"PAPATŪĀNUKU/PAPA:" SOME THOUGHTS ON THE OPPOSITIONAL GROUNDS OF THE DOCTORAL EXPERIENCE

CARL MIKA
mika@waikato.ac.nz
University of Waikato

ABSTRACT. There are significant challenges that face Māori students and supervisors as a "doctoral team." Perhaps the most fundamental of these is that there is a metaphysics at work in writing and talking that Māori are encouraged to speculate on and reclaim. One term for this metaphysics, "Papatūānuku" (often abbreviated to "Papa"), signifies an active entity that rejects strict definition but influences both doctoral text and team. This article proposes that student and supervisor must simultaneously glance towards the conventions of academic writing *and* recollect Papatūānuku as potential being in the doctoral process.

Keywords: Kaupapa; Papatūānuku; doctoral research; Māori; metaphysics

Introduction

Knowingly or not, the Māori doctoral supervisor and student are both at the mercy of a constellation of metaphysical entities. One of these, Papatūānuku, who claims both parties equally, may well provide an ethical platform which undergirds how things in the world may be described or thought about in a thesis. Papatūānuku is sometimes shortened to "Papa" in such common terms as "kau*papa*" and "whaka*papa*." "Kaupapa Māori," in particular, is commonly encountered in research: it can mean "a body of knowledge" (Pihama, 2005, p. 191) and is often used as a method in various kinds of research. Whilst Papatūānuku is often reductively translated as "Mother Earth," it holds more gravid implications for the researcher and the supervisor: it represents potential being, and requests that a writer represent things in the world with some uncertainty; moreover it possesses its own "mauri" or life-force and can – if the supervisor and student withhold from defining it

too restrictively – disrupt the certainty of academic text. This active nature of Papatūānuku in research is one discursive consequence of many, stemming from broad and common utterances that suggest that all things in the world are connected (see for instance Marsden, 1985; Pere, 1982). The dis-ordering nature of "Papa," embedded as it is in terms such as "kaupapa" (commonly, "theme" or "purpose") and "whakapapa" (frequently translated as "genealogy"), has the potential to destabilise a text, as long as those immersed in the doctoral experience commit to a speculative reflection about Papa. If student and supervisor choose that path, then both ethical disruption and creativity can occur in a thesis.

There is thus a peculiar relationship between the researching self and Papatūānuku and all its derivatives. Even though Papatūānuku is energetic, transformative and mysterious, we are called to represent it in text by Papatūānuku itself, the "rock foundation beyond expanse, the infinite" (Marsden, 2003, p. 22). It is important, however, not to rush too quickly into a thetic description of what kaupapa Māori/whakapapa/Papatūānuku *are*, for this would be to constrain their potential within the thesis.1F It is moreover important that student and supervisor engage with another, different perception that gives rise to a discussion of those Māori terms, as clear and highly present. Both student and supervisor are equally implicated in this metaphysical issue, even if the supervisor is conventionally thought to be more expert.2F Even trickier is the issue of how to overthrow that deeply entrenched expectation by which every writer is anticipated as the undeniable namer and describer of an object. We might be tempted to revert here to the Māori language as an antidote to that problem, mistaking the former as immediately opposed to the subject/object divide; however, the Māori language can also be subverted, so that the self is illuminated as a central agent in defining and representing the object. The Māori language could indeed be useful as a political and epistemological tool to destabilise the self-assuredness of English text and of that *a priori* academic expectation, but it will be no more challenging than English unless it is wielded with the metaphysics of a Māori worldview in mind.

