

Address to the National Press Club
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**'Race Relations or
Saving oneself from the grip of the Devouring Serpent'**

I am indeed honoured to be able to speak to such an esteemed audience.

When I looked at the past speakers to such a gathering, including HH The Dalai Lama, Sir Nick Montagu, Alastair Cooke, Glenda Jackson, and President Chaim Herzog I felt slightly overwhelmed at what my humble thoughts could contribute to world peace.

Until of course I remembered the advice of the bard, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players, they have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts".

And so from 'As you Like it' to the dining room of Bellamys, I celebrate the many parts we all play.

I was interested to learn the title of this address was to be an 'outline of Maori issues'. Where would one begin?

I turned for inspiration to the pepeha, *E kore au e ngaro, he kakano i ruia mai i Rangiatea.*

This is a statement about the long-term survival of Maori, about people who have withstood the threat of extinction.

People who have fought against the duty of the colonial government to '*smooth the pillow of the dying race*'. The Benedictine monk, Domenico Vaggioli, wrote about the impact of British colonialism in his 1891 history of New Zealand, saying:

"the unfortunate Maori certainly have to use their wits to save themselves from the grip of the devouring serpent. However they will never succeed in freeing themselves from its tenacious coils, and will eventually perish forever, overcome by its brutal force¹".

This so-called 'unfortunate' population outwitted the predictions, and grew from the precarious state of 40,000 at the year 1900 to the emerging possibility of 750,000 predicted for the year 2021.

Whether it be measles, influenza, tuberculosis, or land confiscation and extinguishment, tangata whenua have not been finally decimated, demoralized or destabilised.

¹ Vaggioli, *Storia della Nuova Zelanda E Dei Suoi Abitatori*, vol 2, p528.

We belong here, our turangawaewae and our ukaipo define us as mana whenua. Our connection to the land is as a baby to the breast, we are intimately linked to this whenua. Our strength, our energy, our sustenance is grounded in the land which we occupy by right of ancestral claim.

And so it is, when I come to 'Maori issues', that I bring with me a history built around this context, around whakapapa: genealogy is the backbone of tangata whenua (and increasingly Pakeha). I am also always conscious about the threats that have been made – and continue to be made – to our enduring survival.

In our world we plan for our future generations through the inspiration and legacy of our extended family and tupuna. Our memory is a way of discovering our past, to guide us to survival in the future.

I contrast this context with where I could begin if I had been asked to focus on 'Pakeha issues'. Or for that matter, Pacific issues or Asian issues, or ethnic issues.

What is the history and experience that 'being Pakeha' brings to this nation?

Last week, we saw the annual event of people donning green, drinking stout, and gaily dancing. And I'm not talking about the Green Party conference.

It is said that up to 20% of the people of Aotearoa claim Irish whakapapa. Their history is one characterized by the problem of land ownership and agrarian distress in Ireland under British rule. A history which demonstrates the long-term results of conquest, confiscation, and colonisation upon a people. A history of survival and resilience which no doubt informs their presence today.

In just over 100 years, nearly 7.5 million people departed Ireland to establish new lives abroad, many of them starting anew in Aotearoa. Dr Malcolm Campbell, a history lecturer from Auckland University, is studying Irish migration in the past, stating that it will help us to understand today's society. He noted:

"Irish people are important in terms of both numbers, and because they constituted a counter to Englishness in the Pacific. Many Irish people tended to be more radical and against the status quo, and that is likely to have had a lasting effect on many Pacific societies²".

In his study, Dr Campbell says much of the character and many of the values of our Pacific society were shaped by 19th century migration.

² Dr Malcolm Campbell, Faculty of Arts, University of Auckland. 2 February 2005. 'Study of Irish migration provided insights'.

“ The Irish were subjected to racial attack and racism in their time too. Work like this makes us realise we need to have more respect for immigrants”.

Even earlier than the Irish, were migrants of Chinese descent, who came to the goldfields in the late 1860s. In the late nineteenth century, our Parliament passed discriminatory laws against Chinese seeking to enter New Zealand. The Chinese Immigrants Act of 1881 imposed a poll tax of ten pounds per Chinese person. Further injustices were to occur. Chinese immigrants were deprived of their right to naturalisation in 1908 and this was not rescinded until 1951.

One of the common accusations levelled at me is that I am trapped in the past, implying as it were, an inertia or indeed obstinacy in facing the realities of the modern world.

Yet as these three distinctive cases indicate – Aotearoa can only grow as a nation if we have the maturity to discuss our background, and to move forward in a position of informed strength.

Race relations is not just about making this a topic for a day – as we all did yesterday. It is an ongoing conversation, a dialogue between the peoples, the histories, shared and separate, of living in this land.

I was stunned when listening to an interview with Dr Brash some time ago, when he was asked to explain how he felt as a New Zealander. His choked response was

‘it’s that lump in the throat when we return home’.

I understood immediately, his feelings. It’s the same feeling I get when I hit Tangimoana on my way home to Whanganui, when I drive through Nga Rauru lands and when I am in the lands of Tuwharetoa. I am inextricably linked to those lands, those mountains, those rivers and lakes by birthright.

Our challenge as a nation is to be able to clearly articulate what it means to live in this land – whether we be the indigenous first peoples of the nation – or whether we came as subsequent migrants to lay claim to this country as our homeland.

Nationhood is more than singing ‘Pokarekare ana’, impressing overseas visitors with our rendition of ‘Ka mate Ka mate’, - or any other form of cultural tradition we feel compelled to display.

Nationhood is being able to know who we are, from whom we descend and what our obligations are to each other.

