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Centre for Indigenous Governance and Development



Constructing 'Traditional' Concepts: The Case of Māori Governance

Te Rina Warren



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Abstract

As colonisation infiltrated Māori societies, 'traditional' practices and concepts became dismantled, restricted to isolated domains, concealed, abandoned or adapted to contemporary settings.

A colonial government has produced a contemporary form of Māori governance in which most people commonly associate with some type of 'traditional' governance system. Although the naming of such institutions has its own tradition, their assimilation into western governance systems merely provides the illusion of traditional control. Understanding that such processes have taken place provides a platform that can increase consciousness of how they can maintain some of their classically traditional structures and practices. This paper considers the case of Māori governance as an example highlighting how traditional knowledges must move from the peripheries of 'knowing' and re-establish themselves back at the centre.

Biographical Note

Te Rina Warren - Ngāti Whitikaupeka, Ngāti Raukawa.

Introduction

Epistemologies evolve over time. Newfound knowledges contribute to them and guide their development. For cultures who encounter and fuse with others, this can be detrimental to the traditional foundations upon which they are built. The process of colonization documents this well and has been discussed by a number of indigenous authors.¹ Thus, it is important to confront and deal 'with the confusing, chaotic, contradictory ideas and theories emanating from the west that tends to become entangled with our thinking about our own part of the world.'² This paper intends to provide some enlightenment and understanding as to *how* indigenous knowledges have been constructed by the process of colonization. By understanding the evolution of knowledge one might be able to reconstruct and re-instate more traditional knowledges into contemporary societies. This piece will highlight examples from the New Zealand Māori, our history and how traditional forms of governance, Rūnanga, have been subject to detrimental forms of knowledge relocation. The deliberate usage of the term 'relocation' is to acknowledge that although indigenous forms of knowing are valid forms, their position in western, academic fields has moved them from their centres into the peripheries of true and correct knowledges. This notion will be discussed further. In order to understand the holistic impacts of knowledge relocation two theories will be examined. First, in Marxist tradition, Modes of Production will provide the foundations for an analysis of how indigenous and 'other' forms of knowledge become susceptible to relocation. It will consider the notions of the base and superstructure, how traditional forms were weakened and how this has impacted on indigenous knowledges. Second, the neo-Marxist theories of World Systems and Dependency will be utilized to offer some understanding of the relationships that are formed. By examining these theories the notions of power become obvious and therefore relevant to how indigenous epistemologies are located. By becoming conscious of the way in which epistemologies have been shaped, we are better prepared to assess our current position and the best ways in which we can fashion our future directions.

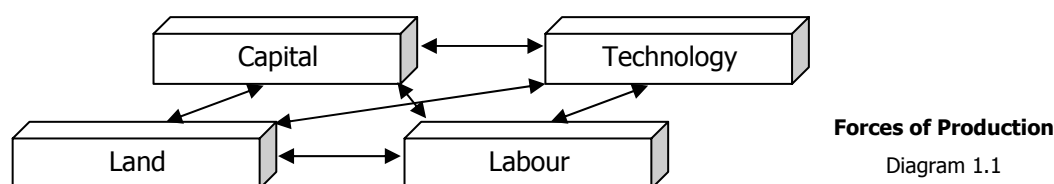
Centering Understanding

Modes of production

Modes of Production is based on the notion of Marx's historical materialism.³ The theory itself has endured a lot of critique and its utility has been often questioned.⁴ However, when the complex jargons are discarded and the essential ideas of Modes of Production are viewed in their simplicity, the theory offers a valuable means to learning.⁵ Overton acknowledges that additional literature and learning is necessary to understand this theory in its entirety and as it applies to different societies in different times, but for our purposes, its basic tenets are useful in understanding particular circumstances. It should also be noted that the use of Modes of Production is, for the purposes of this paper, very basic and simple and that other modes (such as pre-capitalist, capitalist, lineage, Asiatic, and feudal⁶) as well as other Marxist characteristics (such as class formation, reproduction, primitive accumulation, articulation, alienation and surplus value⁷) would require a much more complicated analysis. However, these basic explanations can assist in the way in which we view the evolution of indigenous knowledges. With this in mind, the Modes of Production is used as a basis to

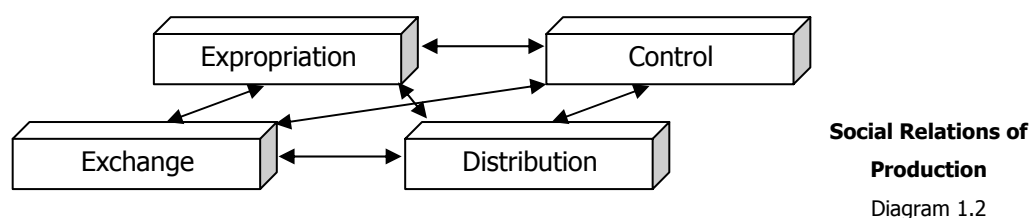
understand how colonization has impacted on indigenous knowledges and offers an insight into how contemporary epistemologies have been shaped.

