

He kōrero e pa ana ki te toa takitini

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I want to love this piece “He wero: Towards a Bi-cultural and Multi-cultural Discipline.” I am sure Stuart and I would agree on a number of things, and any intervention into the monoculturalism of tertiary institutions in NZ has got my vote. At the same time, had I written the piece I sure would have done things differently.

The point that ‘Media Studies’ as a discipline doesn’t exist outside of specific (tertiary) institutions may seem obvious but it reminds us that people don’t merely work in a neutral space called ‘Media Studies’ and then inflect it with their own monoculturalism. Maybe the very institutions within which Media Studies is located are always compromised, always monocultural. Maybe Media Studies maintains its monoculturalism when people with power in departments tend to hire people who look like themselves and/ or people who don’t have a sensitivity to New Zealand’s specific context. Maybe Māori and other non-Pākehā choose to work elsewhere in (and outside of) tertiary institutions for all kinds of reasons, some of which have to do with funding, teaching, research, student demographics, intellectual community and so on. Maybe it’s difficult to publish or hook into existing networks when one is working on locally-engaged research.

While I do not find it difficult to believe Stuart’s observation that NZ-based Media Studies as a discipline is embarrassingly and limiting-ly “monocultural,” for me the significant point is that a “monocultural” discipline in NZ is able to *stay* monocultural as long as it refuses to recognise the extent of the energetic discourse produced by the Māori scholarly community. I would argue that a discipline is only like this because it feels it can be. Monoculturalism in this country, to be blunt, requires an unchecked assumption that NZ-sensitive biculturalism (and, Stuart keeps adding, multiculturalism) is critically uncharted territory.

Ehara taku toa he toa takatahi...

Our good friend Foucault reminds us that a system loves to have a grumpy person come along every once in a while just so it can tell that person off, taking the opportunity to reassert itself and thereby maintain the status quo. Media Studies wants – indeed it requires - to be called “monocultural” so everyone can rush about pointing to the use of

words like “culture” and “Aotearoa” in course descriptions and feeling proud of having the occasional brown body wandering through their corridors and collections of essays, and then return to Business As Usual. The problem with Foucault’s conception of power, of course, has always been that it seems to foreclose the possibility of achieving change that the system genuinely doesn’t want. (Any system will allow for little bits of change on its own terms, for the sake of appearing flexible, which is exactly how it maintains its rigidity). So how might we productively challenge the way things are? How do we ensure our challenges are un-absorbable?

Characterising a discipline as Western and singularly monocultural (that needs a bit of the not-Western or Other, in this case Māori) plays into the coloniser’s second-favourite way of thinking about the Indigene: the Narrative of First Encounter. (The absolute favourite, of course, is the Tragically Dead Indigene.) In the Narrative of First Encounter (NFE), the ‘West’ encounters the ‘Other’ with an assumption that the ‘Other’ has just crawled out of their grass hut and it’s time to negotiate *for the first time* a relationship between these two groups. The NFE is historically tied to ‘actual’ first encounters, but gets played out over and over in the contemporary moment, often appearing in the form of ‘civilising’ and ‘development’ narratives and fanatical celebrations of ‘firsts’ on the part of the Other group. (Strangely, or not, this NFE doesn’t go both ways: we make a fuss of the first Māori person to do just about anything that pertains to the ‘West’ but don’t make a parallel fuss about the ‘first’ non-Māori people to achieve things in the Māori world.)

NFEs feel like explicit challenges to the West, because they say “hey! you! oi! over here!! look I’m over here!! you have to engage with me!,” but by arguing for a new *inclusion* they subtly agree that the West is accurate in its current understanding of itself as monolithic. Drawing on its colonial hey-day, the notion of the “West” is founded on an assumption of its own exhaustiveness and ubiquity (‘know the West and you know the world’): this is why people who have been to Melbourne, London, Paris and New York get to say they have been ‘all around the world’ whereas people who have been to Nuku’alofa, Taipei and Lagos do not. The NFE is a favourite way of thinking because it produces two monoliths (the West and the Other) and neatly evaporates any previous or ongoing relationships and connections between the two groups. Thereby NFEs not only make impossible the claim that Māori have ever participated in the West (and so we can’t look to earlier work, either by Māori scholars or indeed some pro-Māori work by non-Māori allies) but significantly they also let the West off the hook for not paying this any attention earlier (‘see? we couldn’t have done this before we encountered you in this way’).

