

Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot,
 nothing is going to get better.
 It's not.

The Lorax, Dr. Seuss

The 180th anniversary of
 the signing of te Tiriti o Waitangi
 at Te Whanganui-ā-Tara Wellington
 29 April 1840

Kia ora tatou. Thanks to Fionnaigh and Ellen for the wonderful reading and praying and to Kezia and Jasper for livening the service and lighting the rainbow candle!

A significant historical anniversary for Aotearoa passed this week, seemingly unnoticed.

180 years ago, on 29 April 1840, also a Wednesday, 32 rangatira from Te Āti Awa, Ngāti Tama and Ngāti Toa boarded the small schooner 'Ariel' in Te Whanganui-ā-Tara, Wellington harbour. The rangatira had gathered to sign te Tiriti Raukawa Moana - the Cook Strait sheet of the Treaty of Waitangi. Anglican missionary Henry Williams had translated the sheet from English into te reo Māori. Williams and Wellington merchant Thomas Clayton joined the rangatira on board the Ariel and witnessed their signatures. I would like to acknowledge here that one of those rangatira was a woman - a wahine :

Kahe Te Rau-o-te-rangi, signed the Cook Strait sheet on behalf of her Ngāti Toa and Te Āti Awa people. Te Rau-o-te-rangi was the grandmother of doctor, health officer, parliamentarian and cabinet minister Sir Maui Pomare K.B.E., C.M.G., M.D. (1876-1930).

Perhaps that day in 1840 was like Wednesday 29 April this year - bright and sunny with a cool breeze ruffling the waves of the harbour. Maybe the Ariel rocked gently in the breeze - or

for all we know a violent storm tossed the schooner about - this would have been more appropriate in terms of what those rangatira's signatures meant for the Māori people for the next 180 years.

Williams had not made a literal translation of te Tiriti. He mistranslated one word in the First Article that is central to the understanding of the Treaty. This had enduring negative consequences for us all in Aotearoa, and particularly for Māori.

Williams's translation created crucial differences in expectations about the exercise of power. Māori expected power to be shared between themselves and the British Crown. The Crown, with its notions of white supremacy, expected power would be transferred to Britain.

Article One ceded absolute sovereignty to the Queen of England, but the Māori translation hid this fact.

Who says words have no power?

Williams translated the word sovereignty as kawanatanga, a transliteration of governorship. This is at the heart of the inequities we live with today. If we are to truly live our calling as followers of Jesus of Nazareth, the historic person who challenged the status quo and stood with the downtrodden, the oppressed and the marginalised... If we are to live our responsibilities as compassionate people who yearn for peace and equity, I believe that Pākehā or tauwiwi, all people in Aotearoa New Zealand who are not Māori, must reflect on the privilege that colonisation and the mistranslation of that one word has bestowed upon us at the expense of Māori.

It's confronting! It's a challenge and my experience working in this area is that it can become a never-ending itch, that's impossible to ignore. If the challenge is shared by a group, I believe the possibilities to make change are greater than as individuals. That's why I'm reflecting on te Tiriti today. I can no longer not see the disadvantage to Māori caused by my privilege.

Back to the words and translation of Article One: The late academic and writer Dr Ranginui Walker, who first (and ferociously) challenged my Pākehā world view when he taught me at Auckland University in 1974, wrote that, for Māori, kawanatanga was "a benign term not even remotely connected with the basic question of sovereignty."¹

Dr Walker claimed that both translators, Henry Williams and James Busby, knew that the Maori equivalent to sovereignty was the word mana (evidence of rangatiratanga [chieftainship, the right to exercise authority]) because they had used it to signify sovereignty in the 1835 Article of Confederation signed by the 35 northern rangatira.²

Dr Walker wrote: "If sovereignty had been translated as mana whenua 'sovereignty over land', then the chiefs would have had no doubt as to its meaning. It is highly probable they would not have signed the Treaty."³

The missionaries knew that loss of mana was anathema to the chiefs - but they had a conflict of interest because of their vested interest in land claims. At the same time, Hobson was

¹ Walker, R.J. "The Treaty of Waitangi as the Focus of Maori Protest in Kawharu, I.H. (Ed.) Waitangi: Maori and Pakeha Perspectives on the Treaty of Waitangi, Auckland: OUP, 1989.

