

Some Speculations on Māori identity in the New Zealand of Tomorrow¹

Te Ahukaramū

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Tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.

The question of identity resides at the heart of any human society and culture. Who are we? Where are we? What is our purpose? These ideas strike all peoples at all times and the answers to these questions are gloriously variable and diverse. Matters of identity are deeply significant to the way economies work, how culture is expressed and even how health and wellbeing is achieved. Identity, when misconceived, however, can also be suppressive and oppressive.

Like all societies, cultures and nations, New Zealand has numerous ways by which identity is constructed, articulated and expressed. Some of these ways are very old – such as tribal identifications of Māori communities – and some are new and emerging – such as the ‘digital native’, the identity of younger people (usually) who have never known life without the Internet and the Ipod, those who feel more comfortable texting their friends rather than making a telephone call.

One of the oldest identity paradigms in New Zealand is the Māori/Pākehā paradigm which came into existence in the 19th century. These two words have been with us a long time and continue to be powerful ways by which we New Zealanders relate to one another. The effect of these words upon our consciousness, upon ways in which resources are apportioned, upon political power and more can not be underestimated. For some time now, however, I have been wondering whether these words have reached their ‘used by date’ and my purpose today is to raise this question.

My questioning of the Māori/Pākehā paradigm has taken place in the context of my own identity formation – being a person of both ‘Māori’ and ‘Pākehā’ descent - as well as in the context of my recent involvement in policy and research activities designed to advocate and enable creativity and innovation within Māori communities, (particularly creativity involving mātauranga Māori). I find that much of my exploring and thinking leads me to a more complicated, complex but ultimately richer view of life and identity than that afforded by the terms ‘Māori’ and ‘Pākehā’. I am guided by the words of Edward Said, who says:

For those of us who by force of circumstance actually live the pluri-cultural life... it is incumbent upon us to complicate and/or dismantle the reductive formulae and abstract but potent kind of thought that leads the mind away

¹ A paper delivered to a symposium entitled ‘Concepts of Nationhood – Marking 100 Years since the proclamation of Dominion Status for New Zealand’, Legislative Council Chamber, Parliament Buildings, Wellington, 26 September 2007.

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from concrete human history and experience and into the realms of ideological fiction, metaphysical confrontation, and collective passion.³

More and more I have been working in this 'space' wherein older assumptions about 'Māori' and 'Pākehā' are becoming less meaningful and newer articulations of identity seem appropriate. I look forward to the arrival of the poets and artists who by their very special insight and creativity are able to form word-pictures (and other kinds of pictures and symbols as well) for us which are attuned and in some way liberate the complicated yet richer identity I think and feel is emerging in New Zealand today. But before I get too far into this, let me set out something of the context in which these ideas have emerged.

A Heightened Awareness of Creativity and Innovation

I have argued elsewhere⁴ that Māori communities are now crossing an historical threshold from a time dominated by the quest for social justice and the desire for cultural restoration to one in which these pursuits are being supplemented by a heightened awareness and an increased consciousness concerning creativity, enterprise and opportunity. The settlement of Treaty of Waitangi claims is perhaps the best example of processes encouraging this kind of movement.

A conventional claim before the Waitangi Tribunal is considered on the basis of perceived breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi. A claimant group presents its grievance before the Tribunal concerning an historical action(s) or inaction(s) which they assert was in breach of the Treaty of Waitangi. The claimants seek recognition of this historical wrongdoing and wish to be compensated for it. Hence, this action is driven by an historical grievance and is an activity that can be located under the theme of 'the quest for social justice'.

In advancing a claim, claimant groups will appeal to iwi history outlining both the history of the claim and the claimant group (often an iwi). In doing so, it uplifts unique ways of interpreting events and seeing the world based upon an understanding of the culture of their ancestors. The claimant group might advance a differing interpretation of an historical event, an interpretation based upon *tikanga*, the distinctive culture and ways of thinking of the ancestors of the time. In this way, a claim also includes an amount of cultural restoration.

