Stories of Belonging: A Journey Across Aotearoa

By

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During 2020, Inclusive Aotearoa Collective Tāhono held conversations with hundreds of Kiwis from many diverse backgrounds about their experiences of belonging. Everybody had a story to tell, whether it was a person with disabilities, a non-binary teenager, a mum struggling with post-natal depression or a migrant worker. Anjum will speak about what they said, and what we can do to make Aotearoa even better.

Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem

Tēnā Koutou Katoa. Kō Anjum Rahman tōku ingoa.

I would like to acknowledge mana whenua, their history, their struggles, and their aspirations.

I'm sharing a whakatauki that was composed for the Inclusive Aotearoa Collective Tāhono by Associate Professor Tom Roa:

Ka hōkā a Tāhono i Uta!
Ka hōkā a Tāhono i Tai!
Ka rerea a Kōwhitiwhiti!
Ka tau ki Kōwiniwini,
Ka tau ki Kōwanawana!
Tūturu ō whiti whakamaua kia tina!
Tina! Hui e!
Taiki e!

This whakatauki was inspired by the toroa (albatross), a symbol of peace. It soars across the sea, and then comes to land onshore, at its nesting place and place of regeneration. It sews together the onshore and offshore in its flight. To find a direct translation, please visit: https://inclusiveaotearoa.nz/about-us//#our-whakatauki

I arrived in Aotearoa at 5 years old, after a long flight from Canada to a land at the bottom of the world. It was a land of great beauty, a place where you could leave the back door open permanently, even when you went away for the weekend. The prices for bread and milk were affordable because they were set by the government, and the people were eminently laid back.

And yet, it was as incredibly lonely place to grow up in. I struggled to fit in, to find a sense of self.

I ended up becoming a qualified chartered accountant and worked in that role until last year. Over the years, I have also been involved in the community. I had great role models in my parents, who put so much time and energy into building up the Muslim community in Hamilton as well as across the country. As children, we grew up knowing that we had a responsibility beyond ourselves and our own family.

Along with work and family, I started to get involved in not-for-profit organisations and politics. My initial work was with women's organisations, being part of setting up the Islamic Women's Council of New Zealand (IWCNZ) in 1990, and working with others to set up Shama, Ethnic Women's Trust in 2002.

A little after this, I began to get involved in the wider community. I did things like writing submissions to Select Committees, writing opinion pieces for the local paper, joining a political party and standing as a candidate on the party list. I attended the first National Interfaith Forum in Wellington and got involved in the Waikato Interfaith Council.

All of these experiences brought me into contact with people who had different experiences and differing needs. I was able to hear about the things that were important in their lives and what they were fighting for. Discrimination played out in so many ways.

It certainly was a constant in my life, whether it was bullying comments, not being served in a store, or having assumptions made about me that I was a downtrodden, brainwashed person who couldn't speak or think for herself. I felt the pressure of the glass ceiling in the political world, as I struggled to navigate a hostile and challenging process.

Having said that, I'm also awed by the kindness and generosity of my fellow Kiwis. So many would reach out. I've been invited to speak at so many varied and interesting places because people have wanted to learn more about Muslims, or about the work that I do. We know Aotearoa New Zealand is a great place, and we also know that it can be better.

The hostility has come in waves for ethnic minority communities. In more modern times, there was the political rhetoric of Asians taking over the country in the 1990s. Then we had the one-law-for-all and the End of Tolerance speeches of the mid-2000s. Events overseas would wash onto our shores and inflame talkback radio and the letters to the editor page. That would then translate to hostility in our daily lives.

From 2014, Muslim women leaders felt a distinct rise in negativity towards our community. The reason for this was twofold: the rise of Da'esh and the rise of social media. We

were getting increasing contact from women in our community who were struggling in various ways, and it was getting beyond the capacity of our community to resolve.

More than that, it should not be the responsibility of the community that is suffering discrimination to design and implement the solutions for it. In the language of human rights, it is the duty-bearers – those that hold more power and influence in society – who must take on the responsibility of fixing the problem.

Nonetheless, in 2015, IWCNZ began a process of engaging with government to put forward the issues we were seeing in our community. We also discussed suggested solutions, and things the community could offer to help. We told them that these solutions, done well, could be expanded to other communities and be of benefit to them as well. Our approach was one of empowering and resourcing communities to improve their own situation.

