Judith Binney, Gillian Chaplin, and Craig Wallace, *Mihaia: The Prophet Rua Kenana and His Community at Maungapohatu.* Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1979. Pp. 208, illustrated, index. $33.00.

Peter Webster, *Rua and the Maori Millenium.* Wellington: Price Milburn for Victoria University Press, 1979. Pp. xii, 328, illustrations, maps, index, bibliography.

Prophetic movements and religious fervor in the Pacific are quite commonly associated with Melanesia. Yet Polynesia has had a significant history of prophets who have taken upon themselves the frequently awesome task of translating and mediating two opposing cultural traditions. In New Zealand, where there have been several such movements, the opposition and antagonism between Maori and European have become more, rather than less, complex over time. Moreover, the very fact that numerous individuals have undertaken, with varying but never complete success, the tasks involved in messianic leadership, indicates the shifting patterns of shadow and mutual illumination that have played across the colonial landscape. [1] To understand such events from the distance of several decades, to unravel the intricacies of revelation and intergroup rivalries, requires special skills. As Ivan Brady (1982: 185) has recently written:

> History is a hard thing to know. Although visible in the present through cultural developments that have survived the past, history is still never quite known to us, perhaps ever knowable in the extreme. Its combination of mystification and material circumstance always holds point through our puzzling over it, and we know. . . that it must be interpreted to be understood.

Such analyses require an interpretation not so much of events but of meanings.[2] Indeed, the differences between Maori and European are perhaps nowhere more visible than in the context of Maori religious innovation. For the Maori, prophetic revelation offered a glimpse of salvation and equality in the face of European assertions of religious, political, and ultimately moral superiority. For the European,, such divine disclosures pointed to the irrational underside of a native culture only dimly perceived or understood. More to the point in this volatile situation, such claims of supernatural guidance were interpreted by Europeans as challenges to their pretensions to dominion.

Judith Binney, a historian, and Peter Webster, an anthropologist, have each presented us with an account of Rua Kenana Hepetipa, an East Coast prophet who, in the early years of this century, took up the cause of and came to speak for thousands of the most conservative Maoris, the Tahoe people of the Ureweras. These books are very differ. ent, however, reflecting more than the predictable disparity between disciplines.

Binney's previous research on the life of Thomas Kendall, an Anglican missionary, and Papahurihia, one of the earliest Maori prophets, has considerably illuminated our understanding of the early years of religious contact. This study of Rua may be seen quite readily as a continuation of work already well done. Originally Binney, in collaboration with Gillian Chaplin and Craig Wallace, had planned a photographic history, but as she tells us, "it has grown in unexpected ways."

Peter Webster has based his book on his dissertation, "Maungapohatu and the Maori Millenium," for which he did fieldwork in the Ureweras beginning in 1964. It is obvious that Binney and Webster have not collaborated. Binney tells us:

> Since 1971 the thesis has been closed and despite a personal request to the author, I have not been permitted to read it. However, just before writing this introduction, I learned that it is to be published under the title *Rua and the Maori Millenium.* Although I regret Dr. Webster's decision, the publication of two discrete studies of Rua in the same year certainly adds spice to New Zealand historiography.

That is of course not all they add.

Until the simultaneous publication of these books in 1979, little was known of Rua. Both of these books are welcome and needed additions to the documentation of Maori prophetic movements. Binney's and Web-

ster's approaches are so different, however, that we learn different things from each; only the outlines of Rua's life and career remain constant.

Rua, a young Tuhoe, worked in the early years of this century as a shearer and ditch digger for European farmers. His life and the lives of his people were transformed when Christ appeared to him and told him of a diamond buried deeply in Maungapohatu, the sacred mountain of the Tuhoe. Armed with his vision and his certainty of divine guidance, Rua announced that he was the new messiah. Within a year, he claimed that King Edward (then the reigning monarch of Great Britain) would come to New Zealand and, in exchange for the diamond of the Ureweras, restore the Maoris as the rightful owners of the country. A new age was to begin, and in its anticipation people were encouraged to sell their property and belongings. Binney (1979:26) points out that the transaction was to be both legal and logical: "The end to Pakeha [the Maori word for European] rule was to be achieved by simple expatriation, not by violence but by lawful royal purchase. The land which had been ceded by a Queen would be returned by a King."

