Half-castes between the Wars

COLONIAL CATEGORIES IN NEW ZEALAND
AND SAMOA

BY THE 1930s 'half-castes' seemed a near-universal product of colonialism. They were a natural outcome of the human activity of procreation, and not a colony in the world was without them. In New Zealand and Samoa, half-castes had risen to prominence, not always with admiration, and occupied a territory somehow between natives and Europeans. They were a kind of human borderland, markers of the differences between the two populations. Half-castes were born of a 'queer magic', as Noel Coward called it, children of natural human desires, yet often treated as unnatural; left in a position which could attract both envy and disdain. In the years between the World Wars, the well-known figure of the half-caste gained a new kind of relevance as, among others, eugenicists, racial biologists, colonial experts and governments found newer ways of considering them. The prevailing contemporary view did not seem a kind one. The anti-racist scientist Cedric Dover lamented in 1937 that the half-caste was depicted as 'an undersized, scheming and entirely degenerate bastard. His father is a blackguard, his mother a whore. His sister and daughter ... follow the maternal vocation.'

Colonial authority was built on the assumptions that European society in the colonies was an obvious and discrete social and biological whole — a 'natural' community — and that the boundaries which separated colonizer from the colonized were easily drawn and unmistakable. Half-castes were living proof that these assumptions were false, and daily they had to deal with the trauma their existence exposed. Unintentionally they had the capacity to traverse categories, or be cast from one to another, and this often attracted distrust and suspicion. Their variability meant that although the term 'half-caste' was in use

1 Noel Coward, The Lyrics, London, 1995, p.107. I would like to thank Chris Hilliard, Mark Hickford and Ruth Watson for reading and commenting on drafts of this paper, much improving it. I would also like to thank Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese, Hugh Laracy, Malama Meleisea, Asma Siddiki, Nancy Stepan and J. Kehaulani Kauanui, for their help and for refining my understanding of this topic.

2 Cedric Dover, Half-Caste, with a preface by Lancelot Hogben, London, 1937, p.13. The novelist Janet Frame, a child in Oamaru in the 1930s, remembered that 'those people who were known to be half-castes were spoken of as unclean', Janet Frame, To the Is-Land, London, 1993, p.137.

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from the mid-nineteenth century in both New Zealand and Samoa, the substance it enclosed continually changed. Moreover, each reconfiguration of what half-caste meant potentially reconfigured the limits of ‘Native’ or ‘European’, and how distant or different these categories were. This changing nature of the half-caste reveals the creative and plastic nature of colonialism and its terms of government. But it does much more than this, as such terms were part of a vocabulary commonly used by colonizers, and government was implicated in a broader discussion where varied definitions and understandings of half-castes might inform each other, and where definitions remained mercurial and contested. In Samoa and New Zealand half-castes attracted not only political and social interest, but also scientific and scholarly concern. The years on which this article focuses, the 1920s and 1930s, were a highpoint for this.

At this time both New Zealand and Samoa were under the same colonial power — New Zealand — yet in the two countries the half-caste category was not the same. The many differences make comparison intriguing. Samoa was a tropical, plantation colony, with a small population of Europeans; New Zealand was a temperate, settler colony, with an increasing white population. Their histories, however, are entangled, and in several ways the fortunes of half-castes in Samoa and New Zealand shaped each other. Margery Perham, a colonial ‘expert’ and Oxford don, passed through both New Zealand and Samoa in 1929 on a worldwide tour of British colonies. She realized the degree of entanglement between New Zealand and Samoa when she observed that ‘every event in the [Samoan] islands found immediate echo in New Zealand, and New Zealand’s response re-echoed back in the islands’. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler have written that ‘metropole and colony, colonizer and colonized, need to be brought into one analytic field’. Half-castes in Samoa and New Zealand offer an opportunity to do just that.

Long before the 1920s Samoa’s half-castes had established a reputation as troublesome. Many ‘afakasi’, as they were known, and called themselves, from at least the 1860s, had left their mark as traders, interpreters, clerks and craftsmen, and as wives of Papalagi. Even before German annexation in 1900 the longlasting pattern of official recognition had been established. The British, German, and American consular representatives recognized some half-castes as legitimate offspring who were, therefore, like their fathers, considered to be foreigners. However, officials refused to recognize the majority of half-castes, and so denied them this foreign status. From the last decades of the nineteenth century, most ‘foreigners’ or ‘Europeans’ in Samoa were locally born half-castes. In the years after 1879, in Apia particularly, consular government and foreign interventions meant that recognition as a foreigner carried clear advantages in

matters of trade, bureaucracy, ‘protection’ and status. This kind of recognition became further developed when the German administration of Samoa began. The legal status of the half-caste was made a matter of tribunal, where any half-caste, who satisfied the court’s criteria as to language, conduct, and social and economic standing, might be registered as a foreigner or European. The individual would then fall into an entirely different jurisdiction and, implicitly, would have to conform to different standards, legally, socially and politically. Foreign status could be, and occasionally was, revoked. These considerations highlighted that Europeans were difficult to distinguish from half-castes who were not registered, so the distinction was fortified with certificates of registration and published lists of successful applicants.

