

# The Post-assimilationist Thought of Sir Apirana Ngata

## TOWARDS A GENEALOGY OF NEW ZEALAND BICULTURALISM



CONTEMPORARY BICULTURALISM possesses a largely forgotten history in the thought and policies of Sir Apirana Ngata of the late 1920s and 1930s. Ngata's post-assimilationist views were formed in the context of his own political practice as Minister of Native Affairs between 1928 and 1934 and through his theoretical engagement with the work of anthropologists, notably Te Rangi Hiroa, Felix Keesing, George Pitt-Rivers and I.L.G. Sutherland. While there was considerable academic and political debate in the 1930s surrounding Ngata's challenge to prevailing assimilationist dogma, by the time the concept of biculturalism was rediscovered in the early 1980s, Ngata's intellectual struggles and the earlier 'Maori renaissance' to which they belonged were separated in time by the gulf of World War II and subsequent urbanization. By 1939, Ngata was talking of New Zealand as a bicultural country.<sup>1</sup> However, the biculturalism deployed in the early 1980s would not be his. Nor would it be that of Eric Schwimmer, who in his 'Introduction' to *The Maori People in the Nineteen Sixties* (1968) had sought to extend and develop Ngata's ideas and those of Ngata's contemporary, I.L.G. Sutherland.<sup>2</sup> Instead, as first used by Hiwi Tauroa, the Race Relations Conciliator, and academics such as Ranginui Walker, biculturalism was a binary alternative to the policy of multiculturalism which had been gaining in official status since the mid-1970s.<sup>3</sup> Biculturalism accorded primacy to the colonial Maori-Pakeha relationship and the Treaty of Waitangi, the foundation for future multiculturalism.<sup>4</sup>

Despite its broken genealogy, contemporary biculturalism shares with Ngata's post-assimilationism an enduring contradiction between individualism and tribalism which Ngata, and later Sutherland and Schwimmer, sought to resolve through the concept of *maoritanga*, an idealized interpretation of Maori 'culture'. In this article I trace the emergence of this contradiction and its resolution within

1 M.P.K. Sorrenson, ed., *Na To Hoa Aroha, From Your Dear Friend: The Correspondence between Sir Apirana Ngata and Sir Peter Buck, 1925-50*, Auckland, 1988, III, p.285.

2 Eric Schwimmer, *The Maori People in the Nineteen Sixties: A Symposium*, Auckland, 1968, pp.9-15.

3 Race Relations Conciliator, *Race Against Time*, Wellington, 1982; Ranginui Walker, *Nga Tau Tohetohe: Years of Anger*, Auckland, 1987.

4 Andrew Sharp, *Justice and the Maori: Maori Claims in New Zealand Political Argument in the 1980s*, Auckland, 1990, pp. 227-9.

Ngata's post-assimilationist thought and I conclude by suggesting that contemporary biculturalism was born out of the marriage of Ngata's maoritanga with the Treaty-based politics of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The focus for most of my discussion will be on Ngata's break with assimilationist ideology between 1928 and 1934. I use as my touchstone a fascinating exchange of views between Ngata and Mr Justice (later Sir David) Smith, chairman of the 1934 Commission of Enquiry into the Native Affairs Department and Ngata's performance as its minister.<sup>5</sup> This commission was established in a climate of hostility towards Ngata and his farm development schemes, fuelled by opposition politicians and the media. These schemes were directed towards assisting selected Maori men to become productive farmers of sheep and cattle on properties with secure individual leases. Up to three-fifths of the value of the property could be lent to farmers through local land boards, to be repaid from subsequent agricultural production.<sup>6</sup> By 1935-36 there were some 1388 individual farms supporting 11,023 dependants.<sup>7</sup> It was alleged in the months leading up to the establishment of the commission that Ngata had been recklessly overspending on these schemes at a time of severe economic hardship, that the schemes were poorly managed, and that Ngata had been favouring his own tribe, Ngati Porou.<sup>8</sup> The commission supported these allegations in its report to Parliament, leaving Ngata little option but to resign as minister. As Sorrenson put it, Ngata had come up against 'the Pakeha establishment which, through the Commission of Enquiry, had brought him down'.<sup>9</sup> Ngata's challenge to the establishment included the promotion of an alternative policy to 'Europeanization' or 'the amalgamation of the races' and his defeat was also a marginalizing and de-legitimizing of these ideals.

The following exchange between Ngata and the chairman of the commission crystallizes key issues in an emerging debate between assimilationists and non-assimilationists and highlights ambiguities and contradictions in Ngata's position. The exchange was presented in the commission's report as evidence of Ngata's position on 'Europeanization'. The fact that this is the only interview quoted in the report is, I suggest, a reflection of the significance the commission attached to Ngata's views on assimilation and the seriousness of the political threat that they posed.

