

Our Place: Reimagining Local History as Life Writing

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Abstract

The field of life writing scholarship encourages a variety of accounts of lived experience to be reframed and restudied as life writing. The thesis draws on this body of life writing theory to argue for local history books to be read as lived accounts of a geographical community, applying a life writing lens to the reading and analysis of local history books in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific. The thesis shows that expectations and significance (and even practice) of local history change when it is viewed as collaborative life writing. A multiple method research design integrates case studies of three texts—*Matagi Tokelau*, *Moturoa*, and *Patumahoe: History & Memories*—with analysis of the project experiences of a selection of local history book producers to provide further critical insight into the advantages of framing their work as life writing.

The thesis reveals a literary complexity underpinning the history of local place as a window into social worlds and assumptions—particularly the postcolonial. It examines questions of authority and authorship in group life narratives to explore the ethical dimensions of writing about “self” and “other” in these complex, culturally diverse social and political spaces in local history book projects. Through questioning the producers of texts about these issues, and the tensions and nuances they raise, the thesis seeks to stimulate debate and influence changes in the way local history texts are written in future. The study of local history as life writing allows for context, process and reception in the “making” of local history to be appreciated as *as* important as the actual text that is produced. Similarly, life writing critique reveals the way in which communities assert themselves and their perceived community identities by making and remaking boundaries or controlling the significance of memories. Local history, my research posits, is always unfinished, waiting to be reimagined.

The conclusion emphasises the importance of a duty of care expected of writers of local history books as an ethical responsibility to reflect critically and reflexively on their subjects and practices. The thesis enriches an understanding of the production processes of local history books in Aotearoa New Zealand and encourages a step towards more deliberate collaborative practices, posing questions of authorship and representation in the writing and publishing of future texts.

Preface

“I am because other people are.” (Archbishop Desmond Tutu, human rights activist)

The Ubuntu philosophy captured in these six words spoken by Archbishop Tutu is an African worldview. It is an expression of the intimate and intertwining relationship between self as an individual and self as collective—a process of knowing, I believe, negotiated through remembering and storytelling.

I have always been drawn to peoples’ stories, even in childhood being the pesky one asking too many questions and being shooed away from adult conversations. When I reflect upon my stories of place, I open a flood of memories that trace back to my African roots—the earliest being snapshots of the fifteen-year war we called the Rhodesian bush war (also known as Zimbabwe’s war of liberation): oil factories in the distance burning into the late night; my father’s smelly uniform as we collect a near-stranger from his latest state-ordained “act of service” (a compulsory military duty that was enforced); my mother’s tears as we pack and wave goodbye on the tarmac, leaving a place that would soon be no more (with Rhodesia becoming internationally recognised as Zimbabwe in 1980); arriving at a new place—a Xhosa homeland that didn’t feel like home—that only offered an empty promise of peace. I was still only a child, not quite ten, when we moved again—this time to the bedlam of South Africa in the late 1980s. I can’t remember when I first heard the word “apartheid”. It probably made no sense to me until I was well into High School.

We arrived into South Africa as “when-we’s” (a somewhat derogatory term we lived under as Rhodesian immigrants), a people privileged by our white skin, but not entirely accepted, especially when we opened our mouths to speak and our accented tongues exclaimed our heritage. My father died not long after we moved to South Africa, a victim I think now of

history and undiagnosed PTSD. My mother tried desperately to make a home for her family in this new place, but always missed the old place more. Our stories turned silent.

As a teen I tried to make sense of our new place and understand the political tensions I had grown conscious of all around me. In High School I watched the release of Nelson Mandela on television with our domestic worker, trying to make sense of her tears and her stories.

The hope of a rainbow nation thrust me into my undergraduate years, where I learnt that I had to find my place somehow between my settler past and postcolonial present. And that was fraught with tension, emotion and an uncertain reception in different quarters, socially, intellectually and professionally.

Most important to my journey of discovering myself in a collective Southern Africa, was the exposure to life stories captured and presented in different artistic media. When I was a young child in Transkei, the Xhosa machine operators of my father's shoe factory taught me the words of a song they would sing quietly while working. I thought it sounded beautiful and was merrily singing it in the car on the way home when my mother almost had a stroke! Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika (God Bless Africa) was banned at the time and she screamed at me to never sing that song aloud again. I had no idea what she was talking about; she was the one who sounded like a mad woman to me. It was just a song? But I later learnt it was so much more... It was also the birth of my fascination with the power of storytelling and the often conflicting points of view it conjures.

Living in South Africa during the later 1980s, glimpses of life flashed on the dramatic television news broadcasts but my mother was quick to turn them off and evade further questioning. It was like trying to piece together a puzzle, but key parts had been deliberately hidden, stories silenced. We certainly didn't learn much about this at school; we focused on science and maths, never anything philosophical or political and to say history was white-washed would be a dramatic understatement. Then, while apartheid was

dismantled, I entered the University of South Africa (UNISA) as an English and Communications student. Books and texts that were previously banned could now be taught and a world of new life experiences, often lived by people in the same places as my family, opened to me. I cried over the short stories of Nadine Gordimer and was aghast when I read the work of John Maxwell Coetzee. Both wrote to shed light on life lived under apartheid, from various points of view. Our lecturers worked to expose us to thinking and stories that we'd been previously carefully protected from uncovering.

After graduation, my education continued under the tutelage of a Professor of Sociology, a vocal protestor against apartheid in his career. I owe a debt of scholastic gratitude to his influence, helping me to learn about qualitative research in practice, but more importantly, opening a new avenue of storytelling and introducing me to a diversity of peers. I sought out new stories and spent as much time as possible talking to colleagues about their life experiences, and those of their parents, in South Africa. I listened and learned about a breadth of experience, cried many more tears, and marvelled about the vast differences and yet intricate similarities. I would reciprocate with some memories of my own and together we'd try to work out how our stories stood alongside each other, or if they even could. The highlight of this season was meeting with a former leader of the African National Congress, imprisoned on Robben Island, and learning about his stories. Collectively these stories impacted me in a deep and profound way. I wanted to keep learning more how people's stories intersected with history of place.

Unfortunately, the promise of hope couldn't stem the growth of violence brought about by an untenable cycle of poverty where we lived. When I found out I was expecting a baby girl, I agreed to join my husband and his family in yet another place. This time I have been welcomed to Aotearoa New Zealand and I acknowledge both tangata whenua as the first peoples of this land and the settlers that followed. Together they have warmly received

people like me. My story juts up against the stories I have learnt since being here, new stories and new places (to me at least), but familiar themes where settlers' European heritage interacts with indigenous peoples in sometimes tension-filled encounters. In Aotearoa New Zealand I shifted away from academic research into the world of professional life writing where I learnt about the genre and its practice in different contexts, writing several personal and group stories. Through these stories I learnt more about different lived experiences in parts of Aotearoa New Zealand too, similar and dissimilar memories about living in the same place and/or at the same time.

These life experiences, scholastic and writing encounters, ignited a fascination to better understand historical storytelling in the context of places and the stories or accounts of the people who call these places "ours". Reflecting upon my research, it suggests a moral stance. Story is respected and storytelling, especially lived accounts, is privileged as a gateway for humanity to learn from one another. It echoes the emerging consciousness of a young woman finding her place, first in Southern Africa as her birth home and then, as an older soul, in Aotearoa New Zealand as her adopted choice of home. This wrestling with identity, in the context of contested places, is an emotional voyage. It can be confronting and some, like many adults of my childhood, prefer to avoid the conversations altogether. Others, like the scholars of my early career and those I have encountered in my thesis research in recent years, have helped guide me. I hope that from my experiences with both points of view—and some sensitivity borne from my own internal dialogue that encourages me to ask questions while another part urges caution and silence—reflects an understanding that we all enter the conversation at our own pace from our own lived experiences. This thesis is part of my journey, asking questions about self and others in the critical intersection where local place meets the idea of community.

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This thesis and the completion of my PhD studies would not have been possible without the unwavering support of Dr Mary Paul and Dr Trudie Cain. I am grateful for the guidance and mentoring of these two scholars, both so passionate about their fields and willing to invest so much of themselves into the students they teach. I am a better scholar, writer and woman for the time I have spent in their company. They have inspired me to challenge myself and my thinking beyond what I thought possible. Thank you hardly seems sufficient to convey my appreciation for all you have done.

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None of this research would have been conceivable, however, without the willingness of my research participants to be interviewed. I would like to acknowledge the book

producers who were open to talking about their projects and book experiences with me. I appreciated your candour and enthusiasm to take part in my research. I have tried to do justice to your stories, reflections and accounts, but each of your fascinating stories alone could fill hundreds more pages. Thank you for your willingness to learn with me.

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Statement of Ethics

Approval for the research was obtained by the Massey University Human Ethics

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Glossary

- Arohanui (with deep affection)
- Hapū (subtribe, larger kinship group, traditionally primary political unit)
- Inati (traditional food distribution practice in Tokelau)
- Iwi (tribe, extended kinship group)
- Iwi rohe (tribal boundaries)
- Kaitiakitanga (guardianship)
- Kaumātua (elder)
- Kaupapa Māori (Māori customary approach)
- Kia ora (hello)
- Koha (gift, donation)
- Kōrero (stories, discussion)
- Kupu (noun – word or saying)
- Mahi (work)
- Mana (prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma)
- Māori (indigenous New Zealander)
- Māoritanga (Māori culture, way of life, practices and beliefs)
- Ngothando (with love - Xhosa language)
- Pā (fortified village)
- Pākehā (New Zealander of European descent)
- Tangata whenua (people of the land)
- Taonga (treasure)
- Tapu (sacred, off-limits)
- Tauwi (foreigner)
- Te reo Māori (indigenous Māori language)
- Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi)

Toeaina (elders - Tokelau)

Tūrangawaewae (place where one has a right to stand or belong through whakapapa and kinship)

Ubuntu (African philosophy of a collective “we” – community worldview)

Waka (canoe)

Waka huia (treasure boxes)

Whakapapa (genealogy, lineage)

Whakataukī (proverb)

Whānau (family group)

Xhosa (indigenous people of Eastern Cape, South Africa)

Spelling note:

The terms “Aotearoa New Zealand” and “New Zealand” refer to the same country and both terms are used within the thesis. *Aotearoa New Zealand* is the full name of New Zealand, used more frequently in contemporary practice in recognition of the nation’s identity and heritage. *New Zealand* is used officially and historically from the 1800s–2000s.

Patumahoe is the name of a district in Auckland that has historically been spelled without a macron since European settlement. One case study title and original quotes related to the text are, therefore, presented as *Patumahoe* in the thesis—as they are presented in the documents. The body of the thesis will refer to *Patumāhoe* in recognition of te reo Māori and cultural acknowledgements made in the 2017 Deed of Settlement to Ngāti Tamaoho, after the publication of the case study title.

Written records such as newspaper articles, publication titles or book excerpts are also presented or quoted as they appear in the original texts and may not include use of the macron in te reo Māori words, including the use of the word Māori or Pākehā which have often been spelt as Maori or Pakeha in English texts in the past.

Chapter One

Introduction

“Stories create community, enable us to see through the eyes of other people, and open us to the claims of others.” (Peter Forbes, author and photographer)

In May 2015, I was driving along a back-country road in the middle of Aotearoa New Zealand’s South Island in mid-Canterbury, pondering what had been an extraordinary evening for a seemingly ordinary event—a local history book launch. I had been invited to be part of the project a few years earlier, as a commissioned writer, and had made several trips to the countryside during that time, but that evening was different. Pragmatic farmers became poets of the past, and no-nonsense rural men and women blushed over remembered youthful romances. Journalists probed for a story. Historians peered eagle-eyed, and local politicians preened. Everyone perused the pages of their copy; everyone had a reaction. I could not stop thinking about the intersection of encounters from that evening. Ongoing discussion of the book, including newspaper and scholars’ reviews and the word on the street (otherwise known as village gossip), fuelled my curiosity. The book launch was not a novel experience—the book produced was one of many of its sort that year around the nation—and yet each, it appeared, promoted a community encounter of history and story that went way beyond what was visible on the surface. These books, often swept aside as insignificant to mainstream history scholarship, seemed to have another sort of significance at grassroots—one related to their capacity to engage people in the stories and memories of their places.

Stories inform human understanding and order our world. In all fields of knowledge, people use stories to reflect upon and interpret the experiences they have had, the events they have witnessed, or the lives they have led. Storytelling is pervasive, preceded writing

and now coexists with writing in all cultures. However, since the Enlightenment, stories were separated into broad categories of fiction and nonfiction, and numerous genres became established, such as poetry, fantasy, autobiography, and biography. This thesis explores a more recent category of storytelling known as life writing, which blurs boundaries between earlier genre categories. This newer canon gathers together old genres and captures the new and, in doing so, enables novel connections between works that would generally have been seen as belonging to different categories of writing altogether.

Life writing links shared features of different media and genres, such as autobiographies, memoir, travel writing, and ethnographies among numerous others. It is, as life writing scholars Haslam and Neale (2009) describe, an art form and a self-conscious one that explores “how lives might be seen to be stories, and the best ways of retelling those stories” (p. 2). Life writing, therefore, points out the common ground connecting what are often thought of as discrete genres. Haslam and Neale suggest it is “an umbrella term for biography and autobiography” (p. 1), but this thinking has been extended with the argument that life writing is evolving into a much wider field of study and practice with many different genres and forms that are now being studied as life writing. Literary scholar Morrison (2010), for example, suggests life writing is a much more encompassing “umbrella term [that covers] such literary and literary/non-fiction forms as biography, autobiography, memoir, creative non-fiction, narrative non-fiction and auto-fiction” (p. 72), while others suggest it is developing into a self-conscious practice that includes challenges to its own ways of storytelling (Jolly, 2011).

Local History Storytelling as Life Writing

Inspired by these new ideas about the scope and character of life writing, I have matched these discoveries with the complexities of local history books and the excited responses

on that memorable evening in 2015 to ponder whether it is possible and beneficial to explore local history books as a genre of life writing—asking what it adds to local history writing and its study to see these texts as life writing and apply life writing critique to the books and their production and reception. The outcome of those questions is this thesis, which links my interest in local (Pacific and Aotearoa New Zealand) history writing with life writing scholarship. By investigating a diverse but limited number of examples of local histories, a genre that has, up until now, often been understood as a rather inferior history by scholars and critics, I aim to discover whether it is better understood and valued by studying it as life writing.

There are innumerable volumes of local history books across homes and libraries in Aotearoa New Zealand, often birthed in enthusiasm to celebrate anniversary milestones that represent years of research and writing among local communities. These are the stories of lives lived in the collective and explored, interpreted, and articulated in written texts. I contend that these books have evolved into a fascinating genre of writing that can now be named as life writing, not because they have garnered celebrity over the years with their scholarship but because they deserve to be valued for having so much literary complexity that has remained underappreciated.

The definition of local history is that it tells the story of a place and its people. According to Yow (2014), it centres a narrative on the story of lives lived collectively in a specific setting (pp. 189–190). It is an account of history and heritage situated in a locale, which usually articulates the development story of that place as a type of geographical biography or autobiography. This is primarily because the story of the place hinges upon the shared accounts and stories of its people, found in written records and personal reminiscences. Its producers draw upon a recognised boundary or accepted designation of territory around a geographical location and give an account of life lived by people

within these boundaries, united by propinquity and its encompassing sense of collective identity (Daley, 1992; Williamson & DeSouza, 2007). Up until now, the study and production of these books have largely been the province of historians. However, the field is not the most popular or esteemed for history studies and is often critiqued, in what O' Davies describes in his forward to Amato (2002), as "that long-denigrated stepchild of the historical profession" (p. xv). Notwithstanding, in recent years, local history has garnered support for its validity among scholars. For example, Oxford University historian Healey (2012) argues that local history should not be cast aside as irrelevant or parochial since people live in place, and such histories are, therefore, always an important source of study. In Aotearoa New Zealand, for a long time, the worth and significance of local history has been debated, some early views arguing that local history overreaches (Fairburn, 1979) while others have argued for its contribution to history scholarship (Gardner, 1999; McLean, 2007; Warren-Findley, 2001, January). Despite the passing of time and changing attitudes, there are still strong opinions both for and against the scholastic value and credibility of local history. This has been further complicated with the evolution of its forms and practices, which will be explained in detail in Chapter Three.

This thesis shows how the diversity of arguments for and against local history are both understood as typical debates about life writing and admitting the debates into the type of writing. Another example of this is the confusion in how local history and community history books relate to one another. Jackson (2010) explains how the difference between what scholars or producers have called local history (that is place focused) or community history (that is people focused) disguises the common ground between the terms and their focus on learning about people. He argues that local history is closely entwined with community history, and vice versa, and, although there is no consensus yet by scholars whether the terms can be interchangeable, there is agreement that local history

is now more people centred with more interest in the experience of community alongside traditional local history features (pp. 51–52). This emphasis on community focus also fits in with the new life writing category that I propose.

Both terms—local and community—can, furthermore, be interpreted subjectively. However, neither is without problem. The concept of community, it is argued, can deliberately obscure ideologies or hide tensions that reside among groups of people living together when they are represented under an encompassing category. Oral history critic Shopes (2002) suggests that the mere idea of community “is vague and conceptually limited, with generally positive associations and not entirely deliberate implications of commonality and comity” (p. 588). Critics and practitioners agree that community history projects are usually defined by a geographically bounded locale, but they can also refer to groups of shared social identity that transcend place-based boundaries. The definition of local is problematic too because the boundaries of place are also imaginary and socially constructed—borders often drawn to correspond to “official” mapping, but which may not overlap with perceived social connections. Storytelling as a representative collective in this context becomes complicated when one tries to define who community is in the first instance. Therefore, referring to the geographical location of place (local history) is an imperfect but helpful qualifier of the social group being written about or self-representing in these types of books. Furthermore, studying local history as a category of life writing can solve some of the problems raised in the debate between local history versus community history and, at the same time, redress the low status of local history books.

Asking New Questions

Resituating local history within life writing allows questions to be raised about the expression of lived experience related to the propinquity of a locale. Questions about

community and locale emerge, not as things that are solved before writing but as questions that are negotiated within a text as the vital self-consciousness that typifies life writing. I began to ask: what are the differing practices and expectations of local history when it is resituated as a genre of life writing? When local or community history is seen as a kind of life writing, three questions come to the fore, informed by Haslam and Neale's (2009) assertion that life writing is a self-conscious art form that explores how lives are seen and told as stories.

(1) How is meaning created from the encounters of different voices and points of view in local history books when they are read as a collaborative expression of lived experience?

(2) How do local history writers, storytellers, and the texts that they produce negotiate the tension-filled space between the subjectivities of their stories (as lived accounts) and the objectivity of their permanence as a written historical record (a book)?

(3) How are community, authority, and authorship of these texts negotiated as a representation of self and others?

In this thesis, I seek to answer these questions in two kinds of research. First, it will be through the case studies of three local history books written in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific (including discussions held with their producers)—*Matagi Tokelau: History and Traditions of Tokelau*; *Moturoa: A Social History of Moturoa, New Plymouth, New Zealand Aotearoa*; and *Patumahoe': History & Memories*. Second, it will be by means of a critical analysis of the experiences of a selection of New Zealand producers who have published or contributed to a range of local or community history books and their reflection of local history writing informed by their different and varied practices.

¹ See spelling note in Glossary (p. xiii).

Theoretical Framework

The research enquiry is informed by the scholarship of life writing and located within an interdisciplinary theoretical or conceptual framework. Several key theorists have informed my work. First is the philosophy and literary theory of dialogism of Mikhail Bakhtin, especially his broadly applied work on *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), which lends a theoretical framework to examining local history as an expression of creative artistry through its use of discourse and dialogue as “a social phenomenon” (p. 259). Applied to the present research, dialogic criticism informs the reading of literature or nonfiction prose to question how meaning is created from an encounter of different voices and points of view in the construction of a social reality.

Bakhtin’s (1981) thinking proposes that prose is best studied as a system of languages and uncovering the social system within which texts, in this case local history texts, are situated or embedded. Bakhtin’s work focuses largely on novels, and he argues that its forms have artistic creativity and aesthetic appeal because of how voice and dialogue are used in the texts. This heteroglossia contrasts with the traditional single-voiced poetic creativity. Prose tropes instead present many voices—speaking to their context, speaking to each other, and reaching out to speak beyond the text to achieve their completion—a focus that is pertinent to the heteroglossia of community and local histories. Applying Bakhtin’s theory to local history as another form of prose, the dialogic nature of voice, as a system of languages, becomes especially relevant. Numerous local history books are not single-authored, and the case study books have been chosen specifically for their multiauthored or collective flavour. However, unlike Bakhtin’s fictional prose, the narrator in the context of these case studies cannot depart into the imagination but is bound by the genre and its expectations to stay close to a notion of “truth” or nonfiction. Dialogism and the expansion of different points of view thus become a chief consideration in negotiating “truth”. Giving primacy to context (as an expression of

heteroglossia) necessitates a shift away from “purely thematic analyses ... [of process to] ... recognise and define the stylistic uniqueness of artistic prose” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 261) and how it responds, embedded within an open social system of meaning-making. In this context, language responds to what was said before and anticipates a response; it is dynamic and relational, centred around the negotiation of meaning as a plurality of consciousness.

The second theorist informing my work is Jean Paul Ricoeur (1983, 2004, 2016), whose work on history and narrativity expands textual analysis or exegesis in the studied texts to a broader social theory of understanding. His work underpins my examination of the creation of meaning to make sense of or interpret self-understanding or understanding about others as captured, or articulated, in the written texts of local history. His work on linking history and fiction is particularly useful since local history finds its expression as a literary artefact that is, at the same time, dependent on the rules of evidence (2016, pp. 252–254). As a representation of reality, history (and local history) straddles both narrative forms. There is, Ricoeur suggests, “more fiction in history ... [and] ... more mime[sis]” (2016, p. 251) in fiction than is often appreciated. Language, in this context, functions to help human beings interpret and represent their world. In consequence, if language has transformative potential as the embodiment of meaning, his work suggests that a text should be approached as a carefully and intentionally articulated communication, as “discourse fixed in writing” (2016, p. 107). A reader responds when they interpret the text for themselves according to the social system within which they are situated. Questions, therefore, arise about the narrative and historical forms of local history and how these are related to communicative intent or articulated points of view.

The third theorist important to my work is Walter Ong (2012) whose studies across English Literature, History, Philosophy, and Cultural Studies ask us to explore how

human consciousness and culture have been structured by language and different modes of communication. Ong's main interest is the transition of humankind from orality to print-based and digital practice. He explores shifts from primary oral cultures of ancient times, to print-based literate cultures introduced with the invention of writing and printing, and the more recent emerging culture of secondary orality with digital and multimedia technology that unites oral and literary features. Ong's work examines how people interpret and articulate social worlds through writing, print media, or the spoken word and interprets these as expressions of culture and windows into human consciousness. His work raises questions about how local history books intersect with the culture and identity of the geographical community being written about and represented in the texts and the impact this may have on the books and projects that produce these texts.

Thesis Roadmap

I begin the investigation with a review of the field of life writing in Chapter Two to introduce the field and present the explanations and intricacies of life writing and the arguments that have been made for its wider application in the social sciences and humanities and, thus, its relevance to local history books. This chapter raises questions about local history and its relationship to life writing.

Chapter Three builds upon the intersection of local history and life writing and describes the development of the field in Aotearoa New Zealand and its Pacific setting more closely. Chapter Three outlines the main preoccupations and concerns of local history debate in the region, and the influence of colonisation and conversations of decolonisation on the practice and forms of collaborative local history writing in this part of the world.

Chapter Four explains my methodology, which brings together literary studies and social science. A multiple method integrates case studies of three local and community history books with interviews held with a selection of local and community history book producers. The chapter outlines the research design in detail, including steps taken and analysis. This sets out the foundations of the research enquiry and explains how the text case studies and producer interviews were undertaken and integrated.

Chapter Five presents a macro analysis of the context of the three case study books to examine how the books respond to a physical and social context in a point in time as a process of self-expression. The chapter includes discussion of the genesis of the projects and the intentionality of the authors or project teams with reflection on how the projects unfolded and the forms of the books produced. This is an important chapter to introduce three texts that will be largely unfamiliar, owing to their small, localised print runs.

Chapter Six offers a close reading of selected passages from each of the three case study books. The exegetic microanalysis of form explores how language infers meaning into the text and speaks back to the social context within which it originated and responds. The subjective point of view of the passage, through close attention paid to such aspects as style, diction, use of voice, and narration becomes illuminating for the interpretation and reading of the text as both a literary and a social device. The chapter also demonstrates the contribution that literary analysis can make to the study of what has previously been examined as a nonliterary form.

Chapter Seven shifts analysis away from the case study books to examine the broader practice of local history writing in Aotearoa New Zealand as a possible genre of collaborative life writing. Analysis of the reflections of a diverse group of local history book writers and contributors provides insight into how they grapple with the complexities and tension-filled nuances of responding to (or rejecting) the call towards

greater collaboration in grassroots public history projects—that is, history projects that are community focussed and led, telling the story of history, as it were, from the ground up or from the source of the story. Competing interests influence how the project processes unfold and how stories (and meaning-making) are negotiated as a collaborative project, which requires careful consideration of the different types of authority and representation invoked in the research and writing of the books. The concept of shared authority is examined and analysed as a possible answer to collaboration.

Chapter Eight investigates the reception of the books and steps beyond the precinct of the text to explore the performance or reading of the texts from the point of view of the producers. The chapter gives insight—based upon observations of the book producers and feedback they have collected about their various projects—into how readers reply to the text as an artefact, their participation in collective remembering, or debate they raise in response to the publication.

The thesis concludes in Chapter Nine with the main ideas that have risen from my research and their implications. First, the temporality of place is emphasised when local history is resituated within life writing studies to reveal complex intersections of our experience of time associated to a specific locale. Second, the imagined and, therefore, problematic construction of the “we” of community is highlighted. Third, the application of life writing criticism in my research illuminates how the practice of local history writing, or the process of its storytelling, is inseparable from the types of books (forms) these yield and warrants different critical reading of these texts. A duty of care is recommended from the research as better reflexive practice—an ethical and philosophical position that emerges from life writing.

Chapter Two

Writing Lives

“Life writing allows us to see our experience out on the page, where we can view it and make sense of it for ourselves and others.” (Jo Parnell, scholar and writer)

The literature review of life writing scholarship and practice begins, in this chapter, with a review of its origins as a genre of writing, an academic field of study and popular practice. Next, the chapter outlines the major preoccupations of scholars and critics and presents how life writing has been applied to other fields of study, which suggests an opportunity for life writing criticism and scholarship to be applied to local history too.

A Short History of Life Writing

The traditional genre classifications of life writing, such as biography, autobiography, and memoir, trace back centuries and have evolved over hundreds of years. Biography and autobiography, for example, stem back to the senators and saints of Ancient Greece but in the twentieth century evolved into a “warts-and-all” approach described by Cline and Angier (2013) as “a celebration of the whole human” (p. 59) that explores the flaws and triumphs in individuals’ lives—and not only famous individuals—in their art.

Further, in the twenty-first century, it is not only content that has transformed but styles and modes of writing too. New digital media like Facebook and Twitter have reinvigorated autobiographical forms of written self-revelation to become “the new autobiographical mode” (Cline & Angier, 2013, p. 64). Writer Giovanni Tiso (2016) agrees that the internet has been a catalyst for such writings: as “a rhetorical engine, it has created platforms and templates for personal writing that didn’t exist before” (p. 193),

encouraging people to write about all manner of things social, cultural, personal, or political.

Over the past century, a category of writing known as life writing emerged that, according to Bradford (2010), is still being refined. It is, for now, a somewhat amorphous category for an activity that is widely practised in society. During the twentieth century, the scholarship of the new field started to grow (Jolly, 2011), and, by the turn of the millennium, notable life writing critics like Eakin (1999) were proposing that scholars consider a revision of traditional genres to reframe them better as life writing, as I am for local history. Applied to debate about autobiography, for example, Eakin proposed: “The time is ripe for a much more broadly based initiative of reconstruction, which will involve redefining autobiography, recasting its canon, and rewriting its history” (p. 56). This included becoming more aware of the collaborative work that was emerging in the field and highlights the “relationship dimension that is fundamental to all human experiences of identity” (p. 57)—a primary concern with forms and practices of self-expression in life writing. As debate about the field grows, the boundaries of its classification continue to expand. For example, Smith and Watson (2010) list over sixty different subgenres they have documented in autobiographical life writing alone—categories of writing that include life stories of both individuals and groups.

The encompassing nature of life writing as a category means that there is a potentially vast library of genres and practices that can be discussed under its umbrella, including nontextual innovative forms of expression. For instance, Magowan (2001) explains that performance media are a form of life writing too. Her study of songs of the Yolngu peoples (an Aboriginal community in Australia) demonstrates that their lyrical verse narrates their life stories, and the songs preserve their culture and stories in a performative artefact. Similarly, Van Toorn (2001) argues that scholars need to broaden

their understanding of published life stories to include many other types of life writing, especially in written forms, that convey a sense of lived experience or life history—hence her research on correspondence and personal documents. More recently, Poletti (2020) wrote about the diversity of life writing modes, including the popular youth zines (digital magazines), that facilitate creative and nontraditional publishing of lived accounts and experiences.

The complexity of a very broadly defined category of writing, however, encounters trouble when different scholars or writers label similar types and styles of writing in a different way. Life writing scholar Lindemann (2018) points out that scholars claim formats depending on their disciplinary predilections, so one piece of writing may be described as biography, life narrative research, oral history, or a human interest story, depending on the critic's scholastic background (p. 2). The debate regarding definition is further complicated with the newness of the term *life writing*. Many of its practitioners are unaware that what they do or articulate can be termed or studied as life writing. Except for professional life writers who are employed to write about individuals' lives and sometimes community history, it has not until recently been a term used by its producers or the creators of texts. It is, nevertheless, a term that is increasingly used in academic discourse and beyond to group together all these kinds of accounts of life, including self-life writing, life writing about others, or group compositions told through memories and stories about the past as written and spoken records.

A consequence of the lack of consensus or widespread use of the term is that there has been significant difference between how life writing has emerged as practice or an art form and how it is studied in the academy. This has made it more difficult to build consensus across the field. Jensen (2009) explains:

The differing discourses used by life writers and the critics who study them create a damaging distance between practice and theory in the field. That distance, moreover, has become exacerbated by the emergence of innovative and ever-multiplying forms of life-story telling. (p. 299)

However, and interesting for my project, Jolly (2011) argues a closer communion between critics and practitioners has more recently been observed with greater levels of collegial collaboration between writers inside and outside of the academy in studying life writing practice and theory. This has methodological implications for research and critique into life writing and promotes a growing sense of partnership between scholars and practitioners in criticism.

Popular Practice

Life writing has gained popularity as an art form, especially the production of books written by professional writers as a trade or a hobby of self-expression by scores of amateur writers. Kadar et al. (2008, p. 4) reason that the rise of the popularity of life writing indicates a sign of humanity desperate to make sense of the lives people are living in uncertain, turbulent times in the twenty-first century. However, a more plausible explanation may be linked to changes in technology and advanced education. The more affordable digital and self-publishing of today offers easier access than did the more historical gate-kept traditional channels of book production (Morrison, 2010, p. 124). People also have easier access to a diversity of storytelling media that can reach far wider audiences more quickly than in the past and wide entrée to research databases and computer programmes for writing at home (Nelson, 2008). Writing for publication, whether as an economic prospect or for self-fulfilment, has, accordingly, become a more realistic opportunity, creating incentive for many more people to craft and publish their life stories as books.

The popular appeal of life writing today lies in the ordinary as much as the extraordinary. Scholars have noted a rising consumer interest since the 1980s in reading about everyday lives and circumstances (Jolly & Macintyre, 1989). Eakin (1999) explains that by the late 1990s, “the public appetite for life stories of all kinds [seemed] to be voracious” (p. 157)—an appetite that has only grown in the two decades since. People have become fascinated with people’s recollections instead of more traditional history discussions (Jenkins & Munslow, 2004). In addition, Cline and Angier (2013) note that: “Life writing is flourishing as never before... Our thirst for real lives is insatiable—we can’t get enough of TV reality shows, of family history, of political diaries, literary memoirs, ‘misery memoirs’... and everyone can join in” (p. xiii). Memoir as an “act of self-disclosure” has, in particular, become ever more in demand and, thus, increasingly profitable or intriguing to readers (Eakin, 1999, pp. 143, 153). With the proliferation of life writing, many more people are attempting to write their life stories as published books. Within New Zealand, Loveridge (2011) notes the nation has observed a similar increase in autobiography and memoir writing, alongside flourishing local and family history, between 1960 and 2002 (the dates specified in his research). He suggests that a writing culture emerged that supports people to “have a go” (p. 54) at producing their own life story books and proposes that this type of life writing is especially therapeutic for the elderly to bring “a sense of satisfactory closure” (p. 53) to their life story. Thus, it can be inferred that this writing is one way to make sense of the story of their lives as a form of self-reflection in their twilight years.

Life writing has also emerged as a profession because not everyone who wants to tell their story wants to write it themselves, and some prefer to pay to have their stories written by someone else. Professional life writers are, under these circumstances, commissioned to record, write, and publish the stories collaboratively with the storyteller. Critics have defined these arrangements in various terms, depending on the

nature of the collaboration and narrative relationship. Lindemann's (2018) research explores these types of commissioned arrangements and their implications for authorship and authority under the definition of as-told-to life writing, which she defines as "the written account of a subject's life produced by a writer, on the basis of an oral account produced by the subject, over the course of a series of interviews" (p. 1). Lindemann's scholarship, like others, investigates the intersection of practice and form or the processes that are enacted to tell a life story.

Life writing has thus emerged as both a form and a practice, which complicates the establishment of its field of criticism and its popular practice. On the one hand, life writing is *something*, like a written book, and, on the other hand, it is *practised* as an expression, articulation, or record of lived experience. The dual nature of the canon, therefore, informs how it is used and/or studied. Virginia Woolf in the 1930s was one of the earliest writers and critics to ponder this dual nature of life writing. She wrote in an introduction to her own memoir, *A Sketch of the Past* (1939)², that there was a stuffy conformity in biography and autobiography and memoir as the established genres, trotting out facts, dates, and family names that did not really convey the interiority of lived lives that conjure up a person and their experiences. Woolf suggests storytellers could, instead, convey stories about life experiences more creatively by embracing their subjectivity and applying new techniques in literature and fiction to life writing—new styles of practice. Woolf used the term "writing lives" to describe how "people write what they call 'lives' of other people" (1985, p. 69), and her own memoir narrative is an example of how specific quirky moments, memories, and insights rather than "facts" are formative and convey the unique quality of a person. She was, thus, part of a historical

² Republished as a collection of autobiographical writing in 1985.

movement of interest in writing personal stories and the written expression of interiority where before these had been regarded as inferior to other types of writing.

Scholars have since built up a field of study into life writing by asking more critical questions of both form and practice, and practitioners are showing signs of similar critique of their art form. Jensen (2009) researched the extent to which writers critically reflect upon their work and tradition and confirmed that professionals do, indeed, contribute to the scholarship of their tradition and challenge themselves and their peers for the improvement of the category of life writing. Renowned life writing scholar Jolly (2011) asserts that although professional writers—as the popular practitioners of life writing—may not prioritise talking about their tradition, they “intuitively know about self-performance, the gap between experience and imagination and expression” (p. 882). In contrast, life writing scholars have a lot more to say and have developed multiple lines of academic enquiry into the field, driven by their curiosity of the intricacies of life writing and its forms, practices, and preoccupations.

Critical Study of Life Writing

Scholars contemplate life writing as the narration of lived experience in some kind of sequence of accounts that help people to attribute meaning to their world (Reinsborough & Canning, 2017). Through narrative, as a constructive framework of meaning-making, scholars are interested in how life writing gives expression to the human desire to make sense of lived experience in a storied format that relies upon explicit narration that articulates someone’s point of view. Therefore, attention is paid to the intentional construction of the narratives as part of literary investigation (Walter, 2006). Nadel (1984), for instance, describes biography as “fundamentally a narrative which has as its primary task the enactment of character and place through language—a goal similar to that of fiction” (p. 8). Across different media narratives, such as

documentaries and films, critics like De Jong et al. (2012) are also interested in structure and forms of narration.

Reliance on memories and acts of remembering epitomises life writing, which is built upon revisiting and reinterpreting past events in the light of the present time of composition. Therefore, critics investigate personal memories as a “primary archival source” (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 7) since they suggest that memory is “the source, authenticator, and destabilizer of autobiographical acts” (p. 22). Life writing thus implies opportunities to ponder and process memories and experiences as “an attempt to construct memory” (Portelli, 1992, p. 52) and to share these reflections with an audience. Neale (2011) notes that remembering takes on a narrated form:

People’s lives and their memories of those lives often read like constructed narratives, stories that have been in some way crafted. That is not to say that they are artificial; it is just a reflection of the fact that stories are a common way in which we actively think about and preserve our pasts. It is a pattern of thinking and representation we fall into even when we are attempting to be scientific. (p. 113)

As a result, life writing enlivens History (with a capital H) by drawing attention to the sensory and concrete detail experienced by an individual or individuals and articulated in their attempts to remember. There are, of course, as scholars like Lee (2008) point out, tensions about the accuracy of remembering or misremembering in different contexts and which can be amplified in collective remembering projects. In these types of community-styled writings, such as local and community histories, life writing responds to the collective memory studies of scholars like Maurice Halbwachs (Olick et al., 2011), and critics pay close attention to where personal memory intersects with collective or shared memory to highlight “the existence of similar memories across

individuals in such cases [as] a reflection of the fact that everyone in the group happened to have had the same experience individually” (Wertsch, 2002, p. 25).

To express these memories and lived experiences, life writing promotes critical subjectivity because to express lived experience adequately, individuals need to engage in an inward process of exploration to articulate these experiences outwardly to others. Scholars describe these as acts of self-representation or involved narration (Cline & Angier, 2013; Haslam & Neale, 2009). As such, Smith and Watson (2010) explain that life writing tells “the story of self” (p. 271) in various forms as an egocentric lens from which to contemplate a lived experience. The process of exploring and articulating self, whether as an individual or a group, is hence a significant characteristic of life writing as both form *and* process of self-expression or group expression. It facilitates the working out of identity by requiring storytellers to write to make sense of their experiences and “represent themselves to the reader” (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 39). Eakin (2004) notes that telling stories about lives “establishes our identities both as content ... and as act” (p. 5). Through the process of life writing, people explore an understanding of who they are, the cultural values they uphold, and a worldview or ideology that they support (Smith & Watson, 2010). Critics are interested in how people confirm, reject, or negotiate identity through these acts of life writing and the forms they produce.

This expression of identity is complicated when life writing takes a collective form, balancing individual subjectivities and reaching shared or collective agreement about what is remembered and how a group is represented. Such efforts bring a group together publicly, cohering but also reinforcing boundaries within the group. This denotes a “shared identity, an identity grounded in a communal ordering of memories” (Philipsen, 1987, p. 249). Here, the label of life writing becomes a little less clear again because critics recognise that life writing can be collaborative by process (constructed as a group

project) or, according to Smith and Watson (2010), collaborative in characteristic to be representative of a group, meaning that speakers either are not specified or are identified to speak on behalf of the group represented in the narrative (p. 265). Regardless of these distinctions, group projects involve community groups working together to express and make sense of their culture and way of life. They initiate a group conversation about the past: “The past is the actual events, while history is the stories we share to highlight what we feel is important about the past” (Oetzl, 2009, p. 339). When these conversations take on the expression of group identity, they are fascinating to life writing critics because the writer then takes on the responsibility to tell a story “thought to be representative of a particular historical period, social group or community” (Lindemann, 2018, p. 7), which encompasses a number of ethical considerations and philosophical complexities.

One of the challenges of expression, whether an individual or group narration, is the balancing of interests and responsibilities of public and private. Critics have, consequently, paid close attention to how acts of life writing make stories public that have been previously hidden or not articulated, sometimes disclosing experiences that others consider private. This challenge echoes concerns in ethics permissions in university research. Eakin (1999) has studied these concerns about privacy in detail, raising awareness that when storytellers share an account, it inadvertently tells some of the story of someone else or makes public what another person may prefer to remain private. Life writing thus raises important questions about the ethical practice of storytelling, and Couser (1998, 2005), in particular, has written extensively about the impact of life writing and the ethics of responsibility towards vulnerable or oppressed subjects. Writing about the voice of the “other” within the context of ethnographic life histories (as one genre of life writing) and, therefore, political settings of colonisation, Couser (2005) writes:

That is, the subjects of ethnography must be Other, but should not be Othered; they should be represented as different but not alien. To this end, ethnographers have experimented with ways of deploying their methodology more sensitively and responsibly, of minimizing or subverting their own authority, of giving voice to the 'native'. (p. 122)

Couser's studies advocate for egalitarian partnership in collaborative life writing projects. However, he tempers critics' interference with practising writers to remind them that the two practices—writing and its criticism—are often built upon quite different perspectives or points of departure. He cautions that scholars “occupy a distinct and awkward position with respect to the practice of it; our ethics may be at odds with the ethics of those—professional as well as amateur—who practice collaborative life writing ... [and he advises against devising] ... ethical principles that would effectively censor or censure whole genres of life writing” (Couser, 1998, p. 347). The debate continues still. One of the outcomes is that life writing scholarship critically examines the nature of collaboration and the distribution of agency and power between subjects and writers in numerous types of writing partnerships, such as Lindemann's (2018) studies. Smissaert and Jalonen (2018) also contribute to the debate about authorial responsibility and questions of answerability and agree that narrative relationships and writing partnerships remain worthy of ongoing criticism to better inform, for example, the practice and creative forms of life writing.

Life writing scholarship is similarly interested in what these investigations of self and self-expression (or expression of the other), whether as individual or group identity, can reveal about personal or shared values. This is an idea illustrated in Cierpka's (2012) intergenerational study of Polish life stories. Others, like Dorfman et al. (2004), also demonstrate how rural community stories of older residents in New Zealand transmit cultural values through the narratives they produce as a means of sharing their identity

with others. Within family settings, scholars have paid attention to how life writing and storytelling converge to connect generations through the articulation of history (Bouchard et al., 2004; Schuster, 1998; Shepard, 2010; Wineburg et al., 2007). Collectively, these and other studies continue to suggest that “speaking history connects generations” (Ruiz, 1998, p. 72) on an emotional, value-driven level and establish that these types of writing build intergenerational bridges that support identity formation as a socialising tool (Pratt & Fiese, 2004).

There is, nevertheless, an assumption made and explored by life writing scholars that life writing is based on real events and a commitment to “truth”. In writing about life experienced between the World Wars in suburban New Zealand, for example, Stone (2017) explains that his role as a memoirist is to “try to recall as accurately as possible” (p. 7) what he can remember about life during that time. Though realist fiction and life writing are closely allied historically and in literary features (and even arose at the same time in the case of Europe), life writing is distinct in that it makes a claim and guarantee to the reader that it is based on true events and experiences. Readers have an expectation of sincerity from life writing texts and recognise in the genre that it somehow occupies a more credible space as a record of personal and public history because storytellers are attempting to remember with a level of accuracy (Borich, 2013; Haslam & Neale, 2009). Life writing subjects, to the extent possible in their resources, tell the version of truth as they remember it to have happened, though whether that is selective by nature of personal remembering or deceptive by design is often impossible to determine (Maynes et al., 2008, p. 147). Memories are, after all, not infallible themselves, but the intention of life writing is to be faithful to real-life events and experiences.

Issues that arise around life writing are, therefore, often attributed to the creative construction and presentation of stories when writers deviate from what readers and

critics perceive as truthfulness. As an illustration, in her testimonial life writing narrative, Rigoberta Menchù was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for her memoir, *I, Rigoberta Menchù: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1984), in which she detailed her life account and sociopolitical struggles for Indian rights. However, the work was later sharply criticised when it became apparent that certain details were not entirely accurate. Critics began to question the veracity of some parts of her story; some of the experiences she described were not her own. Even though she had worked within the creative boundaries of her genre and used literary embellishments to enhance the emotional connection between the readers and the subject, her readers reacted strongly to what they felt was unacceptable deception (Lauritzen, 2004). Whilst she was upholding literary craftsmanship and her Nobel Prize was not revoked, her readers judged the work on their perception of a truthful account and found it wanting. *The New York Times* described Menchù as a “tarnished Laureate ... [for] ... stretching the truth” (Rohter, 1998). Even though life writing is responsive to the burgeoning of the individual and the need to assert one’s own story, thereby gaining value for oneself or one’s message, there are expectations of honesty on behalf of the readers. In reaction to the outspoken public critique of Menchù, life writing scholars in the field debated the importance of truth and sincerity in other life stories. Most agreed that it is fair for readers to expect a commitment to truth-telling in life writing and its various genres. Lauritzen (2004) explains that if writers make appeals based on experience, “then we need to raise serious questions about the reliability and credibility of experiential narratives and their narrators” (p. 36). Therefore, he counsels extreme caution: “In an effort to do justice to the constructed character of experience, we must not collapse the distinction between what happened and what was imagined” (p. 37). Criticism thus reiterates the *expectation* on each life writing storyteller to recall their account as accurately as possible, which Cline and Angier (2013) describe as “the life writer’s

contract with the reader [to] respect reality” (p. 2). However, they recognise that: “Truth is stranger than fiction, as we know; and it is our greatest freedom that we can tell it, as much as our great limitation that we must” (p. 19).

This contractual obligation implied in life writing is further complicated by commodification of life stories whereby writers as practitioners are especially frank that their stories are a form of literary currency, which they hope to use for maximising appeal (Bourdieu, 1984). For example, writer Andrei Codrescu (1994) highlights the inconsistencies between professional and scholastic interests, similar to the discrepancies of ethical approaches raised by Couser (1998) noted earlier. In recounting his life writing experiences, Codrescu describes how he felt it necessary to maximise his writing as a trade: “This primal notion served me well when Mr. Braziller offered to pay the advance of my life story in monthly instalments. I literally constructed my life story in increments spewed out every time he inserted \$250” (p. 24). Hence, scholars are curious about the different pressures experienced by life writers, including, but not limited to, commodification of their experiences and the temptation to present these in a certain way for maximum reader appeal.

Perhaps the most pressuring questions raised in life writing scholarship, however, are related to the premise that life writing constructs lives. Whether life writing speaks in an individual or collective voice, “the field of life writing studies has always recognized the importance of narrative forms, and that cultural producers make the lives they create, rather than simply represent them” (Breiter et al., 2015, p. vi). Eakin (1999) describes this as a process of becoming or making a self (with emphasis in the original text):

My own instinct is to approach autobiography in the spirit of a cultural anthropologist, *asking what such texts can teach us about the ways in which individuals in a particular culture experience their sense of being “I”*— and, in some instructive cases that prove the rule, their sense of not being an “I”. (p. 4)

By contemplating, reflecting upon, and writing up lived experience, the narrative that emerges in analysis presents a representational construct of human experience. Life, or lives, is presented as stories—a carefully crafted form through which readers can connect with the storyteller(s) and their experiences. Seen in this way, life writing is a dialogical conversation between writers, storytellers (given that in collaborative life writing the witness of the event does not have to be the writer of the text), and readers.

Consequently, the context of this construction of meaning and interpretation of past events and their sites of engagement with one another is an important consideration of critical literary analysis of life writing.

As a result, life writing criticism and investigation appears in contrast to Barthes' (1967) work on the *Death of the Author*. Barthes argued in favour of a reader response theory that discounts the need for textual interpretation to take into account the intention of the author or its context of telling (Seymour, 2018). Life writing, however, argues the importance of engaging with the encounter between the writer, text, and reader. Within this treatment, context and intentionality are not ignored and are proposed as a central part of reading and the performance of the text. The conversations that take place intersubjectively between producer, text, and reader are not isolated from the context of its production nor limited solely between the text and its readers. In discussing the material turn of life and writing, Harley (2017) reflects on who writes to note that “it is not that the writer is dead but that ‘the writer’ is ‘a writing’... Everything that might have been supposed to be outside the writing (dinosaurs, for instance) is internal to it” (p. 277). The influence of the producers is reflective of a much bigger social process of meaning construction and, thus, needs to be reflected upon in critical analysis and reading. Said's (1983, 2003) literary criticism is significant in this regard and reiterates that analysis of texts should always explore the “existential actualities of human life, politics, societies, and events ... [to examine how] ... the realities of power and authority”

(Said, 1983, p. 5) intersect with textual representation. It would, therefore, be erroneous to disregard context and intentionality in the study of life writing texts and in the construction of their meaning, especially in consideration that life writing is both a practice and a field of study. Many scholars translate this interest into researching the purpose behind telling a story a particular way by exploring “an ‘initiative’ that affects the author’s entire process of composition” (Howarth, 1980, p. 86). Writing about questions of agency in the life story of John Kikang from Papua New Guinea, as an example, Kempt (2008) asks what starting point shapes the rest of the narrative and influences how facts about the history, culture, and details of a person contribute to their story and then “foregrounds the narrative itself and its power to create reality in the act of narrating” (p. 51). This engagement with history and self through context and the interpretation or reinterpretation of the past through lived experience and personal accounts offers up endless possibilities for life writing application in other fields.

Life Writing in the Humanities and Social Sciences

Life writing, this section will show, has created opportunities for contributing towards study in the humanities and social sciences. As such, it also proposes the possibility for new areas of study, including its application to local history writing. Life writing scholars promote that life writing is “rich literature that could open up ways of understanding experience-based narratives of geographical and social places and historical periods” (Kadar et al., 2008, p. 1). Research centres, such as the University of Sussex’s Centre for Life History and Life Writing Research, make use of life story as a primary source to study history and culture (University of Sussex, n.d.). Jolly (2011) has made a bold claim that “life writing contains a serious potential to reinvigorate the humanities” (p. 887), but it is a claim substantiated by others. Life writing offers access to “the storied lives of people residing outside of the academy” (Dutta & Harter, 2009, p. 1) and stimulates

aesthetic forms of enquiry that research and articulate worldview from fresh perspectives (Harter et al., 2009, p. 37). Harter et al. (2009) reiterate that: “Scholars can marshal their imaginations in diverse ways to move beyond the spoken and written word to embrace other mediums of sensing and expressing lived realities” (p. 38). Cline and Angier (2013) (2013) describe life writing as a potential window that scholars from different academic fields may be willing to open and explore:

The question here is whether the life of a person is a window on the times or whether the times are a window into the life of that person? Life writers must ask how much *is* [original emphasis] someone a product of their times, their period, the knowledge, scientific, medical, psychoanalytic, literary of that particular society? (p. 25)

Social scientists have advanced the usefulness of life writing scholarship, even without formally aligning with the literary field, by making effective use of life writing sources or practices to pursue lines of social enquiry. Thomas and Znaniecki (1958a, 1958b) promoted forms of life writing as social science data, using family letters and autobiography to study the life experience of Polish peasants and, later, other social scientists followed their example to investigate other groups or social experiences through various life writing forms. Life history, which is arguably a practice of life writing itself, has also been cemented as a useful source and method for social science to learn about human lives and experiences. It is an entry point to addressing social science questions and learning more about the social construction of society and how it operates (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Qualitative life interviews are also commonplace, such as to probe the world of individual or community stories (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Maynes et al. (2008) theorise that the stories shared in qualitative enquiries not only record social and historical experience but also inform cultural practice and experiences to reveal insight into interaction between an individual and their community and to explore collective

social action. One example is Okawa's (2008) research of the archives of the internment of Hawai'i's Issei, which resulted in her (2020) publication of their story. By studying personal letters, primarily written by her grandfather, she accessed the cumulative correspondence and lived experience of Japanese individuals held in detention during World War II and was able to speak to their collective experiences as a social scientist, relying upon personal forms of expression. Therefore, the analysis of narratives can reveal much about how and why people tell the stories that they do and what insight this allows about personal and group identification (Meares, 2007; Terruhn, 2015). These and other studies raise the suggestion of whether different modes and practices of life writing are better explored as socialisation tools and interpretive devices (Berger, 2014; Clifford & Marcus, 2010). Heritage studies also pay close attention to people's articulation of past experiences as a means of identity formation and sense of belonging (Sørensen & Carman, 2009); in addition, cognitive psychologists are similarly interested in life stories as part of a person's developing consciousness and sense of self (Epston & White, 1992; McAdams, 1988, 2006; McAdams et al., 2006; Sarbin, 1986; Singer & Salovey, 1993).

