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Decolonizing rivers in Aotearoa New Zealand

Karen Fisher (Ngāti Maniapoto, Waikato-Tainui, Pākehā)

Introduction

I live on the fish caught by Māui using a magic fish-hook made from his grandmother's jawbone. The exploits of Māui, a mischievous demi-god, have been told and re-told in Aotearoa New Zealand (and elsewhere among Polynesian societies) for generations through storytelling, proverbs and sayings, carvings and artworks (including film). In this particular tale, Māui went fishing with his brothers, against their wishes, with a fish-hook made from the jawbone of his *kuia* (grandmother), Muriranga-whenua. Using his own blood as bait, and whilst chanting a *karakia* (prayer, incantation), Māui pulled a fish out of the sea. This fish, Te-Ika-a-Māui, was, in fact, land that is now known as the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. The geographic features that characterize the North Island (mountains, valleys and hills), were formed by Māui's brothers as they wounded and killed the fish and trampled over its surface.

In an alternative telling, the North (and South) Island of New Zealand is the exposed part of a largely submerged continent named Zealandia, which was once part of the supercontinent, Gondwana. The rifting 82–85 million years ago that caused the Tasman Sea to open also caused Zealandia to break away from Gondwana; 10 million years ago, the land mass recognizable as New Zealand started to form (Williams 2017). New Zealand's shape is due to the convergence of the Australian and Pacific plates, which move in relation to each other, creating two zones of subduction (with the Pacific Plate being subducted below the Australian Plate underneath the North Island, and the Australian Plate being subducted below the Pacific Plate underneath the South Island). Tectonic forces, along with changes in sea level (submergence and emergence), geological and geomorphological processes (uplift, volcanism, sedimentation, erosion and

deposition) have shaped the physical characteristics of the country (Ballance 2009; Williams 2017). These processes continue into the present day, with New Zealand one of the most mobile and dynamic places on Earth (Ballance 2009).

These different accounts of the formation of Aotearoa New Zealand¹ reflect different ontological traditions that continue to co-exist and influence how socio-natural relations are performed, practiced and constituted. For Māori, the polytheist Indigenous population of Aotearoa New Zealand, demi-gods such as Māui along with other gods, animals, humans, human-animal hybrids, supernatural humans, supernatural creatures, spirit(s) (*wairua*) and *mauri* (life essence) constitute an assemblage of humans and non-humans that make up the world within which Māori live. The interconnectedness of the human–non-human–spiritual within Te Ao Māori, or a Māori world view, emphasizes relationality, exchanges, interactions and reciprocity between humans and nonhumans, spirits, the supernatural, and eschews a linear conception of time (Salmond 2014; Tipa 2009; Tipa, Harmsworth, Williams & Kitson 2016). Places and spaces are constituted through practices, performances, rituals and utterances that extend beyond the present into the past and future. This ontology conflicts with conceptualizations of the environment and the place of humans within it derived from a Western modern ontology, which has dominated our ways of knowing, being and governing (Blaser 2013; Chandler & Reid 2018).

In contrast to the relational Indigenous ontology reflective of a Māori worldview, the modernist world is characterized by a nature/culture divide wherein there is one universal reality accessible through scientific knowledge. Whereas Māori relational ontologies emphasize the interweaving of human and more-than-human beings, biophysical, social, and spiritual, Western modernist ontological assumptions separate land/water, freshwater/saltwater, nature/culture, and scientific/spiritual and apply universalist (and universalizing) techniques and measures to know (and enact) the world (Blaser 2013; Chandler & Reid 2018). Indigenous knowledge is, thus, practical and performative and has the capacity to take the non-human seriously (Chandler & Reid 2018). Differences in perspective are explained through differences in culture, which is organized hierarchically with Enlightenment thinking at the peak. This way of thinking about the world (and culture) spread along with colonial (imperial)

¹ I echo Mahuika (2009) and acknowledge the differences among different *iwi* or tribal groups in terms of detail regarding the stories of Māui and other gods, which reflect the situatedness of *whakapapa* (genealogy) and the *mana* (authority, prestige of each *iwi* and *hapū* (sub-tribe)) in relation to these accounts.

expansion across the globe, including to Aotearoa New Zealand. Notions of progress, as a corollary to modernity, emphasized linear (teleological) conceptions of time and movement towards a better (modern) future (Blaser 2013, 2014; Chandler & Reid 2018; de La Cadena 2010; Latour 1993; Waikato Regional Council 2014).

