

Mitzi Nairn: Thoughts on social justice
HERITAGE OF COLONISATION
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Well I want to talk a bit about our heritage of colonisation, which is by and large invisible. It's quite a struggle I think to become aware of it and notice it and see it because it is hidden from us by a kind of collective process of developing Pakeha amnesia. I think where it comes from is quite complex, but I think it starts with the muddliness about the original colonising process. We actually don't know all that much about it. By the time Britain began to put colonists or settlers into this country they'd been doing their present wave of colonisation for about, let me see, from about 1550, nearly 300 years I guess. They had a lot of theorising that had already been done to justify the colonial process. There were theories about how Christian people were the ones God wanted to control the world. There were political and economic theories that began to say that only people tilling the soil had a right to own it. If you look to the actual land tenure in England, or anywhere in Europe pretty well, you could see that actually that was a true double standard because usually the chap who owned it, like the Duke of Gobbledegook, actually never tilled it at all you know. His good lady might have had a rose garden and occasionally done a little dead-heading or something. But there were still these theories, like 'The Right of Peoples - Le Droit des Gens' which was written in French and then translated into English and it said that 'The peoples of Europe too long pent up without enough land were entitled to go and put work into new countries and have ownership of the land, which would come from the right of those who tilled the soil to own it' sort of stuff. So there were a number of theories to make it okay to do what they were doing.

The churches kind of provided things like the story of the sons of Noah. Now it requires enormous complicated double thinking to follow it through, but basically the descendents of Ham were the black ones, and the descendents of Shem were the kind of pale brown Middle Eastern ones and the descendents of whoever the other one was, were the kind of Western moving white types - who were actually the oldest and the goodest and the most deserving. So the church provided that. You also began to have a certain amount of science theorising that progress was going on and that people could be divided into extremely smart progressive people who were inventive and who had higher mental faculties who naturally had better technology and better weapons and better this and that and the other. You had theories that it was inevitable that when a 'superior' culture impacted on an 'inferior' (so called) culture, eventually inevitably the superior one would dominate and the inferior one would kind of wither away. That's called fatal impact theory. You had all sorts of things floating around that made it either inevitable or okay. Who was deserving and who wasn't. Who was destined to win and who were destined to be the losers. Everybody who migrated from Britain pretty much bought into some assumptions about white superiority.

I mean they might just have simple bigotry, you know 'The only good Maori is a dead Maori.' and 'One white man is worth 200,000 black men' and 'One white man, one English man is worth ten French men and fifty Spaniards' and so on, you know those kinds of arguments. But even the

people who came, who were beginning to develop liberal humanist theories still came in a kind of paternalistic way. They thought 'We are the grownups and people of colour and people of everywhere else are a bit like children compared with us.' So one of the differences, if you like, between the liberals and the bigots was whether you believed that people of inferior races could actually learn and catch up if you were very patient and taught them kindly for 200 years or something. Or whether they were just no good, no use, no way you can do it, might as well just push them aside and get on with it. You can see all those things going on for instance in conflicts around the things that various missionaries assumed and believed; the things that military people assumed and believed. Governor Grey was interesting because he had a very, very military agenda but he had quite a social willingness to engage with Maori and later with Xhosa when he went to the Cape. But basically he was collecting Maori myths and legends and stories and artefacts because he actually believed that Maori were on the way out. So I suppose if in say 1850 or 1860 you'd said "What do you think will be left of Maori? Where will Maori be up to in 1960? Think 100 years ahead." both the liberals and the conservative bigots would have said "Well there won't be much left. There'll be a few place names on the map. There'll be some spears and gourds and stuff and carvings in the museums. There'll be people who clearly have some Maori ancestry I suppose. Yeah, they'll more or less be gone." And the liberals would have said "And that's a real pity." And the bigots would have said, "And it can't happen too fast." So you had a situation that wasn't about to set up a balance. Even though Te Tiriti, the Maori text, clearly assumes there is going to be a balance and an interchange. It didn't happen.

How come it's so hard for us, it's been so hard for us to see that, and begin to understand that that actually means that we have a heritage of what was grabbed and taken, when we're good people and we know that our grandfather was, I don't know, a missionary or a humble horseshoe maker or whatever? Well part of it is a kind of history writing and an approach to the past that, I don't think necessarily consciously, lets the English off the hook and makes them seem good and sees England as home. I noticed that particularly when James Belich started to write and publish because his books, particularly 'The Maori Wars and the Victorian interpretation of racial conflict', is like a breath of fresh air - it just cleans out your sinuses. I thought 'How come this man can see so clearly and write so clearly, in a way that nobody else does?' There are other people who have revisited history, say like Tony Simpson and done a rewrite, but Tony is kind of, he's visibly thinking it through as he goes somehow, whereas to Belich it's just like breathing. I think you can see it in his name that part of his ancestry has never had England as home. The people from Dalmatia and Croatia and so on who were recruited, probably by Julius Vogel - which doesn't sound a very English name either, weren't being recruited to go to England they were being recruited to come to New Zealand. So Belich is a New Zealander but he's not really primarily a New Zealander of English ancestry so he doesn't have this unconscious obligation to kind of airbrush the English all the time. So when he looks at what happened and does a little digging he sees it very clearly and just puts it out there. Anyway that's my theory, everyone will tell me probably that actually he had a London grandmother and an aunty from Sussex, but that's my theory anyway.

