

PAKEHA TAONGA AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF DRESS

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ABSTRACT

When in 2004 a Pakeha student was not allowed to wear her amethyst pendant to school, she claimed it as her taonga since it was spiritually and culturally significant to her. Through this she entered a cultural and political debate about what it means to be Pakeha, drawing on Maori cultural meanings to do so. Demonstrating the dynamic and transformational nature of culture, her actions contributed to constructs of cultural identity in Aotearoa New Zealand in a vital way, although her arguments to wear her pendant were never formally recognised. The ensuing struggle over cultural meanings and interpretations which her situation provoked has some parallels with that of Muslim schoolgirls in France wanting to wear headscarves to school, highlighting what it means to wear culture. Their claims are for diversity in the face of a dominant monoculturalism, exposed through this debate as defining cultural identity in its narrowest sense. The debate also exposes some beliefs about where Pakeha stand in relation to the Treaty of Waitangi.

INTRODUCTION

Two recent debates have been played out in the field of appearances and cultural expression within the confines of school uniform, highlighting issues of cultural identity and monoculturalism. In both cases, an item of dress was used to express self as culturally ‘other’ to the dominant culture, resulting in a struggle over meaning.

One case took place in New Zealand early in 2004 involving Megan Church, a Year Twelve student at Marlborough Girl’s College. Megan was not allowed to wear her amethyst pendant to school because according to school authorities, the pendant conflicted with uniform rules. Because the pendant was culturally and spiritually significant to her, Megan likened it to taonga and claimed the right to wear it as part of her cultural identity, taking her case to the Human

Rights Commission on this basis. Thus she entered a wider debate about what it means to be Pakeha and, intriguingly, drew on Maori cultural meanings to do so. Her case provides an interesting study in how culture is defined and by whom, as evidenced in the ensuing debate and in her subsequent treatment by the school.

A similar debate on a much larger scale was taking place at the same time in France, known as *l'affaire du foulard*. Although starting in 1989 this debate continued and was again in the news in late 2003. The debate centred on Muslim schoolgirls in France wearing the *hajib* or headscarf to school. For some commentators, the headscarf was almost unbelievably trivial, while for others, wearing one to school was interpreted as an attack on French Republicanism, the very core of French identity. These schoolgirls however were at the forefront of what remains a wider struggle by French Muslims for acceptance of an inclusive cultural identity as both French *and* Muslim. The attempts by cultural 'others' to renegotiate identity came into conflict with the dominant monoculture, resulting in a battle over cultural definitions and meanings.

There are several parallels in these cases worth exploring. Both debates concern monoculturalism, cultural identity, the attribution and denial of what particular dress items mean to different parties, and what it means to wear culture.

BEING PAKEHA

In Aotearoa New Zealand the case of Megan Church challenged official versions of cultural identity, going to the heart of what counts as culture and what 'being Pakeha' means. Historian Michael King defines Pakeha as '...denoting people and influences that derive originally from Europe but which are no longer "European". Pakeha is an indigenous expression to describe New Zealand people and expressions of culture that are not Maori' (King, 1999:10). King notes the debate surrounding use and meanings of this word. Michael Goldsmith also asks what Pakeha means, identifying changes in meaning over time and concluding that being Pakeha involves some engagement with Maori (2005). This suggests a meeting or crossing of cultures, including the use of Maori words, symbols, and cultural concepts, as part of being Pakeha.

Others define Pakeha as 'the descendents of European colonising settlers' locating the debate and meanings within political and historical struggles, and at the same time asserting an identity specifically connected to Aotearoa New Zealand as a place (Larner and Spoonley, 1995: 39). This consciousness of place

was exploited in the mid 1990s through a 'programme of persuasion' in a process Claudia Bell describes as the 'invention' of Pakeha identity (Bell, 1996: 8). For Bell, interpretations of being Pakeha are nationalistic constructions, economically and politically driven, and also linked to nostalgia and anxiety in the face of overwhelming global pressures (Bell, 1996). She underscores the sense in which national or cultural identity is a *construct*, operating in part to reaffirm the dominance of Pakeha identity in New Zealand yet also central in the production of representational claims of 'who we are' (ibid: 27). Bell finds no coherence or agreement among Pakeha or European New Zealanders about what being Pakeha means, and she rejects assumptions of shared values because these exclusionary visions perpetuate social inequality, deny history, and refuse plurality (Bell, 1996).

