MĀORI INDIGENEITY AND THE ONTOLOGICAL TURN IN ETHNOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

This essay proposes an understanding of commodity fetishism that can mediate between divergent understandings of Māori indigeneity in a politically progressive way. To do this, an account of the Māori concept of whakapapa in terms of a recursive ontology is held up to a critique of such ontological turns in ethnography. The comparison shows that both approaches pursue ethnographic understanding in terms of a paradoxical relationship between creativity and politics. It is argued that the actual convergence of these apparently divergent ethnographic approaches places them, like postmodernist ethnographic forms developed since the 1980s, in the prolonged but still promising historical materialist critique of surrealism begun in the 1920s by the modernist avant-garde.

Keywords: Māori indigeneity; ontological ethnography; commodity fetishism; whakapapa; surrealism.

INTRODUCTION

The Māori renaissance of the 1970s has since then taken different forms, continued to influence or follow ethnic movements in other countries, and is often described now in terms of indigeneity. I have commented on these developments since their early days, most recently in an appreciative critique of Fiona McCormack's analyses of Māori indigeneity in the context of neoliberal governance (Webster 1998, 2016). The present essay pursues my inclination to support the progressive potentials of the continuing Māori renaissance by looking critically at its political and ideological weaknesses. As well as McCormack's parallel efforts, my essay here converges with Jeffrey Holman's work on the early ethnographer Elsdon Best and his continuing influence on 'essentialist texts of the Māori identity movement' and resulting weaknesses in its 'counter-hegemonic' theory (Holman 2007, 14, 380; also 2010, 280–289). My

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own ethnohistorical research on the Tūhoe Māori relies especially on Best's meticulous genealogical census of Tūhoe and complements Holman's study of Best's key informant, Tutakangahau Tapui (Webster 2017). My own approach to Māori whakapapa ('genealogy') is exemplified in my critique of the recent theory of another specialist in Tūhoe ethnohistory, Jeffrey Sissons (Sissons 2010; Webster 2013). More recently, I have completed comprehensive accounts of one era of Te Urewera history (Webster 2019, forthcoming).

The approach I take here is ambitious, pointing out common theoretical ground between Ameria Salmond's recent ethnographic account of how whakapapa is being understood among Māori and David Graeber's critique of 'the ontological turn' in ethnography – which was led by Salmond, among others. Both the essays by Salmond and Graeber examined here were published in the journal *Hau*, a meeting-place of theories and critiques of the ontological turn and other issues (Graeber 2015; Salmond 2013, 2014). Although Graeber includes Salmond among the 'standard bearers' of the ontological turn, her article was importantly devoted to distancing her position from that of other standard-bearers, including Graeber's primary interlocutor Viveiros de Castro (2015, 2). I argue that the distinction is important to extricate ethnography from impasses that Salmond, as well as Graeber, lament.

I furthermore suggest that Salmond's revision of the ontological turn in ethnography places both her and Graeber in the long history of aesthetic modernism, along with the 1920–1930s critique of surrealism and other efforts of the modernist avant-garde. In 1990 I proposed a critique of then current postmodernist ethnographic forms that were emerging from the previous hermeneutic or poststructural variations of ethnographic form, in turn echoes of the still earlier modernist avant-garde (Webster 1990). For better or for worse, the protracted modernist struggle with form and content appears to be taking yet new postmodern shapes in the ontological turn of ethnography. None of the ethnographic efforts in this long history can be dismissed as anthropological self-absorption, if only because they have come to form a material history that might, instead of breaking from it, be overlooked by its most recent practitioners.

Like many of its practitioners, my own lead in following this persistent but obscure continuity straddled anthropology and art: earlier enchantment by Lukács (1971) and Benjamin (1979), then Eagleton (1976), Clifford (1981), Rabinow (1986), Raymond Williams (1977), Jameson (1984), and others. Stocking's explorations of Romanticism in the history of anthropology reassured me that I need not be a closet romantic in social anthropology (1976). Geertz's semiologi-

cal explorations legitimised my literary inclinations in ethnographic writing, but Lukács, Williams, and Asad saved me from accepting culturalist solutions (Webster 1986). I am still inspired by my belated recognition (argued at length in the same essay) of the continuity between Benjamin, Adorno, Marcuse, and Habermas, all emphasising the futility of resolving the predicament of aesthetic modernism at the level of form that remains alienated from its historical substance. Hegel and Marx had explored the precursors of modernism in terms of the alienation between theory and practice, but this problem had been redoubled in aesthetic modernism. In 1929 Benjamin provocatively lamented that the surrealist movement was stillborn due to 'an irremediable coupling of idealistic morality and political practice' (1979, 234). Some variations of the ontological turn in ethnography, like some of its preceding postmodernist forms, appear to continue this fruitless coupling.

