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## Alternative Anthropologies: Kete Aronui from the Waikato

January 23, 2025

As three anthropologists working at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, Aotearoa (New Zealand), we experience anthropology in our daily work in the context of our local histories, communities and politics. While many anthropologists are familiar with the critiques of anthropology that play out in the USA or Europe, the narratives and practices of anthropology from places such as New Zealand are less well known. We argue that these local, diverse experiences of anthropology can enlarge our international understandings and imaginations of what anthropology can be, as well as the challenges it may face.

Anthropologists working in New Zealand today face the same plethora of academic pressures as those found in their counterparts in North America, Britain and Europe; pressures instigated by decades of neoliberal reform, managerialism, and the [impact of new entrepreneurial and corporate models of universities](#) that shape everyday identities and social relationships (Shore 2010). Similarly, the critique of anthropology as a discipline rooted in colonial imperatives and practices, resounds in a society whose imperial history and settler colonial present continues to imprint on educational institutions, pedagogy and research. In New Zealand, no neat historical trajectory marks a path from extractive research, wherein Indigenous knowledge and ways of life are potted for export to the empire's core, to one based on mutuality, co-creation and the indigenisation of anthropological knowledge.

### A Long-Term Entanglement

Anthropology in Aotearoa (a Māori name for New Zealand), however, also has its own distinct history that shapes its practices. Importantly, Anthropology in Aotearoa has never been exclusively for a *Pākehā* (New Zealand European) or non-Māori audience. Undoubtedly, the origins of discipline lie in the British School of Social Anthropology, and with it, accompanying theories and methodologies that have been determined as largely Eurocentric and at times, blatantly racist. Tsosie (2017) highlights that the cultural constructions of Indigenous peoples in colonial-era anthropology has an ongoing influence on legislation and federal policy that has often harmed, displaced or dehumanised First Nations groups (in the context of North America). Yet, it can also be argued that there is an increasing attempt to acknowledge the harms caused by colonial anthropological inquiry to colonised Indigenous peoples, and such a move is also apace in Aotearoa.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ethnographers such as Elsdon Best, Percy Smith, and Edward Treagear significantly contributed to the body of knowledge on Māori culture and life during the early years of colonisation. They also constructed narratives that would later be deemed harmful and disingenuous to Māori; for example, Treagear's (1885) *The Aryan Maori*, [which claimed that Māori and British Europeans were of shared Aryan ancestry](#) and that colonisation was more of a 'family reunion' between kin. Treagear and Smith are also notable for aiding in the formation of *The Polynesian Society*, an organisation of mainly Pākehā amateur anthropologists, which had a number of Māori members and more Te Reo Māori speaking *Pākehā* members in its formative years than at any other point in its history (Clayworth, 2014).

Māori were often considered the 'Buck' in anthropological studies, yet the discipline also sought to attract Māori scholars including Sir Peter (Te Rangihirua) Buck, Mākareti Papakura, and Maharaia Winiata; while Āpirana Ngata (a prominent Māori leader and politician) was also an optimistic proponent of anthropology. To Ngata and Buck especially, anthropology was a significant discipline through which *Māoritanga* (Māori culture) could be preserved as well as a tool for political regeneration (Kahotea 2006). Kahotea, observing that no other colonised peoples engaged with anthropology as early as Māori, points to the strategic nature of this deployment; rather than challenging colonial power imbalances, anthropology was a tool for forging a place for Māori within a drastically changed social, economic and political environment.

The origin of anthropology was associated with Western imperial expansion into new worlds, and explanation of the peoples and cultures they encountered held to the west. Ngata and Te Rangihirua saw anthropology as a tool for cultural recovery and for expressing and maintaining a deeply held sense of identity and cultural being... (Kahotea 2006:6)

Indeed, Ngata's use of anthropological kinship theory to understand the colonising other, is an early exercise in decolonial anthropology. Some 100 years ago, Ngata made a critical connection between kinship and ways of owning, associating European kinship, a "rapid lopping off" of receding relatives, with a system of inheritance and succession to property rooted primarily in exclusivity. Conversely, he visualised Māori kinship as made up of vertical, horizontal, and oblique relationships, radiating from a common ancestor or a group of common ancestors, a circle of relatives. Ngata then links this kinship philosophy to Māori communal systems, wherein the inheritance of rights, privileges and property is traced through both maternal and paternal links, noting that this evokes a tendency to embrace rather than exclude, "those related by blood" (Ngata & Ngata 2019). These observations on property and kinship are relevant to contemporary Māori claims for recognition of colonial alienations of their land and sea territories.

