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The Paradox of Maori Privilege: Historical Constructions of Maori Privilege circa 1769 to 1940.

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degree of

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ABSTRACT

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Today Maori are thought, by some, to be a privileged people. Not only are they considered to have been treated better than other Native peoples, it is also argued that they receive benefits that other New Zealanders do not. This thesis explores the ‘idea’ of Maori privilege. It argues that the notion of Maori privilege is not limited to the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries; rather, it has a ‘venerable’ history the origins of which can be dated back to the eighteenth-century. The main argument of the thesis is that the notion of Maori privilege was central to colonisation in New Zealand.

The thesis focuses primarily on the period between 1769 and 1940. It identifies significant points in the development of the concept of Maori privilege, beginning with the arrival of James Cook in 1769. As a result of the Cook voyages Maori were again made known to Europe through their incorporation into European systems of knowledge. Consequently, Maori were ‘intellectually’ privileged, that is, they were deemed to be a certain type of savage, one worthy of protection. The Treaty of Waitangi was also widely cited as an important example of Maori privilege. For Britain, the treaty was, first and foremost, the means by which it acquired sovereignty over New Zealand and its people. It was reasoned that with colonisation taking place Maori interests would be best protected under English law; moreover, it was only by relinquishing their sovereignty that they could enjoy such a ‘privilege’.

From 1840 the Crown looked to discharge its Treaty of Waitangi obligations. This thesis is primarily concerned with the way in which the Crown implemented article three, under which Maori were afforded the rights and privileges of British subjects. While given less prominence in scholarly analyses of the treaty than articles one and two, it was article three that increasingly framed the Crown’s native policy. In the 100 years following the signing of the treaty, Government policies swung between extending ‘royal protection’ to Maori, while purportedly ensuring they received the ‘rights and privileges of British subjects’.

The thesis divides Maori privilege into two interconnected categories. ‘Official’ privilege refers to Crown policy or initiatives that ostensibly protected Maori. The

second category, 'populist' privilege, refers to the discourse which framed any protective measures as unreasonably granting Maori rights over and above those afforded to European settlers. Furthermore, 'populist' privilege asserted that Crown initiatives aimed at protecting Maori, were, in fact, disadvantageous to them because their interests, so it was held, were best served through their adoption of European customs, laws and beliefs.

No matter the policy of the day it was framed as a 'privilege'. As this thesis will demonstrate, however, policies that purported to protect Maori still resulted in the alienation of their lands and their political and economic marginalisation. Even the very limited gains Maori may occasionally have secured elicited claims of 'populist' privilege and further contributed to Maori loss. Despite this, the view that Maori were an especially privileged people was, by 1940, deeply entrenched.

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ABBREVIATIONS



AJHR	Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives
BPP	British Parliamentary Papers
DNZB	Dictionary of New Zealand Biography
JPS	Journal of the Polynesian Society
NZJH	New Zealand Journal of History
NZPD	New Zealand Parliamentary Debates