

# Re-designing the national imaginary

## The development of Matariki as a contemporary festival

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**ABSTRACT:** *This article considers the factors shaping the contemporary redevelopment in Aotearoa/New Zealand of the indigenous commemoration of the rising of the constellation Matariki as a marker of seasonal change. Through interviews with producers of media materials celebrating Matariki, it examines the ideological, cultural, and economic factors determining the encoding of the materials, investigating in particular the ways in which Matariki can resource a marketplace for spiritual commodities.*

### Introduction

This article explores the phenomenon of Matariki, an indigenous commemoration of seasonal change traditionally confined to Māori inhabitants of Aotearoa/New Zealand, but which in the last decade has been proposed as a festival for all New Zealanders (Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori, 2005). It examines the development of an instance of 'civil religiosity' (Bellah, 1967), that is, the mobilisation of resonant symbols to bind sub-cultures within a nation through practices and images celebrating shared values. The impulse for offering a new partial context for shaping the nation comes from Māori, partners in the bicultural social contract instituted by the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. The preferred identity of the primary audience for the Matariki project is a matter of debate among its providers but,

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ideally, engagement in celebrating Matariki offers all inhabitants of New Zealand an opportunity to re-frame their experience of the natural world in terms defined by Māori.

While it has its roots in material practices from the pre-contact period, the commemoration of Matariki is currently offered to the public largely through processes of mediation—through texts, objects, images, websites, and performances—rather than through the collective gatherings that are a stronger feature of established national commemorations in such as the Waitangi and Anzac public holidays. The most productive framework for understanding Matariki for me, a European New Zealander, is the Media, Religion, and Culture framework initially elaborated in the 1990s by scholars from the United States, Scandinavia, and Australia (see, for instance, Hoover & Venturelli, 1997; Hoover & Lundby, 1997; Horsfield, 1997). The key principles of this framework are that the three territories named above share complex links acting on each other in a series of interdependent processes: in particular, that media and religion are now inextricably intertwined and that, due to changing cultural environments, definitions of religiosity may extend to include a range of beliefs and practices previously understood as secular. The latter is the case in this example, since, although the key concepts underlying the contemporary re-development of Matariki originated in a religious worldview and now align with formations of contemporary spirituality, they are equally well understood as pertaining to the secular realms of education, entertainment, community-building, and cultural commodification.

Similar mixes of secular and spiritual elements are understood by Meyer and Moors (2006) as pointing to a new ‘politics of belonging’, where symbolic resources derived from religious traditions facilitate the creation of new identity positions in late-modern societies:

*With the diminishing capacity of the nation-state for constructing communities of belonging, sub-public and transnational publics that are grounded in religious convictions, imaginaries, and networks have become increasingly important. Essential for the emergence of these new publics has been the proliferation of new technologies of communication and representation (p. 12).*

Meyer and Moors have noted that religion and its less formal sibling, spirituality, are thought to have retained their appeal partly as an outcome of the dynamics of globalised capitalism and particularly as a

counterbalance to its more ruthless excesses (2006, pp. 16-17). For the individual, engagement with religious modes of practice can therefore carve out a space of critique or aesthetic expression as a refuge from the demands of participation in the for-profit economy, but it can also serve as a vector into the public realm for the political and cultural concerns of groups that consider themselves unfairly treated. Mobilisation around a distinctive set of beliefs then offered to others can be an effective method of gaining both resources and influence in an otherwise crowded political field. Fraser described 'two analytically distinct but empirically interrelated reasons for struggle in post-Fordist capitalist societies, namely, struggles about socio-economic (re) distribution and struggles about cultural recognition such as identity politics' (cited in Dahl et al., 2004, p. 374). Matariki sits on the latter of these poles but is also connected to the former.