*Question* (Chairman): 'Perhaps you might explain if you have changed your opinion since 1927 with regard to the future of the Maori race and the relation to the schemes.  
*Answer*: 'I have not. It is simply that they have misunderstood me. I have not changed in any detail at all.

*Question*: 'The difficulty is that in many respects G-10, [Ngata's 1931 report to Parliament] is not consistent with the report of the meeting at Wanganui in 1927. You and Sir Maui Pomare prepared that report?

5 See Sorrenson, ed., III, p.129, n.2 for a list of the commissioners.

6 M. King, 'Between Two Worlds', in *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, Wellington, 1981, p.200; A. Ngata, 'Tribal Organization', in I.L.G. Sutherland, ed., *The Maori People Today*, Christchurch and London, 1940, pp.144-6.

7 G. Butterworth, 'A Rural Maori Renaissance? Maori Society and Politics 1920 to 1951', *Journal of the Polynesian Society* (JPS) 81, 2 (1972), p.176.

8 *ibid.*, pp.177-9.

9 Sorrenson, ed., III, p.257.

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*Answer:* 'Yes. The thing is to harmonize the two views.

*Question:* 'Here the indication is that you and Sir Maui Pomare really contemplate that the legislation should be directed towards helping the Maori become Europeanized with regard to his land and his home life and everything else — that is the tenor of the report of the meeting, and the rest of G-10 is in the opposite direction of helping the Maori to reclaim his Maori life instead of becoming Europeanized.

*Answer:* 'There is a misunderstanding. We say that the Maori should be given the opportunity to live the life of the pakeha if he so desires; this conference was a conference of educated men, and we addressed ourselves to that element there, and you know they are right through the country today. The best men are the men who are setting up as individuals — we have Mr. T. Carroll in the court here today — he is like that, but there is no man more enthusiastic outside to keep up the communal Maori life of the Wairoa people. They get together in connection with matters that concern the district as a whole — we can get the question down to that — that even in their economic life we are seeking to give the Maori the most suitable life of the pakeha, but in their social life we are seeking to retain for reasons of sentiment the old Maori customs and not to destroy altogether the *tangi* — their way of observing respect for the memory of their dead. Then I think we have arrived at the real solution between G-10 and the Wanganui report.<sup>10</sup>

In 1927, a conference of Maori leaders was held at Wanganui to coincide with the annual Easter tournament of the New Zealand Maori Lawn Tennis Association. Organized by Ngata, Pomare and other members of the Young Maori party, the occasion was billed as an opportunity to take stock of Maori developments since 1900, when a similar conference had been organized by the forerunner of the Young Maori party, the Te Aute Students' Association. In his address to the conference, Ngata stressed the importance of such gatherings in breaking down tribal barriers and promoting progressive ideas among younger male leaders. 'The race' had now reached a stage, he said, 'when young men, not soured by past tribal grievances', needed to develop a coherent strategy for fitting into New Zealand society.<sup>11</sup> Ngata went on to review the 'remarkable' progress made by Maori towards greater involvement with Pakeha society — progress that was most immediately evident in their 'department on the tennis lawns'. The 'communal Maori' had become 'an individualist', in terms of both land ownership and home life, and women were most active in 'speeding up' 'the process of Europeanization' in the latter sphere. 'The pakeha ideal of home' was 'gradually being realized in Maori villages throughout the Dominion'.<sup>12</sup>

The 1934 Commission of Enquiry, and even Ngata's supporter at the hearings, Sutherland, assumed that he had advocated, in 1927, an orthodox assimilationist position.<sup>13</sup> However, this was not entirely the case. While there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Ngata's praise for the educated, tennis-playing, home-builders at the conference, it is clear that he was also beginning to question publicly the degree to which Maori needed to 'merely ape the pakeha' in order to progress socially. Perhaps, he concluded, 'the end aimed at may be reached by other paths, even by the old time tracks, with less raising of dust, less bustle

10 *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives* (AJHR), 1934, G-10, p.46.

11 AJHR, 1927, G-8 p.1.

12 *ibid.*, p.2.

13 AJHR, 1934, G-10, p.46.

and wasteful unhappiness'.<sup>14</sup> Within the Anglican Church, Maori were already demanding more consideration of 'racial peculiarities' and 'a deeper appreciation by the pakeha missionary of the *ngakau Maori*, the Maori heart and its gropings'.<sup>15</sup> Certainly, this did not amount to a rejection of an ultimate goal of assimilation — it was merely a questioning of the *means* whereby assimilation might be achieved. However, Ngata does seem to have been feeling his way towards an alternative, less orthodox, less painful, more effective assimilationism.

