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SCHOOL OF MĀORI, PACIFIC & INDIGENOUS STUDIES

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Keynote presentation: Ngā Tari Māori ki te Ao

Māori Studies in the World

Michael P.J. Reilly

Tēnā koutou katoa. Tangi kē. I wish to thank the organisers for allowing me to speak here today. I should point out that I am substituting for my colleague, Dr Brendan Hokowhitu, who was not able to attend. Obviously I cannot speak for him; rather, my intention is to draw upon my own experiences and observations, both as a former student of Māori Studies here at Victoria University, and since 1991 as a staff member in what is now called the School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies at Otago University. I argue that these seemingly discrete fields of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies have always shared a similar set of principles and practices, premised upon a shared understanding of the world. I would argue that Indigenous Studies, as a global description, serves to highlight what is common to all. My remarks may prove useful in a discussion about the intersections between these domains, within local, national and global contexts.

In 1990 when Te Tari Māori, as an autonomous Department of Māori Studies within the Division of Humanities, was founded at the University of Otago, it was conceived along what might be called the classical lines of any Māori Studies academic programme. It taught a Major subject called Māori Studies based around a core of te reo Māori papers with a range of elective subjects on aspects of cultural knowledge, including art, education, history,

tikanga, and literature; the latter topics changing as different staff came and went from the department. The majority of the teaching staff were Māori, although at any one time there were a couple of Pākehā academics as well (normally graduates from Māori Studies programmes). Similarly, most students who graduated in Māori Studies at Otago were Māori, although in the first year introductory papers in language and culture, there were always large enrolments of non-Māori; mostly Pākehā and numbering as many as several hundreds. Later on, these non-Māori enrolments included significant numbers of overseas exchange students, and academic staff who wished to learn the basics about the Māori world. If servicing this demand brought in significant EFTS, Te Tari Māori remained at its core committed to the study and teaching of Te Ao Māori by and for Māori. In these early years, the wider University often seemed somewhat sceptical of the worth of this programme, and certainly appeared surprised at the growing demand for it. While staffed mostly by non-Ngāi Tahu staff, Te Tari Māori put a lot of effort into the maintenance of strong community ties to Otago's Māori community and the mana whenua in particular.

A key driver of these developments until 1995 was the Head of Department husband and wife team, Godfrey and Toroa Pōhatu. However, even in these early years there was a notable consciousness of the relationship between the tangata whenua and other Pacific peoples. This again was driven by the Pōhatu partnership. For example, Godfrey spent part of a sabbatical leave at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, while he and Toroa developed a friendship with the prominent Hawaiian scholar, Lilikala Kame'eleihiwa, who early in the 1990s visited Te Tari Māori as a guest of the department. Thus Māori Studies at Otago from its earliest days demonstrated not only an awareness of its relationship to mana whenua, and to Māori throughout Aotearoa, but also conceived of itself as part of the larger Pacific. When I taught

on topics from creation to colonisation in Aotearoa and other Pacific Islands, such as Hawaii and the Cook Islands, my work was accepted and embraced from the outset as part of that distinctive world understanding by Godfrey and Toroa Pōhatu. When Tania Ka`ai became Head of Te Tari Māori in 1996 she was therefore able to build on an existing vision and to take it further; ultimately, creating the School as it is presently constituted. The significant changes effected during her leadership, notably including a Master of Indigenous Studies, came about because Te Tari Māori at Otago University had always accepted its broader location within an indigenous world. Speaking as an outside observer, I believe this positioning actually lies within the very philosophy and practice of Māori Studies.

For those who can cast their minds back to the beginnings of Māori Studies here at Victoria University, Te Kapunga (Koro) Dewes was a key foundation staff member. He was especially passionate about the Māori oral arts, but in his teaching continually referred to other examples of oral literature from around the world, including the work of Jan Vansina in Africa, and of the work of nationalist collectors in the Republic of Ireland. There was always an awareness that Te Ao Māori incorporated a relationship with the knowledges belonging to other indigenous or colonised peoples. Just as importantly, Māori Studies was never simply committed to what might be called traditional university values of teaching and research in specialised subject areas, with an emphasis on objective writing about knowledge, relatively divorced from the concerns of non-academic communities. In my experience of scholars such as Koro Dewes, Sidney Mead, Godfrey and Toroa Pōhatu, and Tānia Ka`ai there existed amongst all of them to varying degrees an awareness of the larger political dimensions of their academic work which connected them with their students and communities in a common enterprise to advance the study and practice of indigenous cultural values and

knowledges. At Otago I am still told that I work in a Western institution. And yet anyone who has worked or studied in any Tari Māori would soon recognise the lack of fit between the philosophies and practices behind such an utterance and what goes on on a daily basis within our own programmes, departments and schools.

Perhaps it might be helpful at this stage, if I describe a list of the attributes which I think are amongst some of those shared by the subjects we presently define as Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies.

