The Haunted Academy: A Whakapapa Approach to Understanding Māori Doctoral Student Belonging in Aotearoa Universities

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Abstract: Hauntings are often misconstrued as strange and often scary supernatural experiences that blur the lines between what is real and what is not. Yet, Indigenous hauntings can not only be confronting, but they can also be comforting and support place belonging. This paper offers a Māori philosophical way of theorising hauntology and its relation to time, space, place, and belonging by privileging a whakapapa perspective. Whakapapa acknowledges not only kinship relations for people, but all things and their relationship to them, from the sky to the lands, and the spiritual connections in between. Employing a whakapapa kōrero theoretical framework, I draw on Māori constructs of time and place through Wā, Wānanga (Māori stories both told and untold), and Te Wāhi Ngaro to offer some insights from my doctoral thesis where Māori PhD students shared their everyday experiences in their institutions. With a backdrop of settler-colonial structures, norms, and daily interactions, I argue that hauntings are an everyday familiar occurrence in Te Ao Māori which play a major role in the way Māori doctoral students establish and maintain a sense of belonging in their universities.

Keywords: ghosts; hauntings; kaupapa Māori; Māori doctoral students; belonging

1. Introduction

Māori professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1997) refers to mainstream education as a site of tension, and states that “educational battleground for Māori is spatial. It is about theoretical spaces, pedagogical spaces, structural spaces” (p. 203). Institutional spaces are not neutral, often appealing more to settler sensibilities while marginalising Māori, and in this case, Māori doctoral students (MDS).

This paper offers a Māori philosophical way of theorising hauntology and its relation to time, space, place, and belonging by privileging a whakapapa perspective. Whakapapa acknowledges not only kinship relations for people, but all things and their relationship to them, from the sky to the lands, and the spiritual connections in between (Ihimaera 2020). In this paper, I consider the ways that whakapapa impacts MDS belonging in their institutional spaces as Carvalho et al. (2018) note “spaces and places can no longer be seen as disconnected to what students do, they cannot be left as the mere backdrop to the real action” (p. 43).

Employing a Kaupapa Māori theoretical framework, Whakapapa Kōrero (redacted), I examined the everyday macro and micro institutional spaces that pay attention to the hidden realm—Te Wāhi Ngaro. Te Wāhi Ngaro is a key concept in this framework as it provides a space to examine the intangible and the unseen. In a conversation between the authors, Roa says Te Wāhi Ngaro is what houses the things you cannot hear or see but exist and you know it exists through the “unmistakable presence” (Roa and Kidman 2022, p. 139). I observe this space throughout institutional spaces as an opening space between the students and the university and the people MDS bring along with them into their institutional spaces, including their tūpuna (ancestors). I do this to normalise a Māori worldview.
With this in mind, analysing the ways in which Māori PhD students engage with their institutional spaces is useful in understanding how they attach themselves to university space (or not), construct their own identities within them (or not), and contribute to their everyday worlds as Māori scholars.

I argued that ghosts haunt university spaces and can take various forms such as “distorted versions of landscape, repeated acts of violence or simply ‘silences and absences’” (Kavka 2011, p. 149). In this case, the experiences and stories of Māori doctoral students (MDS) are hidden behind distancing forms of lip service that may imply harmonious race relations between Māori and non-Māori in Aotearoa universities (Smith et al. 2021). By examining the social life such as those settler-colonial societies, I peer into those spaces to bring into view the hidden and the silent. I ask whose story is visible and considered history and whose story is concealed and repressed? In doing so, I evoke the ghosts that haunt those places.

Drawing on a whakapapa construct of time and place, I argue that hauntings are an everyday familiar occurrence in Te Ao Māori which play a major role in the way Māori doctoral students establish and maintain a sense of belonging in their universities. I reveal the unseen forces that influence the way space and place shape MDS’s sense of belonging. Here, live the hidden, spiritual, uncanny, and ghostly presences that wānanga with MDS and influence the way in which students orientate in and between haunted places to overcome challenges and heal in ways that enact mana motuhake (autonomy).