Local sociological research suggests that ethnicity is not a strong predictor of feelings of social inclusion/exclusion, with about half of Māori in a late twentieth century study identifying with a mainstream 'New Zealand' culture (Webster, 2001). While such a finding points to mutual accommodations over 150 years, there are nevertheless numerous events in this period that centre on the struggle by Māori for the actualisation of their status as equal partners in the bicultural relationship. In the political realm the most effective tool for pursuing redress has been the activity of the Waitangi Tribunal, set up in 1975 to hear grievances related to land originally in Māori ownership. The effects on the Māori resource-base have been significant since the initial settlement with the Tainui iwi in 1995, as they and other tribes re-invest in business. It is estimated that the Māori economy was worth \$7.5 billion by 2000, \$16.5 billion in the 2005-6 period, and around \$36.9 billion in 2010 (Morse, 2011). Nevertheless, several other Treaty settlement processes remain uncompleted, and even within Tainui there is a lack of consensus as to whether the pursuit of economic power will provide for the long-term survival of valued characteristics of Māori ways of life.

While the settlement of land claims on a tribal scale is a recent phenomenon, the modification of both indigenous and imported religion has long been part of the Māori response to colonisation. In the 1830s and 1840s thousands of Māori converted to Protestant and Catholic denominations, attracted, as Elsmore (2000, see also Jackson, 2003) argues as much by the power that biblically based literacy was seen to afford the incoming Europeans as by the intrinsic appeal of Christian theology. Involvement in these and later denominations

continues in Māori cultures, with the mainstream churches also making accommodation to indigenous cultural practices (cf., Cadogan, 2004, Cody, 2004).

Meanwhile, as European land acquisition increased in the second half of the 1840s, several charismatic Māori individuals founded new religious movements syncretising interpretations of Old Testament formations with elements of local tribal cultures. The philosophies of the Ringatu and Pai Marire religions led by Te Kooti Rikiorangi and Te Ua Haumene respectively were, for a time, effective counters to British and colonial militancy, while the movement of Rua Kenana and the Ihairara, as well as the utopian community at Parihaka led by the prophets Te Whiti and Tohu employed more peaceful methods in the attempt to retain Māori self-determination. They were joined in the 1930s by another new religious movement, the Ratana Church, which gained political influence through an alliance with the parliamentary Labour Party,

After two centuries of input from outside philosophies, the entity known as 'Māori spirituality' can therefore be difficult to isolate. However, there are several accounts (cf. Robinson, 2005; Mead, 2003) of the principles of Māori religious philosophy that underpin and are revitalised in a phenomenon like Matariki. For instance, Pou Temara, an expert in Tuhoe tikanga, or values, emphasises the principle of whakapapa, which traces the relationships between the gods and all living things. Māori religiosity, he says, distinguishes between wairua, the spirit, a force that continues when an individual being has ceased to exist and mauri, the individual manifestation of the life force that is born and dies with each living entity. Māori spirituality employs ideas of sacredness, the state of tapu, and of noa, the state of ordinariness, elaborating these concepts into systems of, among others, wairuatanga, whanaungatanga (kinship) and kaitiakitanga—guardianship over things of value (Temara, 2010).

Indigenous expertise in managing the modulation of these concepts embodied in social encounters has meant that the most powerful civic rituals of New Zealand have long been associated with Māori practices (see Webster, 1998; Stenhouse, 2009). These include the powhiri to welcome visitors, the dawn ceremony to consecrate important projects, and the haka to mobilise competitive energy, especially in international sport. In the arts, especially film and television, there has also been a popular strand of production based on Māori sources, presenting communities in which the forces of spirituality generate strength: in *Mauri* (Mita, 1988); *Ngati* (Barclay, 1987); *Whale Rider*, (Caro,

2002) and *Boy* (Waititi, 2010). These films are also often successful internationally as products in a marketplace for spiritual resources where 'spirituality,' as King (1996) and Van der Veer (2011) argue, is a useful framework for promoting equivalency between diverse cultures.

The people now promoting Matariki are typically knowledge workers employed by state or regional community organisations. Their mediations of Matariki assume that effective adoption of unfamiliar practices comes about through voluntary engagement, by seduction through the enrichment of lifestyle. Communication around this New Year festival offers attractive imagery and concepts and absorbing experiences that draw on entertainment codes as well as commercial techniques of brand-enhancement to produce a favourable disposition in its audiences. So, while there is no church of Matariki and no 'prophet' leading a philosophy built around it, the fact that it operates in the territory of spirituality and collective ritual to support the aspirations of modern Māori connects with these earlier phenomena.

