

MĀORI LANGUAGE REVITALISATION: NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT MAGNANIMITY

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Abstract

Colonisation has had a devastating effect on many indigenous languages, including te reo Māori, the language of the indigenous people of New Zealand. Factors which threatened te reo Māori with extinction and actions taken in response are discussed, including some key initiatives undertaken by Māori, but Government policy is the primary focus. The concept of magnanimity is used to assess Government policies that initially weakened the language and then attempted to revitalise it. Treaty of Waitangi obligations for Government to protect te reo Māori are considered. Census and other statistical data demonstrate the continuing fragility of the language.

Résumé

La colonisation a eu un impact dévastateur sur nombre de langues autochtones, dont le Maori (te reo Māori), la langue des autochtones de la Nouvelle-Zélande. Cet article traite de facteurs ayant menacé le Maori de disparition et de mesures prises en réaction à ce danger, dont certaines initiatives-clé prises par des Maori, mais c'est surtout de politique gouvernementale que l'on traite. On se sert du concept de grandeur d'esprit afin d'évaluer des politiques gouvernementales qui à l'origine ont affaibli la langue et qui par la suite ont tenté de la revitaliser. On prend en considération les obligations gouvernementales liées au traité de Waitangi afin de protéger le Maori. Des données tirées du recensement et d'autres statistiques montrent que l'état de la langue demeure précaire.

Introduction

In his award-winning account of genocide in Rwanda, Philip Gourevitch (1998, p. 55) commented that “colonization is violence, and there are many ways to carry out that violence”. One form of violence occurs when colonised people lose their language. The history of the Māori language, *te reo Māori*, echoes that experienced by many indigenous languages in the context of colonisation. For Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, *te reo Māori* is the essence of the culture; to lose the language is to lose one’s identity. As esteemed Māori leader, Sir James Henare, stated, “The language is the core of our Māori culture and *mana*. *Ko te reo te mauri o te mana Māori*” (Waitangi Tribunal, 1986, p. 34). Initially the preferred language of discourse between Māori and the Europeans arriving in New Zealand from the late 1700s (Moon, 2016, p. 105), *te reo Māori* gradually became subordinated to the English language, until the point that it seemed destined for extinction by the end of the 19th century (Moon, 2016, p. 219). Despite sporadic attempts by various parties to revitalise the language over the intervening years, *te reo Māori* language remains in a fragile state at the time of this writing, in 2020. This is a situation that should never have occurred, given that, apart from any moral rights of the indigenous people, the British Crown signed a Treaty with Māori in 1840 which guaranteed protection of the Māori language.

During the 20th century it became increasingly clear to Māori that, contrary to its promise, the Treaty had not protected their language. This realisation led to various indigenous protest groups in the 1960s demanding recognition of the right for all Māori to be able to use *te reo* as their chosen means of communication. Slowly these demands gained some measure of Government support and various laws and strategies were (and continue to be) implemented with the stated aim of revitalising the language. Biggs (1968, p. 75), commenting on earlier Government policies that purported to support the Māori language, described the Government as “magnanimous” — a case of the “winning” colonisers magnanimously deciding to address concerns of a weakened “enemy”. Biggs’ characterisation of the Government as magnanimous provides a useful lens for discussion and judgement of recent Government actions in relation to *te reo Māori* and associated Treaty obligations.

Magnanimity as a quality appears to have various, even contradictory, connotations, sometimes referring to praiseworthy qualities, other times to qualities far less admirable. For example, persons described as being big-hearted, noble, brave, forgiving, and free from pettiness or vindictiveness embody a virtuous or praiseworthy form of magnanimity. But when generosity, kindness, or forgiveness are demonstrated towards others whom one has defeated or who are less powerful, we must question whether this seeming magnanimity is in fact praiseworthy. For

example, does the apparent generosity extend to power-sharing and shared decision-making, or are there elements of condescension and cynicism in the distribution of favours to the former enemy? It is the latter form of magnanimity, one lacking in praiseworthiness of intention, which Biggs appears to attribute to the colonisers. Certainly, there was little evidence at that time that successive Governments had genuinely desired to meet the commitments of the Treaty or recognised the cultural significance of *te reo* to Māori.

This paper reports on a descriptive case study of the impact of colonisation on the Māori language and uses the concept of magnanimity to assess Government policies that initially weakened the language and then later attempted to revitalise it. The research involved sourcing secondary data from a wide range of publications by Māori and non-Māori scholars, various Government departments, and some Māori organisations. Government census and survey data are included throughout to support the commentary. The paper first provides a summary of the Treaty of Waitangi and then proceeds chronologically, beginning with a brief overview of the Māori language prior to colonisation. This is followed by sections that track the well-being of the Māori language post-colonisation until 2020. Factors leading to the decline of the Māori language and actions undertaken by Māori to reverse this decline are reported. The final section assesses the most recent Government commitments to foster *te reo* Māori so that it becomes a living language for all people of New Zealand.

Throughout the paper terminology is used as follows: The terms *te reo Māori*, *te reo*, and *the Māori language* are used interchangeably. *Government* refers to the New Zealand Government of the particular period; the political orientation of each Government is not noted. *Pākehā* is the Māori word used to refer collectively to people who are not Māori, including the earliest colonisers, their descendants, and people who more recently immigrated to New Zealand. The early part of the paper refers to *Europeans* rather than *Pākehā*, reflecting the origin of the majority of original colonisers. Important concepts in the Māori world referred to include *mana* (*authority/status/prestige*) and *mauri* (*life force*); other concepts are translated in situ.