The first section of this paper provides a background of my doctoral research. I describe the methods I drew on and outline a summary of the findings. For more detailed findings, please refer to the thesis as the scope of this paper draws heavily on the theory.

The second section defines the terms ghosts and hauntings from non-Māori scholarship and compares these to similar Māori concepts. I then unpack a whakapapa-focused theoretical framework that encapsulates the construct of time and the interrelatedness of Māori stories. The following section relates hauntings to space and place and concludes that hauntings occur daily for Māori students which orientates them to particular spaces and away from others, impacting the level of belonging they are able to establish.

2. Background

This paper is based on data gathered in my doctoral study titled Ngā Manu ā Tāne: Stories of Māori doctoral students in Aotearoa Universities (Funaki 2023). With few institutionally safe spaces in predominantly white mainstream settings, Māori often need to carve out space to exist as they are and often, this means on the margins (Morrison 1999; Pihama et al. 2019). Alongside Eurocentric curricula, pedagogies, practices, and ideologies, I argue that university spaces are not neutral, and these types of spaces produce barriers to establishing places of belonging for Māori. Carter et al. (2018) argue for the importance of ‘place’ because of how a student’s establishment of place and belonging significantly influence decisions to enrol, defer, withdraw, or complete university studies. If Māori doctoral students struggle to establish a sense of place in their institutions, they are at risk of isolation, disconnection, and displacement, affecting their research, retention, completion, career trajectories, and overall wellbeing.

I carried out ethnographic research and interviewed 30 Māori PhD students who were studying at Aotearoa universities. I asked how the principles of the nation’s founding document Te Tiriti o Waitangi (a pact between some Māori chiefs and representatives of the British Crown) were enacted or not in their institutions. I also asked how they developed their academic selves throughout the course of their doctoral studies, and how they established and maintained a sense of belonging in the academy. The latter question is the basis of this paper.

3. Terminology: Uncanny, Hauntings, and Ghosts

Sigmund Freud (1919) refers to the ‘uncanny’ as “that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar” (p. 1). In many ways, the uncanny can be viewed as the ‘dark’ side of C. Wright Mills (2000) to ‘make the familiar
strange’. Here, the familiar is disrupted in some way leaving one with a sense that an event, place or set of circumstances has taken on monstrous, eerie, or unsettling proportions, or as Freud explains, the familiar has become unheimlich. The German word ‘unheimlich’ means unhomely, uneasy, or something that was meant to remain secret has been exposed (Murphy 2018). In this paper, I use the term uncanny to denote a presence that leaves people feeling unsettled, out of place, unable to attach a sense of belonging in their institutional and epistemological surroundings. The uncanny is both the eerie places and the familiar everyday places MDS occupy, such as their university office space.

Jacques Derrida (1994) suggests ghosts offer the potential for a different future than the current state by a return of something from the past, a way of considering the future by looking back at the past. Derrida’s words are commonly quoted, that a “haunting is historical . . . but not dated” (p. 4). Boyd and Thrush (2011) state “ghosts are . . . the appearance of something in a time in which they clearly do not belong. Ghosts do not represent just reminders of the past . . . they very often demand something of the future” (p. xxxiv). Hauntings are not tied to a specific temporality but rather, their arrival, or as Spooner-Lockyer and Kilroy-Marac (2021) state, the return of ghosts “disrupts linear time, bringing past, present, and future together in unexpected ways”.

A haunting is transmitted and received by a sense and “is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening” (Gordon 2004, p. 8). Gordon (2004) adds that a:

haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities, the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place. The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. (p. 8)

According to Spooner-Lockyer and Kilroy-Marac (2021), “[A] haunting is how ghosts make their desires known” (par. 5). The purpose of a haunting may be to seek recognition, or acknowledgement; others may require redress (Murphy 2018); and there is a possibility that the desire to haunt for the sake of it might in itself be enough of a reason (Spooner-Lockyer and Kilroy-Marac 2021). In this sense, ghosts maintain agency and are outside our control and therefore may have specific demands that differ for each unique ghost (Spooner-Lockyer and Kilroy-Marac 2021).

