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Weaving Hope

Research question:

How do collective narratives evolve through a community arts practice?

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts,
Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand, 2021

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Salam.

Dear Muslim Community (who this project was created with and for),

Thank you for allowing me to be in the middle of this collaboration — the ‘Weaving Hope Mural’. Your grace and generosity of time and advice at such a horrific time will always be with me.

Thank you to the women who collaborated on the Weaving Hope conversations — Sharifa Isaako, Naseem Shariff, Tracy Underwood, Azima Yusuff, and Liana Leiataua. I believe in the hope woven through your stories.

A special thank-you to the Salam Network (Vodafone New Zealand’s Muslim Society. To my creative collaborators and advisors Muhammad Waqas and Farhan Sarfraz — Thank you.

My thanks go to Nurul Iffah Abdul for blessing the project with its name, and for Mahmoud Shagouri for helping carve the flower tributes to each of the 51 people who died.

These letters are an attempt to place the project in a context. I want to recognise ideas embedded in Islamic, Irish, Pakeha and Māori experience and culture and to look for the places the stories meet and fertilize each other — springing into a forest of ideas. This is a vision that can combat the narrow, violent road of racism with love, belonging and connection.

This project has started me on a pilgrimage to being a more connected human, both to myself and to the multi-cultural reality of New Zealand.

Aroha

R

To the community at the College of Creative Arts at Massey University,

I am hoping we can meet one day in Rumi's field.

“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass, the world is too full to talk about.”¹

I appreciate the efforts made by the Massey community in trying to head towards something hard to define but important.

Thank you everyone, especially Anna and Richard for all the lovely conversations. A huge thank you to Mike Bridgman for your patience helping me learn Premier Pro and helping me edit the 'Weaving Hope' video conversation. Thank you to Julianna for your epic commitment to teaching.

Ngā mihi nui

R

¹ Rumi: <https://nationalpoetryday.co.uk/poem/out-beyond-ideas/>

To the Community of Porirua, my children and my partner,

Thank you for giving me such a strong experience of community and belonging, from my many past collaborators, to my lovely customers and colleges at Pete's Emporium. The experience of belonging has allowed me to heal into a fuller human being.

Thank you to the team at Whitireia, led by Kohai Grace, and the amazing female film crew led by Pikihuia Haenga, who worked on the film conversation.

To my children, Giorgione and Bobby, thank you for your uncompromising reflection of my ideas back to me, and to my wider family including Peter, Amy, Jade and Adam — thank you for your love and support.

To my life partner, Ian, thank you for being my refuge when the journey was difficult.

R

To the Reader,

My main practice is in creating public murals, and often in collaboration.²

In 2019 I was asked to help design a ‘paint-by-numbers’ mural with the staff of Vodafone to mark the horrific shooting of 51 people in a Christchurch Mosque on the 15th of March earlier that year. It was later named the ‘*Weaving Hope Mural*’.³ The project soon evolved from the initial ‘paint-by-numbers’ community day and landed as a large digital mural in Te Ngākau Civic Square.⁴

I made the film ‘Weaving Hope’ as I realised the work of weaving hope was about collective storytelling. I felt a single document, written entirely by me (one person) would be inadequate to demonstrate the power of communal creativity.

Thus, the video, ‘Weaving Hope’, is the most important element of my exegeses, as the video is a demonstration of the context my work sits within and ‘shows’ how I hold a community in conversation.

This self-reflection and research have largely moved away from the ‘-isms’.⁵ Instead, I have increasingly found myself drawn to the holistic theory’s imbedded in permaculture and regenerative movements.⁶ I am also drawn to ideas described poetically through the mystic branches of faiths⁷ and mythologies⁸, each focusing on the power of understanding relationships or symbiosis as transformative rather, than focusing on mapping power structures or dualistic thinking to generate positive change.⁹ The work of eco-feminists like Vandana Shiva, whose activism is centred around natural farming, seed saving and education has begun to sow new understandings.¹⁰ While these concepts may not have fully flowered in my work yet, they are increasingly important in my imagination.

