

# White turnips and mythical Moriori: combatting folk-linguistic and folk-anthropological myths in the popular press<sup>1</sup>

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This paper is a personal account of my experiences over a quarter-century of written attempts to debunk prevalent folk-linguistic and folk-anthropological myths which I believe to be socially harmful. My main vehicles are the Letters to the Editors columns of the *Otago Daily Times* (ODT), and less frequently the *New Zealand Listener*. I do this out of both professional and personal motivation. As a professional anthropologist, I find racism abhorrent, and know from both professional training and lengthy field experience living and working in northeast Thailand how insupportable racist arguments are. In addition, as I am married to a Chinese-Hawaiian I cannot help but be offended by racist arguments, either as letters to the editor or in newspaper editorials themselves (Bayard 1995:13-17). I will discuss and illustrate the myths I have most frequently encountered over the past quarter-century, my own biases and approaches to combatting them, and some of the successes and failures I have met with in this rather quixotic pastime. My examples are drawn from a database of over 200 letters and other items.

I work in an anthropology department, and my research and teaching are devoted to linguistic anthropology. Part of this teaching concentrates on disproving common myths surrounding language, culture, and 'race' in New Zealand, myths which are to my mind socially damaging. Hence this paper is not limited strictly to language, but also looks at popular Pākehā myths like 'who is a Māori?' and 'weren't the Moriori here first?' along with the 'Stone Age' language myth and the pejorative meanings of 'Pākehā'. It also offers some insight into devices used in NZE for 'othering' the Māori and other minority groups, and gives examples of NZE rhetoric used to protest against bi- and multiculturalism in favour of 'One [Pākehā] New Zealand'. Finally, it sheds a bit of light on some of the darker sides of the Kiwi psyche. Quotes in italics are taken from the Letters to the Editor column of the *Otago Daily Times* unless otherwise indicated. Bold emphasis is added by me in all cases.

I believe time spent in combatting such myths is worthwhile, and hope that this brief account will prove helpful to social studies and language teachers — as well as students — in their encounters with prejudice and ethnocentrism.

## Rationale

There is more than ample professional justification for carrying out such an exercise. Ethical statements like the following have been adopted by most professional associations in the relevant disciplines:

2.d. As people who devote their professional lives to understanding humanity, anthropologists bear a positive responsibility to speak out publicly, both individually and collectively, on what they know and what they believe as a result of their professional expertise gained in the study of human beings. That is, they bear a professional responsibility to contribute to an 'adequate definition of reality' upon which public opinion and public policy may be based.

(Code of Ethics, Association of Social Anthropologists of Aotearoa/New Zealand; 1992 revision)

*With the vast expansion of scientific knowledge in this century, however, it has become clear that human populations are not unambiguous, clearly demarcated, biologically distinct groups. ... Racial beliefs constitute myths about the diversity in the human species and about the abilities and behavior of people homogenized into 'racial' categories. ... Racial myths bear no relationship to the reality of human capabilities or behavior.*

(from American Anthropological Association Official Statement on 'Race', 1998; source [www.ameranthassn.org/racepp.htm](http://www.ameranthassn.org/racepp.htm))

As the renowned sociolinguist William Labov commented in an article on objectivity and commitment in linguistic science:

*A scientist who becomes aware of a widespread idea or social practice with important consequences that is invalidated by his own data is obligated to bring this error to the attention of the widest possible audience. (Labov 1982: 172).*

Personally, I am understandably upset to read assertions that my wife and son, along with other Polynesians and 'mixed race' people, are somehow more prone to mental illness, crime, and underachievement than the population in general. Coupled with this theme is the idea that 'mixed race' people are not real Māori; hence there is no need for Waitangi claims. As my letter of protest indicates, I found the following editorial particularly offensive.

