Cultural consensus, far from the normal state of things, is a difficult achievement and when it does occur it is bound to hide suppressed conflicts and disagreements.

William H. Sewell (2005: 170)

Many historians of New Zealand, even those of Māori descent, continue to be preoccupied with its national history, specifically the “making” of New Zealand and its “national identity”. Giselle Byrnes rightly criticises the analytical centrality enjoyed by the “nation” and forcefully argues that it obscures diversity: “a master narrative that silences as much as it potentially empowers.” To counter the primacy of the nation state she asserts that it “ought not to be seen as the dominant factor in shaping the past, but understood alongside class, gender, race, community, iwi, family, ethnicities and so on, all of which operate across as well as against the nation” (Byrnes 2007: 9).

The part of Byrnes’ plea that calls for a consideration of geographic units that are neither national in size, nor spatially European, is a welcome one. And it is one taken up by this article, which examines a sub-region of New Zealand, its traditional Māori appellation—“Murihiku”—and that name’s colonial modification. In deploying this regional gaze I am also influenced by Erik Olssen’s scholarship on provincial Otago. Although many of the organising themes of Olssen’s work are relevant to people and places throughout New Zealand, he insisted that regions have had distinct histories and these need to be grappled with. A History of Otago, for example, was “not New Zealand’s history writ small” (Olssen 1984: xiii). Having said that, I am not advancing the idea that Murihiku is exceptional. Its importance is its ordinariness, or rather, its representativeness: I am simply using this locale to highlight and hopefully generate discussion about a broader historical phenomenon, which persists, to some extent, in the present.

Most contemporary Kāi Tahu use the term Murihiku as the Māori “alternative” for the present-day region and district of Southland (Anderson 1998: 86, 107; 2008: 22; Mules 2007: vi). It is also fairly common for non-Kāi Tahu individuals (for example Taonui 2008: 21) and institutions to use the term in this way too. Thus, the Southland District Council styles itself as Te Rohe Pōtae o Murihiku. On the face of it this suggests the maintenance
of a Māori practice in spite of very thorough European colonisation and acculturation. However, the opposite may well be true. Present usage may in fact say more about the colonial encounter, and its power to modify indigenous placenames and meanings, and produce new and abiding categories of thought. This suggests that we should pay more attention to the interplay of space, place and colonialism, and complicate our view of them. It also suggests the “thinness” of Māori culture, an analytical position that runs counter to structuralist interpretations that prevail in New Zealand scholarship and what we might understand as the “strategic essentialism” of some Māori scholars in particular.

**Kei Hea a Murihiku?**

Recent scholarship on colonialism has stressed the centrality of knowledge-making in the construction of colonial dominance (Ballantyne 2008, Bayly 1996, Cohn 1996). But colonial dominance was always “unfinished business” (Burton 1999: 1) and as a result some indigenous beliefs and practices continued to persist within colonial contexts, and some of these continue to exist in the present-day. Identifying and analysing such continuities, a common concern of historians, is intimately connected with a desire to recover indigenous agency. Less appreciated, in New Zealand at least, is the nature and extent to which colonial knowledge co-opted and re-cast pre-existing knowledge in the development of colonial knowledge orders. In the context of colonial south India though, Eugene F. Irshick has argued that changed significations were negotiated, dialogic productions between incoming colonisers and various local communities (Irshick 1994: 8). This essay on the case of Murihiku offers an insight into the cultural borrowings and re-workings of Europeans in southern New Zealand from the mid-19th century.

According to early southern run-holder W.H.S. (Sherwood) Roberts (1834-1917), a Welsh-born son of an East Indian Company officer, who in “Invercargill’s pre-natal and infant days recorded in his diary everything he saw and everyone he met”, when southern settlers applied for separation from the province of Otago in 1857, they suggested the name Murihiku for their would-be province (Roberts 1913: 82). Roberts was presumably referring to the protest meeting held at Invercargill in January of that year which accused the Dunedin-based Otago Provincial Council of “misrule and injustice”. Olssen revealed that this gathering consisted of “five Maori and 30 European men” (Olssen 2006: 85). Correspondingly, F.G. Hall-Jones noted that Topi Patuki, an important 19th-century Kāi Tahu figure, was present with four other Māori at the “large separation meeting” in 1857 (Hall-Jones 1946: 39). It could have been that Topi and these Māori promoted, or at least supported,
the name Murihiku. What I find most interesting though is that settlers were in favour of it. Moreover, when New Zealand’s seventh province was created in April 1861, they were apparently annoyed that Governor Thomas Gore-Browne named it Southland (Hall-Jones 1946: 39, Olssen 2006: 85). How can we account for the settler palate? Several run-holders were active in public affairs and some run-holders were ex-whalers, many of whom had married local Kāi Tahu women and lived in the region for upwards of two decades. Perhaps by this time a number of them had come to identify with this Māori name?