Whilst trying to find a way to frame what was going on in my practice, I came across Chilean philosopher, biologist and systems theorist, Humberto Maturana. Maturana believes that our power lies not in the past or future, but in the moment. His ideas explore how we reflect on the medium we are in, and how changing our momentary medium through reflection we can alter the drift of life. We still do not and cannot control the drift, but with meditation-like focus we can move alter our awareness of a moment. A collective project marks a moment of reflection and connection in the drift. For me this is a sort of prayerful experience and one I felt I had in common with some of the Muslim community who explained their beliefs to me.

This written portion of the exegesis has letters to my seven times great-grandmother and my seven times great-granddaughter. In the letters I do not talk for the project, but speak as a

² This style of work started in 2010 in Porirua. More of my work can be found at Gorsestreetart.com

³ Read more about the ‘Weaving Hope Mural’ at <https://foundation.vodafone.co.nz/behindthemural/>

⁴ Te Ngākau, meaning ‘the heart’, is the name gifted in 2018 by mana whenua (Taranaki Whānui ki Te Upoko o Te Ika) to Civic Square. <https://wellington.govt.nz/your-council/news/2018/06/new-name-for-civic-square>

⁵ Daniel Wahl describes how the ‘ism’ ends conversations and reduces curiosity. His teacher, Satish Kumar, illuminates this with the saying “*with every -ism there is a schism*”.

⁶ I have largely explored ideas about regeneration through podcasts made by Daniel Christian Wahl where he aims to ‘Catalyse transformative innovation, cultural co-creation, whole systems design, and bioregional regeneration’. He is also the author of *Designing Regenerative Cultures*.

⁷ “[It] is my firm belief that all religions aim at making people better human beings and that, despite philosophical differences, some of them fundamental, they all aim at helping humanity to find happiness. This does not mean that I advocate any kind of world religion or ‘super religion’. Rather I look on religion as medicine. For different complaints, doctors will prescribe different remedies. Therefore, because not everyone has spiritual ‘illness’ at the same, different spiritual medicines are required.” — Dalai Lama XIV, *Freedom in Exile: The Autobiography of the Dalai Lama*.

⁸ One word that I found illuminating from the Islamic tradition is the word *Tawhid*. It is the defining doctrine of Islam. It declares absolute monotheism — the unity and uniqueness of God as creator and sustainer of the universe.

<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e2356>

⁹ Donella H. Meadows in her 2001 essay ‘*Dancing with Systems*’ moved away from predictions and outcomes towards relational values.

¹⁰ I dream of creating living artworks that form parts of systems of life.

member of it. I am reflecting from a moment in time in the drift. I pray to continue to grow, to be more centred. This is where I answer the formal requirements of a Master of Fine Arts, but it is not a format that I believe is well suited to telling collective stories. In fact, I fear documents such as this, risk being damaging to the relational work I am trying to create. The pyramid-like structures of higher education are what have allowed me time and resources to feed my practice, but there is a tension, as institutions are, by their nature, about deciding which individual is most worthy.

And so, I chose to write to my ancestors and descendants, as ultimately, they are the people who form me into a chain of life, of hope.

Ngā mihi nui,

Ruth

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¹¹ I am using Irish to establish a connection with my ancestor and her life experience. I can not even pronounce Irish yet when I hear the language, I hear rhythms of speech that are a part of the way my family speaks.

1. Curtha

The place I am planted

Dear 7 x great-grandmother Bridget Murphy (Daly) from County Clare,

Bridget you are in me, I feel you flow red and warm, a river, my blood.

We fled Ireland in 1860 and arrived in New Zealand which we also know by its original name — Aotearoa (land of the long white cloud). This land has held us, fed us and loved us. We have been here so long our tummy's microbiome has a similar composition to the soil here.¹² We are the creation of this place. Yet my tummy aches when I say this.

I know it hurts the original people of this land, the Māori, to know we are not leaving. We have, as a culture, been built on land that was robbed from them.¹³ I imagine you would understand this loss.¹⁴ I imagine the ancestors of the people murdered on the 15th of March 2019 in Ōtautahi Christchurch would also have known the price of empires.¹⁵ Some might even say this is why many immigrated to Aotearoa and why, ultimately, they were murdered. Some might say racism is the mechanism of empire, colonisation and maybe even capitalism?¹⁶

