

THE PROBLEM OF DEFINING AN ETHNIC GROUP FOR PUBLIC POLICY: WHO IS MĀORI AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

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Abstract

Governments in multicultural democracies are increasingly being challenged to justify the collection of ethnic and racial data, and the targeted policies they support. Given mounting opposition to ethnic-based policies in New Zealand, it is timely to consider two questions that have arisen from ongoing debate. The first is what criteria ought to apply to determine who is Māori for policy purposes. The second is which Māori ought to benefit from targeted policies and programmes. This paper addresses both questions empirically and makes two suggestions: (1) that statistical and legal definitions of Māori be amended to take account of both self-identified ethnicity and descent; (2) that programmes which seek to militate Māori disadvantage be oriented towards those who strongly identify as Māori, since they are the most likely to be in need.

INTRODUCTION

With the new millennium has come rising opposition to the collection of ethnic and racial data and the policies and programmes they support (Connerly 2003, Nobles 2000, Perlmann and Waters 2002, Petersen 1997).² A central critique of race- and ethnic-based policies is that they belie the cultural and socio-economic diversity that exists within historically marginalised groups. Clearly not all persons who identify with a disadvantaged group are themselves disadvantaged. The objectivity and accuracy of the data that inform policy decisions have also come under scrutiny. In order to monitor and address disparities, policy makers need reliable and consistent ways to

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- 2 Race has historically been employed as a biological classification of humans on the basis of genetic makeup, manifest in physical traits. Contemporary definitions define race as a socially constructed category based on the identification of (1) a group marker that is transmitted through reproduction (e.g. skin colour); and (2) individual, group, and cultural attributes associated with that marker (Smelser et al. 2001). Ethnicity generally refers to a cultural group that has a common socio-history based on geographical, religious, ancestral or/and cultural roots.

define racial and ethnic groups, and to identify their members. However, intermarriage and changing ideas about race have complicated how people self-identify, and are identified by others (Goldstein and Morning 2002, Harris and Sim 2002, Perlmann and Waters 2002). Increasingly, the treatment of ethnic groups as discrete is problematised by the ability and willingness of individuals to claim multiple affiliations.

Indigenous peoples³ such as Māori exemplify the problem that policy makers face in dealing with heterogeneity. High rates of intermarriage and institutional pressures to assimilate mean they comprise persons with diverse lifestyles, socio-economic circumstances and identities. Yet, for reasons of history and contemporary politics, public policy tends to treat them as homogeneous (Chapple 2000, Cunningham et al. 2002, Gardiner-Garden 2003, Snipp 2002). Typically indigenous peoples are the only ethnic groups with government agencies to monitor their outcomes, and deliver policies designed to improve their poor group-level status (Birrell 2000, Cobo 1986).⁴ Their claim as original or sovereign peoples also confers specific legal rights relating to ownership of land and natural resources, cultural preservation, and political representation.

Given this, indigenous peoples tend to figure prominently in national debates on race, ethnicity, and resources.⁵ Certainly in New Zealand there is growing disquiet about the appropriateness and fairness of policies and practices that would appear to assist individuals on the basis of ethnicity. Indeed, at the time of writing a host of targeted policies and programmes were under review, including several major ones aimed at Māori.⁶ It is timely, therefore, to give closer scrutiny to some of the issues that have been central to domestic debates about ethnic data and policies.

Underlying the debate is the fundamental question of how to define an ethnic or racial group in contexts where rewards and resources are involved. While this is a matter of consequence for all ethnic groups in New Zealand, it has particular implications for Māori. This paper considers emerging approaches to defining ethnic or racial group

3 A widely accepted definition of indigenous peoples is peoples who: (a) usually live within or maintain attachments to geographically distinct ancestral territories; (b) tend to maintain distinct social, economic, and political institutions within their territories; (c) typically aspire to remain distinct culturally, geographically and institutionally rather than assimilate fully into national society; and (d) self-identify as indigenous or tribal (Cobo 1986).

4 For example, New Zealand has Te Puni Kōkiri, the United States has the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of Hawaiian Homelands, and Canada has the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

5 Parallel debates on defining indigenous identity have occurred in Australia (Birrell 2000, Gardiner-Garden 2003), Canada (Metis National Council 2004), Hawaii (Suyama 2003) and the United States (Liebler 1996, Snipp 1997, 2002). Hawaii is distinguished here from the United States given that Native Hawaiian claims to sovereignty are distinct from those of Native Americans.

6 These include policies and programmes at the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Education Review Office, Department of Labour, and Ministry of Culture and Heritage (Mallard 2004).

membership generally, before turning to the specific context of New Zealand. Related to the issue of definition is the matter of entitlement, and which Māori ought to benefit from public policy interventions. Comparisons are drawn with other indigenous populations with regard to definition and policy entitlement.

THE PROBLEM OF DEFINING COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL ETHNICITY

Over the last decade or so the process and politics of ethnic enumeration have attracted growing attention in New Zealand (Baehler 2002, Chapple 2000, Gould 1992, 2000), and elsewhere (Goldstein and Morning 2002, Nobles 2000, Perlmann and Waters 2002, Smelser et al. 2001, Snipp 2003). This has been due, in part, to the recognition of the key role of ethnic and racial data in political decisions. Such data are routinely used to inform policy formulation, resource allocation, and the determination of electoral boundaries. As awareness of the political importance of ethnic enumeration has grown, so too has the perception that it works to the benefit of minorities (Petersen 1997, Prewitt 2002). This sentiment was manifest in the attempt in California to halt the collection of racial data by state agencies. The so-called Racial Privacy Initiative, or Proposition 54, challenged the “relevance and efficacy of race as a basis for solving many of the problems that cry out for solution” (Connerly 2003). Although defeated, Prop 54 represents an important shift taking place in many countries, away from an implicit acceptance of the need for ethnic and race-based policies, to a more critical position challenging their ongoing justification and utility. In the United States, for example, four states have repealed affirmative action while ongoing legal challenges seek to dismantle programmes intended exclusively for Native Hawaiians.

