

# Sharing words

Tariana Turia

**The opportunity to write a piece for the first ever issue of the Aotearoa Ethnic Network Journal was an honour that I simply couldn't resist. As tangata whenua it is our responsibility – and our privilege – to extend the hand of welcome to all communities and peoples who have come to Aotearoa.**

I come to this first edition then of the Aotearoa Ethnic Network Journal conscious of the importance of relationships. A relationship born out of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The Treaty of Waitangi sets a profound context for the constitutional aspirations of Aotearoa. It requires a partnership between Māori and the Crown, and the duty to act reasonably and in good faith.

The treaty at its heart is about the fundamental relationship between the original peoples of this land, the tangata whenua; and the Crown. It is a relationship of utmost importance to the past, present and future of this land.

The philosophies of the Treaty are admirable. They are the basis upon which we can live together. The values and challenges laid out in that blueprint shape the basis of unity for this generation and for generations to come.

When all peoples in a community thrive, so too does the nation.

With the evolving dynamic of a multi-ethnic community, the importance of the Treaty relationship in providing a stable platform for dialogue cannot be over-emphasized.

Latest projections from Statistics New Zealand indicate that the proportion of the population in New Zealand that identifies with European ethnicity will drop from 79% in 2001 to 70% in 2021.

At the same time, the share of the population that identify with Māori ethnicity will increase from 15 to 17%; with Pacific from 7 to 9% and with an Asian ethnicity from 7 to 15%.

As our population expands and develops the cultural richness of many peoples, Aotearoa is also likely to benefit from the magic of mixed marriages. International trends reveal that ethnic intermarriage and cross-cultural relationships are on the up and up in countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and the United States. Recent trends in Aotearoa reflect the same pattern emerging here.

Inter-marriage rates are high for Māori, and to a lesser degree Pasifika people. Recent research from Dr Paul Callister shows that half of all Māori living as a couple have a non-Māori partner. In other words, nearly 70,000 New Zealand couples are in Māori / non-Māori relationships. That's a lot of cultural interaction happening.

The probability of an ethnic combination is affected by two factors. There are strong associations between age, and the country of origin established with rates of intermarriage. In essence, intermarriage is higher for younger people and also higher for those born in New Zealand.

So what does all this mean?

Does it mean our nation is opening its arms to cultural dynamics and inter-ethnic relations? How are the values unique to the varying ethnic populations

being maintained and nurtured when ethnicities overlap?

It's about respect for self; respect for others; and responsibility for one's actions.

### **Respecting cultural identity**

The Aotearoa Ethnic Network is an excellent example of the importance of respecting our own cultural identity and cultural values.

Last week, when the media reported on the unprecedented \$18 million Lotto win, the brothers who owned the Kaeo dairy that sold the lucky ticket were referred to as 'Indian'. Every week, without fail, people suspected of criminal activities are referred to as Māori or Polynesian. And yet, when Michael Campbell won the US Open, the shouts of victory were all about a 'great New Zealander'.

Respecting our cultural identity should not be reserved for perpetuating cultural stereotypes, targeting race when it suits, and yet on the other hand some people complaining bitterly about the possibility of race-based privilege.

We need to be able to celebrate our unique identities; the essence of our souls. As tangata whenua and as members of the Māori Party, we respect the right of your cultures to believe in your Gods, to continue to celebrate who you are, to continue to speak your language.

Respecting our cultural identity also means we start to value the difference that is brought to a changing land from the myriad and unique experiences that come from different parts of the world.

### **Respect for others**

If we had a chance to talk together, we might find that the aspirations that you and I have, to live in a nation which is strong, where our people are healthy and vibrant, and where our future is secure, might be the same.

Our emphasis could be on what unites us, rather than what divides us.

The Māori Party does not stand by the frequently tossed out platitude – we are all one people, we are all New Zealanders.

History reminds us of the war chant of one people against another – *Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Fuhrer!* (one people, one empire, one leader). The force-fed application of a particular truth, one way of seeing the world, inevitably creates isolation and alienation, for those people who live on the margins of the 'one size fits all'.

Benito Mussolini, writing in 1935, explained such a viewpoint further:

*through clever and constant application of propaganda, people can be made to see paradise as hell, and also the other way around, to consider the most wretched sort of life as paradise.*

Our cultural homelands, our cultural truths are the paradise that we return to either in our hearts and our minds, or literally in our papakainga, our home. We must stay firm in our resolve to uphold the essence of who we are – despite the frequent clobbering approach that being 'proud kiwis' can only come from sacrificing difference.

