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Contested Realities: Race, Gender and Public Policy in Aotearoa/New Zealand

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Mihi/Introduction

Identity, both personal and collective, is formed in the material reality in which we live. Our gendered identities determine to a large degree the way that we see ourselves and are seen. Similarly, our class location is important to these same perceptions. Ethnicity is another layer upon this, and some ethnic identities produce a far greater and more pronounced reaction than others. The Maori experience of colonization and the contemporary reality of marginalization and deprivation in everyday life mean that ethnic identity in Aotearoa/New Zealand is a site of struggle and resistance. There is no single Maori experience. We do not all suffer the same burdens or enjoy the same privileges. Though there is a strong sense of our connectedness, of our belonging to each other by descent and by the land and of sharing a common history, our experience of being Maori is inflected in a myriad of ways. If we understand social policy to be those "actions which affect the well-being of members of society through shaping the distribution of and access to goods and resources in that society" and note that by this process "some groups and individuals will be advantaged and other disadvantaged" (Cheyne et al. 1999:2-3), we understand how social policy influences and moulds these experiences.

To say that I am a Maori woman, which I do, is not to make a claim that is free from ambiguity. Maori, as an ethnic classification is understood in a variety of ways by a variety of actors. Self-perception is an important aspect of identity politics but it may not be the primary one, the perceptions of others may have far greater implications on 'who' you are.

Ambiguity and Identity

I have been asked many times why I self-identify as Maori, the underlying thrust of the inquiry being less posed as an inquiry of interest but rather offered as a challenge[1]; that is, a questioning of the authenticity of my claim. My authenticity is questioned due to the simplest of things: colour. Being of fair complexion means that for many my persistence to identify as Maori is seen by some (non-Maori) as a form of romantic stubbornness while for others it is seen as merely perverse. The issue of 'passing'; that is, of being a 'person of colour' but identifying with the dominant ethnic group, has generated both scholarly and popular works in the United States of America. Two recent publications (Ginsberg, 1996; Sollons, 1997) look closely at the constructive features and

[1] It is interesting to note that those who offer this challenge have changed over time, when I was younger it was mostly Pakeha New Zealanders, as I have grown older it has mostly been non-New Zealanders and mostly in foreign countries at that. I have never been asked by Maori but this is not to say that they have not challenged my authenticity in other ways. The change in who asks the question over the years reflects the changing political status of things Maori.

fictive narratives of identity making, particularly in regard to ethnic hybridity, and the ability to pass as white. Given the far greater level of intermarriage in Aotearoa/New Zealand and a less heightened and hysterical regard to race[2] the issue of 'passing' has not been as pertinent to our ethnic discourse. However, as I have already noted it does not go unquestioned. The question pertaining to my ethnicity could as easily be "why say you are Maori if you don't have to?"(McIntosh 2001:142)

This form of questioning contains an interesting policy dimension. As a young person it was asked of me within the context of assimilation. If I could pass as Pakeha[3] then why persist in being seen as Maori if this serves only to act as an obstacle to my

becoming a 'full, contributing member of New Zealand society'. A call for all to be 'New Zealanders' was a call for Maori to embrace Pakeha values and societal structures while carving out a space of inclusion for (non-threatening) aspects of Maori culture. To sing Pokarekare Ana[4], even if you did not know what the words meant, was seen, particularly by Pakeha, as signifying the unity and particularity of our joint cultures. It was portrayed as a token of the way 'we' embraced each other's culture. Actually, it only signified tokenism. The question posed in this context reflected a belief that New Zealand had the best race relations in the world. As Ranginui Walker has noted "the ideology of one people functioned to hide the relationship of Pakeha dominance and Maori subjection" (Walker 1990:186). Later I was asked the same question laced with suspicion and cynicism. Framed within a heightened awareness of historical grievances and Maori claims my self-definition as Maori was thought by some to be about accessing resources and privileges reserved for Maori. Calls for us to be one people now come from those who believe that Maori have preferential treatment at the expense of non-Maori. For many Pakeha any initiative that seeks to redress Maori disadvantage is seen to be at the great cost of "ordinary" (read non-Maori) New Zealanders. This has meant that most state social policy has steered away from using "affirmative action" rhetoric, instead speaking of targeting Maori "problems" rather than redressing systemic disadvantage. The stigmatizing of the Maori condition leads to further individual and collective degradation. The different ways my Maoriness has been perceived over time mirrors current political and policy debates. The way I understand myself as Maori may have little in common with ways that non-Maori understand me.

