

Getting Connected

Pākehā Masculine Identities in Cultural Context

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Abstract

This paper addresses how the experience of emigrating from the UK and settling in New Zealand stimulated my interest in masculinity, and how the comparative study of masculinities in different social and cultural contexts can enrich and broaden understanding of Pākehā masculinities and their complex association with national identity.

It was the experience of moving from Scotland to New Zealand in 1979 that led to my present interest in gender, and especially masculinity (Bannister, 2000, 2002, 2006a, 2006b). I should explain at the outset that I am not a trained counsellor (although I have received counselling, and have also participated in men's groups that have been led by counsellors). My expertise is in media, cultural studies and music, and as such may seem remote from the concerns of this journal and its readers. However, I believe that it is beneficial to consider the wider cultural context in which gender operates, as this is inseparable from our lived experience and crucial to the formation of subjectivities. In a related manner, theory and practice are intertwined—a fully conscious practice is informed by theoretical reflection, and vice versa.

Media and cultural studies are highly interdisciplinary subjects which use a range of themes, approaches and practices (During, 1993; Goode & Zuberi, 2004; Rayner, Wall, & Kruger, 2004). There is no one model for “doing” these subjects. My approach in this article is informed by a mixture of autobiographical narrative, critical theory (for example, feminism and Marxism), some psychoanalytical concepts, postcolonialism, and discourse theory (Crotty, 1998). Key I think to all these strands is the theme of identity. Simplistically, autobiography is a mode of identity revealing, however partial, and critical and discourse theory are concerned with the social construction of identity by power, postcolonialism with national identity, psychoanalysis with personal identity. Moreover, gender and identity formation are clearly linked. This, I think, justifies a brief excursion into the question of what identity means.

Identity

In my research area, there seem to be two dominant formulations of identity, one of which basically critiques the other. The first, which seems closest to a commonsense definition, broadly follows from Descartes' formulation "cogito ergo sum"—I think, therefore I am. This posits identity as essentially separate and distinct—a knowing "self", a single, unique, autonomous individual who has the power through reason to control his or her environment and self (Benjamin, 1988, pp. 192–193; Brennan, 2004, p. 4, p. 94). Freud was probably the first to significantly challenge this view through his discovery of the unconscious. However, some have argued that Freud's quasi-scientific, diagnostic approach remains overcommitted to the idea of the individual existing in opposition, rather than in relation, to broader social process—emphasising tensions and relations within rather than between individuals (Benjamin, 1988, p. 29).

In contrast, there are a number of approaches which stress instead the relational nature of identity; i.e., how it is constituted and shaped by environment. For example, the perceptual or phenomenological tradition holds that our presuppositions about people, objects and situations affect our experience (intentionality, a phenomenological concept which holds that subject and object are mutually constitutive rather than isolated monads) (Crotty, 1998, pp. 44–45; Laing, 1965; Lecky, 1945; Purkey & Novak, 1984). Emotionally and intellectually, humans are beholden to how we are seen and valued by others (or not). If these experiences are negative, humans do not develop "ontological security", i.e., a positive and consonant self-concept (Laing, 1965, p. 39).

Postmodern, social constructionist and discourse analysis go even further by positing a multiple, dependent, fragmented subject (Bell, 2004; Hall, 1996). They argue that identities are not fixed but in a continuous process of constitution through interactions with environment, culture and power. Identities are not selves but subjects, the connotative difference being that the latter implies something that is not discrete or bounded, but is continuously impinged on and reshaped by social processes. In its most extreme form (e.g., Foucault) the human subject is primarily a product of external power relations—not a producer of discourse, but rather produced by it (Foucault, 1984).

Overall, the suggestion is that identities are produced and shaped in culture; that we are born into a set of social processes that both define and arguably limit what we can know and experience (Crotty, 1998, pp. 52–56). Culture here is understood mainly as sets of learned codes such as languages (written, visual, aural) and learned behaviours (social conventions) through which we interpret the world. Obviously this leaves out material production, but material production is also symbolic—that is, all objects are

also interpretable (Williams, 1983). Culture is thus both around us and in us. There is no exterior point; we cannot “stand outside” culture.

