

On “New Zealand” “Studies”

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‘The question of “Who will speak?” is less crucial than “who will listen?”’
(Spivak 1990, p.59)

Good morning. It’s very strange to be in the centre of London with such an esteemed panel for a gathering about New Zealand Studies. I’m remembering Dean Hapeta, aka Te Kupu from Upper Hutt Posse, who talked about why he identified with his Maori genealogy over his British side. He said, when he is home he is welcomed for being Maori, but being in London and saying you have English ancestry doesn’t get you very far. Anyhow, I’ve just come from Banff in Canada, another part of the empire, and that experience has changed this presentation a fair bit.

For the last six weeks I’ve been collaborating with two artists, both Maori, in a residency called Intra-nation at Banff Centre for the Arts. It’s been a real opportunity to reflect on the construction of nationhood, and a lot of the time I’ve been wondering why the hell a Pakeha like myself is going to London to talk about New Zealand, and thinking maybe I should write something on that. So rather than reiterating the excellent work David Slack (2004) and Pat Snedden (2004) have done on Treaty issues since I submitted my abstract, or spending twenty minutes paraphrasing Stephen Turner (1999) on historiography, or I thought it would be good to think about what we’re doing, right here, to contribute to the cultural struggles emerging in the New Zealand nation-state.

This feeling was especially prompted by two exhibitions at Banff’s Walter Philips Gallery. The first, curated by Candice Hopkins, showcased a number of Native American contemporary artists, including a fantastic video work by Jimmy Durham exploring relationships with the land and the contemporary art world. The second exhibition, immediately following, was by white artist Andrew Hunter presenting a “personal museum” of cowboy memorabilia he’d collected,

exploring nostalgia and his childhood dreams of riding the trails in Banff's Rocky Mountains. I'm not sure if the scheduling of the exhibitions was a sick joke, but in any case Hunter didn't seem self-conscious about using cowboy iconography directly after the "Indians". Maybe he never knew the Indians had been there, maybe the gallery was Terra Nullius. What was interesting about Hunter's cowboy exhibition was that, representations of the Indians were nowhere to be seen. But what does it mean to be a Cowboy without Indians? What does it mean to discuss Cowboys while forgetting their role in state-sanctioned genocide? Hunter is pretty savvy and is obviously aware that it's not the 1950s any more, and after a few decades of identity politics he couldn't get away with direct representations of Indians along side his lone rangers. So instead we get a complete *erasure* of aboriginal perspectives on the domestication of the Rockies. So while the exhibition was much more "aware" of the issues than TV shows like the Lone Ranger, the result was that the indigenous history of Banff was moved even further out of the picture.

The exhibition coincided with Canada Day and a national election, and declarations of patriotism were rife. It struck me that if Hunter's cowboy project was in academia it would be called "Canadian Studies". Hopkins' exhibition of Native American artists would be "Native American Studies", but her show is probably "unpatriotic" and not very approachable by those declaring their geographical affiliation by flying Canadian flags on their car roofs. So here's a paradox: the concerns of Canadian Studies, Australian Studies, and New Zealand studies, to an outside eye, are more similar than different. The titles of these disciplines proclaim their difference from each other, yet the things which could *actually* distinguish them – aboriginal perspectives – are implicitly excluded. In my experience many Maori researchers are much more at home in international federations of indigenous peoples than in gatherings of "New Zealanders".

As cultural studies in New Zealand has begun to emerge as a coherent academic tradition, thanks to the efforts of many who are here today, the decisions we make now potentially structure a great deal of future work. When preparing this paper I was thinking of Stuart Hall's (1980) inspirational introduction to *Culture, Media, Language*, where he describes the Birmingham

Cultural Studies project as springing from a frustration with certain methodological dead-ends in Marxism, sociology, literary criticism and film theory. I feel the same frustration with the approach to “New Zealand” being taken in “New Zealand studies”.

