

Matariki, commodity culture, and multiple identities

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Abstract

The event known as Matariki, the rising of the Pleiades in winter, which Māori take as the mark of the beginning of a new year, was not a strong feature of the wider public sphere for most of the 20th century. Since 2001, however, when Te Taura Whiri, the Māori Language Commission, published an explanatory booklet with the aim of reviving interest in Matariki as an aide to the maintenance of te reo, it has been promoted by several quasi-governmental institutions, especially the national museum, Te Papa, as a winter festival for all New Zealanders. Its main public presence to date has been through media products: posters, banners, websites, television programmes, newspaper features, calendars, some theatrical performances and physical commemoration ceremonies.

The larger project, of which this paper represents an initial descriptive and positioning phase, is a continuation of the researcher's long-standing interest in the intersections of religiosity, culture, and media as they are active in the environment of Aotearoa New Zealand. It assumes, building on theorists such as Bellah and Lundby that the creation of such festivals is an act of 'civil religiosity' that attempts to create and strengthen national community around a set of numinous symbols.

However, the development of an enterprise such as Matariki is pursued in a complex political field, where broad agreement across various factions is needed before the festival can take on an enduring material and symbolic existence. In investigating the factors that will determine the future of Matariki it is relevant to consider the interaction of three factors in particular: the ethno-political history of New Zealand; the characteristics of contemporary reflexive spirituality, which are intertwined with commodificatory tendencies and thirdly, the impacts of increasing globalisation on the parameters of identity-formation for citizens in late-modern societies.

Matariki, commodity culture, and multiple identities

This paper explores the conference theme of identity with reference to the study of Matariki, an indigenous commemoration of seasonal change that was traditionally confined to Māori but, in the last decade, has been proposed as a festival for all New Zealanders (te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori, 2011). This object of study, Matariki, is viewed through the lens of the Media, Religion and Culture framework developed in the 1990s by a network of scholars from the United States, Scandinavia and Australia¹. The key principles of this framework are first, that the three territories indicated by the title are nowadays inextricably linked and act on each other in a series of interdependent processes, in particular that media and religion are in a dialectical relationship; and secondly, that due to changing cultural environments, definitions of religiosity should be extended to include a range of beliefs and practices previously understood as secular.

I am therefore employing an international theoretical framework to examine a local phenomenon in terms of its embodiment in media texts and in the light of its spiritual aspects, even though it would probably not be understood by a hypothetical mainstream 'lay' audience in those terms. In media, religion and culture parlance I am examining the attempted development of an instance of 'civil religiosity' (Bellah, 1967), that is, the kind of implicit religiosity that creates and binds cultures and nations through the celebration of shared values. Moreover, I am examining the commemoration of Matariki primarily in the light of the ways in which it is offered to the public through processes of mediation rather than through face-to-face communication.

An issue with using an international framework in the Aotearoa New Zealand environment, especially around a phenomenon originating from a Māori cultural sphere, is that such an action constellates micro-political factors around ethnic identity and the authority to engage with certain kinds of knowledge. I am a New Zealander of European ancestry and therefore not eligible to employ the theoretical/methodological framework known as 'Kaupapa Māori' which is research led and undertaken by Māori, on issues of importance to Māori, for the betterment of Māori society (Te Ara Tika, 2010). Rather my interest in Matariki is that of someone self-defined as Pakeha, a Māori-originated label that sociologist Paul Spoonley (2007) contends can be used to 'express a relationship towards Māori, especially as a marker of someone who supports biculturalism as a way of moving forward and the need to offer reparations for historical wrongs' (p.11). On the basis of that identity position my work is located in the outer 'mainstream' ring of the model of forms of research relating to Māori topics recently published by the New Zealand Health Research Council (Te Ara Tika, 2010), although I am also endeavouring to be sensitive to Māori values and concerns.

Within the local environment this project is also 'mainstream' work in another sense, in that I am studying Matariki precisely because it is a commemoration no longer confined to a Māori worldview. Instead it is being promoted by a range of civic organisations as a phenomenon to

address all who identify as 'New Zealanders', although as I will point out the label 'New Zealander' is itself changing to accommodate a range of international perspectives. Furthermore, the present moment appears to be one when issues of cultural hybridisation can be foregrounded in discussion. To call on an example from a slightly different context, the artist Michael Parekowhai is currently representing this country at the Venice Biennale with an installation of a black bull standing on a grand piano entitled *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*. This work was recently described as a 're-enactment of the constant passage of ideas, images and objects across time and borders' (Blundell, 2001). In justifying drawing on a range of European and Māori cultural associations Parekowhai himself states that he does not subscribe to an essentialist concept of identity:

The thing about identity – it's much more complicated than just being Māori or just being this or just being that. It's a complicated set of parameters in which, in order to have a voice, you have to be aware of where you fit into the larger picture. (in Blundell, 2011, p.32)

It is from the other side of this territory but with a similar viewpoint that I position my own research, as an investigation into an example of the passage of ideas, images and objects across time and borders, with the further aim of relating that example to larger trends.

