Storying Māori data sovereignty

The intersections of whānau narratives and sociopolitical theorising

Te Atawhai o Te Ao

Independent Māori Institute for Environment & Health

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Author
Kiri West

Edited by
Dr Rāwiri Tinirau

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Kiri West

Editor
Dr Rāwiri Tinirau

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Photograph courtesy of Te Atawhai o Te Ao

He rārangi upoko

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He mihi

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge Te Atawhai o Te Ao for their support with getting this paper through to publication. This paper is the first to be published from my doctoral research, and I am beyond grateful that my first post-doctoral publication will be platformed in this space.

To my whānau, nestled in the following pages are stories of hope and resilience. These are our stories, they are us and we are them. Nan, you expressed your love and passion for our whenua in your memoirs, and it is the greatest privilege to traverse time and place to theorise alongside you. Through your storytelling, I have gained a deeper understanding of what it means to be a mokopuna of Hauraki, and my responsibility to begin the journey of returning home.

He kōrero wāwahi

Foreword

Tēnā kautau i runga i ngā tini āhuatanga o te wā.

As Māori, data sovereignty has long been present in our traditions and tikanga as we are ever-conscious of the protection and preservation of mātauranga-ā-iwi, kōrero-ā-iwi, and reo-ā-iwi. Although this kaupapa is far from new, the growing online landscape with big data and artificial intelligence present new challenges.

Kiri West (Ngāti Marutūahu, Ngāti Whaanga), in her research, joins the conversation on data and shares the complexity of this space, recognising: the value of data which can hold our mātauranga, reo, and kōrero; our responsibility to protect our taonga; and, the ubiquity of data changing what is and is not in our control. Here, Kiri hails the importance of data policy and data sovereignty to Māori—ko tā Te Matua Tangata, ko te mana tuatoru, ko te mana motuhake!

Kiri uses our Māori way of storytelling, sharing her story of being stripped of her data sovereignty during her research, to tuku kōrero around the significance of data sovereignty for us all. Kiri, in this powerful autoethnography, simultaneously illustrates the significance of data sovereignty for Māori, gives meaning to her experience, and redefines her story as an act of data sovereignty.

Kiri's research adds insight and offers fresh commentary to our He Kokonga Ngākau Research Programme, further defining our projects as their own acts of data sovereignty. The Whakapapa Research Project, in asking what is whānau research, sees our whānau researchers lead the storytelling of whānau narratives. The Whakamanu Research Project serves as a space for our hapū to create the protection and preservation methodologies for their marae taonga. Finally, the Whakarauora Research Project results in the restoration of traditional knowledge pertaining to fishing practices and our tamariki mokopuna inheriting this mātauranga-ā-hapū.

Kiri's writing here has been produced as part of our He Kokonga Ngākau Fellowships, an initiative that seeks to support and contribute to the body of knowledge of Māori intergenerational trauma and recovery. Kiri's research excellence no doubt exceeds this objective and we acknowledge her contribution to our research priorities and projects.

He kura ka huna, he kura ka whākina.

Dr Rāwiri Tinirau

He kupu whakarāpopoto

Abstract

Indigenous data sovereignty has gained significant academic and political traction following the seminal *Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Toward an agenda* in 2016. Since then, in Aotearoa, we have seen commitments from universities, corporate entities, and the government to align data policies with Māori data sovereignty. Despite this rapid proliferation of ideas, it was my experience that many Māori who I spoke with in my day-to-day life did not know what data sovereignty was or why it might be important to them. In this paper, I reflect on how the sharing of whānau stories in my PhD became an opportunity for reclamation, for healing, and for the assertion of Māori data sovereignty. In doing so, this paper goes further to reflect on how my whānau stories helped me to better understand the value of my mahi and to be able to explain in real terms what data sovereignty means for Māori.

He kupu whakaūpoko

Introduction

> **My Great Grandmother once wrote a poem called 'Trust not the river'. In it she speaks of how a river 'beguilingly tranquil, glossily calm' can mask its dark undertows beneath a seemingly serene surface. She urges: 'be wary and watch the way that it flows', 'It can burst through its banks and rampaging goes'. As an Indigenous woman working in the field of data sovereignty, it can sometimes feel like I am being pulled around by the violent undertow of a serene-looking river. At a surface level, there is increasing enthusiasm from research institutions and policy sectors to align their data practices with Indigenous data sovereignty. Yet, beneath the surface, the river is a glut of BADDR data and information, creating the 5D statistical Indigene, overflowing, pulling me under and spitting me back out, every time slightly more dishevelled, more disoriented, with less firm ground to find my feet—where I could once touch the ground, now there is nothing. (adapted from my own original piece published in Rowe et al., 2022, p. 691)**