ODT editor: ... *There may be fewer than 5 percent of Maori race in our gaols. The other 44 percent are mixed race — not simply Maori mixed race, but European mixed race. And most of them are in prison not because they are either Maori or European, but essentially because of their mixture. Mixed race people universally have some of the highest levels of emotional, social and criminal problems throughout the world.*

(Editorial 'Malignant cells', Otago Daily Times, 17 September 1988)

DB: Sir,—May I ask for the authority backing your amazing statement that 'Mixed-race people universally have some of the highest levels of emotional, social and criminal problems throughout the world'? This worries me, as my wife [and son are genetic mixtures of Chinese, Hawaiian, Japanese, and European ancestry]. Are they destined for gaol or a mental hospital? Am I also doomed because of Scots-Irish 'blood' tainted with English and German? Or perhaps mixed 'white' races do not count!

(letter to Otago Daily Times, 21 September 1988. To their credit, the editors acknowledged that '*race and ethnicity do tend to become confused in everyday use, and we could have phrased it better*').)

### The main myths encountered (in order of frequency)

#### Number of items collected by topic, 1974-1998

Topic	number	percent
logical Latin	7	3
decaying NZE	9	4
Moriori myth	11	5
'othering'	28	13
Stone Age language	31	14
'Pākehā = white maggot' <sup>2</sup>	64	29
'race' and 'blood'	70	32
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>220</u>	<u>100%</u>

- **MYTH 1** 'We need languages like Latin, etc., to help our pupils think'; in other words, some languages are more 'logical' than others. Since the time of Franz Boas and Edward Sapir it has been accepted that all languages are equally effective vehicles of communication for their speakers (Bayard 1995: 132). In this example, note the confusion between communicative fluency and the social standing of a speech variety.

*Prof Donn Bayard (15.2.96) claims that 'all languages are equally efficient as vehicles of communication for their speakers' .... 1. When I was a teacher in Jamaica, speakers of the local dialect could indeed communicate vigorously and effectively in a Kingston slum, but if they wanted any worthwhile job, the first essential was for them to learn standard English. 2. Several years ago, school authorities in several major US cities introduced programmes to teach Latin in inner-city schools. ... [by an Otago Senior Lecturer in Classics, 1996; this view was defused by the simple expedient of supplying him with a copy of Labov's 'Logic of nonstandard English' (Labov 1972).]*

- **MYTH 2** New Zealand English is decaying; the prescriptivists' myth. This myth is of course universal; older speakers of a language almost always believe that the younger generation is 'mangling' their tongue (Bayard 1995: 94). I save only a minority of such letters, since others in the field keep complete files. The number of those who refuse to accept that language change is inevitable is of course legion. A classic case is provided by the widely circulated diatribe of retired Professor Gunn, an expert in earth and computer sciences but clearly not in linguistics:

*Newzild is now no closer to English than is German. If a German says, 'Blut ist dicker als wasser,' it is at least as close as, 'Blood sickern war ain tit?' ... no longer could I enjoy such conversations in my native land. Our language has gone.*

*(article in Otago Daily Times, 26 April 1997)*

*Donn Bayard and others in our education system should be fighting for a return to the teaching of basics: grammar, pronunciation, spelling and reading and writing. ... Stop mutilating the English language, or future generations of this country will be speaking nothing but pidgin English; next step complete illiteracy. (1997)*

*The continual downgrading of the English, spoken, pronounced, peppered with Americanisms, pidgin English with slang and derogatory 'pakeha' references, should be of concern. ... People of European ancestry should stand up, be counted and take pride in their heritage and their language. (1997)*

• **MYTH 3** 'Do unto the Māori as they did unto the Moriori'. This is one of the more intriguing folk-anthropological myths, according to which 'New Zealand was originally settled by a non-Māori people called the Moriori; these peace-loving people were conquered by the later arrival of the warlike Māori in the Great Fleet'. So runs the myth; in fact the Moriori are real enough, but are the descendants of Māori who colonised the Chatham islands, probably during the 15th Century AD and probably from the South Island. The Moriori never lived on the mainland of New Zealand. The myth was disproved by the Otago anthropologist H.D. Skinner some 75 years ago, and the archaeological and linguistic evidence against the myth which has accumulated since then is huge (e.g., articles in Sutton 1994), but still the myth lingers on. It clearly serves a function in justifying the Pākehā takeover of New Zealand from the Māori.

