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**IDENTITY AND SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT:
TRANSFORMATIONS AND CHANGE AMONG MĀORI WOMEN**

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology,
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ABSTRACT

Several writers have argued that New Zealand's colonial history has thwarted optimal identity development among Māori (Awatere, 1984; Lawson Te-Aho, 1998a; 1998b). In recent decades the view that Māori identity may be restored via enculturation has gained widespread acceptance (Broughton, 1993; Edwards, 1999). Recent research indicates, however, that many Māori perceive their identities in ways that differ from the enculturated ideal (Borrell, 2005; Te Hoe Nuku Roa, 1996; 1999). Relatively little is known of the diverse interpretations that comprise 'alternative' Māori identity forms. This thesis aims to contribute to current understandings of Māori identity by exploring identity change across three generations of Māori women. For the purposes of the research, identity was treated as 'held' within personal life-stories and transformations were investigated by comparing the life-stories of 35 Māori women from different age groups. Attention was given to the impact of three socio-historical processes on identity: the mass migration of Māori from rural to urban locations after the 1950s, the drive towards Māori assimilation which underpinned Government policy towards Māori until the late 1960s, and the Māori political and cultural renaissance which gathered momentum in New Zealand from the 1970s. Data analyses found participants born prior to urbanisation evaluated their Māori identities positively and this seemed to reflect their isolation from Pākehā and exposure to competent Māori role models during their formative years. Participants aged between 35 and 49 expressed disharmony and tension around their Māori identities which many attributed to their early exposure to negative evaluations of Māori people.

‘Post-renaissance’ Māori, aged between 18 and 35, reported prizing their cultural distinctiveness from a young age and affirmed Māori political, cultural and social equality despite what they perceived as enduring Pākehā prejudice. This interpretation appeared to reflect their early exposure to educational experiences which imparted a sense of cultural pride and a national news media which publicised Māori political activism. Women’s life-stories reveal distinct intergenerational differences, a multiplicity of interpretations of Māori identity not widely articulated in literature, and the need to expand current paradigms of Māori identity to incorporate the individuality of group members.

Dad, this is for you.

PREFACE

Background

This thesis explores socio-historical changes in identity among Māori by comparing the life-stories of three generations of Māori women. As an initial orientation to this topic some background information is required.

The term Māori refers to anyone who claims descent from the indigenous peoples of New Zealand (or Aotearoa). Although Māori have been present in New Zealand for over a thousand years (Walker, 1990) Māori have a more recent history of colonisation by Pākehā (white settlers mainly of British descent) who arrived here to settle from the early 1800s (Te Puni Kokiri, 1996; 2000). Largely due to force of numbers and through a series of questionable 'agreements' with Māori, British settlers gradually asserted political control in New Zealand from the 1840s. Pākehā have maintained political and economic dominance in New Zealand since that time (King, 2003; Orange, 2004).

Māori are now a minority ethnic group (at 15 percent the population as of the 2001 New Zealand census) swamped by Pākehā (at approximately 80 percent) (Te Puni Kokiri, 1996; 2000). As a consequence of minority status Māori have had to reorganise their traditional ways of life substantially. Over several generations the values and culture of Pākehā have usurped Māori traditions and profoundly transformed how Māori live as well as how they perceive themselves as people (Durie, 1994). Many Māori believe that colonisation has been fundamentally detrimental for Māori (H. Awatere, 1993; Department of Social

Welfare, 1988) and point to a range of social and economic inequalities between Māori and other population sub-groups that they argue may be blamed on New Zealand's colonial history (D. Awatere, 1984). While it is not difficult to find examples of how contemporary Māori are worse off than their Pākehā counterparts (see chapter three), circumstances have improved somewhat over the last 30 years in the cultural arena as Māori have driven a cultural and political renaissance which has catapulted Māori rights and identity to the forefront of New Zealand politics (Durie, 1998a; 2004).