The Signing of a Treaty

Initially the colonisation of New Zealand was not well organised and the mass of Europeans that were to come was not evident to Māori (King, 1997, p. 30). The first colonists were few in number and easily incorporated into Māori tribal life, with all early settlement occurring on Māori terms (Walker, 2004, pp. 78-79). In 1840, when Māori still vastly outnumbered Europeans, the Treaty of Waitangi was signed between

the British Crown and Māori at Waitangi, in the north of New Zealand. This treaty was designed to secure British sovereignty and ultimately assimilation of Māori within the settler community (Orange, 1987, p. 2). However, this purpose was obscured in the Māori text of the treaty, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, in which Māori ceded kawanatanga (*governorship rather than sovereignty*) of the country to the British Crown in Article 1 and were assured in Article 2 that they would retain tino rangatiratanga (*chieftainship, sovereign rights, or mana whenua*) over their lands, homes, and all their taonga (*treasured possessions*) (Walker, 2004, pp. 91-93). This meant Māori would have been confident of their authority over all aspects of their life, including taonga such as their language and culture. Furthermore, the Crown had agreed to actively ensure that Māori would be able to realise this authority. However within 100 years of the signing of the Treaty, the Māori language was at risk of extinction. It was not until 1986 that te reo Māori was confirmed as being a taonga and thus should have had protected status from the signing of the Treaty (Rewi & Rātima, 2018, p. 308).

The Māori Language before Colonisation

Te reo Māori is the ancestral language of the indigenous people of New Zealand. These first New Zealanders came from Eastern Polynesia, probably from a number of islands, around 1300 AD (Walter & Reilly, 2018, p. 67). The particular islands of origin may never be known for certain, although the notion of a “zone” including the Society Islands and Cook Islands fits with traditional narratives (Walter & Reilly, 2018, pp. 67-68). That the Māori language is closely related to the indigenous languages of Rarotonga, Tahiti, and Hawaii also supports this notion.

Over the ensuing centuries, Māori explored and adapted to their new environment, developing new methods of working with local resources, so that by the sixteenth century a culture distinct from its Polynesian roots had emerged (Walter & Reilly, 2018, p. 82). King (2003, p. 74) summarised as follows: “What this all added up to was a process by which an imported culture, that of East Polynesians, left to develop in isolation, became an indigenous one: Te Ao Māori (the Māori world)”. Te reo Māori was now a uniquely New Zealand language. Moon (2016, pp. 17-20) has described it as an exclusively oral language, imbued with mauri, that was often delivered in formal settings with compelling flair by skilled orators.

During this period Māori society was regionally diverse and the language evolved into a number of dialects, with some variation in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation among different tribal areas (Bauer, 1997, p. xxi; Harlow, 2007, p. 41). Assessments of the extent of these historical dialectic variations differ. For example, Stowell (1913, p.

5) described the differences as “very slight”, whereas King (1997, p. 18) described them as “pronounced”. Harlow (2007, p. 44) proposed that the differences may have been deliberately used to mark tribal identity. Dialectic differences continue in contemporary New Zealand (Harlow, 2007, pp. 45, 52), and Keegan (2017, p. 130) has noted recent renewed interest in these.

The Māori Language after Early Contact with Europeans

The first genuine contact between Māori and Europeans began in 1769 with the arrival of the British explorer, Captain James Cook. On each of his three voyages to New Zealand, Cook brought with him Tahitian interpreters who had little trouble understanding te reo Māori, as would be expected given the origins of Māori. Cook was soon followed by other groups: sealers, whalers, and traders. This initial contact period had little impact on the Māori language which remained the principal means of communication between Māori and Europeans (Rewi & Rātima, 2018, p. 17). There was, however, a need to expand the lexicon in order to include new materials and concepts. Adapting extant words appears to have been the preferred option for this. For example, “pounamu” (*greenstone*) came to mean “bottle”, presumably because of the colour of bottles at that time (Moorfield, 2011, p. 155). Later, transliterations (loan words) were also employed, for example kawana (*governor*) and Māne (*Monday*) (Moorfield, 2011, pp. 65,96). This ability to evolve remains a key feature of the Māori language that defies the notion of it being an anachronism, as was the view widely held by Europeans in the early 19th century (Moon, 2016, p. 12).

The missionaries who followed had a far greater influence on the language as they sought to communicate the messages of Christianity to Māori. The first mission, established in the Bay of Islands by Samuel Marsden in 1814, was initially a controversial and unsuccessful enterprise in introducing Christianity to Māori and having them use spoken and written English (Moon, 2016, p. 55). It therefore became urgent for missionaries to learn to speak te reo, and many did so with considerable proficiency. The missionaries soon instigated the spread of Māori literacy so that religious texts could be translated into te reo and Māori could be taught to read them. In 1815 the missionary Thomas Kendall produced the first book on a Māori grammar, *A Korao no New Zealand*, for use in the newly established mission schools (Biggs, 1968, p. 66). These first missionary schools were founded in the Bay of Islands, the earliest in 1816, and lessons were taught only in te reo Māori (Biggs, 1968, p. 73; Rewi & Rātima, 2018, p.306). Later, in 1820, Kendall worked with Professor Lee and two Māori consultants, Hongi Hika and Waikato, to produce an orthographic system for the Māori language, *A Grammar and*

Vocabulary of the New Zealand Language (Biggs, 1968, p. 66). These early attempts to capture te reo accurately had shortcomings, as noted by the missionary Henry Williams in 1823 (Moon, 2016, pp. 78-79). Improvements were attempted by several others, including Williams' younger brother, William, who went on to compile the first authoritative Māori dictionary, *A Dictionary of the New Zealand Language*, initially published in 1844 (Moon, 2016, p. 221).

