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Problematizing Replicable Design to Practice Respectful, Reciprocal, and Relational Co-designing with Indigenous people

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ABSTRACT

Designing among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is turbulent because we are all working within differing legacies of colonialism and entrenched systems of 'othering.' When design enters this space through widely popular methods like the Double Diamond or Human-Centered Design (HCD) toolkits, it often carries legacies of its industrialized, Eurocentric origins. These origins emphasize problem-solving, replicable methods and outcomes, pursue simplicity and efficiency, and detach knowledge, people, and relationality from the sites of design's embodiment. This risks perpetuating acts of colonialism, inadvertently displacing Indigenous practices, knowledges, and world views. Instead, we propose respectful, reciprocal, and relational approaches as an ontology of co-designing social innovation. This ontology requires a sensitivity to design's location within multi-layered sites of power, knowledge, practices, cultural values, and precarious asymmetries as the condition of collaboration. We provide personal, reflexive stories as Māori, Pākehā, and Japanese

designers negotiating the legacies of colonialism, laying bare our whole selves to show accountability and articulate pluralities of practices. In respecting design that is already rooted in local practices, we learn from these foundations and construct our practices in relation to them. For us, respect, reciprocity and relationships are required dimensions of co-design as an engaged consciousness for Indigenous self-determination.

KEYWORDS: co-design, respect, reciprocity, relational, reflexivity, Indigenous, Māori, Pākehā, Japanese

Introduction: Worrying Trends in Co-design

The intense demand for portable methods and replicable processes of design are reflected in the popularity of the Double Diamond and Stanford d.school Human-Centered Design (HCD) model. Sometimes, the Double Diamond appears interchangeable with co-design. Such models were produced to neatly define “commonalities” of design stages and demystify the process (Design Council 2015) and provide a “crash course” on design thinking (d.school 2017). These models are effective because in this representation, design appears to be universal, applicable anywhere by anyone. In this way it becomes an accessible entry point, usually for non-designers, to learn about problem setting, problem solving, and convergent and divergent thinking (see Figure 1). On the whole, this popularity is a welcome sign of interest in design and the potential contribution it can make to business and society. It also reflects the success of design thinking and co-design for entities that are contracting services from consultancies. There is now an army of people trained or self-equipped with an arsenal of methods being invited into boardrooms, co-working hubs, and community halls, or participating in jams, hackathons, and living-labs, where they are co-designing products, systems, or services to affirm design’s orientation towards making ‘positive impact.’

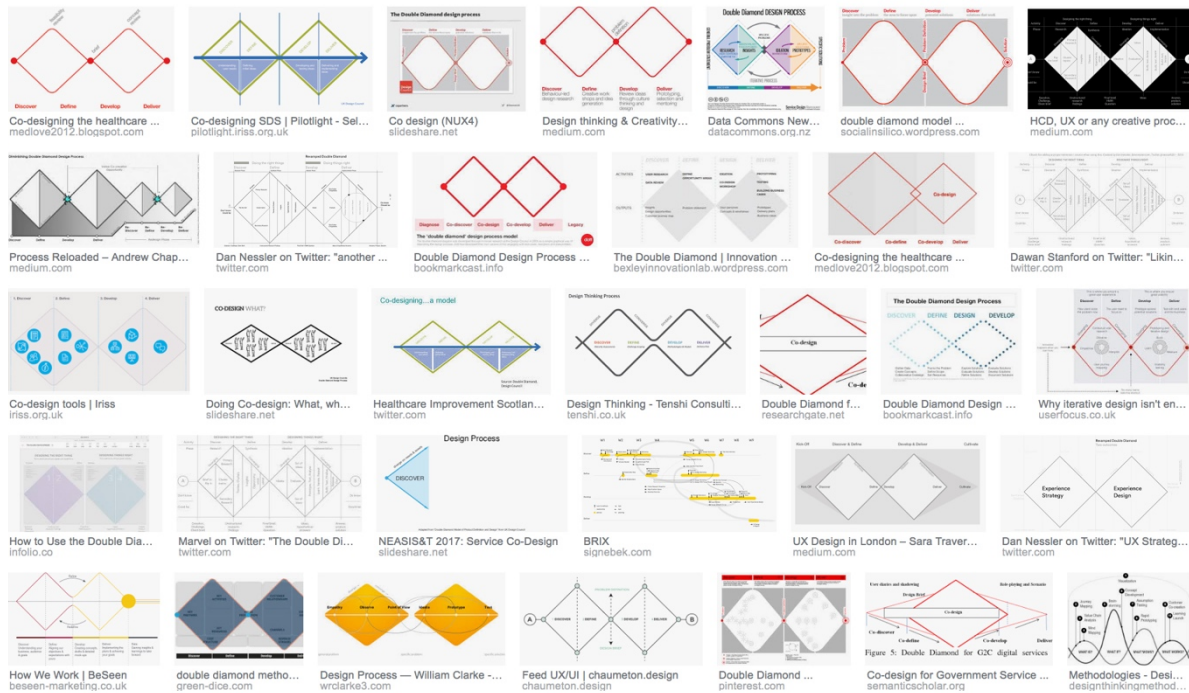


Figure 1 Google image search of co-design and Double Diamond illustrates their similarity, replicable power, and proliferation.

We start by interrogating the notion of a ‘universal’ model by building on critiques from various scholars, like the Colombian anthropologist, Arturo Escobar. He refers to such models as conceived from a Euro-American perspective that has been “exported to many world regions over the past few hundred years through colonialism, development and globalization” (2015, 14). The universalizing paradigm that values knowledge, process, and methods, that can be abstracted, reproduced, and generalized, is powerful because it aids the movement between time, culture, places, and people (Kasulis 2002), but, as Escobar argues, it is a product of colonialism. The historical global hierarchies and dominance of the Global North means that design culture follows this power structure and Eurocentricity, perpetuating a trend of design expertise, replicable methods, and best-practices that travel to the rest of the world. This is layered with fervor of the Enlightenment and modernity to possess, manipulate, and change the environment to ‘better’ the world according to progress and development (Fry 2017; Keshavarz 2015). The ‘West knows best’ attitude might go some way to further explain the popularity of the Double Diamond in use in the Asia-Pacific region (Akama and Yee 2016). This legacy and lineage underlies the way design is shaped and becomes a priori in our discourse, education, and practice, thus dominating how design is generally conceived.

Beyond academia, parallel concerns are being voiced about design methods substituting the outcome, which we also see as disturbing. Sarah Drummond (2017), Co-founder and Managing Director of Snook, a design consultancy that co-designs public services in the UK, laments;

... larger business consultancies who deliver projects for top tier clients see you as the creative 'folk' and the deliverables you itemised become the actual deliverables for them. Can you do one of those post it sessions and get some ideas out? Can you deliver some of those personas – how many can we get? Can you do the user journey mapping bit... There are examples out there of Government funded projects that explicitly utilised design approaches but ended up with a terrible product because the 'how' became more important than the 'what.'