Cameron (2008) summarises that ghosts allude to a presence of that which has been excluded, marginalized, and expelled; although themselves immaterial and spectral, they gesture towards the materiality of colonized abject bodies. Ghosts unsettle the assumed stability and integrity of Western temporalities and spatialities and seem to embody the mismatch between the ideal and the real, the present and the absent (p. 383). In Cameron’s definition, ghosts are positioned as minoritized figures such as colonised peoples. Other definitions of ghost include what Michael Mayerfeld Bell (1997) calls a “sense of the presence of those who are not physically there” (p. 813). Bell (1997) uses the term ghosts in a broad sense to include not just the unsettled dead, but also the living, past, present and future, memories, scary and unfamiliar, but also familiar and homely. He therefore describes ghosts as a theoretical justification for the social experience of the physical world.

John Potts (2009) considers ghosts as representations of the past that linger in the present which function to keep memories of place and shared history alive. Additionally, ghosts can raise anxieties of guilt and shame in individuals and communities (Potts 2009). Potts states that to be haunted by ghosts is to be haunted by the past, unsettling a complacent present that may harbour guilty secrets (Potts 2009). In my doctoral study, I exposed some of those secrets that settle colonial institutions either hide in plain sight as everyday unspoken norms or hidden away in the ‘politics of distraction’ (Smith 2003, par. 2). By this, I mean dynamic and inclusive language is adopted in university policy and statute documents, but often serves as a distraction from unchanging structures giving way to ghosts to demand redress. These understandings of ghosts and hauntings allowed me to
consider the way settler-colonialism in Aotearoa erases and conceals histories and the need to retell the stories that are often silenced as a form of resistance.

4. Hauntology and Similar Māori Concepts

While historical traumatic events, encounters and experiences can haunt generations across time, not all Indigenous experiences of hauntings are necessarily unsettling. Cariou (2006) suggests ghosts that haunt spaces are “figures of healing . . . or simply ancestors” (p. 728). Freeman (2011) adds, “it is ancestors who make a place sacred” (p. 233). Māori author Read (2003) says for many Indigenous communities, ancestral presence is a normal part of everyday life, a kinship relational connection with a spiritual realm. Bringing tūpuna into institutional spaces was a way many MDS could feel safe and guided as they navigated their university. Having ancestral company allowed them to establish an attachment to safe spaces and created a place where they felt belonging. If the goal is to heal from struggle and traumas, it is important to know how spaces can encourage and foster the healing process. Ancestral presence, therefore, is a normal part of Indigenous lives (Ginsburg 2018) and welcomed, while the hauntings from oppressors are anxiety-generating. The comfort in familiarity of tūpuna guidance can support MDS to establish and maintain a sense of belonging in their institutions.

There are vast similarities between the concepts of hauntology and all that is encompassed in whakapapa, which includes but is not limited to genealogy. For example, Spooner-Lockyer and Kilroy-Marac (2021) assert in their writings about ghosts, and those that Māori authors Burgess and Painting (2020) develop about tūpuna and mokopuna, time, and our relations to all existence, whakapapa. Although Burgess and Painting (2020) do not use ‘ghosts’ in their writings, they do normalise the continuation of ancestors from the past traversing time and existing for Māori in the present. For example, as Māori, we can learn from the past through the eyes of our tūpuna and shape and imagine our future through the eyes of our mokopuna. Similarly, Spooner-Lockyer and Kilroy-Marac (2021) suggest we can learn from ghosts who return to the present from the past and imagine what could have been as well as what could be.

Another similarity between the noted authors is the relationality between all forms of existence. Burgess and Painting (2020) assert all existence is in a state of whanaungatanga, that is, everything is connected throughout generations whether it is people, lands, or waters. Because:

[O]ur existence as Māori is intergenerational, each of us intimately connected to innumerable past and future generations, our tūpuna and our mokopuna. We live as though they are here with us, seeing what we see. We are reflections of each other. (p. 214)

Burgess and Painting (2020) conceptualise time through whakapapa and the connectedness between our tūpuna, mokopuna, and all relations of existence.

