

## GREETINGS FROM THE EDGE: CARTOGRAPHIC CULTURAL EXPRESSION

PRESTON D.

Massey University, WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

*“ A line, it has been said, is a child’s first instrument of depiction, the boundary where one thing ends and the other begins. The map reduces the country to a single line, a sudden, magical configuration. Making sense of the map was like discovering gold.”*

Alan Atkinson, Symbols of Australia: uncovering the stories behind the myths.

At the end of last year I received a photo of my 18 year old niece, holidaying in Egypt. She is wearing a black T-shirt with a bright coloured map representing the three main Islands that form New Zealand, one of a series sold as part of a fundraiser for breast cancer services. She is sitting in the umber-toned foreground to Egypt’s Great Pyramid – a young woman off a green New Zealand farm in absolutely alien territory. The photograph is itself an archetype for families in New Zealand where an ‘OE’ (overseas experience) is an almost mandatory rite of passage for young men and women as a way of overcoming New Zealand’s isolation at the ‘bottom edge of the world’. The presence of the New Zealand map in the image embodies multilayered meanings and associations: its simple rendering, created through a repetition of coloured circles reflects the degree of simplification and abstraction capable while still maintaining recognition; its use by the Cancer Society as both a symbol of national unity in support of its cause and as a motif designed to have aesthetic appeal when applied to a fashion item; it is an evocation of ‘home’ for my niece, with the additional link to her mother who is a recent breast cancer survivor, and, as well a reflection of her desire for connection with home that acts as a public declaration of her own sense of national identity.

For me this photograph illustrates literally and figuratively how meanings and emotions are embodied in everyday objects and images, and in particular the place that the cartographic image has come to hold in the New Zealand consciousness and sense of self. A consciousness shaped by its geographic actuality, as a group of islands in the South Pacific, away down in the bottom right hand corner of the world, on most maps.

New Zealand is a very young country by European standards, one of the last large landmasses of the world to be populated. New Zealanders’ sense of who they are and of belonging was for a period inherent in the country’s position as part of the British Empire. What has emerged is a maturing nation now wrestling with issues of bicultural and multiculturalism. New Zealand’s growing sense of nationhood has developed alongside the country’s acceptance of its position in the world’s geography. The simple outline map has become a potent symbol in the country’s cultural lexicon, offering a base of enormous emotional force through which to communicate a wide range of concepts. It provides a shorthand key for patriotic identification and a way to tap into deep lodes of meaning and emotional freight.

This illustrated paper examines the evolution of the cartographic representation of New Zealand. It explores how variations in modes of representation reflect contemporary economic, social and cultural contexts and the extent to which it embodies the nation’s story telling objectives.

*“A map (atlas) never just shows you where you are, where you want to go to and how to get there. It also fires the imagination. Maps which chart rivers, mountains, towns, countries, far-away regions, oceans and continents can arouse intense feelings. A map combines reality and fantasy.”*

Louise Van Swaaij and Jean Klare, The Atlas of Experience.

New Zealand as a geographic reality lies from latitude 34° S to 47° S and from longitude 166° E to 179° E in the southern hemisphere. The group of islands is adrift between three oceans: the South Pacific Ocean to the north and east, the Tasman Sea to the west, and the great Southern Ocean to the south. Not only was New Zealand one of the last large landmasses of the world to be populated, but it is also one of the most geographically isolated – it shares no borders with any other country and Wellington ranks as the most remote capital city in the world based on the distance from the next nearest capital of another sovereign country.

The first to name the islands of New Zealand were the original settlers who arrived from eastern Polynesia some time after 1000AD. It is believed that these ancestors of the indigenous inhabitants, the Maori, created the descriptive name Aotearoa for the islands, which translates literally as ‘land of the long twilight’. Possibly the name describes the longer twilights these Polynesian settlers experienced further into the southern reaches of the Pacific. More recently the alternative translation of Aotearoa as ‘land of

the long white cloud' has gained currency, lending itself perhaps more attractively to the myths of discovery and foundation which have had such resonance for both the Maori and European communities of New Zealand.