Similar anecdotes are heard from those who have participated in HCD training workshops. For example, one of the authors, Penny Hagen has observed and commented on the consequences of misplaced enthusiasm for design thinking toolkits for beginners that emphasize a bias for action, without due process and consideration for duty of care, safety or ethics.

¹ We see such emphasis in the d.School's HCD model, which starts with "empathize" in order to "design for your users" (d.school 2017). But this simplified stage does not stress what biases the practitioners might bring to their set of questioning, and a reflexive awareness of who they are in the process of existing and shifting power dynamics. Such omissions are highly problematic because engaging with social issues, inevitably, involves personal, sensitive, and potentially legal issues. Building 'empathy' or asking about lived experience may mean delving into significant challenging experiences including those of grief or trauma.

Those informed by feminist theory, postcolonial discourses, and anthropology have argued for the situated nature of design (Suchman 2002), and that method and technique are embodied. Light and Akama (2012, 61) exclaim, "there is no method until it is invoked," and they expose a culture of reporting, both in design practice and academia, that isolates method, tools, and technique to make them reproducible. Common to models like the Double Diamond is a sequencing that demarcates the initializing stages, implying that design only begins when the project commences. As HCD is frequently taught or applied to community organizations

and public institutions, our concern stems from the impact this might have in public services, government, and non-profit organizations and communities whose role is to support and enhance community well-being.

Taken all together, our worry is how this dominant understanding of HCD or co-design strips away its embodiment, further perpetuating the view of practitioners as culturally neutral, objective, interchangeable, and a-geographical. Deeper descriptions of their backgrounds, sociocultural context, philosophy, and values are rarely shared. This is cyclically fortifying a design culture of nowhere and nobody, likewise lamented by the seminal anthropologist Lucy Suchman (2002). This necessitates the need to disclose how design is constituted by who we are, our relationality in the world, and how this manifests through our practices when we co-design with people.

Respecting Design in the 'Periphery'

In response to such trends, we see a nascent but growing movement of design's decolonization. Decolonizing design is a political and generative act of breaking down entrenched institutions, conceptions and systems of "othering" (Said 1978), and subjugation to dominant Euro-Western centric design discourses (see Schultz et al. 2018). We see this in the pioneering group of doctoral students and researchers (i.e. Decolonising Design); by a fraternity of Latin American scholars (i.e. Escobar, Calderón Salazar and Guitérrez Borrero); as questions for interrogation at conferences (such as NORDES 2017 and AfriCHI 2016) and through efforts in decolonizing tertiary design education in Aotearoa New Zealand (e.g. 'Awatoru Masters by Design'² and McCaw, Wakes & Gardner 2012). Furthermore, Ngā Aho,³ the Māori design professionals network, has been instrumental in raising the profile of Māori design practice as a way of reasserting Māori values within the built environment, contributing to the ongoing resistance of colonization (Kiddle & Menzies 2016). Built environment design frameworks such as Te Aranga design principles at Auckland Design Manual⁴ are seen both as a form of self determination for Māori (Awatere et al. 2011), and as an offering of significant design opportunities to benefit all New Zealanders.

Elsewhere in participatory design, Winschiers-Theophilus, Bidwell and Blake (2012) argue for vigilance on modernist values, logics, and literacies so they do not become embedded in the technologies we design. Similarly, in the field of human-computer interaction (HCI), Philip, Irani and Dourish (2012) ask us to critically interrogate techno-deterministic

objects and systems through a sensitivity to difference in culture, power, history, politics, knowledge, and practices in all their complexity and diversity. This interrogation includes the positionality and accountability of researchers and participants (Suchman 2002), and ways to sensitize to hidden dimensions that are not obvious, visible, or made explicit (Akama 2019).

The authors are also part of a global movement. Desna Whaanga-Schollum is Chair and founding member of Ngā Aho and Penny Hagen is Ngā Aho *kaupapa whanau*.⁵ Yoko Akama is a co-founder of a research network called Design and Social Innovation in Asia-Pacific (DESIAP), and the three authors are also part of this network. DESIAP addresses a concern for this region in which we live and work that continues to look to exemplars in the US and Europe. This adoption of 'else-where' practice can potentially replace place-specific, indigenous, and heterogeneous practices with imported and dominant paradigm, if we are not careful and respectful.

DESIAP research has, according to the co-founders Akama and Yee (2016), confirmed the obvious—that designing has always been taking place in another name, shaped by various needs, materials, histories, and philosophies of its localities. Similar observations are shared by the fraternity of Latin American scholars such as Calderón Salazar and Guitérrez Borrero (2017, 4) noting there are many 'designs' that are ignored "as they are named and practiced in 'other ways,' yet they precede by far everything that professions, with their presumptuousness, pretend to appropriate." This means, as researchers and practitioners, we must be vigilant of assumed and dominant frames of design, so they do not skew or replace what design means and how it's practiced in 'peripheral' locations, cultures and people (Akama and Yee 2016).

This vigilance also necessitates our own accountability, echoing prominent researchers in critical race theory, to situate oneself within "historical and continuing structures of privilege and possession," especially in locations where there has been settler colonialism, which can "limit what is possible for us to see and to know" (Nicoll 2014, 2). Another notable scholar, Sarah Ahmed (2012, 179), describes how a white subject might not see their own complicity by their own ego ideal of criticality, thus "by seeing their whiteness, might not see themselves participating in whiteness in the same way." This includes the lack of reflexivity especially when the work is proximal and familiar. We glimpse these in our esteemed comrades who are attempting to decolonize design, yet are reticent in fully disclosing their

personhood, rarely turning the critical gaze towards themselves and the world views they hold. One argument of our paper is the necessity for this accountability to be the basis of practice and discourses in design. Thus, we aim to demonstrate this accountability in our writing and how we bring our whole selves to our work when designing with Indigenous peoples and groups.

Accounting Ourselves and Our Stories

All three authors have been trained and conditioned in the dominant paradigm of design during their early practice development. Yoko studied visual communication in London during the nineties and practiced as a graphic designer in various non-profit organizations in the UK before doing a post-graduate degree in HCD in Melbourne, Australia. Penny was trained in a similar setting at a design school in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, working as an interaction designer and design researcher before doing a post-graduate degree in Participatory Design in Sydney, Australia. Desna trained in the same undergraduate program as Penny, worked on a broad range of visual communication and exhibition designs before establishing Ngā Aho. Desna recently completed a Science Communication master degree at Otago University where she studied the eco-philosophical and community connective values of *mātauranga Māori*, exploring the societal implications of design and science-communication actions.

While the places in which we studied design are geographically different, a global system of accreditation means that education, training, and practices in design in the UK, Australia, and New Zealand are relatively similar, drawing upon pedagogic models that stem from the Bauhaus (Bousbaci 2008). Much of our design training was based upon acquiring vocational skills like lateral thinking, problem-solving, prototyping, model-making, often in short time-spans in response to a brief (as proxy for the client), nested within a largely liberal-arts theory, history, and constructivist education. Alternatives to a neoliberal, modernist focus on progress was often self-initiated rather than integral to the design curricula.