Alternatively, perhaps “Murihiku” was a kind of regional precursor to the later national-level “Maoriland” movement. Maoriland is a catchall phrase used to refer to the mainly literary movement that existed in New Zealand from approximately the 1880s until the First World War (Victoria University Press 2006). It saw mostly second and third generation descendants of British settlers deploy Māori names, mythology and images, in an effort to create a sense of deep-rooted national identity. As Nicholas Reid put it, “Only when settlers felt secure in possession of New Zealand, once they had got control of the land, could they afford to romanticise the original inhabitants. Metaphorical “Maoriland” appeared as real Maori land disappeared” (Reid 2006). This sort of thing was by no means a phenomenon unique to New Zealand. For instance, in her close reading of 19th-century New England “replacement narratives”, Jean M. O’Brien showed how Anglo-Americans, in acts of self-definition, used “ancient” Indian remains and placenames to fix Indians in an essentialised past and exclude them from modernity (O’Brien 2010). In summary, notwithstanding the presence of Topi and other Māori in the politics of accession, it is quite possible that the colonial preference for Murihiku, like the later Maoriland movement, was something driven largely by and for Pākehā while the “business of settlement sidelined and dispossessed actual Maori” (Victoria University Press 2006). Indeed, unlike many other Māori, Kāi Tahu were outnumbered by European settlers and largely marginalised by the 1860s.

Above all else though, it is simply illogical to assume that that Murihiku—a pre-European term and conceptual entity—neatly corresponded with provincial government boundaries determined by and for European administrators and settlers. To what extent then, did the former province, and present-day “Southland”, match up with Kāi Tahu conceptions of Murihiku? In 1851, the Cambridge-educated colonial administrator Edward Shortland published the first major text on South Island Māori, using information he gathered firsthand in 1843-44. In it, he described Murihiku as “the district lying between Hakaroa [i.e., Akaroa] and Rakiura” (Shortland 1851: 310). He further wrote that:
The word signifies the extreme tail of New Zealand. ‘He tira-haere he taua ra nei. Ka patae te tangata o mua ki to muri mai i tona tuara. Keiwhaa a Mea? ka ki atu. Kei te hiku, kei muri rawa.’ Suppose, among a party of travellers, or a war troop, one of those in front inquires of the person immediately behind him,—Where is So-and-so? he replies, ‘at the tail end, quite behind.’ Such was a native’s explanation of the word. (Shortland 1851: 310)

One of Shortland’s key informants was the influential 19th-century Kāi Tahu tohuka and Wesleyan convert Matiaha (Matthias) Tiramorehu, who was based at Moeraki (Evison 2010). According to Tiramorehu, Murihiku began at the Waitaki River and went as far as the Waiau River, but not beyond it (Evison 2006: 154). Described by Anglican missionary and ethnologist James Stack as “the best authority on Maori traditions in the South Island” (Pybus 2002 [1954]: 67), Tiramorehu made it clear that the area west of the Waiau was not considered a part of Murihiku (Evison 2006: 154). While Shortland’s description of Murihiku and that offered by Tiramorehu differ slightly with respect to its northern and western extremities, their visions of Murihiku took in both more and less of southern New Zealand than most people now realise. In fact, in terms of the parameters identified by Shortland and Tiramorehu, Murihiku more closely resembles the province of Ōtago at its zenith, that is, prior to Southland’s accession in 1861, than either provincial Southland in the 19th century, or regional and district Southland in the 21st century. This is why Bill Dacker wrote that Murihiku was not the pre-European Southland, but rather the pre-European South Land (Dacker 2006: 44).