- They are often concerned to reintegrate past and present knowledges belonging to the people of the land, in order to create a coherent and living whole, in place of a fragmented knowledge which has been alienated through the process of colonisation from its former custodians and those descended from them.
- The acquisition of indigenous languages and the learning of associated cultural knowledge, in both past and contemporary contexts, are notable features in these fields. The languages of the people are especially cherished, and their acquisition is quite often a central component of the curriculum. The stress is on ensuring that such languages continue to be used as part of everyday communication.
- These fields also practise what they research, so that language and key cultural values appear as elements within their day to day academic practices as a community of scholars. This normalisation of what has often been marginalised by dominant societies serves as an important manifestation of the political commitment to change shown by practitioners in these fields.

- They are concerned with fostering and furthering a series of relationships beyond the academy as part of a recognition that such fields can not exist as a kind of social isolate solely in the academy. They are in fact a part of a greater social and cultural whole. These relationships may include different indigenous communities depending on the location of their institution. In Otago's case key relationships embrace the mana whenua, other tangata whenua, and Pacific communities living locally and elsewhere in Aotearoa and Te Waipounamu.
- These relationships are often premised on genealogical connections reaching out from the staff and students to these other communities, and can involve scholars in various commitments and obligations to these various communities that may include the provision of pastoral support to indigenous students, community related research, or day to day participation in a community. Non-indigenous scholars working in such schools or departments may find analogous kinds of obligations are expected of them, including assistance for students and support for community activities. These academic subjects cannot opt out of a complex web of larger social connections and obligations. The support of indigenous students who are part of the future for their societies is an important dimension of such fields. Indigenous academics are important role models, and take their responsibilities to nurture and support younger generations through their studies as a moral duty.
- Academics in these fields may become powerful voices acting for and on behalf of communities, playing various kinds of leadership and advocacy roles. In Aotearoa, this may involve a role in relation to the dominant non-indigenous community. Such roles may include the education of the dominant group to understand matters of concern to their indigenous neighbours, but which have been ignored or overlooked

by the rest of society. Their position within the university system and the possession of doctorates can provide them with the credentials to undertake what is in many respects a mediating role with such outsiders.

- There is a profound and personal sense of connectedness between these fields of study and indigenous communities which become an inexhaustible source of moral and intellectual strength for all parties, but especially for indigenous academics working in institutions such as universities. It influences the kind of teaching and research they undertake; for example, the provision of distance teaching to reach out to these communities, in order to give them opportunities to develop their own capacity. Otago's on-line Master of Indigenous Studies is an example of such an initiative.
- They share the defining experiences of belonging to peoples who have often experienced varying forms of colonisation.
- They share a unique and intimate relationship with peoples who identify themselves as custodians of the land, whether it is the land upon which they presently live, or one situated elsewhere.
- The past or present domination by a foreign society and culture are common elements found in such fields. Most indigenous communities have had to learn to live with and to survive such an alienating experience, although the means of such survival often differ depending on various local circumstances and conditions. Sometimes, as in the Pacific, societies adopted and then transformed elements of foreign culture (such as religion) in accordance with existing cultural values and norms. These techniques of survival, cultural maintenance, and the reassertions of these societies and cultures

form a key part of the academic teaching and research in subjects characterised as Māori, Pacific or Indigenous studies.

- There is a shared critical consciousness aimed at interrogating the words of those experts or commentators who presume to understand or to authoritatively describe indigenous communities. This may include criticism of past and present forms of representation, from novels, to ethnography, to film, or to journalism; to name a few. Such criticism engages with varying fields of theory in order to question dominant representations of those communities with which indigenous scholars are affiliated.
- Understanding the implications of contemporary forces of globalisation for indigenous communities is another important aspect of these fields. This is a major rationale for the development of a programme such as the Master of Indigenous Studies at the University of Otago.

I am aware there is much that divides these different fields. I realise that in some locations in Aotearoa Māori and Pacific Studies, for example, have evolved quite distinctive institutional lives. While Māori are a Pacific people, in so far as they themselves developed as a culture out of eastern Polynesian voyagers who landed here several centuries ago, their position as the tangata whenua of this land is unique, and needs to be respected. In addition, they hold a unique position as a partner to the Treaty of Waitangi. Seen in these terms, all other New Zealand communities fall under the aegis of the Crown. Despite these important distinctions I believe that at a deeper level these fields share more in common. I would argue that ultimately we need to operate at both levels. We should accept and embrace the differences as unique markers of what makes each group socially and culturally distinctive. Hence Māori

Studies will continue to dedicate itself to the study of the tangata whenua in all its diversity and richness, just as Pacific Studies will celebrate the complex nature of that oceanic world that Māori continue to commemorate as Te Moana nui a Kiwa. This is as it should be. But the example of that great voyaging ancestor, Kiwa, who connects us all through his oceanic journeys, reminds us that the study of the local always also transcends the particular and brings us into relation with other elements that collectively create a dynamic whole. This unitary dimension might perhaps be called Indigenous Studies, as the overarching term encompassing all the kinds of attributes I have outlined, and which are shared in common by the distinctive scholarly subjects such as Māori or Pacific Studies.