There are three levels that compose the Mode of Production. The first level is referred to as the 'forces of production' and is comprised of land, labour, capital and technology. All of these are used to produce goods and services. They are the foundation of the economy, but more importantly they provide the basis for survival. Worsley describes them as the tools and skills required to produce.⁸



The forces of production form the platform for societies. This notion is important, as when one tenet of the forces is weak the others will over compensate for it. They are all interdependent factions of society. Overton cites the examples of Western Europe, in short supply of land and labour but capital and technology intensive, and the Pacific Islands, where land and capital are limited but labour is abundant.⁹ This becomes relevant to further discussions when colonial histories are taken into account and land confiscations and acquisitions, as with the Māori, begin to undermine traditional societies. When analyzing societies using the Modes of Production, the detrimental effects for Māori are indeed overwhelming. By focusing on land alone the effects of colonization on Māori are inarguably obvious: the imperial colonial assault on the Māori base saw Māori land ownership decrease from 66,400,000 acres in 1840 (the year the Treaty of Waitangi¹⁰ was signed) to 34,000,000 acres in 1852, to 4,787,686 in 1920 and to 3,000,000 acres in 1975. Only 3% of this amount had been held 135 years previously.¹¹

The second level of the Modes of Production is referred to as the 'relations of production' or rather the 'social relations of production'. This is what Overton calls the core of the Modes of Production,¹² the most interesting level of society. He articulates that this level demonstrates how the economy and society is organized.¹³ It involves control, who owns the forces of production like land; exchange, how commodities are traded; distribution, with whom goods and services are exchanged; and appropriation, who profits from these transactions.¹⁴ These factors are interdependent and are also dependent on every factor within the Modes of Production. Herein, they are once more acknowledged as being important: when one cornerstone of society changes, so too do the others.



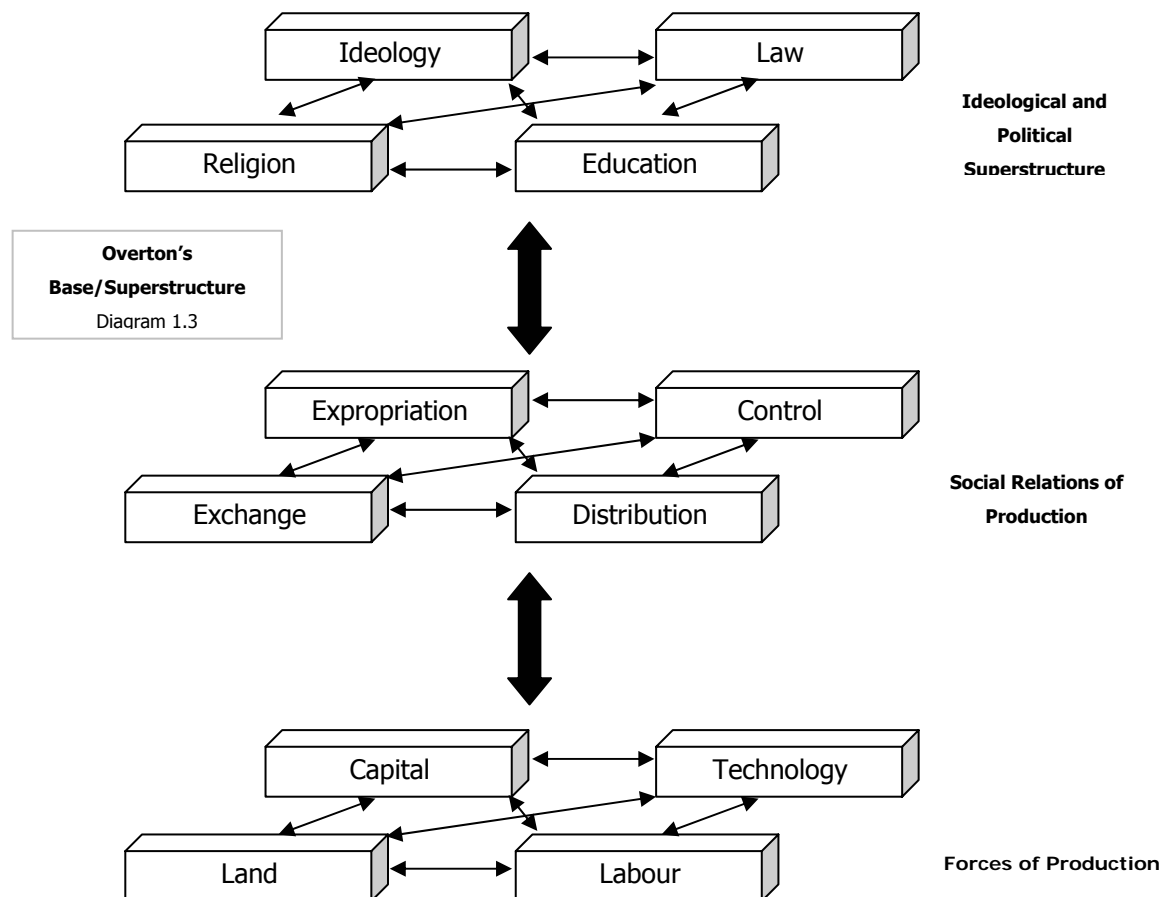
In the case of the Māori, with land confiscation being rapid and immense upon colonial contact, relations within Māori societies underwent the same type of rapid change. Overton uses Pacific communal ownership and the systems of traditional land exchange as examples here.¹⁵ Indeed, for Māori the shift from communal ownership to individual title upon colonial contact had widespread implications for

