

## Bicultural Issues

The National Standing Committee on Bicultural Issues provides regular commentary on bicultural issues. It aims to explain their implications for the activities of psychologists, and for the practices and policies of the Society.

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# In Aotearoa Holocaust<sup>1</sup> is Spelt A-S-S-I-M-I-L-A-T-I-O-N<sup>2</sup>

Raymond Nairn, in consultation with the NSCBI

**When the inevitable end is the killing  
of the wairua we are dead living.  
Racism means to kill us living.  
Racism is death.**

Definitions of racism, Tangata whenua  
workshop group, ACE, 1983.

When the Hon. Tariana Turia spoke to the Annual Conference of the New Zealand Psychological Society about the sequelae of colonisation for Maori people it was reported in ways that emphasised the word 'holocaust'. That coverage sidelined Tariana's concern with the "problems ... of alienation, assimilation, and deculturation" (*Bulletin*, No. 99, 2001: p27). Unsurprisingly, public responses to that coverage focused on the word, which was interpreted as meaning mass killings, and arguments raged about the possibility that settlers had, or had not, killed such large numbers of Maori. When speakers, or writers, did address the substantial decline in Maori numbers between 1840 and 1900 they utilised 'natural causes' such as infectious diseases that were seen as unintended consequences of settlement.

However killings, mass or otherwise, were not what the address was about. Tariana explicitly sought to remind us that colonisation, in Aotearoa as elsewhere, involved the imposition of the settlers' social organisation on all who resided in the country. To achieve that goal the colonial administration, and subsequently, the settler government, proceeded on the assumption that it was necessary for Maori to forsake their tikanga Maori. In a relatively extensive reading of our history, including both a secondary and primary sources, I can find no indication that any settler suggested that Maori people and Maori ways should be part of the governing of the colony.

In New Zealand a variety of terms was used to (mis)represent and refer to this process of overthrowing a people's way of life - 'civilising', 'assimilation', 'amalgamation', and 'integration' are examples that may

be familiar. Each such term not only assumes that the 'civilised', 'British', 'Christian' culture and social practices (of the settlers) will replace those of the Maori but, by sanitising the colonial domination, lends an appearance of legitimation to the alienating processes.

"Civilisation of the Maori" was the all-time favourite trope for colonisation. I have capitalised 'Civilisation' because that is how it appears in Lord Normanby's (Minister of State for War and Colonies) instructions to Captain Hobson (1839). The Lord argued that, such were the benefits to Maori of being civilised, that it was fine to fund the administration of the new colony by buying land cheaply from them and reselling it at (much) higher prices to eager settlers. Edward Gibbon Wakefield's New Zealand Company made considerable use of the same notion to justify buying land cheaply and on-selling for profit (Burns, 1989). A prospectus represented the "blessings of civilisation, religion, education,..." (ibid: 72) as the primary values the 'natives' would receive for their land.

References to 'civilising the Maori' appear frequently in the records of parliamentary debates as the "responsible settler government" shaped the society in which we now live. For example, when seconding the Native Schools Act (1867), Carleton, a former inspector of Native Schools, argued that members should support the bill because it was cheaper to "civilise [Maori] through the medium of English a perfect language" than by use of military force.

In contrast, Governor George Grey appeared to favour the term 'amalgamation' (Barrington & Beaglehole, 1974: 34). Early in his first administration (1847) he was encouraged by Bishop Selwyn and other notables to require that all schools teaching Maori people should include teaching of the English language in their curriculum if they were to qualify for financial support. What Richmond (a Native Secretary, 1867) called the "language of the inhabitants and Government of the colony". From 1847 all Maori attending school

were taught English but settler pupils were rarely offered Maori as a subject. However Maori people continued to speak Te Reo and, in the 1867 Native Schools Act, English was specified as the language of instruction. From then, until the appearance of kura kaupapa in the 1990s, all subjects were to be taught in English. Subsequent annual reports of the Inspectors of Native Schools to parliament regularly lamented the failure of Maori children to abandon Te Reo in favour of English.

Much more recently, the Hunn report on the Department of Maori Affairs (1961) used the term 'assimilation' for this colonising process. For him assimilation meant that "[Maori] would become absorbed, blended, amalgamated, with complete loss of Maori culture" (p15). He argued that assimilation had failed and that Maori should be able to preserve aspects of their culture that "have survived the onset of civilization" (p15), referring to this as 'integration'. This notion of 'integration' accepts that the coloniser's culture and social practices define what is normative while allowing the tangata whenua, and other peoples, to preserve practices that add the spice of variety.