In doctoral work, arguably the most pressing issue besets the Māori student and supervisor – hereafter in places called the "doctoral team" – immediately as they set out to attach a name or label to an object. The abstract as well as material consequences of naming an object, discussing it, placing a boundary around it through singling it out, have an impact on the object as well as the self. Whilst this is a concern that extends generally to conflicts between Māori and Western views on language, it manifests in doctoral work in particularly vivid ways. These include: the ways in which academic expectations push the Māori writer to order data, material and text; the general drive to ensure that the writer is consistent across terms; and the

much more fundamental Kantian insistence that the writer must not engage with the object in its entirety when representing it through language. In this article, I propose that the Western call for a rational and enduring grouping and depiction of objects runs counter to a Māori ontological view of language. I suggest that, to manage the rigid arrangement of language and object resulting from Western academic conventions, the Māori doctoral team needs to consider shaking the very certainty the doctoral thesis asks of its members.

Throughout this article, I refer to "Papa" as *one* very complex term that, as primordial Being, demands to be honoured in its own right within the realm of other common research terms such as "kaupapa" and "whakapapa."3F I propose that, although academic doctoral work calls for a fixity of Papa, the doctoral team ultimately have the option to listen to its mysterious edict and to ethically represent it, and other things in the world, on that basis.4F

The Ethics of Speculation:
Emphasising the Vigour of the Non-foundational Ground

Most indigenous participants in ethics committees will be aware that those forums can only look at certain facets of proper behaviour. The focus of ethics committees is generally on how people are going to be affected by research in a very narrow sense. But ethics for a Māori doctoral team is somewhat askance from the institutional norm, because it asks for an account of a colonising representation of a phenomenon and proposes that there is a more appropriate one to be thought of. Ethics is indeed culturally constructed (Cram & Kennedy, 2010), and most university ethics committees, even in Aotearoa/New Zealand, are not capable of taking into account a Māori speculation on what is right and what is wrong in a most general sense. For Māori, by comparison, ethics is as much ancestrally as socially constructed. That is, an ethical representation in a Māori view attempts to hold the full possibility of an object and its relationships with other parts of the world, past, present and future, and indeed with the world as a whole. Additionally, how one conceives another entity has repercussions on the wellbeing of the world, including the self, at several levels (Mika, 2015c). I have at the heart of my concern here the belief that, if we refer to our ideas and entities in the brightly clear way that I will soon describe, then we cause trauma to ourselves and to the world. To that extent, rationalism has set up a self-sustaining, replicating world of conceptual trauma for us, and the aim of some of us in our doctoral supervision and work is to challenge that reality. The question necessarily arises for the Māori researcher: How do we sabotage that Western machinery?

Any solution must begin with the knowledge that ethics is not merely to do with the human world. Included in the "strong holism" of a Māori world-view are both Māori doctoral student and supervisor, who are accountable to the world, beyond what can be seen or experienced. Thus a doctorate is as much to do with thinking about an ethical approach to, and representation of, a non-human phenomenon (Wildcat, 2001a – and here, "thinking" is crucial!) as with the pursuit of an answer to the research theme proper. These phenomena involve activity beyond our direct experience. As an example: I attended an ethics meeting some years ago, and an application came before us that involved a researcher photographing whakairo – carvings (among other things). The application was a full one in terms of dealing with people – it ticked all the right boxes – but as the Māori ethics committee member I felt bound to point out another problem altogether. The applicant had assumed that the whakairo were there to be photographed, that they were inanimate or lacking their own life. He had assumed this to such an extent that he did not even raise it as an issue. Of course, on an ethics committee such protest is problematic; it smacks of mysticism and the esoteric. Yet, I felt compelled to raise it because of the works of people such as Kincheloe & Steinberg (2008), who quite simply but profoundly maintain that every-thing in the world is imbued with life. I also have my own upbringing, which in places emphasised that interconnection quite strongly.

Interestingly, the Committee agreed, but only to the extent that reason would allow. Thus the members, all of whom are seasoned academic researchers, would bring the value of the whakairo back to something that humans had constructed. In other words, the whakairo might have an essence, but this is due entirely to humans. This is partially correct, but it is incom-plete because indigenous metaphysics tends to acknowledge that there is an aspect to any particular thing in the world that contains its own autonomy, its own "living energy" (Deloria, 2001b, p. 22), regardless of how we construct it.