By the 1920s half-castes became nationally more prominent, largely as a result of their influence in local politics. When, in 1914, New Zealand administration replaced the Germans, their policy regarding half-castes followed the German pattern. However, the 1918 influenza epidemic, in which nearly one-fifth of the population died, sparked Samoan discontent. In the 1920s the Mau a Pule, an organization seeking Samoan autonomy and ‘Samoa for the Samoans’, was established. Several important actors in this movement were half-castes, and the international face was Taisi Olaf Nelson, a chief and successful half-caste businessman. This movement recalled an earlier Mau, formed by Lauaki Namulau’ulu Mamoe in 1903-4 to oppose German government. The German administration had suppressed Lauaki’s Mau, and a disproportionate amount of the responsibility had been assigned to the half-caste ‘Pullack’. In practice, Pullack played only a minor role (Lauaki was the mastermind) and he seemed only to be trying to make advantages from his bilingualism, trading nous and ambition. Lauaki was ‘exiled’ in 1909, and his Mau came to an end (Pullack, being a half-caste, was ‘deported’), but a precedent for political co-operation between half-castes and Samoans had been set.

The nadir of New Zealand’s administration in Samoa was the killing of 11 unarmed Mau protesters in 1929. This gave rise to reflection about the nature and role of half-castes in Samoa. Some chose to blame New Zealand mal-administration, others the impact of the 1918 influenza epidemic, but the majority attributed at least some, if not most, of the blame to mischievous half-castes. One of the New Zealand administrators tried to dismiss the Mau as merely ‘a half-caste movement’, an assertion superficially justified by the pre-eminence of Taisi. The couple of thousand half-castes (out of a population of some 30,000) were stamped with a particular identity in official eyes. They were inappropriate leaders with selfish and modern motives, leading natives astray. Worse, they compromised the social and political distance which colonial governments desired. The administration did not approve of ‘meeting[s] which mix[e]d’ Native
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politics with European politics', and this was what the Mau did. The native involvement and that of Europeans or half-castes generally had different inspirations, but they were inextricably bound together.

The Royal Commission into the killings of ‘Black Saturday’ noted the confusion half-castes represented to the categories of government. The Commission ‘pointed out the difficulty of discriminating between Europeans and natives because of the large number of half-castes, who [we]re in law Europeans’. Here the continuity between the German laws and those of New Zealand in Samoa was quite apparent. A small number of half-castes were legally recognized as such, and thus became ‘Europeans’. A larger number of half-castes, generally those who were poorer, or who did not hold individual property, or who were not as well educated, or who could not find work other than traditional farming, were unrecognized, and were regarded as Samoans. The 1921 Samoa Act defined the terms of government: “‘Samoan’ means a person belonging to the Polynesian race, whether by pure or mixed descent; but does not include (a) persons registered as Europeans with any regulations or Ordinance in force in Samoa; or (b) the legitimate children of a father who is a European either by birth or by registration as aforesaid.” The status of European, which was, it should be remembered, a racial status, could be transmitted through generations regardless of ‘blood’. Many ‘afakasi’ would have only one Papalagi grandparent or great-grandparent, and possibly some would not have had any foreign ancestry at all. Racial definition was dependent on social, political and legal criteria, not criteria which were physical or genetic. The New Zealand administration, as with other colonial governments before it, persisted in seeing Samoa in brown and white, although the people of Samoa came in many more shades and colours.

Samoan possesses a relatively developed literature on the history of half-castes, and by comparison New Zealand historiography seems almost to have overlooked them. The social situation, the everyday lives and interactions of half-castes in

12 Tamasese Lealofi IV’s testimony, Report of Royal Commission Concerning the Administration of Western Samoa, Wellington, 1927, p.xxiv.
14 This was not allowed by New Zealand, but had been by Germany, and New Zealand recognized the Europeans Germany had registered.
New Zealand are only vaguely understood. Individuals such as Henry Mitchell, Henry Balneavis (Te Raumoa), Harry and Roger Dansey, Annabella Mary Geddes, Frederick A. Bennett and Henry M. Stowell, and even individual families (such as the Tapsells), though well known, offer only partial inroads. They were half-castes of privilege, and Samoan histories suggest that they were but the tip of an iceberg. It could well be that there was much more of a ‘community’ than has been suspected. Certainly in some parts of the South Island half-castes occasionally formed distinct communities. The ‘half-caste kaik’ at Moeraki, for example, in the later nineteenth century, was separate from the Maori settlement. There is also evidence that half-castes in the racial climate of New Zealand often aspired to become ‘whiter’, through a process of whitening not unlike that actively pursued in Brazil in the 1920s and 1930s. A contemporary observer felt that in the 1920s there were fewer marriages between European men and Maori women, but rather ‘to-day there are many more marriages between white men and half-caste women . . . and marriages often take place between half-caste young men and white girls’. One quite wealthy half-caste bequeathed her property to a quarter-caste niece, but only on the condition that her niece did not marry a Maori (even another half-caste), but a European. Half-castes in New Zealand often filled comparable roles to those of their Samoan counterparts, though their fortunes could be very different. In Apia half-castes were a community with their own clubs, balls and polo teams, speaking with their own peculiar accent — but it was a community with networks throughout Samoa. In New Zealand half-castes did not cluster together in a main centre. Many positions commonly filled by half-castes in Samoa belonged much more to settlers in New Zealand. In New Zealand, settler numbers far exceeded the number of natives and half-castes, and settlers became clerks, craftsmen and daily wage labourers, positions in which half-castes were commonly found in Samoa. New Zealand’s interpreters, land-buying agents and native ‘experts’ were more often locally raised, educated or ambitious settlers, than half-castes. The white population in Samoa was generally transitory, but in New Zealand their permanence meant many of them were linguistically and culturally equipped to mediate between the races. Ultimately, in New Zealand the large white population was not dependent on half-castes to fill out its numbers. 

