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An Australian View of New Zealand

PETER McPHEE

SHORTLY AFTER I arrived in New Zealand, in January 1980, I began Sgently (or so I thought) engaging in a discussion about the nature of this society with my host at a party. I wanted to 'locate' myself; I wanted to begin developing a mental map of institutions, ideologies and social forces to enable me to orient myself by defining New Zealand's character in relation to what I had come from in Australia.

He finally retorted, in somewhat exasperated fashion, 'What you have to understand, Peter, is that New Zealand is just not like Australia: there is a fundamental consensus among political parties and the community at large about the goals of this society. There just aren't the divisions of class, race and religion that you're used to.'

Eighteen months later, these widely believed myths — for they were no more than that — were shattered by an extraordinarily intense, and, for many people, traumatic, experience which involved almost everyone in this society. The fifty-six days of the 1981 Springbok rugby tour sharpened, or at least brought to the surface, latent polarities between and within families, political parties, work-places, racial groups, and urban and rural communities.

The point of the story is not to highlight the emotional and social impact of those months, harrowing as it was, but rather to make two observations about generalizations which are made about nations and their people. The first is that they are personal and partial — partial both in the sense that they reflect one's own position in a society and also in the sense that they reflect but a thin slice of reality.

The host in question had, after all, lived through the 507-day occupation of Bastion Point in 1977–8 and the debates over the Vietnam War.

Secondly, and more importantly, such views of one's own society inevitably change as they become inadequate to the task of explaining the changing world around us. I recently told the above story in a lecture to first-year university students, who burst into disbelieving laughter. (My point in recounting the story to them — and it obviously succeeded — was to use their own view of New Zealand as an increasingly divided country to warn them to be wary of the regrettable mania to berate 'the French' and all things French in the aftermath of the outrageous actions of the French security services and some of its masters in Auckland in July 1985.)

All societies, then, are complex, dynamic and therefore changing, their specific characteristics moulded by their class, gender and ethnic composition, the individual and collective memories of their peoples, and their historical, economic and geopolitical position. Any attempt to describe nations in terms of some immutable 'national character' is a sign of a lack of knowledge, especially historical knowledge.

That is why this chapter would have been easier to write after six weeks in New Zealand rather than six years, and visiting journalists and VIPs from overseas are happy to rush into print with snap-shot generalizations. I am also mindful of the fact that, apart from travel through both islands, my impressions of New Zealand are based heavily on the view from Wellington, a view as distorted as that from Dunedin or Taihape or perhaps even more so. Moreover, like anyone else, I have my own social and political beliefs and assumptions. In other words, my impressions, too, are partial.

With these provisos in mind, what impressions does this Australian have which go beyond the level of comparisons of the usual type, such as 'the beer's better but the wine's awful' or wisecracks about missing (as opposed to elongated) vowels? The most important, if not the most interesting, impression is of the similarities. The broad themes of New Zealand history are in fact the broad themes of British 'settler societies' in the South Pacific and, in some measure, elsewhere.¹

English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish settlers came to antipodean lands which seemed to — and in most cases did — offer greater economic well-being and opportunities for social advancement. In the process, the indigenous peoples they encountered, while fundamentally different, were almost entirely dispossessed of their land and in large measure of cultures which were predicated on particular relationships with that land and its bounty. The history in New Zealand of the rise of organized labour and of the creation of a sense of nation through sport and fighting wars on the other side of the world — inevitably, too, the creation of 'a man's country'² — also has obvious parallels across the Tasman.

While part of the 'cultural baggage' migrants brought with them was institutionalized into Westminster-style parliamentary govern-

ment, much of the twentieth century has seen in both countries a hesitant search for a distinctive national identity separate from, if often defined in relation to, English culture; this has been underpinned by an often painful reorientation of the economic base away from supplying Britain with primary produce, especially after Britain's entry into the European Economic Community.

The current preoccupations of both societies, too, have much in common: widespread fears about defence arrangements and whether the treaty with the United States made in 1951 serves to protect from or expose to the horrors of nuclear war; social unease and tensions caused by large-scale unemployment, especially among the young and particular ethnic minorities; whether and how dominant white society and its institutions can and will respond successfully to the increasingly assertive claims of indigenous people to their land and to a bi- or multi-cultural society; and, finally, whether the institutions of the welfare state, in broad terms accepted across the political spectrum in both countries for the past half century, are safe in a changing political context of more aggressively 'laissez-faire' conservative parties and Labour governments which can no longer be said to represent the political arm of organized labour.

Of course, every one of these shared characteristics of the two countries has a multitude of features specific to each society; and, beyond those specificities, there is a whole series of contrasts which highlight the particular nature and richness of New Zealand.

I spent almost all of the first thirty years of my life in southern Australia. The lasting memories of my childhood in western Victoria include a strong sense of its landscape, of gently undulating hills and broad plains broken only by huge eucalypts and ancient volcanic outcrops. While spring rains brought hills and plains to life — a green and gold carpet of clover, cape-weed and wattles — a stronger memory is of dry, brittle grass turning white like old bones under a remorseless summer sun, with the unforgettable sound of the leaves and bark of gum-trees snapping underfoot. I recall, too, the long summer holidays on the southern coast, the hills behind almost gasping for air in the stifling heat as humans clustered on long stretches of hot yellow sand between sticky black highway and white-capped ocean.³

The contrast of the New Zealand landscape continues to strike me, to remain unfamiliar. An early and enduring impression is of a luxuriant vegetation and plunging valleys. Only on the bare hills of Poverty Bay and Central Otago have the summer winds filled my nostrils with familiar smells of dust and hay. I stood recently on the Port Hills near Christchurch, looking down and eastwards on to the quiet order of the port of Lyttelton and the exquisitely sculptured bays of Banks Peninsula; to the west stretched sprawling Christchurch and the intensively worked Canterbury Plains, ending abruptly in the brilliant white lace curtain of the Southern Alps. An extraordinarily beautiful land, even if there must be few other places in the world

where a settler people so thoroughly and rapidly 'tamed' the bush by cutting it down, particularly in the North Island.

