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‘This is my ideal life’: The importance of place for how Māori elders understand a good life.

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Abstract

Attachment to place is considered to be an important component of ageing and can be intertwined with an older persons identity. For this reason place cannot be separated from understandings of a good life. This study examined the ways that elder Māori living on the East Cape construct a good life and how place may influence this understanding. Data analysis involved eight interviews with older Māori and a research visit to the East Cape. The thesis used a mixed methods approach to qualitative analysis combining Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis with Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. Principles of Kaupapa Māori research were also integrated throughout the research process. Four superordinate themes of ageing well, social connectedness, economic wellbeing, and autonomy and control were identified as contributing to the experience of a good life. The four superordinate themes represent different components that must be negotiated in order to balance these demands. The analysis also identified a number of discourses including positive ageing discourse, anti-consumption discourse, family discourse and neo-liberal discourse. These discourses were drawn on to balance competing expectations regarding a good life and present the participants identities in a morally virtuous manner. This analysis demonstrates how a good life depends upon finding a balance between the competing demands of living within the wider society, attachment to place, and Māori identity in later life.

Preface

The initial inspiration for this study came from interview data collected through a larger research project on the economic living standards of elders. However, inspiration was taken from several places along the way including my own background. Therefore it is important for me to explain how my background relates to this thesis.

I grew up in a small rural area called Ohiwa, between Whakatane and Opotiki in the Eastern Bay of Plenty. At age seven my parents moved us from Whakatane to live what they thought was the ultimate dream. Our five acres of land had no house, no power and no running water. We lived in a one bedroom shed and two caravans. We cooked with gas and stored food in a gas refrigerator. We relied on candles for lighting. We collected rainwater and showered with a solar shower. After a couple of years my parents invested in a generator meaning that we had power during the evening. We lived like this for about five years. Although I was young, I do not remember feeling like I missed out on a good life. I knew we lived differently than others, however, the neighbours also lived exactly the same. It wasn't all that unusual in the area.

Another important inspiration is my heritage as a bicultural New Zealander. I have cultural affiliations to both Tuhoe and Whakatohea. My appreciation for my cultural heritage and what it means to be Māori has grown throughout my years at University. As an undergraduate student I worked part time on a Māori land court project, which introduced me to the history of Māori land tenure and increased my awareness of the relationship Māori share with the land. My personal background, cultural links and connection to the area has helped me to understand the context of the participants in this study and to relate to their experiences living as rural Māori.

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Glossary of Terms

Ahi kā	symbolic phrase for ‘keep the fires burning’
Hapū	sub tribe
Iwi	tribe
Kaimoana	seafood
Kaumātua	respected tribal elder (male or female)
Kohanga reo	total immersion early childhood education for Māori
Kura	school
Mana whenua	land tenure
Mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge
Pākehā	European
Tangata Whenua	people of the land
Tapu	a state subject to risk, address with caution
Te Reo	Māori language
Tikanga	customs, protocols, procedures
Tino rangatiratanga	self-determination, autonomy
Waka	canoe
Whakawhanaungatanga	affirmation of bonds
Whānau	Family
Whare	House

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