THE PARADOX OF CREATIVITY AND POLITICS

The common ground that I want to explore between Salmond's and Graeber's apparently divergent versions of contemporary ethnographic form is their preoccupation with creativity *and* politics, both their own and their hosts'. This coupling might merely replicate the hoary dialectic of aesthetic modernism re-emergent in the ontological turn. The solution I want to suggest to both of them is already explicit in the confrontation between Viveiros de Castro and Graeber: Marx's dialectical image of commodity fetishism (Graeber 2015, 4–5; Webster 2016). Echoes of the modernist avant-garde critique of surrealism in this coupling of creativity and politics may not be stillborn.

In 2005 Graeber had described various sorts of West African 'fetishes' (a term that originated among 16–17th century European merchants trading in that area) in order to explore the relationship between the changing meaning of the term in that usage and Marx's understanding of commodity fetishism. He argued that if Marx's sense of illusion and creativity in commodity fetishism were extended beyond their materialist boundaries in his value theory of labour, the paradoxical capacity of mere illusion to *create* gods or political power (e.g., trade contracts) attributed to West African fetishes could be better understood. In his 2015 critique of the ontological turn, Graeber reviews his original argument to defend his realist ontology and theoretical relativity against Viveiros de Castro's reduction of it to an ethnocentric refusal to accept the ontological relativity of West Africans' worlds.

However, from the point of view I develop here, Graeber's review of the socially and politically creative potential of fetishisms, whether in Marx's sense or

that found in other cultures less penetrated by capitalism, promises to bridge such gaps between ostensively different ontologies or, similarly, illusions of indigeneity. It could be argued that Graeber over-stretches Marx's concept of commodity fetishism, but his effort parallels that used by Lukács, Adorno, and Benjamin in critical theory and meets it in western Marxism, which has also come to accept ideologies as material historical forces. Especially because Salmond's contributions to the ontological turn can no longer be seen to agree with Viveiros de Castro and other standard bearers (contrary to Graeber's assumption), and because her article raises the dialectic of creativity and politics almost as explicitly as Graeber, my proposal of an alignment or even convergence between their theories of ethnographic practice may be propitious.

Salmond's concern with creativity as well as politics is less obvious in the second part of her article (the part Graeber cites, 2015, 2), perhaps because she emphasises political implications while distancing her position from the form of ontological creativity she attributes especially to Holbraad, Pederson, and Viveiros de Castro. Their striving to avoid a presumptuous representation of other ontologies leads these scholars to exercise 'their powers of creative invention upon the unlimited materials generated' only on their own side of the ethnographic encounter. Salmond pointedly asks if it might be the case

> that in striving to avoid the indignity of speaking for others – to leave alterity undomesticated – these anthropologists have retreated too far in their careful disclaimers, so that recursivity gives way to a solipsistic circularity? (Salmond 2014, 157–158)

Instead of encompassing the ethnographer's hosts with the creativity of one's own ontology, Salmond advocates an ethnographic form that remains open to their alterity: 'There is thus a certain humility in [these] recursive approaches, along with – according to some exponents – a capacity for political mobilization in solidarity with ethnographic subjects of all kinds whose very existence may be under threat' (Salmond 2014, 169). Salmond thereby emphasises encompassment by her hosts' political interests while distancing herself from the creative solipsism that instead might encompass its ethnographic subjects.

The ethnographic example developed in the first part of Salmond's article shows that her hosts' encompassment of her own approach nevertheless couples creative form closely with political form. In this part, referring to her research with a Māori iwi, Te Aitanga a Hauiti in New Zealand, Salmond comprehensively describes the expansively creative capacities of Māori whakapapa (glossed as 'genealogies and oral histories', 2013, 1, 4.) as internally, as well as externally,

encompassing of ontological otherness, including her own ethnographic form as well as the fieldwork team developing the concept. However, her focus in this first part on the extraordinary creativity of whakapapa also invokes its 'time-honored mechanisms for initiating such encompassing *(and always political)* relationships' (2013, 20; my italics). Salmond even appears to anticipate Graeber's 'paradox of creativity' as she turns the tables on solipsistic ontology: '[…] as the ontologists acknowledge, many of anthropology's subjects have long pursued their own projects of "controlled equivocation" and "inventive definition", creatively articulating their differences in practice and in print' (2013, 25). Indeed, Māori oratory, and especially its renditions of whakapapa, have long been admired for these politically potent subtleties, by British colonists as well as contemporary anthropologists. My own exchange with a leading ethnohistorian regarding the Tūhoe Māori offers examples (Webster 2013).

Salmond here poses the politically potent subtleties of creativity in a way that invites expression of it in her ethnographic form as well as its content – indeed as do such subtleties among Māori themselves. Similarly, Graeber distinguishes an 'immanent' form of imagination, as an element in all action and especially the paradox of creativity and politics, from the creations of transcendent imagination that ontological ethnographers dismiss as western epistemologies projected on other cultures (2015, 17 fn18). As will be seen below, Graeber's interest in immanent as distinct from transcendent imagination aligns his notion of political action with the historical materialist critique of surrealism.