People's stories and lived experiences intersect in interesting exchanges between History and Anthropology too. For example, Couser (2005) writes about ethnographic life writing. Over the course of the twentieth century, scholars turned to life stories as an invaluable source of data to explore questions of culture and enculturation (Attwood & Magowan, 2001; Beckett, 2001; Brettell, 1997; Cole, 1992; Reed-Danahay, 1997). Questions were also posed about the meaning people attribute to events, and how community groups construct knowledge about specific historical happenings or known events that inform their cultural identity and "records" of history, such as Sahlins' (1991) research into the Great Fijian War of 1843–1855. By the 1990s, debate about ethical representation had advanced, and anthropologists were also advocating for the practice of autoethnography of community members to speak to their own experiences. The work of

Geertz (1983) was arguably the most influential in this arena and encouraged scholars to look for opportunities to better understand culture and symbolism among particular groups of people, especially at a local level (Alexander, 2011).

The value of life writing within the humanities and social sciences, and the opportunities for learning this makes possible, has already been proven. Hence, it is reasonable to investigate the application of life writing criticism to local history and to explore the implications of this more closely.

Stories Once Hidden

What scholars and critics have come to appreciate is that life writing offers an opportunity to gain insight into conversations accessed through various cultural and poetic or creative forms of historical expression and self-representation, many of them previously unheard or unstudied. Life writing finds a special manifestation in the “existential actualities” that Said (1983) was writing about when one considers its quality or potential as an art form and practice that raises awareness of stories outside of the age-old publication streams, bringing new points of view to light. From the earlier twentieth century, writers and critics raised awareness of the importance of giving voice to the untold stories of humanity, underpinning the significance of life writing as a mode of writing about the lives of people at the popular level. Virginia Woolf herself was part of this movement towards inclusion and open society where many more voices could be heard (Proudfit, 1975). She belonged to a women’s memoir club where women gained confidence in writing and sharing their life stories—stories that society had not yet deemed worthy of telling. However, Woolf predicted that those stories would change the way people see the world and embraced the idea that a multiplicity of voices, including those of the working class, needed to be heard. By the mid-twentieth century, especially in the English-speaking world, working-class people, including women, started using life

writing to offer new perspectives in contrast to established, middle-class narratives, often exposing the personal experience of oppression.

The political nature of life writing is unavoidable, which reinforces its appeal to many theoretical schools of thought with opportunities for application. Schaffer and Smith (2004) argue that life writing is an effective sociopolitical medium to highlight human rights stories or social justice concerns to ignite political reform or human rights movements. For instance, testimonial texts give voice to experiences that may shock or challenge the status quo in certain societies, drawing attention to the experiences of those who have been oppressed as a “kind of memory restoration” (Franklin & Fuchs, 2009, p. 235). Therefore, the analysis or study of such texts and their production has enormous potential for learning and relearning. One such project, an oral history project that promoted testimonial gathering in Northern Ireland, highlighted the importance of grassroots communities having the chance to reclaim their place in records of history to talk about their experiences during major historical events (Hamber & Kelly, 2016). More recent lived experiences have also been expressed in testimonial writing, such as the refugee humanitarian crisis that has emerged over the past two decades. Lounasmaa (2016), as one example, documents the importance of using life writing courses among the Jungle residents—a refugee camp in Calais, France—as a vital form of political self-expression in uncertain times. She writes, “stories are an important part of identity—and the ownership of their stories means holding on to it” (2016, para. 4). Her work draws attention to both scholastic and humanitarian interests in the field.

Indigenous self-expression has emerged as one key consideration of life writing. This is an opportunity, critics assert, for historically colonised people “to show and explain their cultures and historical experience to settlers in the hope that they and their worlds will be understood and recognised” (Attwood & Magowan, 2001, p. xii). Horakova (2013),

writing about Aboriginal experience in Australia, explains that life writing reclaims story and is one means for indigenous storytellers to write back to colonial misrepresentation:

Their stories are also an act of remembrance to teach about their experience of the past under colonial rule, and a means for members of indigenous communities to try to make sense about the life they lived during those, and resultant, times and find a means to express their own identity. (pp. 148–149)

Life writing, therefore, has useful application in research about colonisation, postcolonialism, and decolonisation, raising awareness of dominant and alternative narratives of lived experience to promote an emerging postcolonial consciousness (Kadar et al., 2008). This is increasingly significant in countries negotiating decolonisation or postcolonisation as they remain divided by inequality; in such contexts writing life stories has the potential for the indigenous voice to send news across social chasms back to the colonisers (Whitlock, 2005, 2007). By providing insight into the different experiences of people in these places at points in time historically, life writing gives crucial insight into social systems and the permeation of ideologies (Kadar, 1992) and the “long and complex process of authorization” (Gilmore, 1994, p. 55) that underpins meaning-making and narrativity. Memoir and testimony have emerged as especially popular forms of self-representation and, as Gilmore (2001) has found, a potential space for settlers and indigenous communities to interact more positively with one another and facilitate an encounter. Within this application of life writing debate, critical questions about truth, agency, and representation come to the fore.

Life Writing, History, and Narrative of Place

Life writing application and criticism also intersects with history studies more generally and, as I will expound in Chapter Three, with local history books. Historians are storytellers; they offer scholastic interpretations as crafted narratives but, more importantly, the subjects of the study have stories to tell too. It thus makes sense to

connect History and Literary Studies, such as life writing, as they are united by their “common pursuits”, including their search for authenticity and interest in “common byproducts” (Hirsch & Dixon, 2008, p. 188), most notably the production of books. The fields demonstrate similar goals of understanding the present and exhibiting accounts of this understanding as records. As writer and scholar Steedman (1986) said: “Once a story is told, it ceases to be a story: it becomes a piece of history, an interpretive device” (p. 143). Therefore, life writing scholars are well acquainted with how their work intersects with history applications, but they are also conscious of the differences between their approaches. In general, history follows a scholarship of evidence and interpretation, and introduces a flavour of creativity whereas life writing embraces the creative expression and subjectivity of lived experience and introduces evidence as a supporting practice.

Similar to the development of the field of life writing, the late 1960s promoted history from the bottom up, and social historians began to pay closer attention to the once hidden voices from below too. They raised awareness of the importance of investigating and recording the stories of witnesses to history, arguably most accessible in life writing. The shift towards grassroots-based history and the encouragement for witnesses to history to tell their own stories was facilitated by oral historians like Raphael Samuel (known as the people’s historian and founder of the History Workshop movement) and Ronald Grele (Scott-Brown, 2017). Grele purports that oral history was one of the most effective tools “to democratize the study of history” (Terkel et al., 1975, p. 87) and, as evidenced by the rapid rise in popularity of its practice, many other critics and writers agree. Historians demonstrated an appreciation that people are sufficiently skilled at expressing themselves and that oral history could be relied upon as a valuable research method to uncover vital information (Green & Hutching, 2004; Greenaway, 2016; Hall, 2007; Thompson, 2000). Oral historians—scholars and community-based practitioners—explain the relevance of their work as opening up historical enquiry as conversation

(dialogue) with the public, among themselves, and with scholars (Shopes, 2002), which builds learning connections between grassroots communities and academic institutions with regard to study of the past (McLellan, 1998). Thus, oral history promotes a bottom-up analysis, which local historian advisor McLean (2007) suggests helps a community “to redress the balance and capture some of the flavour of [their] community” (p. 43), adding their stories to public discourse. Furthermore, the value of such enquiries is that accounts of their so-called ordinary lives can teach us much about important issues, such as local institutions and class structures (Gibbons, 2003), and reveal a wealth of meaning that transcends records of “objective facts” (Portelli, 1981).

Perhaps what is more noteworthy is the inclusion of oral history as a subgenre of autobiographical life writing as proposed by Smith and Watson (2010, p. 276). Their recognition of its place in life writing scholarship confirms its value as a practice (both as a field of history and a method of history) and form (the interviews and related publications it produces) of life writing. It also highlights its reliance on remembering (Frisch, 1990) and points towards its contribution to articulation of “a shared identity in the community” (Yow, 2014, p. 172). This thesis proposes that if oral history can be situated among life writing studies, then local history, which makes use of oral history in its application and is also a form and practice of self-expression of history and personal or collective remembering, can be contemplated through the lens of life writing too.

To some extent, all life writing is influenced by its relationship to place. After all, everyone is somewhere, and their stories are situated in a local context. Historian Ballantyne (2016) asserts that local community is the place where lives connect and intersect and where stories entangle. Therefore, in life writing, many storytellers explore their connection or disconnection to their local community in some form or another. Studies, such as Wiles et al. (2017), have shown that there is an emotional significance of

collective remembering in life writing associated with local places, which has been shown to be especially vital to the wellbeing of older residents and affirms their connection to a locale through story. Philosophically, place can exist independently of people, but it is only meaningful according to the attributes people attach to, or engage with, that place and which often find expression through life writing.

Reading Local History Differently

This thesis is an original enquiry that considers the implications and opportunities of reading local history differently under the umbrella of life writing and within the field I have outlined—to ask new questions of its practices and forms. The research achieves this by examining three local and community history books as case studies and looking at them through the lens of life writing. The research asks the reader to consider local history books and their production differently in order to explore their literary and sociocultural significance as collective expressions of a place-based story of identity. Over time, as Chapter Three will demonstrate, local history writing in Aotearoa New Zealand has evolved into a more personal form of accounting more akin to life writing, which adds to a wariness some historians raise about the books being overly subjective. Reading the books as literature instead draws attention to the poetics of local history as a genre of life writing and redefines its relationship to literature and history writing. Historian and ethnographer Denning (1991) explains that history writing, precisely because it is a “cultural artifact” (p. 354), is familiar to readers. Therefore, since each style of history has “its own social rules of expression, its own criteria of objectivity [to] balance past and present in different ways” (Denning, 1991, p. 362), readers and writers have certain expectations of its form and practice. This thesis proposes a closer look at how local history performs from a new perspective to better explore its poetics of expression as a nonfiction articulation of grassroots history that seeks to balance objectivity of evidence with subjectivity of personal story in sometimes creative ways. It

also explores whether these expectations better align to life writing rather than academic history treatises.

There are numerous advantages to resituating local history as life writing. The thesis investigates the application of life writing criticism to local history book production to broaden the opportunity to explore encounters of history, culture, and identity by engaging with the stories of people and the processes by which they are articulated. The research probes the “historically situated experience” (Kirsch & Rohan, 2008, p. 2) represented in life writing. The lens of life writing “helps us understand and explore the fissures of historical narratives, the places at the margins where voices have been suppressed, silenced, or ignored” (Kirsch & Rohan, 2008, p. 3). However, not all such writing promotes alternative points of view; life writing criticism also explores how life writing can illuminate voices that have historically dominated social discourse. Therefore, the storied lives of place can reveal insight into a “matrix of shared mental maps that define collective meaning” (Reinsborough & Canning, 2017, p. 180) for the different communities represented. As such, the application of life writing criticism to local and community history illustrates the use of stories to construct order in social networks on a systemic level (Misztal, 2010) so that local history books read this way offer a gateway to learning more about the community and its members, and their cultural values and sense of identity.

Chapter Three

Writing Lives in Local Places

*“Inā kei te mohio koe ko wai koe, I anga mai koe i hea, kei te mohio koe.
Kei te anga atu ki hea—If you know who you are and where you are from, then you will
know where you are going.” (Whakataukī—Māori proverb)*

This chapter builds upon the literature review of life writing and turns attention specifically to the research problem of local history books and their inclusion within the category of life writing. The argument to investigate the “genre” in this new way is built upon an understanding of how local history has become located within the precinct of public history for “the people” and how the sociocultural and political specificities of Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific—the setting of the three case study books—have impacted the development of the practice and art forms of local history in this region.

The international debate about local history has taken a strong regional flavour in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australasia, and the Pacific where it engages with its colonial past. Writing history about local place has become contested territory, and opposing worldviews often collide with the recognition that histories are only ever “representations of the past” (Howe, 2000, p. 1) but controversies about which representation prevail. Scholars and practitioners of local history in the region have grappled with questions about their work, increasingly aware of historiography and the need for democratisation of history, but little consensus has been reached. Decisions made about who should write about what, or how, are still fraught with difficulty. In short, over the past fifty years especially, local history writing has evolved in this region as writers and scholars have responded to changing political climates. This chapter will demonstrate that local history writing has evolved into more personal accounting of lived experiences with promotion of history from the bottom up, balancing the tradition

of evidence and records with personal testimony and reminiscences, drawing closer to the evolving field of life writing. In closing, the chapter will contemplate collaborative life writing practice as a response to this debate within Aotearoa New Zealand and, to a lesser extent, the Pacific.

Politics of Voice

Discussions of agency and authority have been integral to contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand and Pacific humanities and social science enquiries. Following the end of World War II, the United Nations' programmes of decolonisation extended into the Pacific to facilitate nations negotiating independence or sovereignty, resulting in administrators, scholars, and writers becoming increasingly sensitive to matters of who gets to speak and when. The debate has extended into historiography and writing about local history.

The semantic boundaries of what constitutes a colonial, postcolonial, or decolonising place is, however, far from a simple matter, especially in a nation like Aotearoa New Zealand. Whereas many of the Pacific Island nations are now independent and governed by their mostly indigenous populations, New Zealand is still a complicated partnership between Crown and Māori but with the Crown still firmly in authority, albeit with some Māori in government. Aotearoa New Zealand also has complicated governance relationships with some of the Pacific territories, such as Tokelau where one of the case studies is set. These relationships will be explained further in Chapter Five. Accordingly, many will argue that Aotearoa New Zealand is not yet a postcolonial place. Indigeneity and colonial influence continue to negotiate a co-existence, but generally on Pākehā (non-Māori) terms. New Zealand is unique in being founded on a treaty of settlement document, Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) that was signed by many of the iwi (tribes) on 6 February, 1840 as a “constitutional document that establishes and guides the relationship between the Crown in New Zealand (embodied by our government) and

Māori” (Ministry of Justice Tāhū o te Ture, 2020). However, the spirit and intent of Te Tiriti has been challenged since its inception with unresolved and conflicting ideological tensions between ideas of partnership, guardianship, and governance (Salmond, 2017). The general failure to honour Te Tiriti has seen Māori fighting through the courts for over a century to see the Treaty recognised. Eventually, on 10 October, 1975, the Waitangi Tribunal was established to address the breaches of Treaty claims and is still processing and negotiating claims and restitution to this day (Belgrave, 2014; Orange, 2011, 2012).

As political administrators unpack the historic failures of honouring Te Tiriti and negotiate redress in the Tribunal, scholars and writers also try to work out how to best honour the nation’s founding document in their work, including writing about local history. The ideologies of Māori and Pākehā continue to collide and inform one another in Aotearoa New Zealand, and politics of voice have come to the fore. This in itself promotes growing awareness of different traditions of historical storytelling and their cultural heritage. Settler writing, for example, stakes claims to geographical areas and often translates stories of Māori history of these places into non-Māori contexts and for non-Māori readers. On the other hand, indigenous oral place-based history is integral to Māori tradition and tells and makes its own claims to place, such as local history of waka landing being pivotal to iwi history and whakapapa. Howe (2000) raises awareness of the ideological agency that directs history and asserts that much of history is driven by “Western intellectual tradition” (p. 59), so critical reflection about its practice and scholarship is vital. What follows in history writing is a complex working out of Treaty realities and lived experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand as Māori and Pākehā try to live, work, and write together to negotiate Te Tiriti and its outworking to the mutual satisfaction of both parties in all spheres of life. Metge (2010), a prominent anthropologist and social commentator, describes the importance of such learning

encounters as vital to an experience of belonging or tūrangawaewae in Aotearoa New Zealand:

What we need to weave together is not just head knowledge of each other's cultures, but heart knowledge of the people who are the holders of that knowledge... Only by supporting each other will be we able to stand upright here.
(p. 8)

To achieve this, Metge (2010) writes about the importance of being alert to possible misunderstandings between Pākehā and Māori in communications and encourages scholars (anthropologists in particular) to “develop methods and skills for studying not only what happened in the past but also the way that it is interpreted and retold” (p. 6). Within each local community, any discussion about history cannot avoid questions about Te Tiriti. This, in turn, raises debate about decolonisation in Aotearoa New Zealand and what this may look like for Māori and Pākehā alike. Questions are asked about who a history is for and for what purpose.

History writing, consequently, is also bound up with discussion about identity and point of view. When unpacked in the context of agency and authority, self-expression becomes an important consideration as an opportunity to find one's position within the broader social complexities of a Treaty-driven narrative and the imagined constructions of a New Zealand identity. Sociologist Bell (2017) locates the founding rhetoric of national identity within colonial Pākehā interests in Aotearoa New Zealand and describes how it shifted to a bicultural narrative during the Treaty reforms of the 1990s and has, in more recent times, shifted to a promotion of multiculturalism. Yet what some of these shifts of rhetoric have tried to achieve is an identity that may be “imagined in significant ways as homogeneous and culturally united” (p. 59), leading to the homogenised New Zealander. However, as writers engage in different ways with questions of history, heritage, and identity, some affirm these unified cultural constructions, others challenge them, and yet

others propose an experience of identity as something else entirely. What is consistent is that finding answers to whose stories are told and how they are told has a direct impact on understanding the types of identity narrated by various community groups, especially local geographical communities.

A discussion of local history books and their evolution in the Aotearoa New Zealand setting sits within the development of the broader tradition of history writing and its response to the settings of their time. This is a complicated history of two worldviews that have encountered, informed, and influenced one another since their first meeting, negotiating and counter-negotiating with a yet unresolved question of whether partnership is possible. Local discussion about identity is also influenced by the dynamics of global colonisations and the conflict of globalisation agendas against the assertion of local politics and identity.

European settlers did not arrive to a barren land. Instead, they found a land already steeped in rich Māori oral traditions and storytelling, and their arrival introduced a written language that was almost immediately adapted by indigenous people to record te reo Māori and their longstanding connection to Aotearoa New Zealand. In the words of scholar Ranginui Walker (2003) in an open letter to the Crown, “I have been here a thousand years. You arrived only yesterday” (para. 1). From as early as the mid-1800s, kaumātua, the learned elders, promoted the importance of adopting written traditions and literary genres alongside centuries of oral tradition to preserve and protect Māori cultural heritage in the face of uncertain times and politics following colonisation (Crown & Te Ruki, 2009; Metge, 2015; Tau, 2003). As early adopters of western written traditions, Māori scholars braided together oral and written traditions and worked to position historical content, legend, and whakapapa within written records, “to give the cultural context for the translation so that the story lives and has meaning for Māori”

(Tau, 2011, p. 12). Early missionaries played an integral role in bridging oral and written traditions, studying te reo Māori and translating Māori histories, often referred to as mythologies by these newcomer scholars and distributed to readers in Great Britain alongside Māori who studied English and recorded documents in both English and Māori for a variety of purposes (Salmond, 1991, 1997). The tradition of written history is, therefore, not unique to Pākehā and was adopted and adapted by Māori writers from early encounters while still retaining a strongly performative nature of local history at the same time.

European settlers introduced and pursued many literary traditions upon their arrival in New Zealand from the 1840s, including biblical scriptures, nature writing and documentation, poetry, fiction, and writing local history books. As one of the last places on earth to be colonised by European settlers, Aotearoa New Zealand was also the last land to be settled as firstcomers only arrived between 1200 and 1300 AD. The British colonial settlers who arrived later in the nineteenth century would have been familiar with the written accounts published by earlier correspondents in America, for example, writing back to Britain for newspaper publications and the work of the historical societies that promoted writing about the making of the new settler homes around the globe (Pasternak, 2009; Pratt, 2007). In New Zealand, the early British settlers produced written records of their pioneer experiences for posterity too (Phillips, 2014a), wanting to create records of their adventures and achievements in the new colony. Books such as Lady Barker's (1950) *Station Life in New Zealand* documented the novelty of settler experiences in mid-Canterbury during the mid-1800s while other books and pamphlets presented stories about the establishment and growth of specific towns or districts and were usually written by non-academics, such as ex-military officers, officials, or businessmen. Most published works put forward "pro-British statements" (Hilliard, 1997, p. 5) with a European cultural perspective; almost all excluded Māori history and did not

intersect with indigenous traditions of local history. The books represented an opportunity, from the settlers' point of view, to preserve an account of life in the colony. The largely "amateur" books were especially popular to mark milestone anniversaries and, in Pākehā mainstream, "by the beginning of the twentieth century it was common for such events to be marked by the publication of a memorial history" (Gentry, 2015, p. 131), written with the encouragement of local history societies.

Emergent Traditions of Writing About History in Changing Social and Political Settings in Twentieth-Century New Zealand

The 1940 Centennial shifted the landscape of history writing in New Zealand into a more scholarly domain, promoting professional authorship. Eleven official books were published to celebrate New Zealand's national identity, produced in partnership with scholars, professional writers, and officials (Gentry, 2015; Hilliard, 1997). The books strongly favoured a Pākehā narrative and still largely ignored indigenous history narrative and storytelling, though they did write about indigenous history in connection with celebrations held at the Waitangi Treaty grounds, notably the opening of Te Whare Rūnanga (the House of Assembly) in February 1940, which was a symbolic representation of Māori partnership with the British Crown.

According to Hilliard (1997, p. 109), the Centennial brought together history writing traditions that represented different academic standards, including regional amateurs, journalists, or scholars, but favoured western thought. Prior to the Centennial, Gentry (2015) notes that:

[No one single tradition dominated] amateur historiography in the 1920s and 1930s... The same could be said for academically trained historians, with a number of the 'professional' contributors to the [Centennial] surveys incorporating elements of the 'amateur' tradition within their writing. (p. 169)

Despite renewed regional interest in local histories around the time of the Centennial, a more interesting shift following the national anniversary was that the study of New Zealand history as a culture of western academic scholarship emerged strongly (Gentry, 2015, p. 183). History became less the province of the people to establish itself within the ambit of scholars, “with the academy effectively taking the position that there was little ‘real’ history published until there were academic historians to write it” (Gentry, 2015, p. 4). History was, therefore, consolidated as an academic, institutionally bound scholarship by the mid-twentieth century of New Zealand. The scope and preoccupations of the field were determined by scholars, and, within an established scholarship tradition, written records and documents were privileged as authoritative sources (Phillips, 2014b). Ways of writing history as objective, interpretive scholarship were emphasised. The field began broadening out into professionalisation as more and more graduates had to find work outside of academia from the latter part of the twentieth century, often transplanting their skills and research interests into a public environment (Gay & Wexler, 1975; Hilliard, 1997).

In the late twentieth century, there was a significant shift back to grassroots story and witness testimony, arising out of the international interest in social history and oral history noted in Chapter Two and accompanying debates about historiography within academia. In New Zealand, Oliver (1971) challenged the objective professional status quo with his 1969 lecture, *Towards a New History*, suggesting that historians follow the methods of sociologists and take a step into social history. He encouraged scholars to open the study of the past to include history from “below” to embrace the voice of the witnesses in the search for historic evidence and storytelling, which would supposedly invite increased Māori representation in history storytelling too. Consequently, social history grew in popularity and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. Academic historians, such as Fairburn (1979), Arnold (1990), and Olssen (1995), began to seriously incorporate

and promote social history within the field. Oral history grew too, and historians promoted a rise in personal stories as a valuable source of historic information (Selby & Laurie, 2005; Thompson, 2000), which, in turn, influenced the form and practice of local history. Scholars also supported the study of regional social histories, arguing that they had pervasive value for community members at a local level (Ballantyne, 2012; Gardner, 1999; Gentry, 2015).

The return to grassroots interests was also a public history response to sociocultural and political debate across the nation at the time that ushered in an era of collaboration in history storytelling. This shift paid closer attention to encounters between tangata whenua and Pākehā, and began to raise more critical questions about agency, authority, and representation. From the 1980s, debates about Te Tiriti o Waitangi increased the need for critical historiography that explored the bicultural relationships between Māori and Pākehā. Māori academics, like social advocate Ranginui Walker (Whakatōhea iwi of Ōpōtiki) from the University of Auckland, suggested that the 1970s had been a time of Māori renaissance with renewed interest in biculturalism as a means to protect and assert Māori culture (Walker, 1987). Representation of Māori in Pākehā writing since their arrival had led to a “variegated mishmash of romanticism, myth-making, fact and fiction with liberal lashings of stereotyping, denigration and distortion of history” (Walker, 1987, p. 11). These concerns added weight to the arguments of scholars arguing for critical historiography and sensitivity to how stories were being told and interpreted within the region.

As Māori challenged colonial worldviews and writings about cultural identity, Pākehā were left asking questions of their own history and identity (Orange, 2011; Phillips, 1990, 1996, 2015; Veracini, 2001). Public historians responded during the 1990s by welcoming opportunities for local communities to define their own regional identities and

participate in history storytelling (McCarthy, 2014). At the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, which opened in 1998, this led to the promotion of cocuration to acknowledge the importance of meaning that subjects of history attribute to public history projects. Where possible, the institutions, since the 2000s, invited local communities to collaborate and take some level of ownership over the collections displayed and the narratives these tell (McCarthy, 2011). One example is The Mixing Room exhibition, which promoted cocuration of content in collaboration with Te Papa and the refugee youth community (Gibson & Kindon, 2013). The evolution of public history practice is of particular cultural significance to Māori iwi, who are no longer the object of study in such exhibitions as they were in earlier years of colonial settlement and, instead, reassert autonomy over their history storytelling in these public spaces.

Academic history scholarship evolved during this era of critical historiography too with further implications for writing local history. In Aotearoa New Zealand since the 1980s, historians have played an integral role in Treaty negotiations, serving as tribunal historians or historians acting both on behalf of the Crown and for iwi claimants. The historians' work is described as "essential to [Treaty] deliberations" (Ballara, 2016, p. 22) and the resolution of a number of historic claims. Their work investigating land claims undertaken by the Waitangi Tribunal from the 1980s has strengthened the use of oral testimonies and different sources in writing about the past for New Zealand communities. In addition, according to Reilly (2000), scholars like Belich (2007, 2010), Binney (2001, 2004), and Sissons (1991) "have contributed sometimes innovative and always challenging new histories of Māori" (p. 15) and attempted to find new ways to write local histories more consistent with the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Māori scholars and historians joined the ranks of western intellectuals internationally to challenge the production of history texts and promote critical indigenous pedagogy and

writing. Discussion and debate about sociocultural and political historiography increased.

Despite these rather deep-seated changes in history scholarship by the end of the twentieth century, local history books still remain primarily popular grassroots initiatives, written to celebrate new milestone anniversaries of local towns or districts and with a strong following of non-academically-trained enthusiasts. According to Dalley and Labrum (2000), history storytelling continued to reach new heights of popularity in the early twenty-first century among New Zealanders interested in family and local history. Local historian Smith (2011) proposes that book production is a favoured medium of publication because it is “particularly well-suited to presenting the voices and interpretations of the people of a place” (p. 142) and engages locals in the history of their community. The tradition is arguably strengthened by the evolution of history scholarship and its reiteration of local voice in more recent times. However, critical historiography remains perplexing for local history writing as a historically European tradition. One of the challenges faced by early writers of local history in the western tradition of the settlers was how they engaged with (or ignored) stories of *iwi* rohe or tribal boundaries. For the most part, non-Māori scholars would try to incorporate some of their interpretations of Māori stories of place but focused largely on history post-settlement from the 1840s. Even today, there are questions about whether local history books have changed sufficiently to reflect the Māori–Pākehā intersection of local history or how they respond to these complicated and nuanced, Te Tiriti-informed, sociocultural, and political settings.

Examined from the perspective of the academic historian, local history books remain troublesome. Today, historians still vocalise a wariness towards local histories and their associated grassroots style of production that are sometimes produced without the

benefit of formal academic scholarship. There is a danger, from the scholars' point of view, of the books representing a kind of "parish pump [produced according to] very low standards [and] having little or no relevance to 'genuine' history" (Gardner, 1999, pp. 49–50). This is suggestive of an enduring academic scepticism about voice and its place in history scholarship and writing, even though there has been movement in these attitudes with new theories of historiography since Oliver's (1971) calls in the 1970s. Historians cite concern about local history books' disregard for academic sourcing and referencing and the subjectivity of its contents, concerned about reliance on the anecdotal over critical, objective, scholastic interpretation (Gardner, 1999, p. 3).

Local history advocate Gardner's (1999) response was not to dismiss local history but, instead, to encourage improved scholarship and promote collaborative partnership in the field. Gardner and his peers set up organisations like the Canterbury Historical Association to promote partnerships between scholars and local history groups to encourage excellence in regional and local history publications, inspiring scholars to adopt a posture of stewardship of local history to help local communities in their publishing efforts. The goal is for scholars and community members to create opportunities to come together to facilitate improved scholarship and publications, which has, according to other scholars, the potential to transform the effectiveness of scholarship to the benefit of both parties:

When they are able to participate with historians in the process of creating scholarship, community members can come to an understanding of how the past has shaped the community's present and how both past and present will affect its future. (Serikaku, 1989, p. 73)

This cements the value of local history books within the realm of public history too and asserts that the projects have more significance at the grassroots, local level when there is partnership between the academy and the community. It also suggests the possibility

that these types of projects have a vital role to play in national historiography and awareness of the potential of decolonisation and cross-cultural encounters at a local level. However, there is insufficient examination into the nature and practice of these partnerships within the region or how they engage with questions of sociocultural or political identity. Sociologically, Crothers (2016) has spoken out about the under-utilisation of New Zealand local studies too, suggesting that scholars in the humanities and social sciences should not lose focus on the local in the contemporary emphasis on the national, international, and transnational—a similar argument to that expressed by Gardner (1999) earlier. There is still unresolved debate about the significance (or lack of significance) of local history book projects, with scholars, professional writers, and community members taking vastly different stands to one another within the debate and its situation within the traditions of history writing, its evolution in Aotearoa New Zealand, and its place among conversations about decolonisation.

Writing Local History in the Pacific

The evolution of local history writing has also taken place in the wider Pacific. Situated within the Pacific region, New Zealand's location fosters close, abiding ties that link its stories with other Pacific peoples—culturally, economically, and politically. In the Pacific, questions of agency and who is served by any particular historical representation (Thomas, 1991) have been at the fore since the latter half of the twentieth century. New Zealand's Pacific Island neighbours are largely societies where the indigenous populations have secured independence from colonial rule. However, colonial voices have not been entirely silenced, and a long tradition of colonial influence in the Pacific is impossible to overcome in a few short decades. European or visiting anthropologists, such as Bronisław Kasper Malinowski (1922), were interested in the study of culture and groups of Pacific peoples since their first cross-cultural encounters with one another under colonialism and the tradition of studying the indigenous "Other" was strongly

supported by the rise of anthropological institutes across Britain and Europe following the Enlightenment period. Margaret Mead (1943), for example, studied Samoan youth (primarily young girls) to explore a treatise on psychosexual development in the early twentieth century. Historians were equally fascinated with the region and worked to explain lives lived in set times and contexts in the Pacific too and a diverse collection of scholars from different academic fields wrote numerous books about Pacific peoples and places.

All these literary encounters exist within a power dynamic. Even historical ethnographies, a genre Smith and Watson (2010) now define as life writing, can be seen as a popular administrative tool in the colonised Pacific in the sense that they stressed the superior importance of the self-reflection of the colonisers. The indigenous peoples were to “be studied” and “written about”. Denning (1991) suggests that the multiple collections of anthropological writing about Pacific and Polynesia are “European inventions of the Pacific, to be discovered wherever there is an academy or an archive or a museum or a library ... [and] ... are beyond measure” (p. 357). Administrators frequently used ethnography to report back to Britain and Europe to try and *explain* Pacific peoples and their culture to aid government officials to better “manage” these nations or help scholars to “learn” about them, usually for the advancement of colonial goals. The position of power rested firmly with the coloniser scholars and officials.

The ideal of self-representation came to the fore in debate and literary practice in the Pacific following the decolonisation discussions and programmes of the 1960s and 1970s. As one response, the United Nations Development Programme encouraged the promotion of “insider” history books in the Pacific as a way to promote a new way of writing history in the region—a counter-narrative to the history books written in the age of colonial rule (Laracy, 1983). The fresh wave of publications it encouraged gave new

generations an opportunity to rewrite history and ask more critical questions about their history and heritage. For example, autoethnographies (a genre that can be paralleled with self-life writing) came to be developed by insiders writing as representatives of their own cultures or groups in the context of a political shift towards indigenous self-government and an era of postcolonialism in the Pacific region. Such writing investigates postcolonial meaning-making and establishes a link between the local and world history, grassroots experience, and how it is influenced by global forces (Biersack, 1991). With the shift in focus from the outside observations—as in traditional studies of history and anthropology (Thomas, 1991)—to local lived experience, narration opened “windows on historical consciousness” (Biersack, 1991, p. 20) through the voice and stories of those previously thought of as “Others”.

The practice and forms of history writing within the region have thus shifted to more insider views with alternative narratives speaking back to historically dominant discourses. Life writing genres are especially useful in this regard. Biographical collections have also been popular to offer a literary approximation of life and certain historical ages in the Pacific communities. However, as Gunson (2008) points out, the selection of these individuals as the focus of Pacific narrative can be an arbitrary selection and present an archetype of biographical information. These biographies of individuals can typify Pacific experience rather than engage with the complexities of community accounts as local histories. Therefore, critical interrogation of biographies should raise questions about which individuals have been selected to explain a community’s lived experiences and why, thus causing debate about the significance, or not, of life writing. The study of these works as life writing, for example, interrogating who is speaking and why creates a compelling critical lens to uncover tensions of power and points of view. It also draws attention to important questions of ethical practice in the region, including the forms that self-expression take in local history writing. In the

space of postcolonial or decolonising contexts that have emerged, serious consideration is now being given to matters like ownership, appropriation, and respect of privacy within the Pacific region (Jacklin, 2004). Jacklin goes on to assert that collaboration arises as an ethical strategy of indigenous expression, which:

Suggests the opening of a discursive space in which the critic can meet the subjects of reading as partners in the construction of meaning, and as potential readers of each other's work. Such an ethics would involve serious consideration of the exchange of discourse and the issue of return — the fact that all discourse circulates and penetrates and passes through texts into lives and communities.
(p. 79)

Partnership is implied as a preference with recognition that writing is fully embedded into the types of community discourses that build, sustain, or challenge their very existence. This is not, Jacklin advocates, a consideration to be taken lightly.

There has been acknowledgement that in the past researchers visited Pacific Islands to source “raw material” (Daws, 2006, p. 253) and to take the material elsewhere to write about that place for the benefit—scholastic and financial—of the producer alone. This is entirely inconsistent with the collectivism of many Pacific cultures. Instead, a shift towards collaboration is valued and communal benefits thought through with more sensitivity. This argument includes discussion about which media may be best suited for the story and its storytellers and does not presume the written book is privileged without debate. Questions are also being asked about which languages insider books should be written in and who constitutes the target audience. For example, Daws (2006) suggests that increased digital literacy and availability made it necessary to question whether other digital or online formats may be more suitable or accessible than printed texts. Moore (2008, 2013, June), in siding with Daws' argument, suggests that the *Solomon Islands Historical Encyclopedia 1893–1978* was better served to be published online under

a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 Australia License to step away from “monograph myopia” (2008, p. 290) and make the historical information more accessible to the local community.

Within this debate about agency in the Pacific, writing local history in the region has been compared to family histories, which are more personal and strongly consistent with life writing characteristics. The history stories are cemented on intergenerational personal connections and relationships, entrenched in the collective rather than the individual. Reilly (2009), in writing about the history stories of the Mangaia people of the Cook Islands, refers to their history stories as ancestral stories or taonga (treasure) and describes them as life stories or extended family histories. Within this tradition, scholars assert the importance of writing for a literate public to preserve stories of a personal past and acknowledge that stories embody identity and, thus, are built into Pacific life (Lal & Luker, 2008). For example, van Heekeren (2008) explains that stories of key figures are protected in trust by elders to be a “repository for ‘traditional’ knowledge [and as] reminders of an alternative way of life” (p. 32). As such, local history storytelling adopts a personal significance to the communities the texts represent and implicates discussions about globalisation and indigeneity.

Local History as Life Writing in the Twenty-First Century

Consideration of the politics of voice and its influence on the practices and forms of local history writing in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific support the argument for studying and reading local history as life writing in the twenty-first century and, consequently, asking new questions about its forms and practices. Since local history is mostly communal in character, numerous tensions are often provoked in the development and practice of the genre, informed by the specificities of regional settings. A literary reflection on the evolution of local history books reveals that they promote a

form and practice of group storytelling that narrates collective accounts to interpret the history or heritage of a geographical community. The books, whether written by individuals or in partnerships, represent a collective voice of a community and, therefore, fulfil the definition of collaborative life writing (as a mode of group (auto)biography) proposed by Smith and Watson (2010).

Chapter Two explained how life writing unites common ground between genres, and the discussion above reiterates how local history's return to grassroots accounts in many instances highlights a preoccupation with producing a record or narrative that is both historical evidence *and* personal story, built upon individual and collective remembering in response to certain geographical settings. This local history does not sustain a lengthy discussion of a single life story but, instead, examines collective lived experience within a place. The texts imply that the storytellers (or voices within the narrative) have witnessed similar events and share many everyday life experiences, such as those from their childhood, raising families, work life, or recreation. Local history writers use these vignettes from different life stories to represent common experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific. For example, they may choose a selection of personal stories or memories from community members to describe what it was like going to school in their town during a specific era.

An argument for the evolution of local history books into more obviously a form of life writing is bolstered by how other academic (non-history) disciplines have become more interested in what local history reveals about people and society. Anthropologists, for instance, pay attention to similar stories (such as historical ethnographies) and, with some deviations in practice and writing, produce books remarkably similar to local histories to describe the stories of place and its people. This resonates with the challenge Lindemann (2018) identified within the interdisciplinary canon of life writing (noted in

Chapter Two) that different scholars or writers will claim the format depending on their disciplinary predilections and purposes of writing. My research thus incorporates texts that function as local histories but may be shelved elsewhere in libraries based on the disciplinary interest of its producers. Nevertheless, according to the definition of public history cited by Yow (2014, p. 171), local history primarily serves the interests of the general (reading) public—not scholars—who are less concerned about scholastic classification of books and more about the stories or the people they represent. In Aotearoa New Zealand, public historians, including local history writers, have articulated lofty goals of helping the general public engage with the past to make sense of it for themselves (Belich, 2007; Johnson, 2017; Phillips, 1996; Pickles et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017; Warren-Findley, 2001, January). The notion of making sense of the past is a foundational trope of life writing and reinforces how reading or studying local history book projects from this perspective can, therefore, contribute to interpretations of lived experiences in these different regions.

Additionally, the forms of local history have changed over time, seemingly in response to changes in their social and intellectual settings. This includes contemplating new ways of writing local history with fresh views, including privileging subjective lived experience and diverse personal accounts of the past, to explore local history through different lenses. Amato's (2002) work, for example, is often cited as an encouragement about what can be done to evoke alternative ways to write about the local as case studies of the "details, anecdotes, and peculiarities of place" (p. 188). In reflecting upon local history of the twentieth century, Tiller (2010) describes recent history as the source of immeasurable volumes of writing about place and story based on personal experience, the setting of "all our personal histories" (p. 16). In this context, she argues, distance or scholastic objectivity is not something easily achieved when we are writing about a time of our own. Consequently, subjective testimonies come to the fore. The rise in writing

about local history thus responds to both personal and public interests of history storytelling that bring new pressures to bear on its practice: “This is history which has been personalised, commercialised and consumerised to an unprecedented degree, with inevitable repercussions for local history” (Tiller, 2010, p. 23). Changing practice confirms, furthermore, that it may be time for the redefinition and further exploration of the genre as Eakin (1999) has recommended for other forms of life writing too.

Given the communal character of local history as a mode of group life writing, special consideration of its collaborative qualities is warranted. However, as it is set within a contested territory of historically divergent lived experience and power relations, the articulation of such stories is complicated in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific. Life stories of community adopt a “we” narrative stance to represent a community point of reference, often stated in first person plural narration (Portelli, 1992). This presents a challenge for historians who need to become familiar with a “whole new narrative attitude” (Portelli, 1981, p. 105)—from third to first person. Even though oral historian Portelli was writing this in the 1980s, his work is still a key influence today, and the challenge of cowriting to embrace a collectivist narration remains troublesome for scholars and writers in the 2020s. The shift from detached, distant observation to a closer working relationship with witnesses of history has encouraged historians to add skills to their writing repertoire to be able to better honour the “intent and tone of the interview” (Hutching, 2004, p. 173). By resituating local history within life writing, closer attention can be paid to exploring the tensions among sometimes competing narrative and scholastic interests, set within the political climate and debate in wider New Zealand and Pacific society.

A review of the field of local history confirms how many of the contemporary debates raised by scholars and practitioners fit well within the scholarship of life writing.

Responding to the demands of public history and historiography, scholars and writers articulate how they are facing a number of challenges as they adjust to these new expectations and, as observed by one historian, writers are learning to proceed “with care, it is time for dialogue and collaboration” (Pickles, 2017, p. xiv). Their position suggests that representing community requires careful and critical, historiographic consideration of form and practice, which is emphasised in how local history can be seen to present itself as collaborative life writing.

Reimagining local history as collaborative life writing stresses its collaborative practices as a core scholarly and literary consideration. Anthropologist Jackson (2002; 2018) draws critical attention to the intersubjective nuances of history storytelling as an act of expression, especially within politically complex settings. His work highlights the importance of looking beyond form (or product) to interrogate its production and the various forces exerted on its practice. Jackson’s work asks whether process is equal in importance to the product created in storytelling or writing. He suggests that often, “the process of storytelling becomes eclipsed by the product that the story is pressured into yielding” (2002, p. 109). To engage more successfully with these sorts of products, scholars should pay more attention to the relationship between the process of telling the story *and* the product this process creates. By his reasoning, the process of creation is as important as the final text. Process and collaborative processes (or lack thereof) thus become pivotal to investigations into local history stories to reveal how their meaning-making crafts specific forms and content as forms of group life writing, yet these processes are often left underexamined when these works are read or studied. In contrast, the application of life writing criticism highlights the significance of collaboration as a potential social or political response, especially in places like Aotearoa New Zealand.

Collaborative Life Writing Practice as a Social or Political Response

Discussion about collaboration in public history or collaborative life writing in Aotearoa New Zealand is informed by its response to the complicated historical, sociocultural, and political traditions of history storytelling in the region described in this chapter.

Collaboration has found expression as coproduction, cocuration, or cowriting within a spirit of partnership that its proponents would argue more readily honours the spirit of Te Tiriti in Māori and Pākehā encounters of storytelling (Hancock, 2015, 2018). It is reasonable to argue, however, that collaboration is far from a simple or obvious solution to addressing the politics of voice in local history book projects in Aotearoa New Zealand. Questions are raised about the importance of collaboration as a possible life writing practice, the ethical and moral implications of its implementation in local history projects, and how collaboration responds to the social or political tensions of where the projects are set. It is a complex issue because, on the one hand, collaboration navigates storytelling partnerships across cultural divides and, at the same time, requires working together between different social and learning institutions, such as local history societies, community organisations, and university departments.

Furthermore, the projects represent complicated relationships with producers situated in various contexts wherein questions about representation, authority, and authorship are brought to life once again by the application of life writing criticism. A common feature of local history books in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific is their production by project teams (funded by public institutions or private groups) made up of a combination of scholars, professional writers, and people from within the community who are not trained historians or writers (Swarbrick, 2014). In typical practice, there are three categories of local history book producers: academic scholars, professional writers outside of universities, and community (non-trained history enthusiast) volunteers. Each writing partnership looks a little different, depending on who is involved and their

relationship to the geographical community, the purposes of the project, and intended publication. Notwithstanding, what each has in common is that a partnership is negotiated to produce a story of a town or district, weaving together oral and literary traditions through their use of personal and group interviews and archival document research. By implication, the projects engage with people or witnesses to history in the community to a greater or less extent. Public history advocates such as Schwartz (2010) suggest that project platforms, most commonly oral history projects, that promote active public engagement assign “some significant level of ownership and responsibility” (p. 72) to people living within the community—the grassroots voice. However, the extent and practice of collaboration with public platforms and among project writing teams in the production of local history books within New Zealand practice goes mostly unexamined.

Global life writing scholarship has, in addition, critically revealed the role of the university scholar as coproducer or partner in these collaborative narrative relationships, which has implications for practice both in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific. In relation to the community representation debate, literary scholar and biographer Howes (2011) suggests that it is no longer sufficient for scholars to only ask for permission to write about experiences. In critically interrogating the ethical implications of what it means to represent a community in such partnerships, he argues that scholars better serve communities when they step aside to let the witnesses step forward as “owners of their experience” (p. 104). His view advances a hope that scholars in these circumstances and contexts could be content being, “the producers rather than the interpreters, the personal assistants rather than the stars” (pp. 104–105). Similar sentiment is shared by oral historians like O’Connell (2020), who suggests that collaborative partnerships represent a moral responsibility to invite communities to be “co-creators rather than simply the recipients of new research” (p. 50).

To illustrate the value of this shift in thinking and approach to writing in New Zealand as one way of honouring the intentions of Te Tiriti, Pākehā anthropologist Sissons' (1984, 1991) work, examined through the lens of collaborative life writing, represents an outstanding, early example of writing in partnership, in this case with Tūhoe community members. Sissons' (1991) book, *Te Waimana: The Spring of Mana: Tūhoe History and the Colonial Encounter*, is based on conversations about the past with Tūhoe elders and examines how these personal histories engage with or challenge other written records. Writing in partnership with Tūhoe storytellers, he presents Tūhoe history through four different historical domains: kōrerō of spiritual ancestors, to kōrerō of whānau ancestors, to narratives about key people (such as Rua Kēnana Hepetipa—Tūhoe prophet), until finally reflecting on reminiscences of elders who share their personal memories and knowledge. The conversations with the elders were transcribed and retained as close to their original form as possible for inclusion in the Tūhoe story in the fourth part of the book. Sissons (1991) states an intention to move, “towards a more bicultural history by juxtaposing and counter-pointing interpretations derived from documents with those of local Tūhoe historians” (p. 286). This shift refocuses attention on the “socially-situated speakers who tell their history within history” (1991, p. 288) to make space for their voice alongside the academic author.

Sissons' (1984, 1991) work has additional significance to the debate of this chapter to demonstrate how non-Māori scholars can be sensitive to politics of voice and decolonise their writing as part of new emerging historical and life writing traditions. Within New Zealand's political context of a Te Tiriti partnership and rising debate about decolonisation, the binaries of Māori and Pākehā are unavoidable, even if this is a problematic construction. Any discussion of collaboration of local history writing, therefore, incorporates the complexities of biculturalism. The theory of collaboration and considerations of its practice is tested at local level among book producers who

respond to questions about representation of community from different Māori and Pākehā points of view. Johnson (2010) explains that biculturalism in Aotearoa New Zealand finds expression in one nation with two partners as parallel expressions of experience and authority. In time, he proposes, the nation will move into a space beyond the binaries but, for now, they remain part of discourse in the colonial and decolonising space and place of the nation.

This means that translation of the philosophy of collaboration into day to day writing and research practice is complicated across cultural differences in Aotearoa New Zealand. Further, interrogated through life writing criticism, critical historiography poses an interesting question for scholars about whether non-Māori scholars have the authority (or mana) to teach and write about Māori history or lived experience.

Colonisation succeeded in appropriating and misrepresenting indigenous voice, so it is understandable that the idea of who writes for whom, or even how, is a sensitive matter in the era of postcolonialism or decolonisation analysis. In an ideal world, Māori write Māori stories. However, as Oliver (2001) attests, “This goal, of Māori life stories written in Māori by Māori drawing upon traditional sources, remains an ideal for the future” (p. 151), or so Oliver thought in 2001. In citing the example of *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Oliver argued that the pressing need to record history was more important than waiting for cultural purity, and many agreed. He argued that the best approach to collaboration was to adopt an attitude of cultural respect and for writers to gain a level of competence in understanding Māori culture (2001, p. 144), which includes learning to respect when information is deemed tapu or unavailable for publication.

Almost twenty years later—with many more Māori historians, scholars, curators, librarians, journalists, and media makers than when Oliver was writing—non-Māori writers are still struggling with versions of the same questions, trying to learn when it is

possible to proceed or when it is best to step aside. The rise in Māori scholarship has created more opportunity for Māori writing about Māori history and experiences, but Pākehā history and experiences continue to intersect. It is unrealistic to draw a sharp distinction between the two as entirely separate entities or life experiences. In many local communities, Māori and Pākehā lives have been interwoven for generations.

