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Title: Of the people, for the people, by the people: He tangata, He tangata, He tangata:
The value of autobiography in academia: Māori women and Post World War Two
American Presidents

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1. Professor Radner, Dr. Cooper thank you for allowing me to partake in this Interdisciplinary Research Day under the umbrella of Gender Studies.
2. I would also like to acknowledge my learned colleague Dr. Angela Wanhalla of History who really was responsible for introducing me to the literature on autobiography. And she gave me some of the most wonderful sources to help me with this presentation. *Tena Koe he tohuka wahine.*
3. Lastly, thank you all for taking the time out of your busy schedule to attend these presentations.
4. The catch phrase title of this presentation *Of the people, for the people, by the people: He tangata, He tangata, He tangata* will be immediately recognised by scholars of American history and Maori studies.
5. The expression *Of the people, for the people, by the people* is taken from US President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysberg address at the height of the American Civil War in 1863. Although it is in reference to democracy in the American republic, its literal form in my opinion alludes to the very essence of autobiographies.
6. They are written by people about themselves and they are given to wider audience. And so there is a democratic essence about autobiographies.
7. Any fool, dimwit or halfwit can create an autobiography. And you know what, that is the beautiful nature of them. They can be as formalistic or artistic as the author wants it to be.
8. I now turn to the Maori expression in the catch phrase title. This is an expression taken from a Maori proverb that ponders
9. *He aha te mea nui o te ao, he tangata he tangata he tangata*
10. The meaning roughly translates as What is the most important thing in the world, it is the people, the people, the people.
11. And again, this expression's significance is that autobiographies are a product of people. People and indeed the person is clearly at the centre of the narrative or to use a Maori term, the centre of the *korero*.
12. In this presentation I explore the value of autobiographies in academia.

13. I use the autobiographies of Maori women from Judith Binney and Gillian Chapman's 1986 book *Nga Morehu: the Survivors* and certain American Presidents since the Second World War as subject material to explore that question.
14. For most of these autobiographies, the narrative is done largely through the use of prose. The autobiographies also utilise photographic images of family, friends and physical locations to complement the prose. And in the case of each of the eight Maori women genealogical tables are also employed to explain family relationships.
15. The reason that I have used Maori women's and American Presidential autobiographies is to simply explore issues using such different subject material such as: the politically powerful as opposed to the politically weak; females opposed to males; and the obvious ethnic and nationalist differences.
16. For this presentation, when I mention the term autobiography I am using it in a liberal sense. There is the standard definition of an autobiography being a biography written by the subject or composed with a collaborative writer and certainly *Nga Morehu* (1986) meets this criteria as well as Lyndon Johnson's *The Vantage Point* (1971) and Gerald Ford's *A Time to Heal* (1979).
17. However I also include in the definition of autobiography for this presentation the likes of memoirs, transcripts of interviews, diaries and letters that have been published such as *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (1978), *Plain Speaking Conversations with Harry Truman* (1974), *The Eisenhower Diaries* (1981) and *Reagan: A Life in Letters* (2003).
18. My argument for this presentation is quite simple. The autobiographies of Maori women and Post World War Two Presidents have the same academic value. This is in terms of relating the autobiographer to themselves, their family and the society they lived.
19. The autobiographies raise the same types of questions concerning facts, interpretation of events, bias, and cross referencing with other primary and secondary material.
20. Now essentially nothing which I have said should be entirely new. It is merely a reflection of the basic first principles of scholarship and practice. This is irrespective of substantive and procedural norms of the range of various academic disciplines although I do limit myself to the Humanities and Social Sciences.
21. So what do these autobiographies contain? They contain primary facts.

22. We know that certain people existed such as two little girls from the Eastern Bay of Plenty in the North Island called Heni McDonald and Reremoana Akuhata. And so too did two little boys, one from Hope, Arkansas called William Blythe (later to become William Clinton) and one from Plains, Georgia called James Earl Carter.

23. Now primary facts cover things like family and friends, and various locations. These are events such as schooling, religious instruction, romantic attachments, employment the list can go on.

24. Bill Clinton mentions in his autobiography

Occasionally black kids would come into the store and we would play. It took me years to learn about segregation and prejudice and the meaning of poverty, years to learn that most white people weren't like my grandfather and grandmother (Bill Clinton, *My Life*, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 2004, p.12)

25. Heni Brown mentions that

My mother never lived with us. She was a wanderer- a gypsy-all over the place. She never lived with our greatgrandmother, because our great-grandmother pushed her out! She was against my mother marrying European husbands (Judith Binney & Gillian Chapman, *Nga Mōrehu The Survivors, The Life Histories of Eight Maori Women*, Auckland University Press, 1996. p.41).

26. Now herein lies our first issue. Did a lot of the primary facts such as those mentioned above (and which are throughout all the Maori and US presidential autobiographies actually exist or take place?

27. The reader for most things often has to take their literal word for it. Alternatively, the ever enquiring academic can call for corroboration of these accounts through primary or secondary sources.

28. Testimony by contemporaries or archival material alluding to people, places and circumstances primarily satisfy academics.

29. Admittedly, once US Presidents were elected they became famous. As a result a whole raft of archival material and contemporary testimony exists for them usually in national archives or their palatial Presidential libraries.