The basis for the Maori names for the country's three main islands also arise from the province of myth – weaving the unique shape of the islands into the story of their genesis: Te Ika o Maui, the fish of Maui – refers to the legend of the hero demi-god Maui hauling the northern island up from the depths, and explains its rugged mountain ranges in the way that Maui's brothers (when his back was turned) set about scaling and hacking pieces off the great fish, so that it writhed and raised its fins before it became solid under their feet. The middle island was, variously, Te Waka-a-Aoraki, the canoe of Aoraki (the ancestor frozen in snow and ice as the highest peak in the Southern Alps) and Te Wahi Pounamu, the place of jade or greenstone resources. The third and most southern island was known by some as Te Puka-o-te-waka-o-Maui, the anchor stone of Maui's canoe.

Around 300 years after Maori came to New Zealand, what was effectively the first modern atlas was published in Antwerp by Abraham Ortelius. The *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (Theatre of the World) brought together and collated numerous cartographic sources into a single set of copper plate prints of maps. Although thirty-one editions were published between 1570 and 1612, it wasn't until the 1589 edition that it included a map solely focused on the Pacific Ocean, the *Maris Pacifici*. *Maris Pacifici* and many subsequent maps show only a very hypothetical coastline for the *Terra Australis*, the Great Southern Continent. It would be two hundred years before this myth was finally definitively laid to rest.

In 1642, Dutchman Abel Tasman, commander of a two-ship Dutch East India Company expedition to the islands north of Australia, sailed over the western rim of the sea that would come to bear his name. He reported in his ship's log 'saw a large land, uplifted high'. Tasman's instructions were to find the Unknown Southern Continent ('*Terra Australis Incognita*') which had already captured imaginations and become a feature in European cartographers' and geographers' concepts of the world. After a disastrous interaction with local Maori at the top of the country's middle island, Tasman left, having never set foot on land, and having charted just a small portion of the coastline. Tasman speculated that this coastline was the western extremity of what the Dutch had already mapped at the southern end of South America, and which they'd named *Staten Landt*. So this name was also given to Tasman's coastline. When, later in the seventeenth century, it became apparent that the coast Tasman had charted was something else, the name was changed on Dutch maps to *Nieuw Zeeland*, in reference to the Dutch province of Zeeland, a province important to the Dutch East India Company.

The first printed map solely of New Zealand was produced in an atlas, *Atlante Veneto*, by the Venetian cartographer Vincenzo Coronelli between 1691 and 1696. This drew heavily on the charts made by Abel Tasman and therefore reflected his assumptions and incomplete observations: it showed the north-western coast of the South Island joined to the North Island's southern west coast. The first map of New Zealand's basic shape was created one hundred and thirty years later, when James Cook became the first European to circumnavigate New Zealand. Reasonably enough, Cook made a few errors: he showed Bank's Peninsula as an island and, conversely, Stewart Island as attached to the mainland. But, by 1841, New Zealand had assumed its now familiar shape, (though the islands had not yet gained their current names) and this map became the most significant, and most reproduced, map of New Zealand (fig.1).

Cook's explorations led to significant changes in how Europeans thought about the South Pacific. New Zealand's shape and coastline was now well understood. The myth of the Great Southern Land had been destroyed – and the isolation of New Zealand had also been established.

In a process begun by Abel Tasman, who named the place of his fateful encounter with Maori canoes Murderer's Bay, Cook allocated European names to many of the country's geographic features. Settler agencies continued into the 1800s to rename and reinvent it as an outpost of the British Empire as they worked to entice people from the British Isles to settle this remote land. In 1841, New Zealand was declared an independent colony. The aim was to create a home for surplus British population, which would supply useful goods for the British markets. It was a tough life for many of the new settlers. While the intention had been that settlements would be orderly and self-supporting, the reality was much harder – some of the original sites were flood prone, some settlers had been sold 'city-plots' of land off a grid which ignored both their sometimes very steep terrain, and their existing Maori inhabitants. The settlers, both within and outside the fast-growing new settlements, were dependent on the land for their day to day requirements as well as for trade. Their reliance on the land was the basis of a strong interdependent relationship with their environment that quickly became a cornerstone of national identity. Identification with their physical world was an important replacement for the kinship networks and family relationships, or longstanding associations with specific places, that settlers had left behind. Outside the few major towns,

the new settlers were few and scattered – mainly along the coast and rivers. Their social interactions were limited and it was difficult for them to develop a sense of collective identity. Isolation, from Britain and the rest of Europe, was a key theme in the writing, art and indeed the consciousness of New Zealanders until well into the 20th century. The ongoing evolution of national identity that this paper explores has some of its roots in these early experiences.

