



COUNTERFUTURES

Left thought & practice Aotearoa

Raising (issues about) the Banner

A Critical Reflection on the New Zealand Flag Debate (2015-2016)

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REVIEWING THE HISTORICITY of flags in this country, and psychological as well as sociological and political theory, this article offers a critical reflection on the recent flag debate in Aotearoa New Zealand. As such, the article reflects the author's interest in the psychotherapy of politics, which includes: 'a range of attempts to *understand* and to *evaluate* political life through the application of psychotherapeutic concepts'.¹ This and other contributions to putting culture – and politics – on the couch² not only aim to develop a political analysis that is more

1 Nick Totton, *Psychotherapy and Politics*, London 2000, p. 6.

2 Andrew Samuels, *Politics on the Couch*, London 2001.

psychologically- and psychotherapeutically-informed, but also to help people move from reaction and inaction through insight to social action.³

The psychopolitics represented in this article draw not only on critical and radical traditions within western (and northern hemisphere) psychotherapy, they are also informed by post-colonial studies and indigenous perspectives on psychotherapy.⁴ A key part of such studies is the questioning of western constructs such as ‘self’, ‘ego’, ‘object relations’, and so on.⁵ Even the use of the word and concept of ‘psyche’ (from the Greek word meaning breath, life, or soul) can be criticised for being somewhat individualistic and certainly not grounded in this land and context. One of the peer reviewers of an earlier draft of this article suggested that ‘life-worlds’ or ‘living knowledge system’ might be concepts that more readily lend themselves to a ‘psyche’ that is grounded in the kaupapa, tikanga and kawa of the marae. In response, I wonder about the use of the word ‘iwi’, which, referring both to bones and tribe, carries the sense of a person-in-context: an individual (set of bones) who cannot be understood or conceptualised outside their context, most immediately, their tribe.

3 Sue Holland, ‘Psychotherapy, Oppression and Social Action’, in Rosine Perelberg & Ann Miller, eds., *Gender and Power in Families*, London 1990, pp. 256-69. See, for instance, Keith Tudor and Helena Hargaden, ‘The Couch and the Ballot Box’, in Colin Feltham, ed., *What’s the Good of Counselling and Psychotherapy?*, London 2002, pp. 156-78.

4 See Margaret Poutu Morice, *Towards a Maori Psychotherapy*. Unpublished Master’s dissertation, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland 2003. See also Wiremu Woodard, *Entering the Void*. Master’s dissertation, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland 2008. See also Joanne Reidy, *What are the Meanings of the Mātauranga Māori Concept of Mana and What Might This Concept Contribute to the Understanding and Practice of Psychodynamic Psychotherapy?* Master’s dissertation, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland 2016.

5 For a recent example of which see Keith Tudor, ‘We are, *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 46/2 2016, pp. 164-76.

Symbols and Signs

Central to this discussion is the relationship between flags as symbols and flags as signs. A symbol is an object that represents, stands for or suggests an idea, an image, a set of beliefs, an action, or an entity. It is also a means of complex communication that has multiple levels of meaning which change over time, a point well illustrated in an article by Rachael Peltz in which she contrasts her father's view of the symbolism of the American flag with that of her own.⁶ Semiotics, the study of symbols and signs, which derives from the work of Charles Peirce (1839–1914) and Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), focuses on the relationship between the signifier and the signified. In this article, I draw on the work of Carl Gustav Jung, the Swiss analytic psychologist, who made the first systematic *psychological* study of symbols⁷, distinguishing a symbol, which he used to stand for something that is unknown and therefore cannot be made clear or precise, from a sign, which stands for something known.

In the recent New Zealand 'flag debate', it was possible to view the designs on the 'long list'⁸ without accompanying explanations, and thus as symbols. It was also possible, by clicking on each design, to read the designers' explanations of their respective flags which, in Jungian terms, rendered each flag a sign.

Flags are cultural symbols, and symbols of culture; national flags are symbols of nations. History may be written by the victors (a statement attributed to both Walter Benjamin and

6 Rachael Peltz, My father's flag, *Fort Da*, 10 2004, pp. 8-19.

7 Carl Gustav Jung, Symbols of transformation, in Gerhard Hull, ed., *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung. Vol 2*, Princeton NJ 1962; Carl Gustav Jung, *Man and his symbols*. New York 1964. Carl Gustav Jung, Psychology and Alchemy, in Gerhard Hull, ed., *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung. Vol. 12*, Princeton 1968.

8 The long list was a list of 40 possible alternative flags which the Flag Consideration Panel choose from 10,000 submitted designs; see New Zealand Government, *The Long List*, Wellington 2015, <https://www.govt.nz/browse/engaging-with-government/the-nz-flag-your-chance-to-decide/gallery/>.

Winston Churchill), but traditionally it is the flag of the victors that is the first symbol to be raised over that of the vanquished. As Peltz put it: ‘The flag represents the place where we live at its best and worse’.⁹ Living fully – and preferably best – in the place we live concerns us all and is the purview not only of political and social science and philosophy but also of psychology and other ‘psy’ sciences and disciplines (psychiatry, psychotherapy, counselling psychology, etc.). In other words, in order to understand human relations, we need to draw on ideas about the psyche as well as society.

Flags

Historically, the origin of national flags lies in military standards which were used as field signs to represent, organise and communicate between troops. In this context such standards or flags had – and still have – a representative function. The practice of flying a flag to indicate a country of origin dates back to the age of sail and the use of maritime flags. In this context such flags denoted identity and offered some protection to the ship, goods and crew sailing under the flag. Indeed, this was a major motivation for Māori to engage in the first New Zealand flag debate in the 1830s (see next section). It was only from the early 18th century, with the emergence of greater nationalist sentiment, that national flags began to be designed and displayed in civilian contexts; indeed, only 20 countries in the world have flags predating the 18th century. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, most countries in Europe adopted a national flag, often based on medieval war standards; other countries in other continents tended to adopt or confirm a flag as they became independent.

