



## ***CULTURAL REVITALISATION AND THE MAKING OF IDENTITY WITHIN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND***

This paper is intended to contribute to a larger dissertation on *cultural revitalisation*. It examines the notion of *culture*, *Māori identity* and its *normalisation* as a distinguishing feature of an inclusive New Zealand identity. It looks at the conflation of culture with biology as a hangover of our early engagement with ideas of the superiority of British culture. Discussing contemporary examples it contends that it is not culture itself that requires revitalisation but the values that underpin culture.

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## INTRODUCTION

Post-colonialism is perhaps the sign of an increasing awareness that it is not feasible to extract a culture, a history, a language, an identity, from the wider, transforming currents of the increasingly cosmopolitan world. It is impossible to 'go home' again.<sup>1</sup>

Issues of culture and identity are, as with other settled societies, marked within New Zealand. Policies and programmes aimed at ensuring that Māori are secure, confident and expert in our own language and culture rely heavily on conditions of access, engagement, participation and knowledge. Alongside this is an awareness that the mana, control over, and trajectory of culture and tikanga is resilient. Part of this resilience is the capacity for growth, development, sustainability, quality and succession planning. The *normalisation* of Māori culture as a key feature of the national psyche is both required and contested if it is to retain the qualities ascribed to living an *authentic way of life*.

This paper is intended to contribute to a larger dissertation on *cultural revitalisation*. It examines the notion of *culture, Māori identity* and its *normalisation* as a distinguishing feature of an inclusive New Zealand identity. Responding to questions on the sustainability of Māori culture, tikanga Māori and an assertion that Māori are 'secure, confident and expert in their language and culture', this paper is one of a group of 'think pieces', a soliloquy, or a literary form of discourse whereby the author reveals her thoughts to herself. Writing is always a deeply personal act and by association, open always to elucidation and replete with erroneous assertion.<sup>2</sup> The paper does not pretend any expertise or indeed authenticity or claim to a universal truth.

My musings are therefore a collection of reflections on the shifting and fluid process of enculturalisation that underpins the development of national identities in advanced nation states. I question the notion that there is a moment in history that we can return, to retrieve a culture and identity that is pure, authentic and untouched, as a basis for revitalisation. For me, identity and culture is always an *interpretation* of an interpretation, it is neither *fixed* nor immutable. The problems that arise from this particular stance are not intended to reify a problem that is unique to Māori. Instead I propose a shift in focus from Māori to New Zealanders and the opportunities that exist for culture and the making of a thriving and rich New Zealand identity underpinned by a dynamic and uniquely indigenous culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, (London: Routledge, 1994) 74

<sup>2</sup> It is not my intention to write in the grand narrative style. Eschewing this method I have found that I am better able to articulate and make transparent those ideas that continue to influence my thinking about both culture and identity.

Overt calls for cultural revitalisation evoke a sense of loss, a complicated nostalgia for an image that is presumed to be less defiled, more real and uncontaminated by time and space. This particular response is also tinged with a sense that somehow what we currently do as Māori, as iwi, hapū and whānau if not based on reproducing a past that is pre-colonial, will be viewed as lacking a degree of *authenticity*. This unreflexive stance indicates that we remain at risk of validating criticism based in spurious notions of *race* and *eugenics*. Collectively these ideas underpin the notion that because we also inhabit identities that are contemporary in their trajectory, that we do things differently that we have lost the very essence of what it means to be Māori. Subscribing to a demand for *authenticity*, our sense of identity is always aligned to a wider discourse and belief that we have become tainted by our contexts and divorced from some fixed imaginings of early Māori life and custom.

Gary Larson's cartoon featured here, epitomises the contrary nature of culture and the demand for a specific type of cultural performance. A type of performance that has come to represent all that we are permitted to be. If not interrogated, cultural discomfort in turn produces a self-conscious need to remake ourselves in the image of a past that we are no longer connected to. At its worst these ideas represent a refusal to recognise the potential of all cultures to evolve and respond to the demands of a technological age, our identities fixed at some historical moment in time and space. To manage cultural discomfort, we must keep in mind that we will always feel some level of comfort or discomfort when interacting with



others, even when we belong to the same group ethnically. The key is to not allow the discomfort to dictate our actions or reactions and in some cases a tacit demand to subscribe to someone else's perception of how we *should be*.

Cultural differences are not specific between cultures but are also commonplace *intra-culture*. Avoiding the latent human tendency to conform allows us to better understand the nuances between ourselves and to celebrate the differences that we as Māori express between ourselves. When dialogue and relationships occur *intra-culture*, we are on our way to testing assumptions, and managing cultural discomfort.

Similar to other *settled nations*, colonialism as an ideology is not content to simply usurp our authority, land and resources, it must also work hard to convince us of our cultural frailties in order to deny us the right to self-determination. The impact of this on migrant populations both

early and more recently, is a conscious appeal to multi-culturalism that is difficult to define and present only in *performances of individual difference* divorced from the material culture of the vernacular and practice of everyday life. Yet if culture and identity is to survive it must retain the capacity to grow and extend its influence across all domains of our existence. To imagine otherwise is a fear of contamination that has its roots in racist ideologies of miscegenation that then leads us to the conclusion that as a culture we are somehow deficient.

This unease with our contemporary selves and a desire to reproduce an identity and culture in the likeness of a mythical embodiment of the past, is itself a hangover, an unconscious salute to the durability of the shared violence of our colonial past. For non-Māori the loss of cultural authenticity effected by a movement away from *home* and the colonial folklore of cultural superiority, has failed to deliver to New Zealanders a contemporary identity that speaks to the realities of their lives. The actual complexity of our culture and identity, even our own personalised experience, gets buried under the weight of an idealised image of *what we never were*. On both a personal and social level when things are going well we credit our successful adherence to a cultural ideal, forgetting the conflicts, ambivalences, and departures from the 'norm'. When things are going poorly for us we look for the 'dysfunctional' elements of our collective past to legitimate contemporary disadvantage and bias. The effects of inequalities blamed on an imagined 'life-style' and culture that is neither novel nor responsive to changes in our environment.