Our interpretations of culture are therefore conditioned by the fact that we are always/already part of the thing we are interpreting. However, in the postmodern world, our cultural experience is further complicated by the fact that we are no longer shaped by only one “native” culture: mass media expose us to a vast range of cultural codes, signs and information. Moreover, people now enjoy an unprecedented mobility; they are continually moving between different cultural environments, both virtually and literally. Kiwis who go on their “big OE” may never come back, so are they still Kiwis? Multiculturalism challenges received ideas about what “national” identities might mean today.

Emigration and globalisation are two prominent themes in postmodern thought about identity (Bhabha, 1994; Perry, 1998). In a global environment where people, commodities and media are in continuous flow, is the notion of single, individual, “authentic” self still relevant? I offer both New Zealand and myself as examples, the former a colony of the British Empire, with people heterogeneously and contestedly juggling indigenous, European, Polynesian and Asian heritages, surely an identity project in progress. My own experience is that of being born into Scottish middle-class suburbia (although my parents were English), groomed as an intellectual/bureaucrat by the Scottish education system, then cast into an environment that was disdainful of my accomplishments. Initially thinking of myself as British, now, 30 years on, it is as a “Kiwi”. How do such profound changes in our ontology occur?

Finally, gender itself is a player in this identity debate. Generally, the unitary concept of rational self is annexed to patriarchy, as implying the superiority of reason over feeling, of civilisation over nature, self over nature, man over woman (Humm, 1995, p. 163). Correspondingly, poststructuralist accounts tend to conform to a feminist perspective of deconstruction of the fixed identities, universal truths and grand narratives of masculine, Western thought (Butler, 1990). “Feminist theory has ... exposed the mystification inherent in the ideal of the autonomous individual ... based on the paternal ideal of separation and denial of dependency” (Benjamin, 1988, p. 187).

Nevertheless, this construction of masculinity as independent of circumstance remains a central feature of Western culture—whether it’s Hollywood action heroes, All Blacks, Kiwi blokes, or more broadly the intellectual power of science and rationality to exploit nature and transform the world according to human desire. The implication is that masculinity is above or beyond criticism because it is allied to necessity, to progress, or to eternal or natural features of our environment (the

association between the Kiwi bloke and the NZ countryside, for example). However, my experience and argument suggest that this appearance of naturalness or universality is a social construction, albeit one that is managed differently to some degree in different times and places. To be consistent in terms of this argument would demand that I myself locate what I mean by masculinity in terms of my own life experience.

Subjective positioning

I grew up in a middle-class household in Scotland. Both my parents had university degrees in science and my father was an academic. Both came from lower-middle to working-class backgrounds. We were an “upwardly mobile”, nuclear family, living far away from our extended families. My father, a “scholarship boy” (Hoggart, 1957, p. 238), had few male friends, worked hard, and left the emotional and practical management of family affairs to my mother. Hence, I grew up with an absence of contact and interaction with men, a problem unfortunately exacerbated by my father’s extended illness with cancer, which he contracted when I was seven (he recovered). At the same time, the emotional atmosphere of my home was reserved (there was no discussion of my father’s condition). I was encouraged to pour my energies into schoolwork, and intellectual achievement became the main index of my self-esteem, soaring or plummeting according to how I did in examinations.

A key factor in my interest in gender was the strong matriarchal streak in my family background. Certainly in my home, women (mothers) were the dominant figures, and this also seems to have been the case with my father. This meant a degree of respect for and even fear of women, and a strong intolerance of what would now be called sexism. In the public world, things were different, and this tension between a feminised domestic and masculinised public sphere, equal in importance, but sometimes totally in conflict with each other’s values, has had a profound impact on me, and arguably led towards my present research interests (Holter, 1995). Of course, this tension can also be seen as a problem in gender relations more generally. It is not just that the public sphere values different things—career, achievement, fame—but that men especially may find themselves having to balance two profoundly different worldviews; for example, a “politically correct” set of values in relation to the kinds of opportunities men are commonly afforded in the “world out there”, or what Connell has referred to as the “patriarchal dividend” (1995, p. 82).