## **Description of the project**

The Matariki research project involves analysis of a series of a dozen interviews with cultural producers, most of whom are Māori, combined with the enumeration of a selection of the physical and media products that comprise the public face of the Matariki enterprise. Interviewees were asked about the principles behind the media they produce for Matariki, who they think their audiences are, what they see as the political, economic, and cultural forces shaping the field they operate in, under what circumstances they think Matariki will become embedded in national culture, and whether they see a spiritual framework as relevant to their engagement with Matariki.

It is important also to acknowledge the tensions around my own position in the Aotearoa/New Zealand academic environment, where Māori ownership of indigenous knowledge is a guiding ideal. The paradigm for this ideal is the methodological framework known as 'Kaupapa Māori' that enjoins research led and undertaken by Māori, on issues of importance to Māori, for the betterment of Māori society (Hudson et al. 2010; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). As a New Zealander of European ancestry, my 'voice', informed also by international paradigms, is detectable as foreign within that context. Rather, my interest in Matariki is best seen as that of someone self-defined as Pakeha, a Māori-originated label that sociologist Paul Spoonley contends is used to 'express a relationship towards Māori, especially as

a marker of someone who supports biculturalism as a way of moving forward and the need to offer reparations for historical wrongs' (Spoonley, 2007, p. 11). Since the contemporary Matariki project interpellates 'all New Zealanders' my interest in it is also that of a member of a relevant public.

### **Matariki: A sign of a new beginning**

Matariki is the name of a constellation of seven stars that rises above the Southern hemisphere horizon on a variable date in midwinter. In Europe, the constellation is known as the Pleiades, in Japan it is Subaru, while other Polynesian cultures also mark the return of Matariki. In pre-settler Māori culture, the rising of Matariki marked the beginning of a new year. It was a sign that food-harvesting should have been completed and it was time to start hunting certain fish and animals and to plant new crops. Since it was a society in which the gods were considered active, prayers, incantations, and rituals took place to ensure good fortune and bountiful harvests. The celebration of the appearance of Matariki was mentioned in colonial accounts of Māori customary practices (Best, 1922; Cowan, 1930) but with the hegemony of European worldviews in the twentieth century its commemoration faded, confined predominantly to rural Māori communities, for which its seasonal prompting was still of vital relevance. Instead, the Christian festivals of Christmas and Easter, plus a New Year tied to the first day of January, became the major collective events of the year. The place for an acknowledgment of dependence on the bounty of nature that also aligns with the Southern hemisphere seasons therefore remains unfilled.

### **The contemporary re-development of Matariki**

The origins of Matariki's current redevelopment were apparently spread among members of linked tribal and professional communities in the capital city Wellington. Artist and activist Diane Prince says she and a friend began organising Matariki celebrations at the Pipitea urban marae in 1995. They climbed to the highest vantage point in the city, Tangi te Keo or Mount Victoria, sang waiata, and offered karakia, or prayers (Prince, 2011). Aimed at 'resurrecting' knowledge of the seasonal cycles of food gathering and the rituals and concepts around them', Prince saw Matariki's application as ideally limited to Māori communities: 'iwi communities, hāpu communities, whanau/kura communities—we saw it as a little jewel for us to really look after' (Prince, 2011).