or to assist in forming a society which excluded natives, as was the case in Samoa. In Samoa, half-castes were needed to allow a small privileged ‘European’ society to function, yet unless the colonial élite was prepared to share their privileges with them (and they were not), the white élite had also to be more active in distinguishing and excluding half-castes. In New Zealand, where half-castes were more peripheral to white society, half-caste leaders could emerge within representative politics (as did James Carroll and Peter Buck) and still be marginal to ‘European’ life. In Samoa, meanwhile, the small cadre of colonial administrators was at one and the same time dependent on half-castes, yet committed to their exclusion.22

Half-castes in New Zealand were still troublesome, though in ways different from Samoa. By the twentieth century the transliteration of half-caste, hawhe kahe (or its variants), was widely used. It had been used by South Island Maori as early as the 1850s, also appearing at that time in government publications.23

In similar fashion the ‘problem’ of the half-caste was not new, and had been a theme in New Zealand legislation since 1844. A number of nineteenth-century ordinances and acts made reference to half-castes, most stating that half-castes were to be treated as Maori. The most striking of these was the Half-caste Disability Removal Act, 1860, which legitimized half-castes whose parents had not been legally married at the time of birth but had subsequently married. It also placed in the statutes the most detailed description of the category yet given: ‘the word “Maori” shall include Half-castes and all persons of mixed blood of the European and aboriginal races, unless there be something in the context repugnant to such construction’.24 In effect, this was New Zealand’s own ‘one drop rule’, where any Maori blood in your veins made you Maori by definition. Yet, as was not unusual in legislation elsewhere, it did not define solely on the grounds of ‘blood’, but took into account ‘context’ — if an individual was perceived as sufficiently ‘non-Maori’, he or she could simply be reclassified as European.25

This concern with the legal definition of half-caste, and thus with the legal definition of European and Maori, intensified after the First World War. The problems of the legal definition of race, so often associated with the United States, were not foreign to New Zealand.26 As the case of Samoa well demonstrates, whenever there were different laws for different races, half-castes

22 A case in point was the uneasy friendship between Taisi and the administrator, George Richardson.
23 Variants included ‘awhe kahe’, ‘hawhe kaihe’, and ‘awhe tahi’. Maori seem also to have had other terms of description, such as ‘utu pihikete’ (paid for with biscuits), ‘o te para’ (out of the [whalers’] barrel), and ‘hupaiana’ (hoop iron), Anderson, Race Against Time, p.2. By the 1860s the term was in use in the distant and independent Maori newspaper, the Kingitanga’s Te Hokioi o Niue-Tireni e rere atuna.
24 The Half-caste Disability Removal Act 1860, s.2. I explore these matters in my current doctoral work.
25 Such an approach could cut both ways; for example, the Sea-fisheries Act 1894 (s.72) excluded from penalty not only ‘aboriginal natives’ but also ‘half-caste[s] who shall be habitually living with the aboriginal natives according to their customs’.
were a persistent anomaly, and in New Zealand there were many legal distinctions between Maori and European. Many problems over racial definition intersected with issues of land. Under which law should half-castes be considered? Were they brown or white, or should they have a legal category of their own? Native land legislation is complex, but it should be observed that most land legislation made some sort of expression relevant to the status of half-castes. Such questions were becoming more urgent. The 1909 Native Land Act, which consolidated native land legislation, defined a ‘Native’ as ‘a person belonging to the aboriginal race of New Zealand, and includes a half-caste and a person intermediate in blood between half-castes and persons of pure descent from that race’. This definition crystallized racial categories regarding native land: 50% Maori blood meant you were Maori, though any less meant you were European.

When the 1909 Act was amended three years later, a unique racial clause was included, allowing the governor, by order in council, on the recommendation of the Native Land Court, to ‘declare any Native to be a European’. From 1912 to 1931 a number of ‘Natives [were] declared to be European’, and their names published. Seventy-six people made this magical transition, New Zealand’s own forgotten honorary whites. Europeanization was claimed mostly for conveyancing reasons, and was reportedly ‘averse to Native sentiment’, so that even though there was an average of four ‘Europeanized Natives’ a year, the Act was easily removed from the statute books. Yet though Europeanization was supposedly only a legal status, the Act specified that the court had to be satisfied that a Native was ‘acquainted with the English language’, educated to standard four, and that they either owned or leased land, or had ‘some special profession, trade, or calling’, which provided adequate income. (Notwithstanding that there were many Europeans who were illiterate, undereducated or unemployed.) With such qualifications, it is not surprising that there was a disproportionate number of people with European surnames (who may or may not have been half-castes) out of the seventy-six.

Half-castes were troublesome in other ways, potentially wherever there was differential law between ‘Natives’ and ‘Europeans’. Not only land prompted difficulties. In 1921 Justice John Salmond presided over two such court cases involving petitions for dissolutions of marriage. In one of the cases, a petitioner sought to dissolve his marriage on the basis that his ‘informal’ marriage to a Maori was legal only if they were both Maori. (‘Informal’ marriages among Maori, but not among Europeans, were at the time recognized as legal.) The petitioner claimed that as a half-caste he was not a Maori, thus the marriage was not legal, and so forced Salmond ‘to determine this difficult question’. Was a half-caste a Maori or not? After considering New Zealand precedents, Salmond turned to American jurisprudence, which was more developed. He made a tentative observation that ‘the status of any person of mixed blood follows the...