When King Edward failed to arrive, much less to give New Zealand back to the Maoris, Rua announced that, after all, he was the king who would now lead his people. In 1907 he led four hundred followers to his New City, Maungapohatu, where he hoped to build a "habitation for God and man." In their midst were Rua's twelve disciples--the *riwaiti*. Based on the model of Christ's disciples and Moses' Levites, they studied scriptures and ministered to the people. For Rua, his followers were transformed; they were Iharaira (Israelites), who like the Nazarites of the Old Testament wore long hair and abstained from tobacco and alcohol. Binney (1979:32) tells us:

> Rua's claims in these first years varied. Many derived from Christian as well as Jewish teachings. He performed the miracle of feeding the multitude--with two "fifties" of flour. He called himself "the twelfth prophet" twelve being the sacred number of the tribes of Israel and of the house of Christ, in Te Turuki's [an earlier East Coast prophet, also known as Te Kooti] teachings. He was Moses, to whom God had given the tablets of the law. But the name which he finally took for himself was Hephzibah--Hepetipa--the daughter of Zion.

At Maungapohatu, Rua and his followers built a settlement that eliminated the problems of hygiene and sanitation that had so plagued

other Maori communities, endangering Maori health. Maori autonomy and self-sufficiency were clearly objectives of Rua's, but he did not turn his back on those aspects of European society that would be useful to his ends. Despite his distrust of the Pakeha, Rua realized that the solution to Maori difficulties resided, at least in part, in recognizing and accommodating the European presence. [3] In fact his banner, "One Law for Both Peoples," expressed his determination that Europeans reciprocate by acknowledging Maori integrity rather than persisting in their policy of discrimination and depreciation.

The buildings in the community were a celebration of Rua's religious ideals and revelations. Hiona (Zion), Rua's courthouse and meeting house, was a two-story circular building decorated with playing card symbols, clubs and diamonds. Webster tells us virtually nothing about the symbolism of Rua's *wairua tapu* religion, while Binney interprets it wherever possible. There are of course wonderful photographs to go along with her detailed descriptions. Binney is very concerned with explicating Maori tradition and locating it in a particular historical context. As an example, she describes the symbols on Hiona (1979:48-49) :

> Playing card emblems were used in the nineteenth century as mnemonics to the Scriptures by those who could not read. . . . The Club was the emblem to stand for the King of Clubs. He is the King who is yet to come; the last King in the line of David, on the bloodline of the Lord. The kings in the other suits have been "played," but the King of Clubs is the coming King: [4] Rua the Messiah.

Similarly, the diamond signified both the Holy Ghost and the diamond of Rua's early vision. "Hidden jewels, as here, often stand figuratively for knowledge or energy which is to be recovered and used for a specific purpose" (Binney 1979:49).

Rua ministered to both the secular and religious needs of the community. At its height Maungapohatu was well organized and productive. Rua abolished traditional sacred rules and deliberately violated many *tapus.* Like other Maori prophets, he simultaneously neutralized and acknowledged the power of ancestral spirits. Yet he maintained certain specific religious injunctions that reinforced the strict standards of hygiene he had established. Saturday was the Sabbath on which services similar to those of the Ringatu church (founded by Te Turuki) were held. But there were significant departures from the religion of the other great East Coast prophet that angered many of the people.

Rua attempted to unite the Tuhoe but instead divided them. To some he was the messiah, to others an unregenerate infidel. Wherever he went emotions ran high. It was inescapable that he would anger the Europeans, who could not ignore his independence and autonomy. In 1916 an armed mounted police force entered Rua's settlement. The prophet was taken prisoner and one of his sons killed. In the capture, trial, and sentencing of Rua, justice was ill served. By documenting these events, both Binney and Webster make an important contribution to New Zealand history.