We also advocated for a strategic approach. At a national level, our country needed an overarching strategy around inclusion for all types of people, which showed a pathway towards meaningful change. It is a big task, not something that can be done by one part of government. It required a level of coordination and collaboration, both within the public service and across society.

After the attacks on the Christchurch mosques, the need for a planned and collaborative approach became even more apparent. There were people in the community who saw the need for it and who believed it was possible. That is how the Inclusive Aotearoa Collective Tāhono was formed.

From the beginning of the project, we were certain of two things: we wanted to hear from New Zealanders about how well they fit into society, and we wanted to bring different communities together to work on common goals. In terms of the latter point, we knew there wasn't a space in Aotearoa for diverse communities to collaborate on shared goals. In fact, the competitive environment that not-for-profits work under often hamper the sharing of resources, information and personnel.

In 2019, I started working formally on the project with the support of Foundation North, Trust Waikato and a range of other volunteers who stepped in to make things happen. The board of Shama agreed to host our project and provide governance, for which we are extremely appreciative.

By September, we had hired two staff members, and began the process of working out how we talk to people across the motu. First, we settled on what we would ask them: three deceptively simple questions:

- When do you feel like you belong in Aotearoa New Zealand?
- What stops you from feeling like you belong?
- What needs to change in order for you to feel like you belong?

We focused on belonging because feeling connected and valued is a huge part of wellbeing. We worded the questions so that they would be accessible to as many people as possible.

Then we started thinking about who we wanted to hear from. It soon became apparent that we needed to include

everyone, all genders, cultures, faiths, income levels. We wanted to hear from disabled people, people in rural areas and people of all ages.

We set out to do this in 2020, trying to navigate around Covid lockdowns. In the end we visited 46 towns and cities, and engaged with 864 people via Zoom calls, our website and face to face hui.

The stories they told us were both inspiring and heart-breaking. Most of all they were a window into experiences I hadn't heard before, even though I had been active in the community for over 20 years. I'd like to share a few of these stories with you, and they have been anonymised so that individuals can't be identified.

> *Refuge [is about] providing non-judgemental support, empowering women to be the leaders of their own safety. Created a huge sense of belonging that no-one was going to judge them if they were still in the relationship or went back to it. A lot of the women felt like they didn't belong in their own family groups or social groups because they had stayed [in the relationship]. So, trying to create the environment so that the environment belongs to them. We set up the environment so that they felt they belonged there. Giving people the opportunity to give back. Working with what people's strength is. Some ladies who have long associations: make donations, make a cup of tea, mop the floor. They feel connected to the place by being able to give. With the children's holiday programme and Christmas party. Children feel a strong sense of belonging by sharing kai together. The people are consistent, they talk at the children's level. Accept the*

conversation that the children have. Don't be shocked when they talk about what happened that day. The children liked having the older people there, they called them Nana.

My mum was told in her educated days [ie at school], she was told that she had to change her Samoan name to an English sounding name. She had to change to right-handed when she was a left hander. She was not to speak Samoan in public. We were given English names at school, but at home we had our Island names. My husband's Pākehā … I had 4 at the time, and I'd take the kids to the playground, my kids were quite fair, and I would often get asked "where's the mum?"

I went to a boys' school and it was rugby, alcohol and stuff like that. I did [a humanities subject]. In the last few years, I feel like I do belong to New Zealand. My fear in school was public speaking, and yet now I do this [regularly]. Part of belonging is that people do want to hear this, they want to hear what I say. That's given me a real feeling of belonging. Going to a boys' school and not being into rugby and drinking is a profoundly lonely thing. When I did [a humanities subject], 90% of the 1,000 students were women. There's been a need for this kind of work, but there's been a lack of men.

I don't think I could go in (as a doctor) and dye my hair pink. The female doctors can wear a skirt, but I don't think I could get away with it. This awareness I always have to have when I meet a patient, do they see me as the cleaner or a nurse? I have to use my privileges, my male privilege, to counter some of the barriers I have.

We have had a situation where we were trying to go out to a café and the manager said we don't want this group here [a group of disabled people]. People are getting a much better understanding. There are other people that have a good understanding. If they don't want to support me, I won't support their business. They were from another country, and they might have a different view of disability in their country. I didn't know how to go about it.