The scale of urban settlement is as much of a contrast. Most of my adult life has been spent in Melbourne, a huge and splendid metropolis whose diversity unfortunately diminishes with every kilometre travelled from the city. Only commuters from South Auckland experience what millions of Australians suffer every day: whether in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, or Adelaide, an hour or two each day is spent in polluted, ant-like streams of cars snarling to and from the dormitory suburbs.

In its size and physical appearance, Auckland could be just another Australian state capital. But Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin — the latter the most interesting and distinctive city of its size in the antipodes — each has a particular history and character, as well as compactness, which makes it a singular and above all an easy place to inhabit.

They are also far poorer than Australian cities. There is no doubt that, increasingly since 1970, Australia's extraordinary store of accessible minerals has to some extent counter-balanced the stagnation in many primary industries and the collapse of much of the manufacturing sector. New Zealand has had little of such geological good fortune. Most New Zealanders are in fact worse off in terms of the purchasing power of their wages than they were ten years ago, though just as striking is the fact that the burden of 'economic restructuring' (usually a euphemism for the collapse of industry) is not being borne evenly: in the years 1981–5 the share of wages and salaries in all income earned in New Zealand fell from 54 per cent to 46 per cent while profits increased their share from 31 per cent to 37 per cent.

The impression which New Zealanders have of Australia as a more affluent society is in part a distorted one, for New Zealand cities are rather less segregated by wealth than their Australian counterparts, and New Zealand tourists there normally do not see the sprawling and depressed working-class and lower-middle-class suburbs of the great cities, where unemployment levels are far higher than in New Zealand. While there are obvious contrasts in wealth between Otago and Remuera, Cannon's Creek and Khandallah, Sydenham and Fendalton, these are not of the same magnitude as one experiences moving from west to east in Sydney and Melbourne or north to south in Adelaide.

So New Zealand strikes one with a landscape at once stunning in its variety and visual impact and yet almost violent in the way its jagged edges cut into the horizon and into the roaring storms of the South Pacific; as an urban society but one which is mostly in provincial towns and cities with only comparatively small pockets of the opulence to be found in Australian state capitals.⁴

These of course are obvious impressions of the type a short-term

tourist could make.⁵ Far more important is the fact that New Zealand, and especially the North Island, is a South Pacific and increasingly Polynesian nation. While Auckland may resemble many Australian cities in its style of housing and size, by the year 2000 half its population will be Maori and Polynesian. This is the single most distinctive and exciting characteristic of New Zealand.

To most urban Australians, the indigenous population, which is little more than 1 per cent of the total, is a thoroughly marginal, if not almost invisible, presence, noticed only in the periodic forays of angry Aborigines into displays of national prowess (such as the 1982 Commonwealth Games in Brisbane), the skills of individuals on football fields or in boxing rings, or the increasing struggles over land rights. By contrast, not only are the Maori people numerically far more important (12 per cent of the total and rapidly increasing), but every Pakeha New Zealander is daily aware of a distinctive, proud, and alternative culture. This is not only in rural areas such as the East Cape where it is Pakehas who feel like aliens within a dominant culture, but also in cities like Wellington and Auckland where the massive urban drift of Maoris since World War II has been the basis of the growth of a distinctively urban Maori culture.⁶

The myth of racial harmony in New Zealand has always been just that, but there is no doubt that racist attitudes towards the indigenous people are expressed less openly or aggressively in New Zealand. This is not because white New Zealanders are any less racist than Australians, but rather because the far higher incidence of Maoris in the general population has ensured at least a minimal acknowledgement of their rights and specific needs.⁷

The uncomfortable paradox is, of course, that in New Zealand no less than in Australia, the indigenous people have to live within a dominant British culture and under British institutions. By every measure, Maoris are on the receiving end of white society, even if not to the same extent as Aborigines: the number of Maoris in prison or unemployed are grossly disproportionate, they suffer more from serious illnesses such as cancer and mental disorders, they are starkly underrepresented in white-collar and professional occupations, and have to attend schools which rarely meet their needs (in the demanding School Certificate examinations — equivalent to year ten in Australia — only 14 per cent of Maoris pass in at least four subjects compared to 36 per cent of Pakehas).

The most important thing to say about New Zealand society in the 1980s is that it is at a crossroads in terms of race relations. Certainly, many Pakehas as well as Maoris are aware of the myriad and interconnected ways in which Maori people are disadvantaged and marginalized. The commitment of successive governments to *kohanga reo* ('language nests') at the pre-school level denotes some awareness of the centrality of language to any group.

But the bottom line of demands for a genuinely bicultural society

is of course the question of land. There is a stark question facing New Zealanders: is this country to become a fully bicultural society, with all that implies in terms of attitudinal and institutional development, and above all in terms of the way Pakeha farmers and property-owners view their relationship with the land? Most Pakehas avoid confronting the question but it will not go away. The 1985 decision of the Waitangi Tribunal to grant Auckland tribes greater control over Manukau Harbour may well come to be seen as a landmark in the history of this country (as may the handing back of Ayers Rock to the Uluru people).

It is not surprising if, in the context of a more generalized South Pacific conscience in response to the roles of the United States and France, as well as increasing Maori pride in their culture and pattern of social relationships, the more militant of the Maori people speak of Maori 'sovereignty' or 'self determination' in terms which Pakehas find so threatening that they refuse to seek out what is being demanded.⁸ Their eventual response to the challenge will alternatively allow either an innovative and creative resolution which would restore to New Zealand its boast of the 1930s, 'the social laboratory of the world', or a nightmarish slide into levels of friction, mistrust, and violence of which we have had but a taste since 1980.