Before examining Salmond's account of the creative politics of Māori whakapapa more closely, for guidance I will recapitulate the example I used in 1990 to critique ethnographic postmodernism: Benjamin's and Adorno's understanding of commodity fetishism and their attempts to resolve its contradictions in an immanent critique of surrealism. There may be echoes of this earlier effort of the modernist avant-garde in Salmond's, as well as Graeber's, ethnographic form.

THE MODERNIST AVANT-GARDE CRITIQUE OF SURREALISM

In the 1930s Benjamin's and Adorno's avant-garde historical materialist praxis had guided them to a still earlier exemplary situation: Baudelaire's poetic ruminations upon the spectacle of high capitalism in the streets of Paris in the 1850s – at the same time that Marx was coming to understand it in a different way.[2] I analysed the confrontation between Benjamin and Adorno in terms of their reactions to Bataille and Brecht, all four of whom participated in the avant-garde criticism of surrealism and, as historical materialists, sought to

confront it from within its own aesthetic form, that is, as an immanent rather than transcendental critique of the contradictions arising from capitalism throughout society. As themselves part of the surrealist movement, their divergent forms of historical materialist practice also included the reciprocal influence of anthropology and an ethnographic method that was then emerging in confrontations between familiar and unfamiliar objects and social relations in other cultures. But the example of Baudelaire's images was focused on an analogous form of contradiction rapidly developing throughout the surrealists' own society.

> Benjamin and Adorno's critiques of surrealism were based on Marx's theory of the commodity form, and its seminal reinterpretation by Lukács in 1923. In 1867 in the first chapter of *Capital* Marx demonstrated the fundamental principle of the fetishism of commodities: through the general historical displacement of social use value by abstract exchange value which characterizes the production of commodities in capitalism, social relations between people (as producers of commodities, including their labor itself) take on the misleadingly natural appearance of things, specifically the exchange relation between commodities. Conversely, the relations between things take on the appearance of the social relations between their producers, the latter having been made misleadingly natural through displacement of social use value by the exchange value of commodities. These fetishized appearances of people or things, as natural and ahistorical, obscured an objectively dialectical process and a specific historical development of contradictions that was focused in the commodity form. (Webster 1990, 281)

While Marx's conception of this historical process remained conservatively within the domain of production in his own time, by the 1920s Lukács, anticipating the dilemmas of the modernist avant-garde, argued that modern capitalism was extending this process of alienation to 'the *total* outer and inner life of society' (1971, 83–84, emphasis in original). By the 1960s this radical elaboration of Marx was taken still further in the development of critical theory. Following these developments, in my recent appreciation of Fiona McCormack's critique of Māori indigeneity under neoliberal governance mentioned in the introduction, I emphasised the immanent liberating as well as alienating potential of the *dis*placement of social use value by abstract exchange value to be *reversed* in any particular situation of fetishised commodities (Webster 2016, 3–4).

Both Benjamin and Adorno agreed that Bataille's critique of surrealism was

characteristic of this whole left-wing bourgeois position [in] its ir-remediable coupling of idealistic morality with political practice. Only in contrast to the helpless compromises of 'sentiment' are certain central features of Surrealism […] to be understood. (Benjamin 1979, 234)

Bataille's conception of 'base' materialism was more a reaction to elitist or colonial exploitation and greed, and thus an idealist counterpart to bourgeois guilt expressed in political action. His surrealist ethnographic interest was drawn from Mauss's accounts of sacrifice and potlatch, inclining his materialist preoccupation toward consumption rather than production. On the other hand, Adorno was hostile to the influence of Brecht's stage form materialist critique on Benjamin's textual form. Brecht's dramatic form had led Benjamin to depict the streets of Baudelaire's Paris through details, the contradictions between which – as rooted in the fetishism of commodities – were left for the observer/reader to discover and confront in real life, off-stage or beyond the text. One of these vivid details was Baudelaire's image of the rag picker, teams of which were appearing like the historically still earlier English hand-loom cottage industries, but now working in among the crowds on the street, implicitly reflecting the penetration of fetishised contradictions between commodities and their producers.

Benjamin's critique of Kafka was an apt image of his own characteristic textual form as a parable in the rabbinical tradition. It also echoed the fetishised naturalisation of a specific social and material history in the commodity form that obscures its contradictions.

> The word 'unfolding' has a double meaning. A bud unfolds into a blossom, but the boat which one teaches children to make by folding paper unfolds into a flat sheet of paper. This second kind of 'unfolding' is really appropriate to the parable; it is the reader's pleasure to smooth it out so that he has the meaning in the palm of his hand. Kafka's parables, however, unfold in the first sense the way a bud turns into a blossom. (Benjamin, cited in Webster 1990, 284)

This unfolding of a specific social and historical problem by the observer/reader 'in the palm of his hand' is what Benjamin meant by his theory of 'empathy with the soul of the commodity'. Adorno persistently misunderstood Benjamin's rabbinical or parable-like approach to textual form as theological instead of historical materialist, as invoking 'a realm where history and magic oscillate […] at the crossroads of magic and positivism. That spot is bewitched'.

