

**Mana Tangata: Conceptualising Cultural Diversity
– a review essay**

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Will Kymlicka, in talking about developments in Canada, has recently observed:

I believe that the 35-year debate in Canada between those who argue that multiculturalism promotes civic integration and those who argue that it promotes ethnic isolation can now safely be put to rest...multiculturalism in Canada promotes integration and citizenship, both through its individual-level effects on attitudes, self-understanding and identities, and through its society-level effects on institutions (2009:22).

Given Kymlicka's own inclinations and public commentaries, this position is not unexpected. He is reacting to current European political inclinations to conclude that multiculturalism is a 'failed experiment', and he wants to counter these inclinations by noting that Canadian multiculturalism is very different to European initiatives, but also that there are good evidential grounds for arguing that cultural diversity has both individual and collective benefits. Moreover, that the legitimacy of a modern state is put in jeopardy if that cultural diversity is not reflected in the policies and actions of core democratic and social service institutions.

Kymlicka is correct to one extent. Sociology, along with other disciplines, has contributed to an understanding of the effects and significance of ethnic identity in contemporary societies. The presence of cultural diversity is not something that anyone – academic, politician, public and private sectors – can ignore or easily dismiss. But there is plenty of evidence that there are major and ongoing issues with exactly *how* the presence of ethnicity ought to be recognised in the public realm. For more than a decade, the New Zealand Parliament hosted a political party that made its anti-immigrant and anti-Treaty stances a key features of its platform. The Royal Commission on the governance of Auckland provides some suggestions about Maori representation but does little to guide public debates about the super-diversity of the city. There is little in the Royal Commission's report which addresses matters of diversity planning or ethnically-inclusive governance structures or processes.

Whatever the orthodoxy in terms of most within the discipline of sociology about the importance of ethnicity, there are still either significant gaps in public debates or scepticism and hostility to greater ethnic recognition in the modern state. So what of recent contributions to our understanding? What follows is a review of three publications, one each from New Zealand, Australia and the UK. Two are texts; the third is a contribution to policy debates.

Farida Fozdar, Raelene Wilding and Mary Hawkins provide the Australian contribution, but the book contains a number of case studies drawn from New Zealand (and elsewhere). Almost inevitably, the book begins with the Cronulla ‘riot’ of 2005 followed by a relatively standard contents with chapters on ‘race’, ethnicity, nations and globalisation, migration and public policy concerning diversity. It is intended as a text so there are the now normal devices such as boxed inserts and end of chapter questions. But that is not to dismiss it. While I was sometimes irritated at the orthodoxy of some of the material, it provides a comprehensive and interesting overview of the state of approaches and research. And in relation to the opening chapter on the construction and utility of ‘race’, it is hard to think what might be said differently from the material presented here. The following chapter on ethnicity pays homage to Weber and Benedict Anderson, and rehearses the long-standing debates about the primordial versus the instrumentalist nature of ethnicity. Ethnic allegiances and diversity are combined with the literature on transnationalism, especially cross-border loyalties and globalised politics, to argue that there are significant challenges to the nation-state in ethnicities that operate globally. Finally, there is a discussion of policy approaches to diversity which encompasses monoculturalism, assimilation, the melting pot and pluralist models. Perhaps the more compelling content comes from some of the examples discussed.

What is interesting is that there is often as much case study material concerning New Zealand as there is on Australia. This is obvious when it comes to the centrality of indigeneity to public and national discourses. The discussion on indigeneity in the Australian context is relatively short and discusses human rights, the Stolen Generation and land rights. But New Zealand provides a contrasting set of developments

and discourses, especially in relation to a revisionist history, public sector biculturalism, the cultural and linguistic renewal of the tangata whenua and political/juridical recognition. There are important reasons for these differences, including the size of indigenous communities, linguistic plurality amongst Aboriginal Australians and a rather different settler/colonial history. But it is still interesting to see the two histories counterpoised and a sense that New Zealand might have provided a more enlightened (if incomplete) approach to issues of indigeneity. My only criticism is that some of the more recent literature on New Zealand was not utilised.

There is a similar story when it comes to the issues of 'whiteness'. Australia has made an important contribution to both a domestic and international literature, especially with Ghassan Hage. 'Whiteness' has been problematised and this section explores the social construction of invisible whiteness and the discourses which embed notions of white superiority. But if 3 pages are given over to Australian debates, 5 pages are devoted to New Zealand and the debates about Pakeha. Again, there are some gaps in terms of the contemporary literature on New Zealand but it is still interesting to see Australians discussing whether non-Aborigines (whitefella) could become known as Wadjula in the Nyoongar dialect of Western Australia. It feels somewhat artificial and an academic construction; what is needed is something equivalent to the 1985 Michael King book *Becoming Pakeha* to make the case to a wider audience.

Finally, the discussion that appears late in the book on methodological issues of researching the above is interesting. The issues of power, sensitivity to the researched 'other' and ethics are canvassed with New Zealand getting considerable attention. Kathie Irwin, Ngahaia Te Awekotuku and Russell Bishop (what about Mason Durie?) are drawn upon for a discussion of kaupapa Maori as a model for collaborative research. The discussion notes the tensions of such an approach. It is a cross between a social science model and a community development model which means that one may not be able to meet the demands of the professional and research community and those of the Maori community (Fozdar, Wilding and Hawkins, 2009:254).