² Walker, 269.

³ Walker, 264.

impatient to be the undisputed Governor of New Zealand, which required that the chiefs sign the Treaty.⁴

This mistranslation enabled the Crown to begin its systematic, ongoing process of colonisation. When the rangatira signed te Tiriti in Wellington on 29 April 1840, Māori owned most of Aotearoa. Within a century, the government and large private purchasers like Edward Gibbon Wakefield's New Zealand Company, had whittled that away to a few pockets of land, leaving Māori throughout the country often with too little land to subsist on. The government acquired the land by confiscation, alienation and through legislation that made it difficult for Māori to maintain their land under traditional ownership structures.

We probably all know that, and we probably all know that Māori are over-represented in poverty and incarceration rates, poor health and education outcomes, and low life expectancy. The poor health means Māori are at greater risk from Covid-19, which is why some iwi in their motu have set up roadblocks on their land. They are protecting their people.

Ngati Hine, Ngapuhi poet and writer, Nadine Anne Hura, recently wrote about how the Covid-19 lockdown in Aotearoa is amplifying disadvantage and privilege in our country:

The trouble with the bubble is that it's invisible, the same way privilege is to those who have it... Some people will die of pneumonia this year but more people will die and have died of systemic inequality. Is anyone keeping a tally of the numbers lost to racism?⁵

⁴ Walker, 269

⁵ Nadine Anne Hura. I found this on one of Nadine's social media pages but haven't been able to find it to reference it properly. I have the full text if anyone wishes to read it.

We who are Pākehā or tauīwi might recognise the shameful statistics but do we acknowledge that we have benefited from colonisation while Māori have suffered and continue to suffer? I work in the area of anti-racism so I'm often involved in discussions about race in Aotearoa and the impacts of colonisation. People often say things like, "well we're much better than Australia," or "Maori should be grateful they were colonised."

Jacq Carter's poem expresses well the comparisons I often hear:

one of the worse effects of
colonisation

is when people no longer fight
because they don't see a need
and think that

comparatively speaking
everything's alright.

New Zealand historian Dame Anne Salmond puts it better than I could:

"It is possible that at present, we are trapped in habits of mind that limit our potential as a small, intimate society, inhabiting some of the most beautiful and productive landscapes and seascapes in the world."⁶

Her reference to beautiful landscapes brings me back to Witi Ihimaera's poem; can you imagine what our country might be like if Henry Williams had translated sovereignty accurately, if he and others hadn't used his mana to encourage the

⁶ Anne Salmond. "First Sir Paul Reeves Memorial Lecture", 2012, 18 August 2New Zealand Herald, Auckland.

rangatira to sign the Treaty, if the British Crown hadn't believed the white race was superior and justified colonisation on that basis, if we had done the right thing under international law and honoured the Māori language version?

This brings me to one important, final point. Dismantling systems of oppression, including those based on race and class, is important for the powerful as well as the powerless.

In the memorable words of American poet and scholar Fred Moten: "I don't need your help. I need you to recognise that this ~~shit~~ is killing you too, however much more softly ..."

It's never too late to begin action to change.

I have included in the newsletter a range of articles and books on the subject that some of you might find useful and interesting and perhaps we might, together, come up with ways St Andrews can become more active and work towards justice for all in Aotearoa.

Thank you for listening. Kia ora. Kia kaha. Arohanui.

Niki Francis
3 May 2020
St Andrews on The Terrace, Te Whanganui-ā-Tara Wellington,
Aotearoa