The project

This presentation is the first output from a research project using two methods of data-gathering. On one hand I have been collecting examples of Matariki media texts and merchandise for three years now and on the other hand I am conducting semi-structured interviews with a selection of the producers of Matariki, especially those working in public organisations that organise or sponsor the annual programmes of celebration. Most but not all of those cultural producers identify themselves as Māori. I am seeking to understand their motives for promulgating the concept of Matariki, as well as their predictions for its future. It is my hypothesis that its future is not assured since the project of embedding it is pursued in a complex political field where broad agreement across various factions, in turn giving access to public resources, is needed before the festival can take on an enduring symbolic and material existence.

This paper is an initial analytical description of the object of my study asking the following questions: What are the characteristics of this field in which the proposition of Matariki as a national festival is located? What is the likelihood that this proposition will be successful? In addressing this question it is relevant to consider three factors in particular: the characteristics of contemporary reflexive spirituality, the impacts of increasing globalisation on the parameters

of identity-formation and thirdly the ethno-political context of New Zealand. The first step, however, is to outline my understanding of the nature of Matariki.

Matariki – constellation and festival

Matariki is the name given to a constellation of seven stars that rises above the Southern hemisphere horizon in midwinter, somewhere around the beginning of June. In a European context these stars are known as the Pleiades or the Seven Sisters.

In pre-settler Māori culture the rising of Matariki was a sign that it was time to start planting crops, particularly the sweet potato, or kumara, so they could be harvested in the warmer months of the year. While one of the early findings of my research is that some people from Māori backgrounds are themselves only now discovering, or creating, what Matariki might mean, three key public institutions, the Māori Language Commission (te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori), the National Museum, Te Papa Tongarewa, and the Auckland Council seem secure about the other associations of Matariki, as these frame-grabs from their websites demonstrate.

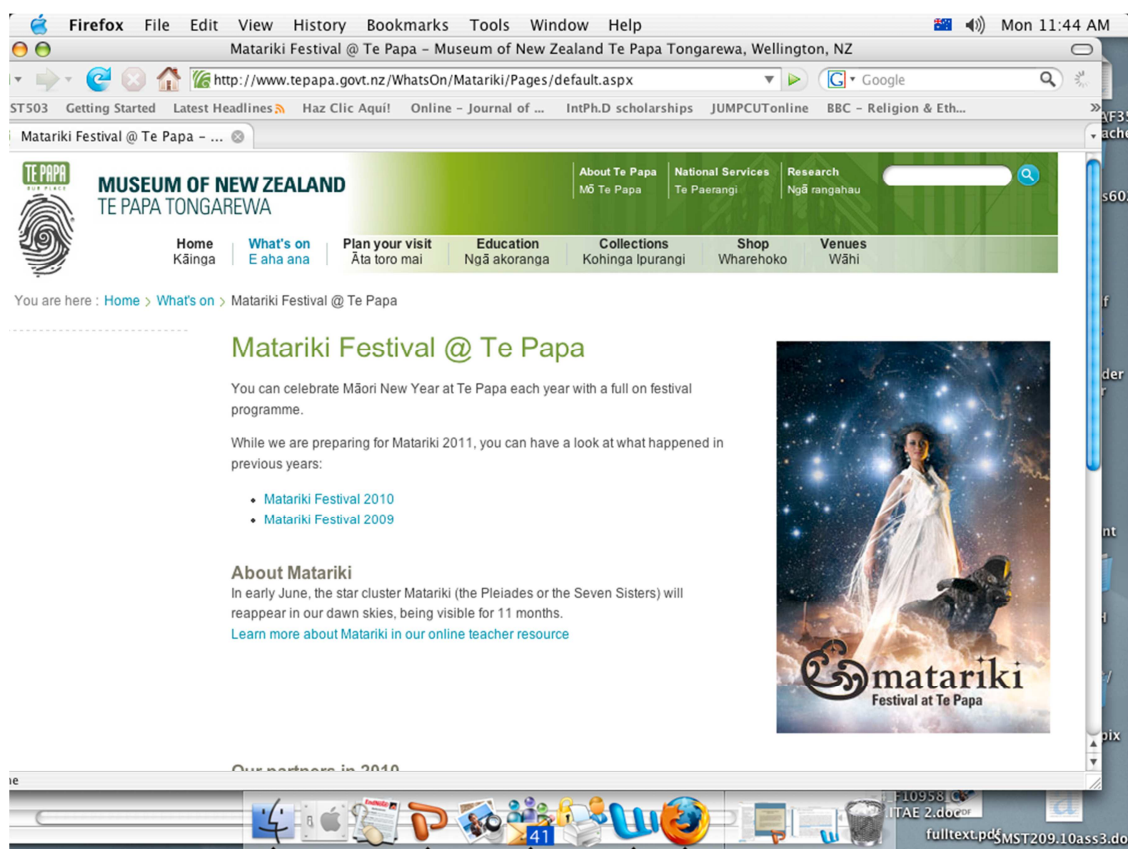
The screenshot shows a Firefox browser window displaying the website for the Māori Language Commission. The page title is "Matariki - Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori - Māori Language Commission". The URL is "http://www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz/maori/matariki_m/index.shtml". The page content includes a navigation menu on the left with options for Māori and English, and a main content area with the heading "Matariki" and a sub-heading "Kōrero Whakataki". The text describes the significance of Matariki, mentioning that it is a time of growth, change, and action, and that it celebrates the diversity of life and the Aotearoa Pacific New Year. A photograph of the Matariki constellation is shown on the right side of the page. The browser's taskbar at the bottom shows various icons and the system clock indicating Monday, 11:40 AM.