An argument often leveled in support of efforts to remove targeted policies is the imprecision of racial and ethnic data. There are at least three sources of imprecision. One is inter-marriage because it blurs the boundaries of groups treated as mutually exclusive for policy and political purposes. It also confers options for people to choose their identity, and thus introduces uncertainty and flux. An example is “ethnic mobility” – when persons change their ethnic or racial affiliation over time, or in different contexts (Coope and Piese 1997, Eschbach et al. 1998, Harris and Sim 2002, Statistics New Zealand 2004). A second source of imprecision is the instrument employed to collect the data, and the inconsistencies and imperfections in the methods and concepts used (Hirschman 1992). A third is the shift in thinking about race. Once viewed as a permanent trait rooted in biology, race is now more commonly understood (by academics at least) as a social category that is produced and sustained through a variety of mechanisms (Smelser et al. 2001:3). In keeping with this shift, many developed countries now allow for multiple-race and ethnic responses in official data collections.

Given that indigenous populations in the “fourth world” are becoming larger and more heterogeneous, the question arises as to who can legitimately claim to be

indigenous, when positive incentives to claim that identity exist. As Nagel notes, "Discussions about group eligibility are often translated into controversies surrounding individual need, individual ethnicity, and ethnic proof" (1994:160). The question of who is Māori has been the subject of considerable debate (Butcher 2003, Callister 2003, Chapple 2000, Durie 2001, Gould 2000, Kukutai 2003, Pool 2001 1991). At the heart of the problem of defining ethnic group membership is the lack of definitive criteria. In this case, just what is it that makes a person Māori? Is it a preponderance of Māori ancestors – something akin to the notion of being a "full blood"? Is it knowledge of cultural practices and engagement in Māori networks? Is it having a Māori ancestor, no matter how far back? Or, is being Māori merely a state of mind? Clearly any criteria invoked are not objective, but are products of the motivations and cultural assumptions of those doing the classifying. However, given its importance for policy, the task of formulating a definition is both worthwhile and necessary.

Biological Criteria

Biological attempts to identify indigenous peoples are not new. Scholars and governments have long taken an interest in the level of intermix within indigenous populations, with various attempts to establish the number of "pure" Hawaiians (Morton et al. 1967), Māori (New Zealand Census 1926, Buck 1938), and American Indians (see Snipp 2002). In the context of pressures to assimilate, "half bloods" and "quarter-castes" (e.g. New Zealand census 1906) indicated the rate of absorption into the mainstream population – an outcome often viewed as inevitable and desirable. The use of blood samples was one way of estimating the extent of intermixing (Morton et al. 1967). More often, the notion of blood quantum was used. This sought to capture the amount of "racial heritage that could be ascribed to an individual" and, by association, the degree to which "certain behavioral characteristics might be manifested in individual behavior" (Snipp 2002:200). It also served as a way by which to limit eligibility for benefits. Until the 1970s the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Service used blood quantum to decide eligibility for benefits and privileges. Proof usually involved tracing one's ancestry to a full-blood ancestor recorded in historical documents such as the census. As Snipp (1997) notes, it is remarkable that such documents were considered definitive given the high likelihood of error. Nevertheless, the modern BIA continued to issue a Certificate of Indian Blood to applicants who sought verification of their Indian ancestry.

In Hawaii blood quantum is used to determine eligibility for a homestead lease from the Department of Hawaiian Homelands. Applicants must have a blood quantum of at least 50% Hawaiian, defined specifically as "any descendant of not less than one-half part of the blood of the races inhabiting the Hawaiian Islands previous to 1778" (Department of Hawaiian Homelands 2004). Until 1974, and the passing of the Māori Affairs Amendment Act, a Māori was defined as someone with "half or more blood".

However, the definition was rather loosely applied, and did not require persons to provide proof of their “blood quantum” in order to receive whatever benefits were then available.

A recent innovation in the biological approach to defining ethnic and racial groups involves gene mapping to trace paternal ancestry from father to son (via the Y chromosome), and maternal lineage from mother to daughter or son (via mitochondrial DNA). One study took segments of mitochondrial DNA from the hair and blood of 54 Māori to estimate the number of the founding female population (Robinson 1998). Elsewhere, it has been used for more pernicious purposes. In the United States, a bill was introduced into the Vermont Legislature in 2000 (Bill H.809) in an attempt to impose standards and procedures for DNA testing to determine the identity of an individual as an American Indian. Although it failed, the expectation was that the results of such testing would be conclusive proof of Native American ancestry. Similar arguments for DNA testing to determine Aboriginal authenticity have been advanced in Australia (*The Australian*, 9 Sept. 1988).

DNA testing is justified by its proponents as a baseline test to verify an individual’s biological claim to belong to an ethnic or racial group, particularly where rewards are at stake. However, given its association with the dubious pseudo-scientific racism of the past, there has been reluctance on the part of governments to endorse its validity. Within academia there has been both methodological and substantive criticism of the role of genetics in determining membership in cultural groups. A key criticism is that the presence of a genetic marker may have little bearing on the lived reality of being part of a minority cultural or social group (Rotimi 2003).