By 1931, Ngata's public position had shifted significantly from the tentative questioning of means in 1927 towards a more radical rethinking of ends. This new position was most clearly stated in his Native Land Development report to Parliament.<sup>16</sup> While the major focus of the report is the land development schemes — their background, philosophy and success — Ngata devoted a substantial portion of the report to contesting the following claim by Raymond Firth: 'Assisted by the deliberate policy of individualizing shares in tribal land, the former communal system has been gradually abandoned as no longer suited to the new environment'.<sup>17</sup> Ngata strongly challenged this view, arguing instead that the communal, that is, the 'tribal' system with its hereditary leadership was, in fact, an ideal vehicle for achieving 'cultural adjustment'. Citing his friend Te Rangi Hiroa, Ngata argued that, unlike the unfortunate Hawaiians, who were being rapidly absorbed into 'the nirvana of American citizenship', Maori were struggling to maintain their individuality as a race and moulding European culture to suit their requirements.<sup>18</sup> He wholeheartedly agreed with Te Rangi Hiroa that the 'tribal spirit and canoe rivalry should blaze up, and out of this will emerge a race consciousness. I can hear the chiefs of old crying across the marae, *kia rongona to ingoa!* "Let your name be heard".'<sup>19</sup>

Ngata went on to propose that Maori success would come from a 'judicious' selection and combination 'of elements of Western and Maori culture', 'once it is understood and conceded that much of the old regime still lingers and still influences the Maori in his everyday life, and the approach to his mind is still largely by the old time paths'.<sup>20</sup>

The phrase 'old time paths' recalls the 'old time tracks' which Ngata identified in his 1927 report as alternative routes for Maori development. By 1931, these vaguely defined alternative means had become elaborated as ends in themselves — stronger tribal leadership, a flourishing tribal spirit and the maintenance of persistent beliefs and customs.

What had happened in the interim? Steven Webster pointed to a fortunate convergence of Ngata's administrative practice with anthropological theory.<sup>21</sup>

14 AJHR, 1927, G-8, p.2.

15 *ibid.*

16 AJHR, 1931, G-10.

17 *ibid.*, p.ix.

18 *ibid.*, p.xiv.

19 *ibid.*

20 *ibid.*, p.xv.

21 Steven Webster, *Patrons of Maori Culture: Power, Theory and Ideology in the Maori Renaissance*, Dunedin, 1998, pp.94–102.

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Following Sorrenson,<sup>22</sup> Webster stressed the seminal influence on Ngata's thinking of George Pitt-Rivers' racialized conception of culture-form, developed in his book, *The Clash of Culture and Contact of Races*, published in 1927. In this work, which authoritatively brought together anthropological evolutionism, Malinowski's functionalism and a degree of cultural relativism, Pitt-Rivers affirmed the intrinsic value of 'native' cultures as a basis for racial development. He distinguished between *culture-forms* (traditions, art forms, beliefs, customs and social organization), *culture-accessories* (implements, weapons, the products of art and mechanical discoveries) and *culture-potential*, 'a term here applied to innate constructive ability, the capacity to develop under suitable conditions artistic, scientific or technical skill; and temperamental dispositions'. Culture-forms were conditioned by culture-potential so that 'at every stage culture is conditioned by the capacity for people to give expression to it'.<sup>23</sup> Pitt-Rivers further argued that people were 'far less adaptable to great changes in culture form' than had been previously supposed and that cultural progress depended upon a judicious selection of traits adapted to new environments.<sup>24</sup> The key issue in mitigating the 'clash of culture' was deciding 'how to maintain the integrity of culture and the unity of the tribe'.<sup>25</sup> He warned that:

... we cannot impose new incompatible culture-forms without first destroying the ones we find. The diffusion of cultural elements between races in contact by borrowing is quite a different process, which involves the selection of some elements only, their modification or adaption to the needs of the borrower and the complete rejection of incompatible elements. This is, naturally a very slow and gradual process; one far too slow and far too ineffective to suit the purpose of those who hope to mould human clay in the likeness of an arbitrary model of their own, instead of being content to watch a natural process of evolution, interfering, if at all; with the greatest caution, and then only in order to mitigate the evil consequences of too rapid a change.<sup>26</sup>

In a concluding passage, which clearly echoes Ngata's 1927 questioning of the need to mimic the Pakeha, Pitt-Rivers expressed the hope that 'natives' would come to value the sound and beautiful in their own culture rather than 'blindly following the lead of people whose proffered cultural gifts they [could] never truly make their own'.<sup>27</sup>

Ngata began reading this work in August 1928 on Te Rangi Hiroa's recommendation and was immediately able to envisage a new stage in his long-term project of Maori development. Here, I must again quote at length:

Such a work as that of Pitt-Rivers opens up a very wide field to chaps like myself, who are perforce immersed in the problems of today and yet are desirous of touching bottom,

22 M.P.K. Sorrenson, 'Polynesian Corpuscles and Pacific Anthropology: The Home-made Anthropology of Sir Apirana Ngata and Sir Peter Buck', *JPS*, 91, 1 (1982), pp.7-27.

