

From Taumarunui to Whanganui and places in between: Three challenges encountered by a Pākehā evaluator along the way

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This article is based on a presentation I delivered at the ANZEA Conference 2022: *Ka mua, Ka muri: Looking back to move forward*. Here, I outline three challenges that stand out for me about what it means to be a Pākehā evaluator in Aotearoa New Zealand. Not one is rocket science nor even particularly new; all, though, are critical to how I aim to “do” evaluation and live in the world more generally.

This article title speaks to time and place; to a journey through the years and across the landscape. In the 1980s I moved to Taumarunui. Despite being from Whanganui, the only thing I knew about any connection that there may have been between the two towns was State Highway 4. Racism, though a critical component of my structural analysis, had no impact on my day-to-day life. My appreciation of intergenerational trauma for Māori was virtually non-existent. Living in Taumarunui, I got to experience aspects of a Māori world that I had never before been a part of and, as a result, to begin a profound new learning journey.

So why is any of this relevant to evaluation? Among the few things I am sure about when it comes to evaluation is that as an evaluator, I am the evaluation tool—no fancy technology and no precision engineering to call upon here! To be up for the evaluation challenge, the first thing I need to actively engage with is what it means for my evolving evaluation practice to be Pākehā.

Ko Pākehā te iwi.

Ko Tararā me Ingarihi me Airihi ōku tūpuna.

Nō Te Whanganui-a-Tara tōku whānau mai rānō i te tau kotahi
mano waru rau whā tekau.

Anei tōku tongi i te taha o tōku matua

Ko Biokovo ngā pae maunga

Ko Adriatic te moana

Ko Drasnice, Dalmatia te whenua o ōku tūpuna.

Anei tōku tongi i te taha o tōku ūkaipō

Ko Blue Stacks ngā pae maunga

Ko Erne te awa

Ko Ballyshannon, County Donegal te whenua o ōku tūpuna.

Anei tōku whakapapa

Ko Pavisic me Urlic me Signal me Whale ōku tūpuna.

I tipu ake ahau i Whanganui.

I ēnei rā, e noho ana e mahi ana hoki ahau i Whanganui.

He kairangahau hauora o Whakauae o Ngāti Hauti.

Ko Lynley Cvitanovic tōku ingoa.

Tēnā koutou katoa.

I am a Pākehā evaluator of Croatian, English, and Irish descent. I am from Whanganui where I was born and grew up in a large extended family dominated by our Croatian Catholic grandfather and his values and world view. I have the honour of working for the people of Ngāti Hauiti, a small southern Rangitikei iwi, as a Māori health researcher and evaluator. Whakauae Research, the Ngāti Hauiti-owned-and-mandated Māori health research centre I work with, is located in Whanganui approximately 40 minutes by car from Rātā Marae where Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Hauiti is based.

This article draws on a presentation I delivered at the Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association (ANZEA) Conference: *Ka mua, Ka muri: Looking back to move forward* in Wellington in October 2022. Being notified by the conference organisers that my conference abstract had been accepted was a buzz, but I soon found myself thinking about the presentation opportunity more often than I would have wished. I was somewhat taken aback when the conference programme was published and I found my session was to immediately follow that of kaupapa Māori evaluation thought leader, Dr Fiona Cram. As it turned out there was really nothing to worry about. When it came to presentation day Fiona, in her usual inimitable style, ensured that the proceedings flowed seamlessly.

I was later invited to submit a paper, based on my presentation, to *Evaluation Matters—He Take Tō Te Aromatawai* for possible publication. Though initially hesitant, wondering how useful the paper might be for a wider evaluation audience, I decided to go ahead after taking in to account the level of interest there had been in the presentation topic among conference participants.

It felt especially significant to be presenting as a Pākehā evaluator in Te Whanganui-a-Tara, the Great Harbour of Tara, Wellington. It felt significant because it was Te Whanganui-a-Tara where the very first of my forebears arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand. They were

among the earliest waves of New Zealand Company assisted immigrants; general labourers and agricultural labourers from small villages in Somerset and in Wiltshire in the south west of England.