Cultural Criteria

The alternative approach to biology is socio-cultural and typically focuses on measures of cultural identity or ethnic group attachment. In New Zealand, there have been various attempts to measure Māori identity, including Ritchie’s “degree of Māoriness” scale (1963) and Metge’s schema of “Māoritanga” (1964). More recently, researchers involved in the study of Māori households at Massey University have proposed a single measure of Māori cultural identity. The continuous measure is a weighted aggregate of an individual’s scores on seven cultural indicators (Cunningham et al. 2002, Stevenson 2004). Māori language has the highest weighting, followed by involvement with the extended family, knowledge of ancestry, and self-identification, all of which are equally weighted. The rationale for the weighting is based on a subjective assessment of the contribution of each to a “unique Māori identity”. It presupposes that there is something culturally unique about Māori, and that this can be approximated through proxy indicators that can be prioritised, quantified and aggregated. Elsewhere, researchers have used language use, religious affiliation and/or network ties as measures of ethnic attachment (Reitz and Sklar 1997).

A simpler approach has been to distinguish between single-ethnic and multi-ethnic peoples. The latter are of interest because of the concern that out-marriage dilutes ethnic identity, which in turn weakens group solidarity and concomitant claims based on cultural uniqueness (Birrell 2000). The underlying assumption is that those who identify with multiple ethnicities have a weaker sense of cultural identity or group attachment, than their single-ethnic counterparts do. From a policy perspective, the distinction between single- and multi-ethnic persons is easier to operationalise than either cultural indicators or biological “proofs”. Thus, it seems more likely to be accepted by policy makers as a way of dealing with heterogeneity, and is deserving of closer attention. This is taken up in the next section, with reference to Māori.

MĀORI: A CASE STUDY FOR DEFINING AN INDIGENOUS POPULATION

Māori Ancestry and Ethnicity

At present, different criteria are used to determine who is a Māori, and these vary according to legal, tribal and policy contexts. The Māori Ethnic Group (MEG) is the reference group used for administrative and policy purposes. Cultural identity is the underlying operational definition of ethnic group as it is used in official statistics.⁷ An ethnic group is composed of people who have *some or all* of the following characteristics:

- a common proper name
- one or more elements of a common culture which need not be specified, but may include religion, customs or language
- unique community of interests, feelings and actions
- a shared sense of common origins or ancestry
- a common geographic origin (Statistics New Zealand 2004).

In contrast, most statutes use ancestry criteria to define who is a Māori. The Māori Land Act, and numerous other statutes, define Māori as “a person of the Māori race and includes any descendant”. Only persons of Māori descent can enrol in a Māori electorate to vote for candidates to occupy Māori seats in Parliament, or lodge a claim with the Waitangi Tribunal. Ancestry is the closest concept to whakapapa (genealogy), which has customarily underpinned any claim to being Māori. As Stevenson (2004) has argued, membership in a cultural group requires a mandate for inclusion, and for Māori this is a Māori ancestor. Thus, ancestry is often treated as an objective basis for identity and serves a gatekeeping function, albeit that the process of recalling ancestry has subjective elements (Waters 1990).

⁷ Separate census help notes direct respondents to answer on the basis of the “ethnic group or groups (cultural groups) you belong to or identify with”.

Table 1 Parameters for Māori Population, by Ancestry, Ethnicity and Iwi, 1991–2001

	Year	Ancestry			Total
	1991	Yes	No	N/S*	
Ethnicity	Yes	393,102 (76.9)	9,327	32,421	434,850
	No plus N/S	118,173 (23.2)	–	–	118,173
Iwi**	Yes	368,655 (72.1)	–	–	368,655
	N/S	146,991 (28.8)	–	–	146,991
	Total	511,275 (100.0%)	–	–	511,275
1996					
Ethnicity	Yes	486,396 (83.9)	12,540	24,435	523,371
	No plus N/S	93,318 (16.1)	–	–	93,318
Iwi	Yes	425,745 (73.4)	–	–	425,745
	N/S	154,794 (26.7)	–	–	154,794
	Total	579,714 (100.0%)	–	–	579,714
2001					
Ethnicity	Yes	487,317 (80.1)	5,322	33,642	526,281
	No plus N/S	116,790 (19.9)	–	–	116,790
Iwi	Yes	454,479 (75.2)	–	14,500***	454,479
	N/S	149,634 (24.8)	–	–	149,634
	Total	604,113 (100.0%)	–	–	604,113

Source: 2001 Census: *Iwi, Highlights* Fig. 5; 2001 Census: *Iwi*, Table 1.

Notes: * N/S = "Don't know" plus "Not elsewhere included" (failed to specify, response unidentifiable).

** Iwi population sums to more than 100% for 1991 and 1996. The reason for this is not stated. Figures are "Total People Stated", and thus should not include multiple responses (i.e. "Total Responses").

*** Figure supplied by Statistics New Zealand (personal communication). Comparable figures for 1991 and 1996 were not available.

In 1991 a question on Māori ancestry was introduced in the census to meet legal requirements for determining electoral representation. At the request of tribes, a prompt for tribal affiliation was also incorporated. Thus it is possible to compare the Māori populations defined by ancestry, ethnicity and tribal affiliation. These are shown in Table 1.