9 Peltz, *My father’s flag*, p. 12.

While the original significance of such banners was a practical one – of organisation and protection – their principle psychological significance was – and is – one of identity. As such, flags are powerful symbols of nation and nationhood; and, for over 50 years, the study of history, symbolism and usages of flags, originally a branch or sub-discipline of heraldry, has warranted its own term: vexillology. Whereas battle standards and flags on vessels were and are means of communication, a national flag, according to Raymond Firth, ‘performs a symbolic function’ because it is a ‘condensation symbol’ and ‘a focus for sentiment about society’.¹⁰ As Malcolm Mulholland puts it:

There can be little doubt about the purpose of a national flag, which is to invoke a deep sense of belonging that facilitates an emotional connection between the country it represents and the person who is affiliated to that country.¹¹

That flags – civil, state, war or military, and ensigns (flags at sea) – are powerful symbols is evidenced by the amount of protocol concerning the definition, colours and display of flags, and, of course, the almost universal prohibition on burning the country’s national flag. Moreover, burning your enemy’s flag is the ultimate protest against a country’s government, policies and even its people.

Flags of Aotearoa New Zealand

The first flag of New Zealand – and, indeed, the first ‘flag debate’ – has its origins in the early 19th century when inter-hapū gatherings were convened in part to deal with the European world, including a number of lawless Pākehā. From about 1808 a new, additional form of united hapū authority came into be-

¹⁰ Raymond Firth, *Symbols*, Ithaca NY 1973, p. 365.

¹¹ Malcolm Mulholland, New Zealand Flag Facts, accessed August 18 2016, https://issuu.com/nzflagconsideration/docs/nz_flag_facts?e=23684794/33552205.

ing which was referred to as Te Whakaminenga o ngā Hapū o Nu Tirenī (the General Assembly of the Tribal Nations of New Zealand) (hereafter ‘Te Whakaminenga’), an Assembly that still meets from time to time. These meetings were an opportunity for rangatira (chiefs) to exercise what Gray Theodore referred to as ‘collective decision in communal governance’.¹² The history of Te Whakaminenga is well-documented in *Ngāpuhi Speaks*¹³ which includes reports of local and regional relationships, including with hapū in the South Island, and discussions informed also by overseas travel and the establishment of international relationships. According to one estimate, by 1840, 1,000 Ngāpuhi had travelled overseas to a total of 69 countries.¹⁴

In their international trading, Māori ships were reported to display their own distinctive flag of woven flax;¹⁵ there were, however, problems with the recognition of Māori-owned ships in international waters, a problem that came to a head when, in November 1830 on her first voyage to Australia, the *Sir George Murray* was seized in Port Murray due to her lack of registration. Understandably, this seizure concerned the northern rangatira who responded by working with officials in Sydney, the missionary Henry Williams and, later, the British Resident James Busby (who arrived in 1833), to select an appropriate flag. In 1831 two rangatira, Patuone and Taonui, who were part owners of the ship, went to Sydney to ask the authorities there to allow a flag

12 Gray Theodore, Evidence of Gray Theodore, June 17 2010, Wai 1040 #4.1.2, Transcripts Week 2, Wai 1040 – Paparahi o te Raki Hearing, 14th–18th June, Te Tī Marae, Waitangi, Aotearoa New Zealand.

13 Susan Healy, Ingrid Huygens & Takawai Murphy, *Ngāpuhi Speaks*, Whangarei 2012.

14 Nuki Aldridge, Supplementary presentation of evidence by Nuki Aldridge, Wai 1040, Doc#B10(e), Waitangi Tribunal, Wellington 2010.

15 Mereana Robinson, Mereana Robinson evidence, Wai 1040, Doc#4.1.3, Transcripts Week 3, Wai 1040 – Paparahi o te Raki Hearing, June 14-18 2010, Te Tī Marae, Waitangi 2010.

for the Māori.¹⁶ In his submission to the Paparahi o te Raki Hearing, Patu Hohepa clarified the following:

They [the authorities in Sydney] were so impressed with what went on there they sent a flag for Māori. It had a Union Jack and the words on it. Wiremu [Henry Williams] looked at it and said “No, it’s not quite right” So they gave three examples of the flags they had thought. They sent to Sydney and they made them up, sewed them up, and brought them back.¹⁷

In his evidence to the same hearing, Manuka Henare clarified the details of and process about the design:

The red of the cross, the Ngāpuhi knew well the Anglican flag of St George, but not being satisfied with that, they demanded and insisted that the flag have a lot more red, red being the colour of mana of the rangatira So the cross of St George was expanded and a lot more red put on this flag.¹⁸

Commenting on Henare’s account, Susan Healy, Ingrid Huygens and Takawai Murphy argued that ‘[it] shows that Wilkies worked on the design *in consultation with Ngāpuhi*’.¹⁹ Finally,

On the 20th March 1834 all the chiefs were gathered to make a decision as to which one was appropriate for them. Twenty five of them and their supporters ... and the missionaries and those who lived here and those Europeans that lived among Māori all gathered here and they agreed [to] that, the flag we call “The Flag of the Whakaminenga o ngā Hapū o Aotearoa”.²⁰ (see Figure 1)

16 Patu Hohepa, Patu Hohepa answers to questions, Wai 1040 #4.1.1, Transcripts Week 1, Wai 1040 – Paparahi o te Raki Hearing, May 14-18 2010, Te Tī Marae, Waitangi 2010. .

17 Ibid., p. 127.

18 Manuka Henare, Manuka Henare evidence, Wai 1040 Doc#4.1.2, Transcripts Week 2, Wai 1040 – Paparahi o te Raki Hearing, June 14-18 2010, Te Tī Marae, Waitangi 2010.

19 Healy, Huygens & Murphy, *Ngāpuhi Speaks*, 94 n⁴²⁰ (my emphasis).

20 Hohepa, Patu Hohepa answers to questions, p. 128.

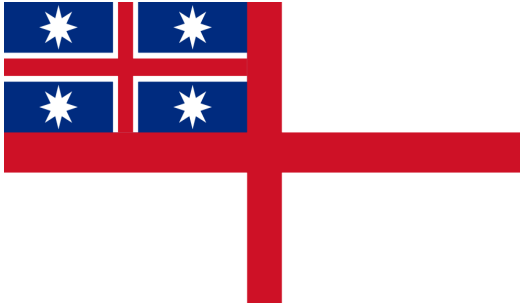


Figure 1. The flag of Te Whakaminenga o ngā Hapū o Nu Tirene (The United Tribes of New Zealand) (1834). Colours: blue, red, white.

