THE LAST PAKEHA

(STATE OF THE NATION SPEECH – WAITANGI 2007)

I have always found it perilous to speak for anyone other than myself. Speaking for myself is difficult enough. There is often a large gap between what I want to say and what I do say and no matter how big the words I use I usually seem to fall into it. My best lines come to me long after I have sat down. I have no doubt that next week I will be lyrical, coherent and sage.

Speaking on the state of the Pakeha nation seems as sure a way of picking a fight as buying clothes for my sisters. If there was an equivalent of a gift voucher I would place one in each of your hands and let you get what you want for yourselves. One of the difficulties is that the idea of a Pakeha nation means different things to different people. Mothers and historians are the best people to talk about nations anyway. Both of them have done the groundwork. I am neither. Despite being a writer I am a poor reader. I was brought up on television and it has, as I was warned, rotted my brain. To escape both my lack of scholarship and my fear at speaking for someone I have no right to, I will tell you instead the story of my own very small Pakeha nation which is six generations old now and changing before my eyes. In fact it is highly likely that when I die I will be the last full-blooded Pakeha of my line.

My surname is Colquhoun. It is Scottish. The clan was formed when the descendants of the de Kilpatrick's married into an old family of Irish priests who lived on the shores of Loch Lomond in the 1300's. They were proto-Pakeha I guess and provided examples of both our best and worst behaviour, especially our worst. One was killed by a cannonball laying siege to a castle. One had his head chopped off for having an affair with the wife of another clan chief. It was served up to her on a platter. One was a necromancer skilled in black magic, allegedly the last known person to openly practise witchcraft in Scotland. We did not come here highly recommended.

My great, great grandfather continued this tradition. He came to New Zealand in 1875 after eloping with my great, great grandmother Jane, a grazier's daughter from NSW. The stories he told about himself have become family legend. He was a remittance man, a failed medical student who was given enough money by his family to go to the other side of the world and never come back. He was aide de camp to one of the commanding officers of troops fighting in the New Zealand wars. He was the sole heir of a great fortune in Scotland which would have been his, ours, if he had only returned to claim it. Unfortunately he gambled away the fare he was sent in Christchurch awaiting the next ship home.

None of these stories ring true. A cousin hired a researcher in Britain to find out more a few years ago. Unfortunately there is no record of Henry Cliffe Colquhoun being or doing any of those things. It seems there was no Henry Cliffe Colquhoun in Scotland. The closest we have come to a trace of him is as Henry Cliffe, a boarder in the home of Elizabeth and James Colquhoun of Edinburgh, whose oldest son was Ludovic. Henry Cliffe Colquhoun in New Zealand had five children. The oldest three were called James, Elizabeth and Ludovic. It seems he took the name when he got out here. No one was going to check. He is recorded as a boarder in that household from the time he was a few months old so perhaps he was a servants child or illegitimate. It seems Colquhoun's were all he knew. What we know is that he died in Russell at the age of 40 after getting drunk one night.

He is buried in Christ's church, the one that Hone Heke shot up in 1845. Tamati Waka Nene is buried not far behind him.

The last story his granddaughter told me about him before she died was that for a time he helped to run a store in Matauri bay where he learnt to speak Maori. I have no way of knowing if it is true or not. It did seem somehow strangely congruent that one hundred and twenty years later I should come to Te Tii, a few miles around the coast with no knowledge that he was even buried in the Bay to crack my stone tongue against the same language. I like to think that story at least is true.

Henry Cliffe's oldest son was James Colquhoun, or Jim. He was my great, grandfather. To him was left the burden of looking after his mother and siblings after his father died. He is famous in the family for being austere and dour. I suppose as a child he had to be. He did what those who have recently settled this land often had to do. He turned his hand to everything. For a while he crewed boats on the Bay of Islands. He travelled south to Wanganui where he captained paddle-steamers up the river. He worked as a baker and finally engaged in that most New Zealand of professions, becoming a farmer in Karaka, south of Auckland, a location that was in a few generations time to strongly influence the future of our family.