Spooner-Lockyer and Kilroy-Marac (2021) also highlight the importance of showing recognition for those who have passed, and the connections they have/had with places such as lands and waters. They add, ghosts may seek recognition of lands that are populated by ancestors and haunt those who have no genealogical connection but seek recognition regardless (Spooner-Lockyer and Kilroy-Marac 2021). As such, the relations between the dead, the living, and the lands invite us to be in “good relation” (Burgess and Painting 2020, p. 208; Spooner-Lockyer and Kilroy-Marac 2021, para. 3). For Burgess and Painting (2020), to be in good relation is to be in a state of whanaungatanga, a concept that they argue is the antithesis to settler-colonialism (Burgess and Painting 2020). The authors encourage us to centre whakapapa as a way to see through and beyond settler-colonialism, to support the goals of decolonisation (Burgess and Painting 2020).

Wairua, in a Māori worldview, is a spiritual construct that encapsulates similar aspects of spirituality that the above definitions of ghosts’ entail. Wairua is an experiential phenomenon in many senses whereas mauri is the sign that you feel it, therefore, mauri cannot be felt without wairua:
You can’t feel mauri, it’s the wairua that you feel. You know that mauri is there—you see the signs, you see life, you see the robustness in the ecosystem, or you see the well maintained whare or you see a healthy person—but the energy felt between you and that ‘thing’, experience and/or person is the wairua. Life is the sign of mauri”. (Maclean 2018 as cited in Ngawati 2018)

The presence of wairua while not seen can still be sensed through the signs that something undeniable is happening. Wairua in this sense could be understood as the way Gordon (2004) defines ghosts as a presence and evidence of a haunting.

Tate (1990, cited in Moeke-Maxwell and Nikora 2019) says, many Māori see wairua, or travelling spirits through everything. Moeke-Maxwell and Nikora (2019) extend Tate’s statement and assert that it is common for many Māori to converse with the deceased. They add:

The notion of a journeying wairua is not unusual or strange, it is embraced, encouraged, celebrated and assisted in its quest. Invocations to te wahi ngaro, to the gods, to God, to relatives passed, to spirits present are but one way to assist a transitioning wairua. (Moeke-Maxwell and Nikora 2019, p. 180)

I argue that it is these everyday experiences between the living and the dead including the things that are difficult to describe whether ill or uneasy feelings, seething ghostly presences, intuition and so forth, that live in Te Wāhi Ngaro. The complexity of the in-between space is therefore unpredictable, and may be disturbing and frightening, which can elicit unease, unsettledness, fear, stillness, and neutrality, or it could be a space of settledness and peace (Roa and Kidman 2022). Te Wāhi Ngaro exists in this timeline because tūpuna and the deities of pūrākau (Māori creation stories) also exist in the present.

Burgess and Painting (2020) note, through our tūpuna, we as mokopuna of the living and the dead—are intimately bound together, and rather than the presence of tūpuna being a ‘disruption’ of time as Spooner-Lockyer and Kilroy-Marac (2021) suggest, Māori tūpuna do belong in all time and places as an everyday aspect of Te Ao Māori. Much like a sociological approach to critically examining the things we often take for granted by making the familiar strange and the strange familiar (Mills 2000), in a whakapapa approach that normalises Te Wāhi Ngaro, the strange is already familiar.

5. Theoretical Framework: Whakapapa Kōrero

Colonisation has restructured how we think about historical time, space and place (Moreton-Robinson 2003). In this paper, I unpack a whakapapa approach to time, space and place through Māori terms Wā, Wānanga and Te Wāhi Ngaro. In te reo Māori (the Māori language), there are only two words to describe senses. To touch, smell, taste, and hear are all translated as ‘rongo’. The verb ‘to see’ is translated as ‘kite’. Any other senses that do not reside comfortably within rongo and kite—including clairvoyancy—exist in Te Wāhi Ngaro. This is where spiritual presence and tūpuna (ancestors) reside. Roa says Te Wāhi Ngaro is what houses the things you cannot hear or see but exist and you know they exist through the “unmistakable presence” (Roa and Kidman 2022, p. 139). The word ‘ngaro’ in many cases is defined as a state of being lost, missing, absent, or silent. Roa describes the unspoken silences that occur in Wānanga (discussion), either alone or in shared spaces with the living and or the deceased.

