The construction of a national Maori identity by Maori media

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the Maori construction of a national Maori identity by the Maori media, and by Maori radio in particular. It then suggests that this is creating a Maori nation within the state of New Zealand. This is an important development for Maori and for the future of New Zealand society. The article suggests that Maori are creating a fully developed identity as required by the radical democratic theories of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and, as such, will provide a practical case study of their theories.

IAN STUART
Te Manga Maori, Eastern Institute of Technology

D URING the past 15 or so years Maori have taken the mass media and are using it for their own ends. However the form of mass media Maori are using is not the Western model, but rather an adapted Developmental Media model. The creation of the Maori media as a developmental media was not a conscious choice, but rather the natural outcome of the stated aims of the Maori media, to promote te reo and tikanga Maori (Maori language and culture). This is in marked contrast to the mainstream media, whose usual aims are purely commercial, either in terms of providing entertainment or information and thereby creating an audience which can be sold to advertisers.

Now, the presence of a developmental media within a Western, free-market and democratic state, presents a near unique opportunity for study, firstly, of the Maori media itself, secondly, of the impact a Maori mass media will have on its culture and society, and thirdly, of the impact the Maori media will have on wider New Zealand. This article suggests that one area, the construction of Maori identity, will prove a fruitful area for such study. As such, it reaches no

definite conclusions, but considers what has happened to Maori identity and the Maori media so far and suggests avenues of future development and further study. It looks at the development of a Maori identity in general terms, and then considers the social effects of a completely Maori identity in terms of the theories of Bourdieu and the left-wing discourse theories of Laclau and Mouffe. It argues that, by creating their own identity Maori will force New Zealand to become the radical plural democracy envisioned by Laclau and Mouffe.

This article focuses on the development of a Maori identity largely in terms of Maori radio, as the major national Maori media, but makes references to print media sources.

Developmental media

The Maori media falls into the developmental media category because of its generally accepted objectives — to promote the Maori language and culture. The Maori media seeks to educate people to ensure the survival of both the language and culture. The Maori media also actively seeks to promote positive images of Maori and to provide a Maori view of events and news, all roles assumed by a developmental media. The Maori media took on these roles because of a Maori perception, based on experience in present-day New Zealand, that these roles are not adequately performed by the mainstream media.

In showing the characteristics of a developmental media and how the Maori mass media conforms to that classification, the work of Robie (1994; 1995) is significant. Robie focuses specifically on the news media and news values. Robie's schema can be extended beyond the news values and into the objectives of the developmental media as a whole. This is characteristic of the Maori media which not only applies these values to the news, but to its entertainment programme, talk-back and other shows. The values are portrayed in the music Maori radio plays, in the announcers' words and in the overall impressions created.

In the field of developmental news media Robie divides the news media into Four Worlds, a First World — essentially the Western — in which the media practises 'objectivity'; a Second World — the communist world — in which the news media is a 'collective agitator' promoting information with ideological significance; the Third World — the traditional third world — in which the news media serves a 'nation-building' role, where news is development; and the Fourth World — the still colonised nations and countries with indigenous first nation minorities — where the news media serves the cause of

'self-determination'.

While Aotearoa/New Zealand may be considered part of the first world, for Maori it is part of the Fourth World as the European colonisers are still present and holding dominant power. This means the majority of Maori media are working with the values of the Fourth World media, though also expressing the values of the other three worlds.

Robie's schema, therefore, can well describe the values of the developmental media in post-colonial countries. However a slight rework is necessary to adequately describe the Maori media in these terms. To Robie the collective agitator of the Second World is ideologically significant and politically correct —eg. the news of the Communist Party. In Aotearoa/New Zealand the Maori media does not support a political party, but it does have an ideology.

Here I want to use ideology as defined by the neo-Gramscian discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe, where ideology is a way of ordering the world, a type of ontological category. In this sense, the ideology of the Maori media can be expressed is basic terms as the validity of the Maori worldview, expressed through te reo Maori and tikanga Maori. It is not the purpose of this article to define the ideology, nor is it necessary.

