

# **The Evolution of Contemporary Maori Protest**

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# Introduction

Historically, the intensity and momentum of Maori political activism has never been consistent. Upturns in protest activity are followed by downturns in struggle and vice versa. The 1970s were witness to a dramatic upsurge in Maori activism which had a profound effect on New Zealand society. The political turbulence created in the wake of the 1975 land march on parliament, Bastion Point, Raglan and the regular protests at Waitangi, once again revealed the exploitative and oppressive foundations on which capitalism had been established in Aotearoa. The decline of the working class movement internationally and rise of the New Right coupled with the degenerative logic of identity politics lured many Maori away from political activity throughout the 1980s. However, the recent upsurge in grassroots Maori activism in opposition to the fiscal envelope and the Sealords deal is **the most significant since the series of land occupations and marches of the 1970s.**

Maori political activism has traditionally been an extremely heterogeneous social force encompassing a considerable variety of political strategies, campaigns and participants. Indeed, it is only a 'movement' in the most tenuous sense (Greenland, 1984: 87). Walker has claimed that both 'radical' and 'conservative' elements of the Maori nationalist movement pursued the same objectives although the methods they used differed (Walker 1990: 243). However, agreement on the vision of tino rangatiratanga is far from unanimous. It can simultaneously be identified with Maori capitalism, Maori electoral power, cultural nationalism or revolutionary activity. In the late 1960s and early 1970s Maori activists commonly asserted, in however ill-conceived or confused ways, that reformism was not an effective strategy and that only through a fundamental transformation of the system could Maori achieve liberation. More than two decades later the situation is completely different. While many still look to constitutional change and electoral politics to reform the worst excesses of the system, a number of powerful tribal executives and corporate warriors have argued, like the New Right ideologues in treasury and the Business Roundtable, that the welfare system has held Maori back and that real self-determination and liberation for Maori can only be achieved under unrestrained, freemarket capitalism (see Kukutai, 1995). In this way the objective of tino rangatiratanga as espoused by various groups is unclear and at times contradictory. This is symptomatic of the fact that despite the occasional separatist rhetoric, Maori movements are not autonomous of the underlying social structures, political forces and ideologies of capitalist society.

This chapter provides a descriptive overview of the evolution from the progressive political activism of the late 1960s and early 1970s to the cultural nationalist framework that dominated much Maori political strategy from the 1980s. It then critically examines the ideological assumptions of cultural nationalism. The chapter finally explores the effectiveness of cultural nationalism and identity politics as a strategy for Maori liberation.

## **(i) The Seeds of Contemporary Maori Activism 1967-1975**

The collapse of the post-war long boom saw an international resurgence in class conflict and industrial militancy on an unprecedented scale from 1968 to the mid-1970s (Roper, 1993: 2; Harman, 1988).

The global upturn in class struggle from the late 1960s was closely related to the emergence of the New Left internationally. The dramatic growth in student political activism, the anti-war movement in the west, Black liberation in the United States, and the national liberation struggle against United States imperialism were important features in the political milieu. It was also characterised by the growth in social movements, which included the women's liberation movement, the anti-racist movement, the environmental movement and the gay and lesbian rights movements (Ibid.).

The emergence of the New Left in Aotearoa closely paralleled developments internationally. The late 1960s saw the growth of student activism and the development of social movements such as the women's liberation movement, the anti-racist movement, the environmental movement, gay and lesbian rights movements and so forth (see Dann, 1985; Roper, 1990). The period was also characterised by a dramatic upturn in class struggle and a sea change in popular culture, which in part reflected the growing influence of radical intellectual traditions, in particular Marxism and feminism. All this had a profound influence on the organisation and strategies of Maori protest groups that emerged during that period.

Initially, Maori protest groups formed part of the progressive social movements of the time, and **they actively sought to broaden, both quantitatively and qualitatively the struggle against racism and Maori inequality.** Indeed, although some were explicitly nationalist in their orientation, these movements were consciously part of the Left.

### **The Anti-Racist Movement**

A close working relationship was forged between Pakeha anti-racist groups and what eventually evolved into the Maori protest movements of the late 1960s. Initially, this relationship crystallised around the opposition that emerged to the New Zealand Rugby Football Union's decision to exclude Maori rugby players from the 1960 All Black tour of South Africa. This generated intense opposition and the 'No Maori, no tour' protests extended their focus not only to the question of the exclusion of Blacks in the Springbok team itself, but to the moral justification of contact with a nation which practised apartheid and wider issues of social justice.