Te Puni Kokiri, the Department of Māori Affairs, became involved with Matariki from the second half of the 1990s, contributing funding for projects such as those at Pipitea marae. The Māori Language Commission, Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori also became supportive of Matariki as a good vehicle for both language and cultural renewal. Its conviction that it was time for a stronger assertion of Māori identity as an aspect of national identity is spelled out in this extract from the English-language text of its 2005 bilingual publication introducing Matariki:

*In recent years there has been an upsurge of awareness among New Zealanders of the place of reo Māori language in both the history and future of Aotearoa. This awareness is part of a process that helps us to be increasingly conscious of our unique cultural identity. The next step is an appreciation of the wider cultural traditions of Māori and one of the most significant celebrations in the Māori calendar is Matariki—the indigenous, Aotearoa, New Year. (Te Taura Whiri, 2005, p. 2)*

The publication, *Matariki: Aotearoa Pacific New Year*, aggregated existing knowledge about Matariki, combining it with suggestions for activities to resource celebrations. The existing knowledge is authenticated by sourcing it to renowned elders or kaumatua: Hekenukumai Busby speaks about the importance of the Matariki star cluster for Pacific navigation (p. 7), while Meremere Penfold weaves denser connections between seasonal change and the ritualised performance of ‘planning, planting, hunting and fishing’ (p. 9). There is a recipe for a hākari or feast and a checklist for the elements of a successful Matariki celebration. The material contained in the Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori booklet and repeated on its website, has served as a core Matariki resource cross-referenced by other linked websites, including Te Papa Tongarewa, the Carter Observatory in Wellington, Te Puni Kokiri, Wellington City Council, New Zealand Post, Auckland City and Te Tai Tokerau Tourism’s Matariki website. The tone of the Taura Whiri materials has anchored the tone of Matariki nationally, so that it has become associated with a set of widely attractive associations such as the importance of family, remembrance of those who have passed on, renewal, self-reflection, generosity, and a more thoughtful connection with the environment. The third Wellington based-organization to disseminate information about Matariki a decade ago and which has since become its most powerful location is the national museum, Te Papa Tongarewa. A former General Manager Māori, James Te Puni, describes marking Matariki in the late 1990s:

*It started with Hec Busby and Te Ru Wharehoka talking to just Māori staff at Te Papa and we had a shared lunch for Matariki, staff only, up in the Hinetitama room [...] it was just us sort of hearing from these old fellas about Matariki [...] and then the following year it just moved a bit further upscale and then the year after that which must have been 2000 [sic] I think was the first time it started to enter into the public programme. (Te Puni, 2011)*

Nowadays, the public program around Matariki stretches out over a month but its heart is still its commemoration by Māori staff:

*We all bring kai (food) and we share kai with each other. But we have a dawn ceremony where we karanga, or call to the stars, to Matariki. So there'll be like seven women doing the karanga one after another ... we have men doing karakia and that's our ceremony to welcome Matariki. (Boynton, 2011)*

Almost all informants spoke about the fact that their own knowledge of Matariki was scant and that the initial stages of revival involved a process of collective re-education:

*For most of the staff there, there was a sense of something they had either not heard of, so in that sense was to some degree lost, for them anyway and so could be rediscovered. (Te Puni, 2011)*

## **Matariki media**

As a phenomenon with a small physical base, the media forming the bulk of Matariki's public presence draw on techniques that allow a few, with limited budgets, to connect with the many. Two North Island sites, Te Papa Tongarewa and Auckland City, have the most extensive Matariki programs spread over the month of June, which they publicise and resource on well-maintained websites. In Wellington, the City Council's Treaty of Waitangi Unit publishes a pamphlet publicising all Matariki events in the region, including a special program at the Carter Observatory and planetarium and linked activities at the science centre for children, Capital-E. Educating the next generation about Matariki is a focus for these last two organisations as well as Te Papa, where approximately 2,500 school students and their teachers go through the Matariki education program each year. There are museum website pages providing teachers with ideas for Matariki classroom activities, and a facility for online chat with teachers by the Te Papa.



A range of products and memorabilia also cluster around Matariki. Te Papa sells T-shirts, stationery items, and a photographic calendar for a year starting in June. A Māori-owned company called Matakite publishes diaries based on a similar time-scheme. The Carter Observatory sells a star-chart highlighting the constellation of Matariki and showing its relationship to the other stars, broadly in the shape of a *waka* or canoe that helped Māori navigate across the Pacific to Aotearoa.