In this thesis I am primarily concerned with one central question – how has Māori identity changed over the last 50 years? Two main factors compelled me to carry out this study. Having been raised in New Zealand and being of both Māori and Pākehā descent I have had many experiences over the course of my life which have prompted me to question what it means to identify as Māori. My father, in particular, inspired me to think about age related differences in Māori identity. He was of Ngāti Porou and Ngāti Kahungunu descent (these are both Māori tribes located on the East Coast of the North Island of New Zealand). His parents were both Māori and, as a corollary, he was a very Māori 'looking' man (his skin was dark and he had strong Māori facial features). He was raised in Porangahau, a small rural township in Central Hawke's Bay, near his tribal marae (meeting place) and he enjoyed close relationships with his extended whanau (family), including his kaumatua (Māori elders). Despite his genealogy (whakapapa), physical appearance and formative conditions, my father did not speak the Māori language (te reo Māori). He told me that when he was growing up his parents and elders spoke Māori to each other but they did not teach their

own children to do the same. When I pressed him to explain why, he told me that when he was younger the Māori language and culture seemed to ‘belong to’ older Māori and younger Māori were encouraged to put them ‘to the side’.

My experiences were very different from those of my father. Born in the early 1970s, I came to age at a time in New Zealand history when it was becoming more ‘fashionable’ to be Māori. I was raised to be proud that I am Māori. I learnt to speak basic Māori at school and was involved in Māori cultural groups (kapa haka) throughout my adolescence. On reflection, I feel fortunate to have been encouraged to embrace my Māori identity and learn to express myself as Māori. At the same time, however, I often feel a sense of disconnection from the cultural environment my father and grandparents knew.

Although I never spoke with my father about how he saw his own Māori identity, when he died in 1990 at the age of 44, I discovered that he had been reading *Teach Yourself Māori* (Harawira, 1954) during his lunch breaks at work. After being deprived of the opportunity to learn the language of his forebears, at mid-life he had wanted to learn how to articulate himself in the Māori language. Reflecting on this, I have often wondered if my Dad also felt the sense of loss and disconnection in relation to his Māori heritage that I have experienced. If so, perhaps he experienced that disconnection in a different way?

I think many Māori would report a feeling of disconnection, in various degrees, from their own Māori identity. It also seems obvious that Māori of my own age interpret being Māori in ways that are radically different from our forebears. As

a person who is interested in how people make meaning of their lives, I wonder how has Māori identity changed? At this stage in my life I wanted to look for an answer to this question and my PhD research provided an opportunity for that to occur.

The second factor inspiring this research was an experience I had several years ago when I observed the then Minister of Māori Affairs, Tariana Turia, present a keynote address to the New Zealand Psychological Society at their annual conference in Hamilton. In her speech, Turia made reference to Post Colonial Traumatic Stress Disorder (PCTSD) which was an application of the individual level psychological concept of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to the process of Māori colonisation by Pākehā at a collective level. Essentially, Turia proffered the view that colonisation (and the concomitant processes of urbanisation and deculturation of the Māori people) had brought about low self-esteem among Māori and this manifested in a range of social problems in Māori communities, including elevated levels of other and self harm (Turia, 2000).

While this speech became the subject of public disdain in the ensuing weeks and Turia, herself, gained a fair degree of notoriety for her sentiments, her assertions were certainly not unique. Similar observations have been made in relation to populations with a similar anthropological history to Māori, that is, relatively sudden contact with a foreign cultural group followed by rapid mass settlement and subsequent political and economic takeover on the part of that group (Renfrey, 1992; Zimmerman, Isreal, Schulz & Checkoway 1992; Zimmerman, Ramirez, Washienko, Walter & Dyer, 1998; Yuen at el, 2000). For decades a

comparable theoretical explanation has been provided for high rates of violence among African American males and high levels of alcoholism within Native American communities (Kasee, 1995). Indeed, for some time, local academics have argued that the history of colonisation experienced by Māori predisposes modern Māori to a form of psychological distress (Dewes, 1975; Durie, 1985; Sachdev, 1989, 1990), which has been termed ‘cultural schizophrenia’ by Edwards (2000) and ‘cultural depression’ by Lawson Te-Aho (1998). In referring to the psychological impact of colonisation on Māori (particularly urban migration and acculturation into Pākehā society), Sachdev (1990a, p.102.) observed that the disconcerting increase in Māori psychiatric admissions in recent decades “...may reflect the impact of psycho-cultural stress on the community.” (cited in Hirini, 1998, p.206). In her description of this phenomenon Lawson Te-Aho (1998, p.219) wrote:

The act of colonisation gave birth to cultural alienation because of forced assimilation into dominant cultural practices originally foreign to Māori people. This caused Māori people to act outside of their essential being as Māori. This created historically sourced behaviours which have had devastating impacts on current generations of Māori.

