

The Art of Walking Upright Here: Realising a Multicultural Society

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Ruth DeSouza

Wairua Consulting Limited
Waitakere City
Aotearoa/New Zealand
ruth@wairua.co.nz

The title of this paper is drawn from a line in a Glenn Colquhoun poem¹. He draws inspiration from a poem by Allen Curnow, himself inspired by the site of a skeleton of a long extinct Moa in a museum. Whilst Colquhoun's words are undoubtedly a profound metaphor for the migrant experience, Curnow's are, perhaps, a metaphor for our failure to adapt to change, whether as a migrant or a member of the host community:

Not I, some child born in a marvellous year,
Will learn the trick of standing upright here (Curnow, 1997, p.220).

Aotearoa/New Zealand has seen a significant increase in new migrants over the last ten years. Drawn here from across the world and facing the challenges of settlement, they face another unique challenge, finding their place within a country that embraces the notion of biculturalism, where Māori are positioned as partners with the Crown. As New Zealand society becomes increasingly multi-cultural, it is still required to negotiate the bi-cultural discourses of Māori which some argue positions migrants from places such as India as outsiders. In this presentation I will introduce myself briefly and outline the challenges facing Indian communities in New Zealand by drawing together the history of migration to New Zealand and outlining some possibilities for the future.

¹ The trick of standing upright here, in Colquhoun (1999).

Migrants in Aotearoa/New Zealand

This is a nation of immigrants and immigration has been an important factor in our economic growth and social development. One in five New Zealand residents was born overseas and this rises to one in three people in the Auckland region (Statistics New Zealand, 2003).

The Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi is the founding document of the nation state, recognising Māori as 'tangata whenua' (Roscoe, 1999). Te Tiriti defines "principles of partnership, participation, protection and equity" (Cooney, 1994, p.9). Yet this benign notion of 'settlerhood' contrasts sharply with the end result of a process that has led to the traumatic colonisation and dispossession of Māori. Favourable policies resulted in subsequent waves of migrants of European descent, resulting in a dominance of this group such that Māori became the 'other' in their own land (Du Plessis & Alice, 1998).

The visibly different migrant, such as Indians, Chinese and Pacific Islanders, became 'others' because of their physical appearance, religion or culture but without the status of the indigenous Māori (Du Plessis & Alice, 1998). Most Indians migrated to New Zealand from Gujarat and Punjab then from Fiji and. About 200 came from Uganda as refugees in 1971. One of the first Indians to arrive in New Zealand was thought to be a Goan nicknamed "Black Peter" (Edward Peters) in 1853 (Leckie, 1995). The first Chinese arrived in 1866 (Roscoe, 1999). A fear of the impact of foreigners led to restrictive laws being introduced between 1870 and 1899 and these were only repealed later when new sources of labour were required.

In the last few decades other trends have impacted on migration patterns. The first being an initial increase in migration from the Pacific Islands in the second half of the 1970s and again following the Fiji coup in 1987. Pacific Islands migration decreased in the 1990s with a shrinkage in manufacturing jobs and the closure of factories as tariffs on imported goods were removed. An increase in Asian migration was the second immigration trend and was related to the encouragement of foreign investment in New Zealand. Refugees also arrived from Cambodia and Vietnam and migration from Hong Kong related to the return of the colony to China. The third was the increase in migration from Africa and the Middle East, predominantly from South Africa. The above trends led to an increase in the number of migrants from non-traditional source areas. Compounding these trends, there has been the noticeable increase in tension between Māori and Pākehā, particularly around grievances and claims relating to the Treaty (Pawson et al., 1996) and land issues.

Government Policy

Following World War Two, the notion of assimilation dominated. 'Invisible' migrants were seen as desirable and the goal was for migrants to 'fit in' rather than change the society they had entered. For many, therefore, change, was one-way. There was a philosophical shift in this policy when Canada and Australia embraced multiculturalism during the 1960s, which held that people had the right to retain their culture and have access to society and services without being disadvantaged (Fletcher, 1999). This transformed the notion of settlement into a two way process whereby change was required by both migrants and the host society. New Zealand policy made a strategic move towards multiculturalism in the 1986 review and subsequent 1987 Immigration Act. This Act eased access into New Zealand from non-traditional source countries and replaced entry criteria based on nationality and culture to one initially based on skills and subsequently through the introduction of a points system (Roscoe, 1999). This policy emphasis on attracting highly qualified immigrants was similar to policy changes in North America and Australia (Pernice, Trlin, Henderson, & North, 2000). The adoption of the points system in 1991 led to immigrants who had experience, skills, qualifications and money being selected for business investment in New Zealand (Ho, Cheung, Bedford, & Leung, 2000).

Implications

Changes in migration policy and the resulting increase in migration have led to much public debate fuelled also by a renaissance in Māori sovereignty, itself related to the global rise in indigenous movements since the 1970s. This has seen the re-positioning of Māori as indigenous to New Zealand and the evolution of a bicultural nationalism (Roscoe, 1999). Many vociferous opponents of increased migration argue that the ideology of multiculturalism is problematic as it negates the primacy of Māori and biculturalism. This, some argue, is problematic because Māori are indigenous, whilst migrants (and refugees) have other places that maintain and preserve their culture. Many argue that because the Treaty has not been honoured, other ethnic groups have had no other option but to relate only to the Crown.