In recent years there has been an upsurge of awareness among New Zealanders of the place of reo Māori language in both the history and future of Aotearoa. This awareness is part of a process that helps us to be increasingly conscious of our unique cultural identity.

The next step is an appreciation of the wider cultural traditions of Māori and one of the most significant celebrations in the Māori calendar is Matariki – the indigenous, Aotearoa, New Year.

The renaissance of this ancient Māori celebration and its tradition is a chance for all New Zealanders to remind ourselves of the very special place we occupy in the world

(http://www.tetaurawhiri.govt.nz/english/matariki_e/index.shtml - accessed 17/6/11).



The screenshot shows a Firefox browser window displaying the website for the Matariki Festival @ Te Papa. The browser's address bar shows the URL: <http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/WhatsOn/Matariki/Pages/default.aspx>. The website header features the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa logo and navigation links: Home (Kāinga), What's on (E aha ana), Plan your visit (Āta toro mai), Education (Ngā akoranga), Collections (Kohinga Ipurangi), Shop (Wharehoko), and Venues (Wāhi). The main content area is titled "Matariki Festival @ Te Papa" and includes a description of the festival, a link to "Matariki Festival 2010", and a section titled "About Matariki" with a link to "Learn more about Matariki in our online teacher resource". A large image on the right side of the page depicts a woman in a white dress standing in a starry night sky, with a dog in the foreground. The image is labeled "matariki Festival at Te Papa".

The dominant contemporary discourse then is that is that the period around the Southern hemisphere midwinter, represented by the rising of Matariki, can be a time of reflection on the past, renewal in the context of family and a time for setting new goals for the future as much as a sign to engage in certain horticultural practices.

In recent history, however, meanings around Matariki have not been in wide circulation. It was mentioned in early 20th century colonial accounts of Māori customary practices (Best, 1922, Cowan, 1930) but with the hegemony of European worldviews in the 20th century its

commemoration slipped into the background. Rather, the Christian festival of Christmas, celebrated during the northern hemisphere midwinter, became the major collective event of the year, closely followed by the celebration of the European New Year, also according to the Christian calendar. The concept of a New Zealand national day became attached to Waitangi Day, the 6th of February, marking the time at which the first group of Māori leaders signed a treaty document with the British government, providing it with justification for exerting governmental power over both European and Māori inhabitants. Due to the contested nature of the meaning of the Treaty of Waitangi (there are Māori and English versions which permit different interpretations) and also due to disagreements about the degree to which Treaty commitments have been honoured, the national day has often been notable as much for performances of protest as for displays of unity. It is an annual ritual, both at Christmas and at Waitangi Day, for Letters to the Editor to suggest that neither commemoration is adequate for the contemporary local context and that an alternative celebration in midwinter should be considered.