While accounts of the history of this country's first flag written by Claudia Orange, Michael King and Michael Wright begin and end with Busby²¹ and NZ History represents this as being a Pākehā initiative decided by a vote organised by the missionary Henry Williams,²² *Ngāpuhi Speaks* presents this clearly as a Māori initiative, decided in consultation. In any case, the flag was hoisted alongside the Union Jack and honoured with a 21 gun salute; later gazetted in Sydney; and, as Orange noted, 'the [British] Admiralty directed its navy vessels to acknowledge the flag and respect the Maori registers'.²³

Eighteen months later, and after some 27 years of wānanga/discussion, the Te Whakaminenga confederation of hapū declared their collective sovereignty in the document *He Wakaputanga a te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni* (*The Declaration of Independence*) (hereafter '*He Wakaputanga*'). *He Wakaputanga* declared the independence of Nu Tirene (New Zealand):

21 Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, Auckland 2003; Claudia Orange, *The Treaty of Waitangi*, Wellington 1987; Michael Wright. Independence daze, *New Zealand Listener*, June 26 2010, pp. 28-31.

22 The Declaration of Independence, NZ History, accessed June 29 2015, net.nz/ media/interactive/the-declaration-of-independence.

23 Orange, *The Treaty of Waitangi*, p. 20.

which is hereby constituted to be an Independent State, under the designation of The United Tribes of New Zealand ... [and that] All sovereign power and authority within the territories of the United Tribes of New Zealand is hereby declared to reside entirely and exclusively in the hereditary chiefs and heads of tribes in their collective capacity.²⁴

The fourth article of the Declaration thanked His Majesty, the King of England (William IV), for his acknowledgement of Te Whakaminenga flag (which they had sent to him a year earlier). By 1839, a further 18 chiefs had signed the Declaration. While Māori did not need validation from Busby, I suggest that it is significant that he himself viewed this Te Whakaminenga flag as a significant mark of Māori identity – but also, and most importantly for British colonial interests, that it would prevent other countries from making formal alliances with Māori.

The tension represented in and between these two positions is important as it symbolises – and signifies – the beginning of two histories, or two interpretations of history, in and of this country. This became most apparent to me in reading the different accounts of the history of the Confederation of the United Tribes of New Zealand as represented by mainstream accounts of New Zealand history and that of Te Whakaminenga in *Ngāpuhi Speaks*.²⁵

Within nine months of the signing of *He Wakaputanga*, a Royal Navy officer, Captain William Hobson, visited New Zealand to investigate claims of lawlessness amongst the settlers. His report recommended that British sovereignty be established over New Zealand. Although historians differ as to the British

²⁴ The Declaration of Independence.

²⁵ Compare, for instance, Orange, *The Treaty of Waitangi*, and King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, with Margaret Mutu, The Humpty Dumpty principle at work, The Declaration of Independence, and He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o nga hapū o Nu Tireni, in Sabine Fenton, ed., *For Better or For Worse*, New York 2003, pp. 11-36.

intentions regarding the form of governance, on 15 June 1839 Letters Patent were issued by the British government to expand the territory of New South Wales to include the entire territory of New Zealand.²⁶ A treaty was quickly drafted (in four days) by Hobson, his secretary James Freeman, and Busby, none of whom were lawyers; translated overnight into te reo Māori by Williams and his son Edward Marsh Williams; and presented to a gathering of chiefs at Waitangi on 5 February 1840. Although Hobson had envisaged that more time would be needed for discussion, food was running out and some rangatira were preparing to leave, so, as 45 chiefs were ready or willing to sign the treaty, Hobson arranged for this to occur quickly, so much so that he signed it while still wearing his dressing gown! Three written articles of *Te Tiriti*, which was originally signed on 6 February 1840, acknowledge Māori kāwanatanga (governorship), and tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty), as well as the importance of օritetanga (equitable outcomes); and, an oral fourth article guaranteed wairuatanga (spiritual freedom). There were and, despite the principle of *contra preferentum*,²⁷ still are differences of opinion regarding the use of *Te Tiriti* (the original treaty that was signed by rangatira and Hobson and others) or *The Treaty* (the subsequent and mistranslated English language version). These differences have concerned the precise understanding that the original parties to *Te Tiriti* had of its articles and, most importantly, its intent; however, a recent judgement has confirmed that the rangatira who signed *Te Tiriti* did not cede sovereignty.²⁸ The fact that, through its representative, the British Crown

26 Claudia Orange. *The Story of a Treaty*, Wellington 1989; Claudia Orange, *An Illustrated History of the Treaty of Waitangi*, Wellington 1990; Paul Moon, *Te Ara Kī Te Tiriti*, Auckland 2002.

27 The principle by which the indigenous language version of a treaty takes precedence over that written in the language of the colonisers, a principle strengthened by the United Nations' *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. New York 2007.

28 The Treaty of Waitangi, Waitangi Tribunal, accessed September 24 2015, <http://www.justice.govt.nz/tribunals/waitangi-tribunal/treaty-of-waitangi> .

was signatory to *Te Tiriti* gives Māori a particular relationship to the Crown and, given that *Te Tiriti* guarantees certain rights and responsibilities, Māori have looked to the Crown both to honour *Te Tiriti* and to redress breaches of it. To date they have been sadly disappointed in both regards.