In settler societies such as Aotearoa New Zealand, the modernist ontological assumptions underpinning colonization influenced conceptualizations of the environment – and the place of people in it – and the institutional arrangements created to manage it. Colonization enabled the rapid and large-scale transformation of environments in relatively short timeframes, which profoundly affected landscapes, waterways and marine environments through clearing of indigenous forest, draining wetlands, conversion of land for agricultural production (and intensification), fisheries exploitation, industrial development, human settlements and so forth (Memon & Kirk 2012; Parsons & Nalau 2016). The entrenchment of localized systems of settler-colonial power, both historically and in the present day, marginalized Indigenous knowledges and practices in favor of Western conceptions of the world (Bacon 2019; Veracini 2017, 2018). Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing as well as Indigenous space, thus, have been colonized (Smith 1999). Smith (1999, p. 51) attests to the power of colonization to remake landscapes according to Western ideals whereby “the landscape, the arrangement of nature, could be altered by ‘Man’: swamps could be drained, waterways diverted, inshore areas filled, not simply for physical survival, but for further exploitation of the environment or making it ‘more pleasing’ aesthetically”. Increasingly, however, Indigenous groups around the world, including Māori, are asserting their rights to protect their relationships to nature and to take an active role in the governance and management of environmental resources (Berry, Jackson, Saito & Forline 2018; Jackson 2018).

In this essay, I give attention to Indigenous ways of knowing and being to consider the possibilities for attending to human and more-than-human relationships and connections in more compassionate terms. I focus in particular on Aotearoa New Zealand and the possibilities afforded by Te Ao Māori, which emphasizes relationality and reciprocity, to repair the damage done to the environment and to repair the damage done to people (especially Indigenous people) in terms of how they interact with the environment. As an academic researcher, I am motivated by Indigenous and more-than-human geographies, studies of the Anthropocene and feminist ethics of care, to find ways to acknowledge multiple ways of knowing (de Leeuw & Hunt 2018) to enable just and sustainable futures, as well as by those seeking to decolonize research,

institutions, disciplines, and selves. As a Māori (Indigenous) woman, I am motivated by my own experiences and coming to know the world and my place in it, where my first lessons about the formation of Aotearoa were based on a carving of Te Ika-a-Māui (the fish of Māui) that hung on the wall in my family home.

In exploring notions of decolonization and repair, I focus on rivers as sites of ontological inconsistency that increasingly challenge modernist assumptions of “rivers” because of legal and governance changes that have created opportunities to incorporate *mātauranga* (knowledge, wisdom), cultural values, and *kaitiakitanga* practices premised on Te Ao Māori (Salmond 2012). I am particularly interested in the agency of *taniwha* (supernatural creatures that live in rivers) to disrupt dominant scientific (and legal) conceptions of river management and share my experiences of coming to know the *taniwha*, Waiwaia, and how this has influenced my thinking around rivers. My intention in this essay is to offer glimpses into processes to divest bureaucratic, cultural and linguistic formations of colonial power (Smith 1999).

River ontologies: different ways of knowing rivers

Western approaches to knowing rivers have drawn heavily on science (in myriad forms), which has strongly influenced what counts as knowledge and what a river is. In privileging colonial systems of classification and representation, Western interests remain dominant (Smith 1999); however, the possibility for repair (of peoples and knowledges) finds hope within Western science itself. Indeed, research about rivers reveals a range of perspectives and epistemologies that emphasize relationality, complexity and connectivity and suggest that how rivers are defined is not as straightforward as it may initially seem (Law & Lien 2013).