I look up at the kowhaiwhai patterns¹⁷ of a whare¹⁸, and it's like I recognize their connective language. I have felt you flow like a joyful brook through me as I look up at the patterned timber ribs of the houses. I have stood in the wharenuī encased in her love. I muse that the earth once whispered the same secret shapes coddled in swirling poetic lines to our people's artist. A Māori/Irish leader of New Zealand, James Carroll “once suggested that St Patrick was in fact a Māori who, after casting out the snakes from New Zealand, decided to repeat the trick in Ireland.”¹⁹ I find it so confusing to define our role as Irish New Zealanders in colonisation. We have at times been the colonising soldiers,²⁰ the fellow oppressed,²¹ the police,²² the priests,²³ the teachers,²⁴ the mothers and lovers.²⁵ Sometimes the rolls have been reversed. I was baptised by Father Te Awhitu in his kitchen in Hiruharama, and my Godmother was Kuia Dolly, and my most influential mentor was Ranga Tui. I was brought up with an older beloved Māori whāngai-brother Brett. My personal experience has often been that Māori hold leadership roles in my life.

¹² In the following paper published in 2019 it is proposed ‘that a close linkage between the soil microbiome and the human intestinal microbiome has evolved during evolution and is still developing’, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6780873/>

¹³ Link to map of land lost by Maori from 1860–1939 <https://teara.govt.nz/en/map/26591/maori-land-loss>

¹⁴ An article about the great potato famine and the land confiscations that created it. <https://www.libraryireland.com/irishnationality/taking-land.php>

¹⁵ I found Adam Curtis's documentary ‘The Power of Nightmares: The Rise of the Politics of Fear’ helpful in unpacking Western attitudes to Islam and the manufacturing of Islamophobia.

¹⁶ Arundhati Roy is an author and thinker who makes these connections. This discussion with Arundhati Roy, Jeremy Corbyn in Conversation with Tariq Ali is a good example of her reflections. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLK2zpqHodo>

¹⁷ kōwhaiwhai: painted scroll ornamentation — commonly used on meeting house rafters. <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=kowhaiwhai>

¹⁸ whare: a house, building, residence, dwelling, shed, hut, habitation.

<https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=whare>

¹⁹ James Carroll (1857–1926), is noted for his concern and solidarity with both Irish and Māori land confiscation

<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/people/james-carroll>

²⁰ Historian Vincent O'Malley in his 2019 article outlines the involvement and disillusionment of Irish rank and file soldiers in this colonial war. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/112546382/national-portrait-vincent-omalley-historian-of-the-new-zealand-wars>

²¹ The Irish were often seen as lazy drinkers. I would suggest the Irish immigrants may well have been suffering from trauma related to the colonisation of Ireland. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/ethnic-and-religious-intolerance/print>

²² Due to discrimination, Irish Catholics found it hard to get employment. One of the few careers open to them was the police and they made up to 40% of the police force in 1930s New Zealand. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/irish/page-2>

²³ ‘Catholicism and Irish identity were one and the same’ for some early bishops such as Patrick Moran (1823–1895)

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/2m55/moran-patrick>

²⁴ Nuns like Mother Aubert helped set up schools in Māori communities. <https://www.catholic.org.nz/about-us/history/>

²⁵ Inter-marriage seems to have been common throughout the history of colonisation. <https://teara.govt.nz/en/intermarriage/print>

Māori culture has had an invisible pull — like gravity. My years in the South Island I missed it like a missing limb.

But on the March 15, any illusions of peaceful race relations hidden below racial inequality,²⁶ the women telling us that they felt unsafe,²⁷ and incarceration rates²⁸ were exposed.

One man killed 51 people in little over an hour. Bridget, they were killed for being Muslim. They were killed for meeting together as a community and praying. It was New Zealand Muslims who suffered unbearably that day, but like a storm it washed away the pretence and many more injustices. So, I write to you, you of my red pulsating blood, whose swirling filament travelled for 6000 years or more in Ireland. I write to you about land and belonging to her. I write to you as the descendant of a colonised people and a part of a colonising culture. I write to you as someone who is the same colour as the murderer, a murderer so twisted he thought he could remedy his alienation with the lives of fellow humans.

On the day it happened, I was at work, involuntarily listening to Jason Gunn on the radio as news started to drift in like a poison gas. The air got thicker and weirder. It was like a smelly shame floated up the North Island. That night as I was installing an exhibition with a local family the shame was thick. You must have felt it; for my blood congealed, like I was freezing. I hardly could believe such a thing could happen, yet you in my blood seem to react, you knew it could and it had before. Auntie Paula lead a prayer for peace at the end of the night, I stood there across from my husband, humbled to be included.

