

A Brief Introduction

Robert Sullivan

Let me begin with an introduction. I identify with and belong to a tribe called Ngāti Manu, literally meaning the bird people, which affiliates itself with Ngā Puhī Nui Tonu from whom more than 100,000 people claim ancestry. My mother grew up in the Northland village of Karetu, not far from Kawakawa and Paihia. My father, who has Kāti Mamoe and Kāi Tahu ancestry through his mother, and Galway Irish through his immigrant father, was brought up in Kilbirnie, Wellington. So I also have strong Irish and Kāi Tahu roots. I also have one English ancestor, New Zealand's acting governor Robert Henry Wynyard, whom I can't but help remember, and some Scottish ancestors on both sides of the family. We also have strong Ngāi Tai and Ngāti Raukawa connections on our mother's side of the family. So by way of listing peoples, I'm introducing myself as multicultural.

Each of these families – the Sullivans or Harawenes, Pomares, Pirimonas, Wynyards, Conlons, Campbells, Morgans – belong to different cultural stories, and they each had different relationships with social and official power. Whetoi Pomare, for instance, was a leader of the North; his signature is the third on the Treaty - for a time he was an enemy of the colonial government. Five years after the Treaty was signed Pomare's fortress at the headland of Otuihu in the Bay of Islands was bombed by HMS North Star and then razed by its crew. Our people moved to the Karetu Valley about ten miles inland from there. Scenes of the destruction were painted by Cyprian Bridge and are now held by the Turnbull Library. I gave a copy of the burning pa to my mother. Pomare's portrait was painted by Lindauer. I gave a copy of that to my brother and another copy to my great aunt in Kawakawa. The original is in the Auckland City Art Gallery. Pomare's wife was Te Rangingangana, a poet and only daughter of Ngati Raukawa's paramount chief Te Whatanui who is credited with

writing the song-poem "Rongo korero au"¹. I don't know much about my father's side, the Conlons, when they were in Ireland. My grandfather James Conlon's birth is registered in Boyle in the 1880s, but apparently he lived in Roscommon, Galway. I visited the Connacht Rangers' Barracks in Boyle and stayed across from the ruins of Boyle Abbey. My sister tells me one of our relatives was a nun there. I also visited the cemetery where Conlons were buried. My grandfather emigrated in the 1920s and was part of the 1951 waterfront dispute. My grandmother Sarah Morgan was raised in Otaki and spoke fluent Māori as a young girl. Her father was Scottish and her mother was Kāi Tahu and Kāti Mamoe. When I was in Boyle I sent my Aunt who pieced our Conlon family tree together a postcard of the place. My wife is of Irish descent going all the way back to Brian Boru; our children

¹ Te Whatanui. "Rongo Korero Au". Kati au i konei : a collection of songs from Ngati Toarangatira and Ngati Raukawa. Charles Te Ahukaramu Royal, comp. Wellington: Huia Publishers, 1994.

have a significant Irish and Māori heritage, but I am the only one in the immediate family who has an Irish passport!

If my family heritage is anything to go by where does the term *bicultural* come from in New Zealand? There was a lot of talk about biculturalism around the sesquicentennial Treaty celebrations. As Jonathan Lamb noted, it appeared in spectacular fashion during the 1990 Auckland Commonwealth Games². Biculturalism represented the culmination of a diplomacy between peoples, hearts and minds sort of stuff, appealing to New Zealander's national higher selves – and the appeal was quickly followed by the Treaty claims process towards achieving social justice, rapprochement. Looking back, it felt a bit like the public diplomacy the USA engaged in during the Cold War by broadcasting jazz on Voice of America³, the jazz of biculturalism being played across a neo-European landscape. Actually it was even more stark, more like a symphony orchestra that had allowed a koauau (bone flute) into the pit. A conductor (from the Court of Appeal) still kept the whole together.

Biculturalism is a compromise interpretation of the Treaty agreement between Māori and the rest of the community which gives the settler community special rights and privileges. Beside the narrow judicial expedient created by the 1986 State Owned Enterprises Act, which referred to the principles of the Treaty, the concept of biculturalism arose perhaps because it became too difficult to ignore Māori after the Second World War. Māori had migrated to the cities and our population was increasing faster than Pākehā. Previously, Māori had lived in separate rural communities and were out of sight. My mother moved to Auckland, as did many of her siblings, in the 1960s, while her father – a veteran, and widower - stayed in the village. Amiria Salmond has told me that the term was first coined by Erik Schwimmer in the 1960s and was borrowed from French Canada⁴.

² Lamb, Jonathan. "A Sublime Moment Off Poverty Bay, 9 October 1769." *Dirty Silence: Aspects of Language and Literature in New Zealand*. Graham McGregor and Mark Williams, eds. Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1991. 97-115.

³ Bayles, Martha. "Goodwill Hunting". *The Wilson Quarterly*. Summer 2005. 46-56.

⁴ Schwimmer, Erik. "The Aspirations of the Contemporary Māori". Ed. Erik Schwimmer. *The Māori people in the nineteen-sixties; a symposium*. Auckland: B & J.Paul, 1968.

