Revisioning New Zealandness: A Framework for Discussion

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Introduction

The following paper introduces some initial thoughts on how we might revision New Zealandness, that is revisioning who we are as New Zealanders.

In this paper, I posit a framework that demands the replacement of a bicultural politics with an intercultural relational politics within a postcolonial Aotearoa/New Zealand condition and supported by cultural citizenship with Maori as the recognised ‘first citizens’. I conclude by endorsing a New Zealand Cultural Studies Project that serves as an ongoing critical consciousness for New Zealandness

Constructing New Zealandness

New Zealandness, expressed here as the New Zealand subject, is not something that is static, monolithic or an absolute. The New Zealand subject has been politically and socially constructed through the historical conjunctures of time and space. It has gone through many evolutions and metamorphoses.

New Zealand is a colonial construct. Prior to the arrival of the European, the identity of the aboriginal inhabitants was derived from multiple tribal groupings and the natural environment. There was no ‘Maori politic’ or dominant ‘Maori hegemony’.

The New Zealand subject during the initial period of contact in the first half of the nineteenth century was still centered around the dominant populous of the aboriginal inhabitants, albeit objectified within imperial discourse as the ‘Other’, the ‘Native’. Confronted by the stark contrast of the culture of the ‘newcomers’, the aboriginal inhabitants began to define themselves around their common ethnicity as ‘Maori’ in relation to the Tauiwi or Pakeha. (Durie 1998)
The period after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi 1840 brought forth rapid colonisation and increased immigration from the ‘Mother Country’, Britain. Maori were reduced to a minority, demoralised and disillusioned by the colonial violence. The New Zealand subject was now centered around the immigrant male settler, who while domiciled on the other side of the world, looked ‘home’ to Britain for his identity. (Paul Spoonley 1996) Maori were still scattered around but were expected to ‘die out’ or be assimilated as ‘brown-skinned Englishmen’. Despite attempts to reassert their subjectivity and the Treaty of Waitangi provision that Maori would enjoy all the rights and privileges as British subjects, Maori remained more or less marginalised. (Walker 1990) While the preferred immigrant was to be of British or ‘non-British ‘white’ stock a small number of Chinese and Indians were permitted to immigrate. However these groups existed on the periphery amongst anti-Asian hysteria and were mostly denied the full citizenship status of the New Zealand subject. (Paul Spoonley 1996)

The period after World War II witnessed a significant shift in the evolution of the New Zealand subject. The urban shift of 75 per cent of the Maori population increased Maori ‘knowledge of metropolitan society and its techniques of domination and political control.’ (Walker 1996, 83) This coupled with a climate of international civil rights and colonial independence fuelled a resurgence of Maori claims for justice for past grievances and greater self-determination articulated through the rhetoric of ‘Tino Rangatiratanga’. These claims were supported by some who assumed a ‘Pakeha’ postcolonial specific New Zealand identity. Other ‘New Zealanders’ actively opposed such claims. Feminist discourses in the 1960s questioned not only the patriarchal character of the New Zealand subject, but also the colonial and class makeup of its own discourses. (Du Plessis and Alice 1998) By the mid-1960s Pacific Islanders were being recruited in increasing numbers to join the unskilled, semi-skilled Maori workforce. By the mid-1987, within the prevailing regime of economic management and efficiency, a ‘deracialised’ immigration policy looked to the ‘business migrant’, including those from Asia. Further, the economic and political entry of Britain into the ECU and a consequential shift to Asia in the search for markets, compelled the New Zealand subject to rethink her national identity from one of British to one located within the Asian-Pacific setting.

What is quite apparent from the above description is that New Zealandness is heterogeneous in character with a multiplicity of identities, interests and aspirations that are in a state of contradiction, stress and negotiation for positionality. The identification of the mutability of New Zealandness, politically and socially (re)constructed by
historical formations of hegemony illustrates that it is not natural, fixed, secure or ahistorical. It further illustrates the immense diversity and differentiation that must be accommodated.