Following the signing of *Te Tiriti*, the Union Jack replaced the flag of Te Whakaminenga (the United Tribes) as the official flag of New Zealand – or, rather, and significantly, William Hobson, then the new Lieutenant-Governor, removed the flag from the Bay of Islands and Port Nicholson (Wellington). Given Busby's own acknowledgment of the significance of Te Whakaminenga, this can hardly be seen as anything other than a direct challenge to Māori tino rangatiratanga. The spirit and wording of *Te Tiriti*, at least in its indigenous version, would suggest that these two flags had equal status, as had been acknowledged a mere 11 months previously. In this context, Hobson's action in unilaterally replacing the flag of Te Whakaminenga with the Union Jack was an early breach of *Te Tiriti* by what was to prove to be an extremely perfidious Albion. This certainly was the view of Hōne Heke, the Ngāpuhi chief, who had supported and signed *Te Tiriti*, and who repeatedly felled his flagstaff at Kororāreka on which the Union Jack was repeatedly raised.

In a discussion of *Te Tiriti* as the Māori Magna Carta, a series of events marking the 800th anniversary of its original signing,²⁹ I heard a story from a Māori rangatira, which had been passed down through the generations, that *Te Tiriti* had been signed on a table covered by the Union Jack; in other words, it had been signed *on* the flag of the United Kingdom, the symbolism of which had not been lost on his ancestor. Malcolm Mulhol-

29 Lisa Chant, (Chair), Isaac Hikaka, Simon O'Connor & Carrie Wainwright. *The Māori Magna Carta – Waitangi and beyond*. Discussion at Magna Carta 800 July 7 2015, The University of Auckland, Auckland 2015.

land also reports this version as one of his ‘flag facts’.³⁰ While this appears unlikely from a practical point of view, as it is difficult to sign a document placed on cloth, the symbolism was – and is – real enough, as epitomised by Hobson’s subsequent actions.

The current New Zealand flag was adopted in 1902 (with the passage of the New Zealand Ensign Act), at the end of the South African War (or Second Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902), to which the New Zealand government, eager to demonstrate its commitment to the British Empire, had sent a total of 6,500 men as well as a number of women who volunteered and served as nurses and teachers (the latter a group of 20 who were referred to as the ‘Learned Eleventh’). The design of the flag comprises a royal blue background which derives from the ensign of the blue squadron of the British Royal navy; in the first quarter, the Union Jack, which recognises New Zealand’s historical origins as a British colony and dominion; and on the right half, the four stars which symbolise the country’s location in the South Pacific Ocean. Interestingly, this flag was disputed, including by the New Zealand Natives Association (NZNA), an organisation comprising second- and third-generation New Zealanders of British origin, whose own symbol was the silver fern leaf with the acronym NZNA on it. While the Southern Cross is a significant symbol of location – it appeared in 21 of the final ‘long list’ of 39 designs for the alternative flag leading up to the first referendum – it is not specific to this land. Moreover, the combination of the Union Jack with (and over) the Southern Cross is a potent reminder of the extent of the British Empire and British influence in New Zealand, and that, although the Head of State is, by title, the Queen of New Zealand, she is more associated with Britain and being British – and, indeed, would not currently qualify for New Zealand citizenship!

30 Mulholland, *New Zealand Flag Facts*.

The idea for a flag to reflect indigenous aspirations came from a trip that a group of Māori activists made to Australia in 1982 to support Aboriginal opposition to the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane. Members of the Māori group were impressed by the prominent display of the Aboriginal flag (Figure 2). Designed in 1971 by Aboriginal artist Harold Thomas, who is descended from the Luritja people of central Australia, the black field represents the Aboriginal people of Australia, the yellow circle the Sun, the giver of life and protector, and the red field the earth and Aboriginal people's spiritual relation to the land.

In 1989, in anticipation of the sesquicentenary of the signing of *Te Tiriti*, the New Zealand government allocated funding to the commemoration. In response to this, Te Kawariki, an organisation based in the Far North, came up with the idea of running a competition for a national Māori flag. Eventually Te Kawariki approached a collective of Māori women artists and Linda Munn, Hiraina Marsden and Jan Dobson Smith came up with the winning design (Figure 3) which is referred to as the Tino Rangatiratanga flag. The black field represents Te Korekore, the realm of potential being, the long darkness from whence the world emerged, the heavens, and the male element. The koru, the curling frond shape, represents the unfolding of new life, rebirth and continuity, and offers the promise of renewal and hope for the future, in which the white colour represents Te Ao Marama, the realm of being and light, and the physical world, symbolising purity, harmony, enlightenment and balance. The red field represents Te Whai Ao, the realm of coming into being, active, flashing, southern, falling, emergence, earth, land, forest, and gestation, the female element and, specifically, Papatuanuku, the Earth Mother, the sustainer of all living things.³¹

³¹ The National Māori Flag, NZ History, accessed June 29 2015, <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/national-maori-flag>.



Figure 2. The Australian Aboriginal flag (1971). Colours: black, yellow and red.



Figure 3. The Tino Rangatiratanga flag (1990). Colours: black, white and red.

In January 2009, the Hon. Pita Sharples, then Minister of Māori Affairs, called for a Māori flag to be flown from Auckland Harbour Bridge on Waitangi Day. The Rt. Hon. John Key, as prime minister, responded by saying that he would support two flags flying if agreement could be reached on a preferred Māori flag. Following hui in July and August of that year at which four flags were considered – the New Zealand flag, the New Zealand Red Ensign (which is the same as the New Zealand flag, but with a red background), Te Whakaminenga (the United Tribes) flag (Figure 1), and the Tino Rangatiratanga flag (Figure 3) – the Tino Rangatiratanga flag was chosen for the task. The choice

was subsequently recognised by Cabinet on 14 December 2009. The principles for flying this flag have since been published by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage.³² The New Zealand Red Ensign was chosen as the other flag to be flown. It has a particular history which bears upon that choice.³³ Since the time of Governor George Grey (whose governorship was from 1845 to 1853), this flag has been given to Māori upon the opening of a new marae, a practice which is enshrined in legislation under the *Flags, Emblems, and Names Protection Act 1981*. According to the Under-Secretary of the Department of Maori Affairs (1950), this is unique to Māori, a fact which represents another layer in the complex political relationship between Māori and the Crown.³⁴

The design and the symbolism of the Tino Rangatiratanga flag marks a significant shift from those that represent and reflect an external (overseas) and imposed authority. Rather, it represents and reflects self-determination, and, thus, in effect, a movement from the monarchy to the people. Despite the richness of this symbolism, only three flags of the recent long list comprised only these three colours: one, ‘Black Jack’ by Mike Davison, which played with the symbol of the Union Jack by incorporating the koru; and two of Kyle Lockwood’s Silver Fern designs. With 17 of the 39 flag designs of the long list and two of the final four designs containing royal (as distinct from Pacific) blue, it’s as if neither designers nor the Flag Consideration Panel could let go of the symbolism of and association with the British monarchy. This is, however, complicated by the fact that, for

32 The National Māori flag, Ministry of Culture and Heritage | Manatū Taonga, accessed September 29 2015, <http://www.mch.govt.nz/nz-identity-heritage/flags/national-m%C4%81ori-flag>.