This raises a number of issues, particularly in regard to notions of homogenous ethnic identity. While not disputing the idea that to be Maori means that one would recognize or acknowledge the significance of certain things (for example, whakapapa, iwi/hapu affiliations, te reo, kawa, tikanga)[5] it does not mean that to identify as Maori

means that one is absorbed into an undifferentiated ethnic mass. My identity as Maori is inextricably caught up with my working class background and the fact that I am a woman. Different

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[2] This is of course not to argue that race and colour do not matter in Aotearoa/New Zealand. They do and they have always mattered. The history of Aotearoa/New Zealand since European settlement is one that is shaped and informed by discrimination and prejudice. Legislation has at times blatantly discriminated against Maori but our experience can be compared with difficulty to the legal processes of segregation and racism that occurred in South Africa or the United States of America. While these countries had segregation embedded in their systems in both a legal, political and cultural sense, in Aotearoa/New Zealand we have relied far more heavily on what Ranginui Walker has termed 'the informal social divide between Maori and Pakeha (1996: 9).

[3] The meaning of the word Pakeha is still contested and can change in a variety of contexts, however, generally it refers to descendants of immigrants from Europe who has been in Aotearoa/New Zealand for several generations.

[4] A popular Maori love song.

[5] Whakapapa refers to genealogy and descent; iwi refers to tribal group; hapu to sub-tribe or clan within an iwi; te reo Maori refers to the Maori language; kawa to protocols and customs and tikanga to appropriate cultural practices.

aspects of my identity provide the shades and contours in creating the multiple realities which are the self. The Maori who I grew up with, who lived in the same street shared similar struggles; struggles as likely to be connected to the inequalities inherent in a capitalistic system as to struggles directly connected with being Maori. Nearly all the Maori men in the street (and my Pakeha father) worked at one of the three abattoirs ('freezing works') in the Otahuhu - Penrose area of South Auckland. This too is a part of *my* experience of being Maori. While other 'common' Maori experiences may have been outside of my sphere of knowledge, the ones I had are a part of my authentic experience of being Maori. To be Maori is to be part of a collective but heterogeneous identity, one that is enduring but ever in a state of flux.

Maori Identity

The history of Maori struggle and its implications in the formation of Maori identity has already been well documented (Walker, 1990; Greenland, 1991; Poata-Smith, 1996). Hauraki Greenland (1991) explores the way that Maori identity has developed over the last thirty years. In this way we can map how over different periods, and due to specific political and economic conditions often underscored by changes in policy direction, identity has been more closely linked to certain aspects than others. Shifts of emphasis do not go uncontested by Maori. Coates and McHugh's (1998) collection canvasses the wide number of views held in the way that Maori identity is understood. In the light of moves towards compensation and new policy directions from government for Maori, the issue of Maori identity becomes even more salient. For example, urban Maori who have become disenfranchised or disaffiliated from traditional tribal ties seek new ways of constituting a Maori collective identity that emphasizes ethnicity and class interests over tribal allegiances. Apirana Mahuika acknowledges that Maori differ on this issue and sees that discussion as healthy and to be expected. While he believes there are legitimate claims to tying identity to ethnicity over tribal ties in a few selective cases, he argues that ethnicity 'cannot usurp the mana[6] and role of whakapapa as the determinant of who one is affiliated to, and who are one's kind based on descent and blood' (1998: 218). Similarly in the same collection Mason Durie, Roger Maaka, Joe Williams and others offer commentaries that illustrate the richness and diversity of issues pertaining to what is at the heart of Maori identity

Linda Tuhiwai Smith looks at the way Maori women are reasserting their own specific identities. Europeans of the nineteenth century depicted, objectified and represented Maori and other indigenous women in ways that have "left a legacy of marginalization within indigenous society as much as within the colonizing society" (Smith 1999:46). Many modern Maori organizations that are perceived as traditional indigenous structures are colonial constructs put in place for purposes of colonial rule and administration. These organizations have often privileged certain groups or families over others, in many cases making positions of power and decision-making an exclusively male domain. In an attempt to reclaim and acknowledge Mana Wahine Maori[7] a group of prominent Maori women have made a claim to the Waitangi Tribunal which hears petitions by Maori relating to the contraventions of the Treaty of Waitangi.[8]

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[6] Mana cannot adequately be translated but it speaks to spiritual power and authority.