Robie's concept of the Third World news media — using values of 'development' matches some Maori media approaches, which can be seen in stories of iwi and hapu development projects, in individual success stories and in the use of Maori role models to provide positive images of Maori. It would seem to be difficult for the Maori media to promote the Third World value of nation-building within an already developed country. In this case the Maori media is building, or rebuilding, a culture, and by doing so, I will argue, is creating a nation, but a nation separated from a state, and internal within a state.

Robie categorises the Fourth World values as 'self-determination', with the sub-headings Language, Culture and Development. An examination shows the Maori media generally defines its role in terms of language revival, cultural survival and to promote key issues, notably Tino Rangatiratanga, thus clearly covering this category.

Looking at specific Maori media alongside these categories, newspapers such as *Kahungunu* were clear examples of collective agitators, *Mana* magazine fits best into the Third World categories, while *Kia Hiwa Ra* and *Te Maori News* fits mainly into the Third and Fourth World categories. But as Robie says, individual media do not necessarily fit into a single category and the categories often overlap (1994: 72). Maori radio and television stations tend to move across

all four categories, depending on their programming and the kaupapa of the programme makers.

Nation-building

In this article I wish to focus on the Maori media as it is involved in nation-building, essentially a function of Robie's Fourth World media. An essential part of nation-building, in the modern sense in which a nation is separate from a state, is the creation of a cultural identity.

The concept of a nation I wish to use is best summarised by Manuel Castells (1997: 27-32) who distinguishes 'the nation' as separate from 'the state'. In this sense the nation is a group of people who share a collective identity, centred on language and culture, rather than territorial groupings within a geographic location bounded by recognised borders. A nation can, therefore, be described as an ethnic and cultural identity. In contrast the state is a political power on the regional and international stage, exercising internal power over a defined territory, and defending that territory against invaders, using its apparatus — the police, army, and bureaucracies — to exercise this power.

Historically, the 19th century iwi can be defined as Maori nation-states (Ballara, 1998). Each iwi had a separate identity, based primarily on whakapapa (identity based on descent lines), but also displaying some differences in language and cultural practice. Political organisation within each area differed, from tightly controlled groups with strong ariki lines, to loosely arranged groups relying on whakapapa ties rather than unified and organised political or power structures and enforcement agencies. But each iwi/nation-state had control over a territory and defended it from invaders. Each iwi was not a nation on the international stage, as Castells describes and as we understand the international stage today, because each iwi only had relations with other iwi, i.e. within the geographical location of New Zealand. But those relationships can be considered international in the strictest sense — because the relations were between-nations.

In this period identity was based on membership of iwi and hapu with the binary opposites of 'us' and the 'other'. The 'us' was the iwi or hapu (depending on circumstances) and the 'other' was other iwi or other hapu. With the arrival of the Europeans a new identity was needed. The 'other' were the white-skinned, technologically advanced, mainly English-speaking, European arrivals and, therefore, the 'us' were the indigenous people of Aotearoa/New Zealand. The 'us' became Maori and the 'other' — Pakeha. At this point the

cultural identities were defined by each group, but in relation to each other. Each iwi had its own cultural identity, though major elements were shared with other iwi, while the arriving Europeans had their identity, usually from the British Isles. The important point is that each group largely controlled its own identity, as much as any groups controls its identity in the face of a 'them'.

Following the European arrival and the Treaty of Waitangi, the settler Government, with its policies of warfare and confiscation, and even genocide, followed by an assimilation policy, deliberately set out to destroy the Maori nation-states. One Maori reaction to this was the attempt to create a modern Maori pan-tribal nation-state with the Kingitanga, summarised by Belich as an alternative Government exercising control over a territory and exercising military power externally (defending its territory) (Belich, 1998: 78-80). These are basic requirements which define a nation-state. However, the settler government's military aggression during the latter half of the 19th century destroyed the Kingitanga as an effective nation-state. Similar fates befell other Maori political responses to colonisation.

After the New Zealand Wars, the assimilation policies of the settler Government destroyed the possibility of iwi becoming 'nations' as well, even going so far as to nearly destroy Maori identity, in a drive to create what have become known, derogatorily, as 'brown-skinned Pakeha'.