Māori societies¹⁶ that allowed easy appropriation by new settlers and shook the foundations of traditional societies. Māori became 'landless citizens in their own country'¹⁷ and 'as pastoralism developed and land alienation accelerated, Māori came to occupy a marginal existence as subsistence agriculturalists and wage labourers.'¹⁸ Further ramifications of land loss for Māori are well documented by Firth¹⁹ who noted the effects on social relations, organization, spirituality, child rearing and knowledge transmission.

These two levels combined, the forces and relations of production, are also referred to as the 'base' of the Modes of Production.

The third level of the Modes of Production is the 'ideological and political superstructure' or the 'superstructure'. Overton describes this level as:

the ideas and institutions which regulate and reproduce the mode of production. Ideology, education and religion may evolve out of, and reinforce, a given mode... whilst the legal systems regulate and enforce the interactions within the system. Customs, ideas, laws and culture are thus seen as integral elements of modes of production, not exogenous factors.²⁰

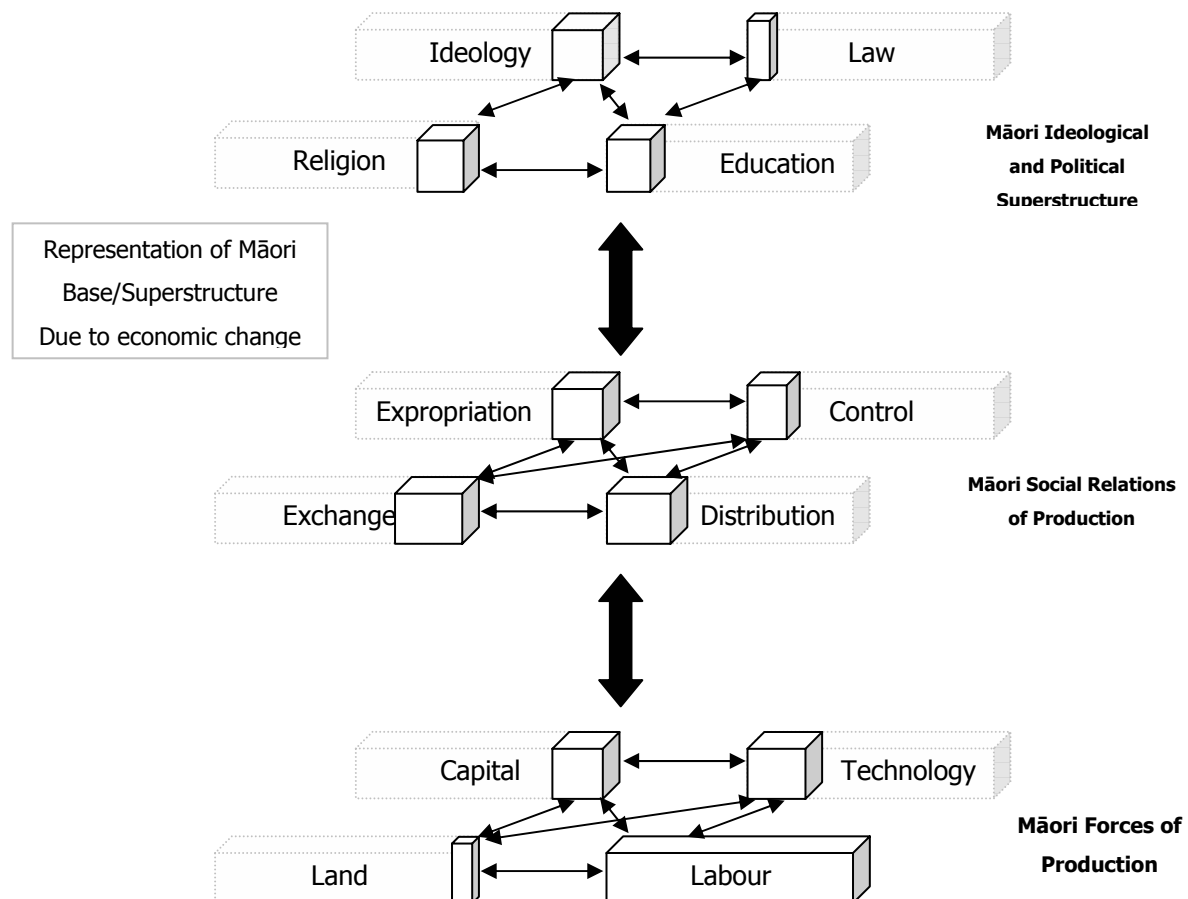


Therefore, the entire Mode of Production can be viewed as one set of factors, all interdependent and changing in regard to each other. If the theory of Modes of Production is used to analyse how traditional societies have changed, the ways in which our epistemologies have changed become more apparent.

In isolation, the loss of land may not initially evoke thought of societal destruction. However, when viewed through the Marxist lens of Modes of Production its influence on societies becomes evident. For Māori, the impacts of land loss were devastating. A 135 year period saw Māori-owned land reduced to a mere 3% leaving the Māori base severely weakened and Māori societies open to further erosion. The 'Proletarianisation of the Māori by expropriation of their resources'²¹ identifies that the relations of production have indeed been affected and an assault on the superstructure of Māori societies is evident.

For Māori, legislation was used to alienate Māori land for purchase and land was otherwise confiscated when Māori opposed land transfer.²² In addition, the assimilation policies of the settler government infiltrated the Māori superstructure, where '[a]lthough it is not widely recognized, colonial policies sought to accumulate capital through the control of Māori labor as well as land.'²³ The consequences of land loss influenced all dimensions of Māori life, from social relations, subsistence production, organization, and labour to spirituality, child rearing and knowledge transmission.²⁴ With regard to religion, Walker notes that 'conversion to Christianity led to further erosion of Māori culture and power'²⁵ where the missionaries were successful in undermining 'the institutions that buttressed social control and the power of chiefs.'²⁶ Christianity was also responsible for introducing a new education system that brought about a change in Māori ideologies.²⁷