As the claim comes to fruition, however, and negotiations proceed for its settlement, other aspects come to play including the need – often – to create entirely new arrangements for the use of settlement assets. Here the challenge is not only to understand the nature of an appropriate settlement but also an appropriate framework for the management and use of settlement assets. When reaching the settlement phase, all claimants encounter questions such as:

- In which organisation should settlement assets be vested?

³ *Orientalism*, The 25th Anniversary Edition, by Edward Said, p. xxiii. Vintage Books, 2003.

⁴ See 'Creativity and Mātauranga Māori: Towards Tools for Innovation', Hui Taumata Trust 2007

- How should this organisation be run? What are its tikanga?
- Who should it represent?
- Who should benefit from the activities of the organisation?
- What is its purpose?
- What is the nature of the community in whose name it exists and the changing nature of that community?

In this way, the resolution of claims catalyses creativity as claimants begin to think about these questions. Treaty settlements therefore move claimant groups from matters of social justice and cultural restoration to creativity and enterprise. Whilst there is great variability in how this process actually plays out in our communities, and whilst claimant groups are not always conscious of this process, on the whole this is what is taking place.

The settlement of claims is not the only process by which this transition is being made in Māori communities. Other examples include the establishment of Māori medium education institutions. Here advocates are moving from the question of the participation of Māori children and students in education to deeper questions as to the nature of the *whare wānanga*, for example, as a distinctive provider of education services. Once again, this entails a movement from a social justice imperative to a milieu of creativity and innovation. Similar transitions are taking place in Māori broadcasting avenues, in Māori tourism ventures, in Māori artistic circles, in Māori businesses and much more.

Consequently, we are seeing a transition from a time dominated by questions of Māori participation in our nation's economy, life and culture, to deeper questions concerning the potential and distinctive contributions the Māori world is able to bring to our nation and to the world as a whole.

Matters of social justice and cultural restoration of the kind described⁵ will remain important for some time yet. And it is important to recognise on-going challenges facing the Māori world which do not appear, at least to the same degree, in other communities. Health disparities are an example as are imprisonment rates. Some of these contemporary difficulties can be sourced to historical disenfranchisement through colonisation. And so there will be an ongoing concern and a requirement to recognise genuine needs.

We should note also that there has always been an amount of creativity in Māori communities – indeed, at times Māori have been ingenious in their responses to a changing world. Overall, however, there is an increased awareness now, a concern to consciously articulate and advocate for enterprise, innovation and

⁵ I believe social justice and cultural vitalisation will always be important. Genuine needs and injustices must be addressed. Social justice and cultural vitalisation, in my view, are about the existence of favourable circumstances which enable members of a society to realise their individual and collective potential. The issues of social justice and cultural revitalisation that I am referring to in this paper concern breaches to the Treaty of Waitangi and the deculturation of Māori communities experienced during 19th and 20th centuries.

opportunity within Māori communities. This may also be a pathway by which to achieve the goals of social justice and cultural revitalisation. The 2005 *Hui Taumata*, which was held at Te Papa and which focused upon accelerating the growth of the Māori dimension of New Zealand's economy, was a water-shed event marking the transition I am discussing here.

The Māori/Pākehā paradigm

There are many aspects and features of this transition into the 'post-settlement' world. One aspect concerns changing assumptions about identity that this cultural transition will bring. For example, in recent decades, we have spent a good deal of time reconstructing and repatriating Māori culture to Māori people. One of the outcomes of this process is the growing ease between Māori and Pākehā when Māori become more confident in Māori culture. Māori antagonism toward Pākehā is intensified if Māori lack confidence in their own identity and culture. Conversely, when Māori grow in understanding and knowledge of their own culture and history, this antagonism diminishes. This is a human phenomenon seen throughout the world – the ease and confidence that grows when a culture and identity is repatriated to a people.