During the first half of the 20th century Maori identity was based on constructs of the anthropologists and ethnographers, sociologists and other writers of Maori history, society and culture. These writers were almost always Pakeha. And by the middle of the 20th century Maori identity, in terms of cultural characteristics was defined by the mass media. Maori identity was therefore largely constructed and defined by the immigrant colonisers — the Pakeha.

The Maori renaissance of the latter quarter of the 20th century attempted to re-establish a Maori identity. But, recognising that the existing 'Maori' identity was a construct of the colonising society, rather than of Maori themselves, the renaissance voices reverted to identities based on the Maori-constructed iwi. The more radical voices of this period refused to be labelled 'Maori' admitting only to an iwi-based identity, wishing to be known as Tuhoe,or Kahungunu, or Te Aupouri, or Te Ati Awa.

The seeds of the new Maori nation were sown in the late 1960s and grew in the 1970s, with major focal events such as Dame Whena Cooper's land march, which was for all Maori land, not one iwi; movements such as Nga Tama Toa,

which claimed to speak on behalf of all young Maori; and liberal Pakeha political initiatives such as the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal. The establishment of the tribunal was significant. Firstly, it brought injustices to the fore of Maori public consciousness and, secondly, it united groups around claims.

The political aspects of the renaissance moved further in the 1980s with Donna Awatere's articles in *Broadsheet* (Awatere, 1982; 1983) on Maori sovereignty — not iwi sovereignty — which crystallised many ideas and lead to a national debate that eventually became calls for the restoration of Tino Rangatiratanga for all Maori. The important idea here, as in all these examples, is that the radical voices are demanding changes for all Maori, not just their own whakapapa/kin groups. The speakers must have some conception of the group they claim to speak for, and possibly some recognition by that group that they are legitimate speakers. This means the group must have a common identity — a consciousness of individuals constituting a group.

In the past this group consciousness has been forced on Maori because of physical differences — brown skin, dark hair, facial features — alongside Pakeha-defined cultural characteristics: the positive stereotypes of a happy, jovial, hard-working, friendly, laid-back people and the negative stereotypes of drug-using domestically violent welfare-dependent criminals. In both cases these stereotypes have been created by the Pakeha majority — a majority 'us' — which constructed Maori as a 'them', excluding Maori from mainstream New Zealand. This led most Maori to refuse the identity of 'New Zealanders' or 'Kiwi', because both identities are defined by the dominant Pakeha culture. Instead they have identified as 'Maori' even though that was more likely an identity based on negatives.

These negatives were re-enforced by the mainstream media in what Walker calls 'a periodic recitation of Maori failings' (Walker, 1989: 43). This annual recitation consists of news stories about poor achievement in education, poor health, high crime rates, mental health, prison populations, unemployment and so on.

Re-emerging Maori media

This negative portrayal of Maori, and the accompanying construction of Maori identities were factors which motivated Maori to re-establish their own media. The Maori renaissance has seen the growth of a new generation of Maori voices — politically aware and willing to use the political and cultural tools of the

dominant culture to achieve their own ends. However, it is important to recognise that these new voices were previously only able to speak to Maoridom through the Pakeha-controlled mainstream media. The mainstream media distorted the message by interpreting it and filtering it through Pakeha eyes — in effect adding radicalism to the long list of Maori negatives. Awatere's Maori sovereignty articles were published in *Broadsheet*, which meant that it was largely printed as it was written and not mediated through the mainstream media filters. But *Broadsheet* was the vehicle of the white feminist movement, and therefore Awatere's thoughts and ideas did not reach a wide Maori audience, or even a wide Pakeha audience.

The proponents of a Maori media, especially Maori radio, did not see them as overt political vehicles. Rather they were vehicles for cultural reproduction — promoting Te Reo and Tikanga Maori. However, given the nature of news and current affairs programming, Maori radio had to address political issues and thus become political itself, at least in terms of providing a forum for political voices. But establishing a Maori media itself is a political act and the denial of the possibility of objectivity has allowed the Maori media to be overtly political in print and across the airwaves.

The advent of *Te Karere*, a Maori news service on Television New Zealand, was symbolically important in that it provided a visible Maori voice and a visible Maori media identity, and therefore a public focal point for Maoridom. While *Te Karere's* symbolic significance can not be under-estimated, it was in te reo Maori, (at *Te Karere's* inception minority language even among Maori) and therefore its importance as a mass information service was negligible. It's importance as an information service grows, however, as more people learn te reo Maori.