Pakeha based organisations such as CARE (which included a number of young Maori political activists within its ranks) maintained a close relationship with various Maori groups and individuals in united front activities (Sorrenson, Newnham and de Bres, 1974: 4). CARE for example, arranged numerous panel discussions on the position of the Maori in New Zealand society and

was pivotal in the launching and promotion of a national campaign against New Zealand's involvement in apartheid sport, using the contributions of Maori speakers such as Syd Jackson, Matiu Rata, Koro Dewes, Whetu Tirikatane and Hone Tuwhare for their publicity campaign against the tour (see Jackson, 1969). This interaction between Maori groups and the anti-racist movement was pivotal in the establishment of the umbrella organisation **Halt All Racist Tours (HART)** in 1969. The name was actually suggested by Tama Poata, the secretary of the **Maori Organisation on Human Rights (MOOHR)** (Awatere, 1982). The relationship between Maori protest groups and the movement against apartheid was an enduring one (although not without conflict) culminating in the opposition to the 1981 Springbok Tour.

## **Women's Liberation Movement**

From the late 1960s influential individuals such as Ngahuia Te Awekotuku and Donna Awatere had consistently publicised the barriers in Maori society that had prevented Maori women from participating in, and contributing to, Maori society as they saw fit. Their critiques of the patriarchal nature of traditional Maori leadership and the issue of Maori women's marae speaking rights reflected the influence of the women's liberation movement, in which a number of Maori women actively participated (see Dann, 1985). By the mid-1970s there emerged a larger group of Maori women within **Nga Tamatoa** who adopted a 'feminist' theoretical analysis of the oppression of Maori women. For many young Maori women involved in activist movements like Nga Tamatoa, an increasing consciousness of their role as 'black' women emerged gradually from the mid-1970s and crystallised around the frustration and anger experienced by Maori women during the Maori land rights movement.

For many women there was an underlying tension between the politics, culture and language of Maori society that they were struggling to preserve and their own liberation from this oppression as Maori women. Ngahuia Te Awekotuku noted the significance and momentum of the renaissance in 'Maori' awareness, but expressed concern that the role of Maori women in the struggle not be restricted: "[w]e, Maori females, can only hope that they recognise the need, and the merit of our energy in this fight ... and not deny knowledge and access to half our people" (Te Awekotuku, 1991: 47). Indeed, for many Maori women it was a battle on two fronts. Firstly in the struggle over land, and secondly in the struggle for equality within the movement (Farr, 1978).

A strong network of Maori women crystallised around the day to day struggles against racism and sexual discrimination, and in this process a number of leading Maori women began to openly examine the oppression of women within Maori society, and the continual barriers that were established to limit their influence in the movement. Their developing political ideology consisted of a mixture of 'Black feminism' and Maori nationalism which was to prove extremely influential as the movement unfolded in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

## **The Trade Union Movement**

The dramatic increase in strike activity and class struggle from the late 1960s had a profound influence in terms of the political education of thousands of Maori workers involved in the struggle for better wages and conditions. Indeed, the influence of the trade union movement in providing

an organisational base for Maori protest groups is most clearly demonstrated in the emergence of Te Hokioi and the Maori Organisation on Human Rights (MOOHR). Both groups were based in Wellington and both had strong trade union links. Tama Poata, the secretary of MOOHR, was also an active member of the Wellington Drivers Union and the New Zealand Communist Party.

Both organisations advocated an alliance between Maori and the progressive elements of the working class. Indeed, for Te Hokioi the fundamental contradiction in society was between labour and capital, between the workers on the one hand and the bosses and land owners on the other. Racism was seen to be an outcome of class inequality. In this regard the majority of Maori were seen as an oppressed section of the working class. Both groups advocated a pan-racial struggle along class lines as the most effective strategy for resolving racism and Maori inequality.

Te Hokioi and MOOHR issued numerous newsletters and pamphlets to publicise their cause. Te Hokioi itself adopted the name of the anti-government newspaper of the Maori King Movement and proclaimed itself as a “taiaha of truth for kotahitanga within the Maori Nation.” From its inception, MOOHR pledged to defend *human* rights not only of Maori but of all ‘minorities.’ (Walker, 1980). It urged both Maori and Pakeha to fight against racism and discrimination and uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Thus MOOHR were at pains to emphasize that it was ‘rich Pakeha’ to blame for racism, not *all* Pakeha (MOOHR, 1970).

MOOHR played a vigorous role in publicising the racism and discrimination in housing, sport, employment, and the infringement of Maori political rights. Together with Te Hokioi, MOOHR embraced Treaty of Waitangi issues, the alienation of Maori land, ‘race-relations’ and resource depletion. MOOHR put an emphasis on the Treaty of Waitangi as a possible cornerstone of a harmonious, bicultural country provided that past injustices were redeemed.

The inspiration and momentum that underpinned Te Hokioi and MOOHR subsided gradually during the early 1970s with MOOHR finally merging with Matekite in the land rights movement in 1975. The decline of MOOHR and Te Hokioi reflected the growing influence of Black Power and rhetoric. Indeed the impetus of the movement shifted to the ‘Brown Power’ of newly emerging Auckland Maori protest groups.