23 George Pitt-Rivers, *The Clash of Culture and the Contact of Races: An Anthropological and Psychological Study of the Laws of Racial Adaptability, with Special Reference to the Depopulation of the Pacific and the Government of Subject Races*, London, 1927, p.3.

24 *ibid.*, p.7.

25 *ibid.*, p.238.

26 *ibid.*, p.240.

27 *ibid.*, p.241.

of recovering from the phases that survive and persist today something of the polity of pre-pakeha days . . . where one has so greatly emphasised the period devoted to the acquisition of pakeha knowledge (1881–1899) and its application to the problem of adaption (1899–1928) what a job it will be now to subordinate all that in the assessment of the elements in the social organization that have persisted, though modified in details, to the vaunted days of ‘Te Ao Hou’ [The New World].<sup>28</sup>

The ‘polity’ and ‘elements in the social organization’ to which Ngata was referring were undoubtedly tribal organization. In Pitt-Rivers’ writings Ngata had recognized both his own recent programme of tribal land development on the East Coast of the North Island and the anthropologist Felix Keesing’s theoretical views, derived from Pitt-Rivers’ writings, on the meaning and significance of this practice. In June 1928, before reading Pitt-Rivers’ work, Ngata had written to Te Rangi Hiroa describing Keesing’s research on East Coast economic development and, influenced by Pitt-Rivers’ views, via Keesing, was able to conceptualize his work as building upon pre-existing tribal relations: ‘I was able to direct [Keesing] here because I have consciously hitched our organisation on to the best elements in the *communal system*, while constantly seeking to approach intrusive pakeha elements, economical or otherwise, through the *tribal mentality*.’<sup>29</sup>

During the run-up to the 1928 election, and a month after reading Pitt-Rivers’ book, Ngata threw caution to the wind and went public with his new thinking on future race relations: ‘In a final outburst at Auckland in September I told my audience that we had reached a point where we could select what we required of the culture of the Pakeha and maintain so much of the Maori culture as showed persistence in the new environment. It was a bold thing to enunciate . . .’<sup>30</sup>

Webster has argued, mistakenly in my view, that the influence of Keesing and Pitt-Rivers led Ngata to develop, at this time, a generalized, idealized and ahistorical concept of Maori culture, divorced from the practicalities of everyday Maori life and ‘separated from a practice of social struggle against assimilation and domination’.<sup>31</sup> Closer analysis suggests, however, that Ngata’s understanding of Maori culture was at this time considerably more concrete and oppositional than Webster has given him credit for. A reinvigorated tribal polity and an associated tribal pride, and not a generalized Maori culture, were to form the foundation upon which Maori would build a new economy and society.

Tribal pride was to be developed through the building and decorating of wharenuī on marae, associated revivals in arts and crafts, greater official recognition of hereditary leaders and the maintenance of Maori language. ‘There must be’, Ngata wrote in January 1929, ‘a careful overhaul of things essential to the maintenance of tribal or racial pride and self-respect, without which individuality [i.e., distinctive identity] must disappear’.<sup>32</sup> Racial pride was to grow out of tribal pride, the two being understood as inseparable. In a letter to

28 Sorrenson, ed., I, p.123.

29 *ibid.*, p.96, emphasis added.

30 *ibid.*, p.163.

31 Webster, p.102.

32 Sorrenson, ed., I, p.165.

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Te Rangi Hiroa in June 1929, for example, Ngata said, under the heading of *Race Consciousness*, 'I agree with all you say under this head, and that it should be based on tribal consciousness'.<sup>33</sup>

The central contradiction in Ngata's early post-assimilationist thinking was not therefore (as Webster argued) between a material reality of Maori agricultural labour or 'work' and Maori 'culture' as an idealized abstraction — Ngata did not view culture at this time as a de-tribalized abstraction. Rather, as I will argue in the next section of this article, the more critical contradiction was between tribalism as a social ideal and individualism as an economic objective, both of which were brought together in Ngata's rural development policies.