It was not until the late 1980s, with the growth of the bilingual Maori newspapers and radio stations, that Maori political leaders and thinkers were able to speak to Maori through their own channels. Because it was bilingual, Maori radio, as a true mass information service, now plays a major role, if not a dominant role, in establishing a new Maori nation.

Firstly, on television *Te Karere*, and the cultural programmes *Wakahuia* and *Marae*, present Maori views of news, politics and culture to a Maori audience. The culture portrayed may well be based in the iwi and hapu but it is broadcast to all Maori. The news and politics is broadcast nationwide, allowing Maori voices and opinions to be heard by a wide audience. Like the rest of the population the aural and visual medium of television offers Maori an easily

accessible information service. But the Aotearoa Television Network has been and gone and, at the time of writing, the new Maori television network has yet to go to air, so Maori radio now provides the major Maori media information sources, especially since the demise of the iwi newspapers.

The national magazines and newspapers such as *Te Maori News* provide political opinions to all Maori. And *Mana* magazine provides national news as well as cultural issues. *Mana* identifies people by iwi and hapu and yet holds up 'Maori' role models, rather than iwi role models. Developments and positive images are of people as Maori, rather than people as iwi members, though iwi membership is not neglected. This is a consequence of their position as national Maori magazines and newspapers, rather than the iwi-based newspapers of the 1980s and 1990s.

The Maori newspapers were largely iwi-based, providing a voice for their communities. The exceptions, *Te Maori News* and *Kia Hiwa Ra* (funded by Maniapoto but aiming to be a national paper) provided broader news and issues while the iwi papers provided a voice for political activists and thinkers based in their own iwi and commenting on regional issues from the iwi/hapu perspective.

Mana magazine, with its glossy format and plenty of visual appeal, sits between radio and the newspapers in terms of audience appeal and accessibility, providing news and information across a wide range of issues, events and people. It delivers its message across iwi lines, promoting Maori images, rather than iwi images and thus, in itself, it is a vehicle for the creation of the new Maori nationalism.

Maori radio and nation-building

Since the demise of most of the newspapers in the mid-1990s, Maori radio has been at the forefront of articulating Maori political aspirations in a national public sphere. Not only is radio an audio medium working in what is regarded (however fallaciously) as an oral culture, and therefore can be argued to be the most culturally appropriate mass communication system, with the demise of most Maori newspapers and Aotearoa Television Network, Maori radio has become the dominant Maori media form.

The first radio station, Radio Ngati Porou, began broadcasting from Ruatoria in an effort to unify the East Coast community following an outbreak of violence centering on the local Rastafarian community. In its attempts to

bring the community together it was largely successful. It is still broadcasting to Ngati Porou.

After several court battles in the late 1980s the Government funded a network of Maori radio stations, which set the stage for the accelerated growth of the Maori nation. Now generally referred to as iwi stations, they were set up to preserve iwi identity in language and culture, with the runanganui holding the licence, though sometimes delegating the broadcasting responsibility to another organisation. This system has worked well to promote iwi identity and unity, and uphold language dialects, using a format of music, news, talk-back and local information, with Te Reo Maori as the dominant language of broadcasting, at least in desire if not practise.

There are 20-odd Maori/iwi radio stations across the country, as new ones are created and older ones drop off the system. However, generally the radio stations are flourishing and providing a service to nearly all Maori in New Zealand.

The Starnet network, which allows all stations to link together and allows nationwide broadcast of news and political programmes such as talkback and current affairs shows, was an important development. Starnet allowed the interlinking of the stations and sped up the creation of a 'Maori' nation, made up admittedly, of different iwi. First, through the Mana News service, then the interlinking through Starnet of interactive talk-back programmes and the all night programmes from Radio Aotearoa, and the now widespread use of the Ruia Mai programming service, Maori radio is proving to be a unifying force for Maori.

Starnet and networked programming meant that the politically active voices in Auckland and Wellington could be heard in homes such as in East Cape's Te Araroa and Ruatoria; Taranaki's Bell Block; Hawke's Bay's Flaxmere; Porirua, Christchurch's Aranui, in fact, across the country. Previously these homes and people had been isolated from national, politically unifying debate but were now brought into contact with Maori political voices through their radio. By providing Maori voices nationwide, disparate and dispersed groups were able to identify with the message of these politically active, culturally aware people.