Southland as it is known today is therefore not Murihiku, but rather, an amalgam of the southern part of Murihiku, Rakiura and the province of Southland (Dacker 2006: 44). This meshes with Roberts’ explanation that “Muri-hiku”, the “general Maori name for all the southern portion of the Middle [i.e., South] Island includ[ed] all Southland and half of Ōtago” (Roberts 1913: 82). Regardless, the recent publication in which Dacker put his case is nonetheless called Murihiku: The Southland Story. The introductory chapter of this book, written by Clive Lind, a former editor of The Southland Times, opens with the line, “Murihiku should need no introduction” (Lind 2006: 15). But by Murihiku, he means Southland, rendering his words unwittingly ironic. With the exception of Dacker, Murihiku is thus used throughout the book as a synonym for Southland. He could have called his chapter “Southland: The Murihiku Story”.

The entrenched conflation of Murihiku with Southland is such that a recent attempt to critically re-examine the term, and use it more in line with its original meaning, was met with criticism. In his review of “Asia in Murihiku: Towards a transnational history of colonial culture”, an article co-authored by Tony Ballantyne and Brian Moloughney (2006), Jock Phillips criticised
the pair for relying heavily on historical evidence relating to Otago when, in his words, “was not Murihiku Southland?” (Phillips 2006: 14). He does not answer his own question, confirming that it was actually an assertion. Was Phillips simply repeating a mistake that was made in the late 19th century and never corrected (e.g., Taylor 1952: 148)? Not necessarily. In *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, published in 1966, Invercargill was adeptly described as the “social and cultural centre of the present-day Murihiku” (Bailey 1966: 172, emphasis added). Likewise, in another part of the same work, a distinction was drawn between Murihiku as a name “applied by the Maoris to the southern part of the South Island” and it being “In more recent times… the name given to a large tract of native land in those parts which was purchased for the Crown on 17 August 1853 by W.B.D. Mantell” (Foster 1966: 601, emphasis added).

This suggests that the alternation of Murihiku with Southland seems to have its roots in the process of alienating Māori land, in which Mantell was a central figure. In 1852, when he visited Foveaux Strait as Commissioner of Crown Lands and agent responsible for extinguishing native title, he informed local Kāi Tahu that he wanted to buy “Murihiku”. This was apparently understood by Kāi Tahu as being the land between the southern boundary of the Otago Block purchased in 1844 and the Waiau River to the west, but not beyond (Evison 2006: 154, Waitangi Tribunal 1991: 99-100). Whether it was the result of cruel design or negligence Mantell nonetheless used the term Murihiku to represent the entire mainland area south of the earlier Otago and Kemp’s Purchases, thus including Fiordland. Referring to the cross-cultural context of colonial cartography in New Zealand, Phillip Barton noted, “Deliberately or by default, [Māori] content is likely to have been omitted, modified, or supplemented by Europeans in the course of copying and printing” (Barton 1998: 531). In short, the creation of the so-called Murihiku Block in the early 1850s seems to have been when a particular understanding of the term Murihiku was calcified in the colonial mindset. This was then given a lift by European settlers in the south in the late 1850s and, ironically, sustained by several generations of Kāi Tahu, and as a result Māori more generally, thereafter.

All of this supports the argument that place-naming transforms space into place; that place is a product of social interaction (Withers 2009: 647, 649). As Doreen Massey put it, a place comes into being as a result of an intersection of a unique set of networks, movements and exchanges (Ballantyne 2011: 60, Withers 2009: 648). Accordingly, places are constantly being remade by the changing shape of these convergences (Ballantyne 2011: 60). The latter assertion suggests that Kāi Tahu reassessments of the “imaginative abstraction” (Ballantyne 2011: 58) of Murihiku might yet modify what is
currently very much a colonial construct. However, if, as a result of Kāi Tahu indifference, this does not happen, it confirms the mixed nature of contemporary Māori knowledge in southern New Zealand. More than that, it points to the folly of models that conceive of Māori and Pākehā knowledge as being clearly bounded. An outcome of Kāi Tahu indifference also suggests that as well as calcifying the boundaries of Māori tribes (Ballantyne 2011: 64), British rule in New Zealand from 1840 has calcified the very way that Māori think about these things. Alternatively, if the tribe seeks to reclaim Murihiku and “re-remake” it, but is ignored by the State and the Pākehā powerculture, how could anyone think that post-colonialism refers to having left the colonial past behind (Byrnes 2004: 5)?

