Disrupted Spaces: Racism and the lived experience of Maori identity formation

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Introduction

In 2004, when Don Brash –then leader of the National Party, hit the headlines with his controversial 'Orewa' speech, so-called 'mainstream' New Zealanders, felt that at last they had their hero. Brash articulated what this group felt was the source of trouble in contemporary Aotearoa society – brown privilege. Letters to the editor and talkback lines ran hot with many applauding Brash's calls for an end to the treaty gravy train and 'race-based' funding in health; anecdotes abounded of Māori students up and down the country getting a 'free-ride' through education and taking prized positions in training programmes from better qualified Pākehā. It was, according to the writers and callers, an oppressive Apartheid-style system favouring Māori that had to end.

Of course there were at the same time voices that spoke out from the margins – both Māori and Pākehā, attempting to articulate a reasoned response. Brash's 'brave' words and almost *all* of the measures of social wellbeing just didn't stack up. But the gate was open and the proverbial horse had bolted. 'Facts' it seems, didn't matter – and neither should 'race'. This was hot on the heels of the 2003 Foreshore and Seabed Act, which removed Māori rights to claim title to parts of the Aotearoa coastline - rights that had already been affirmed earlier in the courts. Despite warnings from both the Waitangi Tribunal and the United Nations of the racist nature of the Act; despite its contravention of international law; and despite the largest demonstration by Māori and other supporters in Aotearoa history – the Act was passed. Here, as in the tempestuous times that followed 'Orewa', Pākehā anxiety was seemingly more important than Māori suffering.

During these troubled times I was completing my BA at Massey University. Māori students I tutored and studied alongside expressed to me both fear and confusion at the tension they felt was palpable in lectures and around campus. Race-relations – an aspect of Aotearoa society many 'New Zealanders' had long prided themselves on, had hit an all time low. For Māori students I spoke with, the festering sore of Pākehā resentment had been lanced and what came spilling out only reaffirmed what they already knew: racism was alive and well in Aotearoa. These events and the emotions expressed, served to validate a decision I had long since made; if and when I undertook research, it would be in the area of racism. It was the blossoming of the seed of an idea that had been planted many years prior when my then five year old came home and uttered the words I'd hoped I would never hear: "I don't wanna be brown mum … I don't *like* it". It is a disconcerting thing when your child articulates so clearly (and painfully) the result of experience you yourself share but have never dared speak of. Indeed I can think of no other that comes close to the sadness invoked by the growing recognition of one's difference, one's 'otherness' that stacks up against 'normal' so unfavourably. How does one come to regret so – the 'skin they're in'? And given, short of radical chemical treatment, its permanence – what does that rejection mean for a child and then adult's sense of themselves? If one *can* blind themselves (and perhaps others) to their ancestral phenotypical endowments, what does that mean for their wellbeing? These questions formed the basis of my recent research on racism and its interconnection with identity.

Investigating Racism

It has been somewhat surprising to discover that little investigation has been done on racism as a phenomenon in Aotearoa. However numerous

researchers and writers, many though not all of them Māori, have provided necessary and valuable insight into the ongoing impact and suffering caused by colonisation (Awatere, 1984; Durie, 1998; Spoonley & Fleras, 1999; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2003; Walker, 1990). This is not surprising given that the two; racism and colonisation, are intimately entwined. As Memmi (1967) asserts, the portrayal of the 'native' as inferior made the theft of native land and the imposition of colonial law a mere exercise in salvation for the coloniser –

they were after all, bringing civilisation to the savage.

Albert Memmi (1999) writes in his book *Racism* "There is a strange kind of tragic enigma associated with the problem of racism. No one … wishes to see themselves as racist; still, racism persists, real and tenacious" (p.3). Its evasiveness can perhaps be tied to the too often narrow definition it receives in public discourse. Racism in this arena is attributed to aberrant individuals – a small group of people who subscribe to, and draw on, stereotypes that position 'racial' other as inferior. Despite the paucity of research on racism in Aotearoa, studies have indicated the pervasiveness of racist attitudes here both past and present. According to Holmes, Murachver and Bayard (2001) research initiated in the 1950s has consistently provided evidence of negative stereotypes of Māori as unintelligent and aggressive troublemakers. Their own study confirmed that these stereotypes persist. Certainly such attitudes and stereotypes are problematic and have import to those whom they target; however racism's invidious tentacles spread far broader than that. Blatant and individual acts of racism or discrimination might be considered 'salt in the wounds' of far less obvious manifestations that can impact over a life-time (Harrell, Hall, & Taliaferro, 2003).