To the contrary, Adorno's skepticism regarding the capacity of the modern proletariat to precipitate the necessarily revolutionary changes led him to reject Benjamin's, as well as Brecht's, confidence in revolutionary insight and active participation of the observers/readers of their work. Instead, Adorno insisted on mediating the contradictions integral to such details as the rag picker by invoking in the text itself the image of a theoretical implication that was objective but historically obscured in its naturalised detail by the generalised fetishism of commodities. Compared to the active textual form defended by Benjamin, Adorno's alternative can be seen as relatively passive: like the surrealist objects Brecht claimed 'do not come back from estrangement', instead remaining merely magical reflections of the objective world, Adorno's could remain stillborn within his textual form (Webster 1990, 283). While Adorno's immanent critique of the contradiction could be resolved in the text, Benjamin's, like Brecht's plays, had to be taken outside the text for resolution in the social reality it represented. Benjamin may even have been gently hinting that, like Kafka's parables, Adorno's would merely unfold passively 'the way a bud turns into a blossom'.

Does this account of the avant-garde critique of surrealism have echoes in Salmond's as well as Graeber's ethnographic form? To recapitulate: now that Salmond has distanced her position from Viveiros de Castro and others, might the example of Te Aitanga a Hauiti's whakapapa project provide an account of creativity and politics that can be productively aligned with Graeber's conception of the paradox of creativity and politics? Can the liberating as well as dominating or alienating potential of this paradox be developed? Can Salmond's or Te Aitanga a Hauiti's ethnographic coupling of creativity and politics be seen in terms of the fetishism of commodities, even the confluence of its pre-capitalist and capitalist forms explored by Graeber? If this could be done, and furthermore found to be expressed in the ethnographic form itself, we might have a resolution to the enduring dilemma in which both social science and aesthetics have oscillated since the modernist avant-garde encountered it nearly a century ago.

TE AITANGA A HAUITI'S PROJECT AND THE MEANING OF 'WHAKAPAPA'

Here I will briefly summarise Salmond's account of the project in Part I of her essay (2013), firstly in terms of the way it was conceived creatively as a recursive ontology by the research team of Te Aitanga a Hauiti representatives (hereafter usually referred to as Hauiti), IT specialists, art historians, and anthropologists. Then I will turn in more detail to political implications she raises regarding the wider context of the Hauiti project.[3]

Salmond's account of the recursive ethnographic form, creatively developed by the research team of which she and Hauiti representatives were a part, is comprehensive, and itself can even be said to be presented in a creatively recursive form. For instance, early in her introduction an account of Cook's 1769 encounter with Māori cannibalism in New Zealand is presented to dramatically invoke a sense of radical alterity (2013, 4), and is followed by an evocatively personal account of Salmond's visit in 2010 to the remote Hauiti settlement of Uawa which, although in a distant part of New Zealand, Cook had also visited twice. Implicitly echoing Cook's encounter with 'the owner of these bones', this visit was to lead to the Hauiti's initiation of a digitally-based repository for their diverse *taonga* ('treasures'):

> […] images, video footage, sound files, and documents both historical and contemporary relating to their *whakapapa* (genealogies and oral histories); their traditional arts of *karakia* (ritual incantations), *haka* (performing arts), and *mōteatea* (chants and songs); as well as *tā moko* (tattoo), *whakairo* (carving), *whatu* (weaving), and *raranga* (basketry). (Salmond 2013, 8)

Even in terms of Benjamin's folded paper boat, discovering all these treasures or 'bones' in a digitalised system could be like uncovering the contradictions between fetishised persons and things: it could be liberating insofar as it is 'the reader's pleasure to smooth it out so that he has the meaning in the palm of his hand'.

Although it is distinguished above from their other taonga, the Hauiti decided that they 'want *whakapapa* to generate the structure of the database and the ontology of the system itself' (2013, 8), including all these taonga and much more.

> In practice, and especially when used by speakers of Māori, it invokes a continuously unfolding generative complex of ideas, processes and artifacts that may be considered both to exceed, and to be incommensurable with, genealogy. As a number of anthropologists have observed, indeed, *whakapapa* is a relational field – or fabric – of cosmogonic proportions […] encompassing everything there is: animals, plants, landscapes, and inanimate objects, as well as people. […] *Whakapapa* is thus much more than genealogy, narrowly conceived; from the beginning ethnographers and Māori have noted its centrality to every aspect of Māori existence, its role in shaping – if not determining – not only social relations but their very conditions of possibility. (2013, 8–9)

Because 'translating Hauiti *whakapapa* into a relational database "ontology"' (2013, 15) deals with *mea* ('things') that always straddle data categories (her example is a chiefly ancestor who was both a 'knot in the fabric' of Hauiti whakapapa and a carved *poupou* (wall panel) still held in a Tübingen museum),

> it is tempting to think of mea not as digital 'entities' but as Deleuzian multiplicities, 'not truly one *being* but an assemblage of becomings', and 'not truly *one* being either […] "belonging to the many as such, [and having] no need whatsoever of unity in order to form a system"'. (Salmond citing Viveiros de Castro citing Deleuze, 2013, 18–19, Viveiros de Castro's emphasis)

However, allowing her hosts to encompass the research team's ethnography rather than the reverse ontology, to which Viveiros de Castro and others are liable, Salmond rejects the Deleuzian approach.

