was also called (by Te Whiti) "Kenana" or Canaan.

The moral high ground that was thus gained also became the basis for passive resistance, in the belief that, like the Old Testament prophets and their followers, redemption would follow from suffering and persecution. It was also based on a powerful belief that liberation not only would come through suffering, but also that non-violent acceptance of that suffering would demonstrate the moral superiority of those who suffer. Thus Tohu's orders to his followers at Parihaka were not to answer war with war, but with dignity and resistance, through which they would overcome.

## CONCLUSIONS: THE POWER OF NON-VIOLENT RESISTANCE

It is argued by those who favour more direct and forceful responses to oppression that non-violent and passive resistance is ineffective. For them, history shows that Parihaka was destroyed; supporters of Te Whiti and Tohu were imprisoned, many without trial, for years; women were raped by the attacking forces; and, in the end, lands were still taken. This is an argument that is still heard today in New Zealand, especially by some of the more radicalized and disillusioned Maori who take the view that they are still dispossessed of their lands, still do not have the sovereignty over their own lives that the Treaty was said to promise, and Maori are disproportionately represented in crime and prison statistics. In short, the peaceful processes of debate, of politics and of following the rule of law have not worked.

However, without seeking to revisit the whole field of non-violent citizen action, I will comment on just three

constructive aspects that emerge from a reading of the history of Te Whiti and Tohu, and how these are threads that run through most, if not all, of the examples of non-violent resistance.

The first factor in the effectiveness of non-violent resistance is the fact that it typically provokes an overreaction on the part of the authorities or those being resisted, which seems an ironic success. It is one thing for opposing armies to confront each other, whether or not acting within the confines of international conventions on the conduct of war. But where there is a radical asymmetry in arms and attitude, as at Parihaka, the reaction is typically not to match the passive response with a reciprocal laying down of arms, but rather to escalate the force. What the military and psychological explanation for this might be is beyond the scope of this paper; but what we do see is the conventional power of arms and authority confronted by an unexpected nemesis wielding a very different kind of power.

Sceptics of the non-violent strategy would say, again, that this proves the point: non-violence is only met by violence and the unrestrained exercise of power. However, this issue of the typical overreaction in the use of force must be read alongside two other issues to be raised later. Acts of military and legal overreaction exemplify the asymmetry of actions and of power, reinforce resistance, and in due course evoke a sympathetic response that undermines the legitimacy of the authority being opposed.

A more formalised aspect of the typical overreaction is not on the field of battle but in the legal system. We have seen in this case, as in perhaps all examples of non-violent resistance, that those engaged in opposition can expect to be arrested and imprisoned. If they could then expect an open and fair legal process, that would be one thing, but Te Whiti, Tohu, and many of their followers did not face full trial, because of the perceived risk that they might be acquitted, which would be seen only to encourage more of the same resistance.

There were, of course, some trials:<sup>12</sup>

"The first 40 ploughmen brought before court, meanwhile, were charged with malicious injury to property, sentenced to two months' hard labour and ordered to pay £200 surety for 10 months good behaviour following their release. Because none could raise the surety, all remained behind bars for 12 months. The Government declined to lay charges against any of the remaining 180 protesters, but also refused to release them."

<sup>12</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parihaka>



In response to this abuse of legal procedures, it was claimed that “bending the law” was necessary in the circumstances, not so much because those imprisoned without trial were an actual risk (after all, their resistance was passive, not violent)<sup>13</sup> but rather because, if the cases went to the Supreme Court, there would be a good chance of acquittal.

Not only was the law manipulated; there were also rapid legislative responses both to legitimise the actions of the militia and to further criminalise acts of resistance. Legislation was passed to make the acts of the soldiers retrospectively legal and beyond review, and to stop the trials of Te Whiti and Tohu to ensure their continued incarceration at the will of the Government, not subjecting them to judicial review.

It may strain the notion of “success” to suggest that the violent and illegal treatment of protesters as somehow favourable for the protest, and that those who were defeated in some sense emerged triumphant. But the point here may be that this asymmetrical conflict needs to be measured in unconventional terms. The asymmetry was of at least three types: the sheer numbers of forces ranged on each side; the modes of combat (violent vs. non-violent); and the available power of the legal system to legitimise the actions of the government forces.