Whilst the general monocultural assumptions that are made about what is 'normal' and 'natural' indicate one aspect of racism, *Wounding Souls* did not attempt to determine types of racism – whether institutional, personal or so forth. Rather I took it on faith that experiences of racism are numerous and pervasive still in Aotearoa, and that such experiences constitute a form of unnamed violence in the lives of those affected. Selecting a qualitative methodology it was not my intention to count the incidence or measure severity or assess responses. Rather the intention was to explore the lived experience of racism for participants and what it has meant to them across their lifetime, indeed across many lifetimes, in terms of identity. Also, rather than research the experience of racism amongst Māori as a whole in Aotearoa, I chose to limit this enquiry to those relatively new to a Māori identity. Not only does this disrupt the assumption of homogeneity that is often made when researching with Māori; it also acknowledges that racism impacts different Māori in different ways with different consequences. Of the many themes that emerged from the research – several in particular seem relevant to the concept of 'Creating Spaces' in the discipline and practice of psychology – On Being Other, Intergenerational Wounds, Caught Between and Invisible Whiteness.

On Being Other

Racist acts invoke a sense, in those they target, of inferiority of 'being other' – in some way *seen* as different by those that count, and different in important ways. Participant A provided an example of being seen along with the painful awareness of that visibility:

> … *growing up and knowing to go into the shops and look at things like that (holds arm out), you know you don't pull stuff off the shelves close to you? Because then it looks like you're stea…, like you learn that really early (A, 158).*

The necessity of the gaze can be rationalised on the basis of stereotypes of 'other' as untrustworthy and devious. Evidence for the pervasiveness of stereotypes that reflect negatively on Māori is provided in Holmes et al's 2001 study considered earlier. The marking-out of 'other' on the basis of stereotypes achieves important things on the part of the marker. To ascribe characteristics to those differentiated from one's 'self', is to invoke a binary distinction where the 'self' is then seen as being *without* that characteristic. If 'other' is lazy then 'self' is productive (else why point it out?); if 'other' is savage then 'self' is civilised and so on. Consideration of Foucault's invocation of the

Panopticon illuminates how both the 'markings' and the gaze that seeks to find them become internalised.

Foucault (1972) invoked one of the most powerful metaphors for surveillance as an illustration of disciplinary power, by borrowing Bentham's model of the Panopticon. Foucault's concept of surveillance/self-surveillance as an exercise of power – the transformation of its targets into bearers of their own oppression, is evident in participant T's reflection on multiple experiences of a judgmental gaze:

> *If you grow up ... and year after year you know you're looked down at and you know you're judged they don't even have to say anything (T, 342)*

Considered cumulatively, experiences of 'being other' can no longer be viewed, as is often the case in popular discourse, as regrettable but isolated occurrences – rather they become repeated inscribers of stigma. Thus reflecting back to the initial account, participant A's understanding of necessary behaviour in a shop, becomes behaviour necessary in *all* the shops – whether scrutinised or not. It implies an inescapable vigilance that has potentially damaging consequences for an individual's ease/dis-ease with themselves and their sense of identity. This identity is further compromised then parents, themselves having experienced similar 'othering', adopt strategies that reinforce the inferiority of being Māori.

Intergenerational Wounds

Many of the participants in the study are a generation or two on from those that were encouraged by their own parents to take up, in Ngata's much quoted words, 'the tools of the Pākehā' – fostered no doubt by racist constructions of a superior Pākehā way of life and State policies of assimilation. Participants spoke of observing the actions of their Māori parent in relation to a Pākehā spouse:

> *I look back and see how he had to fit in to her world and her way of doing things because that was normal ... with my dad he just very, not happily I would say but, thinking it was the right thing gave up anything that was to do*

> *with say for example not putting certain buckets in the, you know (A, 99)*

To devalue the beliefs and practices of the group one is positioned within is to devalue one's self. Studies overseas have determined that 'othered' parents have an important role to play in how their children perceive or live the experience(s) of racism. Interestingly, parents who instil in their children a strong sense of cultural pride were less likely to report behavioural problems; whereas those who denied struggling with racism reported the highest (Caughy et al., 2004). This is indicative of one of the ways the pain of being 'othered' transmits across intergenerational boundaries – a form of socially-inherited dis-ease:

> *My mum ... she deliberately broke all the um, traditional ways of doing things, deliberately broke them. To fit in. And I think that's what it was about, back then, it was a long time ago. I mean, it ... it just was not good to be Māori. Although it wasn't named, you wouldn't want to go round saying you were Māori, she just fitted in ... I guess that's just what people did then. She was one of the one's who was beaten for speaking ... she was a native speaker ... of Māori and so she ... and her generation, well generally, her generation ... didn't pass anything on to us. It's so sad, you know, to think she was a native speaker, and we didn't get it ... but that's the story of a lot of people (N, 112)*

In participant N's case, not only is the inferiority of things Māori reinforced in the home, other important markers of cultural/ethnic identity are withheld, interrupting their ability to negotiate the world they have been alienated from. In failing to confront or even recognise overt assimilative policies of the past, the burden of identifying falls to the next generation. It is a burden several participants spoke of having picked up in order to fortify *their* children from similar dis-ease:

> *Yeah, just that they feel better. When they're older. They won't have to go through that long journey and fight that you've had ... to feel comfortable in a Māori world. And I know*

what its like to feel uncomfortable in the Māori world, its awful. My brother's still like that and I ... see what he goes through, and you know, how he feels, doesn't know what to do (N, 127)

The various participants who expressed their conscious decision to instil in their children pride in being Māori, did so in light of experiences past, present and anticipated. Where racism had worked to dislodge their desire and/or ability to identify as Māori and concomitantly left them without the sanctuary of that belonging, they have to begin anew – to go back (recovering past cultural narratives and practices that have been withheld) and forward (interpreting those narratives and practices in the context of other identities), up (talking with previous generations through their experience and dis-ease) and down (teaching the lessons and instilling the narratives in the next generation) simultaneously. It is resistance that acknowledges that efforts to achieve well-being or eradicate dis-ease that focus on the individual-in-the-present are limited. Just as we learn and ache through experiences both social and personal, so too must healing be explored at the social as well as the personal level. These are indeed whakapapa mamae – genealogies or legacies of suffering. They draw attention to the interconnectedness of human experience and negate the logic of focussing on healing as it can be 'done' in the aid of the *individual*. Rather, legitimating narratives of dislocation and relocation might also enable a transformation of dis-ease to a positive identity.

Caught Between

In her exploration of hybridity – a term borrowed from the natural sciences to account for the children of genetically (racially/ biologically determined) dissimilar parents, Moeke-Maxwell (2003) describes the unique struggle of those who must claim two (or more) ancestries: "Positioned as interlocutors in bicultural hot spots the bi/multi racial woman (or man) is torn between loyalties to Māori and Pākehā communities" (p.12). This painful sense of divided loyalties arose early in participants' conversation and was a theme revisited throughout:

I think that's the hardest walk walking both. It was huge in my life cos it was ... like never identifying as Māori ... or um ... Pākehā either? Didn't feel comfortable in either setting? Now as I've gotten older and I've done a bit of different work and stuff around stuff, I so identify with Māori, I'm so comfortable in Māori settings, but I never used to be and so that was painful ...

To find one's self 'homeless', has its roots in colonial practices of exclusion. Historically State practices have reflected racist beliefs about blood as signifier of 'race' – able to differentiate those superior from inferior. To be authentically Māori prior to 1974 was to embody an ascribed blood quantum that was at least 50% 'pure' – hence the invocation of the 'half-caste' (Kukutai, 2003). Such politics of authenticity serve to limit the number of those that may claim recognition or redress from the State. Increasing rejection of the biological significance of race accompanied by the insistence of Māori to determine for themselves who they are, led to a change in State policy, however at the level of social practice it has retained its currency. Politicians repeatedly claim that there are 'no real Māori left' (as signified by 'purity' of blood), and pressure to assimilate continues in public cries to adopt a more unified, singular 'New Zealander' identity. Given that this identity is implicitly characterised as English-speaking, individualistically-oriented indeed essentially White, it is unsurprisingly seen as a demand that must be met with resistance. Sadly, such resistance necessitates the fortification of boundaries of 'other' by 'other' themselves who demand markers of authenticity that further exclude those caught in the middle:

... you're also rejected by Māori you know ... maybe not always but ... and it's how I've felt all my life too, sort of torn? Don't belong there, and don't belong there ... and um ... yeah, painful (tears) (N, 118)