> Yet the task with which we were charged by Toi Hauiti [a working group of the tribal trust supervising the joint project] was not to apply existing theory to their *whakapapa*, primarily for the benefit of other anthropologists, but to enable their *whakapapa* to reproduce and extend itself. (Salmond 2013, 18–19)

It might be charged that the resulting ethnographic form reflects Hauiti's creative hegemony and eclipse of the project's technical and scholarly participants, even an opposite form of solipsism. However, contrary to the studiedly passive role expected of the non-Hauiti participants, Salmond's comments on the wider historical, as well as political, context of the project display an intriguingly recursive ethnographic form. The generalised suspicion of the motives of anthropologists expressed above in Toi Hauiti's guidelines is one example of the way this wider political context is raised. As in Graeber's ethnographic examples of fetishism, it might even be said that a sense of paradox is invoked in the active coupling of the wider political context with Hauiti creativity.

To test this possibility, I next trace Salmond's account through some divergent meanings of the word 'whakapapa' in its etymology. In the subsequent section I will pursue the wider political context of the Hauiti project; first in terms of traditional struggles for control between iwi (such as Te Aitanga a Hauiti) and hapū or 'sub-tribes' assumed to be subordinate to iwi, and secondly in terms of Salmond's explicit challenge to other contemporary scholarly approaches to Māori indigeneity.

The recursive autonomy of Hauiti's conception of whakapapa is itself presented by Salmond as part of a radically condensed etymological history. Reporting that the literal meaning of the word 'whakapapa' is 'lit.: "to generate layers"', she simply adds that it has 'migrated into everyday New Zealand English' where it means 'genealogy' and signifies 'distinctively Māori ways of reckoning relations of descent' (2013, 8). It can be demurred that even her literal definition might be biased by the word 'generate' toward mechanisation or digitalisation (rather than, say, to 'make' or 'arrange in' layers). But more interestingly, the word 'whakapapa' is not even listed in my sixth edition of the classic Williams' *A Dictionary of the Māori Language* (1957; first published in 1844) except as *one* of many different meanings of '*papa*'. '*Whaka*' stands alone as two very general grammatical prefixes the first of which was translated as movement toward something, while the second was translated as causation of something (e.g., to 'make' or 'generate' something, perhaps *papa*). According to this scholarly authority as recently as 1957, 'whakapapa' was one of at least sixteen different English meanings of 'papa', two of which were considered to be unrelated while the other fourteen were grouped under three different but related meanings. The word 'whakapapa' appears *only* as one of these three groups, but itself had seven distinguishable meanings. Only three of these roughly conform to either the literal or everyday meaning reported by Salmond: 4 ('place in layers, lay one upon the other'), 5 ('recite in proper order'), and 6 ('Genealogical table'). On the other hand, meaning 1 of 'whakapapa' was translated as to 'lie flat', meaning 2 was translated as 'to go slyly or stealthily', and meaning 7 was translated as 'bush felled for burning'.

There appears to be a wide etymological divergence between the ordinary meanings of 'whakapapa' in 1957 and the contemporary meanings described by Salmond. It goes without saying that the meaning of words is continually changing in any language, some loaded with political implications of the past (see, for example, Raymond Williams 1985). As Salmond notes, in 1944 Apirana Ngata had pointed out that although the word 'whakapapa' implied 'papa' layered successively *on top* of one another, when genealogies were written or printed these 'papa' layers were inverted (2013, 20) – one of the meanings Williams overlooked only a few years later. Nevertheless, the gap between these heterogenous meanings as recently as 1957 and the 'generative' and 'cosmogonic' […] encompassing everything there is' meanings of whakapapa reported by Salmond to now be in everyday practice 'especially when used by speakers of Māori' is presented like a paradox begging resolution. Hauiti is furthermore generating a digitalised repository of taonga that encompasses several other traditional arts 'relating to their *whakapapa*' re-conceptualised as themselves

forms of whakapapa, together re-conceptualised digitally as yet another more encompassing form of whakapapa.

The paradoxical gaps opened up between the seven diverse meanings listed in Williams' 1957 edition, current Māori usage as recognised by the line of four anthropological scholars Salmond cites since 1954 (2013, 9), and Hauiti's expanding digital systemisation of radically diverse *mea* (things), all in terms of whakapapa, suggest an important *political* as well as a creative history of the word, perhaps relatively recently.