My Theorising on Dominant Western Metaphysics and Research

From a Māori worldview, another, prior field of thought sits behind the idea that things in the world lack mauri (life-force), which also holds sway regarding the pursuit of clarity in Western research. This most classic of metaphysics (Fuchs, 1976), or "first set of principles" (Deloria 2001a, p. 2), which started with Plato and Aristotle, runs quite contrary to our own world-view. There is a deep-seated expectation in the West that runs in the follow-ing way: an object will appear *as* what we expect it to appear as, and will not appear as anything else (Peller, 1985). Because Being for Plato was static and unchanging, objects, despite their changing appearances, are capable of

being known *as* objects. This *a priori* template precedes issues that we often see writers discuss, such as fragmentation of the object, privilege of humanity in the world, and so on (these are extremely important offshoots of that first, ancient metaphysics). The object, pinned down *as* object, is highly present to the self, even before it appears. The problem here is one of *as-ness*. The object is hence highly positive in its qualities *as* an object, and we can then have clear, epistemic access to it.

There are certainly consequences in that highly expectant worldview for a Māori metaphysics. In theorising about a thing in the world we may, as students and supervisors, have to be prepared to withdraw from saying what that thing *is*. Given the obscurity that characterises Māori metaphysics, it is quite possible that, before colonisation, we never expected an object to manifest in preordained ways. It would have had its own mode of appearance. One of the problems with the predetermined appearance of an object that I have just outlined is that we dictate how the object is to manifest. But in our traditional worldview, I surmise that we had more respect for an object appearing in its own right, and not necessarily *as* any one thing but as an intriguing amalgam of the sublime. The metaphysics of presence has other ideas and poses a distinct dilemma. It arises in the comparison of common linguistic conventions, such as in the English verb "to be," for which there is no Māori equivalent. Whilst the verb "to be" does not exist in Māori, and was not necessary in a Māori preservation of the sublime, it has nevertheless been imputed as a concept through translation. Thinking for many Māori therefore threatens to have been "conditioned to some extent by the structure of the language in which [they mostly] express or formulate [their] thoughts" (Kahn, 1966, p. 245). From a Māori vantage point, a problem with that verb could be its tendency to single out an entity on the basis of its quiddity: where Māori ontology wants to hint at that numinous phenomenon within terms, academic language instead requests a pointing to the entity in its utmost clarity. As we are called on to say "kaupapa Māori *is* this or that," the ontological statement becomes different to the "overplus" (Otto, 1958, p. 5) that is reserved for the term "kaupapa" in its own right. We are making an assertion about what it is for something to *be* kaupapa Māori. We are also pinpointing Papa in that assertion; we can say exactly what Papa shall be, and indeed, as we have seen with the metaphysics of presence, we have apprehended how Papa shall manifest – as object – even before we have turned our thinking to Papa.

As a Māori doctoral team, we will in practice alternate between shades of obscurity (we might here call this "darkness" or "te pō") and luminosity, but that foundation of perception at the very base of Western research forces us to keep things extremely evident. This may be one of the major theoretical issues that face us Māori researchers, whether we are doing philosophical

work or community/iwi research, where our method is more concerned with obtaining data of some sort. We are perhaps to a degree what Wildcat (2001b) refers to as "metaphysical schizophrenics" (p. 116) when he discusses the problem of Native scientists who sell their soul to science. The same malady confronts us, regardless of whether the research is scientific or community related. None of us can fully escape the ground of certainty that the academic tradition has set in place. We can perhaps destabilise it, but even in that act we are comporting ourselves within its bright confines. As a student, I fell afoul of it all the time, and supervising carries its own pitfalls, as the academic convention of clear, rational language asks for wholesale commitment from me. For my own work, I might write about the solid, certain ground in thought and critique where it comes from (a mixture of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes and Kant), and I might employ tactics, such as referring to a very different, poetic source in my work. However, I still end up holding the hand of academic tradition to a very large extent.