By the 1830s Māori were taking to literacy with great enthusiasm (Biggs, 1968, p. 73; Walker, 2004, p. 85). Previously Māori had no need for a written language, but with the arrival of Europeans, literacy was seen by some Māori as the "magical key to European knowledge" (Belich, 1996, p. 165). Moon (2016, p. 92) further reports that "the fervour for books in Māori communities was unquenchable". However, transforming te reo Māori from an oral language into a written form had several, possibly unintended, consequences. As Moon (2016, pp. 73-74) proposed, it was not a culturally neutral deed; for example, standardisation of the language often ignored dialectic differences; the metaphorical nature of te reo and the nuances provided by skilled oratory were features that could easily be lost, and over time written text gained an aura of authority that diminished the status of spoken te reo. Thus, the mana of the Māori language, and thereby the Māori people, was reduced. But the ability to write te reo also empowered Māori; it enabled them to write their own texts for their own purposes, and they did so prolifically. Whakapapa (*genealogy*) books, for example, recorded whānau (*extended family*) history, mythology and other material central to Māori culture, and newspapers enabled Māori to put forward political views, report news, and advocate for Māori (Moon, 2016, pp. 169, 185).

In January of 1842 the first Māori newspaper, *Ko te Karere o Nui Tirenini*, was published (McRae, 2014c). This was a monthly newspaper, published by the Governor, which continued until 1846, with the following purpose (translated into English):

... so that the Māori people would come to know the ways and customs of the Pākehā and the Pākehā would also come to know the customs of the Māori people (*Te Karere o Nui Tirenini*:1842: Hānuere 1:1).

Te Karere was the first of many newspapers published in the Māori language throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and was one of several Government publications. Government was reaching out to Māori, albeit to educate them about the European way of life. Because few Europeans would have been able to read these newspapers, the stated intention that Pākehā would come to know the customs of Māori appears disingenuous.

Māori shortly began publishing their own newspapers, the first of which appears to be *Te Waka o Te Iwi*, a Waikato newspaper circulated in 1857 (McRae, 2014b). *Te Hokioi o Niu Tirenī e Rere atu na* was another Waikato publication produced between 1861 and 1863 after two Waikato chiefs journeyed to Austria with the specific purpose of obtaining a printing press (McRae, 2014a). Some of these newspapers lasted for only a few issues, but many were longer lasting and significantly influential. Examples include *Te Korimako*, a pro-Christianity newspaper published between 1882 and 1888 (McRae, 2014b), and *Te Puke ki Hikurangi*, the newspaper of Kotahitanga, the Māori Parliament (a Māori unity movement which began in 1892), which was published sporadically between 1897 and 1913 (McRae, 2014a). Māori were making use of their new-found literacy and te reo Māori seemed set to flourish. However, the expansion of te reo to include a printed form did not ensure its survival.

The Māori Language Marginalised and in Decline

Four circumstances in which the Māori language became marginalised and set into decline are discussed in this section: Government educational policies that suppressed the language, Population changes associated with increasing immigration, Urbanisation as Māori moved away from rural areas seeking work, and Obstruction of te reo by Parliament.

1. Government Education Policies

As noted previously, all teaching in the first mission schools was conducted in te reo. After 1832, the use of te reo as the language of instruction was questioned, but the enthusiastic uptake of literacy by Māori demonstrated the success of this policy (Biggs, 1968, p. 73). However, in 1847 the Governor decreed an Education Ordinance stating that the mission schools must teach English in order to receive subsidies (Walker, 2004, p. 146). Official policy was now clearly shifting towards assimilation. The 1867 Native Schools Act directed schools to teach in English “as far as practicable”, and in 1871 an amendment to the legislation required all instruction to be in English only (Biggs, 1968, p. 74). The Māori language and culture were viewed as barriers to assimilation and therefore must be replaced by their English counterparts.

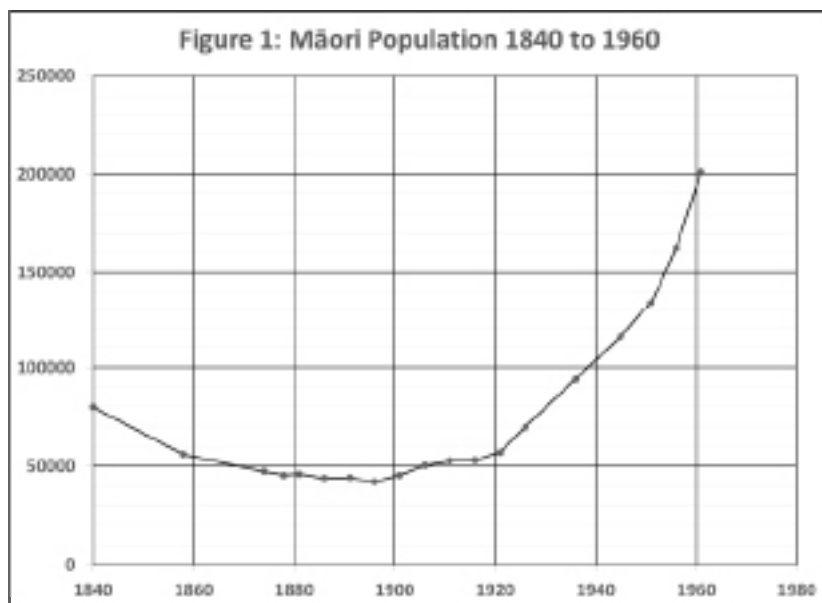
The official policies of discouraging the use of the Māori language continued well into the 20th century. John Pope’s 1903 statement as the first inspector of native schools that the Māori language was an anachronism reflected this policy (Spoonley, 1988, p. 74). These policies clearly breached the Treaty of Waitangi and demonstrated condescension bereft of any praiseworthy form of magnanimity. The Government was using its economic and governing power to marginalise, if not eradicate,

