

What is Intellectual Freedom Today? A Māori Perspective

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Intellectual freedom for Māori is an especially pressing issue because it ties together social and ethical concerns. These themes have their origin in some quite fundamental Māori philosophies. Where intellectual freedom encourages thought as an individual enterprise, for Māori the convergence of the outer world and the self muddies such self-certainty, and how one represents a thing through the mechanism of an idea becomes more interesting. Is the idea a self-evolved phenomenon or is it (as I suggest it is) constructed by the external world as much as the self? From a Māori philosophical standpoint, this holistic proposition would certainly make sense because it attributes ideas to the activity of things in the world (Mika, 2015). Intellectually, then, we are not 'free' because we are dependent on the full interplay of the world.

Whilst these concerns are interesting for some very broad and fundamental speculation about how one thinks in an intellectually free manner, it is a related but more specific problem of where to put the Māori 'voice' in academic writing that I raise here and that seems to be repeating itself in various Māori writers' works. I have either personally engaged with, or have seen colleagues deal with, the problem of how to time the self-conscious Māori voice in writing. In fact, it generally has not arisen as an issue until it is pointed out by Māori (and sometimes non-Māori) reviewers of the article or chapter that the Māori content is in the wrong place. Usually, the corpus that is visibly Māori occurs after a discussion about a Western theorist or a Western historical or sociological perspective. The charge goes that the Māori voice is somehow

devalued because it is sequentially 'after' what is sometimes taken to be the colonising register, or indeed the coloniser himself. One can argue back against the reviewer, of course, but most interesting is this default position that what comes first, is indeed first.

To ensure that we have intellectual freedom, a Māori perspective should certainly shelve such Western notions of time and instead focus on whether the writer has achieved what he or she set out to. Indeed, *where* the Māori content lies is less important than its influence on the rest of the text. It could be that the final word is a well-aimed Māori one, in which case the writer may have succeeded in startling the reader out of a comfortable reverie. Or the writer can resist inserting anything obviously Māori into the text, preferring, for instance, to lay out a thesis *with an unstated Māori regard*. Admittedly, theorising around the nature of this latter approach remains to be carried out. It would require a Māori metaphysical response to the premise that something has to be overt in order to be at all. A Māori speculation on intellectual freedom would acknowledge in that case that it is the withdrawn, silent version that goes where the audible Māori content cannot— but the Māori regard is still present.

All this has direct repercussions for the Māori scholar, most obviously because a prescribed approach to writing stymies intellectual freedom. In an era that forces Māori academics to churn out articles, chapters and research proposals in the same way as their non-Māori colleagues, we are likely to see increasingly restrictive methods of writing and research emerge. The stakes are possibly higher for Māori, because the academy is meant to exist for communities, and the Māori scholar is supposed to be able to articulate what are sometimes uncomfortable perspectives on behalf of his or her community or in defense of a principle that might have been overlooked even by his or her own peers. *Where* the stated Māori matter is to be put, or indeed the degree to which a paper is devoted to Māori content, is less important than its potential to change an aspect of colonisation or wellbeing. It is in the loosening up of the 'how to' of thinking and writing, after all, that the Māori self is free to reflect his or her ideas as a confluence of all things in the world, *not* as an entirely self-evolved act.

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