Although Pakeha culture remains the dominant culture, during the 1980s and 1990s Maori have made significant gains through settlement of historic claims under the Treaty of Waitangi and this period is marked as a time of Maori cultural and political renaissance (Larner and Spoonley, 1995). The Treaty was the focus for politicizing Maori identity and through this became the basis for biculturalism in state institutions, also forcing Pakeha to explore 'the implications of a locally focussed identity' (Larner and Spoonley, 1995: 40). Both Maori and Pakeha cultures rest on localised identities.

The challenge of biculturalism in the 1990s has given way in the 2000s to multiculturalism. In the 1990s multiculturalism was for some a 'soft option' because it bypassed the issue of partnership (Larner and Spoonley, 1995). For King, multiculturalism was an ideal because inclusive, not assimilating, which allows voluntary movement between cultures and thus provides an opportunity to participate in diversity (1999). Although assimilation has been discredited for decades as an unworthy and racist ideology (Larner and Spoonley, 1995), it is an ongoing aim of right wing groups (Bell, 1996). Numbers of New Zealand Europeans refuse 'Pakeha' as their label of ethnicity, identifying with British settler roots instead and generally also not acknowledging a colonial history of racism and inequality (Larner and Spoonley, 1995).

Identifying as Pakeha signals a kind of identity politics that for all its faults is oriented towards a local identity and partakes of the ongoing debate of what this means. This must always take Maori into account through what King calls a 'transforming interaction' (King, 1999: 235). Culture *is* dynamic. What being Pakeha means is both continually changing and contested, yet the underlying theme always concerns political and cultural identities and the power to define culture.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, being Pakeha involves biculturalism and multiculturalism, including the use and interpretation of Maori words, symbols, and cultural concepts. Megan Church accessed some of those meanings and concepts in her own interpretation of what it means to be Pakeha at school, through claiming the right to wear taonga to school.

TAONGA

In this section I now explore what 'taonga' might mean for a School Board of Trustees composed of mainly Pakeha, relying on the sources which schools themselves might use in establishing such a definition ie accessing dictionaries, popular culture and the internet, rather than discussing how this term is used or understood by contemporary indigenous scholars. It is the basis of a *Pakeha* interpretation of taonga that concerns us here. Taonga is defined in various Maori dictionaries as property, anything highly prized (Williams, 1992), as treasure, apparatus, or accessory, (Ryan, 1995) and as possessions, valuables (Reed and Karetu, 1994). Wikipedia extends this meaning to include treasured things, which may be tangible or intangible, giving examples of heirlooms, artefacts, land and fisheries, as well as language, riparian rights, and radio frequencies (<http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Taonga>). The Auckland Museum website gives a more complex explanation which includes the concepts of mana (ancestral prestige), tapu (spiritual protection), and korero (genealogical narratives). Turiana Turia and Peta Sharples (co-leaders of the Maori party in 2007) have described children as taonga, encouraging us to nurture and treasure them as such (<http://www.scoop.co.nz>)¹.

Although the term taonga is contested (such as Kolig, 2004), it clearly includes tangible and intangible possessions that are always treasured and valued, cultural attitudes and beliefs, with cultural and spiritual meanings, and contributing to an apparently vital dimension of cultural identity. Under Article Two of the Treaty, possession and enjoyment of taonga is guaranteed to Maori, but there is a lot at stake in the interpretation. Taonga is a complex concept with considerable political, social, and cultural import.

Taonga are specifically Maori, and in the context of school and school uniform², are objects of cultural and spiritual value worn around the neck, often pounamu (greenstone) or bone pendants. Although this suggests that taonga are a form of jewellery/ornament and thus incompatible with school uniform³, this is not the case. Through their cultural significance taonga are accorded different status and meaning. Wearing taonga is an expression of cultural identity:

wearing culture, not jewellery. Through their visibility, which includes the fact of their appearance *and* what that means, taonga claim cultural, political and social space for Maori. To wear taonga is always to challenge monocultural and ethnocentric claims, asserting cultural reality as full of meaning and therefore much more than the appearance of it. In those times and places where taonga are by whatever way legitimised, the particular definitions of their cultural meanings are placed beyond the reach of the dominant monoculture. There is then a match between the culture and the cultural object expressing it.