27 Native Land Act 1909, s.2. This Act was drafted by John Salmond under the watchful eye of Apirana Ngata.
28 Native Land Amendment Act 1912, s.17. See occasional lists, Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives (AJHR), G-8.
29 ‘Native Land Court Report’, AJHR, 1931, G-9, p.2. The government kept a register of ‘Europeanized land’: Maori Affairs 14/16, NA.
status of his father’, but he felt that he could escape making a final decision about this, and deferred to other principles of law. However, later on that year when a half-caste woman petitioned to dissolve her marriage to her half-caste husband, Salmond gave a firm opinion that a ‘person of mixed descent — partly Maori and partly English — belongs in truth and fact both to the Maori and the English race’. Salmond opined that the law intended half-castes, like Maori, to share in the privilege of ‘informal’ marriage. In this context, half-castes were Maori.

This was not new territory for the courts in New Zealand, which had many times been confronted with the problem of half-castes. Differing kinds of legal process could produce differing views of the problem, as individual moments crystallized interpretations. In 1907 Justice Cooper suggested ‘that a half-caste Maori, especially when he or she is not competent to understand English, is . . . “a person of the Native race of the Islands”’. The same year, Justice Chapman gave an interesting opinion in Matui v. Reweti:

I cannot say that there was anything in her appearance [meaning Monika Rewiti, who called herself a half-caste] by which I could determine whether she was a full-blooded Maori or not. On the other hand, the co-respondent [with whom she had eloped], who stated that he was the child of the marriage of a European with a half-caste, showed his European origin plainly. It is well known that this question cannot always be determined by the appearance of the individual. So far as the evidence goes, therefore, I find that this young woman, the child of a Maori mother, born in a Maori Kainga, and brought up as a Maori, is not shown by valid evidence to be anything but a Maori.

Just as in Samoa, the status of half-castes was often decided less by ‘blood’ or the physical marks of race, which could easily be disputed (and whose contestation publicly undermined the validity of race), but by social markers of race, which were observed and assessed by the court through various legal filters. ‘Racial’ and ‘legal’ considerations were interwoven, and in law just as elsewhere, the limits of the European race were discretionary. Moreover, the law rendered racial categories more usable to government.

The inter-war period was one when officials in New Zealand were becoming more careful, and more watchful, of half-castes. In Samoa, the special status of half-castes meant that accurate censuses of them had been taken since German annexation. In New Zealand there had been less accuracy and consistency, and settler numbers and the spatial separation of Maori and Pakeha made this less imperative. From 1881 the New Zealand censuses included half-castes in

30 Renata te Ni v. Tuihata te Awhi and Honi, New Zealand Gazette Law Review (NZGLR), [1921], pp.331–2.  
32 Hakaraia te Whenua v. Bevan, NZGLR, X (1907), p.147. (A land case.)  
34 Die Deutschen Schutzgebeite in Afrika und der Sudsee, 1911/12, Berlin, 1913, 1, p.173, 2, p.52; ibid., 1912/13, 1, p.196, 2, p.60.  
35 For example, one 1924 guidebook advised that a ‘person may be weeks in [a New Zealand] city without ever seeing a Maori.’ [L.S. Fanning], New Zealand: An Illustrated Description, Wellington, 1924, p.108.
either the Maori or the European population, leaving it to the discretion of enumerators, who decided on the basis of whether they were ‘living as Europeans’, or ‘living as Maori’. (Pointedly, the reverse did not apply to Pakeha living ‘as Maori’). By the twentieth century the racial situation was becoming more complex, and there was growing dissatisfaction with this often inaccurate way of enumerating half-castes. For government to comprehend its population, to be able to target them effectively with its power, this crudity was no longer sufficient. Census officials felt that carefully counting half-castes was the best way of assessing the progress of race-mixing. ‘It is an idea of many people’, one census report observed, ‘that the ultimate fate of the Maori race was to be absorbed in the European. Whether any tendency is shown in this direction must be gathered from the increase or decrease in the number of half-castes. No valid deduction can be drawn except by taking account also of those half-castes who are living as Europeans.’ Consequently, in 1926 ‘half-caste’ became a full census category, giving censuses the power to see. Most other statistics continued to be taken roughly, in general allowing for only Maori or Europeans. Many came with a rider such as one used by the Department of Education: ‘For the purpose of this return, half-caste children and children intermediate in blood between half-caste and Maori are reckoned as Maori, and children intermediate in blood between half-caste and European as European’. Yet in the census this greater sophistication, rather than compromising a two-race, or a ‘50:50’ model of race, actually accorded the model greater protection.

As a result of this change, the 1926 New Zealand census was a more concentrated and effective attempt to come to terms with the country’s racial complexity. It was, in contrast to the earlier efforts, extraordinarily precise and sophisticated, tracing carefully not only the racial makeup of the national ‘body’, but the racial makeup of individual bodies. For the first time the same machinery used to count the non-Maori population was used to assess the Maori population. The census gave a strict technical meaning to half-caste, knowing well that in general usage it was applied loosely to anyone who had mixed blood. Races other than Maori or European were kept separate, and half-castes who lived as Europeans were brought back into the frame. Racial categories were consolidated and elaborated. ‘With three-quarter castes [sic] were included those Maori-Europeans whose ancestry was seven-eighths or five-eighths Maori. Similarly, with quarter-castes were included one-eighth and three-eighth castes.’

38 ‘Education of Maori Children’, AJHR, 1927, E-3, p.17. This was a standard appendage to the department’s tables giving the race of children.
census mapped out the New Zealand population in ways that made half-castes visible as never before. Previously, in some works, numbers had simply been guessed at. Numbers enabled new understandings, and although the recovery of the Maori population had been rendered unequivocal by the censuses before 1926, the 1926 census lent substance to a new interpretation. Maori, it was suggested, were becoming whiter. With its numbers showing an increase in the racially mixed, the census confirmed that the existence of Maori as a race was guaranteed for generations, ‘but its indefinite continuance is quite another matter’.

