



Weaving Our Stories Worldwide: An Indigenous Approach to Global Economics and Ecology

Todd Taiepa

Introduction

The Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1840 between Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, and the British Crown allowed British governance in New Zealand, while affirming Māori authority over their traditional territories (Orange 1995). However, the establishment of a settler dominated parliament undermined Māori authority over customary resources (Orange 1995). In addition an aspect of colonization that has been termed 'ecological imperialism' (Crosby 1996), characterized by the widespread dispersal of animal and plant species across the world, has distorted the environmental and cultural landscape of New Zealand and other countries. Displacement of native species by introduced species as well as land management practices that were highly destructive to existing ecosystems (Park 1995) has resulted in a major physical reconstruction of the natural landscapes. Furthermore, the practice of taking natural resources from around the world, and repackaging and distributing them primarily by functional value or potential economic opportunity, failed to recognise the cultural and spiritual associations between indigenous people and the environment. Long established ecological and human connections have been severed in deference to these demands and this is one of the legacies of our global marketplace.

This paper argues that there are at least two reasons for attempting to deconstruct this colonial landscape. Firstly if such an exercise helped to reconnect and enhance the relationships of indigenous peoples to their customary lands then this could provide a range of positive benefits to groups that are often at the margins of contemporary society. A second imperative would be the potential for connections between the indigenous peoples of the world to be strengthened by attempting to unravel the complex amalgamations of people and place that have resulted from European colonization.

The contemporary landscape of New Zealand is an ecological and cultural montage that often bares little evidence of the Māori narratives associated with particular areas or species. This has exacerbated the already significant effects of loss of land and access to customary resources (Asher & Naulls 1987). It is argued that an approach that promoting Māori traditional concepts and applies them to exotic species, emphasizing the link these species have with other indigenous and traditional cultures, might provide a pathway towards strengthening Māori identity. This paper explores the link between resources, cultural and spiritual rights and the perspectives of indigenous and traditional peoples, and identifies some elements of a framework that might promote these connections for Māori.

Reclaiming Biodiversity

Māori view indigenous species as **taonga**, as treasured and cherished gifts that have been inherited from the ancestors and are to be passed on to future generations. The loss of control and access to these **taonga** has imposed

Correspondence

Todd Taiepa, Palmerston North City Council, Palmerston North, NEW ZEALAND. todd.taiepa@pncc.govt.nz

Ethnobotany Research & Applications 2:093-099 (2004)

great costs on Māori society. A key mechanism for resolving the grievance is the Waitangi Tribunal. The Waitangi Tribunal is a legal forum established to hear contemporary claims by Māori against past and present actions of the New Zealand Government based on the Treaty principles. While the Treaty of Waitangi itself has never been entrenched in legislation the approach of the Government has been to incorporate the principles of the Treaty, applying the 'spirit of the Treaty' rather than the literal words. One of the strongest collective expressions of Māori aspirations for regaining a greater role in the protection and development of indigenous species is outlined in the flora and fauna claim to the Waitangi Tribunal, which is often referred to by the case reference number of WAI 262.

The WAI 262 case highlights the effects of colonization on Māori society, and the country's ecosystems. There are four key Treaty rights identified in the WAI 262 claim by the claimant tribes as being undermined by the actions of the Government.

First, there is the right to development, denied because of limited access to resources, changing technology and the process of determining intellectual property law. Successive governments have failed to recognise the inherent property rights held by Māori in natural resources.

Secondly, the right to conserve, preserve and protect species is undermined by government policy and the establishment of administering bodies that fail to provide for participation.

The assumed right to the use and dispersal of species is also challenged. The claim rejects the government's involvement in the domestic and export trade of indigenous species and its role in encouraging the collection of native species by overseas scientific and commercial interests.

Finally, the right to cultural/spiritual expression is breached firstly because successive governments have denied Māori the right to express the cultural/spiritual ethos associated with Māori values and secondly Māori access to flora and fauna associated with these Māori values has been prevented (New Zealand Law Reporter 1995).