## (ii) Brown Power

The emergence of Nga Tamatoa in the early 1970s saw the articulation of the idea that racism was the basic social cleavage in society. This was most clearly amplified in their rhetoric of 'Brown Power' which represented a fundamental rejection of the racist institutions and values of New Zealand society. Like the Black Power philosophies of Stokely Carmichael and Charles V Hamilton, Brown Power was based on the fundamental premise that: "...group solidarity is necessary before a group can operate effectively from a bargaining position of strength..." (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1970: 146). Thus advocates of Brown Power urged Maori to unite, to recognise their common history and to build a sense of solidarity and community. They emphasised the goal of Maori self-determination, that is, the capacity for Maori to define their own goals and to develop their own separate organisations and institutions. In its early stages, members of Tamatoa were influenced by the revolutionary wing of the Black Power movement in the United States, but as Nga Tamatoa developed different interests and objectives began to be articulated. Indeed, there was a division in the movement between the conservative, university educated students such as Syd and Hana Jackson, Peter Rikys and Donna Awatere, and the more militant exponents of Black Power such as John Ohia, Paul Kotara and Ted Nia (Walker, 1990: 210).

At first it was this more radical faction with their talk of Brown Power and Maori liberation that attracted the sensational media headlines.

However, it was the more conservative element of Tamatoa that took control of the movement. Their strategies differed from the militants in that they tended to look to 'liberal' elements in the ruling class for change. They did this because their political outlook was based on a belief that provided the appropriate legal measures were put in place, Maori could prosper. Hence their emphasis on self-help programmes for Maori development.

Nga Tamatoa employed the protest techniques and tactics popularised during the late 1960s such as the use of petitions, demonstrations and pickets. They initiated the tradition of the annual protests at Waitangi Day celebrations.

There was a fundamental belief that New Zealand capitalism coupled with the parliamentary political system could be cleansed of racism. In essence this view reflected the interests of middle class university educated Maori based on a strategy of advancement within the system. In this way the Brown Power slogan was unclear. It could be identified with Maori capitalism or revolutionary activity. The Auckland gang problem encouraged cooperation between Nga Tamatoa and a new emerging group, the Polynesian Panthers.

**The Polynesian Panther Movement, founded in June 1971 had a largely Pacific Island membership** and was explicitly influenced by the Black Panther Party in the US (Polynesian Panther Party, 1975: 225). They were particularly influenced by Huey Newton's policy of black unity, and repeated his distinction between revolutionary and cultural nationalism in their arguments with the conservative members of Nga Tamatoa. The Panthers located the causes of Maori and Pacific Island oppression within the exploitative social relations of the capitalist system of production. Consequently, the Polynesian Panthers promoted a strategy of liberation based on

the complete overthrow of the capitalist system and the social relations necessary for its development.

**The revolution we openly rap about is one of total change. The revolution is one to liberate us from racism, oppression and capitalism. We see that many of our problems of oppression and racism are tools of this society's outlook based on capitalism; hence for total change one must change society altogether (Polynesian Panther Party, 1975: 226).**

In practice this meant that the Panthers stood in solidarity with other liberation struggles, oppressed groups and activists, working toward a global revolution (Ibid.). They publicised the everyday struggles of Maori and Pacific Islanders, from land claims to the discrimination and violence of the police (Polynesian Panther Party, 1976). In particular the Panthers sought a pan-ethnic grouping of both Maori and Pacific Islanders and their views competed with those of Nga Tamatoa who favoured Maori unity first (Polynesian Panther Party, 1975: 225-226).

### **(iii) Maori Land Rights Movement 1975-1984: “Not One More Acre!”**

As the struggle against Maori oppression and racism intensified, the early movement started to polarise. At the root of this was whether the whole system had to be overthrown and a new society build in its place, or whether real change for Maori could come through the existing political structures. Support for the conservative strategies pursued by groups like Nga Tamatoa rested on the expectation that the state would make significant concessions. However, as the struggle intensified the failure to stem the tide of land alienation through official channels led to a widespread pessimism about the ability of the third Labour Government (1972-75) to secure Maori rights. This led many frustrated militants to look at more direct strategies.

From 1975 to 1978, the Maori land rights movement brought together a wide range of activists. Indeed, such diversity in struggle was actively promoted by Te Ropu o te Matakite, the organising committee of the 1975 Land March on Parliament. In particular Matakite sought to consolidate links with workers, both Pakeha and Maori who were perceived as natural allies in the struggle:

We see no difference between the aspirations of Maori people and the desire of workers in their struggles. We seek the support of workers and organisations, as the only viable bodies which have sympathy and understanding of the Maori people and their desires. The people who are oppressing the workers are the same who are exploiting the Maori today (Te Ropu o te Matakite, 1975).

Despite the divergent political and strategic philosophies there was no room to mistake the object of protest and the enemy of Maori as anything other than a state which was seen as being both racist and capitalist.