Fortunately our tupuna – Maori and British alike – had the courage to envision the future we find ourselves in now.

Some have called Te Tiriti o Waitangi our first immigration policy.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi proposed a relationship between Queen Victoria and 550 rangatira from various tribes. The focus of the commitments made in 1840 was the reconciliation between Kāwanatanga/ Governance with tino rangatiratanga / self-determination.

There is a natural tension between these two forces. A good knowledge of Te Tiriti and of our history as a nation will teach us.

The promise of the Treaty was that the Crown would provide protection for these islands and the citizens within. The expression of Article Two of Te Tiriti o Waitangi is central to the survival and prosperity of Māori as a people.

Most of the reports of the Waitangi Tribunal focus on this Article, and it is clear that the Crown is obliged to actively protect the well-being of all taonga, and respect the rangatiratanga of the Maori partner over these.

Throughout our joint histories in this land it has always interested me that the relationship envisaged by our ancestors has not received equal attention from the partnering signatories. This is particularly so in this House, where various political actors speak of Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a tool of division, or attempt to erase it from the statutes of modern parliament.

Mana whenua signatories and their descendants have maintained their commitment to seeking the full expression of the Tiriti while the Crown and other sectors of the population seem to have variable interest in the relevance of Te Tiriti to the Nation's future.

The Maori Party firmly believes that Te Tiriti o Waitangi provides us with the foundation for nationhood dreamt of by those who have gone before us.

We will advocate for our nation to openly learn about and fully discuss, not only Te Tiriti o Waitangi, but also the history of Aotearoa. It is only from such a position that we can ever achieve power-sharing between tangata whenua and the Crown.

Our history lessons at school must focus on the history of these lands equally when learning histories of other countries. Why is it that our true history has been changed so as to be more palatable, and to deny the wrongs of our past?

The media have a powerful role to play in supporting the public perception towards nationhood.

It is through your stories and perspectives, that the genealogical richness of our peoples can be revealed. You can be the ones that help to distinguish the Pakeha perspectives alongside the Tongan, highlighting the Sri Lankan viewpoint or Malaysian experiences within your brief. You can help to

highlight cultural strengths, and draw our attention to areas where cultural support may be required.

As an example, I read a research report released this month, about grandparents raising kin children in Aotearoa. The report stated that "as at 31 December 2004, 48% of all Maori children in care were placed with extended family and whanau as against 27% of Pakeha children"³.

As way of explanation, the report raised a question about:

"whether it can be assumed that extended family resources are as rich for Pakeha families or those of other cultures".

This should be breaking news. Only a quarter of Pakeha children in care are placed with their own – or putting it another way, the great majority, 75% of Pakeha children in need of care and protection, are placed in stranger care. Is this a cultural crisis for Pakeha? A situation of deprivation? Why are 'extended family resources' not as rich for Pakeha? All of these are real questions that the nation needs to grapple with, as we seek to understand.

In this instance, Maori was being constituted as the norm, based on 'the more inclusive concept of what constitutes whanau or family existing for Maori'. Among the nine kaupapa or values that are built into the constitution of the Maori Party is whanaungatanga or familiness. You can expect that the Maori Party will want to express this value in all that it promotes.

I believe the media has the greatest responsibility to reflect the world as we live it. A world which as we move to 2040 will require us to prepare, thoughtfully, for a very different nation of many peoples.

It has always intrigued me that some people choose to lump our diverse populations together under the symbol of assimilation: a flightless, nocturnal bird. So for instance yesterday's headlines included a release from the Labour Party: "talented KIWIS dominate Labour list".

Celebrating nationhood does not mean we have to become submerged into one bland melting pot of Kiwis. Coming of age is not about hitting 'delete' and customizing the script with the Kiwi font.

None of us come to this gathering today 'culture-free': we are all products of our experiences fifty years, one hundred years and 150 years out and more. We should not need to fear history: our growth comes from the lesson we learnt, the skills we acquired, the survival mechanisms should be celebrated for making us who we are.

As we have traveled around Aotearoa I have been greatly heartened by the burgeoning interest of many Pakeha in learning about their cultural

³ Jill Worrall, MSW. *Grandparents and other relatives raising kin children in Aotearoa/New Zealand*. Commissioned by the Grandparents raising Grandchildren Charitable Trust. Research Report. March 2005. p5.

distinctiveness. They are talking about the events and people that have shared their cultural resources, which in turn will benefit the nation.

Just in time for Race Relations Day, the Human Rights Commission has released a report, creatively titled, 'Race Relations in 2004'. Two of the key recommendations from that report bear repetition:

- The need to affirm a sense of belonging for all people in New Zealand through the development of an inclusive national identity that embraces our Maori, Pakeha, Pacific, Asian and many other community identities;
- The need to continue public education and debate on the contemporary relevance of the Treaty of Waitangi, the nature of indigenous rights and our evolving national identity.

The Maori Party is absolutely committed to the recognition of cultural strengths as the key assets for a prosperous nation. Our economists and business leaders have reminded us that to be a Maori economic leader, one has to be Maori first, and an economic leader second. That same theory applies whether one is a politician, a reporter, or a member of the public.

Genuine progress for the nation rests on the histories, experiences and values that are vital to our survival.

'The grip of the devouring serpent' in 2005 must be released if we are to truly prepare a pathway for Aotearoa in 2025.

We must plan for this future in a way which protects and preserves the essence of all who live in this land. We can and must all take up our parts to play on the world stage.

To do so in a way which means we not only survive, but we are able to thrive in a nation which affirms our sense of belonging.

It is our greatest opportunity – and it is an opportunity for the media to show genuine leadership.

It is a moment we all must embrace.