Clearly there is a high degree of overlap between the various parameters. Given that ethnicity is the concept used for official purposes, how discriminating is it when compared to other expressions of Māoriness? Do persons who have no ancestral claim to being Māori nevertheless identify as Māori? The results in Table 1 suggest not. In 2001, 93% of persons who identified as members of the MEG were also of Māori descent (487,317/526,281 × 100). Of the remaining 7%, just 1% explicitly denied having Māori ancestry while 5% did not answer the question. Interestingly, half of those went on to give a valid iwi response, perhaps because they did not see the descent question as delivering useful information on its own.⁸

Those individuals who have no Māori descent yet identify as Māori challenge the assumption that one must have a Māori ancestor in order to identify as Māori. Anthropological studies provide clues as to why persons with no Māori ancestry might identify as Māori. These include being raised in a Māori family, residing in a Māori community, or marrying a Māori (Metge 1964). They are, however, a small proportion of the overall MEG. The important point to be derived from Table 1 is that ethnicity is almost always co-terminous with ancestry. This suggests that Māori ethnic identity is not just a “state of mind” (Du Fresne 2000).

Having a Māori ancestor, however, does not engender identification as a Māori. Of the 604,113 persons who reported being of Māori descent in 2001, about one in five did not identify as Māori. This asymmetry should be interpreted within the historical context of intermix and the lack of a hypo-descent (“one drop”) rule in New Zealand. Historically there have been few formal barriers preventing those of Māori ancestry from assimilating into the European population and, for the most part, public policy was designed to facilitate this goal (Hunn and Booth 1962).⁹

Tribal Membership

In addition to ethnicity and ancestry there is the “flax roots” view that identification as a Māori depends foremost on tribal affiliation (Broughton 1993, Karetu 1990). This arises from the historical fact that indigenous identity was predicated on hapū (sub-

8 Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for providing this information.

9 In lieu of formal barriers however, informal ones remained, particularly with regard to social structural assimilation (e.g. educational equivalence).

tribal) and iwi (tribal) membership, with pan-tribal Māori identity a construct of colonisation. Many tribes now have their own member rolls, and in order to be registered, applicants are usually required to provide details of the hapū, iwi and marae affiliations of their parent(s) and grandparent(s). Typically only those who are registered members qualify for benefits such as marae-based housing or tertiary scholarships.

Since the introduction of a tribal question, the proportion of Māori descendants with a tribal affiliation has remained reasonably steady at between 70% and 75%, even though numbers for particular tribes have fluctuated – sometimes quite dramatically.¹⁰ Given that the ethnicity question is intended to tap current cultural affiliation rather than ancestry that might have little meaning, one could expect a high proportion of the MEG to acknowledge their tribal ties. Yet in 2001 the proportion of the MEG that reported at least one tribal affiliation (about 78%) was only slightly higher than that for the Māori descent population (75%).¹¹ Moreover, 9% of New Zealanders of Māori descent who did not identify as Māori, nevertheless had knowledge of their tribal origins.¹² Clearly, the relationship between ethnicity, ancestry and tribal affiliation is more complex than simple distinctions allow for.

“Core Māori”

To reconcile these differences, an alternative definition might be a “core Māori” population defined by ancestry, ethnicity and tribal affiliation. The advantage is that it only includes persons who identify as Māori across all criteria currently in use. In 2001 the core numbered 399,941, about two-thirds of the broadest parameter based on ancestry alone. There are obvious implications of using a core concept to define the Māori population. First, a national budget based on the core would be significantly smaller than one determined by ethnicity and/or ancestry. Māori organisations are likely to resist a formula that would decrease their constituency, and not solely because of reduced resources. There is also the question of whether it captures contemporary Māori circumstances. The inclusion of tribal criteria discriminates against those persons who have no knowledge of their tribal origins, yet who still identify as Māori. One outcome of the very rapid post-WWII urbanisation of Māori was the fragmentation of rurally based tribal networks (Pool 1991). It is questionable whether

10 The number of Waikato iwi responses increased 50% between 1996 and 2001 (*2001 Census: Iwi Highlights*).

11 According to the *Census 2001: Iwi Highlights*, 88% of the Māori descent population that could name an iwi also identified as ethnic Māori ($454,479 \times 0.88 = 399,941$). An additional 14,500 ethnic Māori reported an iwi, but not Māori descent (although, of course, tribal descent presupposes Māori descent). The author could not locate published figures for the number of persons who reported an iwi, but not Māori ethnicity and ancestry.

12 Twelve per cent of the Māori descent population that could name an iwi did not identify as ethnic Māori ($454,479 \times 0.12 = 54,537$). This represents 9% of the Māori descent population.

de-tribalised Māori should be defined out of the Māori population because of these historical forces. Moreover, as Rata has argued, non-kin Māori organisations such as urban authorities have tribe-like community leadership functions (2000). Unlike traditional tribes, affiliation to an urban authority is contingent on self-identification rather than genealogical ties.

Where then does this leave us in terms of a definition? Policy makers generally agree that ethnic definitions should accord with the conceptions of those whom they seek to classify. Typically, the view within Māori communities is that, in order to be considered Māori, an individual must identify as a Māori and be descended from a Māori (Durie 1998, Karetu 1990, Walker 1990). The high degree of overlap of Māori ethnicity and ancestry reported in the census confirms that, for the overwhelming majority of persons, cultural identification as a Māori is contingent on identifying as a Māori descendant. Given this, there is a strong case for the amendment of existing statistical and statutory definitions of Māori to reflect both ancestry and ethnicity. This would have implications, for example, in the computation of the Māori electoral population, and would need to be carefully considered.¹³ However, if statistical definitions are to take account of both criteria, then it seems anomalous for legal ones to continue to rest exclusively on ancestry.

WHO OUGHT TO BENEFIT?: FROM DEFINING MĀORI TO ENTITLING MĀORI

The issue of how to define Māori is inextricably linked to the issue of which Māori ought to benefit from public policy measures. Although definition and entitlement are sometimes conflated, the cultural criteria used to define an ethnic group are independent of the group's social structural position. Māori is an ethnic group, not a socio-economic class.