Cultures have always been in flux and often in crisis; they have never lived up to nostalgic notions of 'the way we were' for indigenous or settler populations. This does not mean that the malaise and anxiety we feel about culture or identity are delusions, that everything will be alright if we only realise that culture is not all it is cracked up to be. An unsatisfactory turn to a messy sort of relativism to explain our predicament is to be avoided in a discussion about culture because it tends to close off any possibility for criticism and debate. At the same time it elides the potential for examining the role of culture in the conscious making of a unique national identity. The appearance of culture in the construction of identity for all New Zealanders is unequivocally tied to the country that we inhabit. Its exceptional characteristics already melded with the resilience of its indigenous cohabitants.

The role of government is not to simply preserve culture but to protect the right of cultures and identities to evolve and reshape themselves to their circumstances and contexts. I do know that this is a difficult task and more so in these times where the value of one's identity and culture is dominated by discourses and prejudice that can be used to support calls to undermine the very efficacy of Māori as a distinct culture and identity within New Zealand. Identity is always a matter of history rather than choice, however, history itself is not fixed but

dynamic and it is the right to both individually and collectively define, that is at stake. Merely asserting cultural difference or presenting aspects that we can all ascribe to may reduce a living culture to its status as *performance*. The content of culture, those characteristics that materialise through the shared values that give expression to the way we engage or make sense of ourselves will be denied.

This paper draws on a broad range of literature and criticism concerned with the articulation of culture and identity across time and context and examines the efficacy of its renaissance in the early stages of the new millennium. The limits of cultural revitalisation will be seen to reflect the double-bind proposed by a return to an imaginary authentic space and the risk of *inauthenticity* that *normalisation* or mainstreaming invokes. Yet, what if the very notion of authenticity itself, is a metaphor, an allegory, a moment that signifies the death of culture itself?

It seems to me that in 'looking back' we cannot ignore the context from which a distinct New Zealand identity continues to be formed and its relationship to its indigenous population. Imbued with scientific rationale and beliefs, the propagation of racial and cultural superiority that infused identity formation at the genesis of our nation continues to permeate and hinder the expression of Māori culture and its contribution to an evolving national identity. The impact of this has resulted in a self-conscious and confused identity that impedes opportunities for the making of a truly distinct nation state.

A move to retrieve selected and comforting aspects of Māori culture that fit the sensibilities of political elites, with which to construct an identity, does not reflect the maturity of nationhood but rather, secures our position as an 'adolescent nation' not quite ready for the responsibilities of 'adulthood' and civilisation.<sup>3</sup> National cultures are always diverse, contested and variable. Commentary on the 'child-like' status of nations through appeals to patriotism are merely a reflection of a philosophical argument that has its roots in the taxonomy of civilisations that is itself part of the mythology of imperialism.<sup>4</sup>

Culture is what makes you feel a stranger when you're away from home<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Civilization* can also refer to the culture of a complex society, not just the society itself. Every society, civilization or not, has a specific set of ideas and customs, and a certain set of manufactures and arts that make it unique. Civilizations tend to develop intricate cultures, including a state-based decision making apparatus, a literature, professional art, architecture, organised religion, and complex customs of education, coercion and control associated with maintaining the elite

<sup>4</sup> Note the recent criticism of Māori Party co-leaders, Ministers Marama Fox and Te Ururoa Flavell in the opinion piece by Toby Manhire and his turn of phrase to describe their lack of support for former Prime Minister Helen Clark as 'unpatriotic' and evidence of New Zealand's 'adolescent' status as a nation. *The New Zealand Herald*. August 5 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Bock (ed.) *Culture Shock: A Reader in Modern Cultural Anthropology*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1970

From a certain point onwards there is no longer any turning back. That is the point that must be reached. <sup>6</sup>



Aspects of popular culture, such as print culture, performing arts, language and idiom and material culture are noted as expressions of national culture and identity. The role of government is to not simply protect but support their proliferation through policy, revitalisation and investment. The inevitability of such an undertaking as the protection, preservation and

restoration of culture is however not unproblematic.

As a nation we nod with an appreciative sense of the banal at the spectacle of haka performed as a distinctive expression of the culture and identity of our country. As a nation we rejoice in the shared mana and pride of Māori performance and culture as a clear signifier of our nation, our point of difference from the rest of the world. Aspects of Māori culture and performance is accepted as a shared sense of national identity and testament of our unique status as New Zealanders. And in taking its place within mainstream culture our shared culture and identity reflects the capacity of culture for metamorphosis if it is to endure.

The irony and irrevocability of postcolonial identities produces a moment, an event that collectively, we may have no option but to negotiate as part of the colonial inheritance that we as New Zealanders inhabit. Perhaps, it matters less whether it is only a partial representation of culture, but whether they are being used to liberate or oppress, to recapture just rights or deny them. In the end it is not overt cultural performance or ritual that matters but the expression of values through a shared cultural identity that is important.

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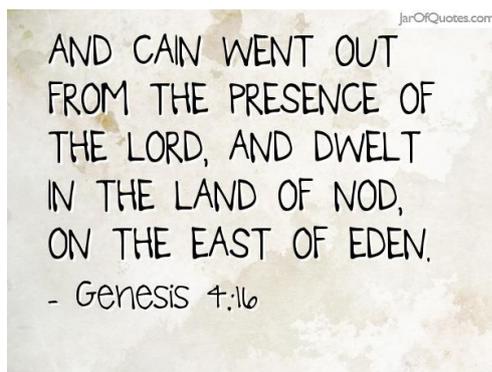
<sup>6</sup> Franz Kafka cited in Max Brod. *Franz Kafka: A Biography*. New York: Schocken Books. 1960.

## THE CONFLATION OF CULTURE AND BIOLOGY

[W]henver the oppressed, the native, [...] are used to represent the point of "authenticity" for our critical discourse, they become at the same time the place of myth-making and an escape from the impure nature of political realities.<sup>7</sup>

An essentialist belief that culture or identity is fixed or biological<sup>8</sup> will, as one commentator has noted, conflate a theory of knowledge (epistemology) with a theory of being (ontology).<sup>9</sup> In short the notion that who you are is connected to what you can know, underscores an assumption that culture and identity itself is inherited, a biological trait. It is important to note here that this conflation in contemporary times, is usually reserved when referring to indigenous groups. This is because we do not expect or demand that other New Zealanders carry a culture or identity that their forefathers and mothers displayed prior to settling in this country. Instead we mistakenly valorise non-Māori cultures as monolithic and imbue their customs with far more clarity and durability than ever existed. Similar to Māori however, our co-citizens are not mired in an identity and culture today that resembles their historical contexts. The certainty that we need only bring forth unencumbered by our collective history or experience a culture or identity, which is pure or untainted, conceals the very real and damaging effects of colonisation and the influence of scientific philosophy on the making of nationhood.