“Masculinity” as such was not a subject to which I gave much thought. Discussion or experience of it was lacking in my home, and seemed similarly irrelevant in the broader

social environment. When British culture considers “men”, it is usually in terms of the bad behaviour of the lower classes—of “hard men” (Scottish slang for working class jobs), football hooligans, pub drunks and the like. Masculinity had nothing to do with middle-class people like me, it seemed. (Of course, second-wave feminism also often focused on precisely these stereotypes of male deviance and violence, but in the process overlooked the class basis of such definitions [Brownmiller, 1975].)

The Scotland I knew was a class culture, with a strong division between the middle class, which placed a premium on intellectual achievement, and the working class, which emphasised sport. Even though sport did interest me, it seemed obvious that working-class people (boys) were better at it, as we middle-class boys were regularly reminded when our school soccer team was thrashed by teams from “rougher” areas. Gender was not such an issue: I attended a comprehensive (co-ed) school in Scotland, so I was reasonably used to mixing with girls. Leisure activities such as discos were generally mixed (in gender and also class to some degree). At discos, we drank soft drinks and danced to the hits of the day, waiting eagerly for the later part of the night when there were slow dances and physical contact.

When I arrived in NZ at the age of 17 (in 1979), I went to a single-sex state school (single-sex state schools did not exist in Scotland). Although I could have gone to a co-ed school, I was told that they were intellectually “slack”. So I moved into an almost exclusively male domain—there was only one female teacher at the school. The culture of the school was very different to Scotland. Masters wore gowns, and school uniform standards were strictly enforced. Caning was common. Rugby was the measure of status, and although as a seventh former I could largely ignore the school hierarchy, it was clear that junior students were regularly bullied and that the masters tacitly condoned this. Almost every desk in the school was covered in crudely carved penises, which the headmaster at assembly euphemistically referred to as “Zeppelins”. The boys’ main leisure activities, as I understood it, focused around driving their parents’ cars to parties (although many had their own cars), drinking (“sinking piss”), vomiting (“chundering”) and sex—“rooting sheilas” from the girls’ school down the road. One boy claimed that the Rector (headmaster) was a “ram” who kept unruly (meaning liberal) teachers in line by “rooting their wives.”

I also saw evidence of a distinctively masculine culture operating at the level of national politics. Although nominally a democracy, the country seemed to be run by one man, Prime Minister Robert Muldoon, who made regular pronouncements about the state of the country, excluded journalists from press conferences if he didn’t like their angle, and inveighed against “trendy lefties” (intellectuals), “beady-eyed” feminists and “radical” Māori. His bullying style of personal debate didn’t seem to

focus on issues at all but on personal invective, especially against the Leader of the Opposition, Bill Rowling, who seemed to be universally regarded as a “wimp”. This kind of ad hominem approach was not a feature of UK politics to the same degree. There was a much more developed tradition of public debate, and intra-party dissension on issues, for example, was tolerated as part of the democratic process. Of course, there is also a class element in this: UK middle-class “refinement” forbids the kind of “in your face” intimidation that Muldoon used.

New Zealand’s egalitarianism, although in one respect clearly an attempt to escape from the limitations of the British class system, seemed to apply mainly to white Pākehā men. It was not so much a belief in equality as a belief in sameness: to be a bloke, you needed to act like other blokes, play sport etc. (James & Saville-Smith, 1994). (I have used Pākehā to refer to the dominant ethnic group in NZ—white English-speakers of European, mainly British, descent. I am aware that this usage is not accepted by all [Bell, 2004; King 1985, 1999].) “Being a man” seemed to have a special importance in NZ that it didn’t have in Scotland. In NZ, one central iconography of masculinity seemed to dominate the landscape: “the Kiwi bloke” (Law, Campbell, & Schick, 1999, p. 15), whereas in Scotland there is no comparable unified figure, probably because of the class basis of that society. Perhaps it is further possible to suggest that if, in the UK, class divisions are the central ideological structure, in NZ gender occupies a similar position (James & Saville-Smith, 1994). From my point of view, this was all rather difficult, because I was clearly lacking in the kinds of masculine accomplishment that NZ society valued. I felt like the “New Chum”, a stock figure in early colonial literature denoting the effete intellectual who is comically inept in frontier society (Phillips, 1987, p. 24).