A number of activities commemorating Matariki do take place. The annual Gala Dinner hosted by Te Papa is an important event for Māori professionals and public servants in the capital. Other face-to-face activities include theatre performances and concerts on Matariki-linked themes, while Te Papa has an annual Kaumatua Kapa Haka program where tribal elders perform in the museum's central public space; these performances are also webstreamed to distant audiences. This is not an exhaustive list of the mediations of Matariki; there are also adshells and banners, CDs, wearable art shows, and art exhibitions. However numerous as these mediations appear on paper, in practice they engage a relatively small number of people, some tens of thousands at most. A wider reach is available through the annual Matariki stamp issue from New Zealand Post, now the second most popular issue of the year after the Christmas stamps: Te Puni persuaded NZ Post to launch the Matariki stamp set in 2007.

*If you've seen something on a stamp from a credible nation, you believe that says something intrinsic usually about the nature of that people [...] And unfortunately that voice in the world of postage stamps had been pretty monocultural. Short version, 'we're looking a bit pale here folks, let's connect with some Māori and Pacific communities as well' and got a really good response, those two things converged really. (Te Puni, 2011)*

I have not yet located any sustained television and radio coverage with the exception of a Matariki panel discussion at Auckland Museum recorded in June 2011 by Radio New Zealand. However, there has been Matariki coverage in the print media. Articles are typically clustered in the lifestyle sections of publications, with a focus on craft activities and food suitable for Matariki celebrations, sometimes cooked by celebrity chefs (cf. Monahan, 2010). This kind of coverage, produced annually, is what is likely to embed Matariki as an accepted part of national life, but it is too soon to say if it has become a fixed event in the calendars of lifestyle editors.

## Shaping influences: Indigenous spirituality in the contemporary world

This outline of the products through which Matariki is celebrated will already have suggested that funding must be part of the production cycle of the celebration, even though the participation of state and regional public servants obscures the necessity for direct generation of income. Two examples can be given of varying degrees in which positioning Matariki in a marketplace for spiritual commodities has impacted on the ways in which it has been presented.

The first is an example from *Te Taura Whiri*, which in the prosperous early 2000s was not directly driven by the need to maximise audience size. Its 2005 Matariki publication, while not excluding others, framed Matariki in relation to Māori religious concepts, and audiences. It contained numerous mentions of myths associated with Māori cosmology particularly Papatūānuku, Mother Earth and Tane, God of the Forest. We are told that in midwinter 'certain vegetables are planted to appease the land-based gods, Rongo, Uenuku and Whiro' (2005, p.8). Matariki is described as an appropriate time for thinking about whakapapa, but readers are reminded to be aware of protocols around tapu and noa when disseminating whakapapa (11) that is, not to share tribal knowledge indiscriminately with others.

By the time the booklet was revised in 2010, it targeted a broader audience and has become less culturally specific. This version makes one reference to the trilogy of 'land-based gods' mentioned above but otherwise reframes Matariki's character with the effect of allying it with the amorphous late-modern category of 'spirituality': 'Matariki is a celebration of people, culture, language, spirituality and history' (*Te Taura Whiri*, 2010, p. 5). The revised edition also draws on the trope of 'new beginnings' to offer an ethnically unspecific, psychologically informed conception of Matariki as an opportunity to focus on the self. Above an image of a lone cyclist are the words: 'Matariki is a good time to reflect on your place in the world, to reawaken old skills or to try out new ones and to set new goals' (p. 11). Nevertheless, compared to some other manifestations, both the *Te Taura Whiri* contributions are structured discursively on the assumption that the dignity of mātauranga Māori is related to a gift, not a cash, economy: 'Matariki is a time to give what you have to spare to those who need it. It's about finding something of yourself to offer to others' (2005, p. 21).

## Te Papa Tongarewa and Auckland City

As an organisation tasked with supporting a bicultural model of New Zealand society Te Papa Tongarewa sees itself as leading, not merely reflecting, New Zealanders' views of themselves. This second example concerns the differing modes of address, expressed in design elements, between Te Papa and the website of the larger, more commercial northern city of Auckland, where the weight of the Matariki enterprise lies with the city council.

