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Partnership, Production & Exchange of Knowledges

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Partnership, Production & Exchange of Knowledges

Cover Page Footnote

We dedicate the article to the memory of Mrs Paea Smith.

PARTNERSHIP, PRODUCTION & EXCHANGE OF KNOWLEDGES

Introduction

The authors' mission is to describe the partnership, production, and exchange of knowledges between the Māori (see appendix) and non-Māori people in the project entitled, *Te Puāwaitanga o Ngā Tapuwae Kia Ora Tonu. Life and Living in Advanced Age: A Cohort Study in New Zealand* (LiLAC Study NZ). LiLACS NZ is an investigation of the successful factors and trends of [advanced] ageing of two groups of people who are 80 plus years old and more. In the project, the two groups may be considered the elite of the oldest old since they are 1% of their cohort in their birth year still living. Currently, the longitudinal study is in the 5th year of operation. The focus of the article is on the lived experience narrated by the advisory group of Elders called, *Te RōpūKaitiaki o ngā tikanga Māori the protectors of principles of conduct in Māori research* at the Gerontological Society of America's conference in New Orleans in 2013.

Te RōpūKaitiaki o ngā tikanga Māori

Indigenous Māori people reaching advanced age is a significant achievement: Statistics New Zealand, in 2012, reported there were 5,000 Māori aged over 80 years of age and predicted that the number of Māori who will reach this age will double over the next decade.¹ The non-Māori population is also ageing: The estimation is that there are over 160,000 non-Māori aged over 80 years and the population will increase by 50%. In 2013, Statistics New Zealand has identified that there are now 73,000 people aged over 85 years and the population has increased by 29.4% since the 2006 census.²

Through the feasibility study called, *Reaching Advanced Age*, a method was commenced to involve Māori participants, investigators, nurses, health and tribal organisations, as well as, a team of Kaumātua Elders called *Te RōpūKaitiaki o ngā tikanga Māori* to conduct the study with non-Māori in the University of Auckland and the community partners in the Bay of Plenty.³⁻⁶ By drawing on the lived experience of *Te RōpūKaitiaki* the partnership between the Māori and non-Māori predicated on Māori lived experience will be described.

At the time of writing, the Kaumātua are aged from 65 years old to 86 plus years old; they have been partners in the research and design of LiLACS NZ since the feasibility study. In this partnership, production and exchange of knowledges their bilingual and bicultural experiences are fundamental to protecting the usage of Māori language and culture from misinterpretation by academics. For each year of the study, the Kaumātua translate LiLACS NZ's documents. The social and political networks of the Elders continue to be crucial to engaging with the Māori and non-Māori research partners, participants, nurses and interviewers, resolving disputes, and promoting the study nationally and internationally.

Let us begin with the narration by Dr Waiora Port who comes from a tribe in the far north of New Zealand. Dr Port has described the invitation extended to her, in 2011, by the Māori investigators to join the founding members Paea Smith, Betty McPherson, Leiana Reynolds, Hone and Florence Kameta as an honour. She goes on to relate that *Te RōpūKaitiaki* represents different tribes in Māori society. One thing that defines them all,

they are kaumātua. The term kaumātua has connotations of noble birth as well as chieftainship; the term has become a title which some Māori use to describe leaders outside their own areas.⁷ Professor Roger Maaka (2003) believes that the terminology, kaumātua, is an inclusive word, which describes both elderly male and female people in both the singular and plural.⁸ The word not only defines a person or a group as older old people, but also can be used as a title, such as the title Elder, which is used in indigenous societies other than Māori. Dame Joan Metge (1967) has stated that the title kaumātua is to a certain extent hereditary,⁸ while Sir Api Mahuika (1975) has described a kaumātua as a person who is a leader in Māori society, particularly on the marae (the ceremonial courtyard of the village).⁹ Emeritus Professor Sir Ranginui Walker (1993) has described a kaumātua as the leader of the extended family who makes decisions concerning the working of the ancestral land, the control and use of the family property, rearing and educating children. The kaumātua was usually the recognised spokesman on behalf of the extended family on the tribal marae.¹⁰

In pre-contact times some kaumātua were the custodians of knowledge and traditions that they meticulously taught to members of their tribe. Some of them cared for the children, teaching important crafts and skills such as weaving, carving, and fishing whilst some advised and counselled. First and foremost, the role of the kaumātua entailed being Māori. By their example in performing ceremonial duties, marae *sacred gathering place of kin relations* protocol, hosting guests, and resolving disputes among their tribe the younger members of the tribe learned what being Māori meant. Therefore, within the tribe, the people's initial learning began by producing and exchanging knowledge, experiences, and skills of other members of the tribe. Children were seen as an integral part of the tribe and those who showed cleverness were selected and encouraged in their dexterity under the tutelage of a tōhunga *expert teacher*. Young men of the aristocracy were instructed in the wānanga *tribal university* to prepare them for leadership status.^{11, 7,}¹² The tōhunga were kaumātua; they accurately and significantly established younger generations' knowledge of belonging to the land and blood.¹³