So, I draw the wefts of thread together, the Irish, the Māori and the Muslim (less invisible after that day). I have tried and use the knowledge of this place, Massey,²⁹ of my traditions and my art discipline to weave a warp in and out and to create a fabric, a design, that shelters us from the ice anger of not belonging. A fabric that I attempt to contribute to with my artwork. I am drawing from the traditions of solidarity.³⁰

I have inhaled the past and know I turn momentarily to the future, to our descendent,

Much love and graduate for this life,
R

²⁶ The average wealth of a white New Zealander is \$91,000 whereas the average Māori person has \$23,000.

<https://www.newsroom.co.nz/2018/07/29/169208/deafening-silence-on-racial-wealth-gap>

²⁷ Muslim women tried to warn police and politicians of the threat of white extremism.

<https://www.odt.co.nz/star-news/star-national/ignored-state-how-muslim-women-tried-warn-danger>

²⁸ Māori are 15% of the population and 50% of the prison population. <https://interactives.stuff.co.nz/2018/05/prisons/crime.html#/>

²⁹ There is a cutting comparison between intersectionality, post-modernism, identity politics and related theories which compares movements of academic thought to a religion (Is Intersectionality a Religion? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyyqUOKhGA&t=1394s>). Surprisingly this made me much more tolerant of the university and its role in my life. I can empathise with this understanding of a University as a religion more than as a form of absolute truth. It has made me recognise how much my interactions with the University are based on waiting for them to see my truth, when in fact it may be more useful to see myself as visiting someone else's sacred place. I would never dream of going into a mosque, church or temple and telling them they were wrong, so why do I want to do it here? I have mistaken it for my church.

³⁰ Examples of this kind solidarity might be the sugar boycott of the English working-class in support of enslaved workers. Another example could be the Olympic boycott by African nations in response to New Zealand's ongoing sporting relationship with apartheid and South Africa, that lead to the extreme protests of the Springbok tour in 1981 New Zealand.

2. Compost

Dear 7 x great-granddaughter,

When I imagine you reading this, I melt with gratitude to think that you are alive and that we made it six generations. Today that looks unlikely.

On the 15th of March 2019, New Zealand had a massacre of people praying in a mosque in Ōtautahi Christchurch. Then the year of 2020 started with horrific wildfires in Australia. Then by February 2020 the world was in a pandemic; the most vulnerable — the old, the frail, the marginalised — have died in huge numbers throughout the world. We have, so far, been protected. As I write this the United States is protesting after the latest in a long line of deaths of black men at the hands of police. Some say the world might be uninhabitable by the time you are reading this.

If you are alive, if humanity has survived, we must have improved, we must have healed our relationships with the environment, with each other.

I work most days as a mural painter, and the rest as a shop assistant. I try to do what I can to improve the world with my work, but today it feels so flawed and so inadequate. It seems to me the most qualified to assess your flaws and truths are those who inherit the consequences. So, you, my many times great-granddaughter, are my light of truth of my life — what I have left for you, what I gifted you; what I have cursed you with.

I am going to name you after a teenage friend, Aloma, as I sense the world will be browner and you will have both our peachy threads in you, as well as the Pacific golden brown. You will be identities I cannot ever know, like a perfect present I will never unwrap.

I'm not sure they will mean much to you, but I want to show you some artists that inspire me and that help sharpen my work.

The first artist I am going to talk about is Mervyn Taylor. He is a bit unfashionable now as he drew heavily from Māori art and some contest this as appropriation.³¹ He was not an 'original genius' type artist but a designer rooted in service. His art sat visually in the tradition of modernist design, yet he seems to me, to be a craftsman, someone who cared about preserving tradition more than breaking it. Not only his art, but his life, seemed to be enriched by interactions with Māori culture.³² He consulted deeply on the Māori content he drew from. What do I enjoy about him? His art asks the big existential question: who are we who live on a small island protected by the large oceans around us? And how do we pictorialize the answers? This is at the heart of most public murals for me. Who is the 'we' of this particular place? It is a dangerous brave question to ask with your heart open, which I speculate is why his gave way at such a young age. As to the question of appropriation, I turn to the great Indian eco-feminist Vandana Shiva who describes how something that colonises something decreases life and diversity, whereas when you are in a healthy relationship with something the life force and diversity of the place you are inhabiting increases.³³ It's easy to find examples of the legacy of

³¹ In Douglas Horrell's 2006 thesis he explores issues of appropriation in Taylors work. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/35458111.pdf>

³² Bonwin Holloway-Smith retraces the creative processes illuminating his cross-cultural interactions. Holloway-Smith, B. (2018). *Wanted: The search for the modernist murals of E. Mervyn Taylor*. Auckland, New Zealand: Massey University Press.