At this juncture the interweavings between government and intellectual concern become apparent. Peter Buck was not only a member of an MHR (1909–1914) and a high-ranking health official (1921–1927), but the leading expert on race-mixing in New Zealand, whose work was widely read. He no longer believed that Maori were slowly dying out, although he expected Maori would be racially absorbed into the Pakeha population. Examining the Maori Pioneer battalion (of which he was an officer) he found that nearly half of them ‘had white blood’, and he collected similar results for students attending native schools. His investigations lent scientific gravity to a common idea. For Buck this was palatable as, like many others, he believed that Maori and Europeans were long-lost cousins, who had both long been racially mixed. Mixture was the natural state of affairs, the path of progress even. ‘Miscegenation has stepped in, as it has all down the ages’, he wrote, and was ‘the stepping stone to the evolution of a future type of New-Zealander in which we hope the best features of the Maori race will be perpetuated for ever’.

Buck also suspected that mixed-race people were more fertile, and that the ‘full Maori’ population was actually falling. By 1935 it was a standard belief, in New Zealand and overseas, that the ‘pure Maori population will eventually be supplanted by a population of mixed bloods’. Only the eccentric Alfred Newman had thought the numbers of half-castes were decreasing, and very few people took him seriously.

By the late 1930s the hybridizing of Maori had become virtually a matter of fact, outlined by Buck and buttressed by more sophisticated census figures. ‘That the full-blooded Maori will ultimately disappear is inevitable’, Buck wrote in 1940.

Buck was a significant influence on the leading Maori politician of the period,
Apirana Ngata. Together the two were at the cutting edge of racial scholarship in New Zealand with their ‘home-grown anthropology’ in the 1920s and 1930s. In New Zealand, Ngata felt, ‘the half-caste has fulfilled his proper function of bridging the intellectual social and political gap between the two races. He has been largely responsible for the cultural adjustments, which in part he has conspicuously enforced.’ However, Ngata thought that, in Samoa, the half-caste seemed ‘to have been ostracized — cut off anyhow from his Native inheritance and status’. Buck, who had spent some time doing fieldwork in Samoa in 1927, and who supplied much of Ngata’s intelligence, agreed. ‘The status of the half-blood’, he wrote, ‘is bad’. Buck and Ngata thought the half-caste was an ideal leader, whose potential had not been utilized correctly in Samoa. For them the sparkling example of the New Zealand half-caste, Sir James Carroll, had ‘bridged the gap between the two Races’, acting as ‘the highway between the two races and between the tribes’. Buck and Ngata remembered Carroll’s time as Native Minister (1899–1912) as one of great benefits for Maori. The ‘Carroll philosophy’, which sprang from ‘his [Ngati] Kahungunu descent... on the one side, and the intuition of his Irish father’ on the other, they regarded as perfectly timed and executed, largely due to his mixed descent. Ngata’s observations, like Buck’s, were genealogical, reminiscent of whakapapa, though not dissimilar to a wider ‘common-sense’ view of inheritance shared by Europeans. The main difference was that Ngata was emphasizing the duality of Carroll’s heritage, rather than fractionalizing it into halves and quarters, as Europeans tended to. Ancestors had an active influence in present life. It is difficult to tell whether similar beliefs were held among other Maori, though one chief reportedly explained that mixed-bloods were more likely to have administrative and business capabilities, as their blood ‘just gives them the extra capacity necessary to adapt themselves fully to all these un-Maori things’. Ngata told Parliament how Buck’s whakapapa made him the ideal observer to have in Samoa, as ‘he could look at the situation not only from the Polynesian standpoint, but also from the Irish, because, like the late James Carroll, he is a happy combination of the Irishman and the Maori’.

Buck and Ngata nurtured local concern with New Zealand and Samoa’s half-castes. Both were convinced of the practical value of anthropology and similar

51 Buck to Ngata, 25 August 1931, ibid., II, p.211.
52 Ngata to Buck, 22 May 1930, ibid., II, p.17; Ngata to Buck, 5 August 1936, ibid., III, p.236.
53 Ngata to Buck, 22 May 1930, ibid., II, p.17
55 Speech by the Hon. Sir Apirana Ngata in the House of Representatives, on Friday, 6 September, 1929, Wellington, 1929, p.1.
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sciences (especially health) for government. The Board of Maori Ethnological Research was established under Ngata’s direction, designed to support not only research about Maori but also about ‘cognate races of the South Pacific Ocean’ (thus including other ‘natives’ governed by New Zealand, such as Samoans, Cook Islanders and Niueans). Ngata lent his and the Board’s patronage to established scholars dealing mostly with ‘old-time Maori’, but also to younger scholars, notably the anthropologist Felix Keesing. Keesing’s book The Changing Maori showed his concern with what he called the ‘racial drama’, and part of this was his consideration of the ‘fusion’ of Maori and Pakeha (he thought it had less impact than Buck). Keesing moved from one New Zealand dominion to another, and spent many of his following years in Samoa, with the support of the New Zealand administration. The book that resulted from his fieldwork there, Modern Samoa, was more sophisticated than his earlier effort. In Samoa, Keesing considered half-castes in more depth, finding that they ‘loomed behind the pure-blood Samoans as a shaping force’. ‘Samoa’, he wrote, ‘provides a most interesting laboratory for the study of race mixture’. His criticisms of the racial attitudes of the New Zealand administration, and his work on half-castes, were widely read, notably by Buck and Ngata. Other less accomplished local writers also found half-castes in Samoa and New Zealand merited their attention.

