Who is Takatāpui? Māori Language, Sexuality and Identity in Aotearoa/New Zealand

David A.B. Murray *York University*

Ka ngaro te reo, ka ngaro taua, pera i te ngaro o te moa
If the language be lost, man will be lost, as dead as the moa —Maori proverb presented at the Waitangi Tribunal on the Te Reo Māori Claim (1986)

Abstract: This paper is an introductory investigation into the complex relations between sexuality, language and Māori indigenous identity in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Through an examination of the development and proliferation of a Māori language term (*takatāpui*) for "gay" and "lesbian" Māori over the past 20 years, I analyze the socio-political implications of language use in identity discourses and the multiple interpretative possibilities that may be generated when a subaltern or minority language is utilized in relation to a minority identification located in an Anglo-postcolonial society.

Keywords: Homosexuality, language, identity, indigeneity

Résumé Cet article présente une investigation préliminaire des relations complexes entre le sexualité, la langue et l'identité des Indigènes Maori dans Aotearoa/Nouvelle Zélande. Au moyen d'un examen du développement et de la prolifération de la langue de Maori (*takatāpui*) désignant «gays» et «lesbiennes» les Māori au cours des vingt dernières années, j'analyse les implications sociopolitiques des usages linguistiques dans les discours d'identité et les possibilités interprétatives multiples qui peuvent être produites quand une langue subalterne ou minoritaire est utilisée par rapport à l'identification à une minorité située dans une société Anglo-postcoloniale.

Mots-clés : Homosexualité, langue, identité, indigénéité

Introduction

In Aotearoa/New Zealand[1] the dominant language of everyday life for the majority of the country's population is English. It is also a society in which "gay" is the most commonly utilized term for "homosexual identity" in public institutions such as the government and media as well as in more informal day-to-day conversations. However, New Zealand is also home to an indigenous population known as Māori who consist of approximately 15% of the national population (*Te Puni Kōkiri* : 2000, 13). Prior to colonization, the Māori spoke a language which is today referred to as "*te Reo Māori*" (the Māori language; sometimes referred to as *te Reo*), although in contemporary Aotearoa, it is estimated that only between 4 and 8% of the Māori population are fluent in this language. According to most reports, despite a major language revitalization movement spanning over 20 years, *te Reo Māori* remains in danger of disappearing or being reduced to a language of "ritual" only.

However, in Māori media and in discussions with a number of Māori individuals and groups[2] over the past five years, I have noted an increase in the use of a *te Reo Māori* term—*takatāpui*—as a way of identifying oneself as homosexual and Māori.[3] The increasing presence of this term raises a number of questions about language in relation to sexual and other identifications: How does language figure in the negotiation of same sex desires and identities amongst an indigenous group who live as a minority in an Anglo-European colonized society? How central is language to these negotiations? Are there distinct forms of same sex talking and text-making amongst this group whose primary language is that of the colonizer and whose native language is only spoken

fluently by a minority? Is language the primary boundary marker for sexual and ethnic identifications? What other socio-political boundaries does language interact with (or transgress) in identity-making projects?

This article is an introductory investigation into questions addressing the complex relations between sexuality, language and identity in Aotearoa. I am particularly interested in teasing out the socio-political implications and linguistic practices of identity discourses, and analyzing the multiple interpretative possibilities that occur when a subaltern or minority language (or specific terms derived from that language) is utilized in relation to sexual identification in a postcolonial settler society. I argue that while the development of minority language terms to replace English sexual terminologies and the insertion of these terms into predominantly English language contexts are empowering for some, there may be others who do not agree with or feel comfortable utilizing this terminology for a variety of reasons. The different reactions to just one minority language term for sexual identity that are presented here indicate the complex relations that individuals of a minority group have with issues of identity and sexuality in a society created through colonization.

This paper therefore not only underlines a foundational principle in sociolinguistic inquiry—that language is a key domain of struggle over difference and inequality and a means of conducting that struggle (Heller, 2001)—it also contributes towards a more nuanced understanding of the generation of terms for sexual identities, or to put it slightly differently, it highlights the intersectional character of sexuality through analyzing how sexual subjectivities are linked to language. We will see how articulations about sexual self/identity are structured through debates about language, how articulations about language are structured through debates about self/identity, and how this dialectical relationship is itself embedded in the cultural particularities of a contemporary Anglo-Western settler society.

I will also stress that there is a contextual connection between language, identity and authenticity when *takatāpui* is articulated. In some discussions, fluency in *te Reo Māori* may operate as an index of one's ability to be fully Māori, such that even the insertion of a single term like *"takatāpui"* into an English conversational context carries politicized symbolic value through invoking an association with an authentic cultural identity. Although this value is not shared by all Māori by any means, it highlights how language and identity may be conceptualized as essential, mutually constitutive domains reflecting a dominant Western cultural logic

that places colonized populations identified as "indigenous" into highly restricted representational regimes. However, in other conversational contexts a range of English terms like "poofter," "gay," or "queen" are utilized alongside of *takatāpui* with no apparent different intent, reference, or meaning, indicating synonymy across the linguistic divide and, by inference, uncoupling the politicized value of linguistic competence from an "authentic" ethnic identification.

