

THE FACES OF RACISM

Racism has many faces. Some of them may be veiled others frankly overt—unmasked.

These faces may be grouped into three main forms—personal racism, cultural racism and institutional racism.

Personal racism affects individuals or groups. It occurs when people of one group are seen as inferior to another because of skin colour or ethnic origin. It belongs to those situations in which an individual is directly diminished or discriminated against on grounds of race.

In our country as in others, it may be manifested in jokes, disparaging comment and prejudiced attitudes. It may occur in rental housing, unequal distribution of opportunity and in our classrooms. Personal racism is the form that cuts most keenly at individual people. It is the variety that diminishes a person in their own eyes. It attacks the fount of personal identity and destroys a sense of self worth, as well as denying the indigenous person access to resources and opportunities in the larger society.

Cultural racism is less obvious than the more open acts of prejudice between individuals. It is entrenched philosophy and beliefs. Its most obvious form in New Zealand is in the assumption that Pakeha culture, lifestyle and values are superior to those of other New Zealand cultures, notably those of Maori and Polynesian people.

It is rooted in the 19th century heritage of unshakable belief in the cultural superiority of Europeans. It is a direct inheritance of colonialism and imperialism, and embodied in the ethos of the dominant group and thence the mind of the individual within the group. Without challenge and change this is transmitted to successive generations in the pre-school stage of development and becomes a recurrent theme in subsequent socialisation.

Despite the fact that tenets of Pakeha culture become fractured, eroded or obsolete (for example the nature of family, the role of marriage and the position of women) the assumptions of cultural superiority persist.

One of the most pervasive forms of cultural racism is the assumption that Pakeha values, beliefs and systems are "normal". This places Maori values, beliefs and systems in the category of "exotic". Provision for Maori cultural preference thus become an "extra". That which sees provision for Maoritanga as anything other than a normal ingredient of our national culture is essentially culturally racist.

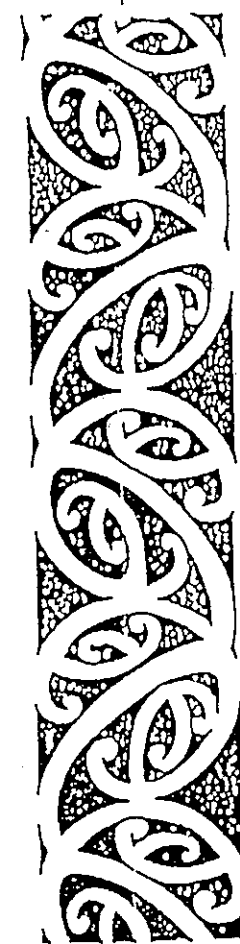
However, the most damaging aspect of cultural racism is the underlying notion of superiority. It is seldom overtly stated in modern New Zealand, but it is constantly implied in advertising, in education and in the marketplace.

One of the ways in which this parcel of attitudes impacts on Maori culture is that the power culture, because it has the authority of "superiority", takes to itself the right to select those aspects of Maoritanga it wants to use or include in general New Zealand culture.

These selections range from the tail motif on our national airline to the inclusion of Maori words in the Dictionary of New Zealand English.

It must be stressed that it is not the inclusion of Maori symbols and elements in the national culture that marks cultural racism. It is the

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arrogantly assumed "right" to select those elements and to use them in ways which hollow them and diminish their cultural importance.

Whilst personal and cultural racism may be described in their own right, institutional racism is observed from its effects. It is a bias in our social and administrative institutions that automatically benefits the dominant race or culture, while penalising minority and subordinate groups.

The effects of institutional racism are graphically illustrated in our social statistics. For virtually every negative statistic in education, crime, child abuse, infant mortality, health and employment, the Maori figures are overwhelmingly dominant. In virtually every positive statistic in these areas, Maori are in miniscule proportion, if not entirely absent.

It is plain that the institutions, by which New Zealand society governs itself, distributes its resources and produces wealth, do not serve Maori people but they do clearly serve the great bulk of Pakeha people.

The persistent myth advanced to explain the cause of Maori disadvantage is that the Maori have not "adapted" or have "failed" to grasp the opportunity that society offers. This is the notion that poverty is the fault of the poor.

The fact is, though, that New Zealand institutions manifest a monocultural bias and the culture which shapes and directs that bias is Pakehatanga. The bias can be observed operating in law, government, the professions, health care, land ownership, welfare practices, education, town planning, the police, finance, business and spoken language. It permeates the media and our national economic life. If one is outside, one sees it as "the system". If one is cocooned within it, one sees it as the normal condition of existence.

Institutional racism is the basic weapon that has driven the Maori into the role of outsiders and strangers in their own land. The more recent identification of institutional racism as the basic evil constraining Maori participation in New Zealand life, has caused something of a furor. The assumption of those under attack has been that their involvement in our monocultural institutions means that they personally are therefore accused of being 'racist'. The resultant resentment has been bitter and a barrier to change. It has polarised attitudes and clouded the capacity for dealing with the issue of monoculturalism.

If a person works within an institution that practises institutional racism, that person need not necessarily be racist. However, if those in positions of influence within institutions do not work to reduce and eliminate the monocultural bias that disadvantages Maori and minorities, they can be accused of collaborating with the system, and therefore of being racist themselves. In a system of monocultural/racist policies and practices, individual behaviour when operating these policies and practices, becomes translated into personal reflections of racism.

Institutional racism can be combatted only by a conscious effort to make our institutions more culturally inclusive in their character, more accommodating of cultural difference. This does not begin and end at "the

counter". The change must penetrate to the recruitment and qualifications which shape the authority structures themselves. We are not talking of mere redecoration of the waiting room so that clients feel more comfortable.

Affirmative action programmes aimed at reducing the monocultural bias in our institutions are an essential ingredient of change.

The first stage of change to a more culturally inclusive New Zealand is the recognition of biculturalism. This involves both the place and the status of Maoritanga in our institutional organisations.