For instance, fluvial geomorphologists such as Fryirs and Brierley (2013, p. 1) emphasize the importance of viewing rivers within their landscapes and catchments and describe rivers as “largely products of their valleys, which, in turn, are created by a range of geologic and climatic controls”. They connect fluvial geomorphology to other physical processes that “create, maintain, enhance or destroy habitats” as well as chemical and ecological processes that influence the form and functions of and within rivers (Fryirs & Brierley 2013, p. 2). Concerns over the physical degradation of rivers has motivated scholars to investigate restoration and rehabilitation to repair damage done largely due to

anthropogenic influences (Ashmore 2015; Friberg et al 2016; Lave et al 2014; Wohl, Lane & Wilcox 2015). Such scholarship has focused on ways to improve hydrologic, geomorphic and ecological processes within degraded environments, while also raising questions about what constitutes a “restored” state and revealing the variability in meaning about what a healthy river is and what ought to be measure (Blue 2018; Blue & Brierley 2016). Thus, rivers are “known” through sediment supply and delivery, Macroinvertebrate Community Index, morphological condition, turbidity, water clarity, and multiple other measures and values (including, in Aotearoa New Zealand, swimmability) (Fryirs & Brierley 2013; McCormick, Fisher, & Brierley 2015; Tadaki & Sinner 2014).

Among scientists, there is also a growing recognition of the importance of acknowledging the multiple factors and facets that constitute socio-biophysical landscapes and a repositioning of humans within landscapes as more than a boundary condition or perturbation. In this way, rivers are seen as co-produced systems co-constituted by social and natural processes (Ashmore 2015; Mould, Fryirs & Howitt 2018). Researchers have also identified the relationships between geomorphology and culture as important for co-producing landscape and advocate combining landscape analysis and a focus on forms, processes and evolution, with human spatio-temporal relationships connected to space and home, and sociocultural interactions (Mould et al 2018; Wilcock, Brierley, & Howitt 2013), including an acknowledgement of intercultural communication, particularly with regard to Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous knowledges (Wilcock et al 2013). Such ways of seeing rivers in holistic terms are promising because they emphasize relationality, situatedness and complexity, which provides opportunities to dislodge dominant (modern) ontological framings and to accommodate epistemological and ontological differences, including Māori ways of knowing, doing and being (Fox et al 2017; Paterson-Shallard, Fisher, Parsons & Makey 2020; Wilcock et al 2013).

Ki uta ki tai – from the mountains to the sea – is a Māori concept that emphasizes the interconnectedness and complexity of natural and social systems (Tipa et al 2016). This way of thinking is emblematic of the ontological assumptions underpinning Te Ao Māori in which the environment is understood as an indivisible and holistic system. Te Ao Māori is characterized by a relational ontology that connects humans to other humans and nonhumans across time and space. Within Te Ao Māori, *mātauranga* is an encompassing term used to refer to Māori ways of viewing and perceiving the world through traditional culture and knowledge originating from ancestors (Harmsworth, Awatere & Robb 2016; Salmond 2014). Te Ao Māori and *mātauranga* Māori comprise a

range of concepts, values, knowledges, ethics and principles founded on traditional knowledge, philosophy, religion and beliefs. The customary practices that emerge from Te Ao Māori and *mātauranga* reflect cultural, physical, spiritual and metaphysical values. *Mātauranga* is enacted through a range of means including *whakapapa*, *tikanga* (customs and protocols), *kaitiakitanga* (guardianship), *karakia* (prayer and incantations), *mōteatea* (chants), *pūrākau* (stories and narratives), *pepeha* (tribal sayings) and *whakataukī* (proverbs).

For Māori, rivers, mountains, oceans and all other beings and entities carry their own distinct *mauri* and spiritual integrity (*wairua*) (Harmsworth et al 2016; Ruru 2018). The natural world is entwined with identity and *whakapapa* such that individuals locate themselves in relation to biophysical features and family/ancestral histories; all are inextricably bound to their environment (*taiao*) through *whakapapa* and as direct descendants from Papatūānuku (Earth Mother) and Ranginui (Sky Father) (Harmsworth et al 2016; Ruru 2013; Salmond 2014; Te Aho 2010, 2019; Tipa 2009). This is exemplified in an individual's *pepeha* or verbalization of *whakapapa*, where the explanation of who you are is positioned geographically, temporally and in the context of ancestors (Te Aho 2019). Based on one's *whakapapa*, the identification of a mountain, an ocean, a river, a *waka* (canoe), a *marae*² or an ancestor provides a means of placing and locating a person into a far bigger web of relations. Within this conceptualization, the interrelationships between individuals and collectives (human, ecological and metaphysical communities) is emphasized; identity is, thus, framed geographically, genealogically and politically (Smith 1999).