The testimony of Shortland and Tiramorehu was created in an era by which time Māori topography “could not readily be said to be separate from European preoccupations with boundaries and ownership” (Kelly 1999: 27). And I admit that there is evidence, albeit sourced more than 80 years later, that some Kāi Tahu defined Murihiku more narrowly. Using material he gathered in 1929, the renowned ethnographer Herries Beattie published a book in 1944 dedicated to recording and analysing southern Māori placenames. In response to a query from the colonial surveyor, public servant and eminent ethnologist S. Percy Smith, Beattie sought to gather information from his “Native friends” on the so-called “tino of Murihiku”. Smith had told Beattie that in the same way that a stone marked the Heart of the Mid-Lothian in Scotland, almost every Māori name which designated a district could be concentrated or applied particularly to a tino or ‘exact spot’ in that area (Beattie 2001: 78). Beattie records that information was hard to acquire: informants claimed to have heard of the tino but did not know where it was. This uncertainty might simply indicate the patchy nature of increasingly inconsequential knowledge, held moreover in ageing minds. Equally, although Beattie’s informants commonly declared their ignorance on given subjects, we cannot discount that they felt obliged to confirm the existence of something that was, however, absent in southern Māori thought, in this specific instance at least.6

At any rate, by translating Murihiku as “the end of the tail”, one person suggested to Beattie that its origins lay in the North Island and Maui “fishing” that island up—the tino therefore being “the last part of the tail that emerged from the sea”. Another person similarly linked the name with Maui and therefore wondered if the tino of Murihiku was at Omaui, an important Māori settlement situated northwest of Bluff (Beattie 2001: 78). Interestingly, “a regular mine of information”, Kurupohatu, told Beattie that Murihiku traditionally embraced the area from Milford Sound to Bluff, and that he thought the tino was halfway along that coastline, at around about Puysegur Point (Beattie 2001: 78). Taare Te Maiharoa said that the tino of Murihiku
was a big rock at the extreme seaward end of an island at the southwest corner of Te Rua-o-te-moko, “the wooded area of the West Coast Sounds”. The latter comment moved Beattie to write that, “The Maori voyagers of old considered it was Land’s End and named that rock Muri-hiku, ‘the end of the tail,’ and from that spot the name spread to embrace the large extent of territory it subsequently covered in the south-west” (Beattie 2001: 78-79). On the basis of these accounts, Beattie felt that Murihiku was not used for places further east than Bluff. In contrast with these “tail-dwellers” as he described the southerners, Beattie mentioned that “the district around Otago Heads and Waikouaiti was known as Mua-upoko (top of the head) and that in powhiri, these terms of distinction were reciprocally employed” (Beattie 2001: 79).

True enough, the name Murihiku was stronger in the south. For instance, when a “Maori marae hall” was built at Colac Bay, west of Riverton, in the first decade of the 20th century, it was named Murihiku: “The name…[was] painted across the curved portal and a whale with flukes aswish [sic] painted above… to proclaim this meeting place to be at the end of the land like the tail of the big whale” (MacIntosh 1980: 136-37). With regard to this “meeting-house at Colac Bay”, Beattie noted in 1922 that Murihiku, which was described as “a comparatively recent name”, was not universally agreed upon as a name for the building. “A few of the old Maoris”, he wrote, “wished it to be named Karara-kopae”. This was in commemoration of a famous feud in the Hawke’s Bay region relating to the origins of Ngāi Tūhaitara, an important founding hapū of Kāi Tahu (Beattie 1922: 138; see also Anderson 1994: 444 and Tau 2003: 111-20, esp. 119). Decades later, in the 1980s, when a marae complex was built in Invercargill, it too was named Murihiku.