Based on these Marxist ideas all societies should be able to articulate their own societal evolution. For indigenous peoples who have faced colonization, identifying shifts in the Modes of Production may contribute to understanding contemporary situations. For Māori, an adoption of Overton's illustration of the modes of production would produce something like the following where the remainder of the faction was consumed by the colonial state.²⁸



Upon viewing the traditional Māori Modes of Production in this light, the holistic implications of imperial and colonial agendas are clear. Thus, *how* Māori and indeed indigenous epistemologies evolve over time also becomes apparent. The notions of Modes of Production can be utilized to consider such changes, whether they are autonomously indigenous, or as in this case, due to colonization.

Dependency Theory

This theory is a Marxist and structuralist theory²⁹ that views the world as a web of interrelated economic systems.³⁰ Its fundamental tenets are that all countries maintain capitalist relationships of exchange that perpetuate capitalism³¹ whereby inequality is created through relationships of power that larger centres (more developed nations, regions or cities which are also referred to as a metropolis or core) hold over smaller peripheries (less developed nations, regions or cities).³² These power relationships take the form of economic, military, technological, cultural and political power.³³

For a society whose traditional Modes of Production has been eroded the implications of such power relationships can be easily understood. If traditional Modes of Production are severely impinged upon, the balance of power no longer lies with traditional methods; the traditional society that may have once been viewed as a centre becomes relegated to the periphery. Māori had been assaulted economically by land and militarily by war: '[i]n the North Island, war and the law were the twin instruments through which a major part of the usable

land was transferred to Pākehā³⁴ hands.³⁵ Technology was acquired when capital was generated by land (and that disappeared quickly), and cultural and political power was sought through legislation. Durie cites three legislative occurrences that impinged on Māori societies:

the first substituted Māori understandings for British concepts and processes; the 1862 and 1865 Native Land Acts, for example, replaced traditional forms of land tenure with British systems thereby accelerating the alienation of tribal estates. In the second approach Māori interests were acknowledged but marginalised to avoid conflict with the law's wider provisions; under the Oyster Fisheries Act 1866 Māori rights to oyster beds were recognised but it was (wrongly) assumed that those rights were at subsistence levels only... The third way of negating Māori interests through statute was simply by prohibiting aspects of custom; traditional healers and political leaders were outlawed in the Tohunga Suppression Act 1907,³⁶ while the use of Māori language in court had been blocked through the Pleadings in English Act 1362.³⁷