*He said the Maoris gave the name 'pakeha' to the settlers, its meaning being 'he who takes all'. History tells us the Maoris themselves took New Zealand from its rightful owners after slaughtering and cannibalising them. Maybe if reminded of this fact they would realise they do not own this land, but they themselves stole it. At least the white settlers allowed the Maoris to live and to share in all the benefits they brought to this country — especially Christianity and civilisation.*

*'Not a Pakeha' (1995)*

*I would like to understand why the Maori tribes need compensation for land which they took by force from the Moriori in the first place. Perhaps I am wrong but I have been led to believe that the Moriori were a peace-loving nation and had no need of weapons of war. How can the true Maoris not see that if you take something that does not truly belong to you — then you set in motion the spiritual law of cause and effect, whereby we receive in like manner that which we give out. (1992)*

*At school, in the history class, we learned that New Zealand was first discovered and settled many centuries ago, by an invasion of people from the Pacific Islands*

*and they were called Morioris. About a couple of centuries later another group, known as Maoris, also from the Pacific Islands, arrived in New Zealand and proceeded to massacre the peace-loving Morioris, appropriating their land and possessions, and driving those few remaining to the Chatham Islands. When our Government is paying millions to the descendants of those Maoris for the land, of which they now claim ownership, is it not guilty of knowingly receiving stolen properties? (1995)*

- **MYTH 4 'Othering' in the press (Riggins 1997):** Pākehā as the only 'New Zealanders', and the subconscious exclusion of other ethnicities from national membership. First the ideal behind the belief, then examples of what 'New Zealander' really means. I provide a number of these, because many Pākehā emphatically deny that 'New Zealander' and 'Kiwi' are exclusive rather than inclusive (for additional quantitative evidence supporting this, see Bayard 1995: 144-55). Note the apparent reluctance to say 'Chinese/Sāmoan/Indian New Zealander'.

*Let us pay this wonderful country the tribute it deserves by melding ourselves together as one people 'New Zealanders'. What a valuable blueprint for other nations to emulate, and a helpful recipe to a more peaceful world. (1995)*

*'Maori are stretching the patience of New Zealanders to the limit'*

(Attorney General Paul East, *Otago Daily Times*, 9 February 1993)

*New Zealanders are strongly opposed to returning land or fishing rights to Maori tribes to make up for past injustices. ... Not surprisingly, however, Maori people disagree.*

(*Otago Daily Times*, 11 March 1991)

*Ms Sew Hoy, who is a fifth-generation Chinese [cf. 'fifth-generation New Zealander'] and great great granddaughter of Choi Sew Hoy ...*

(*Otago Daily Times*, 2 May 1998)

*You should ask to speak to Ted Foy, a New Zealand born Chinese, who is a goldmine of information on everything Gum Sam stocks.*

(*Food and Wine Lover's Guide to New Zealand*, 1990, p. 8)

*The fast food store is traditionally one of the places where Chinese and New Zealanders meet although the relationship is purely commercial. The problem for a second or third generation immigrant is that one ends up on both sides of the counter. ...*

(article in *Otago Daily Times*, 10 March 1998)

*It detailed the experience of an Indian man who had been born in New Zealand and spoke with a New Zealand accent.*

(*Otago Daily Times*, 11 March 1991)

*Greg Semu, a New Zealand born Samoan, lovingly presents aspects of the Samoan culture in Auckland ...*

*(Otago Daily Times, 14 December 1996)*

### And what do those 'othered' think?

*You see, when Pakeha say we are all one people, they seem to mean that you're brown and a unique feature of the indigenous scene. But they want you to act as a European provided you still retain the ability to poke out your tongue, gesticulate and do your Maori dances. ... I can't go along with this because I can't feel I can be a Pakeha. What's more, I don't want to be a Pakeha. There are a lot of things which I do not like, compared with the things I do like in the Maori world. But I'm being asked to become a Pakeha so that I can then be counted as a New Zealander. Cor blimey, I am a New Zealander, a Maori New Zealander.*

*(John Rangihau, 'Being Maori', p. 189, in Te Ao Hurihuri: Aspects of Maoritanga, Michael King, ed., pp. 183-90. Auckland: Reed, 1992.)*

*I don't think we can ever be equal as long as we're not recognised. We don't exist; this is a bicultural country. I don't exist as a person. I'm at the bottom of the list of ethnic categories. I'm the 'other', or the 'Indian: please specify'.*

*(Indian New Zealander Raj Razzak, 'Under the Carpet' documentary, TV3, 1 June 1994)*

• **MYTH 5** Te reo Māori is a 'worthless, Stone Age' language. This category includes those who apparently believe a sort of linguistic social Darwinism operates whereby Māori is less 'fit' than English for the modern world because of many lexical borrowings from English, lack of sufficient sounds, etc. (Bayard 1995: 129-32).

