

from their practical denotations. In this section I endeavour to analyse the ideological implications of the discourse of development, which, I argue, is chiefly running ahead of contemporary practices, and consequently generates and accelerates wide-ranging social change insofar as practices are planned and organized in accordance with the comprehensive model designed for the achievement of future aspirations. Thus the discourse of development affects not only the political autonomy of Maori people, but indirectly bears on other dimensions of their worldview as well.

The discourse of development is characterized by the integration of new signifiers which cannot – yet – be united with an available signified. As an instance of form preceding content it generates change as a result of the dialectical interplay between the connotations evoked by the novel signifiers derived from a utopian order and their actual denotations still indicating a lack of referential significance. Thus the implementation of development programmes brings about not only the intended political change, but entails unanticipated ramifications across all dimensions of Maori society.

When Maori tribes embarked on a development course in the early 1980s, in many areas subtribal groupings were reorganized into management committees. The structure of management committees was argued to be built on an existing network of subtribes, yet in practice the establishment of a development organization on a tribal basis concerned an experiment with novel structures of organization which were implemented to cope with new circumstances. This appeared not only from the confusion about what constituted a subtribe, its boundaries, and criteria of membership, but also from the strategies adopted to set up the management committees. Old subtribal groupings could hardly be revamped, but new organizations had to be established with extraordinary creativity.

Since one of the chief objectives of management committees was to enhance the credibility of Maori tribes to negotiate with government about the devolution of public funds to the authority of Maori communities, the signifiers adopted to officialize their status were mainly derived from European models of organization. A great emphasis was put on formalities, such as legal registration, the occupation of premises as offices, the design of a logo for letterheads and possibly cars, the renting of telephone and ideally telefax equipment, the purchase of computers, etcetera. Although the number of formal features and items available to a management committee in the making did, to some extent, reflect the level of organization of

Maori communities in a certain region, it by no means implied that all elements were consistently applied or used. In some circumstances logos were designed for groups that never developed into an effective organization, while occasionally computers were bought without any concrete idea of what purpose they could serve. The funds for the purchase of computers and other office equipment and the like were often provided by some government organization, which in some cases was obviously misled by the quasi-official status of some management committees, connoting efficiency and organization, yet marked by a lack of efficiency and disorganization for various reasons. I know of at least two cases in which Maori organizations were awarded funds that subsequently were left untouched in a bank account because the applicants were uncertain and undecided about how to spend the budget. It goes without saying that the grants awarded were not wasted or unjustly allocated, but that in this case the community organizations which had successfully applied for money simply needed some assistance to plan a development programme, and to organize, manage, and administer its implementation. It shows that many activities which are taking place under the terms of development are clearly guided by a new ideology which is yet ahead of its institutional support, which consequently affects other dimensions of social practice.

Following the launch of development programmes the people, committed to the success of the new Maori strategy, shifted their focus of attention from traditional roles and activities to the programmes that were being proposed, which on the medium and long term had some repercussions on other aspects of Maori community life. The leaders of the organization which had bought the computers without knowing for what purpose to use them, enrolled for a computer course. By the same token, the leader of one of the organizations which had received a development grant which was not used to implement the plan outlined in the application, went on a business course at a Technical Institute. These examples illustrate an increasing emphasis on the learning of new skills in order to make development a success. The corollary of this shift in social activity among those who were deeply involved in public organization, involved a rearrangement of other, more traditional activities.<sup>25</sup> In the community in which I conducted

25 This point follows the pattern outlined by Barth (1967), who identified change in terms of alterations in the allocation of time and resources.