Finally, I will follow a recent turn in anthropological research on sexual identities emphasizing the importance of *historical* context for understanding the contemporary popularity and meanings of *takatāpui*[4]: We shall see how the increasing presence of and contemporary meanings associated with this term are due to the influence of three distinct but related sociopolitical movements that began in the late 1970s and continued to occupy centre stage in the public culture of New Zealand throughout the 1980s and 1990s: the homosexual law reform movement, the response to HIV/AIDS, and what has come to be known as the Māori cultural and linguistic "renaissance."

I hasten to add that the preliminary observations I offer about issues of alter-sexualities, language and linguistic practice in contemporary Māori society should not be assumed to be "discoveries" in any sense of the word. As I will outline in more detail below, over the past 20 years there has been a proliferation of writing and research on alternative sexualities in Māoridom by professionals in New Zealand's sexual and reproductive health sectors such as the New Zealand Aids Foundation, researchers in Māori Studies Departments in New Zealand universities and in Māori literature (both in *te Reo Māori* and English). My point is that in the social sciences, and in most Anglo-European dominated media and institutions, there continues to be very little information on or theorizing about this topic. This article is therefore dedicated to providing a bridge between what is already being identified and analyzed in some academic and social domains, and segments of academia and society that remain relatively unaware of these developments.

I begin with a brief overview of anthropological research on alternative genders/sexualities amongst indigenous groups[5] in North America, outlining the relatively limited theoretical and thematic lenses through which sexuality has been analyzed. The most prolific discussion in this area has been the debate over terminology and categorization of the Native American "berdache" or "two spirits," a phenomenon that some anthropologists claim is an example of "third gender." This debate pro-

vides some insight into questions of sexuality amongst contemporary North American indigenous societies and provides interesting comparisons to the situation in contemporary Aotearoa. Then, following a brief summary of anthropological research on language and sexuality in Māori society I will present a more detailed analysis of the recent history of the term *takatāpui* providing more detail on the three sociopolitical movements mentioned above. I will conclude with comments from some Māori men that begin to convey the interpretative and contextual complexity of minority language sexual terminologies in daily discourse and practice in contemporary Aotearoa.

Anthropology, Language and Sexual Terminologies in Indigenous Societies

Over the past 20 years, there has been a steady increase in anthropological research focussing on sexuality. However, as Kath Weston has pointed out, much of the ethnographic material produced in the 1970s and '80s was problematic in its emphasis on culturally discrete and different sexual practices in non-Western societies which ran the risk of perpetuating "orientalist" stereotypes and further reinforcing the implicitly primitive "them" vs. modern "us" binary (1993). This critique also applies to much of the research on "indigenous" societies; "the indigenes" are located in places where the colonizing population is said to manifest a modern, cosmopolitan identity and the colonized population is said to have "a" traditional indigenous identity that is represented through a totalizing, static, pre-European contact cultural identity, revealing "indigenous" to be a very modern term and thus complicating the borders of the us/them binary.[6]

However, anthropologists (as well as others) investigating gay and lesbian communities in North America, Britain and other Anglo-American societies have been uncovering the social diversity within them, rendering the concept of "a" gay or "a" lesbian identity or community problematic.[7] These new ethnographies have situated sexuality in relation to numerous other sociological categories such as class, race, ethnicity, age, or political orientation, rendering it much more complex in its definition and application: What's true "at home" is most likely true for "out there" as well, but this complexity is only now being recognized.

However, when it comes to issues of sexuality in indigenous North American societies, anthropology's track record continues to be spotty at best: In her recent bibliography on gender and sexuality in Native American Societies, JoAnn Woodsum noted that scholarship

on Native women has been slowly increasing over the past two decades, but scholarship on Native sexuality and gender variance has been relatively sparse (Woodsum, 1995). Nevertheless, there is one "type" of Native American that has been studied and debated in great depth by anthropologists, popularly known as "the berdache" or "two-spirit," which some claim to be a "third gender category." This is a strongly debated issue, and my brief summary here will only do it injustice, but it is important to mention if only because it represents a sustained (bordering on fetishistic) discussion amongst anthropologists on issues of sexuality, language and terminology amongst a population colonized by Anglo-Americans and it is therefore relevant to the Māori experience.

According to some anthropologists, it appears that throughout pre-contact Native North America, many societies had an institutionalized role for men who dressed as women and/or specialized in women's work or for women who dressed as men and/or did men's work.[8] Although there was great variance in terms of roles and occupations, men who wore women's clothes and did women's work often became artists, ambassadors and religious leaders and women who "performed" as men often became warriors hunters and chiefs (Roscoe, 1998: 4). But who exactly were they? Were they the Native American version of "homosexuals?" Were they "transsexuals?" Transvestites? Another gender altogether? As Roscoe, Epple and others have pointed out, it is very difficult to find an appropriate label in the English language for this category of person, as any of the above English-language terms carries its own historical, political and cultural baggage. Furthermore, the debate that has ensued in anthropology hasn't been simply one of terminology, for what lies at the foundation of these terms are cultural understandings of language, sex and gender and their relationships to other material and cosmological realms (Epple, 1998; Valentine, 2001).

