Social Cohesion and Cohesive Ties: Responses to Diversity

ROBIN PEACE
PAUL SPOONLEY*

Abstract

Policy work that was undertaken on social cohesion in New Zealand around 2005 and resulted in a Cabinet paper has had limited uptake. The indicator framework for assessing immigrant and host outcomes that was developed in the context of government aspirations to build a more cohesive society was seen as too complex for government departments to operationalise, despite the relative success of similar theoretical developments in both Canada and the United Kingdom. The idea of cohesive societies has not gone away – if anything, recent high immigration levels have enhanced its relevance – and it is perhaps timely to reconsider the approach underpinning the framework that was developed and suggest an alternative that considers social and personal connectivity. One such approach, drawn obliquely from linguistics, is to consider the idea of 'cohesive ties' rather than the more abstract concept of cohesion per se and to seek indicators that point to the small mechanisms that contribute to unity, togetherness, continuity, coherence, connection, linkages and interrelatedness between people and groups that are critical to the different ways in which we come to 'know' the 'other'. This has the potential to shift the conversation away from the relatively ubiquitous emphasis on cohesion as a property of ethnic differentiation – where ethnicity is seen as a potentially divisive aspect of social organisation that needs to be addressed by public policy – towards an understanding that differences between individuals and groups are multi-faceted, inevitable and enriching. Our argument is that small mechanisms are what mobilise strong cultural interchange, the possibility of interpersonal trust and acceptance, and facilitate robust and meaningful 'everyday' engagements in our multiple institutions, families, neighbourhoods, schools and communities and across multiple diversities.

Keywords: social cohesion, diversity, immigrants, immigration, cohesive ties.

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* Associate Professor Robin Peace and Distinguished Professor Paul Spoonley are members of the CaDDANZ research programme and of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Massey University.
Emails: P.Spoonley@massey.ac.nz and R.Peace@massey.ac.nz

Wе rehearse the reasons why a policy approach that centres on social cohesion has become important in 21st-century New Zealand, specifically in relation to very high levels of inward migration and the 'diversification of diversity'. Similar dynamics – and a range of concerns about exclusion, lack of trust and poor inter-ethnic relations – have prompted a number of countries to consider social cohesion as a central policy goal from the 1990s, notably Canada and the United Kingdom. By the early 2000s, a similar discussion took place in New Zealand and there was a flurry of interest – resulting in a cabinet paper (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2003) – between 2003 and 2005. But this initial work was not pursued other than in one further exploratory government document (Ministry of Social Development, 2008). We explore the history of this discussion and then suggest an alternative approach to conceptualising our ideas of social cohesion.

We were both involved in the initial policy debates in New Zealand about social cohesion: one as policy analyst in one of the key policy agencies that had responsibility for undertaking the preparatory work and then the writing of the cabinet paper, and the other as an academic who was the programme leader of a major research project, the Integration of Immigrants Programme. We were both personally interested in the complex and problematic issues of migration and settlement, and questions of adjustment and recognition that are subsequent to the arrival of immigrants. In the early stage of work, it was interesting to negotiate the sensitivities and disparate interests of key players, government departments and agencies, note the policy emphasis on economic benefits, and then also note how local community interests (such as in schools, neighbourhoods, shopping centres) might – or might not – be reflected in policy focus. Eventually, the latter was not seen as an important consideration in terms of what needed to happen in relation to adjustment and recognition – and it is this everyday experience of *living within – and with –* diversity that we regard now as being critical. The following account should be read with our direct involvement and particular experiences in mind.

There is also one other omission that we address in this article. Immigration and the discussion of social cohesion are critical in terms of prior and ongoing policy debates in relation to the positioning of Māori, and we would note that this was not a consideration much less a matter of

discussion with relevant individuals, organisations or communities in the early 2000s, and seldom since. However, it should be. Māori were excluded from the initial policy work concerning social cohesion, as they have been with much of the work concerning immigration. As part of our argument, we suggest that important definitional roles in relation to migration belong crucially to Māori as tangata whenua (people of the land). The terms of 'first' settlement were negotiated between Māori and the Crown but those negotiations have been absent from prerogative Crown responses to later waves of settlement. We suggest that the development of a distinctly New Zealand and more people-centred approach to migration may depend on Māori voices being at the table.

Contextualising the New Zealand interest in social cohesion

There are at least two important reasons why social cohesion might be – or should be – considered in contemporary New Zealand. In the 1970s, Britain's entry into the European Economic Community and subsequent changes to New Zealand's terms of trade and engagement with the United Kingdom was reflected (and formalised) in changing migration laws. The review of immigration priorities in 1974 under the incoming Labour Government foreshadowed a first tentative shift from the privileging of British immigration first established under the Immigration Restriction Amendment Act in 1920 (Hutching, 1999; McMillan, 2006). In the 20th century prior to the 1970s, it was simply assumed by the then majority white settler communities that New Zealand was a cohesive society characterised by shared values of egalitarianism, self-sufficiency and a notion of fair play bound in a complex and desirable interdependency with the 'mother country' (Kennedy, 2008, p. 402). The 1970s and 1980s marked a distinct shift from these colonial patterns of governmentality and nation-building (Spoonley, 2014). In the first case, the notion of a singular nation state came under scrutiny and critique as a re-energised and refocused set of Māori politics sought to contest the "displacement of Indigenous others" (Veracini, 2008, p. 364). As Veracini (2008) goes on to note, there has been a significant shift in the discursive and constitutional recognition of indigenous nations in British settler countries like New Zealand, although not without opposition and disapproval. These politics of indigeneity have increasingly reconfigured "political contours in ways unimaginable just a generation ago" (Maaka & Fleras, 2005, p. 9).

