

# Multiculturalism in New Zealand – the need for a new paradigm

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**We are no longer so naïve as to think we can simply bring people from all parts of the world together and expect them to integrate or adapt to each other. Multiculturalism is a complex issue with potential for both disaster and opportunity. Is it time to revisit our approach to diversity?**

In recent times a number of global incidents have led to significant questions being raised about New Zealand's approach to ethnic diversity. These events include the London bombings, the Paris riots (where second and third generation immigrant youth went on a rampage), the racist riots that arose in Cronulla, the strong reactions around the world to the publication of the Prophet Mohammad cartoon and, most recently, the immigrant marches in the United States. Many of these incidents involve Muslim communities around the world. Post 9/11, global scrutiny has been focused on combating terrorism and the Muslim world has come under the spotlight. However, these events have broader significance because they highlight core issues about ethnic diversity that are relevant to multicultural societies around the world. Indeed, they have caused a number of countries to ignite a debate on multiculturalism and its relevance to 21<sup>st</sup> century nations.<sup>61</sup>

The incidents outlined above have served to raise issues around the co-existence of diverse communities and the challenges that can arise for society when the accommodation of different cultural values, beliefs and behaviours is necessary in any given community. Some commentators have gone so far as to question whether people from diverse cultural backgrounds and different values can actually live in a sustainable environment of

peace.<sup>62</sup> We have begun to see some countries review their immigration policies in response to sentiments such as these.<sup>63</sup> Others have sought to review multicultural policies that have for many years sought to ensure that the unique cultural heritage of ethnic minorities is respected and preserved in the context of a dominant culture. They argue that multicultural policies have led to the development of ethnic enclaves that are disconnected with the wider community, leading to some of the problems listed above. What does this mean for New Zealand's approach to ethnic diversity?

## The New Zealand Context

New Zealand is one of the highest migrant receiving countries in the world. The 2001 Census revealed that 10% of the population is comprised of ethnic minority people other than Māori and Pacific peoples. This figure is projected by Statistics New Zealand to be 18% by 2021. The challenges of dealing with multicultural societies may be intensified for us due to this rapidly changing social landscape.

The most apparent impact of international race relations incidents on New Zealand is that we have begun to look at the issue of diversity more closely. It is now apparent that Government and communities cannot take for granted the relatively peaceful environment that we enjoy in this country. Nor can we

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<sup>61</sup> Metropolis Conference, 2005, Toronto, Canada.

<sup>62</sup> See Veit Bader, Dutch Nightmare? The End of Multiculturalism, Canadian Diversity, Vol 4:1 Winter.

<sup>63</sup> Examples include Denmark and Germany.

assume that our 'fair go' ethos is the experience of ethnic minority communities. A strategic approach for dealing with diversity is vital to the future. There is now an increased focus on the topic of diversity on a number of levels including within communities. The increased sensitivity to the issues provides an ideal environment for an honest and robust dialogue on the challenges posed by New Zealand's increasing diversity. In this regard, global racial incidents have presented us with an opportunity to deal with diversity more constructively. An old Chinese proverb states that behind every crisis lies an opportunity. We must actively utilise the opportunity we now have to consider how we should strategically deal with ethnic diversity. In doing this, we must be mindful of New Zealand's unique context. There are many positive elements here that we can draw from.

New Zealand is comprised of a combination of many peoples who arrived on these shores in waves over many centuries. Established Māori communities saw the arrival of many new settlers from around the globe in the first half of the nineteenth century. Apart from English and Irish migrants there were the French settlers of the late 19th century, the Chinese gold miners in the Otago gold rush, the Dutch settlers of the 1950s and the Pacific Island peoples in the 1970s. These have now been followed by a new wave of migrants from non-traditional source countries such as India, China and Thailand. The pattern is not much different from the experiences of other migrant-receiving countries. It would be fair to say the journey has been turbulent to a greater or lesser degree (depending on one's point of reference). However, there is a unique race relations environment in New Zealand that is not shared by other jurisdictions. This environment has been fostered by the existence of the Treaty of Waitangi.