For the First peoples in Australia and New Zealand, where the impacts and legacy of colonialism have been devastating, this universality of design education is problematic more so because it can reinforce modernist ideologies. As argued by Escobar (2017, 3), “design’s history can be discussed with reference to the patriarchal capitalist modern/colonial world system; and philosophically, from the perspective of the rationalistic epistemology and the dualist ontologies that have become dominant with such system.” We can see such modernist

framing in the designer persona who solves problems *for* people and speaks for the 'other,' and in the instrumentality of "changing existing situations, into preferred ones" (Simon 1968, 55). When this design is taught without vigilance on unceded lands of Indigenous peoples, coupled with critical deficiencies in civic education, this can arguably reinforce ongoing acts of colonialism, perpetually denying Indigenous people "further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations" (Tuhiwai-Smith 2012, 1). In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultures rarely shape design education curricula, and are in fact only considered when Indigenous motifs and imagery are used as an issue of cultural appropriation (Kelly and Kennedy 2016). Māori design within New Zealand education is rarely present, only found within the context of anthropology, political arts, and activism rather than as a legitimate alternative view of design and the environment. McCaw and colleagues argue in *Māori Design and Tertiary Education* (2012) for cultural values to be central in non-Māori design programs, rather than merely added on. Unfortunately, there is still a very small portion of Māori graduating in the design fields from tertiary institutions (Menziez et al. 2017).

Designers are not culturally or politically neutral. Our backgrounds matter because they have shaped the kinds of designers we have become, and our sociocultural values inevitably manifest through our designing. Recognition of this undercurrent is important because designing is no longer pertained to "an icon, symbol, identity, profession or finished product" (Keshavarz 2015, 5). In HCD-led social innovation, co-designing is ontological and phenomenological, like a way of "acting in the world that distributes, configures and arranges social actions, sensual perceptions and forms of being together or being apart" (ibid.). This means one must account for how one locates their way of being or belonging to worlds. What's more, our values need to be interrogated when we design with people, especially among those with different sociocultural values and upbringing. Heterogeneity as the condition for design is becoming increasingly common, as addressed by many scholars in the field of participatory design. But there can be no presumptions of consensus or rational resolutions to contested "matters of concern" when designing in the public sphere (Björgvinsson et. al 2012). We go further than working towards democratic ideals with multi-cultural groups in a liberal society, because in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, recognition of sovereignty of First peoples

is the basis upon which any ethnic group or settler can live and work, and there must be a commitment to Indigenous self-determination. Through our stories we share this commitment enacted as our designing. The use of Māori language in the paper further reinforces this commitment in the writing.

Yoko's Story as a Japanese Woman and Design Researcher in Australia

I am a Japanese woman, and grew up in various countries, including Japan, Australia, and the UK. As a child, I felt marked out as being 'weird' in the places where we lived as a family. My mother packed rice into a bento-box to take to school instead of peanut-butter sandwiches. This 'othering' would range from naive racism to curious exoticism, and this continues even now. I struggled with the stereotype of a Japanese woman, both overseas and in Japan, echoing the American-Japanese writer Mitsue Yamada (quoted in Minh-Ha 1989, 87), who speaks of someone that is expected to behave as "the submissive, subservient, ready-to-please, easy-to-get-along-with Asian woman." When entering a masculine profession like design in the nineties, I felt that to *be* a designer, I had to be submissive and 'fit in' with the way design was practiced.

However, inspired by a minority of feminist teachers during my modernist design education, I pursued work in non-profit organizations for human and environmental rights. My first job was as a designer at Survival International, an organization that champions Indigenous land rights and self-determination. It felt like a crash-course education on issues I had known nothing about. This experience was highly significant in shaping my design practice, though the assigned tasks were to turn 'indigenous issues' into content for various communication products for campaigning, educating, and fundraising.

Twenty years since my time at Survival, I now live and work in Australia. Since 2014, my work alongside Indigenous nations to strategize self-determination involves confronting Australia's colonial history of Indigenous cultural extinction through the denial of formal nation recognition by Australian government. In particular, collaboration with members from the Wiradjuri Nation has been profoundly rewarding, and we have designed various events to celebrate Wiradjuri sovereignty and practice cultural renewal. In this work, I use the term 'sovereignty,' following the pioneering work of Aboriginal colleagues, Larissa Behrendt and

Mark McMillan, as a way to build relationships with Indigenous people. “The notion of Indigenous people as sovereign people derives from the fact that Indigenous people have never ceded their land” (Behrendt 2003, 95). They assert that any relationship in Australia must always be based upon recognizing Indigenous sovereignty and respecting their laws, land, languages, and cultural practices, which existed long before colonization. While the term ‘sovereignty’ is contested due to its notion of state authority and sometimes called ‘white sovereignty’ by notable Indigenous scholars like Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015), using the term in our work and re-framing sovereignty is salient, particularly for me because it welcomes my own Japanese heritage, language, and cultural practices.

Peter West, my collaborator in this work, describes sovereignty as an “act of invitation and the offer of being in relation to Indigenous sovereignty. Sovereignty is within and between Indigenous people and place, and an obligation to this is offered to non-Indigenous people through invitation” (West and Vaughan 2017, 4). I interpret this to mean an invitation from Indigenous elders to practice my own sovereignty as a Japanese woman on shared land with and alongside Indigenous people to build a sovereign relationship. This is the “necessary footing” that Larissa and Mark argue is critical in order to transform relationships in the broader Australian society; they state, “If there is to be a new relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians that is premised on mutual respect, then recognition of sovereignty must be the cornerstone of this productive relationship” (Behrendt 2003, 99). This invitation to being a Japanese person in Australia heightens my ethical vigilance even more because Japan is not innocent from acts of colonization in Asia, or indeed, within its own country towards Ainu peoples in Hokkaido and Rykyu peoples in the southern islands.

Responding to this invitation to practice my sovereignty in relation to Wiradjuri sovereignty meant that I, too, have begun re-examining my culture as a designer researcher. As discussed in this article's introduction, I have been institutionalized as a designer and researcher to be culturally neutral and foreground the gaze of the dominant ‘whiteness,’ to deploy my skills in creativity and problem-solving productively onto ‘others.’ This unlearning and re-learning to bring forth a different consciousness and ontology has been undertaken in two ways, firstly by critically reading Japanese philosophies, and secondly by learning about

Aboriginal world views from Indigenous colleagues and friends. In this way, I have begun “provincializing” (Chakrabarty 2000) the Eurocentric origins of my own design education.

I have learned from seminal Japanese philosophers like Watsuji Tetsuro⁶ (1996) that the Japanese word for human being (人間: *ningen*) is composed of person (人) and ‘in-between’ (間), etymologized as ‘between-person’ that situates humans as relational beings, rather than individuals. This means that self is not an independent agent who then forges relationships with other people, sentient beings, and non-beings, but rather, one that sees that they are already integrally related. The *ningen* human being is always and already becoming with many in between-ness. Such notions of interrelatedness have been heterogeneously shaped by Zen Buddhism, Taoism, and Shinto (an Indigenous spiritual tradition of Japan), through intellectual and spiritual evolutions to become ethics, wisdom, ritual, and practices, which can be seen in various arts, designs, literatures, and architectures in Japan (Akama 2019).