I am guessing again but I think he would not so much have seen himself as a New Zealander or a Scotsman but as belonging to God. The son of a man who drank too much he turned staunchly to the church, bypassing mainstream religions and heading straight for the obscure. At first he joined the British-Israel society and then he became a Seventh-day-Adventist. His adult sons and daughter followed him. Their children followed them and after that we became an SDA tribe. I often think of Jim as burying deeper and deeper into the church to ensure himself the security that he didn't have as a child. I have no right to assume that but it seems to fit. His younger brother Ludovic, Uncle Lou, was a much livelier character. Spared the responsibilities of being an eldest son he joined the army to see the world and ended up at the Boer war and then the First World War, fighting in Greece and Gallipoli until he was evacuated following a gunshot wound to his foot in Cape Helles.

Jim's son, Jack, was my grandfather. Like his father he was also a baker and a farmer. He is the first of my ancestors I can remember. He was not stern but loving and funny. He curled his fingers in my hair whenever he saw me and called me 'Old king'. He said things like 'saw me leg off' and 'clip-a-round the ear-hole' and 'belly-well better'. He loved birds and trees. He kept aviaries full of canaries and finches and Indian ringnecks. Along with his twin bother, Cliffe, he ventured into the bush well into his seventies to lug large pieces of swamp kauri out of what the kauri thought were their final resting places.

He planted trees around his property. I remember him naming them to me. I was a child but for the first time I sensed there was something unique about New Zealand. I remember the satisfaction in his voice when he whispered, 'it's a native'. I was left in no doubt that native trees were special. In just about every other area of New Zealand life what was ours seemed second rate or mundane but not our trees. Kauri, Totara, Rimu, Kahikatea, Matai, Kowhai were special. They deserved extra inflexion. He would have seen himself undoubtedly as a European, more likely a Kiwi, but he was the first person to give me a sense of the lush, fecund and compelling indigenous. He made me feel that this place was exotic.

His wife, Joyce, kept a small sepia-toned photograph of two soldiers on the table beside her rocking chair. I remember them from the time I was a small boy. The men in them were Uncle William and Uncle Colin who had gone to the Great War. William was blue-eyed and fair-headed, a railway porter in Hamilton before going overseas. In February 1917 he was sentenced to No 2 field punishment for failing to salute an officer. In October of the same year he was shot in the neck and thigh at Passchendaele. He died two weeks later. Colin was in the same unit, the second company of the New Zealand Machine Gun Corps. He was younger and taller and died on the same battlefield four weeks later.

'Bekker, Koch, van der Merwe, Retief, Claassen, du Rand, Starke, Lochner, Strydom, Howe, Nel, Dryburgh, Johnstone, Briers and Viviers', the Springbok line-up for the fourth test between the All Blacks and South Africa at Eden park in 1956. My father recited then to me often enough when I was a child to remember most of them decades later. One of the fondest memories of my life is being woken by him at one o'clock in the morning for four holy Sundays in winter 1976 to watch the All Blacks play the Springboks in Durban, Bloemfontein, Cape Town and Johannesburg. I was twelve. During those early mornings my dad and I sat in a darkened room around the glow from the old black and white TV while he inducted me into the lore of All Black and Springbok rugby. Everyone else was asleep upstairs. To the legend that summer would be added Joe Morgan's try under the posts at Bloemfontein, Bryan Williams knock on that wasn't, the early tackle on Bruce Robertson that was rewarded with a penalty but not a penalty try - which would have given us the victory in that match and a share of the series.

I saw these things with my own eyes and I knew that what my father had been telling me about evil was true. I am sorry to say there was no room for the greater politics of apartheid. This was about good versus evil, stuff New Zealanders needed to know about. No one else in the family shared these secrets. My older brother did pansy things like hang-gliding and climbing Mt Cook. He never got up to join us. My sisters' couldn't care less. My mother sighed. Only dad and I carried the burden. Fools! Sometimes we looked at each other in ways that needed no explanation, a look between men. It would happen in a glance, a moment, the memory binding us together forever, a meeting of eyes, a setting of the jaw, an inconsequential nod. We knew what was really going on, alright. My God, we knew.

