

*Among Friends? On the dynamics of Māori-Pākehā relationships in Aotearoa New Zealand*

Agnes Brandt

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Reviewed by Avril Bell

This book is a great reminder of how much excellent research is carried out in the course of doctoral theses. In terms of social research into aspects of New Zealand society, it is a pity that more theses don't make their way into book form. The rich and fascinating empirical research reported here is also a reminder of the importance and power of outsider research, as it is highly doubtful a Pākehā or Māori researcher would have elicited the same insights on this topic of Māori and Pākehā friendship worlds. I recommend this book as a valuable source of empirical case studies in cross-cultural friendship, and to anyone interested in Māori-Pākehā relationships in particular.

Brandt is German and came to New Zealand originally as an international student, returning six years later to undertake the ethnographic fieldwork for this anthropological exploration of cross-cultural friendships. She immersed herself in the field, living with families and in flats in various locations both rural and urban (Auckland and Wellington). She had existing contacts from her previous visit and enrolled in *reo Māori* classes and participated in the life of the campus at Te Ara Poutama, Auckland University of Technology. Brandt also regularly attended meetings of a Treaty claims committee and went to a range of *hui* including a claim settlement *hui*. She went to parties, pubs, meetings and funerals, attended classes, did *kapa haka* and generally participated in the life of the communities she lived within and visited (104-6). Some of her participants were close friends, others she only met once or twice. She took fieldnotes, interviewed participants two or three times where possible, and asked her interviewees to complete relationship charts, which mapped their friendships using a series of concentric circles with the 'I' in the centre. She also recorded interviews with 80 people from diverse cultural, ethnic and social class backgrounds and sexual orientations and ages, but ultimately the complexity of dealing with this number and diversity of participants led her to focus her analysis on the 58 who identified as Māori and/or Pākehā.

Brandt develops the concept of 'friendship worlds' to explore the differences between Māori and Pākehā conceptions and practices of friendship. This concept is based on Holland, Skinner, Lachiotte and Cain's (1998) notion of 'figured worlds', a 'figured world' being a 'socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others' (Holland et al, 1998: 52, quoted in Brandt, 49, also see 50-2). This theorisation is not a strength of the book and there seems to be some slippage between the argument that individuals' internalised figured worlds are significant in shaping their friendship experience (57) and the idea that friendship worlds are themselves figured worlds. Ultimately though the data and analysis are key here, and in Brandt's analysis the concept of friendship worlds is mapped on to the distinctions made by her participants about the existence of, and differences between, *te ao Māori* and *te ao Pākehā* and to locate the friendship worlds of participants as either straddling, or located within, one or the other of these worlds.

The analysis is a complex one and a real strength of the book is that Brandt works hard to not oversimplify that complexity while also offering some broad conclusions about Māori and Pākehā relationships based on her research. Her data points to a lot of overlap between friendship conceptions; for both Māori and Pākehā friendship is a voluntary relationship based on mutual trust, support and reciprocity. At the same time, friendship within the Māori friendship world is conceptualised more in collectivist, whanau-centred terms and the one piece of quantitative data Brandt provides illustrates this difference – in their relationship charts some

of her Māori participants were the only ones to produce charts that described friendship relations solely in terms of groups, rather than individuals (143).

The empirical data is analysed in two lengthy chapters, one on 'Pākehā worlds', the other on 'Māori worlds'. In each Brandt organises the discussion around specific individuals whose friendship experiences exemplify a particular location on the continuum from solely Pākehā friendship circles to various forms of cross-cultural engagement – cross-cultural friendships where *te ao Māori* doesn't figure, friendships where it does, and so on. And yes, solely Pākehā friendships appear even in the Māori chapter. This is the story of Rua who, in common with some other Māori participants, was socialised in a largely Pākehā environment – the influence of school experiences is a powerful one in this regard, with the impact of academic streaming mentioned a number of times. While a number of other Māori in the book set out consciously to connect with *te ao Māori* as adults – and again education, this time university, is hugely significant – Rua is a reserved person and also feels he doesn't fit the image of what a Māori person is (supposed to be) like. He likes rock music rather than R& B and hip hop, for instance (193-7), so his connections with *te ao Māori* beyond his whanau are limited and sometimes experienced as uncomfortable. One of the key findings of Brandt's research is that opportunity is a powerful factor in determining friendship circles – Rua, and many Pākehā, have not had the opportunity to form close, friendship bonds within *te ao Māori*.