33 See *Flags of New Zealand*, New Zealand History, accessed August 23 2016, <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/politics/flags-of-new-zealand/other-official-flags>.

34 Under-Secretary of Department of Maori Affairs, 6/12/1950, in IA1 Box 1839 81/1, Part 2, National Archives of New Zealand, Wellington.

many Māori in this country, the Union Jack represents the British Crown as a signatory on and to Te Tiriti; as Malcolm Mulholland has pointed out, Māori have been debating their ‘allegiance’ to – or relationship with – the Crown since 1857.³⁵

Over the past few decades there have been numerous calls for a new flag to be adopted in New Zealand, and in October 2014, John Key, the recently re-elected prime minister, announced a two-stage referendum on the issue: the first to choose a preferred option from those selected by a cross-party parliamentary committee; the second to decide between this preferred option and the current New Zealand flag.

Neither the flag of Te Whakaminenga or the Tino Rangatiratanga flag were put forward for consideration as the New Zealand national flag. Malcolm Mulholland, a member of the Flag Consideration Panel has said that this was at the request of Māori:

As part of engaging with the community, the Flag Consideration Panel undertook a number of roadshow and hui throughout the country. For the hui held at Waitangi, many of the speakers said that they did not want the United Tribes or Te Whakaminenga flag considered, as it was a symbol of their sovereignty and it did not belong to the country as a whole.

A similar response was garnered when we met with the whanau of Te Kawariki that included Hone and Hilda Harawira and the last surviving member of the three wahine who designed the flag, Linda Munn. The flag was designed to represent Maori and had gone through a process whereby it was agreed that the flag does represent Maori; a wish that those who participated in the hui at Whangarei expressed strongly.³⁶

Clearly, it would be for Māori to decide whether either the flag of Te Whakaminenga or the Tino Rangatiratangi flag would ever

35 Mulholland, *New Zealand Flag Facts*.

36 Malcolm Mulholland, personal communication, August 18 2016.

be considered as the national emblem, but, if they did so, some, including the present author, would favour either of these as a symbol and a clear sign of our bicultural history, present, and future.³⁷

Before discussing the flag debate itself, I want to acknowledge that there have been other Māori flags associated with places, such as the Gate Pā flag; movements, such as the Kīngitanga and Kotahitanga movements; and particular leaders such as Potatau te Wherowhero, the first Māori King; Te Kooti, the Ringatū leader and prophet (see Figure 4); and Rua Kenana, the spiritual heir to the Ringatū faith.³⁸ Figure 4 shows a pen and ink drawing by Gilbert Mair of Te Kooti's triangular pennant Te Wepu (the Whip). This was originally made for Ngāti Kahungunu by nuns at the Greenmeadows Missionary School in Hawke's Bay, and captured in 1868 by Te Kooti, who subsequently used it as his personal battle flag. Another version of this flag was captured in 1869 by government forces during the battle of Te Pōrere, near Tūrangi, and given to the colonial museum (the predecessor of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa) in 1870.

According to the online *Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, the symbols of Te Wepu represent the following: the crescent moon, a new world; the red cross, the fighting cross of the Archangel Michael; the mountain, New Zealand; and the bleeding heart, the suffering of the Māori people.³⁹ Given that none of the symbols of these Māori flags, or of Te Whakaminenga, or the Tino Rangatiratanga flag, appear on the current New Zealand flag, or appeared

37 See Chris Trotter, Why the tino rangatiratanga flag should be our national choice, accessed April 23 2016, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/71655482/why-the-tino-rangatiratanga-flag-should-be-our-national-choice>.

38 For further details, see https://flagspot.net/flags/nz_maohi.html#pers. See also Wystan Curnow & Leigh Davis, eds., *Te Tangi a te Matuhi*, Auckland 1999. See also Mulholland, *New Zealand Flag Facts*.

39 Nick Tūpara, Te Kooti's flag, in *Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, accessed August 17 2016 <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/artwork/4228/te-kootis-flag>.

on any of the short-listed alternatives, this raises the question of whether a national flag can represent the ‘suffering’ of its people or a reference to a conflicted or colonial past. In this sense, while a flag is a sign of what is known, it may also be a symbol of what is unknown, i.e., what is missing or has, in effect, been erased. This represents both a ‘gesture of exclusion’ and ‘grand erasure’, two ‘textual moves’, which Raewyn Connell identifies as characteristic of the Northernness of what is presented as general theory,⁴⁰ and which, with regard to the flag debate, contributes to an understanding of how the debate was depoliticised.