The other point to make about New Zealand's ethnic composition is that it is a society whose dominant Pakeha culture draws on a comparatively narrow range of past and recent immigration. Only 5 per cent of New Zealanders were born outside New Zealand, Australia, Britain or Ireland; this compares with 14 per cent of Australians — since World War II four million people from 120 countries have arrived in Australia. One hears strong English regional accents in New Zealand as often as one hears Greek, Italian, and Turkish accents and language in Melbourne and Sydney. The absence of a substantial Mediterranean community in New Zealand is, to a Melbournian at least, almost as striking as the presence of a large indigenous population.

The homogeneity of Pakeha New Zealanders is added to, moreover, by the fact that Irish emigration to New Zealand has never reached the same levels as in Australia. This has had all sorts of consequences, one being that the Labour Party was not originally to the same extent an Irish, Catholic, working-class party. Another has been that, apart from the Maori people, mistrust of English culture and institutions, notably the monarchy, has been the preserve only of small groups to the left of the Labour Party for whom political independence and socialism go hand in hand.

It is not surprising that a context of economic difficulty, the shock of Britain's entry into the European Economic Community, and increasingly explicit contesting of what is seen to be a monocultural and imported set of attitudes and institutions have generated an

uncertain questioning of New Zealand's national identity. To be sure, this is by no means new: the increasingly esteemed and read literature of the interwar years had this as an implicit theme, and over thirty years ago the imperial historian J. C. Beaglehole wrote that

the growth of national feeling has meant a double exploration of independence, in the region of politics — in the widest sense — and in the region of the mind. In either case, within the broad stream of the British tradition, the history of the country has been the history of its discovery — a discovery continuing still — of a tradition of its own.⁹

But Beaglehole's belief that the discovery would continue to be 'within the broad stream of the British tradition' could not be restated with the same confidence today, not only because of the Maori challenge, but also because the force of circumstance has almost severed many of the ties with 'home' and woven new ones with the South Pacific. What have for long periods been the accepted certainties, or myths, of New Zealand life have one by one been questioned or shattered: a special economic relationship with Britain, a defence alliance with the United States, highly protected export industries which would sustain an elaborate welfare system, sporting links with South Africa, the nuclear family, a socially and racially harmonious and egalitarian nation, the British symbols of public life. In the words of the editor of the *Listener*:

That cracking sound you hear is our break with the past. Anzus, All Black tours of South Africa, the familiar faces at the head of so many of our institutions for the last 20 years — gone, or going. Think Big energy projects which were once hailed as economic saviours are now dismissed as suspect investments. Farmers stripped of subsidies now talk of survival and suicide rather than settlement and security. Other industries squeal at the prospect of an unprotected future. Matters as diverse as our systems of parliamentary representation, taxation, social welfare and broadcasting and the subjects taught in our schools all demand our attention as they are subject to official scrutiny with a view to imminent change . . .

Some look for explanation, some for reassurance. There is a sense of dislocation, a desire for new signposts. But the old familiar faces, the reassuring voices, are moving on.¹⁰

Many of these issues of course remain on the agenda of public discussion in Australia and are just as far from being resolved. Where the contrast lies is in the comparatively slower development of a confident sense of nation, unattractive as some of its manifestations have been in Australia where national identity has too often been confused with nationalism. The recent surge of national awareness, for example in literature and the arts, commonly linked with the Whitlam years (1972–5) has really only happened more slowly and tentatively in New Zealand, presumably because of the stronger residual ties with Britain. At times this is a cause for regret, as, for example, for the writer Vincent O'Sullivan:

That subject of 'cultural identity' isn't one that most New Zealand writers listen to comfortably. However we mitigate the fact, it remains true that our history, our physical position and our increasingly obtuse immigration policy have made us very conscious of cultural dependency and often rather too *self-conscious* about anything else.

This is why one feels such an envy for Australian writers — not merely the statistics of 50 times as many grants and fellowships as we can muster, but something deeper and far more important than that: the sense they have of knowing who they are, where their reference points lie, and the optimism of a society that has so much more to draw on than the etiolated Anglo-Saxon strain we've invested with all virtues for the last 100 years.¹¹

There are two comments which O'Sullivan's lament calls forth: first, it illustrates how strong a residue of 'cultural cringe' remains in New Zealand, and, second, it misses the importance of the challenge Australian writers such as Helen Garner and David Malouf have issued to the very concept of 'national' culture or identity.

Within New Zealand the debate about national identity has increasingly polarized the country and links together a series of issues which have never been more acutely posed than in the mid 1980s.

On 24 September 1985 several hundred people gathered on the steps of Parliament in Wellington to present the results of a months-long petition campaign against the Homosexual Law Reform Bill. (Its organizers claimed it had about 800,000 signatures, an astonishing figure for a country of 3.2 million people, while supporters of law reform claimed that there were actually only about 200,000 authentic and adult signatures, and quoted opinion polls showing popular support for the bill.) It was the manner of presenting the petition which astonished and even frightened those who went to Parliament at the same time to voice their support for law reform. The presenters paraded in military fashion, large New Zealand flags waving, and in blue and white uniforms, with red sashes adorned with the slogan 'God-Family-Country'. As 'God Defend New Zealand' was played repeatedly, the presenters came to attention (and, claimed some observers, gave open-handed salutes).

Five months earlier, while debate raged about whether the scheduled All Black rugby tour of South Africa should proceed and anti-tour protestors picketed the 28 April match between Wellington and Queensland, opponents of the Homosexual Law Reform Bill began their campaign by handing out petitions to rugby fans inside the ground.

