



Dutkansearvi dieđalaš áigečála

Volume 4, Issue 1, 2020

Publisher

Sámi language and culture association

Editors

Ellen Marie Jensen, Mere Kepa & Pirjo Kristiina Virtanen

ISSN 2489-7930

One of life's great privileges: Conceptualising Coexistence in Retreat

T. Mere. A. Kepa

The University of Auckland & NorthTec, Te Tai Tokerau Wananga

Epigraph

Te reo Maori me nga tikanga

I roto i tenei tuhituhinga, ka tuhi ahau oku whakaaro e pa ana ki te oranga tahi, oku hanga, oku whakawhitinga korero me nga punanga tuhituhi i whakaturia e Nga Pae o Te Maramatanga (NPM), New Zealand's Maori Research Centre of Excellence (CoRE), in 2002. Mo tenei kai tuhi, ko te mea pai rawa atu ko te whakaaroaro i roto i nga tuhinga matauranga.

Lea faka-Tonga

'Oku ou tuku atu he fakamatalá ni 'a 'eku fakakaukau ki he 'nofo-'a-kāinga', fakataha mo e ngaahi talatalanoa, mo e a'usia na'a ku 'inasi ai mei he polokalama 'a e Nga Pae o Te Maramatanga (NPM) New Zealand's Maori Research Centre of Excellence (CoRE) 'i he 2002, na'e 'iloa ko e Writing Retreats, ko e fakatahataha 'a e kakai 'oku nau fai e ngaahi fekumi mo e fakatotolo fakaako 'i he ngaahi mala'é, 'o nau talatalanoa, mo tohi, e ngaahi ngāue fakaako ko iá. Ko e taha eni e ngaahi monū'ia he mo'uí ni, kiate au, ko e Tangatawhenua, 'oku ou fa'u, mo tohi e ngaahi fakamatala kehekehe - ko 'ete 'i ha tūkunga 'oku te lava 'o tohi he tu'unga mo e founga 'oku fakaako, 'a e ngaahi fakakaukau 'oku te fehu'ia he nofó, mo fa'a fakalaulauloto ki ai.

Pakeha/English

In this narration, I write about my idea of coexistence, my experiences and dialogues at the writing retreats set up by Nga Pae o Te Maramatanga (NPM), New Zealand's Māori Research Centre of Excellence (CoRE), in 2002. For this Tangata Whenua writer, one of life's great privileges is the space in which to reflect critically on scholarly writing.

Introduction

When I awoke, in Takahiwai, Aotearoa, New Zealand, on Tuesday, 1 October 2019, I sensed the ephemeral bewilderment that on occasions comes with being conveyed, too quickly, from the northern to the southern hemisphere. The reflection that the bedroom window and the light the pane allows through the opening below the blind, are in unexpected places. The morning


sounds of the First Indigenous Writing Retreat hosted by the University of Helsinki at the Gilbbsjávri/Kilpisjärvi Biological Station—the silence, a sudden chorus of birdsong in the twigs and branches of the yellow, silver, and black trees on the mountainside, the occasional voice, and the sound of a vehicle drifting in from the linear undulation to and from Norway—either are absent or sound different. That morning, in Aotearoa, in the unfamiliarity of my different surroundings, I heard the familiar creaks and sighs of my home, the silence broken by the birdsong of the Kotare [Kingfisher] in the Native flax garden and the orchard on the green grassed hillside; the deepening voices of male teenagers drifting up from the narrow, country road below where they waited for the school bus. I imagined myself asleep, I was confused, although, in a minute or two I realised that I was in Takahiwai beside the harbour. I was home.

Once out of bed, I pulled up the blind covering the generous window. I had been exhausted when I eventually went to bed the previous night. I had forgotten that I was at home and was looking, not at the mountain of stone at Gilbbsjávri/Kilpisjärvi, but onto the land where the tribe of Te Parawhau has been living for over a thousand years. That makes a difference being Tangata Whenua [the Peoples of the land]. I feel secure. I belong. I am Indigenous, a Native woman and I apologise to no one. One of life's great privileges is to be a descendant of the first parents of Aotearoa, Papatuanuku [Earth mother] and Ranginui [Sky father], as well as a scholarly writer when everything is still happening simultaneously, and activities and events are overlapping.

Importantly, in the University, those people in positions of economic power should enable Indigenous Peoples to write with and among other Indigenous Peoples, together with non-Indigenous peoples that are younger and older, both novice and experienced researchers. Through the privilege of writing in the Arctic land, inhabited since the Stone Age by the Indigenous Sámi people, at the same time as being a descendant of the youngest of all the Indigenous populations, comes an ancient and ambitious conception of coexistence.

