Multicultural Challenges in a Bicultural New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

As one of the classic immigrant receiving societies, New Zealand has not been, in demographic or policy terms, particularly multicultural. But it has explored bicultural options, especially given a significant indigenous population. The diversification of immigration sources since the 1980s has put multiculturalism on the political and policy agenda, but in conflict with some aspects of biculturalism. In this context, a localized and biculturally-compatible multiculturalism might emerge.

New Zealand is a settler society and shares a colonial history which has many similarities with Australia and Canada (Belich, 1996). European explorers arrived from the late 1700s and a British colonial government was established through the early and mid years of the nineteenth century. What was significant was the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 between representatives of the British Government and a number of local Maori chiefs. From this point through to the 1960s, the overwhelming majority of the immigrants who arrived in New Zealand came from the UK and Ireland. Some immigrants did come from Dalmatia, China and India but these were small in number and all faced significant racism and discrimination. The result is that until the second half of the twentieth century, those born overseas and their descendants were British. Connections with the UK were strong with local institutions modelled on their British counterparts and strong trading and cultural links. New Zealanders were British citizens until 1948 with full New Zealand citizenship emerging with legislation in 1977.

Maori, however, constituted a significant and growing proportion of the New Zealand population. Traditionally located in a rural and provincial hinterland, Maori began to migrate to the expanding urban industrial centres after 1945 and within two decades, the majority had shifted to become urban dwellers. Their numbers had also increased, so that by the turn of the century they comprised almost 15% of the population with forecasts of further growth to 20% by about 2031 (see Didham and Bedford, 2005).

The monoculturalism of immigration began to change in the 1950s, especially with the arrival of migrants from the Pacific (Macpherson, Spoonley and Anae, 2001). Citizens of the Cook Islands, Tokelau and Niue were also New Zealand citizens and they were encouraged to migrate. Tongans and Samoans were not but their labour was needed in the expanding industrial sector. Although the latter migration was curtailed in the 1970s and has been controlled since, these Pacific migrants and their descendants now make up 6% of the population. They are growing rapidly and are expected to double as a proportion of the New Zealand population by mid-century.

This first period of non-European migration was accompagnied by another dating from the late 1980s. A review of immigration policy in 1986 led to the disappearance of preferred migrant source countries. This led to a significant increase in the numbers arriving from Asia. The first group came from Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan in the early 1990s, and more recently, migrant flows have been dominated by Chinese and Indian arrivals (Trlin and Watts, 2005). There were also large numbers arriving from South Africa and an ongoing migration from Britain. Asian peoples constituted 5% of the total population by the 1996 Census and this is expected to double in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. The presence of an urban Maori population, combined with Pacific and Asian peoples, especially in Auckland, provides contemporary New Zealand with a much more Pacific and Asian feel. The policy implications are complex.

Constitutional and Policy Approaches

Urban and rural Maori began to articulate a series of political and cultural concerns from the late 1960s, especially in relation to the preservation of the Maori language, the resolution of historical grievances and the economic participation of Maori, both in mainstream institutions such as the labour market and in relation to their own iwi (tribal) institutions. The result, especially with a reforming Labour Government in the 1980s, was to radically alter the constitutional and policy environment.

In constitutional terms, the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi was included in legislation and it was recognized politically as a key document in a modern nation-building process. It gave Maori rights as members of *iwi* (tribes) and *hapu* (extended families) that were not shared by other New Zealanders, effectively creating an indigenous citizenship. This citizenship was

exercised in relation to the ownership of major resources (land, minerals, fishing) and became the subject of court cases when the government did not consider the Treaty of Waitangi and the rights it bestowed on Maori. The Labour Government also made it possible to consider historical grievances (back to 1840), especially concerning land, by the Waitangi Tribunal, a semi-judicial body which heard evidence and then made recommendations to the government.

Alongside these constitutional changes, the Labour Government also implemented a policy of biculturalism. This related to social service delivery but also became apparent in relation to Maori language (it became an official language and a Maori-based education system was introduced that went from pre-school to university) and public rituals and practices (the use of the haka by practically all national sports teams, the singing of the national anthem in both Maori and English). Government services were now required to be aware of the needs of Maori as clients, to consult Maori on policies that related to them and to include Maori in decision-making and delivery. Devolution saw a range of services involving education, health, employment and the justice system transfer to Maori organizations, both traditional and those that represented urban Maori. The state contracted these organizations to deliver Maori services to Maori populations.

Subsequent governments, including conservative ones, have continued to resolve historical grievances, to recognize the Treaty of Waitangi and to adhere to bicultural policies. By the 1990s, biculturalism had become part of the constitutional and policy environment in New Zealand. Aspects of the process were subject to complaint, especially when it was felt that government interests prevailed over those of Maori, and there were still some Maori who had ambitions for *tino rangatiratanga* (Maori sovereignty).