Earlier still, the same fundamentalist groups were bussed to a series of women's forums organized by the new Ministry of Women's Affairs to discuss Labour policy in the area of women's rights. In many centres this organized and rehearsed group swamped other participants; in Auckland, welcomes in Maori were interrupted with shouts of 'speak English!' and the waiata were drowned out by the singing of 'God Defend New Zealand'.

This was paralleled by demonstrations and organizations opposed to the Labour government's policy of refusing port entry to nuclear-powered or nuclear-armed vessels which, at least for the United States government, effectively rendered ANZUS inoperable.

One may dismiss this 'moral majority' or 'radical right', with its iconoclastic hostility to perceived threats to the family and morality, its aggressive racism and sexism and belief in closer British and United States ties, as no more than a small minority. Opinion polls do suggest that it is. But it is symptomatic of one response to the crisis of national identity: a desperate and ultimately futile assertion of old certainties and myths, based on the belief that if we pray hard enough, the 1980s will go away.

On the other hand there is an unquestionably larger minority with diametrically opposed views: hostility to racism here and in South Africa, and to the role of the United States and France in the South Pacific, and insistence on the rights of gays, lesbians, and women in general. In the middle of this debate are the majority of people, whose relative lack of certainty is reflected in their attitudes to the alliance with the United States: opinion polls in 1985 showed a large majority (about 60 per cent) in support of the government's nuclear-free stand, while about 70 per cent also wanted to retain the security of the ANZUS 'umbrella'.

The question of how and whether this debate over national identity, which includes that over biculturalism, is to be resolved is inevitably linked to the nature of public life and the political process. Here there is another powerful impression of difference which this Australian has observed.

On one level New Zealand has enormous advantages over most other countries in the opportunities its small size and population afford for participation in and access to the political process. In a country only 18 per cent larger than the state of Victoria, there are about 25 per cent fewer people: they participate directly in choosing just one house of parliament, without the confusions and distortions of the democratic process faced by Australians as they elect state upper and lower houses as well as a federal house of representatives and senate, often from electorates which have been cynically gerrymandered. Levels of memberships of political parties are considerably higher than in Australia and on a per capita basis the number of people prepared to march for or against a particular issue or development is regularly higher than in Australia, with the possible exception of some recent peace marches in Melbourne and Sydney.

No doubt people in Whangarei and Invercargill, and even Auckland and Dunedin, feel resentment at the 'shiny bottoms' from Wellington and some isolation from decision-making. This is as nothing to what almost all Australians feel about Canberra, where decisions are made in a hot-house atmosphere largely divorced from the mainstream of Australian life. Because of its small size and population, the simplicity

of political structures, and the central location of the capital, there is in New Zealand an unusual degree of accessibility enjoyed by citizens, not only to their Members of Parliament, but to government departments, union leadership, and the media. This is despite the ways in which they are distanced from power in other ways, through lack of education, wealth, and so on.

Yet the paradox is that there is a high level of complacency and mediocrity in public life. Political and intellectual debate is depressingly pedestrian. While there can be few countries in the world where it is easier for groups and individuals to gain publicity on television and radio or in the press, the press in particular is singularly parochial and mundane. At first glance this might be thought to be due to oligopoly (83 per cent of New Zealand newspapers are in the hands of six companies, and 66 per cent of total circulation is controlled by just three of them), but the Australian media is if anything even more tightly controlled.

No doubt in a country where there is no national newspaper but rather a string of provincial dailies, newspaper proprietors simply cannot afford a staff of 'investigative' reporters. Most journalists are no more than deferential chroniclers of daily doings, and the great bulk of the commentary pages in the Saturday editions is simply a reproduction of Australian, American, and British articles. The parliamentary press gallery is obsequious in comparison with its sometimes vicious and unscrupulous Canberra counterpart: in part this is due to the way it was mocked and intimidated into sullen silence by Robert Muldoon (the gallery stood idly by as one of its members, Tom Scott, was permanently expelled from Muldoon's press conferences, just as television reporters accepted his refusal to be interviewed by Ian Fraser, Simon Walker and others).

This lack of cutting edge in the New Zealand media underpins an impression of a rather more sinister shortcoming of New Zealand public life: that is, the total political dominance exercised by Cabinet or even fewer people (Muldoon's 'old guard', Roger Douglas's finance group). In parliamentary regimes elsewhere various attempts have been made to check the 'elected dictatorship' of a merged executive/legislature: upper houses with different electoral bases or parliamentary terms, constitutional councils to vet legislation, or an elected president. The absence of any check other than the High Court and Privy Council in New Zealand has meant that cabinets have been able to bluff their way through scandals with impunity. The last five years of Robert Muldoon's National government in particular were studded with a series of by now largely forgotten crises involving ministerial responsibility and propriety. There was not one resignation. At the same time Malcolm Fraser and then Robert Hawke, harried by a press with the scent of blood in its nostrils, were insisting that a dozen or more ministers stand aside temporarily or resign.

One of the first and most recurrent questions a migrant to New

Zealand will be asked is, 'So what do you think of New Zealand?' By this is meant, 'Do you like us New Zealanders?' Like the people of every other nation, New Zealanders want outsiders — particularly from more powerful countries — to like them and their way of life. They are really no different in that way from Australians, Americans, the English, or the French.

While reflecting about and planning this chapter I was visited by a series of Australian friends whose various reactions serve to summarize a series of (equally misleading) stereotypes about that mythical collectivity, 'the New Zealand people'.