The occupation of Bastion Point and the subsequent eviction intensified the experience of direct conflict with the state. The occupation again brought together the diverse Pakeha left, and mobilised wide public support (Walker, 1990: 218). The Auckland Trades Council placed a ‘green ban’ on the area declaring that no work would begin on the planned sub-division. A North Shore contractor even donated six trucks, including two bitumen tankers to help with a planned blockade (Auckland Star, 1977).

The occupation at Bastion Point was followed by the arrest of seventeen protesters in February 1978 at the Raglan Golf Course. The arrests occurred on land taken from Tainui Awhiro under the Emergency War Act for a military aerodrome during World War II and never returned. Among those arrested were representatives of Nga Tamatoa, Matakite o Aotearoa, Orakei Marae Committee and Tainui Awhiro.

The Land Rights Movement of the 1970s had a significant impact upon the evolution of Maori political activism in the 1980s. In particular, the high level of political intensity that had characterised the struggle provided the conditions from which a young, more militant leadership emerged. Most notably, the Maori land rights movement and the struggle against racism radi-

calised a group of Maori women, the core of whom had been involved in Nga Tamatoa. These women were to form the basis of the Black Women's Movement.

The land rights movement and the occupation and eviction of members of Ngati Whatua from Bastion Point, and the arrests at Raglan also prompted certain activists based primarily in Auckland to adopt a more direct strategy to undermine racism. This was exemplified in 1979 when He Taua confronted and assaulted members of an engineering student group who had traditionally celebrated the University of Auckland's capping week by making, among other things, obscene imitations of Maori haka.

**The Waitangi Action Committee, Maori People's Liberation Movement of Aotearoa and Black Women were at the forefront of Maori political activism in the early 1980s.** These groups were primarily based in Auckland and possessed a considerable overlap in membership (Walker, 1984). From 1979 WAC continued the earlier focus of Nga Tamatoa with annual protests at the Waitangi Day celebrations, arguing that ratification of the Treaty of Waitangi was a futile objective because the cost of reparations would effectively bankrupt the state. WAC called for a boycott of the Waitangi Day celebrations with the objective of escalating opposition to the celebrations until they were stopped. At this time Maori activists proclaimed the treaty as a 'fraud' and denounced it as the: 'cheaty of Waitangi'. WAC used marches to spread their message to various marae on route to Waitangi and were most successful in bringing together the Kingitanga and the Kotahitanga movements for the purpose of a hikoi, a peaceful walk to Waitangi in February 1984. Initially activists in groups like WAC acted in liaison with certain Pakeha anti-racist groups. However, following the rifts between the anti-racist movement and some Maori groups during the anti-Springbok Tour protests of 1981 the association between Maori and Pakeha activists weakened.

There was a widespread perception amongst Maori that too many Pakeha ignored the connection between apartheid in South Africa and colonialism and racism in Aotearoa (see Awatere, 1981). Groups like People Opposed to Waitangi (POW), were widely seen as a way of accommodating Pakeha support for Maori protest so that Maori could maintain autonomy in the movement (Jesson, 1983).

## (iv) The New Right and Cultural Nationalism from 1984

The prolonged economic crisis in New Zealand throughout the 1970s and 1980s was brought on by the inherent tendency in capitalist systems for the general rate of profit to fall which inhibits investment and undermines capital accumulation (see Roper, 1993: 11-21; Shaikh, 1989; 1991: 185-186). For the state, capitalism's chronic tendency to produce crises reverberates to produce a legitimisation crises for the whole system. Thus governments from the 1970s have had to respond to a dual crisis of political legitimisation and economic management, the product of steadily worsening conditions of economic decline and fiscal instability coupled with a growth in unemployment, the politicisation of ethnic and gender inequalities, and other signs of social unrest. In particular, the political turbulence created by the events of the early 1980s encouraged the widespread perception that New Zealand was at the turning point in regard to harmonious race relations. The sense of urgency and concern about the state of New Zealand society manifested itself in the official report *Race Against Time* from the Race Relations Office. It was widely perceived that New Zealand was tinkering on the edge of a prolonged and irredeemable racial conflict (Race Relations Conciliator, 1982).

The upsurge in Maori protest and discontent forced governments to respond to the evidence which showed overwhelmingly that the majority of Maori occupied a peripheral place in New Zealand society. Numerous studies confirmed that Maori experienced disproportionately: poor educational outcomes; high levels of unemployment; low income levels; ill-health and hence lower life expectancy; higher rates of imprisonment; low rates of home ownership; and high rates of state dependency.

While those Maori activists involved in movements such as MOOHR, Te Hokioi, the Polynesian Panthers and land rights at least attempted to find strategies which could successfully challenge the system which produced such dramatic inequalities, others ended up pursuing struggles which represented little or no threat at all to the state. This helped to obscure the fact that capitalism's tendency towards economic and social crisis was a result of its internal contradictions.