The second moment that occurred almost simultaneously with the new politics of indigeneity was the reconnection with other parts of the Pacific in the form of labour migration from Samoa and Tonga (and later Fiji) along with flows from New Zealand dependencies – the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau. In the same way that there was a major relocation of Māori in the post-war years, from traditional rohe (tribal territories/regions) to the urban centres of 20th-century production and life, there was an equally significant relocation of Pasifika communities. By 1990, when the migrant generations of Pasifika were outnumbered by those born in New Zealand, many of the New Zealand-located Pasifika populations exceeded those of their homelands. This relocation and insertion into urban, capitalist modes of production was notable for at least two reasons. One was that it represented the first major modern-era migration from 'non-traditional' source countries differentiated from the previous reliance on the UK and Ireland (Spoonley & Bedford, 2012). Secondly, the visibly and culturally different nature of these migrants, especially as perceived by the hegemonic Pākehā, led to a moral panic which in turn politicised and racialised these migrants. This racialisation of migration also shifted public awareness to other ethnically distinct groups such as, for example, Chinese (Ip, 2003) and Indian (Bandyopadhyay & Buckingham 2018).

The next stage in these evolving politics was the change to immigration policy in 1986–87. A key component was the move away from the discriminatory source-country immigration policy that privileged white settlers from the UK. The 1987 Immigration Act discarded source-country criteria and replaced them with an approach that focused on the economic value (skills and qualifications for jobs that demanded more labour than could be locally supplied) that immigrants added to New Zealand as part of the neoliberal agenda of internationalising the New Zealand labour market.

The first notable effects of the 1987 Immigration Act came in the 1990s with significant arrivals from more non-traditional source countries, notably Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea. As with Pasifika, this prompted a moral panic that began in 1993 with the "Inv-Asian" articles in Auckland community newspapers (Spoonley & Bedford, 2012) and reached a climax with the high degree of support offered to the newly formed New Zealand First political party in the 1996 general election. The numbers of migrants arriving from Asia slowed in the late 1990s, partially as a consequence of domestic politics that were hostile to migrants of colour but

also because of an economic downturn in Asia. After a number of major reforms by a new Labour-led government from 1999, the numbers of immigrants again picked up (see Figure 1 for overall numbers) but were now dominated by other non-traditional source countries, China and India, and an increasing number of smaller flows from a wide range of other countries. As Figure 1 indicates, for much of the 1980s, the arrival numbers were less than 50,000. By 2017, they had risen to more than 130,000. Between 2013 and 2018, the net gain from migration was 260,000. Compared with the previous inter-census period, when it was 35,000, the flows were considerably larger and were also drawn from very different source countries.

Figure 1: Flow chart of permanent immigration to New Zealand, 1980–2017.
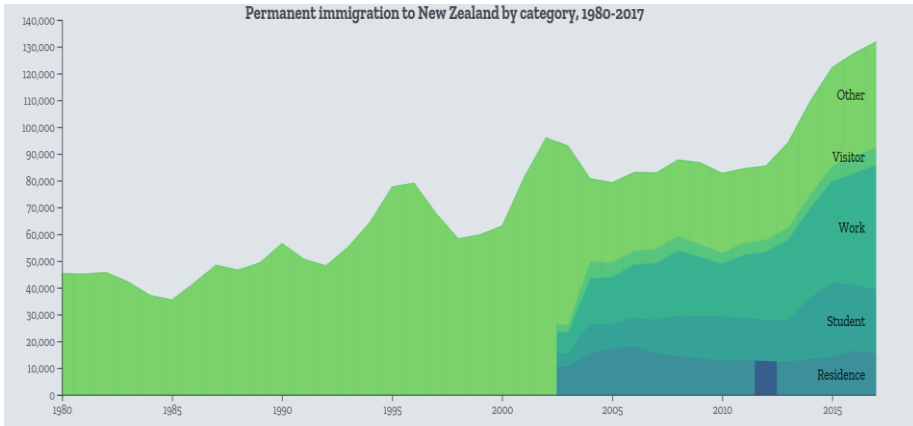
Permanent immigration to New Zealand by category, 1980-2017
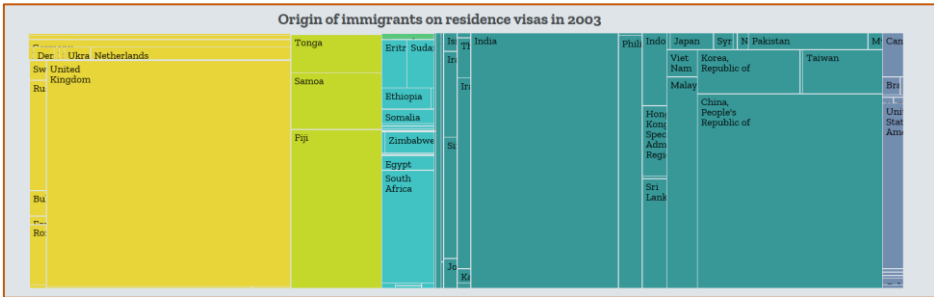
Source: Visualizing superdiversity, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, www.superdiv.mmg.mpg.de.

The composition of these flows can be illustrated by looking at the source countries for a visa category such as the Residence Visa. The following two figures compare 2003 (when new visa categories were introduced) and 2017. The box sizes reflect the numbers. The contrasts, with growing numbers from China compared with declining numbers from the UK, are notable. (Note that the total flows were larger, so these numbers are relative to overall numbers being given approval for this visa category).