Ten years later the New Zealand Maori Council, in its *Manifesto on the Race Relations Bill* (1971) attacked the idea of integration by pointing out that it resulted in the outcomes that Tariana Turia spoke of:

*A people who would act in this way would thereby lose the best of its patrimony; in order to live it would be sacrificing the reason for living. (NZMC, 1971: 4).*

Both the Maori Council and Tariana Turia identify the consequences of the legislative and administrative assaults on tikanga Maori that have been glossed as 'civilising', 'assimilating', or 'integrating' Maori into New Zealand society as destructive of the wairua of Maori as a people. As in the definition provided by the Tangata Whenua workshop definition of racism. These analyses are very similar to those provided by Thompson & Neville (1999) in discussing institutional and everyday racism in another colonial society, the U.S.A. Thompson & Neville emphasise:

*"that racism consists of two interlocking dimensions: (a) an*

*institutional mechanism of domination and (b) a corresponding ideological belief that justifies the oppression..." (ibid: 163).*

These two dimensions have been documented in the settlement and subsequent development of New Zealand society (Ward, 1974; Williams, 1999; McCreanor, 1998).

Throughout the 160 years of this colonising process Maori have resisted domination in many ways. Initially they sought to be part of the Crown Colony administration, to work with and advise the Governor. Later, they fought, they employed forms of passive resistance, and they worked to be successful in the ways recognised by the settler society. But in a colony the colonised are not allowed to succeed and Maori efforts to retain resources, to participate in New Zealand on their own terms, or to create havens where tikanga Maori held sway were opposed, undermined or otherwise prevented. For example from early contact with the missionaries Maori sought education, particularly literacy (Barrington & Beaglehole, 1974), but they did not seek to be schooled into becoming domestic or agricultural labourers.

Historical accounts make it clear that Maori generally welcomed the early settlers and were quick to adopt practices and artifacts for use within their own tikanga. But historical research shows that Maori were given no choice about being colonised. The expectations of the colonists were not consistent with Maori holding and using land collectively. Keith Sorrenson's (1956) study of the impact, on Maori populations, of the 'legalised' purchases of their land is a sobering account of the dispossession of a people and the deadly consequences. The general lack of sympathy, by settlers, towards any acceptance of tikanga Maori is encapsulated in the frequently expressed wish to separate young Maori from "the beastly communism of the pa" – shades of the stolen generation in Australia – and the expectation that Maori should speak English.

The New Zealand society in which we live and practise was shaped by these processes and unsurprisingly, offers few if any places, where Maori (individuals

or people) can relax and be Maori. In work settings, schools, business, courts, health services, counselling, and civil service the systems, the values and priorities, administrative structures and Chief Executives are not Maori. Effectively, colonisation has created a society in which Maori, the tangata whenua o Aotearoa, have to live most if not all of their lives as foreigners or outsiders. That this is stressful should be obvious but it is not the only affliction. Because of the imposed changes few Maori are in a position to carry out their responsibilities as tangata whenua. Reports of the Waitangi Tribunal often cite witnesses describing their duties as kaitiaki and the pain they experience from being unable (lacking necessary resources) or prevented (by law or administrative practice) from performing that duty of care whether for the land, the sea, or the children.

Tariana Turia asked us, as psychologists, to recognise that colonisation constitutes an assault on the spirit of the colonised. I understand that to mean that, as currently organised, our society is an unsafe place for Maori, to live or grow up in, it wounds and it exacerbates older injuries. That conclusion is entirely consistent with the large body of research that is usually understood to show that Maori are "economically disadvantaged" or "culturally deprived" (Thompson & Neville, 1999: 183), interpretations that "place responsibility on those who fit those categories and silently affirms the rightful or deserved place of those who do not fit into those categories" (ibid: 183). If, as a discipline, we are to respond to this challenge we need to be much more aware of the social context of our practice and much less fixated on the individual client. And that was the other side of her challenge; to look at our discipline, at recruitment, training and practice, so we aid healing rather than contributing to the damage.

## References

- Barrington J.M., Beaglehole T.H. (1974) *Maori schools in a changing society*. Wellington: NZCER.
- Burns P. (1989) *Fatal success: a history of the New Zealand Company*. Auckland: Heinemann Reed.

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