The impact of colonisation, assimilation, and urbanisation has brought changes to the way the roles and responsibilities of the kaumātua are understood. The leaders of a Māori tribe are still of ariki *high ranking* and rangatira *noble* descent or ancestry. The leader is expected to organise and control all Māori occasions with the help of their tribe. Not only is the role of the kaumātua very important, but also, according to Sir Mason Durie (1994) the kaumātua are salient to the survival of the mana *prestige, authority, control* of the tribe.¹⁴ In the 21st century, the role of the kaumātua as the leader ranges from a kaitohutohu [advisor], to an important figure in the Nation, to representation on a local council, a university, school, or hospital board, as well as, their most important role on the marae. Not only is Māori language and culture important to them, but also, their deep understanding of the traditional, their counsel and advice on issues of the present-day Māori society. Professor Maaka (2003) has explained, too, that the kaumātua are responsible for upholding the laws of the tribe and for mediating their disputes. In truth, the kaumātua are the manifestation of all who are wise and they retain the tribe's relations with the ancestors and gods.⁸

As members of Te RōpūKaitiaki, Dr Port informs us that they have been filling their kete *baskets* of knowledge from many different sources throughout their lives. Some of them have been raised by their tūpuna *grandparents* and using Māori language from

birth. A few of them were educated when assimilation to become brown-white people or devaluing being Māori was [and remains] the widespread policy of the government-of-the-day.^{15 16} Consequently, some of them have had to learn the ancestors' mother-tongue as a second language in later life. Coincidentally, all of them have been exposed to people within Māori society who live their daily life still using Māori language and living by the values and ways that their ancestors cared for each other and Nature. Of course, Te RōpūKaitiaki has a passion to use the knowledge, in their kete, to perpetuate Māori language and culture and their contribution to LiLACS NZ is inscribed in the proverb, *E kore e ngāro te kākano i ruia mai i Rangiātea the seeds from Rangiātea will never be lost.*

Hone and Florence Kameta come from tribes on the east coast of New Zealand. They live in the Bay of Plenty, the site of LiLACS NZ. Florence and Hone live in the small, paper mill town of Kawerau. After the construction of the mill, in the 1950s, Te Rautahi marae was built as a place where people from the tribes from throughout New Zealand and groups of people from diverse languages and cultures were able to meet, to talk, to celebrate, to mourn, and to come to know each other better. For the indigenous Māori people, the institution at the heart of Māori society is the marae. The marae is the meeting place where the tribe:

Gathers to pray to the gods,

Hosts manuhiri *visitors*,

Mourns their dead,

Listens to their kaumātua recite their whakapapa *shared ancestry and narrates stories from their past*, and

Debates about what is going on in Māori and New Zealand societies.

On the marae, Māori people learn about their history and come to know about the richness of their life, and the proud heritage that is truly theirs.

In brief, Te RōpūKaitiaki shares the honour and privilege of being integral to LiLACS NZ. The precious information that is produced through their sharing their lived experience of ageing well, developing questions to be asked of the Māori participants, translating LiLACS NZ's documents from English to Māori language; as well as, exchanging experiences of successful living with the LiLACS NZ research team, in the research community, in the tribal university, and in the Gerontological Society of America's conference is so important to them who remember their grandparents and parents. All of them remember that during their grandparents' life, living conditions were harsh; there was no transport other than a horse-driven cart, they lived in a *whare nikau an earthen floor hut made from palm fronds*. They remember events such as their parents moving to a 2-bedroomed house with no electric power, just the bare basics including the drop-hole toilet outdoors and the spring water drawn from the well. The kaumātua remember walking or riding a horse to the far-distant school, hospital, and shops. They recall horses being used to plough the fields to grow their food and, if their family lived close to the sea, gathering seafood. They remember grandparents dying in their 60s, many others a lot younger. In their own lifetime, better conditions are enjoyed by them, they have lived not only 60 plus years but more than 80 years. Their homes are comfortable and include a flush toilet and, they own and drive a car. The kaumātua are living longer than their grandparents and parents, they are in better health; food is plentiful, transport is convenient and they are free to make their own decisions.¹⁵

To close: Life has changed for Te RōpūKaitiaki in lots of material ways they still, though, confront political challenges and cultural discrimination. But this is what happens within a society and groups of indigenous peoples must deal with the discourse of empire in partnership, producing and exchanging knowledges with the prevailing society.

Appendix

Te reo Māori me ngā tikanga	English language
Ariki	High ranking, an aristocrat, a chieftain
E kore e ngāro te kākano i ruia mai i Rangiatēa	The seeds from Rangiatēa will never be lost.
Kaitohutohu	An advisor
Kaumātua	Elders, older Māori men and women
Kete	Basket
Mana	Prestige, authority, control
Māori	Ordinary people, indigenous peoples of Aotearoa, New Zealand
Marae	Sacred gathering place of kin relations
Manuhiri	Visitors
Rangiatēa	A homeland of Māori located in Tahiti
Rangatira	A noble, an aristocrat, a chieftain
Tōhunga	Expert teacher
Te RōpūKaitiaki o ngā tikanga Māori	The protectors of principles of conduct in Māori research [for LiLACS NZ]
Tūpuna	Grandparents, ancestors
Wānanga	A place of higher learning, a Tribal university
Whakapapa	Shared ancestry
Whare nikau	An earthen floor hut made from palm fronds

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