While much of this material is illuminating for its ability to demonstrate gendered and sexual diversity within Native American societies historically, there is not much anthropological research that focuses on *contemporary* issues of language and sexuality. Roscoe has recently published material on contemporary "Gay American Indians," noting the recent adaptation of the term "two spirits," which some claim as an alternative to both berdache and gay (1998 : 109; see also Roscoe, 1988 and Williams, 1986). Since the 1980s, there has been a cultural revival movement centred on recovery of "berdache" practices, but many Native Americans have not been comfortable with the term "berdache," an

adaptation of a Persian word utilized by Europeans. At the same time, some Native Americans have not been comfortable with the labels "gay" "lesbian" or "bisexual" as these are terms from the colonizer's language that don't properly represent who they are (Roscoe, 1998: 111). Part of the popularity of "two spirits" is due to the fact that it manages to encompass both sexual and ethnic identities, and it is inclusive of men and women. However, Roscoe notes that adaptation of the term is not universal, and that in some reservations outside urban centres one finds a combination of terms that may include local language words for multiple gender individuals alongside more western terms like "gay" or "homosexual" (1998: 112-113). Carolyn Epple goes further by arguing that even such broad categories as "two spirits" "gay" or "alternative sexuality/gender" are not applicable to some Navajo whose understandings of the world, action and personhood are organized in radically different ways. Reducing these individuals to "variations" of Western conceptualized gender/sex categories misrepresents the ways in which they are integrated into a particular Navajo world view (1998, 279-280).

As we will see below, the crafting of "new" sexual subjectivities and their relation to culturally distinct world views in Native North American societies and the role and significance of language(s) in relation to these subjectivities has numerous parallels with the Māori situation, and begins to illustrate the complex cultural and political terrain through which indigenous sexual identifications are forged in a postcolonial setting.

Anthropology, Sexuality and Language in Contemporary Māori Society

When we turn to issues of alter-sexualities in contemporary Māori society, we get next to nothing from anthropology. My library searches so far have uncovered only one article published by two anthropologists in 1985 which speaks directly towards questions of homosexuality in Māori society. The authors, Stephen O. Murray and Manuel Arboleda, were responding to a 1974 article published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* which concluded that homosexuality did not exist among the Māori prior to European contact because there is no mention of it in the historical records. Murray and Arboleda noted a number of reasons why this reasoning is faulty: First, the absence of any mention of homosexuality in early documentation of Māori society has more to do with the morals and values of the authors, that is, 19th-century Europeans. (Arboleda and Murray, 1985: 130). Second, the absence of words for homosexu-

ality in *te Reo Māori* may indicate the possible absence of an institutionalized homosexual role, but not necessarily of homosexual behavior per se (131). And third, a number of neighbouring Polynesian societies have well documented traditions of "gender-defined homosexual" roles, increasing the likelihood that a similar role may have existed amongst pre-contact Māori. However, we should keep in mind the above debate over the appropriateness of labelling this role "homosexual" or "third gender," when it may in fact have more to do with context and cosmology than sexual or gendered proclivity (see Besnier 1994).

In contrast to this lone and suggestive rather than conclusive anthropological statement about Māori sexualities in relation to linguistic evidence, there has been a fluorescence of material from other professions and disciplines: In literature, there have been a number of novels, biographies and autobiographical pieces on growing up and experiencing being homosexual and Māori. One recent example comes from Witi Ihimaera, an internationally renowned Māori writer who recently published a novel in which the primary character is Michael, a gay Māori man confronting issues of sexuality and identity in contemporary Aotearoa. In the following excerpt, Michael is having a conversation about boyfriends with his "staunch" Māori activist friend Roimata:

> ...Roimata said, "Don was Māori, he had mana and, from what I've heard, he wasn't called Long Dong Silver for nothing. He was totally suitable but what did you do? You rejected him and became a—a potato queen."
>
> "Look" I answered. "I like white boys. When I put my brown hands on them it makes me feel so dirty."
>
> Roimata knew I was joking. Even so, she couldn't resist pushing home the point.
>
> "I only wish, Michael dear, that you would see that you've been colonised twice over. First by the Pakeha.[9] Second by the gay Pakeha...don't you understand, Michael? The issues of identity and space—of sovereignty, of tino rangatiratanga—that our people have been fighting for within Pakeha society are the same issues for gay Māori within Pakeha gay society today!" (Ihimaera, 2000: 197)

In this passage Roimata foregrounds the solidarity and content of Māori identity over "gay" identity, and Michael responds by acknowledging that his sexual desire is racialized but that he is not ashamed of this. The tension between ethnic, racial and sexual identifications was felt by a number of the Māori men I spoke

with, and language was often identified by them as a site of that tension. I will return to this point below, but suffice to say that Māori literature has been at the forefront of presenting issues of identity, authenticity and sexuality that I am addressing in this paper.