Local historians have already noted the religious influence on the colonial project. One stream of thought supported ideas concerned with mono-genesis, a belief that we all came from Adam and Eve. The counter argument, poly-genesis, proposed the notion of two branches, one notably darker in countenance, descending from the biblical Ham that they then attributed to



Māori. The Missionary Society in particular readily accepted a poly-genesis argument to develop their understanding of native peoples. While the church ostensibly remained silent on the moral imperative of colonisation, according to polygenecists, Māori descended from the other branch, and while noted as inferior and child-like in our evolution were indeed worthy and deserving of their tutelage and patronage.

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<sup>7</sup> Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*, (Indiana University Press: Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1993) 44

<sup>8</sup> *Essentialism* is the belief that things have a set of characteristics which make them what they are, and that the task of science and philosophy is their discovery and expression; the doctrine that essence is prior to existence. It also refers to the belief that people and/or phenomenon have an underlying and unchanging 'essence'.

<sup>9</sup> See Gayatri Spivak *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies and Dialogues*, Sarah Harasym, ed., (London: Routledge, 1990)

Heavily influenced by a sense of 'mission' and desire to not simply save souls but to protect Māori from the worst vices of the early settlers. Armed with a sense of duty, missionaries and settlers arrived fortified by the words of Rudyard Kipling and a belief that their presence was part of a greater colonial mission.

Take up the White Man's burden, Send forth the best ye breed  
Go bind your sons to exile, to serve your captives' need;  
To wait in heavy harness, On fluttered folk and wild—  
Your new-caught, sullen peoples, Half-devil and half-child.<sup>10</sup>

The *white man's burden* proposed that the 'white man' had a moral obligation to rule the non-white peoples of the Earth, while also encouraging their economic, cultural, and social progress through colonialism, until they could independently manage their own affairs. The call to educate inferior races, was embraced and further developed through scientific method and the development of psychometrics. Psychometry was used to measure different characteristics that people possessed and how those characteristics of culture made them more "fit" than others.<sup>11</sup> To avoid the tendency of migrants to *go native*, to cohabit with the local peoples, the notions of the purity of the races and the negative effects of cohabitation were an important feature in the case for *miscegenation*.

Miscegenation has been defined as cohabitation, sexual relations, marriage or *interbreeding* involving persons of different *rac*es, originally used in historical contexts as a *transgression* of the law. As outdated as ideas such as this may appear, the values that underpinned their legitimacy in the recent past of our country remain alive and well. An extension of this dogma can be seen in the popularity and development of *eugenics*, a branch of biological science that advocated selective breeding to ensure the purity and dominance of the British within New Zealand.<sup>12</sup> One of the movement's prime crusaders was Dunedin's own Lillian MacGeorge who under the auspices of the New Zealand Eugenics Society toured charitable and social societies as well as schools championing the cause of selected breeding.

In May 1912 *The Dominion* covered the society's first annual report. The report asserted that eugenic ideals, when well founded, lead to useful legislation, signalled by the passing of the then Mental Defectives Act in 1911 at that time. This Act of Parliament enabled the state, under sufficient safeguards, to retain custody of many *defectives* who would otherwise be at liberty to transmit their defects. In October that year the newspaper noted that MacGeorge was set to lecture on "Heredity and Eugenics" at the New Zealand Educational Institute's

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<sup>10</sup> Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden". McClure's Magazine 18 (Feb. 1899).

<sup>11</sup> Francis Galton was the first to term the phrase eugenics, see, *Hereditary Genius*. 1869. London: Macmillan.

<sup>12</sup> Historically, eugenics encompassed not just racial stereotypes but physical incapacity and the fear that the 'working classes' were out-breeding the 'genteel classes'.

**"More children  
from the fit,  
less from the unfit  
- that is the chief  
aim of birth control!"**

**Margaret Sanger**



annual conference to outline various lines of proposed eugenic work connected more or less directly with the Education Department.<sup>13</sup> An earlier 'call to arms' came from W.A. Chapple, an Otago-born and educated doctor who practised medicine in Wellington at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His book *The Fertility of the Unfit* was published in Australia in 1903<sup>14</sup>. Chapple was

concerned that society at that time, was "an army of defectives" with the proportion of people dependent on the state in New Zealand increasing. According to Chapple the "best citizens" were slowly reproducing while the "worst" were having the largest families and that uncontrolled breeding threatened the moral and mental condition, evolution and future of the race. Chapple's own preference was for various types of surgical operations on men and women to prevent them reproducing including sterilisation. Making the 'unfit' or 'defective' sterile was linked to the social good and social reform.

While Chapple's book may today appear incredulous, scientifically indefensible and full of conceit, the book was mainstream enough at the time to have received warm comments written by three prominent social reformers, including two leading politicians and intellectuals. The then Attorney-General J.G. Findlay, himself a strong eugenicist, claimed that "no finer work on the subject has been accomplished", while, Sir Robert Stout declared himself "much pleased" with it and offered to help get it published. These ideas permeated significant social organisations in New Zealand including the Plunket Society. These beliefs were shared by Dr Truby King and Isabella King where "white racial anxieties" gave rise to infant welfare organisations on both sides of the Tasman where maternal purity was seen as analogous to race purity.<sup>15</sup>

The Plunket Society intervened directly in the lives of the working class, laying down a "prescriptive ideology" to be followed in working class homes.<sup>16</sup> These ideas were further incorporated in subsequent government policy where Prime Minister Seddon adapted the findings of the 1904 Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birth-Rate and on the Mortality of Infants in New South Wales, in a 1904 memorandum when he passed the subsequent

<sup>13</sup> *The Dominion Post - 150 Years of News*

<sup>14</sup> WA Chappel, *The Fertility of the Unfit*, Melbourne Whitcomb & Tombs (1904). See also *The Southland Times*, 8 February 1904.

<sup>15</sup> Philippa Mein Smith, "Blood, birth, babies, bodies", p4. This is a paper dated November 2001 which is to appear in a forthcoming issue of *Australian Feminist Studies*; page numbers are taken from the copy of the paper in the Canterbury University library.