³³ Colonisation is about the quality of connections to the life in a particular setting in the natural world (including humans). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErD5Vx8dTw>

Mervyn in the art of others. So unlike artist like the portraitist Goldie, I think he was in a more alive and generative relationship with Māori cultural content. I think he aspired to be a window to, not an owner of, Māori visual wisdom. I would like to think he was drawing from a deep tradition; in a similar way the West refers to Greek philosophy. I hope he saw Māori mythologies as a source of wisdom, storytelling and art, rather than seeing Māori culture as a resource to be mined for a New Zealand aesthetic with little care for the soulful intellect living in it, or the people it lives within.

Aloma, the next designer I want to talk about is Miriam Issa, an Australian permaculture designer, designing within both her garden and community to contribute to a sustainable safe thriving world. She talks powerfully to me as a woman. She has a synonym for her permaculture garden and women's circle — RAW: Resilient Aspiring Women.³⁴ The name turned backwards is 'war' and she explains how men's wars are often external whilst women's are often internal. She talks about how women need to make peace internally to become fully realised powerful creative people. Issa uses the metaphor of a mat being made to talk about how powerful new stories are created. Her mother had taught her that to weave a new mat, the weaver should sit on the old mat, therefore she can see the qualities and faults in the older mat and weave the new one accordingly. She draws from her Islamic faith, refugee experience, Ethiopian culture and looks for the strengths of the culture she has settled in. She talks a lot about grace and how it occupies the same space as grief, and from that space we can be at our most creative — it's a space where new stories are born. What I love about her work is that the ideas that it's built out of are very alive and are constantly evolving.³⁵ In my work she inspires me to work more thoughtfully, with contrasting ideas and ways of being, to find new expansive paths of ideas. My creative practice is being remade in the same way as her mother's metaphoric woven mats; the best and worst of the old mat is close at hand as I constantly work at remaking a collective story.

The inspiration provided by Issa makes me dare to be brave enough to talk to hard topics. Who are we (New Zealand) in Issa's metaphor of the mat maker? And how does this offer a way of understanding public art?

Near the 'Weaving Hope' mural are two recent pieces that talk to this.

One is the *Ngā Kakano* (many colours, textures of vision and sound) by Johnson Witehira.³⁶ This digital mural majestically holds space at one end of Victoria Street. A large portrait of a woman anchors the work at the north end, and a creation dynamically twists as the drama of the Māori creation myth pulsates around the sweeping curve of the building. The traditional red, white and black Māori colour palette builds the many patterns and types of line the image is built from. It is an accomplished and sophisticated artwork that utilises digital design to illuminate the most foundational of Māori stories.

The other piece is a collaborative work *And only sea*, created by the Mata Aho Collective, Andre Te Hira and the literary estate of J. C Sturm.³⁷ This collective type of creation has a lot more in common with the 'Weaving Hope' process. I love how they saw the value in expressly thinking and designing who should come on the journey of creation with them.³⁸ It's a powerful graphic piece that sharpens the anger and power of a poem of J. C Sturm. Her poetic, sometimes angry

³⁴ I draw heavily from these interviews to outline Mariam Issa's practise and philosophy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zds7SqngETA>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdkQ8N6kgqE>

³⁵ Her approach reminds me of the 2001 Donella H. Meadows essay *Dancing with systems* with the quote "We can't control systems or figure them out we can just learn to dance with them."