*The Maori has no authentic history. ... The Maori language is a phonetic one with no background, and may justifiably be regarded as pidgin English.*

*'Kiwi' (1986)*

*You can't expect the language of a simple forest-dwelling stone-working people to do the job of a language developed from Greek and Latin over 2000 years of civilisation.*

*(Frank Haden column, Sunday Dominion Times, 26 July 1992)*

*English is the language of the future and must borrow or steal or assimilate words to function but Maori is staggering along to join the many dead ones which largely exist in archives and are unlikely to reappear. Dead birds do not fly out of their nests. Propping up a stone age language with pidgin just increases the problem. (1996)*

• **MYTH 6** 'Pākehā' is a racist term meaning 'white maggot', etc. Given the neutral, innocuous nature of the term, this is one of the more puzzling and widespread of the folk-linguistic myths; it is strange how many people are

unwilling to abandon the myth that the term is itself an insult. Part of the resentment appears to stem from being classified as one of a number of ethnic groups rather than 'the real New Zealanders' (Bayard 1995: 152-60).

*The Bay of Islands MP, Mr John Carter, wants to ban the word 'pakeha' to stamp out its use as an insult. ... He said it could be interpreted to mean 'long white pig'.*

(News item, Otago Daily Times, 18 April 1990)

*Why submit to being labelled a 'pakeha'? I strongly object to the name. What is a pakeha? Because the Maori language is more emotive than precise, I believe 'pakeha' means a small white flea or white pig, with the added connotation of being foreign.*

'S.R.E.' (1995)

*Previous correspondence to your paper has indicated that the word 'pakeha' is a direct reference to skin colour, meanings roughly equating to 'white louse', 'white fairy' and others of a similar vein, being as close as the very imprecise Maori language of pre-European times could come to describing the novel phenomenon of white-skinned people. (1997)*

*I have to agree with 'White New Zealander' (1.3.97), I'm afraid, as regards the word 'pakeha', as this is a most offensive word. In the Maori dictionary, pakeha is defined as a white turnip, or a white pig. We would never dare to refer to a Maori as a brown turnip (or pig). Why does everything have to be so one-sided and why can we not complain as bitterly as they do?*

'Aries' (1997)

*I do not object to being called a pakeha because it is of Maori origin but because of the many different meanings such as 'white pig' and 'house flea'. Maybe 'Pakeha' does not feel insulted being called a white pig but I certainly do.*

'A White New Zealander' 1997)

To dispel any lingering doubts some readers may have, I append a list of actual translations of some of the presumed insults, and ask readers to find the morpheme *mā* ('white') in *Pākehā*:<sup>3</sup>

'long white pig' = 'he poaka roa, he mea mā'  
 'white maggot' = 'iroiro mā'  
 'white slug' = 'ngata mā'  
 'white thing under a rock' = 'mea mā i raro i te kōhatu'  
 'white flea' = 'puruhi mā'  
 'white louse' = 'kutu mā'  
 'white turnip' = 'tōnapī mā'  
 'Pākehā' = 'Pākehā'

• MYTH 7 'blood' = 'race' = ethnicity; hence there are no full-blooded Māori, and hence no 'real' Māori at all. The rationale for the persistence of

this myth in New Zealand is made very explicit in the third example. However, this folk-anthropological myth is probably the hardest one to combat, despite the fact that all recent scientific research on human DNA indicates strongly that discrete human 'races' simply don't exist; they are social fiction rather than biological reality (see Cavalli-Sforza et al. 1994, Cavalli-Sforza and Cavalli-Sforza 1995, chapter 8). Thus there is no 'Māori race' or 'European race'; Māori and Pākehā become such through their upbringing, not their inherited characteristics of 'blood'. Unfortunately the idea of race is so deeply ingrained in our minds that to argue that recent research denies its existence is to court scornful disbelief:

*... The idea that races are not the product of human genes may seem to contradict common sense. 'The average citizen reacts with frank disbelief when told there is no such thing as race,' said Loring Brace, an anthropologist at the University of Michigan. 'The sceptical layman will shake his head and regard this as further evidence of the innate silliness of those who call themselves intellectuals.'*

(from article on current scientific views of 'race', Otago Daily Times, 26 October 1996)

*A person can very well know what they think about any given matter, and can possibly trace the intellectual rationale of their opinions, but they cannot possibly know the extent to which one particular stream of their mixed racial heritage contributes to their consciousness and consequently to their world view and opinions. ... If it is insisted that a person with a predominantly non-Maori ancestry is nevertheless a Maori it must be explained how this miracle occurs. Despite the rhetoric of the Waitangi Tribunal, I suspect that most New Zealanders are aware of where the greater 'unconscionable fraud' lies. (1996)*

*... But, as we all know by now, Sir Tipene does not accept this — the predominant pakeha element of his lineage has evaporated without apparent trace, and he is a Maori full-stop. Biologically speaking, this is very unusual, as genes do not normally disappear in such a wholesale fashion — the more so since it is only 'pakeha' genes which vanish. Maori ones, it seems, not only persist but expand to fill the space available. ... Sir Tipene ... could make an even better case — using exactly the same logic — that they are in fact pakehas, nothing more, nothing less. But that, of course, would mean an end to the handouts. (1996)*

The motives behind the vigorous support of the 'race' concept are very clear-cut as far as some Pākehā are concerned:

*How audacious of Englishmen like Bishop Paul Reeves, Irishmen like Stephen O'Regan and Scotsmen like Winston Peters to refer to themselves as Maoris. If there were any Maoris left in New Zealand those coloured New Zealanders would not be accepted as Maoris any more than they are accepted as Europeans by European society. The treaty of Waitangi was between the Crown and Maoris. As there are no longer any Maoris, the Treaty is null and void. Therefore coloured Europeans cannot claim something for nothing from the State through a non-existing Treaty. (1997)*



In addition to these major themes, one can also encounter a few other fairly minor myths, like the occasional anti-Asian diatribes during the politicising of the issue by the New Zealand First Party and clones of the Hanson 'One nation' movement. It is encouraging to note the almost complete absence of gender/sexist myths, aside from occasional protests about overly PC items like wishing to replace 'manifold'; has consciousness-raising worked to at least this extent?

### Pitfalls in letter-writing, etc.

The main problem in replying is the length of letter permitted and the need to balance accuracy and intelligibility against clarity and compactness — 150 words is the suggested limit for the ODT, but the editor will sometimes tolerate up to twice that without abridgment. Even with this, it is difficult to provide adequate supporting references and documentation (both of a sort designed for the general, non-specialised lay reader). Here are some of the pitfalls I've encountered:

1. **Getting bogged down in secondary arguments** ('C' = correspondent, 'DB' = author's reply).

C1: *In the Maori dictionary, pakeha is defined as a white turnip, or a white pig. We would never dare to refer to a Maori as a brown turnip (or pig). (1997)*

DB: *I'm continually amazed at the persistence of the 'Pakeha = white pig, white louse', etc. myth, as expressed by several correspondents recently. ... Could 'Aries' supply us with the name of the Maori dictionary which told him that the term meant 'white pig' or 'white turnip'? (1997)*

C1: *In reply to Prof Bayard (14.3.97) I can supply the name of the dictionary - the Lilliput Dictionary, printed by A. H. and A. L. Reed in 1962. It lists 'pakeha - pa: - garden plot; keha: indigenous white turnip, plot where the turnip grows.' (1997)*

DB: *I thank 'Aries' (19.3.97) for the details on the Lilliput Dictionary. Unfortunately no Maori-English dictionary of this name is known to the University, Hocken, or Dunedin Public Libraries (1997)*

DB: *... thanks to information provided by kindly readers it's now clear that the book in question is not a Maori-English dictionary, but a miniaturised 'Lilliput' edition of A.W. Reed's A Dictionary of Maori Place Names (Reed, 1961). (1997)*

C1: *In reply to Donn Bayard (27.3.97), who says pakeha was very probably 'foreigner', I get the feeling he is uncertain as to the real meaning of the word and I doubt very much if the Maori had ever heard of foreigners. They themselves were 'foreigners' and I doubt if the Morioris referred to them as pakehas. (1997)*

....and so on to the Moriori myth!