While it is unclear whether the views gathered in 1929 reflected a particular long-standing tradition of thought about Murihiku, or were relatively new ideas, I remain convinced by the explanation given by Tiramorehu that the term Murihiku denoted an area of land south of the Waitaki River and east of the Waiau River. This also dovetails with evidence that water edges such as rivers were key boundary markers for Māori (Kelly 1999: 15, Woodward and Lewis 1998: 537). Having said that, I qualify my support for the Tiramorehu definition by speculating that perhaps Murihiku customarily referred to southern New Zealand in a general sense. A consequence of this could be that time was when the further south one went within a loosely imagined greater Murihiku the more “murihiku” one was. This might in turn help account for the term’s greater prominence in and around Southland. This notion that the Murihiku footprint was not a precise one, that it simply applied to the southern South Island, meshes with the idea of there being overlapping boundaries between and within iwi and hapū (Kelly 1999: 15). However, colonial cartography did not operate this way. As Jan Kelly put it, “the land-
title boundaries drawn on [New Zealand] European maps…[marked] out an absolute definition of place” (Kelly 1999: 15). Perhaps this is ultimately the reason why and how Murihiku became a different type of imaginative abstraction. That being the case, and lest there be any confusion, I am not simply suggesting that we reset a firm spatial definition for the term. So, while the literal meaning of Murihiku is pretty clear (unlike many other Kāi Tahu placenames), the area to which it applied in southern New Zealand, and the way it did so, is unclear. This supports David Woodward and G. Malcolm Lewis’ comment that “Describing spatial representation in oral societies before contact with Westerners is difficult for several reasons. These include the paucity or virtual absence of extant precontact artifacts [sic]…and the difficulty of interpreting oral traditions as history” (Woodward and Lewis 1998: 2).

Finally, it is useful to note Sir Tipene O’Regan’s characterisation of Murihiku as a “Hawaiki name”—a name brought to New Zealand by Polynesian settlers, variations of which are commonly found across the Pacific (Davis, O’Regan and Wilson 1990: 18-22). O’Regan describes Māori placenames as belonging to four different groups: definite Hawaiki names (e.g., Aoraki), possible Hawaiki names (e.g., Kairaki), descriptive names (e.g., Ruapuke) and names derived from events or people (e.g., Koukourarata and Kaikai respectively) (Davis et al. 1990: 24, Keene and Mau’u 2009: 14, 16). With respect to the Murihiku and Muriwhenua coupling, he noted that a number of them can be found throughout Eastern and Western Polynesia where they represent the southern and northern extremities of landmasses as they do in New Zealand.9 Finally, it might also be relevant to note that Canterbury was at one stage seemingly referred to as muriwhenua (Tau 2000: 29). This might further support the idea that the east side of Murihiku extended as far north as the Waitaki River.

“THIN-CULTURE”

Shifting academic meanings of the term “culture” over the last half-century can help us understand both the emergence of the dominant contemporary understanding of Murihiku and its continued dominance. In an important summary of the contested definitions of culture within anthropology and history, which can be crudely described as “culture as system” versus “culture as practice”, William H. Sewell Jr. points out that system and practice are not alternatives to one another; they are complementary concepts that presuppose one another. More than that, in his words, they “constitute an indissoluble duality or dialectic”. Similar to Marshall Sahlins, Sewell argues that while cultural practice puts a cultural system to work and therefore gives effect to it, it does not always do so mechanically in stereotyped situations. New and
unforeseen situations inevitably arise which invite or demand novel responses. Accordingly, Sewell argues that cultural practices simultaneously put cultural systems at “risk”—of transformation. This in turn can give rise to a “new coherence”, which is itself likewise then put at risk. Consequently, any culture, at any point in time, though very real, often coherent, and seemingly enduring, is nonetheless unstable, and thus “thin”. Sewell posits several justifications for his idea of thin culture and one of them is particularly pertinent in the present case: cultures are weakly bounded. Rejecting social science’s “once virtually unquestioned model of societies as clearly bounded entities undergoing endogenous development”, he argues that “anything we might term as a “society” or a “nation” will contain, or fail to contain, a multitude of overlapping and interpenetrating cultural systems, most of them either subsocietal or trans-societal or both” (Sewell 2005: 152-74).