As mentioned at the outset, Jeffrey Holman has traced in detail the changing meanings of several other important Māori terms designating relatively abstract, metaphysical, or spiritual objects or feelings, as they were defined by Elsdon Best in his ethnographic accounts of the Māori (Holman 2010). Following Best's fascination with certain Māori concepts, Holman's research is focused on such words as *kura huna, wairua, hau, manawa*, and (especially) *mauri*.[4] Holman argues that although Best's intensive fieldwork among the Tūhoe 1895–1907 was admirable in many ways, his evolving definitions of key concepts were guided more by European pre-conceptions than by his informants. Meanwhile, his informants were guided much more by their accommodation or resistance to British colonisation than Best was willing to recognise. Ironically, Holman's careful examination of texts found that by the time the later Māori identity movements began to take shape, many of Best's and his hosts' misleading conclusions had nevertheless become integral to modern versions of essentialised Māori indigeneity, uncritically accepted as authentic or primordial by Māori as well as Pākehā authorities. One of the most important textual mediums of Best's pervasive influence on contemporary authorities is actually Williams' dictionary, which in its 1917 edition credits him with discovery of esoteric meanings of these words (Holman 2007, 334–374; 2010, 239–243).

Holman's study also focuses on the concept of whakapapa, but primarily as the method ('whakapapa-ing') by which Best and his informants explored the metaphysical or religious implications of other concepts (Holman 2007, 128–129; 2010, 133–135). This method was certainly reinforced by the importance of whakapapa in the investigation of land rights for the Urewera District Native Reserve Commission 1899–1907. Since 1895 Best had undertaken intensive field research among the Tūhoe for Percy Smith's ethnological interest in Māori origins and myths. Smith was Surveyor-General and Best worked as a surveyor, but by 1899 they had been appointed chairperson and secretary, respectively, of the Commission. By that time Best had completed an exhaustive census of the Tūhoe, entitled *Genealogies of the Tuhoe Tribe,* that I have found to be extraor-

dinarily consistent and invaluable for reconstructing whakapapa implications of which Best himself was probably unaware (Webster 2017; 2019; forthcoming). Holman discusses how Best's effort to deepen these relatively short genealogies (six to eight generations) with Tutakangahau was pressed by Percy Smith to support his theories of primordial origins, and were eventually used by Best to defend the Io theory that Māori religion was essentially monotheist (2010, 133–135, 188–195, 209–215, 230).

At one point implying that whakapapa was more than a research method, Holman does report that Best saw it 'as a secret key to the mysteries of Māori origins and identity' while his informants, in their modernising interests, steered it toward 'elevating the primal parents, and whakapapa itself, into the sacred regions of the biblical creation account' (Holman 2007, 137–138; 2010, 191–192). This particular description of the reciprocal reinforcement of their respective political interests may be seen to have forecast the all-inclusive cosmological implications of whakapapa in the Hauiti project described by Salmond. Holman points out that this exuberant expression of their generally more routine 'whakapapa-ing' was inspired by widespread Māori interest 1902–1906 to unify and publish tribal whakapapa 'since from the beginning there has existed a primal unity deriving from the parents, Rangi and Papa, from whom are all things' (2010, 191). While the creative overtones were biblical, as well as reflecting a rising Māori identity movement, the political motives probably reacted against the divisive potential of whakapapa, exploited by the Native Land Court to alienate Māori land.

Although this particular instance of Māori creativity and politics may have re-emerged in the Hauiti project, the national efforts of Māori leaders 1902–1906 appear to have gone no further toward an essentialised meaning of whakapapa at that time. The absence of any such influence on the meanings of 'whakapapa' in Williams dictionary, even by 1957, suggests that while Best and his Tūhoe informants may have been developing the cosmological or biblical image of Rangi and Papatūānuku in this thoroughly modern way, the meanings of 'whakapapa' remained mundane as well as diverse.

As will be described below, Holman's argument might be seen by Salmond as over-riding an authentic cultural alterity with its own anthropological or theoretical interests. Nevertheless, one must be given pause by his demonstration of the several ways in which Best's pre-conceptions, hybridised with his informants' quite different but contemporary intentions to which he remained blind, later found their way into fundamental assumptions regarding Māori indigeneity. From this point of view, the Hauiti project might be suspected of

essentialising whakapapa while obscuring the specific political history that has given it the illusion of naturalness, either in its digital form or its recursive ontology – perhaps even fetishising whakapapa as a commodity masquerading as indigenous. Like the surrealist objects Brecht claimed 'do not come back from estrangement', have the indigenist enthusiasms of the Māori identity movement and its patrons made whakapapa into a magical reflection of the objective world?

TE AITANGA A HAUITI'S WHAKAPAPA PROJECT AND ITS WIDER POLITICAL CONTEXT

Although Salmond might be faulted for telescoping the etymology of whakapapa, her further comments on ambiguous tensions among Māori themselves in the contemporary relation between iwi and hapū, and on an impasse between scholarly approaches by Māori and Pākehā to understanding Māori culture, provocatively outline a recent political context that might avoid such a mystification of whakapapa.

