

Mitzi Nairn: Thoughts on social justice
LIBERATION - DECOLONISATION
Transcript of recording 22/02/10

I want to talk about a whole raft of things that I think we are doing now and moving towards which I would put in a context of human liberation following Paulo Freire, who talks about the human need to move from oppression and poverty into a free state, a state of freedom. So that humans all over the world need human rights. Every human child that is born has a right to food and shelter and education and development of its own humanity. There was a World Council of Churches line of development which was shorthanded as 'justice, peace and the integrity of creation' which said you can't have peace without justice and you can't have a stable, peaceful, just world if you go on damaging the planet. So that the world and its plants and animals and its landscape, as well as human beings, have or has its own integrity and humans should take care of the world, the planet. When we modify the landscape we should do it in a careful and respectful way. Clearly humans do need to modify the planet to make gardens and roads and bridges and things like that, so it's not a no development kind of position, but it does talk about being careful and respectful of the whole planet. That I think sits very comfortably alongside the Maori ideas of kaitiakitanga and the mauri of everything – that everything has its essential nature and that needs to be respected.

When we look at the heritage of colonisation it has left us in some very unbalanced and unjust states, certainly in this country but worldwide as well. You can trace a lot back to the problematic attitudes underlying colonisation. So when we start as Pakeha looking at what we do for decolonisation, because Maori have to decolonise themselves by naming their realities, but so do we Pakeha. **It won't be the same but it will be aiming in the same direction. We need to expose** all those things that were hidden from us. We need to remember the things that we have been often helped to forget or we have been willing to forget. We need to admit things that have been **denied. If we get on with that and revisit our history in truthful ways, that's a step. But we also,** and perhaps more importantly, need to become reliable allies for Maori groups. We need to be supportive. We need to be respectful. We need to look at Maori authority and rangatiratanga and put ourselves in a mode of cooperation with those developments and those movements.

We need to, I think as Pakeha, keep moving towards a respect for otherness, to overcome that long, long pervasive history of xenophobia. We need to become more generous in spirit. I think **we need to match that Maori positive value of diversity. It really is a value, Maori don't like** uniformity they like all the little differences. If you think about when you are being taken on to a marae, the person who talks to your group will probably say **"On this marae we speak alternately.** They speak and then we put a speaker and then they put a speaker then we put a speaker and it ends with them. But on a lot of other marae, such as my own home one, they do all their speakers **and then we do all our speakers then they finish off."** I mean they almost always, if you think about it, refer to the other method, the other style as well because the fact that not everybody **does it the same way is valued, it's liked. There's nothing grudging about the Maori attitude to** difference and diversity. I mean there are sometimes rude jokes and cheeky mutters, but overall

that is a positive value and it's one that we have trouble getting our heads around because we see unity as uniformity so when Maori are different and describe things differently, firstly we think that some of them must be right and some of them must be wrong and secondly we think 'They haven't got their act together. If they got their act together they'd have this or this or that or that'. Unity in diversity is something we are quite slow in getting to an appreciation of.

Then I think another place we need to be going is to understand and support Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a foundation for an on-going, continuing future. Not just allowing people to say "Okay, it's having kind of a dying kick of being a basis for Waitangi Tribunal compensation claims." Of course compensation is very important even though Maori mostly are getting back about 10% of what they actually had taken from them. So somebody said the other day "One way goes 10% resources, the other way goes 90% forgiveness." Which I thought struck rather a tragic note. It made me feel fortunate and regretful I think in about equal amounts. But we also need to move towards the constitutional changes that will establish and move it beyond just a matter of tolerance. That te tino rangatiratanga will be in its rightful place and we find some kind of constitutional way of balancing all that out. One of the encouraging things is that the Anglican church, which is structured entirely on the Westminster system, made very radical changes in their constitution and although they've had a lot of what you might call teething troubles, the wheels didn't entirely fall off the Anglican church, at least not for that reason! They've shown that it is possible to make quite drastic changes within the parameters of the Westminster system and nothing fearfully terrible happens.

I think Pakeha fears are one of the main things we have to deal with. I think we have to become very, very reassuring and very, very... shining lights on forgotten things might be helpful. Because a lot of the fears come because Pakeha haven't processed historical realities, and I don't just mean the grim stuff - you know 'Yes that land deal was totally unfair and needs to be fixed' but we need to look at, say, foreshore and seabed. How come Pakeha got their knickers in a knot so easily when somebody pressed the button about you won't be able to go to the beach anymore? I mean considering Maori had always understood themselves to be the owners, owners isn't the right word, the guardians, the managers, the kaitiaki of the foreshore, how come we don't understand that that understanding was the status quo and we've always been able to go to the beach? How come we didn't have an understanding that how Maori own stuff or manage stuff is an open one?