"Sexuality" has also become a key topic in some Māori studies departments in New Zealand universities.[10] In the area of public health research, there has been some important work generated primarily through the HIV/AIDS crisis and the need for better understandings of the ways in which socio-cultural and economic factors are related to prevention and treatment of the virus. One of the most important publications in this sector has come from the New Zealand Aids Foundation and is entitled "Male Call/Waea Mai, Tāne Mā" (1997). It consists of 12 reports, with one focusing on Māori men who have sex with men, providing some rich data based on a nation-wide telephone survey with 1852 respondents, 170 of whom identified as Māori.

One section of this report focusses on sexual identity, in which respondents were allowed to choose as many labels as they felt appropriate. On average, Māori respondents chose 2.6 "identities"—the most popular identity term was "gay," with just over two thirds of all Māori respondents choosing it. Second most popular was the term "homosexual," at 58.8% (Aspin, Hughes, Reid, Robinson, Saxton, Segedin, Worth, 1997: 7). However, the report also notes that proportionately fewer Māori than non-Māori chose gay or homosexual, indicating that these terms are not appropriate to all Māori by any means. The third and fourth most popular identity terms amongst Māori respondents were "bisexual" and "queer" respectively, followed by takatāpui, which was chosen by 31.1% (1997: 8). Although it is fifth in terms of self-descriptive popularity amongst the respondents, I would like to focus on how the emergence of the term takatāpui and discussions about it are important in demonstrating how language constitutes and is constituted through sexual and cultural identity labels but that no clear cut alignment emerges between categories and practices of language, cultural identity and sexuality.

The "Male Call" report notes that, "Historically, the term takatāpui was used to describe an intimate companion of the same sex. The word features in Williams Dictionary which was first published in 1844. However, in contemporary Aotearoa society the term is understood to describe same sex attraction, and it embraces men, women and transgender people" (1997: 25).[11] In my research on the usage of this term in Māori dictionaries and amongst Māori informants, I have found that the distinction between the past and present meanings

is not quite so clear-cut: When I looked up the words "homosexual" and "gay" in the English/Māori section of Te Matatiki, a dictionary of words that has been produced or adapted by Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori (The Māori Language Commission—MLC), there were two terms: tāne takatāpui, and tāne mate tāne, the latter which roughly translates to men who desire men (MLC 1992).[12] In the Māori-English section, takatāpui was translated as "intimate companion of the same sex," In other contemporary dictionaries like The H.M. Ngata Dictionary, takatāpui is also translated as "close companion" or "intimate friend of the same sex," a definition which does not by any means clearly communicate sexual desire or preference for someone of the same gender.

I decided to call the MLC office in Wellington to ask why "takatāpui" was not translated as homosexual or gay in their dictionary since it was clearly being utilized in this way by a substantial number of Māori according to the "Male Call" report and my conversations. I expected that this request might take some time to be assigned to the appropriate person and that I might be asked a few questions by MLC staff about why a North American-accented anthropologist based at an Australian university (at that time) wanted to know about the sexual connotations of a Māori term but the MLC receptionist listened to my introduction without asking any questions and immediately forwarded me to one of their "research staff." The MLC researcher informed me (again without any further queries) that my question about takatāpui was a good example of an ongoing debate within the Commission over the importance of retaining "traditional" meanings of words versus the need to adopt, change, or extend older words to fit new concepts or objects. Some MLC members preferred a "purist" approach, trying to maintain the connection between words and their original meanings; they would argue that takatāpui represents a unique concept for which there is no direct English equivalent, and to attach an aspect of sexual relations to it would be to redefine it completely. Other members favoured a more pragmatic approach, arguing that if a Māori word comes to take on new meaning(s) and is widely diffused and recognized throughout Māoridom, then it should be accepted by the MLC. Takāpui as a Māori word for "gay" was developed by the MLC "purists" in the early 1990s—it was an adaptation of the word takatāpui that would allow the latter term to retain its original meaning. However, both the researcher and I agreed it has not been adopted into everyday usage by the wider Māori community.

This debate over "traditional" meanings of Māori words reveals the influence of a discourse of "authentic" indigeneity connected to a "pure" language produced by a faction within a powerful Māori institution responsible for regulating *te Reo Māori*. The emphasis on language as a source of authentic "traditional" indigeneity is often integrated into a political agenda for Maori sovereignty which I would argue displays the influence of a discourse of modern nationalism and its desire for exclusive linguistic purity attached to exclusive cultural purity. It has been noted that discourses of indigenous authenticity are one mechanism through which groups colonized by Euro-American powers may demonstrate cultural autonomy and ability to resist oppressive assimiliationist agendas yet in many instances they paradoxically reproduce representations of difference developed by the colonizing societies in the first place (Kapac, 1998: Ram, 2000). However, we must remember that some MLC workers recognized language as socially and contextually produced and did *not* claim that a fixed set of "traditional" linguistic meanings determined "authentic" indigeneity. As we will see below a similar division exists amongst gay Māori men in their relationship to *takatāpui* as a sign of identity.

Many Māori (of various sexual orientations) who were not associated with the MLC explained to me that their understanding of the word *takatāpui* up until the last 10-15 years was similar to the Ngata Dictionary definition, but they were now aware of this additional sexualized meaning.[13] While most expressed no opinion about this (which I interpreted as acceptance or tolerance), a few did say that they preferred the "original" definition of "intimate friendship" and thought another word should be developed for "gay" as they liked a specific non-sexualized term for "close friend of the same sex" and preferred to be able to use it without any assumption of a sexual relationship.