Learning about such philosophies is layered with participating in everyday acts when I return to Japan, such as helping my mother repair the worn paper screens (*shoji*) during New Year preparations, or catching up with my aunties over a picnic to enjoy the autumnal colors. These activities ground me to the rituals of my family, home, locality, and routines, and reinforce my sense of belonging to place, people, and ecologies. Such quotidian practices are imbued with *Ma* (間), a heightened sensitivity to ‘in-between’ spaces, time, climate, relationships, and landscapes, attended by “designs with other names” (Calderón Salazar and Guitérrez Borrero 2017). For example, semi-opaque *washi* (Japanese paper) to repair the screens diffuses light so one can sense the presence of another or changes in weather. Local cuisines are packaged in a bento-box for sensual delight and ease in savoring seasonal flavors. I call these “designs with other names” to distinguish and contrast with the widely promoted version of design as innovation, technology, and progress that catalyzed Japan’s ‘modernization’ during Meiji and post-war eras.⁷ The “designs with other names,” including a variety of skills, spaces, artifacts, practices, instruments, representations, knowledges, and ontologies, that are embedded in these everyday environments can enhance an intimacy of interrelatedness ‘in-between’ (間) beings and non-beings. This is a form of participation in which I embody how we are *always-becoming-with-many* in between-ness.

Re-educating my understanding of design and sense of being a designer has been overlaid with profound learnings from Aboriginal Elders, friends, and colleagues. One memorable experience was an invitation to visit *Tae Rak* (Lake Condah) at *Budj Bim* in

Western Victoria, Australia. Damein Bell, a Gunditjmara man and CEO of Guntij Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, took us, a team of researchers, on a tour of a significant part of Gunditjmara Country. Here, I felt awe and wonderment in the presence of design that is older than the pyramids (more than 6,500 years old), evident in the aquaculture landscape, shaped by intimate knowledge and relationships with the land and water to create weirs, swamps, and ponds to create eel and fish farms (Gunditjmara peoples and Wettenhall 2010). During this visit, I received a book from Damein that invites visitors to see the Budj Bim landscape through the eyes of the Gunditjmara:

Theirs was a small world, intimately known. Every child was given a totem—a plant, animal or natural object—that linked them in a reciprocal relationship with the natural world. Totems acted as guides or warned of danger. They had to be shown respect, for in this world human beings and plants and animals were all part of the same social and ceremonial whole. (Gunditjmara peoples and Wettenhall 2010, 11)

This invitation enabled me to learn what design and designing could be, that they are inseparable from Gunditjmara lore—intimate and embedded within a reciprocity of people, land, plants, animals, water, rocks, weather systems, spirituality, and more. I also saw foundations of circular stone huts, home to a permanent population, and the scale of aquaculture that sustained a flourishing economy of production and trade. As I stood on their land, I reflected on the contrast with the history of design that I was taught in the UK, which also flourished based on industrialization. This version of design, preoccupied with material goods, economic growth and societal progress, catalyzed environmental degradation (Walker 2013), and based itself on the belief that humans can control and exploit nature (Gibson et. al 2015).

Such experiences and learnings have shaped my design practice, enabling me to do this work as one Japanese *ningen* (人間) woman with a heightened sensitivity to inter-relatedness of *already-becoming-with-many* on Aboriginal Country.⁸ Heightened sensitivity to inter-relatedness requires a respect of thresholds of places, situations, knowledges, relationships, and things in realms of the beyond. This requires us to not cross over these thresholds without explicit invitation and guidance in how to do so. Reciprocity premised upon inter-relatedness also means a commitment to sovereign relationships, which strengthen our co-flourishing and honoring of dwelling places inhabited by many beings and non-beings.

Penny's Story as a Pākehā designer in Aotearoa New Zealand

I tell my story of growing up in Aotearoa New Zealand as a *Pākehā*⁹ (settler), a country where settler or Māori history is not taught in any significant way in schools, and where, out of three national languages (New Zealand Sign Language, Te Reo Māori,¹⁰ and English), only English is taught as compulsory. This gap in understanding of what sits beneath where I come from sets the scene for my journey. This includes an active attempt to better understand *Te Ao Māori* (Māori world) and to explore where *Te Ao Pākehā* (settler world) and *Te Ao Māori* overlap. It also includes feeling the points at which my own *Te Ao Pākehā* world view needs to be actively deconstructed and challenged in order to learn to see and act differently across different world views, of which there are many. For those like me, of white settler heritage in New Zealand, even the title *Pākehā* can be a point of conflict. It is sometimes afforded a negative interpretation, but it is the term that gives me my identity within Aotearoa and the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand's founding document.

As a young environmentalist I was taken with design's influence as a tool of the everyday. I was drawn to fields such as youth development, mental health, and arts therapy, and I saw design as a means for social and environmental change. Soon after university I took on a contract with a government agency. Any employee of the government needs to account for their commitment and understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi.¹¹ I could speak to the core concepts of the Treaty—Partnership, Participation, and Protection—but was unclear how this might translate into everyday obligations and responsibilities at a personal or practice level. Learning about *tinorangatanga*¹² (chieftainship), connoting sovereignty and self-determination, helped me to better understand some of the deep complexities and trauma that underpinned the history of my home country.

I was yet to make the connection between the politics and potential of design and the 'three P's' of the Treaty. This began when working with feminist artist and scholar Professor Toni Robertson in Sydney while completing a doctorate in Participatory Design (PD). PD politicizes how different people can participate in designing. But my real understanding of design from a cultural perspective began when coming home after fifteen years away. Co-design and design thinking conceptualized through a Western lens, silently embodying dominant agendas and assumptions, has been increasingly popular in Australia and Aotearoa.¹³ I arrived home asking myself what it meant to practice co-design in the context of

Aotearoa and the Treaty, and wondering how we might make visible a practice that is 'of here.'

I have found many fellow travelers in this journey.

For example, I saw these questions confronted in the journey of Lifehack, a national youth wellbeing initiative with which I was affiliated. In their early days, they ran hackathons across the country that drew on typical Western design and startup methods. Early into a weekend event, one young person questioned how the group could work together effectively if they didn't know each other. *Whanaungatanga* (relationships) are central to *Te Ao Māori*, and everything starts with *whakawhanaungatanga*, the act of establishing connection. The obviousness of this question precipitated a significant shift in the Lifehack team's approach to program structure.

The commitment also manifested in a tool, Ngā Uri Ō - Descendants of, developed in partnership with Māori practitioners Christina Leef, Kaye-Maree Dunn and Mita Dunn (with input from many other contributors).¹⁴ Ngā Uri Ō¹⁵ specifically aims to bring together people from different backgrounds to support new design collaborations. Building on the concept of many different river tributaries joining into one, it draws upon *Te Reo* (Māori language) and the concepts of *whanaungatanga* and *whakapapa* (genealogy).¹⁶ The co-design process begins by asking *Ko wai au* (Who am I)? *Ko wai koe* (Who are you)? *Ko wai tātau* (Who are we)? This emphasizes the need to know ourselves and one another before we can work collectively together on an issue (Figure 2).