We live in a time where data is a pervasive feature of our social, political, and economic lives. The increasingly common analogous comparison of data to oil in the 'information economy' highlights the ways in which data is thought to be ubiquitous in the modern world (Rendgen, 2018; West et al., 2020) and arguably among the most powerful and valuable resources of the 21st century (Lupton, 2016). Data is collected daily and can contain the lived experiences of individuals, families, and communities, as well as the complex social and natural environments within which we live (Kukutai & Cormack, 2019; West et al., 2020). Furner (2015) notes that we talk now about big data, linked data, open data, data governance, data infrastructure, data mining, data protection, data quality, data science, data visualisation, and data wrangling. In the few short years since Furner came up with his list, we now have a growing list of

linguistically blended words such as 'datafication' (Couldry & Yu, 2018; Kukutai & Cormack, 2019; Mascheroni, 2020) and 'dataveillance' (Couldry & Yu, 2018; Mascheroni, 2020; Zuboff, 2019), as well as concepts of critical relevance like Indigenous data sovereignty.

Heightened awareness of the omnipresence of data in contemporary settings, however, has not resulted in any conceptual clarity of what data is or is not (West et al., 2020). "Some technical terms are so ubiquitous and (apparently) unambiguous, that they almost become a transparent fluid: always used but never much reflected upon. Interestingly enough, the word "data" is such a term. It is an abstract, weightless and unidentified mass of numbers (mostly digitally encoded), with a potent influence on lives" (West, 2022, p.29). The ubiquity of data in our day-to-day lives seems to have given data a certain status of 'natural' and in many cases an eerie association with neutrality. Data are there, offered as a stable and static representation of the present, an unquestionable and unavoidable aspect of our lives from the moment we are born. To limit the ubiquity of data to contemporary contexts though is quite presumptuous and fails to recognise the long-standing traditions of data collection, storage, dissemination, and safekeeping practised by Indigenous peoples for time immemorial (Lovett et al., 2019; Rodriguez-Lonebear, 2016; Yap & Yu, 2016). What is unarguably distinctive in contemporary contexts though is the increasing technological capacity to realise the 'value' of data in what are often extractive, exploitative, and harmful ways.

Reflecting on my personal experience as a doctoral student, this paper is organised into three distinct sections. The first presents a brief overview of the key focus of my PhD, Māori (Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand) data sovereignty. The focus shifts in the second section to consider how I utilised storytelling to make sense of the relevance of my research for Māori. Finally, the third section offers a reflection on the potential for storytelling as a site of reclamation and re-imagining of acts of data sovereignty. As the reader, you will recognise that throughout this paper, sections of the text are highlighted; this purposeful shift in formatting illustrates stories and data that have been drawn from my doctoral thesis, including excerpts from my great-grandmother's memoirs.

What is Indigenous Data Sovereignty?

Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS) was a concept galvanised in 2016 with the publication of the seminal title Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Toward an agenda (Taylor & Kukutai, 2016). Drawing from broader discourses of ethics and Indigenous research methodologies, and building on the legacy of longstanding Indigenous sovereignty movements, IDS asserts the rights of Indigenous Peoples to have decision-making power, agency, and authority over data that exists and is (re)created about them. Underpinning IDS scholarship is the belief that data is not an artefact of the digital revolution as some may assume, but are in fact a key element of our histories as Indigenous Peoples (Rodriguez-Lonebear, 2016; West et al., 2020).

Māori Data Sovereignty (MDS) sits within the broader IDS movement and extends the theorising to consider the specific interests of Māori in Aotearoa. Strong advocacy for Māori data rights has been a critical aspect of the MDS movement to date and continues to be the primary function of Te Mana Raraunga (TMR - Māori Data Sovereignty Network), the MDS network in Aotearoa[1]. Working alongside TMR in the advocacy space is the Iwi Chairs Forum and the Data Iwi Leaders Group [ILG], more recently operating as Te Kāhui Raraunga (TKR - Advocacy group working alongside Te Mana Raraunga)[2]. The relationship between TMR and the TKR has largely been guided by the Mana-Mahi (Governance-Operations) framework, outlined in Te Mana Raraunga Charter (2016); the application of this model has allowed for the two groups to delineate their respective responsibilities and avoid overlap (Cormack et al., 2020; Sporle et al., 2021).