I can attest to this from personal experience. When I was younger, and felt less confident about 'being Māori', the boundary between Māori and Pākehā was firm in my consciousness. I was singularly focused upon achieving an experience and knowledge of 'being Māori'. Looking back now, I am amazed by how much energy I and others like me put into learning iwi history, whakapapa, stories, songs and much more. (And I am proud to say that I am a product of the 'Māori renaissance' of the 1980s and 1990s⁶.)

Now that I am older – and now that I speak the Māori language, have an understanding of my whakapapa, and am able to participate and at times lead initiatives within my iwi - I find myself less anxious and concerned to defend my Māori identity. I feel more at ease to regard myself culturally as Pākehā too understanding that embracing my Pākehā heritage does not necessarily mean a diminishment of my Māori identity (in the past this was not the case). So long as there are clear and up-to-date ways of exploring, understanding and experiencing Māori identity, I find that I need not be so concerned for its welfare when I embrace my Pākehā heritage.

Consequently, I find that the terms 'Māori' and 'Pākehā', therefore, have become less meaningful and that a new language of identity, a new way of relating is required. I think this is the case for a personal journey such as mine as well as for the larger cultural transition I have been discussing.

⁶ I was fortunate to be a student at Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa, Ōtaki, in those years and to benefit from a tribal development programme entitled *Whakatupuranga Rua Mano: Generation 2000*, a programme focused upon preparing the three iwi of Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Toarangatira and Te Ati Awa for the 21st century.

There are many other kinds of pressures upon the Māori/Pākehā paradigm as well. These include:

- An increasingly diverse Māori population
- An increasingly diverse New Zealand population overall
- The identity called 'Pākehā' has never been uniformly embraced by New Zealanders of European descent and in some quarters it is rejected outright.
- More and more non-Māori are sharing and participating in Māori activities, sometimes leading these activities. Richard Nunns, for example, is widely respected for his work with *taonga pūoro*, or traditional Māori musical instruments. As more and more New Zealanders take up the Māori language (which we hope will be the case) this will increase.

Hence, I see a growing number of reasons to challenge this paradigm and I am wondering whether it is possible to fix the Māori/Pākehā paradigm to a pre-settlement period and if we are able to fashion a new language of identity for 'post-settlement' purposes? Would this be possible?

Now, in advocating this direction, there are two things I would like to make clear. Firstly, I am not suggesting that we Māori abandon our culture, our values and worldview. Like so many peoples around the world (particularly minorities), we Māori rightfully worry about assimilation and I need to make clear that that is not what I am suggesting. I am not advocating for the disappearance of Māori into some kind of new, vague and ultimately oppressive 'melting pot'.

Rather I am calling into question the ability of the word 'Māori' to reflect and express the increasing diversity of the people and culture we label as 'Māori'. (Similarly, I do the same for the word 'Pākehā'). I am also suggesting that the Māori/Pākehā paradigm might be better left to that period of our history commencing with the European colonisation of New Zealand and concluding with the settlement of historical Treaty claims.

A second matter to make clear is the recognition that Māori and Pākehā identities remain very important to a lot of people. This was so in my own case and it is important to understand that my sense of freedom from 'being Māori' now has arisen as a result of my movement *through* being Māori rather than an abandonment of it. Hence, in advancing this discussion, one needs to take care and be humble and patient for we are trying to liberate and enable diverse expressions rather than impose a new and constricting orthodoxy.

Meaninglessness in a 'Post-Settlement' World

The pursuit of claims before the Waitangi Tribunal makes great use, either explicitly or implicitly, of 'Māori' and 'Pākehā'. This is the prevailing identity paradigm in which the drama of a claim unfolds. This paradigm identifies the characters and protagonists who are at odds with one another and the words are

useful in identifying appropriate parties in subsequent quests for settlement and reconciliation.

