Essay

REFUGEES, IMMIGRATION, MULTICULTURALISM, AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR BICULTURALISM

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At the same time as the Māori people were slowly getting a degree of traction over recognition of their status as indigenous people in New Zealand, it was complicated by the mass immigration of Pacific, Asian and African peoples. It is projected by Statistics New Zealand that by 2026 16% of the New Zealand population will be part of the Māori ethnic group but 26% will be of Pacific Island or Asian heritage.

This population change, and the prospective increased refugee settlement in New Zealand, has significant implications for health, education and social service providers, many of which have benefited from the Government providing resources to lift Māori achievement and lessen Māori deprivation. In recent years a shift has developed from a focus on bi-cultural approaches to one of multi-cultural approaches. This paper argues that these terms are not mutually exclusive, and discusses some of the contentious issues that have crept into the discussion on multi-culturalism, immigration and the worldwide problem of refugees. This article is based on a presentation to the Third International Indigenous Social Work Conference in Darwin 2015.

Māori are the indigenous people of New Zealand who were largely marginalised by British colonial settlers in the 19th Century. Our losses included 95% of our land[1] and by the end of the 19th century our population had decreased so markedly that many thought we would become extinct[2].

The 20th century was one of slow revitalisation that saw a growth in our population and a developing political engagement. By the last quarter of the 20th century, at the same time that Māori and the settlers' descendants were seeking to resolve their differences through a process that included a policy of biculturalism, matters were being complicated by a huge influx of Asian and Pacific peoples[3] who now jointly out-number the Māori population. In 2013 the New Zealand census recorded a population of 4,242,051. Of these, 598,602 identified as belonging to the Māori ethnic group, 471,708 identified as being part of an Asian ethnic group with 295,941 identifying as part of a Pacific Islands ethnic group[4]. While today Māori make up 14 % of the New Zealand population, it is projected by 2026 that Māori will make up 16.2% of the New Zealand population. However, by 2026 it is projected that Asian, Pacific and Middle Eastern Groups will make up 26% of the New Zealand population[5].

This rapidly increasing non-Māori and non-European group has called into question the notion of biculturalism where some have called it the "privileging" of Māori and Māori culture over other cultural groups[6]. When the term "privileging" is used the insinuation is unwarranted privileging. The privileging of British culture, language and values in New Zealand is so hegemonic that this form of privileging is almost invisible to the dominant culture[7].

While many Māori continue to push for biculturalism, it continues to be countered by mainstream New Zealand's recent dogma that states we are no longer a bicultural country, we are a multicultural country[8]. But are we? Those demographics would seem to indicate that New Zealand is, and is increasingly becoming, a multicultural society. However, it depends on your definitions as when we discuss terms such as multi-culturalism and bi-culturalism what do we actually mean?

Multiculturalism

Many societies have a plurality of cultures and ethnicities living within their borders, and the term multiculturalism is often used to recognize the existence of diverse populations in a society. People of these diverse groups may set up their own cultural institutions, such as places of worship and community centres, and may start businesses that meet the cultural or personal needs of their populations. Some of these businesses, especially restaurants, allow local populations to feel they are interacting with these cultural groups.

To define multiculturalism more succinctly Canadian researchers Berry & Kalin[9] have come up with a framework that defined multicultural societies and identified them as having three primary features. The first one is the belief that cultural diversity is valued within a society[10]. A society that practices multiculturalism is open to the arrival of other cultures, in fact sometimes societies are proud of the number of different cultures or ethnicities that live within that society. A recent press release from New Zealand's Statistics Department[11] proudly declared that even though New Zealand is a geographically isolated country "New Zealand has more ethnicities than the world has countries". Cultural diversity can be celebrated in popular culture. A well known New Zealand song writer, Dave Dobbyn, saw an anti immigration rally by a small number of National Front activists and in response wrote a song '*Welcome Home'* that became an anthem to multiculturalism[12]. The song expressed a sentiment of welcome to new immigrants and included the words "welcome home, see I made a place for you[13]."

The second feature of multiculturalism is that groups are permitted to maintain their cultural expressions as long as they don't violate the laws of society[14] of which underage marriages, physical punishment of children and forms of slavery are some examples. Sometimes practices are discouraged or cause public consternation such as the wearing of the burqa[15], and sometimes the law is changed to deliberately exclude some of the practices of immigrants, such as what became known as female genital mutilation[16]. However, barring a small number of practices does not prevent cultural groups from expressing themselves and their culture. Sometimes some of these expressions become festivals that may even be celebrated in the wider community. The Pasifika Festival in Auckland, Chinese New Year in Dunedin and the Diwali Festival of Lights, also in Auckland, are important examples.