The additional feeling of isolation in my team: the most wonderful young woman who is very low vision. She functions beautifully at work, we have it all set up. [For lockdown:] in a day we had to get her home, and she didn't have the opportunity to take the equipment as it's big. She has struggled to navigate all of that without the equipment. I talk with her every day. It's been really, really interesting and makes all of us want to work harder to make sure some of those barriers are removed. All of us felt like we had set it up [ie the workplace] and she was really thriving, and it's taken four weeks [of the lockdown] to set her back really.

It's about when you apply for a job. Came with a working holiday visa, English and Germans who came here could get a job really easily. For me, it took so much time to convince people that I was capable, that I can understand English, and I can speak it. I went through a personal process which I never felt before. I felt so unconfident. [She has started crying at this point]. The life I had in my country was not good, I was too spoiled, we always had a maid at home, you go shopping, you have a stable life, you have all the doors open for you. I came to a place where you are not enough, I had to face poverty. But it was good, that's why I left home, wanted to earn my own money and have my own experiences. I was working very few hours, struggling to pay everything. Then I was studying, but the money was not enough. My best friend who is now my partner was supporting me. And the humility of a man supporting me.

It's an unknown or unspoken barrier that we've experienced as a people and an individual. My name isn't a Māori name, I'd fill out my application. I don't think I speak different over the phone. Then when I went to see a person [about the job] who was surprised that I was Māori and spoke so well, I went back to my family to cry about it. [People of a particular faith in our area] are well to do, so I hadn't experienced that kind of thing. The gentleman said "You're not what we expected, you're Māori. The position has been filled." I was told "We don't have time for the likes of you" and got escorted to the elevator.

I spent 14 years in state care. Don't know who your family are. Many of the carers abused me and my sibling. You feel really alone, because there are parts of you that don't develop as a child. The thousands of us who have been abused and taken from our families. There are a lot of children get to stay home, but they are white and well to do. They don't face racism, the assumption that Māori can't take care of their own. Even as adults there are thousands of New Zealanders that don't feel at home, they don't know their families until they're adults. They don't even know themselves.

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*I don't want to paint myself as a victim, as I'm aware of my privilege. White, middle class, mainstream. [There was a] Nazi putting up a post saying that Hitler should have finished the job and put up 10 photos of houses and ours was one of them. The police took down the website but there were no charges laid. And like "F**king Jews", things like that.*

I had a baby. Then the earthquake happened, it felt like the end of the world. Our whole house was shaking. It has affected my whole life, my mental health. There were aftershocks, people didn't realise how many there were. I felt like I wasn't a really good mother. So we sold the house and moved to [xxx]. I was isolated, I didn't know anyone. I was scared and didn't meet anyone. I grew resentful of the world, my husband. I was scared and

frightened of everyone. So I decided to get a job, so I ended up [xxx]. These two older ladies took me under their wing, helped me come back up. They introduced me to people around town, helped me to settle down my roots.

My nephew said something smart arse to a teacher, he shouldn't have said it, but we questioned him being stood down for 2 days. Would it have happened to a Pākehā student? State schools are really bad for our children. The Masters and PhDs are in spite of our education system. My friend who's known us for a long time. "I was talking to your mum", she said, "I always remember your mum saying, 'we didn't give up paradise for our children to become second or third'". They have, individuals have achieved, as a generation cohort, kids raised in the 60s, 70s or 80s are achieving but there's a great, great cost. There's heaps who have suicided, dropped out, become mental health patients, hospitalised. You got that assertive discipline crap, to discipline children, harping on about respect. It's not even a good excuse, a band-aid on a crappy system. The principals get together, and they move around students. There's no aspirations of hope or positivity for these children, just cynically moving the children around. I'm always cynical about any boys' school, they love our Pacifica kids for their physical prowess, to play rugby, so they will take them, but they won't support them, pastorally or academically. You use and abuse our children, but you don't actually care for them, because they make you look good in rugby.

Another kid, he was a great achiever at sports especially at rugby, but the [educator] refused to give him a prefectship. They use the kids, but they won't give the boys cultural leadership, they won't give them prestigious positions, for whatever reason.

I went to her funeral, was sent home from the hospital 2 times, and it turned out she had undiagnosed leukaemia, and the consultant did not look at her, looked at her across the room and decided she looked happy and sent her home with Panadol. People should go to hospital and not expect to die. When our mother was in ICU... they said there was nothing we could do for her, her organs were shutting down, we want to take her home. We'd seen so many people die in hospital, we wanted her home. In that time, we've known heaps of people passing away. People are sick, they're dying of institutional racism.