For Māori, rivers are a lively assemblage of physical, social and metaphysical properties, knowledges and relations that connects people, places, waters and beings (including the supernatural) across time and space. Rather than a singular "worlding" (Blaser 2013) of "River" as a universal and stable category knowable through scientific measurement, Indigenous ways of knowing emphasize rivers as relational and inseparable from identity, ways of knowing and being, history, and the indivisibility of rivers as a physical and metaphysical entity. Rivers are, thus, multiple, and are brought into being, or rendered invisible, through sets of socionatural practices (Mol 2002); accommodating different conceptualizations of what a river is and how "actors constitute realities in power-charged fields" (Blaser 2013, p. 548) has not yet been resolved.

² Courtyard or open area in front of the meeting house where formal greetings and discussions take place. Often also used to include the complex of buildings around the *marae*.

Managing rivers in Aotearoa New Zealand

The Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1840 by representatives of the British Crown and more than 500 Māori *rangatira* (high ranking, chiefly), established a collaborative partnership between Māori and the Crown, and conferred obligations and responsibilities on the Crown and its agents towards Māori (Brierley et al 2019; Salmond 2014). The Treaty has been the subject of intense debate and scrutiny since 1840 not least because there were two versions in two different languages – the Treaty of Waitangi (in English) and Te Tiriti o Waitangi (in Māori) – that were not direct translations of each other (Brierley et al 2019; Jones 2016; Mutu 2018; Williams 2011). While now regarded as the founding document of New Zealand and part of the fabric of New Zealand (Williams 2011), this was not always the case. In 1877, James Prendergast, the then Chief Justice of New Zealand, dismissed the Treaty as a “simple nullity” (*Wi Parata v Bishop of Wellington*). While there were attempts made by legislators to reflect the Treaty in law, at other times, governments “evaded or flagrantly breached the terms of the Treaty” (Williams 2011, p. 3) leading to failures by the Crown to uphold their obligations (Mutu 2018).

The Treaty facilitated the formal colonization of Aotearoa and provided the Crown and settler government with authority to assert settler-colonial ideology and systems of representation and classification that worked to ensure the dominance of Western ideas (Smith 1999). Freshwater management approaches in Aotearoa New Zealand since colonization, as in other settler societies, have tended to reflect a Eurocentric conception of human–environment relationships in which humans are separate to nature, and were influenced heavily by modern ontological and scientific understandings and knowledge (Salmond 2014; Salmond, Tadaki & Gregory 2014). Such ways of knowing, shaped by settler-colonial discourses and political economic structures, meant river management often relied on the use of technocratic means to solve freshwater “problems”. Thus, rivers were channelized, diverted and modified to reduce flood risk, wetlands were drained to reduce health risks to settler societies and to support productivist enterprises, and land- and waterscapes were radically transformed and ‘improved’ in the name of progress (Parsons & Nalau 2016). Freshwater management provides evidence of how, according to Smith (1999), Western ideas came to dominate practice, and Indigenous views of history were dismissed as “primitive”, “incorrect” and counter to settler-colonial ideology and aspirations. Moreover, the institutionalization of European property regimes, and the loss of Māori land through confiscation, land sale, and appropriation via

myriad legal and policy mechanisms negatively affected the relationships between Māori and their rivers (Burton & Cocklin 1996).

From the perspective of Pākehā settlers, the unruliness, unpredictability and undesirability of water (as floodwaters, as wetlands and as a constraint on agricultural transformation) shaped the institutional framework governing water management in Aotearoa (Davis & Threlfall 2006). Initially, the system of water rights brought by migrants to Aotearoa resembled English common law riparian water rights whereby riverbeds were vested in the Crown to the tidal limit and, thereafter, rights of access and use were held by landowners on either side (to the center-line).