<sup>16</sup> See Erik Olssen, "Truby King and the Plunket Society: an analysis of a prescriptive ideology", *NZJH*, vol. 15, no 1, 1981, pp.3-23

Midwives Act.<sup>17</sup> Poverty and deprivation, moral decay, racial decay and racial antagonism were seen as conditions which undermined and posed a threat to the tenets of New Zealand nationalism which aimed to build a popular democracy based on the physically, morally and mentally competent. The Plunket Society at this time epitomised these fears, its middle class founders concerned about, what Truby King called, “racial success and national greatness.”<sup>18</sup> Adding their voices to the concerns of their class, feminists saw “[t]he cleansing of the political system by women’s vote as a necessary prelude to total social purity.”<sup>19</sup>

There is no direct evidence to support the claim that the MAO-A gene confers „warrior“ qualities on Māori males, either modern or ancestral. Furthermore, the assumption that a genetic association in Caucasian applies in Māori; the use of the “warrior gene” label in the context of human MAO-A aggression studies; generalising from a sample of 17 individuals not representative of the general Māori population; and the lack of scientific investigative journalism have combined to do science and Māori a disservice.<sup>20</sup>

Eugenic societies and groups were to become highly organised and politicised in New Zealand during the last century. These societies connected to the Planned Parenting Association, supported sterilising those they considered ‘unfit’ to breed. At the same time the eugenics society urged middle-class women to cease contraception, to have more children and to avoid the continued corruption of the race already dominated by ‘defectives.’<sup>21 22</sup> Angela Wanhalla has noted the ways in which eugenics was adapted to fit existing ideas of race and gender in the early of New Zealand. These ideas provided a specific response to the development of a national identity within the geographical and metaphorical spaces at that time. According to Wanhalla, “New Zealand’s dawning nationalism saw it turn to countries beyond Britain for alternative models of eugenics, to construct and develop a New Zealand eugenics relative to the geographical, racial, economic and political terrain of the country”.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Mein Smith, “Blood, birth, babies, bodies”, 9 – 10.

<sup>18</sup> Truby King in F.C. Batchelor, *Address Delivered to the Society for the Promotion of the Health of Women and Children, Dunedin, 1909*, p13. Cited in Eldred-Grigg, *Pleasures of the Flesh*, p127

<sup>19</sup> See Phillida Bunkle, “The Origins of the Women’s Movement in New Zealand: the Women’s Christian Temperance Union”, in Bunkle and Hughes (eds.), p67.

<sup>20</sup> T. Merriman and V. Cameron, ‘Risk-taking: behind the warrior gene story’. *Journal of the New Zealand Medical Association*, 120(1250) 2007. See also same issue, P. Crampton and C. Parkin, ‘Warrior genes and risk-taking science’.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Problems of the Unfit’ an address by Mr WH Bishop on the importance of a recognition of the science of eugenics at the formation of a society in Christchurch. *Poverty Bay Herald*, 16 August 1911, p. 7, *National Library of New Zealand*.

<sup>22</sup> Note that the application of eugenics was not exclusive to Māori but included all those not part of a burgeoning middle class.

<sup>23</sup> For a fuller discussion of this phenomena within New Zealand see, Angela Wanhalla, *Gender, Race and Colonial Identity: Women and Eugenics in New Zealand, 1918-1939* MA Thesis UC, 2001.

## A SOCIO-CULTURAL RESPONSE TO BUILDING IDENTITY

Fears of miscegenation and the corruption of the fittest species did not merely simmer below the surface but overflowed into the political and social milieu finding their home in the discourses of the early settlers and more recently, the contemporary beliefs concerned with identity and culture. The actual forms of *mixing* that took place, and to a certain extent the discourses about them, were internalised and shaped by Māori as well as European attitudes and agency, and in some instances were shaped as much by existing ideas of male authority and male gender solidarity across cultures as by the interests of settler colonialism. Later assimilationist policies that were to promote inter-marriage between Māori and non-Māori rather than challenging earlier ideas of racial purity, accepted the notion that through inter-breeding it was possible to not just strengthen the 'races' but improve the progeny of these alliances. The development of a national identity during this period was to have a profound effect on the construction of contemporary culture.



Dealing with issues of intermarriage during the 1950s the movie *Broken Barrier*<sup>24</sup> placed New Zealand on the international stage as an exemplar of sorts, for *racial tolerance*.<sup>25</sup> John Harre has noted in his research that Māori parents were also likely to object to such unions.<sup>26</sup> As a child of mixed marriage I was often reminded of the term *half-caste*, a term that was intended to be inferior. I recall being in High

School during the 1970s and the teacher asking all children of any Māori descent to stand so that we could be counted. I was unaware at that time that this instruction coincided with government policy that changed the caste system from a belief in blood quantum to one of descent. An older birth certificate notes that I am '3/4 caste'. Degrees of descent remain problematic because it normalises the tendency for identity to be confused with biological features.

Even today, the notion of blood quantum can be used as a self-identifier of an individual's 'degree of Māori-ness' which is disconcerting. Blood quantum supports earlier assertions that

<sup>24</sup> *Broken Barrier* is a film written by John O'Shea and produced by he and Roger Mirams released in 1952.

<sup>25</sup> Miles Fairburn, 'Is there a Good Case for New Zealand Exceptionalism?', in Tony Ballantyne and Brian Moloughney, eds. *Disputed Histories: Imagining New Zealand's Pasts*, Dunedin, 2006, pp.143–67. Angela Wanhalla has discussed the difficulty of tracing mixed marriages, noting the difficulties specifically for Māori women. See *In/visible Sight: The Mixed Descent Families of Southern New Zealand*, Wellington, 2009. See also Paul Callister, 'Ethnicity Measures, Intermarriage and Social Policy'.

<sup>26</sup> John Harre, *Maori and Pakeha: A Study of Mixed Marriages in New Zealand*, London, 1966.

very few *full blood* Māori exist, legitimating both a turn to *racial traits* and a refusal to recognise the rights of a fully endowed indigenous population. If we do not exist 'in all our purity', then it is assumed that we have no rights. The concern that mixed marriages weakened group identity based on ideas of cultural uniqueness<sup>27</sup> is both unhelpful and scientifically indefensible.