In the last 10 years Matariki has been put forward as a candidate for that mid-winter, national, celebration. At this stage of research I cannot be confident as to the origins of the renovation and extension of Matariki but both the members of Pipitea Marae, an inter-tribal urban marae in central Wellington (Boynton, 2011) and Te Taura Whiri i te reo Māori have been identified as prime movers (Te Taura Whiri website). The Māori Language Commission saw the reclamation of Matariki as support for the revitalisation of *te reo*, since it would provide an opportunity for the dissemination of mātāuranga Māori (that is, aspects of the traditional knowledge that constitutes a classical Māori worldview). *Te reo* might therefore be used more naturally and often if the concepts associated with it were to be in wider circulation. Since it is relatively apolitical by virtue of being associated with food, the reassembly of families, and the seasonal cycle of life, Matariki is potentially a vehicle for the dissemination of Māori concepts and language with general appeal.

A difficulty with regularising the commemoration of Matariki, however, is the fact that because it relies on comparatively slow-moving cosmic cycles it is marked over the period of a month, the beginning and end of which can vary between areas of New Zealand, so there is no single shared day or brief period of celebration. The extension of Matariki beyond Māori communities may have been brief in duration so far, in that Te Papa Tongarewa, now seen as a national leader in commemoration, has only been marking Matariki on a large scale for three years, but it may arguably, have already peaked in intensity. In 2009, a private member's bill introduced by the Māori Party Member of Parliament Rāhui Katene proposing Matariki's institution as a national holiday marked on a single day was defeated in a parliamentary vote and has not so far been reintroduced. The recession which began in 2008 has also gradually restricted funding for public institutions so that some, such as Te Taura Whiri, have had to retrench to core activities: in its case this year supporting Māori Language Week which takes place in July rather than Matariki (Hauraki, 2011).

Matariki as a mediated phenomenon

As a newly-significant, dispersed event on the national calendar Matariki as yet lacks embodied rituals in which this notional category of 'all New Zealanders' can partake. There are local versions of such rituals, for instance the Matariki Gala dinner and Kaumatua Kapa Haka weekend both at Te Papa, but these predominantly involve Māori participants. The majority of New Zealanders therefore, are likely to have been introduced to Matariki primarily as a mediated phenomenon, something they encounter in the form of texts and practices around media use.

The home pages of some of the key websites that promote Matariki were included above: linking from them are notices of forthcoming events, and URLs for other sites with an interest in Matariki, or the sites of major sponsors, such as New Zealand Post, the telephone company Telstraclear and the ministry for Māori Affairs, Te Puni Kokiri,

For instance, Te Papa Tongarewa holds programmes of lectures, performances and interactive events to mark Matariki. It chooses a theme to organise the celebrations around. For 2011 that theme is the making of cloaks – Ngā kākahu o Ranginui: Cloaks of the Sky Father (Te Papa website, 2011). As an organisation specialising in the narrativisation and presentation of national identity, Te Papa also has the resources to create densely symbolic images representing clusters of associations around Matariki. A programme developer explained the elements that each year's key image must contain: a representation of the seven stars of Matariki (which this year are shown as birds), an item from the Museum's own collection, and a hero image of a Māori woman, dressed in garments by a Māori designer (Boynton, 2011)

Because cultural knowledge of Matariki is limited within the general community, and sometimes within subsets of Māori communities, the mediated environment contains blocks of definitional information that strive to explain clearly and succinctly what Matariki is or might be, as well as generating favourable emotions around Matariki. One particular target group is schools, so sites often contain resources for teachers, suggesting activities they can do with students to increase their engagement with Matariki. This is a key focus for Te Papa: a senior member of its education programme said that the Museum does Matariki activities for more than 2500 students annually (Hotere, 2011).

The museum gift-shop also contains a range of Matariki-themed merchandise, ranging from jackets and tee-shirts to small, cheap items such as rulers, pens and key-rings. Five percent of the income from sales on the range is returned to the education group as funding for the following year.

Other organisations have also used Matariki as a theme for commercial products. For several years now one has been able to buy photographic calendars that start the new year from June rather than January. A Māori company called Matakite publishes diaries based on a similar time-scheme, and sends me monthly emails telling me the name of the month in Māori.

The Matariki theme has also been taken up by mass media workers as one of the recurrent discursive frameworks through which news and lifestyle journalism can be focused. There have been articles in national and local newspapers and magazines on food suitable for Matariki celebrations, sometimes cooked by celebrity chefs, and there are news items on seasonal activities such as Matariki concerts, debates, fashion shows and in Auckland, a large kite-flying event, as kite-flying is a traditional Māori leisure activity (cf. 'Flax weaving class to honour Matariki, 2010; Monahan, 2010). This kind of coverage, along with television coverage, is what is likely to make Matariki an accepted part of national life, but it is my impression, although not systematically tested at this stage, that this kind of coverage is less in quantity and prominence this year than it has been in the past two years.