Cultural domination was also aided by missionaries who aimed 'to convert the Māori from heathenism to Christianity and from barbarism to civilisation. Underlying this mission were ethnocentric attitudes of racial and cultural superiority'.³⁸ In this state Māori became 'dependent' on the colonial government in order to develop as a people.

This notion of dependence can be conceived as 'a situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected'.³⁹ It highlights indigenous development efforts as well as the 'relation of interdependence between two or more economies, and between these and world trade. This assumes the form of dependence when some countries (the dominant ones) can expand and be self-sustaining, while other countries (the dependent ones) can do this only as a reflection of that expansion'.⁴⁰

This notion does not only apply to indigenous or world economies: parallels between this theory and knowledge can also be synthesized in order to understand how indigenous epistemologies can be controlled. By viewing indigenous knowledges as traditional centers or metropolises of knowing, the impacts of colonization upon them can be viewed in the same light. The destruction of traditional modes of production may offer an explanation as to how indigenous knowledges became relocated. Just as traditional societies became peripheries of western economic systems, traditional knowledges became peripheries of western ways of knowing. Each periphery is dependent on the centre in some way and each periphery is exploited through unequal power relationships. Tuhiwai-Smith,⁴¹ along with Said,⁴² has written extensively about the discourse of knowledge. The most notable point of dependence here is where the validation of 'real' knowledge is subject to acceptance by Western modes of thought. Therefore cultural knowledges are relocated to the peripheries of knowing where Western knowledge maintains the centre. Indigenous writers are now resisting this notion and we are relocating our own knowledges back at the centre.

Centres and Peripheries

World Systems Theory

As an extension to Dependency Theory the World Systems Theory not only affirms that all nations are capitalist components of a global system⁴³ but offers another level by which to understand power relationships. It is in this light that traditional forms of governance such as Rūnanga are best described. This theory also highlights the holistic impacts of colonisation and how Māori, like other indigenous peoples, find ourselves and our knowledges relocated to the peripheries.

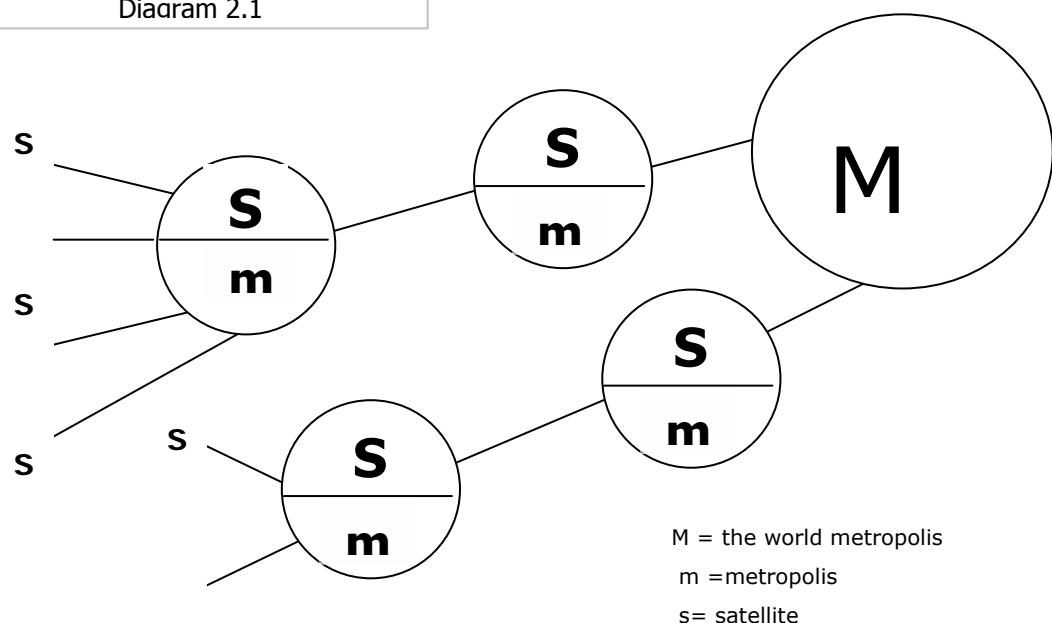
The World System is 'a single division of labour comprising multiple cultural systems, multiple political entities and even different modes of surplus appropriation.'⁴⁴ There are two main theorists for this notion each with their own models, namely Andre Gunder Frank and Immanuel Wallerstein.⁴⁵