I recall a scholar approaching me, wringing hands and looking tearful, after I had stood up at a conference about 'Race Ethnicity and Indigeneity' in the US that had disgracefully neglected the dimension of Indigeneity. "But Alice," she wailed, "please don't be too hard on us. We don't know these things, we don't have access to these things: we need you to come here and tell us these things." My response? "Do your reading. How dare you assume this is not written, not published, not circulating... American Indians have been devouring Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work for a good five years; what has stopped you going to the library?"

Characterising a discipline as monocultural, then, may feel like an accurate description (speaking truth to power) but I'm not sure it opens up space for real change. The intervention becomes a blip on the much bigger radar, its NFE and appeals to disciplinary monolithness having supplied the discipline with the very means by which it may be disregarded. The discipline can go about its business, having incorporated the intervention through its Cheshire-cat-style flexibility.

Indeed, I would go further and argue that disciplines probably don't mind being called monocultural: Media Studies has clearly flourished for years in its present state. If Media Studies is indeed thoroughly monocultural, then its only sins to date have been sins of omission. This is embarrassing, sure, but in a quite comfortable way. ("I'm so sorry. I had no idea. Do go on.") What disciplines – and scholars - *do* mind being called, though, is limited, blind, disengaged, restricted, out-of-date. If it is pointed out that Media Studies *mistakenly* understands itself as monocultural, and that there is plenty of evidence to richly and certainly attest that it is *not*, the sins become sins of commission: the discipline has deliberately suppressed and obscured vital scholarship and scholars in order to maintain its own view of itself. The discipline doesn't, indeed, know itself. And how can you continually assert something that you are no longer confident you even know? How can you return to Business As Usual if the parameters of your Business have collapsed and shifted?

Rather than following Stuart by minimising citations and footnotes, then, I would have performed his intervention by doing the exact opposite. I believe that challenging a discipline requires solid and rigorous treatment of existing sources by Māori and allied scholars: Ehara taku toa te toa takatahi, engari te toa takitini.¹ In an essay that makes the claims it does about the monoculturalism of the discipline I am intrigued to find only one Māori person

1 My strength is not the strength of one, but of many.

(and, as far as I am aware, a distinct minority of non-European people generally) listed in the bibliography. Foregrounding Māori participation in relevant scholarly activity has the effect of reminding us that these ‘things’ we (usefully) call ‘Māori’ and ‘Western’ do not circulate without previous entanglement or connection.

In my view we, as Indigenous scholars within these institutions, need to be sure that we do not participate in our own invisibilisation: we must not only refuse to be dead but must also refuse to be the Natives standing on the beach in an NFE. We make these refusals when we insist upon the multiple and complex critical voices that always already populate this landscape of NZ-based Media Studies. A crucial dimension of the colonial gaze is the obsessive ‘emptying out’ of the landscape so that any space can be understood as ready to be occupied (which is why, of course, the simple fact of continued Māori *existence* is a powerful and anxiety-raising challenge to the colonising power). The extent to which we point to an empty landscape – including an empty critical landscape – is the extent to which we assent to our own removal from that landscape.

Our bibliographies, then, should be thick and fat with the names of Māori and other Indigenous scholars, and if they do not currently brim in this way then it is our job to go out and hunt this work down and bring it into view. While much of this critical work may not be located explicitly within a Media Studies disciplinary context, or may be published in less valorised forms (journal articles, theses, dissertations, blogs) surely we can make arguments for including such work regardless. (Indeed, Stuart includes the theoretical work of Friere, Said, Smith and Spivak despite their locations in disciplines other than Media Studies.) Scholars within Media Studies should be embarrassed by the range and depth of Māori, Pasifika and other Other scholarship, and then reflect on the extent to which they have participated in the marginalisation of these scholars and the extent to which their own work has suffered from not engaging with this scholarship. Scholars in Media Studies need to scratch their heads, and recognise that for themselves and their own work, too, *ehara taku toa te toa takatahi, engari te toa takitini*.