A similar approach was taken to groundwater whereby those who owned land also “owned” water (specifically, rights to exclusive access and use) beneath their land (Burton & Cocklin 1996; Memon & Skelton 2007).³ Changes in 1903 saw rights regarding navigable rivers vested in the Crown; riparian rights for non-navigable rivers remained for landowners until the passing of the Water and Soil Conservation Act (NZ) in 1967, which extinguished riparian rights and vested all rights to (surface and ground-) water in the Crown (Memon & Skelton 2007). Absent from these considerations of rights regimes over water, which centered on Eurocentric understandings of property and ownership, was the recognition of Māori *tikanga* and principles that governed their relationships to and with water. For Māori, for whom social organization centered on *whanau* and *hapū* and which emphasized the collective over individuals, (private) ownership regimes that privileged individualistic rights (to use, exclude and access “resources”) were completely foreign. Māori ways of knowing and being in relation to rivers became obscured through the operationalization of sets of rules and practices within entrenched systems of colonial power, which ensured the dominance of Western interests and knowledge (Bacon 2019; Smith 1999).

Notably, in terms of dominant international discourse on water management, especially in the 1990s and early 2000s (which advocated holistic and integrated catchment or watershed approaches) (see, for example, Calder 2005; Falkenmark 2004; Rahaman & Varis 2005), Aotearoa New Zealand has a relatively long history of catchment-based approaches to freshwater management with the establishment of river boards dating back to 1868 (Davis & Threlfall 2006). Until 1991 and the passing of the Resource Management Act (RMA) (NZ), the

³ See also Coal-Mines Act Amendment Act 1903 (NZ).

management of rivers and catchments was focused largely on flooding and erosion control (and, in some instances, the development of hydroelectricity dams), with less attention given to the complex and entangled land-water assemblages and virtually no consideration of the cultural or spiritual dimensions of rivers and water.

Prior to its enactment in 1991 (and despite the focus on catchments for managing rivers and water), the management of land, water and soil, among other environmental features, was administered by different bodies and different government departments according to different statutory purposes and mandates (Warnock & Baker-Galloway 2015). Fragmented institutional arrangements reflected a utilitarian and anthropocentric way of seeing the natural environment as providing “resources” to be exploited for the benefit of humans (and those things important to humans) from a largely Eurocentric and science/engineering perspective. Indeed, engineers dominated water management: they possessed the technical skills and expertise to control rivers and drain wetlands (Parsons, Nalau, Fisher & Brown 2019).

Prior to the RMA, the ability for Māori to assert their rights, interests or agency in relation to rivers was circumscribed by legal and administrative processes that effectively excluded Māori participation. Instead, at the time the RMA was adopted, there were numerous Māori claims to the Waitangi Tribunal (and the general courts in Aotearoa New Zealand) seeking redress (or remedy) for the damage done to the environment and to the wellbeing of Māori people (Burton & Cocklin 1996). In practice, the extent to which Māori/*iwi* interests and Te Ao Māori are given credence in river management under the RMA has been fairly limited. Despite specific references to the principles of the Treaty and principles such as *kaitiakitanga*, the risk for Māori is that the Treaty (and, to a lesser extent, *kaitiakitanga*) may be reduced to one of several factors to be balanced against others in implementing the RMA.

For Māori, the Treaty underpins their dealings with the Crown (Mutu 2018); however, failure by the Crown to uphold their duties and obligations to the Treaty and ongoing resistance by Māori led to the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975 to investigate Treaty breaches (Wheen & Hayward 2012). The Waitangi Tribunal is a permanent commission of inquiry responsible for inquiring into and reporting on claims made by Māori, then presenting their findings and making recommendations to the Crown (Jones 2016; Mutu 2018, 2019; Wheen & Hayward 2012).

Beyond the RMA, settlements made as part of claims against the Crown for breaches to the Treaty of Waitangi and subsequent legislation in respect of rivers

provide a means by which to endorse Māori values and knowledge while also strengthening the position of Māori in river governance and management (Ruru 2018). In this way, the hegemony of a modern ontology that privileges science and Western understandings has been challenged by the enactment of legislation that makes room for the rights of interests of Māori to be recognized and provided for. For example, in 2018, the Whanganui River was granted legal personhood status with all the rights, powers, duties and liabilities of a legal passing, while other legislation in relation to rivers has recognized the importance of rivers as an ancestor, and the importance of supernatural creatures and reciprocal relations of care as central to Māori identity.