2. **Arguing and taking abuse;** this can be quite disheartening on occasion. Insults, tension, and sometimes a general feeling of futility sometimes lead to over-reaction and intemperate responses on my part.

ODT Editors, 'Civis' column 19 October 1996: ... What is happening—and I'll say it again, whether or not Donn Bayard goes blue in the face—is the ever-strengthening emergence of the new mixed-race New Zealanders. ... the incorporation of mixed-race MPs into the very centre of mainstream politics has been none too soon.

DB: I see that the ODT's resident 'racial science' specialist is once more promoting his bizarre 'mixed race' theory (Civis, 19.10.96). Rather than turning blue or asking him yet again to produce evidence supporting the existence of such a group as any kind of a cultural entity, I instead request Civis to supply the names of the new 'mixed race' MPs so that we can check with them to see if they are in fact 'mixed race' rather than Maori or Pakeha. (1996; the names were of course never supplied.)

C: It would be nice if we in New Zealand could be similarly urbane, but unfortunately — thanks to the Treaty — we can not. 'Maoriness' confers advantages: preferential rights, scholarships, lands, forests, fisheries, television stations, and free underwear, to name but a few. Thus it is a matter of practical and material significance as to what, and who, is a Maori, and it is for this reason that Prof. Bayard's ideas of ethnicity must be rigorously challenged. New Zealand is becoming an international joke: a country where mixed-race people are entitled to invoke one lot of their ancestors to belabour another lot for alleged crimes committed generations ago. (1997)

DB: DW (20.3.97) and I have already had a full debate on the 'race' question in these columns in October-November 1996. This is a democracy, and Mr DW is free to believe that cigarette smoking prevents lung cancer or that the sun revolves around the earth if he so chooses. I can only once again refer him and other readers to the article published in this paper (26.10.96) which outlined the scientific consensus on the lack of biological evidence for any clearly defined 'races', be they 'Maori', 'European', or 'mixed'. (1997)

C: For the information of Donn Bayard (ODT, 27.3.97) I do not believe that cigarettes cure cancer or that the sun revolves around the Earth, but I do believe that Donn Bayard's theory of 'ethnicity' is a load of trendy nonsense and that his brand of anthropology is not science. In science things can be proven or disproven and accurate predictions made, but the most that can be said for the Bayard thesis is that it is politically-correct and infinitely elastic. (1997)

DB: [I know that DW hates the mention of Nazis in these debates (30.10.96), and I certainly do not want to accuse him of being a Nazi racist, although he clearly believes in biologically discrete races. But sadly ideas like this can very easily lead to immense social damage. I enclose copies of the 1935 Nuremberg laws which I also ask you to forward to him.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps he can then explain just how his 'European-mixed race-Maori' scheme (20.3.97) differs from the Nazi 'German-mixed race-Jew' classification which ended in the Holocaust. Your columnist 'Civis' may well want to comment on this too.] (1997; material cut by editor.)