Politically it represents the exposure of racial ideology promulgated in order to conjure up a



platform for the disenfranchised. A more recent discussion on intermarriage reveals much about how Māori and Pākehā have lived together in this country and our changing attitudes to race, marriage and intimacy.<sup>28</sup>

An image of my Taua seen here, shows clearly the history of intermarriage in the Otago region. This photograph also challenges commonly held perceptions of the 'whiteness' of Ngāi Tahu, perceived as 'less authentic' based solely on an uninformed belief that culture and identity is always pre-eminent. This *inter-tribal* designation of 'Māori-ness', based on tribal differences of culture and biological characteristics requires

challenge. The fear of taint or miscegenation now applied to the symbolic and imaginary of culture and identity is reproduced in order to disavow identity. We must refuse the default position of justifying our existence and instead remain attentive to how cultural beliefs are used to liberate or oppress, to recapture just rights or deny them.

Biological beliefs, now often dismissed as an indication of early times have, I contend, found their way into the consciousness of the new millennium where language and idiom often repeat these ideas in the vernacular of all classes and population groups including Māori. Importantly, the notion of a pure and easily retrievable identity and culture remain embroiled in biology. The public response to the release of research claiming to have found a 'warrior gene' in Māori played out in the public arena in ways that repeated earlier assertions of biology and underpinned all that was dysfunctional about Māori and Māori culture. Similar to the political use of 'dog whistling', headlines that utilise terms such as Māori/ Warrior Gene/ Violent

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<sup>27</sup> B. Birrell, 'Intermix and Australia's Indigenous Population, *People and Place*, 8(2):61-66, 2000.

<sup>28</sup> Angela Wanhalla, *Matters of the Heart: A History of Interracial Marriage in New Zealand*, Auckland University Press, 2013.

Behaviour, conjure up the subconscious fears of a nation while at the same time validating inequalities as the effect of biology.<sup>2930</sup>

Prompted by the claim that there is a genetic explanation for inequalities, the science community was quick to separate itself from these claims to biology raising a number of ethical concerns. In particular concerns were raised concerning the validity of the underlying science of a 'warrior gene' and the scientifically unfounded speculation regarding the causality of complex social issues. They conclude that in all "[s]cience, and particularly where there is a highly charged social and political setting, the scientist has a responsibility for the way in which findings are disseminated and for ensuring a clear public understanding of the limitations of the work".<sup>31</sup> This was further supported by G. Raumati Hook noting that 'risk taking' and a history of warfare is not a unique characteristic of Māori.

MAO-A genes have been found in disease states associated with behavioural abnormalities in some non-Māori subjects, there is no evidence to indicate that the behavioural characteristics of Māori as a people are in anyway unusual. Māori are not borderline psychotics, retarded, hyper aggressive, depressive, antisocial, impulsive, suicidal risk takers and to suggest otherwise is irresponsible and not supported by the facts.<sup>32</sup>

The racialisation of the MAO-A genes to explain violent behaviour as inherent to a specific culture, while challenged by the scientific community at large, remains firmly rooted in the consciousness of the general public.

A socio-cultural approach typically focuses on measures of cultural identity or ethnic group attachment.<sup>33</sup> In New Zealand, there have been various attempts to measure Māori identity, including Ritchie's "degree of Māoriness" scale<sup>34</sup> and Metge's schema of "Māoritanga"<sup>35</sup>. More recently the study of Māori households at Massey University have proposed a single measure of Māori cultural identity. This measure utilised a weighted combined score of an individual on

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<sup>29</sup> Dog-whistle politics is political messaging employing coded language that appears to mean one thing to the general population but has an additional, different or more specific resonance for a targeted subgroup

<sup>30</sup> Maori violence blamed on gene. Wellington: The Dominion Post, 9 August 2006; Section A3.

<sup>31</sup> P. Crampton and C. Parkin, 'Warrior genes and risk-taking science'. *Journal of the New Zealand Medical Association*, 120(1250) 2007.

<sup>32</sup> G. Raumati Hook, "'Warrior genes" and the disease of being Māori', *MAI Review*, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Tahu Kukuraiti, 'The Problem of Defining an Ethnic Group for Public Policy: Who is Māori and Why Does it Matter?' *Social Policy Journal of New Zealand Te Puna Whakaaro*, Issue 23, December 2004.

<sup>34</sup> J. Ritchie, *The making of a Māori*, A.H. & A.W. Reed, Wellington and Auckland, 1963.

<sup>35</sup> J. Metge, *A New Māori Migration: Rural and Urban Relations in Northern New Zealand*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1964.

seven cultural indicators.<sup>36, 37</sup> Māori language has the highest weighting, followed by involvement with the extended family, knowledge of ancestry, and self-identification, all of which are equally weighted and based on subjective ideas of a 'unique Māori identity'. These presuppositions about Māori identity and culture were thought to be measurable through proxy indicators that were prioritised, quantified and aggregated. Similarly elsewhere, researchers have noted language use, religious affiliation and familial ties as measures of ethnic attachment.<sup>38</sup>

Measures of Māori wellbeing were developed ostensibly as a response to address the problem of how to define the Māori population in policy and, by association, who then constituted Māori. Problems of definition, entitlement and substantiation are not exclusive to Māori, as parallel debates in other settled nations attest. Given the intricacies of definition, substantiation and consistency, it is not surprising that governments are increasingly being challenged to justify the collection of ethnic and racial data and the policies they support. In some countries, there is a growing call for the abandonment of ethnic and race-based policies. This has arisen more recently in accusations of Māori preferential treatment. There are problems, however, with ignoring ethnicity, and specifically indigeneity. One is the matter of sovereign or treaty rights. Māori have particular arrangements with the state that derive from the Treaty and subsequent Claims which can be distinguished from the contemporary assessment of need which are citizenship entitlements. The challenge facing New Zealand policy makers will be to respond to these complexities and external pressures with critical and thoughtful responses based on robust evidence and research.

The reduction of culture to a set of activities and ascriptions deemed recognisable to a broader popular culture was evident in a series of essays that interrogated the meaning of 'culture' in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).<sup>39</sup> Replete with references to a child's identity and culture, articles 8, 29, 30 and 31 in particular, outline the role of governments in the preservation of identity, the specific rights of indigenous children and their "right to enjoy their own culture, to practice their own religion and to use their own language". The convention goes on to state an entitlement to protection by governments that would enable a child "to participate in cultural and artistic activities". Criticism continue to be raised

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<sup>36</sup> C. Cunningham, M. Durie, D. Fergusson et al. 'Living standards of older Māori', *Ministry of Social Development*, Wellington, 2004.

