

# White Privilege: Exploring the (in)visibility of Pakeha whiteness

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## **Abstract**

Drawing upon critical whiteness theory I examine whiteness and privilege within a New Zealand context, specifically with 15 men and women who self identify as Pakeha. Through in-depth interviews I explore the proposition that the adoption of this identity may preclude an understanding of the ways that whiteness and privilege operate. Employing thematic and discourse analysis, four major themes were identified within the data. The functionality and organisation of language is considered in order to examine participants' detachment from dominant white culture. The thesis illustrates that the assumption of a Pakeha self identity may allow the bearer to discursively obscure both the cultural capital that whiteness provides and the privileges afforded by this capital. Ultimately, this research draws attention to the intersection of privilege and whiteness within New Zealand, in order to offer one explanation for the persistence of white hegemony.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The preoccupation of this study is white privilege: the concept that those of us who are white have at our disposal a number of unearned advantages that enable us to live our lives with greater ease than many non whites. In one of the most widely cited pieces of writing on the subject, Peggy McIntosh (1988) presented a list of privileges, that she had access to simply because of her skin colour. Many white people, she contended, do not acknowledge these advantages and the ways in which the institutions which constitute Western society privilege members of the dominant white majority.

Racism in Western countries is regularly interpreted in terms of prejudice against non whites. McIntosh (1988) instead redefined this issue as privilege, arguing that society provides greater opportunities to white people by disadvantaging those who are not. Being oblivious to these privileges, she contends, sustains a belief in the superiority of a white way of life. By emphasising the previously unacknowledged relationship between non white disadvantage and white advantage, she highlighted the underlying attitudes that accompany white racism. Understanding this connection between an ideology of white superiority and the persistence of racism was a concern of mine throughout this research.



I arrived at the topic of white privilege from a number of different routes. The experience of living outside of New Zealand in a non Western country introduced me to a way of life that was not white. Experiencing life as a racial minority presented a challenge to my inherent belief in the superiority of my own culture. Talking to those who had spent time as foreigners in New Zealand however, I began to realise that my struggle to come to terms with the shock of encountering a foreign culture bore little resemblance to the debilitating racism experienced by many non white immigrants in my home country.

New Zealand has been described in the literature as a country in which the values and beliefs of other cultures are tolerated only within a context of white Western superiority (Awatere, 1984; Consedine & Consedine, 2005; 2009; Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Maori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare, 1986). The resulting racism is predicated upon a hierarchy with white Western culture sitting uncontested at its pinnacle. Recently, I saw this attitude overwhelmingly demonstrated by many white people I knew when, following my sister's hospitalisation in a city in South East Asia, they questioned the quality of care she would receive in a modern, highly industrialised but non Western city.

The "insider insights" (McCreanor, 2005, p. 64), that I bring to this research as a white New Zealander give this reaction, with its underlying inference of the superiority of white Western culture, "a disconcerting level of familiarity". I use the term "as a white New Zealander" not in order to reify this identity by suggesting that all white people in New Zealand share a particular "moral failing" (Bonnett, 2000b, p. 128), but rather to emphasise my appreciation of these reservations. In the same way as Jensen (2005) expresses anger at himself for understanding why a racist joke is funny, I am irritated as much by my own identification with these reservations as by hearing them expressed by my friends. I too see the relationship between the words "'European', 'white', 'Westerner',

‘developed’ and ‘advanced’” (Bonnett, 2000b, p. 142). It is my uneasiness with this relationship that motivated me to understand more about white privilege and ultimately led me to this thesis topic.

### **A New Zealand Context**

In deciding how to contextualise a discussion of white privilege in New Zealand, I was drawn to the debate surrounding the adoption of the word Pakeha by a group of white New Zealanders as an expression of self identity. Ballara (1986, p. 203) defines the word Pakeha as the “Maori name for Europeans”. This is also supported by a number of contemporary Maori sources which translate the term as white or New Zealander of European descent (Moorfield, 2011; Ngata & Ngata, 2010). Despite its origin being contested in the popular imagination, the most prevalent academic argument for its derivation, is that it originated from “pakepakeha” meaning fantasy creatures with pale skin (Hepi, 2008; Hiroa, 1922; King, 1991). It was used by Maori to describe those settlers with white skin from the time of European contact. Adoption of the term Pakeha as a self descriptor began to gain popularity in New Zealand during the 1970s and 1980s and its usage has continued to grow since that time.

During the 2006 census, 8,500 white New Zealanders chose to ignore the tick box of New Zealand European and instead opted to write the word Pakeha in the ‘other’ category of the ethnicity question (Treiving as cited in Irwin, 2010). It seems likely that a larger number would however have chosen Pakeha if that option had been open to them. A study by Liu (1999) found that 20-35% of white New Zealanders used this word to describe their ethnicity, while an earlier study suggested that 16.5% always or often described themselves as Pakeha (Pearson & Sissons, 1997). Based on current population statistics this indicates that anywhere

from 400,000 to 800,000 New Zealanders have a preference for self identifying in this way.

The adoption of the term by these people is not without controversy. Many white New Zealanders explicitly refuse to be identified in this way.

Opposition to the term comes in a number of forms. Some simply prefer to be called something else, some oppose it because they do not like to be labelled, and some reject it on the basis that it is a word from the Maori language (Bell, 1996; Gibson, 2006; Liu, 2005; Pearson & Sissons, 1997; Spoonley, 1988). Others, influenced by what Pearson and Sissons (1997, p. 69) refer to as “a great New Zealand myth”, object to the term because they believe the word to be derogatory meaning “white pig” or “white flea”.

Research suggests that in choosing to be Pakeha, members of this group may feel they are making a political statement - an expression of support for Maori and against racism - that may not be shared by other white New Zealanders (Gibson, 2006; Hepi, 2008; Liu, 2005; Spoonley, 1995a, 1995b; Spoonley & Larner, 1995). In response to the politicisation of the term however, several writers have suggested that assuming a Pakeha identity may actually reproduce racism by allowing the bearer to avoid any association with the contentious issues of whiteness and privilege (Dyson, 1996; Lawn, 1994).

This latter position suggested a way for me to situate the topic of white privilege within New Zealand. Taking the Maori meaning of the word Pakeha (white or European) as a starting point, I was interested in its evolution over time to the point that this original meaning may now have little relevance for the people who use it to describe themselves. It is this newly constructed meaning vis á vis the research participants’ interpretation of what it means to be white that was examined over the course of this research. Key to my analysis was the argument inherent in

critical whiteness theory, that in order to understand the manifestations of white privilege, it is first necessary to interrogate whiteness.

### **Adoption of a Critical Stance**

In the tradition of a number of New Zealand and international writers who have written about the dominant white majority, I have assumed a critical stance in relation to the data and its analysis (M. Anderson, 2003; Bell, 2004, 2006, 2009; Bonnett, 2000b; Hughey, 2007, 2009; Jensen, 2005; Jones, 1999, 2001). In New Zealand, Bell (2004, 2006, 2009) demonstrated this approach as she examined the motivations of the dominant majority in relation to white guilt, settler identity and biculturalism. She concluded that without critical reflection, the words and actions of white people can sustain the continued dominance of the white majority through “the avoidance of engagement and responsibility” (Bell, 2004, p. 90).

In the United States, Hughey (2007, p. 73) notes that research with white antiracists can be separated into two types, “celebration ...or critique”. In assuming the latter position his research was able to demonstrate that racism may not only be present in an environment of antiracism, but may actually be created out of it in contexts in which the full implications of “the lived experiences of white supremacy” may not be grasped (Hughey, 2007, p. 98).

Bonnet (2000b) and M. Anderson (2003) likewise argued that for white antiracists, a critical stance is necessary to continually assess the effectiveness of antiracist strategy. M. Anderson (2003, p. 33) writes; “I have no doubt that self-criticism must accompany white people’s antiracist work. Too often white progressives leave their own attitudes and behaviours unexamined while working against racism”. Within a New Zealand context, Jaber (1998) has argued that a failure by white New

Zealanders to critically consider the power relationships inherent in a bicultural identity may reinforce white hegemony. Liu's (2005, p. 79) description of those identifying as Pakeha as the "best allies Maori have" furthermore encouraged me to consider the possibility that racism may inadvertently be reinforced by, as McIntosh (1988) maintained, a failure to see the manifestations of whiteness and privilege and the consequent reinforcing of an attitude of white superiority.

### **Thesis Overview**

My aim in this thesis then is to examine whiteness and white privilege within a New Zealand context specifically with a group of people who self identify as Pakeha. The research question I seek to answer is: what is the relationship between the usage of the word "Pakeha" by some white New Zealanders and their understanding of their own whiteness and white privilege? I begin with the assumption that such a thing as white privilege exists and shapes the lives of both white and non white people in New Zealand today. While in Chapter Six, I offer evidence to support this claim, the concern of this thesis is not to argue for its presence but rather to offer an explanation for its persistence.

In Chapter Two, I review the literature, laying out a framework for the thesis and drawing together the scholarship that had a significant influence on my thinking. It begins with the literature relating to Pakeha identity, moving to a discussion of race in New Zealand, through to white privilege and the invisibility of whiteness as presented in both New Zealand and international literature. The chapter ends with a description of how I arrived at the research question. It is followed in Chapter Three by an explanation of the methodology used and ontological position assumed in order to construct the argument that answers this question.

In Chapters Four, Five and Six I examine three of the four themes to emerge during data analysis; a Pakeha relationship with Maori, the reification of whiteness and a disengagement from privilege. While distinct in their focus, these chapters flow into each other as recurring topics emerged in the data. In attempting to understand the meaning the participants attached to the word Pakeha, it became apparent that many were very uncomfortable with the term white. In examining the meaning participants had constructed around the word white, it emerged that many saw whiteness and privilege as having little role in their identity as Pakeha.

Instead I argue that for some participants, a detachment from the dominant white culture obscures both the cultural capital that whiteness provides and the privileges afforded by this capital. The ultimate effect of this is highlighted in Chapter Six as the data revealed that participants were often able to grasp the theoretical concept of white privilege without understanding the ways it manifested itself in their own lives. This supports one of the key premises in the literature; that privilege will remain hidden as long as whiteness remains an unacknowledged and invisible norm (Colvin, 2009; Dei, Karumanchery, & Karumanchery-Luik, 2004; Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Gibson, 2006; hooks, 1997; McIntosh, 1988; Morrison, 1992; Sue, 2004a, 2004b).

In Chapter Seven I analyse the fourth and most dominant theme to emerge in the data, that of separation. This theme emerged in relation to each of the topics highlighted in Chapters Four, Five and Six as participants sought to distance themselves from other white people, from the dominant white culture in New Zealand and from privilege. This separation, I argue is achieved through a number of rhetorical devices, not least assuming a Pakeha identity and emphasising the limitations of other groups of white New Zealanders. Analysis of these devices forms the basis of my argument that in creating a sense of separation from other white people, Pakeha are

in fact making their own whiteness and privilege harder to see. The implications of this are discussed in the final chapter of the thesis.

### **A Note on Writing Style**

Throughout this thesis I have opted to use the terms “dominant majority”, “dominant white majority”, or “white New Zealanders” to refer to white people who live in New Zealand. The use of a single word such as Pakeha or European would no doubt have improved my writing style but, I chose not to do so despite the realisation that it may, at times, have resulted in a clumsier manner of expression. I made this choice for a number of reasons. Firstly, as I have elected to study a group of New Zealanders who refer to themselves as Pakeha in order to differentiate themselves from those who do not, I felt it would have created confusion to refer to all white New Zealanders as Pakeha. On the other hand, the term European, has been deliberately rejected by many who identify as Pakeha and I believed that employing it, could create an unnecessary distraction by distancing those who identify as Pakeha from the implications of my argument. In order to remain consistent with my thesis argument, I chose to employ terms that both unequivocally encompass all white people in New Zealand while at the same time emphasising the dominant position this group occupies in this country.

Finally, by focusing on whiteness and privilege, it is not my intention to argue that other factors do not also have a significant role to play in determining the inequalities that exist in New Zealand society. While I believe that it is important to acknowledge what is gained from being white in New Zealand, I also maintain that any individual privilege should be considered within the broader context of societal advantage or disadvantage (Bonnett, 2000b). That being said however, I contend that while factors such as socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality or disability

may impact the degree to which individual white people can access privilege, on some level every white person in New Zealand benefits from the colour of their skin.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

In order to organise a piece of research examining white privilege as it is understood by a group of white New Zealanders, I have drawn together several threads of writing that take the dominant white majority as a focus. I begin with the literature that started to emerge in New Zealand during the 1980s as a number of writers from the dominant majority began to explore the concept of a Pakeha identity. My intention here is to highlight the different meanings attached to being Pakeha in order to understand where whiteness sits in relation to this. While several writers engaged with the idea of Pakeha hegemony, in the main this work did not focus on whiteness, instead choosing to privilege a discussion of ethnicity over race.

In contrast the scholarship which forms the remaining two threads, white privilege and the invisibility of whiteness, emphasises the benefits associated with whiteness. In New Zealand a number of writers have examined the loss of Maori land in relation to its effect on traditional structures of Maori society, arguing that the undermining of these structures contributed to the deprivation that Maori faced in colonial times and that many still face today. Less common however, is writing concerned with the benefits accruing to white people as a result of the acquisition of this land. While the local literature which takes white privilege as its focus is not extensive, it draws attention to the economic

and social advantages that colonisation has provided to white people in contemporary New Zealand. Given the paucity of scholarship in this area it was also necessary to turn to the international literature on whiteness and privilege in order to establish a critical framework for this study. The section concludes with a review of this literature which grounds white privilege firmly within an historical context, demonstrating contemporary privilege as the cumulative effect of past events and past and present government policies.

The final stream of scholarship with which I engage in this review is that highlighting the invisibility of whiteness to white people. This invisibility, it is argued, enables white people in many Western countries to ignore the asset that their skin colour provides. In engaging with this literature my intention is to argue that in order to understand the practical advantages we have gained through living in a “white New Zealand system [that] was designed for whites” (Awatere, 1984, p. 20), it is first necessary to acknowledge that we *are* white.

### **A Pakeha Identity**

New Zealand historian Michael King (1985) was among the first to explore the idea of a Pakeha identity in what he termed his “ethnic autobiography”, *Being Pakeha*. A sense of belonging in this country is stressed throughout his writing. He claimed that, like other Pakeha, he has “no other home”, and so, like Maori, belongs in New Zealand (King, 1985, p. 177). A Pakeha identity is created from this sense of belonging and through interaction with Maori. The term Pakeha, he contended, is the most appropriate way of describing those non Maori New Zealanders who were born in this country, have roots here and have an awareness, at least to some degree, of Maori people and their culture.

King's (1985) work emerged during a period of significant interest in the term Pakeha. Debates on what it meant to be Pakeha occupied the arts, mainstream media (Jesson, 1986; King, 1991), and academic attention (Lawn, 1994; Spoonley, 1986).<sup>1</sup> This interest culminated in King (1991) editing a collection of writing on the topic of a Pakeha identity. In his own contribution to the work he again emphasised the relationship that Pakeha have with this country and with Maori, stating that using the term Pakeha "denotes things that belong to New Zealand via one major stream of its heritage: people, manners, values and customs that are not exclusively Polynesian" (King, 1991 p. 16). His definition was echoed by a number of the other contributors who also defined the term as demonstrating a sense of belonging in this country and an engagement with Maori culture (see for example contributions by: Dann, 1991; Olssen, 1991; Spoonley, 1991).

While incorporating this definition Spoonley (1995a, 1995b) and Spoonley and Lerner (1995) moved the debate forward to one that sought to define Pakeha as a political group. Like King (1985, 1991) they argued that to be Pakeha emerges from a relationship with, and to, New Zealand and Maori. They, however, also emphasised the importance of acknowledging the effects of colonisation and "a set of politics which affirm the centrality of resolving Treaty claims and of endorsing tino rangatiranga" (Spoonley, 1995a, p. 54). From this perspective the term represents a deliberately constructed identity utilised by New Zealanders of European descent who want to express their understanding of, and support for, post-colonialism. In this respect then, claiming a Pakeha ethnicity becomes a political statement.

Avril Bell (1996) also emphasised this position but argued that a focus on belonging should not be an attempt to incorporate indigeneity for white New Zealanders, as King (1985, 1991) had attempted, nor should a post-

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<sup>1</sup> In Spring 1986 a special edition of *Sites: A Journal for Radical Perspectives of Culture* was dedicated to the subject of Pakeha ethnicity

colonial identity imply, as Spoonley's (1995b) definition had, that Pakeha, like Maori were also colonised. Her call for Pakeha "self reflection" and an acknowledgement of our cultural origins encouraged a critical approach to the subject which was a marked departure from much of the earlier scholarship on the subject (Bell, 1996; 2006, p. 253). Similarly Jennifer Lawn (1994, p. 295) was unsympathetic towards what she termed a "Pakeha renaissance". She argued that attempts to define a Pakeha ethnicity had produced little more than "lyrical memories of boyhood fishing expeditions with the Maori kid next door" (Lawn, 1994, p. 303). Using a similar rhetoric to feminists who criticised the modern day men's movement for directing attention away from issues relating to women, Lawn (1994, p. 299) warned Pakeha against becoming self absorbed in this process, "los[ing] sight of their own privilege and neglect[ing] to evaluate the effectiveness of their own anti-racist tactics".

Lawn's (1994) contribution to the debate on Pakeha ethnicity is significant, not only in her attempt to direct the debate towards issues of privilege but also in the attention she gave to whiteness. She proposed that a Pakeha identity can become a means to evade the negative associations that whiteness has increasingly begun to acquire in Western society. This stance was reiterated by Dyson (1996) who argued that the term provided members of the dominant white majority with a discursive means to avoid discussions of the privileges associated with being white.

**A Pakeha identity and whiteness.** Indeed for many writers the position of whiteness in relation to a Pakeha identity is ambiguous. While musician Chris Knox (1991, p. 187) argued that being Pakeha means being white and consequently enjoying greater opportunities from New Zealand institutions, in the main, whiteness as a subject is either dismissed or ignored. King (1985, p. 12), made his position on whiteness very clear in

the opening pages of his earlier work arguing that it had “no meaning in the New Zealand context”. The terms black and white are irrelevant, he claimed, to both New Zealand and New Zealanders. Their irrelevance is emphasised by the absence of all reference to the terms in his later work, *Pakeha: The Quest for Identity in New Zealand*; an omission echoed in the writing of the majority of other contributors to this book (King, 1991).

Those few writers who chose to engage with whiteness were often dismissive of its role in informing a Pakeha identity. In a special edition of the Journal *Sites* entitled “Being Pakeha”, only Shannon (1986) and Motus (1986) made the connection, but the association is uncomfortable, particularly for Shannon (1986) who rejected a Pakeha identity because of it. Pearson (1989), while engaging with an idea of Pakeha hegemony and including dominance in his definition of what it means to be Pakeha, saw whiteness as having little place in this definition. It is too vague a concept, he argued, referring as it does to an “outer shell” and relying on an “often empty” rhetoric (Pearson, 1989 p.64).

Similarly Spoonley (1995a, 1995b), dismissed the application of the word white, suggesting that it is possible to address the principles of a Pakeha identity without engaging with whiteness. The implied connection between the two terms, he argued, is “overwhelmed” through claiming a Pakeha identity and in the process marking oneself as part of the dominant majority (Spoonley, 1995b, p. 98). It is this marking and admission of “the group’s hegemony” that is important, he contended, rather than a focus on race (Spoonley, 1995a, p. 58).

### **Race and Racism in New Zealand**

New Zealand historian James Belich (1994) on the other hand, argued that the naissence of white dominant culture, during the colonisation of this

country, coincided with a particular interest in race and racialisation and that the perseverance of such ideas deserves some attention. His discussion of race highlights the way in which the promotion of racial purity and superiority has featured throughout New Zealand's history in both social policy and public rhetoric (Belich, 1994, 1996). This consideration of race is significant in light of the preference that has emerged in New Zealand since the early 1980s for the term ethnicity as an expression of difference (Colvin, 2009). While in academic literature one is often substituted for another without explanation (Colvin, 2009), there are distinctions between the two terms that have particular relevance to this discussion.

Ashcroft, et al. (2007) characterised race as a term applied to emphasise fixed biological characteristics. The term is considered problematic because of its use in justifying hierarchical divisions between groups on the basis of supposedly immutable behaviours and traits. They argued however that it is inextricably linked with colonisation and its need to rationalise the domination of indigenous people. Frankenberg (1993) proposed that contemporary reactions to these hierarchical divisions rely upon historical conceptions of race, irrespective of whether the reactions are for or against. The science that once supported these divisions has been discredited but the negative consequences are very real and have had a significant impact on the lives of many who are not white. It is the endurance of these consequences for Maori that forms the backdrop to this thesis.