The wider political context of Hauiti creativity is further presented by Salmond in terms of the rising importance of 'what counted as an authentic *hapū* or *iwi*' precipitated since the 1980s by the extension of the Waitangi Tribunal's jurisdiction (2013, 23). Against the resulting legalistic or academic evidence raised in this context, Salmond points out that such kinship distinctions have always been 'inherently *relational*, in that what they *are* may differ in the terms of the particular lineage or nexus from which they are apprehended' (2013, 24). She elaborates as follows.

> […] whereas in one instance a switch from, say, a 'Ngāti Porou' to a 'Te Aitanga a Hauiti' identity might be framed as a movement from one *iwi* to another, on other occasions, and from within different positions in that *whakapapa*, it might appear as one from a larger, encompassing federation to a smaller, more *hapu*-like collective. Yet – contrary to anthropological attempts to create stable typologies out of such relations, thus locking down what is, and is not, an 'authentic' iwi or hapu – these were never 'objective', fixed positions or 'worlds' in the first place.

Although popular colonial stereotypes of Māori descent groups have endured, I know of no 'anthropological attempts' since the 1960s to 'lock down' these nonetheless important groupings. But Salmond then admits that Māori themselves have always defended, 'to the death', their own 'locking down what is, and

is not, an "authentic" iwi or hapu' from the point of view of the descent group for which they are speaking.

> The rub is, of course, that in practice those making such claims do not infrequently find themselves in conflict and among the main challenges faced by those operating within *whakapapa*'s terms, *historically and in the present*, has been the difficult (often impossible) task of maintaining such differences in a state of fertile and generative tension. (2013, 24 my italics)

So she appears to admit that not only anthropologists, academics, and lawyers, but also Māori themselves, have long confronted or asserted what are presented as true or false identifications of an iwi or hapū, whether from inside or outside their own normally shifting situational (and often political) affiliation with various descent groups.

Although Salmond does not specifically raise the implications for the Hauiti project, she admits that 'many iwi, furthermore, are themselves riven with disagreements about the degree to which their current leadership are *tūturu* (authentic, representative), or strategic individualists out for personal gain' (2013, 14). While she simply presents Te Aitanga a Hauiti as an 'iwi (tribal kin group) based in Tolaga Bay, East Coast' (2013, 3), it probably has in fact long been involved in such confrontations and doubts about the legitimacy of leaders, either their own or those of iwi attempting to assert influence over them. Insofar as whakapapa is central in identification of hapū, iwi and their interrelationships, the presentation of Hauiti whakapapa, digital or otherwise, would necessarily have been confrontational in the same ways. In the case of their particular whakapapa project, which may have encouraged the above 'state of fertile and generative tension' 'to reproduce and extend itself' (2013, 7), this may have reflected ambition to gain independence from a dominant iwi or confirm their own iwi status. As with her telescoped account of the meaning of the word whakapapa, Salmond may have overlooked political implications behind Te Aitangi a Hauiti's own assumed status as an iwi, including implications upon which their whakapapa project is based.

My own research has documented the usually sincere but intrinsically subversive government sponsorship of iwi status since the 1980s. Because the status of iwi traditionally implies the subordination of constituent hapū that accept its dominance (usually ambivalently), and because official recognition as an iwi often confers government influence on this iwi status, there has been a rapid proliferation of hapū claiming iwi status in response to the settlement of Māori

claims to treaty rights in the commercial fisheries as well as Waitangi Tribunal claims. Whereas in 1974 there were about forty-two commonly recognised iwi, by early 1998 there were about fifty-five, by later that year seventy-eight were officially recognised by the Māori fisheries commission, and by 2001 ninety-five iwi had been recognised in the official census (Webster 2002, 351–352). In this, and previous articles since 1975, I had furthermore argued that, quite unlike hapū, iwi historically had often been opportunistic adaptations of whakapapa responding to traditional Māori initiatives, as well as those of the colonial or national government. As of 1974, Ngāti Porou and perhaps Rongowhakāta were the only commonly recognised iwi based in the Tolaga Bay area of the East Coast, so it appears likely that Te Aitanga a Hauiti has gained or claimed its iwi status more recently (it has been recognised as an iwi in the New Zealand census since 2001, when this data began to be collected).