<sup>37</sup> B. Stevenson, 'Towards a better measure of cultural identity', *He Pukenga Korero*, 2004.

<sup>38</sup> See J. Reitz, and S. Sklar 'Culture, Race, and the Economic Assimilation of Immigrants', *Sociological Forum*, 12(2): 1997.

<sup>39</sup> For an example of the impact UNCRC on the delineation of culture and identity in Brazil and a declaration that participation in cultural events be used as evidence of authentic culture, see, Manuela Da Cunha, 'Children, Politics and Culture: The Case of the Brazilian Indian', *Children and the Politics of Culture*, Sharon Stephens, ed., (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995) 282-91

around what was intended by the use of culture in the convention and what aspects of culture governments were expected to protect and support. In the case of Brazil, measurements of participation in cultural events and the eating of indigenous food are markers of indigeneity in a country that denies the sovereign rights of an indigenous group. Just as blood quantum is used to exclude, socio-cultural markers of *cultural living* is used to deny the existence of a contemporary indigenous identity.

If socio-cultural responses are to elude the messy entanglement of race and cultural determinism, then we need to think more deeply about the unintended consequences of asserting an identity that is inaccessible to the groups that they profess to describe. A belief that the culture in which we are raised determines who we are at emotional and behavioural levels, ignores the fluidity and malleability of culture and identity in its interaction with other cultures and environments. Former certainties about culture that existed, no longer hold in the transition towards a shared identity. New cultural and political spaces have opened up, and hegemonic conditions that have formerly defined the false appeal of bi-culturalism, based on a need for an antipodean identity, have loosened. This arbitrary separation, not based in our material reality, offered up to society as a measure of who we are, provides an opportunity for courageous conversations that reflect more accurately the values that we wish to promote.

The impossible mission that seeks to preserve the singularity of a culture must paradoxically negate its fundamental element: its historical dynamic.<sup>40</sup>

In a recent interview on *Radio Waatea* Dame Tariana Turia responded to the question “does not speaking Māori, make you less Māori?”<sup>41</sup> She stated that she was not about to be apologetic for what is essentially an effect of history and that she was proud of those fortunate enough to have te reo Māori. Referring to her Aunt, Turia noted that the reo was the ability to communicate with others but more importantly about communicating the interests of her people. She does not subscribe to the notion that not having the reo makes one less Māori. For Turia her whakapapa, descent and unwavering commitment to the interests of Māori’ defines her identity. Noting that some non-Māori have told her that she wasn’t a ‘real Māori’, Turia expressed her disregard for these opinions. Turia expresses a deep belief in kaupapa and that kaupapa is upheld through the practice of tikanga. Accordingly for Turia any discomfort felt when confronted with much younger Māori is really a reflection of one’s shortcomings and not the problem of fluent speakers. In conclusion Turia refused to let anyone deny her a love of the reo simply because she could not speak in Māori.

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<sup>40</sup> Ian Chambers, 1994.

<sup>41</sup> *Radio Waatea*, 10 May 2016.

The sentiment in which Turia expresses the contrary elements of her identity and cultural beliefs extend our understanding of the dilemma felt by many and the grace and fortitude that is conveyed in her reflections. Extending our right to define both culture and identity for ourselves requires that we move past the demand for a classification of culture that would hierarchise aspects of who we are and what we do. As a consequence, policy must avoid the requirement for simple categorisations of what is in effect a set of complex and variable phenomena. As the term suggests, policy is in the service of the *polity* and in turn the polity must be able to represent the interests of all peoples. Policy is for all extent and purposes concerned with the laying down of kaupapa, the rationale for and evidence of the manifestation of culture, sustained through the practice of tikanga. The contrary demand for a representation that expresses our national identity is keenly expressed by those who unsurprisingly feel a distance from their settler origins. This was poignantly noted by historian Michael King in an essay to *The Sunday Times*.<sup>42</sup> In this controversial essay King asserted that the term "indigenous" could also be applied Pākehā.

According to King, Pākehā culture, is no longer the same as its cultures of origin which were non-indigenous to New Zealand. He went on to say that a key element of indigenous as distinct from imported culture is its focus on the country and culture of occupation rather than the country and culture of origin. Culture and identity for King reflects a commitment to participation in the development of the nation proper, informed by the culture of change and unfettered by the need to look back. Viewed as a challenge to our claim of indigeneity and, it might be posed that he said them from a position of advantage or privilege, his thinking about indigeneity remains central to the making of a New Zealand identity and culture.

Difference itself becomes a name for the place where we are all the same - a '*name for*', because difference is not something that can be articulated, or should be articulated, as a monolithic concept. But if difference becomes a name for the place where we are all the same - if difference becomes the name for that - then it stands as a kind of warning against the fact that we *cannot not* propose identity when we engage in actual emancipatory projects.<sup>43</sup>

I do not believe that King intended to dilute the nature of *tangata whenua* in his essay at all. Instead it appears that the political impact of his statements, the way in which they might be used to inflame or reconcile existing tensions, meant that we were unable to imagine a national identity at that time. Saturated in beliefs about biology it is arguable if we are even ready today.

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<sup>42</sup> For a fuller discussion see, Michael King, *Being Pakeha Now: Reflections and Recollections of a White Native*, Auckland: Penguin Books. 1999.

<sup>43</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Remembering the Limits: Difference, Identity and Practice', 1991

## CULTURE, IDENTITY AND THE REVITALISATION OF VALUES

[I]s anyone, anywhere, anytime "simply living" their culture without an awareness of cultural alternatives? Perhaps it is another Western myth to credit Westerners with the knowledge of difference, and others with the lack of such knowledge. The diversity and insularity of the precolonial Pacific did not imply cultural insularity. Linguistic and cultural differences were precipitated out of contact as much as separate development. Trade and ritual exchange in the Pacific often depended on amplifying differences of ecological niche, productive specialism, and cultural styles.<sup>44</sup>

Essentialist views about culture neglect the capacity for our tupuna to be dynamic, aware of other cultures and interested in their environment and the advantages of participating in the novel. They were as noted, in full 'awareness of cultural alternatives'. To imagine them as passive, frozen in another time or even unaware of the impact that colonisation brought is to demean their capacity to assimilate the new into a shape that was congruent with their values about culture and identity. Similarly the introduction of new technologies did not cause them to shy away. We forget that these technologies were also new to the settlers and the changes that modernity brought were fashioned to fit the circumstances and conditions of their lives. I recall a discussion with a friend who had recently been to the Cook Islands. She had noted that all the vaka on one of the islands were the same colour and asked my husband about the significance of this. Without blinking an eye, he replied that this was possibly the only paint available at that time.