A Shift from the Colonial to Postcolonial New Zealandness

A revisioned New Zealandness must reject its location within a colonial discourse. (Parry 1996) Such a discourse presents cultural relations in New Zealand through an absolute dichotomy between Maori (colonised) and Pakeha (coloniser) with an opposition of interests. In such a discourse Maori are forced into the role of a:

homogeneous, monolithic, and dominated faction with no recourse to action except to oppose an equally homogeneous, monolithic and dominating center of power. There is no middle ground for compromise or negotiation. (Lo 1993)

The conclusion that Pakeha are the ‘enemy’ of Maori and vice versa gives cause for a pessimistic and polemic notion of New Zealandness.

I believe what is required is a shift to a postcolonial discourse which recognises complex differentiations within cultural relations and the uneven institutionalisation of the dominant Pakeha hegemony. (Ashcroft 1995; Xie 1997; Gandhi 1998) The ‘post’ does not mean ‘after’ but refers to a continuous engagement with the effects of colonial occupation (Thomas 1993, 8 cited in (Spoonley 1995, 97) that addresses the key projects of agency, subjectivity and the essentialising forces of colonialism.

The broad character of a postcolonial critique allows for wide-ranging investigations into power relations in various contexts, including class and gender. This is important where a revisioned New Zealandness must also acknowledge the broad range of New Zealand experiences and global forces that influences, shapes and challenges its fabrication. It should be remembered that these mediums do not exist an isolation and are not mutually exclusive. They are engaged in Gramscian (Gramsci 1971) terms, ‘wars of position’, the struggle for positionality within the discourse of New Zealandness.

In advocating a postcolonial position I am not attempting to diminish the fact that New Zealand was a creation of colonial violence with the specific agenda of destroying the linguistic and cultural difference of the Maori way of life. Nor do I argue a liberation
from the influence of that colonial violence. I am aware of this form of criticism of postcolonial theory, namely that it glosses over the historical and material conditions of the colonised. Our postcolonialism must acknowledge the structure of power relations and its inequalities. However it must interrogate and deconstruct the complexities, not around the binary and polarised positions, but within the more complicated dynamics of agency and subjectivities that give hope for a more optimistic inclusionary inter-cultural politics of hybridity, relationships and possibility. I believe that it is to these dynamics that we must give our attention to.

**Shifting from Bi-cultural to Inter-cultural Politics**

Our revisioned framework for New Zealandness requires a fundamental shift in approach to the shape our cultural politics should take. Our understanding of cultural politics is informed by the definition as advanced by Jordan and Weedon who maintain that such politics:

“fundamentally determine the meanings of social practices and moreover, which groups and individuals have the power to define these meanings. Cultural politics are also concerned with subjectivity and identity, since cultural plays a central role in constituting our sense of ourselves … The forms of subjectivity that we inhabit play a crucial part in determining whether we accept or contest existing power relations. Moreover, for marginalised and oppressed groups, the construction of new and resistant identities is a key dimension of a wider political struggle to transform society.” (Jordan and Weedon 1995, 5-6).

Prior to the introduction of the ‘bi’ in the cultural politics of Aotearoa/New Zealand, the notion of the ‘multi’ found favour among politicians and policy makers. During the 1970s, social policy reform in education, social welfare and Maori affairs were being implemented using multicultural rhetoric, while in the 1980s immigration policy took on a multicultural stance. (Conciliator 1982; Paul Spoonley 1996, 249)

However, typical of indigenous opinion in other comparative settler societies such as Australia and Canada, Maori began to question the appropriateness of multicultural strategies to their own specific indigenous claims. Multiculturalism became viewed as a strategy concerned with immigrants and their descendents. Maori resented their inclusion within multicultural struggles that engaged them as merely one of a multitude of ethnic
groups thereby neglecting to recognise their indigenous status and actualise the principle of partnership implicit in the Treaty of Waitangi. Instead, Maori successfully argued the need for a refocussing of the state and nation’s cultural politics around the rhetoric of the bicultural as the initial and evolutionary step towards a successful multiculturalism. (Welfare 1986; Walker 1990; Paul Spoonley 1996) The state sector was at the vanguard of this refocus. Biculturalism became official government policy through the State Sector Act 1998 with ambiguous instructions requiring structural and human resource reorganisation. The rhetoric of biculturalism was not limited to the state sector as others sought to consider how it might be infused into other contexts. (Vasil 1988; Ritchie 1992; Sharp 1995) This has resulted in a highly contested, variable and contextual debate in the search for a definition of what is considered to be bicultural and the appropriate form for its manifestations. (Vasil 1988; Mulgan 1989; Durie 1993; Sharp 1995) I do not propose to explore in this paper the range of that debate but merely acknowledge its existence. The proposition and focus of this paper is quite clear. Biculturalism is fundamentally problematic and therefore inappropriate for our framework for revisioning New Zealandness!