Taniwha as agents of repair

Indigenous ways of being extend ontopolitical ethics to include more-than-human others (Chandler & Reid 2018), including spiritual and metaphysical beings. In the context of caring for (or managing rivers), such an approach emphasizes the liveliness of rivers beyond mere geomorphic, biological and hydrological features. As with other rivers in New Zealand, the Waipā has experienced serious environmental decline as a result of land use changes and intensification of agricultural activity.

The Waipā River is located in the central North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, being the major tributary of the Waikato River (the longest river in New Zealand). The Waipā catchment covers 306,569 ha and the river flows through land that was once native bush, wetlands and peat bogs. Approximately 78 per cent of the catchment area is in pasture, 21 per cent is native vegetation, scrub and other land uses, and 1 per cent is production forestry. The catchment comprises 4,825 km of mapped stream and river channels as well as 14 peat lakes, which are valued for their genetic diversity, scientific interest, recreational opportunities, and cultural and spiritual values. The catchment comprises erosion-prone soils and areas of instability that deliver high loads of sediment to tributary streams and the main channel. The habitat quality of streams in the catchment is below average within the Waikato region, while ecological health is around the regional average. Habitat quality and ecological health in streams ranges from poor to excellent across the zone, depending in part upon the upstream land use and activities next to the stream (Hill 2011; NIWA 2014; Waikato Regional Council 2014). Under the RMA, Waikato Regional Council is responsible for managing the Waipā River and for ensuring no further

degradation occurs. In performing this role, the Council adopts an integrated catchment approach and implements policies and plans that regulate access and use, discharge pollution control, riparian management and aquatic biodiversity.

The relationships between the Waipā River and Ngāti Maniapoto, whose ancestral affiliations with and responsibilities for the river are deeply intertwined and connected, have been undermined as a consequence of colonization. Ngāti Maniapoto are the *iwi* with *mana* in relation to the Waipā based on a longstanding relationship premised on *kaitiakitanga* and *whakapapa*, which pre-dates European settlement in the early nineteenth century. In contrast to Western ways of knowing rivers, Ngāti Maniapoto recognize the Waipā River, including its material and metaphysical constituents, as an indivisible entity. The Waipā River became the subject of a claim to the Waitangi Tribunal following on from a settlement between the Crown and Waikato-Tainui in respect of the Waikato River in 2010. The Waikato-Tainui settlement acknowledged the ongoing degradation of the Waikato River (and tributaries) and the need to protect and enhance the river. Since the Waipā River is the largest tributary of the Waikato River, the co-governance and co-management arrangements for both rivers are closely aligned (Paterson-Shallard et al 2020).

On 27 September 2010, Ngāti Maniapoto and the Crown signed a deed of settlement in relation to co-governance and co-management of the Waipā River, which recognizes the importance of the Waipā River as a *taonga* to Ngāti Maniapoto; the obligation and desire to restore, maintain and protect all of the waters that flow into or fall within the Maniapoto *rohe* (territory); and, the *mana* of Maniapoto in respect of the Upper Waipā River. For Maniapoto, thinking about, and caring for (managing) the Waipā necessarily includes attending to Waiwaia, a *taniwha* and *kaitiaki* of the Waipā River and the Ngāti Maniapoto people. *Taniwha* are supernatural creatures that inhabit rivers, lakes or caves, and are the metaphysical and metaphorical embodiment of the relations between Māori and their rivers. To Maniapoto, Waiwaia is held to be the essence and wellbeing of the Waipā. The story of Waiwaia was told to me as follows:

Waiwaia began life as a totara tree (*Podocarpus totara*) on the summit of Rangitoto. The totara tree was made *tapū* (sacred) by a Tohunga (spiritual leader) who used to sit at its base and recite *karakia*. One day, a child was playing in amongst the branches, which angered the tree. Because of this, the land opened up and swallowed the whole tree. The tree then came back out through the Waipā as the *taniwha* Waiwaia. Waiwaia travels the Waipā and the Waikato

Rivers, and has many resting stops along the Waipā; although Waiwaia may travel beyond the waters of the Waipā, he always returns to the Waipā.⁴