   The intriguing possibility that originates in our belief system, that there exist dimensions outside of our understanding and experience (Marsden, 2003), shows itself in an expansive interpretation of whakapapa. The ground that emerges from whakapapa, and is important to Māori generally, is more powerful than its association with its common translation of "genealogy" (Mika, 2011). Here I suggest that whakapapa deals with the world on its own terms and can reinterpret academic dogma. In other words, when we come into contact with the metaphysics of presence, whakapapa dishevels it in some way, or clears it even temporarily. This is one creative articulation that gives whakapapa a mystical ability to act autonomously and imperceptibly. There may or may not be any evident signs of our culture in that act: the Māori individual who is not apparently involved in any Western endeavour is still claimed by that Western ground of thought, but nevertheless deals with it in that destabilising way. In this scenario, a Māori scientist dissipates the colonising field of thought simply by interacting with it, in an unconscious manner. The Māori lawyer does the same, as does the Māori teacher. The Māori researcher obscures the high presence of terms and concepts simply by being involved in them, by (re)conceiving of them and re-presenting them. All this dissipation happens despite the fact that the terms and concepts still appear to be commandingly present, signifying that the destructive, trauma-tising ground of Western thought in research reveals its vulnerability even as it appears to be monolithic. This idea is not an unfamiliar one to certain Western philosophers such as Heidegger (1977), Foucault (1990) and Derrida (1982), and indeed we could return to our ancient Māori idea that the phe-nomenon "korekore," an overly negative metaphysical entity, cannot help but display its positive attributes (Marsden, 2003). Shown in our metaphysics, that susceptible display also occurs in everyday life.

Our Agency within/with Papa

However, my aim is merely to hint at that tantalising prospect, and then to move my focus to the reality of our agency as a Māori doctoral team – to deliberately reclaim some aspect of the sublime Papa within our research. Doing Māori doctoral research, we would be unsettling certainty itself when we invoke kaupapa Māori as a methodical, ethical and theoretical underpinning. In a Māori supervision process, hearing what students want to achieve, what really excites them, by asking them questions and listening to their responses, is a crucial start. It is remarkable that we consider whakaaro (thinking) as residing in the gut (Smith, 2000), so for us, thinking and feeling are at once the same. It therefore suits us better to acknowledge that thinking is due to the outside world as much as the inner. In any case, as soon as we have a reaction to something, we have an inclination towards it, it resonates with us, and that resonance stays with us even if we think we are being purely rational. But we cannot undermine sheer thought, either, even if it is constantly accompanied by feeling. In relation to language, I describe my process in the following way: a term claims my attention; I turn to it and get a feel for it in light of my experience and upbringing (and this does not require proficiency at any one particular language; this is more of a deep recess of whakapapa); and I then consider that it may be a potentially colonising influence. In the Māori doctoral experience, inquiring into the point of curiosity for all members of the team leads to a significant contribution to the thesis.

There is, in the first instance, a full horizon of the team's involvement which needs to be speculated on, although it may not be fully grasped. The thorough extent of an engagement with the text is underpinned by the presencing of Papatūānuku. Here, we see a triadic interaction involving the primordial ground, comprising the supervisor, the student, and thought-within-Papatūānuku. This last, somewhat confusing, nomenclature is not easily rendered in dominant, rational discourse but can be roughly translated by the Māori term "whakaaro" (Mika, 2014). An active engagement with thoughts as our relations, undergirded by Papatūānuku as that which can be pondered but ultimately not known, calls for the team's deliberate and sustained philosophising in the thesis context, as Papatūānuku is an enduring presence in thought. The particular issue of method – how one will encounter a thing in its most basic form and how one determines it will appear to the self (and thence how it will be grouped with other things to answer a research question) – is important, but the team can discuss how concepts can be represented holistically, and how this will dictate an approach to their research. The Māori doctoral team may or may not refer to this process as kaupapa Māori. In that act, I emphasise a *ground* of thinking

that can provoke further thought and encourage speculation down an unconstrained path. As with an ethical representation of the whole, the ground of thought is linked in a Māori metaphysics to a primordial entity that rests within the term "kaupapa" – *Papatūānuku*. Due to the fundamentally unknowable nature of Papatūānuku, the Māori doctoral team is engaged in a similarly uncertain supervisory relationship. To that end, kaupapa Māori – if we identify that concept – is a free-thinking process that originates in the constant accrual ("whakapapa" or "layering") of Papatūānuku to the self.