TAONGA AT SCHOOL

Most secondary schools in New Zealand have a policy of compulsory uniform, well within a tradition and history of wearing school uniform. Through the uniform, schools have the authority to define what matters, extending school authority onto the body and appearance of the student (Webster, 2006). School uniforms everywhere institutionalise interpretations of the person in allowing for a strictly limited set of identities, and until recently most New Zealand secondary schools did not include cultural identity as a valid identity dimension (Webster, 2005). Although not widely recognised, this is a significant concession. The change was a consequence of the New Zealand Education Act 1989 which requires Boards of Trustees to recognise New Zealand's cultural diversity and the unique position of Maori culture and to consult with local Maori communities. Many schools now interpret the Act as requiring them, among other things, to grant permission to wear taonga at school (Webster, 2005).

Judging from school uniform rules, schools have interpreted taonga variously, in part because Maori culture is not 'one thing' and probably also reflecting differences in consultation processes. Also, allowing taonga to be worn is by no means universal practice in New Zealand and has been an issue over recent years in some secondary schools, because whatever is worn is potentially in conflict with the uniform.

But how do schools define what counts as taonga, and who is allowed to wear it? When the Pakeha student, Megan Church, was not allowed to wear her amethyst pendant to school, she claimed it as her taonga since it was spiritually and culturally significant to her. In doing so, I would argue she makes an important contribution to the debate about being Pakeha. The debates that followed her claim highlight differences in cultural meanings and interpretations, also exposing a political view of culture and certain beliefs about where Pakeha stand in relation to the Treaty of Waitangi.

PAKEHA TAONGA

In February 2004 the Human Rights Commission (HRC) mediated the growing dispute between Marlborough Girl's College and Megan Church. As part of her argument to support the wearing of her amethyst crystal pendant to school, Megan interpreted the school rules as allowing Maori to openly wear items of spiritual significance to them, and so on a similar basis she claimed this right for herself. The subsequent refusal of permission by the school to endorse this particular reading of its rules then became the basis of a complaint by Megan and her family to the commission on the basis of discrimination.

At the time, Marlborough Girl's College Board of Trustees had just overturned their ban on open display of jewellery to allow both Maori and non-Maori students to openly wear bone or pounamu carvings. No other jewellery was permitted at the school, with the exception of religious jewellery, which had to be worn tucked out of sight (*Sunday Star Times*, 2004). The policy had been developed following advice from iwi representatives (of local Maori communities) who did not consider the carvings as jewellery at all, describing such items as taonga or gifts that should be worn openly and with pride. Iwi representatives in this school had made a distinction between jewellery and taonga, the latter having specific cultural meanings, values, and properties with the capacity to promote the wellbeing of Maori students.

Iwi recommendations were adopted by the Board of Trustees, allowing them to meet their legal obligations for consultation and cultural recognition. The Board of Trustees thus supported the distinction between jewellery, as merely ornamental, and taonga, which are cultural symbols having particular meanings and properties in Maori culture. Prudently, they allowed both Maori and non-Maori students to openly wear taonga, but at the same time introduced some problems by defining taonga as bone or poumanu, regardless of origin, provenance, or personal meaning, while all other pendants, including amethyst, were defined as jewellery. This distinction is worthy of closer scrutiny.

Megan's mother Mrs Church (personal communication, 2007) described this as a 'double standard'. Even 'love hearts' purchased at the gift shop were permitted as taonga, if they were made of greenstone. The implication here is that mass-produced 'junk jewellery' was to be given cultural value on the basis of its material composition. Mrs Church challenged this distinction, describing taonga instead as 'something special and personal to yourself', perhaps a special gift from someone (personal communication, 2007). The issue for her was

not the material from which the article was made or its identification with a wider symbolic system, but its *personal* meaning.