Neutralising difference, rendering tangata whenua, or migrants, or refugee communities, or new New Zealanders as 'other' can cause what is known as 'cultural estrangement'. This is the misguided belief that different cultures cannot live together in the same place and cherish their diversity.

Respecting others requires that we welcome all communities as belonging in the host country. Respecting others would lead to a safe and supportive environment where the culture, values, language and identity of different ethnic worlds are allowed to flourish, not fold.

### **Responsibility for one's actions**

The dumbing down of difference, stifling our cultural diversity and blending all cultures into one homogeneous mix, is frequently accompanied by rhetoric, which identifies difference with special privilege; that interprets cultural authenticity and distinctiveness as racial separatism.

The same critics who oppose the status of the Treaty partner with allegations of 'a different and superior status' are no-where to be heard when it comes to:

- Asking what privilege is at play to mean the average hourly earnings for Māori full-time wage/salary earners to be four dollars an hour less for Māori (\$16.89) than European (\$20.83);
- Asking what is the superior status for Māori that means survival from cancer, even adjusting for age and stage, is lower than among non-Māori?
- Asking what are the benefits of racial separatism which mean that one in four Māori school leavers had no qualification, compared to one in ten for non-Māori school leavers.

There is no argument. Tangata whenua do have a different status within Aotearoa, which springs, from the foundations of this nation, given form through Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Tangata whenua are the indigenous

For the ethnic communities of Aotearoa, for tangata whenua, the days of being ignored, cast aside and frozen out, have come to an end.

Taking responsibility for one's actions means that we must all start thinking, creatively, about how we can combat racism at all levels to ensure our institutions, our workplaces, our homes, our streets are more culturally inclusive in their character, more accommodating of cultural difference.

It is not enough to say I have a Sri Lankan friend, or the majority of my workers are Tongan. Cultural diversity is not about counting the numbers and sorting by colour. Culture is far more than a census category.

**Māori is not a social category – a label to be conveniently displayed for the sake of the state. We can be Māori and Samoan and Chinese – and embrace the fullness of identity that comes with all the cultural strengths recognised in our birthright.**

people of this land. Even those who travelled here were still part of being first peoples. Tangata whenua cannot go anywhere else in the world to replenish, to sustain, to be part of. Our world, culture, values and practices can only be found in Aotearoa.

But to cast judgment that difference automatically implies privilege; that diversity is bad, that sameness is good, is not just limiting for tangata whenua, it is limiting for the nation as a whole.

Over two decades ago, in 1986, a ministerial advisory committee to the Department of Social Welfare, revealed *'the faces of racism'*: personal racism, cultural racism and institutional racism. The final report, Puao-te-ata-tu, described ways in which racism manifest itself on individual and collective well-being:

*The most insidious and destructive form of racism though, is institutional racism. It is the outcome of mono-cultural institutions which simply ignore and freeze out the cultures of those who do not belong to the majority.*

Addressing racism means that we are all responsible for working to reduce and eliminate the mono-cultural bias that disadvantages Māori, Pacific and all ethnic communities other than the dominant European one.

Nelson Mandela once said, "Discipline is the most powerful weapon to get liberation". Liberation of our communities will be evident when the parcel of attitudes and practices, which smacks of superiority, is no longer evident. Practices and attitudes which are reflected in the ways individuals may select aspects of Māoritanga to adorn their office walls, their by-lines, their party songs, their clothing – but just as quickly dismiss Māori cultural beliefs as mythology, as superstitious, as artefacts of the past.

The first stage to a more culturally inclusive Aotearoa is in recognising the unique status of Māori as the Treaty partner, and the distinctive status of all ethnic communities as defining our national identity.

If we embraced our varying cultural values, norms and identities as a means of uniting us, rather than dividing, we could be proud of the infinite connections and possibilities opened up to us all.

Traditionally, tangata whenua have not defined us as half-caste, part-Māori or other 'race-based' blood measurements, which the state has imposed as attempts to quantify the population for official statistics.

In our worldview, whakapapa creates access to a proud lineage, linking every Māori child to a complex genealogy of 'Māoriness'. Whether our mokopuna are blonde, blue-eyed, living in France, speaking only English is irrelevant. They are Māori. They will always be Māori. Nothing will change that.