When these contests conclude, however, I suggest their meaningfulness diminishes. This is because they do not communicate a worldview, a culture, values, modes of experience, behaviours and more. Rather the terms merely ring fence one group of people and call them 'Māori', and ring fence another group and called them 'Pākehā'. They do not tell us anything about these groups of people and they certainly don't tell us anything about the many people who belong to both. Hence, in a less diverse world in which ethnicities contest, and do so continually, these kinds of words are helpful. But in a much more complex world, a plural world, an increasingly diverse world, one in which lines are blurred, these words become inadequate.

I am looking, therefore, for some identity words which somehow express who we actually are, what we stand for and the values we hold, particularly in the New Zealand of tomorrow. Our children and grandchildren will live in an even more diverse world than we live in today and I want them to be free to express themselves, to express identities old and new, to cherish their heritage and to be who they are.

Reductive Formulae

A second concern with 'Māori' and 'Pākehā' lies with their ability to undermine diversity. People of Māori descent today possess a huge variety of worldviews, values, outlook and experiences. It is simply not so that all Māori think, act and experience the world in the same way. For example, one of the most well known markers of Māori diversity in recent times has been the debate concerning urban Māori and older iwi/tribal identities. I suggest that the terms 'Māori' and 'Pākehā' act as 'reductive formulae' to use Edward Said's terminology. Writing in *Orientalism*, Said discusses terms such as 'The West' and 'Islam' arguing that these terms are ultimately undermining of diversity. He warns us against:

...terrible reductive conflicts that herd people under falsely unifying rubrics like "America", "the West", or "Islam" and invent collective identities for large numbers of individuals who are actually quite diverse.⁷

My thought is that 'Māori' and 'Pākehā' may well be 'reductive formulae', and increasingly so, and I think there is a need to deconstruct our assumptions about these identities. Said's examples are those large conceptions, such as 'The West' or 'Islam', which are used everywhere often with little critical assessment. These identity conceptions are reductive in the sense that they fail to represent the diversity – of experience, thought and values – that exist within populations to which these grand schemes are commonly applied. They are also difficult in that they suggest boundaries – a boundary must exist – but they do not offer us any

⁷ *Orientalism*, The 25th Anniversary Edition, by Edward Said, p. xxviii. Vintage Books, 2003.

guidance about why these boundaries should exist and they are vague about where they can be found or described.

So my general thesis is that the identities called Māori and Pākehā arose in the 19th century and are thus inextricably connected one with the other and to ethnicity contests, both historical and contemporary. They serve these contests in subtle and not so subtle ways by prescribing boundaries often for ideological purposes. This boundary setting is meaningful in as much as it sets one group apart from another but given the historical transition taking place – particularly marked by the settlement of Treaty claims – should a different way of relating, of identifying be developed?

A Way Forward?

It is clear that the New Zealand of tomorrow has already begun to arrive. New Zealand will be a much more diverse and multi-dimensional place than when the Māori and Pākehā identities were first conceived. Identity formation will unfold through a much more complex process than that of the past and some of the features of this new New Zealand include:

- An increasing diversity in our population – larger population, increased ethnic diversity
- Despite our geographic isolation, there has been a huge increase in the amount and variety of information and knowledge available to society – hence, there are challenges concerning knowledge authorities, the quality of knowledge and information, sources of knowledge and so on
- Despite our geographic isolation, it is becoming increasingly easier to participate in events and activities outside our country, and for people from other countries to participate in New Zealand
- Increased pressures upon our natural resources – fuels, food, land for settlement and much more
- As globalisation continues, internal challenges remain concerning what we believe New Zealand to be, what are our points of difference?

From a Māori point of view, one of the significant features of the New Zealand of tomorrow will be the idea of a ‘post-settlement’ world. It is my hope that Māori communities can move into a new period of prosperity and cultural creativity. I hope that the waste of potential that has occurred in history and continues today in our communities will cease.