By unpacking the word ‘wāhi’, the links to time and space are visible, but ‘wāhi’ is also a verb that means to split or to break something. It can be viewed as an opening. In this case, I view wāhi as an opening of another space and time, the opening space in between the spaces. Here, as Roa says, lie all the things we cannot easily describe but know are there. This includes but is not limited to the spiritual dimension, deities and realms beyond this one, the existence of the dead, our ancestors, intuition, ghostly presences, or messages of communication such as tohu or signs (redacted). Tākiriangi Smith (2019a) states, “tohu provide information for future action in order to avert negative consequences and provide positive outcomes” (p. 12). The same is also said for hauntings. Boyd and Thrush (2011)
suggest that hauntings offer a critical way of looking into the past and deliver messages of politics in the present. The connection between signs, past, present and future is consistent in Māori and non-Māori constructs of hauntings because whakapapa connects everything together and is therefore recognised in a whakapapa kōrero framework.

The framework illustration in Figure 1 depicts pūrākau about the whakapapa of Te Ao Mārama, the world of light, otherwise the world we know today. Papatūanuku Earth mother and Ranginui sky father have been separated from their embrace, allowing their children to grow and create new realms. In the centre is a male and female huia bird that no longer lives in body but lives on in spirit and symbols. The absent figures are situated in Te Wāhi Ngaro, the space in between the space.

![Whakapapa Kōrero theoretical framework.](image)

Figure 1. Whakapapa Kōrero theoretical framework.

Tākirirangi Smith (2000) originally used the term whakapapa kōrero to centre Māori spatial temporalities. Smith (2019b) describes whakapapa kōrero as the narratives that stem from our tūpuna which share detailed stories about the existing world. This definition aligned with the way I analysed the stories in my thesis (Funaki 2023). Adding to this understanding of whakapapa kōrero, I intentionally focused on Wā, space and place, Te Wāhi Ngaro—the hidden realm, and the wānanga that occurs within the in-between spaces to consider the influences of institutional landscapes that impact structural, systemic and interpersonal challenges that MDS faced in settler-colonial contexts.

Privileging a Māori philosophy of wā through whakapapa simultaneously restructures time and space, while also resisting ongoing colonialism (Burgess and Painting 2020). Employing this framework allowed me to bring forward the haunted, concealed, and absent or lingering uncanniness in those spaces to gain an insight into the wānanga that MDS are contending with as they journey through their studies.

6. Findings: Ghosts, Space, and Place

The overall themes that emerged in the research showed a push–pull relationality, that moved to and from challenge and resistance toward healing and awareness. In between that tension was a space that I rendered symbolically as a representation of pūrākau, tūpuna, and deities who reside in Te Wāhi Ngaro.

The findings suggested that in the process of gaining new knowledge throughout their PhD studies, many MDS were also figuring out how to navigate their Māori identities. With that, came the challenges associated with reconnecting with their whakapapa, interrogating their own perceptions of being Māori, and learning or relearning te reo Māori.
The stories MDS shared highlighted a growth of consciousness where they felt more confident to speak up in situations that required intervention. In some instances, they were pulled in many directions as they came to understand what it meant to be Māori scholars operating inside oppressive institutions. Many MDS took agentic steps toward autonomy to establish a sense of belonging at the university. They made decisions to work within their own iwi communities, privilege kaupapa Māori methodologies, and some participants also changed supervisors, seeking Māori supervisors and advisers. MDS were navigating a space in between their identities as scholars and as Māori, and several were in the process of healing from past traumas linked to language loss and whakamā.