te reo Māori. As Biggs (1968, p. 74) noted, “Māori language became the ‘enemy’, and generations of school-children were chastised for speaking the language”. For example, Heeni Wharemaru (1997, p. 47), a Māori elder, recorded her experiences in the 1920s: “I stood up abruptly and said to the teacher, ‘I want to go to the toilet’—in Māori. We weren’t allowed to speak Māori in school, and I got a wrap on the knuckles for speaking Māori that day”. The teaching of English was, however, initially supported by some Māori in the belief that it would reap rewards. For example, in the 1920s prominent Māori leader and politician Sir Apirana Ngata advocated for Māori to use te reo in the home while also supporting English for schools, but later recognised the subversive effect this schooling would have on the Māori language and culture (Walker, 2004, p. 193).

Despite the emphasis on English in schools, most Māori children remained predominantly monolingual Māori language speakers in the early twentieth century. Te reo Māori survived in the homes, and in 1900 over 90% of children entering primary school spoke Māori as their first language (Walker, 2004, p. 147). Even in 1930 as many as 96% of Māori children continued to speak Māori at home (Belich, 2001, p. 203). At this stage, few Māori were advancing past primary school, unable to fund further education or pass the proficiency exam required for entrance into secondary school (King, 1997, pp. 82-83). In 1935 a newly elected Government made secondary education free, removed the proficiency exam, and established the Native District High Schools (Education Central, 2018; Walker, 2016, p. 27). This reversal of earlier policy that largely kept Māori children out of secondary education could be viewed as a praiseworthy example of magnanimity, but by continuing to require all teaching to be in English, the condescension and abandonment of Treaty obligations continued, leading to further weakening of te reo. By 1960, although a far greater proportion of Māori children were now attending high school, only 26% spoke Māori (Biggs, 1968, p. 75).

2. Population Changes and Immigration

Another factor that had the potential to impact negatively on the language was a decline in the Māori population. In 1840 the Māori population was estimated at 80,000 (a minimal estimate) and fell to a low of 42,114 in 1896 before rapidly recovering from 1920 onwards (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b). Causes of the drop in population included inter-tribal musket warfare and infectious diseases, with both muskets and diseases having been introduced by European immigrants (Walker, 2004, pp. 80, 84). Figure 1 shows the change in Māori population over the period 1840 to 1960.



It is difficult to assess the influence of the declining population on te reo Māori. Figure 1 shows that the Māori population had recovered to its 1840 numbers soon after 1930, at which time te reo Māori was still the predominant language used in Māori communities. It thus seems likely that population decline was not a significant factor in language loss. But if the decline in Māori numbers did not have a marked effect on the Māori language, being overrun by European settlers certainly did.

Organised immigration began in earnest in the 1850s, and by 1858 the population of Europeans exceeded that of Māori. This population disparity accelerated rapidly from 1858 onwards so that by 1911 the Māori population was only 5% of the European population (Statistics New Zealand, 2019b), as can be seen in Table 1.

The surge of immigrants placed increasing pressure on Māori to sell their land (King, 2003, p. 211). A reluctance by many to do so led to the New Zealand Wars, beginning in the 1860s and continuing through until 1872 (King, 2003, p. 218). The subsequent Government confiscation of land led many Māori to withdraw from contact with the colonists, largely confining themselves to their tribal areas. In 1900 more than 95% of Māori lived in these rural communities (King, 1997, p. 43). Life was mostly based on subsistence farming (King, 2003, p. 248), but because much of the most arable land had been confiscated or later taken

through legal machinations of the Native Land Court (Walker, 2004, p. 136), Māori were losing their economic base. Government policy had effectively stripped Māori of their most valuable lands. Further economic deprivation for Māori resulted from the Great Depression of the 1930s (King, 2003, p. 342). Māori largely remained in rural areas until the Second World War, and in these communities the Māori language and culture remained strong. New Zealand had become two separate communities, one predominantly Māori and the other a Pākehā community of rapidly increasing numbers (Walker, 2004, p. 186). The outcome was a class-based society, with Māori overly represented in the lower echelons. This was an unsustainable situation that soon led to Māori urbanisation.