New Zealand's ties to Britain were maintained and strengthened by its growing export trade in agricultural produce, especially when refrigerated shipments began in 1862; New Zealand, as had been hoped, became 'Britain's farm'. The new colony clung loyally and sometimes a little desperately to the culture they had brought with them – keeping their allegiance to the British crown, language, customs and social rituals, and even culinary tastes.

Although New Zealand became 'home' to succeeding generations, whose attachment to the land intensified far beyond economic reliance, the dominant values and attitudes continued to be 'British'. This enduring faithfulness to Britain inhibited the growth of New Zealand nationalism, and indigenous national symbols were slow to replace symbols of the British Empire. British icons such as the Union Jack, John Bull, and Britannia were adapted rather than replaced. Zealandia became a New Zealand Britannia, for example, standing opposite a Maori chief and beneath the Southern Cross constellation in the coat of arms developed to celebrate New Zealand's transition from colony to dominion in 1911.

This was a moment of officially sanctioned self-analysis when formal visual symbols of statehood: a flag, coat of arms, stamps and coinage, were needed. It was also the beginning of the ongoing search for a lexicon that spoke to and about New Zealanders.

Representation is key to the construction of identities: through the two-way process of presentation and reception identity is made meaningful and tangible. Through visual articulation we make sense of who we are, and the imaginative process of creating a symbolism that represents us is an important step in the formation of identity. In his analysis of what he calls the mythologies of popular culture French philosopher Roland Barthes suggests that myths do not distort or hide the truth, but rather describe what is taken as true in any particular culture. A myth makes sense of the world through 'a complex system of beliefs which society constructs in order to sustain and authenticate its own sense of being, i.e., the very fabric of its system of meaning' (Hawkes, 1988, p131). Barthes' consideration of popular culture through a lens of semiological analysis offers a framework for the exploration of how identity is represented within a society that is complementary to consideration of the underpinning myths. Semiology is based on the study of signs and symbols, the systems within which they operate and the context from which their meaning is derived. According to Peirce semiotics is 'not a one-way process with a fixed meaning. It is part of an active process between the sign and the reader of the sign. It is an exchange between the two which involves some negotiation. The meaning of the sign will be affected by the background of the reader' (Crow 2003, p36).

A nation's 'identity' is frequently understood either as who its members think they are and how they see themselves, or as who they really are, regardless of their self view. Perhaps the reality is a combination of the two: we really are who we think we are. Identity is always in some way an attempt to describe the complex links between the personal and the societal. The formation of identity requires the boundaries of difference and sameness to be located and defined. Sameness is exemplified by the use of 'we', 'us' and 'our' to embrace those who share the identity and exclude those who are 'other'. However, sameness also has to overcome differences within those parameters; differences of race, faith and background. Bill Willmott suggests, in his introduction to 'Culture and Identity in New Zealand', that determination of the parameters that define New Zealand identity has been dominated by Pakeha (Maori word for New Zealanders of European descent) and that those parameters are therefore characterised by an ongoing struggle between the indigenous and the imported. This, he suggests, leads less dominant groups to identify emotionally more as minorities than as New Zealanders (Willmott 1990, p14).

New Zealand's search for an iconography that reflected its new status as a Dominion and that could replace imported British visual symbols gained momentum with the explosion of domestic and overseas consumer markets, developments in printing technology and a greater variety of visual communication media at the turn of the century.

Visual symbols of identity gained a much greater presence in everyday life through handbills, newspapers and posters, and brands and trademarks for the growing number of new products. The visual language of these new media drew on the same sources as the official iconography: Zealandia's womanly form connoted values of purity and strength equally when applied to the Coat of Arms and postage stamps, as when she appeared on packaging for rolled oats.

Increasingly, however, the new symbols were drawn from the environment, and reflected the impact it had already had in defining national identity. New Zealand's native plants and animals, its diverse and frequently rugged landscape, the astronomy of the night sky, and the art and culture of its first Polynesian settlers offered a range of visual signifiers.

New Zealand in the 21st century is awash with cultural symbols. While all nations use symbols to express their identity, New Zealand, perhaps because of its relative youth as a nation, has embraced their use with an enthusiasm that borders on obsession. As a nation New Zealand could be described as being still in its adolescence – in that awkward, self-conscious age of endlessly practicing and experimenting with writing our signature until we feel it perfectly captures our true self, strengths and attitudes.

