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Stirring up Silence

What does decolonising anthropology in Aotearoa New Zealand really mean?

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ABSTRACT | In 1999, Linda Tuhiwai Smith wrote that 'The word … 'research' is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful.' (1). Despite the efforts of many, anthropology in Aotearoa/New Zealand has a history of silence, possibly based on the memories of practitioners who, from the 1980s, lived through times of deep mistrust of anthropologists by Māori. As a student, then practitioner, of anthropology, I received many challenges to my status as an anthropologist *and* an indigenous academic from both indigenous and non-indigenous academics. Perhaps in order for anthropology to continue to have meaning for Māori and other indigenous peoples in Aotearoa, we need to thoroughly stir up that silence to see what lies beneath in order to fully engage in a truly meaningful relationship.[1]

Keywords: indigenous anthropology; decolonisation; historical trauma; indigenous research; kaupapa Māori

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I was teaching a research methods paper recently, and as part of the lecture I played a presentation that Linda Tuhiwai Smith made in New York in 2015.[2] In this she told the story of being interviewed by a Pākehā colleague following the publication of *Decolonising Methodologies* in 1999. This colleague said to her during the interview that she must have been a very angry person to write the book. But for her it wasn't written in anger but with passion and a desire to re-engage research so that it would have meaning for Māori and other indigenous peoples.

And that is my desire here – not to speak in anger, but with passion and a desire to re-engage the relationship between Māori and anthropology in Aotearoa. I've been involved with anthropology in Aotearoa/New Zealand for over 21 years; I am an indigenous anthropologist, I will always be one, and so my desire is also a respectful one.

But because I am a Māori woman, who I am as a cultural being has a fundamental influence on how I perceive the world and analyse it. As an indigenous anthropologist, my intellectual tūrangawaewae draws from two puna (wells) – that of kaupapa Māori, and anthropology. Claiming to be an indigenous anthropologist, however, assumes a certain history of experience, usually that of the negative effects of colonisation on indigenous groups. It is a political as well as a cultural and historical positioning. But it is also about acknowledging the strengths and beauties of our histories, of our ancestors, in order to build, and create, and innovate.

Decolonisation, I believe, is about acknowledging that history, of being willing to deal with it – with the consequences, with the impacts, with the emotions. It is about being able to look beyond the consequences and the impacts also, to see the strength and the beauty. As Dennis Wendt and Joseph Gone (2012) stated, 'The central goal of a decolonizing methodology is to uncover detrimental effects of European American colonialism and to assist historically colonized groups with preserving and reclaiming their distinctive cultural legacies, strengths, and institutions' (164).

If we look at historical trauma, which begins from a past traumatic event or events affecting a group of people, colonisation is the most obvious force contributing to the dispossession and denigration of indigenous peoples, and umbrellas a multiplicity of traumatic events. These events can become embedded in the collective, social memories of the population, and accumulate over generations in the intergenerational transmission of trauma (Brave Heart 2005). But what those such as Choctaw scholar, Karina Walters, say about historical trauma, is the point of it is not to dwell on the 'drama of the trauma'[3] of that history; it is about acknowledging the trauma, dealing with it, healing from it, and transcending that traumatic history to move forward in a much more positive way (Brave Heart 2005). This then can be seen as one kind of decolonisation process.

To go back to Linda Tuhiwai Smith's presentation: she showed a photo she took at the pōwhiri for Jacques Derrida at Waipapa Marae in Auckland. The photo shows Derrida and others waiting in the waharoa to be welcomed onto the marae. In front of Linda are a group of Māori men in traditional dress waiting to perform the challenge. Linda said that what was important about this picture wasn't Derrida, but the space that lay between his group and the group

representing Auckland University. A pōwhiri is about moving people through space, through a series of protocols that acknowledge differences, then join people together. That space, then, is a most dynamic space, where relationships are assessed and negotiated. It can be a space of creation, of innovation, as well as connection.

In the 1970s and 80s, *Te Mauri Pakeaka* were a series of art programmes run in colleges primarily in the upper North Island, developed by Māori artists such as Arnold Manaaki Wilson. The desire was for the development of a 'third space'[4] where mainstream culture could meet with Māori culture in a place of safety, and where assessment and reassessment of relationships was enabled (i.e. Pakeaka) (Greenwood and Wilson 2006). The activities of this third space were 'dialogues, confrontations, accommodations, risk-taking and unplanned discoveries…[that] inescapably …engages with the development of something new'. Mauri refers to the life force inherent in that period of relationship reassessment that is 'the living, irreducible energy that exists in that instant: the promise of growth' (Greenwood and Wilson 2006: 12).

So what is *our* space between? Where is *our* space for negotiation and creation and innovation?

