

## Principled action

E ngā rau rangatira mā, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

One of the things I never understood from the movies is how martyrdom works. It always seemed foolish to me that the bad guy would have the good guy in his hands and wouldn't dispose of him straight away, because of the worry it would somehow turn him into a martyr and, therefore, they would somehow win. I used to wonder: how could the death of one person be that powerful? Such has been the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in the USA. While an innocent victim, rather than someone martyred for a political or religious cause, his murder at the hands of the police started a chain reaction that reverberated across America and then around the world—even as far as New Zealand. The cold-blooded callousness of the murder prompted tens of thousands to gather in protest across New Zealand, wishing to stand in solidarity with Black America against racism. However, these protests were met by some activists from the Māori community who argued, "Why are you just looking at America and not looking at what is happening in New Zealand?"

New Zealand, too, has seen a growing militarisation of the police, with Armed Response Teams set up in response to the shocking March 2019 attack on a Christchurch mosque by a white supremacist, who killed 51 worshippers. These heavily armed units were deployed and ready to respond in areas of potential terrorism and serious crime, targeting areas with large Māori and Pacific Islands populations. This active policing of Māori areas meant that we were likely to see an increase in similar racist outcomes as seen in America on our televisions and social media. While New Zealand is one of the least corrupt countries in the world (Transparency International, 2019), there are veins of deeply embedded racism in the way the

police enforce the law. Māori make up 16% of the population but make up 51% of those imprisoned (Department of Corrections, 2019), are nine times more likely to have a TASER pointed at us, six times more likely to be pepper sprayed and four times more likely to be shot (New Zealand Police, 2018).

Even though normally the New Zealand Police are unarmed, in the seven months after the Armed Response Teams started, three Māori and Pacific Island men were shot and killed by armed police (Scoop Media, 2020), the same as the number of people killed by the UK police for the whole of 2019 (Inquest.org, 2020). Although they were not killed by the Armed Response Team, their presence almost certainly contributed to the growing militarisation of the New Zealand Police and its inevitable consequences.

This general realisation was an awakening, where the populace was turning to re-look at how the New Zealand Police are fulfilling their mission "to make New Zealanders be safe and feel safe." To the credit of the Police Commissioner, Andrew Coster, he realised that a groundswell of opposition was rising against armed police and when 4,000 letters arrived in his inbox in the course of a week, he announced on 9 June that the trial was ended and was not coming back. He said, "It is clear to me that these Response Teams do not align with the style of policing that New Zealanders expect." He also acknowledged that "How the public feels is important—we police with the consent of the public, and that is a privilege" and that consent was in danger of waning (Radio New Zealand, 2020).

The militarisation of the police became such an anathema to the public that even the National Party, which often portrays itself as the law and order party, announced two days later that it was ending its "Strike Force Raptor" proposal of an elite police squad to

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“target and harass gang members” (read: *brown* gang members) (McCulloch, 2020). While there has been some talk in the last few weeks of reinstating the policy, I am unaware of any general support for it.

What this tells us is that Pākehā politicians have known all along that these militarised police options were going to target populations based on race. It was expedient because it was done with the consent of the white populace, who tolerated this because it soothed their fears. At the same time, it maintained an environment where white people could feel superior to their darker neighbours because the crime statistics proved who was better. This, after all, is the foundation of endemic racism—the fear that we might all be equal.

While we can argue the semantics of martyrdom, Floyd’s death did set a chain of events in motion that has had other impacts on New Zealand. The marginalisation of American minorities highlighted how racism was an accepted part of America’s past where statues and institutions could celebrate perpetrators of slavery and colonial dispossession without question for decades, if not centuries. As most of us are aware, this led to the pulling down and removal of numerous statues around the world. The toppling of statues also encouraged a re-examination of New Zealand’s colonial past and its statues commemorating the use of military force to suppress the dissent and resistance of the Māori population in the 19th century. Some statues have been vandalized, some removed and authorities are re-looking at monuments and the names of buildings, businesses, towns and street names that have potentially problematic pasts.

Personally I am against people taking it upon themselves to unilaterally damage or destroy monuments and property. In the 1980s and 1990s I lived in Auckland where there was one monument in particular that I considered a tribute to colonialism and racism, the tree on top of One Tree Hill, the highest point in the City of Auckland.

My understanding was that the native tree that had previously been on top of the hill had been cut down by the settlers and replaced with exotic trees to signal to the people of the land that Pākehā were now in control. Seeing this ritual domination of the landscape, I would see that tree, grit my teeth and mutter to myself. In September 1994, my family moved back down to Dunedin, and a couple of days before we left Auckland I went to the top of One Tree Hill to say my goodbyes to the city. The other thing I did was I put my hands on that tree and said aloud “God I pray this tree die,” such was my antagonism to what it represented. It was the following month that the tree was attacked by a chainsaw, and being ring-barked it was eventually taken away completely. So be very careful with what you curse.