One of the major challenges facing policy makers is how to address disparities between ethnic groups in a way that is efficient and equitable. Broad-brush policies that use ethnicity as a proxy for disadvantage draw criticism because they include well-off minorities, while ignoring disadvantaged persons from the dominant group (or some other minority). On the other hand, a needs-based model that omits ethnicity overlooks the sorting mechanisms or processes by which particular ethnic groups come to be disproportionately concentrated in those strata that are the most needy.

An effective strategy, it seems, ought to take account of both ethnicity and need. Given that Māori ethnicity is negatively associated with SES, one option might be to target those who most strongly identify as Māori. For practical purposes, "sole Māori" versus

¹³ For example, the Māori Electoral Population is computed by the following formula: Māori Descent population/ (No. of Māori enrolled on the Māori Roll + No. of Māori enrolled on the General Roll).

“mixed Māori” ethnicity might serve as a proxy, and indeed some analysts have already used this distinction to demonstrate heterogeneity within the MEG (e.g. Callister 2003, Chapple 2000).¹⁴ It should be emphasised that the distinction between single and multi-ethnic Māori is not biological. Ethnic identity is a cultural measure, and persons who identify only as Māori are not solely Māori in a biological sense. In reality, most Māori have a non-Māori ancestor, sometimes a non-Māori parent, but only some choose to acknowledge it as part of their ethnic identity.¹⁵ This subjective aspect of ethnic identity was evident even under the old census classification where many more persons responded as “full” Māori than was biologically possible (Pool 1991, Metge 1964).

There are various reasons why persons who have more than one ethnic option, choose to identify only as Māori. Previous analysis undertaken by the author found that living in an area with a strong concentration of Māori, and having a Māori partner were important predictors of identifying solely as Māori (Kukutai 2003). The study however was unable to control for other factors that may have been important. These include the ethnicity and descent of parents and grandparents, participation in Māori networks, or physical appearance. The latter is salient as studies have shown that persons who have features typically associated with a particular racial or ethnic group, tend to be perceived and treated as a group member, irrespective of how they self-identify (Hughes and Hertel 1990, Rocquemore and Brunisma 2002, Waters 1996). Familial socialisation, that is, being raised in a household that emphasises Māori culture and networks, is also likely to influence identification choices. The context in which the question is asked, and how it is administered also matters (Harris and Sim 2002, Petersen 1997, Rocquemore and Brunisma 2002). Finally, there are those for whom identity is less of a choice than a lived identity that remains stable across the life course (Nagel 1994). This is likely to be so for persons whose parents are both culturally Māori, and who themselves live in close proximity to other Māori.

The literature suggests two sorts of costs that might be incurred as a result of having a strong attachment to a minority ethnic group. The first comprises obligations, expectations and conformity to group norms. Although this kind of cost involves giving up something, such as time and resources, it does not preclude benefits. This is because obligations based on reciprocity often help to sustain group relationships, and can engender a sense of belonging and psychological wellbeing (Williams and Robinson 2002). The second kind of cost negatively impacts on life-chances. Examples

14 Sole Māori is the term used to refer to persons who identify exclusively as Māori in surveys such as the census. Mixed Māori refers to persons who identify with several ethnic groups, one of which is Māori (e.g. mixed Māori-European). The enumeration of the “sole Māori” population has been complicated in recent years, and the problems well documented. See Lang 2001, 2002, Te Roopu 2000.

15 Analysis of census and survey data has shown that up to a third of children identified as solely Māori in fact have a non-Māori parent (Kukutai 2003).

include labour market discrimination and isolation from mainstream, resource-rich networks (Reitz and Sklar 1997). Typically, it is this kind of cost that policy makers are interested in.

To test whether strength of identity is associated with poorer outcomes and higher costs, I use data from the 1995 New Zealand Women: Family, Employment and Education survey (for a technical description see Marsault et al. 1997). This is a nationally representative survey of 3017 women aged 20-59 years. An advantage of the NZWFEE is the inclusion of a main ethnicity question, which can be used as an alternative proxy for the strength of Māori identity (Gordon 1964, Reitz and Sklar 1997). This is useful since some mixed Māori will identify as Māori on the grounds of somewhat distant ancestry and have little psychological or material investment in the group. Their Māori ethnicity may be largely “symbolic” (Gans 1982, Waters 1990, Yancey et al. 1976). In the NZWFEE, this is most likely to be the case for mixed Māori women who identify primarily as European.¹⁶ For other mixed Māori, their Māori ethnicity is an important part of their personal identity, and signifies a psychological attachment, even if it is not accompanied by cultural knowledge or proficiency (e.g. language fluency). This is more likely to be true for mixed Māori women who identify more strongly as Māori.

The Costs of Māori Ethnic Identity

Table 2 maps the four sub-groups of Māori women in the NZWFEE according to their different expressions of ethnic identity, derived from the ethnic group and main ethnic group questions.¹⁷ Māori women who also affiliated to some other minority ethnic group (e.g. Samoan) are excluded here because of their small number.

Table 2 Expressions of Māori Identity in the NZWFEE, 1996 (N=497)

Identity	Description	N
Sole Māori	Māori the only ethnic group	314
Mainly Māori	Māori and European, Māori main ethnicity	67
Mainly European	Māori and European, European main ethnicity	77
Dual Māori–Euro.	Māori and European, no main ethnicity	39

Note: Excludes mixed Māori women who reported a non-European ethnicity.