There have been situations when ... I've been on a marae ... and ... I have felt the wrong colour ... and I have felt judged by my colour. It's ... and I don't know if it's happening or whether I'm being just paranoid, but I'll go

onto the marae sometimes and I feel all the eyes, eyeing me up and down ... who's this? ... sometimes you just don't know whether you fit here or there and it's really awful ... I I want, I wished I was more Māori, I wished I looked more Māori so then I could have been more comfortable in those circumstances ... and it was, it's been really hard to try and find that balance and sometimes I still don't know if I've managed it (S, 180)

Seeking to ensure the survival and continuation of treasured cultural practices and values risks collusion, however inadvertently, with the creation of "insider/outside boundaries where there are those 'in the know' and those who are excluded from knowing" (Connor, 2000, p.130). The tensions between the two – Māori and Pākehā, become located in the body of the one, thus another 'other' is created – or more accurately the 'half-caste' is re-cast; as the in-between, the go-between, the 'hybrid'. It is unsurprising that this relatively new term of cultural locatedness has in its genesis the notion of nature/blood, much like the practices of exclusion themselves. After Foucault it is easy to imagine how at the level of the collective also, the State/social demand for authenticity becomes collectively internalised. When considering claims to space(s) within disciplines such as psychology, discussions of who is and is not *authentically* Māori; who decides and what such decisions might mean, are vital.

Invisible Whiteness
As a key focal point for the study – consideration of identity is an acknowledgement of plurality. To understand one's identity or be called to reflect on it, both assumes and requires recognition of identities as multiple. This reality for the participants in the study is in tension with the concept of 'invisible whiteness' where identities are not named, not owned, but become insidiously 'normal':

Pākehā people don't think about race. You know, that's something that, that you're always conscious of it but, cos I guess that Pākehā is 'normal' rather than Pākehā, it's just normal, and they get to not think about ... who they are, how that impacts people ... (A, 82)

Participant A's words echo Dyer's understanding of invisible whiteness; "being white is not an issue for most white people, not a conscious or reflected on part of their sense of who they are" (Dyer, 1997, p.5). Whereas those who are marginalised in their 'otherness' are bound to always be conscious of the positions from which they speak or act, invisible/unidentified whiteness enables those that are white to speak and act is if their words/actions are normal, natural – 'just the way things are'. As a result the values and beliefs of other become *ab*normal, *un*natural – less than and therefore worthy of repudiation. Further, the normalisation of whiteness, enables any effort to make room for one's 'otherness' to be viewed as a demand for privilege or special treatment. In university settings, efforts to encourage Māori into psychology, and the claiming of space for Māori and Pacific psychologies, are often interpreted by non- Māori students and staff as privilege. Thus it seems necessary for Pakeha psychologists and academics supportive of space claiming for Māori and Pacifica, to turn the spotlight of investigation toward normative or white space. As Dyer (1997) asserts:

We may be on our way to genuine hybridity, multiplicity without (white) hegemony, and it may be where we want to get to – but we aren't there yet, and we won't get there until we see whiteness, see its power, its particularity and limitedness, put it in its place and end its rule. This is why studying whiteness matters (p.4).

Dyer's words resonate with what I understand as crucial to relationship-making on the marae. For example, an understanding of whaikorero (speechmaking) – the purpose of which is to make connections or relationships among us – suggests the wisest of listeners pay careful attention to what is *not* said. Seemingly key aspects of communication may be found in areas of silence. Similarly, what is not acknowledged in social power relations – that is the pervasive yet unspoken normality of whiteness, is also key to the way such relations, particularly those that are hierarchical, are conducted. To fail to pay them due attention is to enable the maintenance of the status quo.

Extracted From:
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Conclusion

Creating spaces for Māori and Pacific peoples to explore the development of relevant and applicable psychologies carries with it a responsibility to ponder *for whom* they are relevant and applicable. In Aotearoa, historical policies of assimilation, practices of determining 'from without' who is and isn't Māori, and continued and multiple experiences of racism that are integral to the colonial process, have had important consequences for the relevance of 'claimed space'. Whilst in no way wishing to undermine the vitality and necessity of commonly accepted cultural identity markers; whakapapa, knowledge of iwi, hapu, marae – in lived reality the aforementioned influences have wreaked havoc admist such markers for some, resulting in realities of 'being Māori' that are both fluid and complex. Acknowledging the multiple realities of being Māori is a necessary part of the claiming of space, whether in psychological research or practice.

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