

*Recalling Aotearoa. Indigenous Politics  
and Ethnic Relations in New Zealand.*

*Reviewed by Simone Drichel.*

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Edited by Augie Fleras and Paul Spoonley.

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"Ignorance, that's what's shameful", Alan Duff – in typically gruff manner – pointed out earlier in the year in one of his syndicated columns (*Evening Post*, 8 February 2000, 4). (In)famous for his slanted socio-political commentary, novelist and self-styled 'consciousness of the nation' Duff associates (Maori) ignorance above all with their "not being a reading culture, since everything stays static, unchanged, unanalysed in an unwritten culture." Yet when he promotes the benefits of reading, I imagine Duff would have quite a different type of book in mind from the one that is brought into focus in this review; in fact, I believe he would most likely prefer ignorance over the type of enlightenment that *Recalling Aotearoa* offers the reading public – which says as much about Alan Duff as it does about Fleras and Spoonley's ideological positioning and the politics underlying their recent publication.

This latest offering by two of the country's foremost sociologists will not go down well with those who love Alan Duff and whom he loves in return, those "good people praising the Books In Homes programme and telling [him] they agre[e] with virtually every word [he writes]". Instead, it will be much appreciated by those who, according to Duff, "have never been true New Zealanders" because they are part of the rather eclectic bunch of "[a]cademics, protesters, radicals and losers" that Duff so loves to hate. As a non-New Zealander and an academic, I qualify doubly for inclusion in this colourful group and yes, I do admit to liking Fleras and Spoonley's ambitious contribution to the discussion of contemporary cultural politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand and I hope it will attract a wide readership.

*Recalling Aotearoa* is part of a general wave of revisionist histories or analyses that started entering the book market in the mid to late eighties. Its two main parts reflect the authors' individual academic interests - in fact, one wonders why a separate authorship is not acknowledged when it is so clearly discernible? Apart from revealing the authors' separate but interlocking interests, the two parts also reflect one of the main concerns of this book: the negotiation between biculturalism (or bi-nationalism), on the one hand, and

multiculturalism, on the other. In accordance with the authors' pronounced aim to argue for the primacy of the Maori-Pakeha relationship, the former is given quantitative preference over the latter: (Spoonley's) four chapters (1-149) on issues relating to the Maori-Pakeha axis outweigh (Fleras's) three chapters (150-250) on the implications of an increasingly multicultural presence in (bicultural) Aotearoa/New Zealand. My own discussion will follow that pattern and focus largely on the Maori-Pakeha relationship.

In accordance with Maori belief that to be able to move into the future you need to have a firm understanding of the past, the first chapter sets out on a mission of 'Reviewing the Past, Rethinking the Present'. Guided by the observation that "[v]irtually every recent issue involving Maori-Pakeha relations is underpinned by reference to the Treaty (13), its focus is on the Treaty of Waitangi as a "foundational document"(6) of Aotearoa/New Zealand as well as a "contested site" (6) and, ultimately, a "blueprint for a bicultural New Zealand" (14). The authors document the by now well-known dispute over the two versions of the Treaty and conclude (as other studies have done before) that, due to the conflicting messages of *kawanatanga* (state sovereignty) and *rangatiratanga* (Maori sovereignty or self-determination), sovereignty in Aotearoa/New Zealand is divided. Between those who embrace and those who reject the Treaty, Spoonley and Fleras propose as an intermediate position approaching the Treaty as a "relational construct" (17) and a "living and evolving document" (18) for, as they say,

neither *kawanatanga* nor *rangatiratanga* exist as absolutes, but provide counterpoints in a state of continuous tension that may neutralise any tendency towards extremes while exploring creative opportunities in the middle. Crown sovereignty is not absolute but is qualified by Maori *rangatiratanga* rights; conversely, *tino rangatiratanga* is circumscribed by the realities of *kawanatanga* and *kotahitanga* (17).

The remainder of the first chapter traces the multiple and conflicting discourses that surround definitions of *tino rangatiratanga*, and looks at both the politics behind this concept and its practical implementations in *kura kaupapa*. The authors' interpretation of this material stands contrary to New Zealand's foundational myth of '*he iwi kotahi tatou*' ('we are one people') when they conclude: "The success of Maori medium schools suggest [*sic*] that challenging the status quo may entail a period of standing apart before working together" (36).

The second chapter traces the changing discourses of Maori sovereignty that have grown out of the Treaty commitment to *tino rangatiratanga*. In its analysis of the correlation between 'Indigeneity and Sovereignty', it follows

very much the same line of argument as the previous chapter; it is in fact so closely interlinked with chapter 1 that some of its statements seem rather repetitive and thus unnecessary. The main point is that "indigeneity is more than moving over and making space: it is a direct challenge to prevailing patterns of power and privilege" (73). Maori sovereignty discourses contest the absoluteness of state sovereignty and call for a radical restructuring of the hegemonic relationship between the state and Maori, and unless these challenges are met, the old colonial power structures remain in place and Aotearoa/New Zealand will not be properly 'post-colonial'.