But perhaps what was most confusing for me was the encounter between the strangeness of my new position as an outsider and the familiarity of many of NZ’s cultural institutions—the school with its public-school atmosphere, neo-Gothic spires, hierarchically ranked classes and memories of British Empire, the surfeit of UK programming on TV, the plummy voices on the radio—it was all familiar, yet strange. My British middle-class upbringing viewed intellectual power and achievement, and perhaps also to some degree artistic ability, as supreme. They were the cultural capital that gave me “the edge”. Certainly these abilities were still useful to me. I sailed through university with 1st class Honours, and then got a scholarship for a PhD. Such achievements were not much valued in everyday NZ society; on the other hand, they did “work” insofar as they (eventually) helped me find a “good” job, etc. This kind of contradiction between popular and institutional values is one that demands further investigation (see “The colonial legacy” below).

I also had some ambivalence about my learned abilities and cultural background. For example, my father was an academic, but he didn't seem particularly happy. I resolved not to follow him (well, not immediately), so I gave up university and became a rock musician. (In fact, I pursued both interests together for some years, as student life is not necessarily incompatible with playing rock music.) I imagined that music would allow me to escape the strictures of NZ society (by becoming successful), as well as those of my family background. I was wrong. Rather, it forced me to engage at closer hand with the culture I was trying to escape.

Rock music is played mainly in pubs, which are a bastion of NZ male culture. Secondly, the rock music world was not the carefree bohemia I had imagined. Punk rock, which was the dominant force in the music world I was engaged in, actually had a lot of similarities with NZ male culture: it was based around white males, generally valued toughness, rawness and spontaneity, was generally anti-intellectual, and was intolerant of effeminacy (Bannister, 2000). At the same time, the experience—of touring the country, playing to audiences that ranged from drunken university students to stoned meat workers, getting lost, having the van break down on remote country roads, sleeping on other people's sofas and floors, being chased by Christchurch bootboys—exposed me to a far wider range of NZ culture than would have been the case if I had followed the conventional academic route of going overseas to do postgraduate study. It furnished the raw material for my PhD (20 years on) on Pākehā masculinity and NZ rock music (Bannister, 2002).

Initially my motive was critical. Many studies of rock and pop culture emphasise resistance—that is, the ways in which they can provide alternatives to dominant social values (subcultural studies; for example, Hebdige, 1979). In my view, NZ rock culture was remarkable mainly for the ways it conformed—from pub rock with its boozy camaraderie and suspicion or objectification of women, through to punk and alternative rock, which claimed a kind of political correctness through their allegiance to groups like university students, or fashionable causes like Rock Against Racism and Rock Against Sexism, but were in fact as intolerant and homophobic as any travelling rugby team.

These attitudes seemed reinforced by NZ provincialism—suspicion of difference, of outside influence, a defensive insistence on uniqueness which to me belied a broader anxiety that local culture did not measure up when viewed from abroad. And it was not difficult to link this to masculinity in the form of homosociality, which is precisely an insistence on conformity and a demonisation of Other, usually foreign or feminine influences (Sedgwick, 1985). Neither was it difficult to find evidence of isolationism in other forms of NZ culture, from the tough masculine provincialism of

the “sons of Sargeson”, those mainly male writers who had formulated a NZ identity based around accounts of rural working men, “the good keen man”, the “man alone” (Mulgan, 1960) which fed directly into the myth of the “Kiwi bloke” to the harsh minimalist modernism of Colin McCahon’s painting (Baxter, 1955; Wevers, 1991). All these ideologies seem to fit with a model of NZ identity that essentially viewed itself as unique, separate, impermeable to foreign influence, isolated from the rest of the world—i.e., the very masculinised view of the self as separate and autonomous that I set out above. We all know the saying “no man is an island” (Donne, 1624); it seemed to me that Pākehā NZ culture was trying hard to disprove it. But why? Answering this question helped me start to understand the strange mixture of foreignness (especially Britishness) and the local that characterises Pākehā culture.

