

Welcome to the new AEN Journal

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Welcome to the first issue of the Aotearoa Ethnic Network Journal! It's been an exciting few weeks as we pulled together articles for this first issue and we think this has turned into a really great first edition!

We started the Aotearoa Ethnic Network in May last year because we'd get a dozen emails about the same event – and never hear about another... there was no obvious or easy way for everyone in the ethnic sector, those interested in it or for the media to find out what was happening and to connect up.

AEN has been doing this successfully for over a year – we now have well over 200 members. They range from community activists and NGOs through local and central government agencies to politicians. We have a number of MPs on the list and they have been some of our strongest supporters! The media is also well represented and AEN has proved a great vehicle for connecting journalists in the mainstream and ethnic media with people, stories and ideas.

What a first year! So why stop now! The ethnic media seems to be booming and the mainstream media is starting to take a stronger interest in what's happening in the ethnic sector. More and more research is happening and academic publications are appearing. However, a gap for us is that both mainstream media and ethnic media risk homogenising groups and further developing ethnic enclaves without addressing the complexity of multicultural relationships.

The differences within groups remain invisible and mainstream media in particular has failed to report “the struggles between good and bad, tolerance and intolerance, orthodoxy and moderate.” On the other hand it sometimes appears that there is a focus on ‘happy dancing minorities’ who live separated from societal interactions.

As a partner in the Human Rights Commission's Diversity Action Programme, we have been keen to do something that would be visible and could extend beyond community boundaries.

The AEN Journal is a place for smart and creative thinking. Somewhere to raise issues and challenge assumptions. Above all, we hope it becomes a voice for the key thinkers in our ethnic sector and a source of knowledge not only for the sector but for the wider community as well. Knowledge and awareness can break down barriers.

But what is the ‘ethnic’ sector? In fact, who is it? The term is certainly problematic and perhaps as exclusionary as it is self-defining. Our thinking in developing the AEN Journal was to create a broad, yet specific point of focus and dialogue about issues pertaining to ethnic communities that can emerge from those communities and is inclusive of other kinds of diversity, such as religion. Each of the pieces in this journal wrestles with issues of labelling and naming, classification and framing.

We're hopeful that the journal will capture some of the flavour of AEN's online community – energetic, bouncy, educative, informative and challenging but supportive, celebratory and never dull.

AEN has provided the opportunity for better understanding. A fiery diatribe becomes a dialogue through asynchronous reflection. The end result is wider understanding. We hope that, while maintaining the essence of AEN, the Journal extends the dialogue, giving people the opportunity to savour some in-depth writing about issues.

AENJ is about communication; telling our stories, giving our views and having our say. It's a theme that goes right across the articles in this issue. Joris de Bres sets the context in his Guest editorial. He outlines some of the issues leading to the development of the Diversity Action Programme and a strategy for thinking broadly but taking personal responsibility for diversity, wherever you might be.

Perhaps the need for dialogue and communication is no more obvious than in the current Palestinian conflict. We present views from both sides, without judging either but noting that they agree on much. Not least, both Anjum Rahman and Dave Moskovitz talk about the need for dialogue and how this is likely to be led from the grass-roots.

Tariana Turia makes it clear that good race relations are about sharing our cultures. And to understand each other we have to communicate.

AEN recently conducted a survey about media reporting around ethnicity, the results of which are echoed by Brian Rudman¹ writing in the New Zealand Herald when he notes that

You never hear anyone acclaiming a Māori or a Pacific Island victory when the All Blacks triumph. Then, from Remuera to Otara, it's celebrated as a New Zealand victory – until, at least, one of the players overindulges during the post-match boozing.

As Rudman suggests, 'ethnic reporting' is almost always about the negative and needs to be balanced with the positive. A psychotherapist once said that the sign of a healthy relationship is the ratio of negative comments to positive: For every negative comment there needs to be five positive ones.

Communication is the key to challenging the power struggles that are re-enforced in our daily lives. Renowned UK-based psychiatrist, Suman Fernando, suggests that racism is the exercise of power. Nowhere is the labelling of people more problematic than in the justice and mental health systems. Both racism and psychiatry are powerful control mechanisms and the concepts of 'mental illness' and 'race' are highly contested, originating from deficit models and socially constructed, accused of

reflecting "the political realities of a discourse dominated by Eurocentric and patriarchal imaginations"².

In her article on asylum seekers, US-based writer Amy West gives us a timely challenge as New Zealand overhauls our Immigration Act. We must be careful to ensure balance and that we do our bit to protect the world's most vulnerable. As West notes, changes made to protect borders from perceived terror threats come at a high cost to the safety and future of refugees. Equally, as our reliance on migration for our future economic benefit grows, we must ensure good settlement services and equity of access so that we do not steal the potential away from newcomers.

In a similar vein, Mervin Singham challenges readers to expand their definition of multicultural and provides a local context. The journal also summarise a recent AEN survey about how ethnic communities are and should be represented in the media. This is followed by Kate Wood's account of a recent conference on issues facing the Family Court working with diverse families and children.

Tze Ming Mok and Kumanan Rasanathan provide an edgy and humorous discussion on labels and how they can be used strategically to obtain resources but risk siloing and homogenising groups. We end the issue with five poems from Mua Strickson-Pua, Tagata Pasifika Chaplain and an Aotearoa-Samoan-Chinese artist who uses art for healing and social change. His poems provide us with an insight into his life and into what it means to be a New Zealander.

For this inaugural issue, we 'shoulder-tapped' the contributors and we would like to thank them all for their act of faith and support. It is their work that makes this new venture so exciting, not ours. We hope that you enjoy this very first issue. We'd love your feedback, so drop us a line at journal@aen.org.nz. Of course, if you do enjoy the taste of AEN, you might also like to consider joining the list, it's easy to do at www.aen.org.nz.

Ruth & Andy

¹ Rudman, B. (2006, Jun 26). *Twins' deaths a problem for all New Zealanders*. New Zealand Herald. A-2.

² Wong & Tsang, 2004, p. 457