Two assumptions are implicit in the argument made by these writers. The first is that Māori identity is co-terminous with enculturation – or what I call the ‘cultural view of identity’. In this view of Māori identity ‘it’ seems to be conceptualised as the extent to which Māori can engage competently with

specific aspects of traditional Māori culture and society or conduct themselves in a culturally 'Māori way.' From this perspective common indicators of Māori identity include self-identification as Māori, understanding the Māori language and culture, and involvement in Māori social activities. Evidence for the prevalence of this view of Māori identity may be found in written descriptions of Māori identity (Barlow, 1991) and measurement instruments designed to assess Māori identity using markers of enculturation (Stevenson, 2001, 2004; Te Hoe Nuku Roa, 1999; Thomas, 1998). The second assumption implicit here is that Māori identity has suffered via colonisation because Māori are now relatively deculturated (that is Māori have lost the ability to live according to their 'essential being as Māori') and the resultant 'cultural alienation' (or separation from their own cultural heritage) gives rise to a range of maladaptive experiences and responses among contemporary Māori.

These observations have become common ones for Māori writers to make. Indeed, references to the detrimental effect of colonisation (and deculturation) on Māori identity has become a central theme of contemporary Māori scholarship (Durie, 1997, 1999, 2003, Ratima & Ratima 1997; Hirini, 1997, 1998; Pere, 1994; Mead, 1999; Kupenga, Rata & Nepe, 1993; Szászy, 1995; Puketapu-Andrews, 1997).

The use of the concept of identity in this way is the second reason I chose to examine changes in Māori identity. Why? Because the argument is both compelling and influential from a sociological perspective, however, at the level of the individual, the view that Māori identity is somehow defective for deculturated Māori does not hold true for many contemporary Māori (see

Borrell, 2005). As such, I believe that it is time to un-pack and explore more carefully the assumptions that give rise to this view.

To begin with, I think that it is fair to suggest that not all Māori people feel psychologically maligned because they are culturally alienated, or, to soften this argument, I point to the fact that Māori are a very diverse social group many of whom seem to function adaptively in New Zealand society yet differ in their perceptions of the relevance of Māori culture for them personally.

Durie (1994) recognised this diversity when he described three groups of Māori. One group of Māori he observed are ‘conservative’, ‘traditional’ or relatively enculturated. This group are culturally and socially Māori, understand their Māori whakapapa, speak some Māori and are familiar with tikanga Māori (Māori custom). Another group he observed are ‘bi-cultural’, that is, they identify as Māori yet operate effectively among and are socially competent in the company of Pākehā. Bi-cultural Māori evaluate their Māori identity positively and see their Māori culture and heritage as enhancing their lifestyle lived in a Pākehā dominated country. A third group are largely detached from both Māori and Pākehā society. Māori in this group may find it difficult to be accepted socially and culturally among both Māori and Pākehā. Because of their ‘marginalisation’ in this respect they may feel a sense of alienation from Māori society and the same time a sense of animosity or resentment towards Pākehā society and people.

Williams (2000) described similar sub-groups of Māori. One, he observed, are the ‘traditional core’ who are the most enculturated, live close to their traditional tribal areas and speak both Māori and English. The second group he described as ‘primarily urban.’ Members of this group may identify with Māori kin in rural areas but are urban dwelling and functionally bi-cultural. A third group he referred to as ‘unconnected’. This group are biologically Māori but may not identify culturally or socially as Māori. The final group he described is a large group of people who are socially and culturally indistinguishable from Pākehā. This group are biologically ‘part-Māori’ but define themselves as ‘Kiwi’ or ‘New Zealander’ (also see Royal, 2003).

Although these descriptions are observational, research indicates that they reflect a social actuality in which many Māori no longer see their Māori heritage and culture as a particularly significant aspect of their identities. An indication of the number of Māori that may fall into this group was recently revealed in the findings of Te Hoe Nuku Roa (a longitudinal survey of 550 Māori households carried out by researchers from Massey University, New Zealand). In this study when 956 Māori from the Manawatu, Gisborne, Wellington and Auckland regions of New Zealand (aged over 15 years) were asked to choose an identity label that best described them, over half (51.1%) chose Māori but 25.9% preferred to be described as either a ‘Kiwi’ or a ‘New Zealander’. Among that same group of adults, when asked if speaking Māori or being able to speak Māori was important to them, 42.4% said it was extremely important, 37% said it was important, while 19.5% said it was unimportant, or extremely unimportant (Te Hoe Nuku Roa, 1999). These findings indicate Māori have a range of

cultural characteristics and see their identities in unique ways that may or may not be consistent with the ‘cultural view’ of identity.