30. But even under these circumstances those types of records are still subject to a whole lot of other considerations. These are things like limitations on access or censorship on the grounds of national security or simply political expediency.
31. But despite this raft of documentation for many former Presidents, there is still not a lot of archival material from the early period of their lives. Some came from very humble backgrounds just like the Maori women autobiographers, and in some cases some former Presidents came from quite destitute backgrounds like Richard Nixon.
32. In the absence of corroborating primary or secondary sources academics are therefore still forced to accept the autobiographer's word for many of their primary facts.
33. I now wish to consider what I term ancillary facts. These are facts while sometimes not central to the narrative, nonetheless allude to other things. These are things that may pertain to certain items or certain social practises. Some of these may be viewed as being mundane although social anthropologists often take great delight in them. These are things like the food that was eaten, the types of bedding and housing, school and work practises and the list can go on.
34. Here are two examples. Heni Sutherland mentioned

My grandfather Paku was a wonderful man... And then he would make us miti tahu, cut up pork and partly cook it, and then throw it into a camp oven of boiling boiling fat. Then they put it in a container, usually a kerosene tin, and they would pour fat, and covered it with fat. Probably kept it airtight and the meat use to keep indefinitely. (Judith Binney & Gillian Chapman, *Nga Mōrehu The Survivors, The Life Histories of Eight Maori Woman*, Auckland University Press, 1996, p.113)

35. In Jimmy Carter's autobiographical account of his rural boyhood he had this to say

Dogs played a significant role in our lives. Not only were they constant companions on the farm and for hunting, but they also provided the most fearsome nightmares of my childhood. The fear of hydrophobia, or rabies, was even worse than the haunted house or threat of pneumonia or polio (Jimmy Carter, *An Hour before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood*, Simon & Shuster, Sydney, 2001, p.84)

36. Now, academics could still attempt to corroborate these ancillary facts by contemporary accounts of others or social commentators of the time. But again, like primary facts,

academics are forced to accept what is literally said. For instance how can one corroborate nightmares of rabbiid dogs from a boy in rural Georgia in the 1920s.

37. From this point I wish to move on to what I call the tertiary facts. These are facts relating to the perceptions by Maori women and these former Presidents.
38. These tertiary facts are extremely problematic for academics. This is because they relate to things such as the autobiographer's interpretation of events and the human condition of biasness.
39. And yet again, academics are still forced to accept the autobiographers' words although begrudgingly and with a degree of caution.
40. The following demonstrates Te Akakura Rua's account of one source of the quarrels from her late father's estate. There is no corroborating evidence for this other than the account given here.

A portion was taken by Puti and Meri Tukua to build Te Ao Hou. I stepped in and took it and they didn't like it . We fought over our father's money and I used my share . Mine-well, my girl went through college (Judith Binney & Gillian Chapman, *Nga Mōrehu The Survivors, The Life Histories of Eight Maori Woman*, Auckland University Press, 1996, p.182)

41. Lyndon Johnson's interpretation of the fierce Senate battle for passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was as follows.

It would be a fight to total victory or total defeat without appeasement or attrition. The battle would be fought with dignity and perhaps with sorrow but with no anger or bitterness (Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency*, Holt Rinehart & Winston, New York, 1971.p.159)

42. This comment by Johnson about no anger or bitterness, simply does not sit well with other accounts by Johnson's contemporaries in the Senate itself. There was anger and there certainly was bitterness in the Senate over the Civil Rights Bill.
43. But consider this. Even if one was to revert to corroboration with primary and secondary material there is still a huge amount of difficulties. This is because with personal perceptions there are temporal, physical or self censorship considerations.

44. Perceptions change with time and are influenced with time. Sometimes remembering back to how one thought as a child and trying to interpret events of childhood can be nearly impossible even with memory jogging and memory cueing.

45. President Eisenhower in *At Ease: Stories I tell to Friends* (1968), specifically warned the reader

Now there are a few conversations reported in this book ...which I did hear at first hand fifty and even seventy years or more. The key phrases are indelibly imprinted in my memory... But I have engaged in some reconstruction. Consequently, I urge the reader to take all the quoted material... with the necessary grain of salt.

46. And still after everything has been said and done, the autobiographer is still faced with self censorship either because of embarrassment, perceived relevancy, or even simply ignorance of certain facts.

47. Eisenhower did not mention his exact relationship with Kay Summersby in any of his autobiographies. It would have continued to be speculation if Harry Truman did not mention this in his interview with Merle Miller.

But I wouldn't have ever supported Eisenhower under any circumstances for President even if I didn't ... hadn't known about his personal life.

Im sorry, sir. What do you mean?

Why right after the war was over he wrote a letter to General Marshall saying he wanted to come back to the US and divorce Mrs. Eisenhower so that he could marry this Englishwoman...Marshall said that if he ever mentioned a thing like that, he'd see to it that the rest of his life was a living hell. I don't like Eisenhower you know that. I never have but one last thing I did as President , I got those letters from his file in the Pentagon and destroyed them (Merle Miller, *Plain Speaking: Conversations with Harry S. Truman*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1974.p.340).

48. When Truman was interviewed by Merle Miller he had this to say In summation, by considering these autobiographies in the way that I have presented hopefully has drawn to your attention the way in which these autobiographies can be used. Their overarching value (although with limitations) is that they are ONE source of information for primary, ancillary and tertiary facts.

49. At the end of the day, there is one thing which we academics cannot deny. These Maori women and US Presidents were witnesses to their own lives. They were present at all the events that shaped their lives. Even if we were to cross reference the facts to primary and secondary material, and even if we were to refute various facts and claim them as untrue or unreal, they were nevertheless very real to them.

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