Almost all Māori men I have spoken with who utilize *takatāpui* as a term of self-ascription are aware of its prior non-sexualized definition, and in fact a number identified the person they believed to be the creator of its recent connotative transformation, indicating a keen awareness of new developments in Māori language and a willingness to incorporate innovative usages of it for purposes of self-representation. This ability to pinpoint quite precisely the historical moment in which a word transforms in meaning not only allows us to examine the wider political and social milieu which contributed towards the development of new sexual terminologies and their (various) meanings but also allows us to examine how subaltern languages are related to sociopolitical

transformations occurring at local, national and transnational levels.

The emergence and increasing popularity of *takatāpui* as a term during the 1980s and 1990s can be linked to the combined influence of at least three sociopolitical movements occurring throughout Aotearoa just prior to and during this period: gay and lesbian activism, HIV/AIDS and the Māori political and cultural "renaissance." Let me re-emphasize the mutuality of these three factors before explicating them in detail: that is, no single influence produced current definitions of *takatāpui* and the sociolinguistic debates around it, demonstrating the historical contingency, politics of and connectivity between linguistic and cultural production (see Ahearn 2001).

Gay and lesbian activism throughout New Zealand (although particularly in urban centres) began to gather momentum in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This movement was dedicated to overturning New Zealand's discriminatory laws against homosexuals, and their primary focus became a national campaign for homosexual law reform (The Homosexual Law Reform Bill was passed in 1986). While the gay media at that time did not mention any presence of Māori within the leadership of the various activist groups,[14] several Māori men I spoke with remembered participating in rallies and protests supporting the passage of the Homosexual Law Reform Bill. However, one transgender individual told me that she and her Māori friends were too busy "trying to get by" and didn't have the time or the resources to become very involved, even though they supported the objectives of the movement in principle. Another self identified *takatāpui* man told me that he hadn't felt particularly strongly about this movement as he was more interested in dedicating his time to social justice issues for all Māori people. Thus although lesbian and gay activism for homosexual law reform was clearly influential in bringing issues of sexuality to the foreground of public culture in New Zealand it cannot be identified as the only or primary factor bringing about a transformation in Māori sexual terminologies.

The second influence was the rise of HIV/AIDS in Aotearoa throughout the 1980s. HIV/AIDS was rapidly recognized as a threat to Māori people, who at that time were contracting the virus at a disproportionately higher rate than other ethnic groups in New Zealand. The AIDS crisis galvanized the gay community into action, and forced into public circulation what had heretofore been taboo topics. Soon after the establishment of the New Zealand AIDS Foundation in the mid 1980s, a parallel Māori organization, *Te Rōpu Tautoko*

Trust, was established. Because of limited funding to this organization, their efforts were supplemented by regional initiatives which had their origins in gay urban Māori communities (Aspin, 1996: 48-49). In their policy statements, these regional groups specified *takatāpui* as their key target clientele, reflecting the term's new-found presence and legitimacy at least amongst certain segments of Māori society. Thus by the mid-to-late 1980s, sexual terminologies, practices and identities were increasingly circulated in public institutions such as the government and mainstream media that were simultaneously marking recognition of ethnic differenti-ation through language differentiation.

The third influence came from the increasingly pow-erful voices of Māori activist groups who were changing the political and cultural landscape both within Māori society and at a national level: Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, profound and unsettling changes continued in Māori society, one of the most significant being the con-tinuation of a massive population shift from rural to urban centres that had begun in the 1950s. Whereas 10% of the Māori population lived in urban centres in 1936, the percentage had shifted to 76% in 1976 and 86% in 1996 (Spoonly, 1993: 13; *Te Puni Kōkiri,* 2000). How-ever, this demographic shift did not result in socio-eco-nomic improvement for many Māori—a recent report published by *Te Puni Kōkiri* (The Ministry of Māori Development—TPK) emphasizes that many disparities between Māori and non-Māori in the areas of income, unemployment, health and education have increased over the past two decades (TPK, 2000: 7).

During this rural to urban shift, there was also a noticeable decline in *te Reo* speakers (TPK, n.d.). Cur-rent statistics on "fluent" *te Reo* speakers range from 4.45% to 8% (Statistics New Zealand, 1999; TPK, n.d.). This decline in *te Reo* has been noticed and acted upon by Māori leaders since the 1970s. Hauraki Greenland argues that this generation of leaders was influenced by black power in the United States, women's liberation and "alternative culture" movements, and therefore pro-duced new strategies in which politics and "culture"[15] dovetailed (1991: 92). A key aspect of this cultural revi-talization strategy was language, and numerous efforts were initialized throughout Māoridom to revitalize the status and usage of *Te Reo.* One of the first efforts was an adult education program (*Te Atārangi*), followed in the 1980s by the establishment of *Kōhanga Reo* ("lan-guage nests"—Māori language pre-schools) which by 1996 had over 14 032 children registered (TPK, 1998: 22). Māori language broadcasting also began in the 1970s and increased its presence on radio and television over

the 1980s. In 1987, the Māori Language Act was passed, making *te Reo Māori* an "official" language of New Zealand, and establishing the Māori Language Commis-sion to protect and promote the use and development of *te Reo Māori* as a living language (TPK, 1998: 5, 13). The Language Act also conferred the right to speak Māori in the courts, tribunals, coroners courts and commissions of inquiry (TPK, 1998: 13). By 1998, the government spending on Māori language outputs amounted to $50 200 000 (NZ).[16]