The majority of Matariki producers I have interviewed so far have, not surprisingly, expressed their hopes that acknowledgment of Matariki will continue to grow. Their dominant framework for viewing it is as something that will improve the quality of life for all New Zealanders, especially Māori, but not necessarily in a material, economic sense. Almost everybody has expressed the desire that the commemoration of Matariki should avoid the commercialisation which attends other celebrations such as Christmas, Easter and Mother's and Father's Days. Anzac Day is sometimes mentioned as a model for how that might be done since it seen as a day that reflects on collective values and therefore has spiritual or religious underpinnings but relies on a minimum of commercial activity.

I think, however, that this hope of avoiding the commodification of Matariki rests on mistaken understandings of the relationships between media, religion and culture in contemporary societies. Moreover, the brief description I have just given of the channels through which Matariki is mediated show that it is already commodified – in that its major manifestations are as a series of texts, images, products and activities for which people must pay, in one way or another, through entrance fees, purchase prices or local and national taxes. A considerable amount of the economic backing for Matariki is hidden in the budgets of public organisations, but its new forms of existence nevertheless depend on the circulation of money as much as on the goodwill and idealism of those who shape Matariki programmes.

For the rest of this paper therefore I wish to reflect in a more general manner on the intersections of commodification, spirituality and identity.

The characteristics of contemporary reflexive spirituality

In considering the field of forces that both support and oppose the institutionalisation of Matariki I want to note its fit not just with Māori needs but also with certain general tendencies around spirituality in late-modern cultures. If it succeeds in becoming embedded as a national

festival, it will become part of the range of symbolic practices known by the term civil religion (Bellah, 1967). Civil religions do not need an explicit connection with a recognised religious tradition but instead mobilise a range of numinous symbols and images of collectivity to reflect a unified picture of the community back to itself. The national community therefore takes on an aura of sacredness that enables it to command loyalty and compliance from its members.

For many decades now the most powerful civic rituals of Aotearoa New Zealand have been strongly associated with Māori practices. These include embodied communicative performances such the powhiri to welcome visitors, giving them status as a temporary part of the local community, the dawn ceremony to consecrate the beginnings of important projects and the haka to mobilise pride and aggressive, competitive energy, especially in international sport, another area strongly identified with national identity. The 'soul' of the nation has already therefore long been associated with Māori rituals.

In the fields of the arts, especially film and television, there has also been a strong strand of production presenting an enchanted worldview in which the forces of spirituality are an active part of life: often to the benefit of the community as in *Mauri* (Mita; 1988) *Whale Rider*, (Caro, 2002) and *Boy* (Waititi, 2010) but also challenging it in a harsher vein, as in *Once Were Warriors* (Tamahori, 1994) or some of the narratives from the supernatural television series, *Mataku* (2002-2005)

The term commonly used for the public-sphere circulation of metaphysical concepts from a Māori worldview, the concepts active in these civic rituals and media texts, is 'Māori spirituality'. This term in fact refers to a complex, changing entity that is defined as much by non-Māori as Māori. It certainly has connections with traditional Māori religiosity in which the principle of whakapapa traces the relationships between the gods and all living things. Māori religiosity distinguishes between wairua, the spirit, a force that continues even when an individual being has ceased to exist and mauri, the individual manifestation of the life-force that is born and dies with each living entity. It works with ideas of sacredness, the state of tapu and with noa, the state of ordinariness, and elaborates these and related concepts into systems of, amongst others, wairuatanga, whanautanga (kinship) and kaitiakitanga – guardianship over things of value (Temara, 2010). Although there are still proponents of traditional Māori religiosity, known as tohunga, their numbers are relatively few, both because becoming a tohunga was a prohibited activity for several decades after the Tohunga Suppression Act of 1907 and because, in practice, most Māori religiosity has been heavily influenced and hybridised with Christian belief systems (Tawhai, 1996).

However, a set of ideas from Māori religion, especially the animistic concepts of spirit manifesting in many life-forms and human relationships, and of a karmic principle of the return of consequences from actions, fits well with the contemporary international framework of New Age spirituality. It spans what Woodhead and Heelas (2001) have typified as the forms of Religions of Humanity and Spiritualities of Life, where human agency takes an active role in

relationship with principles of divinity. The diagrams below, developed by myself, show two stages of the positioning of Māori religion and spirituality in relation to global trends of commodification.