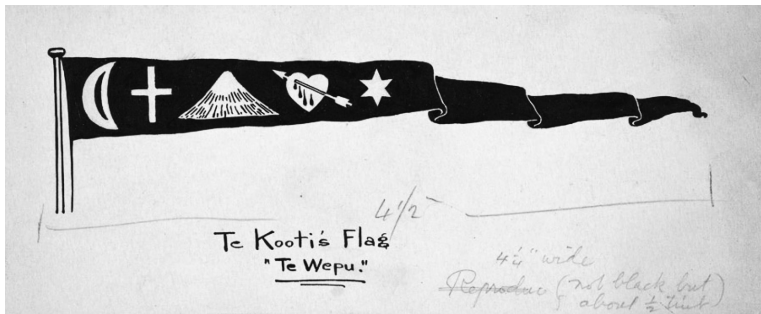


Figure 4. Te Wepu (1860s)

The Flag Debate: Process, Psychology, and Politics

Debates about the current New Zealand flag are not new: Malcolm Mulholland dates these back to 1897.⁴¹ Criticism of the recent New Zealand flag debate focused on a range of issues: its terms of reference; the structure of the two-part referendum; the composition of the Flag Consideration Panel, its processes and its choices (from 10,292 submissions to a long list of 40, to a

40 Raewyn Connell, *Southern Theory*, Cambridge 2008.

41 Mulholland, *New Zealand Flag Facts*.

short-list of four); the cost (estimated at \$26 million); the process whereby a fifth flag ('Red Peak' by Aaron Dustin) was added to the final four (at a further cost of \$380,000); and, at one stage, the prospect of a third pre-referendum about the form and wording of the two-part referendum!

The principal arguments for change were: that the current national flag does not adequately represent Aotearoa New Zealand's current status as an independent sovereign nation; that it ignores Māori as *tangata whenua*; that it acknowledges only those New Zealanders of British heritage; and that it is too similar to the current Australian flag with which it is often confused. These arguments support and are supported by a psychology that embraces change; biculturalism and multi-ethnicity; and distinctiveness; in other words: independence with connection, the latter reflecting what Angyal (1941) described as the human trends to autonomy *and* homonymy or belonging.⁴²

The principal arguments for retaining the current flag were: that it represents the country's history, and, specifically, its past and present links with the United Kingdom;⁴³ and that generations of New Zealanders have fought and died under the current flag. These arguments support and are supported by a psychology concerned with continuity, familiarity, and conservatism (in the literal meaning of the word).

There are, of course, counter-arguments and rebuttals, not least, that when people refer to the 'history' of the nation, they are often referring to only part of this country's history and that only since 1840; and that, as Rhys Jones, former chief of the New Zealand Defence Force, noted, the flag has already been

42 Andreas Angyal, *Foundations for a Science of Personality*, New York 1941.

43 I find this particular argument both partial and somewhat ironic as I do not hear those people who make it, and especially those of British descent, being critical of the Union Jack for its lack of reference to Britain's Celtic, Roman, Scandinavian or French heritage!

changed during New Zealand's recent history.⁴⁴ There is also a certain ignorance about history, for instance, when ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand) troops fought at Gallipoli in 1915, they did so under the Union Jack, not the Australian or New Zealand flags.

In the end, the first referendum on the New Zealand flag, which took place in December 2015, asked the question: 'If the New Zealand flag changes, which flag would you prefer?' The turnout was 48.78% of those eligible to vote; the result, which was announced by the Electoral Commission on 15 December, was that the most preferred alternative flag design was the Silver Fern (the Black, White and Blue version), designed by Kyle Lockwood (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The preferred Silver Fern alternative flag (2015). Colours: black, royal blue, white and red.

The second referendum, which took place in March this year, asked the question 'What is your choice for the New Zealand flag?' Based on an increased voter turnout of 67.8%, the result, which was announced by the Electoral Commission on 30 March, was: 43.2% in favour of the Silver Fern and 56.6% in favour of the current New Zealand flag.

44 Flag Consideration Panel, Flag Consideration Panel Answers the Six Top Questions, accessed September 27 2015, <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO1506/S00066/flag-consideration-panel-answers-the-six-top-questions.htm>

The significance for this discussion of the runner-up lies with the sign-like qualities of the silver fern, which it depicts. The silver tree fern (*Cyathea dealbata*) or kaponga is a species of medium-sized tree fern that is endemic to Aotearoa New Zealand; its leaves are dark green on the upper side and silver underneath. It is commonly associated with this country, most notably through the national rugby team, the All Blacks, whose official shirt (since 1903) has sported the silver fern. It is a quasi-national emblem: it was first worn by New Zealand troops in 1853, and is the symbol on New Zealand Commonwealth war graves; it appears in the coat of arms of New Zealand in which, since 1956, the compartment comprises two ferns (in green); together with the kiwi bird, four ferns adorn the reverse of the one dollar coin (introduced in 1991); and, since 2009 the silver fern has appeared on the cover of the New Zealand passport.⁴⁵

The stylised version of the silver fern was prime minister John Key's preference for the new national flag, and it is perhaps no accident that three of the final four (or five) designs for the new flag comprised variations of the silver fern. These stylised versions, however, reflect more of a motif than a standard, more of a brand than a banner (as epitomised in Figure 6), and, indeed, given John Key's personal support for the fern, a number of commentators referred to the flag referendum as more about 'Brand Key'.



Figure 6. Brand New Zealand. Colours: black and white.

⁴⁵ For further discussion of the symbolism of the silver fern, see Mulholland, *New Zealand Flag Facts*.

In this sense, I suggest that the flag debate has been more about the logo of ‘brand New Zealand’, and not about the flag as an important and powerful symbol and/or sign that represents the political structure or aspirations of the country – which is still a constitutional monarchy.

The Flags and the Debate: Depoliticised and Regressive

From a psychopolitical and a Left perspective, there were two problems with the New Zealand flag debate: it was depoliticised and, thereby, became a question of personal choice; and it was regressive, as a consequence of which, it has put back progressive discussion of the New Zealand constitution.

It was personal, not political

There was very little discussion linking the flag to the present or possible future, let alone any counterfuture, constitution of the country. Indeed, politicians were at pains to depoliticise the debate. One commentator put this clearly: ‘the flag debate is only political in a peripheral sense.... It is primarily a cultural issue’.⁴⁶ This represented what Mathew Flinders and Matt Wood have referred to as ‘societal depoliticisation’, that is, a shift from the public to the private sphere.⁴⁷ In effect, this is a privatisation of what is or should be a public and political issue. I suggest that the concept of depoliticisation is a useful one with which to think about the flag debate as it refers to and describes a narrowing of the boundaries of democratic politics such that choice about,

⁴⁶ David Squire, NZ flag debate is a ‘Cultural Issue, Not Political’, accessed September 29 2015, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff-nation/assignments/what-should-be-on-nzs-flag/11773355/NZ-flag-debate-is-cultural-issue-not-political>.