The point to underline is that not only was New Zealand becoming more diverse as a result of very different migration dynamics and characteristics after 1986–87, there were also new sensitivities and anxieties. The politicisation of immigrants and immigration in the 1970s

and again in the 1990s had been very disruptive and had undermined inter-ethnic community trust and respect. The numbers and the diversity of new settler groups always had the potential to spark backlash from influential sections of existing communities. In addition, the recognition of indigeneity and the introduction of limited but still influential forms of biculturalism invited successive governments to pay attention to 'diversity management' (see, for example, Jones, Pringle, & Shepherd, 2000). As the new century emerged, and under the auspices of a Labour-led government, key government agencies, led by the Ministry of Social Development, were interested in exploring the notion of social cohesion in relation to increasing ethnic diversity.

Figure 2: Origin of immigrants on residence visas, 2003, New Zealand

Source: Visualizing superdiversity, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, www.superdiv.mmg.mpg.de

Figure 3: Origin of immigrants on residence visas, 2017, New Zealand

Source: Visualizing superdiversity, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, www.superdiv.mmg.mpg.de

Social cohesion: International developments

Other countries were exploring how to 'manage' immigration-related diversity. One of the sources of thought leadership in this field was Canada which, from the 1970s when multiculturalism was developed as an official policy, was keen to encourage positive relations between communities, including new settler communities and others. By the 1990s, the stress was on the importance of shared capital. As Jackson et al. (2000) of the Canadian Council on Social Development noted, social cohesion was part of "an ongoing process of developing a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunity within Canada, based on a sense of trust, hope and reciprocity" (p. 34). This approach first appeared in Canada in 2000, and by 2002 was associated with the notion of shared citizenship. By 2004, social cohesion had slipped somewhat as a key policy focus but remained as a high-level policy ambition in Canada.

The Council of Europe (2000) also stressed the importance of shared loyalties and solidarity, which were underpinned by shared values. The aim was to encourage both immigrants and hosts to feel part of a common community and to share feelings of a common identity (although the effect was often to stress the need for these feelings of belonging amongst newly arrived immigrant communities). To achieve these goals, there was an emphasis on trust and the need to reduce disparities, inequalities and social exclusion. The latter reflected the particularities of some European states and a rights-deficit approach, essentially a concern with addressing the absence of rights, in this case of migrants and refugees. As Vasta (2013) has commented (in relation to Europe), there were particular assumptions made about the need for migrants to 'fit in' with existing nation states by many governments and key players.

> The continuing backlash against immigration and multiculturalism is occurring across many European countries with the result that 'integration and cohesion' has become a common catchphrase. Integration is often defined in a normative way, to imply a one-way process of adaptation by newcomers to fit in with a dominant culture and way of life. (Vasta, 2013, p. 197)

While the Canadians stressed the importance of shared citizenship in the early 2000s, the Europeans were concerned with the threats posed by economic exclusion – although there was still an interest in social capital enhancement. These differences reflected both the historical role played by

migration in Canada, as opposed to Europe where most countries did not have national narratives that regarded migrants positively, and the importance played by socio-economic factors – or class – in the industrial economies of Europe where there was a long-standing focus on economic marginalisation and exclusion. What was shared was the implicit assumption that cohesion was a desired target or outcome. In addition, Canada wrestled with the discourses of bi- versus multi-cultural approaches but, like New Zealand, was slow to engage indigenous voice in debates about social cohesion across first, later and more recent settler populations (Darnell 2003).

The approach of the UK was influenced by the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (Parekh, 2000) where cohesion was defined as "community of communities and a community of citizens". This was reliant on a "commitment to certain core values ... equality and fairness, dialogue and consultation, tolerance, compromise, and accommodation … [and a] determination to confront and eliminate racism and xenophobia" (Parekh, 2000, p. 56). Shared with the European approach is the desire to generate a consensus about shared values and the importance of cohesion as a desirable end state. There was also a more explicit emphasis on social exclusion that was associated, especially in some European and British regions, with the impacts of economic (especially labour market) insecurity and political changes/restructuring.

In Australia, social cohesion as a concept closely connected to ideas of cultural diversity and immigration has been sustained through the annual Scanlon 'Mapping Social Cohesion' survey. Since 2007, this survey has collected national response data against criteria of:

> **Belonging**: Indication of pride in the Australian way of life and culture; sense of belonging; importance of maintaining Australian way of life and culture; **Worth**: Satisfaction with present financial situation and indication of happiness over the last year; **Social justice and equity**: Views on the adequacy of financial support for people on low incomes; the gap between high and low incomes; Australia as a land of economic opportunity; trust in the Australian government; **Participation** (political): Voted in an election; signed a petition; contacted a Member of Parliament; participated in a boycott; attended a protest; and **Acceptance and rejection, legitimacy**: The scale measures rejection, indicated by a negative view of immigration from many different countries; reported experience of discrimination in the last 12 months; disagreement with government support to ethnic minorities for maintenance of customs and traditions; feeling that life in three or four years will be worse. (Markus 2019, p. 19)

The Australian focus encapsulated in the survey was not dissimilar to the approach developed in New Zealand.