The New Zealand Company was a private enterprise established by capitalist interests in Britain. The Company intended to systematically colonise Aotearoa New Zealand, purchasing land directly from Māori and on-selling to settlers at a profit, beginning with the settlement of Petone in January 1840. The Company established other settlements soon after, in Whanganui, in Nelson, and in New Plymouth. It is estimated that, at the time, there were just 2000 non-Māori in Aotearoa compared with a total Māori population of approximately 80,000; some 40 times larger (Orange, 2012; Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2019).

When the first of my forebears arrived, in December 1840, there were perhaps 1,200 of their countryfolk living around Te Whanganui-a-Tara (NZ Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2020). Most had settled here only earlier in that same year after voyaging out from Britain on the first of the New Zealand Company commissioned vessels; the *Aurora*, the *Oriental*, and the *Adelaide* (Brett, 1928) among others. My forebears came out onboard the *London*, with others arriving on the *Lord William Bentinck* the following year and coming ashore on the beach at Petone.

My great-great-great-grandparents, Elizabeth and William Membery, disembarked here in the early winter of 1841 with little more than the clothes on their backs, their labour to sell, and perhaps a few agricultural tools and some cooking equipment. With them were seven of their eight children. Their youngest son, 18-month old George, had died during the arduous 4 and a half month journey out largely spent confined below deck in steerage with more than 230 others. At the time of her arrival, Elizabeth was heavily pregnant with her ninth child, Jane who was born in July 1841 (Catley, 1997).

Anyone who has spent any time in Wellington during the winter will be familiar with the keen southerly gales that assail the coastline, the driving rain, and the bone-gnawing cold that persists for months on end. I try to picture how my forebears would have experienced all of this, even on the most practical of levels. Where would they have found shelter? What would they have eaten? How would they have survived at all in conditions that were hardly the most hospitable and that certainly were outside their experience to date?

The realities that many of the new arrivals faced in Te Whanganui-a-Tara, along with the clue to how they survived and eventually prospered, are aptly captured by Kocks (2010) who explains:

... the [*New Zealand*] Company did not prepare immigrants for what awaited them ... especially in the early period of settlement. Great then was the settlers' disappointment when they arrived at their destinations and ... met with reality. There was no surveyed land; sometimes there was not even shelter. Settlers found New Zealand to be cold and damp, and there was a food shortage. It was far from the promised "God's Country"... And there was another surprise: there were other people living there – Māori. (p.189)

It was fortuitous indeed for my forebears that iwi, including the people of Te Āti Awa and Ngāti Toa, were already resident in the Whanganui-a-Tara rohe. The manaakitanga they extended sustained the new arrivals, especially in those early days, amid the chaos that was the New Zealand Company settlement of Wellington (Te Papa Tongarewa The Museum of New Zealand, 2022). Without that support, their struggle to survive may well have been insurmountable. Local hapū helped the new arrivals to construct the first of their raupō dwellings, to secure food, and to establish māra kai. As Kocks (2010) concludes "without Māori support in regard to the provision of food and shelter, settlements could barely have been established, much less continue to exist" (p. 192).

My forebears were later, I understand, among those who worked on the construction of the old Porirua Road. They included William Membrey as well as my Irish great-great-great grandfather, Private John Carrol of the 65th Regiment of Foot who subsequently married William's daughter, Emma.

McDonald (2019) recounts that the old Porirua Road was “built by Wellington ‘settlers’ from the close-circled harbour to the wider valleys towards Paremata and Porirua [*and*] had already been subject to Ngāti Toa resistance. Soldiers had been brought in to secure the continued advance of the road and of settlement (and to provide a labour force)” (p. 57). The redcoats, as the soldiers of the 65th were known, had key roles to play both in the building of infrastructure, including roads, and “as a reminder of the enforcing capacity of British power ... an insurance of force against anything or anyone that might threaten the new order of property and person” (McDonald, 2019, p.66).