They go on to note that there might be restrictions on the nature of the research, the paradigms that might be used (allowed?), of abiding by

institutional requirements and questions as to who exactly is the researcher accountable to in terms of Maori communities. It is a helpful commentary on the issues, and it characterises the book as a whole. Sometimes orthodox and perhaps missing some key interventions in terms of contributors or texts, it nevertheless is a reasonably complete and interesting review of the issues associated with cultural difference and politics.

The second book reviewed is by Richard Jenkins who describes himself as an anthropologist but who has spent his teaching career as a sociologist and who is heterodox in his approach. The book is about ethnicity in particular, following earlier contributions such as Steve Fenton's 2003 book *Ethnicity* (since updated and about to be published in a new edition; this book of Jenkins was first published in 1997 it should be noted). Jenkins' starting point is the contributions of Weber, Everett Hughes and Fredrik Barth's influential book *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969). As the reference to the last author will indicate, the discussion concerns boundary-creation and -maintenance although Jenkins opts for what is a minimalist definition of ethnicity: "...a human collectivity the members of which recognize its existence and their membership of it" (p. 24). This is later qualified in various ways, including that ethnicity is not fixed but is based on shared meanings; that ethnic identity is both individual and collective and is "externalized in social interaction and the categorization of others, and internalized in personal self-identification" (p.169).

He then goes on to discuss the nature of pluralist societies and the new discourses concerning pluralism. He stresses that they represent important sites of resistance to Eurocentric and androcentric meta-narratives and provide the basis for imagining a 'new world of mutual recognition and tolerance' (p.31). He sees ethnic identity and politics as laying claim to some of the important shifts in contemporary politics:

...as a bulwark against fundamentalist images of the world; as an assertion of the rights to autonomous (co-)existence of peripheralised, marginalized, minorityised peoples; as the inspiration for ethics and politics of representation and diversity which challenge the centralization, the homogenization, the integration and the domination of the nation...; and as the

inspiration for new analytical models of the complexity of the human world' (p. 31).

That is quite a list. The assertion of ethnicity by various groups might lead to these possibilities but it must be said that it can also lead to very different outcomes; the radicalisation of Muslim youth in the UK has produced rather more problematic behaviour and a reaction from many parts of the political spectrum that concludes that multiculturalism has therefore failed. The opposition to multiculturalism was already apparent prior to the 2005 bombings and it can be seen in the way that the Bhikhu Parekh report on the 'community of communities' was received by politicians and the media in 2000. The recasting of identity and nationality might be spurred by more of the resistance and assertiveness of ethnic groups but it can also produce exclusive and violent forms of identity politics, ranging from Bosnia to Bradford.

In addition to requiring ethnicity to produce very different political options, Jenkins is also frustrating for another reason, especially for Antipodean readers; he readily admits that he draws upon examples that he knows best, specifically from Europe and North America. But there is not a single reference that I could see to this part of the world. When he talks of nations and nationalism, he uses the examples provided by Northern Ireland, Wales and Denmark; when he talks of a majority ethnicity, the prime example is taken from Northern Ireland. His claim that the schemas which he provides have the widest possible application fails the local test on a number of fronts. In terms of majority ethnicity, for example, the book by Fozdar, Wilding and Hawkins provides an important corrective and a much more nuanced, internationally inclusive discussion than does Jenkins. That Northern Irish Protestant ethnicity might be an exemplar of majority group ethnicity is a view that I would have encountered thirty years ago while studying at Bristol. Similar criticisms can be made about nationalism and/or indigeneity. Settler societies such as New Zealand, Australia and Canada have a very different historical trajectory and contemporary politics to the ones he cites and while some of Jenkins material does translate, other aspects do not. While I can agree with his view that the social construction of ethnicity places issues of power and resistance at the core of what we do as societies, it is a book that ought to be read selectively by an audience

from these settler societies. Parts of the book have a dated feel, especially when the material gets applied to particular situations. It is a book that has its strengths (the nature of ethnicity and its possibilities) and frustrations.

David Bromell has written a book on ethnicity and public policy while he was on leave from the Ministry of Social Development and based at the Institute of Policy Studies at Victoria University of Wellington (who have published it). It is an interesting book for several reasons: it takes a number of theorists/commentators and examines what they have to say although none of these writers are New Zealanders; Bromell makes it clear that he has a personal view on matters of ethnicity and public policy and recognises that this view might not be widely shared; and he writes as someone who is part of the policy-making process. It is a book of two distinct parts. The first concerns these international commentators while the second explores the implications for New Zealand.