The issue of lack of opportunity to connect with *te ao Māori* points directly to the ongoing impact of colonialism, which means that the Māori world is restricted to specific spaces while everywhere else is *te ao Pākehā*. This division is sharply intercut with socio-economic, or class differences also, again separating largely working-class Māori from the experience of many Pākehā. Despite the high level of contact that many Māori and Pākehā experience in their daily lives, the opportunities for Pākehā to cross over into *te ao Māori* are limited for many (and again, socialisation, opportunity and personality play important roles as they do for Rua). So, while Māori are perforce bicultural, Brandt's data points in many instances to the ways in which Pākehā are not – and to the complexity of the reasons for this.

As well as lack of opportunity, Brandt offers further insights into a range of factors that work to keep Pākehā at arms length from the Māori world – factors at work on both sides of the relationship. She talks about the discomfort Pākehā experience in unfamiliar Māori contexts where they don't know how to behave or what is expected of them (161-2), and feelings of shame about their ignorance of Māori culture, which they feel they should know about as New Zealanders (163). From the Māori side of the relationship, a number of participants expressed ambivalence or suspicion at Pākehā desires for engagement with *te ao Māori*. Tino, for example, suggested that learning *te reo Māori* and/or supporting Māori politically is 'like the new hippie kind of thing almost, the new kind of activist thing' (190). Others didn't have Pākehā friends because their professional and personal focus was Māori-centred, and some expressed wariness about the idea of having Pākehā as friends because of the possibilities for conflict and disappointment based on differences in values and Pākehā lack of understanding of Māori (205-6). For those who did have Pākehā friends, a number reported keeping quiet and letting it slide when their Pākehā friends said something ignorant and/or offensive (191, 207, 237-9). In the interests of friendship, these offences are ignored. Interestingly also, this means that Māori are repeatedly exposed to the differences between themselves and Pākehā, while Pākehā are not, and are in some way 'protected' from that knowledge (246). So, while there is also evidence of desire from both sides for Pākehā to engage more, there are also countervailing forces that can make that difficult.

For all these barriers to cross-cultural friendships, there are also many examples of just that in the book. There are Pākehā such as Jonathan, whose interests in sports drew him into relationships with Māori from an early age (171-3), and Julie, who, still a teenager, is growing up in an urban milieu in which cross-cultural friendships are normal (177-80). There are also

Pākehā like Liz (162-5) and Sarah (174-7) who have deliberately sought connections with *te ao Māori* as young adults. On the Māori side, shared interests draw Tino (189-92) and Miriama (207-12) into Pākehā friendship worlds. Others such as Hemi and Rangi have a Pākehā best friend, in Rangi's case someone comfortable in the Māori world, while Hemi's Pākehā friend has highly divergent political views from his own, but their long-standing friendship overrides these differences and allows them to joke in politically incorrect ways about each other's culture (249-50).

Brandt's data also points to changes over time. For some of the older Māori she spoke to in particular, the assimilationist policies of their childhood have meant they don't feel easily at home in *te ao Māori*. On the other side, for many young Māori and Pākehā who grew up in the era of the Māori renaissance and state biculturalism, cultural difference and moving between and combining friendship worlds is taken for granted (251).

Throughout these narratives of friendship, the boundaries between Māori and Pākehā are at times barriers and at others not, sometimes insisted upon and in other instances denied. We see, as argued by du Plessis and Alice, that both 'connections and differences are "crafted" – are the outcome of intellectual and political effort' (1998: xvi, quoted in Brandt, 242). Brandt notes the political importance for Māori of maintaining a sense of cultural difference (256), while in some instances Pākehā who 'get it' are incorporated into *te ao Māori* as 'culturally Māori' (217), or adopted into the whanau (236).

Overall, both Māori and Pākehā in this research explain their friendship choices in terms of homophily – on what they share in common, even when from different ethnic backgrounds. Thus cultural difference is downplayed as a factor in friendship choices (126-7). Arguably, it is the colonial power relationship and the resulting Pākehā social dominance, rather than cultural difference per se, that is the most important barrier to Māori-Pākehā friendships.