The other significant policy change which occurred at the same time as the above was to move away from racial preferences in immigration policy. By the 1980s, the umbilical cord with the UK was well on the way to being cut, and it was felt important to establish trading connections with Asia. One way to do this was to encourage migrants from the region, and migration flows were rapidly diversified after 1986. In 1987, migrants from traditional countries, notably the UK, still comprised 76% of permanent and long-term arrivals. By 1996, it had dropped to 37.5% while the remainder were now coming from non-traditional source countries, especially Asian. Between 1981 and 1996, the overseas-born working age population grew by 32% and the skills and business categories were dominated by migrants from China, India, Taiwan and Korea by 2000-01. The size of the overseas-born population meant that New Zealand had levels similar to Canada and Australia (and double those of the USA), but this population was also much more culturally and linguistically diverse.

Policy changes were particularly focussed on immigrant recruitment and selection, and remain so. New Zealand does not have a comprehensive post-arrival set of policies, and certainly no equivalent to the multicultural policies that were implemented in Canada and Australia in the 1970s. There has been growing recognition of Pacific communities, especially as they are now dominated by New Zealand-born. Pacific peoples have begun to play an important and very public role in arenas such as sport, music and fashion design. The government have also developed some programmes and policies to deal with cultural issues (eg language retention) and employment and educational difficulties. However, both the government and Pacific communities have been very aware of the status of Maori and the pre-eminence of biculturalism. Resourcing for these initiatives is very different to those provided to Maori, and they have a quite different place in the political spectrum. Policy in relation to Asian communities is less obvious or well-developed, although these communities are being recognized as an important political constituency.

These shifts were particularly unsettling for older generations who had been brought up to regard Britain as 'home' and who had participated in world wars in defence of empire. For many in these generations, a lot was being discarded and not a lot gained. However, governments pressed on with change, and much of it had become accepted as important by the late 1990s. But this did not end the opposition.

Public Debates and Discourses

All of these policy developments have attracted opposition. The shift to recognize the Treaty of Waitangi, to settle historical grievances and to institute biculturalism marked a particularly important moment as the colonially-inspired institutions and the values which underpinned them were supplemented or replaced by post-colonial options, especially in terms of Maori (Fleras and Spoonley, 1999). What also occurred was a recognition by Pakeha, the European descent population, of their own local identity and the need to relate to Maori and a colonial history. These shifts were particularly unsettling for older generations who had been brought up to regard Britain as 'home' and who had participated in world wars in defence of empire. For many in these generations, a lot was being discarded and not a lot gained. However, governments pressed on with change, and much of it had become accepted as important by the late 1990s. But this did not end the opposition. A number of minor political parties began to represent the concerns of some New Zealanders that the changes had gone too far.

In 2004, the leader of the conservative opposition used a major speech to articulate his (and that of his party)

opposition to what he described as the 'privileged' place of Maori. This concern has some explicit elements. One is the feeling that racism towards Maori has been replaced by racism towards Pakeha. Maori are deemed to have special consideration and anything which questions this position or which seeks to 'defend' Pakeha values and institutions is defined as politically incorrect. Associated with this complaint about the special standing of Maori is the feeling that they have gained more than enough resource. There is a lobby to end the deliberations of the Treaty of Waitangi and the settlement of historical grievances. In this rhetoric, Maori and liberal Pakeha fellow-travellers are seen as the primary racists in contemporary New Zealand. In the wake of this speech, the National Party gained significantly in political polling and the position of Maori and bicultural policies are now back on the political agenda in a much more significant way.

Alongside this set of politics are a very different set. The 1999 Labour Government initially sought to address what was identified as the 'gap' (primarily socio-economic) between Maori and Pakeha but the party's own polling as well as public comment indicated that this way of identifying the policy issue was not popular. Since then, they have abandoned this terminology but have continued to institute policies that are concerned with addressing Maori need but which are now more carefully explained in the public domain. But they have also faced a difficult task in terms of the seabed and foreshore. Maori have sought to establish ownership rights based on traditional use to parts of the seabed and foreshore, supported by court decisions. But the Labour Government has moved to introduce legislation to affirm public access and Crown ownership. This has angered many Maori, leading to major public demonstrations and the formation of a new Maori Party. This has split New Zealand, and highlighted the issues of indigenous ownership typically contrasted with public/national ownership. The ongoing development of biculturalism has encountered significant Pakeha opposition which, in turn, is reflected in political party positions and campaigns. Alongside the emergence of these positions, the arrival of a new form of political representation has seen a more equitable representation of Maori, and Pacific and Asian peoples in Parliament and the emergence of ethnic-based political parties. The changing demographics of New Zealand give the latter an obvious power base, and Pakeha opposition, while significant, has encountered powerfully articulated and strongly supported positions that reflect Maori interests in a way that would have been inconceivable two decades ago.