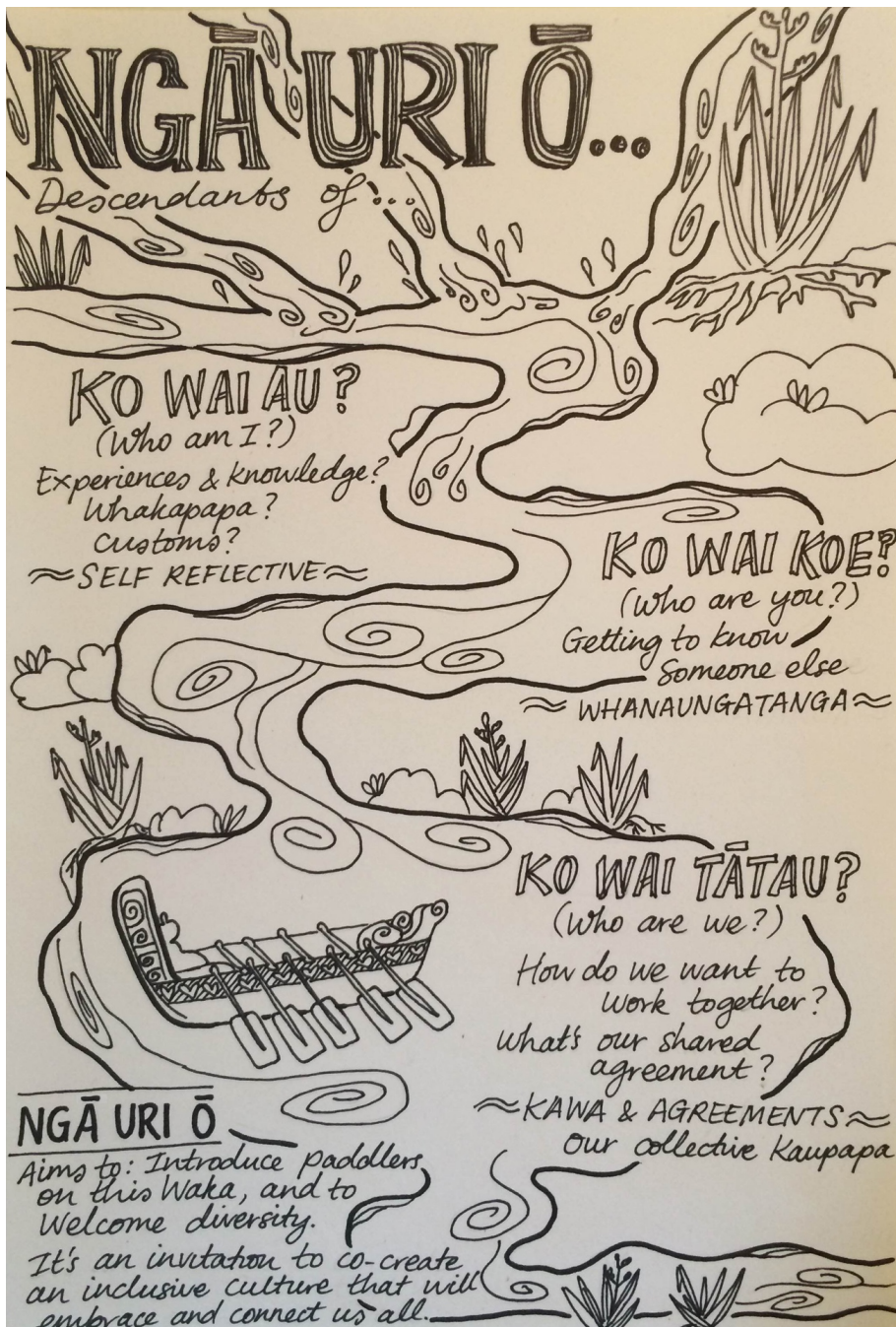


Figure 2 Ngā Uri Ō, collaboratively developed with Lifehack, Christina Leef, Kaye-Maree Dunn, and Mita Dunn, and illustrated by Rebeka Whale.

When encountering the typical Western version of co-design, some of the questions I've heard¹⁷ raised by Māori and Pacific colleagues include: How does this process work for Māori? How does this process work for different Pacific communities? Can we use culturally appropriate methods within this? How can our communities trust us that they will be kept safe as we use this method? I've heard others reflect, "This is what we already do—but seeing it in

this language is alienating.” As well as “This is exciting and how I naturally work,” and “It’s important because I can see how *whānau* (family) can be involved in shaping what happens in their communities through this process.” Together we are actively reflecting on these questions, and building partnerships through which we can learn with and from each other. We are not seeking a singular practice, rather a set of languages and narratives around design practice that together better account for what is needed for us and our communities. This work is based on strengths and practices that already sat within *Te Ao Māori*, as well as other Indigenous cultures, but may not be currently visible to many, and that acknowledges and takes responsibility of our colonial history and legacy.

This journey has led to many shifts in my practice. One is based on acting within our status as a multicultural country that sits on a bicultural foundation, and recognizing the Treaty as a legal and moral framework for my practice. Another is placing fundamental emphasis on relationships as a means of entering the work safely and with respect, understanding how people from different cultures might work together, what ‘moves’ are needed to create the conditions necessary for meaningful outcomes, and what reciprocity looks like in different instances. When design research talks about participants and recruitment, I have instead learned to foreground the need to honor, respect, and protect existing relationships, engage with my colleagues on ‘how we might start’ and with whom, as well as how we will demonstrate these relationships to be reciprocal and central, both now and in the future.

My understanding of mutual learning and its role in co-design has also deepened and changed through the concept of reciprocity. Mutual learning is central to both PD and co-design but it is underplayed within conventional representations of design thinking. As one of my Māori colleagues shared, co-design for his team inherently sits within “A Treaty framework which looks at partnerships through the reciprocal value each party can bring to the table.”¹⁸ Such a view also provides the basis for questions around power and ethics. The same colleague shared: “From a Māori point of view, a Treaty framework [asks], who is the dominant party? Who has the power? Who is making the decisions?” These questions must be thoroughly engaged with, prior, and during any attempt to co-design with communities—especially with those who experience significant stressors and pressure, and are likely to have been subjected to numerous consultations or research that may not have appeared to deliver any meaningful outcomes. Brereton and colleagues (2014) make an analogous argument

about the centrality of engagement and reciprocity in their critique of ethnography and design research when working with Australian Aboriginal communities.

With the exception of PD and research training in academic domains, traditional design education (including design thinking) has not paid much attention to the relational or ethical aspects of designing with people. Questions of power, decision making, reciprocity, or responsibility are often left untouched. This has resulted in a significant gap in teaching and self-training in design. This is no longer acceptable. The learning from *kaupapa Māori*¹⁹ practice calls for ethics in design and social innovation for working alongside Māori and communities in Aotearoa in general. My own experience has been that within *Te Ao Māori* (as well as in other indigenous cultures) the cultural concepts and values, such as *tikanga*²⁰ and *manaakitanga*,²¹ that are needed to help keep us and our communities safe, and that can guide us in negotiating new spaces and ways to work together, already exist.