So I’ve changed the title of this paper to **On “New Zealand” “Studies”**. The title suggests two things to be explored: “New Zealand”, the nation-state, and “studies”, the process of academic labour. I suggest that New Zealand Studies often takes both of these terms to be self evident, and very few works in the genre take a critical approach to these terms. But as David Turnbull (2000, p99) puts it, “we are seldom aware of the ways in which our views of the world are ordered by suppressed social constructs.... boundaries, frames, spaces, centres, and silences which structure what is and is not possible to speak of.”

The result of these constructs is that the answer to “who listens” to New Zealand studies” does not include Maori, who have the most knowledge about New Zealand as a physical place; nor does it usually include much of the international academic community, who have the most knowledge about how to study things. I am proposing that this state of affairs is unsustainable and needs fixing. This might require putting some of our cherished beliefs about kiwi pragmatism second to issues of cultural justice and academic professionalism. And we are the only ones who can do it. Let me be clear that the stakes are high. If we fail, we are failing to be academics and failing as New Zealanders. As experts - rather than artists like Hunter - we cannot take a surface view of culture because we are scared of the implications of what lies underneath.

Martin Tolich (2002) calls this fear of what’s beneath “Pakeha paralysis”, and it springs from a phenomenon Elizabeth Guy (2002) noted, that the issues of colonisation have become so fraught that many white people feel “defeated before they start in their desire to engage with Indigenous people”. The fear is institutionalised in stories I have heard more than once about research directors suggesting that academics “avoid dealing with Maori issues”, to avoid having to negotiate with Maori over cultural ownership. But what in New Zealand is not a Maori issue? What part of New Zealand culture is not implicated in the colonial project of making the land into “New Zealand”?

Can I get a quick show of hands on how many of you have read Linda Tuhiwai Smith's "*Decolonizing Methodologies*"? (Smith 1999) Here's how it works for me as a New Zealand Studies text that should be seen as the paradigm for New Zealand Studies. Firstly, it's a great ambassador. I can take it anywhere. I just passed a copy to an artist from Senegal, who loved it and found it enormously productive. I've corresponded with a researcher in Sydney working on issues of transnational adoption from the third world who is copying chapters from the book and passing them into her community. And so on. Everyone who reads it wants to come to New Zealand. Clearly, if in the humanities and social sciences we seek to deal with universal themes, this book is doing a good job of it.

Secondly, the book is as New Zealand as it gets. Remember that apart from the first couple of chapters of scene setting this book is predominantly from a Maori world view and written for Maori cultural maintenance and not for an international audience. For me, the most important thing this book does is show up the false distinction between regionalism and internationalism that is all too common in white New Zealand academia. After Smith's book, I hope that it's no longer possible for a good study of New Zealand to not **also** be a study of European imperialism.

But, as Spivak asked in my quote at the beginning of the paper, who listens to indigenous voices? Are we allowing philosophical agendas to be set by Maori researchers like Smith on the issues of nationhood and research? A quick scan of the citation indices in New Zealand studies will give us a fairly clear "no." The work is more often sidelined to "Maori studies". It's the Pakeha paralysis again. Pakeha need to get below the surface of New Zealand if we are ever going to call it home. Deep down, we know and feel this. And there has been a consistent call from indigenous people for Europeans to understand and recognise indigenous peoples' relationship with the land, and this has often been expressed in terms of depth. The Australian Aboriginal author Paddy Roe says "You people try and dig little bit more deep / you been diggin only white soil / try and find the black soil inside" (Benterrak et al. 1984). However, digging below the surface brings dangers for Pakeha who know that this digging will eventually take us into an indigenous space. What happens as we dig through to the indigenous world is that we are asked to give up control for a short time. We are asked to forget that

there is a difference for a while and allow our accountability to belong to Maori epistemology. We rarely do this, being extremely scared about letting go of our values for a moment, but we could. It's not like European academia is going to vanish while we're away for a few days.