Setting up Decolonising Research Structures

I am writing this narration because the retreaters at the First Indigenous Writing Retreat in Finnish Sápmi are writing a special journal issue together. For that reason, exclusion, colonisation and decolonization; revolution and transformation; equity, diversity, and inclusion



are words commanding attention in the Indigenous scholarly publication (Jackson 2019; Ihimaera & Hereaka 2019; Smith 1999). Nowadays, exclusion is no longer based on tribe, more through economic exclusion; those who suffer most economically also happen to be Indigenous language and cultural minority groups. Consider for a moment that my colleague, Dr Linita Manu'atu, and I would not have attended the Retreat at Gilbbsjávri/Kilpisjärvi Biological Station if we were not invited. Through the invitation we, together with others in the sanctuary, made the First Retreat, Indigenous and international, more diverse culturally, and broader in experience and age. Although Linita and I played no role in arranging the invitation, the venue, and moving about, we contributed to creating the writing programme and telling our own stories. The University of Helsinki can now tick the approval box for their commitment to Indigenous Peoples and equity; for creating a space of privilege for the groups of people of diverse languages and cultures to ponder, dialogue, and write (Kepa & Stephens, 2016). I call the invitation to the retreat revolutionary, decolonising, and transformative.

In organising the narration, I begin with my thinking about coexistence; then, my experiences and dialogues among the Doctorate candidates, the emerging, and experienced researchers who attended the Writing Retreats set up by Nga Pae o Te Maramatanga (NPM), New Zealand's Maori Research Centre of Excellence (CoRE), in 2002 (Kepa, 2010). For a Tangata Whenua or an Indigenous Maori writer, in retreat from the mundane world, one of life's great privileges is the space in which to reflect critically, with others, about scholarly writing.

As an art, writing is all about creativity; or, as the Maori author, Whiti Hereaka, has described Indigenous Maori writers in the text entitled, *Purakau. Maori Myths Retold*, (Ihimaera & Hereaka 2019, 17):

We are creatures of words ...

We are creatures of imagination.

We live on edges of dreams and the margins of thought.

We live in the whisper of the page.


In consequence, Indigenous scholarly authors will ponder on their topic of interest at the same time as being confronted with the knowledge that the University may be a dispiriting and lonely place for them. In New Zealand, Tangata Whenua know that Maori language and culture are

not revered and that our tribal histories are fragmented. As scholars, moreover, we are confronted with policies that disadvantage us, a lack of qualified, knowledgeable people, and funding to research with Indigenous communities, and we are faced with few likeminded people with whom to dialogue to regain a spirit of satisfaction and a sense of vitality. We are human beings after all with a purpose in life to change all of this dissatisfaction through writing theory and practice.

For Maori scholars who have been involved in setting up research structures in Aotearoa, New Zealand, such as NPM, first hosted by the University of Auckland, the pellucid experience is that groups of people—local, national, and global—have contributed their similar and different knowledges and higher qualifications to the programme. Creating the infrastructure has taken the peoples' faith, resilience, and years under the strong intellectual leadership of the founding Joint Directors—Professors Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Michael Walker. In the New Zealand tertiary education sector, NPM has been a spiritual, tribal, intellectual, international, and practical achievement, and primarily the product of transformative changes in belief systems and approaches to research and writing (Kepa & Stephens 2016).

The principle of the NPM retreats has been more than a solitary life of writing; the function has been to enable a coexistence of scholars to inform, to explain, to communicate ideas, to create new ways of carrying out research by and with Indigenous peoples; to amuse, to entertain, to persuade, to rouse emotions, to communicate deep emotional experiences, and to provide know-how. For the scholars, the retreats were an intimate contemplation of complexities, new and important relationships, and hope in our everyday coming-to-know. In my participation in 16 retreats, there is no doubt that the scholars have written papers about their research. The importance of the publication varied from writer to writer. Without a doubt, the sanctuaries became a highly anticipated event in the NPM calendar in which Maori, international Indigenous, and non-Indigenous scholars contemplated and dialogued about what remains of Indigenous knowledges, wrote together, and individually about what happened in their research and institutions.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's notion of "kaupapa" [theme] deepened the creation of the CoRE (Smith 2016, xii). Her insights included the kaupapa (1) to create a strong community of Maori doctoral candidates and a cohort of researchers; (2) to foster critical researchers to become




research assessors, editors, and peer reviewers; (3) to unbolt possibilities of funding and support; (4) and, to embolden Maori scholars to influence government policies, such as its Vision Maturanga Capability Fund. The policy has been organised by the Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment to unlock the wisdom and innovation promise of Maori language and culture.