1. See https://www.temanararaunga.maori.nz.
2. See https://www.kahuiraraunga.io/.

Mana (Governance)	Mahi (Operations)
Whanaungatanga (Relationships)	*Whakapapa (Connections)*
Rangatiratanga (Self-determination)	*Manaakitanga (Protection)*
Kotahitanga (Collaboration)	*Kaitiakitanga (Guardianship)*

Table 1: Mana-Mahi framework (Te Mana Raraunga, 2016, p. 3)

Working in the 'Mana' space has primarily been the domain of TKR, who has had significant success in advocating for Māori governance over Māori data, including actively engaging in national policy developments. Of note is the Mana Ōrite relationship agreement between TKR and Stats NZ (Sporle et al., 2021). Mahi, in this framework, houses the principles relevant to operations including whakapapa, manaakitanga, and kaitiakitanga. TMR has been at the forefront of carving out theoretical spaces, defining key concepts, and socialising MDS across the data eco-system through hui (meetings) and wānanga (discussion; traditional form of learning), as well as advocating for Māori rights and interests through submissions and public position statements (Sporle et al., 2021).

Where can we see the proliferation of IDS in Aotearoa?

Top-down responses including legislative action can be glacial, particularly if the focus is on creating or adapting formalised legislative levers like new laws. However, the combined efforts of TMR and TKR have resulted in a process of policy-setting by action. In a political environment characterised by barriers and limitations and associated with a slow-moving bureaucracy, government-funded entities and large research institutions (namely universities) are increasingly revising their data access policies to align with the ideologies of Te Tiriti (short for Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Māori language version of the Treaty of Waitangi) and, by extension, MDS. In illustrating this, in 2018, the Health Research Council in Aotearoa (HRC) acknowledged existing datasets as taonga (tangible and/or intangible treasures) and accepted the responsibility that they, alongside HRC-mandated ethics committees, have to assist in the assessment of risk in research. Within this, they also committed to reassuring the public that access to the collective taonga, that is the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI), is governed according to high ethical standards (Health Research Council of New Zealand, 2018). In 2020, Ngā Tikanga Paihere Framework was formalised as the primary mechanism for governing access to Māori data in New Zealand's IDI[3]. The development of Ngā Tikanga Paihere included input from various members of TMR and Stats NZ. Some universities are already signalling a shift towards higher data standards for their institutions. In the strategic document, Taumata Teitei for example, The University of Auckland indicated an intention to become a 'Māori Data Sovereignty organisation' (2020, p. 4).

In a final example of the proliferation of MDS in Aotearoa, building in 2021, the Waitangi Tribunal released the WAI 2522 report in which they put forward the Tribunal's position on whether data is a taonga. In the report, the Tribunal drew the connection between data and mātauranga (knowledge) noting that "data can record mātauranga, and mātauranga also informs and generates data" (Waitangi Tribunal, 2021, p. 52). There is already an existing Tribunal jurisprudence that recognises mātauranga as a taonga as well as the responsibilities of the Crown to ensure active protection of mātauranga. In 1999, claimants of WAI 718, the *Wananga Capital Establishment Report*, noted that whare wānanga (tertiary education institutions, traditionally these were higher houses of learning) were important sites for the preservation, protection, and transmission of mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) and te reo Māori (the Māori language) and should therefore be protected as such (Waitangi Tribunal, 1999). In this case, the Tribunal found that:

> **There can be no doubt that te reo Māori and Mātauranga Māori are highly valued and irreplaceable taonga for New Zealand. These taonga exist nowhere else. The Crown has a duty to actively protect these taonga. (Waitangi Tribunal, 1999, p. 50)**

3. The IDI is a platform with the capacity to link datasets spanning multiple domains. The IDI was launched by Statistics New Zealand in 2014 as a 'one-stop shop' for researchers (Gulliver et al., 2018) to "gain insight into our society and economy… [and] help answer questions about complex issues that affect New Zealanders" (Stats NZ, 2020 para.1).

In 2011, the WAI 262, *Ko Aotearoa tēnei* report, reaffirmed the Crown's responsibility to actively support kaitiaki (guardians, custodians) in the protection of mātauranga Māori and taonga works[4] noting:

> **There is no doubt that Mātauranga Māori and taonga works are treasured things. This wording fits with both the subject matter and an approach consistent with Māori custom. It allows for Mātauranga Māori and taonga works to be shared, provided the kaitiaki retain an appropriate level of authority and control over the sharing. This allows kaitiaki to protect the integrity of the Mātauranga or taonga work. It also allows them, in appropriate situations, to control at least in some measure the use and development of these things. (Waitangi Tribunal, 2011, p. 44)**

In light of this established recognition by the Tribunal that mātauranga Māori is a taonga and the connection between data and mātauranga, the WAI 2522 report found that:

> **We are not able to say whether all data is taonga. Rather, we recognise that, from a te ao Māori perspective, the way that the digital domain is governed and regulated has important potential implications for the integrity of the Māori knowledge system, which is a taonga. (Waitangi Tribunal, 2021, p. 53)**

The Tribunal's position here aligns with data being positioned as a "potential taonga in relation to its utility, through technology or usefulness to the collective" (Dewes, 2017, p.14). This understanding does not universally categorise data as taonga but supports and allows for all data to be considered as taonga.