Stuart’s compelling formal intervention (which we might think about as a case of ‘form following function’) is of course his deliberate adoption of a particular expressive form in order to both emphasise and demonstrate the possibilities of Media Studies critical work that consciously resists monoculturalism. Perhaps we might think about this *whaikōrero*-style essay as an extension of other interventions into the conventional Western linear written essay form that have been made by members of Indigenous (and, indeed, Feminist,

Queer, Pacific, Postcolonial and Minority) critical communities. Clearly the simple existence of Māori scholars and Māori scholarship does not automatically comprise a step away from monoculturalism: this, I would suggest, is the significance of Stuart's decision to produce an argument that demonstrates not only Māori *content* but Māori *form*. Adding 'Māori' to something isn't about adding on a new deck or sunroom to a house: it's about calling in the team from Extreme Makeover Home Edition. In this case, it's about sending a whaikōrero to a written journal.

Stuart's adoption of "a whaikōrero format" is somewhat limited, however, by its refusal to be as openly self-reflexive about its own parameters and specificities as it challenges Media Studies to be. Like the "discursive essay," the whaikōrero form has particular stakes and parameters which deserve – indeed require – critical consideration. Most obviously, whaikōrero are tied into a highly complex structure of kawa and tikanga, which provide not only space but regulatory/ supportive context. Some consideration of kawa is observable in the decision to "[choose] the kawa known as tau utuutu" although there is no explanation for that choice (is this the appropriate kawa for the author's own connections, or for his institutional location, or ?), or how indeed the kawa is framed as manipulable by the "[choice]" of an individual author.

For me, as a wahine Māori, a significant dimension of the whaikōrero form is that it draws our attention to gender: how/ where might women participate in this structure? Given that in some places women participate in whaikōrero and in some places we participate in other parts of the pōwhiri, whose kawa do women follow here? Do older women participate differently to younger women? What about the karanga and waiata? Where do they fit? Can one claim something is a whaikōrero without these balancing elements? At the conclusion of the essay, the author writes that "it is usual to end a whaikōrero with a waiata, impossible in a written format," but presumably a spoken form is as difficult ("impossible") to write as a sung/ chanted form. What are the implications of introducing a whaikōrero but refusing a waiata? Who gets to decide whether a whaikōrero can be followed by a whakatauki instead of a waiata? Who doesn't?

...engari he toa takitini.

Some of these issues could have been treated more explicitly in Stuart's discussion, and in particular perhaps paying attention to gender might have opened up a further challenge to the disciplinary status quo in terms of form: does the use of whaikōrero invite, perhaps, a

different kind of writing exercise than that of an individual author? If a whaikōrero requires (indeed is dependent on) a karanga, should Stuart be required to work alongside a woman in order to produce his own work? Would her contribution be located above his writing, in plain type or bold or italics, on the margins, or off the page? If we're prepared to contribute written whaikōrero in place of written essays, are we also prepared to participate in a more collaborative form of writing practice at the level of conception and named authorship? A whaikōrero, after all, only makes sense within the context of a community: you can't have a one-man² pōwhiri. Producing a piece of scholarly writing and calling it a whaikōrero is *interesting* when it means a single scholar has done something a bit different. Producing a piece of scholarly writing and calling it a whaikōrero is *radical* when it foregrounds its own dependency on a broader community: women to karanga, other speakers, people to waiata, someone to put out the chairs for elders and kaikōrero, someone to vacuum the whare, a group of people bustling in the kitchen switching on the Zip and making cups of tea. Ehara taku toa te toa takatahi, engari te toa takitini.

2 Gender bias intended.