The first of these stereotypes describes New Zealanders much as they would perhaps like to be seen, as on the whole a people in tune with their remarkable environment: above all, as friendly in a somewhat reserved, old-fashioned, and gentle kind of way (except at Queenstown, my friend insisted), as generally a contented, smiling lot (she also insisted that sheep in the Otago high country were smiling at the view though, given the drought, they were probably gasping with thirst), as tolerant, unpretentious, and enlightened people with respect for differences, little of Australians' anti-intellectualism, and a genuine desire to live in a sensible, peaceful relationship with their land and the South Pacific. As the *San Francisco Chronicle* put it recently:

Time and again, New Zealand has proven itself to be an island of sanity in an insane world. While the US, France and scores of other nations might dwarf it economically and militarily, New Zealand towers over all of them as one of the most enlightened nations on the face of the earth.¹²

One wonders what such a stereotype makes of the 'radical right' described earlier, or of the escalating figures for murder, rape and other violent crimes, or of 'gang' warfare.

It is just those symptoms of aggression and violent conflict which a second stereotype would highlight as accurate. Sitting on a suburban train travelling from Paraparaumu to Wellington, I asked another friend the inevitable question, 'So what do *you* think of the place?' and was startled when he replied, 'It's just so *violent*.' This stereotype is, like the first, characterized by a certain geographic determinism. In terms of landscape, New Zealand is indeed a violent land, 'the shaky isles', a series of tortured mountain ranges, some still exhaling sulphurous steam as they are buffeted by lashing westerlies and southerlies but overlaid with a thin veneer of English rural order: cleared fields, white fences and obedient livestock (not all English attempts at recreating familiar order — rabbits, gorse, broom, stoats, thistles, deer — have been successful). In terms of character, the placid, reserved, even stoical faces staring into the southerly battering the train were but thin English veneers over a repressed and fundamentally violent people. This is the dark underside, the 'Taranaki Gothic' of Ronald Hugh Morrieson's unnerving novels, the violent males who, with a good 'skin-full', lurched

from hotels into protestors in 1981 and who make some of New Zealand's hotel bars among the most frightening drinking places in the world. As Phillip Adams, Australian film-maker, commentator and entrepreneur, put it:

It is, under a thin veneer of respectability, a strange and eccentric country. The landscape may look as domesticated as Devon's but it trembles beneath your feet. Everywhere the suburban niceties — but is that not steam rising around the garden gnomes?

Out of the stultifying respectability of New Zealand come the menacing eccentricities of rock groups such as Dragon and Split Enz and the profoundly subversive satire of a Fred Dagg. Such is the violence beneath the surface that, suddenly, the apparently amiable teenagers of Auckland will throw an enormous wobbly and trash the main shopping centre — smashing the windows, shredding the Christmas decorations, energetically looting. It was the biggest punch-up New Zealand police had had since the anti-apartheid riots.¹³

It is the veneer which the third stereotype sees as New Zealand's essence, a land of — to use Gordon McLauchlan's phrase — 'the passionless people'. A combination of geographical isolation, comparative lower-middle-class affluence, its role as 'a Shangri-la for unreconstructed Poms' (in the words of one Australian writer), the fact that the last threat to its shores was when the present occupiers took it last century, have made New Zealand into a petit-bourgeois paradise, a land of insular, humourless, and fundamentally mean-spirited people whose friendship is extended only to other WASPs, and whose love of 'the big family which is New Zealanders' only means that the country has all the vicious pettiness of a huge gossip circle. (It must be said that such an image sits awkwardly with the fact that New Zealanders gave \$4 million — \$1.25 per head, compared with 17 cents in Australia — to the 'Live Aid' concert in 1985, a fortnight after giving \$6 million to a telethon.)

This description is echoed in the words of a Russian Jew who fled Germany in 1937:

... a certain public style of meanspiritedness, superficiality and suspicion in relation to others, dislike of difference... lack of cohesive friendships and of feelings of familial, institutional and social obligation... quiet orderliness... democratic institutions... comparative lack of corruption... tendency to obey laws and... be considerate in public behaviour... self-reliance... a basic social egalitarianism.¹⁴

But the writer in question, Eugene Kamenka, is describing Australia. The point of quoting him is simply to indicate my argument that 'national character' stereotypes are inherently impossible, usually offensive, and based on no more than prejudices for which one may always find sufficient reinforcing evidence.

The historian Jeffrey Kaplow once argued that

... any appeal to human nature and its so-called inalienable qualities as

a principle of historical explanation is a sign of intellectual bankruptcy. Beyond the desire to survive that they hold in common, men change from generation to generation and from year to year. Their problems, and their conflicts, are specific to the time in which they live and to the society of which they are a part.¹⁵

The same holds for appeals to 'national character' or stereotypes. This is not to say that 'people are the same the world over', which is an equally ridiculous statement. But it does mean that if at a certain time most New Zealand people share broadly similar attitudes and patterns of behaviour then that is not the result of an immutable national 'character' but is rather of a complex historical process. As an historical process it is therefore also dynamic and changes across time. Appeals to national character also ignore differences of class, gender, and ethnicity: what does an unemployed Samoan woman from Porirua have in common with a society matron from Takapuna or a farmer from Southland?

But, having said that, it remains true that people do have perceptions of themselves as a group or nation, and of other peoples. In this context, it is particularly interesting and instructive to examine some of the results of the Australia-New Zealand Foundation Survey of the attitudes of 1200 Australians and 1000 New Zealanders, conducted in the second half of 1984.¹⁶

In terms of socio-economic background, interests, and leisure patterns there were not large differences between the two groups, though Australians were more likely to have higher levels of education and to have white-collar jobs, while New Zealanders were more likely to be from country towns and to have formal social affiliations to social clubs, churches, and political parties (reinforcing an earlier point, 14 per cent of the New Zealanders were members of parties compared with 5 per cent of the Australians).

The most revealing, if in some ways perplexing, results of the survey have to do with the contrasting ways Australians and New Zealanders see themselves and each other, whether as people or as a nation.