Rather than a fixed characteristic, ethnicity is defined by Ashcroft, et al. (2007, p.75) as shared "culture, tradition, language, social patterns and ancestry". They describe the term as expressing part of an individual's identity assumed by choice, usually as a means of positive self-expression through an association with a particular faction. Explained in this way it is

possible to see why ethnicity has been seen to be a more appropriate category within which to fit the self appellation of Pakeha. Its close association with self identity rather than to the categorisation of other groups however, highlights the differential relationship with power inherent in the application of these terms (Mason, 1986). To simply replace the term race with ethnicity therefore is to risk ignoring the effects of this power – specifically the benefits that white New Zealanders have gained through colonisation and the development of a nation founded on theories of white supremacy (Colvin, 2009). Furthermore as Frankenberg (1993, p. 189 emphasis in original) pointed out “*because* race has been made into a difference, later discursive repertoires cannot simply abolish it, but must engage it”.

Indeed, what has emerged during this review of the New Zealand literature is that while race has largely been overlooked by white New Zealand writers, it features prominently in the work of a number of Maori authors. Historian Angela Ballara (1986) sought to present a Maori perspective on mainstream historical events that have predominantly been constructed by members of a dominant white majority and have omitted analysis of the strong Maori resistance to colonisation. In particular, she emphasised the beliefs that motivated the earlier settlers, attitudes concerning their racial superiority and the inevitable demise of Maori. These, she argued, have been a defining factor in New Zealand’s development as a nation. Ballara (1986) proposed that the influence of such ideas has extended through into contemporary times and can be particularly exemplified by protests amongst factions of the white majority against any form of Maori assertiveness or activism.

Donna Awatere’s (1984, p. 8) much cited collection of articles originally published in Broadsheet Magazine and then collectively republished as the book, *Maori Sovereignty* also “sought to re-conceptualize colonial experience from a Maori point of view”. Awatere (1984) outlined the

inequalities that existed between Maori and white New Zealanders, particularly focusing on the advantages that white people received from living in a society dominated by white culture. She was particularly scathing of institutions that she saw as promoting and supporting a white way of life arguing that:

“The white New Zealand system was designed for whites. To get through school, to have good health, to get jobs, to get a little justice. If the system was designed for Maori people it would not be the way it is now. And we would get through schools, we would not have poor health, we would have jobs, we would not be getting arrested and being sent to prison” (p.20).

While intentional individual racism may no longer be the dominant mode of interaction between Maori and non Maori in New Zealand, the legacy of notions of racial supremacy - institutional racism - continues to determine the experiences of both Maori and non Maori today.

An emphasis on institutional racism was developed further in Puao te Atatu, a report examining the then Department of Social Welfare from a Maori perspective, which argued that monoculturalism dominated the Department and wider New Zealand society in a way that was alienating for Maori (Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Maori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare, 1986). The authors saw New Zealand’s social statistics as providing clear evidence that “the institutions by which New Zealand society governs itself distributes its resources and produces wealth do not serve Maori people but they do clearly serve the great bulk of Pakeha people” (Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Maori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare, 1986, p. 78). These social statistics, the authors contended, demonstrate an overrepresentation of Maori in every negative New Zealand social statistic including; lower life expectancy for Maori than non Maori, home ownership rates for Maori



that were 38% lower than non Maori and unemployment rates of 14% for Maori compared to 3.7% for white New Zealanders. As will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six, these social statistics have remained relatively unchanged in the 25 years since this report was published indicating that New Zealand's institutions still cater to the needs of the dominant white majority at the expense of Maori in this country.

### **White Privilege**

**White privilege in New Zealand.** Despite the existence of a significant body of work examining these negative statistics in relation to Maori, few New Zealand writers have sought to explore the white privilege that these statistics also demonstrate. Consedine and Consedine (2005) provided an overview of historical and current social policy which they argued has worked, and continues to work, overwhelmingly to disadvantage Maori in favour of white New Zealanders. White privilege was defined by the authors as the benefits that white New Zealanders have access to simply through belonging to the dominant majority group. This privilege consists of living in a country where to be white is to be 'normal'. In the process of colonisation, the language, culture, legal and education systems, decision-making processes and delivery of medical services were all established to cater to this norm. Many members of the white majority, they contended, continue to ignore the overwhelming evidence of the damage done to Maori by colonisation, and consequently are unable to see the ways in which New Zealand institutions continue to perpetuate privilege through legislation and policy designed to meet their needs.

Like Consedine and Consedine (2005), Colvin (2008, 2009) also presented an argument of white privilege with firm roots in the colonisation of New Zealand. In her analysis of newspaper articles from the early to late nineteenth century she identified the discourses of "sovereignty, discipline

and paternalism” (Colvin, 2009, p. 11). Sovereignty emerged as the ideology utilised in order to establish British authority in all of its manifestations. Discipline appeared as a common discourse to justify reactions to Maori protest and paternalism was utilised to imbue actions and attitudes with an element of concern for Maori welfare. These repertoires worked together to bolster white British rule, serving as one avenue to establish and justify settler dominance while at the same time undermining a strong Maori resistance.

Through analysis of these articles alongside the "Orewa Speech" made by Don Brash in 2004, Colvin (2008) argued that discourses of and concerning "natives" have developed into an established language for mainstream media serving to sustain practices of colonisation in contemporary times. It is not possible therefore, she argued, to separate a past constructed on the basis of racial supremacy from contemporary manifestations of racism. Alongside, and indeed supporting, these racist practices, she noted the denial by many in the white majority of the consequences of colonisation. In this way, white hegemony is subsequently reinforced through “its taken-for grantedness its naturalness, its unspokenness and its invisibility” (Colvin, 2009, p. 37).

Likewise Gibson’s (2006) concern was the power simultaneously disguised and reinforced by whiteness as an invisible norm. Influenced by Ruth Frankenberg’s (1993) United States-based research, to be discussed later in this chapter, she argued that while her New Zealand research participants often stated a lack of concern with racialisation and did not consider themselves involved in racism, “they contributed much that was relevant to both” (Frankenberg as cited in Gibson, 2006, p. 14). She noted that, whiteness dominated the "discursive practices" of her participants yet at the same time they struggled to articulate what it meant to be white (Gibson, 2006, p. 248). Of particular relevance to this thesis, was her contention that due to an implicit connection between whiteness and the

ideology of supremacy, her participants felt unable to “claim a ‘white’ identity ... in Aotearoa” (Gibson, 2006, p. 99).

Although not an extensive collection of literature, the work of these authors suggests that white privilege determines the experiences of both the white majority and Maori in New Zealand, although this largely remains unseen by members of the former group. At the beginning of this chapter I mentioned a number of streams of scholarship that have informed this research. The connection between colonisation and privilege and the invisibility of the latter to white people are both engaged with in the New Zealand literature, although not to any great degree. In order to substantiate and develop these further, I now turn to the extensive body of international writing on whiteness and privilege in order to highlight the trends within the literature that informed my own research.

**The origins of white privilege.** A number of international writers, predominately from the United States, have emphasised the historical roots of white privilege, demonstrating how its existence in contemporary society is the cumulative effect of government policy designed to satisfy the demand for land by the early settlers. Political scientist Stanley Greenberg (1980) located his argument within a discussion of capitalism and colonialism. He suggested that white privilege or the “disproportionate control over economic resources, a presumptive privilege in social relations and a virtual monopoly on access to the state” is firmly tied to the fundamentals of colonisation with its violent appropriation of land and labour (Greenberg, 1980, p. 30). He argued that the economic success of colonisation is dependent upon the continued marginalisation of indigenous populations and is only made possible by the political control of such populations. As a result, the development of

capitalism in colonised societies has often produced racial divisions – divisions that do not disappear over time.

George Lipsitz (1998, 2008) too, illustrated how social policy, created by white people for the benefit of other white people, has marginalized and continues to marginalize non whites. Such policy he argued was often deliberately designed to create advantages for white Americans out of the disadvantages experienced by non whites. With its roots in slavery and the dispossession of Native American Indians from their lands, the racialisation of public policy in the United States has created, he argued, a “possessive investment in whiteness.” The result is that white privilege is firmly embedded in the institutions of that country, offering significant assistance to white people in terms of health, education and social justice and ultimately providing greater access to a range of economic and social benefits. Institutional racism, it would seem, validates white privilege.

This argument has significant implications for any discussion of white privilege in New Zealand where, as noted earlier in this chapter, social statistics clearly indicate the institutional advantages experienced by the dominant white majority. White people, Lipsitz (1998, 2008) contended, are frequently ignorant about their own history and so do not make the connection between past government policy and contemporary structural inequality. Furthermore, objections by members of the white majority to affirmative action programmes designed to challenge such inequity are claimed to offer unfair advantages to minority groups. As his argument demonstrates however, white people have been able to enjoy a life time of affirmative action which has allowed members of the white majority to accumulate a significant proportion of the wealth in the United States.

Social theorist Joe Feagin’s (1999) contention is similar but he narrowed his focus to housing discrimination against non whites in the United States. In the process he presented the argument that, beginning from the days of

slavery, white wealth has largely been secured through a range of government policies which have given white people greater access to property. Like Lipsitz (1998), Feagin (1999) stressed the importance of intergenerational wealth transfer arguing that such policy has enabled white people to amass assets which have accumulated from generation to generation. As a result, many white people today own and live in areas which not only offer high financial returns in terms of property equity, but are also located near desirable schools, a situation, he argues, that ensures the continuation of privilege.

For Cheryl Harris (1993), whiteness is not just about the increased access to property but has become a form of property itself. In an argument that sees parallels with the colonisation of New Zealand, she argued that property rights in the United States were defined around European customs which emphasised the cultivation of the land. Land utilised by indigenous people but left undeveloped was labelled as “waste” land and confiscated on this basis. In this way the alienation of indigenous peoples from their lands was justified through law. Whiteness became so closely associated with property rights that it became an asset in itself able to be “use[d] and enjoy[ed]” in much the same way as property (C. Harris, 1993, p. 1731). For Harris (1993, p. 1734); “[w]hiteness can move from being a passive characteristic as an aspect of identity to an active entity that – like other forms of property - is used to fulfil the will and to exercise power”.

The work of these authors emphasises the historical genesis of white privilege and the symbiotic relationship it has with economic and political power; a relationship which both created and serves to sustain privilege in many Western countries. It adds support to the arguments of New Zealand writers, presented earlier in the chapter, that the policies of the settler and succeeding governments which led to the alienation of Maori from their lands and subsequent loss of control over resources, has largely contributed to the current inequalities between Maori and non Maori

(Ballara, 1986; Consedine & Consedine, 2005; Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Maori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare, 1986). While the conditions surrounding the colonisation of this country were unique, what the international literature demonstrates is that the underlying ideology of white supremacy, used to establish and justify white colonial rule, was not. Furthermore by highlighting the institutionalisation of this ideology in the form of social policy, these writers are able explain the endurance of its legacy - contemporary white privilege.

### **The Invisibility of Whiteness and Privilege**

In one of the most influential pieces of scholarship on the subject, Peggy McIntosh (1988) argued that many white people refuse to acknowledge this privilege. Her paper, "White Privilege and Male Privilege", grew from the identification of a white privilege not dissimilar to the male privilege she was working to expose through her faculty work in Women's Studies. She examined how her own white privilege operated and defined her everyday life, discovering in the process 46 assets that she believed she had accrued based solely on the colour of her skin. Her conclusion that "[my] skin color was an asset for any move I was educated to want to make", helped redefine racism as privilege for white people (McIntosh, 1988, p. 11). Consequently, racism was reconstructed as a white problem with an emphasis on both the ways in which Western institutions perpetuate this privilege and the complicity of white people in this.

McIntosh (1988, p. 1) characterized her privilege as "an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious". This invisibility, she argued, allows white people to define their way of life as the norm and a standard against which others will be measured. By seeing whiteness reflected in

the world around, the dominant white majority have come to ignore the voices, experiences and cultures of others. Furthermore, within Western society this is permitted without any negative impact on white people as individuals or as a group. All of these aspects McIntosh (1988) writes, increase the feelings of comfort for white people within society while at the same time, serving to alienate those who do not fit the definition of the white norm.

Following the publication of McIntosh's (1988) paper, academic interest in white privilege grew and an extensive body of international literature exploring the topic in different ways and across a range of disciplines has been published. Her argument that whiteness is invisible to white people found support throughout the literature (Clarke & Garner, 2010; Dei, et al., 2004; Dyer, 1997, 2008; Frankenberg, 1993; Gibson, 2006; hooks, 1997; McIntosh, 1988; Morrison, 1992; Rothenberg, 2008; Sue, 2004a, 2004b).

Dyer (1997, p. 2) extended McIntosh's (1988) argument that to be white is to be the norm, highlighting the tendency for white people to distinguish non whites by race or ethnicity, while at the same time, omitting to identify other whites in the same way. Instead, they are "just people" (Dyer, 1992, p.2). Being without race but claiming to represent the human race is one of the "paradoxes" of whiteness that for Dyer (1997) gives it strength. He argued that in assuming neutrality and ordinariness, whiteness has come to be regarded as invisible. The position of power that this invisibility bestows will be maintained, he contended, "until we see whiteness, see its power, its particularity and limitedness, put it in its place and end its rule" (Dyer, 1997, p. 4). Likewise, Dei, Karumanchery and Karumanchery-Lui (2004) argued that Western societies are structured through race but for white people it is only the race of others that is noticed. In this way the power of whiteness inherent within this structure remains unchallenged.

Ruth Frankenberg's (1993) research aimed to make whiteness visible through an exploration of race and racism in the lives of thirty white women. While the majority of her participants did not see themselves as being concerned with either, she concluded that both were intricately woven throughout their everyday lives. The invisibility to her subjects of their whiteness, and of the part it had to play in their daily lives, often meant concepts of race and culture were perceived as having relevance only for ethnic minorities. In the same way as McIntosh (1988), had done earlier, she repositioned racism as a concern for white people. White culture she contended, needs to be positioned as both "constructed and dominant rather than as norm" and its influence in the lives of white people acknowledged (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 243).

Following a series of interviews with white people on the topic of their skin colour, Sue (2004b) demonstrated that whiteness is often invisible to those whom it describes. Yet as an Asian American, he writes "I do not find [w]hiteness to be invisible because I do not fit many of the normative qualities that make [w]hiteness invisible" (Sue, 2004b, p. 764). Indeed while McIntosh's (1988) proposition that white skin colour accrues a set of privileges was groundbreaking in white academic circles, many non white writers on the subject argued that this knowledge was not new (Ahmed, 2007; hooks, 1989, 1997; Morrison, 1992; Roediger, 1998; Sue, 2004a, 2004b). Whiteness, while often remaining invisible to white people has always been visible to those who are not.

In explicating the ways in which whiteness has been perceived by black people hooks (1989, 1997) exploded the myth of white as an invisible norm and firmly positioned whiteness as a privileged other. In contemporary America, hooks (1997) contends, many white people are stunned to discover that not only are they seen, but in the process of being observed they are stereotyped and objectified in the same way that ethnic minorities are often classified by white people. This assumed invisibility,



she argued, has its roots in the days of American slavery when the "black gaze" was controlled and black slaves forbidden to look at their white owners. For hooks (1997), whiteness far from being invisible is often synonymous with terror and it is out of this that the "power of whiteness" has been constructed (hooks, 1997, p. 175). Living in a society which promotes white supremacy forces her to constantly confront this power; a power that is reinforced by its invisibility to those who benefit from it.

That a number of non white writers, both in New Zealand and internationally, have chosen to focus on whiteness and race had a significant influence on the direction of this thesis. While some Maori writers during the 1980s were compelled to argue that whiteness and its influence had shaped past and present New Zealand society and its institutions (Awatere, 1984; Ballara, 1986; Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Maori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare, 1986), white writers responded by claiming whiteness to be irrelevant (King, 1985, 1991; Pearson, 1989; Spoonley, 1995a, 1995b). In the significant body of international whiteness literature I found support for the former position and the importance of attending to race in contemporary New Zealand. Frankenberg (1993, p. 6) offered a very strong argument for making whiteness visible; that we as white people are able to argue "I am not racist" but that it is more difficult for us to say "I am not white". This reframing of racism as inextricably linked with whiteness emphasises white hegemony and consequently makes it more difficult for white people to ignore.

### **Development of the Research Question**

My overarching concern in undertaking this thesis was to discuss white privilege within a New Zealand context. In the face of New Zealand scholarship that proffered an analysis of ethnicity at the expense of race,

the small amount of New Zealand literature on whiteness and its benefits, alongside the larger amount of international literature on the subject, both validated my interest in the topic and highlighted the gap existing for local research aiming to make this visible.

In looking for a New Zealand context within which to locate this discussion of whiteness and privilege, I was intrigued by Lawn's (1994) suggestion that the label Pakeha as a self identity is employed to evade the negative associations that whiteness has increasingly begun to acquire in Western society. Targeting literature which defined a Pakeha identity as expressing a sense of belonging in New Zealand and a relationship with Maori (see for example: Dann, 1991; King, 1985, 1991; Olssen, 1991; Spoonley, 1991), Lawn (1994) admonished writers for failing to challenge institutionalised white hegemony. While a number of academics subsequently engaged with the idea of dominant majority power, emphasising the politics of claiming a Pakeha identity, a consideration of whiteness and white privilege largely remained absent (see for example: Pearson, 1989; Pearson & Sissons, 1997; Spoonley, 1995b; Spoonley & Larner, 1995).

Through reviewing the New Zealand literature on a Pakeha identity, I became persuaded that a more critical evaluation of the term was warranted; one that took into consideration the effects of institutionalised racism and the realities and consequences of white majority privileges. An analysis of the meaning behind claiming Pakeha as an identity, specifically in relation to whiteness, would allow me to contextualise the themes that I had been drawn to in the international literature.

These themes – white privilege and the invisibility of whiteness - form two parts of the research question. In trying to understand why some New Zealanders choose to call themselves Pakeha, I aim to draw attention to the awareness they have of their own whiteness. Influenced by writing

that emphasises the invisibility of whiteness, I am interested in understanding the place that whiteness occupies in the hierarchy of meaning attached to this self identity. If, as Lawn (1994) suggested, it is obscured by the term Pakeha itself, I wish to question if the privilege that whiteness provides in New Zealand also remains unseen.

The research question I have developed is: What is the relationship between the usage of the word “Pakeha” by some white New Zealanders and their understanding of their own whiteness and white privilege?

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This chapter provides an outline of methodological strategies utilised in order to both gather and analyse data in this piece of qualitative research. I address not only the practical issues dealt with, but also the theoretical concerns I needed to attend to throughout the research. In the tradition of a qualitative research strategy, the ontological position assumed here is one of constructionism (Bryman, 2004). From this position, I look at social reality as being both constructed and constructive through discourse (Bryman, 2004; Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

As illustrated in the previous chapter I have drawn upon critical whiteness theory in order to examine whiteness and privilege as it is understood by a group of Pakeha New Zealanders. Whiteness theory developed as whiteness studies emerged as a field of study during the 1990s largely in the United States and to a lesser extent Britain and Australia. There is an extensive body of literature that falls under the umbrella label of whiteness studies. It extends across a range of disciplines as diverse as history (Lipsitz, 1998; Roediger, 1998), sociology (Frankenberg, 1993), law (C. Harris, 1993), literature (Morrison, 1992), and feminist studies (McIntosh, 1988).

Whilst different in their focus and methodological concerns, all whiteness theorists share a view of whiteness as socially constructed. Whiteness has meaning only through the collective agreement of various social groups that there is power and privilege attached to being white. Whiteness

theory challenges the normalization of whiteness. Seeking to highlight and dispel the belief that white values and culture are the universal norm in many Western societies, it instead draws attention to the way in which whiteness as the norm has evolved into a privilege.

Thematic analysis provided the organising concept for this thesis. Consistent with the perspective that qualitative research is inductive (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005), categories in thematic analysis are identified during the research process and relationships between them explored as the research progresses. At the centre of this is coding. This practice involves making comparisons between different aspects of the data and reorganising it in order to highlight social practices (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Applying this process of decontextualising and recontextualising to my own research data allowed themes to emerge which served as a framework for further data analysis.

Having established themes within the data, I then looked to discourse theory and the notion of language as social action (Wetherell, 2001; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Discourse theory is concerned with the way in which language is used. It argues that rather than being neutral, language is actively employed in order to achieve a particular end. Formed within the postmodernist tradition, discourse theory proposes that in studying language in use, researchers can begin to understand the social realities of their participants. Throughout this thesis I was interested in the version of reality constructed by a group of Pakeha New Zealanders as they discussed identity, whiteness and privilege. My research takes the theoretical position that, “realism ...[is] something that is *achieved* through the way text or talk is put together” (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 95 emphasis in original).