Māori is not a social category – a label to be conveniently displayed for the sake of the state. We can be Māori and Samoan and Chinese – and embrace the fullness of identity that comes with all the cultural strengths recognised in our birthright.

### Diversity or division?

This article is written fresh in the aftermath of another Brash attack; with the tired old slogans of 'separatism', 'special privilege' and superiority attempting to make Māori the political football for another season.

It is also, however, influenced by a Budget in which Labour tried hard to create a new concept for National identity where \$4.6 billion dollars for upgrades of the Orions and Hercules is promoted over and above the importance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. A budget in which \$305 million was sold as a part-payment on new helicopters and \$16 million was appropriated to enhance border security measures – but no new money allocated to Māori.

It is also influenced by the imminent closure of the Treaty of Waitangi Information Unit (to be disestablished 30 June 2006).

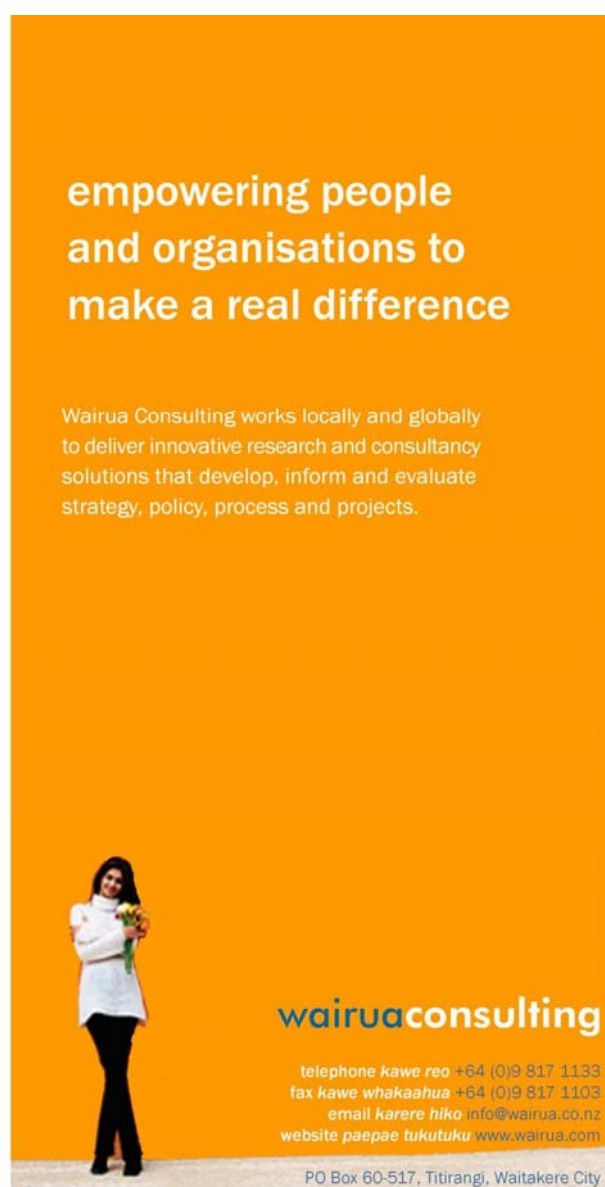
We have been this way before – and we will not be beaten.

The Māori Party congratulates Wairua Consulting for hosting the Aotearoa Ethnic Network, and promoting their commitment towards building an inclusive society and supporting diversity. Such a commitment recognises that we are not all the same, indeed that the greatest risk to our country is in assimilation.

Ultimately, progress for our nation can only consist of a move from policies of assimilation, (assimilating

Māori, Pasifika and other ethnic communities into the Pakeha system) to a policy and practice of recognising and valuing cultural diversity. The Aotearoa Ethnic Network is an excellent example of daring to defy the denial of cultural strength. We wish you great success.

**Tariana Turia** is the Member of Parliament for Te Tai Hauauru and Co-leader of the Māori Party.



**empowering people  
and organisations to  
make a real difference**

Wairua Consulting works locally and globally to deliver innovative research and consultancy solutions that develop, inform and evaluate strategy, policy, process and projects.

**wairuaconsulting**

telephone *kawe reo* +64 (0)9 817 1133  
fax *kawe whakaahua* +64 (0)9 817 1103  
email *karere hiko* info@wairua.co.nz  
website *paepae tukutuku* www.wairua.com

PO Box 60-517, Titirangi, Waitakere City