The physical and symbolic layout of intellectual and academic space also impacts the way Māori PhD students inhabit, occupy, and move through or around campus. These everyday spaces include workshops, conferences, seminars, supervision meetings, and oral defence. One participant, Piwakawaka for example, explained how she needed to know the layout of any unfamiliar space, be aware of who was in attendance, as well as have a planned exit strategy in case she needed to withdraw for the purpose of securing her own cultural safety. In these types of haunted spaces, cultural safety considerations demand advance preparation.

Bryers-Brown (2015) argues that historical sites represent ongoing colonial reminders that elicit trauma for many Indigenous peoples. In this way, those reminders lived on through continued representation, normality, and unquestioned and unchanged physical and symbolic structures. I contend that settler-colonial sites such as Aotearoa and its universities are spaces where ‘ghosts of foe’ haunt. Building on Bell’s (1997) explanation of ghosts of kin which give social meaning to space for that space to become place, I add that, conversely, ghosts of foe must be responsible for having the opposite effect—they repel rather than welcome space visitors. These hauntings create unease that many MDS who participated in this thesis felt in certain areas of their university where they did not feel welcomed or felt potential risk to their level of comfort. This is evident in the way they spoke of unsafe spaces—physical, theoretical, and social/cultural. Participants alluded to a presence that was either not always articulated, or was direct, including shared insights, messages, or tohu provided by tūpuna, past loved ones, or whānau. Smith (2019a) says tohu provides information to act on to steer clear from negative outcomes, and I consider this as a type of communication to orientate individuals away from unsafe spaces. I refer to these types of presences as ghosts who let some MDS know if they can settle, or if they need to be constantly vigilant and on the defence.

Because ghosts are social, it makes sense that a number of ghosts can reside in any one space. This is especially the case in shared spaces such as supervisory meetings. Ghosts of kin might be at work in situations where these meetings run smoothly. The same idea can also then be applied to clashes or tensions between supervisors and students. Examples of these interactions tended to be evident with their non-Māori supervisors. Often this was expressed as a cultural clash of understanding or respect. One participant, Tuke for example talked about her views of the breakdown with her non-Māori supervisor. In these instances, Māori students’ ancestors could be clashing with their supervisor’s ancestors. Rather than trying to eradicate the ghosts in these supervisory spaces, Grant (2010) suggests living with them, along with the discomfort they conjure. What this looks like is not of focus of this paper, however, it is important to understand the way non-Māori supervisors’ interactions with Māori students are mana-enhancing or diminishing—affecting MDS sense of place in their universities.

To determine the best ways to navigate their institutional spaces, MDS had wānanga with other Māori postgraduate students, they pondered alone and had wānanga with their whānau and tūpuna, bringing the wairua of their deceased loved ones into their university spaces. These thought processes influenced and shaped their courses of action, usually in-between spaces of tension. They employed survival tactics in uncanny spaces, the spaces that disrupted their sense of comfort or familiarity, which created instead a sense of eeriness, or out-of-placeness. Many MDS were guided by the presence they felt throughout their
institutions, whether they were consciously aware of it or not. MDS formed connections and networks with other Māori students as they shared stories of struggles and found ways to navigate through them. When they had wānanga together, MDS provided each other with validation and through that newfound confidence, asserted their presence in institutional spaces of comfort (redacted). Here, they brought the physical world and spiritual worlds into that of academia.

Data in (redacted) also suggested that MDS carefully considered how they moved through their institutional spaces, including the larger university landscapes and the micro spaces such as offices and supervisory meetings. The physical spaces they inhabited impacted the way they created and maintained intellectual and institutional attachments and influenced whether they could establish a place to feel a sense of belonging inside the university. Many factors influenced their sense of belonging, and these were dependent on the people they were with, the tūpuna they carried with them in those spaces, and the spectral presence of something beyond the physical realm. Here, I contend that settler-colonial universities are haunted sites visited by settler ghosts, as well as tūpuna ghosts.