The third feature of multiculturalism is that, "all of the ethno-cultural groups within a nation are able to participate in a fair and equitable way in that society[17]". You have to have both the maintenance of the culture and the participation in society, otherwise you don't have a multicultural society[18]. They go hand in hand. If immigrants are encouraged to become indistinguishable from their white neighbours in values and behaviour then the society is not multicultural. If they find it difficult to get a job because they wear cultural or religious headdress, speak English with an overseas accent or have names difficult to pronounce, it is not a multicultural society.

In summary, multiculturalism is; the welcoming of diversity, peoples being able to maintain their culture and being able to participate in society. Already by this definition, Māori people may legitimately question how long this has been true even for us.

I well remember the first time in public that I heard an academic from the University of Otago's medical school state "we are not a bicultural country we are a multicultural country". It was at a departmental feedback on the experience of fourth year medical students placements with the Māori Mobile Health Unit I was working for at the time. The statement at that time, and every other time I have heard or read it, carries with it the same meaning. Biculturalism and multiculturalism are mutually exclusive. You can't have one and maintain the other. Again, it depends on what you mean by biculturalism.

Biculturalism

Firstly, biculturalism, as a term, is not unique to New Zealand. In the western United States it means to be bi-lingual particularly within Hispanic dominated areas, while in other parts of the US it can refer to being able to move between two cultural worlds and even adapting or synthesizing two cultures[19]. In other words, these forms refer

to the biculturalism of individuals rather than of societies. For a societal example of biculturalism we can turn to Canada where their 1960's policy of biculturalism recognised the two main cultures of Canada i.e. French and English. It didn't last long and moved to recognition of the multicultural nature of Canada. Interestingly it changed not because of the recognition of its indigenous peoples but because of the objections of Ukrainian Canadians who felt that calling Canada a bicultural nation excluded them[20].

New Zealand's form of biculturalism is different. Biculturalism came about through the recognition of the monocultural nature of New Zealand's institutions. In 1840 the British reached an agreement with the 512 Māori leaders who signed the Treaty of Waitangi where the British were permitted to set up a government (primarily in Māori eyes to control British settlers[21]) while agreeing to Māori maintaining power over their own affairs and properties and at the same time granting them British citizenship.

However within 14 years, when the first New Zealand parliament was set up, the British Government handed over power to the British settlers. The marginalisation of Māori ensured that the institutions of the state would be run by one cultural perspective, one value base, and one language. This consciously and subconsciously created a hierarchy whereby one culture (British) determined whose values and language were used in the development of policy, the implementation of law, and the distribution of services such as health, welfare, education, and justice. It also ensured the marginalisation of the Treaty of Waitangi, allowing the settler government to ignore the guarantees inherently and specifically promised to Māori within the document[22]. The settlers were in charge of the legislative and judicial processes and were not prepared to share any form of power. Therefore, the Māori population had to adapt to the ways of a foreign country, foreign values, a foreign language and foreign processes. Māori ways of knowing, valuing and communicating were largely ignored. Māori processes were considered inferior. Māori relationships and obligations were marginalised.

The arrival of a progressive Labour Government in 1984 brought about a number of changes including a permanent commission of enquiry whereby the Waitangi Tribunal could look at historic actions of the Crown back to its signing in 1840. The Government seemed to take seriously Māori complaints over the monocultural nature of New Zealand's laws and institutions. This led to a de facto government policy of biculturalism[23], with the requirement for all Government departments to report on their responsiveness to Māori and to the Treaty of Waitangi[24]. The implementation of the Treaty in Government policies and procedures was beginning to be seen as the "basic tenet"[25] of biculturalism.

Biculturalism became about Māori language, values and practices being reflected in "society's laws, practices, and institutional arrangements"[26] and "to make state operated facilities more culturally amenable to Māori as with the recognition of Māori preferences and practices in schools, hospitals and prisons"[27]. It was also about settling past grievances, creating greater political equality and power sharing. Today it has led to joint administration over fisheries, rivers, national parks, and Māori involvement in overseeing the delivery of education, welfare, justice etc.

In summary, multiculturalism is the welcoming of diversity, maintenance of the culture and being able to participate in society. Whereas biculturalism brought indigenous values, customs and processes into Government agencies and those it funds, it required Government departments to report on their responsiveness to Māori and to the Treaty of Waitangi, and included some power sharing.

These are not the mutually exclusive terms that many would have us believe. One is about recognising that immigrants have a valued place and the other is about New Zealand also being a Māori country. They are compatible but they recognise indigenous people as part of two majorities, not one of a number of minorities.