Social cohesion arrives in New Zealand: A policy experiment

Both authors of this paper were involved in the initial debates about social cohesion in New Zealand and so the description of that process that follows is part public record and part autobiographical. During the 1990s, key government departments and agencies realised that some policy settings for immigration were not working effectively, and by the time a new Labour–led government arrived in 1999, there was a perceived need to change policy settings. The Minister of Immigration, the Hon. Lianne Dalziel, oversaw a number of policy shifts in the early 2000s (33 in total). These were to emphasise the alignment of migrant supply with local demand, to stress the economic dimensions of migration and the attractiveness of those migrants who could add to New Zealand's economy, and to provide a range of visa categories that met these needs. While the notion that economic benefits followed from bringing in (skilled) migrants had existed through the 1990s, there was a clearer sense that if an economic dividend was to be achieved through immigration, then policy settings needed to be refined after 2000. Very quickly, the source countries shifted again – and now China and India began to dominate many visa categories. Government departments were instructed to pay more attention to settlement outcomes, and this emphasis was signalled by the emergence of a number of regional approaches and a national policy statement *National Immigration Settlement Strategy, 2003* (New Zealand Immigration Service, 2004). Not long after, and under the auspices of the Centre for Social Research and Evaluation/Te Pokapu Rangahau Arotaki Hapori at the Ministry of Social Development, a policy paper was produced: 'Immigration and social cohesion: Developing an indicator framework for measuring the impact of settlement policies in New Zealand 2005'. A socially cohesive society was envisaged in the context of rapidly increasing ethnic diversity as one "with a climate of collaboration because all [ethnic] groups have a sense of belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition and legitimacy" (POL Min 03 27/3). While ethnicity was never specified as the foundation for the policy, it was always assumed to be the core driver of the state's need to manage 'difference'. These were not the only contributions to the newly emerged interest in social cohesion and they reflected a broader and growing interest in social capital (Ministry

of Social Development, 2004) and social outcomes (Ministry of Social Development, 2003). Almost immediately, there was attention paid to network development as a contribution to social capital enhancement.

The National Immigration Settlement Strategy (New Zealand Immigration Service, 2004) was focused on the development of networks that were intended to be supportive of immigrants and to build what was referred to as "sustainable community identity". A key ambition was to make immigrants feel safe, especially in expressing their ethnic identity, and to be accepted by the wider community. In turn, it was also critical that they were able to – and did – participate in civic community and social activities. Six goals were identified:

- Obtain employment appropriate to their qualifications and skills.

- Be confidant using English in a New Zealand setting or can access appropriate language support to bridge the gap.

- Access appropriate information and responsive services…

- Form supportive social networks and establish a sustainable community identity.

- Feel safe expressing their ethnic identity and are accepted by, and are part of, the wider host community.

- Participate in civic, community and social activities.

(New Zealand Immigration Service, 2004)

In the midst of these documents and discussions, a group from the Ministry of Social Development (Peace, O'Neill) and Massey University (Spoonley, Butcher) produced a working paper on social cohesion. From the outset, there were some interesting challenges and no-go areas. For instance, there were inevitable constraints on writing policy documents for government or contributing to Cabinet debates. Furthermore, the policy work was narrowly concerned with settlement outcomes for recent migrants; the possibility of including Māori in some way was off the table, as both politically sensitive for governments (Māori were not to be considered in the same space as migrants, sometimes for good reason) and unacceptable for some Māori (see Ranginui Walker's concern about migration and the possibility of multiculturalism in Spoonley, 2009). The peculiar definition of ethnicity that operates within government agencies in New Zealand also affected discussions. Some government departments specifically covered things Māori (Te Puni Kōkiri) or Pasifika (the Ministry of Pacific Affairs,

now called the Ministry for Pacific Peoples), so that an agency such as the Office of Ethnic Affairs (now, the Office of Ethnic Communities) was mandated to focus on non-Māori, non-Pasifika, non-European ethnic communities. Therefore, in the documents concerning social cohesion, there was an assumption that social cohesion dealt exclusively with non-Māori/non-Pasifika/non-European migrants. The documents skirt around naming it in this way and, in fact, specific ethnicities or immigrant groups are not identified or mentioned. Aside from the awkward (and bizarre) exclusion of Māori, Pasifika and European from the ethnic categorisation of migrants, no other axes of difference were seen to be relevant in these policy spaces. There was, therefore, no focus on gender, religious or age differentials that might bring force to bear on social cohesion. And we were as guilty as the official agencies of working within these constraints.

Another challenge was to construct a policy approach to social cohesion that did not compartmentalise or place the burden of adaptation on immigrants in a punitive or top-down manner. As we wrote at the time, taking our lead from Beauvais and Jenson (2002),

> [I]f common values and a shared civic culture are the lens to be used, then the emphasis will be on the fragmentation or the weakening of 'shared values' and subsequent policy interventions will be designed to strengthen these values. If social order and control are the main foci, then policy might stress the need to reduce exclusion and the importance and legitimacy of institutions and systems. (Spoonley et al., 2005, p. 88)

There were, and are, "definitional choices [that] have significant consequences for what is analysed, what is measured, and what policy action is recommended" (Beauvais & Jenson, 2002, p. 6).

We took our steer from the Canadians, and especially the work by Jenson (1998) who, as part of a major investment by the Canadian Government, had completed some interesting conceptual pieces through the 1990s (see Jenson, 1998; Beauvais & Jenson, 2002). At the core were five elements – belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition and legitimacy – which all came from the work by Jenson and her Canadian colleagues. It is worth outlining the details of what we referred to as the five "intermediate outcomes". These were the key five contributing elements that had previously been identified by Jenson (1998), and were aligned, in this case, with the *Immigration resettlement strategy: A programme of action for settlement outcomes that promote social cohesion* that had been jointly

written by the Ministry of Social Development and the Department of Labour. There, social cohesion was defined as:

> New Zealand becomes an increasingly socially cohesive society with a climate of collaboration because all groups have a sense of belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition and legitimacy. (POL Min 03 27/30)

We then built upon these five outcomes, and divided them into two categories, and grounded them – at least in ambition – in a New Zealand context. Firstly, there were two elements that represented socially cohesive behaviour, then a further three that were "conditions for a socially cohesive society" (Peace et al., 2005). What follows is the conceptual framework in detail.