These rights are in many ways consistent with those asserted by other indigenous peoples and recognized in international agreements such as the United Nations Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, that affirm cultural and intellectual property rights. As Māori awareness grows of the parallel grievances of other indigenous peoples, the issue of how New Zealand responds to the importation and development of species from other countries becomes increasingly significant. It is also important to recognise that many introduced species already make up a significant part of the ecological and economic fabric of New Zealand. These species may have tremendous significance to other indigenous peoples.

This raises a question: Are there opportunities for Māori to better interpret their modified landscape by coming to understand some of these more recently introduced species through the narratives and experiences of the indigenous peoples who have developed relationships with them over hundreds, and in some cases thousands of years? Healing the dramatically altered landscape of New Zealand will be assisted through Māori coming to know more about the nature of these new species, not only from a Western trained biologist or ecologist, but in dialogue with the original customary guardians themselves.

A key Māori philosophy and practice relating to the environment is **kaitiakitanga**. **Kaitiakitanga** is the intergenerational responsibility that Māori have to ensure that the **mauri** or life force of the environment is sustained. This involves a recognition and respect for both the seen and unseen forces that act to either enhance or degrade the environment. Important questions for Māori are: who are the rightful **kaitiaki** (guardians) of these species? If something of their original 'homelands' is known, then perhaps this may offer new possibilities to a more complete understanding of these plants and animals, and certainly the potential to form a relationship with these people through the technology of story-telling and where appropriate the exchange of traditional ecological knowledge.

Presently, indigenous narratives are for the most part absent as species were brought here with little regard for their origins or the prior rights of indigenous peoples. By the middle of the nineteenth century not only were Māori receiving limited economic benefits from imported species but they were also denied opportunities to develop relationships with other indigenous peoples, who were the customary owners and the repositories of the cultural knowledge of these species. The potential to reinforce historical and cultural continuity and to facilitate enriched relationships, with a diverse range of cultures, traditions, and species was not realized. This might have helped Māori construct valuable cultural responses to the increasingly changing ecological world around them. However international trading was to be managed primarily as a commercial enterprise and the market would ultimately decide what knowledge was of value.

Consequences of the Commodification of Indigenous Species

Commodification is a major issue for indigenous peoples and some of the key concerns for Māori were highlighted in the WAI 262 case. The key issues relate to the loss of control over the protection and development of indigenous species in ways that recognise and enhance the relationships between the natural world and the people. Commodification is seen by Māori to be based on superficial views of species and is usually related to marketability. Commodities are usually denied spiritual or cultural

associations unless this somehow enhances the demand for a product. Issues of power and control include how a species is interpreted and presented to a consumer. Indigenous views are often ignored. The question of who benefits from defining species as economic products is also important in terms of the links between global capitalism and colonization.

Western cultural frameworks significantly undervalued indigenous cultural knowledge. There is limited opportunity to forge connections between indigenous knowledge systems towards a deeper understanding of species. This limits the ability for Māori to express their **kaitiakitanga** and for other indigenous peoples to express their cultural stewardship.

Māori assert that their guardianship responsibilities extend beyond New Zealand. Contemporary concerns include the patenting of indigenous plants and animals by private companies. While for Māori these concerns are clearly articulated in WAI 262, what is less clear is what responsibilities Māori, along with the New Zealand government might have towards the **taonga** of other indigenous peoples that have been brought into the country.

The Roots of Environmental Exploitation

One negative outcome of a colonial heritage and increasing globalization is the emergence of personal and collective identities that pay little attention to an environmental context. A belief that people have an inherent right and ability to control the environment is likely to lead to more destructive patterns of resource exploitation and a lack of sensitivity to negative feedback from the environment that might otherwise discourage such exploitation. Whole cultures can, and have developed that are in essence anti-nature. This separation of culture from nature is a well-documented characteristic that is strongly associated with the unsustainable practices of modern development (McKibben 1990). For indigenous peoples this has resulted in the destruction of customary resources and severed connections between people and their traditional territories. Communities have often been overcome by a sense of powerlessness. Confronted by warfare, injustice, coercion and often a lack of opportunity many tribal peoples have moved away from traditional territories and often from traditional values. Colonization has seen the assimilation of both the land and the people. The destruction of nature and of native peoples has often been synonymous.