This unifying force is creating a Maori identity, constructed by Maori, instead of the previous Maori identity constructed by Pakeha, adopted then rejected by Maori.

As Castells says, nations are constructed through a shared history 'then

spoken of in the images of communal languages whose first word is "we" whose second word is "us" and whose third word is, unfortunately "them".' (Castells 1997: 52) The 'them' has always been Pakeha as far as Maori is concerned. The 'we' was the iwi and hapu. Maori radio is allowing Maori to construct their own 'us'. This means the Maori media will do what has not been possible in the past, make Maori identity a Maori construction, rather than a construction of the colonisers and the Pakeha.

Information flows and feedback loops

Maori first turned to their own media because of the symbol it presented. Tuning in to a Maori station was an act of resistance. It involved actively turning off (rejecting) Pakeha radio and turning on Maori radio. Turning off a Pakeha radio station was a satisfying act of resistance in itself, but coupled with turning on a Maori radio station it became a positive political action. The symbolic power of this act of resistance to the messages of the dominant culture can not be under-estimated. In terms of the neo-Gramscian discourse theories it is a hegemonic counter-practice.

And in this act of resistance listeners did get many of the messages. The ideology expressed in the youth music, especially rap, in the news and in the talkback and political discussions came through clearly. The Maori audience, no longer resistant readers and made more receptive by their own act of resistance and accompanying political act, heard the political messages of other Maori, and thus increased their own political consciousness.

Early in the establishment of Maori radio, political discussion was at a very basic level. The wide-spread audience was generally not politically aware and so did not respond to higher levels of discourse, or to political opinions and information for which they had neither the background information nor the opinions to judge with. Maori radio, (with newspapers and some television) provided base information and opinions, which appealed to Maori, because they were Maori opinions and information. In effect Maori radio is educating Maori about the New Zealand political system and potential Maori action within the system. In turn this allowed an increased level of political debate on Maori radio, establishing a feedback loop with ever increasing levels of political debate across the Maori airwaves and across the emerging Maori nation.

This then allowed Maori radio to present ever increasing complex and higher levels of opinion. Talkback radio is a good example of that because it allows the audience to participate. The more informed and politically aware the

audience, the higher the level of discourse, and the higher the level of opinion the audience is exposed to, the higher levels of debate radio is able to assimilate and reproduce. This is an endless cycle which includes the politicians, who use the media to listen to the 'voice of the people' and design and float policies accordingly.

In Bourdieu's concept, political apathy arises from 'the dispossession of the means of production of political opinions'. (Bourdieu 1998: 4). This is a slightly different formulation from the usual characterisations in New Zealand of Maori political apathy arising from an alienation from the political process, or (what amounts to the same thing) the powerlessness of the socially alienated.

It is worth pausing to consider what Bourdieu is suggesting in terms of decision-making processes and Maori involvement in these processes. People's opinions are based on neutral information as well as decision-making processes — considering, rejecting, accepting or modifying other people's opinions. Generally people get their primary information and opinions from media sources. Personal opinion may also be considered and discussed with colleagues, friends and family, and chosen, formulated or clarified in the discussion.

Until the advent of the Maori mass media, Maori had access only to information filtered through the Pakeha culture, to opinions about Maori expressed by non-Maori or Maori opinions mediated and modified by Pakeha media producers. Maori were conscious of these factors, rejected the information as not neutral and therefore not useful. Maori also rejected Pakeha opinions as flawed and further, rejected the Pakeha presentation of Maori opinion as too selectively presented to be useful. Thus they largely had no information and no opinions to work with to formulate their own individual and valid opinions.

Maori, alienated from the mainstream media, and other informational sources and flows, were unable to formulate opinions and have them represented, or see other Maori opinions represented. More importantly, action is based on opinion, so without opinions Maori had no basis for political action. However the Maori media has been able to involve Maori in information flows and expose them to a range of opinions which can be discussed within the social and familial groups to which individuals belong, thus enabling Maori to form opinions and then act upon those opinions.