16 Shortened from “New Zealand European”; also includes a small number of women who identified as “other European”.

17 For ethnicity, the interviewer asked, “Which ethnic group(s) do you belong to?” A list of 10 ethnic groups, including “Other” was read out, and a show card listing the options was presented. If more than one ethnic group was reported the interviewer asked, “Please tell me which one of these is the main ethnic group you identify with”.

Table 3 Characteristics of Women Who Reported Different Māori Identities in the NZWFEE, 1995 (N=458)

	Māori only (n=314)	Mainly Māori (n=67)	Mainly European (n=77)	(n)
Age at survey	%	%	%	
20–29 years	37.7	47.8	31.2	173
30–39 years	33.2	31.3	37.6	152
40 years & above	29.1	20.9	31.2	133
Union status*				
Married – legal	37.6	35.8	63.6	191
Married – de facto	17.8	28.4	13.0	85
Not married	44.6	35.8	23.4	182
Personal annual income^{1**}				
Under \$10,000	37.6	49.2	36.5	175
\$10,001 – \$20,000	45.1	37.3	32.4	187
\$20,001 – \$30,000	12.8	7.5	16.2	56
More than \$30,000	4.5	6.0	14.9	29
Educational attainment^{**}				
None	46.5	41.8	24.7	193
Secondary	15.9	16.4	27.3	82
Tertiary (degree & non)	38.6	41.8	48.0	183
Occupational status*				
Not in paid work	53.8	47.8	41.6	233
Manual	13.7	20.9	7.8	63
Clerical, sales, personnel	21.0	25.3	20.8	99
Professional	11.5	6.0	29.8	63
Dependent child in household				
Yes	66.4	68.7	81.0	302
% of Māori in TA^{2**}				
Low	13.7	17.9	29.9	78
Medium	40.8	43.3	36.4	185
High	45.5	38.8	33.7	195
Partner ethnicity^{3*}				
Māori	59.4	54.8	10.2	127
European	40.6	45.2	89.8	139

Notes:

1. excludes Don't Know/Refused (n = 11)

2. Low Māori TA = under 10% Māori in Territorial Authority; medium = 10.1–19.9%; high = 20% Māori or more

3. excludes women with no cohabiting partner (n = 183), with a non-Māori, non-European partner (n = 6); Don't Know/Refused (n = 3)

* p = < 0.01 ** p = < 0.05

Women who identified exclusively as Māori comprised about 60% of the NZWFEE Māori sample. This is higher than the proportion of the total MEG that identified solely as Māori in the 1996 and 2001 censuses, but closely fits the identification patterns for Māori women aged 20 to 59 years.¹⁸ The remainder reported multiple ethnic affiliations, and in the overwhelming majority of cases they were Māori and European. Of those who identified as both Māori and European, a slightly higher proportion identified as mainly European. There were also a number of women (“dual Māori-European”) who did not name a primary orientation. Table 3 presents bivariate results for a range of SES indicators according to strength of Māori identity. Because of their small number, dual Māori women are excluded.

Table 3 suggests that women who identify solely as Māori, and those who identify mainly as Māori, have very similar attributes in terms of education, income and demographic behaviour. It is mainly European women who differ systematically. That group has characteristics much more like European – they tend to have more education, earn higher incomes, be married to a European, and live in areas with a low concentration of Māori.¹⁹ In short, they appear to be more economically and socially integrated than their other Māori counterparts.

As cross-tabulations do not control for the confounding effects of interactions, it is necessary to undertake some form of multivariate analysis. Typically the outcome variable is some measure of immediate position, for example, log hourly earnings, or occupational prestige. A continuous measure of income is not possible here since respondents in the NZWFEE did not report actual earnings, instead responding to a pre-determined earnings category. To deal with this, multinomial logistic regression is undertaken using aggregate personal annual earnings as the dependent variable. The results are interpreted as odds of outcome Y_i or Y_j in relation to a reference category Y_k . The predictor variable of interest here is cultural orientation; that is, being Māori oriented (sole Māori and mainly Māori) or European oriented.

The most interesting point of comparison here is the higher income category. When background factors are controlled for, orientation towards or away from the European ethnic group is still a significant factor in explaining differences in earnings. Thus, women who identified as Māori and European, but more strongly as Māori, were 57% less likely than mainly European women to earn in excess of \$20,000 (compared to the baseline of below \$10,000). This is net of other explanatory factors, of which marital

18 In 1996, 52% of the MEG reported solely as Māori; and 56% in 2001. For women aged 20-59, the respective figures were 63% and 60%.

19 Given the scope of this paper, I do not present results for European women. For previous analysis that directly compares Māori, European and “Other” women in the NZWFEE, see Kukutai 2003.

status and occupational status were by far the most important.²⁰ The limitations of the data – the respondents were all women and exact income was not reported – mean that the results should be taken as suggestive.²¹ Nevertheless, the bivariate and multivariate analyses point systematically in the same direction. They are also consistent with a recent study of elderly Māori which showed those with a strong Māori identity were significantly more disadvantaged than those with a “notional” Māori identity (Cunningham et al. 2002).

Table 4 Logistic Probability of Annual Earnings of NZWFEE Women Who Reported Māori Ethnicity (Baseline = \$0 – \$10k; N = 447).

	\$10,001–\$20,000		\$20,001 and over	
	Odds ratio	Wald	Odds ratio	Wald
Constant	.76		.38	
Age	1.02	.01	1.04*	.02
% of Māori in TA	1.00	.01	1.02	.01
Educational attainment				
Tertiary (degree & non) (baseline = secondary or lower)	1.37	.34	1.26	.41
Labour force status				
Not in the work force	.39*	.13	.03*	.02
Part-time (baseline = full-time)	.59	.24	.11*	.05
Dependent child in household				
Yes	2.25*	.67	1.32	.46
Union status				
Married	.14*	.04	.26*	.11
Cultural orientation				
Māori	.91	.30	.43**	.18

Notes:

Married = de jure and de facto marriage. Age and % of Māori in TA = continuous variables.