Both groups saw their country as characterized by both new technology and unemployment, by good food and wine, as a fertile environment for exercising one's abilities, as somewhat nationalistic, but above all as a good place to live. But New Zealanders, far more than Australians, saw their country as rural (77 per cent to 48 per cent), as a good environment for cultural and artistic life (49 per cent to 32 per cent), and as concerned for minority rights (44 per cent to 24 per cent); on the other hand fewer felt that their country had a high standard of living (50 per cent to 65 per cent) or was changing quickly (28 per cent to 43 per cent).

Similarly, both Australians and New Zealanders were likely to see themselves as friendly and relaxed if rather complacent and materialistic. But whereas the Australians were likely to add to this self-definition that as a people they were also rather self-confident,

lazy, selfish, and brash, the New Zealanders felt that their compatriots were also self-reliant, trustworthy, practical, and innovative, even if also conservative and old-fashioned.

New Zealanders would at least agree with the Australians' self-definition, for they, too, see their trans-Tasman neighbours as more self-confident, brash, and ruthless and less friendly, relaxed, cheerful, practical, or trustworthy. When the Australians were asked to list the characteristics they dislike about New Zealanders, 64 per cent could think of nothing and no negative attribute was listed by more than 5 per cent. In contrast, only 29 per cent of New Zealanders could not think of anything they disliked about Australians, while 24 per cent disliked what they saw as a tendency to be brash and loud-mouthed, to be arrogant, superior, or over-confident (20 per cent), and to be boastful (18 per cent). [Several of the relevant tables from the survey are reproduced in the Appendix.]

It has to be emphasized that we are dealing here with people's *perceptions* of themselves and of others, perceptions which do not necessarily describe a reality with any certainty at all. Material standard of living can be measured with some precision, but how does one quantify friendliness or ruthlessness? It is hardly surprising that most people like their own country and people best, particularly when we are talking of two lands which are fortunate in so many ways (only about 5 per cent of each group thought their country 'hard to live in'). But what is remarkable — and what needs to be explained — is that New Zealanders are in general far more hostile to the perceived 'national character' (a meaningless term) of Australians than vice versa.

The answer lies not in any *actual* difference between the character of the Australian and New Zealand people (there are delightful and unpleasant individuals wherever one goes in the world) but in the second general revelation of the survey. The simple fact of the matter is that New Zealanders have a great deal more contact with Australians and know far more about Australia than the reverse. Whereas 47 per cent of the Australians knew fewer than ten New Zealanders, the reverse was true for only 20 per cent of the New Zealanders surveyed. Similarly, only 35 per cent of the Australians had friends in New Zealand and only 5 per cent had relatives, but for the New Zealanders the figures were 78 per cent and 64 per cent. (A paradoxical and little known statistic is that there are nevertheless more Australians in New Zealand on a per capita basis — 1.4 per cent — than vice versa, though New Zealanders' presence in Australia may be more visible because of their concentration in certain suburbs of Sydney.)

Seventy-four per cent of the Australians had never been to New Zealand (compared to 47 per cent of New Zealanders who had never crossed the Tasman). If 73 per cent of Australians in the sample felt they knew little or nothing about New Zealand, only 48 per cent of New Zealanders admitted this about Australia: they were probably correct for while 76 per cent of New Zealanders could name Australia's

capital, only 37 per cent of the Australians named Wellington.¹⁷ (It would be fascinating to do a similar survey in 1988, to note the undoubted impact on Australians of New Zealanders who, in their own fields, recently thrust their country into Australian consciousness: among others, David Lange, Keri Hulme, Richard Hadlee, and Lauris Edmond.)

It is quite clear that New Zealanders are far more conscious of Australia and its importance to them than vice versa. While only 25 per cent of the Australians said they had most in common as a people with New Zealanders, 59 per cent of the New Zealanders listed Australians (interestingly the corresponding figures for Americans were 29 per cent and 3 per cent). And as a country only 37 per cent of the Australians felt they had most in common with New Zealand: a staggering 79 per cent of New Zealanders named Australia.

Even more striking is that New Zealanders overwhelmingly saw Australia as the single most important country to them now (34 per cent) and in the future (48 per cent), whereas for the Australians New Zealand was only the most important at present for 1 per cent and would be in the future for 10 per cent. And if only 15 per cent of New Zealanders felt they were simply uninformed about CER, an extraordinary 58 per cent of Australians were.

Finally and — given the conclusions above — perhaps most surprisingly, only 39 per cent of the New Zealanders wanted closer political ties with Australia while such a development would be welcomed by 70 per cent of the Australians.

For all sorts of reasons — the sheer size and population of Australia, the imbalance in the proportion of trade and industry oriented towards each other, changing geopolitical strategy (Australia has its eyes fixed steadily towards Southeast Asia, New Zealand more towards the South Pacific), the differing origins of European migrants since World War II — New Zealanders know far more about Australia than vice versa. In the words of a senior Australian politician, 'Australians don't care a — about New Zealanders, and they resent us for it.'

Had the survey been carried out between Americans and Australians the results would have been virtually the same, but reversed. Americans would have described Australians in much the same glowing terms as Australians reserve for New Zealanders, and Australians on the other hand would have been much more knowledgeable about the United States than vice versa, as well as being full of resentments about what they see to be American brashness, boastfulness, and arrogance. This is not to say that Australians are therefore half-way between Americans and New Zealanders on a scale of amiability (though New Zealanders seemed delighted when Australia took the America's Cup), but simply that if they knew more New Zealanders they would find more that they disliked, that is, that New Zealanders are just people after all.

