Thus far, this study has charted the emergence of Indocentric frameworks for the analysis of Polynesian, but especially Maori, culture and history. As we have seen, complex webs of correspondence and emerging patterns of institutional exchange spanned disparate parts of the British empire (and reached out into other imperial and institutional knowledge systems), integrating scholars in the United Kingdom, Ireland, South Asia, the Malay peninsula, the Pacific islands and Australasia into new interpretative communities. I have particularly stressed the prominence of the Christian converts, scribal elites and other ‘native experts’ who shaped, contested and re-interpreted this thickening archive of ethnological material.

If we can understand this body of knowledge as a dialogic construct, the heavily intertextual product of competing voices speaking from a host of locations and subject positions, it is also important to recognize that some groups within the empire resisted these discourses or posited counter-discourses of group origins and identity. This chapter explores the various and competing rearticulations of community identity and history in New Zealand in the wake of contact with Euro-Americans. While Chapter 6 documents the active reappropriation of the ‘Aryan’ concept in the Hindi press and its centrality in the increasingly racialized discourses on Hindu identity and Indian nationhood, here I examine a set of indigenous discourses that countered, rather than reinterpreted, the Aryan theory. Maori elders, ‘native teachers’ and prophetic leaders embraced the Bible and the new skills of literacy as resources for an active recasting of indigenous identity within communities that were struggling to cope with depopulation, land alienation and renegotiation of chiefly sovereignty. Within these contexts, the notion that Maori were displaced Indo-Aryans had little appeal or cul-
tural power. Indigenous leaders instead fashioned arguments that empowered their communities in various ways; by identifying Maori as members of bi-racial church communities, as being ‘loyal’ to the Crown or, most intriguingly, as being God’s chosen people destined to throw off Pakeha oppression and herald a millennial age of peace and prosperity.

**Historiographical models**

It is necessary to begin by locating this chapter within the existing historiography on colonialism, literacy and identity in the Pacific. Until the 1970s, the dominant model for the interpretation of colonialism in the Pacific was the ‘fatal impact’ model, an interpretation elaborated forcefully in Moorehead’s popular history of the same name. European intrusion into the Pacific was seen as calamitous, unleashing radical and rapid social change enacted by depopulation, the erosion of chiefly authority and the decay of traditional social systems and cultural values. Parsonson, in an influential 1967 article, identified literacy as a driving force behind this transformation of the Polynesian world, arguing that a ‘literate revolution’ was central in the dismantling of traditional belief systems in Polynesia. This identification of colonialism as a fundamental rupture in indigenous history was challenged by the rise of a revisionist islander-centred interpretative tradition in the early 1970s, as historians strove to emphasize indigenous perspectives, important elements of cultural continuity that spanned pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods, and the islanders’ ability to shape the outcomes of cross-cultural contact. But the centrality of cross-cultural violence and the extent of indigenous depopulation imposed real limits upon this revisionist thrust: Dening, for example, acknowledges that his influential vision of Pacific history still hinges upon the ‘Fatal Impact of the Euro-Americans’.

More specifically, within the New Zealand context, there have been two different interpretations of the place of literacy in Maori history. The first, the New Zealand version of ‘the fatal impact’ school, identifies literacy as a corrosive force that undermined the vitality of Maori oral tradition, and, as a result, played a central role in the construction of Pakeha hegemony. This model has exhibited considerable longevity, as some educationalists and historians continue to identify literacy and printing as key instruments for the construction of Pakeha hegemony, even equating literacy with becoming English. The second