We have so many more stories to tell. These stories sit with us as taonga and also as a heavy responsibility. People were generous with sharing their experiences, and we have to make sure we honour them by continuing to work for change.

Human beings have a tendency to navigate towards those who are familiar – common languages, common life experiences and reference points, common values. We want to be in spaces where we feel comfortable and relax.

Being to sit with discomfort is an important tool in our toolkit. Discomfort is the space where we are challenged and forced to reflect. The initial response to challenge is

defensiveness, the natural tendency to protect ourselves emotionally by justifying our actions, even when we're told we are causing harm. We didn't mean it, it isn't our fault, the person telling us has misunderstood.

Gaslighting is a common feature in discussions around our experiences. See: https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/gaslighting

for an explanation of this term. When I've told someone about my experience of discrimination, that person will often try to find every excuse as to why it isn't racism. That hurts, and makes it harder to push for change, when the problem isn't even recognised. So many people have described this kind of experience to me.

Being able to really hear other people without defensiveness, being willing to take on board what they are telling us and being ready to change long-held practices and ways of thinking are part of the tools of social change. That involves effort and openness. We're hampered by the attitude that others are not really part of our country, or they aren't normal, or any number of other excuses for why we don't have to make that effort.

More than that, it requires us to give up our power within society. Sometimes, it actually means being prepared to be a little worse off, if we're in a relatively good position. Power relates to who gets to make decisions, who gets to hold leadership positions, who controls most of the wealth in society, who designs the systems and the institutions within society.

Right now, power is concentrated within some specific demographics. While that is slowly changing, there is so much more to do. And these changes cannot be made by individuals alone, nor should the burden of this work be placed on those who have the least resources and power to do it. It requires a collective effort, and we need to connect across communities. This means learning to live with discomfort, learning to give up our defensiveness, and learning to move beyond guilt to positive action is crucial.

IACT's approach to meaningful change is through bringing diverse communities together to work on common goals. We know this isn't easy, because different values and ways of thinking can make it harder to focus on a common agenda. We have been working on our tools and putting a structure around our collaborations so that we will get the best results when we invite people to the table.

As we do that work, there are things you can be doing too, at an individual level. Here are some simple suggestions:

- Reflect on whose stories you are listening to most. When you watch movies, television, online content. When you read books, papers, articles. Try to hear from, see and read about people whose experiences are vastly different to your own. It's so much harder to hate someone when you being to understand their lives.
- If you want to find out about and connect to diverse people in your town or city, go to where they are. They often celebrate events that are important to them. They will invite the public to be at these events because they want you to get to know them. Spend time there

listening, without asking a lot of questions, and trying to understand.

- Learn how to be a good bystander. If you see someone being harassed or treated unfairly, see if you can stand alongside them and let them know you support them. Try to make them feel less lonely and afraid in that moment.
- Challenge your own assumptions and stereotypes. So many things we hold as truths or as "normal" are cultural beliefs and practices, but we don't realise it, especially when we are part of the dominant culture. Maybe things have changed, or maybe you didn't have the right information.
- Allow people to fail. A failure of one person or a few people does not make the whole of that community a failure.
- If you have time to spend online, go to social media pages and think about challenging some of the awful things you see being said there. Provide alternative views with gentleness. You may never convince the person you're responding to, but you may convince others who are reading.
- Think about starting a collaboration of people in your area who can take action. We have some tools on our website that might help with that. This starts with building your networks with other communities, so that there is enough trust when you invite them in. Basically, you need to go out to them, before they will come in.
- Try to build diversity into the events you organise, the organisations you volunteer with, even in your workplace if you can manage it. Maybe team-building

days can focus on visiting different community groups to learn more about them. Try to think about incorporating tikanga in a way that is respectful and authentic.

- Amplify the voices of people who often don't get heard. Share their material. Invite them to speak instead of trying to speak for them.

This kind of work is vital for the world we live in, and the future that is to come. Our ability to adapt and survive in a diverse country, our ability to reduce violence and harm, is dependent on our willingness to put our efforts into collective change and inclusion.

Previous Quaker Lectures

Quaker Lecture 2020- MORIORI - PEACE AT ALL COSTS

Maui Solomon

Maui Solomon of the Hokotehi Moriori Trust has played a leading role throughout his adult life in the renaissance of the culture and identity of the indigenous Moriori people of Rekohu (Chatham Islands). The lecture is based around themes of Moriori peace and conflict management, history, colonisation, genocide, mythmaking, suppression of identity over the past 40 years.