Incredibly, within 10 years of arriving in Aotearoa New Zealand as an impoverished, landless agricultural labourer, with few if any prospects of advancement back at home in England, William Membrey was the owner of 25 acres in the Porirua Road District along with a cow and five pigs. In 1848, half of this land block was cleared with 9.5 acres in crop (Carman, 1956, p. 28). While I have no wish to trample on the mana of my forebears—their fortitude and the hardships they endured are undeniable—they nevertheless eventually prospered in the new country as have subsequent generations of Pākehā. That prosperity has been built on the process of colonialisation and on the goodwill of tangata whenua, who first paved the way for the new arrivals.

It would be naïve to assume that the unprecedented improvement in the economic circumstances of my forebears catapulted them in to the realms of the landed gentry. Commonly the economic viability

of small landholdings, such as theirs, were reliant upon men selling their labour beyond the landholding and upon the contribution of the domestic economy; the unpaid labour of their wives and children. According to McLellan (2017), many such landholdings failed due to their small size and to lack of owner access to sufficient capital to invest in their development.

Nevertheless land ownership, albeit small, along with simply being Pākehā conferred privilege of some significance as the increasingly violent process of the colonisation of Aotearoa New Zealand unfolded. Importantly, my forebears assumed ownership of land which benefited them and their descendants to the detriment of Māori for whom the coming tsunami of land loss was to be nothing short of cataclysmic.

McDonald (2019) observes that the tendency of postcolonial settler nations, such as our own, to downplay and even silence our past “is characteristic and necessary in societies built on the dispossession and marginalization of indigenous inhabitants” (p. 50). “Forgetting” about the lives and actions of our forebears, disconnecting them from our present or, conversely, celebrating them in the absence of any broader critical historical analysis, contributes to the denial of the detrimental impact of colonisation on tangata whenua (Buchanan, 2018). Nevertheless that impact is documented and continues to reverberate today (Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2019).

Challenges for a Pākehā evaluator

By now you may be thinking “what does any of this matter”? I would argue that it matters because my Pākehā identity and history are a critical part of who I am, including as an evaluator. These are not elements of my being that I can simply put aside, discount, and operate independently of. In this article, I want to outline just three of the challenges that stand out for me about what it means to be a Pākehā

evaluator. These challenges are interrelated and overlapping rather than linear and stand-alone. They will likely be familiar to many readers.

The first challenge I have identified is appreciating that “getting to know my family tree” matters as much, if not more, than “getting to know the Evaluation Theory Tree” (Alkin et al., 2013). For some time, I assumed that Western academic knowledge was the most important thing to pursue and that attaining it would ably equip me for any future professional role. Once I “knew” the theories, did the examinations and assignments, finished the qualifications—had those tohu hanging on the wall—got a bit of fieldwork practice under my belt, that would be it. I would have all the answers and know how to effectively conduct my work pretty much any old where and with any community.

Realising that these tohu were probably not going to “cut it” came as a bit of a surprise. There is in fact a whole lot more learning to keep doing. Much of that learning is about history as well as about cultural identity and its implications; learning that does not just come out of a textbook. It has become increasingly clear to me that how I interpret and apply evaluation theories and tools is filtered through the lens of my cultural identity. Theories and tools are thus not neutral but rather reflect cultural “ways of knowing”—and they are generally Western ways.

Knowing who I am, in the context of my Pākehā family and social history, supports my better understanding of Pākehā privilege and of Tiriti o Waitangi obligations as well as recognition of the limitations of a Pākehā and Western lens on the world. To be up for evaluation in Aotearoa New Zealand, the first challenge I need to actively engage with therefore is what it means for my evolving evaluation practice to be more than just a Westerner; to be Pākehā. What does that mean for the evaluation theories and tools I choose to use and how I apply them?

