

# Here is my heart: A reflective response to 'Indigeneity in Europe'

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Ngati Kahungunu, Ngati Ranginui, and Ngati Porou, New Zealand

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**Abstract**

In response to the three peer-reviewed articles in this special issue, this reflective piece begins with the author, a Māori woman with Celtic ancestry, acknowledging and claiming her indigenous skin—and, more broadly, an indigenous body of knowledge. The article responds to the articles by Sisalli, Van Werde, and Bagge and Berliner firstly by making connections with them; and secondly, through taking a step backwards into the author's own genealogy in order to suggest certain moves forwards for indigenous health and well-being. Finally, it ends with some comments about Western paradigms and Māori narratives.

**KEYWORDS**

connection, culture, healing, koro/grandfather, Māori narratives, skin, Western paradigms

Don't teach me my culture, but use my culture to teach me.  
(Benny Shendo, member of the Jemez Pueblo Tribe)

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In response to the three peer-reviewed articles in this issue on 'Indigeneity in Europe', I offer some connections that sit in solidarity with them. In offering my reflections and thoughts in the way I do, including poetry, I aim to share the richness of our culture, and some of the processes and tools used to help our people to find their own healer within and, thereby, to (re)claim indigenous wisdom and knowledge as equals within our own countries.

I sit here in my indigenous skin, knowing my journey to wellness has been a long journey.

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I sit here in my indigenous skin, rivers flowing deep inside that come from the rivers of tūpuna/ancestral ancestors, who left me a rich and wonderful culture and traditions that I would use on my journey to wellness.

I sit here in my indigenous skin, knowing the journey of my Celtic family, disjointed by the colonisation of Scotland and Ireland by the English, removed from their land, travelling to Aotearoa New Zealand, not knowing this whenua/land of another peoples.

I sit here in my indigenous Māori/Celtic skin, a screaming mokopuna/grandchild of my grandmothers, my grandfathers, who still had relationships with the natural world of the ancient ones that I grew up with.

I sit here in my indigenous women's skin, knowing that the first coloniser took away the balance of our wondrous culture; and Christianity raped our women's culture of the roles within our traditions, in which we were respected because we carried the Whare Tangata/house of all humanity/womb. Now we are just chattels of sexual pleasure, and the Awa ō ngā atua/menstruation period is named as paru/dirty: the untouchables, we became, not sacred beings and certainly not sacred within this colonised culture. Now our birthing house has been destroyed, as we lie on our backs with our legs up in stirrups, never to feel the gravitational pull of Papatuanuku/the Earth Mother, suffering colonised birthing practices, with families outside the door waiting, not involved in the birthing. Now, our Oriori/lullaby is never written for our new child's arrival, freshly from the Atua/gods/goddesses; the Putatara/a shell used in the birthing rituals never welcomes this child from the sacred waters of Wainuiatea/the goddess mother of all the waters: all lost the birthing stages, rites and rights, within this culture of colonisation.

I sit here in my indigenous skin, knowing that indigenous people the world over are over-represented negatively in education, health, and other social statistics; over-represented in prison populations (both male and female); with the highest suicide rates per capita in the world: and our babies are still being stolen by the dominant cultures.

I sit here in my indigenous Hinengaro/brain, never to remember the teachings of old, never to remember the songs that would sing my soul back into being, never to remember the healing medicines, now all replaced by the invaders, colonisers, and all Western paradigms.

## 2 | THE ARTICLES

Whāia te iti kahungi ki te tūohu koe me he maunga teitei/Seek the treasure you value most dearly; if you bow your head, let it be to a lofty mountain.

This whakatauki/proverb is about aiming high or for what is truly valuable; but its real message is to be persistent and not to let obstacles stop you from reaching your goal.

I feel your soul indigenous peoples of Sicily, as I read your story in the article written by Gaetano Sisalli (2021); invader after invader, like us sealers, whalers, Christianity, Portuguese, Spanish, French, Dutch, English, all invaders in my lands, but I feel the strength of you holding tight to your culture and traditions.

We are so similar as people defending our Earth Mother and all the resources of our respective lands with our lives for our future generation. You have a history of Mafia; we too have a history of gangs in this land, which is part of the same result of fighting off our invaders.

You leave me asking you so many questions in my heart.

Your sacred mountain, Etna, and all that she represents to you as people; we too are connected to our sacred mountains, each tribe to their own mountains; you resonate the same passion of our sacred mountains our Tuākana/elders.

They are the ancient ones I talk to, today, to gather the strength of healing within my soul. The sacred rivers, oceans, lakes, I go to bathe in to help heal and cleanse the paru/dirt out of my inner body. I stand with your sacred mountain, Etna.

I connect with your ability to talk story/purakau for us, to share the healing with the families, empowering them to be a part of the processes of healing ourselves.