## **Sampling Method**

Sampling for this study was purposive in that I strategically selected participants who were relevant to the research project (Bryman, 2004). The condition for participation was the use of Pakeha as a self identity. I recruited participants who met this criterion in several ways. I initially made contact with one of the organisers of Network Waitangi Otautahi, a voluntary group which aims to promote an understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi amongst non Maori in New Zealand. She emailed information regarding my research out to the Network's database. The email stated that I was researching white privilege for my Master's thesis and was looking to interview people who identified as Pakeha. I received a number of replies to this and followed up providing a more detailed information sheet about the project (Appendix B). Those who agreed to participate were asked if they knew of anyone else who might be interested in participating. I also approached former classmates and asked if they or anyone they knew would be willing to be involved. The snowballing technique was used, whereby I made contact with a small number of people who met my research criteria and then used them to make further connections.

**The participants.** All but two of the participants lived in Christchurch at the time of the interviews. Nine participants were women and six were men. They ranged in age from their mid twenties to their late fifties, with the majority being over forty. While most were born in New Zealand, two had immigrated as adults. All were tertiary educated. All participants were advised that the information they provided would remain confidential and their privacy maintained. In order to ensure this, I assigned each a pseudonym. While I did not specifically ask the participants to provide demographic data, this emerged over the course of the interviews. The participants signed consent forms (Appendix A) which advised them they could withdraw from the project at any time prior to

analysis of the data. They were also offered the opportunity to review the transcripts and make changes where they felt the transcript did not accurately reflect their opinions.

### **Data Gathering**

I gathered data using 15 in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Following a review of the literature I identified three themes that I wished to explore during the interviews;

- identifying as Pakeha
- whiteness
- white privilege

These themes provided the framework for the interviews but the flexible nature of semi-structured interviewing allowed me to depart from the Interview Question Guide (Appendix C) and focus on different aspects of each participant's experience as appropriate (Bryman, 2004; Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). While some questions were repeated in all of the interviews, in general I allowed the participants to focus on what they felt was important in relation to these three sections. In doing so, I aimed to understand how the participants interpreted the topics being discussed.

I interviewed 14 participants face-to-face and one by email. My initial intention was to conduct all interviews face-to-face however, I was forced to revise this following the second Canterbury Earthquake on February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2011 which caused major disruption and upheaval in the lives of many people living in Christchurch at the time. An interview scheduled for this day had to be cancelled and while the participant initially indicated an intention to remain with the project, due to circumstances arising from the earthquake she later decided not to be involved. As a result of similar changes in living and working situations during the post earthquake

recovery, others who had earlier expressed an interest in participating also decided against it. Finally in June, four months after the earthquake and facing increasing time constraints, I decided to engage with a participant from outside of Christchurch who had previously indicated interest in the project.

**Face-to-face interviews.** The face-to-face interviews lasted from 45 minutes to two hours with most taking around one and a half hours. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed in full by me. The interviews took place in a variety of locations; in my office, at the participant's workplace or at a cafe, depending on where was most convenient for the person being interviewed. I chose to use this form of data collection for a number of reasons. In-depth one-on-one interviews are an effective means of gaining an understanding of the meaning individuals attach to certain experiences (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Meeting participants face-to-face gave me an opportunity to build rapport and, as will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, to actively participate in the interview. There was a spontaneity to the responses which stood in marked contrast to the more considered responses gleaned in the email interview. While probing for more information was possible in the email interview, the synchronous nature of the face-to-face interviews made this far simpler and, I felt, more effective. I was also able to interpret non-verbal signals to gauge when participants were uninterested in or, alternatively, moved by particular issues and explore both of these further (Bryman, 2004), an aspect which proved vital to my analysis.

**Email interview.** The email interview was conducted using the same interview schedule as the face-to-face interviews and took place over the



course of four emails. For a number of reasons I sent the questions in three parts as naturally dictated by the schedule. In particular, I did not want to overwhelm the participant with information. I also felt that I would be more likely to receive detailed and considered replies to each of the questions if the participant was only faced with a small number at one time (Bryman, 2004). Furthermore, the back and forth nature of the exchange gave me the opportunity to ask for more information where necessary and to tailor questions based on earlier responses. Following the interview, once the data had been converted into a word file, the original emails were deleted in order to protect the participant's privacy.

There were a number of advantages to using an email interview as a data gathering tool. Most obviously it allowed me to interview someone who lived outside of Christchurch without the expense of travel. Furthermore it removed the time consuming and at times laborious task of transcribing the data. It did, however, also present a number of challenges. During the face-to-face interviews the emotions behind the answers were often very visible. Similarly when I felt that a question of mine had been misunderstood, I was able to immediately clarify. In these ways then there was a loss of immediacy within the email interview that I felt translated into a less active role for me as an interviewer and detracted from the richness of the data collected.

### **Active Interviewing**

My active participation in the majority of the interviews was a deliberate strategy and the result of both practical and theoretical considerations. Practically it was important to ensure I gathered sufficient data on the topic to analyse. As outlined in the previous chapter, a significant number of writers have emphasised the invisibility of whiteness to white people. In her research with white New Zealanders, Gibson (2006, p. 71)

highlighted the silences that emerged as her participants struggled to articulate what being white meant to them, revealing that at one point in her analysis she realised she “had 60 hours of women’s speech interspersed with prolonged silences but little explicit [w]hiteness ‘talk’”. For this reason I felt that in order to allow participants to engage fully with the subject, my active participation could prove crucial in the construction of meaning during the course of the interview (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

Theoretically active interviewing is also consistent with discourse theory. From this stance it is proposed that “discourse work interviews ... [should be] treated as a piece of social interaction in their own right. The interviewer is contributing just as much as the interviewee” (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 99). In contrast to the established view of an impartial interviewer, in discourse research he or she is perceived as being manifestly and inextricably involved in the creation of meaning (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). Having redefined the interview as collaborative, discourse theorists then encourage the interviewer to challenge the assumptions of participants in order to draw out as much data as possible. Consequently, in terms of the analysis itself, discussed later in this chapter, the interaction between me the interviewer and those I interviewed was as relevant as the words of the participants themselves.

### **Insider/Outsider Research**

Making the decision to actively participate in the interviews seemed also to fit with my assumption of an insider researcher role. In addition to researcher, I am a member of the research group – a New Zealander who identifies as Pakeha. It was my intention at the outset of interviewing to use my group membership to emphasise a common ground with those I

interviewed in order to build rapport, facilitating the joint production of meaning.

In the early interviews this worked well. The first few interviews were with women of a similar age and socioeconomic background to me. Our educational backgrounds were comparable as were our politics and points of view. The conversation flowed easily and I was able to direct the talk along the interview schedule, clarifying misunderstandings and in the process producing a dialogue containing rich interview data. As the interviews progressed however I met with participants with whom I had less in common. Age, gender and educational differences all served, at various stages, to hinder the easy rapport I had developed in my early interviews and I began to realise that my self-ascribed ethnicity did not transcend all other social distinctions or the misinterpretations and tensions that arose from these (see for example: Gallagher, 2004).

Furthermore, my focus on insider status began to create another problem as I found myself becoming overwhelmed by the opinions and advice of the interviewees. As Bonnett (2000b) carped, one of the difficulties he had to contend with in writing about whiteness was the assumption from many white people he encountered that they already knew everything there was to know on the subject. While the participants I interviewed readily acknowledged that white privilege was a subject that needed to be talked about, some questioned my focus on whiteness either directly or obliquely by attempting to discursively sidestep the topic. In a number of interviews, participants seemed uninterested when I continued to focus my questions in this direction displaying a marked preference for talk about white privilege later in the interviews. It was not that whiteness was unimportant rather it seemed that it was unimportant to *them*. While aware that it is not uncommon for qualitative researchers to struggle to unravel their own opinions from those of their participants (Bryman,

2004), I found myself becoming distracted during the interviews by the implication that I was approaching the topic from an irrelevant angle. Having completed half of the interviews I made the decision to take a break in order to re-establish my focus.

Referencing Gayatri Spivak, hooks (2009) argued that white people may need to reposition themselves in relation to common discourses of hegemony. Instead of continuing to look at whiteness from a white perspective therefore, I re-engaged with the literature which described whiteness as it appears to those who are not. Awatere's (1984) critique of white New Zealand culture; Toni Morrison's (1992) analysis of the absence of an "Africanist" presence in traditional classical American literature; hooks' (1997) descriptions of whiteness as terror; the vivid images of white violence constructed in the anthology *Black on White* (Roediger, 1998), all composed whiteness in a way that had not manifested itself in any of the interview data I had collected to date. Specifically it positioned whiteness as impossible to ignore.

This writing enabled me to see that I needed to reposition myself in relation to the participants in order to move the research project forward. In looking at the data I had collected, I began to notice the ways in which my insider role had at times overshadowed my role as a researcher. Rather than focusing on my position as an insider, I began to realise that I needed to move more fluidly between the roles of insider and outsider, researched and researcher. My insider status did not disappear in later interviews but by necessity, at times, took a secondary role to my outsider role as the researcher. As Griffith (1998, p. 374) has argued "[the] researcher is always located somewhere. Her knowledge is situated in particular sets of social relations. But that is the beginning of the research story and not the end". While still an insider and still actively engaged in the interviews, I was more willing to step outside this location as I sought to understand the relevance of whiteness to the participants. While

understanding that (and indeed why) many of the participants may have seen my repetitive questioning about their whiteness as unnecessary, as researcher I realised I needed to continue to interrogate this.

Furthermore, I began to see that a reluctance to discuss whiteness could be interpreted as a rhetorical device that complemented other themes that were beginning to emerge from the data.

### **Reflexivity**

Integral to my understanding of the need to reposition myself was the incorporation of reflexivity into the project. Young (2000, p. 642) defined reflexivity as a practice which “involves self-reflection of one’s research process and findings, self-awareness of one’s social positionality, values, and perspectives, and self-critique of the effects of one’s words and actions upon the individuals and groups being studied”. Wetherell and Potter (1992, p. 103) likewise maintained that for the researcher, an examination of one’s values and beliefs is an important part of discourse research.

From this position then it is not simply the interpretations of the participants that are implicated in this piece of research, but also my own reactions as I made sense of the data and converted it into research findings.

The admission by the researcher of their own influence on a piece of research has come to be increasingly recognised as an important part of the qualitative research process (Bryman, 2004; Liamputtong, 2009; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). In the context of white writers writing about privilege, however, there has also been criticism of it for being unnecessarily self indulgent (M. Anderson, 2003; Bonnett, 2000b). Paying attention to the warning that autobiographical accounts of whiteness can often provide little insight into the operation of structural white privilege, I have focused my use of reflexivity on the critiquing of my research

methods. Throughout the project, I kept a journal documenting many aspects of the research process and my reactions to these. In evaluating and engaging with these as I wrote this thesis, my aim was, as Spivak (1990, p. 11) recommends, to be “vigilant about [my] practices” and ultimately improve the quality of my research.

### **Data Analysis**

**Thematic analysis.** As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the data was analysed using both thematic and discourse analysis. The first step I took in the process of analysis was to thematically sort the data. I began reading through the transcripts and assigning codes as I read. The codes themselves were initially quite basic. At times I used my own interpretation, but I also noted down words that participants had used that I felt to be significant. For example the word “relationship” appeared frequently within the transcripts as participants described what being Pakeha meant to them and I adopted this word during the coding process.

After refining the codes, I then examined them for connections and grouped them thematically. Moving from codes to themes and back again to the reworking of codes was a particularly important step for me in organising the data and eventually four themes emerged from this process:

- Relationship with Maori
- Reification of whiteness
- Disengagement from privilege
- Separation from other white people

Each of these themes and the relationships between them is discussed in Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven respectively.

**Discourse analysis.** Crucial to my examination of these themes was the process of discourse analysis. As highlighted earlier in this chapter, language in discourse analysis rather than being seen as neutral is perceived as a means to an end. It is not seen as conveying information about events or interactions or things but as constructing these through discourse. In reference to Michel Foucault's work, cultural theorist Stuart Hall (2001) described discourse (the interviews), rather than the speaking subject (the interviewees), as the producer of meaning. Discourse analysis then becomes an attempt to "overcome the traditional distinction between what one *says* (language) and what one *does* (practice)" (Hall, 2001, p. 72 emphasis in original).

This does not mean that discourse analysts are proposing that through analysis we can discover some universal truth obscured by the language of the research participants. Rather, the interest lies in the ways in which language is used and the consequences of this (Wetherell, 2001). The interview transcripts were therefore subjected to a "sceptical reading" where I looked at patterns within and beyond the language (Gill as cited in Bryman, 2004, p. 371). Having identified four major themes in the data, I was interested in understanding the ways in which these were reinforced through the discursive practices of the participants.

I began considering the functionality of the spoken discourse, questioning how the participants used language to portray themselves. I examined the organisation of language and considered how this was structured in order to persuade me, the listener, as to the validity of their arguments. Wetherell and Potter (1992) propose that the manner in which research participants tell their stories should become the subject of the analysis. Informed by their study of racist language in New Zealand I was interested in examining not only the words employed by the participants, but also the rhetorical means used to construct arguments and increase the persuasiveness of their discourse.

Discourse analysis furthermore formed a critical part of my reflexive approach to the data. I subjected my own words in the transcripts to the same sceptical reading as those of the participants in order to emphasise my contribution to the shared meaning produced within the interviews (Wetherell, 2001). My intention was to examine the mutual understandings that existed in the interviews and the ways in which these contributed to, and even extended, the construction of meaning. An analysis of my questioning, for example, revealed discursive practices which may have helped create the appropriate context for participants to utilise the discourse of separation that featured so prominently within the interview data and is discussed in detail in Chapter Seven.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis was informed by a number of theoretical perspectives. The presence of critical whiteness theory extends throughout as I situate this study within the extensive body of international and national literature on whiteness and privilege. Seeing whiteness as a social construct has provided the framework for a number of writers on whiteness and white privilege (see for example: Applebaum, 2003; Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Gibson, 2006). In examining the construction of a Pakeha identity, whiteness and privilege as they emerged in and through the discourse of the participants, I drew on this tradition. Representing both whiteness and a Pakeha identity as social constructs was a concern of mine throughout this thesis.

In utilising discourse theory I was interested in looking for the meaning behind the language of a group of white New Zealanders as we discussed identity, whiteness and privilege. I was concerned from a thematic perspective in understanding what this language described but also in looking beyond this in an attempt to understand the purpose that it served. Wetherell (2001) contends that discourse involves action, in other



words language is always doing something. My intention was to understand the social action inherent in the language of the interview transcripts. Above all my methodological practices were focused on examining what the discourse of a Pakeha identity was doing in relation to the understandings research participants had of whiteness and privilege.

## Chapter 4

### A Pakeha Relationship with Maori

As outlined in Chapter One, for some members of the dominant white majority in New Zealand, the word Pakeha has very negative connotations. It has erroneously been interpreted as white pig, white flea or white dog, amongst other derogatory terms, and for this reason many refuse to be identified as such. Yet a significant number of white New Zealanders have chosen to adopt the term as a self identifier. Through discussions with members of this group, I sought to understand the meaning that they applied to this term. In this chapter I examine the main theme to emerge during analysis of the interview data in which we discussed being Pakeha; that a Pakeha identity represents a connection to both New Zealand and to Maori people. Although my initial assessment indicated that these were two very separate themes, as I spent more time with the data I began to see the extent to which they merged to form one discourse – that of a relationship with Maori – which dominated the participants' talk.

In the second half of the chapter, I consider the predominance of this discourse within the context of whiteness literature positing that many white people in Western cultures similarly consider their ethnicity only within the context of a relationship to non white (Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; McIntosh, 1988; McKinney & Feagin, 2003; Roediger, 1998). I propose that the overwhelming predominance of a relational definition demonstrates what has been referred to as the “empty alterity”

or lack of substance in the Pakeha identity (MacLean, 1996, p. 110). Maclean (1996, p. 117) has proposed that “there is no need for Pakeha to ever articulate the terms of their ethnicity – they, or is that we, hold that power anyway”. A discussion of this power in relation to the social reality of white dominance in New Zealand makes up the final part of the chapter.

### **Connection with Maori**

**Rejection of Europe.** For many of the participants I interviewed, a Pakeha identity represents an expression of national belonging. A desire to both locate themselves geographically and articulate their commitment to New Zealand was apparent in the interviews as we began to discuss why they had made the decision to self identify as Pakeha.

Elinor: I say I’m Pakeha so immediately you know that I’m not Maori but I define as being from here.

Neil: It [Pakeha] is a name that identifies me to some extent as being of this place.

Selena: For me it [Pakeha] has ... a unique New Zealand identity.

For over half of those I interviewed, acknowledging their connection to New Zealand was a significant motivation behind assuming a Pakeha identity. This was further reinforced by the rejection of the alternative label - New Zealand European - by all but two of those interviewed.

Dan: It’s probably more that no other term [except Pakeha] ... works ... for me. Yeah not like New Zealand European ... because I ... don’t feel like a European.

Ann: Why do I identify as Pakeha? Because it sets me aside from ... being identified as European which ... after visiting Europe I think well THEY’RE Europeans and they are so culturally different.

Kurt: If I acknowledge that this is now my place then European actually no longer has any meaning to me, I'm not European.

Marcie: I think the European thing never really made sense to me anyway. ... My European ... affiliation isn't particularly strong. I don't know much about my European history.

These statements correspond with previous interview work with white New Zealanders which has also found that in self identifying as Pakeha, people are emphasising a connection to New Zealand and a rejection of Europe (Gibson, 2006; Hepi, 2008; Pearson & Sissons, 1997). The case presented against New Zealand European is in essence, that it does not securely locate a person within this country in the way that Pakeha does. Through re-reading the transcripts, I became particularly interested in this argument, not only because it appeared with such frequency throughout the interview data, but also because of the similarities with which it was presented. Participants repeatedly stated that they were not European while often proceeding to reveal European ancestry. They argued that New Zealand European did not locate them in this country, despite the term clearly only being appropriate for use by someone who is a New Zealand national with European heritage.

Billig (2001) proposed that we do not create our own language but use the language, and the arguments within that language, we have available to us. The claim to not be European has been created within a particular historical, cultural and ideological context. During the Maori cultural renaissance and protest movement which marked the 1970s and 1980s many white New Zealanders also began to question their own cultural identity. Challenges from Maori activists motivated a number of white New Zealanders to construct an identity that distinctively located them in this country. Donna Awatere (1984) called for white New Zealanders to distance themselves from Britain, and values and beliefs that were not theirs. She argued that the reassertion of a Maori identity had revealed the lack of a distinctive white New Zealand identity. Michael King (1985,

1991) was amongst the first to respond to the challenge and publically declare that he was not European as he sought to define his national and ethnic identity. Since that time this argument has recurred with such frequency that it has become a standard ideology within the discourse utilised by many white New Zealanders to assert their independence from colonial Britain.

Ideology has been described as a thought process that has become so natural that it is assumed to be beyond question (Billig, 2001). In relation to identity therefore, it has become common-sense for many white New Zealanders to argue that they are not European and being common-sense, the statement is seldom interrogated. Yet Billig (2001, p. 218) has also proposed that “it is the nature of common-sense that it contains contrary themes”. The inherent contradiction in the claim not to be European was often acknowledged by those I interviewed but did not appear to them to be problematic. While readily acknowledging that their ancestors came from Europe, the argument was frequently repeated that the terms European or New Zealand European were inadequate descriptors.

- Joy: I think that New Zealand European is ... really [a] misnomer ... my heritage is Scottish, Irish, English, a smattering of Dutch and a little bit of Scandinavian. Yes they are all European nations ... we all have that as heritage as ... culture but ... very few of us identify with the places that we came from or visit them or have ... relatives still living there.
- Kurt: If I labelled myself New Zealand European what I'm saying is that ... I'm giving cognizance to my ... history in Europe but not acknowledging that this is now my place and if I acknowledge that this is now my place then European actually no longer has any meaning to me, I'm not European.
- Chris: Defining myself as European is misleading, as whilst my whakapapa is European I don't have an overarching contextual reference as European.

These claims are interesting because it seems plausible to argue that New Zealand European quite clearly identifies a person as having European ancestry but not being European. If one were to replace the word 'Pakeha' with the phrase 'New Zealand European', in the excerpts from Elinor, Neil and Selena cited at the beginning of this chapter, it does not seem to detract from this emphasis and still equally represents the bearer as being from here. Instead I propose that the participants are drawing on the common-sense ideology of a rejection of the phrase New Zealand European in order to override the inherent contradiction in the argument.