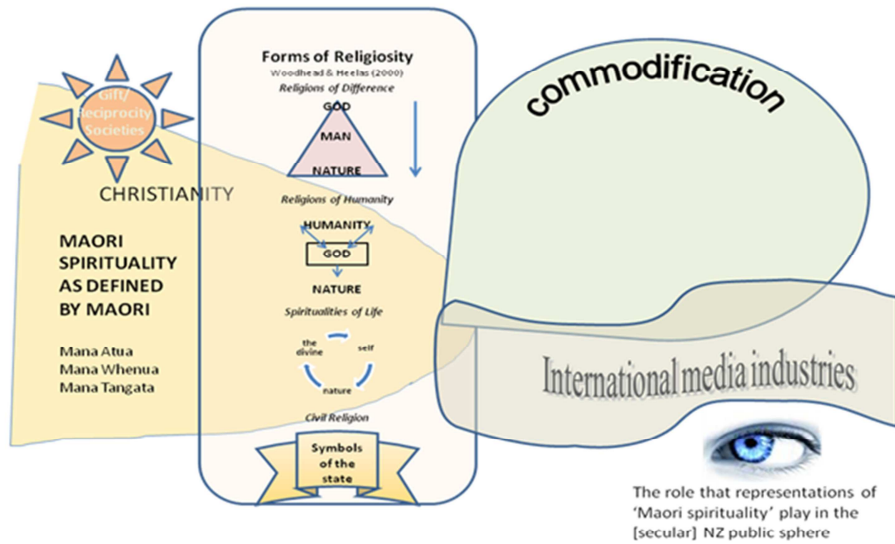


Figure 1: Māori religiosity in an international context

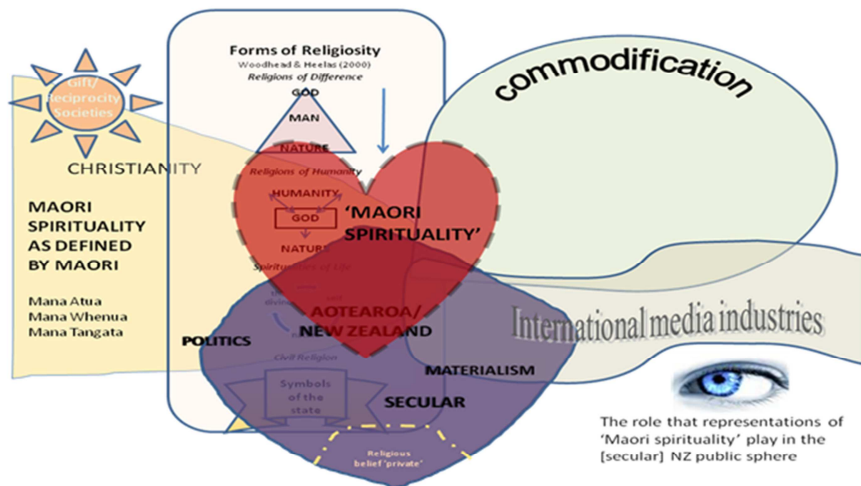


Figure 2: 'Māori spirituality' as the junction of opportunities in the political, economic and commodity spheres

The principle of whakapapa, which mandated or prohibited particular forms of relationships can therefore be abstracted into a more general principle of aroha or love and compassion for others, which fits with the contemporary sacralisation of forms of family. Matariki for example, then becomes another occasion for the celebration of family and other affectionate ties between people, as the Te Taura Whiri i te reo Māori home page also suggests.

Due to the way that popular cultural instances of Māori spirituality have been mediated and they, in turn, have produced further media texts and associated practices, Māori spirituality as an entity, is also imbued with the dynamic of commodification, so that ideas and beliefs are packaged in forms that can be purchased. The extension of this process to spiritual activities has been inevitable in an era that foregrounds the 'soft' politics of lifestyle choices over the hard work of socio-economic transformation. This means, as Mieke Bal (2001) has observed, that commodified phenomena like these highlight a tension in contemporary society between the desire for spirituality and the desire for authority, in particular, for simultaneously keeping, and moving away from, our veneration of material goods:

There seems to be a desire to overcome the dissatisfaction produced by global capitalism without giving up the comfort and luxury it has generated. This negatively defined, hence unspecific craving for a meaningful existence I call a desire for spirituality. Due to the force of cultural habit, this desire cannot simply emerge from a rejection of what triggered it. Whereas people crave something other than material goods, the desire for spirituality imitates the self-trained mechanisms promoted by, among other factors, the media. (Bal, in de Vries & Weber, 2001, p. 242)

According to this theoretical framework, late-modern individuals make sense of their lives by choosing from a range of symbolic resources with desirable connotations in relation to formative values, but which are not necessarily directly referential of institutional forms of religiosity. Symbolisations suitable for the evocation of these types of 'reflexive spirituality' (Mihelich & Gatzke 2006) include expressive representations of natural landscapes in their least modified forms, representations of idealised human relationships; particularly depictions of harmonious communities and fully-absorbing activities undertaken in private or leisure-time modes. They offer viewers images of themselves as members of a utopian community in a construction of civil religiosity inflected by either the special kinship New Zealanders feel they have with their natural environment, and/or, with aspects of Polynesian cultures. They are secular reworkings of something called 'the Kiwi [national] spirit' which an Anglican media commentator has identified as 'the strongest single theme of all media coverage, both in the advertising commercials and the programmes between them' (Bluck 1998, p. 19).