Desna's Story as Māori Artist, Designer, and Researcher in Aotearoa, New Zealand

Our *iwi* (tribe) takes their name from our eponymous tribal ancestor, a female chief, Rongomaiwahine. There are twenty-one generations between Rongomaiwahine and my generation. One of her early *pā*²² sites was situated on Onenui Station,²³ a remote indigenous incorporated *hapū* (clan) land block where I attended my first school, Tawapata.²⁴ Our family moved from here to live on Taipōrutu, a smaller *whānau* land holding. Taipōrutu is an ancient name brought from Hawaiiki²⁵ by our voyaging *waka* (canoes) ancestors, and given to the land, stream and bay. *Tai* is the sea, *pōrutu* refers to the booming sound the sea makes as it breaks on the rocks in the bay, particularly when the swell is from the South-East (Whaanga 2012). Taipōrutu is my *kainga tūturu*.²⁶

As Māori, we introduce ourselves in relation to our ancestral voyaging *waka*, significant land forms on our tribal lands, and our ancestral lineage. The names of ancestral sites hold significant knowledge based upon intergenerational sense-of-place. Our identity is intimately connected to, and defined by, our relationship to the environment. Termed *kaitiakitanga*, the Māori guardianship ethos is based on an eco-philosophical understanding of humans as an integral part of nature, rather than as separate.

In the elemental terms of matter and energy, people ultimately are land, no more, no less than the birds, insects, trees and seeds and the constant process of their birth, growth and decay and the movement of them and their parts through the landscape. (Park 2006, 25)

Inherent in the concept of *kaitiakitanga* is not simple authority over tribal resources, but more holistic intergenerational guardianship of people and place.

I left our tribal region for tertiary education and following this, my career. However, this sense of fundamental cultural connection stayed with me. Returning from a brief stint in the UK, I reconnected with my *iwi* through a newly established, *marae*-based²⁷ annual arts event. Branding the event, exhibiting work, and, in later years, being involved in the event's evolution provided me with ongoing opportunity to consider *Kaupapa Māori*²⁸ relative to community development and creative practice. In seeking to contribute to my *iwi*, I began to foster a cultural creative practice that had not been notably present in my study or early professional employment.

As both design practitioner and Māori landowner, my positionality sharpened as a research assistant for the Wairoa district Treaty claims (2012-2016). This time encompassed *hikoi* (cultural site visits), negotiation *hui* (meetings) and *wānanga* (*tikanga* Māori knowledge sharing events), however the Treaty claim process is inherently combative and fraught with difficulties. Working alongside *whānau*, *hapū*, and *iwi* in our territories, who were dealing with very raw day-to-day realities, and then returning to urban living in a city defined by rapid capitalism-focused growth, was an often jarring and challenging juxtaposition.

Recently, through a Science Communication Masters, I sought to directly contribute to the management of Taipōrutu, and towards further legitimizing *mātauranga Māori*.²⁹ By locating *Māoritanga*³⁰ firmly as its own center within an emerging field, my thesis flexed a discipline's development which has tended towards physical and biological sciences.

Outside of direct *whānau/hapū/iwi* work, I am a founding member and Chairperson of Ngā Aho. Through Ngā Aho, I have participated and co-produced design, arts, and social innovation events associated with the Māori cultural landscape. These events cultivate active evolution of both Māori community-focused industry strategies and my personal practice.

Reciprocity is central and crucial in working with Māori communities, and at the heart of *kaupapa Māori* practice. When shared benefits are not part of the design process, it can compound acts of colonization where Indigenous knowledges and people are the ‘studied other,’ and fruits of such research contribute to the researchers, but not the researched.

Sharing knowledge is also a long-term commitment. It is much easier for researchers to hand out a report and for organizers to distribute pamphlets than to engage in continuing knowledge-sharing processes. For indigenous researchers, however, this is what is expected of us as we live and move within our various communities. (Tuhivai-Smith 2012, 16)

For Māori with a political bent (which encompasses the majority of us who seek to achieve tertiary education), documentation, compilation, and academic writing and recording provide an essential component of recognizing territory and rights incumbent with the cultural history of *whakapapa*, *kaitiakitanga*, and long-term occupation of our lands. The growing body of *kaupapa Māori* theory is an intrinsic critique of colonizing power structures that historically have placed Māori people as the ‘other’ in Aotearoa (Pihama 1993). Through ongoing work in these forms, I have been able to develop means of perceiving our cultural ways of doing and being through a research and design lens. My work has become a journey of understanding and articulating Indigenous approaches for transformative societal change.

Respectful, Reciprocal and Relational Co-designing

The personal stories we (the co-authors) tell have different trajectories, yet share resonant journeys of learning. These journeys also disclose our histories, legacies, education, and professional work, which constitute each of our on-going, continually evolving positionality. Such learning and interrogation is a necessary part of our practice of co-designing with communities, and arguably, not just in Indigenous contexts. Respect, reciprocity, and relationships emerge as common themes among many others in our shared stories. These qualities are highly contextualized, shaped, and constituted by our whole selves in relational work with others. This contextualization is necessary to prevent principles from becoming simplistic, generalized, and assumed as inherently best recommendations for others to similarly adopt. We are not suggesting another universalized framing for co-design. Rather, learning about notions of “Indigenous respect” and “respectful design” from a pioneering

Indigenous knowledge scholar, Norman Sheehan, we aspire for a “deeper situational awareness that generates many divergent spaces where innovation can contribute positively to the well-being of the whole” (2011, 70).

This diversification and innovation is most evident in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Recent conversations to realize co-design within *Te Ao Māori* (Māori world view), and to connect existing Māori design practice with emerging social innovation and design movements are already underway. This can be seen, for example, through the Tikanga Māori Co-design Wānanga^{31,32} and the newly established Tikanga Māori co-design network which sits as part of Ngā Aho.

Angie Tangaere has contributed time and care translating the design process for her community in South Auckland, extending it further to create a ‘*whānau* (family)-centric’ design process.³³ We have learned and interpreted from her work that such a process can, in effect, replace design thinking mindsets with *kaupapa Māori* values, the first of which is *whanaungatanga* (relationships). Also central is *manaakitanga* – the value of hosting, taking care of and upholding the *mana* (authority, influence, status) of those present. This includes how we look after practitioners with whom we are co-designing with and their *whānau* and children. The *whānau*-centric approach emphasizes that the process is designed by and for *whānau*. How *whānau* would like to participate, when, with whom, and for how long is the focus, rather than the approach of fitting people into parts and points of the design process. This means, when scheduling workshops, to consider the local mums that are part of the design team, rather than prioritizing the visitors from central government who are flying in. Tangaere explains, “Don’t try and get people to your project, go to the people and see what is important for them and form a project around it.”³⁴ For Penny, who has spent years explaining the co-design process by putting people inside the Double Diamond process, Tangaere’s provocation enabled her to rethink how to conceptualize the co-design process to support people, and not the other way around.