Kaupapa Māori is hence a process of *theorising* rather than a constant theory in my link with the thesis and the student. Theorising is not necessarily the same as theory, and there is a very bright antithesis to the theorising experience I advocate that I feel compelled to discuss. What is it about the phrase "kaupapa Māori theory" that I have problems with? Is it in the terms? My fear is that "kaupapa" has become too based on a ground that is not beyond our experience but instead has the effect of a textbook – a ground of certain discourse. Has "kaupapa" taken on a complexion that was never anticipated by our ancestors? We can open that textbook, tick the criteria that it lists, and then carry on with research proper. My own reluctance to invoke the phrase "kaupapa Māori theory" rests in its apparently straightforward character, the ground of certainty that it conjures for both student and supervisor. Schelling (1856), the German Idealist, believed that the foundational was paradoxically non-foundational; we are well advised to pay heed to the dangers hiding in a perception of the ground of thought as a firm, complete one – rather than as one of infinitude.

Theorising as Non-foundational Disruption

Some examples are called for here to clarify what is at stake in the textural difference between certain and uncertain, clear and obscure. Kaupapa Māori theory asks both students and supervisor to declare or position their research in line with their whakapapa. If "whakapapa" is taken to mean "genealogy," then kaupapa Māori theory, as a phenomenon of permanence, does not trouble the thesis text and its expectations of academic inquiry in any way. However, if a student is encouraged to try and write about whakapapa as creatively as possible, quite distant from the idea of "genealogy," then problems can occur for both the student and the supervisor. Suddenly, whakapapa becomes anything but genealogy; it becomes something that threatens to shake up the text. Whakapapa, escaping from the constraint of what Heidegger (1971) calls "calculative thinking" (p. 420), takes on its own organic disruption. It might now connote a claim of the self by Papa or, as far as thought goes, a move toward certainty that never quite arrives there (Mika, 2014). In that one reconfiguration of one Māori term – and there are

lots that can be reconfigured – the pristine, settled linearity of academic convention is put on trial, because this reconfiguration opens up the frozen landscape of academic language to a manifestation of the uncontainable. Whakapapa is now no longer the straightforward "genealogy:" it is an active phenomenon.

In this, we remain true to the Māori belief that language has a wairua (Browne, 2005). The antithesis of the metaphysics of presence, it speaks to a certain ontological, energetic nature that resides in a given term and that is affected by our interpretative approach but is not thoroughly defined by it. Fixed kaupapa Māori theory is disciplining but also productive in some instances: disciplining if the student does not theorise about the terms that are given in the principles, and productive if they decide to take the infallible definition to task and move it elsewhere. Other terms that I raise here are "ako" and "whakawhanaungatanga" (Smith, 2002). As with whakapapa, the temptation in academic research is to just represent "ako" as either "teach/ learn" (or both teach and learn at the same time, in line with Bishop & Glynn, 1999), and not to account directly for the sense of fragility that the self must contend with when instructed by the non-human world, evident in other aspects of the term's meaning such as fragility, excitement and vulnerability (Thrupp & Mika, 2012). Whakawhanaungatanga, instead of conjoining nicely and tightly with its economic meaning of "relationship," can push to the surface of the student's writing – and indeed of the student's and supervisor's discussions – a complete otherness, posed by external things in the world and their persistent pull on the researching self. In both these instances, too, student and supervisor can either give free rein to the terms and the mystery that they retain to themselves, or else the established relational economies can constrain them.