Māori people want to contribute to New Zealand and to the world in ways that are meaningful to us. We want to be independent and decrease our reliance upon Government and other external agencies. We particularly seek to overcome perceptions that power, real power, exists outside of ourselves and hence, we want to increase our experiences of creative *mana motuhake*. We want to build sustainable cultural enterprises of mana that our nation can be proud of and we seek peace and understanding with our fellow New Zealanders by being Māori (or its successor) and New Zealanders at the same time.

Concerning the identity of tomorrow, one which can evolve from our existing Māori/Pākehā paradigm I do not have any final answer to this question, recognising that this will unfold over time – and one must be patient recognising that this is likely to come from a ‘bottom up’ approach, from the ‘people’, rather than imposed from ‘above’. I do, however, have a thought concerning features of this new identity.

I like to think that New Zealanders are caring people, that we care for one another (or we at least aspire to this) and that we maintain a sense of fairness in our relationships with one another. I also like to think that we care deeply for these islands that we call our home. We cherish our natural environments, our mountains, our waterways, our indigenous flora and fauna and I think there is a real interest in our people to be a caring and responsible nation.

To this end, I suggest these two themes can be a common meeting ground for all New Zealanders and might be the basis of the *tangata whenua* of the new Aotearoa-New Zealand. My thought is that *tangata whenua* might be a vision for humanity in which we all may share and participate in, regardless of ethnicity, culture, gender and religion. Creating and maintaining quality relationships between ourselves, New Zealanders old and new, is critically important as is sustainable relationships with our natural world. These are issues of the highest importance and my suggestion is that *tangata whenua* might be an Aotearoa-New Zealand cultural movement and vehicle designed to uphold these ideals and address these challenges.

There will be some Māori who will not be pleased with this proposal asserting that such a suggestion could undermine legitimate iwi and Māori rights. It is not my intention to undermine these rights at all – indeed we may not be able to move in this direction if Māori feel their rights endangered. I would like to challenge us Māori, however, to deeply engage in what it means to be tangata whenua - and not tangata whenua of yesterday but tangata whenua of tomorrow as well. I challenge us with the questions, can we really say that we ‘people of the land’ now? Are we not spoiling the earth and her resources just like everybody else? There is much more for us to discuss here.

To be tangata whenua of tomorrow, I suggest, will require us Māori to engage deeply with our language, history, heritage, identity and knowledge together with a desire to create anew - finding new and creative expressions of being tangata whenua in our world today. And as we increase in our confidence as tangata whenua, I feel that we will become less anxious about regarding other New Zealanders as tangata whenua too. Indeed, we may seek their help to grow this way of being a New Zealander.

For non-Māori New Zealanders, particularly Pākehā, being tangata whenua will entail a deep engagement with our past, particularly its relationship with and expression in these islands and then an ongoing ritualising of these relationships.

Pākehā culture has overlooked the importance of ritualising our sense of place and connection with these islands. This new valuing will lead to a deeper sense of being ‘people of the land’.

Ultimately, to be tangata whenua will require a fundamental consideration of relationships between people and between people and our natural world. We need to devise new ways by which to respect difference and diversity whilst participating in a whole called Aotearoa-New Zealand. We also need to create sustainable and mutually nourishing relationships with the natural world.

One way of doing this is by fundamentally engaging our Pacific identity. We live in a ‘global’ world where the centre of gravity is to be found where one’s foot falls. We are, therefore, an island people, an island nation and our cousins in the Pacific, particularly the Polynesian Pacific, may well offer us guidance in reawakening and constructing a truly Pacific inspired identity in the Aotearoa-New Zealand of tomorrow. To be tangata whenua is to look to the *whenua*, the land, to inspire us as to what it means to be *tangata*, human. Our land is a Pacific land, our people are Pacific Islanders.