While Webster's attempt to find class struggle beneath Ngata's maoritanga is unconvincing, his claim that Ngata's conception of culture drew upon specific racial understandings inherent in Pitt-Rivers' theory is more interesting. For Pitt-Rivers, cultural development depended upon racially given cultural capacity — 'culture-potential cannot be modified without first modifying blood'.<sup>34</sup> Pitt-Rivers had argued that different classes within the same society often had different culture-potentials, and that these were, in turn, founded on 'blood' and ancestry.<sup>35</sup> Ngata was in general agreement with Pitt-Rivers on this point; however, he was convinced that the Maori tribal élite, if not Maori in general, had inherited a physical and intellectual potential that was equal to that of Pakeha. Maori culture needed to develop out of the Maori people's unique circumstances, along its own natural paths towards full social equality with Pakeha.

In keeping with his racial understanding of Maori development, Ngata was concerned with the dilution of Maori élite bloodlines. In a letter to Te Rangi Hiroa written in June 1929, Ngata boasted that by choosing his local leaders on the basis of heredity he had usually 'come out right': 'Well, the rangatira families were bred on lines of physical fitness, bravery, "wana" or personality, mental superiority, attainment in art, music or dances, physical beauty and so forth. There has been a departure perhaps in the last two or three generations for the worse, but the dilution with pakeha blood has perhaps been the most serious.'<sup>36</sup> Ngata must have been alarmed, therefore, when Te Rangi Hiroa informed him that the results of his genealogical research supported Pitt-Rivers' view that 'the extinction of the Maori race, meaning the pure-blood, [was] very near, being supplanted by a new race'.<sup>37</sup> His anxiety over racial contamination was to be significantly heightened by the report of the Committee on the Employment of Maoris in Market Gardens.<sup>38</sup> The committee reported to Ngata that there was 'indiscriminate intermingling of the lower types of the races — i.e. Maoris, Chinese and Hindus' which would 'eventually cause deterioration, not only in the family and national life of the Maori race, but also in the national life of this country by the introduction of a hybrid race, the successful absorption of which is problematical.'<sup>39</sup> Most alarming of all, the committee warned that

33 *ibid.*, p. 209.

34 Pitt-Rivers, p.240.

35 *ibid.*, p.13.

36 Sorrenson, ed., I, p.210.

37 *ibid.*, pp.126-7.

38 AJHR, 1929, G-11.

39 *ibid.*, p.5.

miscegenation between Maori and Chinese threatened to submerge the Maori race, as had happened in Hawaii.<sup>40</sup>

In line with Pitt-Rivers' views, Ngata's tribal development depended, therefore, upon realizing a strong Maori racial potential, especially that of the hereditary leadership. Fortunately, this leadership was, Ngata thought, gradually reasserting itself; they were 'in their persons and by virtue of the traditions surrounding their families, calling anew to long-dormant tribal sentiment and allegiance'.<sup>41</sup> His tribal land development schemes had been founded on the 'use of Maori leadership — hereditary preferred' and 'dependence upon the qualities of adventure (physical and mental) of the race . . . and the intelligence and resourcefulness engendered by centuries of roving in all sorts of lands and under varying climes.'<sup>42</sup>

Let me now return to the report of the 1934 Commission of Enquiry, and the quotations with which I began this discussion. It is clear from the foregoing account that if Ngata had not changed his mind about the long-term future of the Maori race since 1927 he had certainly changed his mind about the way in which its future was to be realized. By August 1928, when, after reading Pitt-Rivers, he recognized that his heart had never been 'with this policy of imposing pakeha culture forms' upon his people,<sup>43</sup> Ngata had made an irreversible break with assimilationism. It was this break, more than any financial mismanagement of his department, that was of concern to the 1934 Enquiry and the establishment it represented. Ngata's post-assimilationism was founded on two theoretical premises: (1) rather than mimic Pakeha, Maori people needed to pursue their own path of development, drawing upon their unique racial inheritance; (2) tribal organization and hereditary tribal leadership were the most important contemporary expressions of this unique racial inheritance and were the ideal foundation upon which to develop the race.

The 1934 Enquiry asked Ngata for his views on the future of Maori. By this time it was very clear that this future could not be as it had been widely envisaged some 20 years before. As Ngata argued in 1931, contemporary statesmen needed to make provision for a 'race' that was reinvigorated and increasing in numbers. This and the apparent early success of Ngata's land development schemes on the East Coast constituted important material preconditions for Ngata's racial tribalism. When Pitt-Rivers' anthropology fell on the fertile ground of Ngata's political and economic practice, it became possible to imagine a future for the Maori race other than extinction or absorption: post-assimilationism in New Zealand was born in the fortunate conjuncture of colonial anthropology and colonial struggle.

Ngata's coupling of racial uniqueness and strength with tribal persistence constituted a formidable theoretical defence against assimilation and laid the foundation for all future post-assimilationist policy, including biculturalism. As a precondition for such a future policy, however, Ngata's racial tribalism had to become more generalized and idealized as *maoritanga*. In this section I

40 *ibid.*

41 AJHR, 1931, G-10, p.ix.

42 Sorrenson, ed., II, pp.44-45.

43 *ibid.*, I, p.123.