If we are genuinely concerned about Maori and Pakeha "talking past each other" then it's only people who are connected and experienced in both worlds who are going to point the way through that. While a large number of Maori understand European world-views, most Europeans are not so comfortable spending time in Maori worlds. Let us be clear that these world-views are incommensurable, although they are related. Maori and Pakeha construct what the feminist philosopher Lorraine Code (1995) calls different "rhetorical spaces", "... whose territorial imperatives structure and limit the kinds of utterances that can be voiced within them". The academy has spent a century coercing Maori into demonstrating knowledge of European concepts that have for the most part not served them well. I think it might be useful for us to turn the tables for a bit and enter the Maori rhetorical space. This would mean resetting our research agendas to respond to the concerns of Maori knowledge production identified by Bishop and Glynn (1999): tino rangatiratanga; mana whenua and mata waka; kawa/tikanga; knowledge as "taonga tuku iho" - a treasure from the ancestors to the people; whanau and processes of whakawhanaungatanga. Let us ask: how many of us can discuss our work in the terms of these concerns? For myself, the answer is "not much, yet". But I do see this as central to being able to truly claim some New Zealandness to what I do. And I don't believe that this is totally incompatible with the spirit of enquiry in the humanities, although I am aware that so far the humanities haven't done much to justify such a claim.

Who listens? For us to build a New Zealand Studies worth its name, we need to be listening to Maori, and producing work that they will listen to. My suggestion is that most of us on the white left, including myself, are not particularly well equipped to do this. But if we don't learn to listen to Maori and have them listen to us we will never get below the surface of what New Zealand is. For myself, it's been learning from Maori epistemology, politics, and culture that has provided me with the strongest sense of why I live in Aotearoa. Washing dishes in the back of the wharekai, or marching across Auckland's harbour bridge on a hikoi - these

are the experiences that give me insight into what it means to be where I live, to call New Zealand home.

Let me be clear that this is not a desire to be Maori. My engagement with Maori only makes me even more self-conscious of my cultural difference, my upbringing as a white Australian. But I am suggesting that the only way of understanding what it means to be Pakeha in New Zealand is in dialogue with Maori. And it is only through understanding who we are that we can start to understand the cultural processes in New Zealand that we are part of. Michael King's experiences allowed him to realise that the question of Pakeha identity was crucially underdeveloped. But his methodological error was to pretend Pakeha identity could be seen in isolation. In deciding to focus on Pakeha in the 80s, he stopped listening to Maori (though he didn't stop writing about them), and Maori more or less stopped listening to him. As Barry Barclay has noted at a recent lecture (Barclay 2004), the results of King's failure mean that his hugely popular "History of New Zealand" (King 2003) reinscribes the falsehood that James Cook's voyage was primarily one of discovery and not colonisation, by neglecting to mention the explicit instructions Cook received to take possession of lands for His Majesty. Obviously, for reasons I find unfathomable, Michael King didn't think these were important. For Maori, I suggest that they probably were.

We don't need to repeat King's errors, if we are prepared to look at ourselves through Maori eyes and listen to ourselves through Maori ears. As a few decades of feminist theory has amply demonstrated, to be able to see from multiple points of view, while never entirely comfortable, can be a position of power. Deloria (1973, p63) notes that "Western European peoples have never learned to consider the nature of the world discerned from a spatial point of view." His criticism is well taken, but we can turn that into a positive if we rethink this as our potential to see the world from **multiple** points of view. But to do this we need to give up our false authenticity. This goes against everything in the kiwi ideology. We need to move from being settled in settler culture, to being unsettled, to understand the fragility of our position. Our colonial history denies us indigeneity, but it allows us other kinds of transnational relationships that are extra-ordinarily powerful. Through these relationships, Pakeha have a lot to offer the Maori world - the real New Zealand - if we are prepared to do it in ways they want to listen to.

But to get to a point where Maori will listen to us, we need to be prepared to learn what they want to hear. These are basic conversational manners.

As Stephen Turner has put it, the challenge for Pakeha is not to “increase our knowledge of Maori culture.” (Turner 2004) The challenge is to pick up poi. If we take up that challenge, we are probably going to look pretty stupid for a while as we get the hang of it. We might have to go down to the kohanga and get some four year olds to teach us. But if we are going to have a New Zealand worth studying, one that we can call home, I see no other option.

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