In another example, Rangimārie Mules describes the reframing of design thinking for Māori practitioners working with their own people:

Problem-solving and innovation has been part of our story as Māori for generations; from Tāne Mahuta who sought to bring the first human form into the world as Hineahuone, to Māui Tikitiki-a-Taranga who restrained the sun, brought fire into the world and searched for immortality. These pūrākau are gifts from our tūpuna that construct a platform of innovation in which we can launch ourselves into the world of design thinking.³⁵

This marks a significant departure to the widespread preservationist view that frames Māori cultural identity as an object discrete from evolving society, philosophy, and business practices, to re-situate practices and wisdom that are alive and active in co-designing social innovation. For example, the concept of *kaitiakitanga* views people, place, and practice concepts through a holistic intergenerational lens, working on much longer timelines than most industry and policy frameworks. Through *kaitiakitanga*, *Tangata Whenua* (people of the land) understand that the land, waterways, ocean, and air are living entities with which there is a respectful and reciprocal relationship established (Whaanga-Schollum 2016b). *Kaitiakitanga* has immense leadership potential in an era where the problems of industrialization and the commodification of society and the environment are becoming critical at a global scale.

Across the waters in Australia, the aquaculture design by the Gunditjmarra peoples is arguably some of the oldest in the world, designed by the longest continuous culture on earth. Their wisdom in designing continues to inspire many contemporary designers as 'Blak Design.' A notable Aboriginal designer, scholar and architect Jefa Greenaway acclaims, "They understood the direction of the wind, they understood that harvesting the larva stone from a volcano could be used to channel and create sophisticated aquaculture systems, sophisticated housing, communities that were permanent. This for me, is the genesis of 'Blak Design'" (Browning et al. 2017, np). Jefa further adds that "Blak Design...is a process that facilitates deep listening, engagement, meaningful consultation and collaboration, but also empowerment, employment, so facilitating a legacy." He remarks that this is "distinct from

globalised, homogenisation of design” and a “linear process of design of design-document-build” (ibid.). Instead, it is a

non-linear process whereby we start to incorporate aspects which are not necessarily considered as part of the mix, so social justice, understanding cultural connections, facilitating place-making. All these elements become a toolkit in which we work to engage with some of the sensibilities that connect explicitly to ‘our place.’ (ibid.)

What we learn from such Māori and Aboriginal practitioners in design resonates with the concept of Indigenous respect that “involves a generationally deep observation of relations between humans and the movements of natural systems” and a resistance to “oppressive powers that control,” or to “seek or propose an ultimate truth” (Sheehan 2011, 69). The exemplars we share here powerfully demonstrate how respectful, reciprocal, and relational co-designing is already practiced, and in many cases, is being continually practiced in another name by Māori and Aboriginal peoples, and has been, long before design was coined as a term and a profession in Europe in the twentieth century. Most importantly, this enables us to de-couple design from its modern, industrialized roots so it can be re-situated and re-conceptualized as a method, approach, mindset, and ontology, centrally grounded in respectful, reciprocal relationships. This re-framing of co-designing, building on Sheehan’s “respectful design,” learns from the wisdom and teaching of elders:

Respect is based on this ancestral understanding that we all stand for a short time in a world that lived long before us and will live for others long after we have passed. From this view, we can never know the full implications of any action; thus, [Indigenous Knowledge] respect is about showing care and awareness in the way we identify, explore, and assess meaning because we know our view is always incomplete. (2011, 69)

Where Next for Co-designing Social Innovation

As we have shown, design has multiple lineages that draw upon different knowledge systems, practices, and ontologies, even though the dominant understanding has a singular Eurocentric reference point. This means the widely loved Double Diamond model must sit alongside any

number of design expressions, and not displace, disembody, or dislocate design from the sites in which it lives.

The challenge for us now, as practitioners, researchers, and educators of design, is to carve out ways for respectful, reciprocal, and relational co-designing for social innovation that is premised upon a pluriversal view. In other words, to commit to practicing respectful, reciprocal, and relational co-designing means abandoning the singularity, universality, and replicability of a 'best practice' model. Instead, a situated and responsive awareness of demarcation, opposition, and incompatibility is a necessary condition for locating moments of affinity, resonance, and association. Related arguments for embracing difference have been made in other disciplinary domains, for instance in anthropology by Escobar, who argues for "a world where many worlds fit" (2015, 14), and in the field of Science and Technology Studies (STS) by John Law and Wen-yuan Lin (2017), who argue for pursuing ways to productively and asymmetrically mistranslate, because a translation of any concept from one culture to another is always a mistranslation. In addition, Martin Nakata's argument for a "cultural interface" in Indigenous knowledge and education is to know;

how we all come to look at the world, how we come to know and understand our changing realities in the everyday, and how and what knowledge we operationalise in our daily lives. Much of what we bring to this is tacit and unspoken knowledge, those assumptions by which we make sense and meaning in our everyday world. (2007, 9)

Taken all together, a commitment to practice respectful, reciprocal, and relational co-designing necessarily begins with the way we account ourselves, and how we are continually learning and forgetting, discarding and incorporating, immersing and being shaped by the fluidity of many worlds. Binary categories like 'Indigenous' and 'non-Indigenous,' while a convenient shorthand, oversimplify and lump together experiences of colonialism that have been vastly divergent. As our stories attest, many of us are already constituted by global movements of knowledge, education, language, and philosophies, accelerated by travel, media, and information and communication technologies (ICTs). We hope a recognition of all of our pluralities can pave the way for a respectful and reciprocal co-designing to flourish.

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¹ Read full commentary on Penny Hagen's blog, Smallfire, at www.smallfire.co.nz/2016/07/31/ethics-in-social-design-and-innovation-practice/.

² Developed by Karl Wixon, Jacob Scott and Carin Wilson in 2007, the AWATORU approach viewed *mātauranga*—the Māori system of knowledge encapsulated within collective wisdoms and cultural intuition—as containing *ngā kākano*—the seeds of untapped potential.

³ Ngā Aho was established in 2007. Find more information at <http://www.ngaaho.maori.nz>.

⁴ Find the full Auckland Design Manual at http://www.aucklanddesignmanual.co.nz/design-thinking/maori-design/te_aranga_principles.

⁵ *Kaupapa whanau* are philosophically aligned, non-Māori, or non-design members who contribute significantly to Ngā Aho Inc. Soc objects. (Sourced from <http://www.ngaaho.maori.nz>)

⁶ Watsuji Tetsuro is a prominent scholar of Japanese philosophy, active in the early twentieth-century. Alongside many of his Japanese contemporaries, such as Suzuki Daisetz and Nishida Kitaro, whose work aimed to bridge philosophies in Japan and Europe, they have been criticized for being infected by Western fascination for 'Oriental mysticism' and promoting *nihonjinron* "that touts the cultural homogeneity as well as the moral and spiritual superiority of the Japanese" (Sharf 1993, 35). The situated and historical sociopolitical contexts of these scholars are hard to fully grasp now, a century later. Thus, while exercising vigilance in ethnocentrism and cultural exoticism, I have approached their texts hermeneutically here and in the past, to interpret their articulation of complex philosophies and ontologies through practices I have observed in my vicinity.