**Creating a relationship with Maori.** By setting themselves apart from Europeans, Pakeha are implicitly associating with Maori. Separation from other white people emerged as a major theme in the data and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven. Here one aspect of this - the rejection of a European identity - can be seen to support the most dominant theme in the data to emerge in relation to a Pakeha identity, that in identifying as Pakeha, participants were seeking to assert a positive relationship with Maori.

The narrative which rejects an association with Europe offers a geographical connection to New Zealand. The acceptance in its place of a word from the Maori language similarly implies a connection with the indigenous people of New Zealand. Elements of Maori language and culture that have found their way into mainstream New Zealand culture have become an accessible means for white New Zealanders to set themselves apart from white people in Britain and other countries around the world. Hepi (2008) has argued that a preference for the word Pakeha depends upon its status as part of the Maori language and consequently, its power to emphasise the bearer's claim of belonging in this country. This position was explicitly supported within the research data.

- Selena: When I think of New Zealand ... I think ... of things ... that mean New Zealand and one of those things is ... Maori and Te Reo ... I come from here so then it makes sense to me to identify as Pakeha and that's a Maori word and that's appropriate.
- Rae: Part of me likes that [Pakeha is a Maori word] ... because ... it has a cultural flavour or identity.
- Elinor: I think the mere fact that Pakeha is a Maori word acknowledges the Maori Pakeha relationship.

This relationship was expressed explicitly by all but three of those interviewed. The assertion that being Pakeha conveys a connection with Maori appeared frequently in the transcripts and was articulated in a number of ways. For Eve it was “respect to the indigenous people” and for Joy it was expressed as an “affinity with Maori culture”. The word relationship itself occurred frequently in the data.

- Ann: It [Pakeha] gives me a term that ... [expresses] a relationship with the other treaty party.
- Rae: I think it's [Pakeha] probably more like a home grown label or identity because ... it's Maori and it ... indicates a relationship with tangata whenua.
- Debra: To me it is acknowledging that special relationship that Treaty relationship and everything that goes with that.

By implication this relationship is a positive one and this was highlighted by the use of language which implied the term had been gifted by Maori.

- Kurt: That's why Pakeha is such a lovely term because it's a term that ... completely breaks down that we/ they thing because the name actually has been attributed by another group. It's not self attributed, it's attributed by another group.
- Ann: It's a term that was given to us not one that we've created.

Debra: They've [Maori] named US ... we've come here and we've been able to stay here and live here because of their generosity ...and I think ... being Pakeha's honouring that ... it's the title that's been given by THEM to US.

The reciprocal nature of this relationship was emphasised through the offer of political support for Maori. Spoonley (1995a, 1995b) and Spoonley and Larner (1995) emphasised the political nature of the relationship, arguing that the label becomes a deliberately constructed identity for those members of the majority group of European descent who want to express their understanding of, and support for, Maori claims for self actualisation. While Pearson and Sissons (1997, p. 79) concluded from their research that the political implications of a Pakeha identity were "surprisingly weak", and Gibson (2006) argued that it is no longer politically radical to claim a Pakeha identity, more than half of the people I interviewed indicated that they were making a political statement through claiming a Pakeha identity.

Debra: I think it [the decision to identify as Pakeha] was about a commitment to the Treaty for me as ... a white woman and acknowledging the indigenous people of this country ...I think it's more just who I am as a person and ... it is about my political beliefs.

Joy: It's [identifying as Pakeha] become a little bit of a ... political sticking point for me.

Suze: I identify as Pakeha definitely as a political ... way of explaining how I see the world.

Using the imagery of a relationship with Maori has become a recognised means of describing a Pakeha identity. As discussed in Chapter Three, Michael King (1985, 1991) was one of the first writers to use the notion of a relationship to define his own Pakeha identity. In the process of rejecting a connection to Europe, he argued that his Pakeha identity had emerged from interaction with Maori people and culture. This argument was



reiterated throughout his edited anthology; *Pakeha: The quest for identity in New Zealand* (King, 1991)

The extent to which this ideology has since come to dominate the discourse of a Pakeha identity is exemplified through various research projects with Pakeha, all concluding that in identifying in this way, participants were expressing a relationship with Maori (Hepi, 2008; Liu, 2005; Pearson & Sissons, 1997). The relational conception of a Pakeha identity has furthermore been promoted by all of these authors as particularly positive within the context of support for Maori self-determination. Its repetition throughout the literature indicates that, along with a rejection of Europe, the interview participants were drawing upon available discourses concerning a Pakeha identity.

**Belonging in New Zealand.** A number of writers have interpreted the rejection of Europe and subsequent expression of a relationship with the colonised as a means of not only reconciling the past with the present, but of constructing a narrative of belonging in New Zealand (Bell, 2006, 2009; Dyson, 1996; Lawn, 1994). The rejection of an association with Europe is intrinsically related to the European settlement of this country. The British colonisation of New Zealand inarguably had dire consequences for the indigenous population. For many of those I interviewed, finding an expression of their own identity necessitated a coming to terms with New Zealand's colonial past and the damage colonisation has inflicted upon Maori people and their culture. For some learning about this damage was an integral part of their decision to identify as Pakeha.

Suze: It's [Pakeha] a word which encapsulates the history of ... how Europeans came to live in New Zealand.

Debra: [Seeing] a timeline of all the breaches of the Treaty ... laid out ... was just incredible ... it made me think more about who I was.

Kurt:           What I came to was that being Pakeha is ... belonging to this place and part of that belonging is ... this respectful relationship with Maori and having cognisance of colonisation and what it's done to Maori.

The discursive rejection of a connection to the coloniser then becomes a means of reconciling what Bell (2006, p. 254) has referred to as an “ontological unease” concerning our “dubious moral origins”. Bell (2009, p. 159) later termed the adoption of this narrative “a desire for redemption ... to be *like* Maori, to be *accepted* by Maori”. Her argument, drawing from the international literature on white settler identities, is that members of this group may seek reassurance from the implications of colonisation through associating themselves with the indigenous people. Similarly, Jones (1999, p. 310) has argued that for some members of the dominant white majority in New Zealand, an “infatuation with access to and unity with the other” can represent a desire for absolution. This infatuation has been interpreted as an attempt to renounce a Western heritage and claim indigeneity for Pakeha (Dyson, 1996; Lawn, 1994). For Lawn (1994, p. 300) the “narrative of disowning one’s parents and imagining oneself adopted” often comes at the expense of any engagement with the *consequences* of colonisation for the white majority - the privileges inherited from a colonial past.

Lawn (1994) and Dyson (1996) were addressing the preoccupation with Pakeha identity shared by a number of white New Zealand writers during the early 1990s. They were particularly critical of the focus on a shared connection with Maori which they saw as overwhelming an acknowledgement of Pakeha whiteness. Their argument was not that a Pakeha identity is not a good thing to claim, but rather that, we should examine the term, and our use of it, critically in order to ask does its use challenge existing power structures or instead further perpetuate white

hegemony in New Zealand? It is this position that I want to consider in the second part of this chapter as, having examined what participants felt a Pakeha self-identity might express, I turn to consider what the discourse of a relationship with Maori can potentially obscure.

### **The “Empty Alterity” of a Pakeha Identity**

**Not Maori.** A number of writers have argued that both Maori and Pakeha can only be understood in terms of their relationship to each other. This position stems from the etymology of both words and their origin in the period of New Zealand history immediately following European contact. Prior to this time, Maori had no need for a communal term and instead identified themselves through their affiliations to tribal or family group. Following the arrival of the settlers, however the words Maori meaning “normal or ordinary” and Pakeha gained traction as both groups found the need for terms to collectively describe each other (Bell, 1996; Hepi, 2008, p. 9).

Significantly, within a discussion of self identity it is not inappropriate for Pakeha to define ourselves in relation to Maori. All identity is relational to a certain extent as we seek to define who we are by comparing ourselves to other people (see for example discussions of social identity theory in: Stets & Burke, 2000; Wetherell & Potter, 1992) and the construction of identity is always dependent upon the identification of difference to, and relationships with, those who are other (Hall, 1996). The main deficiency of a relational definition of Pakeha emerged however, when it became apparent that this was not one aspect of the definition but instead was the *predominant* reason participants gave for identifying as Pakeha.

An examination of the international whiteness literature reveals that a white majority describing itself in relation to an ethnic minority is not unusual in the context of Western societies. White people, it is argued,

frequently use the race or ethnicities of others in order to define their own (Dalton, 2008; Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; McKinney & Feagin, 2003; O'Brien, 2001, 2007; Roediger, 1998). Critical whiteness theory points to the inexperience of many white people at seeing themselves as raced. This so-called invisibility of whiteness, to be discussed in more depth in Chapter Five, results in race or ethnicity being associated only with ethnic minorities and consequently whiteness becoming synonymous with the human norm (Dei, et al., 2004; Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; hooks, 1997; McIntosh, 1988). Ultimately then as Dalton (2008, p. 15) explained white people do not think of themselves in terms of what they are, but instead in terms of being “not Black, not Asian American ... not Native American” or in this country, not Maori.

In 1996 the International Social Survey Programme conducted by Massey University surveyed the reasons behind a decision to claim a Pakeha identity and revealed that the majority (62%) did so because they felt the term “best describes a New Zealander who is non Maori” (Pearson & Sissons, 1997, p. 70). This particular wording was also prevalent during the interviews I conducted with more than a third of the people I interviewed answering my initial question “why do you identify as Pakeha” with the rationale that it was because they were not Maori.

- Debra:            So I identify myself as somebody who's not Maori.
- Neil:             I have no Maori ancestry so I ... whakapapa to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
- Rae:              I'm not from Europe, I'm not. So therefore I'm not European. By definition. And I'm not Maori.
- Elinor:           So I ... say I'm Pakeha so immediately you know that I'm not Maori.

While it has been argued that the creation of Pakeha as an identity functions to “mark” the majority group in a way that ends its invisibility

(Spoonley, 1995a, p. 55), defining ourselves in terms of what we are not does not illuminate exactly who we are. While comfortable “marking” themselves as Pakeha, when it was no longer appropriate to define their identity in relational terms to Maori participants were often unable to articulate what it was that made them uniquely Pakeha. This is what Maclean (1996, p. 110) describes as the void at the centre of this Pakeha identity indicating that much of what it means to be Pakeha still remains invisible to those who are using the term to describe themselves.

**Pakeha = white?** One attribute that is quite clearly unique to Pakeha is whiteness. A lack of engagement with whiteness in the interview transcripts however lends support to the argument that this is not a preoccupation in the creation of Pakeha self-identity (Dyson, 1996; Gibson, 2006; Lawn, 1994). While Pakeha have embraced the word itself, the Maori definition of that word has not been so readily accepted. Only one of those interviewed during the course of my research, answered with the seemingly obvious answer that he was white in reply to my question regarding the decision to identify as Pakeha. Indeed for the majority of participants, the term Pakeha, while *suggesting* that the bearer was white, was definitely not *synonymous* with the word.

- Elinor: I’m white but ... it doesn’t it doesn’t mean anything in terms of what I’m trying to say about myself...but Pakeha says it both. It says that ... I’m not Maori [and] it probably says that I’m white.
- Marcie: You can’t look at someone and say “you’re Pakeha” because you don’t know what blood they’ve got in them but you can look at someone and say “they’re white”.
- Suze: We can categorise ourselves based on skin colour but Pakeha’s ... interesting cause it still HAS that connotation for me but its ... something in between, because of the language I think.

A discussion of respondent's attitudes towards whiteness is crucial to this thesis and will be presented in Chapter Five. Here, however, I use these examples to emphasise that the Maori meaning of the word Pakeha has not been assumed with the same enthusiasm as the word itself. This supports Hepi's (2008, pp. 60-61) conclusion that "it is those European New Zealanders that identify as Pakeha, and not Maori, who are developing the term Pakeha to mean something particular and characteristic to European New Zealanders". It is the shift in meaning that has taken place since the word's adoption as a self descriptor that I turn to now.

### **The Appropriation of the Term Pakeha**

While the term appropriation is often used in post-colonial theory to refer to a colonial society's adoption of elements of imperial culture, I use it here in its broader sense to indicate the usurping of language and cultural aspects by a dominant power (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2000). Maori constitute a minority within New Zealand and, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six, social statistics demonstrate that they are often disadvantaged within this country. Yet despite the position that Maori occupy as a group, as the adoption of the koru as symbol of the national airline and the haka to herald the start of each international rugby match demonstrate, it is often to Maori that white New Zealanders turn to differentiate ourselves in an international context.

The appropriateness of the dominant majority using Maori language and culture in order to define a distinctive New Zealand identity has come to be increasingly questioned over the past few decades. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p. 89) has critiqued a practice she has termed "trading the Other" in which Maori culture is offered for consumption with "no concern

for the peoples who originally produced the ideas or images". In response to an Air New Zealand advertisement which featured the Maori song "Pokarekare Ana", Lawyer Moana Jackson (as cited in Pihama & Waerea-i-te-rangi Smith, 1997) issued a challenge to white New Zealanders:

But that song has almost become a Pakeha anthem and my response to Pakeha is to say sing your own songs, why don't you sing your own songs to define who you are, why to define your uniqueness do you have to take something more off us? ( p. 31)

Maori Party Co Leader Dr Pita Sharples has also made it quite clear that the Maori language is an important issue in terms of cultural appropriation, arguing "indigenous peoples are entitled to the recognition of the full ownership, control and protection of the cultural and intellectual property ...[and] that includes Maori words and names" ("Maori Party raises issue of cultural appropriation," 2005).

Dr Sharples was arguing in Parliament against the exploitation of the Maori language for economic gain, and while there is no financial advantage in self identifying as Pakeha, it is clearly viewed by those I interviewed as advantageous, allowing the adoption of a non racist subject position.

Kurt:           He [my son] he's ... part of that environment where ... some people lack tolerance and other people have lots of tolerance ... and we sort of explore these issues at home quite a bit so he's happy to call himself a Pakeha.

Mark:           So I guess that's ...associated with what I would call their [his family members] resistance to categories like Pakeha ...there's these ... cultural prejudices that they have that ... I would say I wouldn't share.

Rae:            If you really start to try and define what it means to be Pakeha I think ... part of it would be you've done a little bit of work in that area ... you've understood the biculturalness of New Zealand.

Selena: I think people who are a little bit more in touch with ...  
Maoridom or a little bit more in touch with New Zealand's  
history would identify as Pakeha.

Identifying as Pakeha then allows us to position ourselves, in the words of the participants, as being without “cultural prejudice” but being “tolerant”, bicultural” and “in touch with Maoridom”.

I began this chapter with a list of negative expressions that have been attributed to the word Pakeha by members of the white majority who reject its use. It is apparent however that it is not only those white New Zealanders objecting to the term, who have adopted a new definition for the word. From a neutral descriptor in the Maori language, the word has been imbued with positive meaning for many of us who use it to describe ourselves. This meaning however, has the potential to conceal more about those who use it to describe themselves than it reveals. In particular it has little to say about current power relations within New Zealand society and the structural inequalities from which members of the dominant white majority benefit.

### **A Consideration of Power**

In his critical examination of Australian multiculturalism, Ghassan Hage (1998) examined the sociological implications of a call for white tolerance within an Australian multicultural society. He proposes that when white people are asked to be tolerant of others, they do not lose their power to be intolerant and it is this issue of power that multiculturalism fails to engage with. For Hage (1998, p. 94) multiculturalism in Australia is “not about making the powerful less so, it is about inviting ...[white people] not to exercise their power”. The theme of acceptance of others both conceals and reinforces the power to accept.



Similarly then a discussion of Pakeha in relation to Maori needs also to be positioned within a discussion of power in contemporary New Zealand society. Questions of power were however, overwhelmed in the interviews by the implication that a mutually beneficial relationship exists and that primarily the adoption of the label Pakeha is in Maori interests. “Good” Pakeha who are “tolerant”, bicultural” and “in touch with Maoridom” were by implication contrasted with those white New Zealanders who have “cultural prejudice”. This dualistic positioning then obscures the power that members of the dominant white majority wield within New Zealand society, defining “‘racism’ in the sense of interpersonal interactions [rather than] ‘racism’ as differential access to power” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 185).

While some individual Pakeha may have personal relationships with individual Maori, the connection with Maori expressed by those I interviewed does not exist in any tangible sense. Indeed what emerged from the data and the literature was the illusory nature of this connection with Maori. I use the word illusory here in reference to Benedict Anderson’s (1983, p. 15) term “imagined community” coined in relation to nations and nationality. He argues that these are social constructs, created in the imagination of people who see themselves as belonging to a nation. He argues that even in very small nations, people do not know most of those who share their nationality yet they see themselves as sharing a connection with these people. In this respect Pakeha belong to an “imagined community” which also includes Maori but excludes other white New Zealanders who may not identify as Pakeha.

## **Conclusion**

Bedggood (1997, p. 84) has described the taking up of a Pakeha identity as “tinged with self congratulation” and while this may seem particularly

disparaging, it seems fair to say that it is viewed by many of those who self identify as Pakeha as a good thing to be.

- Joy: I've kind of done it to be a bit bloody minded. ... I'm going to call myself Pakeha because I find the people [who want to say] ... New Zealand European or white or ... I'm just a Kiwi, ... get over it ... There's nothing wrong with the word Pakeha so that's ... my decision to associate myself with that word. [It's] to try and make it a positive.
- Neil: Pakeha is a term that I ... identify with considerable ... pride now really.
- Rae: Pakeha's a good word, a nice word, a strong word and it's clear. And it's purely New Zealand, but it's not ... New Zealander.

In this chapter I have sought to contrast two aspects of a Pakeha identity; what the participants felt identifying as Pakeha said about them with what analysis of the transcripts revealed it did not say. A strong theme to emerge from the interviews was the notion of a Pakeha identity as representative of a relationship with both the land originally occupied by Maori and with Maori as a people. Yet despite, or perhaps because, this relationship is not real in any tangible sense it becomes difficult to quantify. Beyond the metaphor of a relationship, little else of substance emerged as the participants described their Pakeha identities. Pakeha were defined as being neither European nor Maori as, in line with international whiteness research, participants presented themselves in terms of what they were not. Furthermore the adoption of the Maori word for white by members of the dominant majority, who in the process change its meaning, is potentially problematic within the context of existing power structures in New Zealand. I address these issues of whiteness and power in the following chapter.

## Chapter 5

### The Reification of Whiteness

While the writing concerning whiteness is united by the aim to draw attention to the meaning of the word, what has emerged, as seen in the literature review, is that whiteness means many different things to different people. It has been described as invisible to white people (Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993), but clearly able to be seen by those who are not (Ahmed, 2007; Sue, 2004a). It has been described as privilege (McIntosh, 1988) and as terror (hooks, 1997). The aim of this chapter is to understand how whiteness was understood by the research participants and to explore the implications of this.

The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first I look at whiteness as it was described during the interviews. What emerged was that for many of the participants, whiteness appeared to be associated with a set of predetermined, inflexible and overwhelmingly negative characteristics. In the second part of the chapter I examine how this reification of whiteness may impact on the participants' recognition of their place within dominant white culture in New Zealand. This is then further explored in terms of the research question: what is the relationship between the usage of the word "Pakeha" by some white New Zealanders and their understanding of whiteness and privilege?

#### Interpretations of Whiteness

**Dislike of the word 'white'.** In Chapter Four, I proposed that for the participants in this study, the meaning of the word Pakeha, in the context of self identification, had evolved far beyond the Maori meaning for the word – white. Whether this new meaning incorporates the original definition or not is one of the questions I attempt to answer in this thesis. As discussed in the literature review, scholarship on the subject is divided with some writers choosing not to engage with whiteness (King, 1991; Pearson, 1989; Spoonley, 1995a, 1995b; Spoonley & Lerner, 1995) and others arguing that a preference by some in the white majority, for the term Pakeha, is motivated by a desire to avoid the negative associations of the word white (Dyson, 1996; Lawn, 1994).

Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed a general discomfort amongst many of those interviewed, towards the use of white as a self label. For some, dislike of the word was very strong. Eve referred to it as making her “skin crawl”. She attributed her strong feelings about the word to her German ancestry and the associations it had for her with policy promoted by the Nazi regime during the Second World War.

Eve: I have never EVER considered myself white and I think that may have to do with coming from Germany ... a country that sort of shouldered the universal guilt of eradicating millions of people.

Yet even those born and raised in New Zealand had little affection for the word.

Neil: [When I think of white] I think of 1960s Mississippi, I think ... there is identifiably a discourse about superiority, control. Control of business, control of land. It is such a[n] absolutely kind of STARTLINGLY violent story.