How did this align with my experience of talking about data sovereignty?

Despite the relatively rapid proliferation of MDS discourse across public and private sectors as well as at the iwi (tribe, nation) level, general awareness of MDS continues to be limited. Currently, there is little research that specifically captures the extent to which MDS is understood or practised by Māori. Limited accessible knowledge of MDS amongst Māori was something I observed frequently as a wahine Māori (Māori woman) researching data sovereignty, often in the context of social interactions with friends and family and through my teaching at the tertiary level. What I learnt in these exchanges is that even though I was spending all my time contemplating the huge impact and influence that data is having on our day-to-day lives—both in its minutiae and in large-scale decision-making—data sovereignty is not conceptually relevant to most people. Most people have no idea that the IDI exists, most are not aware of the extent to which automated technologies are making important decisions about their access to services, and most people (myself included) admitted to accepting all cookies, all privacy policies, and all terms and conditions (without reading them) to be able to participate in their online activities.

My observations were and are important sites for learning and resulted in radically altering the direction of my doctoral research. It became increasingly clear to me that in order for MDS to be impactful at a policy level, it must first be meaningful for Māori at flaxroots levels. The challenge then was around understanding how to articulate the key issues of data sovereignty in a way that held relevance for Māori. At the same time that I was navigating the challenges of meaning-making in my doctoral research, there were also significant shifts occurring in my personal life that sharpened my focus and gave meaning to MDS beyond an academic perspective. It was through the process of applying for an extension of my doctoral scholarship that I came to understand the ways in which data sovereignty issues manifest in our everyday lives and the power of storytelling to articulate these realities.

4. Taonga works were defined as the "tangible and intangible expressions of Māori artistic and cultural traditions, founded in and reflecting the body of knowledge and understanding known as Mātauranga Māori" (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, n.d., para. 2).

Writing the self into the research findings is one way of actively engaging in critical reflexivity and negotiating the "push and pull between and among analysis and evocation, personal experience and larger social, cultural and political concerns" (Adams & Jones, 2008, p. 373). Autoethnography does not simply describe an event as it happened, its purpose is to "extract meaning from experience rather than to depict experience exactly as it was lived" (Bochner, 2000, p. 270). Adams and Jones (2008) describe it as "an effort to set a scene, tell a story, and create a text that demands attention and participation; makes witnessing and testifying possible; and puts pleasure, difference, and movement into productive conversation" (p. 375). NunatuKavut researcher, Julie Bull (2020), notes that autoethnographic inquiry requires the researcher to be brave and honest in the sharing of personal stories. This, Bull says, is an act of self-determination. Autoethnography has also been described as a style of self-narrative where the narrator looks back at their past through the lens of the present (Bochner, 2000) putting the "autobiographical and personal" in conversation with the "cultural and social" (Adams & Jones, 2008, pp. 374–375) and presenting a counter 'na(rra)tive' (Bull, 2020, p.91).

While the self is centred in the practice of autoethnography, Indigenous storywork begins with the assertion that stories do not belong to one person (Whiteduck, 2013). They are part of a collective memory, as Bull (2020) puts it, "when I tell my story, I am also telling stories about my family, my ancestors, my lands, and this comes with responsibilities" (p. 90). I acknowledge the responsibilities and accountabilities I have to my whānau (family), my tūpuna (ancestor(s)), and my whenua (land) in my research and I use storywork as an act of reclamation of our collective rights to Māori data sovereignty. Taking on the wisdom of Sium and Ritskes, I consider that "if stories are archives of collective pain, suffering and resistance, then to speak them is to heal; to believe in them is to reimagine the world" (Sium & Ritskes, 2013, p. V). The sharing of stories in my research was and is, therefore, purposeful; it is about demonstrating the links between broad concepts and theories and real people, it is about highlighting that Māori data sovereignty is not an abstract concept, but a living breathing reality.