I stand connected to you, indigenous peoples of Belgium, in your stories as addressed in the article written by the Flemish Dion Van Werde (2021). Connecting to your use of the metaphoric language of your people because I, too, come from a culture rich in this kind of language. Our tūpuna/ancestors used the metaphors of the great forest/ Te Waonui ō Tane, the great trees that gave us life, medicines, waka/canoes or vessels to travel. We understood our relationships within the forests and respected the great trees and animals in the foliage.

I know that I am rooted in the culture of the great oceans, being raised in my tribal area, so that would often be the place I was taken to heal.

I see your tree, and I know the healing that comes from it, and the need that we have to learn to prune and trim the foliage when it becomes too much for the body to carry.

We know as a nation of relocation, removal, stolen from our papakainga/community where we lived as a tribal people together, with all the supportive systems within this collective. We know of the pain within, forced relocation into a system that only individualises people now not knowing how to return to papakainga/community. Our babies still, today, being stolen from their mothers.

We know that we can share with you our own lived experiences of indigenous people who are still surviving cultural genocide.

I connect with you, indigenous people of Greenland, and your stories as carried into this creative world in the article by Bagge and Berliner (2021). We closely link with one and another: we have a love for and are connected with the natural world that takes care of us; our traditions and culture speak the same metaphoric language; our culture speaks of balance in all things between men and women, between responsibilities of the tribal peoples we share that equally; our traditions have our stories that speak to the creation of our Earth and our people and we hold those stories sacred. We understand the sacredness that each of us carry as men, women, children and elders; we have the healers, in every aspect of the natural world who can also can help us to find the healer within; we have narratives that can help us to sing our souls back into being; and genealogy/whakapapa is important to us. You have the Shaman; we have the Tohungā keepers of the sacred knowledge. We understand our place in the Universe.

Now I have connected to you and to how closely we are connected, I know that if given the chance, we as indigenous people of the world can heal this very broken Earth Mother.

It is here at this point that I sit in a multi-cultural skin, understanding my relationships to other indigenous nations within. It is here that I acknowledge that I now live in a Western world who still, in this modern time, cannot accept the knowledge of our nations equal to their knowledge. It is here that I acknowledge their knowledge, but will no longer sacrifice my knowledge that I know can heal my people better than Western paradigms. I do not need your permission to practice what my tūpuna left me as a legacy of healing—not just for us but also for you, the other.

### 3 | STEPPING BACKWARDS

My future is in my past.

To move forward,

I must step backwards.

(Hinewirangi Kohu-Morgan)

According to Moana Jackson (1992), 'The soul of a people, the essence of their being, exists within the warmth of their philosophy; it is nurtured and sheltered by the wisdom of their beginning' (p. 4). It is time to turn this heart around in full circles reclaiming, taking back what was taken from us through the invaders of the Western seas.

Koro/Grandfather  
Speak to me of being women, when a child  
Grandmothers taught magical lessons  
Mother earth/Papatuanuku  
Nurturing, caring, loving my brothers  
My sisters, my mothers, my fathers,  
Sacred circle of whānau, family  
Eternal flame, ahi kaa, Growing inside, of warmth, safety,  
Loving my sisters, growing deep within  
Mother's breasts,  
Brothers, Te Wao nui ō Tane  
Forest whānau inhabiting forest floors  
Whānau, winged children of Ranginui e tu iho nei  
Sky father above,  
Birthing women's lessons from all whānau  
Glowing in women's light  
Grandmothers, kōrero, talk, Koro wind, Tawhirimatea, God of the wind  
His songs, of anger, peace, gentle caressing  
Kissing, licking my paparinga, my cheeks, Four directions, ngā hau e whā.  
His thundering messages, flashing skies  
Colouring pages of my mind, my child's mind  
My beauty, my rains, roimata, tears  
Warm in my sleep words tapping on tin roof  
Ngā kuia old women kōrero talk  
Grandmother moon, radiant light, gifts,  
Light on a road to walk through my nights  
Te awa o te atua god/desses flow  
Red flows from within, full womanhood  
She speaks of me, global beauty, life's circles complete  
Honouring fathers, brothers, uncles, sons,  
Completeness.  
Grandmother moon, birthing mother lessons, Listening to our babies growing deep within,  
Teaching those lessons, sacred houses  
Tapu, sacred time,  
But  
Fear, anger, hate, strangers lost to their roots, different ways, progress, technology, white collars,  
destroying sacred houses  
Removing language removing rituals gods, goddesses, Come calling me barbaric, savage, native, Māori  
Their need for power over  
Raping, violating, killing, destroying my people; My nation, invaders, dancing technological fire dances;  
clouded minds of dope, chemicals, crack, cocaine, heroin  
Dancing alcoholic dances plastic horses spinning  
Faster and faster into a life of death  
Barbarians of the western seas practice genocide  
Winning, losing, betting games.  
Lust, power, for power, tools of the stranger. Babies unborn, dance chemical death songs, Death does  
not come, plastic, tubes, bubbles house

