

Quaking Things Up

(“To quake - to rupture, to pull part and to create new shapes”)

BY GRAEME STORER

At their Meeting for Worship for Business (April 2021) a group of Young Friends identified their interest in exploring the role of Quakers in colonisation in Aotearoa. This included exploring

**(a) how the philosophy, beliefs and teachings within Quakers may have contributed to colonisation
(b) the role Quakerism has played in healing the negative effects of colonisation.**

They suggested that a revitalisation of the Quaker history of pilgrimages could become a process of learning about colonisation as well as what the process of decolonising looks like.

The article below does not address potential connections between Quaker practice and (de-)colonisation. Instead it shines light on why we need to courageously call out the impacts of colonisation, Pākehā privilege, power and racism. The way forward is to embrace the democratic values that underpin the Treaty of Waitangi, as the basis for respectful political relationships based on generosity rather than self-interest. As Quakers, the healing power of kōrero, silent listening and generosity offer a peaceful pathway forward and will allow us to promote the best of ourselves as a nation.

In today's Aotearoa New Zealand everyone must belong.

A recent paper from The Centre for Informed Futures suggests that democracies function well only when they exhibit a level of cohesiveness that allows them to work for the mutual benefit of all their citizens. The paper describes how various institutions and structures whose purpose is to ensure trust, integrity, accountability, and cooperation (the foundations for social cohesion and well-being) are being eroded.

Factors contributing to social cohesion are the levels of trust and respect that exist, firstly, between those who are governed and the institutions and individuals whom they empower to govern; and, secondly, between all the diverse set of identities, world-views, values, beliefs, and interests that are reflected in society. Civil society organisations play an important role in promoting trust and respect for and between all members of society. Equally important is the extent to which human rights and the responsibilities linked to these rights are upheld and honoured. These factors, in turn, allow each of us to feel heard and to gain recognition and to claim a sense of place and belonging.

Challenges threatening social cohesion within Aotearoa New Zealand today include deepening inequalities (worsened by the drawn-out consequences of Covid-19); failure to resolve issues of intergenerational poverty; environmental

degradation; and climate change (both at home and across the Pacific). Increasingly, media and disruptive technologies are shifting the way values and emotions are shaping and polarising politics. For some, the virtual world has enhanced communications and enabled access to knowledge. But there has also been increased division through the cultivation and dissemination of misinformation and disinformation.

A unique challenge for Aotearoa New Zealand is the framing of the country's bicultural foundations against the realities of an increasingly diverse and multicultural society. Biculturalism is an integral part of our national discourse. It is rooted in our history and identity. Some admire the quality of our race relations, holding up Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the 'everywhere' haka and a unique 'brand New Zealand' as proof of racial harmony. Te Tiriti was founded out of competition for land, and public discussion of Te Tiriti has tended to focus on contested power and not on bicultural partnership and participation. In any case, since the beginning of the Māori-Pākehā relationship, the burden has been on Māori to be bicultural. While successive governments have acknowledged that Māori have a unique constitutional and historical position within Aotearoa, they have ultimately failed to appropriately acknowledge Tino Rangatiratanga and Mana Motuhake (self-determination).

Given the prevalence of the Māori-Pākehā bicultural narrative in our thinking, it is not surprising that we struggle to embrace multiculturalism. Biculturalism and multiculturalism are often thought of as incompatible and competing. Two effects of this framing are: first, the dominant Pākehā culture has largely ignored the ethnic, religious, linguistic, and cultural diversity that make up multicultural Aotearoa New Zealand. Second, ethnic communities are marginalised within the treaty partnership. We need to be open to pursuing the co-existence of biculturalism and multiculturalism and the discomforts and uncertainty that this will involve. Every New Zealander has an ethnicity – many of us have multiple ethnic identities – and everyone must belong.

Recently political and public debate emerged around the way the He Puapua report surfaced. Cries of 'apartheid' served to push to one side informed discussion of why we should consider constitutional reform, e.g., as a pathway to constructively resolve how Te Tiriti is embedded into New Zealand society and to shine a light on the dissonance between our bicultural and multicultural identities. The debate spread into other areas, such as local council wards and the Three Waters Reform initiative. All of this has undermined confidence in our democratic processes.

Dame Anne Salmond notes that “the text of Te Tiriti describes a network of relationships among Queen Victoria, the Governor, the rangatira, the hapū and ordinary people based on ...a promise of absolute equality between settlers and Māori ...and their tikanga.” That is, the original treaty embodies democratic values that are a blueprint for the future for all of us and provides the basis for respectful political relationships based on generosity rather than self-interest .

It is critical then that we recognise Te Tiriti as the founding partnership between Māori (mana whenua) and everybody else (tauīwi) and insistently uphold tino rangatiratanga and mana motuhake for tangata whenua. We can do this while also advocating and seeking equity for our diverse, multi-ethnic communities. As Tze Ming Mok notes, the principles of the Treaty give us rules of engagement: “if we accede to them, we will (also) access our right to be different.”

Tackling the unsettled mood of this moment in time – where truth, ignorance, fear and the contradictions of our shared history compete for attention – will not be easy. It will require us to courageously call out Pākehā privilege, power and racism

and the impacts of colonisation and to challenge the story we have held onto for so long of a nation of harmony. We can draw on the healing power of kōrero, silent listening and generosity as we strive to promote the best of ourselves as a nation. The goal: to build a shared commitment to a treaty-based multicultural Aotearoa, in which each of us feels we can locate our relationship to place. Moana Jackson provides us with inspiration:

“It seems to me that change can often be difficult, but it is a wonderful difficulty... because it challenges the intellect, it challenges the courage, and it challenges the ability to dream.”

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Graeme is committed to life-long, collaborative learning. He is part of the active AVP facilitator team in the Eastern Bay of Plenty. He is also learning Te Reo Māori, a journey that is allowing him to deepen connections with his Whakatōhea whakapapa.