My ability to engage in doctoral study was largely facilitated through my access to a scholarship. I relied on the income from my scholarship to support me through my studies and supplemented this income with work as well as support from government schemes such as tax credits. The precarious nature of employment in institutional settings meant I lived with heightened levels of stress throughout the duration of my doctoral studies. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the progress of my research and I had to apply for an extension to my doctoral scholarship. Below is the explanation and justification I submitted to the University to plead my case for an extension of my scholarship to allow me to complete my doctoral studies:

> **When I started my PhD, I was in a relatively secure position with my whānau and mahi. I was able, in the first year, to maintain good progress with my research, including being an active member of relevant research networks, contributing to research publications, and working on my provisional year review (PYR) documentation.**
>
> **Following the successful completion of my PYR, I have experienced a series of significant and traumatic life events which have impacted the progress of my studies. These events include, but are not limited to, separation from my spouse and father of my daughter, family illness and death, relationship [involving] intimate partner violence, miscarriage, PTSD, and anxiety, all in the context of a global pandemic.**
>
> **Aside from the immediate trauma and suffering that these events have caused, there have been related ongoing issues which have had a continued effect on my ability to focus on my research.**
>
> **For example, separation from my spouse has meant that I have had to adjust to co-parenting, while balancing mahi and my studies—this has been particularly challenging through the various lockdowns we have had because of the COVID-19 pandemic as I have also had to take on the role of teacher for Amelia. It has also meant that I have lost a significant source**

> **of financial support, and as the scholarship is not enough to cover my rent, I have had to spend time finding ways to support myself and my daughter financially. Family illness has required me to be available to support whānau. The PTSD I have experienced following my miscarriage has been debilitating at times and has limited my capacity to actively engage in the research process.**
>
> **Despite these challenges, I have continued to maintain a positive outlook that I am capable of completing my PhD and have continued to work, albeit in a limited capacity, on my research. I have started seeking support for my PTSD and have been noticing a significant improvement in my mental health in the past two months. With this in mind, I feel that the additional 6 months of financial support would enable me to focus on getting my PhD done and submitted by December. (K. West, personal communication, May 28, 2021)**

As I wrote this extension application, I began to see the entanglement of the personal and the political unfolding in front of me. While I had been focusing my time on writing about the interplay between MDS discourse and the notion of privacy, my own privacy was surreptitiously becoming an asset for trade. My story became a critical element of my analysis because it took a concept, so often theorised in abstract and idealised worlds, and interrogated its limitations in a 'real-world' application. Almost immediately after submitting the extension application, I felt anxious and exposed. I did not know who would have access to my application and I was worried about the potential that my performance of pain would not be considered 'enough'. As an Indigenous woman, the centring of damage and trauma in my lived experience and the reliance on the disclosure of pain as a source of legitimacy seemed frighteningly natural. This feeling is not unique to my experience.

Critical Indigenous scholar Eve Tuck (2009) discusses the de-facto reliance on Indigenous pain as a feature of 'damage-centred research' which seeks to convince people of our harm to justify reparation. In these research contexts, we are, as Hooks (1989) articulates, socialised and invited to "only speak from the space in the margin that is a sign of deprivation, a wound, an unfulfilled longing. Only speak your pain" (p. 23). Expanding this further, Tuck (2009) asserts that a key element of research on, with, and about Indigenous communities has been focused on highlighting deprivation and depletion as a rationale or reason for current conditions:

> **Native communities, poor communities, communities of color, and disenfranchised communities tolerate this kind of data gathering because there is an implicit and sometimes explicit assurance that stories of damage pay off in material, sovereign and political wins. Many communities engage, allow and participate in damage-centered research and in the construction of damage narratives as a strategy for correcting oppression. (Tuck, 2009, p. 414)**

Though my disclosure was not situated in the same research contexts considered by Tuck or Hooks, the key elements of documenting pain and loss to obtain a particular result were still present. I wanted to produce a feeling of discomfort so confronting to the reader that I would not be questioned or burdened by an expectation to produce evidence deemed sufficient by the University, a state institution that simultaneously positions the state as the coloniser and provider of support and as a healer (Million, 2013). I was desperate to be seen by the institution. And yet, despite being more exposed than ever to the system, I remained paradoxically invisible to it, acutely aware of my positionality as a colonised body.

My Great-grandmother communicates so eloquently the way I have felt about my personal interactions with, between, and through the academy and my mahi within it. Each time I read this particular poem, I am amazed at the insight and wisdom of my Nan. In this poem, Nan speaks to the physical power of the awa (river) whom she knew so intimately. Nan draws upon a metaphor of the beguiling awa and it strikes me that, in her wisdom, she is able to encapsulate my complex feelings and realities.