Thus *te Reo Māori* has occupied centre stage in much public discourse around the "revitalization" or "renaissance" of Māori culture and identity at the same time as "homosexual" culture and identity have been increasingly circulated in public discourses, a confluence that has resulted in some segments of Māori society developing and/or adapting new sexual terminologies from *te Reo Māori.* However, we need to keep in mind that despite the increased recognition and funding of Māori language education, fluent speakers of the lan-guage continue to remain a minority. As we shall see below, given this situation what may emerge is a variety of linguistic patterns which depend on an individual's exposure to *te Reo,* immersion in Māori-identified groups and activities, and other context-specific criteria.

The combination of these sociopolitical movements has meant that indigenous language, identities and prac-tices, and sexual language, identities and practices met and combined in highly visible and politicized public dis-courses at national levels, as well as in more Māori spe-cific (but equally politicized) venues like the *marae*[17] and other urban Māori community networks. This discursive production of a term demonstrates its historical contin-gency and results in outcomes that are not straightfor-ward in terms of alignments between language, sexual-ity and identity.

Takatāpui in Context

Most *takatāpui* identified speakers I spoke with indi-cated that they now utilize this term in addition to or instead of the label "gay" for reasons similar to those put forward by Native American "two spirits" individu-als described by Roscoe—*takatāpui* is a term that incorporates both a sense of indigenous identity as well as communicating sexual orientation. It is different from "two spirits" in that it is not English, and therefore oper-ationalizes a code that highlights some form of differ-ence when inserted into an English sociolinguistic con-text (and is given much of its meaning through this contrast), carrying a political impact every time it used in a predominantly English conversation. However,

while some Māori men were supportive of the non-gendered specificity it encapsulated (because, they said, all Māori of non-heterosexual orientation could find solidarity through common identification as *takatāpui*), others preferred to make a distinction between *takatāpui tāne* (men), *takatāpui wāhine* (women) and *whakawāhine* or *whakatāne* (terms which translate roughly to "becoming" or "making" woman or man, indicating a transcendent or permeable gendered identification), indicating that a powerful model of gendered difference or differentiated conceptualizations of gender undergirded or bisected any construction based upon a uniform "alter" sexual identity (see Epple, 1998 for possible parallels with the Navajo term *nadleehi*). And just to complicate things, one sexual health worker told me that it was important to distinguish between *takatāpui* and *tāne moe tāne* (men who sleep with men), as there are many Māori men who have sexual relations with other men but do not think of themselves as having a homosexual orientation because they also sleep with women.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, not all homosexual-identified Māori men utilize the term *takatāpui* as their only label of self-identification, a situation which is similar to Roscoe's observations of sexuality terms utilized by Native Americans "on the reservation" away from urban centres. I noticed that "outside" the office or official interview, many of these men would use additional terms to describe themselves or others. While having a smoke outside a *marae* or after dinner at someone's home, a conversation could contain a variety of English identity terms such as gay, queen, poof, poofter or gay Māori in addition to takatāpui. Often if a person's name was mentioned that someone was not familiar with, he would ask, "is he a poof?" or "is he gay?" One day at a pub in Wellington I asked Matthew, who works in a Māori organization and is quite active in Māori social and political activities, whether he identified as *takatāpui*, to which he replied, *"Takatāpui,* poofter, fag...they all mean the same thing: we're homosexual, darling, HO-MO-SEXUAL!" Here was a response that was contrary to Roimata's statement about ethnic and sexual identity in the above extract from Ihimaera's novel by contrasting languages to make a point: whereas Roimata prioritized Māori over "gay" identity (while consistently using the English term "gay" throughout her entire speech), Matthew, who is also a dedicated supporter of Māori political sovereignty, prioritized a momentary solidarity of sexual identity demonstrated through his linkage of same-sex identity terms in English and Māori.

However, in another conversation, Paul, who describes himself having a "mixed" heritage of Māori and *Pākeha* claimed that he did not feel comfortable using *takatāpui* for himself, as he had not been greatly involved in Māori affairs for much of his life. He had recently begun to re-establish contact with members of the Māori side of his family, and while this was exciting for him, he did not want to use *te Reo* words to describe himself until he had a better understanding of the language and culture. It would seem that Paul was keenly aware of the political and social implications of language use, as well as the connection between language, authenticity and identity. For him, speaking even a few words of *te Reo* could raise troubling questions for himself and/or to others about the legitimacy or authenticity of his identification as Māori—for the time being, he would continue to publicly align himself with the dominant linguistic sexual term "gay" until he felt that he had sufficient cultural knowledge and linguistic competency to be able to publicly define himself otherwise.