Excludes women who did not report income (N=11)

Chi2 = 136.11 (16) = 0.000

* p<0.01 **p<0.05

These findings raise the question of why orientation towards the European mainstream confers benefits in terms of better outcomes. Or, alternatively, why those who are committed to a Māori ethnic identity incur certain costs, net of the benefits that might

20 Wald tests for each independent variable showed that marital status and employment status were the strongest predictors, followed by dependent child, age and strength of Māori identity. The insignificant educational attainment co-efficient might be because the generic “tertiary” category does not distinguish between degree and non-degree qualifications. It was aggregated, due to the small sample size.

21 Māori women may have different levels of ethnic attachment than men, or may experience higher costs because of their gender.

come with being part of a cultural community. This is an important question that is beyond the scope of this paper, and the in-depth empirical research to answer it is urgently needed. In its absence, explanations that pivot on the benefits of assimilation, the undesirability of Māori cultural maintenance, or the pervasiveness of direct or institutional discrimination, indicate more about ideological preference than they do about causal mechanisms and relationships.

DISCUSSION

This paper has considered two critical questions that have application beyond New Zealand. The first is how to determine who is an ethnic group member and who is not. The second is, given a defined group, who ought to benefit from public policy interventions.

As this paper has shown, there are several ways to define who is Māori. Statutory definitions almost always rely on descent while official statistics use self-identified ethnic affiliation. I have argued that any definition of Māori ought to include both ancestry and ethnicity. Persons of Māori descent who do not identify as Māori should not be counted as Māori for most general policy and legal purposes. They are New Zealanders of Māori ancestry, as distinct from persons who consider themselves to be culturally Māori. Similarly, the small number of persons who culturally identify as Māori but are not of Māori descent should not be considered part of the Māori population because they have no whakapapa claim. This is important since whakapapa remains the lynchpin of Māori identity (Broughton 1993, Jackson 2003, Walker 1990). Moreover, in contexts where rewards are involved, descent also serves as a baseline to limit opportunism by those with no legitimate claim. The dual criteria of ancestry and ethnicity are not unduly exclusive (compared, for example, to tribal affiliation or "blood" measures), and are consistent with Māori concepts and contemporary sentiments.

From a practical perspective, changing the definition of Māori to include ancestry would have implications for the collection of data because few official statistics include both ancestry and ethnicity. Given this, the ongoing efforts of Statistics New Zealand to standardise the collection of ethnicity data across official statistics could be extended to include the collection of Māori ancestry data. This would allow for more refined analysis of sub-groups of the Māori population, as well as longitudinal analysis of the shifting relationship between ethnicity and descent.²²

22 The collection of ancestry data in official statistics is also relevant for other non-Māori ethnic groups. Certainly if New Zealander is introduced as a valid ethnic group in official statistics (see Statistics New Zealand 2004), the inclusion of an ancestry question will facilitate greater understanding of identification choices.

The task of deciding who is Māori is separate from the task of determining which Māori ought to be eligible for benefits in certain contexts (i.e. where an argument is based on need). Conflating identity and SES leads to the spurious argument that in order to be Māori one must be disadvantaged, or vice versa. In terms of differentiating needs within the Māori population, the analysis undertaken here suggests that a critical variable is orientation towards the Māori ethnic group. This dynamic cannot be captured in a crude sole Māori versus mixed Māori dichotomy. The inclusion of a main ethnicity prompt in official data collections would help improve understanding of the dynamic underlying differences within the MEG.²³ Collection of main ethnicity data will be particularly salient in years to come if the proportion of the population claiming multiple ethnicities increases. Recognising this, Statistics New Zealand has identified main ethnicity as part of its future research agenda on ethnicity (2004:15). Of course there will always be persons who feel an equal sense of affinity with several ethnic groups and “no main ethnicity” is an entirely valid response that ought to be accommodated.²⁴ That said, the NZWFEE suggests that most mixed Māori adults do have a main ethnicity, and what that is matters because it is associated with life chances.

One of the criticisms of using ethnicity as a basis for classification is that it lacks objectivity. With regards Māori ethnicity, the concern is that anyone can claim to be Māori, irrespective of their ancestral heritage. However, given the negative stereotypes attached to Māori ethnicity, it seems unlikely non-Māori persons would switch unless the potential benefits outweighed the costs. In reality, there are few contexts in which Māori as individuals stand to gain financially. There is nothing to parallel institutionalised affirmative action in the United States in terms of preferential employment practices, university admissions (although some medical and law schools do have quotas for Māori and Pacific Islanders), and housing policies.

In tribal contexts and legal situations to do with tribal land rights and title, more compelling proof of identity is required, and to a large extent these are already well defined by tribes themselves. Land claims, for instance, tend to require more particular criteria such as recognition as a descendant of a traditional owner.

In non-tribal contexts involving national scholarships, and political or sporting representation, eligibility tends to be on the basis of ancestry and self-identification. However, because it implies a connection to a community, there is a reasonable argument to be made for community endorsement to apply. One reason is that it

23 Using cultural measures in the census such as language use would not necessarily capture those who strongly identified as Māori, since one can strongly identify as Māori but not speak the language.