Chapter 3 draws heavily on Spoonley's various earlier publications on 'post-colonial Pakeha ethnicity'. Yet despite his long involvement in this area, this chapter reveals a familiarity with postcolonial studies that is no more than tangential. Not only is it telling that Homi Bhabha's name is misspelled in the bibliography; in their attempt to rescue the term 'post-colonialism', frequently rejected by colonised peoples because of its latent meaning that colonialism has come to an end, the authors blur the distinction between 'post-colonialism' and 'postcolonialism' conventionally adopted within postcolonial studies to distinguish between a temporal and a critical use of the word, respectively. This useful distinction is lost when the authors define post-colonialism as a "critical engagement with colonialism" (95) and thus attempt to make the temporal term take on the meaning of the critical one.

Furthermore, because the authors acknowledge their intellectual heritage only insufficiently, chapter 3 seems to be marked by a curious contradiction. In a chapter entitled 'The Cultural Politics of PostColonialism: Being Pakeha', it is rather surprising to read that "[w]ith regard to Aotearoa/New Zealand, the interest in post-colonialism is largely a product of the evolving politics of Maori" (97). The contradiction is apparent, rather than real, but could have easily been avoided if implicit correlations had been spelled out. Though this indebtedness remains unacknowledged, chapter 3 emerges out of a larger discussion around constructions of subjectivity. Traditional liberal discourses tend to regard the subject as unmarked and thus universal. Standpoint theories, above all feminist in origin, however, have challenged this notion of the unmarked subject by pointing out its white male bias and have replaced the notion of the universal self by that of discursive 'subject positions' which are always thought of as marked. In the area of ethnicity and postcolonialism, similar work has been done by people such as Ruth Frankenberg or Richard Dyer, who developed a 'theory of whiteness'.

Spoonley and Fleras now take it upon themselves to 'mark' Pakeha culture and thereby dismantle the myth that Pakeha do not have a (specific) culture, that theirs is just the normal and natural way of doing things. By 'marking' Pakeha culture, so the (implicit) argument runs, Maori culture loses the taint of

deviance from an imagined norm, for if there is no norm, Maori culture cannot deviate from it and appear somehow different and unnatural. Both cultures are thereby given equal status - which is what the project of turning the settler colony New Zealand into a postcolonial, bicultural Aotearoa/ New Zealand is ultimately all about. Resistance to such politics have consequently often found expression in a rejection of the (marked) label 'Pakeha' and Spoonley rightly (though rather too frequently) points out that "[t]he act of identifying as Pakeha is itself a political act" (90), which challenges the often-heard 'common-sense' argument that 'we are all just New Zealanders' and usually indicates some degree of sympathy with Maori political ambitions.

Chapter 4 gives a very useful overview over the development of the various policies that have structured the relationship between the two Treaty partners up until the 1990s. It concludes that most changes have been cosmetic in nature. In particular, the authors identify three recurrent flaws from which 'Maori policy' has suffered over the years: ideologies of universalism (denial of Maori cultural difference), an emphasis on needs rather than rights, and too great a reliance on claims-resolution - 'righting a wrong' - as sufficient strategy of coming to terms with colonial injustices. They point out that in the 1990s, "[p]olicy continues to be 'needs-driven' in seeking to improve Maori socio-economic status" (131) and argue that such policies are bound to fail because "a needs-driven policy can only go so far in responding to deeply rooted problems, tending to focus on quick-fix remedies rather than long-term solutions" (148). These "deeply rooted problems", they see in the Crown's refusal to become serious about the Treaty and engage in a true partnership that acknowledges tino rangatiratanga and its implications of shared sovereignty.

Chapters 5 and 6 I do not want to discuss in detail, except to point out that both deal with the impact of immigration and an increasing multicultural presence in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Chapter 5 focuses on immigration from Asia, chapter 6 on immigration from the Pacific. The divided authorship is perhaps most visible in these two chapters, for while Spoonley has been at pains to argue for a bicultural nation, Fleras, in these two chapters, ironically discusses the experience of immigrants in New Zealand as that of "feeling stranded between two cultures" (213) - and he does not mean Maori and Pakeha cultures. A short section (184-5) is set aside for the 'Maori reaction', but otherwise New Zealand is (once-more) constructed as a homogenous cultural unit, with Maori culture being subsumed under that of the majority culture. One could of course argue - rather sarcastically - that these two (more empirical) chapters in fact draw a perfectly accurate picture of the reality that these immigrants would have seen themselves confronted with, which is that of interaction with effectively only one culture in this supposedly bicultural

country. The sad irony of this, however, should have been reflected upon and made explicit, rather than silently carried over into the analysis.