Non-Māori scholars and writers who are responsive to the debate and their complicity in colonial discourse write about encouraging their peers to be aware of the importance of honouring Māori practices and, “in so doing, contribute steps that heal the wounds of colonization” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 12). They promote that this should be built upon dialogue, which, according to Denzin and Lincoln, helps co-construct stories that “create spaces for multicultural conversations, stories embedded in the critical democratic imagination” (p. 6). Once again, the language of democracy is invoked. Their position requires paying attention to the types of books that are written, promoting ideas about new ways of writing or creative means to engage communities with their history in meaningful ways and from different cultural points of view. A notable feature of Māori historiography is helpful in this regard because it embraces multiple narratives that reflect on each other. Tau (2011) describes how interwoven storylines can enrich life writing and history storytelling in New Zealand:

Māori oral traditions are closer to a Quentin Tarantino movie: a compilation of mini-narratives that occasionally align with other narratives but only occasionally so and often by accident. There is no grand narrative that reference back to other narratives. ... History is said to be the story of those who gain the victory. This is a saying uttered by lazy historians reluctant to deal with the idea of multiple stories and perspectives. (p. 21)

Māori storytelling thus encourages different strands of narrative to exist side by side without the need for one story to dominate the other or for everything to be tidily

reconciled. This thinking, according to Smith (2017), is especially useful in decolonising discussions and encourages multiple stories to be told and heard within the spirit of democratisation of history. For public history scholars, such as Shopes (2015), critical interpretation matters less in this context than the opportunities created by partnerships of storytelling, which are enhanced when local history is perceived as personal and group life writing. Shopes suggests:

So maybe we should get out of the way a bit and create spaces where people's stories can simply be told—difficult stories, hard stories, complicated stories—not just stories of survival or of all getting along. And then maybe we can juxtapose stories that contradict one another, that tell of cross-cutting communities within communities, of those excluded and those with power over it. (2015, p. 106)

Making a space for story and storytellers is an important consideration in Māori and Pākehā encounters in history writing and a vital consideration in life writing. Different scholars have their own distinct ways of writing about history and Māoritanga, and engage with the politics of writing history differently. Writers like Metge (2010, 2017) and Binney (2001, 2004, 2010) wrote to bridge the gap of learning and storytelling between Māori and Pākehā for Pākehā especially. On the other hand, those such as Tau (2003), Smith (2012), and Pihama (2017) advance Kaupapa Māori as the expression of self and story that is critical to indigenous pedagogy and any decolonisation conversation (Pihama, 2017; Ware et al., 2018). Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) explains that, “indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways for our own purposes” (p. 29). At the heart of Kaupapa Māori is promotion of praxis and enquiry that empowers Māori to be part of the construction and articulation of knowledge and narrative to the benefit of Māori, advocating for space for self-determination and autonomy (including self-expression) as promoted in Te Tiriti (Lee-Morgan & Hutchings, 2017). Different writers and scholars, therefore, approach local history writing from

different points of philosophical departure. Johnson (2020), for example, suggests that there are new researchers and writers emerging in historical spaces that are approaching history to grapple with identity and ties to colonialism in forms of social restoration:

Perhaps a new type of researcher is emerging, one that is straddling objectivity and subjectivity, identity and difference, and doing so not in the hallowed halls of academe but in the theaters of justice—institutions that were imposed by a colonization that continues to work on the present (p. 429).

This evolution of practice and philosophising further supports the argument that writing such as local history now belongs within a category of life writing. Situated within life writing, the practice of writing local history can be seen as strongly influenced by how the geographical (local) communities engage with questions about their identity in New Zealand discourse and how that encourages (or discourages) local history groups to seek out or reject institutional and cross-cultural collaborations or narrative relationships.

Within the context of decolonisation conversations taking place in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific from the 1970s, it is thought-provoking to explore how different geographical collectives talk about themselves in local history books. Political theorist and philosopher Arendt (1970) reminds us that, “storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it” (p. 105), suggesting that local history books, such as the case studies in this research, can provide vital insight into the nations’ social conversations at different points in time. The complexity of New Zealand places as either Māori and/or Pākehā is further complicated by the suggestion that multiculturalism and pluralism are significant considerations in some circumstances (Metge, 2008, p. 22).

Some warn that advocating for multiculturalism may detract from the requirements of Te Tiriti that are upheld by binational discourse (Johnson, 2010). However, other scholars argue that biculturalism has fallen entirely out of favour since the neoliberal political reforms of 1984, which has led to increasing discomfort about the Māori–Pākehā

dichotomy in some quarters in favour of recognising hybridity or the common ground between indigenous Māori and Pākehā interests (Belgrave, 2014). The debate is still unresolved.

A Final Thought

Given the change in the sociocultural, political, and scholastic environment within Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific region over the past two centuries, including debate about honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, history publication has undoubtedly been influenced by the conversations that speak to, or continue to ignore, political context and its impact on recording life experiences. Historiography has fostered critical examination of the forms and practices of history writing in these places with a growing awareness of the historically dominant settler culture that has traditionally set the tone and content for written history publication.

This chapter, which reviews the field of writing about the history of local places in Aotearoa New Zealand and, to a lesser extent, the Pacific, suggests that traditions of local history books have evolved into a more obvious form of life writing as it responds to the complex sociocultural and political contexts within which the genre is situated. For instance, the shift back towards privileging grassroots voice and lived experiences facilitates a deeper engagement with questions or stories of cultural identity and the politics of voice in written representations. The complexity of the debate raises far more questions than providing answers at this stage, which need to be examined more closely within the context of case studies and specific experiences of local history writers. Set among this multifaceted discussion about politics of voice, agency, authorship, and biculturalism, life writing criticism adds a fresh perspective to the study of local history in postcolonial or decolonising contexts. It examines the processes and philosophies that forge them and the forms they yield to consider the implications of local history books

for community conversations about self and others, as individuals and part of collectives, who live in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific region.

Chapter Four

Methodology and Methods

“We tell ourselves stories in order to live.” (Joan Didion, writer and journalist)

The application of a humanities approach to research adds value to social science.

Examining local history books as life writing encourages us to ask new questions about what these texts may teach about the humanities and social science. A middle ground can connect “the study of text and of the world” (Cohen, 1992, p. 86) to reinforce the connection between a story conveyed as Literature and the details of the experience the writer seeks to share as History. Local history as life writing bridges that middle ground as a befitting classification of texts that are frequently critiqued for being not quite History and not quite Literary yet somehow a blend of both. As a literary form, life writing has been recognised as creating the opportunity to link scholars with “the storied lives of people” (Dutta & Harter, 2009, p. 1). This engagement with storytelling as critical discourse promotes a forum of art and study that stimulates aesthetic forms of enquiry that look at social realities.

A decade of professional life writing experience influenced my research approach. I wanted to bring this practice that engages meaningfully with accounts through texts and conversations to bear on the project. Consequently, my methodology and method reflect life writing principles to focus both on text and the people involved in the creation and reception of text. It also mimics life writing as a critical interdisciplinary research approach, which reveals thinking and debate from different scholastic and research perspectives about studies of texts (or the stories they convey) and the social context of experience articulated. Scholars within the life writing field, as noted by Huisman (2010),

have been vocal about the potential for research across academic disciplines under the banner of life writing research, and I sought to respond to their call in my work.

Chapters Two and Three described the field within which the research enquiry is located and raised questions about its forms and practice in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific. In this chapter, I describe my methodology and research method used to address the enquiry. The chapter has two parts. The first outlines my approach to doing research as a social constructivist paradigm, which depends upon a multiple method approach that accounts for both humanities' and social sciences' perspectives. The second part of the chapter outlines the two research methods employed, namely the case studies of three local and community history books and interviews with local history book producers and contributors.

Methodology

My research is ontologically located within a social constructionist paradigm. Its key consideration is how individuals and groups in everyday life try to make sense of the world or interpret it from various points of view. Berger and Luckmann (1967) propose that human consciousness processes life as “ordered reality” with social phenomena “prearranged in patterns” (p. 35); patterns which construct ideas and concepts that become habitualised and institutionalised into human thinking and action in such a way that they appear as if they always existed. They are normalised and hidden into social constructs. Thus, according to Inglis and Thorpe (2012), the world becomes a “product of our minds” (p. 88), and we can try to understand social actions according to the “ways in which individuals view the world they are in, and ways in which they act within it” (p. 90). This has consequences for life writing and its interpretation because these habitualised patterns and concepts are deeply embedded into the reflections and writing about lived experience.

Reality and, consequently, meaning and knowledge are socially constructed and worked out through communication. In addition, these constructions camouflage ideologies that underscore these social realities and which benefit some social members more than others. However, most social actors overlook these power structures and how they operate in their everyday life. Nevertheless, this ingenuousness does not mean that they do not exist: “The conceptual machineries that maintain symbolic universes always entail the systematization of cognitive and normative legitimations, which were already present in the society in a more naïve mode, and which crystallized in the symbolic universe in question” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 126). Critical deconstruction of language can, therefore, reveal how knowledge or social reality are being constructed in social discourses or counter discourses, or even how the production of knowledge itself is influenced or interpreted a particular way based on when and where it is practised to benefit certain social structures or institutions over others. Dreher (2016) shows how the social constructions of meaning reiterate that a social constructionist approach serves well as an analysis of power, which is entwined in discussions of authority and agency that have emerged from the case studies and writers’ interviews in my research and in response to debates raised from the field.

The idea of “community” that is at the heart of my research is, therefore, viewed here as a social construction. The very idea or concept is defined according to patterns or ideologies that are constructed to serve certain interests and at points in time, and have been habituated in how they are spoken or written about. They appear as objective, natural phenomenon—a narrative that is taken for granted and not critically interrogated by most of the social actors. In addition, the historical view that has produced knowledge about “other” communities serves to uphold the institutional patterns that serve the interests of political or economic powers. How we know about a

place or its way of life is constructed through these systems of knowledge as an interpretative lens.

Social context informs how people experience reality and respond to it, including the meaning attributed to concepts such as “community”. This contextualisation reveals that meaning is changeable; it is influenced by the context and time within which it is constructed or practised. Evolving historical, political, economic, or social conditions can and, thus, do change meaning or knowledge, and this includes how knowledge or experience is talked or written about retrospectively. In addition, given the multifaceted complexity of human experience and activity, many different points of view can arise on any social action, institution, or artefact. In the absence of objective truth, multiple meanings and truths become possible, but the articulation of truth is embedded in a battle of power and the “competition between rival definitions of reality” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 137). Research therefore considers that, “what a person does in the social world, especially through language and patterned behavior, is there to be inspected, considered, appropriated perhaps, rejected at times, and otherwise influenced by others reciprocally in face-to-face situations” (Sica, 2016, p. 45). Meaning evolves and is worked out in language as a discourse. The definition or meaning of community, for example, is not a fixed concept but changes and evolves according to changes in its context—how it is used, by whom, and for different purposes.

In my research, language and writing are examined as a social practice employed to infer and embody meaning. Applied to the research of local history texts, questions are raised about how language is used in the texts and practices to craft a particular point of view of lived experience, influenced by and interpreted in certain ways based on the social contexts within which they are situated. There are two main methodological implications of this ontology. First, it is essential to interrogate how reality and meaning

are “mediated and interpreted through language” (Inglis & Thorpe, 2012, p. 101). When asking questions about the meanings people attach to experiences, memories, or places, as is the case in my research, the enquiry turns its focus to the interpretation of reality, located in a point of view at a particular time and place and seen through the lived experience of people in a specific situation. This is accessible or becomes known through the language they use. For example, in the process of local history storytelling, individuals reveal their part in a collective narrative in “a social act [that will] bind people together in terms of meanings that are collectively hammered out” (Jackson, 2002, p. 103).

Second, this enquiry depends upon the incorporation of an element of reflexivity into the research practice and design to critically consider the influence of the researchers themselves who “have traditionally ignored the role they play in shaping the outcomes of their research” (Gergen & Gergen, 1991, p. 76). Reflexive methodology, in response, establishes a more reciprocal relationship between researchers and research participants to allow the voices of participants to impact research more readily. As such, social constructionism opens up new “vistas of research” (Gergen & Gergen, 1991, p. 77) to better understand how language is used to generate meanings collectively between people and groups. It also directs attention to what is unique in any case or situation, shifting attention to micro points of view as a starting point in the qualitative research or looking outwards from inwards (Gergen & Gergen, 1991; Steier, 1991).

Complementary to the social constructionist paradigm, my research epistemology has been influenced by the literary and philosophical application of poststructuralism, which looks more closely at language as the source of knowledge. In the absence of absolute truth and with language as the window to meaning, the possibility for discourse and counter discourse emphasises the lack of a fixed real world and reasserts that these

hidden structures uphold social constructions that are always open to challenge and change. Any connection between signifiers (words/ideas) and the signified (concepts they represent) is completely arbitrary and can, therefore, be re-established to something entirely new. This is possible because, according to Derrida (2007), “there is not a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying references that constitute language” (p. 34). He goes on to explain that the advent of writing, “strictly speaking, amounts to destroying the concept of ‘sign’ and its entire logic” (p. 34). Therefore, discourse as articulated in language constitutes, “never-ending chains of signification (Inglis & Thorpe, 2012, p. 177). Meaning (and knowing) shifts and changes.

Therefore, meaning cannot be fixed. Instead, the polysemic nature of signifiers emphasises the inherency of difference and the possibility of multiple meanings. It is, for example, possible that any text may be interpreted in an infinite number of ways according to the meanings that the different social actors, such as writers and readers, attach to the text from their many, varied situations and social contexts, and the many discourses that have influenced their interpretation. It is not, thus, possible to capture truth in an investigation but, by looking at something from different ways, perhaps it is possible to reveal different aspects of it as scholars have demonstrated. Ricoeur (1983, 2016), for example, is best known for looking at the power of language to make sense of one’s world. His work in combining phenomenological description with hermeneutics to link the study of discourse and narrativity reveals a kind of critical hermeneutics that was informative for my theoretical framework and consistent with this methodological approach. Likewise, the semiotic analysis of Berger (2014) and the textual dialogism of Wertsch (2002) demonstrate how these concepts find expression in a variety of interdisciplinary research enquiries that approach the text and use of language critically, albeit from different approaches. These critical methodologies highlight how power is embedded within the use of language and investigate how speakers and writers employ

the practice and nuances of language to influence, inform, or instruct social realities for different purposes. Since language is social and historical and meaning is worked out intersubjectively, questions are raised about who has the power to construct story and, thereby, to construct history.

Meaning is also contextualised. Language acts as the key to explain the social world to understand meaning. There is no reality except for the language used to create it, so looking critically at how language is used and in what contexts gives entry to some understanding about the social world in which it operates. This allows observable differences to be analysed or critically examined, and reveals the types of dominant and counter discourses that direct and attempt to influence understanding or learning and convey ideas within a society. The political character of knowledge and knowing is inescapable here too and, from the point of view of poststructuralism, it is recognised that agency and research take consideration of the “complexity, multiplicity and above all instability of power relations” (Inglis & Thorpe, 2012, p. 179). There is a methodological implication in such a position, which is that it is insufficient to only examine a text’s form. Context and process informs the critical analysis and reading of texts like local history books because they reveal “literacy as social practice” (Baynham, 2000, p. 99). The contexts of production and reception as the “situatedness” (Baynham, 2000, p. 100) of writers and readers are, therefore, intrinsic to the social construction of meaning, and the application of life writing criticism facilitates reflection upon wider social systems of meaning-making within which the texts perform.

The idea of situatedness is especially fitting to my research experience where debate about context and meaning-making intersects with real-world application of the research problem. Early in my research, I confronted an ontological and epistemological limitation in the application of my methodology to my method. I tried and failed to

identify a primarily Māori local history book project that could be included among the case studies. I consulted with Māori scholars and writers, who were keen to see the inclusion of such a text too, but none of us was able to locate a text that met the parameters of my study as collaborative life writing of local history. From my research, I have also come to appreciate that Māori story of place is not readily reduced to a single text—books often promote a Eurocentric tradition of writing as a particular method of meaning-making. Instead, local history in Māori storytelling expands over many different media and traditions. These differences in life writing modes of expression were, accordingly, borne in mind in the research analysis.

A Multiple Method: Integrating Humanities and Social Science Enquiry

Using two methods of research—first, case studies of three local history books and, second, interviews with local history book producers—presented an opportunity to reflect and integrate my ontological and epistemological considerations as a multiple method. The study of text in the tradition of the humanities (the case studies) was an obvious first step, but its integration with social science enquiry (the interviews) furthered its insights into how language is used with purpose and interpreted under different conditions. The approaches inform each other to enhance discovery, focusing on real-world micro examples in specific contexts.

This multiple method responds to the complexity of studying local history books as life writing to reflect upon what it is as a product (the book) *and* the process by which it is produced (its practice) to reveal different aspects of local history books. Furthermore, the research design was also inspired by a local te reo Māori kupu, *kōrerō*, which defines “story” as both a noun or object of study and a verb or method of study. From this point of view, local history is better studied as both as an object in its own right *and* a story brought to life by telling—investigating storytelling as an interpretative social device

(Clifford & Marcus, 2010). Chamberlain et al. (2011) propose that it is the integration between methods that is most significant when considering a multiple method design:

How [the multiple methods] fit together seems less important because, if carefully chosen, they will fuse and be integrated into the research, and be accepted as mundane components of the research. Pluralisms, in all their possibilities, bring substantial benefits to research practice and the generation of knowledge. (p. 166)

My integrated use of cases studies and interviews thus draws on the work of scholars like Bakhtin (1981), who advocate for investigation of a text as a literary device and, at the same time, a social device, which function within an open, pluralist system of discourse and meaning-making. Accordingly, the multiple method investigated how the texts function in a more nuanced approach to integrate discovery with the historical and social settings of their time.

My literary analysis respects a longstanding tradition in the humanities to evaluate texts as works of literature that record human accounts and suggest evidence of interpretive frameworks. I examined the three local history texts selected in my case studies to uncover what they reveal about social reality and meaning-making, employing both literary and historic logic to make informed deductions about the construction of stories and what they uncover in human experience (Maynes et al., 2008). Informed by studies of lived experiences, such as Powell (2008), I asked critical questions about these spaces of encounter in between personal accounts (stories) and so-called history—of different points of view or ideology as entrée to social constructions of meaning in the context of the local history books studied—as outlined in the next section, *Research Design*.

The integration of interviews facilitated a more reflexive and critical producer-led understanding of process. The significance of these interviews was informed by “a desire to learn and curiosity about how people see and understand their world” (Sørensen,

2009, p. 176), which is itself a mirroring of the preoccupations of life writing. The interviews also act as a bridge between humanities and social sciences to adopt an interpretive approach to understanding society and collective life (Geertz, 1983) by uncovering “the fixation of meaning” (Geertz, 1983, p. 31) in texts by their producers in the context of local history books and their production. The different points of view of writers responsible for the construction of texts was particularly useful in helping me to better grasp the complexities and nuances of their practices through their experiences with various local history book projects.

There is an advantage to promoting the integration of literary study methodology in social science research enquiries. The application of literary criticism in other disciplines has already been demonstrated as helpful to broaden research practice and gain additional insight. Carter (2014), for example, justified the use of exegesis methodology in research in Higher Education. She demonstrated with what she calls magpie methodology that consideration of literary analysis is helpful in directing attention to, “the connotative complexity of language” (p. 125). Using my integrated multiple method of case studies and interviews, I also sought to use literary study to complement other social science research methods and contribute to deeper understanding of local history storytelling across the humanities and social sciences. By paying attention to both written and spoken forms of language expression, I dug deeper into meaning and knowledge construction, and its implications for the “genre” of local history books.

Research Design

The previous sections outlined my methodological approach to this research. This section changes focus and explains the two research methods employed in the study. Stage one involved literary analysis of three local history books, chosen for their grassroots community involvement in their production, that I identified as forms of

collaborative life writing. Stage two involved carrying out interviews with producers of local history texts to investigate the practice of writing local history books.

Stage One: Literary Analysis of Three Case Studies

Three texts were selected for stage one: *Matagi Tokelau: History and Traditions of Tokelau* (1990; 1991); *Moturoa: A Social History of Moturoa, New Plymouth, New Zealand Aotearoa* (2007); and *Patumahoe³: History & Memories* (2016). The books were chosen to serve as unique case studies (Anderson, 2012), and all explicitly embraced the ideal of public history participatory or collaborative practice, and privilege a communal, rather than individual, account and narrative stance. The texts were chosen because they reflect upon differences emerging in the evolution of writing about local history over a timeframe from the 1980s to 2010s during increasing debate about globalisation and decolonisation in public history.

Two of the books feature the historic narrative of Aotearoa New Zealand communities (one rural and one suburban community) and one of Tokelau in the South Pacific, which sustains close sociopolitical and administrative ties with New Zealand—its residents are New Zealand citizens. The Tokelau text was produced in 1990 in the nation’s indigenous language and translated into an English version in 1991. In my analysis of this text, I examined the form of the English copy but the process and production of both. All three of the books selected for the case studies represent small print runs (most of which have already been sold and distributed) but are still readily available through public library channels in New Zealand.

The texts were read and analysed at two different levels, inspired by Ricoeur’s (1983) description of history as both a “literary artifact and a representation of reality” (p. 96).

³ See spelling note in Glossary (p. xiii).

Ricoeur proposes that the narrative function of history makes use of metaphor and language to capture a sense of identity and facilitates a process of knowing (about oneself and others) through conversations between self and symbol, self and text, and self and metaphor. Meaning is, therefore, a reflexive task inscribed into text and can be appropriated for oneself in an encounter with a text to interpret for oneself, and through which to gain understanding of a social world. The books were read for context (as *entrée* to meaning-making and interpretation of history narrativity) and for their literary features. The analysis reflected shifting perspectives of each text, firstly from a macro level that examined the sociocultural, economic, and political conditions of their production and, secondly, from a micro analysis of close reading to explore what the text reveals of itself.

Each text was read as an historical document, based on an analysis of interplay between context, text, and subtext, which is significant to history studies (Wineburg et al., 2007). Whereas a historian may examine the texts as a test for evidence and interpretation, applying life writing criticism shifts attention from reading for evidential objectivity to looking at their representational nature and reliance on personal storytelling and collective remembering. As life writing, they offer accounts of life lived in the particular locale—complete with its biases and subjectivity—and describe what people remember based on what they can recall at the time of production and how they make sense of this past based on what they know at the time too, including the sociocultural or political environments within which they are situated.

Each book was first read in its entirety to gain appreciation for the narrative and its form, and to familiarise myself with the content of each text. For analysis, selected passages were then chosen to accommodate more in-depth close reading and exegesis. Finally, the text was studied in its entirety once again to integrate the macro and micro analyses.

Macro Analysis: Context

Critical questions at the macro level were asked about the context of the narrative and its telling to investigate whose story is being told, by whom, and from what point of view to determine how the context of telling impacted the content, style, and interpretation of the narrative. Consideration was also given to how narrative logic and evidence was employed by each text to investigate how each works internally to craft its message. Attention was paid to what the texts revealed about their origin and purpose to learn more about their processes of production and the social contexts of the book projects. These insights illuminated different social and cultural practices and the artefacts they created (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Some questions asked at the macro level included:

- Why was a book format chosen as the preferred medium for publication?
- What was the role of the community in the writing of this story?
- How did the community attempt to produce the story as a collective?
- What evidence is there of participatory life writing processes?

The opening and closing chapters of each book were closely examined in this level of analysis, not only because of their important function in bookending the narrative but because they explicitly convey the communicative intention of the text and its producers. The books' introductions set the scene for the readers to engage with the text whilst the concluding pages offer the opportunity for subtext to be emphasised overtly. Together, these sections offer a crucial interpretive framework for readers: these passages in *Matagi Tokelau* included the translators' note, preface, introduction, and closing Chapter 18 with particular reference to *Ancient Tokelau Songs and Words of Greetings to Visitors*; *Moturoa's* passages included the introduction, opening pages of Chapter 2—*Once Upon a Time*, and the afterword; and *Patumahoe: History & Memories*

included the preface, Chapter 1—*Early Years*, the last pages on Chapter 13—*Entertainment*, and the afterword.

Micro Analysis: Form and Content

I followed the practice of analytical reading proposed by Adler and van Doren (2014) in my close reading and literary analysis at the micro level to examine the literary nature of the three texts to see what their use of language reveals. Adler and van Doren suggest critical reading digs deeper into the storytelling qualities of the narrative and its crafting, looking at denotation and connotation of the language and how it is used in the text to convey interpretation and meaning-making. Thus, I examined the three texts to see how the authors used language, metaphor, and imagery to communicate the various accounts to represent the community story. I looked for striking features and themes to identify patterns within each book and explored what the text reveals about itself and the social world it constructs.

I chose revelatory passages from each of the three books to examine the literary forms and features of the texts to show how each text works in whole and in part. In addition, I based my selections on what they revealed about the nature of the geographical community, their story, and specific setting: *The Slave Ships*, *The Post War Years*, and *Recent Events (Matagi Tokelau)*; *Working Class*, *Down at the Wharf*, and *Skool Time (Moturoa)*; and *Farming, Wars and Service* and *Service in the Community (Patumahoe: History & Memories)*. I asked a number of questions of each text to explore how they work and the points of view they represent to the reader (Nathan, 2014). Some questions that were included are:

- Who is the narrator(s)?
- How are characters, events, or experiences described in the text?
- What do we learn about word choice or diction?

- What rhetorical features are evident?
- Whose voices appear in the story?
- How does purpose or point of view shape the content and style of the text?
- What is included in the text and what is excluded, and what politics of inclusion and exclusion are evident?

My close reading of each text explored critical interpretation through use of language, including word choice, voice and dialogue, narration, emotion or tone, rhythm, literary connections, and patterns.

Finally, because I was also interested in how the books perform as representative of a genre, I included syntopical reading in the analysis as set out by Adler and van Doren (2014, p. 327). Here, I looked across the three texts and selections studied in close reading to identify use of common language, rhetorical devices, or discourse to see if similar themes or patterns emerged in the subtext across the three case study books.

Producer Reflexivity: Informing Process, Context, and Form

I integrated the critical analysis of the texts with a reflexive perspective about each case study to discover more about the texts, their production, and reception. Published material about each text was reviewed, including journal articles or online media content regarding the projects, publications, and public feedback or social media platforms.

I also spoke with the producers of the three books to learn from their insider point of view more about the nature and process of the projects and the texts that emerged as a result. In mid-2017, I first met with Professor Judith Huntsman (*Matagi Tokelau* project facilitator and co-editor). Next, I met collectively with three project team members⁴ from the Patumāhoe history book group and, lastly, I held telephone and email conversations

⁴ K. Carter, H. Upfold and A. Coppock.

with the producers of *Moturoa*.⁵ In-person meetings were recorded with permission, and I sought permission to share my written notes from these meetings in my research. The local history group and community volunteer producers in the latter two projects are referred to by surname and initial. They are not public figures or scholars, even though they participated in a book project.

Inclusion of the producers' points of view enriched the literary analysis of the book projects and enhanced interpretation. These producers' reflections offered useful insight into the background of the projects to reveal subtext that expanded upon the macro and micro analyses to reveal how the project processes informed context, form, and the interpretation or reception of each text. In addition to giving me access to feedback and information about the project that was not widely known, the producers offered a nuanced appreciation of the complexities of what they encountered in the project processes and an insider critique of the final publication.

Following each new reading in the stage one analysis, I reviewed the earlier analysis to see whether any new insights emerged with more nuance of understanding or even contradiction. These different readings and their foci reinforced the value of multiple close readings as, "at least, the reading of, viewing of, or listening to the set of texts multiple times (at least three) with the goal of understanding the range and quality of content" (Anderson, 2012, p. 288). The findings of stage one are presented in detail in Chapters Five and Six. The discoveries made in stage one suggested topics and lines of enquiry to be investigated in stage two.

⁵ D. Harris and N. Harris.

Stage Two: Directed Conversations With Other Book Producers

In stage two, I interviewed producers of a range of local history books written and published in New Zealand from the 1980s to 2010s. In this stage, I wanted to expand the enquiry beyond the three case studies to broader practices of local history writing from different points of view and experiences. Based on the types of local history book writers identified in Chapter Three, three categories of producers were recruited: scholars, professional writers, and community-based amateur volunteers. The aim of these interviews was to capture their reflexive accounts on the diverse range of book projects that they had contributed to in the genre to gain an understanding—from their perspective—of the processes, contexts, forms, and reception they had experienced across different book projects.

The purpose of stage two was to engage with the dialogic space that emerges in and around a written text, especially one that depends upon collaborative representation of accounts of collective groups. The interviews therefore contributed to the spirit of dialogism in the investigation. As Bakhtin (1981) points out, “form and content in discourse are one, once we understand that verbal discourse is a social phenomenon” (p. 259). Hence, studying local history through dialogue widens the opportunity for social dialogue to increase “the dialogue of knowledge” (de Peuter, 1998, p. 56).

The face-to-face interviews took the shape of directed conversations, a method informed by the work of Anderson (2012), to elicit a dialogical encounter. A series of prompts was used to stimulate and direct the research conversation to encourage discussion towards such aspects as the nature of the processes used in the different projects, decisions made about content and style, and problems or challenges that came to pass. Each directed conversation started with an opening invitation to: “Tell me a little about your interest in

local history and how you came to be involved with the [name of community] history book project". Conversation prompts included:

- How did you decide who would take part in the community project?
- Did you observe any power dynamics within the project team and/or community and/or outside the community that influenced or informed the project?
- What has publication of the story meant to the community?

The directed conversations were audio-recorded with permission, freeing me from note-taking to practise active critical listening to establish and maintain rapport (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

A pilot study with a coproducer for a collaborative local community book was undertaken to test the method and prompts. Since the book and project from the pilot is not a local or community history within the scope of my study, the content of the pilot discussion is not part of the research data, but it did become evident in the pilot study that slightly different prompts were necessary for the volunteer project members and the professional writers and scholars. This was confirmed among the study participants. The local volunteers were confident to offer opinion and reflections based on their publication experience, but they were less confident making wider-ranging observations across the genre and, as newcomers, are still familiarising themselves with the complexities of local history writing and publication. On the other hand, professional writers and scholars were more comfortable speaking to the field of local history writing based upon their involvement with multiple book publications over a longer period of time. This observation is consistent with the findings of other scholars, such as Couser (1998) and Jolly (2011) mentioned in Chapter Two, who reflect upon the differences between critics, scholars, professional writers, and amateur hobby writers.

Consistent with life writing practice, the directed conversations worked well to put research participants at ease and to engender a collaborative peer relationship. This style of research interaction addresses the common power imbalance in interview situations and shifted these encounters into dialogic practice, a conversation, which is positively perceived as a familiar social engagement (Andrews, 2009; Patel, 2016).

The Interview Participants

The interviews were conducted between late 2017 to mid-2018. Participants who could speak to either Pākehā or Māori points of view were actively sought as well as producers living in different parts of Aotearoa New Zealand. The names of possible interviewees arose from the early stages of my research when I was gathering collections of local history books. Meetings held with other scholars and writers also suggested producers to approach.

Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant. Their identity and participation is confidential. Four scholars took part and are identified as: *Daniel, Paul, Samuel, and Mikaere*. All are actively involved with their academic institutions, although one is recently retired and shifting more into professional writing; two are anthropologists and two are historians; and all are male. Four independent professional writers participated, identified as: *Helen, Sophia, Elizabeth and Abbey*. They are all female, and three work as paid professional historians and one as a life writer. They are located outside of tertiary environments and writing for commission or on self-initiated projects, although one has close connections with a tertiary institution. Five local history group members participated too, identified as: *Betty, Tom, Wendy, David and Charles*. They have varying levels of involvement in their local history book projects; all were volunteers from among their local community and not trained as writers or in history scholarship. The informal discussions held with the book producers in stage one remain separate and discrete to

the directed conversations of stage two. Quotes included in the thesis from the thirteen interviewees of the directed conversations will be italicised for easier distinction within the text. Despite the even split between genders, the scholarly conversation is dominated by a male voice and the professional writing conversation by a female perspective. Participants chose where they would like to meet, and all preferred to meet at their homes or offices, whichever was most appropriate for them.

The range of book projects and publications between the producers and contributors is richly diverse. The books range between Auckland, Central North Island, Wellington, and Christchurch settings. They were produced between 1980 and 2017, and some commissioned and some self-initiated by the writers because of a personal connection to a location. Many of the producers have written multiple local and community history books and are proud of their work in this field; they experience a sense of accomplishment in their work and its contribution to the grassroots community. The scholars and professional writers have a bevy of awards and professional accomplishments to their collective credit. It is, however, largely a Pākehā conversation. Although many producers have worked successfully with Māori and Pākehā communities, only Mikaere offers a perspective on behalf of tangata whenua.

Analysing the Conversations

The transcripts of the directed conversation recordings became the data set for analysis in stage two. Written notes and observations that were prepared after each interview were included. These texts (the transcripts) were read for understanding and analysed thematically, and emergent themes were coded manually and processed as a spreadsheet. They were compared with the discoveries of stage one. Meticulous written records of research conversations, textual analyses, and all research discoveries as well as records of thematic analysis and coding were maintained. I kept a research journal

throughout both stages of the research design to practise robust critical self-reflexivity, upholding a social constructionist approach to methodology, and holding myself accountable to my methodology and design, and to the research participants.

Coding evolved as a grounded approach rather than an a priori one, suitable for a conversational method of research gathering that advocates for an open system of coding (Anderson, 2012, p. 304). The coding of analysis operated as a “heuristic device, it’s a way of seeing and defining our data” (Charmaz, 2017, p. 3). Observations revealed themselves as I looked for patterns and conceptualisations (Charmaz, 2013; 2017, p. 2), and they often took me in entirely unexpected directions.

This interpretivist approach also highlighted the different points of view of the producers interviewed as reflective of their diverse experiences. If stage one informed stage two in design, then stage two spoke back to stage one in analysis. Findings from the directed conversations enabled comparison between the experiences of the producers and what was revealed in the earlier textual analysis and close readings, which enabled comparison of what was learnt from the case studies with other book projects. Chapter Seven of the thesis reflects in detail upon the interviews from the directed conversations and interrogates collaborative practice that emerged as a dominant theme in the discussions. Chapter Eight integrates insights analysed from the case studies and the directed conversations regarding the reception and performance of the texts.

Research Ethics: Procedural and Relational Ethics of Practice

Ethics approval was granted for the interviews by Massey University Human Ethics Northern Committee. A relational ethics of practice was inspired by the research guidelines recommended by de Peuter (1998, p. 58) in narrative enquiry: to speak with care to participants; show consideration; be honest; be straightforward; and, uphold a sense of responsibility. Book producers were invited to reflect on their projects and tell

their personal stories; respect for their shared experiences, founded on the reciprocity of trust, evoked sensitivity for the use of their accounts. Ethical responsibility is, after all, far more complex than adhering to the procedural ethics or administrative requirements and necessitates reflexive sensitivity that thinks about the research participants and the impact of the research on their work and social networks (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). My reliance on these ethical principles contributed to the successful use of the method of directed conversations to create a positive research encounter between myself and the participants. Koha—a box of chocolates—was offered at the conclusion of each directed conversation as a small token of appreciation.

Prior to interviews being conducted and recorded, potential participants were provided with an information sheet about the research, and signed consent was obtained (see Appendix One and Appendix Two). Confidentiality was assured for all participants. This meant that they were free to critically discuss projects and publications without fear of naming their coproducers or the geographical communities involved. There is, admittedly, some paradox of voice in talking about voice but not naming them. However, upholding privacy was necessary to show respect and consideration for their professional reputations and/or relationships within local community. All recordings and transcripts were stored securely to protect confidentiality.

Feedback mechanisms were established. First, participants reviewed the interview transcripts to check for errors or inaccuracies, or to request removal of any of the contents. This was particularly important for matters raised of a sensitive nature. Almost all the participants did request some changes to the transcripts before approving them—correction of a detail or removal of material—which demonstrated their active participation in the feedback process. Second, participants have been kept informed

about the study and its progress. Feedback on initial observations based on the research was, for example, disseminated in March 2019.

Towards New Understanding

My argument to read local history books as life writing requires a test of the application of a life writing approach to critiquing and analysing them. Hence, my research method promotes critical investigation of the construction of meaning as the expression and articulation of storying community into being through the written accounts of local history. Such analysis depends upon the careful integration of my two methods, the three case studies and the producer interviews, as a bridge between literary studies and social sciences.

Since language is a window to the social world, life writing criticism of local history books as form *and* practice opens avenues of learning and discovery that are made richer by the crafting of multiple methods that study people, texts, and how they use and interpret them. Emphasis on literary criticism by itself may focus on the text to the exclusion of insight into collective producer discourse while prioritising social science narrative enquiry risks minimising the importance of the text. Instead, research practice that reflects on the object and practice of life writing enables the academy to enhance studies about the genre and its practice to promote its application and theoretical value to other humanities and social sciences. It also responds to calls for scholars to embrace aesthetic forms of enquiry, such as literary studies, to aid research into societal issues to move beyond “the art/science dichotomy” (Harter et al., 2009, p. 37). By combining the two methods of social science and literary analysis of the case studies and the directed conversations, the study gains access to the complex and hard-to-reach spaces of meaning-making and knowing that exists in between process and emergent form, the spoken and the written, and the ephemerality of memories and storytelling and the

physical, material forms it can evolve into. It also juxtaposes scholarly lines of questioning with practitioner-based ethos and community-led, grassroots interests. Finally, it demonstrates the significance and usefulness of applying life writing criticism to the art forms and practices of local history books.

Chapter Five

Story of the Stories

“This is our ID and DNA. Our folk and memories are in the soil there, among the buildings, tarseal and oil wells.” (N. Harris, coproducer of Moturoa)

Following the rationale for the case studies outlined in the previous chapter, attention now shifts to examination of the three book projects. The aim of the chapter is twofold. First, it introduces the three, largely unknown projects and the texts they produced, and second, it achieves this by interrogating the settings and contexts of the production of these three texts using a Bakhtinian-inspired framework. This chapter argues that the texts graft onto the various sociocultural, historical, and political circumstances of their settings, which Bakhtin (1981) suggests is vital to the literary performance and interpretation of the texts.

Texts as literary devices are more than the sum of their words. Ricoeur (2016) describes a finished text as a carefully and intentionally articulated communication, or a “discourse fixed in writing” (p. 107). In addition, with the application of Bakhtin’s (1981, 1984) writings to investigate the nature of this discourse, there is potential to enrich the reading and study of local history books. This requires paying closer attention to the:

... social, cultural, and political nature of all texts, and the primacy of context to textual meaning. Indeed, [Bakhtin’s] dialogic theory, based on a perception of the inherent relationship between ideology and utterance, addresses the sociopolitical fact of literary performance and provides analytical tools relevant to the act of performing literature. (Park-Fuller, 1986, para. 4)

Bakhtin’s (1981) theory proposes that language has two key qualities that influence how scholars should critique texts as the performance of literature. First, he argues that

meaning is attributed to a text in relation to other texts and other authors. Each text is dialogic to (in dialogue with) other earlier works and is informed by them and, in turn, informs future works. In his words, we should “imagine the work as a rejoinder in a given dialogue, whose style is determined by its interrelationship with other rejoinders in the same dialogue (in the totality of the conversation)” (p. 274). Texts are better understood with insight into the contextual dialogue to which they respond. Kristeva (1980) extended Bakhtin’s literary criticism and coined the term “intertextuality” (p. 15) to describe this interrelationship between meaning-making and the various contexts of text or language’s performance as being part of a textual system.

Second, Bakhtin (1981) reasons that since language is not neutral, a narrative is a socially structuring agent that reveals a position or point of view of the author to suggest an ideological context that informs the text’s point of view. Words are chosen from a vocabulary of a certain culture and time. According to Bakhtin (1981):

The social and historical voices populating language, all its words and all its forms, which provide language with its particular concrete conceptualizations, are organized in the novel into a structured stylistic system that expresses the differentiated socio-ideological position of the author amid the heteroglossia [many voices] of his epoch. (pp. 299–300)

As collective writings, these local history books present themselves as multiple authored, but they still, as will be shown, cultivate an authored point of view that responds to the social and historical situation into which they are fixed and use language (and writing) with purpose. The multivoiced nature of prose resonates, especially in the literary form of local history books, and is organised around the system of values that Bakhtin (1984) believes is a function of the nature of communication as “meaning messages” (p. viii). The speakers and narrators speak from within an authored “socio-ideological conceptual horizon” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 275) or discourse, participating as “an active participant in

social dialogue” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 276). Therefore, prose texts are rhetorical in nature and respond to social context as a social phenomenon. Writers, or book producers, speak into a social system of discourse, either to affirm it or to speak back and challenge it. Ricoeur (2016) notes that when studying history writing critically, scholars need to recognise that “the explanatory procedures of scientific history cannot replace a prior narrative but function in conjunction with it, insofar as they are grafted onto its configurational structure” (p. 242). Each text speaks to other texts and narratives, and it conveys how language is used at a point in time by particular people and their relationship to social, cultural, or political contexts. The point of view that is revealed by authorial intention is what arguably adds creative flavour to the work.

Bakhtin’s (1981) work reinforces that the written life is inescapably political. Everything is broadly political (and, at times, narrowly political), and each point of view—that speaks into a social dialogue—can either reinforce closed systems or open them up (p. 427). It is helpful, therefore, to consider how the texts engage with the social and political discourse to which they respond. In addition, since history books of a geographical community attempt to speak on behalf of a collective group (as the epitome of the collective voice), questions of power and the exercise of authority become necessary in critique of what constitutes community voice and how it is used. Bakhtin (1981), for example, notes that in matters of representation:

In order to assess and divine the real meaning of others' words in everyday life, the following are surely of decisive significance: who precisely is speaking, and under what concrete circumstances? (p. 340)

The question of who speaks, how, and why resonates in the application of life writing criticism of my research enquiry. Bakhtin’s (1981, 1984) ideas raise critical questions about the circumstances and settings of the local history texts and how the writers’ point of view answers back to their context and other texts. It will be argued that the three

books write through the sociocultural and political lenses of indigeneity (*Matagi Tokelau*, 1990; *Matagi Tokelau: History and Traditions of Tokelau*, 1991), class (*Moturoa*, 2007), and the aspiration for equity (*Patumahoe: History & Memories*, 2016).

Consequently, each manifestation of response has implications for the project process and book form as a literary response to their settings.

Thinking through Bakhtin's literary criticism, I thus asked four key questions of each case study, working chronologically from oldest to most recent publication:

1. What is the context of the project: what are the sociocultural, historical, and political circumstances that the text grafts on to, and where is the case study located in time and place?
2. How did the project respond to its context: what was the genesis of the project, including who initiated it?
3. What was the authorial intention of the project: how was language purposed to represent a community story?
4. What was the outcome in terms of project process and form that emerged: did it align with the original intentions or morph with time?

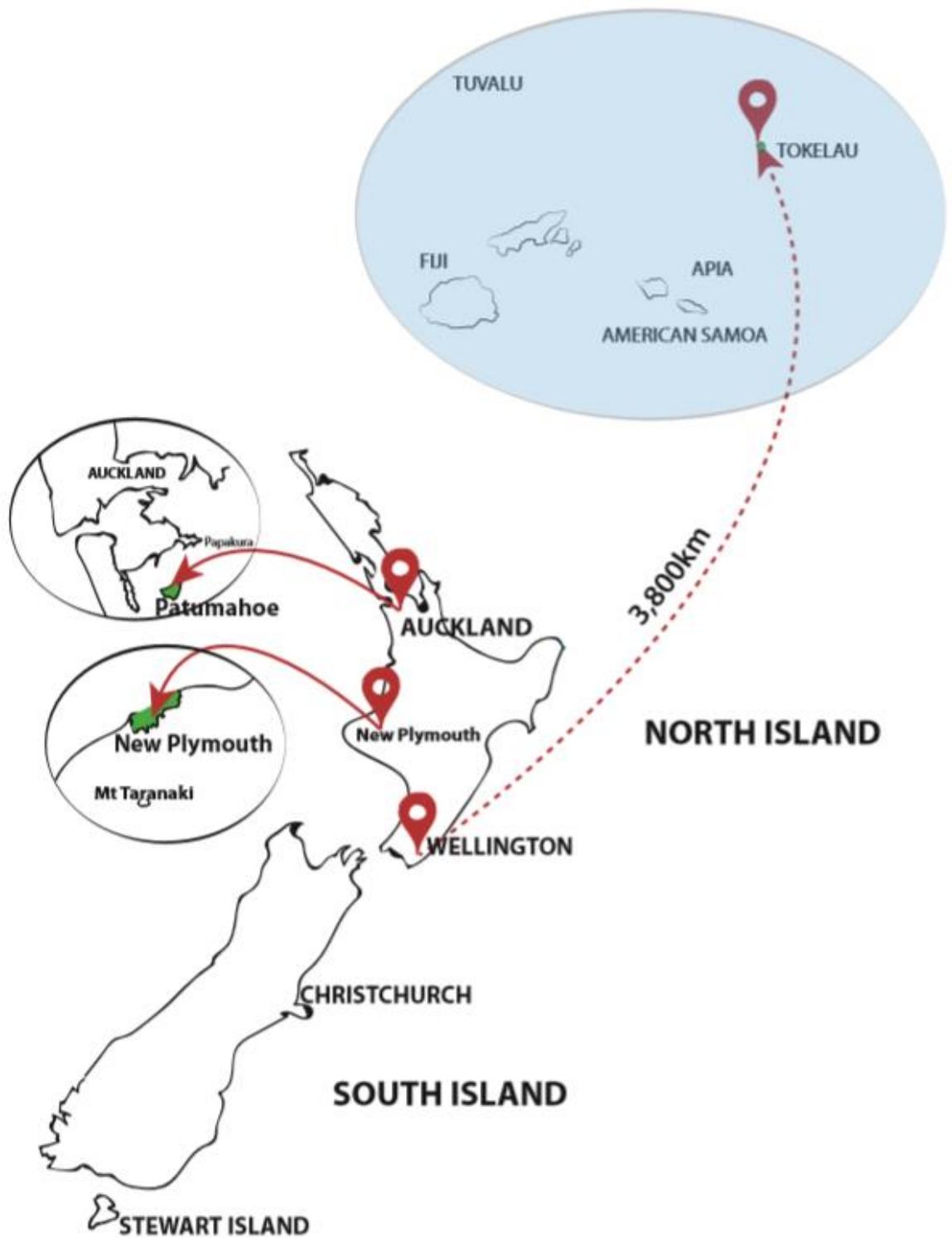
To answer these questions, the prefaces, introductions, and/or afterwords of each of the three books was critically examined to see what the text narrative reveals about the position of the authors and book project teams. In addition, to enhance discovery about context and intention, published articles on the book projects were reviewed alongside the reflections of the producers consulted. Information from archival records and public documents was also compiled to investigate the historical context of the three book projects and the communities they represent. Collectively, the analysis reveals the points of view of the "community" authors.

Contextualising the Texts and Projects

It is helpful to first locate each project and text into a specific time and place to appreciate the totality of the sociopolitical conversation to which each of the case studies responds. The three texts and projects each display a unique relationship to Aotearoa New Zealand historically, socially, culturally, and politically. Geographically, they are in the Pacific (see Figure 1). Two of the projects and texts (*Moturoa* and *Patumahoe: History & Memories*) are situated entirely within New Zealand's borders, but the earlier case study (*Matagi Tokelau*) demonstrates a more complicated relationship between New Zealand and its Pacific territories. In this section, these settings will be reflected upon, as will the texts' foci and where the project teams are situated in place and time.

Figure 1

Geographic Locations of the Three Stories



Note: The image was designed by Juliana Trolove and used with permission.

Matagi Tokelau: History and Traditions of Tokelau

Matagi Tokelau: History and Traditions of Tokelau is the story of Tokelau, a small Pacific Island nation that is still—as it was when the book was published—a New Zealand protectorate. Tokelau’s total landmass is only 10km² made up of three atolls, and it is geographically isolated; their nearest neighbour, Samoa, is five hundred kilometres south (Government of Tokelau, 2014). Despite its 3,800km geographical distance from New Zealand, close political and economic ties are sustained. Tokelau has been administered by New Zealand since 1925 on behalf of the United Kingdom and then, in 1948, New Zealand officially annexed Tokelau (Walrond, 2015). In the aftermath of World War II and in a political climate of decolonisation, the United Nations (UN) encouraged Tokelau in the 1960s to move towards self-government or to seek partnership with another Pacific Island nation to redress the influence of colonisation on their way of life. However, Tokelau chose instead to stay aligned to New Zealand for the greater prosperity of their community at that time. The UN was not convinced of this decision and continued to prompt them to consider independence. However, “[as Tokelau] saw it, it was preferable to be a tiny minority in the larger New Zealand society than a somewhat larger one among other Pacific Islanders” (Wessen et al., 1992, p. 125). Over the decades since, the nation has regularly revisited the decision with the most recent referendum in 2018 that formalised their status of free association with Aotearoa New Zealand.

Tokelau’s relationship with New Zealand secured financial benefits for the small nation, but it has also come at a cultural cost and the depopulation of the three atolls (Atafu, Fakaofu, and Nukunonu). Since before the book project in the 1980s, many of its citizens migrated to New Zealand to pursue economic and educational advancement. Migration schemes were implemented from 1963–1976 to resettle in New Zealand with government assistance but then became self-funded (Walrond, 2015). This migration had sociocultural implications for the island community. Those now living in New Zealand

sometimes struggled to adjust to life in a very different setting with increasing cultural isolation from their heritage (Mallon, 2013; Pene et al., 2009, June; Wessen et al., 1992), and the traditional atoll-based community was being exposed to greater influence from outside cultures. During the book project timeframe of the 1980s, therefore, Tokelau was grappling with the real impacts of globalisation and changing population migration.

The book project was one way to express their cultural heritage and unique past while asserting a traditional voice for themselves in response to changing times. This aligned with evolving administrative goals for greater self-governance, which have since moved towards a more formalised programme of decolonisation with active financial and political support from New Zealand and the UN, moving towards ever-increasing autonomy (Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, 2019). As a response to these circumstances, the text presents the story of Tokelau from ancient origins to 1990 (time of publication). The project work was undertaken by a Book Committee, whose members resided in the atolls and who made an interesting decision at the start and upheld it throughout not to allow Tokelauans living in New Zealand to contribute material for the book.

The project was reserved as a response by the residents living in the islands, not those living further afield. There is no record of what the New Zealand-based community thought of their exclusion from the project, but it is evident that the Book Committee viewed them as part of the audience and not project participants. Nevertheless, the Book Committee did accept assistance from scholars and community members in New Zealand in the editing, design, and translation of the book. This arrangement speaks to some of the tension that Tokelau experiences in being both a Pacific Island nation *and* a New Zealand territory, with sometimes conflicting experiences between those who live

in Tokelau and those now settled in Aotearoa New Zealand, further removed from their traditional heritage.

Moturoa: A Social History of Moturoa

Moturoa is a coastal suburb of New Plymouth, the only city of the Taranaki region (home of Te Āti Awa iwi) on the western coast of the North Island. *Moturoa: A Social History of Moturoa, New Plymouth, New Zealand Aotearoa* offers a perspective on a history that gives voice to moments of colonisation and industrialisation, class struggles, and dislocation experienced by its people during the twentieth century in New Zealand.

Historically, Ngāmotu (the islands) was a thriving Māori community before the arrival of colonial settlers looking for land in Taranaki. New Plymouth became the first Pākehā settlement in the region and, from their arrival in 1841, the settlers began to dominate sociocultural and economic development (Lambert, 2009). Tension over demands for land grew across the country, and the New Zealand Wars became an important weapon in the administrators' arsenal to secure colonisation, using confiscation of land as punishment for opposing forces. Taranaki iwi battled Crown forces over land ownership from 1860 (Keenan, 2012b, 2012c; Sole, 2005). Māori warriors like Ngāti Ruanui's Riwha Titokowaru offered fierce resistance to the Crown, experiencing some mighty victories but substantial loss of life (Belich, 2010). The long-term impact of that resistance was devastating for Taranaki Māori. In addition to huge loss of life, their vast fertile lands were taken by the Crown and made available to the new settlers (Keenan, 2012a) through the New Zealand Settlements Act 1863 that allowed for confiscation (without compensation) of land from any tribe said to be rebelling against the Queen.