If bicultural issues are fraught, although still very dominant, anything which might represent a local multiculturalism is not yet apparent. Pacific peoples faced major opposition to their arrival through the 1970s. They were seen by agencies such as the police and political parties as contributing to public law and order issues, growing unemployment and the decline of inner city areas. They were cast as 'overstayers' (being in New Zealand illegally) and their presence was extensively problematized. This demonizing of them lasted for several decades, and has only begun to wane in the last decade. A similar demonization of immigrants occurred again with a moral panic about the arrival of Asian migrants in the 1990s. An article in a community newspaper in Auckland in 1993, titled "Inv-Asian," marked the beginning of this period and led to an explicit anti-immigration stance in the 1996 General Election by a minority party, New Zealand First. Asians were seen as contributing to problems: placing pressure on education; increasing the demand for 'monster houses'; poor driving habits in expensive cars; and a reluctance to 'fit in'. According to public opinion polling, opposition reached a peak in the mid-1990s and began to decline. Opinion was affected by the decline in Asian arrivals at the time of the Asian economic crises in the late 1990s, and their economic contribution to domestic growth was imperilled. There is still opposition and a problematizing of Asian immigrants by some political parties, but the level of opposition is much less obvious or politically significant. Further, when asked to identify who is most likely to experience racism or discrimination in New Zealand, New Zealanders will identify Asians as the main target, suggesting some sympathy.

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The rapidity and radical nature of some of the changes of the 1980s has raised some important questions about what it means to be a New Zealander, the way in which ethnic and immigrant identity ought to be treated, especially when public resources are involved, and the balance between recognizing Maori and biculturalism, and what is required by way of a multiculturalism that addresses the nature of contemporary cultural diversity. New Zealand has gone from being a devotedly monocultural, Anglophile community to one that has significant proportion of its population who are Maori and who are recognized in various ways that would have been unthinkable in the 1960s, plus thriving and increasingly important Pacific and Asian communities.

Challenges in Aotearoa

Biculturalism is unlikely to be dislodged in any significant way given the demographic base of Maori and their political sophistication in ensuring that the systems of the modern state recognize their position and need. Some of the easier aspects of the transition to biculturalism might

have been addressed, and that what is left are more difficult and enduring issues: complex historical grievances, embedded socio-economic disadvantages which are inter-generational, and urban Maori who are at odds with traditional *iwi* (tribal) institutions. What these developments have illustrated are some specific as well as generic issues, including:

- Defining group membership, especially when there is significant levels of intermarriage and a move away from traditional forms of group membership and practice;
- The balance between national systems and institutions, and participation in these as a requirement of citizenship; and the development of Maori specific institutions, which are critical to preserving cultural traditions and identity but which are often invisible to non-Maori;
- The limits of tolerance from Pakeha, and other non-Maori, in relation to resolving historical grievances and the transfer of resources to Maori.

Alongside these issues are those which pitch biculturalism against multiculturalism. Biculturalism has occupied the pre-eminent place of political and policy debates, and there has been little room for multiculturalism. Further, there is a suspicion voiced by Maori that multiculturalism, especially a 'soft' form, would enable Pakeha and the state to escape its responsibilities towards Maori. There is some evidence for this, as the multiculturalism that is often talked about in the public domain does not involve major public resources, it does not make Pakeha uncomfortable and tends to leave much of the responsibility for cultural maintenance with the community responsible. Some moves have been made to develop a multicultural framework, especially from the Office of Ethnic Affairs and the Race Relations Commissioner. But there is often a first principle involved: Maori as *tangata whenua* (first people of New Zealand) are acknowledged as such and the multiculturalism that is proposed would not disturb this position. In reality, the multiculturalism that does emerge will need to sit alongside biculturalism, rather than in competition with it. Some of us have suggested that this might be cast as a bi-nationalism (Maori and Pakeha) alongside a system of collective rights which encompasses multiculturalism (see Fleras and Spoonley, 1999). One thing that does occur as a result of the emphasis on biculturalism is that immigrants and their descendants feel left out – they are neither Maori nor Pakeha, they are not included in conversations about biculturalism and the state seems preoccupied with Maori. This situation is unsustainable in the long term and a form of multiculturalism which does not displace the biculturalism in place but which includes various ethnic minorities in an inclusive nation-building process and framework is required.

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