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argue that the concept of *maoritanga* became central to post-assimilationist thought as a resolution of a practical and theoretical contradiction between individualism and tribalism. Ngata advocated both an increasing individualization of Maori agriculture and a strengthening of tribal relations. However, as the Auckland University College Professor of Economics, Horace Belshaw, warned at the time, 'One cannot expect to fit Maori settlers into an individualist farm economy without weakening existing community relations and traditions. The more successful is the policy of training them as commercial farmers, the more probable it is that the character of community relations will change.'<sup>44</sup>

Most fundamentally, this was a contradiction between capitalist and tribal society; ultimately unresolvable in practice, it could only find ideological resolution in Ngata's cultural policy. Ngata envisaged that Maori would increasingly participate in a Pakeha economy as individuals, yet retain, in their social lives, their tribal links and loyalties. The degree of social attachment to the tribe would vary; the most successful individuals, economically and educationally, would retain less active ties to the tribe than others who were in greater need of economic and social support. The 1934 commissioners were in no doubt that this view constituted a clear break with assimilationism — that it was Ngata's *alternative* to 'becoming Europeanized'. In their view, Ngata's main objective was 'to establish a new culture for the Maori people, to mould their life to a new form'.<sup>45</sup> This new culture was to be a hybrid one, combining 'settlement on land as farmers of dairy cattle and sheep' with 'a political, social and artistic life centred in meeting house and marae, the influence of chiefs, and the care by the tribe as a whole of each member thereof'.<sup>46</sup>

In breaking with assimilationism, Ngata conceptualized the relationship between tribes and individuals in two main ways — as a relationship between surface and reality, and as a relationship between means and ends.

In 1931 Ngata had argued that individualism, as appearance, often concealed a reality of tribalism. Individualism was merely a 'surface' feature of Maori society, tied to economic progress and Pakeha education. It was Pakeha education that inculcated the desire for a Pakeha home life — 'the flower garden, the cottage piano, the gramophone or radio set and the tennis court'.<sup>47</sup> Yet beneath the surface of individualized culture 'racial influences' continued 'their sway over the mind and spirit'.<sup>48</sup> These hidden influences were primarily those of respect for tribal leadership and tribal loyalty.

Education had also created a new class, 'an aristocracy of knowledge', which appeared to displace the 'natural' leaders, whose traditional power had been eroded by English law. In reality, however, hereditary tribal leadership remained as a powerful force which, although largely hidden from Pakeha observers and 'overlaid by the cult of individual equality and freedom', could be of great value in Maori development.

44 H. Belshaw, 'Economic Circumstances', in Sutherland, ed., *The Maori People Today*, p.212.

45 AJHR, 1934, G-10, p.37.

46 *ibid.*, pp.37-38.

47 AJHR, 1931, G-10, p.ix.

48 *ibid.*

Tribes were also conceived of as administrative and social *means* for enabling individual development as an ideal *end*. Ngata argued, again in 1931, that contemporary Maori leaders who were attempting to fit their people into New Zealand society had, in tribal organization, 'an instrument for publicity and the promulgation of schemes and ideas'.<sup>49</sup> At tribal and inter-tribal hui on marae, leaders were able to share new ideas among themselves and communicate these to their wider Maori public. Without a strong and active tribal leadership able to authorize and translate these new ideas, the 'exponents of the new culture, whether European teachers and supervisors or educated men of the race', would be unlikely to succeed.<sup>50</sup>

The notions that tribal leadership and organization comprised both a hidden reality below the surface of individualism and a valuable resource for individual development were eloquently brought together by Ngata in a letter, written to Te Rangi Hiroa just before the publication of his 1931 report. In this letter Ngata contrasted an outward appearance of material change with 'invisible factors'. These invisible factors, which 'connected the tribe, gave leaders their position of mana to direct and control and enabled the community to get together for common endeavour', had not changed greatly since the coming of Europeans. Ngata continued: 'You formerly produced canoes, or runanga houses, or crops for some tribal undertaking using such elements. We argue we can produce butter-fat in bulk but designated as to quantities to individual members of the community, tallied in a pakeha way, recorded and paid for in a pakeha way.'<sup>51</sup> In other words, what appeared as individual butter-fat production was in reality 'bulk' tribal or community production. There was no contradiction because the individual was simply a sub-unit of the larger collective whole, a contributor to the greater tribal good. The tribe as a context for individual success became, in turn, the ultimate beneficiary of this success.