Initially the politics of Maori cultural nationalism found expression in the struggle to win Maori studies and language programmes in the education system. However, the movement ended up far from these traditions and aspirations. **The emphasis on the rediscovery of the role of Maori in history, not just as victims but as fighters was something to be welcomed.** However, for large parts of the movement the emphasis on the rediscovery of culture came to be the objective of the movement itself and a substitute for practical struggle. For the most part, cultural nationalism placed little or no importance on building a political movement, or on strategies for far reaching social change.

Particularly in intellectual circles, Maori cultural nationalism became less a critique of right wing racist politics than an attack on left social movements. This was best encapsulated in Donna Awatere's polemic, *Maori Sovereignty* which was explicitly directed at Pakeha feminists, trade

unionists, socialists, and the Pakeha anti-racist movement. Awatere was to argue that Pakeha activists were committed to a status quo characterised by white supremacy and Maori subordination. In spite of the alleged differences between white women and white men, homosexual and heterosexual, the working class and the capitalist class, Awatere was to argue all cleavages occurred within a common cultural framework. All whites shared the benefits of the alienation of Maori land and culture and the imposition of European cultural values (Awatere, 1984).

Pakeha society was said to reflect inherent characteristics: it was competitive, exploitative, valued material success and it eroded or dominated traditional or radically egalitarian Maori values. Maori possessed an inherent integrity that had been progressively eroded since contact. However this status could be redeemed by the immersion in Maori identity or 'Maoritanga.' Because the inherent traits of Pakeha were the basic causes of an oppressive and unequal society, the virtues of Maori were critical for their resolution (see Greenland, 1984: 89).

This became an extremely persuasive ideology throughout the 1980s but rather than channelling Maori into greater political involvement the introverted emphasis on Maori consciousness alone tended to lead Maori away from political activism. This was because the implication was that 'Maori culture' and identity by itself would automatically bring about political and economic freedom. With its emphasis on lifestyle changes, cultural rediscovery represented almost no threat at all to the state which easily accommodated the rhetoric of cultural nationalism into the language of state policy-making during the 1980s. In this way, it could accommodate the idea that the low level of participation and achievement of Maori in education and employment structures of New Zealand society was the result of social alienation caused by the loss of cultural identity. Such an explanation for Maori disadvantage did not represent a threat to the underlying social relations of capitalist society.

Following its election in July 1984, the fourth Labour Government attempted to appease the rising tide of Maori protest by enhancing the status of Maori culture, attracting the commitment of Maori to state institutions and satisfying Maori demands for self-determination in their own affairs. Labour did this in two major ways: firstly it extended the jurisdiction of the Waitangi Tribunal giving it the power to examine Maori grievances retrospective to 1840. Secondly, the official policy of 'bi-culturalism' adopted by the fourth Labour Government after 1984 involved the incorporation of Maori personnel, Maori models of organisation and Maori social practices and cultural symbolism within the institutions of the state (see Barber, 1989). The partial adoption of ethnic rhetoric by the state and the co-optation of elites into state institutions gave the illusion of a 'partnership' as espoused under the Treaty of Waitangi, while marginalising the more radical demands (Kelsey, 1993: 234).

## **Waitangi Tribunal**

The Labour Government had assumed that by the introduction of the Treaty of Waitangi Amendment Act in 1985 the state could somehow take control of the direction of Treaty issues and shape the nature of Maori demands. From 1985, iwi and hapu diverted time, energy and meagre resources into researching and presenting claims to the Waitangi Tribunal and in the judicial system. However, it quickly became apparent that the tribunal was a body without 'teeth' restricted to making recommendations on particular claims upon which governments were under no obligation to act.

As Maori demands for political and economic self-determination became more strident, a contradiction quickly emerged between the economic programme of market liberalization and the treaty settlement policy (see Kelsey, 1990; 1993). The fourth Labour Government's Maori policy was motivated by an overriding objective of reducing government expenditure at a time of economic and fiscal crisis. Labour embarked on an economic restructuring programme designed to restore levels of profitability in the New Zealand economy. This was characterised by a monetarist, disinflationary strategy coupled with a programme of market liberalization, which included the deregulation of the financial sector; liberalization of foreign trade; the elimination of so-called 'rigidities' in the labour market; regressive tax reform; the disassembly of the state sector through privatisation, commercialisation and corporatisation; and the dismantling of the welfare state (see Roper, 1991; 1993; Holland and Boston 1990; Boston, 1991). However, a series of claims before the Waitangi Tribunal became an obstacle to the sale of many key state owned enterprises, a crucial component in Labour's restructuring programme. At a time of growing economic and social dislocation, the political costs for Labour were exacerbated by the widespread perception that Maori were getting 'special treatment'. Indeed, the pressures were so great by 1989, that the Labour Government attempted to play down the significance of its Treaty policy.