There is also a parallel in contemporary legal theory which – at least in liberal democracies – acknowledges a right to resist, though it hedges that entitlement with the expectation that those involved can expect to bear the cost of their resistance. Though this might seem a risky trade-off, the underlying principle is that the act of resistance, even if punished individually, serves to test the legitimacy of specific laws or even of governments in the courts. And this can cut two ways: the acts of resistance might be found justified by some overriding principle of constitutional legitimacy, and the resisters vindicated; or, – as in the Te Whiti case – the legal and political systems may close ranks against the resistance and, in confirming the illegality of resistance, reveal, at least to the historical record, the inconsistencies of apparently civilized legal systems. In this way, resistance and its punishment reveal the frailties of law and authority in their own terms.

In response to non-violent resistance, a government responded through its military, the use of excessive force and through the abuse of its legal process. The legal and political overreaction certainly serves to contain the immediate rebellion, but it also serves to undermine the legitimacy of the very system claiming this authority to act.

The second, and related, aspect of non-violent resistance that illustrates its power is the fact that here, and in all well-known examples, those resisting authority use and articulate the standards of those they are opposing. Whether it is Maori resisting forceful land acquisition in the name of the primacy of the legal process and the value placed on the integrity of property ownership, or South Africans resisting apartheid in the name of human dignity, or African-Americans calling for civil rights in the language of the American Constitution and Bill of Rights, or Indians calling for independence in the name of the rights of peoples to autonomy and self-government, they are all, in effect, holding up a mirror to those they are resisting, and calling on the authorities to act as though they believe in what they espouse. This is particularly the case here in the Parihaka example, where the leaders of the resistance relied on expressly Christian values and virtues, so could hardly be dismissed as relying on alien or “primitive” principles.

The third and final element illustrated by this 19<sup>th</sup> century example of passive resistance is the power of doubt. This is not doubt on the part of those resisting, for they act in the name of the very principles that are supposed to be upheld. But it is the doubt that can be seeded in the minds of those being resisted, especially where there are people willing to face the force of arms, to offer bread and hospitality to the attacking soldiers, to put their children at risk, because of the force and justice of the claim they are making. These were not times when the protesters could claim, as they do now under the spotlight of CNN cameras, that “the whole world is watching”. But the power remains in the dignity of resistance. That this is the case in the Parihaka example is clear from two examples already mentioned: the doubt on the part of Parliamentarians that the arrests and imprisonment of the leaders of the resistance would withstand judicial scrutiny; and the doubt illustrated by the fact that the Governor of New Zealand (the representative of the British Crown) went to plead for the case of Te Whiti and Tohu before the House of Parliament in London.

Each example of passive resistance reflects its own cultural and geographical background and the story of Te Whiti and Tohu is now central to revisions of New Zealand history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Also, contemporary Maori will find common ground with others who have resisted oppression and will find in their avatars of passive resistance, considerable common ground with those who have taken the same path in different places and different times. There is, we might say, a common language in

<sup>13</sup> Te Whiti was, however, described at his trial as “a wicked, malicious, seditious and evil-disposed person” who had sought “to prevent by force and arms the execution of the laws of the realm”. See Scott (1975), *Ask That Mountain: The Story of Parihaka*.



this form of symbolic and practical action that transcends time and place.

Simple acts of resistance and collaboration also lie at the heart of this example, in the offering of hospitality, the act of baking bread to share, the welcoming of invading troops. They can all be seen as symbolic acts and gestures of practical ways in which peaceful coexistence might be possible. The hoped-for redemption might not have been

attained by this early act of resistance, but the legacy can be seen in the renaissance of Maori society, language and political voice in the past 50 years, and in the process of restoration of at least some of the lands forcefully taken in the nineteenth century. If not in the lifetime of the resisters, and even if not in the form hoped for by them, redemption has become a process of political, cultural and social recognition. ■

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## ■ Recommended citation

MACDUFF, Ian (2010). "Redemption and Resistance: Lessons in Non-violent Action from Early Aotearoa/New Zealand" [online article]. *Journal of Conflictology*. Vol. 1, Iss. 2. Campus for Peace, UOC. [Consulted: dd/mm/yy].

<<http://www.uoc.edu/ojs/index.php/journal-of-conflictology/article/view/vol1iss2-Macduff/vol1iss2-Macduff>>

ISSN 2013-8857



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## About the author

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