By 1934 Ngata appears to have begun to reconceptualize further the relationship between individualism and tribalism. Rather than a hidden dimension of social life existing *beneath* individualism, tribalism was represented as a form of life existing *alongside* other individualized lifestyles. When pushed by the chairman of the 1934 Commission of Enquiry to state categorically that communalism should not limit individual achievement, Ngata replied that individualism and tribalism would, for some time, coexist as related forms of social life, but with the implication that the latter would eventually give way to the former. For the time being, individual success depended upon strong tribal leadership and tribal pride.<sup>52</sup>

These two coexisting modes of life corresponded, in Ngata's thought, to two classes of people: successful farmers and others who had succeeded in the Pakeha education system on the one hand, and farm labourers and those who would not make it in the Pakeha system on the other. By the time Ngata came to write his contribution to Sutherland's *The Maori People Today* (published in 1940) his two-class theory had become quite explicit: 'The strongly individualist Maori

49 *ibid.*, p.xiii–xiv.

50 *ibid.*, p.xv.

51 Sorrenson, ed., II, p.225.

52 AJHR, 1934, G-10, p.46.

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farmer' comprised one class while farm labourers comprised the other.<sup>53</sup> Tribal organization was performing a vital social welfare function for the labouring class under circumstances in which 'large numbers were failing to hold their own in the competitive struggle with Pakeha civilization' or were failing to make good in the Maori land development schemes'.<sup>54</sup>

As a social welfare system, tribal organization was under strain due to economic pressure on households and new forms of individualization promoted by the state social welfare system. State benefits were, Ngata argued, 'highly individualized' so contradicting the tribal support system: 'By providing individualized material resources they gave a measure of independence of tribal assistance. The psychological need of the tribal background for people who are still of another race contrasts in some degree with the material resources offered by the pakeha.'<sup>55</sup> By this time Ngata had become more pessimistic about the long-term success of his development schemes, recognizing that full economic equality with Pakeha could only be attained 'by selected units, and then at the risk of temporarily if not permanently dissociating them from their tribes'. He went on to suggest, 'If progress and achievement are to be thus gauged and involve this detribalising, then it would appear as if the maintenance of the tribal system must be relegated to those, and they will comprise the majority of the Maori population, who are unable to progress in this sense, who are conservative, or even actively averse to full adoption of pakeha culture.'<sup>56</sup>

I think it is significant that it is in the context of this discussion of the need to preserve tribalism for the majority of Maori that Ngata offered his most complete definition of maoritanga. While it is unclear to what extent he expected this maoritanga to be maintained by the 'strong individualist farmer', it does seem that Ngata saw it as something which might *transcend* differences between classes. It was certainly not equivalent to tribalism — and there is no reference to the tribe in his definition — but was instead a relational concept that opposed, in the most general terms, Maori and Pakeha. 'It means an emphasis on the continuing individuality of the Maori people, the maintenance of such Maori characteristics and such features of the Maori culture as present day circumstances will permit, the inculcation of pride in Maori history and traditions, the retention so far as possible of old-time ceremonial, the continuous attempt to interpret the Maori point of view to the pakeha in power.'<sup>57</sup>

Beneath an idealized, generalized mantle of maoritanga, an attitude that corresponded to the identity of a single racial group, tribal *and* individual identities would continue in tandem and might, at times, come into conflict. Indeed, even if tribalism was eventually to succumb to individualism Maori identity would not be lost. Thus maoritanga constituted Ngata's final conceptual resolution of the contradiction between individualism and tribalism.

My interpretation here is, once again, at odds with Webster's when he writes that Maori 'culture' became for Ngata 'an ideological solution in the mind to a

53 Ngata, in Sutherland, p.152.

54 *ibid.*, p.170.

55 *ibid.*, p.172.

56 *ibid.*, p.176.

57 *ibid.*, pp.176-7.

contradiction which nevertheless remained unchanged in society'.<sup>58</sup> The contradiction to which Webster is referring appears to be the real historical struggle of Maori labour against capital within the capitalist economy. More maoritanga, rather than class struggle, was, according to Webster, Ngata's ideological solution. In my view, however, Ngata's late concept of maoritanga was born out of a much more specific contradiction that, ironically, had been deepened by Ngata's own practice as government minister. Ngata's theory did indeed address a class conflict, but it was a conflict between a class of farmers and a class of those who had been effectively dispossessed.