While iwi struggled with decreasing opportunities, settler fortunes and opportunities increased. In a final act of peaceful, non-violent resistance against land confiscation in the Taranaki—under the leadership of Te Whiti-o-Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi (Te

Ātiawa iwi), and hailed by seasoned warriors like Tītokowaru—Parihaka pā tried to assert ownership of their iwi and hapū land from the mid-1860s until it was invaded by government troops in 1881 (Scott, 1954; Te Miringa Hōhaia, 2017). Many Māori were imprisoned without trial far away from home despite the peaceful nature of their protest, and many more were evicted from the area. Māori were forcibly disconnected from the land of their tangata whenua through these aggressive land grabs, and colonisation thrived. The site of this story is well known as being significant to New Zealand history and illustrates in detail the clash between military action and passive resistance that was driven by pushing for the economic advantage of land ownership for the colonial settlers, leading to the displacement of tangata whenua.

The new settlers promoted the New Plymouth harbour as an important focus of development and a hive of industrial activity for the region. By 1885, New Plymouth had both a port and rail links to the rest of the North Island, and Moturoa emerged as a suburb located adjacent to the port that supported a local community of working-class families, whose livelihoods and lifestyles were dictated to by the expansion of the port (Lambert, 2009). First, the port instigated reclamation of land from the natural lagoon. Māori who occupied the foreshore and lagoon area of Ngāmotu battled from 1915 to be left in peace until finally being evicted in 1935 (“New Plymouth Dispute”, 1935)⁶. During the 1940–1950s, the beach became a prime recreation facility for the Moturoa community until further port expansion in the 1960s reduced beach accessibility. By the 1990s, beach areas were privatised, and residential cottages were removed from the suburb to make way for further industry, including oil and gas. By the millennium, the public bemoaned restricted access to parts of the community, including pā sites that they had previously enjoyed.

⁶ See spelling note in Glossary (p. xiii).

Moturoa: A Social History of Moturoa, New Plymouth, New Zealand Aotearoa is an attempt by locals, in response to a growing awareness of further changes to the community (in the late 1990s to early 2000s), to preserve the heritage of their past before more of their community identity is lost. The text responds to an emerging social consciousness of grassroots conversations that was working out New Zealand identity at the turn of the century. It tells the story of Moturoa primarily through the accounts and memories of its residents during the mid-twentieth century, reflecting too on earlier history of iwi and settlers. Research for the book was conducted locally but also informed by conversations with ex-residents living elsewhere in New Zealand and further afield. The two coproducers, local brothers from a bicultural heritage with an English father and Māori mother⁷, worked together to complete the project—one brother based within the community and another working remotely from Wellington (further south).

Patumahoe: History & Memories

Patumahoe: History & Memories contributes to another social discourse about New Zealand history and heritage where local history stories of tangata whenua and settlers, and their ideologies, collide. This third story is located in Patumāhoe⁸ on the rural southern edge of Auckland in a rapidly developing region of the metropole, historically the place of Ngāti Tamaoho and a transport hub for Auckland and Waikato iwi—a richly fertile agricultural area (Husbands et al., 1993, pp. 2–3, 92–95; Morris, 1965, pp. 17–20). When the colonial settlers began looking for land around Auckland, Ngāti Tamaoho negotiated early land sales (New Zealand Government, 2016a), willing to sell parcels of

⁷ Harris and Harris did not name their iwi or hapū explicitly in the text but include references to iwi and hapū of the New Plymouth area in the book content.

⁸ In te reo Māori, the name tells the story of a significant historical event in Ngāti Tamaoho history when a local warrior killed an invading warrior by hitting him over the head with a māhoe (indigenous tree in Aotearoa New Zealand) branch during battle. The name translates to “struck with māhoe” and patu refers to the action of clubbing with the tree branch (New Zealand History, n.d.)

land in Patumāhoe but vigilantly protecting the 701-acre sacred site that included an important burial ground and which became the hill reserve.⁹ Treaty historians negotiating the iwi claim acknowledge that, in this place:

In the 1840s and 1850s, Ngāti Tamaoho rangatira were recognised as being friendly to Pākehā, and were reasonably successful in engaging with the emerging Pākehā economy. Although Ngāti Tamaoho shared Kingitanga aspirations, they did not believe these were incompatible with loyalty to the Crown. (New Zealand Government, 2016a)

Tensions between Māori and settlers over land demands were, however, growing at a provincial and national level, and Governor Grey's 1863 order for iwi to choose to support either British Queen or Māori King had devastating consequences for Ngāti Tamaoho. Honouring their long-standing relationship with Waikato iwi who had protected them from invasion by the Northland tribes in the early nineteenth century (Morris, 1965, pp. 20–27) meant their lands were confiscated for their so-called rebellion. They were unable to return to their remaining land and sacred reserve in Patumāhoe, leaving them at a distinct economic disadvantage as a result: “many experienced severe social and economic marginalisation and deplorable housing conditions” (New Zealand Government, 2016a). There is sufficient evidence to argue that Ngāti Tamaoho were not aware of the threat of confiscation when they made the choice to support Waikato until it was too late. Notwithstanding, the government of the time moved new English and German settlers onto the Patumāhoe reserve with haste and, even though in 1865 the Compensation Court acknowledged it was not the fair thing to have done, it was too late (Morris, 1965, pp. 133–144). A pittance of compensation (£720) was awarded to iwi (Fergusson, 1928). Legal channels were sought by iwi for the return of land, which culminated in Treaty settlements being negotiated through the Waitangi Tribunal from

⁹ Information provided to the writers of the book by Ben Leonard on behalf of Ngāti Tamaoho.

the 1990s. In the references used for the research of the 2016 local history book, the writers included work of claimant historians to inform the opening chapters. A Deed of Settlement was awarded to Ngāti Tamaoho 150 years later in April 2017 (after the book was published), which acknowledged the harm caused to Ngāti Tamaoho, issued a formal apology, and included cultural redress to honour the iwi (New Zealand Government, 2016b).

Over the past 150 years, Patumāhoe has been transformed into a largely Pākehā place. A new community has been grafted onto the land, including farming, and building churches, schools, sports facilities, and businesses so that the land became a European-looking agricultural landscape. Some generations of these occupants who developed the land have thrived while others have struggled with the climate and unpredictable financial markets. The 1980s economic reforms that removed farming subsidies left a permanent impact on the farming community and, over the next few decades, it became more profitable for many in the long term to sell off farming land for housing development. The publication notes that the district has become attractive as a commuter village for Auckland workers from the 2000s, and more family farms have since sold to housing subdivisions (*Patumahoe: History & Memories*, 2016, p. 135). Patumāhoe has become a community with a quintessential settler history and, according to the most recent 2018 census, still maintains a predominantly Pākehā demographic (Stats New Zealand Tatauranga Aotearoa, n.d.).

From among this community, a local Pākehā project team proposed to write about the district's 150 years of history post settlement. The project was undertaken by local writers, researchers, and storytellers in Patumāhoe and invited participation of ex-residents living elsewhere too. In addition, with increasing conversations about historiography taking place among New Zealand society at the time, the project attaches

to discussion about representing a more balanced history, which the project team interpreted as including the point of view of local iwi: “Addressing injustices to Maori is a work in progress, and, for us in Patumahoe, learning about the role of Tamaoho on this land has been an important step” (*Patumahoe: History & Memories*, 2016, p. 216).

A presiding theme that reveals itself across all three of the texts is colonisation. The communities each respond to the sociopolitical influence of colonisation on their lived experiences, though from very different points of view. Consequently, the three books are, as Bakhtin (1981) proposed, in dialogue with earlier texts, records, and social conversations in their locale. In their context, they implicitly and explicitly engage with questions of decolonisation to make sense of the national and international conversations of which they are part at the time of each local project’s telling. The books can, therefore, be seen as local responses to the changing sociocultural, economic, and political circumstances of their communities, each expressed in a unique way.

Genesis of the Projects: Speaking Back to Their Context

As can be seen by the account so far, the physical location of each of the three books and projects cannot be separated from the sociohistorical aspects, but the context can be further explored by looking more closely at the sociocultural and political conversations taking place historically at the time of their production in the 1980s, 1990–2000s, and 2010s. The authors and project teams of each of the texts respond to the politics of authorship at that time. How and where the idea for the book was conceived in each case study thus suggests an ideological position that responds to the social discourse taking place at the time of the project, both at grassroots and broader sociopolitical debate.

Tokelau’s project, for example, performs in the 1980s during a time of heightened discussion about decolonisation of Pacific nations and is informed by the relationship

between Tokelau and New Zealand, and the types of administrative discourse that prevailed at the time between them. *Matagi Tokelau* was initiated as part of a series of Pacific insider history books supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as an expression of indigenous ownership of history (Huntsman, 1996). However, the idea for the book predates the UN initiative because there had been contemplation of a book project among the community for some time, including discussions with representatives at the New Zealand Department of Māori and Island Affairs, but the idea was not acted upon at that time and the project did not gain sufficient traction to proceed at that time:

For many years there was a lot of discussion among Tokelauans, particularly the doctors and the teachers, about the need for a history of Tokelau. Some people even began to write bits about Tokelau history, but there was a lot of uncertainty about how to go about it, and how to carry it through to completion. (*Matagi Tokelau: History and Traditions of Tokelau*, 1991, p. xi)

Then, as part of the decolonisation initiatives of the 1960–1970s, the UN wanted to include Tokelau in a project that funded a series of eight Pacific local history books under the direction of the Institute of Pacific Studies (IPS) in Suva, Fiji, led by Ron Crocombe of the University of South Pacific. The idea to write an insider history in Tokelau was proposed to be part of this “enterprise that called for Pacific Islanders to write their own histories—to write, as it was said, ‘insider’ histories” (Huntsman, 1996, p. 138). The proposal for the book was presented to the community in Tokelau in 1978, with support offered from IPS, as an ideal opportunity for the community to act upon their earlier idea.

Tokelau’s representatives had to make several key decisions about the project to convert the idea for the book into a feasible, grassroots-led (or insider) project plan. In 1981, the

book project proposal was discussed at a General Fono.¹⁰ Agreement was reached to proceed, starting a ten-year-long process of research and writing. It was never going to be a simple process. Each of the three distinct atolls had their own story to tell that needed to be crafted into one narrative to present a united story of Tokelau. The community also determined that they wanted the book written and published in their indigenous language to start and then translated into English for wider circulation. They also did not want their story outsourced to professional authors, instead preferring “a collective venture, done by local committees, ultimately under the authority of the elders” (Huntsman, 1996, p. 141).

The project in Moturoa takes place a decade later during an atmosphere of cultural questioning in Aotearoa New Zealand. The second case study also privileges a local point of view but with less focus on cultural assertion and more intention directed towards raising class consciousness as part of identity creation. The idea for *Moturoa: A Social History of Moturoa* also arose from within the community but was acted upon entirely from their own initiative too. In the late 1990s, two brothers—D. Harris and N. Harris—had a late-night discussion at the Breakwater Pub in Moturoa. In witnessing an amusing encounter between a local eccentric fisherman and a group of visiting Russian seamen, they wanted to find a way to capture the unique banter and community spirit of Moturoa, realising it could soon disappear like many of the area’s other stories (N. Harris, personal communication, September 4, 2017). They began contemplating writing a book to preserve the accounts and memories of the people of Moturoa. Harris and Harris set the project in motion and began gathering the stories of family, friends, and neighbours, starting with the oldest members. It was voluntary work and self-funded,

¹⁰ Regular formal gatherings held during each year between the three atolls to make governance and administrative decisions.

completed on weekends or around other commitments, and not following strict project objectives and timeframes. Their foresight that night at the pub proved true:

The pub is now closed consumed by port expansionism. The nibbles and bites of big business moves forward but has decimated the community it should serve.

The Moturoa we talk about is now long gone, but pockets of locals meet together randomly, fleetingly. (N. Harris, personal communication, September 4, 2017)

Continuing changes in Moturoa provided a strong incentive for the brothers to make progress and see the idea to fruition and publication, intentionally capturing a worldview of a group of people who would otherwise have been possibly forgotten.

A further decade later, in the early 2000s, Patumāhoe reflects the tensions of a Pākehā attempt at better understanding the bicultural and, to a lesser extent, multicultural lived experiences of the local, reaching into a space of equitable history, as they (a committee of locals) try to accommodate Māori history storytelling in their Pākehā account of place. It resonates with the turn of public history at the time and the increasing awareness of the need to incorporate an indigenous point of view in local history projects. This third case study draws attention to the challenges of a Pākehā worldview trying to account for their interpretation of local history while, at the same time, attending to critical questions of cultural and political historiography raised by the New Zealand society of which they recognise themselves answerable. The genesis of *Patumahoe: History & Memories* can be traced to a renewal of interest in local history among the community in 2010, following a well-supported local history photo exhibition in the village hall, hosted by the then newly established Patumāhoe History Group and in recognition of a changing urbanising community. The idea to write a book was raised in response to the exhibition but stalled until 2013 when one of the group's members drew the community's attention to the school's upcoming 150th anniversary, scheduled for October 2016 (Polley, 2016). The group agreed that the sesquicentennial presented a well-timed opportunity to

reflect upon local heritage and to document the accounts of past and present members to update earlier records and publish a comprehensive history book of the district.

The genesis of the three projects traces to a grassroots desire to record and tell their story when faced with a changing context. The idea for a book came from within each community but whereas the Moturoa and Patumāhoe projects were acted upon only by local community members, Tokelau's book project came about through outside encouragement by the UN. Analysis reveals that all the projects were driven by some anxiety about loss of traditions and identity stories with emphasis on the importance of recording the lived experiences of the communities' elderly residents. Tokelau's atoll residents were increasingly conscious of the impact of modernisation and globalisation on their way of life. *Matagi Tokelau*, as a title, is an apt metaphor for sustaining community life and its raison d'être. It describes a northern wind that is said to bear personal messages, both new and historic: "The title thus gathers up much of the book's purpose and spirit in which it was written—to place a distinctive way of life on record for future generations and to declare allegiance to its relevance and vitality" (*Matagi Tokelau: History and Traditions of Tokelau*, 1991, p. v). Similarly, Moturoa and Patumāhoe residents were also responding to changes in their community when the projects were initiated to preserve the stories of their changing places. Moturoa was facing the forces of industry and Patumāhoe the onslaught of higher urbanisation of rural areas.

The case studies thus reveal some of the ideas or ideals that drove the project teams (as representative of the authors) to respond to their sociocultural, economic, and political contexts with intention. Each project demonstrates that considerable attention was given to the idea for a book and how it responds to the circumstances of their time, with careful thought about who speaks, how, and why. Furthermore, each of these decisions

reinforces some ideological performance of the texts and reveals a particular worldview of its creators. As Bakhtin (1981) writing would emphasise, the texts are inescapably entwined with the social and political contexts of their time.

Authorial Intention

Informed by the genesis of the projects, the texts' creators use language with intention to present the community in a certain light, in what Bakhtin (1981) argues is a "concrete socio-ideological language consciousness" (p. 295) or an active and creative "literary linguistic consciousness" (p. 295). Both notions convey the idea that writers and project teams use language purposively to speak back to their circumstances and, in so doing, represent a worldview. This includes their approach to collaborative writing in the first place, based on their stance towards public history within their setting and the resultant politics of authorship regarding community publications. The genesis of each of the book projects informed the ethos of the projects to also suggest a project ideology that influenced both the process they followed, and decisions made about form and content.

In Tokelau, the idea for an insider-community-led process was held in check by the Book Committee that was organised to represent the three atoll committees. The committees on each atoll agreed that the process would work best if they gathered local accounts and then sent those to the Book Committee to gather the accounts into a book (Huntsman, 1996). To achieve these cooperative writing goals and in the early stages of their planning (in 1980), the Office of Tokelau Affairs approached University of Auckland anthropologists Antony Hooper and Judith Huntsman to help with the project and the book's publication. The scholars had been conducting ethnographic studies in Tokelau and had produced written records of their work for more than a decade by that stage. They had developed a close relationship with the community and were trusted to help guide local volunteers through this project. The anthropologists were also supportive of

being facilitators of the project and operating out of a growing scholastic respect for indigenous knowledge, recognising the community was responsible to provide and determine the content for themselves, including how language was to be used in the book. It is likely that debate in their field during the 1980s when the project was taking place (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 203–204) increased their sensitivity to questions about authority in a project that focused on indigenous voice and Tokelau’s reassertion of cultural authority (responding to debate noted in Chapter Three). One way in which the community-led ethos was enacted was the anonymising of accounts included in the book. Apart from a few exceptions, the accounts and stories written into the book are presented as anonymous storytellers or witnesses who write as “we” (representing the community), without revealing exactly who they are. As such, the text remains a community voiced account—collective rather than individualised.

The two anthropologists exercised caution in their role. Hooper and Huntsman agreed to advise the process as technical editors only, to help translate the text into English and facilitate the technical aspects of publication, such as design and printing. If the text was to meet its stated goal of an insider history spoken in an indigenous collective voice, the academic editors had to take care not to overstep their influence. There were only two accounts where Huntsman and Hooper noted a more explicit influence on editing content. The first was an account that Huntsman asked to include in the book—details on the communal food sharing system (*inati*), which she believed was a unique cultural practice that should be explained in the book (J. Huntsman, personal communication, July 17, 2017). The second account raises an interesting tension in intentions. The scholars advised the inclusion of H.E. Maude’s historical paper about slavery in Tokelau in a chapter detailing the slave kidnapping that decimated the islands in February 1863, alongside local historical accounts. The scholars suggested Maude’s detailed accounting

would increase awareness of the horrible consequences of the event and better interrogate the impact of colonisation. They explain its inclusion in the text:

[In Professor Maude's] opinion it is right that Tokelauans should know the full story and that it should be taught in the schools. Not just simply to revive the old hurts and resentment, but to help people to face the future calmly, with courage and wisdom; after all, Tokelauans should be proud and happy that their forebears recovered and revived so quickly from the awful depopulation caused by the taking of so many able-bodied people to Peru. (*Matagi Tokelau: History and Traditions of Tokelau*, 1991, p. 88)

Maude's account was included but Hooper and Huntsman's translators' note in the English (1991) edition specifies that some sections of Chapter 8, Maude's *Slavers in Paradise*, were deleted without explanation in the Tokelau language 1990 version, suggesting different positions and intentions between the two editions. In their opinion, they note these deleted sections "seemed necessary to us" (*Matagi Tokelau: History and Traditions of Tokelau*, 1991, p. vi), and were maintained in the 1991 English text. They go on to note that there are "some differing opinions and attitudes about both the past and the present" (*Matagi Tokelau: History and Traditions of Tokelau*, 1991, p. vi) which is to be expected in presenting a consensus of accounting and depending upon who is writing about certain events. Writing about slavery and its implications is approached at local level with careful consideration. Maude's full scholastic account details the horrors of the kidnapping and enslaving of almost half the population and the tragedy of the deaths and hardships experienced on board, arriving in Peru to find slavery abolished. Those few left alive were eventually put aboard ships to be repatriated back home, but most died en route. In contrast, the local accounts in the same chapter in both editions speak about the stories of the arrival of the ships and lists as many of the names of those lost as possible but little more detail. The story of slavery and its impact on Tokelau's legacy is more delicately inferred. Fakaofu's account ends with a short note that the Tokelauans

were left with an abiding wariness of “white people living in Tokelau” (p. 101), which lasted for at least a century and notes that, “only recently is this reputation abating now that knowledge and understanding is progressing forward” (p. 101). Nukunonu’s account offers an interpretation of the consequence of this event that shifted the nation from their traditional religion to Christianity because of gratitude and respect for the church leaders (such as Monseigneur Enosi) who they believed had an influence in putting a stop to the “man-stealing ships of Europeans” (p. 105). Cumulatively, all the accounts agree that February 1863 was a “tragic turning point in Tokelau history” (p. 88).

A consequence of the kidnapping was that it solidified a replacement of the traditional religion in Tokelau with Christianity, which has subsequently influenced the community narrative from that point in time onwards. It is interesting that the committee edited Maude’s account in the 1990 edition, and it stands as an unresolved tension between the two versions. More recently following the publication of *The Stolen Island: Searching for ‘Ata* by Scott Hamilton (2016), interest into learning about the Pacific slave trade (known as blackbirding) was reignited and drew attention to New Zealand’s connection with this often-forgotten atrocity. This recent interest in the historical event further justifies the scholars’ full inclusion of Maude’s input in the 1991 edition.

In Moturoa, the text describes an intention to represent the stories of the community as an “honest reflection of our beloved Moturoa [and] *a record of things said* [my emphasis] and where. Some gap-filling, of things that normally race to oblivion” (Harris & Harris, 2007, p. 191). The brothers set out to meet with, interview, and record as many stories and memories as possible to get people in the community talking about the past and to preserve these reflections in the book. Harris and Harris intended to produce a text that captured the vibrant energy and community fellowship that they believed represented the challenges of growing up in the Māori–Pākehā poorer working-class end of New

Plymouth that was occasionally the target of stigmatisation. The book project created an opportunity to remember what life was like for the residents from their point of view, living in a neighbourhood where big business drilled for oil and the port sustained the economy. The storytellers describe the community of their generations as exuding a kind of dynamic tension at the time—there was always “something in the air in Moturoa” according to N. Harris—and this is what the writers sought to capture in the text:

But that made it lively and interesting. We seemed to be always living on the edge, but we never thought about it in those terms at the time. (N. Harris, personal communication, September 4, 2017)

Life in the Taranaki working-class community was, in their opinion, defined by shared economic hardships and class distinctions, alongside cultural differences and similarities. In their communications with me, Harris and Harris described wanting to use written language to reflect upon these vivid life experiences, which I interpret as a reply to their contexts of social situatedness. For example, the introduction of the book depicts these dynamics in loose lines of poetry not grammatically connected, but each a statement about Moturoa to convey a sense of the multiplicity of the community they are trying to portray in the book:

Moturoa a working class pakeha maori¹¹ melting pot, sometimes more like a
'frying pan'

A close-knit community in a small geographical space wedged between an
expanding city and ever-consuming industrial interests

There were multi-generational families under the one roof, which made for
interesting exchanges

A pre-technology era where people socialised

¹¹ See spelling note in Glossary (p. xiii).

There's maori culture, there's pakeha culture, and there's 'shared culture'

We weren't one big happy family, there were undertones, there were contrasts and conflicts

'Shared culture' is where the ingredients mix yet retain their own vitality

Personal opinions, observations and experiences not necessarily mutually supportive

Vernacular tales that put ordinary people back into the landscape

Most contributions willingly offered and accepted. Some kin were dismissive, others felt the need for privacy

Oral accounts and written testimony in their own words and grammar to preserve individuality

There's always been a sense of history and belonging in Moturoa

The idea to write a book came one night at the Breakie. Amid the banter and noise it hit. Will this all be gone tomorrow? (Harris & Harris, 2007, p. 3)

The layout of the poem is deliberately fragmented and jarring, presented as a collection of thoughts and statements that do not offer a tidily reconciled introduction. Instead, it presents a jumble of thoughts and accounts that collectively paint a visual image but on their own are incomplete. It sets the tone for the rest of the book in that its creative value comes in the cumulative collection of the accounts standing alongside one another rather than the individual stories and memories. One line seems to act as an explicit signal of authorial intent: "'Shared culture' is where the ingredients mix yet retain their own vitality". Although class experience is suggestive of a "melting pot" that reduces experience into a common flavour, cultural diversity is more aptly represented in the "frying pan". The cacophony of voices presented in the different accounts that make up the book add to the vibrancy and relational nature of their lived experience as an

interpretation of what constitutes community, which is revealed from the authors' treatment of the accounts.

Patumahoe: History & Memories (2016) is evocative of the grand settler narrative in its representation of community. The book talks about paying homage to “those whose energy and enthusiasm have paved the way for continuing developments and improvements [which] have encouraged this community to thrive” (back cover). The preface describes a “graciousness” of spirit of the senior residents being willing to share their “stories and knowledge” and describes the community as “a huge extended family”, united in “camaraderie and respect” (p.5), built upon self-sufficiency and hard work. A rich narrative of protestant work ethic resonates, proposed by sociologist Weber (2001) as a leading reason for settlers' economic success.

At the same time, the text also attempts to present a Māori point of view to affirm that local history takes account of Māori and Pākehā perspectives in present-day Aotearoa New Zealand. The afterword reasons this inclusion by suggesting that to move forward into whatever the future holds, it is important to learn about the past of Māori and the land confiscation in Patumāhoe. What emerges as a difficulty for the text (as will be shown later in the thesis) is the complexities of representing such a textual foray into equitable history where different points of view are not easily or readily reconcilable.

In all three case studies, language was used intentionally to represent and recognise the local voice or worldview of the community—the indigeneity of Tokelau, the class discourse of Moturoa, and the Pākehā accounting of Patumāhoe following settlement and land confiscation. The different project teams display sensitivity to the politics of authorship, community agency, and representation in their intentions to uphold a spirit of collaboration and present a collective, communal point of view that also required leaving things out. For the Book Committee in Tokelau, this precipitated a decision to

anonymise most of the accounts to represent community without reference to individuals and ward off disagreement between local storytellers. Patumāhoe’s history book group took a different approach by deliberately presenting a wide range of personal storytellers to represent distinct perspectives from among the community. The Harris brothers decided not to forefront ethnic identity and chose not to identify storytellers according to any cultural background, be it Māori or Pākehā, you were simply Jack or Huia and a member of the community:

But it dawned upon me that to write our history of Moturoa with a Māori leaning, by default it would seemingly relegate Pākehā. That just didn’t make sense to us. We all grew up together and we were shaped and moulded by everyone around us. (N. Harris, personal communication, September 4, 2017)

A leading consideration of each of the three projects was to assert community ownership of the project and to produce a book in a style that the writers believe represents the local voice of the community—who they are or who the producers interpreted them to be.

The intentional crafting of a collective “we” or “us” is undeniably ideological. Each implies a political stand. For example, *Matagi Tokelau* is embedded into a political development story. Huntsman (1996) acknowledges that it was “politically charged with development talk” (p. 140) from the outset and became part of an agenda to strengthen Tokelau’s unity and shift towards greater self-determination. The book was suggested as a national saga that could “confirm and celebrate the unity and identity of Tokelau” (Hooper & Huntsman, 1990, p. 140). To this end, Huntsman (1996) notes that by the end of the process, the committee chairperson was taking greater ownership of the editorial changes as he became more “anxious about its contents” (p. 147) and wanted to present the community in the best possible light without offending anyone by the text or causing social disruption among its readers in the climate of decolonisation.

Moturoa's class ideology is also embedded in colonisation even though the producers (Harris and Harris) argue that social class takes precedent to debate between indigenous and settler engagement in their rhetoric. The book project is informed by the colonial context of the west coast of Taranaki, working-class community, whose twentieth-century lived experiences are part of a historical legacy of political dislocation and displacement. The book speaks back to history to ensure that their stories will not be forgotten in the name of economic advancement or progress that was initiated by the early settlers and continues largely unchecked.

The case study in Patumāhoe, on the other hand, raises debate about the ongoing differences between community texts that continue to uphold colonial-inspired worldviews or those that draw attention to questions of decolonisation. The project team demonstrates nuanced understanding that the settler point of view, whilst the dominant one, is not the only version of history in their locale, which is built upon the troubling past of land confiscation. The text also extends discussion to other migrants' accounts of life in Patumāhoe, such as the Chinese and Indians, and includes accounts and stories from other points of view. However, all these accounts are ultimately collapsed into a Pākehā-centric point of view of community, which continues to assert its narrative dominance over the local history storytelling, including how language is used.

The three case studies thus use language to convey a representation of community and corresponding sets of ideals and values in conversation with their place and time. As a result, form and content decisions are made by the intentions of the producers to signal how they want their texts to be interpreted. However, how the projects develop is also part of the story and a consideration in how the texts come to fulfil their performance, as a Bakhtinian framework would suggest.

An Account of the Projects

The fourth question asked of the three case studies examined how the projects were implemented, exploring research and writing processes managed by the project teams and the texts yielded by these processes in reply to these contexts of their settings and authorial intentions. Under the banner of community representation, a collaborative style of cowriting is consistently evident across the three projects, although each is exercised with creative and literary difference. As noted earlier, the origins of the Tokelau and Patumāhoe projects represent formal community groups that were established to implement the project idea on behalf of the collective whereas *Motorua* was an informal partnership between residents who initiated the idea themselves and then later invited broader community participation.

Matagi Tokelau: Committee Writing

Writing of *Tokelau's* (1990; 1991) story was undertaken in a “co-operative spirit” (*Matagi Tokelau: History and Traditions of Tokelau*, 1991, p. xi) with no author assigned to the text. It was presented as a “truly communal endeavour” (Huntsman, 1996, p. 140)¹², and the editors suggest that (of its time), “perhaps no other book has ever been written in the way that this Tokelau book was” (*Matagi Tokelau: History and Traditions of Tokelau*, 1991, p. xi). *Matagi Tokelau* was proposed to be a simple process of writing across committees as the best means of representing the local indigenous point of view, but the process was not as easy to manage as hoped. The early 1981 planning meeting, in consultation with Hooper and Huntsman, set out guidelines for the book committees on each atoll to collect local accounts (*Matagi Tokelau: History and Traditions of Tokelau*, 1991, p. xi). In January 1982, the Tokelau Book Committee met in Fakaofu to propose a

¹² While no authors are named, copyright is attributed to the Office of Tokelau Affairs, who managed the project administration on behalf of the community and is listed as copublisher with the ISP at the University of the South Pacific.

book outline and agree who would contribute sections to the book (Huntsman, 1996). Huntsman (personal communication, July 17, 2017) did note that the accounts were generated from mostly male residents although women would have been consulted. She suggests that this gendered participation is not a deliberate exclusion but a reflection that, at the time, males were more interested in the project.

The bulk of the book was “originally written in Tokelauan by different people or by groups of people for whom one person acted as a scribe” (*Matagi Tokelau: History and Traditions of Tokelau*, 1991, p. v). Only a small selection of topics was written by individuals considered experts on areas, such as the education or health sectors. These accounts were all sent to Hooper and Huntsman since the committees decided it was easier to send writing to the scholars, who agreed to collate the information and craft a publication on behalf of the Book Committee (who represented the committees and wider community); Hooper and Huntsman also later translated the book into English (Huntsman, 1996). A suggestion was raised that to prevent any discord, the submitted accounts should be reviewed by the committees, but, logistically, this was impractical and never took place. It was left to the scholars to reconcile the accounts into a cohesive narrative, based on their knowledge of the community story.

The complexity of committee-styled writing led to a much longer project process than anticipated in the planning. Huntsman (personal communication, July 17, 2017) described the writing process as slow, and she stressed how important it had been to maintain meticulous records of the information and accounts they received. Book committee meetings (uniting the three atoll committees) were held in 1984 and 1986 to review progress and try to stimulate additional contributions or keep project momentum going (*Matagi Tokelau: History and Traditions of Tokelau*, 1991, p. xii). This was particularly important because the three committees were working separately in

different locations (on each atoll), and the editors were based in New Zealand. Book Committee meetings were rotated between atolls. Hooper and Huntsman followed up gaps in information from local contributors and worked to maintain enthusiasm for the project among the various committees.

The two scholars worked carefully to minimise their influence on the text, but their influence persists. At a June 1986 meeting in Nukunonu, Hooper and Huntsman proposed a draft structure for the book that placed material into a chronological and logical framework, grouping accounts thematically (Huntsman, 1996, p. 145). In their opinion, they were careful to stay true to the accounts submitted and were grateful that no controversy arose from submissions received, of which there were about one hundred discrete texts to collate and craft into the book (Huntsman, 1996, p. 146). The scholars grouped accounts together in chapters and wrote short introductions. They shared the draft manuscript with the Book Committee for feedback and made the minor amendments the committee required (Huntsman, 1996, pp. 143–144).

The Tokelauan version, *Matagi Tokelau*, was published in 1990 (see Figure 2) and printed in New Zealand with funding assistance from the UNDP. Costs to purchase were kept to a minimum to enable its broad distribution among the community. The English translation, *Matagi Tokelau: History and Traditions of Tokelau*, was released in 1991 (see Figure 3) with assistance from volunteers among the Tokelau community based in New Zealand and coordinated by Hooper and Huntsman. Translation complicated and extended the production process, but Huntsman believes the English version is more meaningful because Tokelau community members in New Zealand, who no longer speak the language, were able to read about their history and heritage (J. Huntsman, personal communication, July 17, 2017). It also opens the text to interpretation by other English-speaking readers outside of Tokelau.

This recognition of the importance of indigenous reflection of the past to inform the future remains a relevant sentiment in the community today, especially as Tokelau battles the imminent consequences of climate change. A 2019 documentary offers a similar refrain to the 1980s project that the advice and wisdom of the elders (as encapsulated in *Matagi Tokelau*) are still vital to their long-term communal wellbeing as a Pacific nation. Despite the complications of committee writing in the 1980s, it was necessary to uphold the ideals of a community collective reasserting their story of the past and its significance for the present:

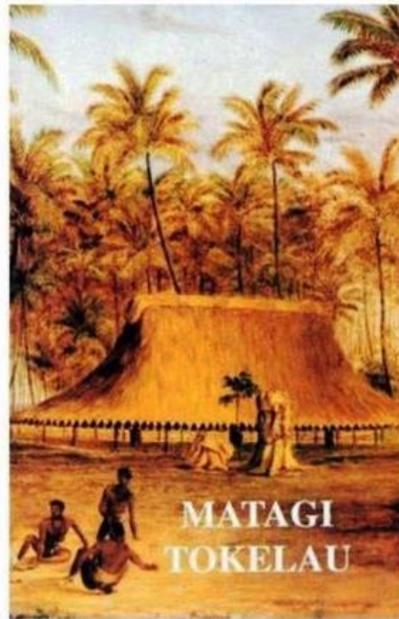
The vaka will get through all the rough seas

Our elders are at the stern

They will keep everything calm. (Moneymaker, 2019, 19:12)

Figure 2

Matagi Tokelau Book Cover and Publication Description

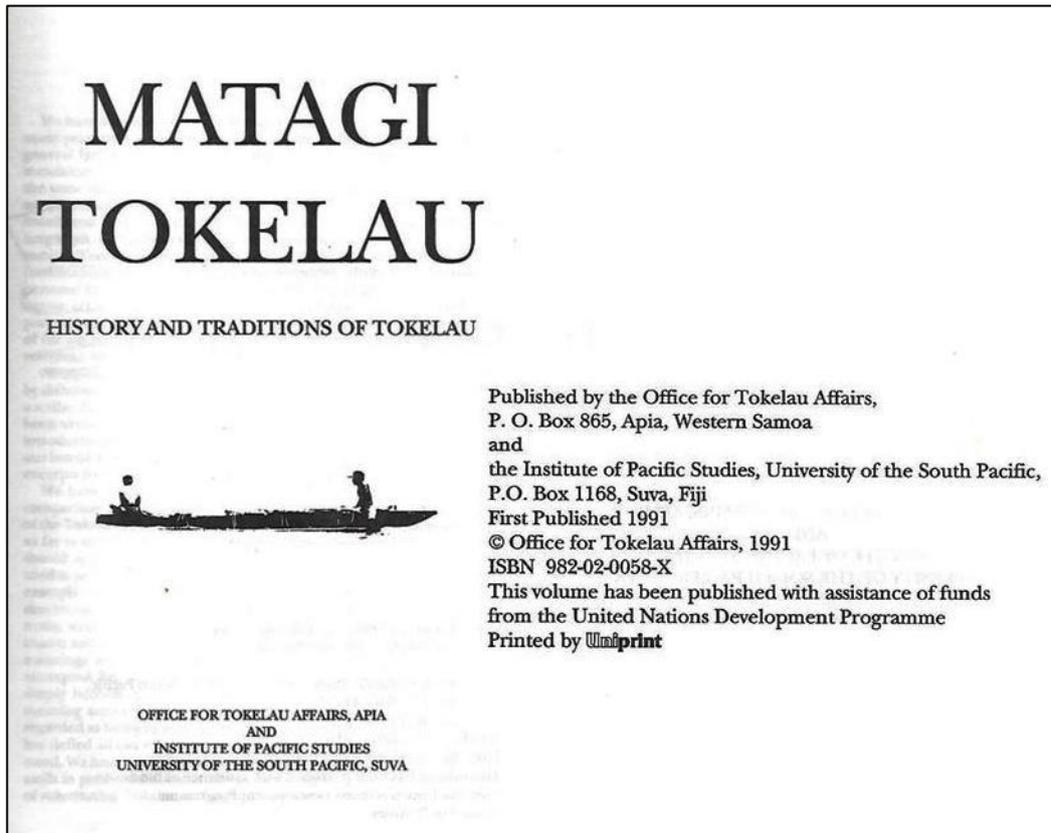


The book is presented as 223 pages, A5 sized, black and white pages. It is perfect bound – meaning glued not sewed – with a paperback soft cover that depicts a historic artwork of a traditional scene circa 1840s. The text contains numerous black and white hand-drawings throughout the book to illustrate the text in a style familiar to ethnographies. In addition, there are two sets of photographic black and white plates – 24 pages each. The first illustrates a historical collection of maps and images of people, places and key events. The second is a series of photographs taken from the 1960-1980s depicting a cultural way of life such as food gathering and community food distribution, community gatherings etc.

Note: Permission granted for use of image from J. Huntsman in 2019.

Figure 3

Matagi Tokelau Publication Details



Note: Permission granted for use of the image by J. Huntsman in 2019.

Moturoa: A Homegrown Tale

In contrast to the UNDP-sponsored Tokelau project (a formal local project supported by external advisors and funders), *Moturoa* is the outcome of a homegrown project with little pre-planning, no funding, few resources, and run out of a home office. Unlike Tokelau's community authorship, *Moturoa* (2007) recognises D. and N. Harris as the book's producers. However, it also lists ninety individuals or families as contributors in the afterword, describing them as "the backbone of this book" (Harris & Harris, 2007, p. 191). By the late 1990s, D. Harris explained that he began talking with family and friends. Before long, the informal grapevine of the close-knit neighbourhood was alerted and people began seeking him out, offering to take part in the project (D. Harris, personal communication, August 31, 2017). The brothers informally interviewed community

members and met with people to listen to their accounts while others wrote down their stories for the Harris brothers to include in the book. Written records of all these accounts were accumulated into an archive.

Moturoa's story unfolded organically in the brothers' approach. An open process of community participation was encouraged so it was more of a casual, "let's talk" method than targeted research or writing. Family, friends, and neighbours, both those still living in the area and those long since moved elsewhere, responded and shared their stories with the book's producers. However, these sorts of casual approaches are time-consuming, and the project, like *Matagi Tokelau*, took over a decade to complete (N. Harris, personal communication, September 4, 2017).

The second stage in the project was to compile a narrative from the accounts the brothers had collected. N. Harris was responsible for putting the book together, and he organised the accounts, stories, and memories into thematic chapters, using his discretion on presenting the content of the book. Harris was professionally experienced in report writing, but he also sought advice on writing social history from professional writers and scholars through attending social history workshops and reading on the subject. Since neither brother had experience in producing a book, they were happy to receive this advice. Noted scholar and author Christine Cole-Catley, for example, encouraged N. Harris to avoid bland writing and embrace the colour or vibrancy of their community:

When I mentioned a story about throwing tomatoes at a neighbour, she loved that we would admit that. "Leave it in," she exhorted. Other writers were somewhat more cautious, presenting a constant positive view, 'it was the same sunny day all the time'. (N. Harris, personal communication, September 4, 2017)

Harris explained that Cole-Catley encouraged them to be aware of the pitfall of only presenting the cheerful side of life. This was not a problem for the Harris brothers

because they had observed that they “didn’t go out looking for dirt, (it came after us, particularly ignoring it in some cases) but we wanted to show variety—real life as we knew it” (N. Harris, personal communication, September 4, 2017).

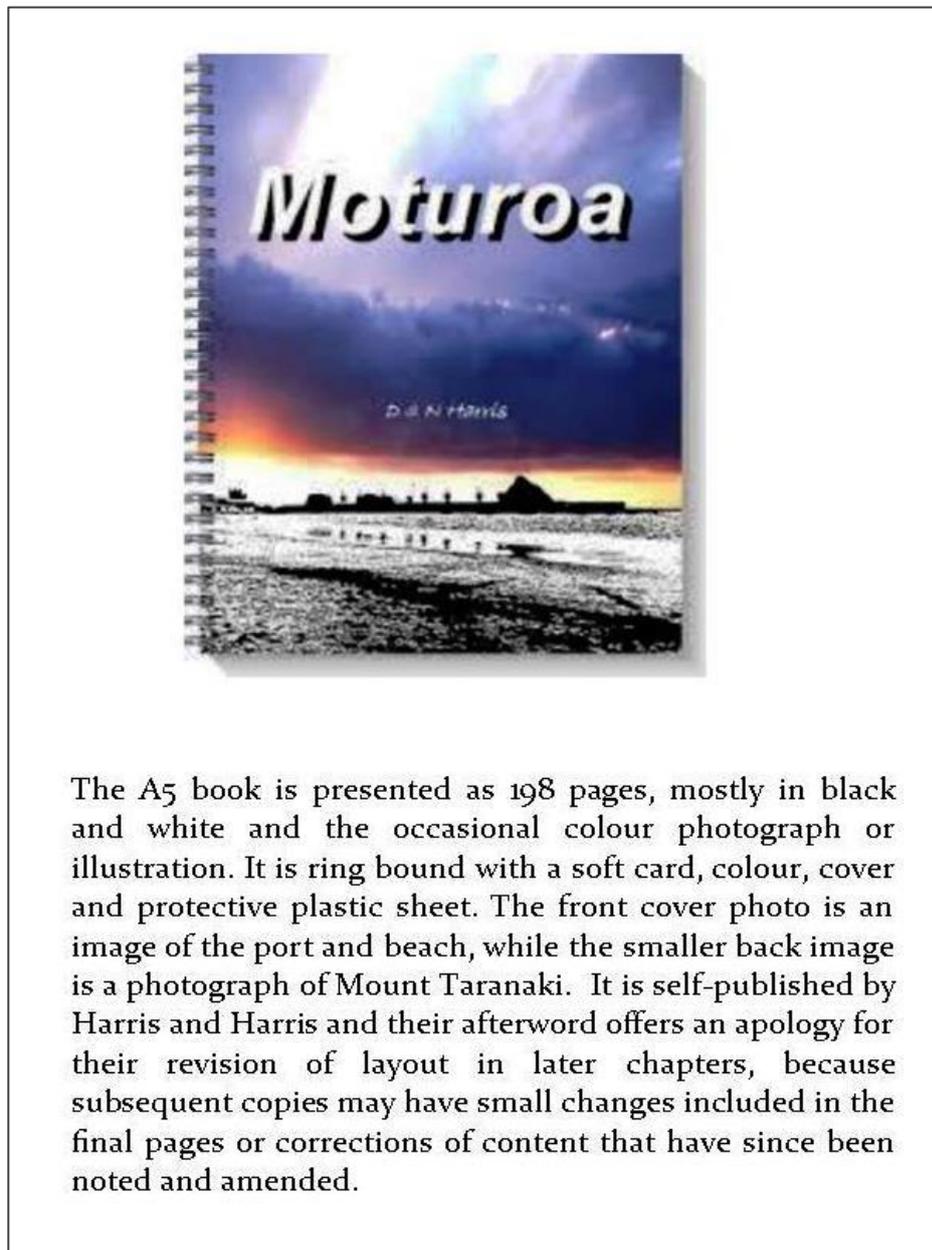
The brothers’ expression of intention also deliberately responded to, and cited, historian Eldred-Grigg’s call to reclaim the history of the working people (Harris & Harris, 2007, p. 195). Inspired by the idea of talking back to society, Harris and Harris sought to privilege the voice of the working class of their community in the form and content of the book. As a result, two chapters of the book detail memories of work life, one of which is dedicated to the 1951 Waterfront Dispute that is recognised as “the biggest industrial confrontation in New Zealand’s history” (New Zealand History, 2017). At Moturoa, harbour workers (called wharfies) joined the national 151 day protest against wage disputes in what has become a defining tale of the neighbourhood’s working-class labour history (New Zealand History, 2019). This and other lived experiences of the working class are presented through the stories and accounts of residents from the latter half of the twentieth century.

As the project progressed, the producers’ rejection of external authority intensified. Harris and Harris described discussions they had about approaching book publishers to help complete the project but realised that they wanted to produce the type of book that would not likely appeal to professional publishing and editing. They grew confident to express their accounts without assistance from professional writers or scholars and chose to self-publish, retaining authority over how the material was presented and the style in which it is was written. Once completed in 2007, they made copies available for community members or others interested in the story. The books were never intended to be a commercial or profit-making enterprise and sold for a nominal cost to recover costs of printing only. A series of reprints has been undertaken in subsequent years, each

dated on the bottom righthand corner of the front cover (see Figures 4 and 5). What was seemingly most significant for the project was for the process to be responsive to community interests and remain, accordingly, a book for the local community made at grassroots to represent a homegrown tale.

Figure 4

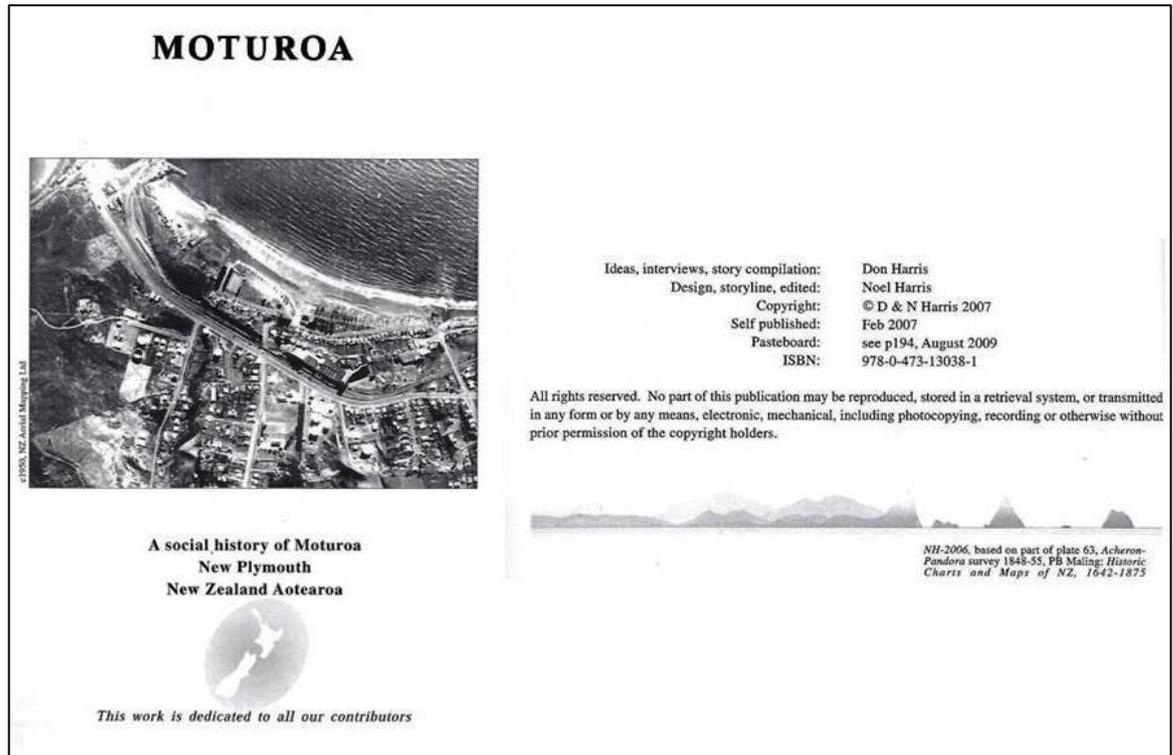
Moturoa Book Cover and Publication Description



Note: Permission granted for use of image by N. Harris in 2019.

Figure 5

Moturoa Publication Details



Note: Permission granted for use of image by N. Harris in 2019.

Patumahoe: History & Memories: A Local Project

Patumāhoe’s book project was a community endeavour from its inception. *Patumahoe: History & Memories* also has no listed author but goes a step further than Tokelau’s publication and lists no publication detail at all. The book is self-published without a listed International Standard Book Number (ISBN) or named copyright.

Following a public community meeting held by the local history group in 2013 in Patumāhoe, a book project group formed to produce the book for the school’s anniversary in 2016. This was not the first such project for the district, with other school anniversary publications (booklets) published earlier in 1966 and 1991, but it was the most ambitious. The aim of the project was to gather stories with broad participation encouraged through informal networks and sustained reporting about the project

through local media notices and personal communications. Membership of the project team remained open, and anyone interested in the project was invited to join. While some storytellers or community groups and/or individuals were specifically invited to provide content for the book, snowballing of storytellers was set in motion where one interview would lead to the next and yet another—much like what Harris and Harris encountered in Moturoa.

The grassroots history book group, mostly new to writing a book, were enthusiastic to research the history, stories, and memories of Patumāhoe, but they needed direction. They contacted professional writers and scholars with ties to, or interest in, the Patumāhoe story. For example, the project team consulted Logan Moss, a social historian from Waikato University, who advised on proposed thematic structure and online archiving. Two of the team, K. Carter and H. Upfold, volunteered to manage the project and maintain progress of the work. They took responsibility for much of the research and encouraged others to gather information across the district. They accessed funding through the formation of a charitable trust (administered on behalf of the Patumāhoe community) to assist with project costs and rallied the community to participate in the storytelling. Carter is recognised by her neighbours as working tirelessly to bring their stories to the fore of the project and prioritising the older community members to start (K. Carter, H. Upfold, & A. Coppock, personal communication, July 18, 2017).

Multiple methods were employed to encourage the participation of as many community members as possible. Individuals and representatives of families and community groups were interviewed or given the chance to offer other forms of content, like written submissions, reports, or personal records. “Butcher shop interviews” (a popular café venue in the village in the old butcher’s store) hosted group discussions about topics and themes, such as the history of the post office. Most people spoke freely about matters but

did not necessarily want everything included in the book. The book group explained that it became a driving motivation to respect the storytellers because they “trusted [the book group] with their stories” (K. Carter, personal communication, July 18, 2017). The work of writing and editing became the responsibility of the history book group, who accepted responsibility to represent the spirit of their community in how they told these stories or at least according to their interpretation of the Patumāhoe community (K. Carter, H. Upfold, & A. Coppock, personal communication, July 18, 2017). By the end of 2013, draft copies of the book were distributed around the neighbourhood for feedback and to identify additional research needed.