[7] Mana Wahine Maori is the spiritual power and authority of Maori women. Mana wahine is also used to denote Maori forms of feminism.

[8] The Treaty of Waitangi was signed between Maori chiefs and the British Crown in 1840. The Treaty had three provisions and two versions one in English and the other in Maori. The competing interpretations that exist within and between the two versions have "played havoc with politics and policy" (Fleras & Spoonley

Before this Tribunal, the Maori women taking the claim are having to establish and argue, using historical texts, research and oral testimonies, that the Crown has ignored the *rangatiratanga*, or chiefly or sovereign status, of Maori women. To argue this, the claimants are compelled to prove that Maori

women were as much *rangatira* (chiefs) as Maori men. At a very simple level the 'problem' is a problem of translation. *Rangitiratanga* has generally been interpreted in English as meaning chieftainship and sovereignty, which in colonialism was a 'male thing'. (Smith 1999:46)

As Maori lawyer Annette Sykes argues, the implications of believing that Maori power regimes replicated nineteenth century European ones has led to a loss of status for Maori women in their own communities, effectively devaluing women and their roles and denying them their rightful voice in helping determine their communities futures.

The essence of the claim is to bring to the forefront of the current Treaty jurisprudence, the need to look at notions of governance in Aotearoa and the exclusionary practices that exist, which inhibit and prevent participation by Maori women in tribal models for self-determination, that have been erected under New Zealand legislation, and the erosion that this itself has had on Te Mana Wahine in Te Ao Maori [the mana of women in the Maori world]. (Sykes cited in Smith 1999:156.) Reclaiming, reasserting and in some cases reconfiguring Maori identities and Maori relationships has become a crucial part of Maori personal and collective politics.

Radical identities

My previous discussion on personal ethnic identity formation was an attempt to portray identity as a 'process rather than a result' (McHugh, P. 1998:149). Since the 1960s, and particularly the 1970s the most common face of Maori presented to the non-Maori audience has been the 'radical' one. For the most part it was a very specific face: young, urban and angry, and it was not only Pakeha that withdrew from it. Many Maori elders were disturbed by the path these young people chose to air their grievances. But as the assault continued there was a need to try and determine the type of people the 'radicals' were and to ascertain the nature and legitimacy of the grievances they had. Hauraki Greenland notes (1991: 91) that radicals were typically criticized as 'false Maori who adopted Pakeha techniques to protest Maori take (causes)'. This drew on the stereotype of the radical as being a disaffiliated, disrespectful, shiftless individual who had ceased to listen to the counsel of those who knew better and was unable to take responsibility for his/her own obvious shortfalls. However, Maori protest did not exist within a vacuum but should be seen within a global context of protest movements. Civil rights movements, Black Power, Women's Liberation, student political activism, the Vietnam War, the rise of the New Left and the influence of Marxism and feminism all created a greater awareness of conditions of oppression, conflict and the desire for redress. The level of discontent, the dire picture that was portrayed of the living conditions of Maori and their demands for revolutionary change were disconcerting to many. The "best race relations in the world" myth was shattered as

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1999:9). The Waitangi Tribunal was established by parliament under The Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975. This Act establishes the Tribunal that is charged with hearing claims by Maori that the Crown has contravened the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. At first this applied only to contemporary grievances. The Tribunal was able to recommend action by the Crown but the recommendations were not binding. The Act was amended in 1985 in order to extend the scope of claims back to 1840 (Smith 1999:57) There is a vast literature on the Treaty of Waitangi (see for example, Walker 1990, 1996; Cox 1993; Durie 1995, 1998;Kelsey 1996, Graham 1997, Fleras & Spoonley 1999).

young Maori, men and women, exposed the level of oppression and deprivation that existed in Maori life. An international focus on inequities coupled with the consequences of urbanization that led Maori and Pakeha to face each other in everyday life, sometimes for the first time, meant that Maori began strongly articulating their struggle for self-determination.[9] That articulation has been continued in a range of voices.