Nan says, TRUST NOT THE RIVER, maybe she was right:

Deep river, wide river running so still.
Quietly flowing by farm and green hill.
Beguilingly tranquil, glossily calm,
Serene reflections, the joy of its charm!
Green hills, green trees, blue face of the sky,
On its bright mirror surface so peacefully lie.

I know well this river, its great force and might,
So deceptively hidden away from our sight.
Trust not the river, with shimmering sheen.
It's a witch, it's a bitch, it's ugly and mean.
It has teeth, it has claws, it can be a fiend.
With its dark under-tows, though it looks so serene.

Trust not the river, though gently it flows,
Be wary, and watch the way that it goes.
It may rush through your house when you least expect it,
Then run on its way when it's rubbished and wrecked it.
Yes, I know this river, the way that it flows,
It can burst through its banks and rampaging goes.

It loots like a vandal, takes what it will,
It even comes up to my own window sill.
It says "How do you do? What have you got?
I've come here for loot and I'm taking the lot!"

(Ryan, 2001, p.38)

This poem sits within a collection of musings and memories of Nan's life growing up on the whenua in Pare Hauraki (confederation of iwi affiliated to Tainui waka of the Hauraki and Coromandel Peninsula area) where my whānau have whakapapa (genealogy). Surface level readings of this piece, devoid of context and historical knowings, may sit uncomfortably and perhaps paradoxically to common expressions of Māori relationships with the natural environment. Read alongside 'OUR PA' (village, fortified village), though, we start to see how deeply Nan loved her whenua and relished in her sense of belonging—and therein lies the complexities of a simultaneous experience of pain and joy.

OUR PA

You can tell by the way I write it on the page, that we children are proud to belong to this place: OUR VERY OWN PA.

We have no hesitation in proclaiming to any stranger unfamiliar with it—"this is OUR PA".

Some may smile or wonder as we pass it on our way up or down river, seeing only huge pine trees and a glimpse of Pakeha[5] houses hidden behind them.

Where is THIS PA? 'That's it' we will say, while there is bound to be family waving and shouting to us from the bank.

Where is the CARVED MEETING HOUSE? The TRIBAL TOTEM POLE? Is there a TATTOOED CHIEF? A TATTOOED OLD KUIA?[6]

'We have two chiefs' we will say; our Uncle Peter Grace and our Uncle Alf, and neither have tattoos. The only bit of tattoo you are likely to see is THE GRANNY ALL[7] when she visits. She has the MOKO[8] ON HER CHIN—SHE IS OUR CHIEFTAINESS; spoken by me with the knowing certainty of a child.

Those who are familiar with "OUR PA" and our family will know some of the story. The stranger will pat us on the head and smile at the inventiveness and imagination of a child… A PA, HA HA.

But they don't know what we know. They don't know how the wave-washed mud has revealed many of the old secrets, sealed in time like the page of an old history book.

Things we pick out of it into our very own hands, to wonder and marvel about.

What is it? Who made it and why?

Our parents tell us it is something belonging to "THE ANCIENT ONES", those who lived here long, long ago. OUR ANCESTORS. With only stone tools, sand and water to work with and their own great patience, they shaped and fashioned these things for use or decoration, and for you to wonder at.

We are only children, but we feel so proud to hold these things in our hands. Things made by our very own people and preserved here for us. Not things factory-made and bought from shops and supermarkets, but made with the clever ingenuity of people, who found out for themselves, the way to make things like these, that could survive the countless years, so that their mokopuna[9] would find them and see for ourselves, the beauty and intricate joy in the art of their own craftsmanship.

After being washed and polished, we stared at them and wondered about OUR TREASURES, OUR ANCESTORS, and how we came into being from those very people, linked to them with the bits and pieces that the wind, waves and time flung literally, at our feet!

Something to think about as children, something to dream about when we grow old!

Many bits and pieces of OUR PEOPLE also being dug up with the spuds and kumara[10].

History out of the garden, the river and hereabouts that tell us the story of OUR PA.

cont.

5. European settlers of New Zealand
6. Elderly woman
7. I was puzzled for weeks reading these stories of 'Granny All', searching through our whakapapa trying to find where she sat. It was only after reading further into my Nan's stories that I realised Granny All was actually Nanny Matuku, who was gifted the name Granny All (though I'm still not certain whether this was a name used only in Children of the Pa) because she was a Granny to All.
8. Short for moko kauae, a traditional Māori female chin tattoo
9. Grandchildren
10. Sweet potato; *Ipomoea batatas*

We know by the feel of the ground we walk upon that this is the true site of a once great fortified Pa.