I think that what Donna Awatere named 'Pakeha amnesia' is a really complex phenomenon. Part of it is made up of ignorance. We've had a good century of not really doing New Zealand history in schools or even in our universities very much. We look back to Britain. We learnt for years and years and years the Wars of the Roses and the Stuart monarchs and the House of Orange and stuff like that. We didn't actually look at New Zealand history and when we did look at it it was usually by the time most people had already left school and you could probably do a half paper or so on New Zealand history at university. That kind of clinging to England was a very strong 'England is Home' kind of a thing for early settlers, when they called the Maori 'New Zealanders' and thought of themselves as in some way temporary or better Britons in the New World. What made the New Zealanders rush off to the Boer War which they weren't invited to? We just roared off and joined in. Quite extraordinary when you think about it. It's much harder to understand than say the First World War even though that was a European conflict. But the Boer War is really a strange phenomenon. An identification with the interests of England and the interests of English colonisation.

So you've got those kind of English orientations among the early settlers and the other things that were going on in New Zealand in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century that weren't really attended to at all in our education systems or even in conversations. When I think back to the sort of conversations, you know where you sit under the table and they forget you are there and talk grownup stuff, I don't remember any really insightful history stuff. So they'd already forgotten it or not known it, my grownups who were kind of born in the first 20 years or so of the twentieth century. So the forgetting goes back quite a long way but at some stage it wasn't exactly forgetting, it was denial and it was concealment I think. For instance, after the attack on Parihaka and the imprisonment and exile of so many of the men of the Taranaki region it vanished from our narratives extraordinarily fast. When about ten years later the Government published the first atlas of New Zealand Parihaka wasn't on that map. Now right through to the 1960s and later, the AA - the Automobile Association - made road signs, you know those yellow ones with black writing on, you don't see them so much now. There was a sign to anywhere that had, I don't know, a cowshed and four dog kennels at the end of the road. But no signs to Parihaka even in the 1960s. Now that's initially a deliberate not mentioning, a hope that if nobody can go there and it isn't on the map nobody will ask "Is this a place to go for a holiday? What happened here? Who lives here?" That's a very symptomatic kind of concealment I believe.

If you look at what happened to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, by the 1880s it was being eased out of parliament, it was being dropped out of the courts – good old Prendergast or Pendergrast, I forget which he was, saying that 'The Treaty is a legal nullity'. But before that the New Zealand Company, all their local newsletters and so on sniped continually at the Treaty and sniped at the governors who often mentioned the Treaty. The real broker around the dropping of the Treaty turns out to be George Grey. He clearly doesn't use it as an instrument in any sort of governance sense and he maintains a stream of propaganda, anti-Maori propaganda, to London to his bosses in London and he militarises. He militarises fantastically. I don't think we realise how much he begged for troops, imperial forces, how much he bought up, what is it called, ordnance - cannons

and cannon balls and muskets and musket balls or whatever you shoot out of muskets. He bought them up and stored them and stored them. By 1860 the whole of South Auckland was a militarised zone you know. We don't remember that. We sort of think now that when you come up the deviation and you know that bit at the top of the hill where you look down over the Waikato, we sort of think of that being the Waikato - Tainui but actually Tainui's real boundary is the back of the Kohimarama ridge and the Manukau Harbour. The northern part of the Manukau Harbour not the southern part either. That zone, that whole zone, there were all those redoubts starting at Miranda on the Firth of Thames and going right across. Martin's Redoubt is still on the map but there were, kind of within a day of each other, a chain of five or six went right across a reasonably narrow part of the island. There were all those Fencibles based at St Heliers. There were others based at all the redoubts. It was occupied territory, the northern part of Tainui. Like Ngati Te Ata for instance lived in a militarised zone for nearly 20 years before the actual land wars or sovereignty wars began. That's a long time. That sort of got invisibilised somehow. I was really surprised when I figured it out and part of it was the enormity of it and partly was that I hadn't realised it for so long even though I lived within a quarter of a mile of the old remains of the Miranda redoubt. I mean I ought to have known what a redoubt meant - no, didn't have a clue.

So when the Treaty kind of fell out of the courts and was squeezed out of parliament it also never got into education either. So it wasn't taught as history, most of the time, and it wasn't taught as civics. From 1840 to 1940 it was being squeezed aside, but for the 1940 centenary, groups like the Methodist Church and I think the Ratana movement, and probably lots of others as well, began to agitate to have the Treaty part more focused. Considering that was the centenary how you would have a centenary without mentioning the thing it was a centenary of is quite tricky. But, for instance there was a call to honour Te Tiriti, honour the Treaty of Waitangi. That was a couple of years leading up to 1940. The petition, which was the biggest petition that had ever happened so far up to then in the New Zealand parliament, some bright spark voted that it 'Do lie upon the table'. That means you don't address, you don't debate it, you don't have anything to do with it but you have acknowledged that it is here. It laid upon the table until 1940 at which time they decided that a copy of the Treaty of Waitangi should hang in every school of New Zealand. At my school I think it was on the back of the door, under the hooks for the raincoats. I think that's where it was. It wasn't quite what the petitioners had had in mind and it certainly didn't impact in my school which I think was quite a good school with a reasonably on-deck, fair-minded sort of a teacher. So I guess it wasn't really getting into the education system.