Location

As tangata whenua (people of the land, indigenous people), Maori find their social location in New Zealand society to be a highly contested one. The struggle to achieve Tino Rangitiratanga (self-determination, sovereignty) is seen as primary to most Maori but both its achievement and interpretation are areas of some dispute. Social policy in New Zealand of the last thirty years has been informed by these debates to a certain degree and the meeting Treaty of Waitangi obligations has become a central objective of policy outcomes.[10] Though the present government has clearly articulated its intention to uphold the Treaty of Waitangi and to "close the gaps" between Maori and non-Maori achievement in education, labour force involvement, housing and health, this intention has been met with a certain cynicism by many Maori and strident opposition from other sectors of New Zealand society. Many Maori doubt that there is sufficient political consciousness and will to truly address the causes for the ongoing social and economic disparities while some non-Maori strongly resent policies and programmes that they perceive as privileging Maori over other "ordinary" New Zealanders. Criticism of the Treaty itself is often a broad canvas to the belief that the treaty is used as a cloak for "dubious Maori activities, from violent protests and civil disobedience on the one hand, to illegal plunder of customary resources on the other" (Fleras & Spoonley 1999:16) For others, Treaty entitlements are compared to apartheid strategies where privileges are given out on the basis of 'race' (ibid). For still others, there is a sense that the Treaty is being used to fool successive governments into making "extravagant payments in perpetuity to Maori" because on ill-founded sentiments of guilt based on actions in the past (ibid). Against this backdrop we find that all things Maori are political.

That there exist major cleavages between Maori and non-Maori is clear. Extensive research on the Maori condition shows that Maori suffer disadvantage from birth. The Maori infant is more likely to die than the non-Maori infant. The Maori child is less likely to participate in early childhood education. Though there is little significant data on performance at primary school level we know that young Maori are leaving secondary school with much lower levels of qualifications than non-Maori. Maori are much more likely to be suspended and expelled from school which increases the likelihood that Maori will achieve lower educational achievement and be more significantly involved in youth offending. Maori unemployment rates are considerably higher than for non-Maori and Maori income is considerably lower. Maori are more likely to require government assistance or be totally dependant on a government benefit. Many Maori live in inadequate housing and suffer a poorer mental and

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[9] The struggle itself was not new only the forms that it undertook. Walker's *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End*, (1990) provides evidence and analysis of the Maori struggle for social justice, equality and self-determination since European contact.

[10] The Treaty and its importance in contemporary Maori lives is not something that can be taken for granted. Not long after it was signed it was dismissed as a "nullity" by colonial governments. In the space of the last 30 years the treaty has gone from a document of historical interest to a "blueprint for a bicultural New Zealand and from a 'fraud' to a framework for living together with our differences" (Fleras & Spoonley 1999:14).

physical health status than non-Maori. Disadvantage and difference are marked in Maori participation in the criminal justice system. Maori are over-represented both as victims and offenders (Te Puni Kokiri 2000: 6-7). For too many people unemployment, illness, psychiatric conditions, poverty and prison life is what being Maori is. Though the position and legitimacy of Maori culture within New Zealand society has been greatly enhanced since the 1970s, with greater respect afforded to our tikanga and te reo, the Maori renaissance has been far less successful in addressing the many other social inequities that Maori face in their daily lives. There is a danger of speaking of a culture as a whole way of life outside its own political economic history (Webster 1998). While culture is obviously vitally important to physical and spiritual well-being, for this to be fully achieved we need to ensure that day-to-day struggles and the solutions to them are met with the same determination that we give cultural considerations. There is the need to not only fight for the preservation and vitality of culture but also to assure equity in regards to economic and political standing and the accessing of resources, power and knowledge.

Intersections

Race[11], gender, sexuality and class are interlocking: each of these factors impacts on the way the other is experienced. Maori attempts to address issues of their own oppression have been multifarious. There is a tendency to privilege cultural discourses that stress the differences between Maori and Pakeha cultural values and to ignore the way that oppressive relationships are inflected by gender and class. Some commentators have noted the need to explore how attempts to tackle forms of racial discrimination may benefit different sectors of Maori more than others and in some cases continue to perpetuate forms of gender oppression. Maori women are at the forefront of the struggle to better the social position of their communities, yet they continue to bear the greatest burden of social, political and economic oppression. Maori women continue to critically examine their position both as Maori and women in New Zealand society. This has led them to, amongst other things, challenge Pakeha feminists and to question their own allegiances. This challenge is passionately articulated in Donna Awatere's (1984) *Maori Sovereignty*.[12] Written first as a series of articles for a New Zealand feminist magazine it is a blistering attack against racism, sexism and capitalism. In it she is sharply critical of the feminist movement, the trade unions and the left, positing that their inability to truly align with the Maori sovereignty cause is because in the end "all white people are captives of their own culture"(Awatere 1984:9).

Her section on the feminist movement first looks at what Maori women have achieved. She argues that the Maori Women's Welfare League[13] is the strongest indigenous women's movement in