It is problematic in the sense that the rhetoric of biculturalism privileges a cultural politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand concentrated and contested around the antagonistic binarism of Maori (the colonised) or Pakeha (the coloniser), oversimplified and essentialised. I am not saying that the bicultural approach has not produced some benefits for the New Zealand subject, although the degree of benefit is a moot point. It has supported a revitalisation of the Maori language, greater Maori political representation, the resurgence of ‘tribes’ through community based social programmes and the Treaty of Waitangi Settlement process. (Walker 1990; Durie 1998) However I believe that these ‘developments’ can be accommodated in a reimagined and redesigned cultural politics. Our principal concern must be to avoid the dichotomous conceptual orientation of ‘us/them’, ‘either/or’ imbued in the ‘bi’ and whose conclusion is an adversarial polarity premised on exclusivity where New Zealanders are forced to declare its loyalties. Neither Pakeha nor Maori or any other groups in Aotearoa/New Zealand are ‘an homogenous group that confront each other in a unified and hostile manner’. (Te Ahu Poata-Smith 1996, 113)

In dismissing the ‘bi’ form of culturalism I am not advocating a return to a monoculturalist assimilationist agenda that has typified New Zealand’s colonial past and whose traces are still active in our postcolonial dynamic. (Armitage 1995) The rhetoric
of ‘One New Zealand’ and ‘Can’t We All Just Be New Zealanders’ is radically flawed where it speaks to a fictive homogeneity of New Zealand subjectivity. It is completely unacceptable where it requires the acculturation of minority groups within the dominant Pakeha hegemony. The ‘Other’ will not accept a culturally conformist and assimilationist agenda.

Our framework must recognise and accommodate the plurality of differences and visions that are evident. That includes not just Maori and Pakeha but all ethnic within New Zealand. Further, if we are revisioning a progressive New Zealandness then this necessitates the interrogation of not only difference but also affinities that is premised on the principle of ‘inclusion’. Thus, what I am proposing is a cultural politics that speaks to the ‘multi’ but looks to the crossroads of the ‘inter’, that is interculturalism.

I prefer the rhetoric of the ‘inter’ because it privileges the criss-crossing, the overlapping, the hybridity, the in-betweeness of cultures. It is at the ‘cutting edge of translation and negotiation of cultures’ (Bhabha 1994) and ‘transculturation’ (Linsay 1997). It promotes the search for common ground within the dynamic of exchange, interchange and inclusion. It is particularly appropriate where the borderland zones between Maori, Pakeha and other groups within our revisioned New Zealandness will only become increasingly blurred as we see ‘continued encounters across cultural boundaries, of the confluence of more than one cultural tradition, of the negotiations of dominant and subordinate positions’. (Hall 1996, 471) I might add that hybrid identities or ‘interculturalists’ (Tully 1995) positioned in-between, and who straddle, the conjuncture of cultures will become more prominent in a postcolonial environment of increased miscegenation. These subjectivities will challenge the validity and authenticity of any essentialist cultural identity.

Indeed inter-cultural politics must endeavour to avoid essentialism. Diana Fuss says that essentialism:

is most commonly understood as a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the ‘whatness’ of a given entity. Importantly, essentialism is typically defined in opposition to difference. The opposition is a helpful one in that it reminds us that a complex system of cultural, social, psychical, and historical differences, and not a set of pre-existent human essences, position and constitute the subject. However, the binary articulation of essentialism and difference can
also be restrictive, even obfuscating, in that it allows us to ignore or deny the differences within essentialism. (Fuss 1991, xi-xii)

In a specifically Aotearoa/New Zealand context, we find essentialism in the reduction of the indigenous people to an essential idea of what it means to be Maori, namely a native savage, albeit of a noble character, that required Christian conversion and civilization thus simplifying and facilitating the colonial project. We also find the reduction of what it means to be Pakeha, namely ‘innately materialistic, exploitative and aggressive’ (Te Ahu Poata-Smith 1996) thus simplifying and facilitating the de-colonisation project.