### 3. Over-reacting; the obvious danger of angering rather than persuading the people you're arguing with

C1: *It was only in 1974, (significantly, about the time that PC was gaining momentum), that it was arbitrarily decreed by the Maori Affairs Amendment Act that any percentage of Maori blood, however small, qualified a person as a Maori. Such nonsense bears the same relation to truth as the rest of political correctness. It needs to be remembered that since the coming of colonisation and democracy, Maoris have had exactly the same rights as anyone else to everything this country has to offer.*

*... Wake up New Zealand! (1996)*

DB: *How on earth can a people deprived of their land, often referred to as 'savages' or 'niggers', and beaten for attempting to speak their own language in school 'have had exactly the same rights as anyone else'? It is interesting that, emphasising the tie between 'blood' and race and Nazism, CHR closes his letter with a local translation of the 'Deutschland erwache' rallying cry of Hitler's storm troopers. (1996)*

C2: *It seems that one is not allowed to disagree with Donn Bayard's odd views on race without incurring the insinuation of being a genocidal neo-Nazi. In letter after letter, Dr Bayard hauls Hitler into the discussion, the latest instance (23.10.96) being when CHR's innocent phrase, 'Wake up New Zealand', was repackaged in German to facilitate some tortuous association with Nazi storm-troopers. There is no reason for this nonsense ... (1996)*

### 4. Providing examples. Trying to keep these simple and clear is a problem, and they are often misinterpreted, deliberately or not

**Wrong way?** In this example I should have used 'claiming more than one ethnicity', as the census had it, rather than the correspondent's 'mixed-race', even in quotes:

DB: *While there are probably hundreds of thousands of Kiwis with some degree of both Polynesian and caucasoid genetic inheritance, all but a handful of these are in fact either Maori or Pakeha. In the 1991 census only 4.3% of New Zealanders said they were 'mixed race': hardly a significant group. Of course Ciovis could always issue his own South African-style pass books showing the MPs' status! (1996)*

C: *... Then Dr Bayard goes on to disclose that 4.3% of New Zealanders identified themselves as 'mixed-race' in the 1991 census. That works out at around 170,000 people, not bad for an extinct racial group. How, I wonder, do all these folk feel about being allowed to quietly expire? (1996)*

### Right way?

C: *Donn Bayard says there is no biological evidence for clearly defined human races. Consider, then, the African people known as pygmies, who are approximately half the height of another African people, the Masai. ... By the Bayard thesis, however, a pygmy baby in a Masai household would in due course become 'ethnically'*

*Masai. Maybe so, but I would suggest that genetically and racially he would remain a pygmy, and that this salient fact would be obvious to all. (1997)*

DB: *In reply to DW (1.4.97), of course a Pygmy raised by Masai would be a Masai, if a rather short one; with no knowledge of his/her biological parents' language or culture, s/he could hardly be a Pygmy, any more than Mr DW could be a Finn or Russian. Similarly, a Vietnamese orphan raised in America will be an American, a white child raised by Sioux became a Sioux, and a Rumanian or Russian child raised by New Zealanders will be a Kiwi. In the first two cases the child will be physically distinctive compared to the norm, in the latter two not. (1997)*

## 5. Successes

It is rewarding to see occasional agreement by correspondents and occasional positive shifts in editorial emphasis, at least in some editorials. Eventually some correspondents will get the point and begin agreeing with the evidence you have presented (first example). In addition, there is the rare but encouraging stroke of fortune, e.g., the 1997 shift of editors at the ODT. The present editor, who earlier made the very astute statement about not being 'any more racist or culturally biased than the norm' quoted below, has presented a much more balanced view of the issues discussed here;<sup>5</sup> columnists now cover the full spectrum in our society, from left to right, from Taha Māori to 'redneck'.

C: *We pakeha are a bit more reserved. We still have our half-baked myths, the full-blooded Maori myth, the Moriori myth and others. (1997)*

ODT Columnist [now ODT editor]: *We should do much better than that. To be blunt, the fact that we have a lower proportion of the recognised slower learning Maori and Polynesian students may be reflected in 'better' C grade passes than the average, but it should also allow us to stand out at the top end of the scale.*

(Otago Daily Times, 'Prester John' column, 9 May 1991; emphasis added)

DB: *Yesterday's Prester John column (9.5.91) stated that one factor responsible for 'better' C grade school certificate passes in our region is 'the fact that we have a lower proportion of the recognised slower learning Maori and Polynesian students'. Could I ask Mr Charteris to reconcile this belief with the results of the Christchurch Child Development Survey [Fergusson et al. 1991] reported in this week's Listener? Its director states that '... ethnicity is irrelevant in school achievement [except when] correlated with social class [defined in terms of parental education, occupation, and income]'. (1991; not published)*

