

# Thoughts Around the State of the Pakeha Nation

February 2013

*“How is it our minds are not satisfied? ...  
What means this whispering in the bottom of our hearts?”*

So ended a public lecture in 1842 by prominent Sydney barrister, Richard Windeyer. The lecture was meant to be a reasoned demolition of the rights of Australia’s original inhabitants. But it ended with a question, acknowledgement of a troubled conscience.

I recently read these words on the back cover of *This Whispering in our Hearts*, the 1998 work of Henry Reynolds, Australian historian. I felt the expression “troubled conscience” would resonate, consciously or unconsciously, with people in New Zealand. The words provided a theme for my thinking about the state of the Pakeha nation.

The original “State of the Nation” addresses were not on this theme. They were an annual summer event, instituted by Robert Muldoon, leader of New Zealand’s National Party. His intention was to gain media attention for his party’s policies. After his defeat as Prime Minister in 1984, the event was discontinued until revived by a new National Party leader, Don Brash. In 2004, Brash used a cleverly crafted reflection on New Zealand’s history and the Treaty of Waitangi to suggest that Maori were unduly privileged. Brash and the National Party were immediately rewarded with a surge in the polls. The fact that most social statistics for Maori were decidedly worse than those for the general population meant little or nothing to the many New Zealanders who were delighted by Brash’s statement.

For Pakeha who had spent much time and energy in promoting the Treaty relationship, this turn of events in 2004 was disturbing. It made us realise just how profound in our communities was the prejudice against Maori and their rights. One constructive counter to Brash’s speech was initiated by Network Waitangi Whangarei. From 2006 to 2009 they hosted an annual panel of speakers on “The State of the Pakeha Nation”, and from 2010 have been publishing essays on the same subject. These panels and essays are intended to continue the legacy of Joan Cook, staunch and inspirational supporter of Pakeha commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Thank you, Joan, for being an ongoing inspiration to us. May you rest in peace!

Each contributor has brought to these panels and essays their personal insight as one who has reflected long and hard on the history of this country and our identity as Pakeha New Zealanders. So, I begin by giving some of my background and interests in coming to this topic. I will then acknowledge how I have been helped with this essay by a meeting round a kitchen table, and expand on the ideas nurtured at that table.

I am a Pakeha of Irish, English and Cornish ancestry. Over 30 years ago I attended Maori language classes at Henderson High School with Awa Hudson as our tutor. Awa was a wonderful teacher. She not only introduced us to te reo Maori but also to te ao Maori (the Maori world), both its culture and political critique. This was for me a beginning of a

long, slow process of conversion: from an identity shaped almost entirely by a colonialist view of our country to one that is much fuller. I believe that as Pakeha we are enriched as we grow in appreciation of the land to which our peoples have come, and in respect for tangata whenua as the indigenous proprietors and guardians of the land in the areas where we live.

Over the past three years, I have been privileged to listen to and reflect on the evidence given by Ngapuhi Nui Tonu in the first stage of the hearing of their claim to the Waitangi Tribunal, the focus being He Wakaputanga (Declaration of Independence, 1835) and Te Tiriti o Waitangi (1840). Ingrid Huygens and I were there as Pakeha representatives on an independent panel asked to assess the cases brought by Ngapuhi Nui Tonu and the Crown. We worked closely with panel colleagues Takawai Murphy and Hori Parata, and a wider support group. Attendance at this hearing and involvement in the writing of the independent report, *Ngapuhi Speaks*, have been an incredibly valuable learning experience, and I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to be part of this project. The significance of this report for Pakeha is a subject I will return to later in the essay.

Before coming to the kitchen table, I want to mention one of my present concerns for our nation, that is, the apparent diminution of the value put on moral integrity. Not so long ago there seemed to be a less ambivalent public expectation of uprightness in our leaders. Too often today politicians and others are assessed on their performance in the media battle, rather than whether they acted rightly in a given situation. Thus, recently (12 December 2012), TV journalists were expressing surprise that Actors Equity were once again pursuing a justice issue in relation to their employment: since two years earlier they had “lost the media battle” with the Government over a similar issue. The rightness or otherwise of the actors’ stand was not commented on. We Pakeha New Zealanders like to pride ourselves on our sense of fairness. But if we value “image” more than “integrity” the chances of achieving fairness will decrease; and this in turn will affect our ability to approach the Treaty relationship with real concern for truth and justice.

To come now to the kitchen table. When asked to write this Joan Cook memorial essay, I found it hard to disengage myself from immersion in the *Ngapuhi Speaks* project. So, I asked Mitzi and Ray Nairn if they would help me stand back a little and get some bearings for an approach. They invited me to their home, to sit and talk with them around the kitchen table. Our main conversation was about the independent report and what it has to say to us as Pakeha. The rest of this essay is not a recounting of the conversation but of thoughts that developed from that stimulating interaction with Mitzi and Ray.