I am likely to be the first member of my family to identify myself as Pakeha - as well as the last. After I was born my father and mother moved off the farm in Ardmore and into the working-class suburbs of Manurewa and Papatoetoe in South Auckland. My father was a carpenter and spent his life building houses there. At the same time Maori and Polynesian were flocking to these suburbs and the neighbouring ones of Otara, Otahuhu and Mangere. When my older brother went to school the roll was approximately 20% Polynesian and Maori. By the time I went, perhaps 40%. By the time my youngest sister left a few years later Maori and Polynesian would have made up 90% of the school population. From my grandfather's 'get-a-bend-on' and 'square-bottomed-sun-of-a-gun' we went to 'shame-on-your-face,' 'bro' and 'manus'. It was a joyous, funny and colourful transition. It brought the virtues and vices inherited from my forebears alongside tapa cloth, pineapple pie and lava lava.

Seven nephews and nieces and one daughter carry the future of this Pakeha nation now. Three of them are Maori, two of Te Arawa and one of Ngati Raukawa decent. Three are Samoan. The other two are American and live in Ohio. Where Pakeha, Maori and Polynesian lived side by side in my street they now live together inside these young people. The Irish priests, over-sexualised Scotsmen,

Europeans, Kiwis and Pakeha have been brocaded into caramel-skinned dancers of the Siva and fierce practisers of the pukana - who turn dark in the sun.

I have always been fascinated by the pieces of flax at the edge of a kete or mat when they are being woven. They stick out like spines on a hedgehog. My family seems to me one of those, six generations long, only now starting to be woven into the fabric of this landscape. From now on we will be striped and undulating and bound. I can't help but think it will happen to all Pakeha and Maori and Polynesian at some point. In other families it has happened to greater degrees. In some it will take another 100, 200, 300 years. I'm sure the last full-blooded Pakeha will come from somewhere deep in the heart of Christchurch – despite the process being considerably advanced in their rugby teams.

I do not think being woven into the ethnicities of the Pacific is an endpoint for being Pakeha of course. It is merely a stop on the way. I value it because it seems a significant step in adapting to these islands. It brings fresh ideas and perspectives and allows old ideas to be shaken out like a mat in the breeze or else jettisoned. We do not become Samoan or Maori but we are influenced by their best qualities filtered through our already significant inheritance. In a sense we become more fully Pakeha. My people have survived being Celtic and Scottish and European. We will survive being Pakeha and may even define ourselves differently again one day - but we will still be my people. In a sense being Pakeha is a snapshot of a moving story, one that must seem out of date and strangely dressed in the future but also one that bears an uncanny and powerful resemblance to that which follows.

As an immigrant culture it seems at times Pakeha are a book without a cover, one with the first chapter missing. For me, being Pakeha now is enormously exciting. It means we get a chance to write that chapter, or at least compile the stories that reveal it. Other cultures often come complete with mythologies of beginning but there do not seem to be enough celebrated stories that adequately define the journey that was to take place for us here. I think we came expecting to continue the way we always were – just in a new place. There didn't seem to be any need for explanation. We didn't expect the place to change us, to colonize us. That was our job. Our new mythologies need to contain the ways in which we were changed from European to Pakeha.

The creation of a unique Pakeha spirituality is also a challenge for us to grapple with. I expect it would have to deal with our acknowledgement of a greater power than ourselves - which might prove tricky. It would provide for the human right to be forgiven because we constantly learn from making mistakes. It must bring us to redemption, forgiveness and humility. It should inspire us to praise and comfort us when we are in pain. The only entities powerful enough to do that for me are our landscape and our collected stories. I don't mean that Pakeha struggle for an individual spirituality but instead a collective spirituality. Living among Maori I have seen dozens of times the comfort of the marae, whakapapa, a sense of the animate landscape comfort and inspire and bring together. It is a deep well to drink from. As a Pakeha I want an institution to protect and respect my stories the way iwi, hapu and marae do for Maori. A completely secular world seems as cold to me as the old worlds of the long dead churches we brought with us.