The two books differ in range and scope. Webster's book takes the reader to 1918, Binney's study continues until the Prophet's death in 1937. Moreover, they each had access to different information and each took what she/he had gathered and used it to different ends. Webster, who started his research in 1964, was fortunate in being able to interview Reverend Laughton, who established the first mission station in Maungapohatu. Laughton's relationship with Rua was complicated and many sided, reflecting the complex personalities of each man and the structural intricacies that are inevitable when missionary and prophet confront one another. Webster was also able to interview Pemia, the youngest of Rua's wives. In addition, he details several of his fieldwork experiences, which allow the reader to understand the difficulties Webster faced as a European doing this kind of research. Nevertheless the reader never knows how close he was to the people. His information, when compared to Binney's, often seems sparse. Surprisingly, he and Binney seem to have talked to very few of the same people. Binney was extremely fortunate in the cooperation she received from both European and Maori sources. A major achievement was her acquisition of the papers and documents of Rua's defense counsel, J. R. Lundon. Binney's study is that much more complete because she has had access to the only surviving record of the trial.

But the real debt, as Binney acknowledges, goes to the Maori people, who assisted her and ultimately transformed her efforts into a documentary, rather than a photographic, history. It is by listening to elders as they relived their experiences during those momentous times that Binney obtained a sense of the important differences between European and Maori perspectives. She writes:

> In the course of carrying out research for this book, it became apparent that substantial differences existed between the published sources--mostly journalist's articles and contemporary Pakeha reports-- and the Maori oral accounts and their manu-

> script records of the same event. There is a real gap between Maori and European perceptions as the symbolic quality of thought belonging to the Maori world view shifts "reality" into forms unfamiliar to the European. At the same time, I found the elders with whom I talked very accurate in their knowledge, not only of events, but also surprisingly the dates of those events, many of which I could verify from written records.

Her relationship with the followers of Rua was clearly warm and intimate, for they revealed much to her. Yet she has the wisdom to realize that more than one interpretation is possible:

> One day, a Maori-- and I hope a Tuhoe will write a history of Rua, and it will be very different from this. I have tried to understand what I have been told, but in shaping the material in written form I have been conscious that I may be altering its values and the significance it has for the people with whom I talked.

Because she is a woman, Binney could talk freely to women who were able to reveal details of daily life in Maungapohatu, all of which are richly conveyed. Binney too is aware of the many sources of information to be had in any Maori community. In addition to oral accounts, there are ledgers, account books, and personal manuscripts, which many individuals keep to mark important events. Furthermore, Binney makes consistent efforts to use and to translate Maori, while Webster in his obvious discomfort with the language leaves much unmentioned, For example, Binney translates pages from a ledger, which allows us to see how the community was organized and how it functioned. In short. Binney appears justifiably humbled by the complexities of her task; Webster seems less in awe of the project he has undertaken.

Binney is clearly fearful of a biased interpretation; she presents and describes rather than analyzes much that transpired at Maungapohatu. By contrast, Webster shows no such inhibitions. For Webster, Rua's followers represent a millenarian movement whose dynamics can best be understood by an explication of collective psychology. He is especially indebted to Neil Smelser's work on collective behavior for his interpretation of a Maori iconoclast.

There are several problems with this approach. Dr. Webster is attached to concepts such as alienation and deprivation, which are of

dubious explanatory value when applied to a defeated, dispossessed group. To say that they are deprived is to state only the obvious. Moreover, Maoris faced a moral, not a psychological dilemma. The use of psychological concepts to elucidate a social phenomenon requires great caution. For example, "anxiety" is difficult to ascertain eighty years later. Such an analysis ultimately depends too much on Western characterizations. In Webster's hands the results are ethnocentric and judgmental. He writes, in a typical passage:

> It is therefore possible that the known external threat developed from a comparatively straightforward case of objective anxiety to include elements of frustration and the threat failed to mobilize the Tuhoe in a positive way. Instead their anxiety became blurred, and begins to include elements of free floating anxiety whose sources cannot be pinpointed and thus becomes neurotic.

