

I have followed the New Zealand flag debate with interest, intrigued by the opportunity it presents to redefine us as a nation, both for ourselves and in the eyes of the world. This proposal outlines several aspects which seem crucial to approaching such a challenging assignment, followed by a suggested design solution.

### **Simplicity**

The flag needs to be straightforward. One test that has been touted is that kiwi schoolkids should be able to draw the flag easily, which is a great quantifier. Simple does not mean naive – the goal should be for a design solution which represents New Zealand's identity as a vibrant and progressive country.

### **Clarity**

The flag needs to signal clearly what New Zealand is about as a country and a people. In terms of design, the symbolism should be clear – but a reflection of a multifaceted nation, not simply an amalgam of its visual motifs.

### **Resonance**

Resonance refers to emotional qualities – what a flag evokes for the public. The flag must find its place in the hearts and minds of New Zealanders. It must speak to New Zealanders of all generations and origins.

### **Quality**

It is crucial that the design solution is of the highest quality, which is reflected both in the concept behind the design, and the execution of the idea. The international family of flags is characterised by the use of simple geometric arrangements and bold colours, providing certain design constraints. Rather than be limited by these parameters, this encourages the development of a simple, sophisticated design solution.



In developing a new flag design, it is apparent that the solution will lie in an adaptation of design elements which are synonymous with New Zealand. Essentially all design proposals submitted to the NZ Flag website have followed this notion, exploring variations and combinations of established national symbols: the kiwi, the silver fern, the koru, the southern cross. My approach is slightly different: I suggest that we should adopt a design for a national flag which already exists – albeit within a different context. My suggestion:

## adopt Tino Rangitiratanga as our national flag

This is not a new idea, but it is one which seems to have been dismissed too readily – and I believe it is an option which should be explored more fully.

Tino Rangitiratanga is a simple, evocative piece of design, designed in 1990 by Hiraina Marsden, Jan Smith and Linda Munn. It embodies a symbolism relevant to all New Zealanders.

“As a whole, the design represents the balance of the forces of nature, masculine and feminine, active and passive, potential and physical, air and earth. It can also be interpreted as symbolising the white cloud rolling across the face of the land, as in the Maori name for New Zealand, Aotearoa.”<sup>1</sup>

It is widely acknowledged that New Zealanders' love of this land, 'our' land, is what we all share, and lies at the heart of what it means to be a New Zealander. As Russell Brown observes in *Great New Zealand Argument* 'New Zealanders not only love the land, they believe(d) it to hold their essence.'<sup>2</sup>

Tino Rangitiratanga is an expression of this essence: the relationship between this land, its spirit and people.



images: Jacinda Torrance

<sup>1</sup> James Dignan, source: Otago University Student Newspaper The Critic, Issue 10, April 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Russell Brown, source: *Great New Zealand Argument: Ideas about Ourselves*, Edited & Introduced by Russell Brown, Activity Press, 2005.



This proposal presents Tino Rangitiratanga in a new colour palette. The intention is to look at the design with fresh eyes, to highlight its design qualities, and make a break from the strong emotional associations of the original red and black version. The new colours also offer direct associations with the New Zealand landscape and echo recent identity design which represent New Zealand with fresh, natural colours. (eg. the Tourism New Zealand logo). It becomes a literal expression of the first view our ancestors had of New Zealand when arriving on its shores.

The symbolism of the original design still applies: (definitions courtesy. James Dignan)

**Blue stripe** represents Te Korekore, the realm of potential being. It thus symbolises the long darkness from which the earth emerged, as well as signifying Rangi – the heavens, a male, formless, floating, passive force.

**White stripe/koru form** represents Te Ao Marama, the realm of being and light. It symbolises the physical world, purity, harmony, enlightenment and balance. The spiral-like koru represents the unfolding of new life, hope for the future and the process of renewal. This is also a representation of the 'Land of the Long White Cloud' translation of Aotearoa.

**Green stripe** represents Te Whei Ao, coming into being. It symbolises Papatuanuku, the earth-mother, the sustainer of all living things, and thus both the land and active forces.

Tino Rangatiratanga embodies a simplicity, resonance, clarity and quality of execution which is a prerequisite for any new flag design for New Zealand. It sits comfortably in the international language of flags, providing a unique and innovative twist on the conventional 'tri-colour' relationship of coloured horizontal stripes, with the incorporation of the distinctive and recognisably New Zealand koru motif.

The proposal of a new colour palette is an open one – not intended to subvert or diminish the original design. Perhaps the two flags could be flown together or used independently, depending on the context. The emotion and spirit which is inherent in Tino Rangatiratanga has simply been recognised as a force for positivity.



Tino Rangatiratanga is a flag with a history, and until now, one intrinsically linked with Maori. However in its short life this symbolism has evolved significantly: initially synonymous solely with Maori self-determination, it now serves as a banner for the recently-formed Maori Party, serving as a symbol of unity for Maori. It is a spirit of unity which could apply to all New Zealanders.

The New Zealand flag debate has arisen at a time when we are coming to terms with our past, and looking to our future as a nation. What better way to signal this spirit of reconciliation and new beginnings than by adopting Tino Rangatiratanga as our national flag?

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