What we are observing in this survey is symptomatic of the 'love/hate' relationship typical of many countries which feel rightly or

wrongly that they are in the economic, cultural, and sporting shadow of a similar but larger and more powerful cousin (an obvious parallel is that between the United States and Canada).¹⁸ In his comparison piece to this chapter, John Salmond recalls the place of Australian 'popular culture' in his youth; in the 1980s, on the other hand, the rejection of that cultural influence took on an ugly dimension.

The talented Christchurch satirist A. K. Grant, well aware of his compatriots' certainties about 'the Australian people', expressed his surprise at what he found on his first trip across the Tasman:

Where, I began to ask myself, were the brash, boorish, belligerent, xenophobe, chauvinist Australians that we New Zealanders prided ourselves on not being? Why did these relaxed, pleasant, unthreatened, unthreatening people fail so comprehensively to conform to the stereotype which had formed part of my mental landscape for so many years? Why weren't they all brawling, throwing cans of Fosters at each other and treating their women with contempt? Could it be (and this idea took a bit of getting used to) that they were not only fortunate inhabitants of a rich continent but also ordinary decent people with it? Even (dare one think it) as ordinary and decent as we New Zealanders knew ourselves to be?¹⁹

Unfortunately, this is not the prevailing stereotype of Australians which one encounters in New Zealand. Repeated endlessly in the media, particularly by sportscasters, is a series of trivial but ultimately offensive puerilities which highlight the peculiar and unnecessary mix of inferiority and superiority complexes directed at Australia. The infamous and underhand/underarm tactic devised by two Australian brothers to ensure victory in what had been a marvellous cricket match in February 1981 (a tactic as roundly condemned in Australia as in New Zealand) was the signal for an outpouring of xenophobia which smeared all Australians with the same brush. It was exemplified by the then prime minister who snarled, 'Now I know why the Australian cricket uniforms are yellow.'²⁰

Take an *Evening Post* editorial (14 August 1984) which, after berating the chauvinism displayed by the host country at the 1984 Olympic Games, concluded that 'we did, after all, and without wishing to gloat like our host, beat the Australians in the gold medal count!' Or the *Sunday News* which, in the same issue (29 July 1984) both revelled in the choice of Auckland for the 1990 Commonwealth Games ('Auckland's selection is also one in the eye for the Aussies. In the tradition of under-arm bowling, Perth tried a \$530,000 bribe to get the games') and, in the guise of a commentary on rugby league, described Australians as 'gutless... adept at ducking challenges' and squirmers. Or the radio announcer on 2ZM: 'I'll play you a song in a moment from an Aussie group: apart from that it's a good song.' Or the 'jokes' which mock alleged Australian stupidity and hedonism ('Why wasn't Jesus Christ born in Australia? They couldn't find three wise men and a virgin'), and stupidity again ('What are the longest four years

of an Australian's life? The fifth form'). The list could go on and on.

On a national radio 'Insight' programme (22 September 1985) devoted to the survey findings outlined earlier in this chapter and to Australia-New Zealand relations in general, the current Prime Minister, David Lange, dismissed such jokes as no different in essence from the good-natured banter between the inhabitants of Auckland and Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin, or Sydney and Melbourne. He was quite wrong: the anti-Australian jibes are more frequent, more stupid and more intense.²¹ They represent something of a national obsession revealing of an uncertainty about New Zealand's own identity.

Fortunately, the close and increasingly important links of trade, migration, and defence are too well established to be seriously affected by the particular whims of politicians, journalists, and broadcasters. New Zealand, like Australia, is an intriguing, privileged, and splendid land; the two countries face similar challenges, problems, and opportunities. The particularities of each society may well mean that the challenges of the 1980s are resolved differently, but the destinies of each will be, inevitably and fortunately, ever more closely linked.

Appendix

Selected tables from *A Report on a Study Investigating Trans-Tasman Attitudes. Supplement*, prepared for the Australia-New Zealand Foundation, 1984.

TABLE 1

How We View Our Own and Each Other's Country

Description	Australians' View of...		New Zealanders' View of...	
	Australia (%)	New Zealand (%)	Australia (%)	New Zealand (%)
Have a lot of minerals and raw materials	82	14	76	29
A high standard of living	65	31	59	50
A lot of strikes and industrial conflict	57	8	29	42
Have many unemployed	57	38	42	48
Good food and wine	54	34	49	53
Interested in new technology	52	21	59	48
Rural based economy	48	74	38	77
Good hotels and tourist facilities	45	68	59	48
Fast changing society	43	16	45	28
Believe in private enterprise	42	31	48	45
Anybody with talent can get on	39	15	53	44
Interested in other countries	37	26	34	47
Good artistic, cultural environment	32	34	28	49
Very nationalistic	30	37	49	32
Invest in new industries	27	16	46	30
Highly industrial	27	11	42	13
Industry is modern, efficient	26	13	44	20
A lot of government ownership	26	20	16	36
A high level of productivity	25	20	45	29
Concerned about minorities' rights	24	21	13	44
Hard work, extra effort are not rewarded	22	11	8	36
A hard country to live in	6	19	17	5

TABLE 2

How We View Ourselves and Each Other

Description	Australians' View of...		New Zealanders' View of...	
	Australians (%)	New Zealanders (%)	Australians (%)	New Zealanders (%)
Friendly	87	82	67	93
Relaxed	72	55	50	68
Cheerful	58	50	49	65
Self-reliant	49	31	49	62
Trustworthy	45	41	26	58
Practical	42	37	43	64
Complacent	42	23	24	45
Materialistic	41	16	48	38
Self-confident	40	31	64	30
Lazy	36	10	18	17
Conservative	32	45	17	53
Status conscious	29	16	31	28
Forward-looking	28	25	38	30
Energetic	27	26	34	37
Short-sighted	26	14	13	26
Emotional	23	16	18	22
Efficient	23	23	34	32
Innovative	23	13	25	43
Slow	22	25	12	21
Selfish	22	7	22	14
Naive	20	18	8	29
Brash	19	5	48	4
Old-fashioned	16	43	6	34
Ruthless	7	4	22	3

