

A RESPONSE FROM SHAUN HENDY AND SIOUXSIE WILES

“Voice Control” (October) contained several serious errors that contributed to a misleading and unbalanced narrative. *North & South* has agreed to correct one statement because there is clear written evidence that it is false, as revealed by a text exchange with author Yvonne Van Dongen.

Although *North & South* has told us it is a member of the Media Council, it does not print a summary of the Council’s complaints process in its magazine as members are required to do. We believe that in “Voice Control” *North & South* breaches the Media Council’s guidelines in several other ways.

“Voice Control” itself is structured around a straw figure. Universities are bastions of free *scholarship*, not free *speech*. Academics only earn the right to speak with authority through diligent scholarship and research. This authority is always up for debate with their peers.

Van Dongen describes the “*Listener 7*”’s attempts to have their views published in an academic journal. They were unsuccessful, which happens when articles do not meet rigorous scholarly standards set by peer review. The authors did not need to pass the same bar for publication in the *Listener*. It should not be surprising though that their attempt to bypass their peers’ critique drew that critique into the public domain.

Like those academics who dabble in climate change or COVID denial, the “*Listener 7*” have chosen to dismiss criticism of their views as a collegial conspiracy. When the Open Letter disputing their views was signed by more than 2,000 educators, including both of us, one of the “*Listener 7*” -- John Werry, sent an email comparing its signatories to “sheep”.

Academics around the world have faced vitriol and harassment for their work managing the COVID-19 pandemic. In New Zealand, threats of physical violence against academics, including ourselves, have become routine. We find it remarkable that Van Dongen did not investigate this challenge to academic speech. Are threats to the egos of the “*Listener 7*” really more important than threats to academics’ lives?

Finally, we would like to share some facts that Van Dongen chose to omit from her article. First, two of the “*Listener 7*”, Cooper and Clements, engaged a lawyer to obtain the emails of junior and other colleagues, which those colleagues naturally found intimidating. Second, Deborah Chambers’ letter accusing us of being bullies contained several false statements. As Van Dongen knew, Chambers was alerted to these false statements in February. Chambers has yet to correct the public record.

Most importantly, “Voice Control” does not accurately portray the contents of the open letter. Van Dongen suggests the open letter did not engage with the content of the *Listener* letter, Chambers claimed it was bullying, while Paul Moon described it as taking offence, not an argument. We invite readers to form their own views after reading it.

Shaun Hendy, Siouxsie Wiles
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The open letter:

A letter signed by seven University of Auckland Professors/Professors Emeritus, published in the New Zealand Listener (July 23) claims to be 'in defence of science' against what is described as an effort to "encourage mistrust of science".

We, the signatories to this response, categorically disagree with their views. Indigenous knowledges - in this case, Mātauranga - are not lesser to other knowledge systems. Indeed, indigenous ways of knowing, including Mātauranga, have always included methodologies that overlap with 'Western' understandings of the scientific method.

However, Mātauranga is far more than just equivalent to or equal to 'Western' science. It offers ways of viewing the world that are unique and complementary to other knowledge systems.

The seven Professors describe efforts to reevaluate and revise the significance of Mātauranga in NCEA, including the acknowledgement of the role 'western' science has played in rationalising colonisation as contributing to "disturbing misunderstandings of science emerging at all levels of education and in science funding." The Professors claim that "science itself does not colonise", ignoring the fact that colonisation, racism, misogyny, and eugenics have each been championed by scientists wielding a self-declared monopoly on universal knowledge.

And while the Professors describe science as 'universal', they fail to acknowledge that science has long excluded indigenous peoples from participation, preferring them as subjects for study and exploitation. Diminishing the role of indigenous knowledge systems is simply another tool for exclusion and exploitation.

The Professors present a series of global crises that we must "battle" with science, again failing to acknowledge the ways in which science has contributed to the creation of these challenges. Putting science on a pedestal gets us no further in the solution of these crises.

Finally, they believe that "mistrust of science" is increased by this kind of critique. In contrast, we believe that mistrust in science stems from science's ongoing role in perpetuating 'scientific' racism, justifying colonisation, and continuing support of systems that create injustice. There can be no trust in science without robust self-reflection by the science community and an active commitment to change.

North & South responds: *North & South* and Yvonne van Dongen stand by the reporting in this story but we also accept there was an error made, and for this we sincerely apologise to Dr Wiles, and Dr Hendy. In reporting on a Media Council rebuke over a Stuff column that saw Dr Wiles make allegations of intimidation by the “*Listener seven*” writers to junior colleagues, we said Dr Wiles had “declined to talk further on this” to *North & South*. This was an error made during the editing process and is not correct — she was not given that opportunity.

Dr Wiles was also concerned that a response she made to texted questions from Yvonne van Dongen did not get included in the article. In a text exchange, Van Dongen asked the question, “would it not have been better to engage with the content of the Listener 7s letter than criticising the individuals?” Dr Wiles replied in part: “Regarding the open letter, it’s telling that the “*Listener 7*” have been free to write their letter and reiterate their talking points over and over both to media here and overseas, but an open letter signed in support of their colleagues impacted by racism in the academy is called bullying.” We accept this would have clearly shown Dr Wiles’s views.