McKibben (1990) highlights the links between globalization and environmental degradation. He proposes that the global economy is accelerating the destruction of the natural environment, calling this the 'end of nature'. The imperatives that he indicated are driving this are:

- Economies must grow;

- Resources are scarce and there is never enough;
- Mass production is always more efficient and productive, legitimizing the commodification of humans and the destruction of natural systems;
- 'Appetite' is the ruling element in human behavior.

Much of the economic development in New Zealand has been based on international trade, and especially supplying food products for Britain. The expanding demand for New Zealand products fuelled industrial and agricultural/horticultural practices that are associated with greater impacts on the environment. The opportunity for Māori participation in these expanding markets has been low because of governments policies that have alienating Māori from their resources, and the economy, hence the benefits of economic growth. The effects have been numerous and, as Durie (1999) highlights, in terms of health poor outcomes for Māori are "closely intertwined with poverty traps and deculturalization."

The Origin of Species: Valuing Unfamiliar Strands in the Web of Life

The global economy has undermined Māori identity and the viability of native species in New Zealand. If the 'end of nature' and the 'end of culture' are inextricably linked then the renewal of both might also be connected. A challenge for Māori, which is perhaps related to a process of decolonization, is to create new realities, in dialogue with other cultures close to the land, rather than unquestionably accepting those that have been imposed by other interests.

The value many Māori place on introduced species sometimes appears to mimic mainstream environmental values more than a Māori understanding of the world. Many species are valued on a limited set of criteria including the ability to be sold in the marketplace for a profit. However this is not surprising since references that might enable Māori to develop alternative viewpoints are often lacking.

An example might be the way Māori deal with tobacco use. This is a sacred ceremonial plant to many Native Americans. However it is now sold in a highly modified form that encourages addiction, rather than reflection. A report published in 1991 on the effects of smoking on Māori called '**Te Taonga Mai Tawhiti** (Gift from a distant place) identified the tragic effects of smoking on Māori health (Reid & Pouwhare 1991). The term '**Taonga**' can also mean cherished or treasured and this sentiment reflects the cultural value placed on tobacco by Native American people. Culturally and spiritually grounded practices have significant meaning and contribute to their well-being. Commercial exploitation has ignored these important values and Māori responses to tobacco are shaped by that context. A recent Māori health promotion declared, "**Tino Rangatiratanga** (Māori self-determination) is about waging war against to-

tacco". Recent public insights into the manufacturing and marketing practices involved in the industry however suggest that **Tino Rangatiranga** is more about waging war against tobacco companies rather than the tobacco plant itself. Dialogue with Native American communities might not change the fact that for many Māori people, an effective way of keeping them from using tobacco products in unhealthy ways is to 'demonize' the plant. For others its sacredness, rich cultural values, and the need to respect the plant might be a more powerful basis for making healthy choices. If these other stories are not sought, then important opportunities may be missed. Ultimately it is better for young children to be raised knowing that tobacco is a sacred plant that has been manipulated chemically by private interests and in this form is a major cause of death and suffering in Māori communities. It is ironic that the anti-smoking programmes funded by the New Zealand government do not seem to demonize the tobacco companies themselves.

Due to negative effects on the New Zealand environment many exotic species are seen in a negative way. These species are not only viewed as out of balance with the ecology but are often described with metaphors like alien and invader. Attitudes are particularly negative where a species has major effects on indigenous species. For example there are 70 million possum in New Zealand (Brockie 1992) with the original source being Australia. Their voracious appetite for native vegetation is one of the top conservation concerns. With over 50,000 years of experience with this species it seems that not involving Aboriginal people in the solutions makes any strategy somehow incomplete. Exactly what any contribution might be is uncertain. However, if Māori retain an interest in native flora and fauna that have been taken to other countries might other indigenous peoples have similar views?.