Joy: It [white] makes me think of the 60s. It makes me think of Martin Luther King, it makes me think of no blacks no whites and ... apartheid in South Africa.

Suze described the shock she experienced upon hearing herself described as white and when asked if she ever identified as white Ann replied “no [be]cause all I can see with that is skinhead”. For Elinor, as for a number of the other participants, hearing herself called white by Maori would be seen as an accusation.

Elinor: If they were talking about me as a white woman I would assume that they were about to criticise my ... unjust power and position.

Ann: If someone said “you white woman” it would sit uncomfortably with me because I would think that they would be equating me with all the people who’ve been oppressors.

Others did not articulate such strong opposition to the term but still felt there was a “stigma” attached to it, expressing concern that the term could be used in a “derogatory” way.

**Reification of whiteness.** Research with white people both in New Zealand and overseas has suggested that the participants are not unique in wishing to disassociate themselves from the word white (Frankenberg, 1993; Gibson, 2006; Goldstein as cited in McDermott & Samson, 2005; O'Brien, 2001, 2007; Sue, 2004a, 2004b). Goldstein (as cited in: McDermott & Samson, 2005) noted a preference amongst highly educated white Americans, for the label Caucasian instead of white, proposing it as indicative of a desire to distance themselves from a word associated with racial dominance. Bonnett (2000b) has similarly noted antiracist organisations in North America and the United Kingdom rejecting a white identity which, he contended, is constructed in opposition to an antiracist identity.

He proposed furthermore, that this rejection is justified by a significant portion of whiteness scholarship that has imbued the word white with a set of unchanging and indeed unchangeable characteristics. M. Anderson (2003, p. 28) likewise targeted whiteness literature in which “whiteness comes to mean just about everything associated with racial domination”. As the examples from my own research cited above demonstrate, participants similarly defended their dismissal of a white identity on the basis of its negative associations, utilising a discourse which clearly reified whiteness. The word white emerged in the transcripts as having little meaning aside from supremacy and domination and its relevance for many of the participants, particularly those who wished to demonstrate their commitment to antiracism, was rejected.

**Resistance to race.** In her research with white women in New Zealand, Gibson (2006) argued that avoidance of the term white was an effect of a “colour/ power evasive discourse”, a term originally used by Frankenberg (1993) to describe an attitude which avoids acknowledging difference in order to affirm that everyone is equal. This is also expressed as “colour blindness” and is readily identified through a discourse of sameness; to acknowledge difference is to demonstrate prejudice. As a discourse often utilised by members of the white majority to discuss race (see for example: Frankenberg, 1993; O'Brien, 2001), this talk was identifiable throughout the interviews, with participants at various times attempting to distinguish the unifying characteristics of different New Zealand ethnicities in ways which demonstrated an avoidance of difference.

Yet, despite the recurrence of this discourse, it was not the most dominant to emerge during the section of the interviews in which we discussed whiteness. More prevalent was the utilisation of a discourse which acknowledged ethnic and cultural differences within New Zealand but

rejected the relevance of the terms black and white as expressions of this difference. This at times contradictory stance - participants were open to expressions of difference, but opposed to using skin colour as a way of differentiating - is apparent in the following examples as participants construct their arguments in almost identical ways to suggest that identifying by skin colour can be divisive.

- Kurt: You know white can become whities ... if you flip that over there would be the ... darkies wouldn't there? But ...that's sort of back to that us /them... So that in a way, that's why Pakeha is such a lovely term because it's a term that... completely breaks down that we/ they thing.
- Suze: If our society was able to move away from ... categorising people in terms of their skin colour then you know the ... world would be a better place. Because that's the thing, we can categorise ourselves based on skin colour but Pakeha's kind of ... in between, because of the language I think.
- Ann: I feel a bit uncomfortable with those [the terms black and white]. I'm much more comfortable with Pakeha /Maori, THAT kind of dichotomy ... because black ... [and] white are so ... confrontational.
- Elinor I think Pakeha for me ... is ... a less extreme term than white because you've got ... whites and blacks, not that I necessarily see that as being the case here [in New Zealand], but white ...it's a term that you use ... in conflict.

In her research with white antiracists O'Brien (2001, p.55) demonstrated that a colour blind discourse can often co-exist with a reflexive approach to issues of racism in a way that individuals "both are and are not" resistant to seeing themselves as raced. Similarly many of the participants in my own research readily acknowledged the cultural differences between Maori and non Maori but to distinguish on the basis of skin colour suggested a racial intolerance which appeared to be irreconcilably problematic.

A resistance to race and preference for ethnicity was identified in Chapter Two as a significant discourse within the New Zealand literature concerning dominant majority identity. Its presence within the interview data was obvious as participants presented a Pakeha identity that clearly did not encompass whiteness. I noted in Chapter Three, the reservations expressed by a number of the participants at my focus on whiteness and its perceived irrelevance within a context of white privilege. For these people, whiteness as skin colour has become detached from whiteness as privilege and analysis of this forms an important part of the discussion in Chapter Six. Within the context of identity, however the dismissal of whiteness, or what Moreton-Robinson (2004, p. 82) referred to as an attempt to “deracialise” identity, is a failure to acknowledge that skin colour is an intrinsic component of the way people within Western societies construct a sense of themselves and others. Groups within these societies, Dyer (1997, p. 44) argued, need to be “visibly recognisable”; without such recognition the interplay of power becomes seriously impeded.

The discourse dismissing the relevance of whiteness to a discussion of New Zealand identity is problematic because it overlooks the defining factor that race has played, and continues to play, in this country’s national development (Ballara, 1986). Colvin (2008, p. 54) proposed instead that any discussion of this development must also consider the role of whiteness in determining “social identity, social knowledge and social power”. In the following section, I consider these aspects and their interrelation in contemporary New Zealand society, in order to emphasise the significance that whiteness brings to bear on social identity in this country.

### **Whiteness in New Zealand**



Sara Ahmed (2007 p. 154) proposed that whiteness is “an orientation that puts certain things within reach”. Influenced by the work of philosopher and revolutionary Frantz Fanon, she argued that colonisation has produced a society in which white people have the capacity to attain certain advantages more easily than those who are not. In New Zealand, as in many Western countries, whiteness has come to dominate cultural space and its subsequent normalisation within that space offers significant advantages to those who are white (Moreton-Robinson, 2004). It has been proposed that institutions in this country put privilege within the dominant majority’s “reach” by positioning white culture, values and beliefs as standard while, at the same time, failing to accept cultural difference or promote opportunities for the expression of such difference (Awatere, 1984; Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Maori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare, 1986). While dominant white culture is able to represent itself as the universal human norm, the relationship between whiteness, power and the production of cultural knowledge remains ignored.

**White cultural capital.** The social asset that whiteness puts within the reach of white people has been described as cultural or symbolic capital (Clarke & Garner, 2010; Hage, 1998; Lewis, 2003). Drawing from the work of French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, Hage (1998) defined cultural capital as a shared social language that enables us to make sense of and communicate with the world around us. As the majority, white people have the privilege of being able to live in a society that reinforces the centrality of a white subject position and rewards white cultural knowledge. In other words, whiteness provides a form of capital that can be exploited to gain access to further resources, power and privilege.

Many of us in the white majority are so accustomed to having access to this cultural capital, that it has become an integral, yet invisible part of our lives. It is as Ahmed (2007, p.156) described it “a habit”. On the very rare occasions when we find ourselves in situations where it cannot be utilised, we often interpret this, not as putting us on an even footing with those who are not white, but instead as placing us at a significant disadvantage. In a New Zealand context, Alison Jones (1999, 2001) highlighted this imagined disadvantage when writing about the resistance she encountered from white students placed in a situation where they were unable to draw upon their white cultural capital. As a university lecturer, concerned that a course she was teaching had become dominated by the “words, assumptions and interests of the Pakeha students and lecturer”, she divided the class by ethnicity into two streams (Jones, 1999, p. 300).

These streams, consisting of mainly white students in one and Maori and Pacific Island students in the other, were taught separately for the duration of the course. The decision to divide the two groups was overwhelmingly supported by the Maori and Pacific Island group but negatively received by the white students whom Jones (1999, p. 311) observed resisting being “suddenly displaced from the unproblematic centre of knowing what counts as knowledge in the university”. The following example cited from a white student’s journal highlighted this:

The activity in which we were asked to pick out and comment on an aspect of the meeting house [marae] made me feel extremely uncomfortable and stupid. I thought it served to emphasise rather than diminish my status as an “outsider”. The activity assumed a prior knowledge which I did not have ... I left shortly after the end of this activity having decided that I did not belong. I have difficulty in seeing the relevance of this visit. (Jones, 2001, p. 282)

The student had been put into a position that privileged Maori cultural knowledge at the same time as it challenged her definition of what constituted learning. Her whiteness no longer provided cultural capital or what she termed “prior knowledge” and as a result she felt excluded from the learning process.

Similarly, within my own research group, a number of participants struggled to articulate the ways in which their whiteness benefited them, instead focusing upon how it served to put them at a disadvantage. Selena, working with Maori and Pacific Island families, felt that in operating within a different culture, she was often out of her “comfort zone” and didn’t always “understand quite what [was] going on”. Both Suze and Neil described situations when they had acted in ways around Maori which were culturally inappropriate and the discomfort they experienced upon realising their behaviour was inadvertently, in Neil’s words “ill considered [and] stupid” and in Suze’s “ignorant”. What was significant about all of these examples is that they were given at a point in the interviews when we were discussing white privilege. That is, when the participants were asked if they could provide examples of how their whiteness had benefited them, they recounted situations where being white was *not* an advantage and they were *not* able to utilise their cultural capital. They were aware of their shortcomings when operating as outsiders within environments that privileged another culture’s knowledge but at the same time, even when prompted, were not able to articulate the ways in which their insider roles as members of the white majority culture had proved to be an asset.

**White culture as “no culture”.** An explanation appears to be that many of the participants were unaware of the extent to which they were part of white culture. There are two important aspects to this. The first can be demonstrated in an often repeated theme in the whiteness literature; that

many members of the dominant majority find it difficult to acknowledge their occupation of cultural space (Bell, 1996; Black, 2010; Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Gibson, 2006; Spoonley, 1988; Wepa, 2005). This also emerged in my own data as a number of participants struggled to describe the characteristics of the culture with which they identified.

- Ann: We're a bit lost in that respect and that's why I think so many of us who may well have a closer connection in working with Maori maybe are quite happy to borrow so much.
- Joy: In terms of New Zealand Pakeha culture I'm struggling to identify anything that I can really think of as truly ... fitting into that bracket.
- Neil: I don't know if I want to use the word culture. There ... [are] habits that ...[we have] we accumulate private wealth, we try to persuade everybody else that that's a good idea. Culture? I don't know if it ... qualifies as culture. It's almost like pseudo culture.

In her research with white women, Frankenberg (1993, p. 192) found that for members of the white majority, their own culture was often perceived as "no culture". This, she proposed, is because culture is frequently defined, in a very narrow way, as the customs associated with ethnic minorities. Instead members of the majority often do not see themselves as having culture because their own practices are considered to be "normal". In other words culture is defined as something that "others" have and as such has no role to play in their own daily lives.

**White culture as "bad culture".** While Neil was hesitant to describe the "habits" he noted as culture, others were not so reticent. For Rae, white culture is about "racism ... superiority, power". Suze described white culture in relation to "money, power and privilege". Mark defined the

majority culture in New Zealand as being “blind and prejudiced”. A number of the women interviewed distanced themselves from a culture which they saw as distinguished by its androcentrism.

- Debra: I think ... as a woman that a lot of what is defined as our culture doesn't actually fit with me as a woman.
- Rae: When I think of white culture I think of white male dominance.
- Eve: It's very stereotypical ... patriarchal ... very strong male dominated beer drinking, rugby playing.

This reification of whiteness and white culture into characteristics which participants clearly do not associate with themselves, is the second explanation as to why many of the participants may have had trouble in locating themselves within dominant culture. Discursively this can be seen as a rhetorical device which enabled them to separate themselves from others within the dominant white majority. Participants had become so practised in disassociating themselves from whiteness that they were unaccustomed to seeing how proficient they were in white culture. This device forms an important element of the theme of separation which recurred throughout the data and which will be developed further in Chapter Seven.

Here, this disassociation also illustrates Frankenberg's (1993, p. 202) description of whiteness as having a “slipperiness” to it, moving as it does between “‘no culture’ ... ‘normal culture’ ... ‘bad culture’ and back again”. By considering white culture only in terms of its difference from the daily reality of their lives, participants were able to argue that they themselves were somehow cultureless. When I asked Suze if she felt that the culture she had characterised as “money, power and privilege” represented her, she replied that while she understood she could not “escape ... [her]

heritage”, she tried “not to identify with it”. In other words “bad culture” has transformed back into being “no culture” at all.

Addressing this narrow view of culture, cultural theorist, Stuart Hall (1996, p.439) has instead defined culture as a mode of “common sense” peculiar to the social group to which we belong. It is this common sense that I believe Wepa (2005) is referring to when she wrote in a New Zealand context:

Our way of living is our culture. It’s our taken-for grantedness that determines and defines our culture. The way we brush our teeth, the way we bury people, the way we express ourselves through our art, religion, eating habits, rituals, humour, science, law and sport; the way we celebrate occasions (from 21sts, to weddings, to birthdays) is our culture. All these actions we carry out consciously and unconsciously. (p. 31)

Frankenberg’s (1993) definition of culture also incorporated socially acquired knowledge and practices that have been learnt through the experience of simply living but added to this the theoretical element of culture as a way of seeing and interpreting the world. Culture is manifested within the organisations and structures within society and transformed through our interactions with each other and these systems. Culture is what shapes our view of ourselves, each other and society around us. This perspective then begins to illuminate the role that white culture has to play in the everyday lives of all white people and significantly, that all “white ...[people] are, by definition, practitioners of white culture” (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 228).

### **Justifying a Pakeha Identity**

In stark contrast to this assertion, the majority of participants went to some rhetorical lengths to distance themselves from a white New Zealand culture, which was overwhelmingly defined in negative terms. Their rationalisation for rejecting the relevance of whiteness has both similarities to, and significant differences from, that employed in the rejection of a European identity. While participants could not claim that they were not white in the same way as they were able to argue that they were not European their construction of argument, in particular their utilisation of “contrary themes”, resonated with Billig’s (2001, p. 218) observation noted in the previous chapter that contradictions are often unproblematically ignored in everyday discourse.

In response to my question, would she prefer to be labelled a white woman or a Pakeha woman, Marcie replied with the following:

- Marcie: If someone was to describe me as a white woman they would probably be making a huge big generalised statement about my ability to be accepted on face value at something... or my chances of getting an interview at something or ... it would go along with a big general statement of probably superficial perception... because it doesn’t really mean anything.
- Claire: Yeah but then it’s quite interesting because you said it doesn’t mean anything but it almost sounds like it does mean something, like it does have some meaning attached to it?
- Marcie: Yeah meaning in ... an accepted way. I guess ... it’s got ... superficial meaning so it means that you might be accepted because you’re white ... but it doesn’t mean that they know anything else about you.

A significant contradiction is evident here with Marcie arguing that the word white is meaningless *and* that as a white person she may have a differential access to social power. This contradictory argument was repeated in a number of the interview transcripts with other participants

similarly explaining their rejection of the label white on the basis that it lacked meaning but at the same time implying that there was something very significant about the word.

The employment of this argument within a discourse of the reification of whiteness further worked to increase the persuasiveness of the argument for a Pakeha identity. As Wetherell and Potter (1992) have demonstrated, accounts are constructed not only to argue a particular point (for Marcie, the unsuitability of the label white) but to contrast with an alternative viewpoint (the suitability of the label Pakeha). Irrespective of the contradictions inherent in her reasoning, Marcie's argument - that the label white was both meaningless and loaded with meaning - was contrived in order to emphasise the appropriateness of her choice to identify as Pakeha.

The rationalisation of the rejection of white culture and identity obscures an important ideological position. For a number of the participants, a focus on whiteness during the interviews caused obvious discomfort revealing a resistance to the concept of race, as highlighted earlier in this chapter. For Joy, the terms black and white reinforced "divisions purely based on colour" and, as a number of the participants argued, the term Pakeha becomes a way of avoiding classifications that are constructed in this way offering a means of discursively evading an engagement with the issue of race.

The legacy of colonisation in New Zealand is that of a dominant majority culture founded on beliefs of white racial supremacy. As highlighted in the previous chapter, for many of the participants, knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the colonisation of this country had a significant impact upon their formation of identity. For the same reason, an affiliation with dominant culture has become, in the eyes of many of the participants, something undesirable. Bell (2006) referred to white New



Zealand culture as having a fragility about it, coming as it does from somewhere else and being tainted by the violence associated with colonisation. She contrasted this with the perception of more authentic cultures and their emphasis on the relationship between people and geographical place (Bell, 2006). A Pakeha identity becomes a way of aligning oneself geographically to New Zealand – a discursive relationship emphasised in Chapter Four- while at the same time avoiding links to a culture with all of its colonising implications. In other words a Pakeha identity is instrumental in evading engagement with white dominant majority culture.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to consider whiteness within a New Zealand context and particularly in terms of its meaning for the interview participants. It became very clear that a significant number of the participants had reified whiteness to the extent that it no longer had any relevance for them personally. I do not disagree that whiteness is associated with supremacy, domination and colonisation, but in this chapter I argue that it is not *just* about these things. For members of the white majority in contemporary New Zealand society, I propose that whiteness provides a cultural capital putting a number of clearly identifiable, and importantly, *inescapable* privileges within their reach. To some extent, all white people in New Zealand have access to this capital through belonging to the dominant majority. Within the context of the research question, I have sought to ask if participants were able to articulate their own whiteness. Taking whiteness as I have defined it here, however as inextricably linked with white cultural capital, the answer seems to be that often they cannot. A Pakeha identity moreover appeared to offer a discursive means of obscuring a connection with whiteness and subsequently with dominant white culture in New Zealand.

## Chapter 6

### White Privilege

In the previous chapter I examined how, for many of the participants, whiteness had been reified to the extent that it was seen to have little implication for them personally. This is significant in terms of the whiteness literature which argues that white privilege will remain hidden as long as whiteness remains unacknowledged (Colvin, 2009; Dei, et al., 2004; Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Gibson, 2006; hooks, 1997; McIntosh, 1988; Morrison, 1992; Sue, 2004a, 2004b). The narrow view of culture that emerged in Chapter Five is consistent with this literature suggesting that many in the white majority are unable to recognise the culture to which they belong and is responsible, Dyer (1997) argued, for the difficulties many white people have in understanding the way in which white privilege operates. In believing that we have “no culture”, he argues “we can’t see that we have anything that accounts for our position of privilege and power” (Dyer, 1997, p. 9).

In this chapter I focus on the concept of privilege. In the first half I examine the research participant’s interpretations of white privilege. A disengagement from personal privilege was the dominant theme to emerge from the data and was seen through the employment of three strategies; utilising a discourse of racism, a disinclination for talk about personal privilege and the rhetorical separation of self from other white people. In the second part of the chapter, I examine the intersection between institutional and personal privilege. I propose that there are a multitude of privileges available to white New Zealanders because we live in a society which is buttressed by institutions offering significant advantages to members of the dominant white majority (Awatere, 1984;

Consedine & Consedine, 2005; Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Maori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare, 1986). My intention is to offer a contemporary interpretation of white privilege in New Zealand.

### **Disengagement from Personal Privilege**

Given the findings in the previous chapter, as I reviewed the data concerning privilege I was surprised to hear all of the people I interviewed acknowledge that, to some degree, being white in New Zealand was an asset. Indeed many of the participants spoke at length about the importance of recognising white privilege and stated that they had chosen to participate in the research because they wanted to explore this further. I initially saw this as representing a significant contradiction: participants did not recognise the extent to which whiteness influenced their lives, but did recognise the existence of white privilege. As I read and reread the data however, I realised that much of this talk about privilege was of a particular kind. While the concept of white privilege was recognised to be very important by the participants, there was little or no focus on how they as individuals were privileged by their whiteness. Thematic analysis of this talk led to the identification of a major theme in the data - disengagement from personal privilege - supporting the findings in Chapter Five, that the advantages afforded by whiteness are frequently unseen.

**The discourse of racism.** Within this theme, I identified a number of strategies used by the participants to distance themselves from privilege. Utilising a discourse of racism was the first of these and was evident in the majority of the transcripts as I noted conversations that began with the topic of privilege quickly changing to become dominated by talk about the disadvantage experienced by Maori.