And Megan's crystal was replete with meaning. This small amethyst crystal was a gift from Megan's grandmother. She had worn it on a chord around her neck since she was eight years old, never removing it and generally keeping it hidden under her clothing at school. Megan believed that the crystal had special properties to help her, which she protected by never removing it and never allowing other people to touch it. Such beliefs are consistent with various forms of alternative and New Age spiritualities (see Hall, 2003; Harold, 1986; or Richardson, Richardson and Huett, 1980). It is clear that Megan's crystal was spiritually significant to her, yet because it was not made of bone or greenstone, it did not qualify as taonga and she was not allowed to display it openly. Megan asked: why are only Maori allowed to exhibit cultural and spiritual meanings?

The design of school uniform blouses meant that sometimes Megan's crystal was visible, and most teachers had simply asked her to tuck it back in. But early in the 2004 school year, one teacher insisted that it be removed and went so far as to bring scissors and cut it off. Although very upset about this, Megan chose not to go to the police for what was technically an assault (personal communication, 2007). When neither this teacher nor the school would take responsibility or apologise for what had happened, Mrs Church approached the Human Rights Commission (HRC) to register her complaint. She wanted the school to adopt one rule for everyone: that either everyone be allowed to wear items of cultural, spiritual or personal significance, or no one.

The HRC organised mediation between the school and Megan's family. The iwi representative did not attend. Mrs Church blames this person for the misunderstanding, claiming that 'she did not have a clue' about what 'taonga really means' (personal communication, 2007). The Church family were also disappointed in the HRC, perhaps misunderstanding the commission's limited powers. The school did not back down, the rules did not change, and Megan never went back to school.

The principal Greta Firth did not attract the same levels of criticism from Mrs Church as did the iwi representative or the HRC, although Ms Firth's implementation of the Board of Trustees' policy and her interpretation of taonga were decisive for the student. Challenged in the press, Ms Firth defended the policy by describing bone or pounamu carvings as 'not just Maori cultural

symbols, but New Zealand symbols, embodying the idea of two peoples, one nation' (*Sunday Star Times*, 2004). She evoked patriotism, describing the carvings as a unique New Zealand art form and therefore a source of pride for all New Zealanders. 'Its us', she said (*Sunday Star Times*, 2004). Although supporting the distinction between taonga and jewellery, Ms Firth gave a different meaning to that arrived at by the board through consultation. She described taonga as an art form, belonging to *all* New Zealanders, with material composition not cultural or spiritual significance, as the defining characteristic. How could Megan be discriminated against on the basis of culture when cultural differences were not even recognised? Attributing taonga as belonging to all New Zealanders denies its specific connections to Maori, Maori culture, and Article Two of the Treaty.

Trying to position herself inside the norm of common practice, Ms Firth claimed that several other state schools had the same policy. My research contradicts her claim of normality. The norm was rather one of adaptation to a changing political climate, or a more generalised acceptance of diversity. Although about a third of high schools had detailed school uniform policy restricting jewellery, piercing was their main concern. During interviews, teachers and principals described piercing as 'subversive' and 'dangerous', and therefore subject to strict monitoring and control. Most high schools had rules that allowed for items of spiritual, cultural, and even sentimental significance. Such items often had to be worn unobtrusively, while schools that allowed them to be worn openly did not distinguish between taonga and jewellery. They did not need to, because they had already conceded this aspect of student appearance as a matter for the student. A second variant among schools were students' views on the display of taonga. Some students told me they wanted to wear them openly, and I also observed many who did, while others explained that because they were 'personal' they preferred to keep them hidden.

The issue brought to the HRC was a case of possible discrimination, on the basis that the Board of Trustees had not extended recognition to items of cultural or spiritual significance to Pakeha. A mediator from the Commission facilitated discussion between Megan, her family, and the school, and issued a statement on March 24th 2004 that included the following:

Schools are increasingly finding themselves in the position of needing to accommodate a diverse range of cultures. While this diversity is positive, allowing for it in uniform policy can be complex... We recommend that schools seek the views of local Iwi in order to improve the well being of Maori students though it is also impor-

tant that the cultural needs of students from other backgrounds is not forgotten. *These policies need to be seen as fair* (HRC, 2004, my emphasis).

Discriminating against Maori and non-Maori is prohibited under the Human Rights Act 1993, while claims of cultural significance require some evidence in support. Megan's mother admitted: 'it would be difficult for the school to distinguish between genuine cultural beliefs and fashion' (*New Zealand Herald*, 2004) although other schools seem content to take a student's word for it. Recall that Megan had worn her crystal since she was eight years old, it had been a gift from her grandmother, and she believed that it gave her power - hardly a fashion choice.