I am challenged to be mindful that the “knowing” I bring to evaluation is a Pākehā way of “knowing” and that, more importantly,

it is just one way of “knowing”. Other ways exist that are equally valid. In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand in particular, it is mātauranga Māori that stands out. There are Māori ways of “knowing” and understanding the world that I am never going to grasp, more than superficially, or be a party to. That is ok; these are not places for me to go.

A second challenge I continue to engage with is being open to learning about the places and histories around me and to how Māori see them (Tu Tama Wahine o Taranaki, 2018). It has been said that “a good place to start is where your feet are”; that is just start small and with what is right in front of you.

Despite being born and growing up in Whanganui when I turned 17 and left home for Queensland, I had never been up the Whanganui River Road. I had never been near a local marae. My experience was not particularly unique. Indeed the 1950s Whanganui that Young (1998) describes had changed little by the time that I left:

.... few townsfolk travelled the Whanganui River, or even followed the rattly river road into the interior.... for most, to leave the date palm, plane tree and band rotunda preserve of British culture that was Wanganui and venture upriver, would be to enter a forbidden place. (p.3)

Whanganui was, and to some extent probably still is, one of those provincial centres that are big enough for Pākehā to lead lives quite separate from Māori with any contact being confined largely to school or perhaps the workplace. My lens on Whanganui at the time that I left was simply that it was “a hole”. What I was leaving behind “was a river without beauty, in a region without a sense of place, in a community without a developed sense of belonging” (Young, 1998, p.1). My knowledge of my hometown’s British military roots, let alone the area’s iwi history, was virtually non-existent. I could not wait to get out, and when I did there was no way I was ever going back.

Moving to Taumarunui eight years later, after a spell at university, was something of an eye-opener; probably an understatement. I took with me my newly acquired knowledge of the nature of Aotearoa New Zealand society, about Te Tiriti o Waitangi, about all the “-isms”—racism, sexism, socialism, feminism—my tohu and some life experience including as a social-justice activist. I had still never been up the Whanganui River Road. It never occurred to me that I would.

Taumarunui was a culture shock. So small everyone knew everyone else, or so it seemed. So small that leading a separate Pākehā life did not appear to be the norm. Here, I got the opportunities to start learning about life in Aotearoa New Zealand from a whole new perspective. Here, at the top end of Te Awa Tupua, the world looked a whole lot different. I got to hang out with local people, go to local places and to get involved in aspects of a Māori world that I had never before been a part of.

My experience then and since has been of goodwill and sharing; from Taumarunui back down to Whanganui and places in between. Hopefully my eyes have been opened a little more to the wonder of this place that I once dissed. Everywhere, doors have been opened to me. The willingness of Māori to share stories, spaces and places takes me back full circle to when my forebears landed on the foreshore at Petone 180 years ago. They survived and thrived largely because of the goodwill and sharing extended to them by the people of Te Āti Awa and Ngāti Toa.

A third and final challenge I want to outline is clarifying my role as a Pākehā evaluator and identifying where I can best make a difference. As a Pākehā ally in the evaluation space, or as a *hoa haere* as one conference participant instead proposed, my role includes acknowledging my Pākehā privilege and being ready to yield it; though easier said than done in my experience. How can I, for example, best “support contemporary Māori aspirations without exerting further

assimilative pressure” (Huygens, 2016, p. 156). I can continue to learn about the original Tiriti agreement, grow my awareness of the violence of the process of colonisation in Aotearoa New Zealand and accept the need, as Kirkhart (2015) asserts, to give up:

privilege in evaluation relationships ... I must be ready to step back and be open to nonparticipation or to taking a “back seat” that makes my role less visible. I’m speaking here of truly yielding privilege, not being a back-seat driver who is still trying to control the ride. (p.13)

I can attest through my own practice experience, and what I have seen of that of some of my Pākehā colleagues, that insidiously “asserting control” even when ostensibly “giving it up” is a critical issue and one I need to constantly monitor. Of course, such practice is not confined to the evaluation space and can be identified in all sorts of situations including in the apparently most unlikely of settings.