The Treaty of Waitangi is a founding document for this country. For many years, there has been rigorous debate about various aspects of the Treaty, including its relevance to contemporary New Zealand. A long history of debate and reconciliation between the Crown and Māori has taken place and this has impacted on all New Zealanders in a number of ways. Many issues remain and will probably continue to surface long after the Treaty settlement process is completed. However, through these difficult phases New Zealand has gradually acquired experience in dealing with complex issues

about relations between the Crown and community and relationships between diverse communities. The journey has provided valuable insights into cultural values, identity and our humanity that we may have taken for granted. This experience is invaluable in navigating our way through an increasingly complex pluralistic environment where ethnicity, religious belief and national origin intersect with citizenship, national identity and trade. In many ways, Māori have paved the way for new minority communities. Their journey illuminates the way for others. We can and must, respectfully capitalise on the existence of this vital knowledge and wisdom.

Perhaps it is this context that has led to a history that reflects a willingness to reconcile and make amends for wrongdoings of the past. The Government's apology to the government of Samoa and the apology to the descendants of the Chinese Poll Tax legislation are positive indications of New Zealand's approach to diversity. Furthermore, the relatively small size of our population makes it easier to communicate across communities. Public awareness and educational campaigns are more likely to yield faster results because of this. Similarly, community dialogues are able to have wider reaching effects when compared to larger societies. The way we deal with multiculturalism in New Zealand can therefore be quite different from how other jurisdictions choose to respond because of our unique environment. I think we are fortunate that we possess the 'X' factor that other countries struggle to cultivate.

What have we done to deal with the opportunities and challenges that ethnic diversity poses?

### **Dealing with Diversity: The Equality Paradigm**

The Government has been responding to our increasing ethnic diversity in a number of ways over the years. New Zealand has ratified a number of international conventions based on elimination of discrimination and the assurance of fundamental rights for all citizens (including minority groups).<sup>64</sup> We have also introduced domestic legislation and other policy frameworks to ensure equality of treatment of

<sup>64</sup> International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights.

people<sup>65</sup>. The primary focus of these initiatives has been ensuring equality and reducing disparities between minority and majority communities. The avoidance of the development of inequalities is a key factor in ensuring equal participation by minority communities who may otherwise become socially and economically disadvantaged.

In recognition of this, a number of population agencies including Te Puni Kōkiri, the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs (MPIA) and, more recently, the Office of Ethnic Affairs (OEA) were set up to provide policy advice to the Government on issues relating to their respective sectors. This advice would be helpful in ensuring that the needs of minority communities are considered in policy development.

The OEA's work in the community involves engaging with communities in order to provide advice, increase the development of networks within communities and enhance the development of social capital within the sector for the benefit of all New Zealanders. The OEA also provides a telephone interpreting service in 38 different languages for use by participating agencies.

Another example involving disparity reduction is the Reducing Inequalities Project led by the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) aimed at assessing, monitoring and preventing the development of disadvantage based on ethnicity and other inherent characteristics. MSD's Family and Community Services programmes are aimed at building capacity of vulnerable migrant and refugee communities.

The Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) targets set by the State Services Commission for state sector agencies is yet another initiative with the objective of ensuring that ethnic minority people are represented in all levels of state services. Representation not only has symbolic value. It also helps achieve equality by ensuring that ethnic minority views are manifested in policy development and service delivery.

More recently, new initiatives have been created or current ones further strengthened. These strategies are not primarily based in disparity reduction. For example, the NZ Settlement Strategy – aimed at

improving and assisting the process of settlement for migrants and refugees – was created to assist newcomers to this country. This strategy is led by the Department of Labour but is also the responsibility of a wide range of agencies including the (OEA) and the MPIA.

Recently, the work of the OEA has been extended to include: building intercultural awareness; raising visibility of ethnic communities and their contributions; and promoting dialogue on ethnic community issues amongst communities, particularly amongst youth.

These are only some of the of the Government's responses to ethnic diversity. The interventions are primarily based on an equality/disparity reduction paradigm. The basic premise is that the preservation of equality and the prevention of marginalisation are essential to the well being of our country. History is littered with examples of social and political strife that can emerge when big disparities arise within subgroups of the population. Disparities can lead to costs across the spectrum to society – from loss of opportunity to costs of quelling social disorder. Reducing inequalities, in its many forms, can therefore play an important role in ensuring that incidents such as Cronulla/Sydney do not arise in this country.