A third individual, Timotei, who works for a sexual health agency, indicated a similar awareness and sensitivity towards issues of authenticity associated with Māori sexual terminologies. Timotei said that he utilized *takatāpui* carefully and strategically, as he was aware of its potential to create solidarity and to alienate, depending on who is being spoken to. He said that amongst Māori who feel comfortable and confident with *te Reo,* who claim a homosexual identification and who felt they had strong attachments to other Māori, he would utilize *takatāpui* freely. But when speaking to Māori whom he thought weren't necessarily "homosexually" identified, who didn't feel confident with *te Reo* and/or who didn't feel very connected to a Māori group or community, he would be much more cautious in using the word, as he felt that they might think he was trying to be superior through his use of Māori linguistic terms.

Paul and Timotei's comments indicate the complex political valences of a minority language associated with an "indigenous" identity located in an English dominated postcolonial society. For some Māori, fluency in *te Reo* is seen as a marker of Māori-'ness', that is, a sense that one is knowledgeable of Māori cultural concepts and therefore secure in one's identity as a Māori. Others feel that if they are not fluent then they will be judged to be less knowledgeable of Māori cultural concepts, and therefore will be viewed as more "alienated" from their Māori identity. Paul and Timotei had thus recognized how, in different contexts, the use of one word had different potential outcomes related to sensitive issues about indigenous identity and the language associated

with it: *Takatāpui* had the potential to unify *or* fracture an identification built around alternative sexual and ethnic identification. Their comments also highlight the performativity of linguistic practice, whereby meaning (or successful communication of meaning) cannot be deduced only through the intentionality of the speaker or the perception of the listener; rather, meaning emerges through a more complex and dense analytic terrain that factors together differentiating individual experiences, specific spatial and temporal contexts, and wider linguistic, socio-cultural and political tropes framing the particular linguistic exchange, thus allowing failure, misinterpretation and/or ambivalence to be as structurally integral to the exchange as mutual comprehension (Kulick, 2000: 268-269; See also Livia and Hall, 1997: 12-13).

The social and political consequences of these terminological twists and turns should not be assumed to be trivial in any way: Māori language and gay/*takatāpui* Māori do not currently occupy the same sociopolitical status as the English language and white European "gays" and "lesbians": *Te Reo Māori* is a minority language in New Zealand, and despite great changes in the last 20 years, it faces a daily battle for survival and legitimacy in a wider social spectrum that is benignly uncaring or aggressively hostile to accommodating its presence on an equal footing with English. This applies to social relations as well. Many *takatāpui*/gay Māori have had negative experiences within Anglo-European gay communities, and some have faced rejection from their own families, so that their relationships with other *takatāpui*/gay Māori men become critically important as a primary support network. As Timotei told me, if these individuals feel rejected by their peers because they are not "Māori enough" due to linguistic incompetence, then isolation, depression and anger may result in mental and/or physical trauma. There is thus a great deal at stake here as the debates over language use, identity and sexuality may have profound consequences for these people's health and well-being.

Conclusion

Takatāpui is a term that communicates more than just sexual identity and indigeneity; it is also/always a political statement when it occurs in public (English) discourse as it conveys information about the current status and import of *te Reo* in Aotearoa in relation to English, which simultaneously conveys a political message about Māori cultural identity in relation to Anglo/*Pakeha* cultural identity. It also reveals a great deal about the recent history of the constructions of gen-

dered and sexual identifications in Māori and non-Māori communities in New Zealand and changes that have occurred to both. Finally, it reflects desire for the expression of a "silenced" sexual subjectivity, but as we have seen, the articulation is problematic as it reveals its origin in and engagement with already circulating discourses of "authentic indigeneity," and authentic "gay" identity, both of which have been produced in a modernizing, colonial context.

We cannot forget that almost two thirds of respondents in the NZAF survey did not choose the term *takatāpui* or chose other English language terms in addition to it, and that "gay" and "homosexual" are still the most prevalent terms of self-identification. This may be due to the recent genesis of the sexualized definition of *takatāpui*, and we need to keep in mind these numbers may be changing—certainly amongst the urban Māori I spoke with, the majority are comfortable with describing themselves as *takatāpui*, albeit in addition to other identification labels. Perhaps the situation in Aotearoa is similar to Roscoe's observations on the "two spirit" spirit term in relation to urban/rural divisions and multiple labelling. The NZAF report suggests that *takatāpui* may be more popular amongst urban Māori than rural (1997: 26),[18] and my research amongst primarily urban Māori has indicated that *takatāpui* often co-exists with other English terms. Clearly, there is still some ambiguity surrounding the term and the fact that many Māori utilize multiple identity labels indicates both the influence and a critical rethinking of English gender and sexuality terminologies, and how these terms are not sufficient for the identities they index.