⁴⁷ Matthew Flinders & Matt Wood, Depoliticisation, governance and the state, *Policy & Politics*, 42/2 2014, pp. 135-149.

agency in, and the outcome of issues of social/political concern are constrained and compromised – all of which occurred in the process of the debate.

Taking Colin Hay's conceptual work as a starting point,⁴⁸ Flinders and Wood mapped three forms of depoliticisation:

- i. Governmental depoliticisation, which represents a shift from the governmental to the societal sphere – an example of which, with regard to the flag debate, was the establishment and the work of the Flag Consideration Panel.
- ii. Societal depoliticisation, as described above – an example of which was the efforts made by politicians not to make this a party political issue and, in effect, a personal, 'conscience vote'.
- iii. Discursive depoliticisation, which represents a final shift from the private sphere to what Flinders and Wood refer to as the 'realm of necessity', that is, a kind of normalisation of political issues, such that they become or are perceived to be matters of necessity, nature or fate – examples of which with regard to the flag debate were the two lines of argument that as New Zealand is inevitably linked to its colonial past, its flag should acknowledge that by retaining the Union Jack; and, conversely, that, as at some point in the future the country will have an elected head of state, its flag should reflect that sense of independence.

While the debate was 'cultural' in the broad sense of the word, often framed in terms of what it means to be Kiwi, it was not cultural in the sense of engaging with what it means to be a bi-cultural nation and a multi-ethnic society and which flag – or flags – might best represent that. Of course, arguably, a bi-cultural nation could – or should – have two flags. In this sense, the

48 Colin Hay, *Why We Hate Politics*, London 2006.

‘flag debate’ has reflected consumerism rather than citizenship, a contrast well examined by Klein in her book *No Logo*.⁴⁹ In other words, while there has been a product (the different designs), and a method (the process determined by the government and held by the Flag Consideration Panel), there has been no methodology (i.e., any clarity regarding the philosophical or political assumptions underlying or informing the debate).

In some ways, it was strange to see politicians arguing that this debate was not political. What they meant was that it was not – or, rather, that they did not want it to be – conducted along party political lines. This was entirely pragmatic as both proponents and opponents of the change of flag needed to garner votes from across the political spectrum. However, the fact that the debate was conducted within one electoral cycle meant that it was always more likely to be viewed and conducted along party political lines. Also, as John Key was so personally associated with one option, the vote also became a vehicle to express satisfaction or dissatisfaction with him and, more broadly, with the National Party. Indeed, a number of commentators suggested that this was the driving factor in both the Labour Party and the Green Party opposing the referendum, which, from a principled, political perspective, they might have supported. Some suggested that if the debate had been conducted over two electoral cycles, ‘it may have had better buy-in from parties of the left’,⁵⁰ but, perhaps more broadly, there would have been more chance of it involving genuine, political debate about what the – or a – national flag represents, and of entailing a debate about the constitution.⁵¹ As a result, the debate became more about a plethora

49 Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, Toronto 1999.

50 Audrey Young, Lessons to Learn From Flag Vote, *New Zealand Herald*, March 26 2016.

51 For an example of which, see Grant Robertson, New Zealand Flag referendums Bill – Third reading, [Speech], accessed April 21 2016, http://www.parliament.nz/en-nz/pb/debates/debates/speeches/51HansS_20150813_00001140/robertson-grant-new-

of personal motivations and preferences than about the politics, let alone the psychology, of what the flag symbolised and/or signified.

There is, moreover, a more insidious aspect of these politics becoming personalised, and specifically on Key. Oliver Jutel has described Key's function as being an agency of desire. As he puts it: 'Key has served as a model of the good life while transcending stagnant historical-political battle lines and offering a new nationalism of corporate spectacle and self-confidence'.⁵² Key's politics of enjoyment are seductive: they invite us to enjoy through him (for instance, his relationship with All Blacks captain, Ritchie McCaw),⁵³ and to strive for this enjoyment in our own lives. Key is, Jutel wrote: 'the agent of "yes, you can!"' In this sense, the idea that we could choose our own destiny by the choice of a new flag debate represented a 'libidinal investment' in independence – though, in reality, as this was not linked to any political discussion about independence, it was a *faux* independence.

It was regressive, not progressive

Some have suggested that the nature of the debate and the relative closeness of the result has created a momentum and that the factors driving change or the desire for change will only increase,⁵⁴ including the debate about republicanism. Indeed, some republicans, notably Lewis Holden, supported the alternative flag. Others, however, including the present author, viewed the depoliticalised flag debate as a distraction, and the prospect

zealand-flag-referendums-bill-%E2%80%94-third.

52 Oliver Jutel, The political logic of desire, *Overland*, 223 2016.

53 Ritchie McCaw retired in 2015, following the All Blacks' victory in the Rugby World Cup.

54 Lewis Holden, Opinion: The flag debate – it's only just begun, *New Zealand Herald*, March 25 2016, accessed April 20 2016, <http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/299907/this-flag-debate-has-only-just-begun>.

of an alternative flag as both regressive moves that take us further away from a political debate. Such debate could occur as part of a general election or a referendum, about a political decision about the political constitution of the country.⁵⁵ The American psychiatrist and family systems therapist Murray Bowen developed the concept of ‘societal regression’ to describe a gradual erosion of functioning at a societal level, evidenced by, amongst other things, emotionally-driven decisions that are inadequately supported.⁵⁶ I suggest that the flag debate was an example of such regression, precisely because it was depoliticised, and, as a result, people’s individual decisions were based more on their emotional responses to the flag, the nation, the troops, Britain, John Key, politicians in general, feeling alienation, powerless, etc., than on a political analysis.