However, I think we need to lift the discourse a couple of pegs. The paradigm we choose for dealing with ethnic diversity is vital because it helps us perceive and define issues. It also moulds our responses.

In recognition that disparities are only a part of the problem, the Prime Minister recently stated that “the most difficult issues concerned potential tensions with home grown communities that cannot be explained by socio-economic disadvantage; and what is required is an overarching strategy to empower diverse communities and promote cohesion”.<sup>66</sup>

*We regard the building of greater understanding through dialogue as of the utmost importance in the Asia-Pacific. Our wider region is one where all of the world's great faiths are to be found – and the same is true of New Zealand itself, which is becoming increasingly multicultural and diverse... in dialogue, we can empower each other, affirm*

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<sup>65</sup> Equal Pay Act 1972; Citizenship Act 1977; Immigration Act 1987; State Sector Act 1988; Bill of Rights Act 1990; Human Rights Act 1993; Ethnic Perspectives in Policy 2003.

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<sup>66</sup> Symposium on Diversity, April 2006, Wellington.

*our hopes, nurture our relationships, and achieve mutual respect for each other. We can also affirm our commitment to tolerance and our rejection of extremism and violence.*<sup>67</sup>

It is clear that other paradigms are equally important as the one based on reducing inequalities.

No one wants to be a victim or be perceived as such. In ensuring that we avoid the development of disparities within diverse communities, we must be careful that we do not contribute to entrenching perceptions that ethnic minority people are needy, vulnerable and victimised. As an ethnic minority person, I do not want people to be nice to me, help me settle better and retain my mother tongue to prevent me from becoming a problem to the community. Rather, I want to be valued and included because my contributions as a migrant New Zealander are recognised and respected. This preserves my dignity. I am sure most ethnic minority people feel the same. In fact, all New Zealanders want this. This is a far more positive platform from which to launch a discourse about ethnic diversity in New Zealand.

### **Strength in Diversity: A New Paradigm**

It is a fundamental tenet of democracy that everyone is treated equally, respected and enabled to preserve their dignity. Implicit in this is the idea that everyone has something valuable to contribute to the community in which they live.

Instead of emphasising the avoidance of problems that could arise from ethnic diversity, we could be focusing on the immense benefits that it brings to this country. One of the key advantages of this approach is that it has more public appeal. It highlights how all New Zealanders stand to gain from an inclusive country that draws upon the rich resources offered by its diverse communities. It also recognises and values the contributions made by diverse communities.

Hence the discourse needs to be raised to one that recognises strength in diversity. A shift of paradigm may be necessary in order to achieve this. The new

paradigm of strength in diversity offers a positive platform from which to engage on the issue of multiculturalism. It also encompasses the equality paradigm because you cannot reap the fruits of diversity effectively without ensuring all citizens are treated equally.

For New Zealand, enabling ethnic people to be seen, heard, accepted and included is no longer a moral responsibility. It is a strategic imperative. If we do not deal with diversity effectively, we will lose the many benefits and potential gains that this new and fast arising dynamic bring to our families, communities and country. Instead of seeing increasing ethnic diversity as a huge challenge, we could see ethnic community integration as a global talent management opportunity for us.

### **Diversity and What the Future Holds**

Immigration to New Zealand is projected to remain for some years due to our ageing population. Similarly, refugees will continue to arrive on our shores due to economic, political or environmental strife. We will need to draw skilled migrants from around the world in competition with other countries that face the same dilemma. The best way to draw talented people to New Zealand is to ensure an environment that celebrates and rewards the contributions they bring. Vibrant, creative and multicultural environments are a big pull factor for drawing skilled people to any country.<sup>68</sup> How do we tap into this potential for New Zealand's benefit? How do we build a competitive immigration advantage in this country?

An increasingly globalised trade environment will call for new skills and talents. In 35–50 years, 45% of the world GDP will shift to Asia – more than the current combined GDP of Europe and the United States. The world will be a very different place then. We can already see new dynamics arising with trade implications as China and India position themselves as economic superpowers on the global platform. What strategies can we put in place to ensure New Zealand gains from these changes? How many Mandarin and Cantonese, Hindi and Tamil speakers will we have to maximise on trade links with these nations? How can we cultivate the intercultural and linguistic skills that will be undoubtedly required to maximise these trade opportunities?