The *Pinus radiata* or Monterey Pine from California is one of the most widely planted pine species around the world, and is the main source of wood for commercial use in New Zealand and a major export earner. It is however threatened in the Monterey area in which it is native (Smith & Ferlito 1997). Many Māori work in the forestry industry with these trees and a number of tribes have major forestry interests. One gets the impression though that these trees are seen as having a lesser status than Māori trees. The following quote from a recent newspaper article is indicative of the way these trees are depicted in New Zealand. "Massed pines are somehow not right. Not kiwi, not a natural part of the landscape. Dark and foreboding, they are, enmasse, hardly a lovable tree." (Aldridge 2001)

It is likely that Māori would be concerned if important species such as **totara** and **kaori** were taken from their forest environment and essentially farmed, some might say degraded in this way. Māori work in close proximity with the Monterey Pines, and yet knowledge of them is relatively superficial. The point is not necessarily about whether we

utilise the trees or not, although the views of the particular Native American peoples who have a relationship with this tree have not been sought. It is perhaps more about the spirit in which they are used. Moore (1996) expresses that:

"currently the use of trees for wilderness and for building is the subject of angry debate, but often one has the sense that both sides advocate a disenchanting world. As long as the debate takes place in this context, there can be no solution, because without a sensitivity to the soul of trees, neither our protection or our exploitation will benefit from the wisdom of the tree itself. Our arguments will all be human ones, when the issue is fundamentally a matter of theology: our use of the earth's materials has to be done in a sacred manner, or we will have no deep guidance in knowing how to build and how to preserve. The very last words of Black Elk's memoirs read: There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead".

Although the sheer number of new species in New Zealand seems overwhelming, at another level these species provide an important window on the ecology of the world, and therefore a potential basis for enhancing Māori understandings of their place in a world of both ecological and cultural diversity. The examples of the tobacco plant, the possum and the Monterey Pine illustrate how this approach could be extended to inform a foundation for Māori participation in a global political and economic system. This would be constructed from a Māori world view, dialogueing Māori values. Relevant themes might include the geographic origins of a plant or animal, the cultures who live there, and who may have alternative values and relationships with the species that add a different context to Māori knowledge. Māori understandings of the world can then be negotiated with other parties in a respectful dialogue where the integrity of a Māori world-view and that of the indigenous guardians of the species is affirmed rather than dismissed.

There is a need to find a basis for development, that focuses on protecting and restoring indigenous ecosystems and species, as well as strengthening and renewing those connections between Māori and the environment, and with other ancient cultures. Our approaches should reflect the foundations of our cultural world view. For Māori this includes a cosmological perspective that incorporates the primeval parents Ranginui, the Sky Father (Rangi) and Papatuanuku, the Earth Mother (Papa). These environmental considerations are also closely related to broader socio-economic issues including health.

Health promotion must take into account the nature and quality of the interaction between people and the surrounding environment. It is not simply a call for a return to nature, but an attempt to strike a balance between de-

velopment and environmental protection, and recognition that the human domain is intimately connected to Rangī and Papa (Durie 1999),

Weaving our Stories Worldwide: Deconstructing the Colonial Landscape

George Manuel, of the Shushwap Tribe of British Columbia, in his role as a representative of the National Indian Brotherhood made an important reflection on his return from a trip to New Zealand and Australia.

"I hope that the common history and shared values that we discovered in each other are only the seeds from which some kind of lasting framework can grow for a common alliance of native peoples" (National Indian Brotherhood 1971).

The question articulates the key motivations behind this paper. How could such a framework be developed? I believe the metaphor of seeds used by Manuel above is a key. This literally reflects the reality – the seeds of their ecology have already been literally sewn throughout New Zealand. The basis of the connection is already here in a very tangible sense. An active dialogue with other indigenous people may animate the new ecology in dynamic and creative ways.