Another weakness of the argument that cultural alienation lies at the heart of Māori social dysfunction is that it tends to detract from the fact that many Māori are actually very proud of who they are and show a keen interest in expressing themselves culturally as Māori. For example, a report from Creative New Zealand (1999) indicated that over the 1997/1998 year, Māori were more likely than other groups to be involved in cultural arts and activities as a student or teacher. Nearly half of Māori (45%) took part in some form of Māori arts or cultural activity. Māori women and those aged between 45 and 59 had the highest level of participation (50%). The key reasons women gave for taking part were enjoyment and to maintain and pass on Māori cultural skills and traditional knowledge.

In addition, the results from the 2001 New Zealand census showed that the Māori language is the most widely spoken language in New Zealand after English. The census found one-quarter of all Māori stated that they could hold a conversation in Māori about everyday things (Statistics New Zealand, 2002). Further, Māori parents seem committed to encouraging their children to learn their language and culture. In testimony to this, in July 2001, nearly 10,000 Māori children were enrolled in kohanga reo (Māori ‘language nests’) and these children made up 31% of all Māori enrolments in early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 2001).

How do we reconcile the concept of cultural alienation with statistics that indicate that many Māori are flourishing culturally, are positive about their cultural identity and are passionately working to affirm and improve their knowledge of Māori language and culture? Moreover, how can it be argued that Māori identity has been maligned by cultural alienation when some ‘biological’ Māori seem ambivalent about their own heritage and culture? Terms like cultural alienation and PCTSD seem inappropriate to apply to Māori as an entire people.

Moreover, in stressing the harm of colonisation upon Māori identity, concepts such as PTSCD downplay the rich complexities in the way individuals experience being Māori and tend to paint a picture of deculturated Māori as dysfunctional individuals who have not adapted identities that allow them to cope effectively with modern society. It seems timely, therefore, to shift focus from the argument that Māori identity has been maligned by deculturation towards exploring why Māori differ so much in their own expressions and interpretations of their Māori identity and the factors that shape their identities in this respect. By focusing on identity change in this thesis I hope to elucidate how Māori identity has adapted with socio-historical changes while not becoming focused on how Māori have been culturally alienated or disadvantaged.

To carry out my research I collected and examined the life-stories of three groups of women. One group comprised women born prior to the 1950s (who were raised in mainly Māori communities and in Māori cultural contexts), a second group comprised women born between 1950 and 1970 (a period marked

by rapid Māori urbanisation and increased contact between Māori and Pākehā) and the third group comprised women born after 1970 (who came of age after the beginnings of the Māori cultural renaissance spurred on by the Māori political activism in New Zealand during the late 1960s).

During data collection I focused on how the women interviewed defined, described and evaluated their own identities as Māori and the origins of those interpretations in their personal life experiences. To clarify the relationship between historical context and identity, during the process of data analysis I focused specifically on the differences in life-story content between women from different age cohorts. I found women in each group reported different social contexts and life experiences and, therefore, different ideas about what it meant to be Māori. In this sense, reflecting historical patterns in social, economic and cultural processes, and public opinion regarding Māori identity and culture, women's life-stories demonstrate the relationship between massive social changes in New Zealand history and individual level differences in how women perceive themselves as Māori today.

This thesis comprises of eight chapters. Chapters one and two provide a theoretical context by proposing the life-story conceptualisation of identity and addressing key considerations of working with ethnic identity as a topic of study. Chapter three discusses the socio-historical context and reviews important features of Māori and New Zealand history that worked to shape the lives of the women interviewed in this research. Chapters four and five discuss the research process in some detail including the data analytic techniques used. The

limitations of the study are also discussed in these chapters. In chapters six and seven I present and discuss the results. Finally, in chapter eight, I discuss the data in relation to current understandings and conceptions of Māori identity as well as additional issues arising from this research.

While it is hoped the insights provided in this thesis support current efforts to improve the Māori social condition by elucidating how Māori identity may be appropriately understood and nurtured, I recognise that it is not within the scope of this work to cover other several important areas of study. In particular, I acknowledge the omission of discussions of Māori men, and gender and sexuality as salient factors in identity development.

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