Marlborough Girls' College agreed that it would review its uniform policies, working with the Commission to ensure that the final policy was seen to be fair. According to the Principal, the policy as it stood was still within legal guidelines. Greta Firth herself has since left Marlborough Girls' College and 2007 school uniform rules make no reference to taonga or to any religious, cultural, pounamu or bone items (personal communication, 2007).

The case attracted some attention in the media (for example *Sunday Star Times* 22/2/2004; *Otago Daily Times* 26/3/2004; *New Zealand Herald*, 30/4/2004.). The Minister of Education, Trevor Mallard, described the policy as 'trite' also saying that it had 'exposed the school to ridicule' although he did encourage schools to '... understand the needs of Maori students and to educate in a culturally effective way' (*Sunday Star Times*, 2004). Prompted by the debate, the Maxim Institute also issued a statement to the media. The Maxim institute describes itself as a research 'institute promoting the principles of a free, just and compassionate society through policy and public debate' (<http://www.maxim.org.nz/>). However, even a cursory look at their website links reveal distinctly right-wing views. The institute used the case to attack cultural diversity as supposedly a site of minority privilege and victim status, opposing diversity to a national identity that according to them ought to be coherent, unified, and modern (Woods, 2004). This is an essentially 'one nation' view of culture, i.e. monoculture. Assimilation is the subtext of monoculturalism.

In the aftermath of the HRC intervention, schools like Marlborough Girls' College remain largely independent. Although controlled by the Board of Trustees, the principal is responsible for overall management, and the HRC can only offer voluntary mediation⁴. Cases like Megan's are always grossly unequal, and her mother felt the school had let Megan down (personal communication,

2007). By the time the HRC issued a press statement on 24th March, 2004, Megan was no longer enrolled in the school. Leaving school without qualifications is a setback whatever way you look at it. Although she tried to continue her education with correspondence this was not a success, and the only other school in Blenheim is a boys' school. Today she continues to wear a crystal pendant while washing dishes in Nelson.

‘BITS OF CLOTH’

As mentioned in the introduction to this article, at around the same time as Megan was experiencing her dispute with the school, in France, other girls were also ‘under fire’ for what they wore to school, and this was also on the basis of cultural identity claims. Three young immigrant Muslim women wore headscarves to their French school in 1989 and when they refused to remove them they were expelled, sparking a debate that developed into ‘a crisis of French national identity’ (Moruzzi, 1994: 653). The topic of Muslim women’s dress is a charged one, not helped by discussions which conflate headscarves with full body coverings or veils that cover the face, as Galeotti insists on doing (1994: 674). Various writers have explored Muslim women’s dress, notably Fadwa El Guindi, whose work concerns Muslim women in the Arab world. She interprets their distinctive styles of body covering and headwear as part of the revival of Islamic feminism (El Guindi, 1999). Others have focused more closely on headscarves, such as those worn in Turkey which are alternately described as ‘bits of cloth’, items of popular culture or political symbols (Breu and Marchese, 2000). Headscarves have multiple cultural meanings within Islam and within national and cultural boundaries (Brown, 2001).

Others have considered the headscarves worn by Muslim women in France to be part of a complex problem of cultural, political, religious and gendered identities (Moruzzi, 1994) or as the intersection of French social history and the struggle for Muslim identity (Bowen, 2007). Both of these writers tried to explain meanings across cultural barriers: Moruzzi to refute a French liberal feminist critique of the *hajib* as largely anti-Muslim and calling for localised feminisms, while Bowen offers an explanation of ‘Why the French don’t like headscarves’ *and* why certain Muslim women do. These explanations are unusual in that they offer cultural interpretations of dress objects *and* the cultural meanings that underpin them.