An excellent final chapter before a brief conclusion, however, partly makes up for that shortcoming. After a fruitful discussion of the pros and cons of multiculturalism (as practised in the USA and Canada), the authors move on to argue that the recurring discussion about the adoption of either biculturalism or multiculturalism as an appropriate strategy for managing Aotearoa's ethnic relations should be resolved by embracing a policy of bi-nationalism. Bi-nationalism, they claim, offers a 'both/and' option because multiculturalism and bi-nationalism "occupy different domains" (248). In accordance with the Treaty principle of *tino rangatiratanga*, bi-nationalism "acknowledges the primacy of indigeneity and original occupancy in establishing agendas and setting priorities" (248) while at the same time not "reneging on pluralistic commitments"(249).

The authors do not hesitate to admit that the distinction between 'biculturalism' and 'bi-nationalism' might seem somewhat artificial and point out that bi-nationalism is biculturalism properly understood. Too often, they argue, biculturalism has been depoliticised in the public imagination and reduced to "a personal coping strategy" (233) or a touch of 'te taha Maori' in mainstream organisations. These superficial changes, however, do not deal with what they regard as the root cause of the Maori-Pakeha problem: "the colonisation of Maori and the corresponding loss of self-determination of identity, land, and political voice" (235). This root cause, according to the authors, cannot be addressed by either multiculturalism or biculturalism. Instead, it "needs to be addressed by a bi-nationalism that grants significant space and discretion to Maori for autonomy" (253).

While I find myself in general agreement with the authors' call for bi-nationalism, as a logical consequence of conflicting messages of *kawanatanga* and *rangatiratanga* in the Treaty, I reject their easy acceptance of essentialism as an unproblematic part of that bi-nationalism when they say:

The rationale behind bi-nationalism reflects an essentialist reading of diversity - that is, each group of people is fundamental [sic] different, and these primordial ('essential') differences constitute the basis for entitlement and engagement. (246)

I do not agree that it is necessary to re-introduce 'essentialism' into the discussion. In fact, I think it is dangerous, because it adds fuel to the fire of those who love engaging in 'authenticity talk' to establish that there are no 'real' or 'full-blooded' Maori left in New Zealand anyway, and that

consequently nobody can be entitled to anything simply on the grounds of 'being Maori'. The authors should have made clear that it is a strategic essentialism that underlies a commitment to bi-nationalism. Qualifying the essentialism as 'strategic' makes explicit that the Maori nation is constructed as an imagined community with the aim of wrenching power from the 'mainstream', while at the same time avoiding the 'authenticity trap'. Here, as earlier, the book could have benefited from a more thorough engagement with postcolonial theories. This would have allowed the authors to avoid promoting highly problematical terms as 'essentialism'. It might also have led them to explore the (productive?) tension between, on the one hand, their own post(-)colonial politics of binationalism, which ultimately lead to a renewed emphasis on "binary cultural politics" (98), and postcolonial theories, on the other, which generally set out to deconstruct such binary thinking.

But such questions are academic in nature; more immediately pressing, maybe, is the question of how the authors' (idealistic?) recommendations compare to the policies that are actually currently implemented. Labour's 'Closing the Gaps' policy is the latest in a long list of policies purportedly designed to improve the situation of Maori in this country - but how does it measure up against what Fleras and Spoonley have identified as necessary actions to address the "root causes of Maori problems" (131)? In a recent article based on an interview with Treaty Negotiations Minister Margaret Wilson (*Evening Post*, 20 September 2000, 5), Ruth Berry writes that

Wilson admits Maori may not be satisfied with the Government's restriction to what it says are Article 3 rights only. She concedes issues of governance and self-determination [as addressed in Articles 1 and 2] are on the backburner. Those issues centre around constitutional issues and while they form part of 'general discussions', the Government is unlikely to address them now. 'You can't really talk about constitutional change unless you are talking about positions of equality... what we have identified is the first step if you like towards constitutional change, if that's what's there.