Local scholarship made New Zealand and Samoa more accessible, but international scholarship was already interested in race-mixing in the Pacific. In a single year two important monographs were published in London. The authors were reasonably prominent scholars, the anthropologist George H.L-F. Pitt-Rivers (son of Augustus), and the historian Stephen H. Roberts. Concerned with racial problems in general, the books had very different approaches and disagreed in many ways, but not over the general fact of race-mixing. Both believed that the Maori race was destined to disappear through miscegenation with Europeans. (Both knew and used Buck’s research, and Buck was Pitt-Rivers’ patron while he did fieldwork in New Zealand.) ‘The Maori is clearly being absorbed’, Roberts wrote, ‘and little objection, either theoretical or actual, is raised to this tendency’. Roberts thought this outcome ‘a happy one’, whereas Pitt-Rivers, the functionalist always in favour of minimal intervention, considered it the end of a race (and thus, for him, of a distinct culture) which he

57 The Board was provided for by the Native Land Claims Adjustment Act, 1923. See H.R.H. Balneavis (Te Raumoa), ‘The Board of Maori Ethnological Research: A Review’, Te Wananga, 1 (1929), pp.3-9, 83-91.
58 Felix Keesing, The Changing Maori, New Plymouth, 1928, p.102; also pp.80-81, 101-4, 162-3, 181. This was a revised version of his MA thesis.
much admired. Where Roberts saw a recovery of population, Pitt-Rivers saw a ‘population substitution’. Both thought the Maori case exemplified a process of even greater importance, ‘a convenient illustration of a world-wide process’.

Others, too, turned their attention to half-castes in New Zealand or Samoa. People as different as George Bernard Shaw, on a talking tour of New Zealand, and Margery Perham, visiting Samoa and New Zealand, found the subject of interest. It was one of Perham’s great shocks to find that in Samoa, half-castes, people she thought unsavoury, were not seen as such. The ‘adjective’ half-caste, she wrote, ‘is not opprobrious here’. Many of them, she was surprised to see, even sprang from legal marriages. Her worst suspicions might have been confirmed by an unhappy encounter she had with an illicit drinking and dancing house run by two ‘fat evil-looking quarter-castes’, but Perham seems not to have minded too much. Her interest in half-castes carried over to New Zealand. ‘There can be very little pure blood left’, she remarked near the end of her stay, ‘and all the time the Maori blood is spreading and thinning as it spreads. I made a point of asking New Zealanders of all kinds their opinion of the situation.’ When she gained an interview with Ngata (whom she thought was ‘a very dark man . . . not one of the forthcoming, genial Maoris’), she quizzed him, and he told her how statistics greatly underestimated the numbers of half-castes. Showing Buck’s influence, he told her how it was ‘becoming increasing difficult to be sure which of them are full Maoris, so much is the white blood infiltrating’.

Samoa and New Zealand forced Perham to look with new eyes at the old half-caste ‘problem’. Writing to *The Times*, she reiterated the difficulty of the half-caste in Samoa who ‘retains his links with both races. He is peculiar to the Pacific and embarrassing to government.’ Perham’s Britain, still firmly at the centre of the empire for New Zealand, was no stranger to the half-caste ‘problem’. In the inter-war period in Britain, half-castes were more than just a colonial concern. The numbers of foreign ‘coloured’ seamen resident in Britain had boomed, and a population of half-caste children had resulted. In port cities such as Liverpool, Cardiff and London,
half-castes were commonly perceived to be a developing problem, often subject to more attention than the presence of their ‘coloured’ fathers. In 1927, for instance, the Association for the Welfare of Half-caste Children was established in Liverpool. This association was concerned with half-castes, who generally grew up in and around the docks, struggled to find work and opportunities, and were easily drawn to illegal or immoral activity. Half-castes were, the Association’s literature commented, ‘born with a definitely bad heredity, and exposed to a definitely bad environment’. The Association set up clubs, wrote reports and petitioned government; other similar associations sprang up. These half-castes drew concern from other arenas, where their plight often attracted sympathy for the everyday prejudice they faced.

This domestic half-caste concern and the general atmosphere of ‘race relations’ in Britain demonstrate how empire encompassed complex dynamics, both materially and intellectually. The Colonial Office was in London; but London also held Britain’s largest non-white population. Race-mixing was a complicated issue in Britain; in the larger British Empire it is unsurprising that there was no singular course of action, or even an agreed set of principles. When a doctor interested in inter-racial marriages wrote to the Colonial Office in 1937, inquiring about the state of such matters in the Empire, no one at the Colonial Office was quite sure how to answer. Forced to take some kind of position in reply, the Office hesitantly replied that ‘mixed’ marriages were legal, at least in the territories it looked after. (The Office remained unsure about South Africa and Southern Rhodesia.) The official view remained one of tolerance, and there was never central legislative intervention in such matters. Ronald Hyam has argued that government grew less approving of sexual irregularity among its officials from before the turn of the century, but legal and ‘moral’ intercourse was never prohibited. Indeed, to other European nations the British could even appear ‘advanced’. A professor wrote to the Colonial Office from Germany asking it to relieve a German half-caste of his daily hell. He was the son of a black French soldier and one of his brothers had already killed himself. ‘The German children leave him perfectly alone and will not play with him.’ Would the Office let him take such half-castes (Mischlingskinder) to Africa?

