

Your voice

Cultural insensitivity

Call me precious, but I found a passing comment made by the writer of 'Hurry, register now! ALIA 2004 Biennial Conference (*inCite*, September, p6) kind of offensive, both in its guilelessness (it's still so easy to do) and its flippancy. Of course it did fit right in with the jaunty tone but it's a fine line to tread between irony and offense. In this instance, the writer lost his or her footing.

The offending line?

'An opening ceremony where you can have a smoke without endangering your health.'

This is of course a reference to the Aboriginal smoking ceremony that follows the welcome to country.

Such a 'funny-ha-ha' description of a spiritual ritual thousands of years old, wrought from generations of people and their land, stories, songs, dances and language is politically,

socially and culturally ill-timed.

The writer is condensing an indigenous experience that has tremendous meaning to its performers to the worst kind of pun, not to mention tainting the significant meaning inherent in the gesture of providing such a ceremony for a conference (on Aboriginal land) for an audience that is predominantly non-Aboriginal.

I can only imagine the response of my mob in Aotearoa to see a 150-year-old haka put into the context of: 'a folk-dance where you can stick your tongue out at enormous Maori guys without getting thumped'.

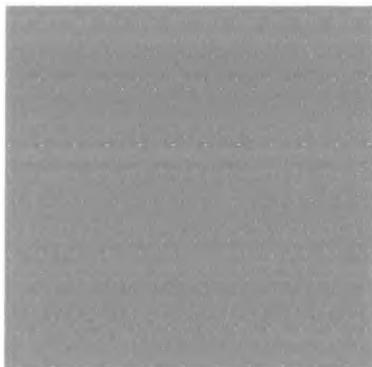
And for those of you who think to yourselves that I should lighten up — you might want to ponder on that idiom.

Lesley Ngatai

Your letters on any issue of relevance to the library and information sector are welcomed.

All letters should be addressed to the *inCite* editor and may be e-mailed to incite@alia.org.au, or faxed to 02 6282 2249, or posted to: Your voice, ALIA, PO Box 6335, Kingston 2604. Please include your name and postal address with your letter or e-mail.

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