Māori schools and educational domains, that emphasise language and cultural learning, might incorporate insights emerging from this process into their curriculum. Ecology, geography and social and political studies would discover that strong connecting symbols already exist across the countryside. A simple corn cob becomes a basis for a lesson that takes a student from New Zealand to the South American continent. The journey involves rich stories of the sophisticated systems of horticulture that allowed this plant to become a staple diet in the area. The cultures and teachings of those communities could be incorporated into the lesson. More recent history might include imposed systems of government that in many cases continue to oppress these peoples (Berger 1991). The Internet is not the first world wide web. Our increasing focus on this technology and the virtual world can undermine a more active and essentially human enriching undertaking that can identify profound connections between people in the physical world.

A Māori centred framework

There are a number of key principles that would be important considerations if an exchange of knowledge such as that promoted in this paper were to have integrity from a Māori perspective. Outlined below are four concepts that have practical implications for how such a process might be conducted. They recognize the need to reclaim the cultural landscape, as much as the land itself, as Māori participation in the New Zealand economy expands.

Such a framework also suggests that Māori ought to be careful not to perpetuate the cultural baggage of colonization, including the possibilities of exploiting the natural resources from other countries in ways where Māori become the colonizers of other places and cultures. Following the guiding principles below could avoid that.

Wairua: Acknowledging the spiritual dimension

Wairua is a Māori term for spirit and here refers to the imperative of acknowledging the role of spirit in conducting important activities. While as individuals there is a range of spiritual beliefs, ceremony continues to affirm an evolving Māori cultural and spiritual tradition. In the context of exotic species ceremony might be an important part of strategies for pest management for example. This will not necessarily change the goals. Rather it will involve a shift in the spirit in which they are conducted to one that is more consistent with guardianship roles. Ultimately this is about restoring balance rather than metaphorically or literally 'waging war' against a species.

Kaitiakitanga: the roles and responsibilities of kaitiaki

Kaitiaki has some parallels with Western concepts of a guardian or steward (Tunks 1995, Nin 1994). **Kaitiakitanga** is a distinct, dynamic and evolving philosophy and process that arises through intimate interaction between Māori people and the environment (Te Wananga o Raukawa 1998). The concept includes intergenerational responsibilities to protect and nurture the environment and customary resources. Sustainable development is facilitated by recognizing spiritual and cultural concerns as these can invoke a certain humility and a restraint on development activities. Through the stories and traditions of other indigenous peoples Māori may not only find that a species attains a greater importance but creative solutions may also emerge.

If we look at the possum for example, there has never been a formal meeting between Māori and Australian Aboriginal peoples to discuss the animal and the tremendous impact of its presence in New Zealand. From a Western scientific point of view there might seem to be little benefit. While Aboriginal people may know this animal intimately in their homelands, what could they offer Māori when the ecosystem is totally different? From an indigenous perspective however, it may well be the appropriate starting point to a long-term solution based on a more complete knowledge. This knowledge includes the recognition that the species has its own cultural and spiritual legacy that needs to be recognized.

Whanaungatanga: Recognizing the importance of relationships

Relationships are key elements of a Māori world view. While Western science tends to have a reductionist approach to studying the world, Māori tend to focus on the dynamic relationships between different aspects of the natural world. Genealogy is an important part of this approach and Māori are able to connect themselves with non-human species and geographical features including mountains and rivers. This recognizes a strong bond between humans and the rest of the physical world. This is demonstrated by the Māori phrase **Ko wai koe?** This literally asks 'from whose waters do you come'? Another example is the Māori term **whenua** that is used for both land, and the placenta. As the **whenua** nourishes the unborn child so the land nourishes that child in the world of light. It is difficult then to understand and respond to a species with no genealogy and no one to tell its stories. How does one describe such an animal to a Māori child beyond curiosities and superficial characteristics? When a child asks "where does it come from?", how can we give an answer that truly honours the spirit of the question? Dialogue with other indigenous peoples can help develop a sense of continuity and reduce the ongoing distortions of a colonial heritage.