Two key issues regarding Pakeha and tangata whenua surfaced in that conversation: relationship and vision for the future. With regard to relationship broadly, I have found it useful to reflect on the parallels between the development of a healthy and productive relationship between individuals and the development of the same between communities. These parallels include respect for the autonomy of each other; communication; growing in knowledge and appreciation of each other; fairness; allowing each the space and resources they need to develop their potential; working in cooperation on matters of common interest; and addressing differences. A healthy relationship can lead each partner

to grow in self awareness, and to revise and broaden their judgments, values and understandings.

The importance of this self understanding came to mind from hearing Ray talk about what he gained from perusing *Ngapuhi Speaks*. He found the report presented him with insight into te ao Maori, and then into how te ao Pakeha has stood in relation to te ao Maori. He became aware how deeply imbued our Pakeha world is with values and convictions that come from a colonising heritage. I felt Ray's admission was a humble one; and I am sure the practice of humility and listening is essential for those of us who come from a culture of dominance. Not, however, the sort of humility that expresses itself in self-flagellation—"how dreadful we are"; but that which helps us listen carefully to what tangata whenua have to say. Such listening will help us sort the wheat from the chaff in our convictions and values and come to a place of true self-respect, one based in knowing we belong to a people who have been invited into relationship with tangata whenua.

In sharing their knowledge with the Waitangi Tribunal, and hence with the New Zealand public, the Ngapuhi Nui Tonu speakers were conscious they were taking the risk of once again being ignored or having their words turned against them. For too long the Crown and the Pakeha community generally have approached Maori knowledge with much disrespect: by avoidance, downright denigration or trivialisation. The Ngapuhi Nui Tonu evidence showed how lacking and faulty has been the commonly-available information about history and tikanga from the North, and particularly about He Wakaputanga and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. If we as Pakeha have any care for the Treaty relationship or, failing that, our integrity as a people, it is important we take time to consider carefully what Ngapuhi Nui Tonu have said and what response is needed from Pakeha and the Crown. As Ray put it: "*Ngapuhi Speaks* provides a clear impetus for us, the settler people, to engage with our Treaty partner".

In particular, I believe that we tauiwi (non-Maori) writers and researchers who are concerned about our relationship with tangata whenua need to consider carefully the premises and practices on which our academic disciplines are based. We might ask: Why has so much writing and research in this country led to misrepresentation of the Maori world and the Crown–Maori relationship? Why has there been such a massive failure to appreciate the philosophy, language, law and political economy of the tangata whenua? Are some of the "standards" set for academic scholarship barriers to engaging respectfully with Maori scholars and Maori knowledge? If so, what is needed to ensure respectful engagement and good scholarship? These sorts of questions are important because, sadly, so much of our received scholarship sustains and justifies the colonising relationship, rather than enabling respectful engagement and the opportunities for mutual benefit.

As noted earlier, the discussion round the kitchen table also had a focus on vision for the future, again with *Ngapuhi Speaks* as the main trigger for our thoughts. It was interesting that, although the report might seem to deal largely with the past and, to a lesser extent, the present, our conversation turned more to ways forward that the report points to. In

that, we were influenced by the evidence from the Ngapuhi Nui Tonu witnesses who spoke with great clarity about what their hapu intended in entering into relationship with the British Crown and Pakeha, and how those intentions continue from the early encounters with Europeans and on through the present. As Ray saw it: “This report invites us to recognise what has happened and what is now in place, but does so in a way that opens a way into a different, more culturally just, future”.

As one of the authors of the report, I was greatly encouraged by Mitzi’s formal “Pakeha Response”, which is included at the end of this essay. Her response opens with the words: “As a Pakeha New Zealander I am enormously excited by this report”, and goes on to explain why. My concern had been that Pakeha would read the report as simply negative to Crown and Pakeha. It is true there is a major challenge to the Crown in its unilateral exercise of power. Despite that, the report focuses on the positive intentions of Ngapuhi Nui Tonu in entering into relationship with the Crown and Pakeha. Their intentions were, and remain, inclusive, based in tikanga (law), and directed towards right order and peace; they point to ways for tangata whenua and tauwiwi to live and work together in rightness of relationship.