Nevertheless, while individual Maori researchers may be successful in conventional terms of research, many of the researchers who prefer to work with Maori communities from a Maori knowledge base, using Maori language, concepts, and researching priorities that matter to Maori people, struggle to make their way within their disciplines, through the maze of expectations from institutions, funding agencies, and their own communities. Accordingly, inside and out of the NPM retreats, the kaupapa of collective responsibility and leadership has provided compelling mentoring and formidable support in the research system.

In presentations and publications all over the world, Smith has clarified that to begin to conceptualise a community of Maori scholars requires more than one individual who identifies as Maori and as a scholar. The coexistence is a collective of resilient Maori scholars that chooses to write together across many different boundaries, disciplines, institutions, and experiences around a sense of cooperative purpose and shared values, such as to promote Indigenous scholarship. Two decades ago, there were so few Maori in that position that Smith has referred to them as the “ones, the one Maori here and the one Maori there” (Smith 2016, xii). The development of the first NPM was a gathering of the ones and the twos of Maori scholars concealed in the corners and side lined in their departments and institutions. Sometimes they were keeping quiet in public places but were not recognised as Maori and did not work in more curriculum focussed areas such as Maori Studies, Maori education, or Maori health.


The situation of being one of a few Maori scholars is common to many other Indigenous, minority language and cultural groups, and non-traditional scholars in the higher education system. In the broader context, being alienated, feeling alone and having to represent a whole group of people who are generally stereotyped by the University is a friendless place. What often has made the situation worse is that the University is the very place that has postulated the Maori experience, where the experts on Maori language and culture have abided, and where



the authoritative voice on Maori identity, on being Maori has been tolerated. This desolate place has been fraught with pressures, discourses, and ways of functioning that constantly undermine the rich expertise that many of the Maori scholars have in their own disciplinary areas. Stereotypes of Maori not being good enough, of being in the University because they are Maori, of not being a valid scholar, of taking the easy route to academic achievement are old tales that are always present in social discourse. Institutions of higher education have been and, some will say, continue to be precarious places for a tribal Maori with an advanced degree. Coming together under the NPM umbrella was not the first attempt to do so but it came at a time, in 2002, where almost 60 Maori scholars could be gathered together. The action became an exciting way to envision a community where Maori scholars from different disciplines could come together, participate, and work on coexisting ambitions.

A community conveys a sense of belonging, of having some form of shared values and understandings of working together. A community has its elders and young ones entering the collective. Scholars, like other professional groups, have shared professional needs and aspirations but a community of Maori scholars has some added features that make it *more* than a professional network and *more* than a community of practice. Maori scholars have been committed, also, to making a conscious and transformational difference for Maori people. They tend to carry the responsibilities of their own extended family and community. They may bear in their body and soul the legacies of the colonial experience and they may also be driven by a desire to put things right. Not all scholars in this community are interested in politics but they are often made aware of the politics of being Maori by being constantly washed with the pessimistic, not even amusing, views of their colleagues and their students.

Through NPM, the means to become a scholarly community received a significant boost of support. Focussing on championing Maori with a Doctoral qualification, enhancing Maori research through funding, creating ways to work together in writing retreats or on research projects started this sense of community. Interesting outcomes have emerged from these early efforts, such as an increased number of Maori with a Doctorate, a number of glass ceilings have been shattered as discipline by discipline Maori began to emerge through the doctoral and research ranks. There are genuinely transdisciplinary collaborations, and the emergence of matauranga Maori or Maori knowledge as a body of research that transcends disciplines



requires dynamic leadership and a highly engaged generation of younger scholars who have formed in the community.

A strength of Maori scholarship is the sense of ambition and commitment on making a difference in some way for Maori people more broadly. The scholars come from different disciplines, perspectives, and paradigms and not all of which are effortless bedfellows. What has made the community work is the commitment, support, and respect for the legacy of our earlier scholars, such as, the late Apirana Ngata, Peter Buck Te Rangihiroa, and Ranginui Walker; as well as, the leadership of the present and next generation, and the scholars yet to be born.

Experiences and dialogues in the NPM writing retreats

In practice, seventeen writing retreats were funded by Nga Pae o te Maramatanga from 2006-2015 (Kepa & Stephens 2016). The first retreat was held at Solway Hotel in Masterton. For a little tourism gossip, Masterton is a large town in the Wellington Region of New Zealand and the seat of the Masterton District Council. It is the largest town in the Wairarapa, a region separated from Wellington, NZ's capital city, by the Remutaka ranges. It was established in 1854. The final sanctuary was held in September 2015 at Huka Falls Resort, Tauponui a Tia, officially known as Taupo. The town is on the shore of beautiful Lake Taupo which occupies the caldera of the Taupo volcano in the centre of the North Island of New Zealand. It is the seat of the Taupo District Council and lies in the southern Waikato Region.