The colonial legacy

Researching local history, I found myself revising and critiquing its dominant discourse, which is of the emergence of NZ as a nation (Belich, 2001; Gibbons, 2001; Sinclair, 1959, 1985). What was repressed in these accounts was another story, one that challenged a simple “identity” thesis: how deeply dependent NZ had been on the UK, culturally and economically, an association that only really began to unravel when Britain joined the EEC (Belich, 2001; Perry, 1994, pp. 41–46). And this goes back to NZ’s colonial history as a part of the British Empire, mainly useful for supplying raw materials, primary produce and manpower, that is, the functions of a working class (albeit one outside the national boundaries).

Pākehā men, it seemed to me, acted the part. They exhibited the characteristics of a working-class group, taking pride in teamwork, and physical and technical accomplishment, disparaging intellect, being “matey” and suspicious of effeminacy. When there was a war, NZ supplied men to fight—in popular discourse, the memory of Gallipoli remains central to the idea of NZ’s “coming of age” as a nation. In peacetime, NZ supplied meat, wool, timber, dairy and other agricultural products. In Marxist terms, NZ functioned in the British Empire as a kind of rural proletariat, and there is a body of thought, world systems theory, that sees colonisation and imperialism as precisely an extension of capitalism beyond national boundaries, a project that continues today as a major aspect of globalisation (Wallerstein, 1974). The concept seems to knock against the idea (or really, ideology) that NZ is or was a classless society. But perhaps this was because the real source of power, the real ruling class, was somewhere else—i.e., in Britain. Viewed in this light, Pākehā masculinity starts to look less like simply a dominant group (although they may function in that way in a local context) and more like a bit player in a global network of power relations. And the ways in

which Pākehā men are supposed to behave show not so much “Kiwi pride” as their acceptance of a subordinate position as the workhorses of Empire.

It is worth considering here that the history of NZ/UK relations has also been one of exploitation. In a colonial network, manpower and natural resources are exported and transformed into high-end products, which are then exported back to the colonies at a profit. Chief among these products is culture, which cements the grip of the ruling group by reminding the colonials who’s best, and also has the bonus of discouraging the idea that culture (which is essential to identity) is something we can do ourselves. This in turn was confirmed to some degree by my own cultural prejudices—the British middle class typically think of colonials as stupid and uncultured and of colonial life as dull. Hence the cultural cringe—that continual anxiety that Pākehā culture is inauthentic, that it doesn’t measure up on the world stage—that is the dark undercurrent to bold pronouncements about “Kiwi world-beaters” (usually in sport). And of course, all this is cemented by the local masculine ideology that holds artistic expression and creativity as effeminate and inappropriate for men: “academics and artists were stereotyped as bearded, sandalled beatniks—failures when it came to the real business of being a man” (Coney, 1990, p. 24).

Men’s group

But it also struck me that if I simply blamed Pākehā masculinity for its perceived shortcomings, I was ignoring the fact that I was myself a white, heterosexual man. So who was I, to point to supposed masculinity in others while disavowing it in myself? This would be to fall into the old Cartesian dualism which says you can separate yourself from the thing you study. An important stage in my change was my involvement in a men’s group in Auckland. Although the group was not overtly political or ideological in its aims, it had an implicit ideology of dissatisfaction with the dominant modes of masculinity in Pākehā society, and a recognition that these dominant modes forced men into positions of isolation and mistrust. The main activity of the group was basically to talk about one’s emotional life and to foster feelings of connection between men on an emotional level. I found the non-intellectual nature of the group did help me get in touch with my feelings and feel closer to men, which is something I had little previous experience of. On a personal level it helped me to interpret my own experience of coming to NZ in a wider frame of reference.

I joined the group because I felt depressed and isolated from other men. Of course my own upbringing had not encouraged me to feel close to men, and depression is endemic in the male side of my family—both my father and his grandfather—as well as arguably among men in general (Clare, 2000; Real, 1997). It seemed to me that at

the root of this depression was a sense of disconnection. Now clearly the modern world is full of disconnection—from family members, from moving homes (as was considered the norm for academics), from work (Marxian alienation), through TV and mass media. All these can disconnect us, men and women. But I think the problem can be particularly acute for (some) men. For them quite simply to be male is to be disconnected, not in the sense of losing your broadband or Sky TV reception, but by not being in touch emotionally with yourself or the people around you, or having a place where you belong. Connection relates precisely to the “feminine” domestic sphere that is so undervalued in modern life.