- Claire: And I just wondered if you thought that being white gave you any advantages?
- Joy: Oh I do, I totally do. I feel ... like this has massively shaped my experiences teaching at XXX and ... especially XXX Primary School which was at this stage a Decile 1 school which is the ...lowest socio economic grading a school can have... I just feel like there's such a stigma attached to being brown in New Zealand.
- Claire: How do you think being white has made your life easier?
- Kurt: Oh well here I am sitting in a ... room with you and [you and] I are both highly educated people... there's a far greater representation of ... us at this level than there are of Maori... and there's a reason for that ... both of us are likely to have ... well paying jobs and ... we don't represent a group of people that is overrepresented in the prison system or the welfare system or all of those things.
- Claire: How [has] privilege ... impacted on your life... in what ways [is] your life easier because you're Pakeha?
- Suze: I'm free to go to a school that promotes a world view that relates to my heritage and I live in a country where ... the indigenous people were ... forcibly removed from their land and put in prison and killed and ... their language wasn't valued and school wasn't appropriate for them and ... a lot of discrimination and ... prejudice which has enabled me to have a lot of privilege in terms of my position in society.

In all three of these examples the participants initially seem to engage with my question but then move the discussion away from privilege. Joy agrees that being white provides her with advantages but instead of outlining these, she chooses to focus on the educational disadvantage experienced by Maori. Kurt turns the conversation away from himself to a more general commentary about the privilege enjoyed by "us" and then moves to a discussion of racism. Suze prefixes a generalised statement of her privilege with specific examples of discrimination against Maori. The change in focus away from privilege and towards racism dominated replies to my questions about white privilege in the majority of the interviews.

One of the first writers on white privilege Peggy McIntosh (1988, p. 1) explained, “as a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage”. While the participants were aware of white privilege as a concept, white people are so used to talking about racism in terms of the deficit experienced by non whites that it seems it is extremely difficult to switch focus to the benefits accruing to white skin colour. Despite my questions being quite specifically about privilege, the answers seemed inevitably to turn towards racism. Suze summed this up in response to my question “how does privilege operate?” by joking that “I could probably give you ways that it doesn’t operate, it’s ... MORE ways that it doesn’t operate”.

Contrary to this, hooks (1989) has argued that racism is less about the subjugation of people of colour and more about white supremacy. Similarly Colvin (2009) proposes that the marginalisation of Maori in New Zealand is the result of white domination and privilege and it is this that needs to become a focus rather than revisionist histories of colonisation. The vocabulary of discrimination that we have available to us however does not make it easy to do this (Wildman & Davis, 2008). No matter how much the participants said they wanted to talk about privilege, analysis of the data revealed that they often struggled to do so. The discourse of racism that ran through the majority of the transcripts, effectively equated to a discourse of silence about privilege.

**Disinclination to talk about personal privilege.** The prevalence of this discourse supports the arguments put forward by international writers on white privilege, that if it is not looked for, the silence surrounding privilege

renders it invisible (see for example: McIntosh, 1988; Wildman & Davis, 2008). This was further highlighted by the second strategy to emerge in the analysis. In addition to the very dominant discourse of racism, white privilege was frequently obscured in the data by a noticeable disinclination or an inability to talk about personal privilege (O'Brien, 2001, 2007).

While willing to admit that white people in New Zealand enjoyed advantages, Joy found it difficult to articulate the ways in which she personally was privileged eventually conceding that instead she was “less discriminated against”, a sentiment also echoed by other participants. In the following excerpt, Mark constructs a similar argument.

- Claire: Do you feel then that your life has been made easier because you're Pakeha?
- Mark: It's a tricky one. All I'd be willing to say is that I'm very aware that there are a lot of ... Maori in New Zealand who have it HARD ... Because their LANGUAGE is not valued and that they have often been brought up in poor families, again this is an inherited poverty, and they have it hard and ... I certainly recognise that as a reality ...But ... I would hesitate to jump in and talk about my privileged situation
- Claire: So ... what would make you hesitate?
- Mark: Well I guess just that its more complex ... in a way that ... sure I've [been] brought up in a wealthy family, I could go to University and ... in a way I've benefited FROM being in that situation but I would hesitate to... DOMINATE my talk ...using the categories of white privilege ...
- Claire: They might be overly simplistic or?
- Mark: Yeah I think so yeah. But I was I was only being a little hesitant in talking about me. ... I didn't want that to detract from the reality of hardship or ... the fact that there is systematic Maori underprivilege that exists.

Again, as in the examples above, Mark's talk is dominated by a discourse of racism but he also appears unable to articulate the ways in which he may be benefiting from this racism. While acknowledging that he had an

upbringing free from economic hardship which allowed him to gain a tertiary education, he demonstrates a reluctance to engage with the idea of himself as being privileged. Here he readily adopts the position of acknowledging disadvantage in others - the discrimination faced by Maori - but struggles to engage with what has been argued to be the root of this discrimination, privilege for white people as a group, and his own subsequent privilege as a member of this group.

While some participants, like Joy and Mark, seemed reluctant to engage with the personal effects of privilege, others acknowledged its existence but struggled to provide concrete examples.

Claire: Do you believe that white privilege exists?  
 Mike: Shit yeah shit yeah  
 Claire: Can you think of any examples of how you've been privileged because you're white?  
 Mike: Ah not really in New Zealand although ah as an individual? It's hard to say having only six years of experience in New Zealand

While emphatically acknowledging the existence of white privilege, Mike became hesitant when I asked how it had benefited him, and concluded that it was because he, as an immigrant to New Zealand, had not lived here long enough for it to have an impact. This pattern of struggling to express personal privilege was repeated throughout a number of the transcripts. Ann concluded that the problems she had in articulating her own privilege were because she did not "seek [it] out". Selena found it difficult to describe specific examples of privilege eventually conceding that "I can't think of a conscious time where I have realised that, right then in that moment ... I've been privileged because of my skin colour". Neil, adamant that he experienced white privilege, was only able to provide examples that demonstrated class or male privilege. He, like a number of the

participants, following our discussion acknowledged the unexpected difficulties he encountered in attempting to articulate the realities of white privilege.

An inability to identify the personal manifestations of privilege is consistent with O'Brien's (2001, 2007) research among white antiracists in the United States. She termed this understanding of privilege at a macro (institutional) level but not a micro (personal) level, selective race cognizance. Participants in her research displaying selective race cognizance were able to identify institutional racism and historical and contemporary manifestations of white privilege in general, but were not able to consider the ways in which they personally benefited from this privilege. In her research, Frankenberg (1993, p. 169) also found participants struggled to articulate the juncture of personal and structural privilege, concluding that both a limited understanding of systems of power and the means to express this, hampered their ability to engage with the structure of race in their own lives.

An inability to articulate the relationship between racism, power and themselves as individual white people was evident throughout many of the interviews. Despite my efforts to personalise the discussion by asking the participants directly how being either white or Pakeha had contributed to making their own lives easier, the replies were often constructed in general terms with the personal impact that privilege played in each individual's life receiving only cursory attention, if any at all. This is illustrated in the examples above; Joy ignored the personalising aspect of my question, Kurt answered my question by referring to our shared educational attainment but instead of continuing to develop this argument, he moved to a discussion of Maori disadvantage, Mike, Selena, Ann and Neil were unable to distinguish the ways in which white privilege



operates in their lives and Mark seemed reluctant to consider himself privileged. The effect of this selective race cognizance, like that of the discourse of racism, was to obscure the existence of privilege in the lives of the respondents.

**Separation from other white people.** The third strategy employed by participants to disengage from personal privilege was the construction of distance between themselves, and those who were seen to have privilege, by implication other white people. This distance adds to the existing theme of 'separation from other white people' that ran throughout the data and will be discussed in the next chapter. The strategy at times overlapped with the previously discussed strategy whereby participants argued that white privilege existed at a macro but not a micro level. In the excerpt above for example, Mike argues for the existence of white privilege but, at the same time, that he himself is not privileged. For this to be possible it implies a conviction that he is somehow disconnected from other white people who do have access to privilege.

The strategy was also very evident in the talk of participants who deliberately introduced different forms of privilege into the discussion. When I asked Mike, an immigrant to New Zealand, how white privilege manifested itself in his home country he noted his ability to access University. He was quick to mitigate this however by arguing that the class system in his country, excluded him from admission into more elite Universities. An emphasis on class or socioeconomic status was also evident in the talk of other participants.

Suze: [I] don't want to reinforce that just because I'm Pakeha I have more opportunities you know ... class comes into it as well

Chris: I don't believe that you can be defined as being privileged simply because you are Pakeha. There are a large number of Pakeha who are not privileged, due to economic and educational constraints.

A number of the women I interviewed qualified their positions of privilege by emphasising the gender discrimination they experienced. Elinor, for example, argued that she had neither gender nor class privilege and so could only concede that she was “relatively privileged”. What is particularly significant about this, and further comments from participants arguing that white people experience privilege in different ways, was the timing - in direct response to a question that I had asked regarding *personal* privilege. The utilisation of this strategy, and the construction of self as separate from other differentially privileged white people, allowed participants to divert attention away from the personal privilege that they themselves enjoyed.

My intention here is not to detract from the experiences of those whose lives are shaped by gender or class oppression. New Zealand women, as a group for example, do shoulder more of the responsibility for unpaid household work and childminding and have a significantly lower median income than New Zealand men (Statistics New Zealand, 2005). White New Zealand women, however, have a higher median income than women of other ethnicities in this country. In New Zealand, single white mothers reliant on the Domestic Purposes Benefit confront social and financial barriers not experienced by parents with access to other sources of wealth. Yet this group is less likely than Maori women in the same circumstances to experience the repeat discrimination which has been associated with poorer overall physical health (R. Harris et al., 2006). The

degree to which white people can access privilege will of course be influenced by individual conditions: at the same time however I wish to emphasise that for all the injustice they experience, white people in this country can never be oppressed as white people (Johnson, 2008).

**Reflexive race cognizance.** Disengagement from privilege was the predominant theme to emerge from the data. This is not to say that it was the only one present. A number of participants actively challenged white privilege demonstrating what O'Brien (2001, 2007) has called reflexive race cognizance whereby there is an understanding of both institutional and individual privileges. Eve very clearly outlined the privileges she and her children had experienced.

Eve: I wasn't even questioned when I came to New Zealand to become a resident ... it was just accepted. ... I think it would have been quite different if I ...[had] come from a ...country with a different skin colour and religious background ... and ... that privilege has then ... extended to my children who have ... the same skin colour and therefore have never had any problems with being accepted by any schools ... or any clubs or ... activities that they wanted to join.

She along with other participants, who, for example, deliberately sent their children to culturally diverse schools, demonstrated how it is possible to "interrupt white privilege in her life" (O'Brien, 2007, p. 431).

This interruption of privilege was not however a dominant theme in the data. More prevalent was the utilisation of one or more of the three strategies outlined in this chapter, enabling participants to disengage from white privilege, despite their avowal of the importance of acknowledging it. Johnson (2008 p. 118 emphasis in original) wrote of the paradox that many white people face through "*being* privileged" but not "*feeling* privileged". This contradiction was evident throughout the transcripts

where privilege appeared to be defined as something bestowed upon individuals rather than gained through belonging to a particular social group. As highlighted in Chapter Two there is a significant body of international literature outlining the benefits accruing to white people as a group; benefits which are entrenched in the institutions of many Western societies. In the second part of this chapter, I endeavour to highlight how this institutional privilege may operate in New Zealand, in order to emphasise the ways in which privilege is made available to white people in this country.

### **Institutional Privilege**

All of the participants I interviewed had some knowledge of the disadvantage that Maori, as a group, face in everyday life. A number mentioned socioeconomic indicators, health, education and the justice system as areas where Maori experiences were dominated by institutional racism. In this they are supported by social statistics which demonstrate that Maori have an average net worth one third that of white New Zealanders, are less likely to own their own homes, are over represented in the prison system and as a group, have poorer outcomes in relation to health and education (Department of Corrections, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2011a; Ministry of Health, 2011a, 2011b; Statistics New Zealand, 2002, 2007).

Yet while the majority of the participants decried the effects of racism, what many failed to engage with was the fact that institutions discriminating against Maori, do so by privileging white people (Consedine & Consedine, 2005). A society that disadvantages one group achieves this by providing greater opportunities to members of another. In this section I look at how these privileges might manifest themselves in New Zealand by considering the significant disparities that exist between white New

Zealanders and Maori in four areas: education, housing, health and justice. My intention in doing so is to provide an alternative script to the discourse of racism that particularly dominated the talk of the participants.

**Education.** Quality education is inextricably linked with the goods and services that a person can access yet statistics show that the New Zealand education system is predominantly catering to the needs of white New Zealanders as a group. Milne (2009, p. 21) has argued that there is a “hidden, unacknowledged nature of whiteness and power” dominating New Zealand schools. Inequalities between Maori and non Maori are reinforced by a perspective which fails to acknowledge the validity of a Maori point of view, text books that position mainstream white culture and values as the norm and teachers who are unwilling or unaware of the need to challenge classroom power dynamics (Milne, 2009; Smith, 1999). As a result, in 2008 75.2% of white New Zealand school leavers had gained NCEA level 2 or above, compared to only 50.5% of Maori school leavers. While figures show the gaps between the two groups have been closing in recent years, white New Zealanders are far more likely than non white to complete a secondary school education and achieve comparatively higher qualifications in doing so (Ministry of Education, 2011a; Ministry of Social Development, 2010).

The level of education a person attains in New Zealand is directly proportional to the likelihood that they will obtain employment. In tertiary education, rates of white New Zealanders entering and completing degree level courses and above are significantly higher than those of Maori (Ministry of Education, 2011a). Data from the Ministry of Education moreover, shows the median annual income for students five years after completion of their study was highest for those who had completed post-graduate degrees (Ministry of Education, 2011). White New Zealanders

are far more likely to achieve these post-graduate qualifications that have a particular significance in light of potential future earnings.

**Homeownership.** Like education, the connection between the generation of wealth and homeownership in New Zealand is also well established with the ownership of property providing a significant source of economic security through a combination of mortgage repayments and capital gains (Duncan, 2004; Perkins & Thorns, 2001). Current rates of home ownership are 70.5% for white New Zealanders compared to only 42.5% for Maori (DTZ New Zealand, 2007). This disparity, offering members of the dominant white majority considerable economic advantage, is the result of several factors including past housing policy which privileged white people, and discrimination from real estate agents and lending institutions (Waldegrave, 2006).

Family money amassed through property gains in this country has enabled the accumulation and transfer of wealth across generations of white New Zealanders. It has facilitated the sustained purchase of property in areas which offer both high capital gains and the guarantee that children will have access to quality education (Feagin, 1999). The advantages of homeownership cannot be overstated. It has been identified as a significant contributor to the average net worth of New Zealanders (Statistics New Zealand, 2002), an amount proposed to be the most important determinant of privilege in that it is almost entirely dependent upon previous opportunities for the accrual of assets (Lipsitz, 2008). In New Zealand however, Maori are over-represented amongst those individuals with negative net worth and the average net worth of white New Zealanders is three times that of Maori (Statistics New Zealand, 2002, 2007).

**Health.** The third area in which there are significant disparities between white and non white is health. Life expectancy for a white New Zealand woman is 83 years compared to 75.1 years for a Maori woman. For men the gap between Maori and non Maori is nine years (Statistics New Zealand, 2009). Recent health statistics indicate that rates of avoidable mortality – that is death that may have been preventable had an individual had access to medical interventions - are more than two and a half times higher for Maori than for non Maori (Ministry of Health, 2010a). White women, for example, are significantly less likely to present with lung, breast or cervical cancer, however if they do, they are more likely to survive these diseases (Ministry of Health, 2010b). While they are also far more likely to be involved in screening programmes for both breast and cervical cancer (Brewer et al 2010; Thomson, 2009) participation in these programmes does not fully explain the differences in survival rates suggesting the possibility of differential access to treatment between ethnicities (Brewer, et al., 2010).

Research has also suggested a discrepancy in the treatment different ethnicities receive within New Zealand hospitals. Studies of Ischaemic heart disease, the leading cause of death for both Maori and non Maori in New Zealand, has revealed the mortality rate for Maori is almost twice that of non Maori (Ministry of Health, 2011b, 2011c). Based on rates of mortality and hospitalisation, it has been concluded that access to surgical interventions for this disease varies on the basis of ethnicity, that is, white New Zealanders are more likely to be presented with the option for life saving surgery (Curtis et. al, as cited in Reid & Cram, 2005)

**The justice system.** White people in New Zealand, it appears, are also far less likely to be arrested or convicted of a crime and if they are, considerably less likely to receive a custodial sentence. While comprising only 14% of

the population, over 50% of all inmates in New Zealand's prisons and 60% of women prisoners are Maori (Department of Corrections, 2007). A Department of Corrections (2007) report concluded that in comparative terms; Maori were more likely to be arrested irrespective of actual wrong doing, that following apprehension Maori were more likely to be prosecuted, and having been convicted they were more likely to receive prison sentences.

Further research supports this claim with evidence of police partiality towards white New Zealanders, based on police self reporting and on Maori self-reporting of their interactions with police (Maxwell, 2005). A current longitudinal study lends weight to this claim demonstrating a disparity in the police treatment of white and non white individuals. Young white people in the study, for example, were significantly less likely to be arrested and convicted for offences involving cannabis than Maori in the same age group, with the same criminal history and rates of self reported cannabis use (Fergusson, Horwood, & Swain-Campbell, 2003). The authors' conclusion that prejudice exists throughout the legal process, indicates privilege for white people from the way the police manage initial offences through to the workings of the New Zealand legal system. An analysis of diversion in relation to both the police and court sentencing suggests that there are not sufficient constraints in place to prevent the continuation of such bias (Latu & Lucas, 2008).

These areas are by no means the only ones in which white New Zealanders experience privilege. I have chosen to highlight these however in order to demonstrate the futility of the argument implicit in the talk of many of the participants, that it is possible for white people to separate themselves from privilege. White children are in a position to benefit from an education system set up to cater almost exclusively to their needs. Statistically those in the dominant majority have a higher socioeconomic status than those who do not have white skin and this is maintained



through access to education and homeownership. Accumulated capital has proved crucial in terms of the opportunities many white families have been able to access and to provide to their children, opportunities that work to maintain the persistence of privilege. White people continue to benefit from a health system designed to cater to our needs, which is succeeding in keeping us alive for longer and a justice system which by implication suggests we are less likely to commit a crime and more likely to be rehabilitated if we do. These are not benefits that we can take or leave, it does not matter if we do not “seek [them] out”, as one participant claimed, instead they are a fact of New Zealand life.

### **Conclusion**

Wildman and Davis' (2008) argument that we do not have the language to talk about privilege is supported in this chapter. While talk of institutional racism dominated the interviews, its corollary - that the participants as white New Zealanders inevitably benefited from this - for the most part remained unacknowledged. Recognising the concepts of racism and privilege at a macro level is fundamental to any discussion of privilege but in order to contest the power created and sustained by racism, it is also important to acknowledge the specific ways that white people, as individuals benefit. A tendency by many of the participants to discursively avoid the material realities of privilege and its manifestations within their own lives however, revealed a lack of engagement with the subject. In the previous chapter I concluded that participants were unable to recognise the symbolic capital that whiteness provides. This chapter demonstrates that the privileges bestowed by this capital similarly went unacknowledged. I propose that this is not because the participants were unaware of the existence of privilege but because a separation from the manifestations of whiteness made it difficult to engage with the

advantages that it has to offer. It is to this concept of separation that I turn in the next chapter.

## Chapter 7

### Separation from Other White People

In this chapter I examine separation, the fourth, and most dominant, theme apparent in the data. In the first section I expand on this theme as it appeared in previous chapters. In particular I look at the strategies used by the participants in order to effect this separation and to emphasise difference from other white people. My intention in this thesis however is to argue that consideration needs to shift to the advantages *shared* by members of the dominant majority rather than focusing on the differences between us. Part two of the chapter therefore seeks to emphasise what has been described as a “hegemonic whiteness” that transcends these perceived distinctions (Hughey, 2010; Lewis, 2004). While not attempting to deny the differences that exist between white people, by highlighting this hegemony, I wish to emphasise the group cohesion created by whiteness; specifically the benefits shared by living in a society structured along racial lines. This chapter presents the final part of the thesis proposing that the concept of separation, a seemingly integral part of a Pakeha identity, can work to obfuscate understandings of whiteness and privilege.

#### Separation via a Pakeha Identity

In Chapter Four, I proposed that in the process of emphasising a connection with Maori, many participants distanced themselves from other white people. The rejection of a European identity was identified as

a rhetorical device employed by the majority of the participants to separate themselves from those in the dominant majority who do choose to identify in this way. Similarly, the adoption of a Pakeha identity was also interpreted as a means of effecting this separation.