Table 1: Māori and European Populations 1840-1911		
Year	Māori	European
1840	80,000	2,250
1858	56,049	59,412
1874	47,331	297,654
1878	45,543	412,464
1881	46,140	487,890
1886	43,926	576,525
1891	44,178	624,474
1896	42,114	701,100
1901	45,549	770,313
1906	50,310	885,999
1911	52,722	1,005,591

3. Urbanisation

By the 1940s, Māori population growth was putting pressure on depleted rural resources and Māori began moving to the cities seeking work (Walker, 2004, p. 197). After the Second World War, this migration began in earnest. In 1936 11.2% of the Māori population was urban, but by 1945 this had increased to 25.7%, and to more than 91% by 1990 (King, 2003, p. 470). In the cities Māori were out of regular contact with home marae (traditional Māori tribal meeting places) where the language was

marae (traditional Māori tribal meeting places) where the language was still strong, and they were now living in an environment where use of English was expected and deemed necessary. English became the preferred language in Māori homes. Certain city suburbs became densely populated with Māori, and their children attended schools which did not offer te reo as a language option and did not recognise Māori culture. Whilst te reo Māori continued to be used in rural areas, a generation of urban Māori grew up who could not speak their own language.

Increasing Māori urbanisation and rapid Māori population growth prompted Government to commission an investigation into the welfare of Māori in 1960. The resulting report, delivered to Parliament by Jack Hunn, the Acting Secretary for Māori Affairs, reveals the extent of scorn with which Māori language and culture was regarded at that time. For example, the Māori language was described as one of the ancient Māori cultural “relics” not “worthy of preservation” (Hunn, 1960, p. 15). Further belittling references to Māori included the assertion that they “are a virile race” (p. 17) and needing to be induced to “fall into line” (p. 16). Interestingly, the report refers to the goal of Government policy being one of integration, in which Māori culture would remain distinct (rather than assimilation which would lead to a complete loss of the culture) (Hunn, 1960, p. 15). Although integration may have been the official policy, in reality assimilation had always been the desired outcome and as Walker (2004, p. 198) commented, continued to be so.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s successive Governments continued to marginalise the Māori language and overlook their responsibilities under the Treaty, again exemplifying the cynical form of magnanimity identified by Biggs (1968). It appeared that the Māori language was in danger of annihilation.

4. Parliamentary Obstruction

Elections for New Zealand’s first Parliament took place in 1854, but it was not until the passing of the Māori Representation Act in 1867, that Māori were deemed eligible to enter into Parliament. The legislation allowed for (only) four Māori members to be elected, an inequitable number given the Māori and European population numbers at the time. Requests by the newly elected Māori members to have Bills and Acts translated into te reo were usually ignored, and when translations were provided, they were typically poorly constructed (Moon, 2016, pp. 181-183). When hearing claims put forward by Māori, only written submissions were accepted; oral submissions were not permitted (Moon, 2016, p. 183). These examples demonstrate an extreme form of deliberate marginalisation of te reo Māori and exclusion of Māori from the political system. The trivialised attempt to translate some official parliamentary materials must be considered a further example of magnanimity that

belittled te reo and the indigenous people.

Revitalisation of the Māori Language

Throughout the 100 or so years in which te reo Māori became increasingly endangered, there had been efforts by Māori to reclaim the mana and rightful status of their language. For example, as a Māori representative in Parliament, Apirana Ngata managed to have several Māori language-supporting proposals accepted, including helping to establish the Māori Ethnological Research Board, which he used to promote the Māori language by financing the recording of Māori oral material, and having the Māori language accepted as a university subject in 1923 (although it was not taught until 1951) (Walker, 2004, p. 194). Ngata also established the School of Māori Arts and Crafts at Rotorua in 1926, and together with Pei te Hurinui Jones, collected and published *Ngā Mōteatea*, an important collection of traditional songs (Belich, 2001, p. 203). However, as we have seen, by the mid-1900s, te reo Māori had become seriously endangered, prompting new efforts among Māori to revitalise the language. Two decades later, the Government responded with a range of language-supporting measures.

1. Māori Initiated Action

That Māori took actions to restore the language is not surprising. As Walker (2004, pp. 209, 321) pointed out, Māori had long realised that democracy would not deliver for them. Although urbanisation had damaged Māori language proficiency amongst Māori, it also brought about social change that would lead to concerted revitalisation efforts. The weakening of links to tribal kin led to the development of a growing pan-tribal Māori identity and an associated activism which was willing to confront Pākehā-dominated institutions (King, 1997, p. 100; Walker, 2004, p. 199). During the 1960s an increasing articulation of Māori aspirations were constantly thwarted, leading to the establishment of a number of Māori urban protest groups in the 1970s that set out to challenge institutional prejudice. The first such groups were Ngā Tamatoa, based at the University of Auckland, Te Reo, based at the Victoria University of Wellington, and the Māori Organisation on Human Rights, which protested against (among other issues) the lack of teaching of te reo Māori in schools (King, 2003, p. 482). Activist groups such as these brought the plight of the language to the attention of the wider population and the Government. In response, the New Zealand Council for Educational Research in 1973 commissioned an investigation into the state of the Māori language. The forthcoming report provided the first research evidence confirming Māori claims that the Māori language was

in crisis. It confirmed that fewer than 20% of Māori were fluent speakers of their own language, most of whom were elderly and living in isolated rural communities (Benton, 1997, pp. 15-18).