A sociology of culture might be defined and understood as the collection of symbolic codes used by a society and manifested in society. Culture can also be defined as the ways of thinking, the ways of acting, and the material objects that together shape a people's way of life. Culture can be any of two types, non-material culture or material culture. Non-material culture refers to the nonphysical ideas that individuals have about their culture, including values, belief system, rules, norms, morals, language, organisations, and institutions. While material culture is the physical evidence of a culture in the objects and architecture they make, or have made. It refers specifically to material evidence which can be attributed to culture past or present. Critics of non-material culture note with irony that tradition is no longer the practice of the rural masses but the rhetoric of the urban elites, "those most removed from traditional lifestyle and values and are most involved in modernity".<sup>45</sup> Babadzan elicits a view on the

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<sup>44</sup> Cited in Margaret Jolly 'Specters of Inauthenticity', *The Contemporary Pacific*, Volume 4, Number 1, Spring 1992, 49-72 University of Hawaii Press

<sup>45</sup> Babadzan, Alain (1988). *Kastom and Nation-Building in the South Pacific*. In R. Guidieri, F. Fellizzi and S.J. Tambiah (eds.), *Ethnicities and Nations: Processes of Interethnic Relations in Latin America, Southeast Asia and the Pacific*, pp. 199-228. Houston: Rothko Chapel and University of Texas Press. 206.

authenticity of culture that has its roots in a disappointment that ‘urban elites’ articulation of culture is less *real* and tainted by its proximity to modernity. Culture according to him is the practice of the ‘traditional’ identified by him as ‘rural’ that is usurped by an ‘urban elite’. An adherence to material culture untouched by modernity disavows the pragmatism and innovation of our tupuna for an imagined state. The enterprise with which our tupuna embraced the problems of the past and the challenges of the future using whatever ideas and technologies available to them is to be honoured rather than dismissed.

The ongoing debate concerned with ‘Māori elites’<sup>46</sup> draws on earlier criticism of what is deemed ‘rural’ and ‘traditional’, backed up by reference to habitat, clothing and ritual performance. This criticism is often focused on those tribal entities who have received Treaty Settlements and, or, a growing Māori middle-class, centred on the perceived failure of these groups to express culture in a manner that reflects the impoverished conditions of many Māori households at this time. The conflation of poverty and material culture as a numerator for being Māori is to imbue poverty as a cultural marker and to normalise disadvantage as an authentic signifier of identity. Disadvantage and poverty is neither traditional nor a contemporary expression of culture. Poverty and disadvantage is the manifestation of historical exclusions based on institutional and interpersonal bias. There is a recurrent denial in our rationale for inequalities that inevitably locates its source at the cultural door of the most vulnerable. When culture is used to define disadvantage it also stands as a reminder that we must propose identity when we engage in actual emancipatory projects<sup>47</sup>. Someone reminded me in another context that the issues with rurality conceal the fact that if you subtract ethnicity, there is no disadvantage in health for rural populations.

VALUES  
MATTER



In a twenty year study by the *Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development*, four important findings were noted. The first is that *Sovereignty Matters*. According to the researchers, when Native nations make their own decisions about what development approaches to take, they consistently out-perform external decision makers on matters as diverse as governmental form, natural resource management, economic development, health care, and social service provision. The second finding noted that *Institutions Matter* and that success is bound to assertions of sovereignty supported by capable institutions of governance. The third finding

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<sup>46</sup> Rata, E. M. ‘Whanau Revival and Retribalisation: Establishing the Context of Tribal-Capitalism’. *SITES: Journal for South Pacific Cultural Studies*, 32, 1996.

<sup>47</sup> G. C. Spivak, 1991.

noted that *Culture Matters* and that successful economies stand on the shoulders of legitimate, culturally grounded institutions of self-government. It went on to say that each nation must equip itself with a governing structure, economic system, policies, and procedures that fit its own contemporary culture. The final finding was that *Leadership Matters* and that nation building requires leaders who introduce new knowledge and experiences, challenge assumptions, and propose change.<sup>48</sup>

Expressions of sovereignty, culturally grounded institutions and leadership that is innovative, will challenge our assumptions and propose change is required to ensure the sustainability of Māori identity within the context of normalisation or mainstreaming. Our capacity for reinvigorating the old with the new has resulted in an increased diversity for expressing both culture and identity. The legacy of kawa that we imbue each day in the course of our lived reality is based on *simply living*, and being aware of *cultural alternatives* that add value to and enrich our potential. Underpinning this is a set of values and beliefs that fit our contemporary contexts and are conveyed in an application of tikanga. These values drive our response to the ordinary and imbue our practices with meanings that are often at odds with the values of our resident majority culture.

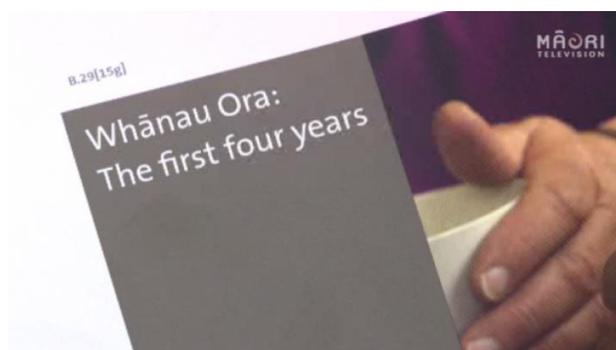
This dissonance between cultural values is best exemplified, if not perhaps over-simplified in Māori perceptions of wellbeing or *Oranga*. The decision to change the name the refreshed *Child Youth and Family Services* to the *Vulnerable Children's Service/ Oranga Tamariki* expresses values that many find deficit or victim-naming. Alternatively the values that also sit behind the name evoke a focus on children that live under conditions that produce vulnerability. If as the government's own report tells us that 6 out of 10 children in care are Māori and that this increases to 8 out of 10 across other areas within the agency, its naming falls short of conveying the importance of cultural values that underscore the findings of over twenty years research into what works for native peoples. Government has some way to go if it is to seriously accept its own findings that Māori continue to be under-served. For change to occur leadership is required that is uncompromising in its values that Māori culture has within it the capacity to self-determine and engage in solutions that are consistent with our values.

