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LAND AND SOCIAL CHANGE : aspects of the Maori case

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ABSTRACT

This thesis sets out to examine some aspects of change in a modern Maori society as a consequence of alterations in traditional land tenure and partly of acculturation. It is simply divided into eight chapters. Chapters one and two are introductory and present a brief account of the history of Maori/Pakeha relationship in land since 1840. Chapter one shows how European settlers come in contact with Maori people and their land, Maoris' reaction against their loss of tribal estate, Maori Land Court and its power over Maori land, and Maori land legislations up to the end of the 1940s. Chapter two, dating from early in the 1950s discloses some major government policies that lead to a drastic change in the tribal custom and deterioration of tribal authority in land and in the community.

For a purpose of comparison, in chapters three and four I reconstruct the pre-European Maori society: its social structure, organization, land tenure, exercising of leadership, administration, and recognition of descent and kinship. This will assist the explanation of change that I present in the following chapters.

Chapters five and six provide another base for comparison, containing details of modern Maori society. Data in chapter five is based entirely on ethnographic accounts concerning Kotare, Orakei, and Waima Maori communities, whereas chapter six analyses the aspects of change and employs also evidence from other sources to support the assumptions stated in the outset.

Chapter seven covers some events that counter-challenge the change described in chapters five and six. This shows, in general, the Maoris' attempt to put together some threads which would restore their traditional values and Maori identity. Unfortunately, little attempt has been made in the three communities referred to as 'models' of change and, as a result, they have tended to become disintegrated.

The concluding chapter (Ch. 8) draws together the whole of the thesis. Using the land issue as a frame of reference, a general conclusion is reached in that a modern Maori community has changed at the expense of the traditional social, economic, and political systems.

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PREFACE

In pre-European times, the Maori people lived in a tribal community and had close association with land. Since the arrival of European settlers and the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), the native people have been continually affected by the loss of their land and changes in many other aspects of their tribal lives. The Maori relationship with Pakeha was not a very happy experience and was one which was vulnerable to exploitation. Throughout the history of contact they found that as more of their land was taken their social and political systems were also overwhelmed by Pakeha principles. The land wars of the 1860s were the early sign of conflict and marked the turning point of the future of Maori society. The Maoris' loss at the end of the war was permanent and the outcome was that they were to be assimilated into Pakeha society. Maori attempts to resist such assimilation was ineffectual because of Maori disorganisation and of the government's desire to unify the nation.

Thus, as I shall describe in this thesis, the government attempted several methods to Europeanise Maori people and their culture, specifically in land, and in their social and political practices. From 1862 onwards, a number of legislations were enacted to individualise Maori land and to make it available for sale on open market. At the end of the 19th century, of the sixty-six million acres that make up New Zealand, only approximately 10 million acres was left in Maori hands. More importantly was government's commitment transferring the power over land of the tribal chiefs to the Maori Land Court, the outcome of which was the weakening of the tribal authority and the liquidity of the local group.

At the turn of the century the government became concerned over the way Maori land was to be developed. Yet this came rather late, and as the Maoris had lost most of their land and the remnant was insufficient for large-scale production. As a consequence, the land development assisted only a few Maoris to settle on their land, while many others had to seek their livelihood elsewhere.

Towards 1950s, there was evidence that Maori people were dispersed throughout the country and a number of them were living away from

their local group. At the same time the government developed a clear policy to endow the Maori people with all privileges and rights of the Pakeha to assimilate them. Regarding this, a Maori Affairs Act was passed in 1953 under which many Maori customs, including those in land, were replaced by common laws. Taking the Act for granted later governments followed the same route to encourage modernisation in Maori society.

During the period 1950s - 1970s, some ethnographic accounts were published disclosing the conditions of a Maori community. The studies of Metge (Kotare, 1955), Hohepa (Waima, 1958) and Kawharu (Orakei, 1964), in particular, have shed some light on the area of social change. The authors found that loss of land and acculturation have resulted in high population movement and socio-economic changes in the communities. Even though the Maoris' expression of traditional values remain strong, many major aspects of tribal custom, *viz.*, recognition of descent and exercising of leadership (tribal authority) have declined in their significance and functions. Given these conditions, plus government policies the communities are heading towards disintegration.

This thesis attempts to examine a condition of change in a modern Maori community, as a result of alterations in traditional land tenure and in other relevant matters. Undoubtedly, land is not a sole cause of change; there are also many others, e.g. acculturation, Maoris' adoption of Pakeha principles, education, lifestyle, and a money economy. With the Maori people, however, land stands as the backbone of all aspects of tribal life. Once change in land custom occurs other elements connected to it fail to operate and there is a great social consequence for the community.

My approach to the topic of this thesis is to review changes in some major aspects of Maori custom that result in a collapse of the traditional social and political system. My discussion is based significantly on data derived from Kotare, Waima, and Orakei communities, which I selected as a 'model' explaining change in a modern Maori society. The selection of these three communities has some social significance. They provide adequate data enabling a comparison with the tribal society in the past and have a long history in contact with the Pakeha

settlers. Kotare and Waima are in the upper north where Pakeha influence has been persistently intense since 1840. From their dealings with Pakeha they have lost most of their land and subsequently their economic independence. Their people have become dispersed through emigration. Orakei, with its association with the growth of Auckland city, has been more exposed to extraneous pressures than any Maori community. Kawharu (1975) reveals that few can have been more perplexed and disconcerted by loss of lands, *marae*, and economic independence, and by an existence subject to the whim of government, or few more completely stripped of identity and self-respect than this Ngati Whatau *hapū*.

My investigation and discussion of change in this thesis is confined to the extent of available data, and I shall focus on the areas of descent and kinship, leadership, and social organisation. Such changes and deterioration of the tribal social and political systems might have been applicable elsewhere. Finally, I must make it clear that my discussion, given the scope of the topic, is general and my conclusion is tentative.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------------|--|
| <u>AJHR</u> | Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives |
| <u>JPS</u> | Journal of the Polynesian Society |
| <u>NZL</u> | New Zealand Listener |
| <u>NZMR</u> | New Zealand Monthly Review |
| <u>NZOYB</u> | New Zealand Official Year Book |
| <u>NZPD</u> | New Zealand Parliamentary Debates |
| <u>NZS</u> | New Zealand Statutes |