## Maori Elite

In addition to its Treaty policy, Labour also undertook a process of co-opting key individuals in the Maori protest movement into a series of secretive negotiations and consultation. The co-optation of a Maori elite within the structures of the state forced many Maori leaders to straddle the uneasy gulf between pushing the Maori struggle forward and maintaining the existing state of affairs. **The prestige and wealth that went with such privileged positions in the settlement process meant that Maori leaders became increasingly removed from the concerns and vitality of the flax roots Maori struggle.**

Like the fourth Labour Government, the National Government also set out to restore levels of profitable investment in the New Zealand economy. The National Government was concerned that the backlog of treaty claims created a climate of uncertainty for investors because the ownership of a number of key resources was in doubt. Treasury officials were concerned about the fiscal implications of some of the major Treaty claims declaring it an "unquantifiable fiscal risk" (Southland Times, 1994: 14). National attempted to end this uncertainty by negotiating a full and final settlement of all Treaty of Waitangi claims at minimal cost. Like Labour, the National Government embarked on a series of secret negotiations with a selected number of corporate warriors and tribal executives which resulted in a full and final settlement of fishery claims under the Treaty of Waitangi in the form of the Sealords deal.

The lack of accountability and democracy in such negotiations generated intense anger and resentment which manifested itself in the bitter internal divisions that have characterised the recent upsurge in Maori protest over the signing of the Sealords deal. These divisions were strained further at the time of the negotiations surrounding the Government's \$1 billion Fiscal Envelope, an attempt to evoke a full and final settlement of all remaining Treaty of Waitangi claims.

The attempted chain-sawing of the pine tree on One Tree Hill on 28 October 1994, the anniversary of the 1835 Declaration of Independence, the beheading of the statue of John Ballance at Moutoa Gardens and the explosion of anger at the 1995 Waitangi celebrations heralded the most

significant upsurge in Maori protest since the 1970s. The occupation of Wanganui's Moutoa Gardens by Whanganui Maori **has been a powerful symbol of the resurgence in the struggle for mana whenua**. The 79-day occupation at Pakaitore marae had invigorated other struggles around the country, in particular the occupation by **Te Ropu a Te Pohutu** of Rotowhio marae at Whakarewarewa in Rotorua and the occupation of the former Tamaki Girls' College in Auckland. The upsurge in Maori struggle has also expressed itself in the occupations of the **Takahue school** near Kaitaia and of the court house at Patea. Other struggles include, the **Tuhoe embassy** in Taneatua, the occupations of the Taumaranui police station site and Kaitaia Airport. These occupations have been a long time in the making and reflect the growing anger, frustration and desperation at the lack of real options available to Maori for the resolutions of their grievances.

While much of the recent protest has represented a continuation in the tradition of the land rights movement of the 1970s, some more notable struggles such as the occupations of Coalcorp land at Huntly by the Whaawhaakia hapu and of the Waikato University marae by Te Toitutanga and the other protests in opposition to the \$170 million Raupatu settlement between the Government and the Tainui Trust Board represent a challenge to the mandate of decision-making bodies within iwi to make such settlement agreements.

#### **(v) Maori Liberation and the Politics of Identity**

While the official policy of bi-culturalism, has resulted in a dramatic expansion of opportunities for middle class professional Maori, in the state apparatus, education system, health and the media, the emphasis on identity alone as the crucial determining factor in Maori oppression has been an unmitigated disaster for the vast majority of working class Maori whanau who have borne the brunt of the fourth Labour Government and the National Government's 'economic restructuring' (Ministry of Maori Development, 1992).

For the majority of **Maori cultural nationalism has failed so dramatically in this respect because as strategy it has firstly, evaded the significance of the relative location of the majority of Maori in the working class within New Zealand's class structure and also the existence of class differentiation within both Maori and Pakeha populations**. Secondly, such an approach has prevented through its rhetoric and posturing the possibility of building the strongest movement by combining with other progressive social movements in order to achieve specific political objectives. Thirdly, cultural nationalism has in effect provided a way out of engaging in struggle by encouraging individual lifestyle changes rather than a strategy for fundamental social change or transformation of society. Finally, the internal logic of the underlying philosophies of cultural nationalism have been inherently degenerative, fostering confusion, demoralisation, and internal fights over authenticity.

## **Fragmentation**

This emphasis on cultural identity as the determining factor in Maori oppression encouraged the perception that the struggle against Maori inequality and racism could be reduced to a clash of cultures; a conflict between 'races.' Indeed, New Zealand history had been characterised by an irredeemable clash of cultural values. Against the inherent hostility of Pakeha, Maori sovereignty was the only hope for justice.

One of tendencies of movements which emphasise the identity of their members as the determining factor in their oppression is to 'personalise' the conflict for liberation. If you personalise

power you tend to personalise the enemy. Hence the struggle for equality becomes reduced to a fight against prejudice, the fight against the institutions and practices against individuals and attitudes not against the system that perpetuates that oppression. In this way one of the most notable features of Maori protest from the late 1970s is the increasing personalisation of the Maori struggle for liberation whereby the object of Maori oppression is Pakeha and the Pakeha culture. This leaves the struggle against Maori oppression to be fought out at the level of individual relationships between Maori and Pakeha while the system in which this relationship occurs remains untouched.