There have been people from all over the world invited to take part in all of the retreats. There have been scholars that the retreaters knew and new people to meet, bringing with them their language, their research projects, their special knowledges, their wit, their distinctive prolonged greetings, and manner of leave-taking. The retreats were always full of activity and life as people began to talk, to agree, to disagree, and to write about their research interest.

The retreaters arrived from the disciplines of Education, Maori Studies, Indigenous Studies, Anthropology, Psychology, Sociology, Gerontology, Public Health, Medicine, and Geology, among others. They came from academic institutions located in Auckland, Hamilton, Whakatane, Palmerston North, Whanganui, Wellington, Canterbury, and Otago in Aotearoa; from the Kingdom of Tonga, Nepal, India, China, Canada, and the USA. All of them brought

collective values on research and education to the sanctuary of scholarship and dialogue. The seven to eight days retreats were held twice yearly, in Winter at Masterton, in Winter and Summer in Omapere until December 2011, in Winter and Summer in Rotorua city, at Raglan in the Summer of 2012 and in the Winter of 2015 in Taupo all of which are located in the North Island of Aotearoa. Every day, the researchers were engaged in contemplating and writing scholarly articles, chapters in books, books, submissions, research proposals, essays, reviews, technical reports, funding applications, and cultural reports. They discussed, at length, areas of shared research interest with one or more new colleagues and shared texts and ideas in a particular research area with colleagues. The seminars, held every evening, were cooperative attempts through dialogue-without-end to share insights and experiences to common problems of frustration, irritation, anxiety, alienation, despair, and anger in research and life in the Academy.

At the 2011 retreat in Raglan, the purpose to write and to dialogue with other senior researchers underwent a change that included training a small number of doctoral candidates and postdoctoral fellows; some of the Maori scholars discussed community-based research projects with their principal investigators. A few of the retreaters arrived, at intervals, throughout the sanctuary, stayed for a short period and departed. Being close to the university of one of the writers added to the sense of coming and going. The people's movements disturbed the sense of belonging and inclusion, both strong features of the earlier retreats. The presence of young children, wives of the husbands, and partners was a new direction and the practice would be continued in the retreats to come. Traditionally, their inclusion is understood as the important Maori link of whakapapa (shared ancestry).

At the retreat in Taupo, the community of scholars, although small, in comparison to the 16 previous retreats, was very successful because seven (7) of them had attended most of the retreats. The scholars were published, some widely, most of us were well-known to each other, and we were all Maori. They were free of fear to share their ideas, experience, and knowledge about their fields of research to their own benefit, along with promoting learning by the three (3) doctoral candidates attending the retreat with their supervisors. A notable feature of the retreat was that most of the scholars were sort of disabled by exhaustion and lassitude on arrival due to the dispiriting struggles that had been confronted in their places of work. The antidote was the spirit of good humour that they shared, particularly, after dinner. Of course, at the end



of the sanctuary, when they returned to their participation in the New Zealand economy, their condition of overtiredness had been dissipated by the good company, conversation, and food; walking and jogging, and the bracing air of Winter in Taupo, and the proposal for a book. The satisfying feature of the retreat was that, once again, a community of scholars had agreed that their workplaces were toxic to Maori. One of the professors among them was able to shed a little light on the next reiteration of Nga Pae o te Maramatanga; for the most part, however, in 2015, the scholars clearly remained in the dark about research structures and possibilities to come.

Personally, sharing living space with a colleague from a tribal Academy included exciting conversations about what had led to our resignations from our respective education institutions and what was happening in our lives as public academics. These conversations led to a discussion of several writing projects in which we might share our thoughts and experience of research and writing retreats. That's how we came to publish the book, *Diversity in Community: Indigenous Scholars Writing*, in 2016.

In 2008 from June 13 to 19, the fifth writing retreat was held at the Quality Resort Heritage in the tourist city of Rotorua. In that year, the community of scholars from New Zealand and international Universities, tribal Academies, Health agencies, Crown Research Institutes, and Independent Maori owned Research Institutes working in quantitative and qualitative studies retreated together. The retreat provided an international forum for research and practice across disciplines, organisations, and interests through writing, round-table discussions in addition to opening-up interactive network relations.


