

# GLOBALIZATION'S IMPACT ON INDIGENOUS STORYTELLING TRADITIONS IN WITI IHIMAERA'S "THE WHALE RIDER"

**K. Lakshmipriya**

*II MA English, V.H.N.S.N. College, Virudhunagar*

## **Abstract**

*This article examines the impact of globalization on indigenous storytelling traditions via the prism of Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider*. The novel, a staple of contemporary Maori writing, blends old Maori tales and oral narratives into a modern framework, demonstrating both the survival and transformation of indigenous storytelling in a globalized world. By evaluating Ihimaera's adaptation of Maori customs for a worldwide audience, this thesis contends that globalization both threatens and revitalizes indigenous culture. Through textual analysis, it demonstrates how the novel sustains Maori cosmology and values while making concessions to non-indigenous readers. The report concludes that, while globalization presents obstacles to indigenous storytelling, it also creates chances for cultural preservation and cross-cultural discussion, as illustrated by *The Whale Rider*'s international success.*

**Key Concept:** *Globalization, tradition, and storytelling.*

## **Introduction**

Globalization, characterized by increased interconnection and cultural interchange, has had a significant impact on indigenous storytelling traditions. These traditions, which are largely based on oral histories, confront issues such as cultural uniformity and the loss of native languages. However, globalization allows for the preservation and transmission of indigenous stories through literature, film, and digital media. Witi Ihimaera's *The Whale Rider* is an excellent case study for investigating these processes. Published in 1987, the novel combines Maori mythology with contemporary storytelling techniques to create a narrative that is both firmly rooted in Maori culture and accessible to a worldwide audience. This paper looks at how Ihimaera's work represents globalization's dual impact on indigenous storytelling: as both a cause of cultural destruction and a tool for preservation and adaptation.

## **Significance of Maori Storytelling Traditions**

Indigenous storytelling traditions are essential for preserving cultural identity, history, and values. Oral tales such as myths, stories, and lineages (whakapapa) are central to New Zealand's Maori culture. These myths not only explain natural events, but they also strengthen social structures, spiritual beliefs, and links to the land. In *The Whale Rider*, Ihimaera largely relies on Maori mythology, particularly the myth of Paikea, the whale rider. By incorporating this tale into a contemporary story, Ihimaera preserves its value while reinterpreting it for current audiences.

### **Globalization as a Threat to Indigenous Storytelling**

Globalization frequently results in the marginalization of indigenous cultures. Traditional narratives may be lost as a result of global language domination, such as English, and cultural commodification. In *The Whale Rider*, Ihimaera acknowledges these threats through the character of Koro Apirana, who laments the decline of Maori customs and the younger generation's alienation from their roots. The novel's location, Whangara, represents a society torn between maintaining its traditions and adjusting to a changing world.

### **Globalization as an Opportunity for Preservation**

While globalization presents obstacles, it also provides opportunity for indigenous storytelling to reach a larger audience. The decision by Ihimaera to compose *The Whale Rider* in English rather than Maori demonstrates this contradiction. By adopting English, Ihimaera makes Maori culture accessible to a worldwide audience, ensuring that its stories are not limited to local groups. The novel's international success and subsequent film adaptation broaden its reach, bringing Maori mythology to people around the world. However, this accessibility comes at a cost: portions of the story are reduced or universalized in order to appeal to non-indigenous readers.

### **The Hybrid Narrative of *The Whale Rider***

One of the most notable aspects of *The Whale Rider* is its mixed narrative structure. Ihimaera incorporates traditional Maori narrative elements, such as oral cadence and spiritual symbolism, into Western literary traditions. For example, the story alternates between the fabled tale of Paikea and the modern account of Kahu, a young girl destined to take up the mantle of the whale rider. This juxtaposition emphasizes the longevity of Maori customs while also showcasing their adaptation in a modern setting. Kahu represents the resilience of Maori culture, fighting patriarchal and colonial stereotypes that have historically oppressed indigenous women.

### **The Role of the Film Adaptation**

Niki Caro's 2002 film adaptation of *The Whale Rider* exemplifies how globalization can enhance indigenous stories. The film's popularity elevated Maori culture to the forefront of global filmmaking, collecting plaudits and encouraging cross-cultural understanding. However, the adaptation illustrates the sacrifices that come with presenting indigenous storytelling to a global audience. Certain cultural subtleties are simplified, and the focus switches to universal issues such as gender equality and environmental stewardship, making the story more accessible to foreign audiences. Despite these changes, the video captures the core of Maori mythology and demonstrates its relevance in a globalized society.

### **Challenges and Resilience in Indigenous Storytelling**

The popularity of *The Whale Rider* demonstrates the persistence of indigenous storytelling in the face of globalization. Ihimaera's work demonstrates how traditional

narratives may adapt while maintaining their basic essence. However, it poses important problems regarding cultural ownership and authenticity. Who gets to tell indigenous stories, and how do they change when they're adapted for global audiences? Ihimaera navigates these complexities by being true to his indigenous roots while exploring the possibilities of global storytelling platforms.

### Conclusion

The *Whale Rider* by Witi Ihimaera demonstrates how globalization has had a contradictory impact on indigenous storytelling traditions. While globalization threatens to erode cultural identity and homogenize narratives, it also offers chances for preservation, adaptation, and cross-cultural communication. By combining Maori mythology with contemporary narrative, Ihimaera assures the survival of these traditions in an ever-changing world. The novel's international success and film adaptation demonstrate both the advantages and disadvantages of telling indigenous stories to a global audience. Finally, *The Whale Rider* proves that indigenous storytelling can live in a globalized society as long as it remains grounded in its cultural heritage.

### Works Cited

1. Caro, N. (Director). (2002). *The Whale Rider* [Film]. South Pacific Pictures.
2. Durie, M. (2009). Understanding health and well-being in Indigenous communities. *International Journal of Indigenous Health*, 5(1), 3-6.
3. Ihimaera, W. (1987). *The Whale Rider*. Penguin Books.
4. Mead, H. M. (2003). *Tikanga Maori: Living by Maori values*. Huia Publishers.
5. Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*. Zed Books.
6. Thiong'o, N. wa. (1986). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. Heinemann.
7. Walker, R. (2004). *Ka whawhai tonu matou: Struggle without end*. Penguin