In 2012, the Ngā Wai o Maniapoto (Waipa River) Act 2012 (NZ) came into effect. The cultural significance of the Waipā is identified in the legislation as being at the heart of Maniapoto spiritual and physical wellbeing and tribal identity and culture. It clearly states that, to Maniapoto, the essence and wellbeing of the Waipā is Waiwaia. In naming the river, physical and metaphysical elements, including *mauri*, are detailed. In articulating the obligation Maniapoto feel towards the Waipā for present and future generations, *tikanga*, *kaitiakitanga* and *mana* are made explicit: Maniapoto are charged with the care and protection of *the mana tuku iho o Waiwaia* (the ancestral authority and prestige handed down from generation to generation in respect of Waiwaia). Waiwaia has been put to work in legal and bureaucratic processes. The legal work performed by Waiwaia is further enabled through the Waiwaia Accord (established at the same time as the deed of settlement), which establishes formal relationships between Ngāti Maniapoto and a raft of government departments as well as the Prime Minister. Waiwaia actively affects how Ngāti Maniapoto personally encounter the Waipā, and how Ngāti Maniapoto environmental managers and *kaitiaki* relate to the Waipā (for example, in restoration efforts, planning, management and regulating access to the River and its resources).

The cultural significance of the Waipā River to Ngāti Maniapoto, and the centrality of the Waipā to Maniapoto spiritual and physical wellbeing, and tribal identity and culture, is also explicitly recognized in the Ngā Wai o Maniapoto (Waipa River) Act 2012. Throughout the legislation, including the principles of interpretation, there are clear attempts to accommodate Te Ao Māori values and knowledges. Māori concepts form the foundation for co-governance and co-management with specific guidance given to the interpretation of the key concepts *mana*, *rangatiratanga* (chieftainship, right to exercise authority), *kawanatanga* (government, rule, dominion), *kaitiakitanga* as they relate to Ngāti Maniapoto and the Waipā. Moreover, principles relating to processes and procedures for working together to ensure efficient and practical outcomes emphasize partnership (under the Treaty of Waitangi), integration (across a number of levels and a range of agencies) and integrity (a shared commitment to act to protect the integrity of the deed) as fundamental to the co-governance and co-management framework.

⁴ This story of Waiwaia appeared in a booklet with illustrations completed by children from a Kōhanga Reo (Māori language pre-school) in Otorohanga.

Between 2009 and 2016, I attended numerous *hui* (meetings) and *wananga* (forum) focused on the Waipā River in my capacity as someone who identifies as a member of Ngāti Maniapoto, and as someone with an academic interest in environmental governance and, later, as someone who worked for and with Ngāti Maniapoto. These meetings were mostly in relation to the settlement agreement to establish the co-governance and co-management arrangements, as well as in relation to the development of planning documents and to prioritize river restoration. Waiwaia was present at each of these gatherings. First, through *whakapapa*: while the meetings were open to all Ngāti Maniapoto, most of those attending were from families who have been located along the Waipā for generations.

For Māori, articulation of identity positions individuals in relation to land, water, mountains, the *waka* that brought ancestors across the Pacific to Aotearoa, to ancestors, to extended family and immediate family. In this way, Waiwaia and the Waipā are embodied in those Maniapoto who affiliate to Ngā wai o Waipā (the waters of the Waipā). Second, through *kōrero* (to speak, talk). At the meetings, people spoke of their personal encounters with Waiwaia; in many of these accounts, Waiwaia appeared in the river as a log. There were stories of people being saved by Waiwaia, as well as people “being taught lessons” in response to behavior deemed by Waiwaia to be displeasing or inappropriate. Third, through *tikanga* and *kaitiakitanga*. *Tikanga* refers to custom and practices; these can be mundane or highly ritualized. *Kaitiakitanga* is most commonly translated as guardianship or stewardship; a *kaitiaki* is an individual who acts as a guardian. Such practices (and accounts of *kaitiakitanga* and *tikanga*) connect Maniapoto directly to the Waipā and to Waiwaia. Fourth, through co-governance and co-management arrangements enabled through Treaty settlement. This is how I have encountered Waiwaia.

This encounter profoundly influenced my thinking about governance and management of rivers in Aotearoa New Zealand, strategies to enable the decolonization of rivers (and other dimensions of life in Aotearoa New Zealand and in other settler-colonial contexts more broadly), relational ontologies, and the interconnectedness of humans and more-than-human others.