At the six (6) day sanctuary, the scholars wrote on an array of topics, with a particular focus on their own research interest. Discussions, in the evening, took place around the role of the retreat in the overall responsibility of Nga Pae o te Maramatanga for research excellence in the development and advancement of Maori in the New Zealand and global economy. This Winter retreat was thought-provoking and relevant, and there was an inspirational and robust line-up of leaders to preside over the round table discussions about personal writing plans, the publication process, and, specifically, about *AlterNative an International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* published by the CoRE. Indeed, two members of Alternative's editorial committee met with four scholars who were attending the retreat from Ho'okulaiwi Centre of

the University of Hawaii, Manoa. The editors agreed to publish twelve (12) Native Hawaiian scholars' articles, on the condition that the writers would provide an account of cutting-edge research of interest to teachers, researchers and policymakers, to enable a fresh and informed Native Hawaiian perspective on revitalizing Hawaiian language and culture. Importantly, the supplement provided a medium for the Native Hawaiian writers to publish political matters in theory and practice. Of course, the best way to enhance education through high quality writing is to establish an international journal. Formerly known as *AlterNative a Journal of Indigenous Scholarship*, now, *AlterNative a Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, the journal has swiftly gained momentum as a formidable international research publication to authenticate research by Maori and international Indigenous scholars.

Closing remarks

My writing is my Native birdsong, my Maori, southern hemisphere writing. Only with reading, thinking, talking, listening, practice, and publication can I ever hope to write onto the page the ambitious conception of coexistence of the descendants of the ancient and youngest of all the Indigenous populations. Through my narration of the NPM writing retreats, the most distinguished pioneer of globalised Indigenous Writing Retreats, I have brought together some of the coexisting voices that have boosted and exposed Indigenous People's scholarly writing. What has endured of the principles and functions as NPM has changed? Post NPM, on the other side of the earth—where it is yesterday—a community of Sámi, Indigenous, and non-Indigenous peoples from institutions of education have interacted with each other in peace and harmony and engaged in intellectual debate that has excited and encouraged the scholars to extend theory and practice through writing this journal issue. The University of Helsinki's First Indigenous Writing Retreat is a triumph of the ambitious concept of co-existence.

Creating the University of Helsinki's First Indigenous Writing Retreat is one aspect of encouraging and validating Indigenous candidates, emerging and experienced researchers' academic writing. Scholarly writing involves sophisticated intellectual skills and understanding the Indigenous as well as the non-Indigenous cultures in which we live, taking them apart, deepening them, then rewriting them. At the heart of the writing retreat is the retreaters' trust that insights and experiences, research skills, and knowledges are for sharing and these skills and qualities are enriched by our own language and culture.



In the retreats-to-come, Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars will enter a tolerant and tranquil place where the ancient spirit of goodness will surely prevail. In the years to come, the intangible spiritual tranquillity springing from the retreaters' intense trust in people's goodwill and creativity to write will continue. Without a doubt, to describe Indigenous Peoples in retreat from the mundane world as being a strong community of scholars writing in coexistence will be one of life's great privileges. I pass this narration on to the retreaters in the First Indigenous Writing Retreat and to those who follow and are yet to follow.

Acknowledgements

The contributions of Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Michael Walker founding directors of Nga Pae o te Maramatanga, New Zealand's Maori Centre of Research Excellence (NPM), Marilyn McPherson, NPM's Research Director, the scholars that participated in the NPM writing retreats, 2006-2014 and the First Indigenous Writing Retreat, Arctic Sámi land 2019. The contributions by Dr Waiora Port, Morag Pepe, and Dr Linita Manu'atu for the epigraph in te reo Maori me nga tikanga, and Lea faka-Tonga.

References

- Ihimaera, Witi & Whiti Hereaka. 2019. *Purakau. Maori Myths Retold*. New Zealand: Vintage, Penguin.
- Jackson, Moana. 2019. "The Hope of Decolonization". In *the Handbook of Indigenous Education*, Elizabeth A. McKinley and Linda. T. Smith (eds.), 101–110. Singapore: Springer. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3899-0>.
- Kepa, Mere. 2010. "Cultural fragments. Concerning Maori research development." *He Pukenga Korero* 9(2): 2–28.
- Kepa, Mere & Cheryl Stephens (eds.). 2016. *Diversity in community: Indigenous scholars writing*. Wellington: NZCER Press, New Zealand Council for Educational Research.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 1999. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 1st edn. Dunedin: University of Otago Press.
- . 2016. "On becoming a community of Maori scholars". In *Diversity in community: Indigenous scholars writing*, Kepa, Mere & Cheryl Stephens (eds.), xii. Wellington: NZCER Press, New Zealand Council for Educational Research.