In the French press the *hijab* or headscarf was presented primarily as an item of Muslim dress and although charged with religious and political meaning, there was no consistency however between the various parties about the nature

of these various meanings although indeed they were far more likely to have French meanings transplanted onto them. Widely interpreted as the thin end of a 'Muslim wedge'⁵, headscarves were interpreted by many non-Muslims as an incursion by a 'sexist' and 'backward' religion into an 'enlightened' and 'modern' France (Moruzzi, 1994). Certainly headscarves symbolised Muslim identity and through their visibility, constituted an expression of Muslim cultural or religious identity in public. Religious symbols are emphatically not allowed in public schools, where secularism is part of a specifically French ideology of value-neutral public space.

Yet for these young women, wearing the headscarf was not an attack on France or secularism, but an effort to negotiate a specifically Muslim identity, an identity that secular France sought to erase (Bowen, 2007). Regardless of whatever meanings their wearers gave them, headscarves were interpreted in the media as a radical threat to French society and culture, rekindling historic concerns about the relationship between religion and the state, while focusing anxieties about political Islam, immigration, and suburban violence (Bowen, 2007). Headscarves (and Islam) were interpreted as anti-republican and anti-liberal, and the political Left and the Right were united in denouncing them as militantly anti-French (Moruzzi 1994).

The controversy came to a head when a government appointed panel made its long-awaited report in December 2003. The panel recommended sweeping changes in the way France balanced its fierce secularism with the perceived demands of a growing immigrant population of Muslims. Their most dramatic recommendation was for a legal ban on the wearing of conspicuous religious symbols in France's public schools, widely understood as directed against the headscarves worn by Muslim girls.

Welcoming the report, France's president Jacques Chirac called for a new law to ban headscarves and all other religious symbols from public schools (Richberg, 2003). Chirac asserted that the head scarf had no place in the public school, and that banning them upheld the secularism initiated in the French revolution then enshrined in France's Constitution (Richberg, 2003). Although France has a large immigrant population, it aggressively assimilates them into French language, culture, and tradition. But demands for integration are not neutral. Because France collects no official statistics on ethnicity or religion, this information is not available and cannot be used to consider disadvantage of particular ethnic or religious groups (Bowen, 2007), in contrast to New Zealand statistics where ethnicity is nearly always an important feature often understood as an outcome of colonial history (Larner and Spoonley, 1995).

Liberal feminists and the media decried the headscarf as a symbol of women's supposed oppression under Islam. This feminist reading casts the wearers as passive victims and the state as having to prohibit these girls from wearing scarves 'for their own good' from a position of Western social practices as 'a secular and emancipatory norm' (Moruzzi, 1994: 661). Moruzzi points out that secularism in France is an unequal religious prohibition because it assumes separation from not just any religion but from the Christian Church, so that secular values are always framed within Christian cultural practices (1994). In New Zealand a similar assumption would seem to operate, defining Pakeha identity with Christianity the only legitimate spirituality, conceding spiritual significance to crosses but not to crystals.

Bowen interprets the fierce secularism of France as part of a strategy to avoid more difficult discussions of colonial history and migration (2007). This likewise has parallels in New Zealand, where a refusal to engage with deeper meanings of culture and cultural identity also avoids the otherwise inevitable confrontation with New Zealand's own 'unsettled' colonial past. By deciding against the expression of pluralist identity expressions, the French state has so far declined to include Islam, instead reasserting French monoculture. Bowen considered this to be a failure to live up to the promise of Republicanism, one where differences may be spoken and therefore taken into account (2007).

WEARING CULTURE

Allowing people to wear taonga in New Zealand and headscarves in France is about allowing expression of cultural identity *and* participation in that culture, together understood as necessary for wellbeing. This is what diversity and pluralism allows. At Marlborough Girl's College, the principal co-opted the word, the very concept and cultural meaning of taonga, replacing it with a one-dimensional materiality, which emptied it of cultural meaning. If meaning and significance had been allowed, the crystal would qualify as a form of Pakeha taonga. The denigration of Megan's cultural, spiritual and personal identities is against the stated aims of the New Zealand education system. The case is also a failure of consultation, and since ultimate authority still rests with the principal, made this a double bind.

Far from Trevor Mallard's summation of the case as trite, this goes to the heart of what diversity in New Zealand actually means. The debate includes the intangible properties of cultural objects as symbols and as political signs. Since meanings only exist through a process involving expression and interpretation, permission to wear meaning is permission to *participate* in that existence, by

actively maintaining, regenerating, and creating meaning, and that permission also legitimates the *source* of such meanings. This gives life to culture and cultural diversity. Without expression of such diversity, meaning itself withers away. Culture is not an imposed thing, unless it is part of political myth making to which Bell refers (1996). What we wear is an essential part of who we are, part of being and becoming, and fundamental to belonging. It matters what you wear.