The third great challenge of being Pakeha for me is justice. I do not believe in hand-wringing or wasted guilt but it seems an unavoidable truth that much Pakeha success in this country has been built on the back of hard work and imagination as well as the alienation of Maori resources. I don't know how to dress this up any differently. Much Maori land was inexcusably taken from them

by patronizing and unscrupulous Pakeha, or by Pakeha who didn't look too hard at what they were doing for fear of what they would see. Pakeha governments manipulated the law to openly encourage or at least to allow this to happen. Sometimes land was simply stolen. Maori have been incredibly patient about this. Most communities I have worked in have been seeking redress for generations but have been ignored or under-resourced in outlining their arguments. They are in no way Johnny's-come-lately to this issue. If anyone is then they are more likely to be Pakeha than Maori.

It is complicated beyond belief to bring justice to bear in the situation of one people's wealth being built in part on another's stolen resource but that does not mean it does not need to be attempted openly and properly. It is unbelievable that Pakeha, so recently exposed to what happened in the past can have so quickly grown tired of the claims against them, rewarding themselves with the right of a backlash. This is the argument of a man beating a woman who when dragged off her by others complains that everyone is against him.

I do not know how to solve this problem but one of the lasting values of my ancestors was the right of everyone to a 'fair go'. Pakeha have not yet given Maori a 'fair go'. They are still a political football, to be romanced when they bring votes and scorned when they lose them. Would it be so bad to give some power away? The bringing of justice to this problem is every bit as much a Pakeha issue as it is a Maori one. We should be talking to Maori about how to go about it at least. It is no good going on about moving forward unless this wound is healed somehow. We are smart and creative people. There are lots of stories of love between us. It is a fantastic challenge - just slightly more rewarding to me than winning the America's cup or beating Australians. It may require an act of generosity as powerful as the many acts of meanness which make it necessary. It will require trust but then again why on earth would Maori want to harm us. Many of them are made of the same mix we are.

Perhaps if as Pakeha we were more secure in our myths and stories of beginning as well as in our shared spirituality we would not be so threatened by what Maori have a right ask from us. Our discomfort with Maori demands should make us look at ourselves, not Maori. Sometimes I think we are like an unsure teenager turning the wheels of our speeding car to the right as the boot slides out to the left. To keep going in a straight line we should, of course, be turning them to the left.

Story still seems to me the most powerful representation of an individual and their nation. Told truthfully it exists more solidly than flesh, ignored it leaves a hollow in the centre of great civilization. Crucially, it provides points of entry and exit for other stories to weave into. It is at once a way of knowing who we are and where we are going. It is a means of joining other people to us who then become our story. When we live next door to each other we hear each others stories. When we hear each others stories we often fall in love.

I am sure I have said some things that will stand on someone's toes. To others I will appear soft and fuzzy, hopefully at least. I am quite calculated in remaining so. I have walked a cultural coastline for many years and I still believe in those most old-fashioned of sentiments, love and aroha, those giant feelings in the chest that make us respond to each other, our inner tides and waves tugged without mercy by the great moon of the heart. This is of course wild and crazy and no basis for the sensible negotiation of race relations - but it is also crucial. I don't know of any cultures that have dealt with the hurts they have perpetrated on each other. I am sure there are some. Being Pakeha means being given the opportunity to be a player in that struggle. At the end of the day I am for love. It

is not all we need and it is repugnant if not based on justice but it is still what draws me into the Maori world over and over again.

My daughter is both Maori and Pakeha. People get confused because her mother and I both look like we are either dark Pakeha or pale Maori. They ask me which side of her is which. This Xmas I wrapped a pile of empty boxes and left them underneath the Xmas tree in the lounge-room. They were supposed to be decorations. My three year old looked at them for a while then told me 'Those are my presents, dad.' – her Maori side coming out I assumed. I frowned and told her that they were only 'pretend presents'. Tears welled in her eyes. Her bottom lip dropped. She put her head down for a while and sulked – surely her Pakeha side. Then slowly, like the dawning of a new day, her eyes lifted and shone. She tugged on my arm. 'Can I just pretend to open them then?' she asked me. And there before my eyes at last – the best of both worlds, her spectacular capacity to adapt.