³⁶ More information about this project can be found here: <https://www.johnsonwitehira.studio/nga-kakano>
<https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/AK1711/S00653/civic-square-artwork-kicks-off-wellingtons-art-on-walls.htm>

³⁷ <https://wellington.govt.nz/services/community-and-culture/arts/outdoor-public-art/murals/central-city/civic-precinct>

³⁸ <https://www.mataahocollective.com/#/and-only-sea/>

words are space holders, glimpsed through the difficult to read font, placed at unusual angles. The content can only really be read if photographed and turned up the correct way to read. The striking acid pink and yellow palette places the work uncompromisingly in the present. The collaboration brings contemporary Māori women together to collaborated with one of our male peers to celebrate a grandmother figure to many creative women of our generation. The sign, like graphic clarity of the yellow arrows, leaves no room for doubt about the visual confidence of the piece.

Both works are powerful images that inspire me; one for its mythical visual poetry and the other for its political and social power. They both also leave me feeling slightly frustrated, almost jealous. It's been my perception that collective stories that tie us to our native land, spiritually and politically, are normally only encouraged in publicly funded projects if the artist is Māori.

As a Pākehā, am I meant to feel represented by Neil Dawsons's *Ferns orb*? Hovering over the heart of the city like a UFO, a ball that never lands. Is it a testament to our sports obsessed culture? A culture not allowed to ground itself, to land, to connect to the earth and submit to the reality of gravity? Are we allowed to be held by the earth? Or only held aloft by the power of the engineering defying wind and earthquakes of Wellington?

So Aloma, who gets to speak and about what is good and bad is complicated. I trust you will understand this better than me. These are questions that time and your heart will answer. I come back to Issa's metaphor of the mat — we can only sit on the old mat and weave the new one.

Aloma, I look forward to telling you more in the next letter. It's so frustrating that you can't write back. I am 'meditating on love' for a better world for you,

All my love,
your ancestor,
R

3. Pruning

Kia ora Aloma,

How do we leave a world for you Aloma?

How do we prevent future murderous racism?

What is the role of artist? The Pākehā artist? The woman artist?

Richard Buckminster Fuller (1895–1983) once said, “If you want to teach people a new way of thinking, don’t bother trying to teach them. Instead, give them a tool, the use of which will lead to new ways of thinking.”³⁹

Some of the new tools of my generation that have explained racism have been identity politics, appropriation, and ideas around the roles of empires and colonisation. As Fuller predicted these have led to new ways of thinking — however they didn’t prevent 51 murders.

These ideas have acted like spanners allowing the machine of racism to be mapped, but not deconstructed. They have illustrated who suffers most.⁴⁰ They have aligned with a time in history where people are increasingly unempathetic⁴¹ and where inequality has increased.⁴² These tools have not been effective at creating social justice⁴³ and solidarity,⁴⁴ not because they were not useful but because what they uncovered was treated as subjective truth when in fact it was often a tiny piece of a much larger more dimensional truth better understood through socialism (Walter Benn Michaels 1948-)⁴⁵ and turned into policy based on solidarity rather than difference. Walter Benn Michaels describes identity politics as a way to manage inequality, not solve it. Adolph Reed (1947-)⁴⁶ points out that identity politics is better understood as a class concern — class structures are not challenged by identity politics, just the make-up of the players in the different classes. I refuse to give up on a common humanity, on solidarity.

James Baldwin writes in his 1972 book: *No Name in the Street*, “people are not, in action, worth very much; and yet, every human being is an unprecedented miracle. One tries to treat them as the miracles they are, while trying to protect oneself against the disasters they’ve become.” For me there is nothing natural about racism, it is the disaster we have become. As Cornel West says “You can't lead the people if you don't love the people.”

³⁹ <https://www.bfi.org/about-fuller/biography>

⁴⁰ Kimberlé Crenshaw explores intersectionality — a concept about layers of the oppressions such as race, gender, and sexuality leading to a form of extreme oppression only understood by seeing them as a grouped. I think it has been useful in helping people understand their lived experience, but it has been largely unhelpful at generating meaningful societal change. I think this is because it has not taken economic oppression seriously, and it only offers a path to rearrange the members of the ruling class not the toxic pathology of having a ruling class and how inequality fuels racism.

⁴¹ Jamil Zaki’s new book, “*The War for Kindness: Building empathy in a fractured world*,” describes the decline in American college student.

⁴² The average income of someone in the richest 1% has doubled, from just under \$200,000 to nearly \$400,000 (adjusting for inflation). In contrast, the average disposable income for someone in the poorest 10% is only slightly higher than it was in the 1980s.