A recent phenomenon is the upsurge in symbols from popular culture unique to, or particularly common to New Zealand in the early and mid 20th century, which have been labelled 'kiwiana'. Predominately commercial in origin, heavily promoted through the advertising and souvenir industries, and driven by a nostalgic myth of a 1950's middle class New Zealand, they have been used on a wide range of items including postage stamps, jewellery, t-shirts and greeting cards. These images of toys, food and clothing etc reflect little of the reality of this 21st century, multicultural, nation and are a form of nostalgia that English cultural commentator Stephen Bayley has described as 'the enemy within, a three-headed monster: contemptuous of the present, a betrayal of the future, and indicative of a crisis in modern taste'. These symbols are as irrelevant as a cultural expression as the earlier borrowings and appropriation of British culture.

Symbols are extremely important for cultural identity and cultural regeneration. They are used to define what the culture stands for, and to help individuals feel an emotional connection to other individuals of the past, present and future.

*"We live in a whirl of symbols, and to make sense of the world around us, even as children, we need to become experts in attaching appropriate meaning to an immense range of images, logos, numbers and signs."*

Alan Atkinson, Symbols of Australia: uncovering the stories behind the myths.

The distinctive outline of New Zealand charted by Captain James Cook has quietly entered the consciousness of New Zealanders. Amongst the welter of signifiers for national identity that have developed in the late 19th and early 20th century the distinctive outline of the islands has been a consistently potent visual symbol. Used in both official and commercial applications, and incorporated into posters and early cartoons, it frequently represented the nation as a whole or was a base upon which a key character could stand and be better identified (fig. 2). One reason for the map's extensive use is that the simplest and most accessible way of representing a nation is through its cartographic expression. From a design point of view the map is self-contained, easy to draw and instantly recognisable. It offers a base upon which to communicate a wide range of concepts: it provides a shorthand index for patriotic identification and links to a deep vein of meaning and emotional significance. The map is able to act as a 'stand in' for the whole nation and to represent all those within its borders. Its boundaries are definite and factual and do not suffer the blurring effect of differences within community or of the relative dominance of any one group.

The outline map of New Zealand offered a base on which other signifiers could be overlaid, including those borrowed from Britain, such as the Union Jack, Britannia and the cross of St George (fig.3). It was also overlaid with the newer, indigenous symbols derived from the landscape, flora and fauna and from Maori culture (fig.4).

The placement of the map in the context of the wider world was frequently used to illustrate the nation's connections with Britain and the British Empire. Frequently, the outline map was placed within a globe, which allowed the nation to be connected with whichever other country was identified; most often, of course, it was Britain. Exaggeration of the countries' size and reduction of the distance between them also accentuated the bonds and connections and reduced the sense of geographic remoteness. Interestingly, where the New Zealand map was shown on the globe it had, more often than not, taken up its bottom right hand corner position, reflecting where it frequently found itself placed in world atlases of the day.

Maps have an inherent authority and neutrality, but maps are selective representations, and much of the information they contain is man-made and therefore subjective. They perfectly reflect Roland Barthes' ideas of denotative and connotative meaning in that they are a mixture of both science and mythology. This fusion of fact and artifice is actually the source of the map's persuasive power.

*"The map is at once empirically rooted and imaginatively liberated and liberating. Ultimately, all spaces are impossible to control, inhabit or represent completely. The map permits that illusion. It is a creative*

*process of inserting our humanity into the world and seizing the world for ourselves. That is why the boundaries between the art and science of mapping, so long and so arbitrarily surveyed, charted and policed, are today smudged and fading, and why the imaginative and projective potential of mapping has become so vitally present in our lives.”*

Denis Cosgrove, *Mapping in the Age of Digital Media*.

I've had a love and fascination for maps, both real and imaginary, from an early age. As a child I often recorded and defined my fantasy worlds on paper using traditional mapping conventions and techniques. In my teens maps gave me a window to the possibilities of the wider world, and an escape from small town New Zealand.

Maps later became the research focus for my Master of Fine Arts, and through this I became aware of the frequency with which the New Zealand outline map was used. This was sparked when I began noticing an insignificant little map appearing in New Zealand's national Sunday newspaper, which recorded the lightning strikes for the past week. The maps contained a tightly cropped outline of New Zealand, and seemed to have no real purpose or definable audience. I was interested that this little map, although failing in its overt communication aims, retained some inherent capacity to connect with its reader. In relation to my study of semiotics it highlighted, in its simplicity, the power of the basic outline of New Zealand and its ability to extract an emotional response from its reader. Once my interest had been kindled, I noticed how very frequently representations of New Zealand as an outline map were used. Increasingly, the map is coming off the page and appearing in everyday items. It's used in popular culture as a comforting decoration that reminds New Zealanders of who we are – on everything from coffee cups to pillowslips. Its broad acceptance as an icon of the country has made the map more popular than ever as an adornment, on T-shirts, jewellery and as tattoos, that allows individual New Zealanders to signal to others who they are. Its political and cultural neutrality has provided a canvas for minority groups to represent their own uniqueness as New Zealanders. In some uses its form is so abstracted that it becomes a symbol of the map of New Zealand, rather than a map in itself.