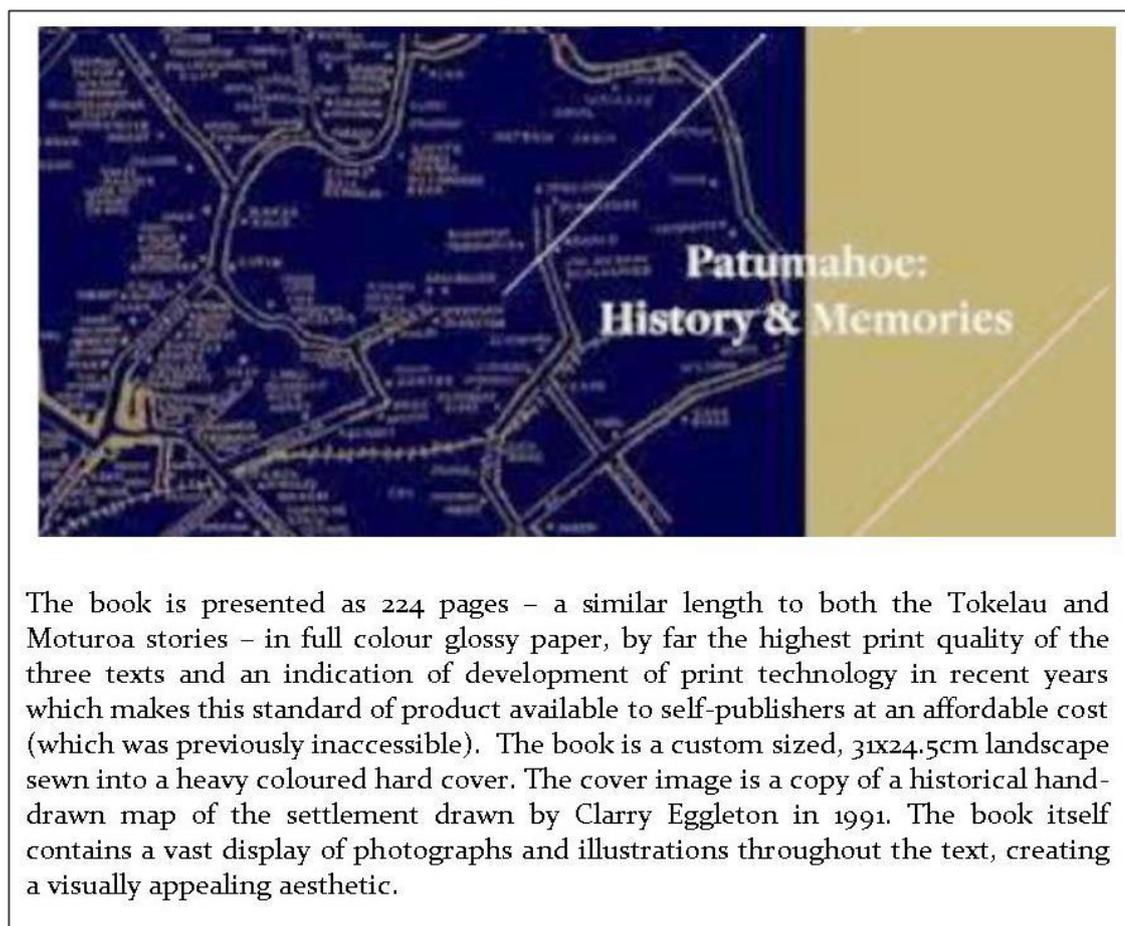
Aware of their lack of experience in book production, in 2014, the project team approached professional writers to work on the text. The writers’ input was helpful, but it also alerted the book group to the difficulty of outsourcing writing *and* staying true to representing what they perceived as the community point of view of the book or their style of storytelling. Journalist Dita De Boni, for example, was asked to write a first chapter as a trial. She contacted Ngāti Tamaoho and established vital connections between the history group and the trustees, facilitating the inclusion of input from Ngāti Tamaoho into the book. However, the history book group worried that a professional style and tone of writing did not match the grassroots-styled community character that they were trying to convey in the book (K. Carter, H. Upfold, & A. Coppock, personal communication, July 18, 2017). Instead, they favoured condensed versions of evidence-based content and a colloquial style of storytelling, which they worried would be lost if the book was written from the point of view of scholars’ and professional writers’ expertise. Therefore, much of the book content was prepared by the local project team themselves, who became more confident writing and publishing the community story over time. With help from skilled graphic designers and publishers from within the community, who joined the team in the final stages of book production, the local project

met their October 2016 deadline, and the book was ready for distribution in time for the school's 150th anniversary (see Figure 6).

The project did morph over its duration. The team learned that not everyone had the time or inclination to participate despite the initial public enthusiasm at the start of the project. They also confronted the limitations of learning about or including the totality of a community story. The preface of the text acknowledges that it would be impossible to tell all the district's stories in one book and admits mistakes are unavoidable. It offers a blanket apology for any lapses as, despite the best of intentions: "some stories have had to be left untold—150 years of history can't be crammed into one book" (*Patumahoe: History & Memories*, 2016, p. 5). The book presents the story of Patumāhoe told through a diverse collection of local witnesses and storytellers, supported by other records and "evidence" and reconciled into a community narrative—the "we" of Patumāhoe.

Figure 6

Patumahoe: History & Memories Book Cover and Publication Description



Note: Permission was granted by K. Carter for use of the image in 2019.

There are consistent features observed across the accounts of the three projects despite having quite different approaches to exercising intention. First, the project teams learned that even with careful planning, it was more important to be flexible and respond to changing circumstances as they were encountered rather than adhering to a rigid step-by-step project implementation. One result of this, however, was two of the three projects (*Matagi Tokelau* and *Moturoa: A Social History*) took a lot longer to complete than anticipated—over a decade from inception to publication. Second, over time, the grassroots initiatives grew more confident to express what they perceived to be community accounts of local history. Scholars and professional writers played a role in

their improved confidence but in different ways. Hooper and Huntsman, for example, provided a scholastic safety check for Tokelau's efforts, reassuring the Book Committee that accounts were being compiled into a trustworthy narrative that met scholastic expectations at the same time as protecting community interests. Third, the project teams discovered that self-publication afforded them greater control over the final stages of publication of the story and reclaimed a public history storytelling space for themselves. Collectively, these project features demonstrate the project teams' responsiveness to their local contexts and the storytellers they work alongside and a willingness to allow the projects to morph into different types of collaborative processes. In addition, despite initial nervousness towards the task at the start, the teams grew more able and confident to assert their creativity and interpretation of scholarship over their local history storytelling.

Our Place and Time in History

The advantage of examining local history books through the lens of a Bakhtinian-inspired framework is that it raises the importance of the social, cultural, and political nature of the texts and situates interpretation about their form and content (and the processes that produce them) into the context of their time and location—geographically, historically, and philosophically. By asking the four questions posed in this chapter inspired by Bakhtin's writing, we gain an improved understanding of the socioideological literary performance of the texts—the story of the stories—and see how theory translates into practical experience in real-world examples. This includes demonstrating what the texts reveal about the authors' intentions, the discovery of which is enhanced by reviewing other sources of information about the book projects, including the point of view of the producers themselves. By attending to authorial intention in the narratives, the “socio-ideological position of the author amid the

heteroglossia” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 300) is revealed too. This informs the texts’ point of view and suggests a value-based representation of community that responds to a social situation at the time of its telling. Seen in this way, local history books represent a window into a worldview in a point in time.

Informed by a Bakhtinian framework, the application of life writing criticism to local history books calls for reading the context for intent. This approach encourages critical reflection into how questions of authority, agency, and representation intersect with intentional articulation of collective lived experience as an intertextual response to evolving historical and political circumstances. Exactly how the texts (and their authors) respond to their social contexts, with stated political intention as part of discourse about colonisation, for example as revealed in the three case studies, explicitly informs the content and style of the books that emerge. Moreover, the books’ use of language conveys and confirms the communal point of view being purposively represented in the text as a socially situated system of ideas and ideals. In the next chapter, I will shift from a macro lens of analysis of context to examine the texts up close to probe what the texts reveal about the social worlds of the writers, narrators, and characters through their use of specific language. Like fingerprints or traces of evidence, no matter how representative or objective one attempts to be when crafting a history narrative as lived account, writers leave their personal imprint in the forms and words they use to reveal insight into a particular construction of social reality. This is the literary DNA of humanity and part of a much bigger social story that far extends beyond the boundary lines of the locale.

Chapter Six

The Literariness of Local History: Reading the Case Studies

“Literature is analysis after the event.” (Doris Lessing, author)

When a local history text is read as literature, that is with an awareness of its form and language, a different vista of analysis opens. Close reading reveals new insight into texts to explain the use of language as a literary device that confers social meaning. Therefore, this chapter interrogates how reality and meaning are “mediated and interpreted through language” (Inglis & Thorpe, 2012, p. 101) by employing close reading techniques on excerpts from each of the case study texts. The approach suggests an interpretation of social reality, articulated through a point of view embedded into a specific time and place that becomes known through the language used to convey an experience of the local community.

This exegesis of the local history book case studies is a critical interpretation of each text where each excerpt opens to a broader social commentary as well as interpretation of the wider text. It is not exhaustive—no reading or analysis can be. Each excerpt is situated within a narrative arc, and the analysis thus illuminates how the parts speak back to the whole book too. This micro analysis is a markedly different method to the identifying and analysing of contextualisation and intention that I employed in the last chapter, but its significance is heightened by adding its findings with that approach, and, together, they enable a thicker conclusion about the nature of these works (Alexander et al., 2011; Geertz, 1983). In this chapter, I ask what each of the three texts reveals of itself and the social world of its actors constructed through the language used in the excerpts.

Encountering Other in *Matagi Tokelau*

My first reading is from *Matagi Tokelau*. The section falls in the second half of the book, following writing about World War II. This account is presented as an independent section with an illustration as part of a chapter that details key events and experiences in the post-World War II years. It should be remembered that the book appeared in two versions, first in the Tokelauan language and then in English, translated by members of the Tokelau community living in New Zealand. The full English excerpt is included here, including the image that accompanies the account in the publication (see Figure 7):

THE SOLAR ECLIPSE

At the beginning of 1958, a number of scientists came to Atafu from New Zealand and from Great Britain; they came in search of a suitable location to photograph the solar eclipse in October of that same year. After that visit, some concrete blocks were erected right at the lagoon side of the hospital.

Professor Harold von Klubber led the British group, while the New Zealand group was led by Thomson.

The Europeans who undertook these activities lived in their own tents which stood close beside the place where their instruments were. They were certain of the day of the solar eclipse, and this fell exactly on White Sunday (or Children's Sunday). The morning of the day of the solar eclipse was an absolutely beautiful morning. The sun arose gloriously, a few tiny clouds were in the sky, the breeze blew gently from the east, and everything was completely clear. What was promised was clear weather all day. The scientists expressed their delight on that morning. At seven in the morning they began to take photographs with very small cameras that they usually carried around.

About the stroke of 9am we began to see that the brightness of the sun was somewhat obscured, yet the atmosphere was absolutely clear, not a single cloud. It seemed to us as if the circular whole of the sun was not complete, since we used mirrors which were distributed by the scientists group, so we might be able to look at the sun, while the eclipse of the sun progressed.

At 10am, the consumption of the whole half of the sun was completely visible. Actually, the eclipse of the sun means that the moon moves through space between the sun and the earth. That was the thing that was now happening, the moon was travelling exactly between the sun and the earth, so that the sun was completely lost from the view of people in Atafu, but it was not like that in other places of the world, because the moon did not move exactly in front of the sun to obscure their view of the sun.

At some time between 10 and 11am the scene was very strange, it appeared that the light was like that of late afternoon; the light was weak; it was slowly reaching the point when the sun would be hidden by the moon. The scientific parties, both the New Zealand group and the British group, proceeded calmly and peacefully with their activities. Many people sat about 30 yards from the place where the telescopes were.

It was shortly after 11, when something occurred in a blink of an eye; the sun was completely eclipsed by the moon from the perspective of Atafu. It was nearly dark, like early morning darkness or evening darkness, and roosters crowed and flew up to their roosts.

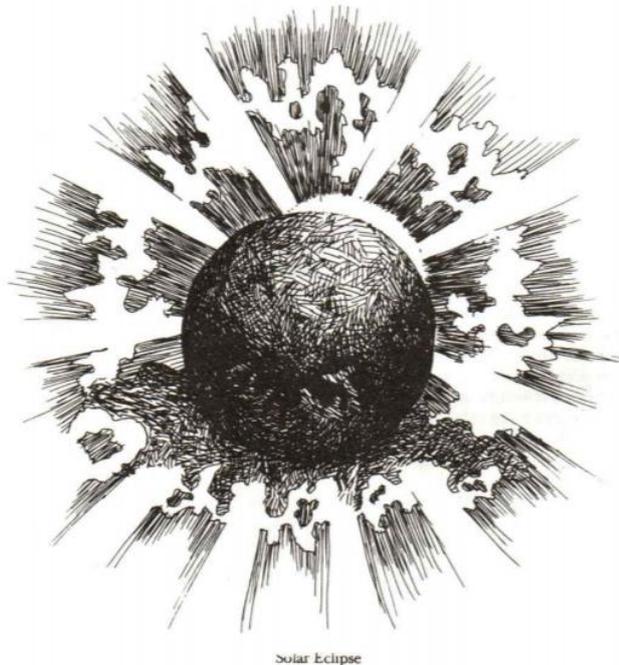
One sees reflected the full circle of the moon because the sun is almost completely hidden by the moon. It appears as a black ball, while all around the edges of the black ball is coloured gold and silver for a few seconds; this is called the corona, this colour seen at the edge of the moon during a solar eclipse. Everything was completely silent. Not a single voice. Nor was anything done to make noise, except the gentle hush of the breeze in the tree branches, together with the chickens crowing in their roosts. Even the

activities and attention of the scientists to their photographic instruments produced no sound. For five to seven minutes the sun was totally eclipsed, then it again appeared in something like the blink of an eye at the outer edge of the moon at the eastern side, since the movement of the moon is faster than that of the sun, and the brightness gradually increased until the sun was again completely full at noon time. The scientists showed their pleasure at the time when their task was finished, when the complete eclipse of the sun was finished. The following day the village gathered together, and the scientists came to express gratitude and appreciation to the village and people for their helpfulness in all matters, for the way they were able to help with everything and able to assist them in their activities.

(*Matagi Tokelau: History and Traditions of Tokelau*, 1991, pp. 134–136)

Figure 7

Illustration of Solar Eclipse in Text



Note: This picture is part of the original text, *Matagi Tokelau* (1991, p. 135).

This retrospective account narrated by an elder or scribe on behalf of the Tokelau community contains their point of view and appears to be a careful telling. The account opens with sparse detail. Sometime “at the beginning of 1958” a group of scientists from Britain and New Zealand suddenly appear on Atafu. Little explanation is given for their arrival other than they are looking for a “suitable location to photograph” a solar eclipse later in October. The atoll is treated as an observation site for science, and the impression is given that the visitors assume, ostensibly, a right to access without

question. Short of any description of forewarning or the circumstances of their arrival (including a lack of formal greeting protocol common in the Pacific) or the lack of account of it, they settle among the islanders and “erect” some seemingly random concrete blocks near the hospital. The staging of observation appears obscure and makes little sense to the storyteller and thus to the reader as well, but its mention suggests the blocks had a purpose—possibly as a commemoration of the event. The mention de-contextualises but also emphasises the curiousness of the scientists’ actions to the atoll observers. Notwithstanding, prestige is recognised in the naming of “Professor Harold von Klubber” of the British party while the New Zealand contingent is simply led by “Thomson”—a less formal acknowledgement. The rest of the account refers to “the scientists” or “the Europeans”. Nothing is said of their months of preparation other than that they kept themselves separate and “lived in their own tents” and kept close to “where their instruments were”, presumably to keep them safe—possibly an implied criticism against their “hosts” or a sign of their preciousness.

To the people of Atafu, the arrival of the expedition is a fascinating event, observed and narrated from a local perspective. The cumulative descriptions of the first three paragraphs evoke a curious watchfulness. At first, there was a mood of vague detachment as they record “a number of scientists”, looking for a “suitable location” somewhere near the hospital, who erected “some concrete blocks”, but, as the account continues, the Atafu community becomes more interested in exactly what the scientists are doing. The descriptions provided in the excerpt suggest little direct contact is made between the locals and the visitors. The narrator (representative of the community present at the time—the “we” of the account) watches and interprets the behaviour of the scientists, inferring things about them rather than reporting conversations. There is an element of humour in the narration too when the scientists are described with the “very small cameras” that they carry around. This description also emphasises a shift in

perspective—the scientists who have come to observe are instead being observed in the encounter. “We” the community are watching “they” the scientist visitors.

When the account turns to the anticipated day of the eclipse, a theme of knowledge is solidified. The account wrestles with two different systems of knowledge that jostle with one another in this encounter and offers a European versus Tokelauan interpretation of the natural event. The certainty with which the visitors predict the eclipse is conveyed in a tone of surprise and respect for the knowledge of the scientists, who “were certain of the day of the solar eclipse”. The power of western science is, furthermore, juxtaposed with religious reverence since the day of the eclipse falls “exactly on White Sunday”—a church service held by Christian communities in Tokelau, Tonga, Samoa, and American Samoa on the second Sunday of October to celebrate children (Macpherson, 2018). This is also the account’s only reference to a calendar date since no actual date is ever specified. It is assumed that the religious importance of the day is its most memorable way to record it. This is not surprising. The colonised community of Tokelau converted to Christianity in the nineteenth century and has since remained entwined in the two worldviews of western thinking and indigeneity. The day, celebrating science, unfolds with a spiritual quality. The narrator appears perched between a supernatural appreciation of wonderment and their interest in the scientists’ explanations and observations. In addition, they seem to describe the day with reverence as the apostles of science go about their work, proceeding “calmly and peacefully”. Then, when the eclipse is full: “Everything was completely silent. Not a single voice”. The atmosphere of awe and reverence, a common expression of faith, influences the day’s experience but, in this case, is associated with a natural event that has been ritually prepared for by the scientists.

On the day of the eclipse, the introduced world of the west converges with the local indigeneity. For example, the account begins to record the day in hourly increments to try to capture the detail of the event as a scientific record, which contrasts strongly to the vague beginning noted at the start of the passage with the arrival of the visitors. This jostling play on perspective that emerges between the two parties is emphasised by the mirrors given to the local observers by the scientists so that they “may look at the sun” without mention of the physical impossibility or danger of looking directly at the sun without them. The account from the point of view of the Tokelauans also attempts to understand and recount the scientists’ perspective. How the islanders “see” the event is influenced by the work of the scholars. In addition, as the eclipse unfolds, the narrator points out that the people of Atafu were having a unique experience with the eclipse because “it was not like that in other parts of the world”. Scientifically, it was the best possible geophysical location where the eclipse could be so fully observed. As the eclipse occurs, two explanations sit side by side in the account: “At 10am, the consumption of the whole half of the sun was completely visible. Actually, the eclipse of the sun means that the moon moves through space between the sun and the earth”. The consuming of the sun, a more intuitive and traditional use of imagery, is quickly tempered by a scientific explanation, likely one repeated frequently on the day by the visitors and echoed in the local account afterwards. Denotation and connotation converge with the simple addition of one word, “consumption”.

Most of the descriptions used to convey the experience are rooted in communion with nature and are far more emotive than scientific language. The narrator describes the day in detail: “[It was] an absolutely beautiful morning. The sun arose gloriously, a few tiny clouds were in the sky, the breeze blew beautifully from the east and everything was perfectly clear.” While the scientists are there to observe and record without emotion, the local witnesses take in the full wonder of the moment. They delight in the immediacy

of what they experienced and capture it in their account as a vivid community memory, such as the description of the sun as in “all around the edges of the black ball is coloured by gold and silver” (see Figure 7). As a result, the account is filled with aggregative repetitive descriptions consistent with primary oral cultures, as identified by Ong (2012, pp. 37-49). Here, the oral nature of the text and language used reveals the culture of the storytellers and their preferred ways of knowing or learning. Interaction with the environment is not impartial or objective, but it is experienced and emotive, descriptive, and lyrical, and often appearing in the present tense (“is coloured”).

The traditional and modern, western and indigenous, encounter one another through Atafu’s experience, but it is only conveyed through one narrative point of view, and the traditional, indigenous view effectively interprets the modern western one. The local account encounters the scientists’ and observes their different experiences of the same event. The scientists, for example, work peacefully using their telescopes and photographic equipment while the people “sat about 30 yards from the place where the telescopes were”. As local meets science, there is a meeting of knowledge systems that reinforces some of the tensions experienced by the indigenous community of the time. The day was described as both “very strange” and yet somehow calm and peaceful. It was filled with quite a bit of activity by the scientists and yet is still completely quiet. The experience was also shared together but, yet, somehow kept apart from one another. From the reasoning of the narrator, the validity of the scientists and their expertise is upheld and respected, but the validity of the villagers’ experiences also accompanies the record. Two worlds collide, peacefully and still not quite resolved, leaving the local observers to make sense of the eclipse from two perspectives. This is not to suggest that the local witnesses are ignorant of western science but acknowledges that the level of skill and minutiae of expertise and scientific knowledge of the renowned named scholars

such as Professor von Klubber would exceed them and, indeed, all non-scholastic observers.

There is implicit tactfulness in Tokelau's account as they do not question the arrival of the scientists and refrain from any criticism. The account implies that when the village gathered after the eclipse, the scientists only belatedly acknowledged the local community. It is only in the final few lines of the excerpt that the scientists respond with "gratitude and appreciation to the village and people", recognising their help in "all matters" and thanking them for assisting them "in their activities". The framing of their response implies that the completion of the task was of primary importance to the success of the scientists' visit; it was not driven by concern for the people of the community. The passage does, however, imply a reconciliation of sorts at the end or a coming together that is missing from the rest of the account, which does not support the idea of partnership inferred in the closing lines of the account. This suggests a politeness in the narration, which only infers the lack of respect of the visitors coming to the site at the beginning of the account but is acknowledged when the scientists finally express the proper respect owed to the locals many months after their time on the island.

Although the excerpt denotatively records a physical event of the eclipse, it connotes the deeper social realities of Tokelau from the 1950s. By the end, the account enlarges our understanding of the point of view of the lived experience of the community at Atafu during a time of change, illustrated by a specific event (the encounter with the scientists and eclipse). In the late 1950s, following World War II, there began to be more widespread critical awareness about colonisation in the Pacific and exploration of opportunities for decolonisation. In this account, the sovereignty of Tokelau is reasserted over the story, and the local community is positioned as the primary actors; they are not acted upon. This is their story. By presenting the event from this point of view, the

narrative angle in the excerpt shifts to them as the protagonist of the story and the eyes through whom the event is interpreted for the reader—not the scientists.

The excerpt symbolises a shift in perspective where the coloniser point of view of an encounter such as this is subverted by the colonised/indigenous peoples' interpretation of the encounter from their insider perspective. Here, they are watching and recording, evaluating the western visitors, and reconciling them to their world. In the emerging tradition of autoethnography, a fresh perspective thus appears. The trouble with travel writing, author of *Travel Eyes* Mary Louise Pratt (2007) would argue, is that for centuries it reinforced an idea that “gave European reading publics a sense of ownership, entitlement and familiarity with respect to the distant parts of the world that were being explored, invaded, invested in, and colonized” (p. 3). Writing established and reaffirmed a colonial trope in which explorers and scientists were invested with authority to describe and interpret the non-western scenes they visited. In critical contemplation of what she calls these “contact zones” (p. 8), the question is raised about whose point of view describes these encounters. Readers of *Mataji Tokelau* who are not residents of the atolls experience these encounters from the indigenous perspective not the colonial arriving to the island. An insider view emerges instead. As such, the text responds to the “huge gap in the archive” that Pratt identifies—“the participants whose voices I wasn't hearing” (p. 5).

The analysis of this passage thus uncovers the prevailing dignified tone of the assertion of self-sovereignty and, therefore, self-representation throughout the book. It is an example of the finesse with which the traditional beliefs and adoption of Christian and other western-inspired thinking have been reconciled locally into a self-determined historical representation with graceful diplomacy. This close reading illustrates how these different points of view have been peacefully and potentially beneficially reconciled

in the Tokelau perspective. Later in the chapter from which this excerpt is taken, description is offered of the self-determined political union formed with New Zealand in the early 1960s. Once again, the self-representation of the accounts shifts the Tokelauan view into a position of partnership, reminiscent of the language of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. What is suggestive in the language used and revealed in the text is that partnership is presumed upon some grounds of reconciling the different points of view of the coloniser and the colonised in the rhetoric of partnership. Essentially, hope for political unity, peace, and prosperity depends upon finding ways to merge or blend western thought (represented by the science of the eclipse encounter) and western religion (that is closely allied historically with indigeneity) with traditional indigeneity while still asserting local sovereignty and authority. The uncomfortable reality of negotiating with stronger economic and political forces in these encounters is not, unfortunately, readily confronted or openly debated in such narratives, nor are the tensions raised in the encounters of alterity fully resolved in the accounts.

Working-Class Testimony in *Moturoa*

My second reading is from *Moturoa: A Social History of Moturoa*. The extract is an account that is included in the chapter, *Down the Wharf*, that speaks to lived experiences associated with working at the dock. It follows a previous chapter about working-class experiences in general. Set in the second half of the book, the account is part of the reflections recorded about the 1951 Waterfront Dispute (part of an earlier local oral history initiative circa 1990). This major event is presented through the life and language of wives of the waterfront workers. Eileen Komene's account is included here:

1951

Eileen Komene:

I was born in 1926, my father was a bushman. I married in 1944 and had six kids. Bill started in 1945 on the wharf, I can remember my husband going to work, and then when he came home¹³ he said *"We're out!"* I said what do you mean we're out? He said *"We're locked out. They won't let us on the ships to work."* I thought the bottom had fallen out of my world. I was very frightened, what was I to do? I rang the lady that had the [hospital cleaning] contract. She said *"When can you start?"* Right away! *"Be here half past seven in the morning."* When my husband came home I said better get a good nights sleep lad, you're going to need it, I'm going to work in the morning. He said *"You can't do that, you've just had a baby."* I said I'm not losing my house for this lockout, and I went.

They used to have pressies (at Christmas) once a year. It was a bit of a handful struggling along with six children, five of them under 5. I didn't go to many things. I was too busy at home with the children.

We didn't know anything of the causes of the lockout. And there was no way he was ever going to be a scab. I never pressured him, no way, because he was fighting for a principle. I supported him in that, because I believe in principles myself. These men didn't go on strike here, they were locked out. I cleaned at the hospital 7.30 in the morning to 4pm. I brought in very little money really. You see, people were told not to hire watersiders wives. But the lady who had the contract for the cleaning, I knew her, but even if I hadn't have, she would've given me a job anyway.

She said no one was going to tell her who she's going to hire. She stuck up for us, and for the men.

My day started at 5 o'clock in the morning to be at work by half past seven. After ten I'd do the washing at night, baby's last feed, not getting to bed by eleven. So naturally I was very tired. Tired when I got up and tired when I got to bed.

My wages paid the house and the light. We waited too many years for that brand new home, and there was no way I was going to lose that roof over my head. Cheapest meat cuts, amazing what you can do with certain meats. The child allowance went straight on them – they were alright for clothing. We had a very good grocer, milkman and butcher. When the lockdown started the grocer went to the door and I said I didn't want an order. And he said *"Why?"* Because we've not got the money to pay for it. And he said *"You've got 4 children and I'll be coming every week for the order. Never mind about the money. Fix that up when things come right."* And the butcher was the same. And the milkman used to put four quarts, not pints, in our box every day. And not one of these people ever pressed us for money. When the lockdown was over we paid them off so much every week. We grew our own garden which was a big help.

Bill was home everyday. He started the vegies going before I got home – the baby was always changed and fed. The other children seemed happy with him. Probably happier than what they were with me – probably got away with more. After tea I'd do the washing, then baby's last feed, then clean the floors. It wasn't easy.

I remember this one particular tram driver. We had trams in those days. Evidently one man, a scab, was waiting and old Stan pulled up, saw he was a scab and said *"No scabs on my trams"* and drove off to the port. That was the sort of support the wharfies were getting. There were some nasty comments made about wharfies, especially when you went into the dairy near us. I asked for weetbix. The shopkeeper said *"We don't have any, they were held up on the wharf"* They'd look at you and say *"You can thank the watersiders for that."* Everytime the butcher brought the meat there was a packet of tobacco in there for my husband. That's the sort of people we had in those days. People that you dealt with all the time, people who knew you, they stuck by us you know. There were marvellous people, Charlie Cottam the furniture man was one of them.

It took five months to pay all those people back, after the dispute ended. Those people never pressured us. They were amazing people. You've lost that touch now – with the big supermarkets.

¹³ Grammar and spelling mistakes are part of the original text. This is purposive by the editors and is explained in my analysis.

Everyone knew who you were. *“How’s so and so getting on? Has your baby passed it’s teething? Has so and so got over the measles?”* You know all those little things. Don’t have that now (in this) modern age. (Interview by Heather Bassett c 1990).

(Harris & Harris, 2007, pp. 133–134)

The testimonial account begins with a brief two-sentence introduction to the narrator (Eileen). She introduces only the touchstones of her heritage—date of birth, father’s occupation, marriage, and children—before shifting from her personal narration to describing her reaction and response to a pivotal experience in Moturoa’s shared history. In this account she speaks on behalf of her working-class family and as representative of others’ experiences. The account opens without preamble about the lockout and no warning about the devastation of the event in their lives. Her husband arrives home simply with a resounding, “We’re out!” and her world is thrown into immediate disarray.

The perspective of the account is remarkable because it subverts expectations of an accounting of lived experience of the significant national event on two levels. First, the text only uses the wives’ point of view in writing about, or accounting for, the 1951 dispute. Situated in a chapter about working on the wharf, the expectation of an account from a worker’s perspective is supplanted by one like Eileen’s. Although Bill features in the excerpt and is introduced from the start, this is Eileen’s story, an “I” account.

However, Eileen’s account switches between “I” and “we” narration that reconciles her and Bill as working partners. Eileen speaks as a mother and a wife and takes up a gendered position about the impact of the dispute on the home and family of the wharf workers (the wharfies), and she speaks to their experience as a couple, “we waited too many years for that new home”. She immediately springs to action, driven by fear, to secure whatever work she can for her family—determined to save her house from foreclosure, “I’m not losing my house for this lockdown”—despite just having had a baby. Her account implies that women are the heart of the working class, supporting their husbands without question and working hard to help provide for their families when

needed. Theirs is an economic partnership of child-raising, and she warns her husband, “better get a good nights sleep lad”—tomorrow you watch the kids, and I am going to earn the money! What is quite extraordinary given the times (1950s) but perhaps less so for the neighbourhood context, Bill meets all Eileen’s expectations seemingly without protest, which strengthens the suggestion of their domestic and economic partnership. In her account, she explains how he swapped roles with her, staying home to look after the children, and “started the vegies going before I got home—the baby was always changed and fed.”

On the second level of subversion, the language used in the account suggests a counter-discourse to popular talk of workers on strike. Eileen’s support is unquestionable to Bill and that is because of how they frame the experience. In dominant capitalist economic and political discourse at the time, strikers and their disruptions to production or service delivery were rhetorised as being the antagonists or “troublemakers” by authorities. Instead, according to Eileen’s account, their experience was not of a strike, they were “locked out” or not allowed on the ships to work. The event is, in her language, only described as a lockout or a dispute. Contrary to media discourse about the troublemaking wharfies persistent around the event, Eileen’s language is scared: “the bottom had fallen out of my world, I was very frightened”. Instead of being rebellious troublemakers, her language describes someone responding staunchly or with resolve to a situation that is out of her control but in which there is only one possible position to take. She makes it clear that the politics of the matter is unknown to them, “we didn’t know anything of the causes of the lockout”, but she is fully supportive of the union workers “fighting for a principle” and repeats more than once that there was no way her husband was going to be a “scab”. However, she points out again, “these men didn’t go on strike here, they were locked out”. Throughout the account, she reasserts a point of view that the men and their families, instead of being the cause of trouble, are the

recipients of injustice. This is intensified by their treatment within the community, experienced as some kind of economic punishment, when she describes how “people were told not to hire watersiders wives”. She does not, however, specify who exactly the people were making these assertions, but one can assume they align with the port authorities and government officials trying to bring a forceful end to the dispute through financial hardship. Fortunately, according to Eileen’s account, there were those like her new boss willing to stand up for the workers: “She stuck up for us, and for the men.”

The language used in the account describes a tone of exhaustion, even looking back retrospectively from better times. Eileen’s account, having asserted her support for the locked-out workers, does not belabour the injustice of how they were being treated, and she quickly moves onto a record of her days during the lockout. She describes long days starting from “5 o’clock in the morning” to “not getting to bed by eleven”, leaving her “tired when I got up and tired when I went to bed”. Paradoxically, this productivity yields little, knowing that she was earning “very little money really”, but it helped the family pay some of their bills, especially the mortgage. She describes their economic creativity as having the “cheapest meat cuts, amazing what you can do with certain meats” and relying on “our own garden which was a big help”. The theme of partnership is also reinforced with the description of Bill taking care of the children while she worked but is accompanied with an acknowledgement that “it wasn’t easy”. These were tough days, living close to the poverty line and barely managing to provide for their family.

The weariness of her experience is, however, counter-balanced with hope and fellowship that resonates from the practical and emotional support of her community. Eileen speaks to the caring action of the grocer, milkman, and butcher, who continued to provide food for her family even though she explained she could not afford to pay for the orders: “And the milkman used to put four quarts, not pints, in our box every day. And not one of

these people ever pressed us for money.” Worried about the children and wanting to express support for their wharfie neighbours, tradesmen offered whatever practical support they could to the families. This sense of community, the account implies, cemented a sense of camaraderie among the local working-class neighbourhood that sustained the wharfies and their families through one of the most harrowing labour disputes on record in New Zealand. “That’s the sort of people we had in those days. People that you dealt with all the time, people who knew you, they stuck by us you know.” The “we” in this quote infers the community and reiterates how “us” (the wharfies) fit into the local social network. However, the language of the account reinforces that it was not all utopian. Eileen’s account balances the “support the wharfies were getting” with commentary about “some nasty comments made about wharfies”. She describes uncomfortable encounters in her local dairy with cruel passive aggressive remarks made to her about the negative impact of the dispute when enquiring over the lack of weetbix (breakfast cereal) in the store—“you can thank the watersiders for that”. The tension in the community is, nonetheless, overridden by her experience of kindness, and she takes care to point out how much that support meant to her family at the time. She repeats towards the end of her account that “those people never pressured us”, and it took her and Bill as long as “five months to pay those people back, after the dispute ended”. Eileen’s language is suggestive that the dispute was a fight for the principles of fairness, not greed, and a happy consequence for Eileen and her family was an enhanced feeling of unity (for the most part) that made it possible to endure the months of being locked out.

What is most striking about the language used in this passage—its diction and style—is its lack of editorial refinement. The text is included verbatim in the book, meaning that its rough elements of grammar and use of colloquialisms are not smoothed away. Instead, the realism presents a dialect of the New Zealand working class that imbues the

passage with personality. Applied to the book more widely, one sees that this style persists in all the accounts where the speech of the narrators or storytellers is kept intact without editorial interference. The approach is suggestive of the realist movement of writers like Chekhov and Stendhal who determined that art should be true to life (Borny, 2006; Brombert, 1968; Finke, 2005; Lantz, 1985). Their work drew attention to the everyday lives of everyday characters to reflect upon the lives they were living in certain times. Chekhov (1973) wrote that, “literature is accepted as an art because it depicts life as it actually is. Its aim is the truth, unconditional and honest” (p. 62). This realism is achieved in the passage, and *Moturoa* as a whole, where language (as narrative and literature) reflects the real to draw attention to the social consciousness of life from a specific perspective. By raising awareness of the banality and rawness and yet beauty of the ordinary, this literary style hopes for a sincere reflection of what this can or should mean, without artistic prettification. It resonates with Harris and Harris’ (2007) hope stated earlier in the book to highlight “vernacular tales that put ordinary people back into the landscape” (p. 3). Here, the women’s working-class experience is privileged as a point of view and through which the nature of the wider Moturoa community during the 1950s becomes better known.

The excerpt, when seen alongside the full text, reinforces that the experiences of the working class are built upon relational realities. Even though it is traditionally characterised by economic pressures and the grim hardship of work, the social nature of their experiences finds its fulfilment and expression in the relationships built at home through domestic partnerships and among the neighbourhood as an experience of community. Work is necessary to maintain family, and family and neighbourhood is revealed as the central theme of their lived experience. The passage conveys the relational soul of the wharfie experience, primarily because it is not told through the point of view of the locked-out workers but, instead, through the eyes and voice of their

wives. A strong sense of community emerges as everyone collectively battles the economic forces of the dispute, and this is steeped in a lament of nostalgia. Eileen ends her account wistfully. She observes, “everyone knew who you were” and suggests that the modern age of convenience—“the big supermarkets”—has weakened the personal ties that were common in her day and the neighbourhood of old. This implies that the changes in working conditions and what are generally understood as economic improvements have detracted from the drive of supporting one another as neighbours or even getting to know one another (“Has so and so got over the measles?”). The passage infers that in times of hardship, from Eileen’s lived experience, people in Moturoa could rely on the close community. Unfortunately, she observes that the era of convenience has, while a boon for many, meant the end of “all those little things” that mattered so much to the watersiders’ wives in 1951.

Eileen’s account speaks back to the broader narrative to reassert the primacy of the class discourse of the text. Eileen and Bill’s lived experience is presented as the point of view of the working-class wharfies in New Zealand during the 1951 labour dispute. Although it is reasonable to assert a political framework to the experience, the account mostly considers economic factors instead and their contribution to the working-class culture of the neighbourhood. The predominance of the narrator’s economic realities, and the working-class culture that emerges in consequence, is the privileged point of view of the community discourse suggested by the accounts of *Moturoa*. There is, for example, no mention in Eileen’s account of cultural heritage and no distinction between Māori, Pākehā, or “other” experience of the dispute. The account is framed in the language of the besieged working class of the 1950s, looking at a major event of national economic and political significance that illuminates the impact of the event on the social and economic realities of the wharfie families.

Eileen's account does not stand alone. Like the style of *Moturoa* as a collection, Eileen's account sits alongside the stories of two other women—Jean Christensen and Mrs Crow. Each of their accounts, while united in their common experience of the 1951 lockout, brings a unique perspective on their lived experience during those difficult days. Cumulatively, the accounts paint a more vivid and complex tale of the 151 days and the after-effects of the dispute for the three women and their families. It also informs their experience of community in Moturoa and reveals how they balanced the fear of poverty for their families with the comradery of the other wharfie families and the support from other parts of the Moturoa community. This style is consistent with the book structure, which is built upon a collection of stories or personal memories grouped around common experiences or events that, without explanation or interpretation, construct a conversation among the storytellers to present an account of their place. The combined weight of voices adds to the expression of a community experience, and each of the accounts, like Eileen's, reveals community triumphing over adversity, uncovering the attitudes of both the speaker and the community they represent.

The Metaphor of the Settler in *Patumahoe: History & Memories*

My third reading is from *Patumahoe: History & Memories* and is placed in the second half of the book in a chapter that examines the farming and rural lifestyle of the community. Preceding chapters focus on the early history of the community and establishment of infrastructure like the village, schools, and transport; for example, the chapter prior is an account of an outlying rural community within the Patumāhoe district, Helvetia. The reading is made up of two shorter excerpts that speak across time to each other. The first accounts for the early days of settler farming presented as an objective record, and the second offers an account of farming in the late twentieth century told from an expert commentator. The chosen excerpts illustrate how various

sources of evidence (earlier works, community records, and anecdotal remembering) and authorised accounts from local witnesses are combined into a single community account or historical description to be representative of farming activity in Patumahoe during these times. The two excerpts are included here:

YEARS OF STRUGGLE 1865–1900

In the early days, most Patumahoe farmers were agricultural labourers or tradesmen hoping to enjoy a life free from the controls of Britain's upper classes. From the start, however, they were handicapped by their tiny five- and ten-acre (two- or four-hectare) plots, while the casual labour work promised at larger nearby farms proved almost non-existent. Essentially, they were forced into subsistence farming.

Bush-felling provided jobs for a few but mostly settlers felled their own bush. Timber was used in the slab-sided houses, and puriri could be fashioned into railway sleepers which sold well as the main trunk line crept southward. Families survived partly by hunting birds, rabbits, wild pigs and cattle, eels and saltwater fish and by developing home gardens and orchards. Even when their plots were grassed and fenced, they could support only two or three cows, a few pigs and some chooks. It was a luxury to own a horse.

The economic depressions of 1865–1867 and 1876–1890 were brutal. Although the larger Mauku farms could produce grains, chaff, wool, beef and potatoes for Aucklanders, Patumahoe's mini farms could not. Despite lack of capital though, some tenacious farmers managed to enlarge their farms to become economically viable. Eventually, they could compete, if on unequal terms, with their Mauku neighbours. Grains, wool and beef were the most saleable items.

An encouraging development was the refrigerated ships that began carrying farm exports to Britain during the 1880s. They put new life into the embryonic dairy sector. More metalled roads and the promise of a Paerata to Waiuku railway were signs that by 1910 the district could hope for better times.

*(Patumahoe: History & Memories, 2016, p. 110)*¹⁴

CHANGING LAND USE

By Max Adams (Adams is a Pukekohe farm advisor and land valuer who has kept tabs on the changes from the 1960s to the 1980s.)

Like most rural communities in New Zealand, Franklin survived the 1930s Depression and two world wars with resilience. It became renowned as a food producer growing staple vegetables and providing all-year-round milk and dairy products. The rich volcanic soils were well suited to both activities. Many large intergenerational families were established, and the expectation was that subsequent generations would share in the prosperity.

The opening of global markets and deregulation of the economy in the 1980s put the squeeze on gardening families who responded with improved efficiencies, including the use of large machinery. This, in turn, led to the demand for large cropping blocks further south where many have expanded their operations.

It was more difficult for the pastoral farmers, especially those on 100-acre dairy farms who lost their town milk premiums and became uneconomic. Families were asset rich, but cash poor. Until then, farmers had almost acquired a sense of entitlement—the right to own and farm land as their predecessors

¹⁴ In between these two excerpts, the chapter offers accounts of dairy farming, sheep farming, farming memories, and horticulture to describe the development of different aspects of farming from the late nineteenth century to early twenty-first century, including more detailed stories of some farming experiences, such as Hellaby Farms, the Wai Shing enterprise, Kole King company, and the Hiku family.

had done and then hand it over to their heirs. Attitudes had to change. The day of the smallholder or lifestyle farmer was nigh.

In the 1980s, the local farmer-led council bent to pressure and the subdivision juggernaut was released. Over a period of ten years, most uneconomic dairy farms and many others were subdivided into horticultural blocks of one to four hectares. While most ended up as lifestyle blocks, it did provide the grounding for a substantial greenhouse industry throughout the district.

At the same time, some innovative crops were grown, such as kiwifruit, avocados, citrus, cut flowers and herbs. There were also ventures into aquaculture and many forms of intensive livestock production.

Overall, the intensification of land – especially close to an urban centre – is a wise use of resources. The combined economic and social benefits are compelling. When considering the advantage or disadvantage of rural subdivision, many residents believe that in Franklin, it has been justified.

(*Patumahoe: History & Memories*, 2016, p. 135)

The heading of the first excerpt immediately contextualises the passage into the struggle rhetoric of the early European settlers, arriving in New Zealand in the middle of the 1800s. There is no episodic creation and no building upon earlier events. It begins without preamble or explanation as *fait accompli*. The narration, compared to the other two texts, is seemingly more impersonal—there is no first person “I” or “we”. Instead, a middle-distance narration is observed that seeks compromise between a historical perspective and the immediate. The point of view of the farmers, a settler perspective, is cemented into the worldview of the text by an omniscient narrator who adopts a tone of authority and objectivity to present these experiences as the way it was. The use of middle-distance narration supports the tone of distant objectivity but tempers it with an element of the personal and the immediate. The tone, however, leaves little room for experience of difference. Discussion of farming (which is the core activity of the district), it suggests, begins with the newly landed Patumāhoe farmers—previously British “agricultural labourers or tradesmen”. In this passage, there is no reference to tangata whenua and their centuries of farming traditions (unlike Chapter One of the book that discussed this in detail). Instead, this chapter and excerpt infer that a record of farming began with the settlers and, as such, the industry was established upon their efforts.

The tone elicits sympathy for the farmers who travelled to New Zealand on a dream of freedom, “hoping to enjoy a life free from the controls of Britain’s upper classes”. The metaphor of the intrepid class battler coming to claim sovereignty of their own economic destiny is established. They are the underdogs in this point of view. The irony is not lost on readers that British upper classes remained in political and economic power in the new colony, and that the freedom they were seeking was not immediately theirs or that the new immigrants achieved the new status as owners by dispossessing the indigenous people. None of these tensions are unpacked in any detail in the text, nor explanations attempted. The casual labour the hopeful farmers were promised is simply described as “almost non-existent” and “they were forced into subsistence farming”, once again at the mercy of economic disparity. The narrator’s description of being “handicapped” by their “tiny” plots paints a picture of hardship and a poor deal, but the text does not offer explanation for why the plots were so small. The dream of economic freedom that the settlers were promised is denied to them as not immediately accessible, and they are locked, once again, into class and economic inequalities against more aggressive land speculators.

The metaphor of tough and rugged pioneers resonates in the language used throughout this short passage. The farmers’ dependence on subsistence farming while trying to fell their own bush, build their primitive “slab-sided houses”, and work on setting up railway infrastructure contributes to the description of their innovation and hard work. “Families survived” by hunting and growing their own food, planting gardens, and raising stock during “brutal” economic depressions. However, “some tenacious farmers” managed to “enlarge their farms”. It is suggested that the hard work of the farmers contributes not just to their survival but to their growing success and prosperity. Language use infers that a capitalist model of thriving quickly surpasses surviving to become the driving economic force for the district. The description of what they struggled to survive on,

“hunting birds, rabbits, wild pigs and cattle, eels and saltwater fish” and only affording “two or three cows, a few pigs and some chooks”, also reveals retrospection from a perspective of prosperity because for many readers this may, in fact, sound like a wealth of resources. It accurately describes the previously contented living conditions of iwi settled in the region earlier (and referenced in Chapter One of the book), in sharp contrast to the survival rhetoric of the new settlers and underscores the different, contested economic models. Without reference to the Māori worldview in these passages, the individualism of economic success is reinforced, and the farmers, who manage to leverage what little capital they have, managed to “become economically viable” to “compete” with other farming neighbours more successfully.

The theme of economic development is underscored in the final paragraph of the excerpt. Towards the end of the 1800s, the passage claims, “the district could hope for better times”. These assertions are built upon the inferred hard work of the pioneer farmers and their enterprise, reliant upon industrial progress of the railways and refrigerated ships, all of which enabled farmers to engage with wider trade around New Zealand and to their homeland of Britain. The metaphor of bringing life to the region through their efforts is conveyed by the idea of the “new life” of the “embryonic dairy sector”. The conceptualising of growing something new in the language used and giving life to an industry reinforces the saviour role of the pioneer as one who has come to bring economic vitality and implies that without their influence and activity, this would have been limited. Therefore, individual and family work and industry are the foundations upon which society is built.

The second passage shifts perspective to a more modern time, the end of the twentieth century. The passage title reflects upon the main themes of development of the farming land since the 1910s and, in so doing, picks up the narrative from where the first excerpt

ended. It infers an evolution of change. A named narrator is given the authority to speak on behalf of the community and their farming activities. In contrast to the omniscient narration of the first passage, the ethos of the personal speaker is established as a local “farm advisor and land valuer”—his credentials reinforce the authority of economics as the dominant point of view expressed in the accounts. Although the passage is framed as a personal account, it is also presented as representative of lived experience for the Pākehā farmers, and the speaker solicits credibility to speak on their behalf because of his known expertise. The perspective he offers is therefore offered as reliable.

The passage opens by strengthening the metaphor of the pioneer settler. The district, the narrator explains, “survived” the catastrophic events of the World Wars and Great Depression with “resilience”, emerging as a “renowned” food producer and successful farming district. The hope of prosperity that the first passage introduced has been fulfilled. However, that success is tempered by the third line of this excerpt that suggests their success is related to the “rich volcanic soils” of the land, implying that the land quality itself was a predeterminant of achievement. Nevertheless, this notion is not further explored. Ownership of land is the key to success, and the passage describes how “many large intergenerational families were established” as some farmers successfully acquired more land and secured it for further generations’ use. Through the language used, the model of pioneer success is reinforced again because it is implied that the earlier hardships of the pioneers were borne willingly to benefit their descendants. Indeed, the passage points out there was an “expectation” that “subsequent generations would share in the prosperity”. Accumulation of wealth and success secures a better future for the families of the individual farmers. No mention of community or the experience of community is expanded upon in the passage, and a culture of individual achievement emerges as a priority.

There is a striking shift of perspective in the language used in the second passage—what was once desirable is no longer enough. In reference to the changing land use, the narrator picks up the theme of economic depressions and tough times from the first passage (described as “brutal”) and talks about the “squeeze” that more recent depressions put onto “gardening families”. They respond with innovation, once again “improving efficiencies” and expanding “their operations” where possible. To survive, his language implies, farms needed to grow. When the narrator describes the challenges for the dairy industry, the “100-acre dairy farms”, surely a dream of success for the 1865 farmers on their five- and ten-acre “mini” plots, was no longer viable and became “uneconomic”. Farming families were “asset rich, but cash poor”. In response, the narrator critiques the “sense of entitlement” of the farmers to “own and farm land” and “hand it over to their heirs”. The language implies such a system is undesirable and unsustainable. The economic rhetoric is, however, sustained when the passage reveals that change is only associated with the use of land; the capitalist model of ownership and enterprise is still accepted without question. The change of attitudes, the passage infers, is not about who owns the land or why. Debate does not centre around social or political factors but the best economic use of the assets, which the passage suggests is a mixture of horticulture and housing. This is a response to the “subdivision juggernaut”, which implies a powerful force outside of their control. Indeed, the farmers “bent to pressure”, and land change was initiated. Once again, the farmers are the underdogs of the rhetoric. The passage highlights the loss of the tradition of land succession that has always been important to the local farmers and their families, as evidenced by a recent study of neighbouring Pukekohe farmers (Curran-Cournane et al., 2016). The passage does not, however, ponder the losses and gains of these land sales—either for the individual families or the community at large—and, instead, justifies the change as a “wise use of resources”. Rural subdivision, which will arguably have a significant impact on the

experience of community in the district, is presented as a logical outcome with “compelling” benefits (economic and social). The rhetoric of prosperity is reinforced as the consequence of hard work and rooted in the imagery of the rugged pioneer farmer who earned the success of his descendants through land accumulation and the ability to adapt and innovate in tough times without critical examination of political or economic forces. The notion of being politically or socially enfranchised or disenfranchised is avoided altogether in the excerpts.

What is revealed in the language and use of metaphor in these short passages is a generic narrative of Weber’s (2001) protestant work ethic: work hard, live well, and set up the next generation for success. Within this paradigm, the notion of subsistence is devalued, and progress or success is associated with accumulation and increasing personal wealth. The two passages, therefore, may focus on farming in the district, but they draw the reader’s attention to a broader social and economic Pākehā point of view, anchored in the dominant discourse that emerged from the early settler arrivals that has persisted ever since. The logos of struggle towards prosperity also speaks back to the entire book, which establishes and maintains a narrative structure that imposes a protestant work ethic logic onto each chapter and the overall text narrative. Tropes and imagery used paint a picture of the barren beginnings to which the settlers arrived and details their hard work over 150 years of settlement into something that is presented as significant and noteworthy. The passages end with hope and prosperity, and a pattern of transition from deficit to accomplishment dominates form and the rhetorical argument. The passages highlight that the point of view expressed in the excerpts is a culturally and socially loaded one, steeped in an economic worldview. In the text, it is implied that the perspective of the book’s narrative is representative of Patumāhoe as an “increasingly balanced” (*Patumahoe: History & Memories*, 2016, p. 216) history of community in New Zealand, but closer interpretation of these two passages emphasise settler discourse and

rhetoric. As has been noted, for instance, neither passage makes mention of the Māori perspective acknowledged at the opening of the book (in its first chapter). Farming is presented as an account from 1865 to present day that, although a community record, is weighted towards the metaphor and lived experience of the settler.