I need to be mindful that there are places I can usefully go and evaluation work that I can do. Likewise there are other spaces and places where I do not necessarily belong and where it is much less likely that I can conduct evaluation that is going to be effective and beneficial for Māori. Being clear about that demands ongoing critical thinking and reflection.

Goodwin et al. (2015) identify the application of the concept of cultural fit as one way to assess the effectiveness of our evaluation practice in specific contexts. Cultural fit can be used to critically consider how suitable we may be to conduct a particular evaluation in terms of what the impact of our cultural identity might be. Indeed:

the practitioner’s or evaluator’s positioning is important, if not crucial, for effective outcomes, and this can be described in part by the cultural fit or alignment one has with the values, characteristics, and language of the culture(s) of the programme recipient and evaluand ... (Goodwin et al., 2015, 41)

Wehipeihana (2013, 2019) too discusses factors that contribute to conducting evaluation that “works” for Indigenous peoples. She has developed a useful model that is relevant for Pākehā, and other non-Indigenous evaluators, to assess our evaluation practice and the degree to which it benefits Māori. If evaluation is to be effective, it is critical that Māori and other Indigenous peoples lead and ultimately control their own evaluations using their own Indigenous ways of knowing as they choose, with or without reference to Western knowledge (Wehipeihana, 2013, 2019).

Wehipeihana’s model includes the concept of the invitational space. The invitational space is that which non-Māori come into only when specifically asked to do so by Māori for a purpose determined by Māori. Non-Māori accept that our evaluation participation is by invitation only and the nature of that participation is Māori determined. We may have a role to play in amplifying the Māori voice or it may be something else. Perhaps there may be no role for us at all.

Other elements that can usefully contribute to being an effective ally in the evaluation space include respecting Māori-specific knowledge and skill along with being willing to hear challenges from Māori as a call to strengthen our evaluation processes and practice.

Conclusion

This article has highlighted that, as a Pākehā in Aotearoa New Zealand, I have the opportunity and the obligation to claim a cultural identity specific to this place and moulded by its colonial history. Te Tiriti o Waitangi confirms the rights of tangata whenua to sovereignty just as it assures my place here and my responsibility to act in ways consistent with Tiriti intent.

I have identified that my people’s past in this country is inseparable from my present; the process of colonisation has coloured my world and conferred benefits specific to those of my ethnicity. They

include benefits that are explicit across multiple measures of wellbeing including health, education, justice, and the economy.

As a Pākehā evaluator, social justice requires that I contribute to enhancing the wellbeing of Māori and to achieving Māori social equity. Avenues for doing so are innumerable and may include simply “getting out of the way” where necessary, taking up any invitation to participate in evaluation mahi where it may be extended, and being willing to give up privilege. Enhancing Māori wellbeing and achieving Māori social equity are critical to building a better Aotearoa New Zealand; after all what is good for Māori is by definition good for all of us who call this place home (Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, 2021).

Glossary—*te reo Māori*

Most of the definitions included below have been sourced from *Te Aka Māori Dictionary* online <http://www.maoridictionary.co.nz>

Airihi	Irish
awa	river
Ingarihi	English
iwi	tribe
kaupapa Māori	Māori approach /philosophical doctrine
mai rānō	ever since
Māori	Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand
mahi	work
mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge
matua	father
maunga	mountain
moana	ocean, sea
Pākehā	New Zealander of European descent
tangata whenua	Indigenous peoples of the land
Tararā	Dalmatian, Yugoslav

Te Awa Tupua	The indivisible and living whole, comprising Whanganui River from the mountains to the sea, its tributaries and all its physical and metaphysical elements. (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2016)
te tau kotahi mano	
waru rau whā tekau	the year 1840
tupuna /tūpuna	ancestor, forebear / ancestors, forebears
ūkaipō	mother
whakapapa	genealogy
whānau	family group
whenua	homeplace, land

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