The shift in educational achievement for Māori students is one example where our values are driving change often in the face of huge resistance by powerful and self-interested educational bodies. Similarly opportunities to exercise sovereignty, culture and leadership in the development of institutions can be seen where Māori have taken steps to elaborate and build and find success across the primary health sector.

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<sup>48</sup> Stephen Cornell & Joseph P. Kalt, eds., *What Can Tribes Do? Strategies and Institutions in American Indian Economic Development*, Harvard University Press, 1992

Wedged between the interests of mainstream providers and inefficient government agencies *Hauora Māori*, is an expression of cultural values that provide opportunities for government to recognise the importance of culture in the provision and delivery of core services. Normalisation and mainstreaming is not about ‘adding sugar and stirring’. It requires a set of values that turns our notion of mainstream on its head. If mainstream is a nod to the majority culture of our country, then, it seems to me that conferring this space as something other than Māori is to accept a level of second-class status that is not congruent in anyone’s values. There is no tangible space that we as Māori do not already inhabit. What is missing in a consideration of ‘mainstreaming’ is the normalisation of the four core values of *sovereignty, institutions, culture and leadership* on the symbolic and material landscape.



The decision by government to accept the advice of the then Minister of Whānau Ora, Tariana Turia to confer commissioning status on the three Whānau Ora Entities, convey a shift towards embedding Māori values into institutions. While there will be many detractors to the Whānau Ora

Commissioning Entities, their very existence on our landscape provides a challenge to the values that drive commissioning with New Zealand. Strongly values-based organisations, Whānau Ora Commissioning Entities articulate most convincingly an approach that takes seriously the right for whānau to self-determine and become active participants in the making of culture and identity.

*Sovereignty, culture, institutions and leadership* are the values that underpin a whānau ora approach to commissioning. Admission to those conditions of access, engagement, participation and knowledge are apparent in the broad range of investments currently supported by Whānau Ora Commissioning Entities. Partnerships between whānau, government agencies, private business, Tertiary Institutions, iwi and local communities have been enabled and actively encouraged. The confidence gained by whānau in these interactions ensures that whānau themselves are defining the terms of engagement and profit. Sustainability of culture and identity in all its manifestations, is fortified through these experiences and opportunities, underpinned by local expressions of sovereignty and driven by courageous leadership. Culture is the shadow that values leave behind.

## CONCLUSION

The deafening noise of past ideologies, their contribution to a contemporary sense of loss and the cultural cringe enunciated through the fear of 'taint' and 'inauthenticity', sent me on a far reaching investigation to understand these anxieties. I do hope that I have elaborated these ideas sufficiently to frame my discussion. It is clear to me that anxieties about culture and national identity are an unwanted legacy and transference from those unable to 'return home'. This includes everyone that calls New Zealand home. To default to a position that authenticity itself might herald the death of culture is however, most unsatisfactory. Just as an appeal to cultural relativism would be to miss the point entirely.

The risk of reproducing an argument that reflected the symbolic power of biology and a turn to the 'purity' of culture and identities is an option that we must collectively refuse. Even at the risk of denying a comfortable and safe retreat from the spectre of cultural revitalisation. Interrogating the very fabric of our sense of identity and its potential for developing a national culture that we might collectively subscribe to, is not to 'discard the baby with the bath water'. It is however a reminder, a caution succinctly expressed by Dame Tariana Turia, that we seek always, to further the interests of our people. Contemporary allusions to the 'warrior gene' remind us that racist ideas of biology simmer just below the surface and expose a contemporary denial of the capacity to remake ourselves as we see fit. This denial also forecloses the opportunity for non-Māori to develop, diversify and remake themselves in the image of their environment. Cultural revitalisation then is a problem not just for Māori but for all peoples who call this country home.

Cultural revitalisation is an incomplete term for the right to continually remake our culture and



identities in ways that we may yet, not even imagine. We carry our fears in a way that our mokopuna do not. They will have opportunities, yet to be discovered, and it is the role of all of us, including government to ensure that policy is broad and deep enough to support their right to express their culture with the technologies at their disposal. Culture should be an ordinary part of what defines us and not a burden to be recovered. The confidence in which our

children express their culture is captured in the image of my moko through a harirū and hongiri shared between her and the Duchess of Cambridge during a visit to Dunedin. In an impromptu moment my moko expressed her identity through values that she had subconsciously imbibed in her interactions with others. That she subsequently moved in closer for an unrestrained hug

illustrated her comfort in what was a very formal ritual of engagement that day, not dissimilar to the gravity of *kawa* she will have witnessed displayed on *marae*.

We acknowledge proudly the fluency of our *mokopuna*, we celebrate their successes and also provide comfort for their mistakes. Cultural revitalisation is never value-free or unencumbered for settled societies in the ongoing expression of nationhood. Revitalisation is an obligation to build the confidence of each other in expressing the courage and support for the collective capacity for *making culture*. The important role of values expressed through sovereignty, leadership and institutions grounded in values, provides a vehicle for elaborating culture in all its appearances. These values allow us to refuse the facile turn of revitalising selected aspects of our culture.

Our identities spring forth from cultures that as a nation state are interconnected. Not exclusive and not always reconcilable to our awareness of alternative cultures. Aspects of ourselves are the result of choices that we consciously make and inhabit in the interests of representation. None of these are wrong. What we must not neglect in any discussion of cultural revitalisation is that representation itself is always partial, incomplete and demanding of further elaboration. The role of government is to ensure that policies reflect the values of the culture it seeks support. This will mean ensuring that the public sector as a whole is representative of our uncompromising requirement for sovereignty, culture, institutions and leadership. Without these values culture is merely a performance.

I began this soliloquy, thinking out loud on the page, about the role of government in supporting the sustainability of culture and the pride that we as Māori express as experts in our own right. What did it mean to *normalise* or mainstream Māori culture and identity? And how this agenda might be used to liberate or oppress, to recapture just rights or deny them.

I conclude with a sense that it is not *culture* itself that requires revitalisation or mainstreaming. We are already an essential part of the mainstream culture of this country. It is not culture in a material sense that is at issue here. Culture *matters*, however it is the values that underpin culture that require expression, as evidence of sovereignty and leadership on our political and social landscapes. It is not knowledge of culture that we lack, but rather, the courage to act on what we know.

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