Nevertheless, I admit that ‘essentialist frameworks’ have been and will continue to be employed as a strategic movement in creating certain spaces of resistance against immutable colonial elements, and as an immediate and simplified solution to making sense of cultural representations and practices. However, we must view these frameworks as ‘strategic essentialism, a temporary moment’. (Spivak 1987) We must not solidify this strategic essentialism so that it is naturalised and dehistoricised. Hall [1996 #654] reminds us that we must ask ourselves ‘whether we are any longer in that moment, whether that is still a sufficient basis for the strategies of new interventions’.

It is important that this inter-cultural politics is at the center and not on the periphery of any debate concerning reimagining New Zealandness. In fact, a key project for form of cultural politics must be to de-center the dominant Pakeha hegemony. It is for this reason that I am not comfortable with the discourse of ‘mainstreaming’ evident in the current arrangements of the public service in their quest to be responsive to Maori. (Parata 1994; Kokiri 1997) The dominant Pakeha hegemony retains its centered position. The Pakeha subject remains the central reference point in the power ploys of bicultural policy. Inter-cultural politics must work towards centering the hegemony of the complex and plural New Zealand subject. Inter-cultural politics must also adopt a relational approach.

They are Not Going Away! - Towards a Relational Inter-cultural Politics

New Zealand’s heterogeneity needs to be accepted as a contemporary reality in a dynamic state. In spite of the wishes of some, Pakeha are not going to go away, yet neither are Maori. Further, the multiplicity of other ethnic groups that make-up New Zealand’s citizenry are also not going to ‘go home’. If they (whoever they might be as some of us
hybrids are they) are not going to go away or ‘home’, then I believe there are only two options available to us. We can either choose to continue to pursue a pointless oppositional and adversarial cultural politics or we can move towards developing a relational inter-cultural politics in which ‘neither self nor other, we nor them, take precedence, but in which relational process serves as the productive source of social transformation’. (Gergen, 1993)

Identity is inherently relational. Each of us is constituted by the other; we cannot deliberate or decide without implicating otherness. We are Maori in relation to those who are Pakeha, who are Asian and so forth.

A relational inter-cultural politics must not fall into the trap of subscribing to binary constructions of cultural identity and representation which has typified the ‘manichean’ fabrications of imperial practices and processes. To internalise this polarising approach is to be complicit in its totalising and essentialising project where all is reduced to a set of basic dichotomies, Maori or Pakeha. New Zealandness must refuse a cultural politics built around the oppositional and antagonistic ‘or’ that only results in a regressive ‘cultural politics of polarity’. (Bhabha 1994) We must instead replace the ‘or’ with the coupler ‘and’ with its implicit notion of a dynamic and productive relational inter-cultural politics of possibility. (Hall 1996)

We must also desist with a cynical model of a cultural politics of blame that plays a ‘zero-sum game where we adopt an all or nothing approach, our model replacing their model, our identities in place of their identities’. (Hall 1996, 468). A relational approach will demand negotiation, collaboration, compromise and much sacrifice. It will take place on a non-level playing field, well policed and regulated by the dominant Pakeha hegemony with little space for maneuverability. There can be no illusion that it will be anything but hard work. Nevertheless, I don’t believe that the difficulties are insurmountable and that we can afford not to engage in this form of politics. It will demand creativity and strategic positioning producing gains and losses, advances and retreats at a painfully slow place. Such creative and strategic positioning might include the employment of a ‘cultural citizenship’.

Cultural Citizenship
This paper takes for granted the three types of rights, civil, political and social, suggested in T.H. Marshall’s classical analysis of citizenship in postwar Britain. (Marshall, 1994). I want to join those who have called for a new component, namely cultural rights (Kymlicka 1991; Tully 1995) that gives rise to the notion of a ‘cultural citizenship’ as an integral part of any citizenship politics.

This cultural citizenship must be shaped, embodied and articulated from the principles of the inter-cultural politics as already discussed. It must give recognition to the right to cultural diversity not only for the individual but also for the group. Collective cultural rights are therefore a central part of inter-culturalism. However, it should also promote the progressive search for elements of common cultural citizenship.

The primary goal of this cultural citizenship is about the participation and contribution of all groups as first-class citizens in the continual transformation of New Zealandness.