I'm sure there are many learned people who can discuss the nuances of the various Treaty articles, and as you know valuable work has been done by many scholars to contextualize and socialize the Treaty discourse – in particular Sir Hugh Kawharu and Dr Claudia Orange, Michael King, Ranginui Walker, to name just a few of many. I am equally sure that many can describe the heterogeneity of the New Zealand Pākehā population through history. I found the proceedings of the Population Conference and *New Zealand's Historical Atlas* as useful social research in that regard.

To parse the word biculturalism, it's unfortunate that the word 'cultural' is in there isn't it? It's confusing because the term has a special constitutional application in the New Zealand context. As I mentioned before, the term has come to relate to the Treaty Principles first developed by the Tribunal in the Manukau case and later supported by the Court of Appeal in the mid to late 1980s. These were the core principles of partnership between the Crown and Māori, the partners' principle to act cooperatively and reasonably in good faith, the Crown's principle to actively protect Māori interests and the principle of redress for past breaches of the Treaty. A superficial reason for resorting to principles, which I won't cover here, is that the texts of the Māori and the English versions of the Treaty promise different things. The bicultural term relates to the core partnership principle of the Treaty, but as I said earlier, it is a result of a new urgency in Māori-Pākehā relations.⁵

Since the Treaty, Māori have lived with multiple cultures, and married them; in our own extended family there are Spanish, Irish, English, and Scottish ancestors. In our immediate family there are Māori, Pākehā, and Samoan whanau. Of course it is difficult to extend our own family's experience to that of Māoridom, but then the very notion of a Māori nation remains reductive given the whanau-hapu-iwi structure of traditional society.

There have been many debates in recent times about the role of the Treaty in contemporary New Zealand. J.G.A. Pocock has ascribed part of the urgency of this to the entry of the UK into the European common market when New Zealanders were treated by the British like "faithful servants no

longer needed”⁵. This caused not only an economic crisis but also one of cultural identity among Pākehā. The focus moved from an *idée fixe* of global Britishness to New Zealand’s relations within the Asia-Pacific region. This process is still continuing. This perhaps helps to explain the re-emergence of Māori nationalist movements given the general ferment of economic unrest in 1970s-1980s New Zealand. For a while, with the conciliatory sounding Waitangi Tribunal claims of the mid-1980s and 1990s it appeared to many that at last relations between Māori and the Crown had made a positive turn.

Yet things have recently become seriously negative between the Treaty/Tiriti partners. The clearest recent stain, with the most power polishing, is New Zealand’s foreshore and seabed legislation; the alienating process, among other things, split the Māori membership of the second-term Labour caucus. When the Government realised that the Court of Appeal in the Marlborough Sounds case was going to allow the Māori Land Court and the High Court to hear cases that might vest customary rights in the foreshore (land between the high tide mark and the low tide mark), and seabed (land below the low tide mark going out to sea) to particular iwi, it responded by making the judicial process pertaining to that unavailable to Māori. It was, in my view, a very serious ethical error and a very public demonstration to Māori (widely reported in the media) of domination by vested interests. The Waitangi Tribunal’s *Report on the Crown’s Foreshore and Seabed Policy* covers a range of relevant legal precedents and responses in New Zealand, Australia, Britain and Canada. It finds that at the very least the Crown’s policy is unfair as it removes property rights from at least some iwi without any compensation. I was tempted to use the term oppressive, instead of unfair, but as the African American scholar bell hooks says, oppression is when one has no choices. At least Māori have New Zealand’s democratic political process open to us.

But to what degree is the process open? It is tempting to scan the media reports about the Māori

Party to see the impartial coverage of the fourth estate. In early July 2005, I was lucky enough to see a one hour television show hosted by Simon Dallow which brought representatives of the community into a discussion forum. Alright, it wasn’t representative – there were only two Pākehā women, and one Māori man, in the group of twenty plus speakers. The Māori spokesperson, Professor Winiata, was allowed to speak near the end of the forum for less than a minute before being interrupted twice – once by Mr Dallow, and once by another spokesperson. At least Prof. Winiata was from the Māori Party and speaking independently. Well, we do have the political process open to us, but the usual means of canvassing support – the general media – is unavailable to us because it very generally presents the Māori world in a negative light or ignores it. The political process enabled Tariana Turia to turn her professional life upside down so that she could support her and many Māori view of the foreshore and seabed legislation. This was well justified by her party’s Māori electoral seats victories in the 2005 election which also, unfortunately, highlights the government’s and the multi-headed opposition’s alienation from mainstream Māori.

At least there is an alternative fourth estate of Mana News and the Māori TV channel, TV One’s news in Māori, and the network of iwi radio stations. To date, there is no daily print media that targets a Māori audience. A Māori political party today can reach a Māori constituency despite the mildly racist general media. It is far more difficult for it to reach a general constituency.