7. Discussion: Māori Doctoral Students and Ghosts Negotiating Space

Bell (1997) argues that ghosts imbue space with their social presence, and in doing so, space becomes place. The connection or disconnection people have with the ghosts in those spaces directly impacts the boundaries and sense of possession tied to the space. And in this way, ghosts can haunt seemingly empty spaces even if no one is there. It is these hauntings that shaped whether MDS felt a sense of kinship which was more inviting than an eerie sense of risk—ultimately influencing the way they experienced the university institution.

What was evident in the way Māori PhD students moved through their institutions was how they utilised space, how they were drawn to particular spaces, and withdrew from others. They thought carefully about how they engaged in the macro spaces of the university environment such as its landscapes and buildings. Māori PhD students withdrew from areas of the campus that evoked a sense of unease, eeriness, or discomfort.

Within places, including historical sites, ghosts help with boundaries of connection and possession impacting our sense of belonging. We feel a tie of kinship with place and a lack of kinship in other places. Bell (1997) adds, “ghosts of belonging are ghosts of kinship” (p. 824). This, he argues, is because we experience “a social tie with the physical world, animating an otherwise inanimate realm” (p. 824). We get the sense of belonging when “we attach our spirits to that place, and thus that place is attached to us” (Bell 1997, p. 824). For example, I get this sense of kinship tie to places that are homely, safe, and comfortable. These feelings of security are often when I feel the presence of my tūpuna in places I could imagine them as young children playing such as the forest or the beach.

Building on Bell’s (1997) explanation of ghosts of kinship which give social meaning to space for that space to become place, I add that, conversely, ghosts of foe do the opposite—they repel rather than welcome particular space visitors. ‘Ghosts of foe’ haunt settler-colonial sites such as Aotearoa universities. These hauntings create unease that MDS felt in certain areas of their university where they did not feel welcomed or felt the potential risk to their level of comfort. This was evident in the way they spoke of unsafe spaces—physical, theoretical, and social/cultural. MDS alluded to a presence that was either not always articulated, or was direct, including shared insights, messages, or tohu provided by tūpuna, past loved ones, or whānau.

The wairua in some spaces university left MDS feeling threatened and needing to withdraw, and this impacted how they orientated themselves in the physical spaces of the institution. I argue that these types of spectral presence are hauntings, in the sociological sense of the word, that directly affect the level of belonging they experience. The stories MDS shared about feeling uncomfortable or when they explained an eeriness in particular spaces, I argue, are the ghosts that lurk in the present distorted and palatable settler version of Aotearoa history, impacting their belonging in university places.
As MDS moved through their university settings, they found themselves in between challenges and resistance. I contend that what happens in that in-between space or Te Wāhi Ngaro is a negotiation between MDS and the ghosts of kindship or ghosts of foe. The relationship MDS has with the ghosts determines the level of attachment they can establish in any given place which can foster or impede belonging.

8. Conclusions

This is a philosophical and theoretical paper that draws on Māori epistemologies and ontologies to consider the way settler-colonial university spaces impact Māori doctoral students’ sense of belonging. The findings illustrate throughout their doctoral studies, Māori doctoral students negotiate their everyday institutional spaces. And in that process, they also enact agency and autonomy to resist unwelcoming or uninviting spaces. A Whakapapa Kōrero theoretical framework gives room to consider the uncanny and all of the ghostly presences that reside in Te Wāhi Ngaro to come in full view and disrupt Western temporalities.

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Glossary

Aotearoa New Zealand
Kaupapa Māori incorporating Māori ideas, knowledges, skills, lens
Kite to see
Mana prestige, authority, power
Mana motuhake autonomy, Indigenous sovereignty
Māori Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand
Mauri life force, life essence
Mokopuna descendant, grandchild/ren
Pūrākau Māori creation stories
Rongo to sense, taste, feel, touch, hear, smell
Te Ao Māori a Māori world
Te Wāhi Ngaro The Hidden Realm
Tohu sign
Tūpuna ancestor
Wā time and place
Wairua two waters—both the physical and spiritual worlds
Wānanga to discuss, to deliberate
Whakapapa relational connection
Whānau extended family
Whanaungatanga to be in good relation, relationality

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