

Chapter 2

Social Justice, Transformation and Indigenous Methodologies

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This chapter invites you as a researcher to begin again. It asks you to reflect on the beginning, the meeting place between researcher and researched, between researcher and indigenous community. Rather than describe an indigenous methodology I will simply use an indigenous approach, a way of thinking, to inform the structure of the paper and draw out the insights I wish to share. There are many indigenous methodologies that are being formulated as research approaches and being described in the literature, from storywork and storytelling to traditional ecological knowledge practices, from yarning to singing, from survivance to contemporary technological innovation (Archibald, 2008; Kovack, 2009; Vizenor, 2008). I draw on one example, the Māori practice of welcoming visitors on our *marae*, the *pōwhiri*, to welcome you into a research space, to have you reflect upon the deceptively simple moments of meeting as researcher and researched. This is not the interview, the encounter or the observational moment but the human-being-to-human-being meeting, the beginning, in its ritual, spiritual, visceral, uncertain, sweaty first touch of skins, histories, genealogies, politics. This is a reflection on what can happen when researchers are actually invited in by a community, on the shift in power that can occur when an indigenous community is actively engaged in its own well-being, rather than a reflection on what has historically happened when ethnographers have invited themselves in to eat the food, disturb the well-being and unsettle the spirits.

Imagine for a moment a scene on the marae, the formal Māori cultural space, when visitors have been called, through the call of a woman's voice known as the karanga, to enter on to the grounds. The karanga representing the first call of life, and most often performed by the senior women of the marae calls out to the visitors, welcoming them and all their ancestors. This call acknowledges those who have

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recently died. A similar call crosses from the visitors to the hosts, also called by a woman. The visitors, strangers to this place, move across the grounds, into and within the spaces assigned to them, usually a separated space on one side of the meeting house. They would move onto this space as a single group, as one. In some contexts the women and children would be in front, the older women leading, the men at the back. In other contexts it would be reversed. On the host 'side' similarly, people have their ascribed space for this most formal of occasions.

Over the next period of time, the tangata whenua or hosts, and manuhiri, or guests, address each other. There are other dimensions present as well: the scene is gendered, age and status apply, te reo Māori in its most formal form is used and oratory or whaikōrero are embellished with ancient sayings selected for the occasion. This scene is further imbued with the notion of tapu and the sense of tikanga—cultural values and practices—which prevails. These are formal meetings in which both 'sides' greet each other, past and present, the dead and the living, until they have completed the ritual, and then the two sides come together to hongī, to mingle their 'ha' or breath, and to engage in less formal talk before the visitors are called into another area for food.

In this scene the two 'sides' of this meeting, the people, merge together so that they become one collective unit. There are spaces in which the process can be disrupted; for example, a new group may be called on to the marae, but as the ritual continues these spaces are gradually eliminated. If this gathering and event were to continue for a few days there would still be times, for example at night, when the sides would still occupy certain specific spaces: the manuhiri would sleep on one side of the wharenuī, the tangata whenua along the other wall. The marae ātea, the area outside where this ritual took place, becomes available again for less-formalised activities.

What I want this scene to illustrate is the actual meeting place, in time and space, of researched and researcher. I also want you to think about a meeting occurring on the grounds, the lands and the spaces, controlled by the researched community who are now, in the twenty-first Century, no longer naïve about research. This particular ritual recognises the humanity, the spirituality, the genealogy, the sacred power of the individual, and the group or community, in this case of the researcher community.

McClintock, Mellsop, Moeke-Maxwell, and Merrill (2010) have applied the pōwhiri process as a research process. It is applied here as a way to analyse and raise questions about a set of relationships and the mediation of relationships which is one purpose of the pōwhiri. Why might this reflection be important? Understanding this dynamic is always going to be important to researchers whose very method is to immerse themselves inside a context and a community. It is important because it makes many things transparent and draws attention to the need to mediate those differences. It is important because researched communities tend to see researchers as a collective of one community. They do not see, nor should we expect them to see, the differences between one kind of researcher and another, and, furthermore, they see researchers as being accountable for each other's work and for the work of their 'ancestors'. Many researchers find this a bit hard to swallow the first time, more so the second and third times, possibly because they may see themselves as having no

responsibility for the actions of others or their own predecessors and, furthermore, may in fact define themselves as researchers acting within a totally different, more socially just, paradigm of research than their own colleagues.

Researchers for the most part have been here before, been in this indigenous context before. Hopefully, not only are the researched communities wiser, but so are the researcher communities. This chapter simply asks this generation of researchers to return to that place of first meeting and think about how that liminal meeting ground was mediated, negotiated and resolved. So here are some questions to facilitate the reflection:

1. How did you come to be here at the entry point of this community?
 - (a) Were you invited or did you select the community?
 - (b) What are the implications of being invited or doing the inviting?
 - (c) What intellectual, emotional, ethical, political and spiritual preparation have you had?
 - (d) Why the interest?
 - (e) Where have you come from? What are your geo-political origins and touchstones?
2. Who is your community?
 - (a) Who are your research ancestors?
 - (b) Did they come here before? If so, what mark did they make?
 - (c) Who travels with you?
 - (d) Who represents you in a formal speaking situation?
3. Whose voices best represent your community?
 - (a) How can they be known by this new community? (can they call and speak?)
 - (b) How well do they represent your research to this new community? (can they speak and sing?)
4. How do you 'see' the people you are moving towards?
 - (a) Do you see it as a simple 'ceremony' being performed simply in your honour?
 - (b) What baggage do you bring on to this space?
 - (c) What hope and possibility do you bring on to this space?
5. What does this meeting mean for you?
 - (a) Can you see them in their history and place?
 - (b) Can you see their ancestors?
 - (c) Can you see their baggage?
 - (d) Can you see their hope and possibility?
6. What does this meeting mean for you?
 - (a) Is it the means to the end?
 - (b) Is it simply the switching of power relationships?
 - (c) Is it a meeting of possibility?