Every little piece discovered here, links us to the people who left it to us.

Some of the ancient fortifications still faintly visible after the big easterly gales.

The authenticity of it being a Pa never in question—and it is ours.

Now I could shed tears, to think these treasures we children found, were thought so little of to be given to some "WHEEDLING PA-KEA" for his own prized collection!

(Mum dearest Mum, you were much too kind. You gave away our history).

(Ryan, 2001, pp. 60-61)

Nan's memoirs gave my research purpose. As challenging as it was to read some of the memories captured in her writing, what I realised was that nestled amongst these words she so carefully chose were the theories, insights, and understandings that I was looking for. I did not need journal articles, westernised scholarly research, or triangulation to make my mahi meaningful. The data was, is, and always has been there, etched in my bones, kept safe by my whakapapa.

It's dark outside tonight. My living room [read office] is illuminated by the blue light of my computer screen. My eyes have sunken in, rimmed red and bordered with deep purple circles signalling sleep deprivation. My mind wanders off. When was the last time I watered the plants? I should put some washing on while I'm here. What's the time? 3:30 am. *groans* I'm going to be tired at the gym tomorrow. Head in hands now. FOCUS! Every so often I remind myself to relax my tensed shoulders and breath. I'm anxious, I want to give up but the light at the end of the tunnel beckons me. I'm almost there.

I'm writing the final chapter of my thesis—the discussion and concluding thoughts. This is where I have to make it make sense, connect the dots and make it cohesive. This is the final hurdle before I release my mahi. This is my final story—it is a story about writing a story.

I remember when I first thought it would be a good idea to do storywork as a core feature of this thesis. I was at a writing retreat with other wāhine Māori [Māori women] also doing PhDs—inspiring. I was applying for a scholarship extension and I was exhausted, angry, and broken. I had the bones of my thesis in place but every time I thought about it, I was left wanting; there was something missing. I needed more meat on these bones.

An intensely raw and honest conversation with one of the most resilient, awe-inspiring, loving wahine I know made me realise that I was living out my thesis.

I had spent all of this time writing about the relationship between privacy and vulnerability, the audacity of the state to demand our trust, and the cruelty of a system that writes our stories before telling us we can't read them. But these were not abstract concepts that apply to 'us' [read Māori] in the royal sense; they were happening to us, to me and my whānau, and I saw myself reflected in my mahi. I saw meat on these bones.

It inspired a passionate response in me. I put pen to paper (metaphorically—more like fingers to keyboard) and for the first time my writing flowed. It flowed like the river that carried Nan from Duck Creek to the Thames in her stories. I was excited and I felt like these stories would strengthen my research even more. I spoke to my supervisors about my idea—they liked it. I let out a breath I didn't know I was holding.

I have spoken to the struggles I had with making decisions about what to include and whether it was ok to share these things in a public forum—and these moments were challenging. There were beautiful moments in the process where I felt a deep and intimate connection to my Nan that I never felt when she was with us ā-tinana [in person]. Then there were times that my emotions overwhelmed me and I wrote from a place of fury and frustration—a big F-you to the system. In these times, the writing flowed rapidly like the awa that carried Nan's sister Elsie away—treacherous and terrifying.

Still, I was emboldened in these moments. I felt powerful and like my work mattered. Now though, it has dawned on me in a way that I had not anticipated, that very soon, someone will read this, and they will know about lost land, lost language, lost dignity and lost babies.

Do they see me differently now? Do they judge me? Is there pity in their eyes? Did they stop talking when I walked into the room? Was this what I really wanted?

He kupu whakakapi

Conclusion

Through sharing my personal entanglement with data sovereignty issues, my research shifted away from viewing Māori as a series of zeroes and ones in exponential datasets, towards seeing ourselves and our whānau as Māori being [re]presented in datasets. I was no longer interested in taking an evaluative approach to MDS and instead became passionate about exploring how MDS can be articulated as meaningful for Māori. My story is important because I am a Māori woman, a māmā (mother), a tamāhine (daughter), a mokopuna, and a future tupuna. While my story belongs to me, it also belongs to those before me, after me, and next to me. In this sense, it is a story of how Māori data sovereignty is stripped away from our communities daily, and a story of my decision to expose my pain, to speak out from the margin, to re-story, to reassert Māori data sovereignty, and to reflect on the challenges and opportunities for healing that come with this act.