The trope of the settler functions within what historian Veracini (2010) terms “settler colonial imaginaries” (p. 12). Settlers, Veracini explains, assert their utopian sovereignty over their “new home” by domesticating the economy to their advantage to fulfil their desire for a better life for themselves and their descendants. However, the process of successful settlement disguises the capitalist system of wealth accumulation as the foundation of economic prosperity, and enterprise is promoted as more important than sociocultural or political values. The consciousness of being settled thus depends upon promoting a certain lifestyle or economic activity upheld by the political institutions. Veracini suggests that the “imaginary spectacle” (p. 75) of the ordered, settled community working hard and living together in harmony is upheld by “symbolic and ideological backdrop that epitomises settler industry” (p. 75) but is built upon capitalist orders. What results is a determination to uphold the ideal for “classless, stationary and *settled* [original emphasis] body politic” (p. 75), which is achieved through narrative constructs like those evident in the excerpts. For example, the point of view of the account of the passage justifies the development of the farming industry along the same philosophical and, thus, economic lines that Veracini suggests. The settler worldview therefore makes sense of an activity like farming according to an extremely specific point of view and calls upon images and metaphors to concretise them into local discourse.

What is interesting to note, however, is that the use of these metaphors is often so embedded into community discourse that language users incorporate them into speech and writing without conscious or prejudicial intent. Metaphors as a figure of speech offer

useful insight into social constructionist thinking because the ideas offer “building blocks” (Wetherell & Potter, 1988, p. 172) of community meaning that become part of how the community talks about itself as a form of social practice and as interpretative repertoires used to interpret and represent certain social realities (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Therefore, close reading of these metaphors and their use is a significant consideration of self-representation of identity and one way to understand better the community’s interpretation of a collective self.

The use of language and word choice, in addition to being steeped in settler metaphor, is reasonably casual and reminiscent of local colloquialism. This offers a suggestion of a “New Zealander” point of view. The tone and style of the language used in the passages moves away from scholarly monographs to a more casual record or as-told-to written account. For example, the narrator refers to “some chooks” (instead of chickens) and talks about deregulation putting “the squeeze on” farming families. A type of local “yarn” emerges from the passages that is consistent with the accounts in the rest of the book, which resonates with Frank Sargeson’s (1982) style of short story writing when he introduced a colloquialism to New Zealand literature in the 1930s, evocative of Chekhov’s realism. The literary style captures the unique or quirky moments of lives and presents them, without judgement, to the reader. What can result is a light-heartedness or casual diction that is not misplaced in historical records; in fact, it finds favour among readers and some scholars. Historians and other scholars have shown literary flair in moving beyond dry monographs and incorporating casual styles of writing with humour as a literary device. Crawford Somerset’s (1938) noteworthy work on *Littledene*, by way of illustration, successfully employs local diction and humour in his sociological study of rural life in Canterbury in the 1930s, and the popular and academic appeal of his writing has led to the text being used as an exemplar. Crothers (2016) reminds scholars that texts like *Littledene*, written in engaging styles, promote both the value of local history and the

creative ways it can be expressed. Nonetheless, some concern is expressed that promotion of a “New Zealand” style can detract from the cultural richness of the differences between Māori and Pākehā points of view in favour of a homogenising colloquialism (Bell, 2017; Johnson, 2010).

The Personality of Community

Close reading reveals how language presents an interpretation of social reality. The qualities and characteristics of the language used in the chosen passages of each of the three books demonstrates a distinctive point of view, which creates the different personalities of the communities being represented in the books. The language that is used to reflect upon and articulate their lived experiences (as witnesses) or the lived experiences of others (as editors or as-told-to writers) conveys a depth of meaning to the readers about their interpretation of their society and how they see themselves, perceived within specific settings in time and place. Literary scholars like Bakhtin (1981) acknowledge that point of view is relative and recognise that it offers a window into perspective but cannot presume omniscient interpretation of lived experience:

A point of view is never complete in itself; it is rather the perception of an event as it is perceived from a particular place, locatable only as opposed to any other place from which the event might be viewed. (Holquist, 1990, p. 163)

Rather than try to explain away the limitations of a relative or subjective point of view, which may be of concern in some historical analysis, in literature the author uses these points of view to add meaning to the text, “he welcomes them into his work” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 299). Close reading of local history texts, therefore, allows discovery of a wealth of meaning embedded into language and its literary use. The effective use of voice, for example the Tokelauan voice of *Matagi Tokelau* or the working-class voice of *Moturoa*, conveys a “speaking personality” or “speaking consciousness” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 434) of

the texts and the worlds they represent. The language used, and the voice within which it speaks, expresses a “particular way of viewing the world, one that strives for a social significance” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 333). Meaning is inferred and speaks back to the texts’ social contexts. This is primarily the reason that Bakhtin advocates that criticism pay careful attention to the artistic representation of voice and use of language in prose forms, especially their use of dialogue. The three passages reveal how language can be used creatively by the narrative point of view, such as to emphasise particular social realities. Even historians like Veracini (2010) admit that encounters with social consciousness may be better served by more creative, even fictional reconstructions because: “non-historical approaches sometime display an analytical sharpness that is seldom within the reach of traditional historical narratives” (p. 84). Given that life writing accounts successfully straddle creative self-expression as sincere yet personal records of lived experience, they are uniquely suited to capture social realities and still satisfy the demands for history scholarship.

The use of style and language reveals the quite different personalities of the three communities, expressed in different modes of orality. Two texts—*Matagi Tokelau* and *Moturoa*—explicitly reflect the as-told-to nature of the texts, and the *Patumahoe: History & Memories*’ preface states its reliance upon oral history and as-told-to life writing. All three assert a representation of community culture as spoken through the accounts gathered in the research and writing. *Matagi Tokelau* reclaims its indigenous voice by staying true to their language, making careful use of the English translation to retain its oral (spoken) quality. The text, although written, tries to reflect the performative nature of its telling in the style in which it is presented. In contrast, *Moturoa* and *Patumahoe: History & Memories* display features of secondary orality, which return some characteristics of orality to written texts, employed purposively to assert (*Moturoa*) or reassert (*Patumahoe*) the cultural identity of the community being

represented. The notion of secondary orality proposed by Ong (2012) reasons that in more modern times of improved technology, writers and speakers engage with questions of cultural identity in a different age of literacy and oral tradition, upheld and informed by changing technologies. Notwithstanding, a “strong group sense” (Ong, 2012, p. 134) has been engendered in writing, and the “individual feels that he or she, as an individual, must be socially sensitive” (p. 134). Orality, Ong argues, has become important once again but in a whole new mode, arguably represented in the case study texts. It has been shown in the excerpts that the spoken word—as a fundamental source and characteristic of life writing genres—informs the use of language and, in consequence, the representation of a social reality. Seen through the lens of life writing, the narrators and storytellers work out their identity in a “spoken” account that interprets the past from a particular point of view and articulates this collective self-expression through the written text.

When read to illuminate point of view, the texts thus reveal an implied construction of community. The “we” of the story is the lens through which the accounts are refracted, and a social order is encountered, interpreted, and promoted. The community functions as the protagonist of each text. Furthermore, the personality of this community is established through the language used and literary devices employed in writing, such as the work of narration, which is especially significant. Whereas the anonymous (though inferred as *toeaina* or elder led) collectivism of “we” in *Matagi Tokelau* explicitly denotes a spirit of unity personified in Tokelau’s text, the narrators of the other two texts are symbolically representative of their peers and neighbours—they speak on their behalf. Moturoa’s representation is a more personal narration spoken through collections of voices whereas Patumāhoe’s representation is conveyed by a mostly omniscient narration and speakers chosen to reflect upon certain topics. The repetition of community as an ideal, in the texts and the projects that craft them, implies an

experience of objective inclusion but, critically interrogated, always betrays a subjective point of view. Therefore, through use of language, community is spoken into being in these texts. Rather than reflecting upon an objective phenomenon, life writing (as literature *and* discourse) constructs a discovery of self or becoming—as an individual and part of a collective group (a geographical community in this case)—through encounters with others and different experiences. The “we” of the community thus speaks back, from inside out, to illuminate a point of view that reasserts a dominant discourse in the social environment or to raise a counter-discourse.

What is interesting, as evidenced in two of the three selections for close reading, is the temptation of the narrator to reconcile the tensions raised within the text. In *Matagi Tokelau* and *Patumahoe: History & Memories*, the passages end with a whimsy of pathos on a tone of emotional positivity. Community stability is upheld. In *Matagi Tokelau*, for instance, the suggestion of partnership between the local community and the visiting scientists is implied, and, in *Patumahoe: History & Memories*, decisions of enterprise or land use are justified as being of the community’s long-term benefit. *Moturoa*’s passage is more resistant to this temptation and sits somewhat more confidently within the discomfort of the tensions raised within its account and the nostalgia for the loss of community experience that Eileen laments in her closing. None, it could be argued, want to negate “the good stuff” of community that is recognised in their locale nor dwell too much on the more challenging aspects of critical reflection and interpretation. For two at least, there is tempering of language in the conclusion of the passage that concretises the written record into a more positive accounting.

This chapter, by examining how language is employed, reveals a deeper context of social meaning that uncovers a social consciousness that expresses itself as community ideology. The writers use language with intention to articulate a point of view that

legitimises a way of life and, in so doing, inadvertently faces tensions with other, conflicting points of view. *Matagi Tokelau*, for example, portrays the view of the colonised encountering the coloniser and, in this experience, asserts their interpretation and evaluation of the relationship. The community reasserts their subject position, not in a judgemental stance as may be expected but as one of reconciliation. The excerpt demonstrates how the experience reconciles both worldviews to the advantage and benefit of both—the proposed template for political partnership. *Moturoa* asserts reclamation of story or ideology is not just about a point of view but also how language is used purposively to state a subject position. The storytellers and narrators reject the need to edit or polish the rough edges of their language use and present themselves, with a degree of vulnerability, as they are. In addition, it is here that they defend the significance and value of their personal and collective identity as they demonstrate an ease to present themselves unapologetically—an obvious quality of life writing. Lastly, *Patumahoe: History & Memories*' creative use of imagery reveals a longstanding tradition of social meaning encapsulated in the particular economic worldview of the settler trope. However, this comes into some conflict with the bicultural, balanced history the community project hoped to present and demonstrates that despite the best intention of neutrality, language reveals value-based subject positions, especially in writing associated with the representation of a group.

This chapter, therefore, extends the findings of the previous chapter to reveal different aspects of the books. It also draws attention to how the texts and their producers each did something unique to tell the story of their place from a particular, socially responsive and collective point of view, which depends upon—to a greater or lesser extent—on managing collaboration and dialogue between writers and members of the local community. Chapter Seven examines questions raised about collaboration, authority, and representation further, utilising interviews with writers and producers of local

history book projects to reflect critically upon a wider range of project practices and experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Chapter Seven

Grappling With Collaboration: Aspirational, Awkward, or Impossible?

“Successful conversations require reciprocity and a mutual respect among participants, as well as mutual interest and balance of contribution.” (Kathleen McLean, public historian)

When local history is studied as life writing, the examination of its collaborative practice is imperative and responds to debate about the narrative relationships and ethical responsibilities of writers noted in Chapter Two. For this reason, the discussion now shifts to looking at the complexities of collaboration in local and community history writing beyond the three case studies, not looking at texts but drawing on the experience of the interview participants. In this chapter, I report on the directed conversations conducted with a selection of local history and community book writers in stage two of my research. The three case studies (from stage one) revealed how their producers negotiated collaboration with the local communities and how these practices influenced the art forms that emerged. In the interviews, I examine how other authors of a wider-range of projects in New Zealand negotiate the concepts of authority, representation, and authorship in the creation of a “community” story.

In studying local history as life writing, the practice and problems of collaboration becomes a significant object of study. The interviews reveal that the call for collaboration is problematic for many of these writers and uncovers similar tensions to those exposed in the case study findings. This chapter argues that collaboration is desirable in public history projects such as the production of local history books but, in practice, writers of

local and community history often find themselves in tenuous positions as they try to answer to competing interests in their work. The interviews offered an invaluable opportunity for the writers to reflect critically upon these positions in their experiences with collaboration. On the one hand, writers and project teams may be encouraged to engage dialogically with grassroots storytelling but, on the other hand, they acknowledge the tradition of independence in history writing as a genre. In response, the different groups of writers—academic scholars, professional writers, and untrained community volunteers—answered by strategising the practice of collaboration pragmatically according to their various subject positions: they grappled with what collaboration can or should be, whether it is something to be pursued as life writing critics propose, or whether it is wisest to avoid it altogether.

Collaboration fits within Bakhtin's (1981) philosophy of dialogism. It describes, in part, the relational encounter between authors and storytellers (the local witnesses) to produce a work, influenced by the context within which they are situated. Political and social forces inform the dynamics of power and authority to influence the encounters, which has implications for a writer's interpretation of collaboration and, in consequence, the project process and text. Bakhtin (cited in Holquist, 1990) challenges authors to be aware of their part in, and influence over, how they produce texts. For Holquist, growing consciousness embodies authorial responsibility:

What the self is answerable *to* is the environment; what it is responsible *for* [emphasis in original] is authorship of its responses: "It is not the content of a commitment that obliges me but my signature underneath it". It is largely the way I use language that lets me sign my name, in this responsible sense.
(Holquist, 1990, pp. 167–168)

Authorship takes on a moral quality, a position that resonates strongly in life writing criticism. Eakin (1999) explains that one of the ethical pitfalls of writing about others is

the complexity about exercising authority in representing the stories and voice of others: “How that power is exercised becomes the central problem of the ethics of life writing, for there is no getting around the fact that ventriloquism, making the other talk, is by definition a central rhetorical phenomenon of these narratives” (pp. 180–181). Eakin thus proposes that writers need improved critical understanding of what collaboration requires to become more conscious of the importance of the ethical production of life writing texts. Collaboration, he suggests, is a space of negotiated give-and-take where power and agency are acknowledged and worked out in a narrative relationship.

Stumm (2014) adds to this definition, describing this central problem of the ethics of life writing collaboration as a kind of relationship building. In her view, collaboration seeks a coproductive partnership built upon ethical dialogue, which sets up an internal conscience within the writer and keeps them alert to their entanglement with the stories and lives of others:

Dialogic communication is clearly at the heart of co-laboring, where two people must engage with one another, address and respond to each other, share a narrative space, and produce a story between them ... Many life writing scholars have noted, however, that collaborative relationships are charged with problems of power, politics, and property (p. 386)

In life writing, collaboration describes people meeting in a narrative space and working together to produce a story—which is precisely, one can argue, what takes place in local and community history writing. An idealised notion of democratic collaboration may imply an egalitarian practice where a writer and storytellers meet on equal grounds but, as Stumm (2014) points out, the relationships are often a meeting of authorities and emotionally charged. Application of life writing criticism to local history, therefore, asks how writers approach the narrative spaces of local history storytelling and writing, and how they understand their authorial responsibility in response to the genre. Is

collaboration treated as an opportunity or a problem? This chapter will argue that, according to the interviewees, collaboration is perceived neither solely as an opportunity nor a problem *per se* but, rather, something that the writers believe they need to manage carefully, albeit for different reasons. It may be aspirational to some and vital to others, but collaboration is also questionable, even troubling, to many.

Shared Authority in Public History Projects

The notion of *shared authority*, a term coined by Frisch (1990), is one articulation of collaboration that is touted as an effective principle to guide oral history projects and that has strongly influenced how public history projects contemplate collaborative practices and forms. Therefore, the concept is important to my discussion and informs a notion of dialogic partnership and ethical responsibility within local history writing. It also shifts focus from the typical two-person encounter Stumm (2014) and Eakin (1999) write about to viewing community as a collective, representing groups of people, which is fitting for local history books and, hence, significant to my interpretation of the writers' experiences about collaboration. In this section, therefore, I offer a brief commentary of shared authority as a potential face of collaboration in local history book projects.

Oral historians were growing increasingly sensitive to their complicity in maintaining historical hegemonies at the time of Frisch's (1990) paper and were looking for ways to open public participation in certain types of history projects. Frisch's work provoked an awakening mindfulness of a writer's/producer's responsibilities in public history work that resonates loudly with collaborative life writing criticism:

Not only might this dialogue from different bases of authority more regularly inform the process of participation in design and development, but it might more deeply characterize the experience of finished products themselves. If oral

historians need to understand that their method involves much more than the extraction of knowledge from human history mines, public historians need to realize that their method can do much more than merely redistribute such knowledge. It can, rather, promote a more democratized and widely shared historical consciousness, consequently encouraging broader participation in debates about history, debates that will be informed by a more deeply representative range of experiences, perspectives, and values. (Frisch, 1990, p. xxii)

Shared authority suggests a dialogic *synthesis* of authority that meets somewhere between the voices of the authoritative scholars and professionals as the traditional writers of books and the voices of the storytellers within the community from whom the stories originate (Frisch, 1990). Such collaboration makes it possible to preserve “scholarly and intellectual authority ... [*and* authority of grassroots community] ... to explore and interpret their own experience” (1990, p. xxi). In consequence, Frisch advocates for dialogue that encourages broader participation in debates about history, engages with questions about hegemony, and seeks to include new and sometimes unexpected voices in the conversation that may be suggestive of new forms of public history writing, such as revealed in the three case study books. Shared authority is more than the negotiation of individual roles of authorship and storytelling; it facilitates the rise of historical consciousness (as a moral philosophy that enacts Bakhtin’s (1981) theory of dialogism) and the bringing together of different points of view in such a way that influences both process and form of history storytelling. Critics, such as Shopes (2002), responded to the concept of shared authority to reflect critically upon the different interests brought to bear on public history research and writing—for example, scholars completing research for institutions or educational advancement on the one hand and grassroots projects documenting their own experiences on the other hand, each of which rely upon different forms to “tell” the stories of history to their audiences (pp. 588–589). Local history books usually try to reach a compromise that includes both popular

community stories with wide general appeal and some level of scholarly or professional interpretation that will also appease the critics. However, finding the right balance is complicated. Shopes (2002), reflecting upon the complicated dynamics of oral history projects conducted across the states of Pennsylvania and Maryland in the United States of America, observes:

While there are fine examples of the process working well, at times negotiated history can be unsatisfactory to all parties—too critical and de-localized for community members, too uncritical and narrow for scholars. The tension points to a deeper issue: the essential disjunction between professional history and history as it is popularly understood. While it may at times be necessary to decline participation in a community project on principled grounds, it is precisely the opportunity such projects provide for opening up dialogue with the public about the nature of historical inquiry that, to my way of thinking, makes them eminently worth doing. (p. 598)

The promise of dialogue, Shopes (2003) argues, is the political heart of “both the method and the ethic—or perhaps one should say the politics—of the oral history enterprise ... [encouraging shared authority as a philosophical basis of] ... democratic cultural practice” (p. 103) of public history projects. However, Frisch’s (1990) concept of shared authority is very nuanced and, over time, became simplified into an idea of benevolent producers being willing to give away some of their authority as a generous act of public service to community interests. Frisch (2011) reacted to this interpretation and clarified his theory, citing concern that it was being misinterpreted as “sharing authority” rather than the “shared authority” he intended to convey. Authority, he argues, was not something that could be bestowed by scholars or writers:

The difference I had in mind was this: the construction “Sharing Authority” suggests this is something we do—that in some important sense “we” have authority, and that we need or ought to share it. “A Shared Authority”, in contrast, suggests something “is”. [Meaning-making and interpretation is shared,

or dialogic by nature.] In this sense, we don't have authority to give away, really, to the extent we might assume. Thus, I argued that we are called not so much to "share authority" as to respect and attend to this definitional quality. We need to recognize the already shared authority in the documents we generate and in the processes of public history engagement—a dialogic dimension, however implicit, through which "author-ship" is shared by definition, and hence interpretive "author-ity" as well. We need to act on that recognition. (Frisch, 2011, pp. 127–128)

Shared authority is the realisation that authority is shared *ipso facto*—it exists even if critics and practitioners do not explicitly attend to it. Furthermore, Frisch (2011) proposes it is time to move beyond the debate of "letting go" of or "holding on" to authority to engage with shared authority mainly as a means "to enact an active dialogue between experience and expertise, between people working together to reach new understandings" (p. 136). When scholars or professional writers respond to the concept of shared authority in local history writing, they recognise the implicit authority that the collective storytellers or community maintains over their stories and accounts. Likewise, the local storytellers recognise the authority exercised by scholars and, together, they negotiate a partnership that meets their mutual interests to agree upon a narrative and produce a type of document they both find suitable. However, this apparently simple notion is not so easy to negotiate in the field, and "shared authority" is still being debated by writers and public historians: "Historical representation (or the lack thereof) does not magically spring forth; it is an accomplishment. More often than not, what frequently shapes historical representation is hegemony" (Sandul, 2019, p. 101). Whereas Shopes (2002) does not single out projects that exemplify the idea of shared authority, others like Sandul (2019) demonstrate how the principle finds expression in projects like his oral history work with the East Texan African American community of Nacogdoches. The intentional pursuit of shared authority observed in practice requires the enactment of a type of "moral historiography" (Sandul, 2019, p. 102) among project teams, which

finds support in the ethical collaborative stance of life writing scholars, such as Couser (1998, 2003, 2005), who theorises about bringing together different interests in the process and forms of autobiographical (and, by implication, biographical) representations. According to Couser (1998), the collaborative nature of these accounts is dialogic in process and operates like an intimate partnership, “rather like marriages and other domestic partnerships: partners enter into a relationship of some duration, they ‘make life’ together” (p. 335). His approach is a counter to hegemony, and he argues that it must be built upon recognition of partners and their positions of power or authority towards one another:

The fundamental [ethical rule] might be a variant of the Golden Rule: do unto your partners as you would have your partner do unto you. Thus, autobiographical collaborations should be egalitarian; neither partner should abuse or exploit the other. Given the subject’s stake in the textual product, a corollary principle would be that the subject should always have the right to audit and edit the manuscript before publication. As we shall see, however, in some circumstances, this is easier said than done. (Couser, 1998, p. 335)

Theorisation about collaboration and its articulation as shared authority as one possible solution has implications for authorship beyond the autobiographical too—it informs how the different parties in local history book writing encounter one another and are involved in the construction of knowledge about the community. Collaboration implies democratising of practice or the promotion of dialogue and, when applied to local history writing, suggests that writers have some ethical responsibility in their interpretation of authority and authorship in their representation of a local community. The notion of shared authority may, for instance, exist *ipso facto*, but it can be silenced in practice unless scholars and writers act upon it intentionally.

The directed conversations uncovered contested positions of the writers towards the idea of collaboration, influenced by the competing interests that they struggled to

reconcile from their various subject positions. Two opposing subject views emerged from the interviews, which revealed insight into the different writers' attitudes towards authority and authorship in local history writing: a tradition of hegemony upheld by some writers and, in contrast, an emerging practice of grassroots response among other writers. Next, the chapter considers whether any evidence of enactment of shared authority is revealed in the interviews, and, last, considers the writers' experiences of being held accountable to the different interests they encounter in representing "community" in the practice of their craft and authority.

Knowledge Hegemony: Top-Down Practice Persists

The two history scholars and three professional writers with a history background that I interviewed do not, typically, pursue the types of co-labouring partnerships Stumm (2014) or Eakin (1999) propose when they write local or community history books.

Instead, informed by their training in history, an academic hegemony persists. Practice, according to their experiences, reinforces top-down assertion of authority where writers are responsible to write about the history of a local community, stimulated by their own scholastic interests in a town or district, or as a commissioned work. Under these working conditions, the five writers approach narrative spaces as a source of storytelling with less intention of treating contributors like narrative partners. Narrative relations are, therefore, negotiated on the writers' terms.

In the interviews, the two scholars were wary of the idea of collaboration in general, preferring to be, "*largely left alone to decide how the project should be done*" (Paul). Samuel concurred that historians are "*still very individualistic*" and would avoid collaborative work if possible. Both Paul and Samuel felt strongly that collaboration is not characteristic of their own practice or experiences with local history writing even though public history debate, as has been shown, has more recently encouraged a shift

towards partnership. Perhaps even more significant is that, for these two scholars, the reliability of storytellers and, therefore, the need to even negotiate narrative spaces or relationships is questionable from the outset. They favour traditional evidence-based research in their work, which means that they prefer to rely upon documented evidence or records rather than community storytellers. They justified this by explaining that storytellers can be unreliable sources:

Well the worst is when you are interviewing and hear these porkies [lies], you have to be very polite and very careful not to contradict them to their face, but gently steer them around to the possibility that they might have been misinformed—very tricky. You have to be very diplomatic when interviewing people ... People will tell stories that have sometimes been constructed and reconstructed over the years, influenced by their circumstances. I'm not saying that the written record is always infallible, but it is a much more reliable source. (Samuel)

Samuel's position asserts his scholastic authority over the storytellers. He perceives it is his role to question or challenge their stories, based on the evidence in the records. His training gives him authority to test and interpret sources, including storytellers. His approach argues that it is his responsibility to exercise his scholastic power and authority over the encounter to give it validity rather than facilitate a narrative space of democratic encounter. This position eschews the mandate of collaboration as developing narrative relationships between producers and the community that they are writing about.

Given the stance the scholars expressed against collaboration, I asked their opinion about creative history texts that are represented without named authors or sources within the texts, such as *Matagi Tokelau* and its anonymous yet personal accounts. These notions were deeply troubling for Samuel. In his opinion, their attempts at co-authoring a community point of view highlights a significant problem with collaborative writing for historians:

It's postmodernist and leaves me uneasy as to whether I have a grip on this or whether another reader would take a completely different slant on it ... It does have a lot to do with authorship and what is being said. If you have a team of writers and you have all been commenting on and modifying each other's writing, then it becomes very difficult to pin down a particular statement that has been authored. And that raises all sorts of warning flags for academic historians who will wonder whose is the voice here? Is this a genuinely collective voice or whether somebody has persuaded the rest of the group that their point of view is valid? (Samuel)

From this point of view, the promotion of narrative relationships as a communal voice that emerges from coproduction or collective writing confuses the interpretation of the story and detracts from the scholarly necessity to create reliable records. Samuel argues that the creative styles of authorship of these sorts of history books detract from their long-term value and have, therefore, questionable benefits to the genre.

Professional writers Elizabeth and Helen share similar views to Paul and Samuel: they did not recognise community collaboration as important in their work. They based the practice of their craft upon their academic training within history and saw no need to invest in or negotiate narrative spaces as ethical writing partnerships. They explained that their responsibility is to “*write something that is accessible and lively, and is something that people in the community are going to respond to ... [so] ... you shape the story*” (Helen) to do so. Elizabeth and Helen state that writers plan the outline of the community book from their review of public records or evidence, such as newspaper articles and local organisation records, or according to a project brief and seek out encounters with storytellers and private records from among the community (such as diaries or photographs) that will benefit the publication. This requires some negotiation of narrative relationship but does not direct research or writing practice:

We realised, well of course we could have found a lot more people, but we didn't need to, we found out everything we needed to find out. I'm sure there was more we

could have found out, but we were happy with what we had so we interviewed as many people as we wanted to really. (Elizabeth)

They invited storytellers into a narrative space on their terms and approached the idea of collaboration cautiously and lightly. The other professional history writer, Sophia, who worked more collaboratively with local volunteer historians among the community, explained that while it was possible to expand the breadth of the project to be more participatory or collaborative, she was mindful of the limits of her work: *“that was all I was contracted to do and I had to keep within that”*. By their reasoning, collaboration is practised by professional writers only to the extent that it is necessary to fulfil their work obligations and even that, Sophia explained, is *“a little bit hit-and-miss at times”*. The narrative relationship that Stumm (2014), as a scholar of life writing literature, advocates as vital in the space of collaborative storying was not given any serious consideration among these history scholars and graduates.

Like Paul and Samuel, the professional writers justified decisions they made about who to invite into *their* narrative space. As a result, these encounters did not accommodate fully developed dialogic narrative relationships but only a limited encounter of sorts. According to the proponents of collaborative public history, this exercise of authority limits the potential of dialogue in the community project. Furthermore, there was no opportunity for the storytellers that they did approach to comment upon or influence the narrative that emerged in writing. However, Helen argued against any suggestion that the community storytellers would be interested in providing feedback. While she agreed to an element of co-labour in meeting and talking to witness accounts, she was quite confident that the storytellers were happy to let the professional writers take responsibility to complete the actual work of writing or speaking on their behalf:

Quite a lot of the people we were speaking to were fairly relaxed, they were pleased that a book was being written but they weren't particularly concerned about how they were going to appear. It simply didn't figure a lot in this book. (Helen)

A tension emerges in this response, which makes a bold evaluation of the community's disinterest in how contributions would appear in the book. In discussions held with other interviewees, especially local community members, this was, in fact, especially important to their evaluation of the book, and they were acutely sensitive to how the accounts were written and presented in the books. In contrast, from Helen's point of view, the producers' responsibility to the community was to engage with the stories from within the community to inform their work and then to present a book that responded to what the writers had learned. The narrative responsibility of all three professional writers is to listen carefully to the story of the grassroots community. However, collaboration itself is not an aspiration for them, nor its difficulty something that troubles them—they distance themselves from the public history debate about partnership and coproduction.

The interviews with the professional history writers indicate a practice that is a legacy of the tradition of history writing by academic historians with the addition of the professional writer's attitude to fulfilling a contract. The projects, initiated with a publisher or from a community group, are commissioned and should only take a limited time. The narrative encounter, from this point of view, is not approached as sharing a narrative space. Instead, it is something to be carefully managed by the authoritative historian or professional writer who applies the rigours of their scholastic training to ensure the reliability of the local history and, for the commissioned works, fulfils the requirements of their contract. This is different to the academic freedom of scholars pursuing study of local history for their own research and scholastic interests, although

they do have other institutional requirements to fulfil, such as publication, teaching, and budget targets.

Therefore, the application of life writing criticism to local history writing challenges practice for scholars and professional writers from a history background and asks them to reconsider the relevance of narrative relationships as part of their responsibility or answerability to the genre and the public debate about democratisation of history as applied to local and community history writing. However, other practitioners do not agree with the perspectives of the historians interviewed.

Destabilising Hegemony: Pushing Back

Some producers—the five local community group volunteers, the life writing professional, and two anthropology scholars—push back against the authoritative voice of scholarship to assert that partnership is more important to the significance of local and community history than upholding reliability of “evidence” or professional independence. For these writers and coproducers, the aspiration for collaboration creates opportunity to challenge the forces of intellectual hegemony in local history book projects—a position that resonates from the case study books that assert local voice as a more important authority over local history writing.

The anthropology scholars, in their interviews, promoted collaboration and partnership as vital to the performance of their discipline. The shift from ethnographic to autoethnographic approaches, for example, privileges an insider view to the study of groups and their experiences. In doing so, they destabilise the tradition of top-down scholarship in favour of grassroots interests and encourage an environment better suited to enacting shared authority. Therefore, the types of ethnographies that they produce rely upon careful negotiation of the narrative spaces and relationships that Stumm (2014) advocates, even if they do not necessarily use the same literary terms to describe their

practice. Daniel, for example, explained that his project was built upon the basis of collaboration from the start:

I was visiting his family and he said, do one on us. Do one on XXX. He was strongly pushing me to do this, "I really want this history recorded". In a way I felt easy about that. I never felt that I had pushed myself on other people really; it had been the other way around. He really wanted me to do it. So that comes through in the book. It was a partnership with XXX which is central to it all. It was a collaborative thing And I just think that was the way to go. (Daniel)

Daniel's invitation into the community is not dissimilar to the professional historians' commissions, but their experiences diverged when Daniel built upon the notion of partnership to record and write the iwi history. He acknowledged his fortune to have a "kind of mentor figure" from within the community who "guided" him initially. According to Daniel, having this community reference point directing his practice meant that:

In a way [the community partner] was also orchestrating the voice of the community as much as I was. I was doing it through my interviews, but he was behind it because he knew the community so well, but he didn't have a particular story that he wanted told at all. He wanted me to find a story, but that he would help to say these are the voices that would tell that story. (Daniel)

What emerged was what Daniel saw as a conversation that unfolded between himself and the community storytellers. The dialogue helped to produce a book that not only told the history of the community but also represented them as partners in the process. Dialogic relationships between Daniel, the community guide, and local storytellers opened a narrative space among them, within which they nurtured a mutually beneficial narrative relationship. For Daniel, this required a shift in perspective where he approached the community as partners and, similar to the producers of *Matagi Tokelau*, remained acutely conscious of his responsibility to work with them and treat them as research collaborators. This practice, which Stumm (2014) and Eakin (1999) would

describe as ethical collaborative practice, was a boon to Daniel's scholarship as well as the community. In fact, he suggested that the work was likely more valuable to the people he was responsible to because of the nature of the collaborative partnership:

You get it wrong so easily if you don't have inside knowledge. ... And I think that makes it also more valuable to people themselves because it becomes more true to their voice. It's very difficult to do. (Daniel)

Despite the promotion of collaboration as a rising intellectual shift across academic disciplines such as anthropology, translating the aspiration into practical scholarship is not easily achieved. Poignantly, Daniel was not able to replicate this approach elsewhere or at other times in his career. The level of difficulty to manage collaboration well, while not entirely impossible, seriously complicates the work of scholars and depends on available and willing partnerships with local communities, which becomes more difficult to attain if, as the interviews with the community group volunteers revealed, an uneasy attitude towards scholastic authority endures, including some measure of distrust.

The community volunteers' point of view was adamant that collaboration and the subversion of intellectual hegemony in local history writing are vital to the success of the genre, regardless of whatever difficulties they may pose. All five of the local history group members were outspoken about the necessity of creating opportunities for the writers to engage with the stories of local community members in a narrative *partnership*. David was emotive when he spoke about the significance of such a shift and used vivid metaphors about teamwork in sports teams to emphasise his point. He spoke at some length about the importance of community members working alongside the project team members, especially the professional writers or scholars. For David, the threat of having a dominating authoritative voice that dictates a community narrative is mediated by collaboration:

Yes, the more collaborative you are, the less chance you have got of one person firing their bullet ... That's another good thing about collaboration; it's pretty hard to have a big ego. The best way to sort out [sic], the best person to sort out a smart bugger on the rugby team is the rest of the rugby team. (David)

The writers, such an attitude suggests, are answerable to the local community and responsible for maintaining an atmosphere of mutual regard within the narrative space. This attitude recognises the community in local history storytelling more as partners or teammates and asserts their influence over the balance of power, politics, and property. This fits with what Stumm (2014) calls being at play in the narrative spaces, pushing back against the hegemonic forces that may seek to temper collaboration. By David's reasoning, negotiation of the narrative space prevents a particular agenda by any one person being exerted over the project. His metaphoric "firing their bullet" hints at an aggressive stance of authority exerted over others to the detriment of the implied victim (being shot at). He revealed his distrust of singular authoritative points of view or interpretations (that "*smart bugger*") and argued that collaboration mitigates any single person putting "*their slant on it too much*". This is an exercising of power that he appeared sensitive to with his frequent circling back to this point (repeating a similar sentiment at different times in the interview) to give an indication of what he perceived to be the need to reclaim passionately the community's place in the storytelling partnership in local history work. Collaboration, by such argument, preserves the democratisation of history records for community. Therefore, the local history group volunteers interviewed recommended that collaboration needs to be carefully and consciously managed by writers or project teams to avoid books being overpowered by the traditionally dominant voices of scholarship. The voices from below, in this subject position, assert their authority to speak for themselves—a position recognised and protected in the scholarship of the anthropology scholars too.

Shared Authority: Mine, Yours, or Ours?

Collaboration is built upon the idea of these different authority positions (writers, scholars, and local volunteers) working together. Yet, writers approach narrative relationships from quite different perspectives as has been shown above, which complicates the enactment of the concept of shared authority in their work too. As also noted earlier, shared authority is a significant consideration when life writing criticism, which incorporates oral history theory such as Frisch (1990, 2011), is applied to the study of local history writing and its reliance upon collaborative project practices. Therefore, it was insightful that some evidence of the enactment of shared authority emerged from the writers' recollections of their experiences. The writers and coproducers interviewed did not refer to the term "shared authority" directly in the discussions since, for many, it is a term used outside their experiences, but analysis of the interviews revealed evidence of their growing awareness of the application of the concept or, at least, a related idea.

The local history volunteers advocated for careful negotiation of authority between community storytellers (the local participants), the project team (writers and researchers), and scholar contributors. This appears to be an unconscious recognition of shared authority *ipso facto*. An important realisation emerged during the interviews with the local history group producers. As they spoke, they all in one way or another came to the realisation that their work had most value when embedded as a discussion among their community members, the project team responsible for the book, and the scholars who informed or influenced it—they observed "truth" was worked out as a conversation between various partners. The concept of a community conversation (or dialogue) was vital. Betty explained that, in trying to work out their community story:

We would have some good debate. Usually in those sorts of situations there has to be a grain of truth there somewhere ... You need to check your facts, and then have another conversation. (Betty)

Dialogue produced a narrative that contained a measure of “truth” that was acceptable for all partners. For Betty, the process of conversation was, therefore, more important than the content of the record created—the opportunity to talk through different points of view, to work out some kind of truth, was vital to their practice from her experience. Her enactment of shared authority is consistent with Frisch’s (2011) view of the dialogic dimension of negotiating “author-ship ... [and] ... author-ity” (p. 128). Authorship of the books is an act of authority exerted over the community story and, from her point of view, exemplifies shared authority when authors negotiate the content with their subjects to agree upon the “truth” of the local story—a process Betty described as “*winkling it out*”. The sentiment of the need for shared authority for initiating public dialogue as a construction of story was echoed in all the community volunteer interviews, which advocated for broad public participation from community members to honour community authority and create opportunities for local storytellers to contribute to the books being crafted.

The idea of collaboration as an obligation rather than an intrinsic part of the project was also found in the interviews. Volunteer Tom pointed out on more than one occasion that: “*There has been ample opportunity for people to put their things in and say what to include, there was ample opportunity*”. The project was a success, he reasoned, because it was open to participation, and the project team could not be judged if people did not want to participate. The invitation to participate sufficed. Such reasoning highlights a tension that participation is, of course, entirely voluntary, and, while the authority of the community is recognised, it is at the members’ discretion whether they act upon this authority. Wendy (a volunteer in the same project) added a subtle aside to Tom’s statement that is similarly defensive and confirms a tension that underpins the idealism of widespread participation: “*Yes, [the project writer] gave every chance*”. This telling statement suggests that the project leader invited partnership as part of the assertion of

their authority and that the writer or project leader ultimately retained the power to enact or recognise authority. It was at their discretion, like the position stated by the history professionals earlier, whether they wanted to seek participation or not. This resonates with Sandul's (2019) argument that acknowledging shared authority as a given may be valid, but it requires an intentional act by someone to be applied to practice. One may desire shared authority as an ideal, but there is unresolved tension about other exercises of authority that persists (including one's own). Ultimately, as evidenced in the interviews, the writers retain the authority to invite local storytellers or even scholars to join the conversation or not. A writer can choose to facilitate a process of dialogic engagement like Frisch (2011) suggests, but this depends upon managing the democratic practice Shopes (2003) proposed. Therefore, ultimately, it is a matter of choice, not expectation.

The idea of a project champion emerged across all the directed conversations to describe someone (usually the writer or local committee chairperson) who willingly stepped into a role of leadership to ensure the completion of the publication. David's comment about his project team manager confirmed the authority of this champion: "[The community chair] *stood up to this one [scholar's] perspective and said no, I am the boss. I admired [them] for that*". David's position is more overt than Tom and Wendy's. For him, shared authority is not undermined but added to by the champion's authority, which is expressed in their project leadership style. From David's point of view, this person needs to act in a position of authority and that includes challenging the authority of others in the perceived best interests of the project. The local community volunteers saw the actions of their project champions as acting in their interests and holding others in check, safeguarding the community authority. It gives rise to a slightly paternalistic tone revealed unintentionally by their observations.

As the conversation proceeded, David returned to the idea of the competing interests of scholars and locals. He appeared to have a lot of angst about the encounter between these two sometimes oppositional forces on local history writing:

[Scholars/writers] can decide that because they are a professional, they are better than the farmer who might be just as intelligent. You've got to get a balance between the two, a balance between the raw and the refined. I think that is very important. (David)

A clear concept of shared authority is understood in David's words. He emphasised the importance of finding equilibrium between the voice of the scholar and the voice of the farmers in his community, similar to Shopes (2002). To David, this notion of balance kept the perceived authority of both parties accountable in a reciprocal balance to each other. David reacted against the authority of the "refined" voice here and implied that these professional voices may be perceived as superior to the "raw" voice of the farmer but reasserted that while they have different points of view, they are both worthy of respect.

Such a stance answers the question of "whose story is it?" with a collective "it is ours". Collaboration, as experienced by David, is about finding the right balance, and this becomes one possible ethical position towards shared authority that finds expression in being multiauthored. It is "mine", "yours", and, more importantly, "ours" at the same point in time. Notwithstanding, the subtext to David's statement is once again confrontational as he reasserted the importance of the community standing up for its own authority rather than being usurped by the professionals—a need to defend one's right to reciprocate. David believes that without interference, the scholars or professionals will reassert their authority over the local voices. They must be managed, arguably by the project champion.

This attitude is supported by Charles's interview. He described the importance of working alongside a professional writer and scholar in their project as a key contributor to the success of their book project but took care to explain how the authority of these professionals was held in check by the community's authority over their own story:

If we had just engaged a historian and said you go and write the history of XXX, here's a bit of information use it or lose it—do what you like. You know go your own way. I don't think we would have got a publication that would embrace us all. It would be very difficult for one person to put together something that everybody sort of agrees with. (Charles)

The acknowledgement of the authority of both the community and project team, and the community and professionals facilitated a dialogic synthesis that Charles believed benefited the project process and, more importantly, the finished product they produced. The synthesis enabled the community to exercise some authority by their participation in the process but, equally significant, the process and product benefited from the authority of the scholars and professionals involved too. Charles acknowledged that the project borrowed authority from the professionals to lend credibility to the local story. It was important to their community that the project, which required a significant investment of time and money, be perceived as having value and that included being well-written, professionally presented, and of some interest to the general public (not just the members of the local community):

I have a few publications here ... and I remember we looked at all these and I said yes some of them are beautiful books with glossy photographs, but it is badly written! It is always a pity when they are badly written. It's not the fault of people but once again I think if you want a document that is going to last and be credible it has to have some professional element. (Charles)

A balance of authority is not only an assertion of a moral position, it can be pragmatic. Community projects in Charles's experience can leverage the authority of their partners

to benefit community interests while, at the same time, recognising that the scholars and writers need to enjoy benefits too.

The interviews with the professional writers revealed somewhat more complex and conflicting methodological interpretations of shared authority, depending on their position in favour of, or rejection of, collaboration. As revealed earlier, the professional history writers interviewed tended to avoid community partnerships for the most part. Their position opines that it is their job to write about the community with scholastic diligence, but this does not presuppose participatory practice with community storytellers as Shopes's (2002) interpretation of shared authority suggests. Both Elizabeth and Helen maintained their professional authority over the project as the highest priority. They were motivated primarily by professional self-interests, and Elizabeth's rejection of any suggestion of community partnership was unequivocal:

I never felt it was a collaborative work with people in the community. I loved doing it because I could walk around and look at things, talk to people. I actually viewed it as a brilliant way for me to get to know the area ... Yes, we worked pretty much independently We had total freedom. (Elizabeth)

It appears that the idea of an obligation to be open to community input in the construction of the story holds little sway over the work of the professional historians. Only one of the three writers (Sophia) overtly acknowledged any element of partnership in her work with local history committees. The writers welcomed the "total freedom" to research and write about local community without the restraint of formally factoring in community involvement. This does not, however, entirely disregard the interests or authority of the community. The writers' insistence on talking to the people of the community and to learn about the points of view and lived experiences of community members revealed that, despite their insistence on independence, they actively sought out a community perspective to guide and influence their work to produce books that

represent what they learned about the community, from the community. Each of these three writers pointed out the importance of talking to people to inform and guide their research, which is a recognition of community authority but one that manages community input carefully. Even Sophia, who worked more interactively with her clients (the local history committees), happily engaged with their input in planning but ultimately preferred to complete her work independently, much like Elizabeth and Helen:

Well yes, they had lots of suggestions about people to interview and I interviewed some of them too. They were always making suggestions; they were good—very supportive. That’s perhaps me, I didn’t really encourage them to go out and do things. (Sophia)

Sophia revealed another tension that the writers navigate in a growing consciousness of the authority of community and their input, which is accompanied with recognition that inviting more active participation in local history projects would considerably complicate the writers’ work. Instead, Sophia described her appreciation of their support and suggestions but limited their participation to allow her to complete the work of research and writing more efficiently. The experiences of all three professional historians illuminate the tensions that Shopes (2002) points out in her discussion of the complexities of negotiating shared authority, “the essential disjunction between professional history and history as it is popularly understood” (p. 598), where writers struggle to respond completely to the competing demands of the professional and public interests in history storytelling.

Shared authority is also a troubling concept for some writers who prioritise the authority of their clients in styles reminiscent of “as-told-to” writing or ghostwriting revealed in Abbey’s interview. Abbey is employed as a professional life writer with experience of community history work. She described approaching narrative relationships in marked

contrast to the three professional historians. Whereas the scholastic authority of Elizabeth, Helen, and Sophia appeared to be paramount in their fulfilment of their contracts, Abbey downplayed her interests or influence over the narrative in her interpretation of responsibility towards her clients. Abbey negotiates each project to determine whether the subjects of the book prefer her to be a ghostwriter or named contributor; most of the publications she helps produce are as-told-to life writing, and she is named as a writer. However, she interprets as-told-to writing as primarily client driven:

[The story and process] has to come from the client. So, you listen, you listen and think, and listen and listen again. And from listening, the process becomes available to you really. So, you can't go in with any preconceived ideas or make any judgements, you are the receiver of this story. You are only a vehicle, maybe you've got some skills that are needed but it belongs to them, not to you. You are just a receiver with some skills to organise it. (Abbey)

Abbey believes that in her practice authority belongs to her clients. She positions herself as what she sees as being a neutral conduit of their story. To this end, she worked collaboratively with book committees when working on local history books to negotiate styles and modes of authorship that suited their purposes and served their interests rather than her own. Abbey did not view this as a letting go of authority since it was never hers in the first place—it was always theirs. She believes that her job as a professional is solely to facilitate the process of storytelling. Abbey holds to the opinion that she can subvert any authority of her own in favour of the clients. Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism rejects such a position, seeing it as untenable and asserting that no language can be neutral, so the writer cannot avoid influencing the narrative being constructed or silence their own interests. Certainly, Abbey's expertise—skills and knowledge of writing, the publishing process, and audience—and her position as writer do place her as an authority over all these texts and points of view they articulate. Similar

to the assertion of the scholar editors in *Matagi Tokelau*, Abbey was particularly careful towards practising authority, but it does not detract from the authority that she retains. This authority is one of the reasons she is given the responsibility to write with or for others and is trusted with their stories.

The four scholars interviewed revealed ideas about shared authority that are based upon their methodological training and are informed by their different positions towards the exercise of authority in the sorts of grassroots projects that typify local and community history writing. The two historians were troubled by how the idea of shared authority is actualised within a long-standing practice of objective, evidence-based testing, which privileges the authority of the scholar, including over oral history. Both Paul and Samuel described themselves as “traditional historians” and are well versed in the historiography of authority and hegemony and its impacts on local history writing. However, despite this insight, their practice continued to endorse a top-down intellectualism to uphold the scholarship of history writing.

Yet, they acknowledged that traditions are changing, which has introduced some unsettling tensions. Samuel articulated some of the concerns that historians confront when they step into the types of writing partnerships promoted by collaborative practice. Samuel’s interview uncovered a wariness towards the suggestion that collaboration was beneficial. He revealed concerns from his experience about how the concept of shared authority may find expression in the committee-styled authorship of collaborative projects. Samuel described how he resigned from one project after worrying about his place in such writing:

There are all sorts of undercurrents ... And I felt like I was losing my voice—I am no longer the author you know. That’s a book that has no author listed, over on the back they list contributing writers and three or four including mine. So, you can’t see, but going through they have used probably between a half and two-thirds

based on what I had given them. The first draft they said was too traditional, dull and boring—they wanted something that emphasized [the institution] as what it is now. And I realised that what they really wanted was a marketing tool ... [It was] an unhappy experience. It did really make me wonder a bit about books written by committees Well they were paying for it and it was what they wanted. But it was an interesting experience being a historian under contract for a specific purpose. It raised all sorts of interesting issues about, oh I don't know, integrity I suppose.
(Samuel)

According to Samuel's experience, negotiation of shared authority was deeply flawed by such an arrangement. There was no mutual benefit to be negotiated and, under the guise of supporting community interest, Samuel experienced the loss of his authority entirely with no reciprocity. This, in his opinion, was ultimately to the disadvantage of the publication too. Samuel experienced this encounter as a loss of integrity, which is in sharp contrast to what Couser's (1998) Golden Rule imagines for mutually beneficial writing partnerships. The committee was unable to reach compromise on the form of the publication as the working out of their collaborative partnership left both parties unsatisfied. The unfortunate experience has constrained Samuel's willingness to attempt collaborative writing again in the future.

The two anthropologists, on the other hand, straddle both positions in their approach to collaboration to find an appropriate balance between promoting scholastic integrity *and* community authority. Partnership between the academy and the community finds an easier expression in their ethnographic work than the experiences of their history peers, and Daniel's project experiences revealed an easy acceptance of shared authority that underscored his work in writing about the history of a geographical community. Dialogue and partnership were a vital part of his philosophy and methodology, and, accordingly, his project did not follow the usual scholastic approach of top-down decision-making about what to research. As noted earlier, his work was initiated in

partnership from the start on the basis of shared authority: the community recognised the authority of the scholar and the scholar respected the authority of the storytellers with whom he engaged. Both benefited from the encounter: Daniel produced a publication helpful to his career and scholarship, and the community contributed to a valuable record of their history. This collaboration was founded on a spirit of give-and-take that does not pretend there was equality in all decision-making but recognised shared authority *ipso facto*. Daniel did not “let go” of his authority—he yielded it with greater care. He noted, for example, that “*I chose the voices of the people who best knew those communities. That is how I chose them*”. This illustrates that within the partnership, he knowingly took authority and responsibility to produce the narrative and text, but his work took place within a context of recognising the authority of the community and their stories. The dialogic approach permitted a synthesis of storytelling and record-making, which produced a book that met the different interests of the scholarly community *and* the grassroots community.