By calling Māori 'the first immigrants', it is argued that the rights of Māori as first nation people are negated and their claim for special status as tangata whenua countered (Walker, 1995). The argument continues that the preamble of Te Tiriti o Waitangi allowed immigration to New Zealand from Europe, Australia and the United Kingdom and for any variation to occur, consultation with Māori is required as descendants of the Crown's treaty partner. Walker concluded that the government consultation process with Māori was flawed because some Māori leaders were not representative and dissenting voices were ignored. Some have also argued that the points system of immigration and active encouragement of migration from non-traditional source countries was

a quick fix for rising unemployment and a stagnant economy driven by the partnership between corporate business interests and the government.

Within this debate between Pākehā and Māori, many visibly different migrants felt marginalised on two levels; firstly as outsiders to Māori and secondly as outsiders and cultural 'other' to Pākehā (Jaber, 1998). The process of 'othering' of Asian immigrants² differs from that of Māori. Firstly, Asians are considered to be contributing to the economy even if they are 'too successful' by virtue of their skills and working attributes and secondly, elements of Asian culture can be commodified for consumption in the form of food and restaurants (Pawson et al., 1996). In particular this packaging absolves the consumer from caring about "the authenticity of the product, its cultural meaning, its technical sophistication or its historical origin" (Yuan, 2001, p.79). This process of consumption fetishises, foods, clothing and rituals into a decontextualised barren image. Sari material, yoga, ayurvedic medicine and Eastern spirituality have joined the list of consumables that many New Zealanders enjoy without understanding their social, political, cultural and spiritual significance. Despite the consumption of 'Indianness', little emphasis has been accorded to visibly different migrants in the debates over citizenship.

Roscoe (1999) sees two ways in which citizenship can be viewed; the first is civic nationalism, underpinning the discourse of multiculturalism, when a national identity is shared equally by citizens regardless of origin. Secondly, citizenship can be viewed as 'ethnic nationalism,' when greater standing is given to members of the dominant group. Far from being the welcoming immigrant nation New Zealand purports to be, the paradigm of ethnic nationalism is more representative of the reality and is based around Pākehā notions of New Zealand. So, there remains a tension between the universalist, egalitarian notion of equal treatment of citizens and the need for recognition of cultural specificity. Docker and Fischer (2000) suggest that there needs to be a recognition of the politics of universalism and the politics of difference and conclude:

Thus, we experience a plethora of overlapping, competing and unresolved contradictions: colonial versus post-colonial, old settlers versus new settlers, indigenous people versus invaders, majority versus innumerable minorities, white against black or coloured, the search for a collective, inclusive or 'national' identity...vis-à-vis the search for individual and personal or group identity based on ethnicity, language, country of origin, or religion. All these struggles are played out on the same but rather less-than-level-playing field: social antagonisms, class and gender

² 'Asian' is a term that has differing definitions depending on the geographical context in which it is used. Here it defines a category under which Indians are subsumed but more commonly in New Zealand it is used in reference to those of South East Asian and Chinese origin.

differences continue to play decisive roles in the game of identity recognition (Docker & Fischer, 2000, p.6).

Critics such as Thakur (1995) argue that the official rhetoric of biculturalism recognises the legitimacy of Māori and Pakeha but excludes migrant cultures that are non-white and non-indigenous. These 'others' are excluded from the debate on the identity and future of the country in which they live, leading writers such as Mohanram (1998, p.21) to ask "what place does the visibly different coloured immigrant occupy within the discourse of biculturalism?" This tension exists for many other groups as well, for example Wittman (1998, p.39) has commented "on the exclusionary effect of any others by the ideology of biculturalism" for Jewish people in New Zealand. Many Chinese argue that in New Zealand, a bicultural society, migrant cultures are not even relegated to the margins of society "our place is nowhere" (Yuan, 2001, p.121).

Conclusion

As the global marketplace shrinks, countries compete for people with skills and wealth creating potential. Gone are the days of relying on migrants from the traditional source countries. This transformation in migration means that there is now an urgent need for settlement focussed-resources for new migrants and refugees. New migrants need to be resourced to recognise, understand and value the special position of tangata whenua and to be able to examine their role in relation to the Treaty of Waitangi. Equally, it is necessary for immigration policy and settlement policy to be inclusive of those already here. This means not only Pākehā (represented by government) but also Māori.

Can biculturalism and multiculturalism co-exist or are they mutually exclusive? I would argue that one need not preclude the other. Recognising and celebrating the ethnic diversity of modern day New Zealand need not diminish the rights of Māori. Perhaps we can all work together to create a social and political milieu that is both universal and egalitarian: ironically something many Pakeha New Zealander's assume already exists. In this model we treat citizens equally, celebrating their diversity but valuing as a central tenet of our society the position of the Treaty of Waitangi and its guiding principles. This ensures a unique position for Māori to be recognised as the guardians of this special land. By doing this we create a dynamic and vibrant society leaving behind a past based on fear (for loss of whiteness), grievance (for abuse of Māori rights) and invisibility (of others arriving in an already formed land).

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RUTH DeSOUZA RCpN, GradDipAdvNsgPractice (Counselling), MA (Hons)

Ruth was born in Tanzania and originates from Goa. With a background in mental health nursing, education, research and facilitation, she is partner in Wairua Consulting, consultancy and research practice based in Waitakere City. Ruth is an active member of many cultural organisations, including being a trustee of the Auckland Regional Migrant Services Trust (ARMS). For more information, refer to: www.wairua.com/ruth.