Much of New Zealand's sense of identity derives from its seeing itself as an island nation isolated at the bottom of the world. What was once a disadvantage is now a positive expression of uniqueness. This is increasingly reflected in a wide range of visual representations that celebrate New Zealand's position on the 'edge of the world' that can be seen as a culturally creative position.

I have recently chosen to narrow my focus to the map's inclusion in logos and trademarks. This draws on my own experience as a graphic designer specialising in corporate identity and understanding that a logo, like a map is a synthesis of fact and myth. The earliest example I have found so far is a trademark for a Wellington publishing company first registered in 1893. The map of New Zealand hovers over a shield containing the cross of St George and surrounded by the constellation of the Southern Cross (fig. 5). An example of the incorporation of indigenous icons with imported symbols common to that period.

Not only do a great number of logos contain a map (more than 150 examples collected to date) but the map is now frequently simplified and abstracted to an almost unrecognisable degree, as in the following three examples.

Freeview is a free-to-air digital provider for TV and radio in New Zealand (fig. 6). Its logo features a globe formed by dots within which New Zealand is identified simply by four circles, and by the familiar angle made by its two main islands. At once this logo represents the modern and connected world, and also refers to New Zealand's customary position at its bottom right hand corner. In this example New Zealand's position no longer reflects a sense of isolation but is part of a world of digital connections.

In the Tennis Association logo (fig. 7) the map is simply a series of stylised tennis balls. The balls overlap to create a sense of connectedness while also representing the six separate tennis districts.

Te Wao Nui, the great forest, is the name of the New Zealand-themed section of the Auckland zoo. Its logo alludes to the seafaring origins of the country's settlers, both Maori and European, and New Zealand is a white sail with a sweep of white wake, navigating its way through an empty ocean of blue (fig. 8).

The expression of a nation's identity through its cartographic form is far from unique to New Zealand. 'The national hexagon' of France, as one historian has described it, has a far longer history as a cultural signifier, for example. My research has focused on New Zealand to this point, and comparisons with other countries are yet to be made. I am particularly interested in how other countries, with far more established lexicons of visual symbolism, are responding to the new technologies that ignore the old physical boundaries and to a world that is increasingly homogenous.

The changing use of New Zealand's distinctive geographic outline charts the country's shifting view of itself and its place in the world. It reflects a growing confidence and a striving to define its developing

identity. It is a tangible expression of the linkage with the land that has been central to the identities of New Zealanders since the first Polynesian inhabitants. The map's early use was as a 'realistic' symbol of New Zealand, and a marker for geographical position relative to other, implicitly more important, places. However, this has given way to more flexible use of the map's distinctive shape and political and cultural neutrality. Depictions of the map now frequently refer to New Zealand's position, not to symbolise a sense of isolation but to celebrate its position at the 'bottom edge of the world' and associated ideas of independence and uniqueness.

Over several generations the map of New Zealand, drawn and re-drawn, simplified and abstracted, read and re-read has come to be perhaps the defining visual metaphor for the nation.