TABLE 3

Aspects Disliked About Australians and New Zealanders

Aspect	Australian %	New Zealand %
Nothing disliked	64	29
Parochial/narrow-minded	5	-
(Over) Nationalistic	4	-
Arrogant/superior/over confident	3	20
Too many New Zealanders/take our jobs	2	-
Staid/conservative	2	-
Lazy/don't want to work	2	2
Aggressive	2	-
Dislike the way they speak/accent	2	6
Brash/loudmouthed	2	24
Boastful/brag a lot	-	18
Rude/pushy/cocky/crude	2	8
Bad sports/need to win at all costs	-	7

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Notes

1. See Donald Denoon, *Settler Capitalism: The Dynamics of Dependent Development in the Southern Hemisphere*, Oxford, 1983.
2. The expression is from J. O. C. Phillips, *A Man's Country*, Auckland, 1987.
3. Western Victoria is recalled in Alan Marshall's autobiography, *I Can Jump Puddles*, Melbourne, 1955; the south coast is the setting for Arthur Upfield's *The New Shoe*, London, 1952.
4. It should be noted that, at least for the 1970s, this impression that New Zealand was and is rather more 'egalitarian' is not borne out by surveys: see John Gould, *The Rake's Progress: the New Zealand Economy since 1945*, Auckland, 1982, esp. pp.32-36.
5. As are comments about accents. I have a letter from a Melbourne colleague in 1980 commenting on skiing at Ruapehu: 'One hears all around from those who've just zipped down the slope, "CL DO, AAY?" [a phonetic rendering of "Cool do, eh?"] This means "a superbly exhilarating experience, don't you agree?" Indeed, the linguistic assertiveness of "AAY", as in "Good AAY" or "Good one, AAY?", is one of the few occasions when New Zealanders, particularly Wellingtonians, continue to resist that wind which has, by enforcing semi-permanent closure of the lips, effectively exterminated the vowel from human discourse.' But that was 1980, and 'Cool do, eh?' has been replaced by 'Really neat, eh?'
6. Those few people who contest the fact that the Maori people were the original occupiers of the land have to resort to the myth of the 'Moriori'. Comparatively few Australians assume that all of Australia was Aboriginal land. In my own case, the dispossession of Aboriginals in my own state, Victoria, was something I rarely contemplated until reading Don Watson's *Caledonia Australis! Scottish Highlanders on the Frontier of Australia*, Sydney, 1984.
7. Among attempts to explain differing race relations in the two countries, see Kerry Howe, *Race Relations, Australia and New Zealand; a Comparative Survey 1770s-1970s*, Wellington, 1977; and Keith Sinclair, 'Why are Race Relations in New Zealand Better Than in South Africa, South Australia or South Dakota?' *NZJH*, v.5, 1971, 121-27. The myth of racial harmony was first challenged — at least for Pakehas — by the American David Ausubel in *The Fern and the Tiki: an American View of New Zealand*, London, 1960.
8. The most controversial statement of this position has been by Donna Awatere, *Maori Sovereignty*, Auckland, 1984.
9. J. C. Beaglehole, 'The Development of New Zealand Nationality', *Cahiers d'histoire mondiale*, v.2, 1954, 122. Whereas the teaching of Australian history pre-dated World War II, it was not until 1960 that New Zealand history began to be taught to undergraduates as other than a component of British imperial history.
10. *Listener*, 3 August 1985.
11. *ibid*, 26 April 1980.
12. Quoted by Tony Garnier in the *Evening Post*, Wellington, 1 October 1985.
13. *Bulletin*, 29 January 1985. In July 1981, in the small Taranaki community of Eltham, nine lonely anti-tour protestors were abused and pelted with refuse by their neighbours.
14. Eugene Kamenka, 'Culture and Australian Culture', *Australian Cultural History*, v.4, 1984, 13-14.
15. Jeffrey Kaplow, *Elbeuf during the Revolutionary Period: History and Social Structure*, Baltimore, 1964, p.9. Within the context of France, a brilliantly effective critique

- of national stereotypes is Theodore Zeldin, *The French*, London, 1983.
16. *A Report on a Study Investigating Trans-Tasman Attitudes. Supplement*, prepared for ANZF by McNair Surveys NZ Ltd.
 17. These figures have a certain authenticity in the case of this particular Australian who knew only a handful of New Zealanders before migrating and little more about their country than the 'four Ms': Muldoon, Maoris, Mountains, and Mutton.
 18. The social history of Australia-New Zealand relations, to which this volume is a contribution, is more complex than most people realize. An enlightening analysis of one strand of this history is J. O. C. Phillips, 'Musings in Maoriland — or was there a *Bulletin* school in New Zealand?', *Historical Studies*, v.20, 1983, 520-535.
 19. *Listener*, 9 February 1985. See, too, the humorous piece 'Not quite kissing cousins', written by Neil Roberts for *Air NZ Pacific Way* no. 1, 1984, 17-18.
 20. The incident and responses to it have been well described in Adrian McGregor, *Greg Chappell*, Sydney, 1985.
 21. It is true to say that parallel anti-New Zealander jokes are told in Sydney. And nothing I have heard in New Zealand matches for vulgar offensiveness the remark by a columnist in the once widely respected *Bulletin*, 19 February 1985: 'As for New Zealand's behaviour [*sic*]. Recently I wrote that Prime Minister David Lange was behaving like a troglodyte and was leading his fellow troglodytes back to their caves. I am now inclined to think I was unfair to the troglodytes.'