The pressure exerted by present-day public history debate to collaborate complicates local history writing for all categories of writers as they attempt to respond to these different interests and demands on their work. All the writers I interviewed respond to these pressures by being entirely pragmatic. The writers and coproducers acknowledged that local community members have an interest in the outcome of their work, but, in order to produce that work, the writers must assert their narrative authority and craft a reliable “good read”—a term used consistently by most of the interviewees. To achieve this, they recognise what I now describe as *anecdotal authority*. The writers acknowledge that the local storytellers have authority over their own stories and accounts of local history as a form of personal testimony necessary to the performance of the genre. Although they are unproven “evidence” in the traditional sense, the writers give these contributions empirical and literary value by using them to inform the community

narrative. The storytellers invest their stories and their authority with the writers, who act upon that investment with their narrative authority to produce a record written in recognition of the shared authority that resides over local history writing. The business transactional quality of the work process becomes evident and explains certain writers' pragmatism that is needed to deliver an end product on time. Within these working arrangements, shared authority in public history writing finds an expression in the collaborative narrative space that is revealed when anecdotal authority and narrative authority encounter one another.

Interrogating Community

Collaboration in local history writing is further problematised by situating discussion about authority and representation within the collective accounting of a geographical community, which is far more complex and nuanced than Stumm (2014) and Eakin (1999) write about in their largely individualised (auto)biographical literary criticism. It was, therefore, interesting that there was little evidence presented in any of the directed conversations critically interrogating the concept of "community" in reflection of the writers' projects or alongside the notion of collaboration. Community was spoken about in vague and encompassing generalisations of a geographical boundary in all the interviews. The writers and coproducers interviewed spoke in terms of "*most people*" or "*everybody*", and entire communities were amassed under a collective umbrella: "*They all felt a huge connection with [the story]*" (Elizabeth). This lack of critical interrogation of community suggests the local history writers interviewed do not necessarily question whether storytellers are adequately representative of the diversity of community. Instead, "community" is presented as a vague "us" (of the story), but the sociopolitical or cultural boundary of who constitutes that "us" is not always questioned. Critique of individual storytellers and the socioeconomic or politically charged nuances of

community representation was glossed over and set outside the conversation. When questioned specifically about possible missing voices—for example, speaking to alternative points of view—the interviewees were quick to explain that they recognised this was possible, but that it was “*never intentional*” (Betty) or “*not done intentionally*” (Wendy) in their projects. The writers believed that, because there was no conscious act of exclusion, they acted ethically and inclusively to represent everyone. This appears to be an impossibly optimistic position to sustain.

There is one explanation for some writers’ reluctance to draw attention to counter-narratives or alternative points of view, which may be perceived as threatening the unity of the “community” story. Several of the writers mentioned how their involvement with the writing—what Stumm (2014) would describe as their engagement with a narrative relationship where the writer and storytellers address and respond to each other—had a lasting, personal impression on them. These insights were, however, strikingly limited to discussions by the amateur and professional writers, not the scholars. The local history group volunteers I interviewed observed that their involvement in entering these narrative relationships, a key part of their collaborative project ethos, strengthened their personal connection to their home community:

You get to know the people ... And it doesn't matter what you are doing or writing, there is always something that connects with you and you can put a little extra bit of your soul into it, that may not be part of it before. (Betty)

A stronger personal, enduring connection was forged as a result. This may not be an unexpected outcome (that they invest into that with which they have always identified), but it also points out they became aware of new ways with which they responded positively to the local story through these narrative engagements. The same experience was true for professional writers who wrote about their home community. On the other hand, professional writers who were commissioned to write local history projects and

invited to work with local groups that were new to them also recognised that they too became part of the community and embedded into the narrative. Sophia was articulate about how personal their work becomes:

I love interviewing people—so privileged to hear about their lives. This whole thing about oral historians falling in love with the people they interview, I feel that. I just think it is an incredible thing—the luckiest thing of the job ... You know you form a great attachment. You cannot go in and write about a place without forming an attachment not just to the place but to the people you interviewed and the people on the committee. I am very fond of them. I think you kind of have a sense of ongoing commitment ... You made good friendships and long-term connections. You definitely are always connected to that place. (Sophia)

The relational connection or attachment that results from the narrative encounter in local history writing takes on deep personal significance and has consequences for the book projects. As Sophia indicated, it leaves the writer with a heightened sense of responsibility to the community and an answerability to these narrative relationships, which endure long after the book is published. This sense of responsibility appears to influence how writers write about or critique the community. Writer Susan Sheehan points out that a challenging part of scholars seeing subjects as collaborative writing partners is, “knowing that you’re forming a relationship that will last the rest of your life” (as cited in Howes, 2011, p. 104). Within these contexts, writers find themselves between awkward tensions and contribute to producing these tensions too. On the one hand, they are held professionally accountable to the genre and for managing collaborative narrative spaces with storytellers while acknowledging their responsibility for choosing narrative relationships that represent community authentically and which draws them into broader sociopolitical debate. On the other hand, the writers feel personally beholden to the people and community with whom they have built real relationships. However, the pressure for ethical representation of “community” does not end there.

The interviews also revealed how professional writers and scholars respond to two other forces of authority in their book project experiences in New Zealand that influence their positions on representation of “community”. Writers with scholastic backgrounds acknowledged an answerability to the critics and university peers of their academy as a primary consideration while some interviewees confronted their responsibility towards indigeneity in their attempts of adequate representation. Both these forces exert pressure on the projects and influence how the writers interpret or reject collaboration as practice.

Answering to Academia: Upholding “Standards”

Critics interrogating the genre may fail to account sufficiently for the force that academia exerts on how collaboration is practised within local history writing or whether it is, in fact, pursued at all. Whilst most local history producers remarked about some level of attachment that they formed with the community they are writing about or for (whether as residents among the community themselves or a newcomer learning about the community), many also identified strongly with the academic community from whence they come. Interviews with the professional writers uncovered tensions that they negotiate in the work they do among the community at grassroots and academia. They are aware theirs is a complicated balance between professional, community, and scholastic interests. To this end, the writers have given much critical thought to their responsibility towards the genre *and* academia to try to explain how these forces influence their work, the narrative spaces they advocate, and to inform scholarship in response—speaking back from the field to academia.

Paul explained in his interview that previous boundaries between grassroots community and university work were more separate, but closer working relationships were now

being tentatively considered. From his experience, this is an acknowledgement that attitudes between the two worlds are changing, albeit slowly:

I think there is now more readiness on both sides to engage with each other. So perhaps now I would, if I was doing such a thing again, I would engage more with communities. That in turn, however, requires a commitment of time and therefore implicitly money so that it can be done, or something that takes a very long time to do if it is not well resourced. (Paul)

Desire to collaborate is thus more likely today than in the past, but the four scholars interviewed are concerned about the practical costs of time and money that such practice requires—resources that are not readily available within their academic institutions. The scholars also observed that—as the case studies of *Matagi Tokelau* and *Moturoa* have demonstrated—efforts to write local history collaboratively can take a lot longer to complete than if the scholars worked independently. Furthermore, any incentive for them to work in local history is seriously hampered with confession that this writing is not considered “*academic enough*” (Samuel). This is an academic scepticism about the quality of local history writing that makes it (up until the time of writing this argument) ineligible for the Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) that ranks the scientific weight of their scholarship.

However, while the university-based scholars acknowledged that local history is not always attractive for their academic resumé, the scholars were quick to reiterate that these projects have value in themselves outside of the institutions: “*I think it’s still great to encourage that sort of work and let it stand for what it is*” (Paul). The genre continues to attract “*a great deal of community interest across the country and many people who are interested to write them and are capable of doing so*” (Paul). Further conversation revealed that though institutions encourage the teachers, professionals, or competent graduates who do write local history books, the institutions do not perceive this as a high-status

area. Their position suggests intellectual classism as some attempt to maintain intellectual hegemony over history storytelling. It does not admit much room for storytellers outside of academic traditions to be recognised as significant contributors to history scholarship. Professional writer Sophia is, however, hopeful for more collaboration in the future:

I think there has been a movement in universities to being more inclusive to try and bring the whole community of people who are interested in history, to try and bring them in. [The universities] have been seen to be a bit ivory towerish and they are under pressure so all of a sudden, they are looking out more broadly. (Sophia)

Sophia relates how universities have responded by engaging more with local history societies to raise the level of scholarship among grassroots' projects, which, in her opinion, is necessary to uphold and promote scholarly standards—similar to Gardner's (1999) recommendations. Yet, her position still upholds the authority of scholarship over creative community-led conversations of local history writing.

The interviews with all three of the professional writers trained as historians revealed how they incorporate a sense of answerability to academia as critical reflection about the nature and practice of their work in local history writing. In consequence, writers like Helen have grown more wary of the genre since publishing and have spent time thinking about what the work entails, *“perhaps questioning it a bit more; thinking about the context more”*. At the time of undertaking the projects, she admitted, *“we didn't really disturb ourselves too much about the issues”* but, subsequently, *“have thought about it more and am a little more conscious of the methodological limitations and constraints”* (Helen). The writers' ability to reflect upon the scholarship of their work impacts how they practise local history and, based on their growing awareness of the critical limitations of community-styled writing gained from personal experience, they have become more cautious about being involved with local history book projects.

Discussions held with the professional writers uncovered some regret about how they perceived the academy views their work in local history. On occasion, the writers felt a little disrespected by their university peers, who do not appreciate the tensions within which they are working and the expectations they are managing, including writing for popular community interests. Helen and Sophia both noted that academia suggests that local history does not confront the big questions of society or offer a scholastic enough critique of local contexts so is somehow not as prestigious as other forms of history writing, but that, in their opinion, overlooks what it does do:

Some people would say, and I do remember a couple of people, being a bit snarked, referring to it as a coffee table book. I found that really kind of annoying because it's not and is far more than that. Even if it is a coffee table book there is a sort of snob thing going on there about picture books not being quite kosher. But in fact, if you engage people and get them thinking about history and get them thinking about their community and being aware of it, well that, in my view is kind of ninety percent of the battle. So, I'm not apologising for a coffee table book! (Helen)

Local history is, after all, a careful balance of the interests of community and academia in the history and story of a particular place. Writers work to engage the public history and, at the same time, produce an accounting that will withstand scrutiny by their academic peers. These sometimes conflicting forces, however, complicate the writers' navigation of the possibilities and difficulties of collaboration among other practices of research and writing. If, for example, the force of academia is experienced as dominant, it poses a serious risk to further undermining the opportunity for collaboration that may be more beneficial for the local community's dialogue about their past. Put another way, I would argue that writers face an untenable position if they must choose between academy or community in the pursuit of writing local history.

Answering to Indigeneity: Recognising the Politics of Voice

The discussion of collaboration in New Zealand also responds to debate about indigeneity evoked by Te Tiriti o Waitangi, as discussed in Chapter Three and experienced by the writers I interviewed as another force upon their practice. Critics and practitioners have grown increasingly aware of how ideals that are promoted in public history, such as collaboration, are informed by contested points of view of knowledge and learning between Māori and Pākehā. Patel (2016) acknowledges that learning can be transformational when the colonial influence over “knowledge” and its creation is challenged. She suggests that answerability is required from knowledge producers and includes being responsible and accountable as part of a reciprocal exchange (p. 73). By extension, this means paying closer attention to how Māori and Pākehā encounter one another in local history writing too and offers another perspective on the co-labouring that Stumm (2014) and Eakin (1999) advocate in life writing criticism. Even the premise of a book project itself is arguably a colonial bias, which historically privileges the written text over other indigenous history record-keeping, and the writers I interviewed describe growing realisation that responding to or ignoring these different worldviews and history storytelling traditions are difficult to incorporate into their projects. However, life writing critics are outspoken that life writers should be “active agents of community building, kinship restoration, the (re)construction of knowledge about region and community, and the critique of colonialism” (Griffiths, 2013, pp. 62–63). Writers and publishers have been encouraged to “navigate dissimilar approaches to historical storytelling and diverse political ideologies” (Freeman, 2009, p. 142) with careful attention paid to the imbalance of power being represented in the encounters. I was curious, therefore, to explore the tensions uncovered in the intersection of indigeneity and collaboration among the experiences of the book producers.

A growing discomfort emerged when the writers and book producers were encouraged to reflect critically upon Māori and Pākehā encounters in their work. Problematically, it was revealed that questions of indigeneity only became known later in self-reflection after the projects were completed. Instead, a politics of pragmatism, once again, propelled the book projects forward at the time of their production, and critical reflection followed in hindsight. The professional writers described experiences where they were alert to encounters of difference within the local community project. Helen, for example, raised an incident when she contacted one Māori storyteller and was given a “slightly hard time”:

I was a bit taken aback by it because this individual would not—he just wouldn’t cooperate and was quite aggressive on the phone about our presumption I suppose when we weren’t fourth generation [from the community] and weren’t Māori. So that was difficult. But really, we were quite blithe and just carried on. (Helen)

Helen’s use of language is revealing: “*blithe*” denotes she easily sets aside any objections and unconsciously reveals a bias in authority. There is no evidence of her reflecting critically on why he should want to participate in the first place nor recognition that he may have a contesting point of view or that he may be arguing that his story is not theirs to tell. Evidence from the directed conversations suggests that most of the local history book projects are built upon a presumption of goodwill and a positive spirit of community, so it can be jarring for writers when that is challenged. Despite what was obviously a startling encounter for the producers and a politically loaded one, Helen quickly moved past the objection to continue with the project—encouraged that others were more ready to talk. When questioned further about the incident, she explained that the conversation “*wasn’t imperative, I didn’t feel stymied—it was just one of many voices that wasn’t going to talk with us*” (Helen). What Helen’s reflections fail to point out is that his political and cultural point of view is likely imperative to why he was not willing

to engage with the Pākehā producers, and the response of moving quickly away from the encounter cements further erasure of his point of view or a Māori voice in this instance.

Other Pākehā writers shared a similar pragmatism to Helen when they encountered the voice of Māori and Pasifika in their local history book projects. Sophia explained that in one project:

I did find it quite difficult to get people to interview from Pasifika and Māori. I tried but in the end I tried to be sympathetic to all sides, and talked about a lot of tension in the 1970s with lots of Pasifika people coming to live in XXX and I tried to show that, and that there were not clashes but racist attitudes going on, and that at the same time people were getting on. (Sophia)

Sophia's language reveals her consciousness of reflecting upon different points of view in the projects. However, her situation as a Pākehā writer underpins her approach because she tries to accommodate interviews "from Pasifika and Māori" and describes her struggles to recruit participants—another example perhaps of community members being wary of collaborating or simply being unavailable or inaccessible to the writer. Sophia's solution is to try to write about contested lived experiences and the struggles of Pasifika people within the local neighbourhood at points in time to weight the story from "all sides"—further cementing the dichotomies of cultural lived experiences.

Unfortunately, the trouble is that without an adequate meeting of voice and story in the research process, discussion of difference can appear to lack genuine engagement with story and be presented as a superficial fulfilment of obligation. I acknowledge this is a recurring problem for writers who try to represent a "communal" point of view but do not have access to all parts of the community, which was a concern raised in Chapter Three about non-Māori writing about Māori community.

Another tension emerges here with an uncovered desire to settle the politics of the local story. Although Sophia raises the tensions of difference in community and her writing,

she clarified that when she is writing about community, *“I like being a bit positive I suppose.”* The temptation to present the positive, reconciled face of community can erase the tensions raised when contested and sometimes difficult lived experiences are voiced within the community narrative. The need for the writers to point out that everyone was “getting on” was strikingly evident across the experiences of all the interviews with the local history group volunteers. They smoothed out any suggestion that the community may be unsettled because of their different political experiences, striving to present a veneer of inclusivity over what can sometimes be a complex, contested space and presented the collective as unconflicted. David, for example, pointed out: *“If you really read that book and analyse it, you could learn that at one stage in the history of XXX that the local Māori and the local Pākehā got on exceedingly well.”* When questioned further, the writers shied away from problems, returning to talk about the positives rather than any questions of discomfort. This was particularly noticeable among the local history group members who hinted at large societal issues but swiftly pivoted away from critical interrogation or closer reflection. The desire for settled politics found expression in Charles’s assertion that:

Let’s face it, in New Zealand, we acknowledge Māori and many things we have done wrong and have attempted to right some of them. But nobody is ever going to be completely satisfied but I think, talking in context Aboriginals in Australia look to New Zealand and the way Māori and Pākehā have worked it all out and they wish they could do it better over there. I don’t know; it’s difficult to say. (Charles)

The idea of equitable history can in itself be seen as a misinterpretation of collaboration. Although Charles is hopeful of an already reconciled politic of New Zealand, such a position overlooks the ongoing imbalances of power experienced by Māori at community level in Aotearoa New Zealand and does not engage critically with Māori experience. Veracini (2001) points out that this has become an established view following the 1980s

debate about historiography in New Zealand. Recognition of Te Tiriti has been seen as establishing a narrative of a bicultural history, redefining relationships between Māori and Pākehā as more or less “resolved” so that, “the unsettling of the history of Aotearoa/New Zealand had led to a resettling on a sounder basis” (Veracini, 2001, p. 37). Settled politics, therefore, came to depend on the sustained narrative of a happily bicultural (and, thus, not contested) New Zealand.

The consequent insistence on a reconciled, balanced history constrains the necessary conversation of difference between Māori and Pākehā local experiences that is central to dialogue about decolonisation. The interview with Mikaere, for example, reveals his worry that:

There is a Pākehā conversation that has always been happening around here but it is not ours [Māori] and it is really ruined by the academic community—really ruined by the kiwi academic community—who insist on writing equitable history.
(Mikaere)

The continued assertion of scholastic authority, this time to represent “equitable” history, reveals itself as another iteration of colonialism—limiting narrative spaces or relationships that create opportunity for people (writers and storytellers) across Māori and Pākehā difference to listen to their stories and respond to one another in peaceful contestation. Mikaere described the problems of Pākehā historians trying to write Māori history in their publications and felt that Pākehā would be better served owning and telling their own story first—which includes critical reflection about their role in colonisation—and recognising Māori history as its own authority:

Yes, instead of saying this is who I am, this is what I believe in, these are the people. They don't. And then they throw in the Māori stuff to give it relevance at times that is a distraction. Why do you spend so much time trying to understand us? I appreciate it is important – but you are really not getting to grips with yourself.
(Mikaere)

Mikaere went on to explain that local history is a real opportunity to learn about self and stories of place, which are all too often lost when the projects and local points of view are overtaken by the political and professional interests of others. Mikaere's perspective as an anthropologist resonates strongly with life writing criticism and stresses the importance of writing from a personal reckoning of history accounting with sensitivity to where and how the voices of "self" and "other" encounter one another. Daniel (also an anthropologist) shared similar sentiment to Mikaere and stressed that, despite the positive reception to his past work, he would not attempt such work at present: "*No, doing it in this period and this era, no, it's just not something I would do*". Debate about decolonisation and the work of scholars like Tau (2003), Smith (2012), and Pihama (2017) in New Zealand—detailed in Chapter Three—have come to the fore, driving criticism and practice across the humanities and social sciences to assert Māori autonomy and self-expression and, in response, Daniel alluded to growing discomfort in what he recognises as scholars' complicity in colonisation. Scholars are questioning source materials more critically and becoming sensitive to the types of research partnerships, including collaborations, they pursue in consequence. Paul, a history scholar, when asked how Pākehā should navigate writing about Māori content in local history storytelling, answered "*very carefully*". This includes, he explained, becoming aware of Māori written and oral records—much of which is available through the Waitangi Tribunal archives—and learning to engage with different traditions, acknowledging that some content is not available to Pākehā writers: "*I would say be aware that there are some things you are not going to be able to access, or know or get hold of and you just have to accept that*" (Paul).

The interviews have shown that these different forces or interests exerted over local history book projects seriously complicate how they are undertaken at grassroots, and the writers, as shown in the interviews, are becoming more sensitive to the pressures on

their practices and the expectations that they must respond to these pressures in their work. The proposed popular use of collaboration (as an approach) also intensifies the awkward subject positions that writers find themselves in—balancing these responsibilities to individual storytellers, a community collective, history scholarship, the crucial societal questions of the time such as decolonisation, *and* their own interests as a writer.

The Messiness of Collaboration

Writers of local history books can thus find themselves in tenuous subject positions from which they respond to these various pressures and forces upon their work. As evidenced in the interviews, the different groups of producers have particular subject positions that inform construction of knowledge in these book projects—positions that are not easily reconciled into a simplistic approach to collaboration. Consequently, the concept of collaboration is highly contested in local history book projects, and the types of narrative relationships that result can be complicated and untidy—co-labour that is described as “messy” (Partnoy, 2009, p. 22) but necessary to challenge old models of research and writing. My research uncovered that some writers are indeed keen to explore collaborative practices but encounter methodological and practical limitations, others make them work in their own fashion, but others still are simply not interested in diluting the authority of their own position to engage with the notion at all. This chapter has revealed how different writers grapple with the tensions that collaboration raises for their practice and how they respond to, or feel responsible for, the competing interests evoked by their work as aspirational, awkward, or impossible.

As a result, the tensions and issues that are revealed by studying the local history books as life writing become a valuable subject of the study of the texts and projects. Revelation of the messy subject positions of producers encapsulates and speaks to history of a time

and place, and contributes to a better understanding of the situated narrative relationships between writers and the subjects of local history. In addition, the application of life writing criticism evokes the challenge to collaborate better, being responsible for negotiating the concept of collaboration and its application within the field, and thus promises in the future to shift local history writing into a more self-conscious possibility as life writing. The Centre for Biographical Research at the University of Hawai'i is a pioneering institution that demonstrates what is possible in practice. The Centre fulfils a mandate for collaborative research and writing in their life writing focus and advocates actively for collaboration that works academically and with community, to support a new stance on academic authorship and authority:

Co/labour/active research could also mean that language and literature researchers offer their skills to a team including those directly engaged in a community, who might also claim primary responsibility for representing and evaluating the community. (Howes, 2011, p. 105)

For now, collaboration is still viewed by many as something that must be carefully managed *if* it is chosen as part of their practice, and the working out or grappling with collaboration is fraught with tensions and contradictions. Within this uncertain context, writers contend with being answerable to different interests and responsible for how they accommodate these in their writing. There is a residual tendency for top-down intellectual hegemony to dominate local history writing in the protection of academic standards. However, there is also growing push back from local community agencies or grassroots' storytellers to assert their authority over local history writing and a recognition from scholars that collaboration is more necessary now than previously. The traditional practice of independent writing of local history books is being challenged by emerging practice that philosophically and methodologically advocates for shared authority to inform and influence how local history book projects are undertaken. This

will have implications for future projects and the more creative forms of books that local storytellers and project teams may promote.

The different forces influencing the exercise of authority and power that shape the narrative encounters and narrative spaces theorised by life writing scholars are complex. The aspiration of collaboration does not secure equitable partnerships in local history writing. Broad community involvement in these local history book projects is cited as desirable by local committees, but questions about who participates and who remains silent in the community writing endeavours are seldom asked and rarely critically interrogated at the local level. Writers continue to uphold narrative authority while also recognising the anecdotal authority of community accounts as a pragmatic expression of shared authority in local history writing. The way in which writers respond to these forces in Aotearoa New Zealand is further complicated by how they respond to indigeneity in their practice and hold the project processes and forms answerable to the decolonising conversation of their context. This has implications for how Māori and Pākehā encounter each other in these dialogic encounters and their recognition of each other's narrative and/or anecdotal authority. This matter is far from resolved at present.

The local history writers who participated in this research recognise that as much as they all enjoyed their involvement in these book projects, the projects require a big investment of time and personal commitment. Betty described the responsibility of the writers as "*quite scary*", and Sophia talked about the "*burden*" of the work alongside its benefits. On further contemplation of the forms and practice of the work—its limitations, complications, and complexities—others, like Helen, Elizabeth, Paul, and Daniel, avoid it altogether now. Samuel and Sophia continue with care and caution. All appear to agree that writers are rightfully becoming more conscious of their growing responsibilities to a genre that represents communities and an accompanying need for

critical self-reflection of their practice and ethical responsibility towards community representation. Awareness emerges from this self-discovery that collaboration, despite being messy, is necessary if the writers accept their dialogic responsibility to public history writing is a choice to engage with moral historiography (Sandul, 2019).

The evidence from the interviews and case studies suggests that one of the reasons writers are so readily responsive to this call for greater responsibility in their practice and scholarship emerges from their appreciation for what these local history book projects signify at grassroots. The producers assert that the books and the processes that craft them have potential to richly engage local community with their history and heritage as lived accounts, and their project experiences confirm how valuable the books are for community members, as will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

Chapter Eight

The Story Beyond the Text: Response and Reply

“It was lovely to see so many friends, relatives, whanau¹⁵, old neighbours—young and old, many Tigertown residents all with the same thing in common, MEMORIES! That is all we have today ... everything has changed—but never our memories and that knot in your heart when we think of our people.” (Harris & Harris, 2007, p. 165)

In its focus on collaboration, the previous chapter has drawn attention to the intersubjective space that *precedes* and *informs* the construction of local history texts. This chapter moves on from the discussion of collaboration and its influence in crafting texts—including the extent to which collaboration is possible—to focus on reader/audience *response* to the text, which always takes place within the broader social milieu. The chapter theorises the reception of the texts based on the book case studies and interview material from the directed conversations. I argue that when local history texts are seen as life writing, part of the significance of the texts is found in valuing their reception (or interrogation thereof) as an ongoing process of meaning-making. This poststructuralist approach proposes that meaning of a text is only completed by a reader, which means that it can be endlessly recompleted. Events of reading or reception keep on taking place long after the text has been written, and the responses (and, thus, meaning-making) are a vital part of the story of a text.

The text is not the end. Ricoeur (2016) is the foremost proponent of this theory about reading and performance of a text. He proposes that texts remain incomplete until readers attend to them or give them significance. When they interpret it for themselves,

¹⁵ See spelling note in Glossary (p. xiii).

they “fulfil the text in speech, restoring it to living communication” (p. 114). Therefore, this idea means that there is always a potential for a multiplicity of different readings and interpretations:

The text, as writing, awaits and calls for a reading. If reading is possible, it is indeed because the text is not closed in on itself but opens out onto other things. To read is, on any hypothesis, to conjoin a new discourse to the discourse of the text. This conjunction of discourses reveals, in the very constitution of the text, an original capacity for renewal which is its open character. (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 120)

The meeting between the text and the reader reveals a mediation that Ricoeur (2016) calls “the appropriation of meaning” (p. 147) to describe the actualisation of meaning when the writer addresses the reader and the reader responds. The reader’s “interpretation is complete when the reading releases something like an event, an event of discourse, an event in the present time” (p. 147).

Ricoeur’s theory complements Bakhtin’s (1981) work on dialogism, which does not regard the text as a closed entity but in dialogue outside itself with its readers. At the same time, the dialogue within the text engages readers too. No text is a self-contained isolated entity but is a conduit of language and meaning that both responds to, and calls for response from, the context into which it speaks. The text is an open system; it is part of discourse directed towards a listener, who is an active respondent in these dialogic encounters. Bakhtin (1981) critiques stylistics that approach the text as a “closed system presuming nothing beyond themselves” (p. 273) and suggests instead that “we imagine the work as a rejoinder in a given dialogue, whose style is determined by its interrelationship with other rejoinders in the same dialogue [in the totality of the conversation]” (p.274)—what is said in each written text responds to what was said before and anticipates a response. It is easy to envisage how this applies to the case study texts discussed in the thesis. For example, the reader may bring to their reading a

knowledge of critique of colonialism or settler discourse they know from other texts on one hand, or a critique of unsophisticated anecdotal history on the other. Bakhtin concludes that all rhetorical forms “are oriented toward the listener and his answer” (p. 280). However, while texts and the way they are written are constructed with the audience in mind and usually hope for or expect a particular response, regardless of the effort invested, they cannot control the response or how the readers interpret or reply to the text.

How the text speaks into the context within which it is situated and how the readers or audience respond is part of the meaning of a work. It is, nevertheless, challenging to access this intersubjective space since meaning-making and interpretation must be traced in a variety of ways. Coming back to my study, there is limited access to the types of discussions that may take place in the day to day between community members represented in the local history narrative as they debate, defend, celebrate, or reject these publications. Occasionally, some readers’ responses are publicised through reviews or social media, or via direct contact with the book producers, but overall, we mostly know indirectly how the books have been interpreted. Distribution and sales figures give indication of the public interest in obtaining copies of the book, and these and celebratory events to launch the publications may suggest one interpretation of the reception of these books.

I approach the question of reception broadly in this chapter by drawing on a diverse range of examples that have a bearing on reception to see what significance can be drawn. These include notices, reviews, articles, events, and once-removed commentaries by writers and project team members who remain connected with the community discourses and maintain an interest in assessing how an audience is responding to the work they helped coproduce. Insights were also generated from the conversations held

with the producers of the three texts studied and from the interviews with the local history producers. Many of these writers shared feedback about the book projects they had received from readers, and some of these reader comments or observations are included in the discussion. I will show how three themes emerged when looking at response. The first can be seen as reification, the second as valuing memory, and the third a critical or counter response.

Reification and Local History

Across the various discussions, case studies, and evidence collated, one of the responses to local history books has been appreciation of these publications as an artefact—not necessarily something to read but to treasure as an object. My research has shown that audience response to the physical object of the book is a significant response, although reception and response are usually contemplated by how the texts are read or interpreted.

It was striking to note that from the outset, the construction of a book was an appealing motivation for all the community book projects I investigated in my research. In contemplation of initiating a local history project, all the producers interviewed never once considered any other form or medium. The producers always anticipated producing a book (a hard copy, not digital) of some sort—a format they argued could be easily shared and distributed among readers and/or community members. Other artefacts have been proposed in response to the text, including the possibility of a movie for *Moturoa* as a follow up to the book, but none were considered as possible alternatives to a book at the start of planning. The professional writers and scholars I interviewed pointed out that writing books was part of their training and the obvious goal for their work. Also, collectively, all others agreed that the book has value in and of itself as an artefact. Local history group volunteer Wendy's passionate outburst is shared by all those interviewed:

“I would have to have a book—I can’t think of anything else. There’s nothing like a book I don’t think!” Their thinking supports the book’s enduring “gold standard in many humanities disciplines” (Mole, 2016, p. 13), not for its ability to negotiate meaning-making or truth but due to its perceived status as an artefact of value. The “academic book” (one deemed worthy of scholarship) is perceived to be the “centre of our intellectual lives” (Mole, 2016, p. 13) and the production of them symbolic of achievement and status. The argument is that a book takes on significance, not for its content but its physical form.

Possession of the physical object has thus achieved the status of taonga or treasure for some community members. This theme emerges at times from all three of the book projects studied in detail in this thesis, but especially from the reception of *Matagi Tokelau*. This book, published in two editions, was made available to readers in both Tokelau and Wellington (New Zealand). Copies were distributed through the Institute for Pacific Studies, and community members were eager to own a copy for themselves. In my conversation with Huntsman (project facilitator and co-editor), she explained that the books were stored in lavalava boxes in the home—where the family treasures are hidden for safekeeping: “They approved of what had been done and were proud of it. They put it away as something that is a treasure” (J. Huntsman, personal communication, July 17, 2017). Although she recognises it is difficult to know whether the books come out to be read, she observed that: “People want something they can hold.... It was a thing to have for some of them, rather than a thing to consult” (J. Huntsman, personal communication, July 17, 2017). The reader response here was not tied to reading but, rather, to their reaction to the tangible object of the book—the “thing”. The physical possession of the object of the book is also noted as important for the readers of the case study texts of *Moturoa* and *Patumahoe: History & Memories*. The project teams shared

written feedback, such as emails, from their readers, which all consistently reflect upon their enthusiasm for *owning* copies of the book.

It is the physicality of the artefact that is treasured most—the transformation of the intangible account of storytelling into something concrete that can be “held”. This idea of holding or touching resonated across most of the interviews as an important response to the book. For example, history group volunteer Betty stressed the physical nature of the book to explain its significance for herself and her peers:

Well you can pick up a book anytime and you can read chapters and look at it, look at the pages and feel it ... I want a paper copy. I like to hold the whole thing in my hands [my emphasis]. (Betty)

The ability to hold, own or possess, or share becomes part of the response to the text as an artefact—it is something that can become theirs, a possession to engage with as and when they wish—“you can pick a book anytime”. This is also demonstrated in how the books circulate among community members. Personal ownership of the copies is prized; even though copies are available at libraries, more value is attributed to having one’s own physical copy. Sales estimates provided by project team members interviewed across a variety of book projects confirmed that the local history books quickly sell out, purchased by current and ex-residents. They are generally small print runs of under 1,000 copies and sometimes requiring a reprint to meet demand. The Patumāhoe book group, for example, noted that all 600 copies of their book were gone far faster than they ever anticipated, and others, like history group volunteer Charles, expressed the exact same sentiment in their community experience. All the producers of the three case study texts also described how members from the community would buy multiple copies of the books and share these among family, friends, or ex-neighbours, who may have moved away from their home community geographically. Those responsible for distribution, like Upfold from Patumāhoe or the Harris brothers from Moturoa, explained that they

did not anticipate interest in the book from elsewhere (outside their local district) yet have been asked to send copies of the books across New Zealand and to many other parts of the world—sending a trace of their locality to residents in another place.

As community members respond to the book as an object to be owned and cherished, it becomes reified into a community treasure. It achieves status and value. For example, David, a volunteer at his local history book group, described the importance of securing multiple copies of the book for himself and others upon its publication:

[The book] means a huge amount to me. It means, for instance I bought five of these. I bought five of them for my two daughters, one for me, one for a friend because he is a history buff and another one because there is somebody who will have missed out—and I don't know who that person may be but I was sure there would be someone who wants a book and then they can have it. (David)

Some of the significance attributed to the object of the book, or reification of the artefact, is because it functions as a repository for the future. Like others, David responds to the book as an artefact, something to have and to own—an experience he shares with his family and friend so that they can have a copy for themselves too. But even more revealing is David's willingness to secure the artefact for somebody (by implication, in his social network) who, as yet, is unaware of the book or who has not recognised the significance of the artefact. David's investment extends the possibility of reading into an unknown future or reader and builds upon the potential for the text to later become the living communication that Ricoeur (2016) anticipates to a perhaps unexpected audience. Hence, the use of reification is not so much of a fixed object but a potential for future understanding. David explained:

Well I think that in time, seeing the things that are in the community at the moment, we have a lot of young people with a lot of young children. At the moment their whole life revolves around their children, we live in a busy world. So this won't

really hit them, it will be interesting but it won't hit a lot of them until they get a bit older. (David)

The books find expression as a time capsule—one aspect of reification. David pointed out that the younger members of the community may not be aware of the significance of the artefact until later and anticipated a forgetting of local story that he believed needs to be prevented. Other producers agreed that the books are valuable for future generations or readers, with a reader email cited by the *Patumahoe* project team that expressed: “Not only is [the book] a great asset for my family to have, but also for the generations that follow” (Anonymous). The language of “asset” implies a type of cultural story banking. This does not necessarily imply static meaning-making but, rather, encapsulates the story in time (the time capsule) for readers to return to it later and make sense of it from their own context. Anecdotally, interviewees observed that community members are often more interested in local history as they grow older, so the need to preserve it for a future time is imperative. The books offer an opportunity to engage readers of the future to read and interpret the texts for themselves in the “appropriation of meaning” (2016, p. 147) that Ricoeur described when a reader meets a text to make sense of it. The text, therefore, can come back to life, evoke a response, or be completed ongoingly—with many different, even unexpected, readings.

From this perspective, the physical book offers a focal point or something tangible to reinforce history storytelling of a geographical community as an ongoing process of meaning-making. One reader in Patumāhoe, for example, remarked that “I feel sure [the book] will be read and pored over for years to come” (Anonymous). The book becomes the focus for readers’ engagement with “their story” and launches the story of becoming “us”. The artefact draws readers into a conversation with the text *and* the community discourse. What is noteworthy from these responses is that they anticipate that the

books (the artefacts) will one day be shared and read to achieve its completion, as Ricoeur (2016) would suggest.

However, the most complete expression of the reception of the text as an artefact is the desire to possess by putting it away safely, without reading. Even ardent advocates of these books confess that they have only read it in part, if at all. One reader email to *Patumahoe's* committee notes, "the Patumahoe book is excellent—I have just browsed at this stage but will be reading it all before too long", and David, in his directed conversation, himself confessed for their project too, "*I haven't read the whole thing*". Because the book is seen as an artefact to be treasured, it is sometimes not read and interpreted as Ricoeur (2016) suggests is essential for completion. Indeed, most of the producers interviewed observed that ownership of the books does not mean that they are ever read fully, which appears to be completely out of character with the intended nature of the book. A book is meant to be read; how else can it attain the fulfilment of interpretation that Ricoeur (2016) discusses in his theory or reach its "capacity for renewal ... [or restoration to] ... living communication" (p.120)? The answer rests in the expansion of meaning-making of a book, beyond the immediate interpretation of the text itself to consider reification and its implication for meaning-making. The horizons of reading are expanded. Fulfilment of a text can be delayed.

The book as an artefact suggests the *possibility* for reading exists; its completion is not guaranteed nor is its timeframe or location predictable. Reification thus facilitates expansion of the potential for history storytelling and interpretation across time (generations) and space (readers across the world). When books are shelved in personal libraries or stored away in treasure boxes, they are still waiting to be opened or responded to. In this scenario, the open character of the text and its ability to stimulate new discourse attached to the text is closed off prematurely or paused. However, it is not

lost altogether. As a repository, the book holds onto its possibility for renewal or completion—waiting for a reader in a future time or place to open the book and respond to the text. This immeasurably extends the open character of the work and the possibility of interpretation. Professional writer Elizabeth, for example, in assessing the long-term impact of the local history books she had helped write, observed that she is still surprised by people who respond to some of these books years after publication and reach out to talk about it with her: “*People come across it in one form or another, accidentally or on purpose*”. And whenever the book is removed from a shelf and read, it is restored again to living communication, and a new discourse can be added to the text.

Matagi Tokelau is an example that shows that books may take an awfully long time to achieve their full potential for completion (as acts of interpretation or reading). But they always have the capacity to be reappreciated for what is inside their covers, and their reification makes this possible. Upon its release in the early 1990s, most copies were stored away by community members as taonga to be preserved safely (or at least by those who managed to obtain a copy for themselves) with some public copies well looked after in library collections or archives. The book itself, as has been shown in the thesis, was produced according to clear sociocultural and political goals, but being reified as an object to be stored away safely may have limited its potential social responses. In 2017, during the early investigative stages of my research, I became aware of the Pacific curatorial team of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa working in partnership with the community in Tokelau. The aim was to work alongside the community to acquire objects and cocurate an exhibition that Tokelau felt represents climate change in their environment and provided the stories as part of a Natural Environmental Renewal Project at Te Papa (according to information provided in email correspondence with R. Yates of Te Papa’s Pacific Cultures’ team, 2017). However, when I asked whether the Te Papa team was familiar with *Matagi Tokelau*, they had never heard

of the text and were immediately keen to find a copy at the National Library. It would appear that the artefact (now a few generations on) has, for the most part, disappeared from public discussion. Yet it only takes one reader to respond to restore it to the living communication Ricoeur (2016) advocates and prompt a new response. Therefore, for the possibility of completion to be protected, it seems that in the case of some community histories, reification is necessary to preserve the artefact and make it available when needed in the future for when the next generation starts searching for their stories.

As we become more accustomed to the dissemination of texts digitally, we can see that valuing physical books is in itself a reification of the books. We speak of books to be possessed as objects, and this is a type of reception, but it is also a potentiality that promises a text may be fulfilled in reading across time and space. Books, as artefacts, bridge time and space of meaning-making by being *texts in waiting*—waiting to be read, waiting to be restored to living communication, and waiting to be interpreted. The artefact bridges the past and present in future space to speak to an unknown reader with renewal of possibility for completing and reading. The significance of texts in waiting locates the preservation of local history books among centuries-old traditions of medieval libraries, assembling and storing stories for future generations—who may have neither the skill, nor inclination to read them at the time—to attend to them later.

Walk with Me Down Memory Lane

Another response with regard to reception of the text also emerged in discussion with the producers and reader reviews of the various books. As has been discussed previously, each of these texts is the outcome of a process of remembering—a conversation about the past held between writers and storytellers from among the community. Further, upon reception, a response to the text is for the readers to join in that conversation to engage with their own acts of remembering as a form of meaning-making.

Readers recognise and respond to the memories of a place and bring their own memories to bear on the text. Their response is an imaginative return to a place with which they identify through the stories, memories, and accounts of the storytellers and narration. Here, they interpret the text as an opportunity to learn about themselves as individuals and to connect to a collective, based on the shared memories of a specific geographical place or home. In these books, the restoration of the text to the living communication that Ricoeur (2016) describes as part of reception correlates closely to their dependence on conjuring of these personal memories as the framework for the text. In his work on narrativity, Ricoeur (1997) describes how responding to books is an act of commemoration, “which is by nature both collective and public, as strictly correlative with the individual bringing to mind (remembrance) of the past” (p. xliii). Ricoeur (2004) emphasises:

Memory asserts its priority over history not only because it ensures a consciousness of, respectively, continuity between past and present and a feeling of belonging, but, on the contrary, also because it maintains the dialectical connection between what, following Koselleck, we have called space of experience and horizon of expectation. (p. 478)

History, in this context, is subjugated by personal memory, and public history takes on a personal nature while still being very much public. Individual stories assert priority over history records and create an opportunity for readers to examine the past without the assumption they would usually bring to public history. Valuing memories and remembering is upheld as a priority in the process of local history storytelling by most of the producers I encountered in my research, which adds weight to my argument for reading and studying local history as life writing. The point of view that this imaginative return to place encompasses is also significant. Oral historian Frisch (1990) asserts the opportunity for public history and the collective remembering it evokes to either sustain

or challenge worldviews. This has considerable appeal to life writing scholarship and (auto)biographical writing of a group:

Memory is living history, the remembered past that exists in the present. In one sense, it is a force that can be tapped, unleashed, and mobilized through oral and public history to stand as an alternative to imposed orthodoxy and officially sanctioned versions of historical reality; it is a route to a broadly distributed authority for making new sense of the past in the present. But in another way, memory is a deeply cultural artifact. (p. xxiii)

Memory, and its articulation, is thus an important act of meaning-making. In reading, it begins with an individual reader's response to the text that leads to an interpretation of "us" that is conservatively reinforced or radically revised by the point of view expressed in the text.

The reader's memory journey begins when they respond to the text by imaginatively identifying with the storytellers and their descriptions about their place. The stories resonate with the reader's memories and call to mind their own stories about the place being described—its people, activities, or events. A reader of *Moturoa*, for example, emailed the Harris brothers: "I loved reading the stories and could see and hear the people talking as though it was yesterday. You've captured the essence, character, the heart of the people and community" (Anonymous). The reader describes how the sensory nature of remembering—being able to see or hear the people talking in their memory—builds a connection between past and present to evoke the reader's "feeling of belonging" (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 478) to a shared story. This experience of responding to the voices of the past is consistent across all my research and, what one writer explains, makes the texts feel "*far more alive*" (Elizabeth). Producers believe that privileging personal story makes it easier to draw an affective response from readers and invites them to participate in the memory journey. By upholding the human element of story,

they believe the text is kept “*as relatable as possible*” (David) and can elicit a personal response or experience of connection to the story.

Memory in local history storytelling is paradoxically personal and public at the same time. Some readers do not have personal memories about what is described in the text and respond to the private memories (made public) of others to interpret the group story and make their own connection to the place being narrated. This is particularly noticeable among younger readers, imaginatively identifying with older storytellers, who then attribute their own meaning to the memories of their elders. *Patumahoe* coproducer Carter believes that an important feature of the book’s reception is that young readers are “now making these connections with the older more established members” (K. Carter, personal communication, July 18, 2017) through their memories and stories. In *Moturoa*, N. Harris recalled one story of a local “lass” dancing on the tables in the pubs. The story was included in the book and, on meeting the son of that “lass” in later years after her passing, the son recalled with great fondness that story of his mum’s antics in the pub—as the community remembers her. He reconnected to the private memory of his mother through the public story shared in the book. These are not his memories, but they become his through public remembering. His response restores the text and this story to living communication and reconnects him with the community who remembers his mother.

In the context of these books, remembering fits the individual into a collective experience of shared, public history. As readers respond to the text with their own memories of a place (or imaginatively through the memories of others), they become part of an experience of “us”. This remembering response to a text and the intersection of memories we share with others create capacity for group identity or a sense of belonging as similar memories are articulated and reinforced. For example, when all storytellers

describe schooling of a particular era, it becomes reinforced as “the way things were” for everyone at that time. In New Zealand, students from the 1940s to 1960s (in the age of the initial free school milk programme) all offer the same vivid memories of lukewarm milk for lunch. The half pint glass bottles would be delivered in the morning and left out in the sun until lunchtime (there was no refrigeration) to become a rather sour and unpleasant drinking experience for most. Many others also recall the school discipline that allowed corporal punishment until the 1980s, with these “hidings” embedded into their childhood recollections—currently the focus of investigation of abuse in some educational facilities that may eventually reframe or reinterpret this collective memory (Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand, n.d). Therefore, the response of identifying with shared memories can be seen as a social response to living history, which sustains “the deeply cultural” function of the remembering response that Frisch (1990) articulated, in contrast with memory as living history that “unleashes” or “mobilises” oral and public history. As a cultural artefact, remembering recognises and entrenches an existing public memory that is part of similar public discourse, such as meaning attributed to the school accounts from the twentieth century in New Zealand.

For many readers, their participation on the memory journey of “us” evoked by the texts generates a reconnection with place and one another. Like the quote from *Moturoa* noted at the start of this chapter, memories form a web of personal social connectivity that comes to be seen by a group or community as defining those who belong as “our people”. Readers respond when they identify with the memories shared with their own act of remembering—referring to their encounters with the books as a kind of homecoming across distance and time. *Moturoa* readers were grateful to the Harris brothers because the book reconnected them with home and fostered this sense of belonging to “our people”. One reader wrote to say: “The book put me right back into Tigertown [a local moniker for Moturoa]!” Their response recognises a return to a

particular era and shared experience of their unique neighbourhood through storytelling.

N. Harris explained that the book is a vehicle that allows readers to return home, imaginatively and emotionally:

Regularly I take a peek back into *Moturoa*; it warms still hearing the voices, makes me teary, gulp and laugh all at the same time. There's always a hug and a punch in there. It's like time travel. Take [Molly] for example, [I] never met her. She got wind of our book from her sister Norma. She cried when she read "Tigertown" in Canada, after all those years". (N. Harris, personal communication, September 22, 2017)

Molly personifies the importance of writing a book like *Moturoa* for local communities seeking to maintain community bonds through story and history where collective remembering can be elicited as an affective response. Molly typifies the types of emotional responses Harris observes towards the book, feelings that are both strongly uplifting and sad at the same time. The significance of reception as acts of emotive remembering extends meaning-making or interpretation of the text into a space of relationship building and group identity construction. To reconnect means that our present-day selves (being older with more lived experience) relate to these stories of the past with new sensitivities and insights—evoked with emotional affect. This, in turn, invites further capacity for renewal of the text and possible alternative interpretation. As Ricoeur (2016) suggests, each response to a text extends the possibility for new discourses to be added from the evolving social spheres into which the text speaks. *Moturoa*, for example, may be read differently in the future by readers who are contemplating the social impact of the oil and gas industry in Taranaki, which anticipates the disappearance of that industry in the near future.

The local history book sparks a dynamically entwined process of individual and collective remembering when it tells a community story. Taking this idea further, one of

the meanings of local history books read this way is that they function as memorials to time and place. The construction of local town halls or garden gates that dominated mid-twentieth-century New Zealand is no longer in vogue. Instead, these books have become a popular way to pay homage to heritage and local history stories, often written to commemorate milestone anniversaries. The books memorialise the voice and memories of community members (mostly the older generations), through their stories, across time and space, and readers respond to their memories affectively with those of their own. The book as a reinforcer of memory involves reading and reacting to familiar stories or making private stories part of public conversation. Professional writer and historian Helen explained that local history is then, “*kind of like a community memory you are preserving and honouring*”. It is to this that readers respond to find their own place within the collective story.

As a characteristic of memorialisation, the book also suggests that being part of a public record validates the personal memories of storytellers and the readers who identify with what they say. N. Harris, for example, observed from the responses shared by their readers that some were “over the moon to see themselves or family members enshrined in print” (N. Harris, personal communication, September 4, 2017), making it much easier for them to engage with the book and their own memories too. D. Harris described “the look of delight in the peoples’ eyes and those smiles, so proud of seeing their stories” (D. Harris, personal communication, August 31, 2017). A similar refrain was expressed by Huntsman about the community in Tokelau when their book was released: “All of a sudden they saw themselves as significant, in a world of things where for years they had been dismissed and neglected” (J. Huntsman, personal communication, July 17, 2017). Memorialisation of the accounts and the readers’ response to their stories creates opportunity to privilege memory over history to enable a consciousness of public history as the “living history” Frisch (1990) describes that validates personal lived experience.

However, this does raise the question of whether the acts of remembering in these books (individually or collectively) limit community memory to being a cultural artefact that reinforces the status quo or whether they can be used to interrogate something new or critical—the force that Frisch (1990) argues can be harnessed to speak as an alternative to “imposed orthodoxy and officially sanctioned versions of historical reality” (p. xxiii). I would argue that the potential for reinforcement or reinterpretation of the status quo depends on the intentionality of the act of remembering itself—articulated, for example, by the producers of the three case studies, as discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

As an illustration of an alternative, *Moturoa* positions itself as an antihistory that speaks back against its context. The very nature of the text is designed to provoke oral or public history and remembering that disrupts reader expectations to draw them into a personal discovery of story and how they fit into it. The Harris brothers challenged official views of historical reality by asking sometimes provocative questions of their community’s past and shared these with the readers to demand a response. Harris and Harris stumbled across a collection of newspaper cuttings in 1993 (article dated 10 April, 1935) about “Natives at Ngamotu” beach and their forced eviction from their foreshore homes to make way for the port expansion. In *Moturoa*, the narrator describes their horror at learning about such an awful event and shock at being unaware of this part of their community story (Harris & Harris, 2007, pp. 168–172). Harris cannot fathom how: “There was just nothing in any of the hand-me-down stories of a harrowing past. No one told us anything. Why?” (Harris & Harris, 2007, p. 170) In the sanitised versions of their stories, no one had passed on a public collection of personal accounts about what he perceived to be a major event in the community’s history—the beach evictions. This insight gave impetus to their own book project to ensure that the stories of the disenfranchised working class would be memorialised and not be lost in future conversations, overspoken by the ruling powers of economic and political expediency. Their book is

then “a force that can be tapped, unleashed, and mobilized” (Frisch, 1990, p. xxiii) that challenges the sanctioned, earlier versions of the community story. Also, as narrator, Harris demands readers explore their own memories about this event (and others) in interrogating their shared past. Such an approach acts upon Cole-Catley’s (the social historian referenced in Chapter Five) advice for N. Harris to embrace the darker side of life and ask some tough questions if needed in the text. Notwithstanding this critical lens, *Moturoa*’s overall tone cannot entirely escape from some element of nostalgia.

