

Major issues and trends facing New Zealand in Māori-Pakeha interactions: an introductory commentary.

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1. Introduction

This is a brief commentary which identifies some of the possible implications of current demographic trends on Maori-Pakeha interactions in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It is very general in its analysis and while it draws on a broad body of literature, a more detailed analysis would be accompanied by appropriate references and a bibliography.

2. Definitions

For the purpose of this commentary, Maori are defined as anyone of Maori descent. Pakeha is a looser term, however, and in this context refers to non-Maori predominately of European descent. The reason for this delineation is that it allows for specific consideration of a third group: recent immigrants to Aotearoa/New Zealand from countries outside of Europe. These three broad groups – Maori, Paheha, and others – obviously overlap in several ways, but the categorisations are useful for examining some of the aspects of evolving Maori-Pakeha interactions in the wider context of Aotearoa/New Zealand society, and in particular, the trend (even if it appears to be merely a statistical one to some people) from New Zealand being a bi-cultural to a multi-cultural nation.

3. New Zealanders

The ongoing struggle to identify with any useful degree of precision what constitutes a New Zealander reflects that fact that Aotearoa/New Zealand does not have a homogenous population (this is not the same as saying, though, that it does not have an indigenous population). Consequently, there are various and often conflicting ideas of what it means to be a New Zealander. Changes in the definition can be marked historically, geographically, culturally, as well as according to various other criteria and combinations of criteria.

The matter is further complicated by a specific political relationship that has existed between the indigenous Maori population and the majority European population since 1840, courtesy of the Treaty of Waitangi. In a strict sense, the political dimensions fall outside the scope of this commentary, but some of its implications for Maori-Pakeha interactions cannot be excluded altogether, and these are given brief consideration.

There is also a legal definition of New Zealander which encompasses the broadest variety of ethnic and national groups and which can be subdivided – as suggested above – into Maori, Pakeha, and others.

‘Interaction’, in the context of Maori-Pakeha relations implies some differences existing between these two groups. An argument could be made that the sensation of a distinct cultural identity is proportionate to the extent to which differences to the Other are accentuated. In a predominately bi-cultural community, the Other exists in a clear binary relationship. However, in a multi-cultural community, which is what New Zealand is increasingly becoming, the presence of multiple ethnic and cultural poles disrupts earlier bi-cultural presumptions and relationships.

4. The role of the Treaty

Since 1975, the role of the Treaty of Waitangi in public life has steadily ascended. However, with the settling of almost all of the remaining major historical Treaty settlements likely to occur over the next decade, the relationship between the Crown – which was characterised particularly in the 1970s and 1980s by some claimants as an adversary – and Maori will enter a new phase in which the claimant communities that have concluded a Treaty settlement will have a less fractious relationship with the Crown. This has the potential to influence Maori-Pakeha interaction in several ways.

Pakeha are defined by some as tangata tiriti – a people whose presence in the country and relationship with Maori derives to some extent from their being associated with the Crown. Pakeha thus become a de facto Treaty party. In the strict legal sense, this is a flawed rationale, but it is an idea that is accommodated by some people regardless. Given this malleability in defining Treaty parties, Maori-Pakeha interaction can be (and, indeed, is in some instances) prescribed by the provisions and principles of the Treaty. In some Government agencies, for example, the Treaty principles of partnership, participation, and protection are applied as if Pakeha were a direct Treaty party.

Possible issues to be faced:

- As the process of the settlement of historical Treaty claims approaches its conclusion, the de facto nature of Maori-Pakeha interaction cast by the Treaty will evolve from the sometimes adversarial nature of the claims era into possibly new accommodations, which will be:
 - a) less confrontational, and
 - b) focussed more on Maori autonomy in areas such as management of iwi land and the provision of health, social services, and education.

This greater Maori autonomy – a move towards tino rangtiratanga – is already evident to a modest extent in the proposed Tuhoe settlement, and will have implications for the role of the Crown/Pakeha in territories and areas administered by claimant communities.

- Another possibility is that the role of the Treaty as a feature of Maori-Pakeha interaction will diminish as both groups perceive that the major grievances of

the past (which in various ways have left their residue on Maori-Pakeha relations) have been settled. Allied to this diminution of the perceived role of the Treaty is the evolution of the nation's demographic profile, in which the growing proportion of immigrants which make up Aotearoa/New Zealand's population may result in a different perspective on the importance of the Treaty relationship emerging, particularly if non-European groups do not see themselves as part of the tangata tiriti group.

If Pakeha are tangata tiriti, and therefore a de facto Treaty party along with the Crown, then it is possible that as the Crown's activity in some areas relating to the Treaty diminishes, so too will some Pakeha feel that 'Treaty issues' are a thing of the past, and have less bearing on them. And perhaps to a similar extent, some Maori will feel that with the grievance period having passed, the Treaty relationship in practice will be less important than the relationship between claimant communities and their trust boards. The increase in the proportion of non-European immigrants in New Zealand may accentuate this perception that Treaty issues have less direct bearing on contemporary New Zealand society.

- As settlement communities become more cash-rich and asset-rich, they will invest increasing effort in developing their educational capital. Evidence of this is already abundant. The lingering perception of Maori as an educational under-class will be eventually displaced by one of Maori as a group with a higher-than-average educational attainment. This is bound to have implications in the power relationships that currently lies underneath some Maori-Pakeha interaction.

5. Geography

One of the most pronounced aspects of evolving Maori-Pakeha interaction is the role that geography plays. Certain areas of the country retain high proportions of Maori in their populations and effectively remain predominately bi-cultural. Parts of Northland, the East Cape, and the Bay of Plenty are current examples of this. However, the counterpoint to this is Auckland, which in addition to being the biggest city in the country, continues to grow at a faster rate than any other New Zealand city. Auckland is also far more multi-cultural than any other of the country's cities and has a critical mass of some ethnic groups that has resulted in certain parts of the city having characteristics which reveal the significant presence of distinct ethnic groups.

Possible issues to be faced:

- The perception of Auckland as 'another country' in New Zealand has the potential to create a widening rift between a multi-cultural core in the city, and the nation's largely bi-cultural periphery. Of course, this is an assessment which conceals burgeoning multi-culturalism in other parts of the country, but as a generalisation, it is a trend that seems to be accelerating. If nothing else, it will make it harder to speak of Maori-

Pakeha interaction in New Zealand as a single phenomenon. Instead, it will be better described according to its regional variations.

- The characteristics of Maori-Pakeha interaction become far more intricate in a multi-cultural as opposed to a bi-cultural environment. As Auckland contains the single largest concentration of Maori in the country, this brings the dynamic of Maori-Pakeha interaction in a multi-cultural setting to the fore. One possible consequence is the enhanced role that historical perceptions can play in this environment. Whereas to some extent, bi-culturalism pits one group against the other, the presence of other cultural groups in significant proportions could cause Maori-Pakeha interaction to become more consolidated in the face of new Others, and for elements of this interaction to draw on historical connections to assist in the consolidation.

6. Conclusion

Data from the latest Census will go some way towards quantifying some of the trends discussed above, and in conjunction with an analysis of the literature on the political and social dimensions of Maori-Pakeha interaction, will assist in establishing some of the issues facing New Zealand society more generally.