Marcie	I would choose to be Pakeha because of a better understanding of indigenous issues in New Zealand.
Rae:	[The label Pakeha] ... indicates a little bit more thoughtfulness or intelligence possibly.
Kurt:	It's [identifying as Pakeha] an intellectual journey.
Dan	No other term [than Pakeha]... works I guess for me... Not like New Zealand European ... I think it [identifying as European] feels really old school to me like ... people in my parent's generation still ... talk about England as home ... I react against that a bit, I don't like that term.
Selena:	The wool shed and the shearing and the black singlets and the ... afternoon teas and ladies a plate and all of that kinda thing ... that's very much a New Zealand Pakeha, no sorry not Pakeha, New Zealand European, white New Zealand thing.

Marcie has chosen to be identified as Pakeha because of a “better understanding”, presumably than other white people, of matters concerning Maori. For her, as for Rae and Kurt, the identity is used to highlight a degree of consciousness not shared by those who reject a Pakeha identity. Dan and Selena define a European identity as representative of a traditional white New Zealand identity. In their talk they portrayed the label as having particularly conservative implications that are negated through the adoption of the more contemporary Pakeha identity. Similarly Eve described living in what she termed “white country” and emphasised the differences between her own Pakeha family and other white families who lived in the area who were “very white [and] very conservative”. Selena extended on this, describing a European

culture which positioned Maori as outsiders, a positioning she did not see existing in “contemporary Pakeha” culture.

**A political separation.** Several of those interviewed expressed surprise that friends or colleagues they had spoken to after receiving my invitation to participate in the interviews, and who they assumed would share their Pakeha identity, did not. The assumption was based on the fact that these people shared, in the words of one of the participants, “similar views ...and attitudes to all sorts of cultural issues”. A number of participants explained such attitudes as a specific political divergence from other white people. During the interview with Elinor, she proposed that those who did not identify as Pakeha would have very different beliefs in relation to Maori and the Treaty of Waitangi, a position echoed by a number of other participants. For Suze, a Pakeha identity allowed her to express her political views and forge connections with other Pakeha, whom she assumed would similarly share her beliefs.

The assumption that those who identify as New Zealand European subscribe to a political position that is unsupportive of Maori self determination was apparent in the comments of a number of participants as they explained why they had rejected the label in favour of the term Pakeha.

Mark: They [family members] would quite readily use phrases or language to the extent that they're fed up with all this Maori Treaty nonsense, let's just move on ... Along [with] that would be a resistance to... this category Pakeha because it's obviously a Maori category. ... I guess they'd ... be more comfortable with European.

Mike A lot of people's reactions [are] “NO I'm a ... European I'm a New Zealander” and I refuse to be labelled by

something that is a MAORI word ... it's really reactive and it's particularly divisive as well.

New Zealand European is the most commonly assumed ethnic identity for members of the white majority in this country. For this reason it was the identity that was most often singled out by the participants as they constructed an argument defending their choice to identify as Pakeha. Other options, such as Caucasian and New Zealander, were also referred to and similarly dismissed.

Caucasian, a term commonly used by the New Zealand media in crime reporting, was felt by the majority of the participants to lack any relevance in relation to their own identities. While the term New Zealander was used by most to identify their nationality, a number spoke disparagingly of those white New Zealanders who eschewed ethnic identifiers and adopted the term to represent their ethnicity.

Ann: One of my brothers would ... call himself Pakeha ... The other one, I don't think he would even think about it. I don't know what he'd call himself. New Zealander probably if he had to think about it and he doesn't generally ... he's a lovely chap but ... his world view is incredibly narrow.

Rae: I had a discussion with my mother in-law who said "we should be all just New Zealanders. We should be all just one"... and I ... [said] "which one? which one? Just your culture is that what you're wanting? ...and ... that shut her up really ... she doesn't think past that.

For Ann and Rae, those who choose to identify as New Zealanders in this context, were depicted as being narrow minded and unwilling to consider another point of view; a depiction evidenced in part, by their decision to identify in this way.

As I reflected upon my involvement in the interviews, I began to realise how my own comments similarly demonstrated this assumption.

Claire: That would be the first question why do you choose to identify as Pakeha as opposed to

Suze: A Kiwi? Or a New Zealander?

Claire: JUST a New Zealander ((Laughter))

Suze Just a New Zealander

Eve I'm ... connected with a New Zealand family ... and ... with them I have ...fun ...using one [Pakeha] or the other term [Tangata Tiriti] ((Laughter)) because they see themselves as neither

Claire: Yeah right are they JUST New Zealanders?

Eve: Yes ((Laughter))

My emphasis on the word “just” and the subsequent laughter indicates the disparaging way both I, and the interviewee, perceived this conflation of ethnic and national identity. Those who identify as “just a New Zealander” were categorised as politically separate from Pakeha and the implication was this preference is erroneous within the context of racism. This supposition is supported by whiteness literature critical of those in the dominant majority who ignore their own ethnicity, seeing themselves instead as representative of a universal norm (Dei, et al., 2004; Dyer, 1997; Frankenberg, 1993; Gibson, 2006; Sue, 2004a, 2004b). Its presence further reinforces the discourse of separation prevalent throughout the data although it is unclear whether my employment of this discursive practice actually encouraged its use during the interviews. A more likely interpretation, I believe, is that the ease with which this discourse was utilised demonstrates its perceived appropriateness within the context of a discussion of racism.

### **The Prejudice Problematic**

Following interviews with white antiracists in the United States, Hughey (2010) highlighted a reliance upon a narrative emphasising the diversity of white identities and the relevance this was perceived to have in relation to racism. Many of those he interviewed readily categorised individual white people on the basis of their varying political positions: “neo-conservatives and progressives, moralists and relativists, racists and antiracists”, aligning themselves with certain factions in order to affirm their non racist positioning (Hughey, 2009, p. 929). Politically separating racist and non racist - the bad and the good - tends to ease discussions of racism amongst white people by providing them with a distancing mechanism from racism (Hughey, 2009). This strategy, as Bonnett (2000a, p. 10) also pointed out, allows white people to readily identify the “heroes and villains” in racism without implicating themselves.

An emphasis on the failings of another group of people is a key feature of a strategy described by Wetherill and Potter (1992, p. 201) as “the prejudice problematic”. In analysing what they termed “the language of racism”, they identified the strategy, commonly utilised in debates of racism by members of the dominant white majority in New Zealand, of contrasting oneself with other, purportedly less progressive, individuals. Its effect, they argued, was the construction of a non racist, benevolent identity reliant upon deriding the opinions of others in order to demonstrate the superiority of one’s own. Within my own data, the use of what Wetherell and Potter (1992, p. 154) termed “extreme case formations” further worked to highlight this dualistic positioning. A number of participants shared stories of particularly confrontational experiences with other white people, emphasising their own non racist attitudes.

Kurt:                There are aspects of Australian culture that I’ve ... found  
                              really alienating ... I visited a girlfriend in Brisbane and there



were a pair of pistols crossed on the wall with quite long barrels and they were used to hunt Aboriginals ... so it was a reality check ... what are the beliefs going on here?

Ann: When I was over in England in the mid 80s there were big race ... [demonstrations] going on in the East End and quite a few of us went from our school to stand against the skin head protest that was going down the street. They were awful, awful, awful, awful people and ... it makes me feel ashamed of being white if people are that hateful.

Rae: I'm not afraid to look at difference and accept other people ...I was ...at the pub the other night with someone ... he said "ya know if someone's got a full moko on their face ... they are looking for a fight"... he was being an antagonist and he was trying to get me to have this discussion ...and I thought to myself ... how am I responding to this racist stupid comment? And I guess that I have such an understanding that this is such racism and such stupidity and such ignorance that I'm going to come across people like that and it's not [for] me to judge them for being in that position.

Such statements served to emphasise the tolerant stance of the speaker through highlighting their reactions to the extreme behaviours of other white people. Kurt related visiting with people who in his words "celebrat[ed] killing" non whites and contrasted this with his reflective, non judgemental act of trying to understand their "beliefs." Ann described how she went to "stand against" racist white skinheads in London's East End. Her action - standing - is not one of violence but of quiet, dignified protest. Rae describes an encounter where she resisted the provocation to argue about an aspect of Maori culture. The effect of all three examples is the same; the irrational stance of others in relation to racism accentuates the speakers own contrasting attitudes and behaviours. Positioning another's attitudes as unreasonable served to increase the persuasiveness of the argument that the speaker's own views are reasonable and by inference, more appropriate.

What is significant about the appearance of the prejudice problematic within the transcripts is that it is also demonstrated in Wetherell and Potter's (1992) work with members of the mainstream white majority whose attitudes concerning race appear to align less with those of the participants I interviewed and more alongside those of the white people they were distancing themselves from. In contrast to the majority of those participating in my own research, for example, many of the participants in Wetherell and Potter's (1992) study demonstrated a belief in biological determinism and an adherence to an anti-Maori discourse. Both groups however, used the *same* discursive strategy - dependent upon being able to group others on the basis of their perceived prejudice or tolerance - of locating prejudice in others. Yet as Wetherell and Potter asked (1992, p. 215) "when all of us become skilled at exploiting the prejudice problematic, who is to say just which of us are the tolerant sheep and which the prejudiced goats?"

The "tolerant sheep" in the data emerged as Pakeha and the identity itself became a convenient means of signalling this. Earlier in this chapter I observed that a range of positive characteristics were associated with being Pakeha. In addition to indicating a contemporary positioning, the identity was taken to suggest a certain degree of knowledge and moreover, the intellectual capacity to absorb such knowledge. Kurt gave the example of a colleague who identified as New Zealand European but whom he believed would eventually come to accept a Pakeha identity "if he thinks through these issues enough". The issues were defined as those relating to Maori and their culture. Elinor argued that the more she heard white people express opinions in relation to Maori that she felt were "unhelpful and wrong", the more she wished to be identified as Pakeha. Mike portrayed himself as "open minded" in comparison to the "reactive and ...particularly divisive" white people who do not want to be labelled as

Pakeha. The suggestion from all of these participants is that to be a Pakeha is a very good thing to be.

### **The Heterogeneity of Whiteness?**

In his work with white antiracists, Hughey (2009, 2010) argued that a narrative of separation can work against the conceptualisation of white people as a group thereby limiting interpretations of white privilege.

Conceptualising white identity as heterogeneous however is encouraged in a significant portion of the literature relevant to this thesis.

Frankenberg (1993) and O'Brien (2001, 2007) for example, categorised white people on the basis of their cognizance of race and racial attitudes. For Frankenberg (1993), race cognizant individuals were defined as being outside of the mainstream in terms of their political positioning and attitudes to social justice. Likewise O'Brien (2001, 2007) contrasted selective race cognizant individuals with those who demonstrate reflexive race cognizance, offering detailed examples of the types of activities and personal reflection that those belonging to both groups might engage in, and the ideologies they may subscribe to. While such literature in no way advocates the division of white people into good and bad - indeed O'Brien (2003) specifically rejected such a dichotomy - it can be argued that its focus on difference and categorisation can potentially encourage such separation.

A narrative of separation was also very apparent in the literature cited in Chapter Two surrounding the formation of a Pakeha identity. King (1991), for example, distinguished between those white New Zealanders whose identity is aligned with Europe and Pakeha who perceive themselves to be rooted in this country. Similarly, Spoonley (1995a, p. 54) suggested that a Pakeha identity presents the opportunity for "alternative conceptualisations of dominant group identity". More recently, a number

of Pakeha writers on the topic have unproblematically argued for the heterogeneity of white New Zealand identities, in order to reaffirm a Pakeha identity that is sympathetic to Maori concerns (Hepi, 2008; McCreanor, 2005; Mitcalfe, 2008). McCreanor (2005) has emphatically stated:

“I acknowledge my own position within the empowered group and follow early anti-racism workers in Aotearoa positioning myself as Pakeha to signal difference from other European settlers who ignore or deny the status of Maori as tangata whenua. My usage is intended to signal critique of the established power relations”. ( p. 53)

As Bell (1996, p. 146) has noted, choice of identity can be seen to represent not merely a personal preference but a “discursive struggle” to assert oneself politically in relation to other groups. Indeed, the main emphasis in McCreanor’s (2005) statement above, is his political opposition to other groups of white people in this country. Such a positioning however, while *signalling* critique, arguably does little to actually *challenge* the “power relations” referred to in this statement. Locating the site for change firmly within an individual through targeting his or her attitudes and beliefs, detaches racism from the structural inequalities that exist between white and non white, potentially overwhelming issues of power (M. Anderson, 2003).

Lawn (1994) was one of the first writers to identify the potential pitfalls of embracing a Pakeha identity without engaging with the existing structural inequities defining New Zealand society. An emphasis on a Pakeha identity, she argued, runs the risk of overwhelming the issue of racism by creating an illusion of Maori/Pakeha equality. Maintaining a sense of belonging to New Zealand and a willingness to acknowledge Maori

political interests, as those who advocated the adoption of a Pakeha identity had done, had not subjected them to the social inequity experienced by Maori as a group. Directly critiquing King (1991) she asserted that his goals for Pakeha are independent of Maori interests: Pakeha “centeredness” and “identity”, for example, may serve predominantly to protect the interests of the dominant white majority. In order to achieve the reality of the “equal dialogue” that King (1991) promoted, she proposed, Pakeha, as white New Zealanders, first need to appreciate “their economic and psychological investment in inequality” (Lawn, 1994, p. 303).

Throughout this research project, and in particular in Chapter Six, I have noted the difficulties that participants appeared to have in reconciling their affiliation with institutional and structural privilege. While there was an overwhelming acknowledgement during the interviews, of the existence of privilege and that indeed it must have shaped their lives in some way, many participants openly struggled to share specific examples of the privileges they received from New Zealand’s institutions.

One explanation for this, I propose, may be found in the notion of individualism long associated with Western culture, in which society is perceived to be made up of autonomous, self sufficient individuals (Laungani, 2007; Lipsitz, 1998). The concepts of independence, self-reliance, autonomy and responsibility for one’s actions are all intrinsic to this ideal. As self-autonomous individuals, we can draw sharp boundaries between others and ourselves within the context of racism, abstracting ourselves from situations where we might otherwise be implicated (Sampson, 2000). We alone bear the moral responsibility for our actions and subsequently we cannot be held accountable for the actions of others. Within the context of privilege however, believing ourselves to be autonomous can obscure the ways in which we may benefit – albeit unintentionally - from society’s institutions. A dependence on the

philosophy of individualism and an adherence to the notion of individual rights can prevent us from understanding the collective reality of our experiences.

### **Whiteness as Social Collectivism**

As discussed during in Chapter Two, a number of New Zealand writers have attempted to draw attention to the white majority as a social collective (Awatere, 1984; Colvin, 2009; Consedine & Consedine, 2005; Dyson, 1996; Lawn, 1994). Dyson (1996) focused on the origins of whiteness in New Zealand arguing that by the end of the nineteenth century the white majority, made up as it was by individuals from a range of different European nations, saw itself ultimately as one homogenous group. This homogeneity was officially endorsed, she argued, within the 1901 census when all white people were included in the category “population”. The population however, specifically excluded those “of the aboriginal native race, of mixed European and native blood and Chinese)” (as cited in: Dyson, 1996, p. 61). While colonisation in New Zealand, initially manifested itself in the attempted reproduction of a white British culture affording those who claimed British identity significant privileges, by the beginning of the twentieth century it seems, whiteness alone was enough to guarantee these privileges (Cohen, 1997).

Lawn (1994) similarly engaged with whiteness in a New Zealand context, arguing, in response to the growing popularity of a Pakeha identity, that identifying as Pakeha potentially provided a discursive means of sidestepping the negative connotations that had come to be associated with whiteness in Western society in the 1980s and 1990s. In contemporary New Zealand society, as at the beginning of the twentieth century, it is whiteness that provides the assurance of privilege. It is the linking of whiteness with privilege therefore that provides a justification

for analysis of whiteness as social collectivism, a collectivism I propose that is potentially overwhelmed by the separation inherent in a Pakeha identity. As Lewis (2004, p. 624) has argued “[w]hether all whites have self-conscious racial identities may or may not matter as much for their life chances as external readings of them as white”.

In shifting focus and assessing white people as a group, the problem arises as to how to avoid essentialising whiteness and suggesting that white people experience it in identical ways. Notions of essentialism which have dominated many discussions of race, gender and culture in the past have been challenged for their assumption of shared fundamental group characteristics (Ashcroft 2007). The concept has also been defended for its value as a tool of resistance for many minority groups. In response to this debate, Spivak (as cited in Ashcroft, et al., 2007, p. 74) introduced the notion of “strategic essentialism”, noting not only the value of essentialism but also its political inevitability, arguing that while it may be preferable to avoid “discourses of essentialism...*strategically* we cannot”.

While, Spivak’s argument was directed towards colonised people and the means by which they may celebrate their traditional cultures, in discussions of racism and privilege, the concept of “strategic essentialism” appears valuable in redirecting discussions of whiteness away from the notion of heterogeneous white identities and towards white hegemony. Ironically appropriating Spivak’s argument on behalf of the dominant majority allows us to consider whiteness strategically within this context, and study what is shared by white people without implying that their experiences of whiteness are inevitably replicated.

A number of international writers have developed this notion of collectivism to demonstrate how white identities are both created by, and contribute to, social dominance. Hughey (2009, 2010), for example, compared two politically opposed organisations - white nationalists and

white antiracists - in order to challenge the assumed division between these two groups in relation to racial identity. By analysing their similarities and differences, he demonstrates the shared means by which white people may make sense of their whiteness through identifying the replication of notions of white supremacy within these two seemingly antithetical organisations.

Within an Australian context, Hage (1998) suggested that white racists and white multiculturalists also may share more assumptions than either group suspected. He maintained that white Australians are preoccupied with the fantasy of a “[w]hite nation” locating them at the nation’s centre, while positioning aborigines and non whites as objects on the periphery, but within a white “sphere of influence” (Hage, 1998, p. 89). Through linking the concepts of tolerance and power within the context of white Australian culture, he argued that the call for tolerance by multiculturalists merely hides and reinscribes the power to tolerate. It is only white Australians - racist or multiculturalist - who are able to proclaim tolerance of non white others: that aborigines or immigrants should ever announce that they are tolerant of white Australians is “clearly ridiculous” (Hage, 1998, p. 88). For both Hughey (2009, 2010) and Hage (1998), a willingness to embrace inclusiveness not only does not move whiteness from the centre, but can obscure the power inherent in the occupation of a cultural space defined as normal.

**White Culture and Power.** Indeed for both of these authors it is this concept of cultural space that links seemingly politically disparate groups of white people and allows whiteness and white people to be conceived of collectively. The notion of culture was previously examined in Chapter Five. In that chapter, I proposed that whiteness provided a form of cultural capital and argued that, to varying degrees, all white people in



New Zealand were able to access this capital and consequently resources, power and privilege. The chapter concluded however, that because many of the participants I interviewed had reified whiteness to the extent that it had little meaning for them personally, they were unable to recognise both their own whiteness and the extent to which they benefited from it.

An emphasis on white culture in this thesis is intended to highlight the impossibility of separating whiteness from white people. An attempt to do just that however was implicit throughout the interview data. When I asked Suze if she ever used the word white to describe herself she replied:

Suze            I might talk about white privilege ...yeah definitely white privilege or white supremacy ...not in terms of MYSELF not white supremacist. I mean I talk about it in relation to GROUPS to ... show how I feel about them. ... In terms of ... the Government is a white supremacist government.

Suze's obvious discomfort in associating herself with whiteness was replicated throughout the data. Marcie argued that the word sounded "discriminatory" and Elinor stated that white "doesn't mean anything in terms of what I'm trying to say about myself". Neil on the other hand proposed that despite the negative associations that accrued to the word he did not "want to let go of it". Similarly Mike suggested that while happy with both labels - Pakeha and white - he could "take them on take them off" if they were used by others in derogatory ways. Notwithstanding the opposing stances expressed by these participants in terms of their proclaimed willingness to identify with whiteness, implicit in the language of all of these examples is the notion that one can choose to either reject or accept whiteness.

That a white identity is seen as just one of several alternatives suggests that whiteness is perceived as a matter of individual choice. The idea that white people can somehow separate themselves from whiteness seems

unsustainable in light of the evidence presented within this thesis which demonstrates the tangible benefits associated with being white in New Zealand. Such an attitude ignores the relationship between white culture and power reinforcing the untenable position that white people can just decide not to be white and the material advantages associated with whiteness may somehow disappear.