There is a large body of theory that deals with the alienating tendencies of modernity. Max Weber, for example, identified “instrumental rationality” which values efficient process and systematisation above and beyond any social end (Benjamin, 1978, p. 36; Horkheimer, 1994, p. vii; Weber, 1970). Weber’s main example was capitalism: “an economic system based, not on custom or tradition, but on the deliberate and systematic adjustment of economic means to the attainment of the objective of pecuniary profit” (Tawney, 1970, p. 1e). When conceptualised more broadly as the most efficient means to an end, instrumental rationality can also be applied to other modern discourses such as industrialisation, science and globalisation, and is implicit in the dominant achievement rhetoric of our age: “go for your goals”, “target-setting”, “rationalisation”, etc. Such an approach reduces the complexity of lived social relations and experience to a flat plane marked by straight lines leading to various goals and aims, conflicts and conquests. It concentrates entirely on the public sphere to the exclusion of the private. It has no place for the here and now, but only the past and future. It reduces the world to a kind of phantasm (Benjamin, 1988).

Now it might be argued that the above discussion has little to do with masculinity as we encounter it in our everyday experience. But this is no more than to say that it is highly ideological—that is, it seems natural and normal, but in fact it embodies a set of assumptions that work in favour of the most powerful groups.

The idea of rationalization forms a bridge between intellectual history and the history of social and economic relations. It describes the essence of modern social practice and thought. It is, in Foucault’s sense, a discourse. My argument is that it is a gendered discourse, that the instrumental orientation and impersonality that govern modern social organization and thought should be understood as masculine ... Thus regardless of woman’s increasing participation in the public, productive sphere ... it remains ... a man’s world. (Benjamin, 1988, pp. 186–187)

The implication is that masculinity in modernity has ceased to be only about the behaviour of men—through its association with discourses of instrumental rationality, it has become apparently objective and universal. “Ultimately, the large historical context, the big picture, is essential for understanding ... ethnographic detail” (Connell, 2000, p. 39). “We must pay attention to very large scale structures ... the world gender order ... hegemony ... connected with patterns of trade, investment and communication, and a transnational business masculinity, institutionally based in multinational corporations and global finance markets”; these in turn historically related to Western Imperialist expansion (Connell, 2000, pp. 40–41; Wallerstein, 1974).

Masculinity is a very powerful discourse precisely because it is in some respects invisible. It is hard to study, because it is not an object, but rather a way of seeing. “Most of what has been perceived as universal in the observed system (gender or sex) may in fact have been part of the observing system” (Holter, 1995, p. 102). Conventional empirical scientific studies are not going to tell us much about masculinity because it is part of the methodology employed. Similarly, one can start to suspect that studies of men that focus only on “how men behave”—issues like men and violence, sport, gay men, male bodies—are only showing part of the picture, because they focus on the visible. Secondly, such studies tend to be selective. They look at groups who are relatively disempowered: working class, Māori, gays. The one group that doesn’t get examined is the one that encompasses those conducting the study, that is, the ones who have the power in the first place.

This is relevant to NZ because its history has been shaped by these forces, starting from colonisation. Many of the reasons why Pākehā see themselves the way they do, and even the very idea of, say, “the Kiwi bloke” as a dominant stereotype in our society, can be traced back to the kinds of global and institutional forces of money and power that were at work historically in shaping our nation. It could be argued that we are no longer a colony, and no longer have such close links with, say, the UK, in which case we might expect the dominant national ideologies to change. But this has not occurred.