Bringing all of this back to Murihiku, so to speak, the risk associated with practice is heightened in cross-cultural contexts, especially in imperial and colonial encounters. We might date the former as beginning in southern New Zealand in 1792 and the latter in 1844. Takata pora (an early term for Pākehā in the south that means boat people/ship men), mainly sealers and whalers, became familiar with Kāi Tahu terms and placenames and used them. Later Europeans, colonists proper, did the same thing, though not to the same extent. Murihiku thus entered into a European settler discourse and a developing colonial knowledge order, and Kai Tahu lost exclusive use and control of the term. This in turn had enduring effects for Kāi Tahu knowledge: the evidence outlined above suggests that tribal members understood the term much differently in the 1950s than their ancestors did in the 1850s. So, while the continued existence of the term Murihiku suggests a partial Kāi Tahu rejection of colonial categories of thought and action, I would argue that quite the opposite is true. For several generations now, a critical mass of Kāi Tahu individuals and representative bodies have understood and maintained Murihiku as a synonym for Southland. There is nothing especially unique or deeply worrying about this situation. As Kavita Philip points out in the context of south India, “it would be surprising if we found no historical continuities in [postcolonial] institutions and psyches” (Philip 2003: 93). Put differently, I am critical of those who think it is possible “to refer to a pure, unalloyed indigenous system with values untouched by other elements” (Irschick 1994: 6). Accordingly, like Philip, I am also dismissive of the idea that indigenous knowledge so imagined can “deliver us back to a state of oneness with nature” (Philip 2003: 21-22).

Nonetheless, I feel that a point made by fellow Kāi Tahu historian Te Maire Tau is worth bearing in mind when he deftly outlines and criticises the belief that there is a Māori (or other tribal people’s) “dimension” to Western
knowledge. This, he explains, flows from the notion that “any primitive system can be understood by taking aspects of a culture and fitting it to an assumed series of universal principles held valid by western scholars” (Tau 2001: 65). Granted “Southland” is not a universal principle, but the point still holds: there was (and remains) an assumption by institutions and some scholars that there is and ought to be an interchangeable Māori equivalent of Southland. That most Kāi Tahu have absorbed this way of thinking does not point to the inauthenticity of present-day tribal knowledge, but rather, its inevitably mixed nature. A consequence of the latter is that it underscores the limits of the ahistorical dyadic approach that Tau adopts. For postcolonial Kāi Tahu, and Māori more generally, it is surely “not possible to draw hard and fast boundaries between ‘traditional’ and ‘European’ cartographies… or to ascertain what is truly ‘traditional,’ ‘indigenous,’ or ‘original’” (Woodward and Lewis 1998: 2). As Te Aue Davis, Tipene O’Regan and John Wilson (1990: 7) have put it, “Place names had a very different role in traditional Māori society than they do today.”

Nearly 30 years ago O’Regan warned that Māori history was in “grave danger of becoming a quaint colouring-in of the Pakeha landscape” (O’Regan 1982: 171). The case of Murihiku suggests that this had actually been the case for quite some time. He also said that “Maori history only makes sense when it is related to its own boundaries” (O’Regan 1982: 171). I agree, especially in the context of pre-European Māori history. In which case, following Tau, Kāi Tahu people and institutions should reflect on their predilection for the “dimension” approach to Māori history.