<u>Elements of socially cohesive behaviour</u>

A sense of **belonging** derives from being part of the wider community, trusting in other people and having a common respect for the rule of law and for civil and human rights – New Zealand is home to many peoples, and is built on the bicultural foundation of the Treaty of Waitangi. *Ethnically and culturally diverse communities and individuals experience a sense of belonging and their contribution is recognised, celebrated and valued.*

Participation includes involvement in economic and social (cultural, religious, leisure) activities, in the workplace, family and community settings, in groups and organisations, and in political and civic life (such as voting or standing for election on a school Board of Trustees). *All people in New Zealand are able to participate in all aspects of New Zealand life.*

<u>Elements that comprise conditions for a socially cohesive society</u>

Inclusion involves equity of opportunities and of outcomes, with regard to labour market participation and income and access to education and training, social benefits, health services and housing. *All people in New Zealand share access to equitable opportunities and services and contribute to good settlement outcomes in ways that are recognised and valued.*

Recognition involves all groups, including the host country, valuing diversity and respecting differences, protection from discrimination and harassment, and a sense of safety. *Diversity of opinions and values amongst the many cultures that make up New Zealand today are accepted and respected, and people are protected from the adverse effects of discrimination.*

Legitimacy includes confidence in public institutions that act to protect rights and interests, the mediation of conflicts, and institutional responsiveness. *Public institutions foster social cohesion, engender trust and are responsive to the needs of all communities.*

(Peace et al., 2005, pp. 17–18).

These elements, although persuasive at one level, are not unproblematic. For example, as Vasta (2013) has noted, "belonging [is] formed between the interplay of the subjective self, collective agency and structural positioning" (p. 198). Personal, community and national forms of belonging might involve very different processes and outcomes – and not necessarily align. Moreover, for immigrants, and especially skilled cosmopolitan migrants, there are strong transnational ties and multiple sites of belonging.

Next, there was the task of actually specifying the indicator framework – what was going to be used to indicate whether certain social outcomes and therefore social cohesion was to be achieved. The other substantive contribution to policy debates in New Zealand at the time was provided by the Indicator Framework, which was included in the MSD document as "under development". The indicators were chosen for their relevance, national significance, ability to be disaggregated, validity, statistical soundness, replicability, interpretability and as being internationally comparable (Peace et al., 2005, p. 21).

The limited uptake of social cohesion in New Zealand

In terms of an overarching strategy that was to influence various settings and policy ambitions, social cohesion was, at best, a minor success. It re-emerged in some agencies and policy initiatives, but as a rallying call for greater consideration to be given to settlement outcomes and equity and, therefore, social relations and trust, it was of limited influence. It failed to survive in any coherent form, and it was not something that entered political, policy or public discourse as a serious policy priority. In this section, we identify six reasons for the limited uptake.

The first reason was that government departments operate often as silos, sometimes even as competitors. It soon became obvious that while some government departments (other than those involved in the initial work on social cohesion) were needed to drive a comprehensive social policy agenda with specified outcomes and measurements, social cohesion was not something that they were prepared to commit to. There was insufficient cross-agency agreement that social cohesion should underpin policy when it came to settlement outcomes or community development/relations. This lack of inter-agency agreement was not helped by the rapidity with which policies

are re-forged by successive governments and ministers in a cycle of three-year government terms. The initial discussions concerning social cohesion took place under a new Labour-led government but then spanned a general election in 2005 that resulted in a multi-party coalition, still led by Labour but with a strong anti-immigration voice.

The second obstacle was the indicator framework and the work needed to populate it with appropriate outcome indicators and data. It was simply seen as too complex for government departments to implement within their respective areas of responsibility. This was in spite of the fact that similar indicator frameworks had been made operational in both Canada and the UK and worked as measures of how immigrant communities were faring and how host communities were reacting and playing a part in developing trust and respect.

A third reason was that the term itself remained confined to policy and governmental circles and there was little attempt to explain to various public audiences why it might be an approach that would help community relations. It was – and remains – an abstract policy term that has extremely limited use and understanding in public domains.

Furthermore, there was a move towards the use of the concept of social *inclusion* and *participation* (Bromell & Hyland 2007) with a more direct transactional focus that foreshadowed waning political interest in the complexities of social cohesion by proposing more measurable alternatives.

Figure 4: Draft Indicator Framework for measuring the impact of settlement policies on social cohesion

Source: Peace et al., 2005, p. 19.

Unlike Canada and Europe, where there had been an extensive and ongoing public debate about the need for a policy framework that centred around social cohesion, and an alignment between this initiative and existing frameworks concerning an official multiculturalism (Fonseca, Lukosch &

Brazier, 2019), the idea of social cohesion sat uncomfortably with public understanding and discourse in New Zealand. It was not a label that resonated with many. It was seen as politically problematic in its focus on immigrants and settlement outcomes without meshing with a policy environment that was widely influenced by a bicultural framing. Bicultural considerations and recognition of tangata whenua were absent from any of the key discussion documents, and so the question of how it sat alongside, or in competition with (as some would argue), biculturalism was an obvious and significant vacuum.