This incident may seem a long way from half-castes in New Zealand and

72 A.W. Stirling to Under-Secretary, 10 March 1937, CO 323/1512/2, Public Record Office, London.
73 J.H. Thompson, minute, 25 March 1837; Bigg, minute, 1 April 1937; H. Duncan, minute, 2 April 1937; E.J. Howard to A.W. Stirling, 14 April 1937, CO 323/1512/2.
75 D. Westermann to Dr Witte, 12 January 1932. ‘Die deutschen Kinder lassen ihn vollkommen links liegen und spielen nicht mit ihm’, CO 847/1/5.
76 D. Westermann to Hans Vischer, 6 February 1932, CO 847/1/5.
Samoa, but such appearances are often deceptive. Samoa’s half-castes had only a few years previously themselves been ‘Mischlinge’ (mixed-bloods).\textsuperscript{77} Moreover, when scholars of biology, anthropology, eugenics, or colonialism sought to investigate race-mixing they often turned to Maori, Samoans, and other Oceanic indigenes. From the late nineteenth century, most literature in English on race crossing (or hybridization or mixing or intermarriage as it was variously known) would make reference either to New Zealand, Hawaii, Samoa or Pitcairn Island, if not all of them.\textsuperscript{78} What this meant was not that theories developed elsewhere were being applied secondarily to the Pacific, but rather that perceptions of the Pacific were vital contributions to this discourse about race-mixing. Often observers uninterested in race-mixing or half-castes would look at New Zealand or Samoa and pass comment. The broad relevance of half-castes and the mixing of races to most colonies meant that particular colonies could contribute to a larger concern. Samoa and New Zealand had much to say about the half-caste ‘problem’, not only to each other, but to a larger imperial and international audience. Consequently Cedric Dover could remark that Oceania and New Zealand had reached the point of reorienting the white attitude.\textsuperscript{79} He might equally have said that they played a crucial role in constructing it in the first place.

Half-castes and race-mixing had risen to prominence in mainstream representations, science and scholarship to a remarkable degree. In the 1920s, the mixing of races was of enormous interest to racial scientists, colonial ‘theorists’, eugenicists, social scientists and anthropologists alike. A eugenicist wrote in 1926 that ‘no one, least of all an Englishman mindful of our Empire problems, would deny the paramount importance of an investigation into human miscegenation’.\textsuperscript{80} A standard work on race named race-mixing as one of the three most important forces in the production of racial differences.\textsuperscript{81} Yet the breadth of the discourse exacerbated, rather than eased, the difficulty of the subject, making it tricky to achieve any detailed consensus. It was a many-sided and complicated discussion. Some argued in favour of indiscriminate mixing, seeing no harm in it and regarding the obliteration of race by means of intermarriage as the best way to deal with the dangers of race and race discrimination. ‘The colonies where the greatest advance towards racial equality has been made’, a group of British colonial ‘experts’ observed, is ‘where there has been admixture of blood for generations’.\textsuperscript{82} Lord Olivier, who had worked in India and Africa, believed that so long as a half-caste retained the characters of both of his parents he would be ‘a superior human being . . . potentially a more competent vehicle of humanity’. A ‘fortunately constituted hybrid’, he

\textsuperscript{77} Mischlinge was in the National Socialist racial vocabulary, and as a consequence is no longer in general use. Halb-blut was occasionally used in this period (notably as the title of Fritz Lang’s first film in 1919), but rarely in Samoa.


\textsuperscript{81} Carleton S. Coon, \textit{The Races of Europe}, New York, 1939, pp.4–6.

felt, would possess something of a 'double consciousness' and find the diversity of his ancestors to be 'a perpetual feast'. On the opposite side, some 'experts' were against any race-mixing, and were committed to the defence of racial purity — especially the purity of the white race — arguing that race-crossing could produce 'a real Frankenstein's monster'.

However, the great majority of 'experts' went to neither of these extremes. Instead they endorsed selectively, regarding some crosses as beneficial, others as dangerous. Only the most careless of scientists, cautioned one influential writer, would sanction indiscriminate race crossing: 'One crossing gives a fool, another a genius — one mating gives sickness and another health, one a criminal, another a useful citizen.' Crosses between races which were closely related or 'near' could be beneficial, whereas crosses between races which were distant might result in inferior offspring. There were extensive plant and animal experiments as well as human observations, and it was hybridization experiments that triggered the rediscovery of Gregor Mendel's work. The burden of such evidence was that offspring produced from crossing were sometimes an improvement and sometimes inferior. The scientific axioms of 'hybrid vigour' and 'hybrid degeneration' described these trends. The existence of both was almost universally accepted: the problem for experts and governments was to decide which crosses would lead to which. Hybrid vigour, or heterosis, where 'crossed individuals show unusually rapid growth, attain exceptional size, and display other traits of rapid development, high resistance and increased fecundity' was obviously desirable. Yet injudicious crosses might lead to hybrid degeneration, and generally 'inferior and unreliable progeny'. 'Experts' argued whether such and such mixed race was vigorous or degenerate, and it was 'not rare to find the same mongrel race spoken of by different writers in quite contradictory terms'. Truly, race-mixing was a 'troublesome topic ... in which the final word cannot be uttered'.