In 2010, I was privileged to be a keynote speaker at the anthropology conference in Rotorua, along with Dame Joan Metge and Jeff Sissons, representing three 'generations' of the anthropological whakapapa in Aotearoa New Zealand. In my presentation I raised the issue of the fraught relationship between Māori and anthropology.[5] At that same conference I also presented as part of an indigenous panel where I raised issues relating to indigenous anthropology that came from my doctoral thesis.

In 2012 I presented in Wellington at the anthropology conference as part of an indigenous panel. I was very unprepared, I must admit. Nevertheless, in two minutes I delivered the heart of my kōrero, which was to ask for an open conversation on the relationship between Māori and anthropology, here, now. Apart from a brief comment from Steven Webster, there was silence.

In 2014 I convened an indigenous panel through the generosity of Ruth Fitzgerald and Otago University, which included indigenous panellists from Canada and Australia as well as Aotearoa. That was a great experience, given our diversity yet commonalities, and we revelled in sharing anthropology with other indigenous anthropologists – I admit we played hooky at one stage too. But at that conference, rather than being a keynote panel as was originally intended so that our message could be heard by all, we were streamed as one panel of several. This relegated us to just another interesting panel (for some), rather than acknowledging the special relationship that *should* exist between Māori and anthropology.

I haven't been to an anthropology conference in Aotearoa since, because the promise that was present at the 2014 conference hasn't been realised. I admit to falling into a kind of despair with anthropology in Aotearoa – I, too, became silent. Nevertheless, there is strong connection in our whakapapa between Māori and anthropology, but what is here at present? And what kind of future are we looking toward?

At the 2010 conference I asked:

> So where do we (as anthropologists in Aotearoa/New Zealand) go from here? How do we create an anthropology in which we are free to work together without uneasiness? How do we trust, and ensure that we no longer 'talk past each other'? (see Metge and Kinloch 1978) … I don't have the answers … but I'm willing to talk and listen and learn, and consciously create.

Here we are in 2017 and it seems we haven't moved forward any further in negotiating that space between us. If we look at the composition of staff in anthropology departments in New Zealand for example, there may be one Māori staff member. What's that about? Let's talk about that! Are we still seeing anthropology as primarily being about studying the 'other' in far off exotic places? Are those of us who study with our own people here at home seen as 'less than', and not 'real anthropologists'? Are indigenous anthropologists being seen as 'going too native'? In 2012, I wrote:

> As an indigenous anthropologist I cannot escape the obligations and responsibilities of fieldwork with my own people, i.e. Māori of Aotearoa (New Zealand). There is no 'other' in indigenous anthropology, although we are the traditional 'other' that many anthropologists from the early days of the discipline sought in new and exotic places. Just as 'Māori' can be translated as 'normal' or 'ordinary', for indigenous anthropologists (in this case a Māori anthropologist) those we research with are 'normal' and 'ordinary'. Yet in the process of our task, we find the extraordinary in the ordinary, and therefore 'being native' can be seen as a positive factor when working with one's own people. 'Going native' (i.e. being personally committed to the goals and aspirations of the community) is often a necessary part of the rules of engagement in the construction of an anthropology that is "a model for critical engagement *with* the world, rather than a distanced and magisterial explanation *of* the world" (Herzfeld, in Knauft 2006: 413, my emphasis) (60-61).

Eve Tuck is an Unangax scholar from Alaska who teaches in the field of critical race and indigenous studies at the University of Toronto. In 2012 she and Wayne Yang wrote:

> […] we want to be sure to clarify that decolonization is not a metaphor. When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization…. Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks. The easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation. When we write about decolonization, we are not offering it as a metaphor; it is not an approximation of other experiences of oppression. Decolonization is not a swappable term for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. Decolonization doesn't have a synonym (3).

If we wish to decolonise or reclaim anthropology where we hold respect for the place between us as a space for negotiation of relationships, of creation and innovation, then we must have some difficult conversations – or at the least, converse! We must be honest about the history that lies between us. We must stir up the silence that, I believe, has pervaded anthropology in recent years. In order for anthropology to continue to have meaning for Māori and other indigenous peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand, we need to thoroughly stir up that silence to see what lies beneath in order to fully engage in a relationship of true meaning.

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Notes

1. This paper was first presented at the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Anthropology Programme at Victoria University of Wellington in 2017.

2. see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rIZXQC27tvg

3. Address to MAI Doctoral Scholars, Kawhia, November 2014. (See also Walters 2007, Walters and Simoni 2002).

4. The term 'third space' originated through a letter written by Arnold Wilson to one of the communities engaging with Te Mauri Pakeaka, prior to Homi Bhabha's use of the term as 'an evolving and dynamic space' (Greenwood and Wilson 2006: 11).

5. See Macrae and George (2013).

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