Frank employs a two-fold relationship of the metropolis and satellite⁴⁶ where the metropolis is large (a 'developed' nation or region and more powerful), and the satellite is small (a less 'developed' nation or region). The theory essentially describes the way in which the larger metropolises exploit the satellites for capitalist gain.⁴⁷ The relationships form a web of metropolises and satellites that feed into the larger 'world metropolis' where each satellite also has the potential to become a metropolis to a smaller satellite.⁴⁸ It can be described as a

world capitalist system... characterized by a *metropolis-satellite* structure, where the metropolis exploited the satellite... The monopoly structure [is] found at all levels, i.e. the international, the national and the local level, and created a situation of exploitation which, in turn, caused the 'chain-like' flow of the surplus from the remotest Latin American village to Wall Street in New York⁴⁹

Frank's Metropolis-Satellite Model

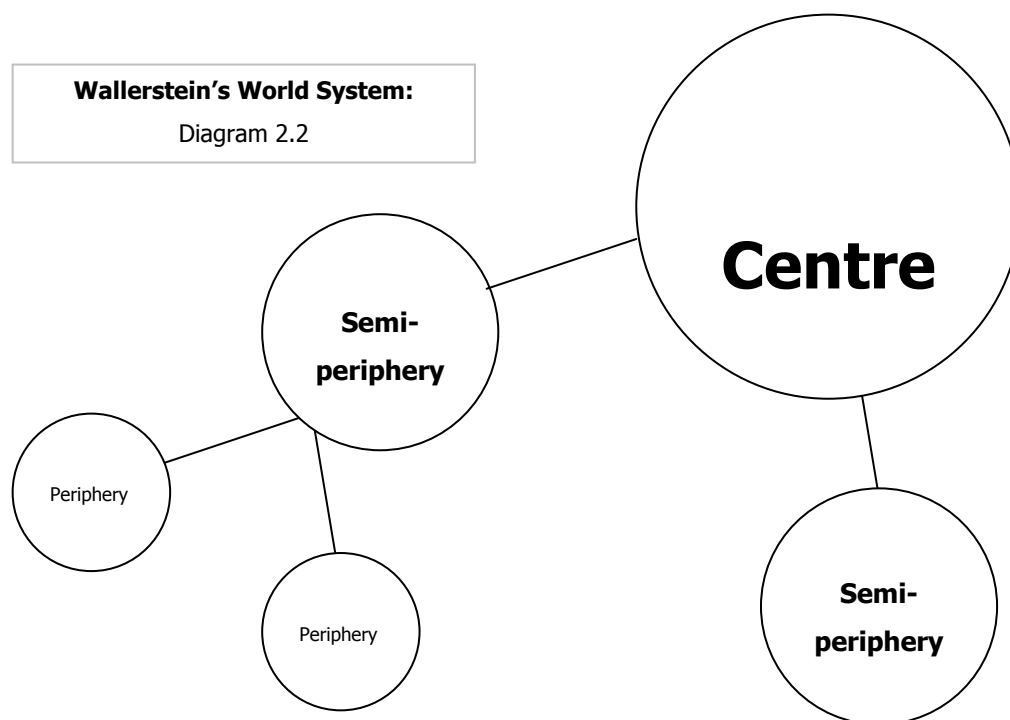
Diagram 2.1



This view would then place Māori and other indigenous peoples as an exploited satellite and the State as a metropolis for those dependent on the State for development.

Wallerstein however uses a slightly different three-fold division of the world system, which consists of the centre (core or metropolis), the periphery (satellite) and the semi-periphery (an intermediary).

Wallerstein elaborates that the centre maintains unequal exchanges for self-benefit while exploiting the peripheries (these are mostly mono-agricultural beings who are dependent on exporting low-wage products).⁵⁰ These unequal exchanges lead to the 'underdevelopment' of the peripheries. This *underdevelopment* means that the centre prevents peripheries from developing their own systems and relationships thereby forcing peripheries to become dependent on the centre.⁵¹ Underdevelopment can then be seen as a *process* by which the core benefits at the expense of the subordinate periphery.⁵²



In this sense Māori are exposed to a state of underdevelopment, developing only as permitted by the centre (or the State) as it benefits from the conquest of traditional Māori societies. Parallels to other societies whose Mode of Production has been reformed can be drawn in the same vein, certainly with regard to indigenous knowledges.