The opposition of hybrid vigour and hybrid degeneration meant race-mixing and half-castes were a question of health, subject to the medical gaze. Samoa, a tropical country, raised completely different medical and health questions from

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84 Edward M. East, Mankind at the Crossroads, New York, 1923, p.59.
88 Gregory, Race as a Political Factor, p.70.
89 S.J. Holmes, The Trend of the Race: A Study of Present Tendencies in the Biological Development of Civilized Mankind, London, 1921, p.247. It is important to note that, as William Provine shows, it was not new data that began to alter biological ideas about race, but changes in political and social views: 'Geneticists and the Biology of Race Crossing', Science, 182 (1973), pp.790-6.
New Zealand, which was temperate. Regarding Samoa, and the tropics more generally, it was occasionally suggested that native blood might fortify European blood, and allow Europeans to survive in the tropics. In the tropics it was the European race’s ability to survive that was in question. In New Zealand, it was not Europeans who were considered endangered, but, of course, Maori. Here, in some respects, the argument was reversed. H.B. Turbott, a leading public health official, believed that ‘half- and quarter-castes suffer least from tuberculosis, the incidence increasing with the degree of Maori blood’. The question of ‘place’, or environment or climate, was implicated in most racial thought. The Pacific gave intellectuals an opportunity to study the spread of a single race over a variety of climates. Nor was it just European scholars who thought that temperate climates raised a race in the scale of civilization, as both Ngata and Buck believed that the Maori was the most advanced of Polynesians.

In this context of scholarly debate, examples of race-mixing such as New Zealand and Samoa could prove critical. The Pacific was attractive to researchers (then as now) because it was well documented, accessible, and because there was such variety in population, environment and history. As scholarly and scientific debate had not produced a single dominant model regarding half-castes and race-mixing, particular cases could hold crucial positions in learned discussion. Indeed, the study of race-mixing remained the study of the particular. Nicholas Thomas has rightly pointed out that colonial travellers and ethnological writers were not merely concerned with white supremacy, ‘but with the superiority of some indigenous peoples over others’. Race-mixing made this sort of ‘ranking’ of races even more significant, if not essential, as it needed to order races as ‘near’ or ‘far’. Polynesians were, as one American author put it, ‘somewhat unsuccessful attempts of Nature to produce a Caucasian type’. Thus, Samoans and Maori did better in rankings than, say, Australian Aboriginals or ‘negroes’. As Maori and Samoans were closely related to Caucasians, the progress of race-mixing in both New Zealand and Samoa was often seen as vigorous, an important example, as Dover noted, of balancing out some of the mixes treated as degenerate. Half-castes remained an exciting and popular ground of research, even though, by the late 1920s, the intensity of scientific racism was beginning to recede.

Racial ranking was apparent in everyday life, such as the treatment of Chinese people in Samoa and New Zealand. Indian and Chinese market gardeners

HALF-CASTES BETWEEN THE WARS

Co-habiting with Maori women sparked a parliamentary committee. The committee felt such behaviour was not in the public interest. 'The indiscriminate intermingling of the lower types of the races — i.e. Maoris, Chinese, and Hindus — will, in the opinion of the committee, have an effect that must 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'. The committee was also concerned that the Chinese might 'submerge' the Maori race, as they were said to have done to other Polynesians in Hawaii. (The committee cited overseas race experts to underpin the latter point.) In Samoa, the New Zealand administration remained thoroughly committed to keeping Samoans and Chinese apart, even passing legislation to that effect. Those who did complain, mostly regretted that the segregation was not complete. Only 'immigrant' populations such as Chinese, Indians (and in Samoa, Melanesians) attracted legislative attention against race-mixing in Samoa and New Zealand. This disparagement and targeting of the Asian/Polynesian half-caste was a stark contrast to the softer light in which its European/Polynesian counterpart bathed, and although in scholarly circles the disparagement was generally more tempered, it was still present.

Localized and particular contexts were as vital as the metropolitan scene to understanding the construction of half-caste categories. After all, New Zealand and the Pacific region had its own small, but thriving, learned communities. There were the universities and a number of societies, such as the well-established Polynesian Society and the newer Pacific Institute. The 1920s and 1930s saw a number of major scientific meetings, from Pan-Pacific Science Congresses, to meetings of the Australasian (later Australia and New Zealand) Association for the Advancement of Science. The Pacific, then as now, was crawling with anthropologists. New Zealand’s possession of the Pacific, concrete in the government of Niue, Western Samoa and the Cook Islands, was recognized internationally, as parts of the Pacific became scientifically ‘the special province of New Zealand’. Local work or discussions in New Zealand and Samoa remained capable of intervening in wider contexts, just as work done elsewhere could be appropriated into New Zealand and Samoa. There were multiple centres


98 Samoa Act 1921; for example, Rowe, Samoa Under the Sailing Gods, pp.269–71.


of production, and a complex of interchange between them. Such interchanges cut both ways: New Zealand and Samoa were part of a larger web of countries that partook in the racism of the inter-war period, but they were also sites, and often very enthusiastic ones, of racist production.

But the relationship between scholarly investigations, matters of law and the categories of government were never straightforward. Even when personnel overlapped, there was often inconsistency. Different discussions existed, but did not merely parallel each other. Rather, they intersected and selectively appropriated. Responsive to many stimuli, the category of half-caste was constantly in motion, anchored down only at particular moments in certain texts, in statutes, ethnographies, censuses, judgments and myriad other acts of discourse. In this period between the World Wars, it is clear that half-castes were 'between the wars' in another sense. They were caught at the centre of the many-sided struggle between Europeans and Maori, and Europeans and Samoans, not just for resources and authority, but for the definition of races themselves. That act of definition was absolutely essential for colonialism. Half-castes in both New Zealand and Samoa were obvious disruptions to such definitions, and forced the boundary to be actively and visibly policed, so that the inequalities of colonialism might be maintained.

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