As with discussions about equality for women, dominant groups in New Zealand could not truly cope with the revolutionary thinking required to create equality for Māori, Pacific Islanders, and Asians, especially in relation to social justice. Thinking of bell hooks again, I think Māori ought to think about who we are seeking to be equal with. Do we really want to be copying behaviours of the dominant in this society? Do we want to be as powerful as Ruth Richardson and Roger Douglas once were? Do we want to be like Bob Jones or Theresa Gattung or other CEOs? Do we entirely accept assumptions about material wealth, and social distinctions that go with that?

⁵ He Tirohanga o Kawa ki te Tiriti o Waitangi: a guide to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi as expressed by the Courts and the Waitangi Tribunal. Wellington: Te Puni Kokiri, 2001; and Report on the Crown’s Foreshore and Seabed Policy. Wellington: Waitangi Tribunal, 2004.

Ah well, I needed to say that, and I do respect your right to disagree. It's very political. Personal really. As the Canadian author Thomas King would say, if he was here, "platititude platititude platititude."

When I read the conference binary and transcendentalist theme, "biculturalism vs multiculturalism", I was immediately reminded of my days in Auckland Grammar School's debating team. I remember our fourth form year debate which we won taking the affirmative of the moot, "That There is No Hope". I also recall an unfortunate comment by our headmaster, saying to the effect that all Māori are lazy, which was bandied about by the media. I know he didn't mean it. How? I got to see him interact with and lead us every day in school assembly. Face to face (although mine was in a sea of faces that did not look like my family's). It was a media beat-up, just as the lively if benignly racist New Zealand media reported the golfer Michael Campbell's similar recent comments that "Māori are quite lazy" soon after he won the 2005 US Golf Open.

I still wonder at some of the *Herald* staff's perception of their audience when they ran a negative comment by one of New Zealand's most successful golfers to Brendan Telfer's Radio Sports show, which echoed one he also made to *The Australian*:

*A lot of Māori people back home are trodden on. They're very much a race that sometimes get very lazy. I'll admit to that, too. You get to places where they get very complacent. But then you can turn your whole career around very quickly. Look at me, if I can do it, so can you*⁶

Perhaps it's newsworthy, titillating stuff.

A couple of weeks later, social commentator Tapu Misa, also of *The Herald*, had this to say about Campbell's comments:

Being a person who sometimes gets lazy, I know where Michael is coming from. Indeed, some of my best friends are of a similarly slothful disposition - which is probably why I

*like them so much. I'm sure I'd warm to the workaholics as well, if I could only get them to sit still long enough to have a conversation*⁷.

I'm with Tapu Misa and her friends on that one. I sometimes get lazy too. I'm also with Michael Campbell – his achievement is inspiring. Unfortunately the interesting part of his statement that Māori are trodden on, did not make up *The Herald* headline.

How is this dialogue taking place? Campbell is quoted in *The Australian*, although the *Herald* cites *The Boston Globe* as the original source where the comment is made, while Brendan Telfer's radio interview was later. A lot of weight is given to his words and actions now. Like a great text, he has become a great New Zealander, and so his comments are given special attention, as if they were written down rather than uttered, given almost the same attention paid by some people to poetry with its charged language or to the provenance of a souvenir. It's telling that the dominant culture media picked up on the message it wanted to hear.

As well as Campbell being a great New Zealander, he is also a great Māori. Nationalism has friends in more places than just golf courses. I was in New Zealand for the win, but my friends tell me he received pretty good coverage in Hawaii. An acquaintance of mine remarked that 'they might all want to play golf now', but I couldn't reliably judge his tone. When I got back I saw Campbell on the David Letterman Show where he was introduced to the American public as 'your' US Open champion.

Of course there's a difference, isn't there, between a Māori or a Samoan or a Chinese or a Pākehā New Zealander – well, Pākehā is a broad term isn't it, a bit like European or even British. J.G.A. Pocock's *The Discovery of Islands* sheds interesting light on English and British identity and reminds us of just how troubled the notion of Britishness has been. It isn't surprising then, that the term Pākehā has not yet met universal acceptance⁸.

⁶ "Māori Quite Lazy, Says Campbell". New Zealand Herald 30 July 2005.

⁷ Misa, Tapu. "Genetic Research Can Only Benefit Us All". New Zealand Herald 3 August 2005.

⁸ Pocock, J.G.A. *The Discovery of Islands: Essays in British History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 20.

The ideology of hard work has many echoes, as Michael Campbell knows, and which any reader of New Zealand history will also know. This ideology affects and affected our education system, the demography of 'employment', New Zealand's former colonial practices and hence our race relations, and continues to deeply affect whether we respond positively or negatively toward one another when we start talking about such things. I still hope we have the chance to get beyond introductions one day.

Robert Sullivan has published five books of poetry and two books for children. Among other things, is coediting "Best New Zealand Poems 2006" with the poet and novelist Anne Kennedy. He is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Hawaii, Manoa, where he specializes in Polynesian and Māori literature, and creative writing. His latest book of poetry is "Voice Carried My Family" (Auckland University Press, 2005). He has won several NZ awards for his writing.