<http://www.inequality.org.nz/understand/>

⁴³ I mean social justice as justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society, not as a cover-all term for resent activism.

⁴⁴ I mean solidarity as in understanding we are all connected and true wellbeing is a collective project where other people’s wellbeing will support over all wellbeing. A great example was Paul Robeson’s support for striking Welsh miners and their support for him through the McCarthy error.

⁴⁵ In the following podcast Benn Michael discusses his book *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality, to talk about the recent resurgence of middle class liberal anti-racism and how the left can adequately combat racial oppression.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HT41gzsN7Ik>

⁴⁶ “The Myth of Class Reductionism”. *The New Republic* (September 25, 2019)

The Norwegian Muslim film director Deeyah Khan (1977-) of Punjabi/Pashtun descent, explores this territory of racism in her documentaries.⁴⁷ Her powerful work follows her path to befriending people with extreme beliefs. She describes the similarities between white and Islamic extremists,⁴⁸ saying they are men are searching for meaning, brotherhood, belonging and purpose.

François Matarasso (2019) illuminates the many insights about participatory arts; he points out how ‘that full, free and equal participation in cultural life is both a human right and a path towards a more just and democratic society.’

My place in this project aims not to be merely empathetic, or sympathetic, but to stand with solidarity. Solidarity because a society where violence is how ideological battles are fought will be horrible for me as well. Solidarity because liveable land⁴⁹ could be used to define who ‘belongs’ risking all our homes. Solidarity because it’s stimulating spiritually and intellectually living in a world rich in diverse ideas and ways of being.⁵⁰

Aloma, I had two very skilled male Islamic designers who stood beside me as a community-based women artist. I did not have their cultural knowledge or their computer-based design skills. I believe they were not my ally but were in solidarity with the grand vision we all held close of a more just Aotearoa, and we needed each other to weave that story.

Another way I understand the disaster of our times is through the lenses of Internal Family Systems theory developed by Richard C. Schwartz. I found Schwartz’s chapter in *Innovations and Elaborations in Internal Family Systems Therapy* (2016) useful, as he explores racism: “Should we exorcise or embrace our inner bigots?”

He describes his own inner world as being made up of coalitions of racist and anti-racist parts, all of which are protectors of more venerable parts of his system. Schwartz goes on to outline the discomfort and shame of acknowledging these inner parts and the inner discord they create. Schwartz talks about healing as not being facilitated by education, but by paying attention to all his parts, knowing himself, acknowledging good intentions and allowing them to help release burdens.

He outlines that within a group there needs to be adequate ‘self (soul)’ energy before a discussion on race can take place. This was something I was aware of in the Mosques, since that group was grounded in the virtues of the soul (self). Only in such groups can people disclose their inner and outer experiences with the belief they will be heard and not judged. Schwartz believes such groups can heal on a personal and communal level.

In the context of the ‘Weaving Hope Mural’ and subsequent video, I was aware that the inner dialogue within my system was much more positive when there was collective with high self-energy. How does one talk about race if shame drives parts of us into more extreme protective rolls? I think that racism that has crossed many generations in an intimate way, such as with Pakeha and Māori, is much more potent and deeply felt. The undertone ‘you do not belong’ is an impactful weapon when you literally have never belonged anywhere else.

⁴⁷ JIHAD: a story of the others (2015), *White Right: Meeting the Enemy* (2017)

⁴⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=knrgQyaD2FA>

⁴⁹ “The world has lost a third of its arable land due to erosion or pollution in the past 40 years”
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/02/arable-land-soil-food-security-shortage>

⁵⁰ In a Nick French’s *Jacobin* article (2020) he describes the solidarity between groups as diverse as French revolutionaries and Haitian Revolutionaries. He rejects allyship as being weak compared to the motivation of fighting for a shared just world that solidarity provides. Solidarity is a concept that can address the root, inequalities, fears, and insecurities more meaningfully. It also does not center any hierarchies such as academic as its moral arbiter. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/author/nick-french>

In the documentary *Desert Fire*⁵¹, about a stateless national soccer team, a member of the Kurdish team describes how the place you are born will always be loved because it's the first place your heart opened. In Aotearoa New Zealand we are going to have people who love this land that are going to be increasingly drawn from diverse cultural backgrounds.