This discussion of the etymology of one sexuality term and its relationship to language, linguistic practice and cultural identity by no means fully reveals the diversity and complexity of the daily life of those who utilize it, nor should we assume that any simple generalizations about character or personality can be made on the basis of knowing the sociopolitical genesis of a single identity label. The need for further ethnographic research is critical in order to flesh out and represent the diversity of these gay or *takatāpui* lives as they are currently lived, to better understand the relationship between English and *te Reo Māori* in everyday conversations, and to better understand the ways in which these are connected to wider social and political forces. For example, a number of linguists have identified "Māori Vernacular English," which is more a "style of English than an actual separate dialect" (Gordon and Deverson, 1998: 144). This "style" has a number of distinctive phonological, prosodic and syntactical features, one of which is regular code switch-

ing and lexico-semantic borrowing from Māori. The extract from Witi Ihimaera's novel and the insertion of *takatāpui* into primarily English discourse may be examples of this style. At the same time, I would suggest that while there may be other "sub-dialects" within Māori society, one of which could be oriented around the social practices of some homosexually identified Māori individuals, they cannot and should not be taken as proof of a singular, autonomous linguistic, socio-cultural or sexual identity, for to do so would oversimplify and reify the dense, layered and interrelated contexts of linguistic and cultural production and their varied outcomes.[19] This is the challenge for anthropology, which has for too long ignored sexuality as a valid domain of research and only recently recognized the cultural and political complexity of language and linguistic practices in relation to sexuality, indigenous peoples and their ongoing battles for social justice and respect.

Acknowledgments

David Murray, Department of Anthropology, York University, 2054 Vari Hall, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, Ontario, M3J 1P3

Notes

1 Aotearoa is the Māori word for the nation of New Zealand. I will use these terms interchangeably throughout this paper.

2 The majority of informants consulted in this article are men who claim an exclusively "homosexual" orientation in their sexual and romantic practices, although a couple of comments from "transgender" individuals are also included. It is important to keep in mind that there are Māori men who have sex with men but do not necessarily view themselves as having a homosexual "identity" (see the New Zealand Aids Foundation "Male Call/*Waea Mai Tāne Mā*" Report 5, Sexual Identity, 1997 and Report 3, Māori Men who have sex with men, 1997 for further details; see also Epple, 1998 for a discussion of problems in applying Western sexual identity categories to Native American (Navajo) understandings of bodies and sexual practices which raises similar issues for Māori research). I will return to this point towards the end of this article.

3 In this paper I investigate this term primarily as it used amongst men; however, it should be noted that takatāpui and variations of this term are used by some Māori women's and transgender groups.

4 See Altman, 1997; Kapac, 1998 and Manalansan, IV: 1997 for similar analytical perspectives emphasizing historical and global contingencies in the development of gay Asian subjectivities.

5 Although I recognize the term "indigenous" is problematic in terms of referencing and defining a social group as it cloaks the process of colonial relations which have, through modernity, created the category of "indigenous" as opposed to "settlers" or "immigrants," I will continue to identify Māori as "indigenous" throughout this paper as it is a popular term of self-reference and other terms such as "ethnic" or "racial" would be equally problematic, if not more so. I attend to the sociolinguistic implications of this colonialist binary terminology below.

6 Thanks to Tom Boellstorff for this point.

7 See for example, Esther Newton, *Cherry Grove, Fire Island*, 1993, or Stephen O. Murray, *American Gay*, 1996.

8 At least 65 Native American societies are recorded having these kinds of individuals according to Will Roscoe (1998).

9 "Pakeha" is a Māori word that describes New Zealanders of Anglo-European settler descent.

10 For example, Victoria University of Wellington's School of Māori Studies offering an undergraduate paper on Māori sexuality entitled, *Te Huinga Takatāpui*.

11 Lee Smith, a linguist in the Department of Māori Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, indicated to me that the term is not present in *Nga Moteatea*.

12 Thanks to Lee Smith for this translation.

13 Others told me that they had never heard of this word until recently, but these individuals tended to be primarily monolingual (English) with little experience/education in *te Reo*.

14 There are very few references to ethnic subdivisions within gay and lesbian communities in any of the gay media of this period.

15 "Culture" is not clearly defined in this text but appears to support an exclusivist, autochthonous application.

16 However only a small portion went to the MLC; the majority was spent on Māori television broadcasting (TPK, 1998: 25).

17 A meeting house belonging to members of an extended family or sub-clan of a tribe.

18 The researchers conducted a "logistic regression" in order to investigate the effect of demographic and social milieu variables on the likelihood of Māori men identifying as *takatāpui*, and found that Māori men who lived in cities were significantly more likely to identify as *takatāpui*, as were those attached to the gay community, defined in relation to membership in gay organizations, reading gay newspapers/magazines, and the respondent's own set of criteria through which he decided that he is part of the community (Aspin et al., 1997: 26).

19 This observation needs to be further researched in order to contribute to the debate over whether the existence of "gay language" is important or irrelevant (see Kulick, 2000): During my field work, I encountered no discussion of or reference to the possibility of a "gay" or *takatāpui* language amongst the Māori I knew nor did I note any structural morphological, grammatical, or phonological features indicative of a distinct language. What became evident was how English and *te Reo Māori* mutually influenced and structured the dynamics of linguistic practices of sexual (and other) subjectivities—instead of interrogating the possibility of a "gay" language I gradually realized I should investigate how sexual subjectivity was articulated through "a" language (associated with a minority "indigenous" identity) positioned in an unequal relationship to another language (associated with a majority "Anglo-settler" identity).

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