

The Politics of Closing the Gaps

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The issue of ontological politics 'is not simply how what is out there can be uncovered and brought to light...it is also about what might be made in the relations of investigation, what might be brought into being...which realities might we try to enact?...what realities do the current methods of social sciences help to enact or to erode? And what realities might they help to bring into being or to strengthen?' (Law and Urry 2004 'Enacting the social' *Economy and Society* 33(3) August: 390-410, p.396).

**The co-existence of the idea of
'Indigenous population' and the idea of
'Indigenous people' is a source of
instability within the discourse of social
justice.**

Modes of Maori (Indigenous)collectivity

- Maori in traditional kin groups such as whānau, hapū, and iwi (sometimes called families, sub-tribes, and tribes); Maori in Maori voluntary organisations, such as modern ‘urban iwi’; and Maori conceived of as members of the ethnic or racial group Maori. Each kind of grouping has a different ruling justification for existing – roughly, blood kinship, consent, and the sharing of genetic and cultural material. But in each case the ruling justification is not the *only* one (Sharp 2002 ‘Blood, custom, and consent: three kinds of Maori groups and the challenges they present to governments’ *University of Toronto Law Journal* 52, 2002 9-37 p.15, emphasis in original).

Population v People

- Population = statistical category (ethnic identifier); no intrinsic social cohesion; comparable to other categories of population, in terms of socio-economic variables, to produce an account of needs
- People = imagined community with a history, kinship and voluntary association mobilized to create self-conscious collective capacity, bearers of collective rights vis a vis a nation-state

‘Maori’ in the NZ Census

- **Ancestral Maori** (who are entitled to be on the Maori Electoral Roll and to avail themselves of the Waitangi Tribunal, but who do not necessarily identify as members of the Maori ethnic group)
- **Ethnic Maori** (who are generally assumed to be ‘ancestral Maori’ and who also identify themselves as belonging to Maori and possibly to other ethnic groups)
- **Sole Maori** (the subset of Ethnic Maori who say they do not belong to any other ethnic group).

Chapple on 'ethnic Maori'

- Popular rhetoric to the contrary, [ethnic] Maori do not share a common experience of socio-economic disadvantage. The Maori ethnic group is not a group whose boundaries are well defined by socio-economic failure. Socio-economic differences amongst Maori as a group overwhelm socio-economic differences between Maori and other groups. Maori ethnicity is not socio-economic destiny. Seeing members of the Maori ethnic group as socio-economic failures defined only by the average Maori group outcome is to perpetuate a highly inaccurate stereotype (Chapple S 'Maori Socio-economic disparity' *Political Science* 52(2), 2000 101-115, p.110).

Two features of the Chapple/Kukutai debate

First, neither side was treating the Maori population (and hence the binary of which it is a part) as a given, as if it were a natural phenomenon; it is agreed that there are multiple 'Maori populations' and more than one Maori/non-Maori binary is possible. Second, whatever their differences, both Chapple and Kukutai highlight socio-economic criteria for determining the Maori/non-Maori boundary. Ethnic identity is thus a necessary but not a sufficient element in the definition of the Maori population when 'social justice' is operationalized as 'Closing the Gaps'.

‘practical reconciliation’

Howard's rhetorical strategy, in his ‘practical’ v. ‘symbolic’ dichotomy, effectively invoked ‘population’ as a substitute for ‘people’.

Rata's critique of iwi

Rata argues that the empowerment of iwi neglects the interests of Maori who are either not affiliated with iwi or are not treated equitably by the iwi to which they are affiliated. She infers that this significant minority of the Maori *population* does not share in the resources held by iwi on behalf of the Maori *people*. That is, Rata's argument mobilizes the 'population' representation of Maori to reproach the politically ascendant 'people' representation of Maori. The implication of this is that the advocacy of Indigenous self-determination has the ideological burden of making the idea of Indigenous 'people' convincing, in addition to the idea of Indigenous population.

Statistics of people-hood?

There are many ways to evoke Indigenous people-hood so that it is as vivid and compelling an idea as 'Indigenous population', but can official statistics be used to represent the idea not only of Indigenous *population* but also Indigenous *people*?

Towards Maori specific statistics

- Durie M, E.Fitzgerald, Te Kani Kingi, S.McKinley, B.Stevenson 2002 *Maori specific outcomes and indicators* (a report prepared for Te Puni Kokiri the Ministry for Maori Development) Te Putaki a Toi School of Maori Studies Massey University Palmerston North

The unaffiliated Maori

- On the one hand, ‘a positive outcome would necessarily deconstruct access boundaries – to te ao Maori [the Maori domain] or te ao Pakeha [the Pakeha domain], leaving the individual *with choice and a genuine sense of control*’ (Durie et al 2002, 34, emphasis added). This seems a concession to the sovereign individual, choosing between ethnically defined worlds for his/her primary identity and way of life. On the other hand, the Report seeks to evaluate the extent to which public policy fosters Maori well-being by enabling ‘participation and achievement in Maori *society*. Active participation in the Maori world is closely linked to a secure cultural identity’ (Durie et al 2002, 51, emphasis added). I take these words to mean that a person of Maori descent who does not participate in the Maori world is insecure: his/her non-participation is not an expression of individual autonomy but a mark of his/her regrettable deracination.

Maori vehicles of autonomy

- Most participants considered that the test was whether an organisation employed Maori values as well as Maori staff and operated for the benefit of Maori people. However, a few participants did not accept that the *modus operandi* was the essential point – rather it was primarily a question of control. In their opinion, provided the day-to-day decisions were made by Maori, *tino rangatiratanga* [the Treaty right of Maori control over Maori affairs] was being exercised (Durie et al 2002, 43).

‘Ontological politics’ again

How do statistics figure in the presentation
of social justice as a problem
of distribution,
of reparation or
of re-establishing Indigenous autonomy?

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Why study differences within the Indigenous people?

- The diagnosis of the bases of Indigenous disadvantage might be illuminated by studying the history and circumstances of the strata of Indigenous people who are not disadvantaged.
- The idea of an Indigenous *people* is implicitly normative, so a discussion about 'Indigenous norms' is an unavoidable and desirable feature of the discourse of people-hood. Instead of invoking aggregate statistics (such as rates of employment for the entire Indigenous population) perhaps it is better to face up to Indigenous socio-economic diversity and to discuss what differences of Indigenous outcome are consistent with social justice (because they reflect normative diversity among the Indigenous people) and what differences of Indigenous outcome are an affront to Indigenous standards of fairness.