By centering a *taniwha* into all considerations of the Waipā River, and the relationship between Waiwaia, the Waipā and Ngāti Maniapoto, the river became more than a physical object or entity to be carved up into discrete resource units to be managed. Concerns over how any proposed activity or action might affect Waiwaia (positively or negatively) require a more holistic approach than implied within an integrated catchment management approach (as adopted by the Waikato Regional Council).

My encounter with Waiwaia also reminded me of the “other” ways of knowing I had benefited from (such as *pūrākau* about Maui and my family’s carving), but which I had come to take for granted (though never dismissed). While I was initially interested in the Waipā co-governance and co-management arrangements because of my academic training, I was enticed by Waiwaia to learn more about the myriad spaces that *taniwha* (as an example of a powerful more-than-human being and a *kaitiaki*) now inhabit. I have taken Waiwaia with me (as a colleague) to teach cohorts of students about Te Ao Māori and different ways of knowing, and to explore ontological and legal pluralism at conferences and seminars in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, and the United Kingdom. I have focused on Waiwaia as an agent of repair, who disrupts Western ways of knowing rivers and re-focuses questions about river health and water quality away from metrics and calculative practices designed within positivist and reductionist framings. In working with Waiwaia it is clear to me that Western science alone cannot answer the question of how to manage for a *taniwha* or, more importantly, how to manage a river.

Conclusion

Indigenous knowledge and practices have been threatened by colonization and assertions of colonial ideology that sought to oppress and control Indigenous Peoples, including Māori (Smith 1999). Nevertheless, Indigenous Peoples from around the world continue to resist and to (re)assert their rights at local, national and global scales. The emergence of Indigenous practices that disrupt hegemonic political formations can, therefore, be seen as evidence of the destabilization of dominant (Western) knowledge systems (Blaser 2013, 2014; de La Cadena 2010).

The story of Te-Ika-a Māui is representative of stories that connect humans with non-humans and that transcend the physical to include the supernatural and spiritual. In comparison to scientific accounts of the world and the forces acting on its materiality, this kind of story reorients relationships between humans and nonhumans and allows different values to be recognized and acknowledged. By asserting these stories and emphasizing their significance, bureaucratic, cultural and linguistic formations of colonial power are disrupted and possibilities for doing things differently emerge (Smith 1999). Māori ways of knowing and being, thus, have the potential to enhance the management and care of rivers in Aotearoa New Zealand by emphasizing relationality and

reciprocity between all things across time and space and for its focus on rivers as more-than-material and more-than-human.

For Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngā Wai o Maniapoto (Waipā River) Act (NZ) and the deed of settlement signed as part of a Treaty settlement go some way to repair the damage done to their *mana*, as a consequence of colonization, by recognizing and asserting their rights and interests in relation to the Waipā. This ultimately enables the repair of the relationship between Ngāti Maniapoto and the Waipā River as well as environmental repair as a result of restoration efforts. By legally recognizing the importance of a *taniwha* as central to the relationship between Ngāti Maniapoto and the Waipā River, and in acknowledging the role of *taniwha* as a *kaitiaki*, river management and restoration practices must account for *mātauranga* and Te Ao Māori. This requires the Crown and its agents (including Waikato Regional Council) to find ways to work with Ngāti Maniapoto and has the potential to transform river management from a technical exercise that deals primarily with physical and material elements of rivers to consider approaches that support and enhance the non-tangible, cultural, social and metaphysical dimensions as well.

Finding ways to ensure a *taniwha* (such as Waiwaia) can thrive requires more than limiting nutrients, planting riparian margins, reducing sediment loads or regulating use. It is not simply a matter of what is done, it is also how it is done; managing (or caring for) the Waipā requires the application of *mātauranga* by *kaitiaki* – accumulated over generations – through *tikanga* and other practices deemed appropriate and necessary by Ngāti Maniapoto. At a personal level (myself included), encounters with more-than-humans (be they metaphysical, spiritual or nonhuman entities and beings) can be transformational and generate deeper-felt connections and collective caring towards rivers than a list of values or set of indicators that attempt to measure and define a river. The benefits of decolonizing river management in Aotearoa New Zealand, thus, outweigh maintaining settler-colonial institutions for both rivers and people (Māori and non-Māori alike).