The semi-periphery is described as a mediator that disguises the tension between the centre and the periphery.⁵³ Whilst the centre exploits it, it also exploits the periphery, described by Hoogvelt as primarily a political element or go-between within the world system.⁵⁴ This resembles the relation of the periphery to the centre and the centre to the periphery. For Māori, many semi-periphery bodies have been constructed throughout history where '[c]onsistently, the Crown has sought to impose upon Māori structures which are designed to give a veneer of autonomy yet allow the State to direct and focus activity.'⁵⁵

More importantly, Wallerstein's semi-periphery provides the *critical* focal point for indigenous development and indigenous epistemologies. By using this notion to identify similar tenets in indigenous societies it may be useful in planning future developmental and relocation strategies.

Semi-periphery structures are most notable within Māori governance systems, for example in the legislative establishment of district Rūnanga, Māori councils and committees. These establishments are described by Cox as 'structures appearing to reinforce Māori authority, but remaining very much creatures of State initiative and control.'⁵⁶ They were used by the colonial government (at the centre) with the intention of exploiting Māori people (at the periphery). The colonial state agenda can be noted in 1861: 'the great object is to devise a system which, at this critical time, both Natives and Europeans will gratefully accept.'⁵⁷ At this point, the traditional Māori form of governance known as the Rūnanga was co-opted to gain 'indirect rule rather than genuine self-government.'⁵⁸ For Māori, although they were accepted as a traditional form of governance, the colonial government used them to subdue Māori concern for waning autonomy and land loss while expediting land appropriation through them. In 1861 they were acknowledged as a threat to colonial rule by the colonial government:

we look to runanga, or Native council, as the point d'appui to which to attack the machinery of [Māori] self-government and by which to connect them with our own institutions... We have no choice but to use it, it exists as a fact, it is part of the very existence of the Māori – we can no more put it down than we can stay... and, if we do not use it for good purposes, it will assuredly be used against us for bad.⁵⁹

Thus Rūnanga were established under colonial legislation to act as a semi-periphery unit in the colonisation of Māori people. Rūnanga were officially abandoned in 1865,⁶⁰ but their legacy as an instrument and creation of the state lives on. The short-lived nature of this institutional Rūnanga may also have been the reason why 126 years later a further attempt to institutionalise them was abandoned once again. In fact, research into the history of Rūnanga as a traditional form of governance often uncovered barrages of ill sentiments for these state creations. This illustrates how susceptible societies, including Māori, have been to the ramifications and relocations of traditional knowledges and practices. The essence of Rūnanga brought to Aotearoa⁶¹ from the ancient homeland Hawaiiki had all but been forgotten. The knowledge of what they were, where they came from and their purpose had been quickly supplanted by notions manufactured by State implementation of them. This particular piece of traditional knowledge has, over time, been relocated from the centre of knowing to the periphery.

Within the World System the semi-periphery can act to further exploit its peripheries in a uni-directional way, or it can be used to extract benefits from the centre in order to provide counter-directional benefits to the peripheries and act as a means of resistance to the exploitations of the centre. As an example, in Aotearoa the education system has long been a buffer to guide the education of Māori. Through the establishment of Native Schools, Māori Boarding Schools and tertiary institutions, Māori have been conditioned into thinking a certain way. Media portrayal also affected the Māori perception of ourselves and the world around us.⁶² The establishment of Te Kohanga Reo,⁶³ Kura Kaupapa,⁶⁴ Wharekura⁶⁵ and Whare Wānanga⁶⁶ can be viewed as semi-peripheries of Māori development. While these institutions are not autonomous and rely on the government for funding, they are buffers for alleviating Māori education

concerns. On the one hand they provide education in keeping with some traditional codes of belief, improving the number of Māori language speakers and providing the closest thing available to traditional education, and on the other hand they still deliver a curriculum set out by the State. The critical point here is that semi-peripheries must remain conscious of their position within the World System and be vigilant in striving for best outcomes while remembering the histories, purposes and locations of the institutions in which they are involved.

The Revolution

World Systems Theory does offer two solutions to unequal power relationships. The first is to sever all ties to the centre thus establishing absolute autonomy. The second is to revolt.

In both the case of traditional governance such as Rūnanga and in the field of indigenous knowledges there are attempts to weaken the ties to the 'centre'. For Rūnanga this has been happening as contemporary Rūnanga are being established based on their traditional capacity and where they have reverted back to the traditional function of Rūnanga as decision-making bodies which refuse to operate within any legislative paradigms offered by the State.⁶⁷ In doing so, these Rūnanga have identified the existing power relations and are choosing to relocate traditional methods of governance back at the centre. While this does not sever all ties to the centre it does weaken the control that it has over particular directives for tribal development. For knowledges, theories such as Kaupapa Māori⁶⁸ resist Western paradigms of knowing and are relocating traditional and indigenous methods of knowing back at the centre.

