

Hinemoa Watene

Journeying into the Local Environment

Being a young, Māori wāhine in a foreign space so far away from home, I initially had no sense of personal connectivity to the surrounding whenua (land) around me in Dunedin. For Māori, having a strong sense of connectivity with the whenua is crucial in building the foundations needed to cater to their sense of belonging and self-identity to their tīpuna (ancestors) (Dell, 2017). Dell, (2017) explains that strong whakapapa (genealogical links) to the whenua provides a source of identity, a site of stability and untethered connection to future generations. This is crucial to understand in terms of Māori identity, and why gaining that connection with the environment for myself, and other Māori is inherently important for our overall well-being and of course, our sense of knowing where we belong. Understanding my connection through a Māori lens to the environment, in terms of being kaitiaki (caretakers), tāngata whenua (people of the land) and as children to our Māori deities, really emphasises the importance of knowing a place, whether that be through its name (toponymic approach), through narratives passed down (narrative approach), or simply by being there through other people's stories (experiential approach) or, by being there yourself (numinous approach) (Raffan, 1993). By having these different approaches to forming a connection with the environment, I found that this journey of ours really helped me connect the narratives I have heard to the natural environment here in Dunedin. This being through learning more about the Māori deities and their importance in Te Aō Māori (The Māori World), the history of the Taranaki people from Parihaka here in Dunedin, as well as, using these narratives to form my own sense of belonging within the environment, whilst doing so with new people. These elements all played a pivotal role in helping me feel very much at home, in an environment so far away from my whenua and whānau (family), which I believe was very much a common theme with those all involved in this spiritually enhancing journey.

Our journey into our local environment began at the Pineapple track, then up through Waitati, to finally our first resting place for the trip in Te Whare Wānanga (house of learning), based in Orokonui. Even though every part of my body ached, being able to see the raw nature that surrounds us and to learn more about my culture in this part of the motu (island), as well as growing with new people, definitely over-shadowed any thoughts and feelings of wanting to go home. Listening to the

kōrero (conversations) around the purpose of the whare wananga, particularly how it was a place designed to welcome those from all corners of the world, especially those who had lost their way, was one of my highlights. The people in my group, as well as myself, were all from different places, and to have a space so welcoming, and designed for embracing different people, with different backgrounds, was really heart-warming. The different carvings in the whare moe (sleeping house) each represented a different Māori god, and their domains in which they rule. Papatūānuku our Earth Mother (God of the Earth), to Māori is the very essence in which we stand on to call our homes, she is the caretaker and provider to all living things (Lockhart, Houkamu, Sibley & Osborne, 2019). As supported by Evison, (1993), the whenua are not just sources of economic well-being to Māori, but a site of burial for their children's placenta, and the bones of their ancestors. As well as a home for the atua that sustain Māori, one generation to another. In summation, the whenua houses a deep, generational connection to all living entities from the past and to the future. In order for us as both kaitiaki and people that reside on this whenua, according to Raffan (1993), we need to personally identify ourselves with our environment, and see ourselves as one with the land, as well as with other ecological aspects within our environment here in Dunedin. This is what I believe this journey instilled in each of us, that sense of identity, as well as, a sense of protectiveness over our environment, which will hopefully lead to more mindful practice of waste production and food consumption from each of us in our own personal journeys.

There is an immense amount of history that lurks within the environment around us, whether that history be about a people, animals, or even the ecological entities. A people aside from the local Ngāi Tahu people, that have strong physical and spiritual connections to Dunedin, are the people from Parihaka, Taranaki. Located on the west coast of the North Island of New Zealand, Parihaka was a peaceful settlement, aimed at welcoming all Māori who were alienated from their lands due to the arrival of the British settlers. Parihaka at the time of its invasion was a stronghold of Māori resistance against the increasingly aggressive colonial powers, who had their mind set on freeing up Māori occupied land for European advancement and settlement. Parihaka was founded by Māori prophet Te Whiti in the mid 1860's, as a response to the mass alienation of Māori land nationwide caused by the

Crown and the New Zealand Settlements act, which allowed for the full confiscation of Māori land from iwi (tribes) that were deemed to be in rebellion against the British Crown (Parihaka | Te Kāhui o Taranaki Iwi, 2021). Te Whiti was seen as a huge threat to the colonial powers, as he stood up in rebellion against the advancement of European land alienation, as well as, doing it in a peaceful manner. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 1881, the peaceful settlement was invaded by over 1500-armed British soldiers, all those that resided there were taken as prisoners, whilst their village was burned to the ground to make way for European settlement (Parihaka | Te Kāhui o Taranaki Iwi, 2021). The reason I am discussing Parihaka is because the very roads and infrastructure we utilise today here in Dunedin, were built by these prisoners from Parihaka. Through listening to stories from our guide, Alex, at Te Whare Wananga, going to Anderson's Bay where they were kept as prisoners, and feeling that sense of emotional heaviness as I passed by the caves, I can't describe just how sad that connection is knowing that my people were enslaved here in Dunedin, in the very place many Māori like myself seek to pave a way for their own journeys. Feeling this connection, and now having seen the caves, I feel like I owe it to my tīpuna to do better in every aspect of my life, especially in taking care of the environment around me, so the generations after me can see the same beauty I was so very privileged to witness.

This spiritually uplifting journey really opened my eyes up to the beautiful landscape that surrounds us, as well as, allowing me to recognise how much we take it for granted. There's a Māori proverb that says, "*Whatu ngarongongaro te tangata toitū te whenua.*" As man disappears from sight, the land remains ("Māori Development, Ministry of, Te Puni Kōkiri, Annual Report for the year ended 30 June 2016 E.47 (E.47) - New Zealand Parliament", 2016). This Māori whakataukī (proverb) to me demonstrates just how much power the land holds over us, as it describes how once we leave, the land will always be there. In our current generation we are facing huge environmental issues like, global warming and resource depletion that threaten the very land we stand on. Non-recyclable waste, careless rubbish dumping and resource depletion by the very beings that should be the caretakers of the land, demonstrates just how disconnected we all are from the entities that sustain us. This journey although enjoyable and a highlight for 2021, especially with being able to see and try new things with

new people, has been pretty eye-opening in terms of the negative impact humans actually have on the environment, and the wildlife that live in it. However, all negatives aside, I found that this journey has not only helped me form a sense of connectivity with the Ngāi Tahu people down here, as well as the whenua that they belong to, I have learnt a lot more about my identity as a Māori. As someone who shares the responsibility as kaitiaki (guardians), this journey has propelled me to do better for the environment that sustains me, whether that be in how I purchase and consume products, or simply in my carbon foot print.

In conclusion, I know that from this journey onwards, I will put my best foot forward in doing better for Papatūānuku, so that the generations after me can experience what I have whilst honouring our Taranaki tīpuna who paved the way for us. Knowing what I know now with how deep rooted the history of Dunedin really is, especially with my Māori people, I want to be a better educator and more confident in who I am. Otherwise, my tīpuna across the motu would have died during the period of early British settlement for no reason.

## References

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