

# My New Zealand Identity

Nigel Murphy

**This poem sums up the author's thoughts to date on being a sixth generation Pākehā New Zealander. The process of thinking about identity and ones place in the great scheme of history, of course, is never ending. As they say, identity is a verb not a noun.**

Why do some new migrants to New Zealand feel  
more connected to New Zealand than me?

Why do they have such love  
for this land?

For me  
I have no particular feeling for New Zealand  
except for tiredness.

It is, for me, my identity

Like being part of a family one does not particularly  
get on with  
or like.  
One is part of that family whether one likes it or not.

I think I can take or leave being a New Zealander.

The Māori-Pākehā thing is almost tedious

'what's done cannot be undone'  
said Lady Macbeth.

My heritage is central to the imperial and colonial  
project  
of fucking over Māori and creating  
New Zealand.

Just as we had to destroy the native forest to create  
the farmland of modern New Zealand, so we had to  
destroy and dispossess the Māori who were here  
before us.

No hard feelings, it's just business . . .

## New Zealand

I have no love for New Zealand.  
It is my mother and my country and I'm stuck with it.  
I have no choice in the matter.  
As Frank McCourt said  
'I have no choice in being Irish,  
everything else I have a choice about.'

Or words to that effect . . .

Reconciliation with Māori is a duty not a desire  
Or  
more accurately  
it's a political necessity.

We do it because we have to.

Do we do it out of love or respect?  
No, we do it just because we have to.

'is this a dagger I see before me?'  
Said Lady Macbeth

## The land

For me I feel no connection with the land that so many white people go on about.  
When I see the New Zealand landscape I see violence and bloodshed and robbery.  
I see infamy and disgrace in every fold and crease.  
When I see the land I feel tired.

Who did we kill here?  
Who did we dispossess there?

## My heritage

My heritage is not connectedness but rupture and dislocation.

The longer our family is here  
the less connected we become.

not more.

For me Māori is foreign, are foreign.  
And remain so  
and will remain so  
and are so

I am too aware of my Anglo-Irish and Irish heritage  
—being in a country but not of a country  
We Anglo-Irish:  
What difference is there between us here and us in Ireland?—

to know that sixth generation New Zealander

means nothing

‘Being born in a stable does not make you a horse’  
Said the Duke of Wellington  
A good Anglo-Irishman, God bless him.

## Our joyful heritage

I look at the land and feel,  
The weight of history  
The weight of smug  
privileged  
exclusive  
selfishness.

‘A fair go for all?’  
yeah, right

whatever . . .

I feel the grinding oppression of racism and conformity.

All nations are created  
by the spilling of blood.  
White New Zealand takes this moment  
on April 25  
1915  
Gallipoli

It should be 1863  
when Cameron crossed the Waikato.

Or September 25  
1905  
when Lionel Terry murdered Joe Kum Yung  
for not being English.

New Zealand identity is founded on lies and foul deeds  
covered by more lies.

‘and all the perfumes of Araby will not sweeten this little hand’

Lies that we tell ourselves  
as well as others

The lie that we are not racists  
The lie that we have the best race relations in the world  
The lie that we are all equal  
The lie that we are multicultural

Our culture is based on emotionless Englishness  
and dour Scottishness.

Where things and systems are more important  
than human values and emotions

Māori culture is foreign  
to me.

But so is Pākehā culture

When I think of New Zealand

I feel nothing  
but tiredness and resignation

A feeling of claustrophobia

Trapped by history and identity

*'out out damned spot!'*

'Where is home for Cromwell's men?'

my cousin wrote

and yes:

where is home

for Cameron's men?

This land sucks the life

from me.

Rather than

gives me life.

So therefore let me praise my glorious ancestors

and yours.

Who gave us all

this legacy

and enjoy it.

Because

we cannot escape.

We are New Zealanders.

**Nigel Murphy** is a sixth generation New Zealander of Irish-German-English descent. He was born in Rotorua in 1958. He spent the years 1963 to 1971 in rural Queensland and New South Wales, including three years at Young, site of one of the largest Chinese gold fields in Australian history. It is from there that his interest in Chinese Australian and New Zealand history stems. He has studied Chinese New Zealand history for over 20 years and has been involved in the Chinese New Zealand community for nearly as long, being secretary of the Wellington Chinese Association and chair of the Wellington Chinese Language School. He has published and lectured widely on the history of the Chinese in New Zealand and on racism and White New Zealand, his most recent publication 'Aliens at My Table: Asians as New Zealanders' was co-authored with Manying Ip and published in 2005. In 2002 he was seconded to the Office of Ethnic Affairs as a researcher and historian to support the Chinese poll tax apology reconciliation process. One outcome of the process was the National Library exhibition 'A Barbarous Measure: the Poll Tax and Chinese New Zealanders' which he curated. The exhibition was held at the National Library in Wellington in 2003 and toured New Zealand between 2004 and 2005. He has recently completed a Masters of New Zealand Studies, his thesis being 'Racism and Empire: Discourses of Race and Empire in the Formation of New Zealand's National Identity 1890-1907'. This was an attempt to examine the origin and nature of New Zealand's racism against Chinese and others, a question that has increasingly obsessed him. He has also spent the last six years studying his own family history in New Zealand, Ireland and Germany, discovering in the process how intimately connected his family has been in the imperial adventure in such diverse places as Ireland, India, South America and of course New Zealand.