The first part, which is the major part of the book (about 240 pages out of 306), provides a commentary on the following: Michael Sandel (civic republicanism), Charles Taylor (politics of recognition), Will Kymlicka (multicultural citizenship), Bhikhu Parekh (common citizenship), Iris Marion Young (politics of difference), Ghassan Hage (white nationalism) and Brian Barry (egalitarian liberalism). Each gets considerable attention; for example, Kymlicka has 46 pages devoted to his arguments concerning the nature of multiculturalism, and multi-nation and poly-ethnic states. Bromell provides a synopsis of the key texts and arguments for each author, and in doing this, there is some value. There is also some discussion (sometimes quite limited) of the implications for New Zealand and a critique is offered of the shortcomings of each approach, both in general and what it might mean for this country. But there is a tension in these commentaries; Bromell is not a believer, almost without exception. His own view is that the communitarianism of Sandel and Taylor, the multiculturalism of Parekh and Kymlicka and the politics of difference of Young and Hage are all fundamentally flawed in some way. As he says, "...I have not been entirely convinced by any of the above, or by any other author I have had occasion to read in the context of this inquiry" (p.272). Bromell's own view is that many of these

authors suffer from a cultural relativism and that the institutional recognition of difference is not typically warranted. He favours individual rather than group rights, although this does not mean he is opposed to public recognition; he is not convinced that there is a role for central government in the recognition of group rights; and he is opposed to biculturalism and multiculturalism as he believes that they encourage identity politics and are divisive. A number of these arguments are in direct contrast to the authors that he is providing a commentary on. This tension does not invalidate the commentary – often there is considerable value in the review provided – but it does produce a rather unusual dimension to the book and it raises some questions : were these authors chosen because they are so important in international debates and therefore the intent was to identify their weaknesses and/or inappropriateness to New Zealand?; why weren't other authors (Huntington or Minogue) who were more sympathetic to Bromell's position given attention?; who is the intended audience?

Bromell also turns his attention to New Zealand although this material is often not directly related to the discussion of the seven authors mentioned above. Other contributors are now included and the discussion includes a broad literature. (Sometimes his enthusiasm for qualifying the material in the discussion means that the footnotes take up more page space than the text). His approach has already been signalled but to elaborate, he is opposed to both biculturalism and multiculturalism (all versions?) believing them to inappropriately recognise the collective nature of identity in the public domain. Inevitably, Bromell argues, this demeans the individual nature of human rights and marginalises some people. Biculturalism, in particular, “demands more of the Treaty than the original text (whether in Maori or English) can bear” (p.41) and that biculturalism ‘ distorts the complexity and pluralism of contemporary New Zealand’ (p. 42). It also leads to other possibilities; Bromell raises the concern that a New Zealand-located community such as Niueans might claim to be treated as a ‘national minority’ within New Zealand (p.147). He goes on to say:

I have become increasingly uneasy...about the extent to which we focus on ethnicity in public policy in New Zealand, and particularly the manner in which analysis commonly proceeds as if New Zealand society comprises clearly bounded social groups,

one of which is assumed to have valid claims to special recognition on the grounds of indigeneity (p. 286).

He justifies this scepticism on a number of grounds, including that intermarriage has an effect on claims to indigeneity, that 'finders keepers' claims to territory do not provide a 'convincing moral claim' to prior occupation and that many 'Maori have in any case moved on from' biculturalism' and are focusing on self-development (pp. 2008: 291, 293, 295). He also argues that contrary positions such as that provided by Simon Chapple have been silenced by a 'political backlash' (p.297).

What to make of the book? It has its strengths. I thought that the discussion of some of the authors highlighted here is worth the read. But the way in which the book is organised and the personal view of the author will frustrate many readers. Bromell is obviously concerned and exasperated at the importance attributed to ethnicity and indigeneity in contemporary New Zealand society. He is opposed to institutional recognition beyond certain attempts to counter racism and discrimination. He argues for matters of identity to be largely the preserve of the individual domain. But why then engage with those who argue quite the opposite? Why not provide commentaries on those who align with his position? And why not include a discussion of key local authors such as Mason Durie (there is not a single reference to Durie) or critique some of the key policy documents that now abound on matters of ethnicity and indigeneity (the 1987 briefing documents from Treasury to the incoming Labour Government would be a good starting point with their advocacy of the very developments that Bromell is concerned with)? Debate about these matters is important and there is room for different approaches. I am not sure that this book is going to successfully marshal the arguments for those who would oppose some of the current approaches to indigeneity or ethnicity. Nor is it going to convince those who see value in the public recognition of cultural difference to abandon their views.

What Bromell's book did inadvertently highlight is that we need the local equivalents to Will Kymlicka or Iris Marion Young. There are important local contributors such as David Pearson or Cluny Macpherson, but sociology lacks a strong and compelling public voice on these matters in the political and community domains that are so important. The 1980s and 1990s saw the restoration of some of the rights of Maori that were

taken away during a colonial history and a much greater public recognition that Maori identity is important for both individual and collective (including national) reasons. Brash might have tried to reverse these developments but he was ultimately unsuccessful. The approach adopted towards the foreshore and seabed debate by the Labour-led government produced a much more apparent form of Maori political representation. Despite Bromell's view, it is hard to see these and other developments being abandoned in the foreseeable future. Where are the sociological interventions in these public debates?

References:

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