Doctoral Reflection on a Dialectic

The Māori doctoral team is consistently faced with a practical decision: to continue on down the path that a Māori term has suddenly carved into the manicured turf, or to pull that term back into line – to discipline it back towards its given, unchallenging meaning. The difficult path actually consists in the representation of the sublime *whilst* accounting for that very deep ground of high presence and clarity. For me, whether it is an ethics committee, or lecturing, or writing, or presenting a paper in a forum, my job is to name the problem. When I talk about research – empirical or philo-sophical – I want to address the ground of Western thought and perception that allows research to thrive, to begin with. Even when we are making assertions about our own worldview, those of us working in this area, I find, are constantly manoeuvring backwards and forwards between critique and

affirmation (see, for particularly good examples of this approach, the works of Andreotti, Ahenakew & Cooper, 2011; Ahekanew, Andreotti, Cooper & Hireme, 2014). This is a method that our ancestors may have encapsulated with the term "wananga." In a social context, that could mean the presence of both critique and affirmation. Identifying a problem and suggesting a solution thus go hand in hand.

For Māori researchers, this dialectic tries to keep an entity in one piece as we talk about it, but draws back from foreclosing Papatūānuku by establishing its permanent properties. It is in that consciously resistant yet affirmative activity that kaupapa Māori theory becomes theorising. Alongside just giving Papatūānuku free rein through creatively and directly representing it, I attempt to engage with the doctoral experience by identifying and unsettling the potential constraints placed on it. In other words, how can a way be cleared for Papatūānuku to merge into the text of the thesis? For a Māori researcher, the process perhaps starts with a self-confidence concerning speculation itself. Māori students frequently declare their pepeha (tribal saying, linking with "whakapapa") to position themselves and to assert their right to undertake the research. With that utterance as it stands, there is a snug fit with the expectations of academic writing conventions, because it does not actively disturb the rational nature of academic thought. But we are encouraged to go further than that: the Māori doctoral team is called to inquire into how that same pepeha also acts as an *im*-position on the text, incidentally *un*-positioning the idea that one's knowledge of the pepeha is all that matters. The critical use of a student's pepeha calls on one's mountains, lake and so on as a deliberate saboteur: all these entities emerge and position themselves against the rationalism that doctoral writing privileges. They are not just conceptual phenomena and can accord with a view of whakapapa that holds within it the potential being of "Papa." In the example of the pepeha, Papatūānuku is not mentioned, yet the doctoral experience asks that the ultimate originary ground of Papatūānuku be given space to flourish – even where Papatūānuku is not being held as a point of debate. Papa here is silently forceful when we reflect on colonisation and pose it as a problem in a thesis. Those of us Māori who make philosophy our central work and write about it have to come to terms with Derrida's (1982) warning, for instance, about the apparently self-evident term, and must become intimately familiar with its quietly constitutive and oppositional counterpart – Western thought. In the doctoral exercise, the Māori doctoral team may co-construct a response, drawing on both Māori and appropriate Western theory, to then philosophise about Western colonial thought as it relates to the student and their text. We have to know and counter the assumptions that emanate from the West *as they impact on the student and their writing*.

Conclusion

Like it or not, we have a relationship with the unyielding ground that the West has laid for us to research on. More than that, we are connected permanently to that ground. But we have other tools besides those that the West offers at our disposal, and it is this excess beyond the Western expectation that we have to consider if we are to truly get to the root of both philosophical colonisation and the unsettling of it in doctoral research. Whether innate to the terms kaupapa and whakapapa, on its own, or indeed left unspoken, Papa moves the supervisor and student to repeatedly transcend the banality of academic convention, even if those instances are just fleeting. It is the responsibility of both supervisor and student in the doctoral experience to try and hold a speculative response to the call of Papa and to leave aspects of the world unclear and autonomous. Conjoined with Papa in that brief instant, the participants in the doctorate are themselves made vulnerable and ungrounded, but are simultaneously invited to ethically represent an entity with Papa as the guiding force.

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