### **Conclusion**

Within this chapter I looked at the most dominant theme to emerge from the data – that of separation. Analysis demonstrated how discourse was used by participants to effect a separation from other groups of white New Zealanders, both personally and politically. I identified a number of rhetorical devices, repeated throughout the data, which served to emphasise the heterogeneity of whiteness and white identity in New Zealand. In the second part of the chapter however, I argue that the link between whiteness, power and privilege necessitates a consideration of whiteness as a form of social collectivism. This chapter reemphasises this connection and the need to acknowledge the dominance of white culture in contemporary New Zealand society.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion and Implications

#### Thesis Overview

The preoccupation of this project was to explore the suggestion that a Pakeha identity precludes an engagement with whiteness and subsequently obscures an appreciation of the way white privilege operates within and shapes a person's life. Adoption of the term Pakeha, by many white New Zealanders, gained momentum in New Zealand in support of the anticolonial sentiment voiced by a number of Maori during the 1970s and 1980s. As demands for state recognition of the Treaty of Waitangi and redressing of historical wrongs grew white New Zealanders, sympathetic to such matters, sought to align themselves with Maori (King, 1991; Lawn, 1994; Spoonley, 1995a, 1995b). In claiming a Pakeha identity, it became possible to express concern through separating oneself from those in the white majority who were unsupportive of Maori interests.

In Chapter Two I presented a review of the literature. I identified the themes of white privilege and the invisibility of whiteness which provided the framework within which to answer the research question. Whiteness has been described as an unseen asset which provides social and economic advantages to white people and determines the experiences of both Maori and non Maori in New Zealand (Awatere, 1984; Colvin, 2009; Dyson, 1996; Gibson, 2006; Lawn, 1994). Literature pertaining to an analysis of a

Pakeha identity and whiteness as both invisible and as a form of privilege was therefore particularly relevant in contextualising an analysis of the significance of whiteness to those New Zealanders who choose to identify as Pakeha.

My study was shaped by several theoretical perspectives as outlined in Chapter Three. The influence of critical whiteness theory is apparent throughout as I locate my own research alongside that of writers on whiteness and privilege. My analysis drew upon thematic analysis in order to identify the four themes which made up chapters four to seven of the thesis: a relationship with Maori, reification of whiteness, disengagement from privilege and separation from other white people. The study was also strongly influenced by discourse theory as I concerned myself with the ways in which language was used by the participants in this study to construct their explanation of identity, whiteness and privilege. Understanding the meaning behind the language of the participants and the social action of this language was a concern of mine throughout the analysis.

In Chapter Four, I explored the discourse surrounding a Pakeha identity. The analysis revealed a dependence upon several common ideologies; the rejection of a connection to Europe and subsequent construction of a Pakeha identity as representative of a relationship with both the land originally occupied by Maori and with Maori as a people. The imagery of a relationship with Maori emerged as a defining aspect of a Pakeha identity for the participants. I contend however, that this relationship does not exist in any tangible sense and is potentially problematic within the context of whiteness literature maintaining that members of dominant white majorities often rely upon the identities of non white in order to define their own. My intention is not to discredit the meaning that participants gave to their Pakeha identity but to encourage a critical examination of the label in order to ascertain its effectiveness in

representing a relationship with Maori. There are significant implications for its continued use if, as this thesis suggests, that use may serve to perpetuate white hegemony by ignoring the power differential that exists between Maori and Pakeha in New Zealand society.

Having touched upon whiteness and the participants' disengagement with this aspect of a Pakeha identity in Chapter Four, the following chapter further expanded upon this theme. In Chapter Five, I considered the interpretation of whiteness by the research participants. The reification of whiteness theme was developed as I looked at the discomfort which emerged during the interviews as we discussed what being white meant to the participants. Words such as "skin head", "oppressor", "supremacy" and "domination" were used and it became clear that many of the participants had reified whiteness to such an extent that it had no place in their own formation of identity.

I argue that this is problematic for two reasons. Skin colour is a fundamental way that people gain a sense of themselves and of others. Not only do we differentiate people on the basis of skin colour, but in Western societies there is an inherent value attached to this differentiation. Whiteness is transformed into a form of cultural capital which reinforces the centrality of a white subject position and rewards white cultural knowledge. Such capital, however, frequently remains unseen by members of the dominant white majority, serving to further strengthen its power. I propose that a relationship exists between the invisibility of whiteness and white cultural capital and argue that many of the participants had become so accustomed to disassociating from whiteness that they were unable to see how they benefited from a proficiency in white culture. In the final section of Chapter Five, I argue that because of the ambiguity of the term in relation to race, a Pakeha identity potentially offers a means by which participants can separate

themselves from both whiteness and New Zealand's white majority culture.

Chapters Five and Six together answer an important part of the research question. These chapters illustrate that many of the participants did indeed struggle to appreciate their own whiteness and the privileges that accrue on account of it. The degree to which participants were constrained by their understanding of whiteness, was illustrated in Chapter Six where, despite acknowledging the social statistics demonstrating privilege, few demonstrated an understanding of the extent to which they personally enjoyed the benefits associated with whiteness in New Zealand.

In that chapter, I highlighted three strategies utilised by participants in order to create a perception of distance between themselves and privilege; a discourse of racism, a disinclination for talk about personal privilege and the rhetorical separation of self from other white people. These discursive approaches ultimately worked to emphasise the privileged positions occupied by other white people - positions seemingly unavailable to the participants. Privilege was identified by a number of the women participants as something enjoyed by men. Similarly, some of those with working class roots, emphasised the relationship between socioeconomic status and advantage. The ultimate effect of this was to reinforce a separation from whiteness that made it difficult to engage with the privileges that it can confer. In the final part of Chapter Six I explored the intersection between personal and structural privilege, outlining the privileges made available to white New Zealanders solely on account of their whiteness.

The theme of separation, highlighted throughout my analysis, was key to this thesis. Within Chapter Four, the notion of a Pakeha identity as representative of a relationship with the land as originally occupied by

Maori and with Maori as a people emerged. I argue that emphasising this relationship offers a discursive means by which Pakeha may separate themselves from other white people who may not identify in this way. The theme was also discussed in Chapter Six where I argued that a separation of self from other white people was a device enabling participants to disengage from personal privilege.

In the first part of Chapter Seven I extended on this theme, identifying a number of rhetorical devices utilised in order to create a sense of separation from other white people. The adoption of a Pakeha identity and subsequent rejection of other ethnic identifiers, I proposed, helped create a sense of detachment from other white New Zealanders. The utilisation of the “prejudice problematic” further served to emphasise this distance. Separating oneself from other white people by calling attention to their failings may facilitate the construction of a non racist identity. Positioning others as prejudiced can, by contrast, highlight one’s own non racist attitude. The utilisation of this device, I argued, was particularly significant in that it has been demonstrably used by white people across the spectrum of racism. This suggests that in creating a sense of separation, participants may have been drawing upon a standard discourse shared by members of the dominant white majority in discussions of racism.

In the second part of the chapter, I argued that the concept of separation depends upon the notion of individualism. Societies in Western culture are often perceived to be made up of autonomous self-sufficient individuals; however, such a notion is constraining in relation to discussions of privilege for what Lipsitz (1998, p. 20) has described as its “inability to describe adequately the collective dimensions of our experience”. A focus on individualism may instead divert attention away from the ways in which white people across the political spectrum are connected through shared culture and access to material resources.

In creating a sense of separation from other white people, I propose that Pakeha risk diverting attention from the relationship that exists between all white people in this country. Whiteness, I have argued, provides a form of symbolic capital putting a range of inevitable privileges within the reach of white people. A failure to acknowledge this potentially obscures the relationship between whiteness, culture and power, and risks redefining privilege as individual status rather than the structural inequities that are embedded within the institutions of this country. Pakeha may be able to recognise the consequences of colonisation for Maori, but an emphasis on separation may preclude an engagement with how the legacy of colonisation - contemporary structural inequality - serves to favour all white New Zealanders.

### **My own Pakeha Identity**

At the beginning of this thesis, I presented an account of the origin of my interest in white privilege and decision to incorporate an analysis of the Pakeha identity into the research question. My decision to explore a Pakeha identity came from a personal investment in this topic. During the course of my undergraduate degree I began identifying as Pakeha overriding my earlier preference for New Zealand European. The change came about as I encountered material surrounding the colonisation of New Zealand and began to understand the extent of its effect on Maori. Elinor, one of the participants in this study, told me “I would like to think that people hear that I define myself as Pakeha and immediately know some stuff about me”. Like her, I felt that the act of self identifying as Pakeha, signalling as it does a readiness to engage with the Maori language, presented a statement about me and my inclination to support Maori.

In Chapter Three, I identified my willingness to engage with the data in order to recognise how my values and beliefs shaped the project. I wrote



in that chapter about my use of reflexivity to critique my research practices and to engage with my reactions to the research process. Having reached the end of that process an explanation of these reactions is warranted. Giddens (1991) described reflexivity as a practice by which people make change within their lives drawing on knowledge gained through interaction with their environment. During my undergraduate degree I felt the need to reconcile my identity as a non Maori New Zealander with the new knowledge I had gained – knowledge about institutional racism, colonisation, biculturalism and the Treaty of Waitangi. Through drawing upon available narratives, in particular that of being “not European”, and revising my “biographical narrative” (Giddens, 1991, p. 5), I managed this process of reconciliation declaring that I was now “Pakeha”.

This process was undeniably an intellectual one as I attempted to understand myself within the context of my social environment (Archer as cited in Burkitt, 2012). Having assessed the historical evidence surrounding colonisation and the implications of this for contemporary Maori, I wanted to make a statement of support for Maori; being Pakeha allowed me to do that. Yet it was not only a result of an intellectual engagement with the material I was studying that pre-empted my adoption of a Pakeha identity. I was also reassured by the feeling that to identify as Pakeha was to make a positive statement. My emotional response supports Burkitt’s (2012) assertion that the way we feel about our relationship with the world and the people in it, is critical to reflexive thought.

Emotional responses were critical drivers throughout the research process. It came as a shock when I began to search for literature on white privilege – my chosen thesis topic – to encounter Lawn’s (1994) critique of the Pakeha identity. My emotional engagement with this criticism ultimately led me to question the adequacy of the biographical narrative I had created and to the research question which formed the basis of this

thesis. Lawn's (1994) article was not supported with New Zealand based research, nor was any forthcoming in the years following the publication of her article. I was motivated therefore to explore her proposition that a Pakeha identity may allow white New Zealanders to avoid engaging with issues of structural racism and reconcile this with my own Pakeha identity.

In Chapter Three I outlined the feeling of being overwhelmed by my position as an insider researcher. This feeling re-emerged at several points in the research process. I wrote in Chapter Seven of the realisation that I had actively used a discourse of separation during the interviews. This realisation led me to question the effect this had on the quality of the data. An assimilation of participants' dominant discourses can lead to collusion or at least leave the researcher open to accusations of such (van Heugten, 2004). Again, as outlined in Chapter Three, I needed to reposition myself in relation to the data in order to understand the implications of this. This allowed me to realise that as a member of the researched group, I will utilise the discourses of this group, and indeed it would be remarkable if I did not. What was crucial was to relocate myself as researcher in order to recognise the significance of these discourses for the research project.

Engaging reflexively with the material in this way inevitably had a bearing on my Pakeha identity. Analysis of the data allowed me to see how my Pakeha identity influenced my use of discourse yet at the same time I was critiquing this discourse throughout my writing. My use of reflexivity involved rationalisation and a certain degree of "self-feeling" as I assessed myself in relation to my environment and ultimately re-evaluated the environment itself (Burkitt, 2012, p. 471). In other words my critique of the social context within which a Pakeha identity is created caused me to reassess its relevance for me personally.

I have reached the conclusion of this project still identifying as a Pakeha New Zealander but acknowledging now that I am first and foremost a New Zealand European. Utilising a word from the Maori language still seems an appropriate way of conveying support for Maori. It is the European identity however that affirms for me my ancestry and the role this has played in assuring access to an array of institutional privileges. I am in no way promoting this as the only conclusion that can be drawn from the research. It is the result of my own personal engagement with the data and subsequent decision concerning my representation of self.

### **Research Limitations**

All research that focuses attention on the dominant white majority runs the risk of diverting attention from the issues of racism and leaving white hegemony unchallenged (Consedine & Consedine, 2005). By contextualising my research within a discussion of white privilege, I hope to have minimised this potential problem. Future research in this area could further diminish the risk by directly incorporating the voices of Maori people. I have cited the opinions of a number of Maori writers throughout my writing, but the data collection did not include any direct interviews with Maori. While aware of this limitation, constraints naturally dictated by the scope and length of a Master's thesis meant it was not practical to do this.

A further limitation is apparent in my focus on the term Pakeha. In recent years the term Tangata Tiriti – People of the Treaty - has emerged as an alternative identity for white New Zealanders. Its adoption does not appear to be widespread and only two of the participants in this study advised that they regularly used the term to describe themselves. Analysis of their comments did however, indicate the recurrence of several discourses shared with a Pakeha identity; the belief that it represents a

political statement and an indication of support for Maori. More research is indicated in this area in order to explore the implications of the adoption of this identity, in particular in relation to whiteness and hegemony.

There were also limitations presented by the location of the research project. Due to time and financial constraints the research was carried out in Christchurch. The New Zealand European population of the Canterbury region is 77.4% compared with 56.5% in the Auckland region, 69.8% in Wellington and 67.6% nationally (Statistics New Zealand, 2006). The lack of visible cultural diversity in Christchurch may have meant that participants in the study were less aware of their whiteness than people who live in other areas of New Zealand.

### **Implications**

There are a number of implications arising from this thesis. Most obviously, as white people, we need to consider the consequences of uncritically proclaiming a Pakeha identity. If, as this thesis suggests, a Pakeha identity is used to convey a relationship with Maori then the inequity in this relationship needs also to be acknowledged. Not doing so risks maintaining white privilege by ignoring the differential in power that exists between Maori and non Maori in this country. Furthermore, if this relationship is used to create a sense of separation from other white people in New Zealand, then this risks obscuring and subsequently strengthening the privilege which I argue is shared, albeit to different degrees, by all white New Zealanders.

While analysis has focused on the participants as individuals, it is not my intention to consign the responsibility for change solely at an individual level. Although as individuals we each bear responsibility for understanding whiteness and privilege, patterns of privilege are maintained at a much deeper level, within the institutions through which

this country distributes resources and wealth. As cited earlier in this thesis, the report *Puao te Ata tu* maintained that these institutions “do not serve Maori people but they do clearly serve the great bulk of Pakeha people” (Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Maori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare, 1986, p. 78). As the evidence highlighted in Chapter Six suggests, little appears to have changed in the decades since this report was published.

Considering my own reflexive process draws attention to a further implication of this research; that educational programmes teaching about the colonisation of this country need also to emphasise its consequences for white people. My decision to identify as Pakeha was an outcome of encountering material concerning the European settlement of New Zealand. While engaging intellectually with this material helped me begin to understand its detrimental impact on Maori, my studies did not require me to consider the corollary to this – that as a white person, the legacy of colonisation has offered me both supremacy and institutional privilege.

Stuart Hall (1993, p. 136) wrote of going through “the long, important, political education of discovering that I am ‘black’”. This research suggests that for white people the politics of whiteness also needs to be a focus of bicultural education in New Zealand. Without understanding the role of whiteness in our lives we may struggle to understand the privileges we can access simply through being white. These privileges are not options we can choose to take or leave. We have been granted them on the basis that we belong to the dominant white majority and are practitioners of dominant white culture. The challenge then for Pakeha is to find an expression of support for Maori that does not risk obfuscating the material reality of white privilege in New Zealand.

## **Appendices**

Appendix A:	Consent Form for Participants
Appendix B:	Information Sheet for Participants
Appendix C:	Interview Question Guide
Appendix D:	Transcription Code and Writing Conventions
Appendix E:	Ethics Approval Letter

## Appendix A: Consent Form for Participants

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### Consent Form

Project title: Exploring the (in)visibility of Pakeha whiteness

I have read and understood the information sheet concerning the above-mentioned project. I agree to participate as a subject in the project, and I consent to publication of the results with the understanding that my anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may withdraw myself and my information from the project at any time prior to analysis of the data.

Name:

Signature:

<p><b>This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury HEC low risk process</b></p>
--

## Appendix B: Information Sheet for Participants

Claire Gray  
Masters Student  
Human Services Programme  
School of Social and Political Sciences  
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### Information Sheet

My name is Claire Gray and I am a Masters student in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Canterbury. As part of my thesis, I am conducting research with white New Zealanders who choose to identify as Pakeha. There are a number of identifiers available to us as white New Zealanders (for example; Pakeha, European, Caucasian, Kiwi, New Zealander) and I am interested in exploring the meaning behind the choice of the word Pakeha. Alongside this, I am also interested in gaining an understanding of how whiteness and privilege operate in New Zealand society.

Your involvement in this project will consist of a discussion with me that will take approximately one hour. If you are willing, I may also contact you again in the future for a follow up discussion. I will record our conversations and take some notes. I will also be responsible for transcribing the data and you will have the opportunity to review the transcript. To ensure your anonymity, pseudonyms will be used when the data is transcribed and any information that could be used to identify you will be removed from the transcripts. The written transcripts and interview files will be stored electronically and password protected. Your name and contact details will be stored separately from the research data in a password protected electronic file. Research records will be stored for the required five years and then destroyed. Completed theses are made available in the University of Canterbury library and can be accessed electronically via the University of Canterbury Library website.

Thank you for agreeing to participate. I am really excited to be conducting this research and hope that you will enjoy being part of the research process.

<p><b>This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury HEC low risk process</b></p>
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## **Appendix C: Interview Question Guide**

### **Topic A: Identifying as Pakeha**

Can you talk me through why you have chosen to identify as Pakeha?

Is it meaningful for you to identify as such or is it just a label to put on, for example, a census form?

What do the labels white, Pakeha, European, Caucasian, New Zealander, kiwi mean to you?

Are there any other labels that you use to identify yourself in ethnic terms? Are these labels more appropriate to some situations than others?

Are there any that you would not feel comfortable using?

How do your friends and family identify?

Is there something different about your experiences compared to theirs that has led you to make the decision to call yourself a Pakeha?

How you think that those that don't identify as Pakeha would respond to hearing you identify yourself as Pakeha?

What do you think you have in common with people who identify as European in terms of values and beliefs?

How have your views about what it means to be Pakeha changed over time?

### **Topic B: Whiteness**

How does the label Pakeha compare with the label 'white'?

Do you think that being 'white' means only the colour of your skin? Why or why not? In comparison then do you think that Pakeha means only the colour of your skin? Why or why not?

Would you rather be referred to as a "white woman/man" or a "Pakeha woman/man"? Can you tell me more about this preference? Would your preference change depending on who was doing the calling? E.g. a Maori person vs. a Pakeha? Someone who wasn't a New Zealander?

If we were to think about whiteness in an international context – do you think what white New Zealanders share any commonalities with white people from other countries for example Australia, United States or Britain?

Do you think therefore that there might be a white culture? What might it be made up of? Do you associate with that? Is this your culture?

Michael King, the New Zealand historian, wrote that the terms black and white are irrelevant to New Zealand and New Zealanders. Do you agree with him? Can you say some more about that?

### **Topic C:                      White Privilege**

Do you think that white privilege exists in New Zealand? Can you think of any examples of the way it operates?

What do you think is the effect of this?

To what degree do you think that Pakeha New Zealanders feel they have privilege in New Zealand? Is that the way that you feel too?

Do you feel that your life has been made easier because you are Pakeha? In what ways?

Do you feel privileged? In what ways?

What would your life be like if did not have privilege?

Is there anything further that you would like to add?

## **Appendix D: Transcription Code**

CAPITALISATION	Indicates words emphasised by participants
...	Indicates omitted words
[ ]	Indicates alterations made in order to increase clarity and grammatical flow
((Laughter))	Indicates demonstrative expressions

## **Appendix E: Ethics Approval Letter**

Ref: HEC 2010/84/LR

10 November 2010

Claire Gray

School of Social Work & Human Services

UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Claire

Thank you for forwarding to the Human Ethics Committee a copy of the low risk application you have recently made for your research proposal "White privilege: exploring the (in)visibility of Pakeha whiteness".

I am pleased to advise that this application has been reviewed and I confirm support of the Department's approval for this project.

This approval is subject to the following:

- Please add the supervisor's name and details to both forms.
- Please add the statement regarding the thesis availability and access from the consent form to the information sheet.
- Please add directed space for participants to write and sign their name on the consent form.

- Please add to both forms that the project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury HEC low risk process.

With best wishes for your project.

Yours sincerely

Dr Michael Grimshaw

***Chair, Human Ethics Committee***

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