To New Zealand Māori, multiculturalism does not carry the same expectations as does biculturalism. I don't think that there are any societies that are genuinely multicultural – that is, where all participatory cultures have a degree of equality with their values being recognized and included within government institutions and policies. Berry and Kalin's[28] multiculturalism suggests a dominant culture should "allow" minorities to be accommodated, but only

insofar as they do not disrupt a country's laws and customs. This leaves little room for the possibility that a country's laws and customs may need to change. Their multiculturalism is a lesser form of intercultural arrangement. A more accurate term for these so-called multicultural societies would be cosmopolitan or multiethnic. They may be tolerant of people of another culture but hesitant to apply the others' values into their own structures. Immigrants or minority ethnic groups may be welcome, but only as long as they do not expect the locals to endorse or be personally influenced by the minority values. Immigrants may participate equitably, as long as they adapt to Western approaches and assimilate or integrate into the dominant culture's way of doing things.

Another issue with the term multiculturalism is, as mentioned previously, that it can be used as an excuse to ignore bicultural obligations. The statement that "we are a multicultural society, not a bicultural one" is often, not as it seems, standing up for other minorities, but used to uphold monoculturalism. In other words, we can't learn every culture, therefore we shouldn't have to learn any[29]. In Berry and Kalin's[30] form of multiculturalism, new immigrants are expected to acculturate into the new society; there is an expectation that when they come to a new country they may hold onto their traditions, but they will have to adapt their ways to fit into institutions, policies, and laws of the land. This power dynamic, whereby the privileged maintain their power, is what prevents genuine multiculturalism in many countries. To some extent, it still prevents genuine biculturalism from existing in New Zealand. Under multiculturalism the elite still maintain their influence, their processes, and their language is the dominant one. We can play being indigenous at home but that has no effect on the state or challenges inherent injustice. Multiculturalism is not about power sharing or integrating other people's values into decision making, under the West's view of multiculturalism, the power remains with the dominant culture.

Discussion on Refugees

Immigration policies also suit the values of the ruling elite. In New Zealand it has been claimed that immigration is used as a tool to keep wages down[31] and that even skilled workers are often bought in as a cost saving measure rather than training the local population[32].

Even the current focus on Syrian refugees is about doing their bit to assuage their consciences in the light of what other countries are doing; doing the minimum conveniently possible. But it will also impact on us as indigenous people. The social services budget will be strained, and our people will miss out, we already see that with other marginalised minorities in New Zealand, where there is an increasing number of immigrant families in need of support. So what do we do? As indigenous peoples we need to be at the forefront of fighting for immigrants and refugees. We should say to them, white people forced their way in here – but look, we are creating a place for you, and you are welcome.

Currently anyone coming to New Zealand sees the relative disparity between Māori and Pākehā New Zealanders. The new comers see Pākehā as superior to Māori. They come to New Zealand with aspirations, and their aspirations are not to join Māori at the bottom of the pile. Māori can also be seen as a threat and we have a history of immigrant parents telling their children not to associate with Māori or to not be like them[33]. Is it any wonder they would not want to join our side?

But in the case of refugees, we have to help, we have to have compassion, because if we can't have compassion for them, why should anyone have compassion for us. It is also better to have them as our allies rather than join those who still see Māori as a threat or irrelevant to New Zealand society.

As an individual, it is surprising how quickly things change. One week I'm grumbling about the number of immigrants coming in, the next week I'm feeling guilty over my selfishness in light of the plight of refugees all around the world. As the indigenous people of this land we have to get ahead of the game. We can't stand on the sidelines scowling, looking resentfully at new immigrants or refugees. If we do we may pay for it in the long term. They are coming no matter what we think and we are better off with them as our allies, rather than as our competitors or enemies. Otherwise we will see the perpetual re-colonisation of our lands.

We have to be the ones they are grateful to. We have to be the ones who stand there with open arms. We have to be the ones who make them feel like they belong, because we are the ones who can truly make them feel like they belong. Around the year 2000, the minister of the church I attend asked me if I could do something for him. A family from the congregation had just attended a citizenship ceremony to become New Zealand citizens. The minister thought it would be nice if I would welcome them in the church service as new citizens. I did "my thing", welcoming them first in Māori and speaking about their right to be in the country granted by the Treaty of Waitangi and as an individual Māori person I welcomed them to the country. I noticed this did a number of things. Firstly they said it helped make them feel like they belonged here. Secondly, I think it made the Pākehā in the congregation squirm a little. They and their ancestors often hadn't been particularly welcome and hadn't worried if they were welcome or not, just forced their way into the country because their British Government said they could. My mother's family came from some of these immigrants; they escaped the poverty of the Scottish clearances and were grateful to come here. They weren't grateful to Māori.

Immigrants and refugees will not forget who made them feel welcomed and who did not. New Zealand, Australia and other colonised countries were often colonised by economic refugees. Scots from the clearances, Irish escaping famine and oppression, English turfed out of their communities by the industrial revolution or seeking religious freedom. Those economic refugees were supported by the British government who were often glad to get rid of them, they forced their way in, killed our peoples and took our resources. That is one of the reasons we need to embrace these new refugees, so that these new refugees will be better guests than those past ones.

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