In a 2004 ethnographic and semiotic study comparing concepts of national identity in the US, Australia and NZ for advertising agency FCB, researchers noted the continuing “blokieness” of Kiwi culture:

When we looked at all the symbols for what is New Zealand ... men and women all bought the same ... symbols: rugby, All Blacks, barbecues ... gumboots, tractors ... In America ... the female symbols ... apple pie, friendship diaries, are different to the men's. (Jacqueline Smart of FCB, quoted on Campbell Live, 2005)

“Local” culture—TV programmes, advertising, sport and writing—continues to identify the local with a discourse of white masculinity, even though most New Zealanders live in cities, come from increasingly diverse cultural backgrounds, are not necessarily male, and therefore have little in common with this national archetype (Longhurst & Wilson, 1999; Perry, 1994).

One possible reason for this strange persistence is that the colonial ties of Empire have been replaced by those of global capitalism. For example, advertising (which is ironically the most ubiquitous source of representations of national identity) still draws on a highly selective and often masculinised set of “local” images and ideas, the difference being that the products being advertised generally come from multi-nationals—Toyota (“Welcome to our World”), Adidas (Sponsors of the All Blacks), McDonald’s, TV3 (which is owned by CanWest).

Sky TV’s aggressive targeting of a male demographic for its sport channels (and its possible effects on Kiwi households) is an example of how global finance continually influences the local, often in a retrograde manner. As Stephen Turner points out, in an increasingly globalised world, local identities provide a marketing point of difference (“uniquely Kiwi”) but usually the identities drawn on are fairly conservative: “New Zealanders do not need to tell each other they are Kiwi, yet they do so all the time, precisely because the integrity of their cultural identity is manufactured for others, and therefore uncertain” (2000, p. 225). One way to challenge this would be to develop different forms of local culture that did not defer to a masculinised model of identity and its connotations, and I think there is some evidence that diversity of representation is more likely when local culture is not left entirely to the free market.

Conclusion

I hope that in this article I have placed men’s issues in New Zealand in a larger cultural and historical framework. I have stressed the importance of history, or perhaps more accurately what Foucault would call “genealogy” in the constitution of identities, exploring how and why the identification of masculinity and local identity has occurred (Foucault, 1984, p. 76). I would now question “history” as a term because its implicit narrative element (the need to organise elements into a story) can hide the numerous disjunctures, fissures and even chance circumstances that have informed the production of the “I” that I am now, that “you” or “we” believe ourselves to be. I have shown that masculinities work differently and even conflictually (as in my initial encounter with Pākehā culture), and that what is taken for granted as a universal is specific to a time and place. By genealogising Pākehā masculinities I have not simply “exposed” them as a dominant construct, but rather shown how they are themselves

dominated. I think this is important, because it reveals how gender is only one element in power relations, and that male “problems” need to be understood and examined, rather than simply condemned.

As Susan Faludi comments on a counselling group for violent men: “there was something almost absurd about these men struggling ... to recognize themselves as dominators when they were so clearly dominated, done in by the world” (1999, p. 9). She continues: “the popular feminist joke that men are to blame for everything is just the flip side of the family values reactionary expectation that men should be in charge of everything” (pp. 9–10). Faludi’s argument overall is that while global capitalism can be viewed as a patriarchal construct, it actually disempowers individual men (and women of course, but the paradox is the point).

Traditional “masculine” values of hard work (in the public sphere), loyalty to an institution or workplace, pride in physical accomplishment, and collective public action are being increasingly rendered irrelevant in a postmodern global landscape characterised by flows of people, goods and information that continually disrupt any kind of fixed continuity—an example being how the movement of global capital results in industries moving offshore to cheaper locales, something that is very relevant to New Zealand right now.

Masculinity, Faludi argues, has become just another set of signs circulating freely in media, without referents. This can be seen in the spectacularisation of masculinity—the way maleness is objectified and eroticised in the media (think of Dan Carter in his boxing shorts) (Faludi, 1999; Rutherford, 1988). Men have become “objects of the gaze” in postmodernity, as women have long been. However, the constant here is the gaze itself and the consequent process of objectification. Behind the shifting gender positions of the subject-object binary there is a meta-discourse—and it is thoroughly masculinised—the idea of the gaze itself as a way of looking at the world. In this respect, counselling and therapeutic approaches, with their commitment to exploring other forms of relationship than the mainly visual paradigm that dominates postmodernity, thus offer the best possibility for exploring and reintegrating identities, masculine or otherwise.

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