By re-instating the paradigm Māori at the centre of knowledge systems with respect to Māori research, they are challenging the dominant western position of validating knowledge and acknowledging Māori epistemologies as the foundation ideology for knowledge construction pertaining to Māori. It re-empowers the position of Māori epistemologies by validating itself in its own terms.⁶⁹

As indigenous peoples relocate all our traditional knowledges and practices back at our centres we can validate our own epistemologies. Knowledge is power... the only question is whose knowledge is it?

Notes

¹ Cox (1993), Durie (1998), Tuhiwai-Smith (1999), Walker (1999), Gegeo (1998), Fry (1997), Hua'ofa (1993).

² Subramani, M. (2003). Emerging epistemologies. Retrieved from: <http://www.usp.ac.fj/fileadmin/files/others/vakavuku/subramani.doc>

³ Marx (1967).

⁴ Overton, J. (1988). 'Modes of production and human geography: a diagrammatic scheme', in the *New Zealand Journal of Geography*, April, 7-12:7.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid:7

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Worsley, (1984: 25).

⁹ Overton (1988: 8).

¹⁰ Treaty signed by Māori in order to protect Māori rights and colonial representatives for the 'acquisition, control and ultimately, expropriation of land' (Walker, R. (1990:197))

¹¹ Durie, M. (1998:119).

¹² Overton (1988: 8).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Durie, Cox, Pihama.

¹⁷ Firth 1973, cited by Warren 2004.

¹⁸ (Watson and Petterson 1985:544.

¹⁹ Firth, (1973).

²⁰ Overton (1988: 8).

²¹ Walker (1990: 186).

²² Durie, M. (1998: 8).

²³ Webster (1993).

²⁴ Firth (1973).

²⁵ Walker (1990: 86).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Walker (1990: 81).

²⁸ It should be noted that the size of each component is a mere indication of retraction; it does not factually represent the changes. As used by Warren, K.T.F. (2004). *Rūnanga: manuka kawē ake, facilitating Māori aspirations*. Unpublished Masterate Thesis. Palmerston North: Massey University.

²⁹ So (1990: 91).

³⁰ Frank (1983: 182).

³¹ Blomström& Hettne (1984: 67).

³² Warren, K.T.F. (2004) *Rūnanga: manuka kawē ake, facilitating Māori aspirations*. Unpublished Masterate Thesis. Palmerston North: Massey University.

- ³³ Department of Development Studies (2003: 32).
- ³⁴ European.
- ³⁵ Durie (1998: 116).
- ³⁶ Webster, P (1979: 221-224). cited in Durie (2003: 125).
- ³⁷ Durie, M. H. (2003: 125).
- ³⁸ Walker (1990: 85).
- ³⁹ Dos Santos (1970 : 231).
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Tuhiwai-Smith, L. (1999) *Decolonising Methodologies*.
- ⁴² Said, E. (1978) *Orientalism*.
- ⁴³ Harrison (1988: 97-98).
- ⁴⁴ Wallerstein (1980: 5).
- ⁴⁵ Harrison (1988: 84-85).
- ⁴⁶ Frank (1970: 5).
- ⁴⁷ Surplus value is the difference between the cost of producing a commodity and its final price.
- ⁴⁸ Diagram 2.1 reproduced from Blomström & Hettne (1984). Pg 69 cited in Warren (2004).
- ⁴⁹ Bomström & Hettne (1984: 67).
- ⁵⁰ Ibid: 87.
- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² Ibid.
- ⁵³ Harrison (1988: 87).
- ⁵⁴ Hoogvelt (1982: 192).
- ⁵⁵ Cox (1993: 75).
- ⁵⁶ Cox (1993: 77).
- ⁵⁷ Grey, G. (1861, 31 October) *Appendices to the journals of the house of representatives*.
- ⁵⁸ O'Malley (1998: 18).
- ⁵⁹ Fox, William. (1861) *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*. (1861-63: 422).
- ⁶⁰ Cox (1993: 88).
- ⁶¹ Māori name for what has now become known as New Zealand.
- ⁶² Pihama (1994).
- ⁶³ Māori language immersion pre-school.
- ⁶⁴ Māori language immersion primary school.
- ⁶⁵ Māori language immersion secondary school.
- ⁶⁶ Māori Tertiary education institutions.
- ⁶⁷ Warren (2004).
- ⁶⁸ See Smith, G. (1997).
- ⁶⁹ Warren (2004).

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