I am aware that these conversations about place and belonging were part of the Muslim faith from its inception — as it was a political, economic, as well a spiritual, reimagining. Would we have had the powerful insights of Malcom X had it not been for the wisdom of the Islamic tradition? Would we have had the wit and the charm of Muhammad Ali without the Islamic tradition? It is worth remembering the idea of oneness so important in Islam, has been a powerful anti-racist understanding many cultures, including the West, have benefited from.

Aloma, I am aware that before you read this it will pass through many hands, some of whom, according to this theory, will have extreme protectors performing racist and anti-racist rolls. How will they feel reading this? Will it feel like I am letting racist people off lightly?

I will not end on my words but turn to Farid Ahmed who lost his wife in the Ōtautahi Christchurch massacre. Ahmed said he hoped to show the power of prayer for those who had perpetrated evil against the Muslim community. He said he had prayed for the killer to find the heart to take responsibility for murdering 51 Muslim worshippers at the two mosques in Christchurch in March 15 last year. This is his powerful statement from March 2020:

*He has taken the right step in the right direction. It is good for him, good for me, good for everyone else, good the country. People do horrible things. In each person there are two sides, one side is the evil part and the other is the good, righteous side... Some people are very strong in their mind and they suppress that evil part. He has done wrong things. But most particularly when I look at the issue of his guilty plea in that part definitely, he has thought well. He has realised that he has done the wrong thing and he is admitting that. That part is a good part. I must respect that and I want to encourage him to continue taking the right path. Continue working on the path of love and peace that is good for him and is good for everyone else.*⁵²

Aloma, I can barely imagine what your journey home is like?

Love your many times Grandma Ruth

⁵¹ Losh, J. (2016a, October 14). *The rebel World Cup: on the road with Kurdistan's football team* | Soccer | *The Guardian*. The Guardian; The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2016/oct/14/football-alternative-world-cup-kurdistan-team-jack-losh-sebastien-rabas>

⁵² <https://www.nz.co.nz/national/programmes/checkpoint/audio/2018740336/mosque-shooting-survivor-explains-love-forgiveness-for-the-terrorist>

4. Athchúrsáil

Dear 7x great-grandmother Bridget,

There is a Māori saying: ‘Ka mua, ka muri’ (to walk backwards facing back into the future) so I turn to face you, my ancestor, as I write a new story, as I weave a new mat, tell the old story, tell the new story, to tell my story, to weave all the wisdom I can find and then to gift the story to the river of life to be remade again and again. To evaporate like water in the hot sun of truth and to rain again in some other place as nourishment. This is a story that needs to be grown, composted, regrown and recomposed — its depth needs to build from the work of generations of story gardeners.

So, I dig through the internet looking for stands of stories that I can build my compost heap with. I aspire not to steal them, but to bring them to life, to create a symphonic explosion of life from their wisdom. I take a little from the environmental and class critic George Monbiot (1963-), a little from the concept of interbeing from Charles Eisenstein (1967-), with its connection to the Muslim concept of Tawhid, and I weave a little of the Māori concept of Kotahitanga (unity, values of reciprocity, knowing oneself to know others).⁵³

I call up the words Dr. Vandana Shiva’s blessing for the New Year in 2020:

We’re beginning a decade of transition, a decade of new possibilities... It is time to move forward into diversity and unity, into an age where we finally awaken to the fact that we are inter-beings and we co-create with the Earth.

I also weave into my mat the lovely observations from contemporary New Zealand artist George Nuku:

‘Herenga, Paihere, Hohou, Hono’, — To bind together, join, link, connect, confirm; inter-connect, inter-relate, inter-depend...

*Religion: from ‘Religio’ — Latin, ‘Religar’; from the old French, ‘Ligare’ or Ligament, ‘Religare’, to bind together.*⁵⁴

I cannot imagine if I got up every morning seeing the world only as a set of power-based interactions, how I would even get my toe out of my sheets.

So, let us weave hope. Let me not forget the silent vows made subsequent to the 15th March 2019 to try to make the world better.

Aroha,
R

⁵³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upe36hTrrII>

⁵⁴ From George Nuku Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/people/George-Nuku/100063655083775/>

5. Video

Use this url link to access the video “Weaving Hope”: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yi-EoYDM_GvaGQ6SBu0v-bGCteOK27Qb/view?usp=sharing

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