As a Māori researcher, theorising Indigenous data sovereignty has been a series of journeys, through the pā, down, around, and across the river, transcending westernised notions of time and space, through layers of papa [foundations]. In theorising Indigenous data sovereignty, the use of pūrākau [traditional tribal narratives] and storywork—our data—in the multiplicity of forms it is created, maintained, protected, gifted, and treasured, have illustrated the complexity within which our data is embedded with all that we are, and the right and responsibility we have to ensure it remains sovereign.

The struggles I have had in deciding what to include, whether it was ok to share our stories in such a public forum. All stages of the journeys are enactments of reclamation and sovereignty.

Do they see me differently now? Do they judge me? Is there pity in their eyes? Did they stop talking when I walked into the room? Was this what I really wanted?

They see me differently now. They judge me. No pity in their eyes. They start talking when I walk into the room, of Indigenous data sovereignty, of rivers and pā, of whakapapa and time, of koha [gift(s)] and givers, of pūrākau and kōrero [dialogue]. This is what I really wanted.

Living, breathing, changing, expansive, data sovereignty.

Nan says, TRUST NOT THE RIVER; I've dipped my toes in the river, it's dark outside, but I know where I am going even if I can never know the entirety of what lies beneath the surface. The water is warming up. This river is my own.

He kuputaka

Glossary

Use of tohutō (macrons): the introduction of macrons over some Māori vowels, have (1) clarified definitions and (2) made it easier to pronounce Māori words (i.e., knowing where to place the emphasis as you are saying the words). When we quote sources from earlier periods where macrons have not been used, we have not included the macron to remain true to the original text. In the glossary, we have included both versions of the word (with and without macrons).

ā-tinana	in person
awa	river
hui	meetings
iwi	tribe, nation
kaitiaki	guardians, custodians
kaitiakitanga	guardianship
koha	gift(s)
kōrero	dialogue
kotahitanga	collaboration
kuia	elderly woman
kumara/kūmara	sweet potato; *Ipomoea batatas*
mahi	operations, work
Māori	Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand
māmā	mother
mana	governance
Mana Ōrite	relationship agreement between Te Kāhui Raraunga and Stats NZ
manaakitanga	protection
mātauranga	knowledge
mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge
moko	short for Moko kauae, a traditional Māori female chin tattoo
mokopuna	grandchildren
Ngā Tikanga Paihere	framework for governing access to Māori data
pa/pā	village, fortified village
Pakeha/Pākehā	European settlers of New Zealand
papa	foundations
Pare Hauraki	confederation of iwi affiliated to Tainui waka of the Hauraki and Coromandel Peninsula area
pūrākau	traditional tribal narratives
rangatiratanga	self-determination
taonga	tangible and/or non-tangible treasures
tamāhine	daughter
Taumata Teitei	strategic document of the University of Auckland
Te Kāhui Raraunga	advocacy group working alongside Te Mana Raraunga
Te Mana Raraunga	Māori Data Sovereignty Network
te reo Māori	the Māori language
Te Tiriti	short for Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Māori language version of the Treaty of Waitangi
Tīkapa Moana	Hauraki Gulf

tupuna/tūpuna	ancestor(s)
wahine Māori	Māori woman
wāhine Māori	Māori women
wānanga	discussion; traditional form of learning
whakapapa	connections; genealogy
whānau	family
whanaungatanga	relationships
whare wānanga	tertiary education institutions; traditionally these were higher houses of learning
whenua	land

He rārangi rauemi

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Ngā āhuatanga toi

Conceptual design

The design elements in this publication focus on Trust Not The River, a poem on the paradoxically nurturing yet destructive nature of the river, composed by Kiri's great-grandmother and shared by Kiri for its parallels to her PhD experience with her university as well as its exemplification of how stories can function as sites of data sovereignty and reclamation.

The front cover image, depicts the light reflecting off the Waihou River, as it flows towards Tīkapa Moana (Hauraki Gulf), with no visible hint of the river's power. The green used throughout the publication, which for many is symbolic of life, further illustrates this point as, for some hapū, green also represents death.

Trust Not The River layered over top of the front cover image warns us lest we fall for the river's allure and deception. The use of binary, reminiscent of data or 'zeros and ones', juxtaposes Trust Not The River as its own story as well as the role of stories in MDS (Māori data sovereignty) scholarship.

Finally, the tāniko, as a traditional method of recording mātauranga, serves as an example of both data and stories. The use of the tāniko here (from Te Morehu wharepuni, Rānana Marae) evidences Kiri's assertion of the long-standing traditions of data sovereignty practices including data collection, storage, dissemination, and protection.


Te Atawhai o Te Ao
Independent Māori Institute for Environment & Health