⁷ See Adriasola, Teasley and Traganou (2016). My article in this issue, "Ba of emptiness," shows nascent thinking and clumsy language (written in 2013, published in 2016), where I am referring to the dominant understanding of design with Euro-US origins while attempting to explain my observations through a philosophy of *Ba*. This evidences how unlearning entrenched paradigms can take many years.

⁸ "In Aboriginal English, a person's land, sea, sky, rivers, sites, seasons, plants and animals; place of heritage, belonging and spirituality; is called 'Country.'" (From the Australian Museum's Glossary of Indigenous Terms, <https://tinyurl.com/y958oyzx>)

⁹ *Pākehā* refers to a "New Zealander of European descent—probably originally applied to English-speaking Europeans living in Aotearoa/New Zealand. According to Mohi Tūrei, an acknowledged expert in Ngāti Porou tribal lore, the term is a shortened form of *pakepakehā*, which was a Māori rendition of a word or words remembered from a chant used in a very early visit by foreign sailors for raising their anchor... Others claim that *pakepakehā* was another name for *tūrehu* or *patupairehe*. Despite the claims of some non-Māori speakers, the term does not normally have negative connotations." (From Māori Dictionary, maoridictionary.co.nz. Full definition at <https://tinyurl.com/yc4qh59o>)

¹⁰ Te Reo Māori is the Māori language.

¹¹ "The Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand's founding document, was meant to be a partnership between Māori and the British Crown. Although intended to create unity, different understandings of the Treaty, and breaches of it, have caused conflict. From the 1970s, the general public gradually came to know more about the Treaty, and efforts to honor the treaty and its principles expanded" (Orange, 2012).

¹² "*Rangatiratanga* is most often defined as chieftainship, and *tinorangatiratanga* as full chieftainship. *Tinorangatiratanga*, as it was used in the Treaty of Waitangi and interpreted today, has connotations of sovereignty, and of self-determination." (From <http://maori.com/misc/power.htm>)

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- ¹³ This includes Stanford d.School, the Double Diamond model and also the National Health Service's experience-based co-design model which has been influential in health settings.
- ¹⁴ We would like to acknowledge the many people who contributed to the *kaupapa* (agenda or purpose) of Ngā Uri Ō and were central to its development.
- ¹⁵ Read more about Ngā Uri Ō at <https://lifehackhq.co/nga-uri-o-descendants/>.
- ¹⁶ *Whakapapa* is defined as “genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent - reciting *whakapapa* was, and is, an important skill and reflected the importance of genealogies in Māori society in terms of leadership, land and fishing rights, kinship, and status. It is central to all Māori institutions.” (From Māori Dictionary, maoridictionary.co.nz. Full definition at <https://tinyurl.com/y7dd9so3>)
- ¹⁷ Note that these are not actual quotes, but summarized anecdotes of conversations.
- ¹⁸ See Penny Hagen’s slide presentation featuring this quote at <https://tinyurl.com/y85okpzt>.
- ¹⁹ *Kaupapa Maori* is a Māori approach, topic, customary practice, institution, agenda, principles, ideology—“a philosophical doctrine, incorporating the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of Māori society.” (From Māori Dictionary, maoridictionary.co.nz. Full definition at <https://tinyurl.com/y7tb2s5f>)
- ²⁰ *Tikanga* is the act of interpreting and practicing Māori philosophy through principles, appropriate protocol, or systems of value.
- ²¹ *Manaakitanga* is defined as “hospitality, kindness, generosity, support—the process of showing respect, generosity and care for others.” (From Māori Dictionary, maoridictionary.co.nz. Full definition at <https://tinyurl.com/y7v968v5>)
- ²² *Pā* is defined as a fortified village, or ancestral Māori occupation sites.
- ²³ Onenui Station: As early as 1909, incorporations were made legal bodies by parliament ... In the beginning, incorporations were family affairs; the owners would meet, make all the necessary decisions and do the work themselves. Gradually, this co-operative spirit lessened, and incorporations now often resemble private companies far more than communal enterprises.
- ²⁴ *Tawapata* is possibly a variation of *Taupata*—an abundant coastal shrub or small tree (*Coprosma repens*) in the Māhia Peninsula region. *Tawapata* was also the name of a *kainga* (settlement) on a stream which also held the name (Tairāwhiti Māori Land Court, 1925).
- ²⁵ “Hawaiiki is the traditional Māori place of origin. The first Māori are said to have sailed to New Zealand from Hawaiiki.” (From the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/hawaiiki>)
- ²⁶ *Kāinga* means home. *Tūturu* means to be “fixed, permanent, real, true, actual, authentic, original.” (From Māori Dictionary, maoridictionary.co.nz. Full definition at <https://tinyurl.com/y9q73389>)
- ²⁷ *Marae* is a complex of buildings constituting Māori community meeting houses. (From the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/glossary#marae>)
- ²⁸ *Kaupapa Māori* research and practice is guided through *tikanga*, the act of interpreting and practicing Māori philosophy through principles, appropriate protocol, or systems of value. *Kaupapa Māori* is concerned with Māori communities achieving cultural, educational, and social liberation, thereby supporting a process of decolonization (Whaanga-Schollum 2016a).
- ²⁹ *Mātauranga Māori* is a living and evolving body of belief systems and knowledge, often context-specific and inseparable from practice. Approaches and understandings of cultural knowledge may vary between *iwi*, *hapū* and *whānau* (tribal groupings) as they are heavily influenced by the immediate environment and associated resources of the defined grouping of people.
- ³⁰ *Māoritanga* comprises “Māori culture, Māori practices and beliefs, Māoriness, Māori way of life.” (From Māori Dictionary, maoridictionary.co.nz. Full definition at <https://tinyurl.com/y82ddw>)
- ³¹ Historically, *whare wānanga* were schools of learning where highly valued oral traditions, lore and *mauri* were preserved. This knowledge was passed on to *rangatira* who were considered to be able to hold responsibility for that *mātauranga*. As with other concepts in Māori society, researchers and practitioners have re-interpreted the term *wānanga* for new applications within the contemporary context (Whaanga-Schollum 2016a).
- ³² To read notes from the first Tikanga Māori co-design wānanga, visit <http://www.ngaaho.maori.nz/page.php?m=187>.
- ³³ Read more about Angie Tangaere’s research at <https://tinyurl.com/y8affe3w>.
- ³⁴ See Penny Hagen’s slide presentation featuring this quote at <https://tinyurl.com/y85okpzt>.
- ³⁵ Event description for Toi Poto Webinar: Co-design by Rangimārie Mules, <http://toitangata.co.nz/events/toi-poto-webinar-co-design-by-rangimaarie-mules>.