

# Anton Blank

## Indigenous migrations

### Love

I've been teaching in Switzerland over the last couple of years. I've been thrust onto the international worldwide web, a disguised blessing in the chaos of Covid. I am a true digital native now, strangely comforted by a multiplicity of faces on my screen.

I am absolutely used to this type of reinvention. Over a twenty-year arc of business, I generally have to pivot to respond to changes in the market every three years. It makes for a heady six months of re-grouping. The trick is to anticipate what is the next new thing and innovate.

Indigeneity is the new thing on the international landscape of identity politics. The world is hungry for our ways of being. Our spiritual connection to the environment and one another offers a remedy for climate change and our complex, neurotic modern identities. Brand Māori is oh so hot right now.

My father Pius was Swiss, I am both Swiss and Māori. Normally I'd be heading to Switzerland for work and family life about now. Instead it is Zoom meetings at 7 pm, some of the workshops I've

delivered to university staff and students in Zürich have been very early morning New Zealand time.

The workshops are titled ‘Racism, Bias and Wellbeing’. The goal is to open up a discussion, so that everyone can see where they are situated on the territory of nationhood and belonging. The Māori value triggered during the workshop is kotahitanga. I hadn’t really considered this aspect of the discussion until just now.

This is what happens when the learners understand their psychological response to the social world; why they fear some groups and favour others. They want to embrace diversity rather than run from it. Whenever I say this type of thing in a public forum in Aotearoa, I am bombarded with stories of racist friends of friends. But my greater experience of New Zealanders is that we want to be tolerant and loving.

## Hope

**T**he dynamics of racism and implicit bias in Switzerland are complex; sometimes mind-boggling. I don’t have the reference point of the colonisation which I have lived and experienced in Aotearoa. My inclination is still to lead however, even when I am scoping and researching, I want to propose a way forward. I think this is very important when we consider the issue of racism – to be aspirational, rather than confrontational. Otherwise we stay stuck in the mire.

Switzerland has four regions and languages, and is the most democratic country in the world. Citizens vote in referenda with alarming frequency. The Swiss are detail obsessives and spend hours arguing the intricacies of social change. The most famous referendum of recent times banned minarets on buildings. There is one Thai temple I know of in Aarau, 40 minutes from Zürich. It is a surreal split-second colour-pop when you speed by on the train.

Swiss natives have effectively said no more temples in our country, thank you very much.

The first nations peoples are German, French and Italian speakers. In the Graubünden region the official language is Romansch, a derivative of Latin. The high level of participatory democracy means each region maintains its own distinctive identity.

There's no sense of post-colonial recovery like Aotearoa. The country, its buildings, traditions and culture are in pristine condition. The standard of living is high and everything is so expensive, sometimes it makes my eyes water.

Muslim and African migrants stand out in this physical context. They look strangely displaced in Zürich, where I spend most of my time. According to the data, these are the groups who experience the most discrimination. I watch them being stopped by the Police.

Swiss museums and galleries are full of African artefacts, so it is a conflicted relationship of attraction and suspicion. Being Māori in Zürich, I feel the suffering of these people of colour deeply.

I am conflicted about the Swiss model, still working my way through its dynamics, the pros and cons. I like the way it has preserved the first nations' cultures. I can visit Wil where my father spent his childhood, and the old part of the town is perfectly preserved, like the chocolate-box fantasy. Talking the model through with a Māori colleague, she said, 'it all makes sense to me.'

## Mana

**T**he flip side of the Swiss model is xenophobia. Migrant cultures and identities feel restricted, a bit suffocated, Swiss citizens determine the freedoms and parameters. Foreign students have been enthusiastic participants in my work, because they struggle to find a voice in Switzerland when there is such a clear integration imperative articulated by the establishment.

Migrant populations accounted for 70 per cent of the growth

in European workforces in the past ten years. They increase the flexibility of the labour-market and contribute to economic growth. Similar patterns are evident here, but compared to the Swiss, we impose fewer restrictions when it comes to cultural expression and identity. In Tāmaki Makaurau, where I live, the physical presence of migrants is tangible and visible in almost every suburb. I love this aspect of the city.

Humans are entitled to live a life they value. I think this is the starting and end point when we consider racism towards Indigenous peoples and migrant cultures. It is the aspirational goal. I have mana, you have mana.

Māori have a history of migration. We descend from the Indigenous tribes of Taiwan, who migrated down through the Pacific, into Southeast Asia and across to Madagascar. Aotearoa was their last port of call, which means we are people of the sea and land. Hawaiki is our mythological homeland, but our origins are in fact located off the coast of China. When I hear Māori speaking unkindly about the recent Asian migration here, I remind myself of our heritage. We share linguistic and cultural traditions with the whole of the Austronesian territory.

Migration challenges our identity with its push-me-pull-you dynamics. Maintaining traditions, protecting Indigenous rights at the same time as we welcome manuhiri. And what does it mean to be Indigenous when we are ourselves migrants? Lyotard argued that identity is not a fixed phenomenon; it is in a constant state of flux, adapting to its surroundings. This is true for the indigene and the migrant.

I've been introduced to the context of emotional tax by a Swiss friend. Marginalised and diverse groups – the other – pay an emotional price to be part of the establishment. In the corporate and government sectors, our rates of burnout are higher, because we are pushing back against systems which don't share our values. Basically, if you're not a member of the dominant culture, it's just harder to live. You are the child staring into the window of the toy shop.

## Kua mutu

**M**āori are well positioned to lead these discussions here and overseas – into te ao mārama. We understand what it means to have mana, and how to nurture it in ourselves and others, so that no-one is looking from the outside in. Haere mai tātou katoa!