Overall, in the New Zealand setting, cohesion was seen either as a term that conduced towards 'making everything (ethnically differentiated people) stick together by making it (them) the same', or as binding everyone so strongly to a national idea and national sense of unity and harmony that there was little space for transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, or the full acceptance of non-citizens, including temporary migrants. In either case, the concept was tightly connected to ideas of the ethnic difference of new migrants rather than more broadly with any notion of human diversity and engagement across multiple and intersecting constructs of difference (such as age, gender, sexuality). Religious difference, at least in the context of Islam, was conflated in large part with perceived ethnicity and this lack of clarity produced a range of unaddressed complications. Ideas concerning cohesion were seen to be negative, top-down and reinforcing a 'one New Zealand/we are all Kiwis' view of identity that did not sit well with Māori or, indeed, many others for whom difference defined who they were or their relations with the broader society. It highlighted the way in which Māori were largely absent from debates around social cohesion, either in relation to policy development per se or in relation to the naming of an approach that was grounded in New Zealand and te Tiriti o Waitangi (see Burns et al., 2018). Animosity to the concept grew such that for most, both in relation to the public but also government departments, social cohesion as a policy option had disappeared by the second decade of the 21st century. Even a review of debates concerning diversity and citizenship under the Labour Government (1999–2008) omits any mention of social cohesion (Simon-Kumar, 2012).

Internationally, however, the concept is far from moribund. It has recently been revived in discussions in relation to the tension between European-level social policies and "organic, local social cohesions in

everyday life" (Boucher & Samad, 2013), defining cohesion in a South African context alongside *ubuntu* (Burns, Hull, Lefko-Everett, & Njozela, 2018 – see below), in the context of resilient cities (Fonseca et al., 2019), and in terms of its inseparability from its spatial context and place-based dimensions (Mehta, 2019). These latter three publications also go to some length to rehearse the definition and use of the concept of social cohesion and Burns et al. (2018) provide what they describe as a new "austere" definition, to which we return later:

> Social Cohesion is the extent to which people are co-operative, within and across group boundaries, without coercion or purely self-interested motivation. (Burns et al., 2018, p. 13)

Fonseca et al.'s (2019) reconceptualisation of social cohesion examined close to 70 European variations of its deployment since Durkheim coined the concept in 1897. This scholarship is useful not least because they also propose a framework that explicitly acknowledges that cohesion exists at the intersection of individual, community and institutional effects. They define the dynamic and complex nature of a cohesive society as:

> ...the ongoing process of developing well-being, sense of belonging, and voluntary social participation of the members of society, while developing communities that tolerate and promote a multiplicity of values and cultures, and granting at the same time equal rights and opportunities in society. (Fonseca et al., 2019, p. 246)

As they suggest, cohesion is what comes into being in the triangulation of capacities and interdependencies between individual, community and institutional settings and highlights equal rights and opportunities in society as a core component of a definition.

Burns et al. (2018) take issue with the inclusion of equality in a definition of cohesion, suggest this is merely a way of "smuggling" an additional variable alongside cohesion and argue persuasively that this is not a desirable way to proceed if, in fact, the aim is to understand cohesion as "*variably realisable*" (emphasis in the original, p. 11). In working with the Nguni (South African) conceptualisation of *ubuntu,* their approach emphasises characteristics of "collective shared-ness, obedience, humility, solidarity, caring, hospitality, interdependence, communalism" (Burns et al., 2018, p. 11). Such conceptualisation also specifically makes space for the "organic" and "local" aspects of social cohesion "in everyday life" as also discussed in Boucher and Samad (2013). It is to these ideas of the organic and the local, and the variably realisable, to which we now turn through the

introduction of a completely different metaphor drawn not from structural images but more directly from language and its role in sense making.

Talk about social cohesion is problematic. In policy contexts, it increasingly reflects a desire to manage difference (Rata & Al-Assad, 2019) and is, as Burns et al. (2018) suggest, a way to smuggle in ideas that suggest we should aim to be 'more the same', while also being more inclusive and more equal. In academic contexts, it is debated vigorously but without reaching consensus about its best use. Here we propose this linguistic turn as a way of reinvigorating a New Zealand approach to social cohesion and suggest a different way of articulating what might be needed to 'glue' communities and individuals into lightly bonded touch points of conviviality, civility and hospitable respect that conduce towards a "vigorous capacity" (Erasmus, cited in Darnell, 2003, p. 117) to build relationships between peoples.

Cohesive ties and interconnections: Extending notions of social cohesion

One idea that has underpinned our determination to keep thinking about social cohesion as a potentially useful concept is the value it has in discussions about collective safety, peace and prosperity. Burns et al. (2018) were also faced with this challenge and chose a very concrete image to underpin the direction in which they wished to proceed. They began by suggesting that "the metaphor of cohesion calls to mind a physical structure whose parts *stick together*. There is a failure of cohesion when a structure *falls apart*" (Burns et al, 2018, p. 9, emphasis in the original). They begin with a presupposition, as all the writings about social cohesion do, that there is implicit value in societies being cohesive in some ways. They take their concrete visual image and suggest that there are:

> ...two paradigmatic ways in which a structure could fail to stick together: it could either crumble into a multitude of individual fragments, or break into a few pieces. As we will see, these two types of falling apart correspond with two different ways in which a society can fail to be cohesive: by being an *atomised society* and by being a *divided society*. (Burns et al, 2018, p. 10)

These images also permit the imagination of different ways of 'gluing' potential parts together: small sections with tight adhesive and larger pieces perhaps tied together in looser but still connected ways. This

feels, intuitively, like a useful approach to pursue. It is only through determining the direction of the definition that measurement can also be considered.