Each year Te Papa chooses a theme for its Matariki celebrations. In 2010, the theme was 'Voyaging', in 2011, it was the making of cloaks—Ngā Kākahu o Ranginui: Cloaks of the Sky Father (Te Papa, 2011). The theme is then incorporated in a key image representing associations around Matariki, also linked to items in the Museum's collection. Each key image must contain a representation of the seven stars of Matariki (in 2011, shown as birds), and an item from the Museum's own collection (2010, the prow of a canoe, 2011, the cloak the main figure is wearing). These elements support a 'hero'[sic] image of a Māori woman, dressed in garments by a contemporary Māori designer (Boynton, 2011). As compositions, they add new resources to the national imaginary by presenting a feminine, aspirational version of the spiritual character of Matariki. These images strive for the timelessness of myth at the same time as evincing a strong address to an audience. Moreover, they introduce a trace of the marketplace by virtue of their aesthetic style, reminiscent of the fantasy art associated with some forms of New Age spirituality rather than genres of either traditional or contemporary Māori art.

By contrast, the design framework for the Auckland City Matariki website is less overtly ambitious. The pattern of variously-toned circular elements carries different assumptions about the place of Matariki in the community: this is a secular, modest, multicultural design, underplaying 'Māoriness' in favour of representing unity in diversity. There is a central image here, too, in the form of an icon showing seven linked stars, which looks like a candelabra. However, what it gains in inclusivity through its abstract design, the Auckland website loses in emotional power. The design is pleasant but bland and, apart from the Matariki icon, is potentially interchangeable with many other designs produced annually by professional graphic designers. It is, as the commissioning client, Auckland Matariki organizer, Mikki Tae Tapara, acknowledges, the kind of design associated with the marketing of a product.

*Our tohu (logo) is the seven stars of Matariki as they appear in the sky. And below is the trunk of a kauri tree going deep, deep into the ground. The coloured dots are the different people of Auckland. [...] We should get six years out of this brand. (Tapara, 2011)*

The contrast between that characterisation of Matariki and the one offered by Te Papa raises an issue of vital interest to the supporters of Matariki—the extent to which it ought to be commodified.

## **Matariki and commodification**

One of the vectors of acceptability for Matariki and the appreciation for Māori spirituality that it draws on has been that it represents a refuge from a lifeworld defined by the circulation of money. It deals with productive processes that pre-date the turning of life-sustaining food products into commodities. The majority of my interviewees appreciated this 'alternative' aspect of Matariki and were anxious that it be preserved from the commercial debasement seen as a feature of Christian festivals. Their motivation to increase respect for Māori cultural practices through a version of Matariki that Māori shape and control is so strong that they hope to evade the other dynamics that shape contemporary everyday life:

*[...] we definitely want it to be on a different level that it becomes a national treasure, that it becomes a major calendar event. Its [sic] something that we, that people, own from a spiritual perspective, that it's not something to go along with nice food, you might see a nice performance. It means something'. (Boynton, 2011)*

*A concern would be that the more publicity Matariki gets and the more of an idea the spirituality around the Matariki, the awareness of it, is that [...] 'we're gonna go exactly the way that Christmas, Easter and Waitangi Day have gone down, where it's no longer about, Christmas is no longer about Jesus Christ, Easter is no longer about his suffering and death, it's about a bunny, a chocolate bunny. (Ormsby, 2011)*

For two interviewees, however, the commodification of Matariki activities is inevitable and indeed desirable if it is to attract general audiences. For instance, in the search for sponsorship for the Auckland Matariki program, Mikki Tae Tapara merged the logics of Māori

hospitality and contemporary food distribution by obtaining the support of a large supermarket chain: 'I approached New World and said 'how would you like to be involved in a wananga kai (cooking school)? Because kai is a part of every Māori event, manaakitanga, looking after strangers' (Tapara, 2011).