Revitalisation work by Māori occurred at both tribal and national levels, particularly in the field of education. In 1975 three tribes, Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Toa, and Te Āti Awa, initiated a language development programme, Whakatipuranga Rua Mano—Generation 2000 (Winiata, 1979, pp. 4-5) and the first bilingual school was established in Ruatoki in 1978 (Harris, 2004, p. 48). In 1979 Te Ātaarangi, a course designed to prepare Māori adults for teaching te reo, was established (Rewi & Rātima, 2018, p. 308). In a meeting of Māori educators in 1981 the concept of Te Kōhanga Reo (Māori immersion language preschool “nests”) was proposed and the first was opened in Pukeatua the following year (Walker, 2004, p. 238). By 1983, 188 Te Kōhanga Reo were in operation and by 1988 there were 521 (Walker, 2004, p. 239). In 1984 Māori educators and a group of concerned parents expressed concern about the lack of follow-up to Te Kōhanga Reo, and as a result the first Kura Kaupapa Māori (Māori immersion language primary school) was established in Auckland in 1985 (Rewi & Rātima, 2018, p. 308), although this was “outside” mainstream education and was funded by Māori. The purpose of Te Kura Kaupapa Māori was to “ensure the survival of the Māori language into the twenty-first century and beyond” (Walker, 1992, p. 515). Demand for this schooling grew as more Māori chose to take control of their children’s education, and other Kura soon opened (Walker, 2004, p. 240). Māori (and other) children now had the option to have all their schooling funded by Māori and conducted in te reo Māori.

Māori were also aware of the role the media could play in revitalising te reo Māori. Calls were made in the late 1980s for the Government to provide funding for radio and television programmes that would support Māori language and culture (Walker, 2004, p. 331). Demands for a share of the bands available for radio broadcasting soon followed. The increasing use of digital media after 2000 brought further opportunities for Māori to foster te reo, but also new challenges. For example, when the Government introduced its Digital Strategy in 2005, Kamira (2007, pp. 15-16) noted that the strategy failed to recognise the Government’s responsibilities towards te reo Māori. Māori were increasingly taking action themselves, but they were also calling the Government to account.

2. The Government Response

Official policy gradually began to fall in line with the wishes of Māori, although not without a decided shove. This shove, initiated by the urban protest groups, was given considerable impetus by a decision of the Waitangi Tribunal. The Government had set up the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975 to hear cases claiming breaches of the Treaty of Waitan-

gi from that date on, but was given the authority to hear retrospective claims in 1985. In 1984 Ngā Kaiwhakapūmau i te Reo Māori, a group of Māori broadcasters, brought a claim before the Waitangi Tribunal to have the Māori language recognised as a taonga and therefore guaranteed protection under Article 2 of the Treaty of Waitangi. The Tribunal found in favour of this claim in 1986 and made a number of (non-binding) recommendations to the Government regarding its obligations to support and preserve the Māori language (Waitangi Tribunal, 1986, p. 51).

The Government responded to the Tribunal's recommendations with a number of measures. Most significant was the passing of the Māori Language Act 1987. This Act made three important declarations. Firstly, it declared te reo Māori the official language of New Zealand. This may be seen as largely symbolic, but it does confer on the Māori language its rightful status as the first language of the country (and furthermore English is currently not recognised with legal status in this manner, although a bill was put before Parliament in 2018 to recognise English as an official language). Secondly, it gave people the right to use the Māori language in the law courts, regardless of their competency in English. Thirdly, it established the Māori Language Commission, now known as Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori, whose stated purpose is to "promote the use of Māori as a living language and as an ordinary means of communication" (Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori 2020). The Commission fulfils its purpose by advocating for the Māori language, initiating research into the language, promoting and supporting Māori medium schools, training Māori language medium educators, and formulating and implementing language policy. It has also advocated strongly for an increase in media broadcasts in the Māori language. An associated measure was the Government's eventual recognition of Te Kura Kaupapa Māori in the 1989 Education Act and the provision of funding for these schools from 1990.

In 1990 Māori formalised their claim for a share of the bands available for radio broadcasting by lodging cases with the Waitangi Tribunal (Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment, n.d.). After initial Government opposition and a series of hearing in the law courts, the Māori Broadcasting funding agency Te Māngai Pāho was eventually established in 1993, tasked with promoting "Māori language and Māori culture by allocating available funds for broadcasting and the production of programmes to be broadcast" (Te Māngai Pāho 2019). Later, Te Māngai Pāho commissioned Māori medium television programmes, such as Te Karere and Te Waka Huia which were (and still are) shown on mainstream television (although arguably in marginalised time slots). In 1998 the Government announced funding for a Māori television channel which began broadcasting in 2004. Māori Television (2019) states, "Māori language is a taonga at the heart of Māori culture and

Te Kuaha ki te Ao Māori” (the doorway into the Māori world).