Webster's chapter on theoretical orientations also includes a brief review of millenarian movements. It is in this context that he hopes to analyze Rua's prophetic message. Certainly Rua held out a vision to Maoris that was similar to those offered by other millenarian leaders. To the extent that anthropology seeks generalizations, this is an important point to make. But Rua was much more than one of a type. To represent him this way is ultimately to trivialize his movement and to miss the point of what he was trying to accomplish. If Webster was seeking comparative materials, he had only to investigate the tradition of Maori prophets that preceded Rua. Instead he writes only of Te Kooti. By failing to discuss the tradition to which Rua himself felt so linked, Webster must ignore the continuity that Rua posited between the past and the present. Thus as a faithhealer, Rua takes his place alongside other Maori religious leaders, including the traditional *tohunga.* To be effective in this realm is to deny that all power resides with the Pakeha. Yet Webster discusses faithhealing not in terms of Rua and the Tuhoe, but in terms of anxiety, reaction depression, and placebos.

Much of Webster's theoretical discussion is unnecessary. Although he attempts to evaluate the utility of a symbolic approach, he is not inclined in that direction. (On that score, it is a surprise to see no mention of Geertz in his bibliography.) Many of the points that were obviously in his dissertation would have been more effectively omitted in a book designed for a more general audience. Nevertheless, despite its problems the book is a valuable document of an important time in New Zealand history.

It is an effort for Binney, Webster, or the reader to be entirely dispassionate when confronted with the details of the police raid on Maungapohatu and Rua's subsequent trial. Binney and Webster both capture the prejudice, bigotry, and ignorance that his followers endured. In the face of this, it is not surprising that Rua failed; what was important was that he tried at all. Binney concludes: "Essentially Rua's dream had been a simple one: that the Tuhoe might survive. His millenium offered them the chance to build their city of God on their own lands. To lives which were otherwise bounded by quiet despair he brought hope that might 'show the heavens more just.' Who would deny them that?"

The tradition of prophecy that produced the prophet of the Ureweras has inspired subsequent leaders with visions that are now familiar, but no less compelling. So long as New Zealand society offers only inequality and misunderstanding to Maoris they will continue to turn to such leaders. But there are implications here that remain to be explored. Rua and other Maori prophets do more than mediate different social historical traditions; they are important creators of culture (Keesing 1982). For it is they who frame the symbolic dimensions of the contemporary Maori world. We cannot afford to ignore them but must be led, by people like Binney and Webster, to deeper levels of understanding.

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NOTES

1. Ivan Brady (1982:186) points out that to understand such situations, both colonizer and colonized must be studied. He writes, citing Geertz: "Where tribal history rests largely on the records of intruders, 'to know the native one must know the intruder' (Geertz 1973:346)."

2. Marshall Sahlins (1981:72) has recently argued that structuralism and history can be combined for a powerful analysis. He concludes his study by writing:

> The dialectics of history then, are structural throughout. Powered by disconformities between conventional values and intentional values, between intersubjective meanings and subjective interests, between symbolic sense and symbolic references, the historical process unfolds as a continuous and reciprocal movement between the practice of structure and the structure of practice.

3. Binney (1979:24) writes:

> For the Tuhoe to achieve some Pakeha living standards and to become self sufficient again, they had to retain economic control of their land. Rua sought to develop the wealth of the Tuhoe so that the land could be used for their own advantage. If his movement was founded on a very considerable distrust of Europeans and their material pursuits, it also sought to use some of their ideas and skills.

4. Binney (ibid.:49) tells us that "Rua claimed to be the 'mystic fourth' in a line of Maori prophets: Te Whiti, Titokowaru, and Te Turuki. Three had fallen, as prophesied, but the fourth would stand: the King of Clubs."

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