The possible role of ‘societal regression’ is reflected in the criteria used by the Flag Consideration Panel when selecting its long list from the 10,000 submissions it received. According to John Burrows, the chair of the panel, in reviewing these submissions, the panel was guided by the view that ‘a potential new flag should unmistakably be from New Zealand and celebrate us as a progressive, inclusive nation that is connected to its environment, and has a sense of its past and vision for its future’.⁵⁷ What is striking is that none of these aspirational descriptors or qualities were subject to any political analysis or discussion during

55 He Whaakaro Here Whakaumu Mo Aotearoa, Matike Mai Aotearoa, accessed April 24 2016, <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/MatikeMaiAotearoaReport.pdf>; Focusing on the Things That Matter, New Zealand Republic, accessed April 20 2016, <http://www.republic.org.nz/latestblog/>.

56 See Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, New York 1978; Patricia A. Comella, Bowen’s concept of societal emotional process, New England Seminar on Bowen Theory, Conference on Emotional Process in Society, Wooster, April 2009; see also Keith Tudor, There ain’t no license that protects, *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 41 2011, pp. 154–61.

57 Quoted on <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/70996308/a-list-of-40-possible-alternative-flags-chosen-from-10000>; see also Mulholland, New Zealand Flag Facts.

the flag debate but, rather, were simply asserted and, thereby, remained personal. Several points can be drawn from this:

- That Aotearoa New Zealand is a ‘progressive’ nation implies that it is not a regressive or repressive one, or, presumably, a neo-liberal one.
- For New Zealand to be an ‘inclusive’ nation would require a political discussion about Māori sovereignty, and of the limits to our inclusiveness, for example, in accepting immigrants who are ignorant or dismissive of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
- The claim that the *nation* is ‘connected to its environment’ is a particular – and particularly significant – way of expressing this relationship, as ‘the nation’ was imposed on this environment (land) and its indigenous people; and, as a concept, is at odds with the more personal relationship with land and place as, for example, is expressed in the word and concept *turangawaewae*.
- That the nation has ‘a sense of its past’ implies that it has and/or we have an agreed view of the history of this country, and doesn’t acknowledge that history is disputed.
- That the nation has ‘a vision of its future’ is, similarly, problematic, especially as no such vision was discussed during the flag debate.

Changing the flag without a discussion of the political system it represents, without reference to the land and people on which that system has been imposed, and without any real discussion about the nation’s past or future, would simply have been a form of window-dressing. From this perspective, having an alternative flag in the current constitutional context not only represents a reformist agenda, but also would have been a regressive move. I suspect that this was why many on the Left, both inside and

outside parliament, and some of the Māori Left, campaigned for the existing flag, despite its associations with colonisation and British tyranny.

The Point is to Change It

Karl Marx famously wrote, in his Eleven Theses on Feuerbach, that ‘The philosophers have only interpreted the world ... the point is to change it’. While psychoanalysts have offered interpretations to their patients or clients, including about their relationships with the world, traditionally, they have not themselves focused on changing the world. Moreover, the ‘psy’ professions, especially those in the Western tradition, are open to the accusation that by focusing on insight and self-awareness, they are encouraging individuals to be(come) more individualistic. At the same time, from the early days of psychotherapy, there have been a number of Marxists, socialists and radicals committed to helping clients *and* changing the world. Perhaps not surprisingly, some practitioners in this tradition, who specifically identified as radical psychiatrists and radical therapists,⁵⁸ drew directly on Marx’s theory of alienation, expressing it in the following formula: Alienation = Oppression + Mystification + Isolation. Such a formula enabled therapy to be viewed as a form of liberation, which could be expressed as: Liberation = Awareness + Contact + Action.⁵⁹

58 See Paul Robertson, *The Freudian Left: Wilhelm Reich, Geza Roheim and Herbert Marcuse*, Ithaca 1990. See also Keith Tudor & Karen Begg, Radical therapy, *The Journal of Critical Psychology, Counselling and Psychotherapy*, 2016, pp 1–13.

59 The Radical Therapy Collective, *The Radical Therapist*, New York 1971; The Rough Times Staff, *Rough Times*, New York 1973; Claude Steiner, Hogue Wyckoff, Daniel Golstine, Peter Lariviere, Robert Schwebel, Joy Marcus, & Members of the Radical Psychiatry Center, *Readings in Radical Psychiatry*, New York 1975. Hogue Wyckoff, ed, *Love, Therapy and Politics*, New York 1976; Beth Roy & Claude Steiner, eds., *Radical Psychiatry: The Second Decade*, Privately published manuscript 1988, available from Beth Roy, 270 Prospect Street, San Francisco, CA 94110.

In terms of the psychopolitics of this article, it is my contention that, the flag debate was a depoliticised (at both governmental and societal levels), alienated and alienating process. It was thus by virtue of three interconnecting dynamics:

- i. That the power to make decisions about the selection of flags was placed in the hands of very few (a form of oppression).
- ii. That the process was unclear, and complicated by the fact that, at the last minute, ‘the public’ appeared to have had some power to include a fifth design (a kind of mystification).
- iii. That the lack of a genuine political debate or mass action left people on their own (in isolation).

The point of this analysis, however, is not simply to offer some insight into psychopolitical dynamics and processes. It is to raise awareness of the point that people make contact with each other and with organisations such as the the Independent Working Group on Constitutional Transformation.⁶⁰

Conclusion

Psychology, psychotherapy and the ‘psy’ disciplines are, among other things, concerned with meaning, and the meaning we make of meaning. Symbols are powerful objects that convey complex and multiple meanings. Given the significance of the national flag as both a symbol and a sign, it seems important to debate any proposed change to this in Aotearoa New Zealand with regard to biculturalism; ideas of nation and nationhood; politics, including the constitution; as well as the psychosocial implications of all of these. The recent flag debate did not do any of this,

60 Matike Mai Aotearoa, He Whaakaro Here Whakaumu Mo Aotearoa.

settling instead for generalised and depoliticised assertions of what it means to be ‘Kiwi’, and with very little reference to iwi. If we can take anything from this expensive mistake, I would hope it would be that the next debate about the flag should be based on and in a political debate about the constitution of our country, based on relations between tangata whenua and non-Māori (Pākehā and tauiwi), which a new flag would then represent. In this way, both our history and our counterfuture might be written by the participants.

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