UNIFORMS AND CULTURE DIVERSITY

The expression of cultural identity in schools as state institutions is controversial worldwide. It does seem reasonable for schools to limit expression of diversities, since proliferations undermine school uniform to the point where they cannot function except as enforcement (their least desirable function). At the same time, the potential of school uniforms to sustain and communicate school identity is diminished if not lost through multiple forms. It is also vital for individuals to retain membership in their cultural groups and to resist the homogeneity of a dominant culture that excludes or marginalises them. The dress of Moslem girls and women in schools has been an issue not only in France, but also in USA, UK, and Germany over recent years, foregrounding issues of cultural identity in these countries (Gavin, 2004, Knox, 2004).

The erasure of cultural diversity is about making people disappear from group belonging into a mass of disconnected units, undermining the political power available to them through the collective identity of their culture. What is important here is to maintain the reality of different cultural values and symbolic meanings, yet mediate this within the limits of uniformity. Such a balancing of competing concerns calls for consultation in the best sense: inclusive, respectful, effective, and fair.

CULTURE, SPIRITUALITY, MEANING

Megan Church's case raises fundamental issues about who and what we are as a nation. It challenges our understanding of culture and spirituality, and of being Pakeha. It highlights a lack of coherence in cultural meanings among the parties, and demands that we look again at these meanings. Megan's attempt to wear her crystal was also a struggle to belong and connect while retaining those parts of cultural identity necessary for her wellbeing. Wearing meaning, claiming the intangible as real, and expressing identity in 2004 was an act of resistance and a creative, active participation in the cultural dynamic of being Pakeha. Megan did not get natural justice, and the triumph went instead to the

most impoverished view of what cultural means. Such acts are always about power, the power to act and the power to define. In this case, it was the unbridled power of the Principal that counted in the end, backed up monoculture.

This struggle was played out under Article Two of the Treaty, but the treaty is between Maori and the Crown, not *Pakeha*, Maori and the Crown. Although Megan's claim to an alternative spirituality was not respected, the claim itself was made possible by the political struggles and cultural renaissance of Maori, who through the struggle have created in New Zealand the beginnings of a new and public cultural and thus spiritual space.

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NOTES

- 1 Accessed in February 2007, the statement was responding to a UNICEF report that ranked New Zealand children as among the worst off in the developed countries in terms of child deaths, child poverty, and educational failure. The chances of educational success continue to be much greater for Pakeha students, suggesting that school environments remain monocultural in some critical respects. The Ministry of Education Schooling Strategy for the period 2005 to 2010 identifies concerns about gaps in achievement linked to ethnic and socio-economic groupings, where Maori and Pacifica students continue to be over-represented (Ministry of Education, 2005).
- 2 My PhD research of school uniforms and identity in New Zealand included study of a representative sample of 110 secondary schools. These schools were surveyed in 2003 and also asked to send their current prospectus. The telephone survey covered a wide range of uniform practices and school characteristics, and had a participation rate of 91%. 103 school prospectuses were received and studied. Nearly all included some information about uniform rules, and most had photographs of students wearing uniform. In 2004 I visited eleven schools that between them represented a good range of school characteristics in terms of gender, size, location, types, decile, and uniform practices. From these schools I collected over 800 school photographs from which I compiled a visual history, and in four of these schools I interviewed students about their experiences and viewpoints on school uniform and dress.

- 3 Jewellery as merely decorative or fashionable is almost never allowed in school uniform rules (Webster, 2005).
- 4 Boards of Trustees ostensibly run schools, and under the Education Act 1989 have power to make and enforce rules. While boards have this authority, the Human Rights Act 1993 does apply where any unlawful direct or indirect discrimination occurs, and there have been cases of discrimination in school uniform rules brought to the HRC, on the basis of gender, culture, and religion.
- 5 Over recent years Islam has become the second largest religion in France, estimated at between five and seven million followers (Richberg, 2003).

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