The conclusion that Pakeha are the enemy of Maori is very pessimistic to say the least. Moreover, since cultural nationalists explain the division between Maori and Pakeha as biologically rooted, the rupture must be permanent. From this, it follows that any strategy aimed at the liberation of Maori necessitates an apocalyptic struggle because the very existence of Pakeha is the basis of Maori oppression.

Given that identities are blurred, multiple and historically contingent the idea that the main division in society is between Maori and Pakeha also risks fragmentation of the movement itself because it inevitably leads to confusion and fights over authenticity (di Leonardo, 1994: 168). Thus if the reasoning of identity politics is taken to its logical conclusion then Pakeha are not the only oppressors: men are oppressors, heterosexuals are oppressors and so forth. The fragmentation and demoralisation of the women's liberation movement according to sexuality, class and race demonstrates this precisely (Smith, 1994: 4-5).

## Class Divisions

While it is certainly true that for some left wing groups the belief in the centrality of working class struggle disguised a fundamental resistance or in some cases hostility to the struggles of Maori activists, it is also a notorious fact that Maori movements since the 1980s have tended to fight for the political changes of greatest benefit to those Maori already middle class or wealthy. In this regard, **cultural nationalism and the politics of Maori identity have been the perfect social theory for the upwardly mobile Maori middle class because it presents the interests of Maori in contemporary capitalist society as essentially unitary.** Thus the affluent right-wing individuals such individuals as Donna Awatere (Maori affairs spokesperson for the Association of Consumers and Taxpayers (ACT)) right through to the interests of the Maori unemployed, homeless and hungry of South Auckland's 'ghettoes' can be presented as philosophically and culturally the same. This ignores the critical importance of differential access to economic and political power within and across Maori society.

Indeed, Maori are all too frequently discussed by cultural nationalists as if forming one homogeneous entity, its members possessing exactly the same experiences of oppression, and exactly the same political aspirations. However, this ignores the fact that there exists a dynamic range of aspirations and political strategies within so-called 'Maoridom.' Moreover, these aspirations often conflict with one another and are not divorced from the influence of the wider social and economic environment.

The emphasis on Maori solidarity conceals the historical reality of social class stratification within both 'traditional' and contemporary Maori society. Since the differential incorporation of Maori into the working class it is imperative that we recognise the fundamental antagonism

in capitalist social relations between capital and labour. It is also important to recognise the inequalities that exist between men and women.

Cultural nationalist approaches also ignore the fact that Pakeha in capitalist society are not a homogeneous group that confront Maori in a unified and hostile manner. The fact is that like Maori, Pakeha, in capitalist society are also stratified according to class and gender. Thus references to 'Pakeha society', 'majority culture', and so forth, may be useful rhetorical devices to focus blame and motivate action but they are not useful concepts for explaining social reality nor are they useful as the basis of a strategy for Maori liberation (Loomis, 1990: 4).

The idea that Pakeha are innately materialistic, exploitative and aggressive is fundamentally problematic. It assumes that the underlying values and behaviour of Pakeha as exhibited in capitalist society are primordial and static. This ignores the fact that the construction of identity at any point in time is socially constructed and historically contingent. Thus what it means to identify as Maori or Pakeha changes radically throughout history reflecting the dynamic relationship between changing material conditions and the way in which those societies are organised.

## **Lifestyle Changes**

The idea that 'Maori culture' and identity by itself will automatically bring about political and economic freedom provides a way out of engaging in struggle. Indeed, what is conspicuously absent in cultural nationalist accounts is talk of transformation and change. Indeed, such an introverted focus has tended to encourage strategies based primarily on changes in individual lifestyle which is detached from any emphasis on collective Maori struggle to construct and change any aspect of the world we inhabit. Thus in recent decades there has been the progressive decline of the active base of the movement, and the rise of strategies based upon 'direct action' tactics: "...attention grabbing actions carried out by the enlightened few, the aim being to shock and disturb the ignorant masses" (Smith, 1994: 20).

The emphasis on the rediscovery of traditional culture as the solution to the basic causes of Maori oppression has involved a celebration of Maori superior virtue, spirituality and attachment to nature. The frequent references to the special nature of Maori society and the separate and enhancing 'world of the Maori' are testament to this. However, it is important to note that such appeals to a special 'nature' as a guide to human action provide few secure reference points (Segal, 1987: 7). Indeed, conceptions of the 'natural' have changed radically throughout human history.