The most critical sets of issues facing humankind today relate to the challenge to create and maintain harmonious relations between peoples, and between people and the natural world. I hope that *tangata whenua* might be a distinctively Aotearoa-New Zealand ‘way’ or ‘vehicle’ by which these challenges might be addressed in the Aotearoa-New Zealand of tomorrow.

Kia ora anō tātou katoa.

An Additional Note about the Treaty of Waitangi

In advocating for a new identity ‘post-settlement’ of historical Treaty of Waitangi claims, it might be helpful to offer some thoughts on the Treaty. In my view, the Treaty was never designed as an instrument for the alleviation of grievance. Rather its purpose was more forward looking, guaranteeing and entrenching certain rights to those representing ‘tino rangatiratanga’ and establishing new rights for those representing ‘kāwanatanga’. I do not believe that my ancestors would have signed the Treaty if they truly believed that their *rangatiratanga* was soon to be seriously compromised and undermined. Rather I think they saw the Treaty as a way of entrenching their position as well as introducing some order into relationships with the newly arrived Pākehā of the time.

As we know, they did indeed come into serious conflict and their rangatiratanga was deeply compromised. Once this took place, the Treaty became entrapped in a conflict between Māori and the Crown, Māori and Pākehā, as Māori naturally appealed to the Treaty of Waitangi both to articulate grievances and to seek compensation. This began in the middle of the 19th century and continues today. Hence, it is possible to say that we have been robbed of the potential of the Treaty by our experiences and trauma of 19th and 20th century colonisation.

A second concern relates to what might be called the ‘ethnicisation’ of the Treaty. On many occasions the partners to the Treaty are referred to as Māori and Pākehā whereas the partners are the British Crown and those iwi and hapū whom we have subsequently grouped and labelled as ‘Māori’. But this may not have been and may not be appropriate⁸. For example, it is not too much to suggest that those iwi that were in conflict with my ancestors at the beginning of the 19th century (and remained so in 1840) would be quite unhappy to be lumped into a group called ‘Māori’, a group which included my ancestors! I think conflicting rangatira of the time signed the Treaty not so much that they felt that they were all ‘Māori’ but rather they believed that the Treaty recognised their *rangatiratanga*.

Colonisation and its outcomes entrenched the Māori/Pākehā paradigm into our thinking about the Treaty. Thus ethnicity contests arose rather than encounters between identities which are more ‘constitutional’ in nature. The people of Ngā Puhi, for example, have been consistent in their view that the Treaty created a relationship between them and the British Crown *first*, prior to any relationship with the New Zealand Government. This idea is held in numerous other iwi as well. Hence, my preference is to use identities communicating tino rangatiratanga on the one hand and kāwanatanga on the other. I prefer to think about the Treaty as a relationship between tino rangatiratanga and kāwanatanga as I find these terms more meaningful than Māori and Pākehā.

⁸ We can note that the word ‘Māori’ is used in the Treaty.

With respect to moving forward, once again I hope that with the settlement of Treaty of Waitangi claims we can evolve our thinking about the Treaty. Before the settlement of a claim, we regard the Treaty as an instrument for the alleviation of grievance – and this will continue for some time yet. After settlements, however, I hope that we can relate to the Treaty more in the light of its original creative intention. I hope that we can begin to relate to the Treaty as a creative intersection between tino rangatiratanga and kāwanatanga rather than as a competing and traumatised relationship such as we have been accustomed to. This will entail liberating tino rangatiratanga and kāwanatanga out of a constricting ethnic and cultural paradigm.

I think we have a long way to go yet to fully realise the potential of the Treaty of Waitangi. As I have suggested, we have been robbed of the potential reality of the Treaty by our colonial history. In thinking about the ‘fundamentals’ of an Aotearoa-New Zealand of tomorrow, the Treaty will offer guidance and a source for these fundamentals if it is seen in the creative light such as I have described. To move forward and prepare a written constitution for Aotearoa-New Zealand without due recognition of the Treaty of Waitangi would be perilous and inadvisable.

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