A cultural citizenship, within a settler society must recognise and actively promote the indigenous people, not only as first class citizens but also as the ‘first citizens’ . From such a unique position should derive special rights and duties for the indigenous people. Maori are therefore the first citizens of New Zealand. This satisfies that element of the bi-cultural politics that privileged Maori as the indigenous people and a partner to the Treaty of Waitangi.

**In Support of a New Zealand Cultural Studies**

In this paper I have drawn from the broad interdisciplinary and international discipline of Cultural Studies.(University of Birmingham. Dept. of Cultural Studies.; Grossberg 1992; Nelson, Grossberg et al. 1992; Bennett 1993; During 1993; Sardar 1997). A local New Zealand Cultural Studies project made an appearance in the 1980s:

“concerned with an emergent sense of identity, in both national terms and ethnic terms. It was also part of a break from a colonial and rural past, a break associated with an emergent biculturalism and the new prominence of the Treaty of Waitangi (1840) and issues of Maori sovereignty, with questions of gender and sexuality in a no longer masculine-dominated frontier society, and with the demise of the country's traditional egalitarianism and the rise of an entrepreneurial culture.” (Shuker 1993)
I believe such a project is vital for the ongoing revisioning of New Zealandness wherein it promotes the study and public debate of cultural questions and issues. Given that culture is inherently political, it must not be just an intellectual but also a political undertaking that endeavours to celebrate our achievements, challenge our deficiencies, and laments our missed opportunities. This project provides New Zealandness with a critical cultural consciousness ‘conceived as an activity concerned to offer a critical assessment of the functioning of particular cultural practices undertaken in the light of the particular circumstances of their deployment’. (Bennett 1993) A critical consciousness is a sign of maturity and development of a society.

In developing a critical consciousness, we must remember that dominant hegemonic traditions of New Zealandness are not fixed or ahistorical. We must seek, where necessary, continuous opportunities and possibilities through counter-hegemonic struggles for overturning, disrupting, or confounding the status of the authoritarian hegemony. We must challenge those traditions embedded in, and constituting, the authoritarian structures and ideological apparatuses. In fact it may be useful to conceive the New Zealandness as in a post-traditional dynamic ‘where traditions are not givens, they are instead, forced to declare themselves to justify themselves and re-invent themselves in the face of a multiplicity of alternative practices, mores and identities’. (Havemann 1997, 9) Havemann is not talking here of ‘the radical demise of tradition conceived in terms of movement between oppositions but the co-existence of the old with the new and indeed the construction of tradition’. (Havemann 1997, 9)

**Concluding Comment**

This paper represents thinking in progress and is an introductory presentation of raw ideas and approaches to revisioning New Zealandness. Clearly some ideas need continued development.

However, I think one position is clear for our project of revisioning New Zealandness and perhaps it is the key point to made. We can no longer accept a polemic and adversarial cultural politics. A revisioned and progressive New Zealandness must go beyond the binary of Maori or Pakeha and move towards an inter-cultural politics of hybridity, relationships and potentialities within a postcolonial reality!
Bibliography


Foreigners

_ It is used by Maori as a label to refer to all white Europeans.
_ I do not propose to examine this in any detail. It has been well recorded. See for example: (Simpson 1988; Walker 1990)
_ For a discussion of the patriarchal nature of colonial New Zealand see (Du Plessis and Alice 1998).
_ See the broad range of topics addressed in the (Ashcroft 1995)

There is the criticism of the discourse of culturalism as preserving the fundamental power differentials by masking the class and gender divisions with a gloss of ‘ethnic difference’. (Paul Spoonley 1996. 249)

The Maori language has only recently been recognised as an official language of New Zealand with the enactment of the Maori Language Act 1987. In the past, the Maori
language had been prohibited from being spoken in many schools. Assimilation of Maori was the preferred Maori Affairs policy up until the 1960s.

The notion of a bicultural public service as a desired goal seems to be more ambivalent today with the adoption of the mainstreaming approach and the rhetoric of policies that are ‘responsive to Maori’. See (O'Reilly 1991; Durie 1994; Boston 1996)

Abdul JanMohamed [1995 #525] argues that the western concept of the oriental is based on the ‘Manichean Allegory’, that is seeing the world as divided into mutually excluding opposites. If the west is ordered, rational, masculine, good, then the orient is chaotic, irrational, feminine, evil.

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