In our case, we have turned to the idea of a communicative utterance — a sentence or a clause — as the basis for an alternative metaphor. The premise is only loosely derived from linguistics and, in this interpretation, might cause linguists some discomfort. However, the logic of the metaphor proceeds as follows. An utterance that makes sense ('is sensible') to a general reader is the outcome of multiple parts (conceptual language and small grammatical mechanisms) working alongside each other to deliver something that is coherent in any given language to readers of that language. English linguistic scholars have studied and named the ways in which the 'grammar' of English delivers sense to readers and have defined the various ways in which *cohesive ties* help to deliver linguistic cohesion and sense. A cohesive tie is that part of a sentence "where the interpretation of any item in a text or discourse requires the making of a reference to some other item in the same text or discourse" (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 11) such as where a pronoun, noun or conjunction in one clause refers backwards or forwards to another clause. These are also called reference items. In English, they include personal pronouns, such as *I, you, he, she, it*; possessive adjectives, such as *my, your, his, her*; possessive pronouns, such as *mine, yours, his, hers*; demonstratives, such as *this, that, these, those*; and the definite article, *the*. For example, in the sentence "I see **six shoes** at the door – they are **yours**", 'yours' references the already identified six shoes. We presuppose the tie between the shoes and their owner. These are the small mechanisms of language that those of us who are not linguists take for granted and pay relatively little attention to, but without them, our language founders and our ability to communicate effectively with others is severely limited. They can be likened to the "weak ties" first described by Granovetter (1973) and more recently elaborated in the work of Mehta (2019).

Making a leap from these language observations to the behaviour of people is a challenge. However, we argue that the focus for social cohesion work in New Zealand may well need to shift to paying attention to 'small mechanisms' if we are to make sense of the increasing diversity that requires some presupposition of relationships that are already latent, unobserved but fully present in the everyday intercourse between groups and individuals.

In the previous iteration of a draft indicator framework (Peace et al., 2005, p. 19), we were seeking measures from both host and new migrant communities across a very large number of potential data points. This was thorough but unwieldy and assumed that cohesion is somehow a property of ethnically defined population groups. Arguably, we were looking for evidence of cohesive ties in the wrong place and at the wrong scale.

In order to illustrate an alternative way of thinking about this, we turn briefly to the Islamophobic massacre in Christchurch that occurred during Friday Prayer on 15 March 2019. In this mosque-based shooting, 51 people were killed and 49 were injured, many seriously. Such an attack, related back to Burns et al.'s (2018) metaphor, indicates both an atomised society on the one hand and a divided society on the other. The atomisation is apparent through the destructive capability of individual interconnection through social media. On the surface, a single individual acted to produce destruction but was, in fact, bolstered by an atomised 'audience'. Those who are opposed to diversity recognition range along a spectrum and there has been a tendency to overlook or discount the significance of either the more mainstream within this spectrum or those on the activist fringes. Looking back at our earlier work on social cohesion, it was a major oversight on our part when we omitted to consider the power of the internet to contribute positively or negatively to social cohesion or to consider the ways in which social media connections are driven by highly individualised forms of engagement with others.

The divided society, which manifests itself in the representation of 'this group' versus 'that group' can be seen in all the ways in which white settler New Zealand was complacent in the face of increasing Islamophobic abuse experienced by the Muslim community prior to the mosque massacres. It was generally agreed that religiously based division was not part of the national character of New Zealand as witnessed by the public uptake of the Prime Minister's early claim that "This is not us" (Guardian, 2018). However, as Jess Berentson (2019) has subsequently said: "So better then to say: 'This has been us. And we don't want this to be us.'" This event in Christchurch demonstrated aspects of both an atomised and a divided society, but the complex responses to it may illustrate more of the small mechanisms that we argue point to the possibility of seeing value in cohesive ties rather than seeking the nominalised and more abstract state of social cohesion.

People of all backgrounds, ethnicities, genders and ages responded strongly in the aftermath of the attacks in support of the Muslim communities in New Zealand. They spoke about it, gifted money, wrote about it in public, educated themselves, and castigated themselves for ignorance and apathy. More importantly, they had conversations with their Muslim neighbours, and looked for ways to show respect. While much of that outpouring of solidarity has since subsided, it drew attention to the fact that development of cohesive ties with a particular community is possible.

Pillet-Shore (2011) suggests that strangers, for all of us, embody "a locus of uncertainty" (p. 74). And it is uncertainty that makes us afraid. So, we need ways of stepping out to meet the stranger, to introduce ourselves, and to understand that if we belong to a mainstream, Anglo masculine world of the Christian 40-somethings, then a responsibility rests with us to make that first move. The teaching of civics in New Zealand schools appears to focus on the rights and responsibilities of individual citizenship and critical thinking (Tavich & Krieble, 2018), but does not actively engage questions of community building or developing strategies for identifying and challenging stereotypes or institutional or personal racism. Although schools are relatively age-homogenous, gender, ethnic, sexual and religious diversity thrive within them and would seem to be an ideal space in which to more openly discuss and engage with strategies for meeting the other. Thinking about hospitality as both a philosophy (Bell, 2010) and as an underpinning motive for new architectural forms in cities (Drechsler, 2017) is also an important frame for engaging with others.