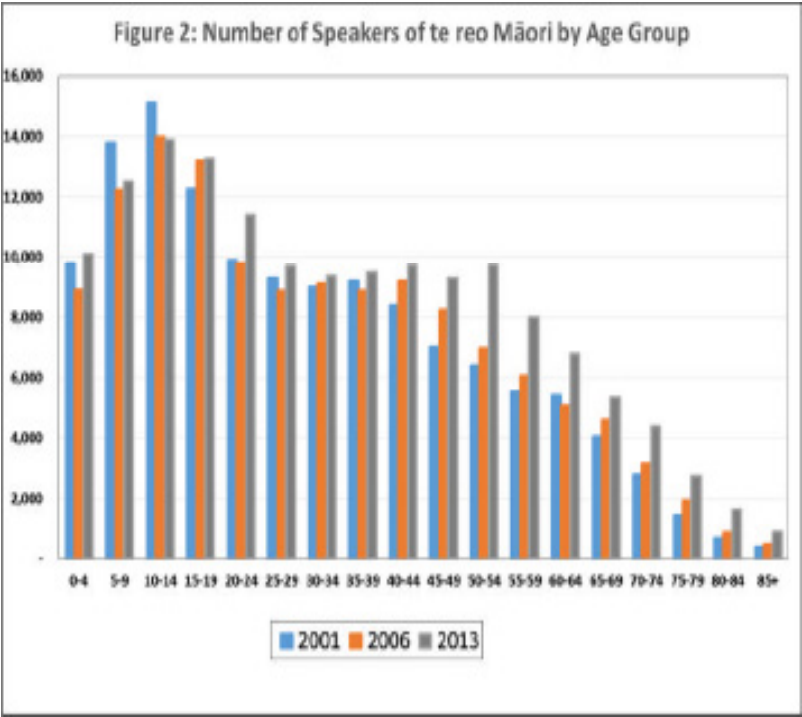
These various steps taken by Government during the 1980s and 1990s demonstrated a certain willingness by Government to meet its obligations as Treaty of Waitangi partners. The Government did not ignore the non-binding recommendations of the Waitangi Tribunal: it awarded legal status to te reo Māori, and provided funding for Māori to implement strategies to revitalise the language. However, that Māori needed to lobby for these developments and that the Government had initially opposed some of the proposals reduces the praiseworthiness of Government magnanimity over this period.

The Māori Language Since 2000

The New Zealand Government gathers information on the languages spoken by the New Zealand resident population through its five-yearly Census of Population and Dwellings. Data from Statistics New Zealand (2017b) concerning speakers of the Māori language over three recent censuses reveals a declining percentage of Māori able to speak te reo, as shown in Table 2. Note: Publication of the results of the 2018 Census was delayed due to the overall individual response rate being lower than expected by Statistics New Zealand.

Table 2: Percentage of the Māori population claiming to be competent Te Reo Māori Speakers	
2001	25.15%
2006	23.74%
2013	21.31%

Further analysis of data for the same Census periods reveals insights relating to the age of te reo Māori speakers. As noted earlier, Benton’s (1997) survey conducted in the 1970s found that most speakers of the Māori language were elderly. In comparison, these Census data (Statistics New Zealand, 2001, 2006, 2013) show that proficiency in te reo Māori is now spread across all age groups, with considerable numbers of young Māori able to speak the language, as shown in Figure 2.



At first sight these data seem to be encouraging. However, there are some concerning signals. For example, the largest increases in the number of speakers of te reo have occurred in people aged 50 plus, whereas younger people (aged under 20) who have had the benefit of educational and other opportunities to learn the Māori language, have either decreased or barely increased in the number able to speak te reo. Furthermore, when the percentages of different age groups are considered, it appears that there has been a decrease in the proportion of people of all age groups able to speak the language over the period 2001-2013. Table 3 presents these data.

Table 3: Percentage of Māori Able to Speak the Māori Language by Age						
	0-15	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
2001 *	19.7	24.2	23.0	24.7	30.1	47.3
2013 #	15.7	19.3	22.6	23.1	24.6	34.4
Sources: * 2001 Census of population and dwellings: Māori tables 1 and 13a (Statistics New Zealand, 2001) # People who speak te reo Māori, by age group, 2013 Census (Statistics New Zealand, n.d.) and Māori Population Estimates: At 30 June 2017 – table 1 (Statistics New Zealand, 2017a)						

For a language to survive and thrive, it must be spoken and used for everyday communication. This is particularly true for the Māori language, which, as noted earlier, was not originally a written language. Yet gaining oral fluency in a language appears to be more difficult than other language skills such as reading. This can be observed in a 2013 Statistics New Zealand survey of Māori well-being which included various measures of te reo Māori proficiency. Results from this survey, Te Kupenga (Statistics New Zealand, 2013), are presented in Table 4. The data indicate that being able to speak the language is the most difficult challenge for Māori. It would therefore make sense for organisations working to revitalise the Māori languages to emphasise speaking skills.

The data in this section paint a bleak picture of the state of te reo Māori competency and suggest that all efforts to revitalise the language, at least up until 2013, had been largely unsuccessful.

A slightly more positive picture may be emerging from the draft 2018 Census data, with 23.9% of Māori (185,955 out of a total of 777,195 Māori) claiming to be able to speak the Māori language (Statistics New Zealand, 2019a). This may indicate a small reversal of the decline that occurred over the 2001-2013 period. Statistics New Zealand advised by

personal communication on 4 December 2019 that age group data for Māori able to speak te reo would become available eventually.

Table 4: Percentage of Māori Able to Speak, Understand, Read, Write te reo Māori in 2013	
Speak Māori very well, well, or fairly well	22.6%
Understand Māori very well, well, or fairly well	33.1%
Read Māori very well, well, or fairly well	30.9%
Write Māori very well, well, or fairly well	23.5%

Recent Government Commitment to Revitalise the Māori Language

In this section an important recent action by Government that aims to revive te reo Māori is discussed.

1. A New Māori Language Act

In 2016 the Government repealed the Māori Language Act 1987 and replaced it with Te Ture mō Te Reo Māori 2016 – the Māori Language Act 2016. This new legislation reflects an enhanced commitment to revitalise the language, illustrated significantly by the Māori version of the Act having precedence over the English version. The Act re-affirms te reo Māori as a taonga and recognises Māori as kaitiaki (*guardians*) of the language.