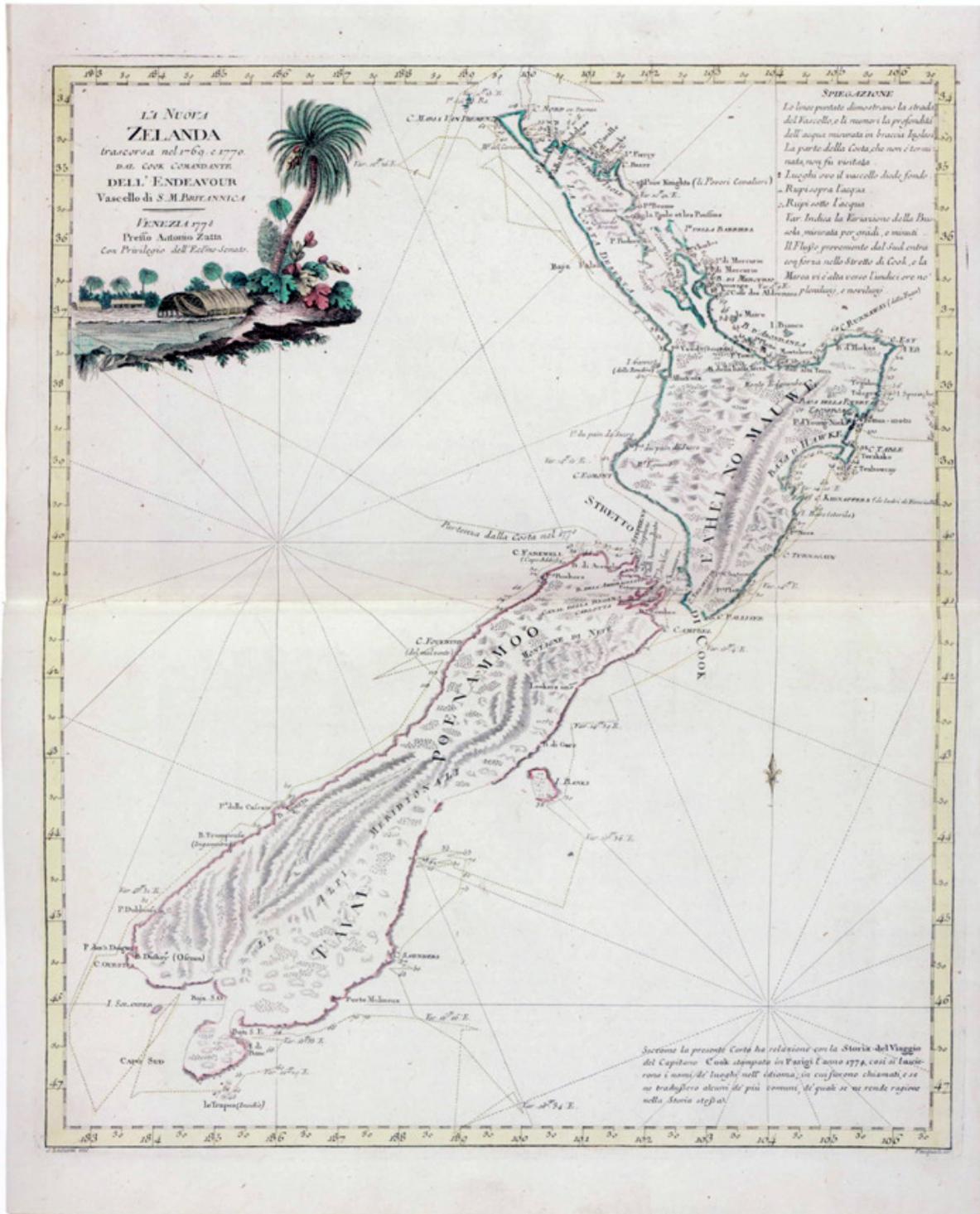


Fig. 1

*Give him an inch and he'll take an ell*



*If you do not use your power  
he will take the lot*

**Strike out the bottom line  
on both ballot papers**

~~1 Vote for National Continuance~~      ~~1 Vote for Continuance~~  
~~1 Vote for National Prohibition~~      ~~1 Vote for No License~~

Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



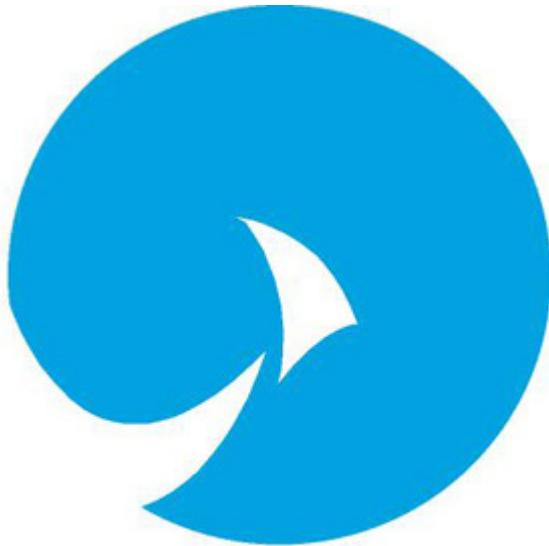
Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig.7



**TE WAO NUI**

EXPLORE • CONNECT • PROTECT

Fig. 8

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