24 The absence of a primary ethnicity might be a factor in ethnic mobility between the Māori and European ethnic groups. That is, some persons who identify as Māori and European in one context might simplify their response to either European or Māori in another (Coope and Piesse 1997).

affirms a person's place within a broader group, and thus the claim is less likely to rest on a "symbolic" attachment. It also helps to protect against what has been termed in the United States "ethnic fraud" (Nagel 1994). In Australia, the definition of "Aboriginal" used for most public policy purposes, and in some court judgements, is someone "who is a member of the Aboriginal race of Australia, identifies as Aboriginal and is accepted by an Aboriginal community as an Aboriginal" (Gardiner-Garden 2003). For Māori, community recognition could be through affiliation to a tribe or a non-tribal community such as an urban Māori authority. This already happens to some extent. To be eligible for scholarships administered by the Māori Education Trust, an applicant must be of Māori descent, and name an affiliation to a Māori community. However, while an applicant's ancestry requires endorsement by a Justice of the Peace, there is no formal process by which to verify an individual's background.

Indeed, solutions to questions of authenticity are often difficult to implement. They are rarely definitive, and can place heavy resource burdens on applicants and the organisations charged with overseeing the process. For example, proving 50% Hawaiian blood involves collecting affidavits from "knowledgeable persons" who can "verify" an individual's ancestral claims. Some applicants only need go back one or two generations, but for others it involves reconstructing a family tree with roots to remotely remembered ancestors.

In New Zealand, as in North America and Australia, tribal identity has been revitalised through the channeling of government funds into tribal development via the settlement of historical claims and policy initiatives. Applications to be registered on tribal rolls are typically considered by local elders or a committee recognised as knowledgeable in local genealogy. Documented evidence of a "full blooded" ancestor, or even the birth certificate of the applicant, are not required. This contrasts with American Indian tribes, which typically require applicants to prove a minimum tribal blood quantum (Snipp 1997). In Australia, court cases have debated the relative weight of descent, identification and community recognition criteria. For example, people who strongly identified as Aboriginal claimed the sources were not readily available to prove their Aboriginal descent. In spite of best efforts, tests of criteria can become very messy, especially as they become more restrictive.

A recurring theme in this paper is that how ethnic group boundaries are defined and delineated is an intensely political process that is tied to resources and who can access them. Implicit in this is the question of who gets to decide which criteria count. Here it is imperative that Māori individuals and organisations are at the forefront of institutional attempts to give effect to changes over what constitutes Māoriness. Only Māori best know who and what they are. In addition, policy makers and analysts ought to be more forthcoming on how Māori is defined, and the assumptions about why and how it is deployed. For example, the Māori Statistics Framework developed by

Statistics New Zealand (2002) elaborates a thoughtful framework on measures of definitions of Māori wellbeing, but does not ever define who is Māori.

For a broader perspective, it is useful to locate the New Zealand discourse within the context of those unfolding in comparable countries with indigenous populations. In many ways these peoples all share similar characteristics: high rates of intermix with the European-descent majority, integration into a capitalist economy, rapid urbanisation, differentiation in legal and policy contexts, pronounced population growth in recent decades, and over-representation in the lower socio-economic strata. What distinguishes Māori is the lack of restrictive criteria that have been applied in terms of a group definition, or entitlement, perhaps because of the lack of opportunities to directly benefit from claiming to be Māori (e.g. no gambling revenue or tax breaks).

This is evident when contrasted with the complex situation in Canada. There the Constitution defines three aboriginal peoples: Indian, Inuit and Metis (Constitution Act 1982). Those registered under the Indian Act are Registered or Status Indians, and are entitled to benefits that may not be available to other Indians. Programmes and services available to Status Indians include specific tax exemptions, non-insured health benefits, and dental and eye care. However, knowing which programmes and policies apply is difficult, as social legislation varies across territories. There are also Treaty Indians, whose bands or nations have treaty rights with the Canadian government, as well as other rights protected in the constitution. Thus, Indians who live in the Yukon, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories are free to fish and hunt in all seasons throughout the territories (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development 2004).

Given the complexities of definition, verification and consistency, it is not surprising that governments are increasingly being challenged to justify the collection of ethnic and racial data and the policies they support. There are problems, however, with ignoring ethnicity, and specifically indigeneity. One is the matter of sovereign or treaty rights. Indigenous peoples have particular arrangements with the state that derive from historical relations (e.g. treaty making), and which can be distinguished from the contemporary assessment of need.

Secondly, studies in New Zealand and abroad have shown that ethnicity and race are often associated with disadvantage. Sometimes the effect is direct and causal. That is, when other factors are controlled for, ethnicity or race still has a significant effect on the outcome studied (Risch et al. 2002). However, even when ethnicity is not a significant predictor of disadvantage, it is often significantly associated with the other factors (e.g. family size, educational attainment, employment status) that explain it. Ignoring ethnicity ignores the historical and contemporary processes by which particular ethnic groups came to be disproportionately concentrated among those most in need – the unemployed, the imprisoned, the sick, and the under-educated. Moreover, there are

policy areas such as health where particular groups are high risk, either because of genetic or lifestyle factors, and need to be directly targeted on the basis of their ethnicity. As the recently completed Review of the Measurement of Ethnicity noted, ethnicity continues to be a “vital demographic and social variable” in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand 2004:6).

In conclusion, this paper has attempted to address the problem of how to define the Māori population and, by association, who is Māori. It has also considered the related issue of which Māori ought to benefit from public policy. Problems of definition, entitlement and verification are not exclusive to Māori, as parallel debates in Australia, Canada and the United States attest. In those countries, there is a growing call for the abandonment of ethnic- and race-based policies. The challenge facing New Zealand policy makers will be to respond to these growing complexities and exogenous pressures with creative and open-minded responses based on robust research.

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