* * *

Māori, like other indigenous people in postcolonial settler societies, continue to use colonial ideas even as they reject the dichotomies that animate them (Raibmon 2005: 16). I think that this helps us to understand why, in the context of the Waitangi Tribunal’s investigations into the Crown’s historical breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi, Māori claimant groups tend to adopt a sort of strategic essentialism (Ray 2009: 110) and deploy romanticised polemic ethnohistory. To paraphrase Fred Hoxie, a stable Māori mind is imagined as standing stoically at the centre of history. It may be treated cruelly or ignored in one era, but it survives through time. For adherents of this view of things, “history is the interaction of fixed cultural spheres” (Hoxie 1997: 602). This is perfectly understandably though, and proves that “the terrain of dominant discourse is the only plausible arena of struggle” (James Scott quoted in Raibmon 2005: 10). Even so, as Māori kin-groups settle treaty claims by way of constitutional property settlements, I hope that
they might begin to revisit and reassess their histories in quite different ways and recognise that colonialism, while indeed a project of domination, was an “intensely collaborative, if not harmonious, project” (Irschick 1994: 11). In entering into existences that are in some ways less emotionally charged, less politically volatile and less juridical, post-treaty-settlement groups are better placed to more fully evaluate the “global networks of economy and fantasy” (Philip 2003: 11) that have washed up on this, the furthest edge of empire. In my view, this is not simply an interesting aside to be pursued if or when time and money allows. Rather, it is critical to contemporary debates about the shape and utility of Māori language and culture, and attempts to revitalise them. It is also my view that such historical revisionism has yet to happen within Kāi Tahu even though the tribe’s claims were settled well over a decade ago. However, if or when Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu places a higher value on our colonial-era history or approaches it more creatively, I hope that the shifting meaning of Murihiku, and other placenames besides, which have been subject to the same sort of forces and transformations (and there are plenty of them), is critically investigated.

Maps created in colonial New Zealand are “undeniably useful” in reconstructing the Māori past and rebuilding cultural capital in the present. However, they should not be “used purely and simply as a quarry of facts” (J.B. Harley quoted in Kelly 1999: 2). Certainly, many of these maps recorded Māori placenames that might otherwise have been lost, for which we should be grateful. However, it is too bold a statement to say that placenames alone “open directly into cosmology as well as ancestors, history, and the everyday” (Simmons quoted in Kelly 1999: 26). The reality is that a multitude of names in and around Murihiku, like the term Murihiku itself, are disemobdied as a result of the colonial knowledge order that recorded and reordered them; they stand without their embodied kōrero ‘talk’ (Kelly 1999: 23).

Regardless of what any future academic or tribal scholarship might determine in relation to these matters, I will simply conclude this article with an endorsement of Margaret Jolly’s assertion that “adjudications about which [cultural] transformations are tolerable and which are worthless hybrids are eminently political judgements” (Jolly 2000: 279).

NOTES

1. Kāi Tahu Whānui, or Ngāi Tahu Whānui, most commonly known as Ngāi Tahu, is the iwi that holds mana-whenua over Rakiura/Stewart Island and the majority of Te Wai Pounamu/the South Island of New Zealand. Its mandated representative body, created by private statute in 1996, is Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu (TRoNT). See http://www.ngaitahu.iwi.nz/About-Ngai-Tahu/

3. This contrasts with T.M. Hocken’s comments that Murihiku was “south of the Otago Block” and “the district south of the Mataura [River]” (Hocken 2009: 177-78).

4. See especially the map on p. 100.

5. An 1875 map that shows the land purchases entered into between Crown-agents and Ngāi Tahu between 1844 and 1864 illustrates how Mantell and successive colonial administrators spatially defined Murihiku (i.e., as the entire (mainland) area south of a line running from Nugget Point on the east coast to Milford Sound on the west coast) (MacKay 1875: 2).

6. Regarding the shaping and reshaping of the pre-European Māori past (albeit without explicit reference to post-European influences such as colonial ethnography), see Anderson (1998: 59-60).

7. A desire to tie Murihiku to a specific localised setting is still evident in some quarters. For instance, Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori, the Māori Language Commission, pinpoints Murihiku at Bluff (http://www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz/english/resources_e/placenames.shtml). In another instance, however, it offers it up as the Māori name for Invercargill, http://www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz/english/resources_e/list_placenames.shtml. (Awarua and Waihopai respectively are the two most common Māori terms used for these southern settlements.)

8. The map that best represents this is located in kāi tahu taoka: Treasures from the Otago Museum (Otago Museum 2006: 10).

9. O’Regan also reckons that “our own Murihiku probably has the highest density of Hawaiki names in Maori toponomy” (O’Regan, pers. comm. 13 March 2008).

REFERENCES


This article examines the shifting understandings of the term Murihiku as it relates to southern New Zealand. It suggests that current usage of the word, including by most Māori, owes more to colonial transformations than is realised. It is argued that this points to the “thinness” of Māori culture and its mixed contemporary nature.

**Keywords:** Murihiku, Kāi Tahu, colonial knowledge, cartography, place names.