This process need not be in explicit opposition to Pakeha opinions and information sources, nor need it be in conjunction with Pakeha media systems. However the reality is that in some case it is one or the other. 'Radical' Maori

opinions tend to be formulated in direct opposition to Pakeha, and accepted expressly because they are oppositional, while more 'moderate' opinions are formulated in conjunction with Pakeha opinions and accepted or rejected as such. (The definition of politically 'radical' or 'moderate' depends on where the person making the judgement sits on the political spectrum and so is a subjective judgement, hence the 'quotation marks'.)

However, the huge growth in Maori participation in politics, and particularly in Maori voting patterns, is a direct result of access to the informational flows of the Maori media, particularly Maori radio, and therefore access to the means of production of political opinions.

The feedback loop was accelerated before the 1996 election when there was a major push to get Maori onto the electoral roll to increase the number of seats in Parliament. The campaign not only achieved its goal, it also increased Maori political awareness. It did this by bringing the number of seats in parliament to the fore of Maori thinking, as well as prompting a public debate on Maori political power in the mainstream of politics. Maori radio played an important role in this process.

Hegemonic practice and cultural identity

The two concepts of identity and political action come together in the neo-Gramscian discourse theories of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001) In fact, within their theory, the establishment of an identity is a political act in itself, and the re-establishment by Maori of their own identity is a clear example because it is so overtly political in nature. In doing so Maori are challenging the Pakeha hegemony and engaging in their own hegemonic practice of articulation (Torfing, 1999: Mouffe, 1993: Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). The implications of this are discussed in the next section

It is worth pausing to look at Bourdieu's construction of legitimate spheres of discourse and the language appropriate to those spheres. (Bourdieu, 1991) Maori have been shut out of Pakeha-controlled political arenas largely because they do not use an officially sanctioned language for that arena. As well, Maori are not usually authorised to legitimately speak in that arena. In creating a Maori media, Maori have established their own arenas, with an official language, and where Maori have more authorisation to speak.

Effectively, non-Maori are shut out of these arenas, unless specifically invited to speak. What this means is that Maori have created a sphere of

discourse where they can fully develop their identity because there is no other fully developed group to restrict that development.

The future

These developments have huge implications for New Zealand society.

By creating their own identity and accompanying discourse, Maori may be forcing New Zealand down the path towards Laclau and Mouffe's radical plural democracy, in which social antagonisms are healthy, where plurality is valued and where conflicts are a healthy part of democracy. In Mouffe and Laclau's concept, the necessary ingredients of a healthy, but radical, plural democracy are fully developed identities that confront each other as adversaries, not enemies. Mouffe and Laclau argue that people regard the 'other' as an enemy to be beaten, but need to regard the 'other': as adversaries to be challenged and who challenge the 'us'.

The first results are already obvious as the discursive limits of the public discourse, limited by the social antagonism of non-Maori New Zealand towards Maori, are expanding to include Maori views. The social antagonisms are still evident, such as in the recent stories of the taniwha who apparently held up the rerouting of state highway one and added millions of dollars to the project's cost and the taniwha who impeded the new prison at Nga Wha. However there are also stories that attempt to explain Maori values and beliefs to non-Maori. Such stories do not present these views as not to be taken seriously, as the majority of news reporting does. As well Maori are taking a larger role in the New Zealand wide discourse, partly aided by the number of Maori in Parliament and other major political roles.

But the development of a Maori identity, and the consequent development of a Maori nation within the state of New Zealand will provide a case study of Laclau and Mouffe's radical democratic theories with a range of questions such as: will the theories work in practice; how do they operate in real situations; what are the positives and negatives, impediments and benefits; how do two fully developed identities related to each other within the same society?

This final question is the most important one for the future of New Zealand society and one which needs to be resolved if New Zealand is to grow into its own myth of a society with good race relations. It is important if New Zealand is to have a true bicultural society, and then a multi-cultural society.

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Ian Stuart is lecturer in Maori Studies, Te Manga Maori, Eastern Institute of Technology, Hawkes Bay. This article is a later version of a paper presented at the Between Empires: Communication, Globalisation and Identity Conference, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand, 13-15 February 2003.
istuart@eit.ac.nz