### Contributing to our Kete Aronui

Māori Studies emerged as a separate discipline in Universities during the 1970s (a decade later than teacher's colleges implemented Māori studies), separating from Anthropology following the Māori cultural Renaissance in the 1970s-80s. Webster (1998), commenting on this disciplinary split, posits that anthropology was perceived to not fully support Māori initiatives and to displace Māori peoples as the 'true' experts of their own culture. In recent decades, however, anthropology in Aotearoa has made a renewed commitment to uplifting Māori voices, highlighting relevant local issues, involving Māori peoples at all levels of research, and placing an emphasis on *kaupapa* Māori (Māori-centred research methodologies). Te Tiriti-centric (centred on the 'Treaty of Waitangi') or co-governance research methodologies. Indeed, the *whakapapa* (genealogy) of anthropology in Aotearoa for Māori means that for many, it continues to persist *alongside* Māori studies, rather than in competition with it. Māori perspectives in anthropology not only enrich the discipline, but enable Māori anthropologists to acquire helpful tools to walk consciously 'between two worlds'; Te Ao Māori (the Māori worldview) and Te Ao Pākehā (the western worldview). An ability to walk consciously is a struggle faced daily by many Māori, particularly those in academic institutions. Māori Anthropologists do this, while reconfiguring learnings from the discipline to promote the interests of their respective kin groups – *whānau*, *hapū* and *iwi* – an active attempt, we suggest, to decolonise anthropology.

### Waikato Anthropology

The University of Waikato is physically situated on land that was illegally confiscated by the British Crown from iwi Māori (tribes) (in particular, Ngāti Wairere and Ngāti Hauā) following extensive wars between Māori and European colonists in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Māori King movement, *Te Kingitanga*, emerged within the Waikato region in 1858, its aim to provide a national forum for politically uniting Māori in their confrontations with the Crown. The position of Ariki (paramount chief) has been continuously held in the Waikato region by descendants of the first king, Pōtatau Te Wherowhero and is currently held by University of Waikato graduate, Ngā Wai Hono i te Pō. This history has significant bearing on how the University operates. In the mid 1990s [the University's land was returned to Waikato Tainui](#) (the local *iwi*), who in turn agreed to lease the land back to the University. At this time, the University changed its motto and crest and increasingly adopted Māori symbols.

Over time, it has introduced a suite of special events (eg. Kingitanga Day), infrastructure (such as the new Pā – a student, office and collective hub drawing on Māori architectural design and aesthetic features) and ceremonies that celebrate a partnership with Māori. All new staff undertake training in the history of Te Tiriti (also known by its English interpretation, *The Treaty of Waitangi*) and the University's obligations to honour Te Tiriti in terms of recognising Māori sovereignty. This bureaucratic recognition of Māori and particularly, Waikato Tainui, does not rid the University of [institutional racism](#) or alter the arguably neoliberal decision making and [partisan politics of senior leadership](#). Waikato Māori history does however provide a widely known political narrative against which everyday teaching, research and administrative practices take place.

Waikato anthropology was shaped more directly by Ngapapa Hopa who became head of the department in 1994. Hopa, a Māori doctoral graduate of Oxford University, played an important role in advocating for anthropology to be active in everyday political activism and made New Zealand politics, especially Indigenous politics, a tangible issue for the discipline. While the economic insecurity and political disenfranchisement of Māori were Hopa's key areas of focus, she was also influenced by previous generations of social science activism, such as Sol Tax's work on self-determination and action research among the Meswaki Native Americans (Hopa 1988).

When Hopa returned to New Zealand in 1986, she did so with a political perspective on anthropology which would offer a distinct challenge to most leading New Zealand anthropology of that time; in the mid 1980s New Zealand anthropology was working predominantly within culturalist and functionalist paradigms. Hopa wrote, "Whereas anthropologists have frequently returned from their vision quests to write about 'their people' and to somewhat romanticize the value and nobility of tribal life, some 'native' anthropologists like myself, raised in tribal contexts, have returned from a different vision quest (1988:3). Our people' in response to their call and the clarion call of radical anthropologists for the need to decolonize the discipline" (1988:3). Hopa (2015) also fiercely criticised the "the competitive university environment" which prioritised publications and practical degrees before engaged action, quality education and the "wellbeing of our people".