Quaker Lecture 2019 - CRIME and PUNISHMENT

Terry Waite

Terry Waite former hostage for nearly five years, talks about prison reform and rehabilitation. This lecture addresses the issue of penal reform, where Terry brings his personal experiences to this pressing issue. For most of his life Terry Waite has worked in the area of international affairs and has worked in most of the world's conflict zones. He is both an Anglican and a member of the Society of Friends.

Quaker Lecture 2018 - CAN RELIGION SPEAK TRUTH?

Elizabeth Duke

Truth goes far beyond statements or beliefs; we live it - it is incarnate in action, in relationships and in the nature of all that is. Elizabeth's lecture explores the subject from a number of perspectives; the truth in the founding experience of Quakers; her understanding of 'religion' and 'truth'; truth

and science; truth in ecotheology, humility, ethics, and religion; truth in concepts of imagery, myth and mystery.

Quaker Lecture 2017 - TRANSCENDING NEOLIBERALISM

Jane Kelsey

Jane Kelsey is one of New Zealand's best-known critical commentators on issues of globalisation and neoliberalism. She has taught at the University of Auckland since 1979, specialising in socio-legal studies, law and policy and international economic regulation. In her 2017 Quaker lecture Jane addresses the issue of Neoliberalism both globally and in New Zealand and offers thoughts and suggestions on how this country can “move from a state of denial to progressive transformation”.

Quaker Lecture 2016 - A PEACEFUL WORLD - How can we make it so?

Marian Hobbs

People the world over want to live in peace. At the same time the human species continues to wage war and to develop armaments that could annihilate life on earth. The unwelcome intrusion of other countries into the Pacific to test their nuclear weapons, and the distressing violence we are experiencing at a national and global levels has mobilized communities to create networks of action for peace.

Quaker Lecture 2015 - WHAT WE KNOW, WHAT WE SAY and WHAT WE DO

Bryan Bruce

Bryan Bruce and John Key grew up in poor circumstances at a time when the Welfare State gave them the chance of a better life. Yet now they hold very different views of the state's obligations towards the well-being and future of its younger citizens. In our once egalitarian society, the top 10% of the population now own 52% of the wealth while the bottom 20% hold almost nothing.

Quaker Lecture 2014 - STANDING IN THIS PLACE

David James, Jillian Wychel, Murray Short, Linda Wilson

In this lecture, four Pākehā people analyse their past and continuing roles as supporters of justice for indigenous peoples. They consider firstly how these roles have changed over time, and secondly how they might evolve as claims relating to the Treaty are settled.

Quaker Lecture 2013 - ENOUGH! The challenge of a post-growth economy

Jeanette Fitzsimons

As humanity starts to reach and exceed the limits to growth modelled by the Club of Rome in 1972, two possible futures stand in stark contrast: a failed growth economy, or a Steady State described here as an economy of Enough. A willingness to say "I have enough now; the rest is for others, or for Nature" could usher in a future that is dynamic, congenial, prosperous, and ecologically and socially rich.

Quaker Lecture 2011 - CHANGING THE PRISON SYSTEM

Tony Taylor

Quaker Lecture 2010 - HONOURING THE OTHER

Kevin Clements

Quaker Lecture 2009 - KIWI DRAGON - the First Quaker Lecture

Bill Willmott

Sales of Lecture booklets

You can purchase copies of the printed booklet of the 2021 Lecture from Quaker Book Sales ($10 each) - email quakerbooks@quaker.org.nz

Some copies of earlier lectures may also be available.

Who are the Quakers?

Quakers are a spiritually based group who trace their roots back to mid-17th century England. Originally deeply rooted in Christianity, today there are Quakers of all faiths and none. Based on the teachings of George Fox (1624-91) Quakers live lives based on these values:

• Integrity • Equality • Simplicity • Peace • Sustainability

So are you a Quaker?

• Do you believe all people are equal?

• Do you believe that no one person has a higher connection to God than anyone else?

• Do you strive to live a life that is consistent with values of integrity, simplicity, and peace?

• Do you find silent contemplation a helpful spiritual practice?

Well maybe you are!

If you would like more information, please find your nearest group by visiting our website: http://quakers.nz/