While it might be premature to speculate about this policy's potential for success, recent statements by Margaret Wilson such as these certainly do not allay concerns that 'Closing the Gaps' might be yet another 'wolf in sheep's clothing', focussing, as it does, on article 3 of the Treaty and its emphasis on equality of Maori and Pakeha. Harmless though it might appear, 'equality' is actually quite a dangerous term, as it has in the past served as a popular gloss for colonial dictates of homogeneity and assimilation. The first of the three recurrent flaws in 'Maori policy' Fleras and Spoonley have identified,

denial of Maori difference, thus lurks not far below the surface of Labour's declared aim to concentrate on 'equality'. Similarly, this emphasis also runs the risk of repeating the other two recurrent flaws, an emphasis on needs rather than rights and a reliance on grievance claims, to improve Maori socio-economic position. Fleras and Spoonley agree that "[h]opes of securing self-determination at political, economic, and cultural levels are conditional on a solid economic base" (144). But they caution that "on its own, and divorced from the bigger picture of rethinking Maori-Crown relations" (144) the emphasis on socio-economic equality is not enough.

With their calls for 'bi-nationalism', Fleras and Spoonley aim to bring "the bigger picture" into focus, which for them means concentrating on Articles 1 and 2 of the Treaty and drawing attention to significance of change on the constitutional level:

The next stage will need to consider questions about the fundamental nature of New Zealand society - questions that move considerably beyond what has taken place so far. How will Maori rights to tino rangatiratanga be incorporated into future constitutional arrangements?

Our argument would be that questions of sovereignty and jurisdiction now need to be considered and a negotiated resolution attempted that is capable of recognising multiple jurisdictions, and especially those that afford space and autonomy to Maori. (253)

Ruth Berry seems to have a similar course of action in mind when she prompts Margaret Wilson, "What about the argument that little will change for Maori unless there is a process of constitutional change first?" Wilson replies, however, "What I would say is it's probably putting the cart before the horse. I'm not saying those issues are not genuine ones, but first things first."

But which are the "first things" in today's renegotiation of the Maori-Pakeha divide? Are they issues of social and economic equality, a rectification of past injustices, or an implementation of Article 2 of the Treaty - Maori sovereignty and self-determination? In a recent report on the background of the Waitara shooting in the *Evening Post*, headed 'Waitara lessons lie in past', New Zealand's Race Relations Conciliator, Rajen Prasad, said that "Taranaki people must learn about the history of dispossession suffered by local Maori before race relations will improve" (20 September 2000, 3). Though Fleras and Spoonley would go further and make the improvement of race relations dependant on the implementation of rangatiratanga rights, I believe that Prasad's assessment is right insofar as this country needs to take the step of learning to understand the past before it can see the logical and ethical

necessity of sharing sovereignty. New Zealanders need to learn about, and acknowledge, the lingering presence of colonialism in postcolonial Aotearoa/New Zealand before race relations can improve. The recent public uproar about an issue (rather misleadingly) called 'post-colonial traumatic stress disorder' indicates very clearly how badly needed such education is. As long as people do not understand that, in Prasad's words, "historical injustices done to the Taranaki [and, by implication, other] Maori [are] still fresh in the minds of their descendants today", the root of current problems is not addressed. As long as there are voices calling for Maori to forget about the past and move into the future, the wounds inflicted by colonialism will fester, not heal, because for Maori, there is no future which is not firmly rooted in the past.

This book could not be more timely. Issues such as the Waitara shooting, 'Closing the Gaps', and 'post-colonial stress disorder' all call for a thorough investigation of the concerns that lie below the surface of (and nurture) these festering wounds in today's Maori-Pakeha relations. *Recalling Aotearoa* offers such a thorough investigation and should thus be of interest for many people. Anyone seeking to gain a greater understanding of the principles structuring race relations in postcolonial Aotearoa/New Zealand will find a multitude of thoroughly researched and well-presented material. Especially the numerous case studies - ranging from the Waitangi Tribunal to New Zealand film, from the 'cultural safety' debate to the Department of Maori Affairs - and the useful 'recommended reading' lists that follow each chapter will add to the attraction of the book.

Intended for a broad audience, it does, however, seem highly doubtful that Fleras and Spoonley's important publication will actually reach that audience. No doubt the education this book has to offer will be welcomed by that group of weirdos - "[a]cademics, protesters, radicals and losers" - that are not "real New Zealanders". But what about these 'real New Zealanders', the people who write letters to the editor complaining about a supposed Maori privilege and pointing out the utter ludicrousness of something like a "postcolonial traumatic stress disorder" - will they read this book? It seems highly unlikely. One of the problems with *Recalling Aotearoa* (though not its fault) is that its reach will be limited, speaking only to those who already agree with its ideological stance. Those who most should read it, on the other hand, will most likely dismiss it as yet another instance of politically correct rubbish and leave it sitting on the shelf. Rather than allowing themselves to be confronted with a version of New Zealand which challenges their own (largely institutionalised and unacknowledged) privilege, they will choose to ignore this book and thus remain ignorant, which is a shame - and shameful. Even Alan Duff says so, though he might have preferred not to be quoted in this context.