These questions will hopefully trigger some thoughts about the first meetings you have as a researcher with your research participants and communities. The meeting may be in a home, a park, a clinic, a mall, a university office—it doesn't really matter. The same questions apply, more or less.

Let us now move on to the next step in that space between researcher and researched to reflect upon the first words, the first touch. In a ritual sense that has already happened, but the words were expressed in ancient style, using metaphors and invoking spiritual dimensions. This next step is in the specific engagement between the researcher and her/his participants and communities. Who speaks first? What do you say? When do you whip out the ethics forms? I used to think ethics forms were a real barrier to engaging indigenous participants in a conversation or interview until I carried out a large study with young people in New Zealand (Smith et al., 2002). One of my roles was to take young people who wanted to participate in a youth tribunal through a 30-min talk about the study, and about their right to consent to participate, the right to withdraw and the right to confidentiality (Smith, 2001). We found that the young people really engaged with this issue, raised questions and made a determined gesture to complete their forms. Because they were under 18 years, they were actually giving an 'assent' to participate rather than 'consent' to participate as their parents had to complete the final consent process. Rather than chase them away, as we had feared, the young people responded very seriously to the invitation to participate. They asked questions, they posed little 'what if?' type scenarios to which they wanted us to respond, they took their forms to their parents for signing, and, thankfully, brought them back. As our youth tribunal travelled around New Zealand the 'ethics talk' became a very serious ritual that bound our participants to the research. And, yes, they did test us, by asking if they could change their mind, if they could remove their transcripts, if it was really, really confidential, and in only one case did that transpire as a serious request to withdraw information.

Researchers talk about the ethical space of meeting with research participants as if that somehow excuses us morally and culturally from further obligations to establish deep engagement, of the long lasting kind. Ethicality, in my view, is a 'way of being' for a social science researcher, for an ethnographer, it is embedded in every conscious and subconscious interaction (Ermine, 1995). It is one of the most fundamental tools for engagement with participants and is not simply a process for gaining entry into a community. Ethical values, practices and expectations are constantly being negotiated throughout the research process and the onus for behaving most ethically, all the time, falls squarely upon the shoulders of researchers. Individuals and communities can and do sometimes behave outrageously and the researcher can be put in to quite difficult and dangerous situations. At any point in the ethnographic experience, the question, 'Who is the researcher here?' has to be an ethical touchstone. 'How did I get be in this situation?' is an ethical question as much as it is a reflexive responsibility. 'Was this through my doing? My innocence? My intervention? My accident?' I know of some situations where the more immediate question 'How do I get out of here now?'

should have preceded the above reflections but for the most the difficult situations I am addressing are ethical dilemma rather than life-threatening crises.

The next step across the researcher-researched space beyond the first entry point, the ritual encounter, the socially-awkward touch of skin and eye contact, the first formal ethical moment, is the invitation to eat, or in research terms to partake in the food of the research, the questions, the observations, the responses. For the most part this is the researcher's menu, their agenda, their secret research structure (although in actual pōwhiri ceremony the hosts put on the first meal). The invitation to partake, to participate in an ethnographic context can be as simple as a head signal to come and join in or as complicated as a formal interview with a large group of people. The questions to reflect upon here are about the quality of the food, or the quality of the research question. Is it a worthy research that warrants people getting all excited about? Does it merit their time? One observation I would make from my own experience with communities is that even the poorest among them are very busy, perhaps busier than most, because survival takes time and energy, and because most are volunteering to perform cultural obligations. My communities are also hyper-aware of the differences in material well-being between themselves and visitors. They comment on the cars in the carpark—even though they might be hired—on jewellery—even though it might be cheap bling—on shoes—even though they might be from Payless Shoes. Basically, they notice difference and make their own assessment. They also notice other qualities such as humour, a smiling face or a dour face, a warmth of character or shyness. Some in the community have a tendency to notice psychological issues and can diagnose problems but I will not dwell on that in this paper.

In summary, there are discrete steps or aspects in the mediation of space between researcher and researched. Some of these aspects are actually quite formal and involve a ritual or ceremonial element. While an ethnographic approach might involve more fluidity, the basic elements are still being negotiated—although they may happen simultaneously or as one part of something else. Why is this reflection important? As mentioned earlier, because, the onus of performing well is more on the researcher than on the researched, and, because our credibility or ability to engage and make sense is displayed with our first step or stumble, and finally because researchers generally claim to know what they are doing, why they are doing it and why it is so important. Do we really know this space well?

Finally, let me shift the orientation entirely to the role of the researched. In the pōwhiri scenario that I have drawn, the invitation to the researcher community has come from the researched community and that is historically unusual. In recent years, particularly in the Māori and indigenous contexts, communities are no longer naïve about research. More so, however, they have built their own research capacity, methodologies and researcher communities. One contribution of indigenous methodologies has been in the arena of ethics, with guidelines being produced in Australia, Canada and New Zealand in relation to health research. It is still rare but our communities do actively seek researchers to help them answer questions and resolve issues that are extremely important. When the invitation

comes, many research institutions are ill-prepared—they get excited but do not really have capacity themselves to answer the multidisciplinary and complex problem the community has identified. Many discipline-based researchers may not even understand the issue and have often turned communities away rather than listen deeply to their concerns. Being invited is a first and tentative step in rebuilding a relationship between indigenous communities and researchers—how often those invitations come is entirely dependent on how researchers respond.

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