One of the responses to that attack on the tree was that there was an attack on my tribe’s waka taua, where it and its building was set on fire in retaliation. While attacks on Pākehā monuments, etc., always make big headlines (e.g., the attack on the America’s Cup), the continual attacks on sites, monuments and buildings important to Māori much less so. In Dunedin in the late 1990s, a response to Treaty settlements was that our local marae was destroyed by arson, as was the Ngai Tahu Law Centre. Some of our public carvings have been attacked in protest by Pākehā as recently as July 2019 and the landscape has also been attacked by the settlers and their descendants. Right now, my hapū Ngāti Tamainupo is fighting the destruction by developers of the last of the pits that give Ngaruawahia its name.

Some may disagree with my resistance to damage and the threat of damage as a form of protest, but I worry that we have more to lose. The progress I have seen in my lifetime, even more so than in my father’s lifetime, tells me that reasoned discussion is still a more powerful medium for change and that civil disobedience does not need to be destructive. In fact my favourite forms of protests are creative. Witness the statue

of Queen Victoria in Dunedin that had a necklace of potatoes placed around her neck to protest British heartlessness in the Irish Potato Famine.

My view is that our political activism should be as principled and ethical as our social work practice. As free of hypocrisy as we can make it, always knowing what we believe and why we believe, leading us on to principled action.

Speaking of principles, in this issue of *Te Komako* we feature a number of authors highlighting the principles that underpin Māori research, theory and practice. Emma Webber-Dreadon details a new model of supervision for Māori that builds on her previous influential work of the 1990s. It reinterprets the supervisory relationship, re-examining these positions and naming them as *kaitiaki* and *tiaki*. She defines nine of these principles with some associated questions to use in supervision. I am sure that the practical outworking of this model will be beneficial to many social workers.

We have three writers who each individually describe their distinct *kaupapa* Māori methodologies for undertaking research. Kerri Cleaver describes an innovative way of doing *mana wāhine* research with Ngāi Tahu women who have been through the state foster-care system. Her approach uses traditional *pūrākau* and how the identity of Ngāi Tahu women are increasingly validated through the connection with the past. Marjorie Lipsham has also used *pūrākau* as a way of informing her research methodology; however, rather than focus on *iwi* narratives as Cleaver does, Lipsham focuses on *whānau* narratives with very personal examples of how research can, and should, follow Māori processes. Ange Watson uses *harakeke* as a model to both explain and guide the research process and gives an example of how this process was used to discuss ethics in Māori social work.

Erica Newman writes an informative piece on the practice of adoption in Aotearoa

before the implementation of the Adoption of Children Act in 1881. The need for the act is a fascinating tale of cross-cultural misunderstandings and racism.

Hannah Mooney, Michael Dale and Kathryn Hay present a research project they undertook to investigate the quality of social work placement for Māori social work students. Māori students have extra requirements and expectations inherent to their identity and so need placements that take these extra requirements into consideration in how they are placed and supported.

Finally, in late 2019, a group of University of Otago social work students invited a group of Māori social work practitioners to speak at a seminar on the most important things they have learnt in practice. Three of the *kōrero* are presented reflecting a variety of practice and approaches. All three are very personal, revealing much about themselves and how they approach working with Māori. Each is slightly controversial in its own right. Awhina Hollis-English advocates resisting the maxim of the “*kumara doesn’t speak of its own sweetness,*” that it sometimes it can be a false modesty and that we should step up to the leadership opportunities put before us. Heramaahina Eketone provides a challenging discussion on self-care in social work and how we deal with those things we come across in our work that weigh heavily on us afterwards. She speaks of them in terms of issues of *tapu* and *noa* and discusses how we cleanse ourselves spiritually after working in difficult situations. Kerri Cleaver highlights how in social work, every life story that a Māori social worker brings in to social work is “*a Māori story,*” especially as it reflects the reality of many of the *whānau* that we work with.

This year of 2020 is one few of us will ever forget, with Covid-19 and physical distancing, protests against racism, the growing financial crisis and possibly a climate starting to spin out of control. However, it has also opened our eyes.

Māori were some of the first to get organised to deal with the impacts of Covid-19 on our communities. We have seen a growth in articulate young Māori voices speaking out convincingly against injustice and there is a growing acceptance of the underlying nature of racism within our country.

Maybe I am naive to pin my hopes on principled action, tikanga if you will, but it was what I see in the people I admire, those Māori and Tauīwi who are making a genuine difference in our community, nation and world. It is what I also love about social work.

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

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