Consequently, the branded logo of the Auckland festival appeared in the fortnightly supermarket fliers distributed to hundreds of thousands of New Zealand homes in June 2011. Exposure for Matariki therefore increased but in the process the boundaries between the initial conception of the festival and commodity culture were almost completely removed. Similarly, James Te Puni, the man who persuaded New Zealand Post to launch a range of Matariki stamps also believes that both a community base and sources of revenue are necessary if a project such as the embedding of Matariki into New Zealand's national culture is going to be successful:

*The reality is if it works from a large organisation's point-of-view that's really interesting, but in the end if it has no community support it just withers and dies. Equally, if something works in a community perspective but no one has the energy or resources to keep it going, it withers and dies. So the reality is that we need both of these elements. (Te Puni, 2011)*

## Conclusion

Most cultural workers for Matariki identify primarily as Māori (with diverse identity paths). For many, Matariki is also 'new' and they are exploring their understandings of what it was and could be as they create it. The basic justification for most who participate in its organisation is that Matariki is seasonally and culturally appropriate to 'Aotearoa'. They want it to become embedded, to be experienced as a dominant framing for a time each year. To facilitate acceptance, a positive, universally relevant set of concepts around food production, self-development, and sharing with others has been highlighted. That this dominant encoding might not be the only one possible, however, is glimpsed in a statement by one of Te Papa's Education team as she reflected on her own learning about Matariki:

*My grandfather knew about it but to them, the people where he came from in Waikato, Ngati Maniapoto, he said to me that it wasn't a time of celebration, it was a time of warfare, of settling debts and sending out your war parties. Because it was cold there was no ground to till, no work to be done. (Hotere, 2011)*

Nevertheless, if Matariki is to be a successful vehicle for increasing respect for Māori-referenced identities in Aotearoa/New Zealand, it is wiser to explore the first set of associations rather than the second. That is, because both the redevelopment of Matariki specifically and an idealised conception of 'Māori spirituality' generally harmonise with developments around religiosity in late-modern cultures internationally. For instance, the principle of whakapapa, which mandates or prohibits particular forms of relationship, can be abstracted into a general principle of aroha or love and compassion for others, which fits with the contemporary sacralisation of forms of family. In practice, some Matariki producers prioritise its spiritual aspects by highlighting the manner in which it reinforces respect for the land and helps sacralise relationships between people, while others see it primarily as 'useful'—teaching te reo, science, technology, astronomy, a vehicle for the telling of culturally formative stories, a focus for arts-based education.

There are some differences as to whom the primary audience for Matariki ought to be: Māori communities, or 'all New Zealanders'. Although audience research is necessary to establish the size and nature of actual audiences, that new identity positions are being created is suggested by the attendance figures from the Auckland festival, which are skewed towards a non-Māori demographic: 30-39, female, Europeans, and 'new New Zealanders' (Tapara, 2011).

Some interviewees expressed concern about the sharing of 'profound' cultural knowledge with those not intrinsically interested: that cultural capital will become devalued. The majority of interviewees perceived a potential conflict between the 'spirit' of Matariki and its commodification, but they also assume the two can be kept apart somehow—that Matariki can indeed be an antidote to some of the more harmful effects of capitalism. From a media, religion, and culture viewpoint, tension between wanting the observance of Matariki to grow and fear that greater acceptance will blur its specifically Māori characteristics is not a surprise. Instances of Māori spirituality have long been in circulation in national popular and civic culture, in turn producing further media texts and practices packaged in forms that can be 'purchased', either in a literal or metaphorical sense. The extension of this process to activities that originally were a core part of indigenous religious culture has perhaps been inevitable in an era that favours the 'soft' politics of lifestyle choices over socio-economic struggle, so that, as Te Puni argues, the conditions that have made the popular dissemination of Matariki possible are also the conditions that shape its contemporary characteristics.

Indeed, as the New Zealand government divests itself of expensive activities following the watershed of the 2008 international recession, it may be that the infrastructural support for the extension of Matariki is already on the wane and that its sponsors' dedication to it will be tested. Nevertheless, it remains an interesting case study of the interaction of the forces that Meyer (2009) described, where the blurring of distinctions between religion and entertainment creates new opportunities for people to come into contact with religious ideas and practices at the same time as the representation of those religious concepts is re-shaped by the underlying forces of commodification.

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