## **Autonomy in Struggle**

The assumption that only those actually experiencing a particular form of oppression can either define it or fight against it has gained a following on the left commensurate with the decline of the level of class struggle in the main advanced capitalist societies from the mid-1970s through the 1980s (Smith, 1994: 5). For movements organised on the basis of the identity of their participants, the enemy tends to include "everyone else" perceived as an amorphous, backward blob which makes up the rest of society (Ibid.) It is assumed that in some way that society at large benefits from a particular form of oppression and have an interest in maintaining it. From this rather pessimistic conclusion it follows that each oppressed group should have its own distinct

and separate movement. Hence, the so called 'new social movements' that have arisen during the 1970s and 1980s tend to be organised on the basis of 'autonomy' or independence from each other.

While no Maori organisations have been built specifically on the basis of identity politics many of its key assumptions have gained widespread acceptance amongst anti-racists both Maori and Pakeha alike. In this regard, one of the most significant developments in the evolution of Maori political activism since the early 1980s has been the extent to which Maori movements have adopted the language of identity politics.

Indeed, one of the central tenets of cultural nationalism has been the idea that Pakeha have a fundamental interest in maintaining racism in Aotearoa and that their contribution to the movement for Maori liberation is more likely to be divisive than constructive. It has followed from this that the most effective way of fighting racism and discrimination was for Maori to organise and struggle separately. This emphasis on autonomy in struggle has resulted theoretically at least, in the exclusion of Pakeha, whatever their social class and gender, from playing a key role in fighting for Maori liberation. However, this stance is fundamentally problematic in two major respects: firstly, because there is no necessary or immediate unity between oppressed groups in Aotearoa, most lack the required resources to fight back when they are isolated from each other. Unfortunately, the perception that the struggle for tino rangatiratanga is primarily a Maori versus Pakeha struggle forces Maori to struggle against the entire Pakeha population. In essence this isolates the Maori struggle forcing it to rely entirely on its own resources. Given the fact that these resources are meagre, the struggle is very unequal to say the least. Secondly, movements consisting of Maori alone have no real social power to fundamentally transform their oppression. **Historical evidence shows that political movements based solely on the 'identity' of the participant tend to lurch from left to right of the political spectrum precisely because they have no real means to achieve their political aims.**

It is also important to remember that it is not necessarily true that autonomous movements in and of themselves raise the issues and struggles of the oppressed because even these movements are not autonomous of the underlying social structures, political forces and ideologies of capitalist society. There is therefore, no guarantee that self-organisation of the oppressed will produce the best political strategies for liberation. All too often, for example, the interests of middle class elements have become dominant within these so called 'autonomous' movements, as the history of the women's movement and Black nationalism have clearly shown (see Shawki 1990: 92-99; Segal, 1987).

# Conclusion

**It is only through a critical assessment of the strengths, weaknesses and effectiveness of the various strategies for Maori liberation, and the groups that wage them, that we can hope to build the strongest possible movement.** One of the most significant developments in the evolution of Maori political activism since the late 1960s has been the increasing use of culture and identity as a strategy for dealing with Maori disadvantage and perceived powerlessness. This has been the dominant ideology in the Maori nationalist movement since the early 1980s. However, cultural nationalism is not a primordial phenomenon that constitutes the only authentic strategy for dealing with Maori disadvantage. Rather Maori cultural nationalism is a relatively recent phase in Maori political development, which has, as this paper shows, embraced a considerable variety of political strategies, campaigns and participants.

The recent upsurge in Maori political activism following the Sealords deal and the fiscal envelope proposal has exposed the failure of cultural nationalist strategies to provide a real solution to Treaty of Waitangi grievances and Maori disadvantage in wider society. Indeed, while the cultural nationalist emphasis on the rediscovery of Maori identity was something to be welcomed, the rediscovery of culture as an end in itself and a substitute for far reaching social change has been a disaster.

Cultural nationalist strategies have done nothing to change the material reality for the vast majority of Maori. Thus, while a few corporate warriors, tribal executives, and middle class Maori professionals have benefited from the narrow pro-business agenda of the New Right, the Employment Contracts Act, the benefit cuts, user-pays education and health have all impacted most severely on working class Maori whanau. By failing to challenge the underlying power structures in Aotearoa, cultural nationalism cannot provide a solution to the problems that face most Maori.

While culture and identity remain absolutely essential to Maori social well-being, it does not automatically follow that cultural identity alone should provide the organisational basis for the fight against racism and Maori disadvantage. Because identities are blurred and multiple, any fight against Maori oppression must be based upon building the strongest possible liberation movement by uniting different oppressed groups into a common struggle. This is essential because true liberation for Maori will not occur without a fundamental transformation of capitalist society and the creation of a classless society in which there is real women's liberation, gay and lesbian liberation, and freedom from racism. It is not necessary to actually experience a particular form of oppression in order to fight against it, any more than it is necessary to be destitute in order to fight poverty (Smith 1994: 4). All those struggling for a better society can learn to recognise and identify with those facing particular oppressions and can be enlisted as common allies in the struggle.

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