The Act established Te Mātāwai, a new independent Māori language entity charged with increasing both the number and fluency of te reo speakers. Te Mātāwai’s vision is that “Te reo Māori [will be] restored as a nurturing first language” and its Maihi Māori strategy for 2017 – 2040, developed by iwi for iwi, sets out how the vision will be achieved (Te Mātāwai, 2019). Two ambitious goals focus the organisation’s approach and planning: That by 2040, (1) there will be at least 1 million people using te reo in community domains, and (2) te reo will be the first language of 25% of all Māori children aged 0 – 7 years (Te Mātāwai, 2017). A contestable investment fund is available to support community-based Māori language research initiatives and activities.

In addition, the Act required the Crown to also develop a strategy for Māori language revitalisation. Accordingly, in 2018 the Government published Maihi Karauna: The Crown’s strategy for Māori language re-

for Māori language revitalisation. Accordingly, in 2018 the Government published *Maihi Karauna: The Crown's strategy for Māori language revitalisation 2018 – 2023* (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2018). *Maihi Karauna* explains what the Crown will do to deliver the vision “kia Maori Ora te reo” (te reo is a living language). *Maihi Karauna* also identifies ambitious goals: That by 2040, (1) at least 85% of New Zealanders will value te reo Māori as a key element of national identity, (2) at least 1 million New Zealanders will have the ability and confidence to talk about at least basic things in te reo Māori, (3) 150,000 Māori aged 15 and over will use te reo Māori as much as English (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2018).

An expectation of *Te Ture mō Te Reo Māori 2016* is that the two strategies, *Maihi Māori* and *Maihi Karauna*, will work in complementary fashion to revitalise te reo Māori, as would be expected of Treaty of Waitangi partners. The legislation has a special focus on young Māori, but aims to cultivate competency in te reo Māori among all New Zealanders by the year 2040, the bicentennial of the signing of te Tiriti o Waitangi.

One means by which the Government could work towards meeting its *Maihi Karauna* obligations would be to introduce compulsory te reo Māori classes in schools. Given the role education could play in ensuring the revitalisation of the language, it is significant that te reo has never been a compulsory subject in mainstream schools in New Zealand. Many schools now offer te reo as an option, but this is not a statutory requirement. The concept of compulsory te reo classes has been debated in recent years and remains controversial, but a survey of well-being in New Zealand, the General Social Survey (GSS) 2016, reported that the majority (53%) of respondents had expressed support for compulsory te reo Māori classes (Statistics New Zealand, 2018). In 2017 this was followed by one party to the (then) current coalition Government proposing that the Māori language be made compulsory by 2030. However, this proposal was not endorsed by the Prime Minister, who, despite commenting that “It goes without saying that te reo Maori is part of who we are as a country”, did not commit to making the Māori language compulsory (Cheng, 2019). This apparent lack of commitment to the newly legislated *Maihi Karauna* could perhaps be explained by the current serious lack of teachers able to teach te reo competently. The recent Government launch of a \$12.2 million pilot programme to strengthen the Māori language competency of teachers in a number of regions (De-guara, 2019) suggests this may be the case.

The new Māori Language Act suggests a significant shift from an arrogant and patronising form of magnanimity towards a more genuine attempt by the Government to revitalise the Māori language. Under the umbrella of *Te Mātāwai*, Māori will develop and implement strategies to restore the mana and mauri of te reo Māori. This will supplement existing efforts within Māori communities. Importantly, the Government

has committed to work towards the same overall goal. This has the potential to deliver a more praiseworthy form of magnanimity than has been observed since early colonisation.

Conclusion

Te reo Māori developed as a unique indigenous language in New Zealand, distinct from its Polynesian roots. The arrival of European colonisers in the country towards the end of the 18th Century set in motion a sequence of events that eventually led to the marginalisation of te reo and its gradual slide toward extinction. The signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 should have ensured that te reo Māori was protected from the onslaught of colonisation, but as of 2020, the Māori language remains in a fragile state, with fewer than 25% of Māori able to speak te reo.

The introduction of a written form of te reo by the missionaries was an irreversible shift that threatened the mana of the traditional oral form but also empowered Māori with literacy. However, once the European population exceeded that of Māori, te reo gradually lost its primacy as the Government's policy of assimilation imposed English on Māori in schools, in parliament, and in the justice system. Rapidly increasing numbers of Pākehā led to English becoming the default language in most communities, the main exception being Māori communities in remote rural areas. In relation to the Māori language, Government demonstrated a cynical form of magnanimity that belittled the mana of the language and of Māori. Activism by Māori protest groups in the 1960s brought the plight of te reo to the attention of the wider population and to Government, which eventually took some steps to meet Māori demands and support the revitalisation of the language. The praiseworthiness of these actions by Government is reduced by their delayed implementation. Recent statistics show that despite these measures and the efforts by Māori over many years, the Māori language has not revitalised as hoped.

An apparently more genuine commitment by Government to revitalise the language can be seen in Te Ture mō Te Reo Māori – the Māori Language Act 2016. This legislation more closely models the partnership expressed in the Treaty of Waitangi and sets explicit goals for Māori and for Government to reach to revitalise te reo Māori. This apparent praiseworthy magnanimity on the part of Government now needs to be fulfilled. The introduction of compulsory te reo Māori classes in New Zealand schools would be one step demonstrating Government commitment, but a shortage of teachers and possible public resistance are barriers to be overcome. It is possible that technology will be a key factor in the revitalisation of te reo Māori; the wide range and popularity of “learn te reo” apps indicate this may be so. This is an arena that Govern-

ment could also support.

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