Bearing in mind Burns et al.'s (2018) austere definition of cohesion entailing "without coercion or purely self-interested motivation" (p. 13), what are some of the interactions between humans that could be measured? Could we, for example, ask someone to record the number of times they spoke 'warmly' to a stranger because at some previous time, a stranger had spoken warmly to them? Or could we count the number of times Stranger 1 ate a food that was different from their usual food because they had met Stranger 2, who was different from them but who had liked the food Stranger 1 ate everyday as well as their own? Should we count the languages people speak or the greetings they use in everyday life, both with those in their own immediate circles and with strangers or neighbours? Or what about the number of times in a week people find themselves outside their own comfort zones and the strategies they use to find comfort among

strangers? Or the number of times a person visits or shops at a neighbourhood market, sends their children to public schools, uses public health services, public libraries or community centres, or hangs out on street corners with loose gatherings of friends whom they met less than a week ago? Or how do churches of all faiths operate to include congregational strangers? Or could we explore concepts of hospitality as acts of "crossing thresholds between strangers … creating a dialogue between new arrivals, established newcomers and locals through finding and exploring communalities in different ways" (Drechsler, 2017, p. 49)? Or, as Arezou Zalipour (2019) suggests, "We need to create the space where our stories are told, where our voices are heard, where we create new memories and histories together". Do we need to more energetically build the representation of our differences so we become more familiar with the other through screen presence?

Whereas social capital 'bonds like to like', the kind of thing we are envisaging for the small mechanisms are 'quotidian interactions with difference'. In the way that the word 'yours' interacts with the word 'shoes' and helps us to make sense of some property of the shoes, the small mechanisms of daily interchange help us make sense of our respectful engagement with others: there is a grammar to it – a system of interchange that is not fixed but has the overall purpose of enhancing human connection. Malcom Gladwell (2019) argues for and about the insufficiency of the current tools and strategies we use to make sense of people we don't know and suggests that "what is required of us is restraint and humility" (p. 343). So, too, do many of the essays in Aelbrecht & Stevens' (2019) book. These need to be the new reading. Ties between and amongst individuals who are essentially strangers to each other at first point of contact, constitute the small mechanisms of exchange, respect and interdependence that have the potential to underpin less-Western, less-institutionalised constructs of cohesion. If the task of policymakers is to measure initiatives that conduce towards social betterment of groups and individuals, how then might cohesiveness be measured or evaluated? We argue here that whatever those measures are, they should relate to ties, to the things that lie 'between', that help us to make sense of difference, not sameness, the strange, not the familiar.

It is not our purpose here, however, to outline what such an alternative and quite radically different set of measures might look like in

detail but rather, to sow the idea that other measures are possible and might be more effective at measuring the nature and possibilities (both negative and positive) of what we have referred to as cohesive ties. If we conceive cohesion as something that is the property of positive interaction and meaning-making between individuals, that exists in the ties rather than in some abstract notion of harmony or aspiration toward sameness, then it becomes a concept capable of reinforcing the value of difference. Conceptually, cohesive ties would focus attention on the everyday and micro-interactions that occur and give meaning to difference and valorise the importance of these interactions for individuals and groups in real time and scale. It would go without saying that these ties would not just be drawn from a focus on ethnic difference but encompass the diversity of differences that we present each other with.

Conclusion

In attempting to reconceive social cohesion in a New Zealand context, our conclusion returns to the question of the political: What can be measured, which agencies have the will and capacity to measure it, and how might the debate be shifted away from normative, and at times quite skewed, conceptions of ethnic difference as the only difference that counts? We suggest three possible and not mutually exclusive pathways that could be explored.

The first, following the lead provided by Burns et al. (2018, p. 14 ff), is to pass over the definitional capacity of the concept to Māori and give space to Māori scholarship to not only define the concept in ways that might be useful in New Zealand but, indeed, to replace the concept in its entirety with something that would have greater legitimacy for Māori. The concept of whakawhanaungatanga (Rata & Al-Asaad, 2019) mobilised as an alternative to "state-managed multiculturalism" clearly articulates one such approach. The South African work in relation to *ubuntu* in this context may also be of value, as might reflection on Erasmus' concept of vigorous capacity.

Secondly, we argue that social cohesion in New Zealand has been routinely represented as a property of ethnic or ethno-religious/language difference and that it needs to become a more inclusive concept. Our current focus solely on these ethnic and migration-related categories overlooks the impact of other axes of difference such as age, class, gender and sexuality

which are also critical to the negotiation of what can bring positive benefit to wider communities and society. The narrow concern with cohesion related only to migration has also allowed us to focus on the ways that social media has fostered those who use digital spaces to engender hate and to amplify gender, age, religious and ethnic prejudice but has encouraged us to overlook the ways in which media and cultural expression are also important tools of community building.

Finally, we suggest an increased focus on the idea of the cohesive ties that manifest themselves in the small mechanisms that comprise interpersonal engagement and communication. The consideration of this concept in a linguistic sense provides a way to think about how interconnections that make sense to people (and therefore are less threatening or destabilising) are usually based on prior reference points. We can speak more easily to 'strangers' if it is something we have done before, or if we learned strategies in school, for example, or have common places in our cities that we routinely inhabit alongside others who are different from us. Thinking about ways to maximise knowledge of the other through everyday engagement is one way, we would argue, to give more robust meaning to discussions about cohesion – and to the possibilities for enhancing it. Following Aelbrecht & Stevens (2019), who draw attention back to the concept of "weak ties" and suggest that cohesion "demands regular encounters with unknown strangers and with the unfamiliar" (p. 319), we propose that these weak ties are in fact *cohesive ties* and it is the presence or absence of these ties, at the local level, that need to be the focus of renewed policy engagement.

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