Around then you had Cook's bicentenary I suppose, comes up in 1969 - 1972 somewhere around there. The schools put out a huge amount of special journals about Cook to celebrate his bicentenary or whatever it was. I remember there were a lot of contradictions in there. For instance the book did mention that some of Cook's sailors shot the Maori who tried to come on board the boat. Then it says something really odd like, 'Captain Cook was very upset because he was a man of peace and Maori now might not realise that he was a man of peace'. Isn't that extraordinary? I mean 'Wow what smart Maori, gun a few down and they mistakenly don't recognise a man of peace - silly Maori'. Later if you read Anne Salmond's book about Cook, you

know 'The Trial of the Cannibal Dog' you discover that actually Tupaia set the course to New Zealand. Cook, who had the wit to engage Tupaia for a number of reasons that were all good, simply shadowed his course with his sextant and whatever they used for navigating, taking the sun at midday and whatever else you do, you know all that stuff. Basically Tupaia set the course because he already knew how to go to New Zealand. Not only that, but Tupaia actually mediated most of the early exchanges between Cook and Maori. It was true what Cook had thought that there would be some commonalities of language, which would enable him to be a bit of an interpreter. He was also recognised I suppose by some Maori as more 'like us' than these other weird looking guys. It's possible, he was a very high status man in Tahiti, it's very possible that as a tohunga he actually had some ancient language in common with the current Maori tohunga, it's not really clear but there's a whole sub-text there that never got into the original kind of think books about Cook.

So you can see a process of a mixture of discarding and overlooking and not mentioning. It's a bit like in George Washington and in Thomas Jefferson's diaries and journals they wrote about how observing the political confederation process of the Iroquois, they actually came up with the new system, the new world system, of congresses and federation and so on. Now when their journals and so on were published, I think after they died but maybe in their lifetimes, all that stuff was left out, edited out. It wasn't until for their bicentenary or whatever it was, it was about 1990 somewhere about there, when their journals were published, for the first time those things were put back in. The origins of the American political system, which was quite different from the European system, actually had a lot coming from observing how the Native Americans were developing their political relationships. Now I think you get that process, that is a real true colonial process of ignoring. So you get that denial, you get a whole lot of myths around the invasion of the Waikato for instance. A whole lot of stories from Grey to England and back again and what the settlers believed and what the papers wrote locally and so on and so forth. Just nothing that we were told. So that the land purchases, for instance, so called, well of course they were all legal. We were making the laws, the settlers were making the laws. If you look at how they kept changing the laws to enable what they wanted to do next to stay legal, it's breathtaking, it's frightful. But it was all invisibilised to us.

Another thing that we were taught, or I was, and I think we sort of got a flavour of it, was that really the Maori had been enormously lucky to be colonised by the nice English rather than the treacherous Spaniards or the cunning French or the horrible Portuguese, or whoever. Whereas what Gustavo Guttieras said when he was here was that "Except when there were successful wars of extermination, the impact of disease and the taking of land and other resources meant that in almost all of South America there was an 80% population collapse". So if you started with 100,000 people you ended up with 20,000 people. Now there is a lot of hawering around what the New Zealand figures were, but it sounds remarkably as if we had pretty close to an 80% population collapse because the lowest measures are those 1880 - 1890 censuses where you get down to 40,000. Now if that is 20% you've got to add on 160,000 haven't you, I think my sums aren't too bad, which would put you up to 200,000 at the point of contact. Now people say at the time of

the signing of the Treaty some people give it a 200,000 at that point, although the population had already begun to decline in a worrying way. That was one of the reasons for the Northern Maori leaders asking for British intervention, they were worried about the health of the people. Even if it was only 150,000 at the time of the signing of the Treaty, which is probably the deniers pushing down the figure, I'm not sure that 40,000 is all that good a record really. It's a good two thirds collapse - 60 or 70% population collapse. So actually just on that measure alone it looks as though we were pretty standard for colonisation.

So how did we get this invisibilisation, this forgetting, this hiding and concealing? This not mentioning, denial and dismissal and plain ignorance, cultivated ignorance I think. Where did all that knowledge go? Some of it is down to media, some of it is down to historians and some of it is down to political and economic funding. If you look at book publishing for instance you can see that the Waihi Miners strike of 1915 or 16 is practically invisibilised. There aren't too many books that mention it too much historically. Most of the history of the trade union movement and labour movement is pretty skimpy in terms of what's published. So some of it is money calling the shots I guess and certainly money was the main driver of colonisation I think. I mean you've got missionaries who came to save souls or whatever and you've got people coming to make a better society or for freedom but on the whole the people who came for freedom came for self-freedom in the end. Don't you think?

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