Undoubtedly, maoritanga was also intended to transcend other social divisions, particularly those between tribes. As such, it was from the beginning a nationalist concept in terms of which relationships with Pakeha might be negotiated. In this context, therefore, the instincts of the Tuhoe academic, John Rangihau, were right when he warned of the potential of maoritanga ideologically to disempower tribes: 'I have a faint suspicion that this is a term coined by Pakeha to bring tribes together. Because if you cannot divide and rule, then for tribal people all you can do is bring them together and rule . . . because then they lose everything by losing their own tribal identities and histories and traditions.'<sup>59</sup>

By the mid-1970s, when Rangihau raised his concerns over the political uses of maoritanga, this concept had become central to official and academic understandings of Maori-Pakeha inequalities and prescriptions for Maori improvement following a period of rapid urbanization of Maori. Post-war industrial expansion created a greatly increased demand for manual labour in cities, much of which was filled by formerly rural-dwelling Maori. Between 1961 and 1971 the proportion of urban-dwelling Maori rose from 46% to 70.2%.<sup>60</sup> Accompanying this urbanization and proletarianization was a new ethnic activism, led initially by trade-unionists and later by Maori tertiary students.<sup>61</sup> Under pressure from this mobilization, which dramatically highlighted Maori marginality and exclusion, state officials and academics turned to maoritanga, or idealized Maori culture, as a solution. It was envisaged that Maori social alienation and 'underachievement' would be significantly reduced by promoting and affirming maoritanga in schools and the wider community. Maoritanga thus became a 'state resource', able to be used to ameliorate Maori alienation caused by urbanization.<sup>62</sup> Just as it had for Ngata, this concept transcended individualism and tribalism, apparently reconciling a growing contradiction between individual, urban participation in a capitalist economy with the maintenance of rural tribal practices.

<sup>58</sup> Webster, p.102.

<sup>59</sup> J. Rangihau, 'Being Maori', in M. King, ed., *Te Ao Hurihuri: The World Moves On*, Wellington, 1975, pp.232-3.

<sup>60</sup> NZ Dept of Statistics, *Maori Statistical Profile, 1961-86*, Wellington, 1986, p.29.

<sup>61</sup> E. Poata-Smith, 'He Pokeke Uenuku i Tu Ai: The Evolution of Contemporary Maori Protest', in P. Spoonley, D. Pearson and C. Macpherson, eds, *Nga Patai: Racism and Ethnic Relations in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, Palmerston North, 1997, pp.101-2.

<sup>62</sup> J. Sissons, 'The Systematisation of Tradition: Maori Culture as a Strategic Resource', *Oceania*, 64, 2 (1993), pp.97-116.

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In both the 1967 and 1976 editions of Joan Metge's influential introduction to Maori society, *The Maoris of New Zealand*, there were substantial sections devoted to maoritanga, a broad concept that, according to Metge, included 'a general attitude of pride in being Maori' and distinctive Maori 'ways of looking at and doing things'.<sup>63</sup> However, even in the mid-1970s, Metge made no link between maoritanga and biculturalism. Indeed, she wrote in 1976 that the latter term, as most recently advocated by Schwimmer, had 'hardly passed into general currency'.<sup>64</sup> Maoritanga and biculturalism were first brought together by Maori writers reacting to increasing references to an ideal of multiculturalism and arguing that the partnership between Maori and Pakeha established in 1840 by the Treaty of Waitangi should be accorded priority in cultural policy. Thus, in 1981, in the context of a discussion of the need to ratify the Treaty, Ranginui Walker wrote, 'we pay homage to the in-word multiculturalism without even understanding the first step towards biculturalism'.<sup>65</sup> The following year Hiwi Tauroa, the Race Relations Conciliator, wrote in his widely read report, *Race Against Time*, that 'the first step towards a multi-cultural society is the deliberate development of a bi-cultural New Zealand'. 'Maoritanga', he added, was for all New Zealanders, as a basis for unity; '*hei kaupapa whakakotahi*'.<sup>66</sup> Ngata would surely have agreed.

In 1940 maoritanga was promoted by Ngata and Sutherland against a background of recent tribal development, most evident in the construction of whareniui on marae, and increasing economic individualism.<sup>67</sup> By the time this concept came to be used for bicultural purposes in the 1980s its origins in Ngata's post-assimilationist efforts to reconcile tribalism and individualism had become lost from view. Ngata's contradiction has, however, proved to be an enduring one, most recently evident in the disputes between Maori urban authorities, representing individual Maori, and tribal trust boards, claiming traditional mandates. Ngata's post-assimilationist thought anticipated such conflicts, even if his ideas proved ultimately unable to resolve or prevent them.

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63 J. Metge, *The Maoris of New Zealand: Rautahi*, London, 1976, p.48. I also wish to thank Joan Metge for her helpful comments in discussions and subsequent correspondence on Ngata and biculturalism.

64 *ibid.*, p.309.

65 Walker, pp.78-79.

66 Race Relations Conciliator, p.51 Maori text.

67 Sutherland, 'Introduction' in Sutherland, ed., *The Maori People Today*, p.421.