Nostalgia, in fact, emerged as a strong driving feature of the narrative of many of the books and projects studied and discussed in my research. In local history books, the affective response of remembering is most often expressed as a positive encounter with the good old days or the “golden years” of a particular era as a form of nostalgia or focus of remembering. This is usually the basis of criticism against the genre as “parish pump” (Gardner, 1999, p. 49), which presents the *good* face of the community in these written projects. Textual analysis of the three case study books’ contents does uncover a presiding message that runs across all three: *this is/was a good place to live*. Community relations are portrayed positively for the most part, and a feeling of goodwill perpetuates the stories and memories. Our place, the narrators assert, was a good place to live well, and the readers respond with their own happy memories. This assertion, however, reduces possibility for challenging sanctioned representations of community and their history.

Nostalgia acts to direct remembering (as a response) towards a positive and often unified story of “us”. Yes, it can be a reduction or oversimplification of the story, which scholars like Savage (2008) point out can be used as a political tool to recreate the experience of community for political control. However, this does not detract from acknowledging that nostalgia is also a valid response to a time of economic, social, or cultural change,

without always having nefarious intent (Ramsden, 2016, p. 96). As has been shown, all three of the case study texts respond to changing times with a feeling of nostalgia for a lost age in their community. Collective remembering—as a reader response to the book—invites readers to remember their own stories of the place in reaction and implies a camaraderie that keeps “us” strongly bonded together through memories shared. Although they have undoubtedly a sociocultural and political point of view, it is overreaching to declare the use of nostalgia nefarious in these texts. Instead, nostalgia is one valid response to the “deeply cultural artefact” (Frisch, 1990, p. xxiii) of local history as an expression of public history or its completion in meaning-making and interpretation.

Acknowledgement of the unavoidable influence of nostalgia in collective remembering and memorialisation does, however, assert the importance of raising the level of critical consciousness of readers and producers of local history storytelling. Acts of remembering at community level are enhanced by critical reflexivity that interrogates the implied commonality of community or that “sense of oneness” (Shopes, 2015, p. 105) captured in the text. This can depend on apparent forgetfulness of the darker side of community experience or a positively reimagined community (Anderson, 1991) that resonates with Ricoeur’s (2016) theory of narrativity when he writes that: “this imaginary world is itself a creation of literature” (p. 111). Reception as remembering—and its associated nostalgia—is therefore a form of completing a text in Ricoeur’s reasoning; it is also a reimagining or rewriting of the text as something new.

A Different Point of View

A third theme emerged from the research when querying reception of the texts. Readers can, as one more response, attribute significance to the text when they reject it or raise critical questions about what is left out of the book and why. Here, the response

challenges the text and the point of view it portrays. In this context, to read or complete the text opens the possibility for readers *not* to identify with the experience of community being shared and to query the very constitution of “community” represented by the text. The expression of experience that Ricoeur (2004) writes about as an articulation between past, present, and future, reflected in the intersection of the “space of experience ... [and the] ... horizon of expectation” (p. 478), is judged by readers to see whether it resonates with their experience and expectation for the text. This is best explained through one specific example from the case studies.

The whole gist of the local history of Patumāhoe is problematised by the Māori perspective on what is seen as a historically dominant settler narrative. The text, published in 2016, entered social discourse in Aotearoa New Zealand society at a time of increasing discussion about decolonisation and critical reflection on Māori–Pākehā relationships (see Chapter Three). The text also responds to a history of dislocation and colonisation (as examined in Chapter Five). Further, as already noted, the local history book project team expressed a desire to promote a more “balanced view” (*Patumahoe: History & Memories*, 2016, p. 216) of New Zealand history, meaning that the team wanted to include both Māori and Pākehā points of view in their writing about Patumāhoe. To this end, the text begins with the story of tangata whenua to explain how it transitioned into a Pākehā community through land confiscation. Ngāti Tamaoho was approached to include iwi accounts alongside other historical records in the text. The book project team indicated that it was aware that for some residents of Patumāhoe, this was not a part of their history with which they were familiar and, since the residents of Patumāhoe were the anticipated audience of the book, the team wanted to introduce their readers to the Māori history of the district too:

[The project team] were able to make it an accessible, readable, understandable and sympathetic story to both sides, as much as we could. There are an awful lot

of people in this area who now know and have discovered the history. (K. Carter, personal communication, July 18, 2017)

Difficulty materialised from this well-intentioned desire to represent the project team's interpretation of history that could accommodate both points of view. An article published in an online journal—as a secondary text written in reply to the book text—sparked what Ricoeur (2016) would describe as an event in response (a type of reception). This article—and the aggressive media reaction it provoked—was far from what the producers and community had anticipated and was unexpectedly confrontational.

Wilson's (2016) article was published online on *E-Tangata* (16 October, 2016) prior to the book's publication and critiqued the book project. The article was the full reproduction of a chapter that Wilson, a journalist with ties to the community who had been working with the book project team to contribute content for the publication, had submitted for consideration in the Patumāhoe book too:

I helped with that Patumāhoe history project — and one contribution I offered was a brief final chapter where I was encouraging the readers to think about who'd been dealt a bad hand by our 19th century history, and who had benefitted from it. The Patumāhoe book team didn't use the chapter. They thought it would make some people 'uncomfortable'. So we offer it here. If we are to move forward together, we need to get past that discomfort. (Wilson, 2016, paras. 14–15)

Wilson (2016, October 15) expressed the desire to confront this discomfort and engage readers with the chapter he had written as a response to the text to add to the conversations being stimulated among the Patumāhoe community (and wider New Zealand) in their interpretation of the district's past and its consequences for residents across the past, present, and future. He was not dismissive of the Patumāhoe text. He acknowledged the hard work of the team in preparing the “substantial” book and

acknowledged its point of view as “mostly [a] Pākehā operation because this is a mostly Pākehā town” (para. 2). He pointed out that:

To their credit, the Patumāhoe researchers have dealt with the pre-Pākehā days and the early Māori-Pākehā contact. But they stopped short of spelling out how the land that lies under their village was acquired. They’ve assigned Māori involvement to some distant past, as if the echoes and ramifications of that history aren’t still felt today. In doing so, they have underplayed the price that Māori have paid in forfeiting their land and future there. And they shied away from pointing to the need for Pākehā to understand how fortunate they have been as beneficiaries. (paras. 7–9)

The article conveys a frustration that the book is not explicit enough in offering critical interpretation of the text or making present-day community members aware of the long-term consequences of Ngāti Tamaoho’s alienation from their land. Wilson (2016) argues that locals needed to accept that land confiscation had led to “generations of rawakore, generations of having nothing [and] generations of mamae, of hurt” (para. 23), with Māori “often being treated as second class” citizens (para. 25). His article explains that there is a different point of view—a Māori perspective—that is not the same as the Pākehā one and that it would be meaningful for “us locals to come to terms with it in our own way” (para. 13).

Wilson’s (2016) response challenges all writers of local history about their role in maintaining hegemony, whether it is through intention or inexperience. Wilson is outspoken too about mainstream media in general remaining “too comfortably white” (“New Year Honour”, 2019, December 31, para. 1) and raises awareness of the role of writers in their complicity in sociopolitical constructions. Social media commentators immediately responded to Wilson’s (2016) article with their own critique of the project—not having read *Patumahoe: History & Memories* since the article was published before

the book. Media agencies added their critique, and a brief debate about local history texts was ignited, all before the critics had even read the publication.

The producers were discouraged by the experience and the confrontational approach of the media, especially given their good intentions for the project and desire for inclusivity. It could—from another perspective gained from my discussions with the project team—be reasonably explained as a misunderstanding in the media. Wilson, whose other submissions were already incorporated into the book, later submitted another chapter (the article published online) for inclusion—as a modern Māori perspective on the history of Patumāhoe. The project team explained that this submission (the chapter that formed the basis of Wilson’s article) was received with the book already in its production stages. The team believed that the content of the new submission had already been covered in existing writing (what was to be its Chapter One) and explained that the article could not be included at that stage but, instead, encouraged its publication elsewhere. This was in keeping with the project’s goal to share as much of the information gathered by the project across different public forums if not used within the book itself. The project team was disappointed that when the article was published, it did not reference the project logistics that the committee had indicated as explanation for the article’s exclusion from the book. Furthermore, media coverage as part of the response overlooked the team’s collaboration with Ngāti Tamaoho and their contributions to the publication, and no follow up was done by the media agencies or social commentators to review the book later, once the text was published.

The debate prompted a local response to Wilson’s (2016) article and the *Patumahoe* text too. Much of this is hearsay gathered informally from the project team and community sources, but at least one resident responded online on the local history group’s social

media platform to encourage others in the community *to engage with* the different points of view to build on the conversation and trigger new interpretations or reading of the text:

So without any preconceived intent—but taking advantage of the dialogue with [the project team] that day—this post is primarily to start a conversation which begins with a question, (particularly for those not intimately involved with Patumahoe history): *Did you know that the residential village of Patumahoe rests entirely within the “Native Reserve” allocated at one time to local Māori?* [emphasis in original] (Crosswell, 2016, paras. 10–11)

Patumāhoe’s example of reception draws attention to the concerns that scholars like Mikaere have articulated about Pākehā writing “*equitable history*” all around New Zealand (noted earlier in Chapter Seven). In my interview with Mikaere, he suggested that in trying to promote a scholarship of balanced history, the trouble is that Pākehā fail to think through and confront their own history first: “*Pākehā are quite happy to forget their colonial heritage and create a new one*”. He worries that this unconscious forgetting encourages them to disengage with and disown their personal story—not to confront some difficult realities. Aporia transpires as unresolved rhetorical tension in this response. It is characterised as a blind spot in the argument that Derrida (as cited in Horowitz, 2002) points out is the text’s most doubtful or contradictory moment—the very tenements upon which the argument is based is the thing that makes it impossible. This stance argues that a writer’s assertion of striving for equitable history reveals a position of power as they seek to speak for someone else or accommodate another point of view in their narration. This gives rise to deep unease in history narratives that speak across sociocultural or political differences with omniscient narration with what can be experienced as erasure of voice or story.

On the other hand, a different perspective would propose that it is acceptable for Pākehā writers to include Māori history in local places as an authentic desire for learning. When writing for a mostly Pākehā audience, as Wilson (2016) acknowledged is the case in *Patumahoe*, the writers know what their Pākehā peers do not know about these places and stories. Renowned New Zealand anthropologist Metge (2017) has coincidentally a personal history with the Franklin district where Patumāhoe is located. Metge believes there is value in writers expressing these stories for an audience they best understand: “my argument has been that I (and other Pākehā) know what we need to tell other Pākehā because we know what they don’t know” (p. 139). She uses her own encounters with Māori perspective from her youth in neighbouring Pukekohe (an area adjacent to Patumāhoe) to highlight the necessity of challenging a monocultural Pākehā worldview:

We have come an unimaginably long way from where we were when I was young, but it’s important that we acknowledge what has happened in the past. Part of the reward of making Māori friends is finding out there are two sides to our history. (2017, p. 136)

Metge suggests learning needed about the complexity of New Zealand history can be gained effectively in local settings, which, it can be argued, is the positive outcome for Patumāhoe’s project experiences. She describes the “patience and graciousness” (2017, p. 139) she has encountered from Māori storytellers to work with her and other writers—similar to the sentiment experienced by the producers of *Patumahoe: History & Memories* with input from Ngāti Tamaoho—to learn to write with greater sensitivity to the viewpoint of the “other”. Therefore, the key consideration that emerges from this debate about local history writing is a consciousness-raising of who is writing for whom, in what sorts of narrative partnerships, and what societal forces are influencing the conversation.

Patumahoe's producers explained that they had wanted to highlight the "tragic past" (Boynton, 2016) of Ngāti Tamaoho and did so in the book by including the voice of Ben Leonard to speak on behalf of the iwi to raise awareness of Patumāhoe as the "heartland of the Ngati¹⁶ Tamaoho rohe" (*Patumahoe: History & Memories*, 2016, p. 6). Leonard ends the first chapter:

In 1864, following the end of the Waikato War, the 701-acre Native Reserve, now named the Patumahoe Block was confiscated... The land was sold to European immigrants, and its character changed forever. Although Ngati Tamaoho could never again occupy their ancestral homes, their deep connection to that land did not cease. They continue to regard themselves as tangata whenua and kaitiaki (guardians) of these places, which remain integral to their tribal identity and a vital part of their story as a people. (*Patumahoe: History & Memories*, 2016, p. 13)

Wilson worries that in local history accounts, iwi lived experiences can appear to be presented as being from a distant past that is peripheral to more recent Pākehā experiences. However, Leonard's writing affirms Ngāti Tamaoho's ongoing connection to the local story, and the book committee welcomed the iwi as part of the book's launch to build upon the relationships the book project had begun to rebuild.

The different perspectives of Māori and Pākehā meet uncertainly in local history books. Textual analysis of the *Patumahoe* text reveals that the narrative is patterned on Weber's (2001) protestant work ethic, a movement from deficit to success (described in Chapter Six), which reveals how the community story is constructed from a Pākehā worldview through the 150 years of accounts the publication represents. In contrast, the Māori story is one that moves from accomplishment (landownership, farming, and trading) to deficit (confiscation, homelessness, and poverty). The two worldviews and lived experiences do not co-exist easily, and the two narratives are difficult to reconcile in the "good place"

¹⁶ See spelling note in Glossary (p. xiii).

styled rhetoric of collective remembering associated with local history writing—one usually subsumes the other. Despite good intentions, the *Patumahoe* text gestures at the absences of alterity by starting and ending with commentary on the difficult race relations in Aotearoa New Zealand but struggles to fully incorporate it as a main theme throughout. This is consistent with other local history texts, which briefly raise societal issues with significant implications but do not cover them critically in-depth, as indicated in Chapter Seven. Herein, Mikaere’s concerns about local history writing come to the fore. The addition of Māori experience in certain approaches can appear to delegate Māori as minor characters, overlooked in the central narrative. In response, some readers may judge such texts as perfunctory. Mikaere’s solution is for writers to write freely from their own point of view, interrogate it for themselves, and ultimately, juxtapose different accounts alongside each other rather than reconcile them into a “unified” text. Applying Ricoeur’s (2016) theorisation, this would enhance the possibility for dialogic discourse and maximise the potential for reception with even more possibilities for meaning-making and interpretations—stimulating a much richer social conversation.

The complexity about debate of representation and authority in local history writing is demonstrated well in *Patumahoe: History & Memories*. There is varied reader response to the text and the conversation of history and heritage it inspired. Readers like Crosswell (2016) respond with enthusiasm for further discourse and learning, which is encouraging for the book project team. Others react to the project with criticism that the content does not go far enough, while yet others may feel it is already going too far in opening discussion that makes them uncomfortable.

While one response of reception may be to identify with the shared public memory articulated in a text, another response is to question or reject the text. This response of

questioning—or even challenging—the text affords the opportunity for ongoing completion of the text and its contribution to social discourse as a living communication with an “original capacity for renewal” (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 120). In this response—as a theme of reception—the event it precipitates is reactive to its wider sociocultural or political setting. Here, when the text opens to other possibilities for meaning-making as Ricoeur (2016) describes in its completion or reading, the discourse added to the text proposes a counter-discourse in reply. In addition, in the space of negotiation of meaning or interpretation from sometimes opposing worldviews (namely, the coloniser and the colonised), tension is unresolved, and sits uncomfortably and is not readily reconciled.

For the community of Patumāhoe, a noteworthy event took place after the book was completed that reiterated the importance of engaging with these tough conversations about history and lived experience in local settings and affirmed the significance of their book project. Upon the awarding of the Treaty Settlement of Ngāti Tamaoho in 2017 as redress for the historic land confiscation, the Auckland Council erected a plinth to acknowledge the iwi’s history in Patumāhoe. Before the text was published, the book committee suggested that locals would have no idea why the memorial was necessary. Following the publication, the team recognised that the text and the responses to it had raised understanding among the community with regard to the significance of the Crown’s settlement of the Treaty of Waitangi claim and explained why the Deed of Settlement that had been awarded is an important restitution. The project reignited dialogue about the different experiences of tangata whenua and settlers among community members, which was beneficial for the community to learn and discover more about their history and heritage (K. Carter, H. Upfold, & A. Coppock, personal communication, July 18, 2017)—a significant opportunity for renewal.

Reaching Beyond: The Conversation Continues

The discovery of the three themes as the types of reception found in my study of local history books applies Ricoeur's (2016) thinking about the completion (reading) of the texts to the life writing lens employed in the thesis argument. My application of the theory directs critical thinking about these books to historical critique and analysis of their form and content into better understanding the ongoing dynamic engagement between local history books and their social environment. The three themes draw attention to the *extratextual features* of the book projects to argue that a crucial part of the significance of local history books is the value and meaning attributed to them by the readers in response. The stories of what happened after publication are a vital part of their meaning and are brought to the fore when the books are viewed through the lens of life writing criticism. Therefore, critical reflection of reception should be incorporated into literary, historical, cultural, or sociological analysis of community history stories—especially local histories that purport a collaborative grassroots point of view.

The three themes of reception—reification, remembering and memorialisation, and the potential for counter-response—are interrelated. In the same way that *kōrero* references story or discussion as both noun and verb, artefact (noun) and remembering (verb) are two ways of looking at the issue that are interdependent on one another. Life writing as form (object) and life writing as remembering (practice) are affectively entwined in meaning-making and find another expression in the reception of these texts. Whenever this storying intersects with debate or critical discussion that challenges the text or the representative boundaries of the collective, the possibility for counter-discourse emerges in a heterogenous sociocultural or political context, such as the contexts discussed in the three case study texts and the local history producers' New Zealand experiences. When readers respond to a point of view (as encapsulated in these texts) or the

representational nature of remembering, they encounter the possibility for a response to collective remembering that may unite the collective or question its very foundation.

The three themes of reception are discrete and yet respond to one another as further evidence of the necessity for extratextual interpretation. They can represent different responses to similar ideas based on the text and readers' situatedness in their context. For example, a refusal to include what is uncomfortable can be the basis for revering memories in the kind of local history that privileges the nostalgic in favour of building a positive community rhetoric. In contrast, another response interprets this avoidance of discomfort as grounds for challenging these kinds of history texts. In both responses, tensions emerge that continue to inform and influence the interpretation (or reading) of the texts.

Despite the unified or nostalgic worldview often provoked by these texts, the spirit of the text is such that the possibility of their ongoing meaning-making is endless. The conversations or discourses that attach themselves to the text continue to evolve and unfold far beyond the producers' original expectations for the book. Neither the book itself as an artefact, nor the action of remembering that responds to it, is finite or complete. Even in situations where the book is reified and not read, response has not yet come into being as a text in waiting—preserving the text for later interpretation. Meaning-making endures, or has the possibility of enduring, long after the book has been written and circulated.

This chapter has focused on reception. However, across the research, it has been shown that the producers are aware of the limitations of each book but are hopeful for the possibility that the text will speak into other projects and texts later as “*a framework to inform future work by others*” (Paul). None of the writers or project team members believes the text is the end of the conversation. In fact, the attitudes of the producers I

have interviewed match the theorists I have used: they assert that the significance of the project is its ability to continue to influence dialogue within the community about their shared past long after the book is completed. The writers see their efforts as a contribution to an ongoing conversation that can and must be improved upon in future work and texts where new stories will be sought, the accounts reviewed, and other possibilities for interpretation emerge: “*Hopefully, in another few years someone else will pick it up and write it again.*” (Tom). Stories shared by several of the interviewees demonstrate how the books stimulate new discourse or events added to the text as readers respond to the text and use it for further continuing social discourse. Scholar Daniel noted that, “*in a sense [the book] did have a life afterwards*”—it became an important part of the iwi’s land claim at the Waitangi Tribunal and a credible record for iwi negotiations. One of historian Samuel’s publications informed the decisions of a town planning committee of the redevelopment of an area in his city. In addition, *Matagi Tokelau*’s two translations found expression as a language teaching tool for the community (J. Huntsman, personal communication, July 17, 2017); it also inspired a musical drama in Wellington performed by Tokelau’s New Zealand-based youth that told their history as a performance and expression of identity (Huntsman, 1996, p. 149) and prompted the community to write a follow-up book about traditional fishing practices (co-authored with Hooper). Both *Moturoa*’s and *Patumahoe*’s projects stimulated discussion with local heritage curators (such as museums or libraries) about archiving of history records and memory-keeping within the local communities, including an online “digital museum” and the expansion of interaction with the local history group through social media like Facebook among the Patumāhoe community (K. Carter, personal communication, July 18, 2017).

The examination of these different sources to question how the audience responds to the local history works has thus uncovered helpful insight into how these texts find

fulfilment. The application of Ricoeur's (1997, 2016) work has revealed how the text is locked into a continual process of becoming, with endless possibilities for completion and meaning-making. It can be argued that the text is the vehicle for imaginative wanderings into the past and the medium through which individuals interpret or encounter their own memories of local place and negotiate themselves in reply to the collective discourse—which is very much a feature of life writing. As such, the approach promoted in the research provides an entry point into further interdisciplinary research into the space of reception—or the story beyond the text—to speak to the impact and influence of the life writing of community story and explore what this can reveal for future literary, historical, sociological, or cultural studies and readings.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion: Situated Truth

“If you do not tell the truth about yourself, you cannot tell it about other people.” (Virginia Woolf, writer and critic)

This thesis was prompted by my own experience as a life writer and as someone who grew up in social contexts that have now mostly disappeared. Following my experiences in mid-Canterbury in the early 2000s, described at the start of Chapter One, my original desire was to encourage others to take part in local history writing projects as transformative, community building processes—processes that, based upon the projects I had observed, appeared to be as important as the texts produced. To test this perception, I turned to life writing and life writing criticism because they reflect upon process and practice as part of the meaning of a text and engage with the social contexts within which book projects are situated. The approach has led to many discoveries, some of them challenging to my initial unnuanced enthusiasm. Application of life writing criticism to local history books reveals a literary complexity underpinning the history of a place (a geographical community), told through the accounts of its people in narrative relationships with a writer, as a window into social worlds.

The study of local and community history books as life writing makes possible a deeper understanding of the texts and community. Local history has often been objected to as “parish pump” (Gardner, 1999, p. 49) that is open to being self-serving, full of assumptions, and aporia or, worse, manipulative. However, the thesis was able to show how under the umbrella of life writing, the “judged” or elided aspects of local history can be studied as examples of broader social discourses that reveal, for example, the operation of authority and power in history storytelling. Questions about the politics of representation associated with authorship and the

exercise of authority to speak for others come to the fore, and the ethics of life writing is highlighted in the negotiation of complicated storytelling relationships in local history writing projects.

Local and community history books find a space to embrace their complexities of meaning-making within the genre of life writing to wrestle freely with what it is, what it does, what it cannot do, and what it should not do. The approach also facilitates interdisciplinary conversations across common grounds of interest as, for example, literature, history, cultural studies, and anthropology. Accordingly, resituating local history under the canon of life writing does not detract from the traditional scholarship of its study as a field of history but adds to the critique of these texts and the study of the processes by which they are crafted and interpreted.

I sought to examine how practices and expectations of local history may change when it is reimagined as life writing. Most importantly, my research revealed that the shift in emphasis encourages questions about community as a negotiated self-consciousness that emerges in life writing processes, which reveals a life story of a place among the convergence of historical records and personal remembering or accounting. A “community” comes to life in the reflexive processes that unfold during these book projects. Therefore, the generative character of life writing informs an expectation of closer critical study of the situatedness of the books: the contexts of their production, the literary forms that emerge, and how readers respond or reply to the texts. It highlights the subject positions of writers, subjects of the story (community members), their interaction with one another, and responsiveness to other interests from within the local community, broader sociopolitical settings, and even academia.

My research recognises that local history books are popular public history texts, especially within Pākehā New Zealand, but they are less popular among academia in general. The merging of academic history and public history interests takes on special significance within

my study as I examined texts that are evaluated from sometimes opposing points of view, being judged as questionable by some scholars holding firm to academic standards or esteemed as valuable among community members for finding creative ways to validate local stories and accounts. The debate is likely to gain momentum in New Zealand following the September 2019 government decision to make teaching New Zealand history in school compulsory at a more senior level (O'Malley & Kidman, 2018, November/December) and the possible bicentennial publications that may already be being mused on in the New Zealand public history arena. These movements will likely add to the popularity of local history book projects and increase the possibility for further contestations of local accounts and local history practice. Debate about local history writing is complex because it responds not just to scholarship that questions traditional and emerging practices but also to public history expectations of democratisation in general and specific conversations of decolonisation in New Zealand and the Pacific (as discussed in Chapter Three). My research has argued that local history writing has evolved into a more obvious form of life writing—a kind of historiography as a result—which challenges the production of knowledge evoked in these book projects and influences how we read and study these texts. The application of a life writing approach to my research problem thus allows the life writing features of local and community histories to reveal themselves better and influence how we interpret and value the books and the projects that produce them.

Several considerations are addressed in this conclusion. First, I will specify the methodological contributions from my study. Second, in stepping back from the analysis, I offer three final insights that integrate my discoveries across the different chapters: the temporality of place; “our” construction of place; and a literary accounting of place. Finally, in closing, I address my place in the conversation.

Methodological Contribution

My research was built upon case studies of three local and community history books—*Matagi Tokelau: History and Traditions of Tokelau*; *Moturoa: A Social History of Moturoa, New Plymouth, New Zealand Aotearoa*; and *Patumahoe: History & Memories*—integrated with critical analysis of the experiences of a further selection of New Zealand book producers and writers. The research method facilitated a learning encounter between textual form and the case study of process, which harnessed the ability of multiple integrated methods to reveal different things. The texts were read or studied for context and their situatedness into social conversations of meaning-making. At the same time, writers spoke back to their work to critically engage with their texts and writing practices and processes and reflected upon the genre and its impacts among community discourse.

An outcome of this research method was the furthering of discussion between scholars and practitioners—two sometimes opposing positions as noted in Chapter Two—that are breaking down old divides for the benefit of both practice and scholarship (Jolly, 2011). Hopefully, an approach such as the one used in this thesis hastens the increasing porosity of these boundaries. In addition, incorporation of both professional and amateur experiences adds nuance to the learning discoveries to juxtapose scholarly lines of questioning with professional practitioner-based ethos and community-led, grassroots interests.

The approach also emphasised the importance of invigorating discussion between academic fields, pushing at interdisciplinary boundaries. It has been shown that the application of a humanities approach adds value to social science and reinforces the connections between local history storytelling as literature *and* as historical record to explore the social realities or interpretive frameworks these texts thus encapsulate. The integration of macro and micro analysis of the case studies first interrogated the settings and contexts of the production of the books to uncover the sociocultural, historical, and political circumstances to which the

projects responded as a socioideological literary performance (Chapter Five) and, second, revealed the use of language as a literary device to confer social meaning through close readings (Chapter Six). Collectively, these analyses demonstrated how texts and language represent open social systems and convey—in dialogue with their settings—a social consciousness that articulates an identity of community as a distinctive and situated point of view. Building upon the importance of the extratextual features of the books that arose from the application of life writing criticism, the research method enabled me to theorise reception based on the producers' experiences and evidence they had gathered, revealing endless possibilities for meaning-making in how texts find fulfilment (Chapter Eight). Therefore, the books present themselves as both literary *and* social devices when viewed as life writing whereby knowledge-making and social construction of meaning are central parts of their evaluation and performance. The making of the books, and their completion in reading, is a process of meaning-making that is most consequential for the genre.

I would argue that the success of integrating the two research methods is that local history books are appreciated more fully as cultural and social artefacts, and the practice of local history is interrogated more closely, including its influence on the literary art forms that emerge from certain research and writing processes. The two methods enabled me to compare the specific examples of the three book projects with a wider breadth of experience and practice from different points of view. In addition, my work uses the theoretically oriented ideas and concepts of scholars, such as Bakhtin (1981), to examine how they manifest in practice in local history book projects. In so doing, the research reveals the possibilities and limitations of certain practices in local history writing. The emphasis on situatedness uncovered in my research is especially relevant to wider debate among public history work raised in the thesis as a response to changing demands that are experienced by writers in the genre.

My research method revealed the complicated subject positions and tensions—including disciplinary training and questions of indigeneity—encountered by writers as they grapple with or reject calls for improved collaboration. The ethics of life writing as better representation practice promoted by Couser (1998, 2003, 2005) and Eakin (1999, 2004) converge with the application of Bakhtin’s (1981) theory of dialogism to reaffirm the moral quality of authorship to ask us to confront what this looks like in local history writing. As such, new ways of thinking are exposed to better address the nuances of local history as form (books) and practice (processes of storytelling and writing). Furthermore, my research method exposed how the link between form and practice is built upon the narrative relationships that characterise life writing and the contexts within which these relationships are situated. The methodology enabled me to explore how oral history principles, such as “shared authority” (Frisch, 2011; Stumm, 2014), are revealed within case studies and other writing practices to illuminate how these relationships operate in various types of negotiations between the narrative authority of the writers and anecdotal authority of storytellers from among the community. The outcome challenges Frisch’s (2011) proposed synthesis of authority by drawing attention to the tenuous and sometimes irreconcilable tensions raised in different practices and the competing interests that act upon the processes. Furthermore, the reflexivity built into the research method uncovered evidence of an increased mindfulness to process and its impact on the art form, as has been shown in the three case studies. However, the interpretation of writers’ or project teams’ responsibilities differs significantly from case to case, including how they respond to the demands for appropriate history scholarship alongside the promotion of creative self-expression of lived experience and personal accounts.

My research generates possibilities for studying other texts or books produced within the humanities and social sciences, not previously examined as life writing, to be looked at afresh, especially those forms that, like local history, straddle the literary and scientific worlds. My approach is not entirely new since it is used by literary scholars to study works of fiction, but

its application across nonfiction or academic fields is full of opportunities for other studies, particularly if one heeds Eakin's (1999) call to reconsider forms of (auto)biographical writing as life writing and apply life writing criticism to their study. As my research has shown, the life writing characteristics of local and community history writing emerge as fascinating discoveries from my reimagination of local history books as life writing. The use of life writing criticism as part of the research method to study texts that promote "truthfulness" and balance self-expression with demands of proof renders an application that is curiously balanced between subjective storytelling and accounting, and the production of factual records. The approach thus suggests a wealth of potential for future studies—studies that may incorporate reader reception more closely too or explore the visual aesthetic of local history books to reflect upon the physical artefact differently.

Temporality of Our Place

The practice of life writing and the forms it takes possess a *temporal* quality that is more complex than single-authored, conventional historical accounts. Seeing local history as life writing reveals a rich, multilayered experience of temporality as a subjective reflection of time where lived experiences are contemplated as collections or a series of moments that intersect. The accounts or remembered stories of the local communities gravitate around each place in dynamic encounters across time and space.

From the research, we can see this temporal quality manifests in multiple ways. Writers, storytellers, and readers are united by a common experience of looking backwards to reflect upon a place's stories but each from their own unique experience of a situated present—the point of time when they reflect about the past of a place. Local history books in this way bridge past, present, and future across different moments in time. First, the experience or event happens. Next, individuals perform acts of remembering that make up accounts of that event or experience and reflect upon them at later times. When a book project is begun, at yet

another moment in time, writers gather stories and listen to these witness accounts or secondhand (or even thirdhand) stories shared about the past, interpreting them in the writer's present to produce a narrative about the place. Doing so, producers bring stories and accounts of past moments back into the present through the production of a text. Then, the readers of the future reflect on how that place is represented in the text to interpret or complete its meaning for themselves. Long after the project is completed, readers across different points in time engage with the book and its accounts to work out their connection with the story of "our place", based upon what they too know of the place. As Ricoeur (2016) suggests, they restore it to a living communication when they receive and interpret it, and, as my research confirms, this act of interpretation is strongly informed by their situatedness, which includes the temporal dimension. Finally, taking the notion of temporality one step further, the producers themselves, at various points in the future (a new present), look back reflexively about their project experiences and practice to think critically about what they did and the narrative they helped craft, and question their future practice. Meaning-making, as a temporal feature, is thus infinite. Whenever attention is paid to the local history text or project practice, meaning is once again reinterpreted in the present, and new possibilities emerge for the future.

Moreover, there are layers of reflexivity where the concatenations of accounts intersect in linkages of "community". The story of the place, spoken for the place now about the place then, is part of a collective subjective experience of *shared* moments in time. When applied to a project to write about place, my research has shown that the local history books are the outcome of community-driven acts of remembering as people come together to grapple with existing accounts of that place's past and create a new one. These moments of remembering signify *a moment* of reflection or a temporary *pause* to make a conscious effort to think through matters of community and heritage, and contemplate the story of a place, which can be easily overlooked when not prioritised. Readers identify with (or reject) the story of the

local place through the stories of its people based upon how they identify with these experiences or if they feel personally connected to those stories in their present, which, in turn, informs their future experiences of that same place.

Each local history book project is located within a time-stamped conversation related to the broader conversation of a regional or national history. As such, the imagined conception of “community” at local level becomes increasingly difficult to define, label, or evaluate. Map boundaries do not necessarily equate to the experience of local community or match records maintained by grassroots organisations or institutions. As my research has shown, people who have long since lived outside of the district still identify with the narrative and have an interest in what is written or represented in these books. Although no longer physically present, they continue to feel bonded to the story of local places and take an interest in the local histories of places they or their ancestors have called home. In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, for instance, tangata whenua may be physically displaced from local contexts due to the tragedies of war and dispossession, but their connection to the locale endures. Similarly, migrants resettled in local places hold complicated bonds to stories of places from their past and their present. “Community” can thus be contested on these grounds as a space or place of difference too. Yet, my research has shown that despite intention to honour difference, the texts privilege what is similar or shared to tell the stories of places, activities, sites, people, or events that people in the same place hold in common. If however, “community” is to be reflected as a site of difference *and* commonality, situated in an intricate woven braid of temporality, how can writers and artists reconcile these points of view within any single narrative? Writing about community implies trying to make sense of who or what “community” is, and that is a troubling premise for local history, filled with contradictions and different points of view.

The Imaginary Construction of Our Place

The application of a life writing lens encourages us to see processes and forms of different types of history writing in new ways, including, for example, contemplating local history as an (auto)biographical life story of a place, thereby opening up novel enquiries and critical readings of such texts. Eakin (1999) describes autobiographical life writing as a process of becoming an “I”, which, when applied to the group narratives of geographical communities in my research, uncovers a story of becoming “us” or “we”. Even when written as a biographical form, the character of the place revealed represents a personal collective. This collective representation is emphasised in the application of life writing criticism to highlight the complexities of writing about a place as a collective self or “our” place, which allows questions about identity to emerge from this process of becoming and relate these questions back to the practice of local history and the art forms such practices take. I proposed a link to Ong’s (2012) work on how certain forms of oral or written expressions inform or contribute to building an experience of culture, which revealed a collective consciousness that is fostered by local history books and the processes that craft them.

Consequently, the imagined “we” of community surfaces as a significant feature of local history books and resonates with Anderson’s (1991) work on the imagined communities of nation-building. Anderson suggests that these mental and emotional constructs of “community” are built upon a deep-seated experience of kinship that may ignore the contested or messier sides of collective experience. Applied to local places, a deep desire for “community” is foregrounded among (sometimes a select group of) people living in a locale and finds expression in how they act as the collective “we” to which they seek to belong—reaffirming the mode of “settling” within local history writing that Veracini (2010) suggests promotes a “settled body politic” (p. 75). Therefore, a life writing perspective asks readers and critics to view local history, not as something that exists to be studied objectively or based upon analysis of evidence but to appreciate how it is spoken into being and constructed in a

process of writing and project-managed reflection. The life story of a town or district reveals itself through local history projects as a situated point of view, an opportunity to get to know one's own self when self is experienced as a member of a geographical community.

Collectively, these processes of remembering define the shared experiences or memories of "community" in these places to express an identity. Thus, the subjectivities of local history become a valued object of study, appreciated for their literary and social significance and uncovered in literary analysis, such as close readings—critical readings that uncover, for example, how language is used to represent a "personality" or situated point of view of a community. This shift from seeing subjectivity as something to be managed to something that is respected informs emerging new creative processes of writing local history texts, exemplified by the *Moturoa* case study.

There is a fascinating tension within local history books that responds to the imaginary construction of "community" and the temptation in writing about a community to highlight only the uplifting features or Gardner's "parish pump" (1999, p. 49). However, my research has shown that writers and project team members are motivated from a sincere intention to present a truthful as possible accounting of the lived experiences of a geographical community. Therefore, it is helpful to regard these texts as life writing—as authentic attempts at representation based upon personal accounts and stories, curated alongside other evidence. Book project teams do look to make a positive contribution to a community they value, but this does not suggest glib superficiality. Even among newcomers to the genre—as the case studies have shown—local storytellers and writers have demonstrated a willingness to think through the uncertain complexities of their time. Nevertheless, the subjective interpretation of community experiences crafts a narrative point of view that represents a construction of life, and this cannot ever adequately capture the full diversity of collective voice within any place, no matter how careful or sensitive it may be. Similarly, there is appreciation that regardless of a commitment to being authentic or sincere, "Truth" is evasive, and a limited interpretation is

the best one can hope to represent as situated “truth”. Notwithstanding, the case studies and directed conversations as well as my wider study of local history texts reveal a trend of reconciling any potential negatives about the community story into a positive ending. Concluding on a hopeful note suggests a desire to avoid social disruption and destabilising community relationships or negate what is good about a place. This intention is underpinned by the writers’ reflections about the responsibility they felt towards the communities in their work.

Even though unintended, what results is a kind of social tool that upholds one point of view of “community” over others. In addition, because the text is built upon lived experience, it is swayed by those who have the authority and access to speak through the narrative. For this reason, the texts, in their situatedness, come up against social issues even when they do not specifically write about them and cannot escape that social identity has been formed from a place’s political situation in the colonisation of New Zealand and the Pacific. Thus, looking closely at these books and the processes that produce them can be unsettling (as opposed to the “settling” described before). I even found myself at times veering into a space that made me anxious about raising questions of representation in my own practice, which was heightened when my research insisted that I respond to how the texts perform in colonial and postcolonial spaces.

Reading the books as life writing brings the matter of sociopolitical context to the forefront of our discussion on meaning-making as social constructs of identity and self-expression. Each case study, for example, responds to a sociopolitical influence on their lived experience—whether articulated as indigeneity and self-sovereignty in *Matagi Tokelau*; the working class of *Moturoa*; or the bicultural debate of New Zealand in *Patumahoe: History & Memories* where Pākehā and Māori experiences intersect. Interestingly, the insistence of these texts to deal with such matters confirms their place among life writing scholarship as a field that engages

with social movements, including postcolonialism (Jolly, 2011, p. 880). Local history confronts its political past explicitly or implicitly—it simply will not be silenced. It reveals an ideological position in the language used in the narrative and the experiences privileged. As a result, the reimagining of local history as life writing demands critical examination of the implications for constructing a “community” in a particular literary way. Life writing criticism facilitates a closer, critical look at the social realities of local history texts and accepts the debates as part of the engagement. Life writing argues for the situatedness of the genre as part of its character and promotes social discovery through literature to view self-expression as a pathway to learning about “self” and “other” through dialogue or discourse—a responsibility the three case study projects felt answerable to themselves.

Following my research, I feel even more strongly that these texts are delightful as grassroots’ literature that deserves to be enjoyed and celebrated, and, more importantly, respected. Some would argue that it is better to let these texts be what they are without interrogating them too closely or disrupting practice. However, refusing critical reflexivity would result in a lost opportunity to consider, according to the theories of Bakhtin (1981) in particular, how literature (including life writing) illuminates social contexts through dialogue and discourse to speak back to or within social systems of humanity. Writing in the earlier twentieth century in unsettled Russia, Bakhtin’s (1981) work on dialogic imagination was helpful as a theoretical foundation for my own research to make some sense of the ambiguity of the twenty-first century when politics of voice has intensified by examining the intertextuality between ideology and utterance as a performance of literature (Park-Fuller, 1986). Application of Bakhtin’s concepts, usually applied to prose fiction but in my research to local history texts, revealed how point of view emerges as a celebrated feature of the work as a literary quality that helps voice find fulfilment in other non-traditional prose, including creative nonfiction texts. Heteroglossia finds a new expression here in how the authors and storytellers and readers speak to one another through the processes and texts of local history writing as

socially situated encounters and creative engagements of personal storytelling of place. Questions are raised, in response, about how language functions in these situations and what representation of “community” looks like.

Local history is unapologetically relational and personal. Our lived experiences define us and our learning encounters in these settings. How these relationships or “community” are interpreted or conceptualised by book producers and storytellers in each situation directly influences the processes of local history projects and the types of books they produce. For instance, *Matagi Tokelau*’s insistence on an anonymised, performative telling in recognition of village culture among the atolls is in sharp contrast to the individualised collations of *Patumahoe*’s text. However, all the books I studied reflect a multifaceted engagement with community, culture, and identity and should hardly be judged as too simple or too parochial. They are beautiful, frustrating, complicated, and dynamic. They exceed rules of evidence, even though the objectification of story and history is part of what they are because, ultimately, the book projects are subjective community makers. Furthermore, their translation into a credible record or object of history is based more upon the authority subjectively inferred by members of the community instead of the achievement of some objective standard of scholarship. Local history offers a situated “truth”, located in place, time, and relationship, which is inexplicably bound up with how it is practised. Thus, the imagining of place is acknowledged as a flawed construct on a shaky foundation, always able to be repaired or renovated.

Consequently, my research confirmed that process or the practice of local history is inseparable from the forms it takes. As such, application of life writing criticism suggests that the texts should be read with a different kind of critical reading to contemplate how process impacts its representational responsibilities and choices made, raising questions especially about where or how collaborative practices are incorporated in the representation of others and their voices, or the imagined construction of “community” in local and community history

books. As my research has confirmed, neither the books nor the projects discussed in the interviews are necessarily produced collaboratively (Chapter Seven). Even though the case studies advocated for a collaborative ethos of writing and publication (Chapter Five) as an ethical responsibility of the project teams, the research revealed how difficult it is to achieve collaboration even with intent or why numerous other writers do not assimilate it into their practices.

A Literary Accounting of Our Place

Life writing scholarship offers possible solutions for the continuation and expansion of the genre of local history to inform ethical practices of representation and deliberation on collaboration. In particular, the resituation of local history under the umbrella of life writing exposes its moral quality (similar to what Bakhtin (1981) attributes to prose fiction) and inspires debate about method and practice as an ethical responsibility. The acts of self-representation at the heart of local history put pressure on writers and book project teams to respond to these debates and ask critics and writers to rethink what it means to exercise authority in authorship of these books. For example, the communities represented in the projects revealed a sensitivity to power dynamics, and my interactions with community-located writers and team members confirms a strong desire for a grassroots' voice to speak back to society from among the community. There is also heightened consideration about being represented in the collective, whether Pākehā, Māori, or Pasifika, and an element of cautiousness in working alongside scholars or writers outside of the local community.

Therefore, those who commission a writer to produce a narrative on their place's behalf are watchful over the process and the interpretation of their accounts.

My thesis argues that the adoption of a reflexive stance has emerged as a significant expectation of local history when it is reimagined as life writing that represents a collective group account. Such a stance manifests as a duty of care exercised by writers and project

teams to fulfil the ethical responsibility to reflect critically on their subjects and writing approaches, as evidenced in my research. However, there is no predetermined one-size-fits-all approach that I can offer at the end of my study since this duty of care—as social responsiveness—manifests differently in various contexts and project teams. But it does require writers to recognise that they are not merely writing a book or gathering some interesting information; they are facilitating what can be a sensitive community dialogue about “becoming us”. Local history producers are asking more questions now about how to act upon the recommendation of shared authority as something that underpins public history work and translates duty of care into careful consideration of narrative relationships in local history writing. Authorship and authority cannot be left as incidental to the process but should, instead, be carefully thought through, discussed, and negotiated to promote better critical consciousness about the forms and practices that will be inspired, including who the project or book benefits and why, and what sorts of tensions, opportunities, or limitations may be encountered in the various approaches chosen. Furthermore, the literary lens encompasses creative historiography that encourages writers to reflect critically upon the use of metaphors, tropes, and interpretive repertoires in their authorship of texts that represent community interests and asks writers to make considered choices about how the “voice” of community is represented. A reflexive stance promotes literary accounting or answerability.

Trouble arises, unfortunately, when this insight is only learned in hindsight from personal experience. Scholars and professional writers may be re-evaluating their local history practice, but newcomers to the genres—for example, untrained volunteers within the community—are often unprepared for the nuances and tensions within local history writing. They may find themselves, like *Patumahoe’s* team, unprepared for debate about representational ethics associated with decolonisation conversations, despite their good intentions for the book projects and a sincere desire to be respectful of people’s diverse experiences. First-time writers or project leaders are often encouraged to read McLean’s (2007) guide on local history in New

Zealand—a useful start, which edges close to my position in this thesis but does not go far enough to account for the complexities and ethical challenges in writing local history in today’s society in New Zealand or, by extension, within the Pacific region. Such guides retain an element of instrumentalism, reiterating the approach proposed by Gardner (1999) to improve the history scholarship of local history with, for example, better use of evidence and referencing but are in danger of erasing the complexities of the genre and miss its expression as social and cultural identity of “our place”. Instead, a social responsiveness needs to be encouraged to complement these popular guidebooks to extend thinking about local history practice beyond the improvement of traditional historical research methods. I feel acutely the loss of scholars in the field, like McLean and Gardner, and wish I had the opportunity once more to pick up on earlier conversations to deepen debate about the complexity of representation to work out more precisely how best to work with local history groups and enthusiasts to navigate the even more uncertain times of 2020 and beyond with a rapidly evolving politics of voice.

In conclusion, my thesis asks us to confront, with transparency, the worldviews and subject positions of the writers, project teams, scholars, and community members who try to work together to present the “record” of “our place” and tell its stories. This begins with a reflective self-consciousness of writers and producers to tell the truth about oneself first (as Virginia Woolf suggested in her quote at the start of this chapter) to be acutely aware of their role and the implications thereof in the social construction of meaning-making that encompasses the production of these popular books. Once again, this highlights the inseparability of process from the book forms and reasserts the situatedness of local and community history storytelling. In addition, the practice of reflexivity further enhances the potential for renewal of the text as the “living communications” (Ricoeur, 2016, p. 116) discussed in Chapter Eight, which argued for the significance of these local history book projects in sometimes unexpected ways, far beyond the immediate text the project produces. Extending the notion of

reception of the texts further, my own study has built upon the capacity of renewal and meaning-making for the various books and given them opportunity to contribute to metatheoretical learning and discovery far beyond their locales.

Local history book producers manage complicated social encounters, nuances of tensions, and different interests in each book project, situated within complex historical and political contexts and born of a desire to preserve a human connection to local places and leave a record of who “we” are (or were) and where “we” have come from. Presenting and reading these books about “our place” in a reflexive way stimulates a conversation about memories and lived experiences that informs an experience of “community”. Seen as life writing, local history books and the processes that create them become transformative and restorative—a means to encounter one another in our stories and to learn about a place through personal accounts rather than to argue over authoritatively asserted facts. Such an approach reminds us that local history is full of possibility—always waiting to be reimagined, reinterpreted, and retold—as demonstrated so aptly by the three case study books. A life writing approach encourages us to sit among our memories and talk through our stories, and to appreciate different points of view of lived experiences, not in spite of their limitations but because of them. This is the literary richness of the genre that its resituation in life writing advances—a way of learning about “self” and “other” in our stories about our places, which brings local history deeper into a dialogic space of discovery and self-reflection in intriguing traverses across time and place.

My Place in This Conversation

“Mai i te kōpae ki te urupa, tātou ako tonu ai—From the cradle to the grave we are forever learning.” (Whakataukī—Māori proverb)

It is not lost on me that I have come from places elsewhere to research and write about peoples’ stories in places that are not historically mine. I am tauivi—a foreigner born in Africa and resettled in New Zealand—but becoming Pākehā. I have a story, but I am not of this place Aotearoa or the Pacific. However, my roots are being grafted here—my adopted home—and I am grateful to be part of its story now too. I have asked myself multiple times over the course of my research how I justify my place in this conversation. My forebears are colonisers; my history is intertwined with unsettled “settlement”. Yet, I am more than the sum of my heritage. I am a scholar and writer, who has worked in different geographical communities and with a diversity of storytellers. I am situated in this conversation by practice and experience—not legacy—and the scholarship of others who have kept me alert and sensitive to my place in New Zealand conversations. However, I am embedded here too. One of the unexpected outcomes of my thesis work has been a deeper awareness of self and a critical interrogation of my own lived experiences and points of view. The discipline of reflexive writing during my PhD studies was an important part of turning my critical eye inwards, and this analysis has been woven into the thesis as part of my discovery of learning, discovery of practice, and a refined discovery of self. I acknowledge that I impact the process and the process impacts me. I have been braided into this research story, and its telling forms an enduring and endearing connection to me. In a large part, this thesis is about situating and contextualising, and appreciating one’s own story and how it impacts how we try to represent others.

Ngothando, arohanui

Janine

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Appendix One: Information Sheet



My story, your story, their story, our story: Life writing and local history

INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Janine Irvine and I am completing a PhD (English) thesis exploring the impact of collaborative life writing on the telling of local history in Aotearoa New Zealand. As someone who has been involved in the production of a published local history, I am very interested in talking with you about your experiences.

What does the research involve?

I would like to be able to talk with 12 people (writers, scholars and community members) about their experience of working with community groups who are trying to share their collective story. I am particularly interested in the processes by which these stories are generated; and the impact of these processes on the narrative itself as well as different community members.

The results will be combined with analysis of existing local histories to produce a model of good life writing practice that can be used by community groups and practitioners.

What will you have to do

If you choose to take part, you will be asked to meet with me for a 'directed conversation' about your experience of working on a community history project. A directed conversation means that I will ask you some questions to stimulate discussion, but the flow and specific content of the interview will be determined by what you think is important and what you choose to share.

I anticipate we will spend between one and two hours together and we would meet at a time and location that is convenient for you.

I would like to audio record our conversation to help me with my analysis. I can send you a copy of the audio-recording if you like, as well as transcripts of the parts of the interview I would like to quote in my written thesis. You will have an opportunity to highlight any specific content that you would like to be excluded from the study.

I will use a pseudonym in any written work arising from this research in order to keep your identity confidential. However, it is worth noting that you could inadvertently be identified through your involvement with projects that might be discussed in the thesis. I am happy to talk further with you about this before you agree to take part.

Your rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation, but if you agree to take part in this research, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any particular question;
- Withdraw from the study at any stage, up until you give final approval for the use of the transcribed content;
- Ask any questions about the study at any time;
- Ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during our conversation;
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- Receive a summary of the research when it is concluded.

If you have any questions or would like to hear more about the research, please don't hesitate to contact me. I will give you a call in a few days to see if you would like to participate and, if so, we can schedule a time to meet that suits you.

If you prefer, you are also welcome to contact my primary supervisor, Dr Mary Paul. Mary's contact details are noted below.

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This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application NOR 17/16. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Brian Finch, Acting Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz

Appendix Two: Participant Consent Form



My story, your story, their story, our story: Life writing and local history

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I wish/do not wish to review the audio-recordings transcripts of my interview.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature:

Date:

.....

Full Name - printed

.....

Te Kōwhiri
ki Pūrehuroa

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