Competing legacies and histories of New Zealand anthropology, from the colonist's desire to categorise savage and disappearing peoples, to early Māori scholars direct work within, and challenge to, the discipline from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, was brought into a clearer theoretical debate in the 1990s. During this period, some anthropologists of European backgrounds ceased working with Māori communities altogether, accepting the request of some Māori academics that only Māori do research with Māori. Most famously, Linda Tuhiwai Smith who rose to become the Dean of the Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Studies at Waikato, like Hopa, directly criticised the work of anthropologists (among others) who undertook an unethical and hierarchical approach to research with Māori. Tuhiwai Smith (1999) called for decolonised research methodologies that would be shaped by Māori and benefit Māori instead of primarily benefiting the career of the researcher.

Professor Smith's exit from Waikato University in 2020 occurred [in the context of broader accusations of ongoing institutional racism](#), specifically its treatment of Indigenous staff. The demands for a decolonised research process she initiated, however, ultimately affected both institutional ethics processes and research funding bodies across the country. The primary research funding bodies demand that all research that affect Māori demonstrate their benefit to Māori and justify how Māori *tikanga* (protocol, customs) and knowledge be upheld. Indeed, all research conducted by New Zealand based academics in Aotearoa requires acknowledgement of Vision Mātauranga, that is, unlocking the "innovation potential of Māori knowledge, resources and people". For anthropologists from outside of New Zealand who wish to undertake field research in Aotearoa, the national Anthropological Association ASAANZ (Association of Social Anthropologists of Aotearoa New Zealand) [urges compliance with its ethical principles and offers an ethics review service](#)..

Political history has ongoing effects in terms of everyday anthropological practice. In the Waikato, anthropological "subjects" are part of the daily life in which anthropologists practice. Many students majoring in Anthropology or doing Masters or PhD degrees at the University of Waikato are Māori or are Indigenous cousins from the Pacific region. We find that many students are politically active and are not afraid to push for decolonial research and the acknowledgement of Māori sovereignty. Similar to the ongoing relationships between anthropologists and research communities in South America, as described by Restrepo and Escobar (2005), for those who do research with Māori communities, relationships with research "subjects" are ongoing. Interview informants include respected political leaders who themselves may also be respected leaders in the academic space. Anthropology seminars at Waikato University provide a space for diverse stakeholders including Māori activists and students, Pacific scholars, and academics of European ethnicity to meet in a space that is intentionally focused on community. We hope, in anthropology seminars, community is a priority over academic innovation, even as the latter is significantly valued. In deed, in anthropology push back against "disciplinary genealogies and boundaries" and "normalizing machines that preclude the enablement of different anthropological practices and knowledge worldwide" (Restrepo & Escobar 2005:104).

### From Indigenous Scholars to Indigenous Students: Mona-Lisa Wareka

As a Māori anthropologist (Ngātiwai, Ngāti Rereahu), the disciplinary training I, Mona, have received provides me with the tools to reconnect with my ethnic identity in a meaningful way, whilst also opportuning a space to share that sentiment with upcoming Māori and Pasifika students as a tutor and lecturer. As with Professor Ngapapa Hopa, in learning about other cultures and the parallel struggles of former settler colonies, anthropology has critically enriched my understanding of my own culture and inspires me to look towards cross-cultural connections between Indigenous peoples. Throughout my university career, I have observed anthropologists at Waikato foster myself and other Māori and Pasifika (Pacific Island-descent) students, and bring awareness to issues relevant to the Pacific, including academic staff presenting evidence to the [Waitangi Tribunal](#) on behalf of *hapū* (tribal kin groups), participating in *hiko* (marches) and protests, and promoting Te Tiriti-centric *Te Aotearoa*; these are not acts of performative allyship, but a genuine practice of mutuality and cooperation. *This* academic environment, alongside the ability to culturally reconnect and become a pou (ritual post) for my whānau (extended family), has significantly influenced my academic career trajectory as a first-in-family tertiary student.