The dying, babies survive born into a chemical hate  
 E Koro, grandfather, I am supposed to love the strangers, So many questions, love, hate, love hate, I  
 hear your song e Kui grandmother,  
 I just have to remember  
 The words, savour the taste of them on my lips,  
 The words fade into wairua, spirit  
 Life then become bearable, stillness enters my soul, And it begins to fly, I will not be lulled into the  
 mystical  
 Trendy, eastern, western religions  
 But stay close to the wisdoms of the ancient ones,  
 I have the intrinsic knowledge passed down through  
 The wai u breast milk of the mother  
 I know I have survived, I will survive,  
 I will live  
 I hear your prayers old ones, Those songs that enter, my heart I will sing.  
 I remember my woman, My Ngati Kahungunu connections to you,  
 I am woman  
 I am man  
 I am grandmother  
 I am grandfather,  
 I am light and darkness  
 Sparkling newness comes  
 Old voices, old waiata, old wisdoms, renewed  
 Live with me an old, wise, powerful indigenous woman.

#### 4 | WESTERN PARADIGMS VERSUS MĀORI NARRATIVES, MĀORI NARRATIVES VERSUS WESTERN PARADIGMS

The emphasis on what differentiates Māori from non-Māori knowledge from Western knowledge is often fixed in the idea of a static pre-colonial past. This can make invisible the dynamic nature of knowledge systems where, for example, new knowledge is continually added and incorporated into Māori world views. Indigenous knowledge, using this construct, is as much about the present and future as it is about the past (Moewaka Barnes, 2006, p. 4).

Moewaka Barnes goes on to cite the work of Sir Mason Durie, a respected kaumatua who, in his work with mental health, uses Māori narratives. He is quoted as saying that he did not use the tūpuna kōrero 'Te Whare Tapa Whā' (the four corners of the house) for Māori, but, rather, that he put it together so he could teach Pākehā (non-Māori) how to work with Māori using Māori narratives.

Rangimarie Turuki Arikirangi Rose Pere's Māori Tohuna spiritual assessment uses a metaphor of Te Wheke/Octopus in her healing with our people. She stated:

I am a Spirit having a physical journey. My Spirit is made up of 'two waters'. One 'water' Waiora, is directly linked into the Central Sun, the Divine Spark. Waituhi, the other 'water' records everything that I do, whether it be good or bad (Pere, n.d.).

She uses Māori narratives of her tūpuna to work with healing people of the world.

TABLE 1 The four doors of healing

Door of the whare	Part of the body	Place and voice
The first door	Puku/stomach	The Kuia/Koro voice where we stored our pain
The second door	Ngakau/seart	The place of Rangatahi/youth, a place of discovery and exploration
The third door	Kaki/throat	Oriori/lullaby, the baby
The fourth door	Upoko/head	Karanga/the first voice

My father, Anaru Harehana Kohu, used the metaphor of the four doors of the whare, a Māori narrative that helped me to sing my soul back into being (see Table 1).

Using Taonga Puoro/Māori musical instruments, I could call on the Atua wahine/goddesses to help me apply the healing stories to my own healing. It was a way of working through pain, hurt, and anger, and when my heart softens and stills, I could see another huarahi/road to walk to my healer within.

My Mother, Helen Nelly Hineatarau Mataira Kohu, taught our whakapapa/genealogy all the way back mai IO/ to the supreme Being. She taught us the value of belonging and knowing from whom we descend. She taught us that whakapapa/genealogy without story is dead, and that we must always seek the stories of our ancestors, held in our sacred language, te reo rangatira. She taught us the value of writing our own stories, and that we would have many to tell—the good, the bad, and the ugly. It was about living and walking in your truth.

Every one of these ancestors played a huge role in shaping the lives of the children of our marae: the rich legacy from birth until death and beyond into the other worlds.

It is these narratives which are our legacy and that will heal our people: taking back and reclaiming is what we want and are no longer asking, or having to prove that we can heal ourselves, our minds, our hearts, our whole being.

I can go on naming tohunga Māori within my own tribal area who taught me narratives that would help heal our people.

I live in several worlds of indigenous nations and will stand fully in my mana and continue to fight for our rights to live as indigenous peoples of Aotearoa using our own narratives to heal our people.

Ka hawhahi tōnu mātau ake, ake, ake/I will fight forever and ever and ever.

(A slogan from the 1986 march to Waitangi)

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**How to cite this article:** Kohu-Morgan, H. (2021). Here is my heart: A reflective response to 'Indigeneity in Europe'. *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, 19(2), e1589. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ppi.1589>