ODT Columnist four days later: *Mea culpa. Several correspondents have strongly condemned my comment last week in connection with school certificate grades that Maoris and Polynesians are 'recognised slower learners'.... I did not mean to impute that learning capabilities could be judged from awareness of ethnicity; nor do I believe myself any more racist or culturally biased than the norm that operates in our multi-racial society today. What I meant, but failed to state correctly, was that Maori and Polynesian students are recognised as 'lower achievers' in New Zealand's educational system. That's been established, like it or*

*not. My initial choice of words was wrong, and I apologise to any who may have taken offence.*

As an example of shift in editorial policy, consider the following two extracts:

ODT Editorial, 10 November 1989: ... *[W]e should not simply allow anyone of mixed racial background to opt to vote as a Maori. A definition based on a physical, rather than a personal psychological yardstick should be laid down — what fraction of Maori blood still constitutes a Maori?*

contrasted with:

ODT Editorial, 19 August 1997: *Part of the problem certainly lies in the failure by most adult New Zealanders to make any serious effort to understand their own country's racial history, let alone the cultures and languages of minority groups, especially Maori. Ignorance is always a comfortable refuge for the racist, and racism is, if nothing else, ignorance. ... But attitudes towards race relations start being formed in the home, and that is where urgent efforts must be made by us all to learn tolerance and seek an understanding of others.*

## Conclusions

*Unfortunately, Donn Bayard like Don Quixote and the current race relations figurehead, keep charging windmills contrived in their own imagination.*

(Letter to editor, ODT, 25 July 1998)

This correspondent certainly has a point; as I said at the beginning, it is a rather quixotic pastime. However, I hope that the examples I have provided—plus the increasing economic and health gaps recently reported between Māori and Pākehā—demonstrate that the windmills are far from imaginary. Until the Pākehā majority realises that there is a considerable amount of unconscious racism in New Zealand society, including institutional racism (Spoonley 1993:21), such racism will continue unabated. Recently some are starting to criticise any attacks on racism as political correctness, which will only serve to drive increasing numbers of (Pākehā) New Zealanders into Pauline Hanson-type political parties. This may have some truth to it; I am not myself a great fan of political correctness for its own sake, and believe that each individual must decide for themselves whether a remark is too PC or a matter of being polite. On the other hand, if the world community had dismissed sanctions against South Africa as mere political correctness, Mandela would still be rotting on Robben Island; if civil rights protests in the United States had ceased for fear of driving citizens into the arms of the Ku Klux Klan, African Americans would still be riding in the back of the bus.

The consensus of opinion among my colleagues seems to be that endeavours like this are certainly worthwhile, but 'better you than me'. I hope very much that educators at all levels will not follow this advice, but take the time and trouble to combat the sort of folk-linguistic and anthropological myths described here to bring about an increased level of

tolerance in our society. I continue to think that anything which can make people realise that covert, hidden racism is almost as damaging as overt racism will help toward this goal.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This paper is a revision of one presented at the Sixth New Zealand Language and Society Conference, Victoria University of Wellington, 28-30 June 1998. I thank my wife Daisy and son Ian for help in typing letters into the computer database; Martin Fisher scanned a large number of other letters for me. The comments of two anonymous referees have improved this paper considerably.

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<sup>2</sup> Note that in the examples below the term “Pākehā” is frequently uncapitalised; this is because the *ODT* refuses to dignify the word with a capital and thus make it an “ethnic” name like “Māori”.

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Associate Professor Ray Harlow, formerly of Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori, for checking these translations.

<sup>4</sup> Copies of the laws may be found at [www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/timeline/nurem-laws.htm](http://www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/timeline/nurem-laws.htm); also at this site is a cartoon “flow chart” used by the Third Reich to explain to its citizens just who is “German-blooded”, “Jew”, and *Mischling* (“Mixling/Mongrel”), along with examples of marriages forbidden to Jews and *Mischlinge*.

<sup>5</sup> For example, in the *ODT* of 30 July, 1998 a standard “Pākehā = insult” letter was disarmed by a simple editorial citation from a Māori dictionary: “non-Maori, European, Caucasian”.