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*The koru and the unconscious:  
an articulation of national identity in  
Aotearoa New Zealand*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Sociology

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Penelope (Penny) Anne Lysnar  
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# Abstract

This thesis pursues an understanding of national identity in Aotearoa New Zealand that extends existing academic commentaries in this subject area. As such, it looks to the unconscious and aesthetic realms as productive forms of knowledge. By taking these and existing academic forms of knowledge into account, this thesis enables a fuller understanding of national identity in Aotearoa New Zealand. It also highlights how personal and subjective experiences of national identity provide a productive and extended way of thinking about and understanding national identity. In this regard this thesis refers to the work of Christopher Bollas, a psychoanalytic practitioner and theorist, and Fredric Jameson, a cultural critic and post-Marxist theorist. Elements of these theorists' work are melded together to form a methodology. Here, Bollas' three orders of knowing (i.e. the maternal order, paternal order, and order of the infant) and his concept of the 'evocative' object are considered in conjunction with Jameson's conceptualisation that the 'energy' found in objects of mass culture represents a collective form of unconscious desire or utopian fantasy. Jameson argues that this fantasy functions as a response to the restrictions placed upon citizens by the politically and ideologically dominant forces of the society in which those citizens live. Employing images of the koru motif, a ubiquitous signifier of national identity in Aotearoa New Zealand, as the primary research data, reveals that the compelling or captivating nature of this motif represents a collective unconscious desire within mainstream society, for the maternal order to operate as a valued form of thinking and knowing. This unconscious desire is a response to the ideologically dominant function of the paternal order of thinking and knowing in contemporary mainstream society in Aotearoa New Zealand, which represses other forms of knowledge.



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