The appeal of anthropology to Māori and Pasifika students lies in several factors that I have identified in the past eight years as a student and as a member of the teaching staff at the University of Waikato. BIPOC students enjoy, and perform discernibly better, when there is authentic representation within the classroom, especially when the curriculum is additionally supportive of Indigenous worldviews, experiences, and knowledge systems within the learning process (Kowlessar and Thomas 2021). In the third-year of my undergraduate degree, I became a tutor for undergraduate anthropology classes, and during my current PhD journey, I have taken on the role of teaching fellow, lecturing a large first-year course employing anthropological approaches to interpret the cultural history of Aotearoa and its relation to the wider Pacific. Many students – particularly of Māori, Pasifika, Pākehā (non-Māori Europeans) descent – have expressed their enjoyment of the subject matter and content, and further acknowledge anthropology's ability to foster and validate their own cultural experiences in the world. At the same time, this fostering can also be perceived as an active preservation of the discipline's *whakapapa* (genealogy) in Aotearoa, inspiring students to assert their own sense of *tinio rangatiratanga* (self-determination/sovereignty). Anthropologists in the University of Waikato Anthropology programme emphasise the importance of nurturing Indigenous students' ability to critically explore their own cultural identities, history, knowledge systems and actively engage in politics of change. This *kaupapa* (principle) is felt by students, which is in turn reflected in their significant enrolment in their disciplinary degrees at the University of Waikato.

### Anthropology in Aotearoa: local and global

In the context of New Zealand's tertiary institutions, local metrics for measuring and evaluating academic performance, however, continue to enforce the hierarchy of disciplinary knowledge for Euro-American markets over and above anthropology *at/for* home. Indeed, the idea of New Zealand anthropology as peripheral to that produced in imperial centres, that its significance is confined to national or regional concerns, is also periodically voiced by our international colleagues. Keith Hart, for instance, [in a 2016 workshop in SOAS](#) contemplating the contemporary relevance of The Gift (sponsored by the journal HAU), commented in frustration, "The point ... is not so we can learn about the fucking Māori." This, we argue, is an unfortunate distinction. Perhaps the point is not to learn *about*, but rather *with*, "the Māori".



Image 1: Rotorua parliament in November 2024 as part of the [recent hiko](#) protest march against the Treaty Principle Bill being introduced in the NZ parliament by the ACT party (photo Mona-Lisa Wareka)

What is specific about anthropology from New Zealand is the prominence of Māori as founding ancestors and their critical role in shaping its maturation, both from inside and outside of the discipline's boundaries. The relationships forged with Māori – as students, teachers, colleagues, researcher and researched – provide an up and close critique of anthropological theories and methods, a pragmatic response to attempts to reify Indigenous culture and ways of life and generate lines of solidarity. In turn, anthropology provides some Māori with another gateway for participation in their respective *hapū* and *iwi* by utilising their learned anthropological skills to actively participate and advocate for relevant social and political change (Kahotea 2006). The ability to intervene theoretically in contemporary debates, grounded in the tradition of comparative research and notions of the universality of human experiences, is very much alive in New Zealand Anthropology. This global reach is combined with a deep commitment to local concerns.

In Aotearoa, the effects of colonial violence on Indigenous people are everywhere to be observed – in the unbudging disparities in health, education, employment, housing, suicide rates, infant mortality, life expectancy, and more. The advance of climate demise is also exacerbating existing lines of inequality, [threatening Māori material culture and relationships with non-human kin](#). Since the new coalition government was elected in October 2023, New Zealand has witnessed a full pronged attack on its public health, education, welfare and environmental protections; a free market onslaught more accelerated than the neoliberalisation of New Zealand in the late 1980s. That this is now combined with moves to dismantle hard won Indigenous rights and recognitions and indeed deny colonial history, is of serious concern. As a national organisation, [ASAANZ is actively confronting this challenge](#).

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Cite as: Wareka, Mona-Lisa, McCormack, Fiona and Isaacs, Bronwyn 2025. "Alternative Anthropologies: Kete Aronui from the Waikato" Focaaalblog 23 January. <https://www.focaaalblog.com/2025/01/23/mona-lisa-wareka-fiona-mccormack-bronwyn-isaacs-alternative-anthropologies-kete-aronui-from-the-waikato/>

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