These commodified forms of spirituality, eventually dislodged from reliance on specific geographical or cultural locations then became resources for the reflexive construction of identity for many people internationally. One of the clearest examples of this practice in relation to Māori spirituality is the acquisition of tattoos, which traditionally illustrated one's

whakapapa, or ancestry, by non-Māori in the fields of sport and the arts, as bodily decoration and general tokens of courage (Te Awekotuku, 2009)

The complexity of the motivations for the advancement of Matariki out of the ethno-political history of Aotearoa New Zealand are therefore joined by the complex dynamics of the commodification and circulation of spiritual products within the sphere of international popular culture.

The impacts of increasing globalisation on the parameters of identity

While the characteristics of contemporary reflexive spirituality support an environment in which the institution of a new spiritually-themed festival like Matariki is likely to be successful, there are other factors at work which mitigate the possibility that it will be a success, by limiting the achievements that it would be likely to yield. These factors relate to the rapidly-globalising nature of individual lifeworlds, where there are many claims on one's symbolic attention. I will use my own experience as an example here.

Clearly, I am not Māori, but then Matariki's primary target is perhaps not Māori either, or at least not Māori who are secure in their tribal backgrounds, language and customs. However, many people with the appropriate ancestry identify as Māori as a subsidiary identity to that of 'New Zealander' (Webster, 2000) or, if they have no Māori antecedents nevertheless feel a sense of attachment to practices that have become embedded on our national life, as outlined previously. Matariki is presumably designed to encourage more support in this second, less centrally indigenous sector.

Still, it necessary to note that there is considerable competition in this field for attachment to a new New Year celebration. In our house we currently acknowledge five celebrations of the beginning of another year. For the last few years Matariki has been among them because my University responsibilities position me both to help fund the University's contribution to the event and to attend the dawn ceremony which gathers together representatives of the region's tertiary institutions.

Beginning with the European calendar, two of the celebrations for our household are on the same evening: the 31st of December. The one I have celebrated longest is the English-Kiwi New Year. It used to be fun, when most of us were located in Christchurch and a very sociable aunt hosted a big party every year – we would join hands and sing 'Auld Lang Syne' at midnight on her back lawn. But four decades later, the family live in five different cities and the custom now is for the young adults to segregate themselves at huge parties at popular beaches, so that, all

too often this New Year is a non-event. It was always a physical rather than a mediated celebration – we ate and drank, didn't buy presents or send cards. Lately, however, its mediated manifestation is all there is of this English/Kiwi New Year – probably some local variety show on the television padding out time until the midnight countdown.

However my recent marriage to a native of Argentina has saved that situation. The Latin New Year overlaps with the English/Kiwi one but has a more determined vibrancy of spirit. The various regional mixes of dominant Spanish/European and dominated indigenous cultures result, at times like this, in an internationally serviceable party culture. At home in Hamilton, in the growing community of Latin immigrants, pushed by economic collapse and pulled here by the prosperity of the first half of the 2000s, we roasted beef and lamb outdoors and there is singing and fireworks.

My fourth New Year is less riotous and more personal since it is commemorated by the diasporic Tibetan Buddhist community that I have belonged to for the last twenty years. On a date determined by the lunar calendar, usually in February, at the temple north of Auckland old and worn things are taken down and everything is cleaned: a process that is supposed to include our souls. For Tibetan Buddhists, in common with both classical Māori and Chinese traditions, the land and air are alive with spirits (*nagas*) in the form of energies that can respond to human actions. The next day, supervised by the Lamas (priests), re-enacting traditions from their homelands, new prayer flags are strung between tall pines on the hilltop, so the wind can send their messages out over the land and down to the sea. It's a complex airspace, a complex landscape, a process even more explicitly spiritual than Matariki but, like it, ultimately dependent on the financial contributions of supporters.