If you look at some of the ways people see the Waitangi Tribunal compensation deals and so on it's sort of 'It's ours, us Pakeha, and we're giving some to them'. We don't even get as far as 'It's ours, Pakeha and Maori, and we're balancing out some of the control and management'. Let alone getting to 'It's theirs and we're giving it back' which is probably the truest understanding. Looking back at some of the early Waitangi Tribunal recommendations and how they were implemented, they were heavily, heavily ring fenced with joint management prescriptions - like Okahu Bay at Orakei. That was really nailing down something that was already a probability - unnecessary.

When the University of Waikato was re-vested in Tainui quite a lot of anxieties went around. They didn't just see it as a change of landlord. I don't know, I think some Pakeha thought that Tainui

would tow the university out to sea and sink it or something. As far as I can see it's still got the same faculties, mostly the same staff, teaches the same courses, and that should have been quite predictable. Although Tainui might have liked to take an interest in making it more accessible for Maori students and maybe seeing that certain parts of courses were reshaped, or certain courses **were offered, but we're totally misunderstanding, not noticing the high Maori value on education.** And value on all sorts of education. That the incoming people, the Pakeha people, should do their thing in education and under the Treaty Maori should be resourced to do their thing in education **but also access the kawanatanga education. I mean it's a huge value. Te Rauparaha probably about 30 years before the New Zealand University was founded said "We need our Oxford and Cambridge here in this land."** He transliterated it in an unusual way and it took years for Maori scholars going back to it to work out that is what he had said. But you know there is that huge value on education at every level, not just wananga and the kura and early childhood, but pre-birth education.

I heard an interview with Richard Nunns the other day, he and Hirini Melbourne did all that rediscovery of Maori flutes and how they were made and so on, and in that he said we almost lost **a particular flute because we didn't know what it was, we didn't know what it was for.** Hirini Melbourne went to interview an elder somewhere about something else and just in passing this **elder named this other flute and so then they started saying "Tell me more".** Eventually after he'd drawn it and **they'd made a prototype and he'd modified it and so on, it's a whatever the Maori word is for fontanel.** It's shaped to reflect the fontanel of the newborn baby's skull and it was **played, depending on the importance of the child and its ancestry, but the music was played throughout the pregnancy and throughout the birth and the instrument was played for it for about the first two years of the child's life.** There was a woven mat, a takapau, with the important things that that child needed to learn in the first two years, of its genealogy and various relationships with other tribes and a sort of a map of the territory and everything, and that was all played to the preborn child and the newborn child through this particular instrument which would be inscribed, **made for its pregnancy, it was for that child to be taught by.** Well that's an amazingly detailed theory of peri-natal education. That was nearly lost because that elder died within 18 months so they had that very short time to recover not only the instrument but the purpose of the instrument and the use of the instrument and how it should be decorated and why.

Just listening to that interview made me think that's a very sophisticated piece of educational theory. We do it sometimes, Pakeha people, I mean a lot of women who are pregnant play more Mozart or stuff like that you know. So we do have some theories around the child in the womb **but if you think of the beginning of Patricia Grace's novel 'Baby No Eyes' the narrator is the baby in the womb in the first part because they are hearing and thinking before they are born.** We don't really think about that. We really think that a baby is pretty stupid and is gradually being given the gift of wisdom or knowledge or intelligence or something by us around it when they are born.

So you can see there are all sorts of areas of Maori knowledge and wisdom that have gone totally unappreciated and totally unknown about - totally invisibilised. Probably if they had been put forward we would have had some useful words to dismiss them like superstition or folklore or

whatever. There is a good address that Chief Judge, as he was then, Eddie Durie made about not saying 'law' meets 'lore' but 'two streams of law come together'. He talks about the place in Otago where the two rivers converge. One is the Kawarau I think, I can't remember what the other one is. One is glacial and blue and one of them is sort of brown and peaty, comes out of forest and you can see the rivers coming together because they are such different colours but if you go a little way downstream you've just got a river. I think there are a lot of points at which we came in in colonisation invisibilising the people we were encountering, partly because we were doing them some injustices so we didn't really want to communicate or listen. We didn't want to perceive them as people as we are people - I'm not saying people like us but human as us.

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