Moreover, there are Pakeha who will appreciate the critique of the Crown in the report. At this time when we are being invited to reflect on our country’s constitutional arrangements, *Ngapuhi Speaks* provides helpful insight into the structure of state power. In their unique claim, Ngapuhi Nui Tonu have gone to the heart of the questions about sovereignty, its meaning and practice. By sharing their traditions of law, decision making and confederated political power, they have presented alternatives to the very centralised, hierarchical model of authority under which we currently live. In studying what Ngapuhi Nui Tonu have said, we can learn from the justice of their concerns for true power-sharing arrangements and critically reflect on our present system of national government and the exercise of state power. Through listening to and dialogue with tangata whenua—and in the process clarifying our own values and concerns—Pakeha and other tauwiwi will contribute to the building of a constitution that honours the Treaty relationship and provides for the rights and needs of our diverse communities.

In terms of where the Pakeha nation is at the moment, the greatest barrier to the development of such a constitution would seem to be Pakeha failure to engage with the issues. This was brought out in a discussion of Treaty and the constitution on National Radio (10 January 2013), where Brent Edwards spoke with the Maori MPs, Shane Jones and Metiria Turei. Shane described how he finds that the Treaty and the constitution are constantly being discussed at Maori hui, whereas they are rarely discussed at “mainstream” gatherings. Brent, Shane and Metiria all agreed that this gap means that national conversation on the Treaty and constitution will be slow to develop. It is a situation that presents an ongoing challenge to those of us Pakeha who believe that such conversation is vital to the health of our nation.

I cannot help wondering whether Pakeha reluctance to discuss these issues doesn’t derive in part from fear and shame arising from the “whispering in the bottom of our hearts”. Maybe, too, a certain feeling of helplessness in face of the history we have inherited?

And fears about what might become of our assets, privileges and identity? Like any fears, these will not be addressed by denial or inaction. We have been asked to think about and discuss our country's constitution and it is important we do so. As yet (January 2013), we are unclear about the process or adequacy of the "national engagement in constitutional review" that is to be put to us by the Government-appointed Constitutional Review Panel. I think that, at this time, the most useful way for groups and organisations to enter into conversation about the constitution has been supplied by Peace Movement Aotearoa. The process they suggest is set out in an attractive booklet called: *Time for Change: A framework for community discussion on values-based and Treaty-based constitutional arrangements*. The booklet lays out a positive and encouraging process that, together with the included information, will enhance our ability to think and talk clearly about the country's constitutional arrangements.

In conclusion, I want to say that I am proud to be Pakeha. I am grateful to tangata whenua for the challenges they put before us, and agree with Mitzi's words on our behalf in her "Pakeha Response" to *Ngāpuhi Speaks*. I think that as a Pakeha nation we have a lot of history to overcome if we are to move beyond being a colonising people and to enter into the sort of relationship that tangata whenua invited us through the Treaty agreement. I believe we have the capacity to keep working towards this if we keep before us a desire for fairness, truth and moral integrity.

Thank you, Mitzi and Ray, for such a helpful conversation.

Susan Healy  
21 January 2013

## **Pākehā Response to *Ngāpuhi Speaks***

As a Pākehā New Zealander I am enormously excited by this report. I am grateful to Ngāpuhi who have put so much work into the hearing to set out the circumstances and intentions of their ancestors in entering into a treaty with the British Crown.

In the process of giving an account of their political processes, particularly He Wakaputanga, Ngāpuhi have shared much of their history, values and identity, with appropriate pride and humility, and reading these records I, in turn, feel humble, realising what a great gift is here for us and for posterity,

Those ancestors made provision for people like my family to immigrate, live in safety and be self-governing, in relationship with their own Rangatiratanga.

I write as a long-term member of national Pākehā and Tauīwi Tiriti workers organisations. I describe myself as a Pākehā New Zealander, by which I mean that I belong here under the provisions made in Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

I am thinking about those of us who live here because of that Tiriti o Waitangi and how we may well respond to this account. Most of us will have grown up in ignorance of our history, and been raised with a false and distorted perception of the process of colonisation. This has given us a sense of entitlement, a belief in the basic rightness of things as they are. Ignorance and false perceptions can both be put right, but it will be harder for some than for others.

There will be my fellow Pākehā who have been lucky enough to have reached a point where we share a longing for the full development of the possibilities of Te Tiriti. Others will have to get their heads around quite a lot of new stuff, and I say to them: don't be alarmed, there is nothing to fear because, as we are being reminded in this document, the spirit of Te Tiriti is one of wisdom and care for all people.

There are some who will be hard nuts to crack, who will turn a deaf ear, for reasons of fear, guilt, greed, or who knows what? Let us hope that eventually a tide of justice will move them.

Now, we need to read this report, consider it carefully and ponder its implications. We are reminded that it was this document, Te Tiriti, in the Māori language, which William Hobson, representing the Crown, signed. It is not too late, in fact it is timely, to pick up on those mutually beneficial possibilities. A wise vision for the future is still as relevant now as it was then,

So be willing to be challenged and inspired.

Mitzi Nairn  
26 October 2012

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