<sup>67</sup> Rt. Hon Helen Clark, 14 March 2006, Regional Interfaith Dialogue Conference.

<sup>68</sup> Richard Florida 2002, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*

New Zealand is a big exporter of halal meats. There are 1.2 billion Muslims in the world. How can we maximise the trade opportunities presented into the future with people of Muslim faith? How many people with the intercultural ability to work with the Muslim world do we have to build these links? The same applies to one of New Zealand's most lucrative sectors -our foreign student industry. We will need an environment that is inclusive and welcoming if we are to preserve and grow this vital industry that has drawn from China, South East Asia and now the Middle East.

There are also many examples of the benefits that diversity offers on the micro level. Research has demonstrated that the most innovative and productive workplaces are culturally and ethnically diverse.<sup>69</sup> For example, it is now accepted that innovation and management of workplace risks are better when you have multiple perspective on any given issue. Ethnically diverse workforces have this cutting edge potential. They are also enormously helpful into tapping into different worldviews and new markets within the domestic population base. However, diverse workplaces need diversity management strategies in order to be successful in this way. This includes valuing diverse cultural values and beliefs and linguistic skills in the workplace. IBM a global leader in diversity management has created a multiple language workplace that recognises that a global market place requires global communication skills. The strategy includes a rewards regime for inclusive behaviours amongst staff.<sup>70</sup> How can we get New Zealand's business sector to view ethnic diversity in this way?

There also many non-economic benefits that ethnic diversity brings. For example, literacy in more than one language contributes to a student's academic achievements. There is sound evidence that advanced bilingualism promotes academic excellence.<sup>71</sup> It also helps preserve cultural ties with

one's ancestors and places of origin, leading to strong sense of identity and confidence in young people.

Multiculturalism creates a sense of vibrancy and vitality within our communities. In the social arena, cultural diversity enriches our everyday interactions and experiences. New sights, sounds and tastes make for a more interesting environment. This is evident in the many multicultural marketplaces, celebrations and festivals that are increasingly becoming the norm in many parts of New Zealand. The development of the arts is also affected by the presence of diverse communities, introducing new and innovative cultural expressions in the visual and performing arts. Apart from the many benefits outlined above, multiculturalism also enables New Zealand to position itself as an innovative, peaceful nation and a good global citizen. This branding has many positive spin-offs both locally and internationally.

## Summary

Multiculturalism brings the globe within our borders. We can tap into the potential this offers us all. A shift in paradigm may be necessary in order to achieve this successfully. I suggest we consider a *strength* in diversity paradigm as a new way of approaching the issue of ethnic diversity. Government, civil society, private sector, leaders, families and teachers all have a role to play in realising this vision.

Legislation and policy frameworks can provide frameworks and benchmarks for societal mores, but they cannot dictate human relationships. In order for multiculturalism to be fruitful in New Zealand, each individual must consider his or her relationship to others. It will call for open-mindedness, patience and generosity of spirit from ordinary people. Perhaps, the biggest benefit lies in the enrichment of our human spirit when we choose to open our minds and hearts to new ideas and different ways of doing things. The journey to understanding and accepting others ultimately leads back to understanding one's self. Multiculturalism offers a path to self-edification – the most basic of all benefits.

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<sup>69</sup> Adler, N. J. 1997, *International dimensions of organizational behaviour*, South Western Publishing, Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>70</sup> IBM [http://www-03.ibm.com/employment/us/diverse/executive\\_corner\\_vp.shtml](http://www-03.ibm.com/employment/us/diverse/executive_corner_vp.shtml)

<sup>71</sup> See paper to CLANZ conference in Wellington: Stephen May, Richard Hill, Sarah Tiakiwai, 2004, *Bilingual/Immersion Education: Indicators Of Good Practice: Final Report to the Ministry of Education*, Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, School of Education, University of Waikato; Stephen May, 2005, *The Challenges of Cultural Diversity, Developing a National Languages Policy Overview*, New Zealand Diversity Forum @ Te Papa, August 23 2005.