The final New Year also has a basis in international migration flows. It's the Chinese New Year which in 2011 fell in early February. Our borders, a young couple, are our share of the commodity trade in 'international' students, a necessary security so that we can pay the mortgage. In China, the New Year is a period of visiting and feasting when young people receive red packets of money from their elders. They won't be getting any from us though, because as our female tenant said sadly 'there's nobody here', that is nobody who counts within her worldview. However, I notice that there this year there were more articles and advertisements about Chinese New Year in the media than I have ever seen previously. If I were to research that, instead of Matariki, I might find that it now has an equal if not greater presence in terms of the degree to which it is entering the linked media- and economic-spheres. Whether, because of the differing histories of the Māori/European encounters and the New Zealander/Chinese encounters, it has as much chance of entering the 'hearts' of New Zealanders I am less sure.

Discussion

I have highlighted the manner in which Matariki is presenting itself as a commodified phenomenon and the degree to which it is also a political phenomenon, fostered by those interested in a bicultural form of national unity that also makes moves to equalise the power of the two partners in the relationship. Currently, I am not aware of spontaneous manifestations of Matariki in my personal environment outside the university. I can buy my Matariki stamp set from New Zealand Post which tells me that Matariki is a time for 'reflection, renewal, celebration' and for the youngest members of the community I can buy a book called *The Seven Stars of Matariki* (Rolleston-Cummings, 2008) or direct them to the educational supplement in the local newspaper explaining the festival.

Does the fact that the festival exists mainly as a series of media products and that most of these things must be purchased or paid for from taxes therefore mean that there is no solid core of value to its proposition as a national festival?

My answer at the moment is an uncertain one – 'not necessarily'. In a sense that is just how 'we' as Māori, Pakeha or Chinese do it these days – that most of the things in which we invest sentimental or spiritual value, also involve the exchange of money, whether it is in the form of tithes, subscriptions, donations or payments for products and services. For many scholars of religion and culture the ruling metaphor has been for some time now one provided by Wade Clark Roof, that we live in a 'spiritual marketplace'ⁱⁱⁱ or as Bal (2001) put it 'the desire for spirituality imitates the self-trained mechanisms promoted by, among other factors, the media' (p. 242).

However, the fact that Matariki has left the gift-and-obligation economy of traditional Māori culture, where knowledge was passed through face-to-face personal relationships and is entering the capitalist marketplace as a spiritual product, also exposes it to the instabilities of that market. For a start, most materials for Matariki are published in English. This widens the possible market for their consumption but also runs counter to Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori's desire that the festival be used to enhance the validity of te reo as a national language: as is a commonplace observation in the Media and Religion field, the use of mediatizing processes also re-shapes the 'religious' practices from which the texts ensue.

Furthermore, as I have pointed out, the attempt to embed the festival is primarily being sponsored by state agencies and they in turn rely on funding from the public purse. Although the push for recognition of Matariki began under the previous Labour government the current National-led government is a coalition with the Māori Party (and the right-wing Association of Consumers and Taxpayers). At a time of recession the government is cutting as many non-essential programmes as it can and would seem to have no natural attraction to the expansion of Māori spiritual tropes (while in opposition it mocked requests by Waikato Māori that the course of the national highway be slightly diverted to avoid a swamp reputed to be the home of

a nature-spirit known as a taniwha (see Hardy, 2003)). The continuance of funding for the Matariki-project therefore likely depends on a favourable balance between the wishes of the Māori Party (which I assume are that Matariki be supported) and the destructive energies of cost-cutting.

Finally, like myself, many New Zealanders, including many Māori, now occupy multiple identity-positions. Affiliations and loyalties may be more temporary than previously, and not all new (or old) New Zealanders still view the nation as beginning its process of formation through the Treaty between Māori and the British Crown. Indeed, if we are to believe a critic of postmodern capitalism like Slavoj Žižek, then the pursuit of specific 'universal' dimensions such as ideas of national identity has become an unsustainable pursuit:

Does the universal dimension to which we refer really exist? But what if it is our particular identity which does not exist, that is, which is always already traversed by universalities, caught up in them? What if, in today's global civilisation, we are more universal than we think, and it is our particular identity which is a fragile ideological fantasy? (Žižek, 2010, p. 285)

Is Matariki then 'a fragile ideological fantasy' from a small country obsessed with its own idiosyncratic concerns, a fantasy that will fade with the media products that set out to constitute it? Or is it, referring back to the example of the bicultural artist, Michael Parekowhai, an example of a kind of cultural creativity and social development made possible by the conditions of a mediatised society? In that case the fact that spirituality and deep meaning are commodified may actually serve to make them more accessible as democratic tools for those with the means and motivation to use them. These are issues that the wider Matariki research project is considering.

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ⁱ See for instance, the work of Hoover & Venturelli (1997), Hoover & Lundby eds. (1997), Horsfield (1997)

ⁱⁱ Roof, Wade Clark (2001) *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Making of American Religion*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press