

## CULTURAL SETTINGS — by Anahera Herbert-Graves

Because we have always lived with and amongst all the different cultural traditions in our rohe, Tangata Whenua are multi-cultural. No matter how closely those traditions run together, or how often they intersect with others, they each retain their own uniqueness within our jurisdiction. And that is [the defining essence of multi-culturalism](#).



However there is another definition of multi-culturalism which a few Tangata Tiriti have tried to foist on us. At its most benign, it is something that [over-rides our culture](#). But at its most malign they use it to try to control and [constitutionally disempower](#) us.

Nowadays we see it in action from the way racism against us is tolerated and trivialised in the [mainstream media](#), through to [legislative theft of our resources in Parliament](#).

Possibly as a result of this twisted version of it, some of us have rejected multi-culturalism as a concept, preferring bi-culturalism instead. But just because a few haters twisted and used it against us, does not require us to abandon our multi-culturalism, or any other culturalism for that matter.

To understand how and why that is, we need only check our cultural settings. Culture is socially defined, not biologically fixed. When we are at least bi-lingual we are not limited to being mono-cultural. However, when we are in a mono-cultural setting we could describe ourselves as mono-cultural. So too can we describe ourselves as bi-cultural when we are in bi-cultural settings.

To illustrate, in 2011 [Miria Simpson](#), known as a Taniwha of the reo, was asked by a reporter what it had meant to her to be fluent in te reo all her life. The then 79 year old answered, “When I compare myself with people who do not have the language, then the only explanation I can give is that I am whole, W-H-O-L-E. Because I know what it is like to be able to do both things [*speaking te reo and English*] I consider myself absolutely both bi-lingual and bi-cultural.”

Experience tells us that when we are well-grounded in at least two cultures, we are also able to experience true multi-culturalism in its setting. The recent [tangihanga of Ta Ranginui Walker](#) was a wonderful example of that, and it simply could not have been wholly appreciated within a mono-cultural setting.

The beauty of cultures is that they can be learned by the willing. One outcome of the cultural exchange between Ngati Kahu and Shanghai is the sharing of our languages. Some of us are also learning New Zealand Sign Language. Already we appreciate how much we miss in those cultural settings without their respective languages, and we love the learnings.

As heirs of the Rangatira who declared sovereignty in *He Wakaputanga o Te Rangatiratanga o Nga Hapu o Nu Tireni 1835* and reaffirmed it in *Te Tiriti o Waitangi 1840*, we embrace our multi-culturalism in its true form.

And as successors to Taniwha like Miria Simpson, we remain whole, regardless of our cultural settings.