Rangatiratanga: leadership, authority and vision

A commonly used English equivalent for **rangatiratanga** is 'self-determination'. Māori aspirations for regaining a role in the active management and protection of indigenous species are an expression of **rangatiratanga**. The right of other indigenous peoples to express an active interest in species that have importance to them could also be seen as an expression of their **rangatiratanga**. Further, the activities of government, and private research and development interests that exploit exotic species in New Zealand may be affecting the rights of other indigenous peoples and Māori need to be aware of this.

Concluding Comments

The approach that is advocated offers pathways to a more secure identity for Māori in that a greater understanding of global processes and linkages is promoted. The approach acknowledges the need for Māori communities to construct their own reality assisted through dialogue with other indigenous cultures, thereby gaining a more complete knowledge of exotic flora and fauna. Social and cultural reality is enhanced as the layers of meaning placed on the species are revealed and therefore placed within a more complete sense of historic, geographic and cultural continuity. Decolonization might then be about the development of a more encompassing ecological perspective, which might allow new values and knowledge to contribute to resolving contemporary management issues.

Questions about how we value indigenous and introduced species could be reframed within this wider context. As a result, mainstream environmental managers in New Zealand may no longer be the only, or even the first, port of call for Māori who are seeking strategies for protecting and renewing the remnants of New Zealand's indigenous landscape and protecting them from introduced 'threats'.

Literature Cited

Aldridge, V. 2001. The scenery is pining away, *The Dominion*, March 12.

Asher, G. & D. Naulls. 1987. *Māori Land*. New Zealand Planning Council, Wellington, New Zealand.

Berger, T.R. 1991. *A long and terrible shadow: White values, native rights in the Americas 1492-1992*. University of Washington, Seattle.

Brockie, R. 1992. *A living New Zealand forest*. David Bateman, Auckland, New Zealand.

Crosby, A. 1995. *Ecological imperialism: the biological expansion of Europe, 900-1900*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK.

Durie, M. 2000. *Toi te Kupu, Toi te Mana, Toi te Whenua: Māori Development in a Global Society Conference*. Te Putahi-a-Toi School of Māori Studies, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

Durie, M. 1999. *Te Pae Mahutonga*. Paper to the Health Promotion Forum Annual Conference, Napier, New Zealand.

Hau'ofa, E. 1994 'Pasts to Remember', Oceania Lecture, University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji.

McKibben, B. 1990. *The End of Nature*, Viking, London.

Moore, T. 1996. *The Re-enchantment of Everyday Life*. Hodder and Stoughton, London, UK.

National Indian Brotherhood. 1971. *Report of the National Indian Brotherhoods Tour of New Zealand and Australia*. Ottawa, Canada.

New Zealand Law Reporter. 1995. *Māori claims to indigenous flora and fauna*. October.

Orange, C. 1987. *The Treaty of Waitangi*. Allen & Unwin, Port Nicholson Press with assistance from the Historical Publications Branch, Dept. of Internal Affairs, Wellington, New Zealand.

Park, G. 1995. *The groves of life - Nga uruora : ecology and history in a New Zealand landscape*. Victoria University Press, Wellington, New Zealand.

Reid, P. & R. Pouwhare. 1991. *Te taonga mai tawhiti: A gift from a distant place*. Niho Taniwha, Auckland, New Zealand.

Smith, L. & K. Ferlito. 1997. Monterey Pine Forest: A Forest At Risk. *Fremontia* 25(2):3-4.

Te Wananga o Raukawa. 1998. *Kaitiakitanga: Tona orange i te rautau hou – Setting the agenda for the 21st Century, A report concerning a hui convened by the confederation of Ngati Toarangatira, Te Ati Awa and Ngati Raukawa with Te Wananga o Raukawa*. Raukawa Marae, Otaki, New Zealand.

Ward, A. 1995. *A show of justice : racial 'amalgamation' in nineteenth century New Zealand*. Auckland University Press, Auckland, New Zealand.