More directly implicating what Salmond only hypothetically mentions as Hauiti's 'movement from one *iwi* to another' or 'from a larger, encompassing federation to a smaller, more *hapu*-like collective' is the research of Fiona McCormack among the East Coast Māori where Hauiti is also located. Her account of the Ngāti Porou, Whānau a Apanui, and Ruawaipu iwi details the restive status of hapū arbitrarily subordinated to them (and Ruawaipu to Ngāti Porou) by the fisheries or tribunal settlements (McCormack 2011; 2012). These confrontations are furthermore posed in terms of whakapapa:

> At the time of my fieldwork a formally conceived hapu of Ngati Porou had emerged as an autonomous political grouping and a second was in the process of being established. Both groups base this splintering on claims of prior occupation and have constructed genealogies that link back to alternative founding ancestors. (2011, 296; also see 2012, 426)

Although McCormack emphasises the liberal cultural intentions, but subversive neoliberal political-economic results, of these government policies, she acknowledges the progressive initiatives that Māori nevertheless are able to take in particular situations and concludes that 'although indigeneity may potentially co-opt neoliberal spaces, there are costs associated with this engagement' (2012, 281). McCormack has also examined the parallel political, economic, and cultural forces at play in Waitangi Tribunal proceedings on marae, concluding that 'the contradictory spaces opened for indigeneity under neoliberal governance and their unintended consequences, inventions, and creative hybridizations' that nevertheless emerge from such encounters may favour Māori as well as government interests (2016, 226).

As mentioned above, in an earlier essay I described the approach of McCormack to Māori indigeneity in the context of neoliberal governance (Webster 2016). In the fraught political context, where the traditional aspiration of hapū to be recognised as independent iwi is aggravated by neoliberal governance and associated struggles for power, the opportunities available to Te Aitanga a Hauiti's whakapapa project may have reinforced such aspirations. Emphasising my appreciation of the way McCormack's critique of both indigeneity and neoliberal policies accept the outcome of their confrontations as unpredictable, I urged her to analyse these processes in the light of Marx's dual form of fetishised commodities which guided Benjamin and Adorno in their avant-garde critique of surrealism.

Here I would urge the same dialectical insight, or at least McCormack's less doctrinaire form of open-ended critique of Māori indigeneity under neoliberal governance, on Salmond's recursive ontological ethnography of Hauiti's whakapapa project. Far from encompassing Māori goals with irrelevant social theory, precisely because their status as iwi or hapū is 'in a state of fertile and generative tension', it might support their cultural creativity in ways that enable them to gain further independence from the subtle dominance of neoliberal governance. Māori themselves have long distinguished the illusory and interchangeable appearance of fetishised commodities and alienated persons from real or tūturu things and persons (the oft-quoted proverb *he aha te mea nui? he tangata, he tangata, he tangata* can be translated as 'what is the most important thing? a human being, a human being, a human being'). Indeed, having survived the brunt of colonisation, some Māori may be more perceptive in this regard than some Pākehā.

Salmond also comments on a range to contemporary scholarly or government understandings of Māori identity, again suggesting Graeber's paradox between creativity and politics. She critically notes a long-standing confrontation in 'debates […] [inside or] outside the academy, in national politics and in inter- and intra-iwi tensions' specifying a current 'conceptual opposition of timeless cultural integrity on one hand and strategic cultural identity construction on the other' (2013, 14–15). Significantly, she adds that 'Among my aims here is to test how a recursive approach to ethnography might help to address this impasse […]' (p. 15).

The Hauiti example of a recursive approach to ethnography obviously discredits traditionalist assumptions of a 'timeless cultural integrity', whether scholarly or governing, through its boundless creativity as a 'generative cosmology'. Salmond devotes most of her criticisms to a range of anthropological or scholarly

positions (including mine) for the self-serving implications of their 'strategic cultural identity constructions' or their academic detachment from the actual situation of Māori (2013, 6, 12, 13–14, 17, 22, 23). While traditionalist assumptions may be more or less transparent, this pole of the problematic conceptual opposition is often opaque. One might suppose that as well as the strategies Holman revealed in Best's, and more contemporary identity constructions of Māori by Pākehā (including Holman's own), comparable strategies might be identified in the adaptive or resistant identity constructions of Best's Tūhoe informants, and the later Māori intellectuals who accepted as authentic the resulting hybrid identity constructed between them. But then one must suppose that some contemporary traditionalists or defenders of alternative strategic cultural identity constructions, Māori as well as Pākehā (for instance, asserting alternative whakapapa in defense of their own iwi), may see the Hauiti whakapapa project as itself a strategic cultural identity construction.

The origins of the cosmological understanding of whakapapa that Salmond counterposes to this impasse are similarly selective and eclectic. In support of her report that 'from the beginning ethnographers and Māori have noted its centrality to every aspect of Māori existence' and that 'a number of anthropologists have observed […] *whakapapa* is […] of cosmogonic proportions encompassing everything there is […]', she cites Prytz-Johansen in 1954, Marshall Sahlins in 1985, Anne Salmond in 1991, and Paul Tapsell in 1997 (2013, 9). The insights of these four anthropologists might be seen to be collegial insofar as Sahlins was an influential admirer of of Prytz-Johansen's work, Anne Salmond's work was significantly influenced by Sahlins' structuralist theory, Tapsell was a student of Anne Salmond's at University of Auckland (and Ameria Salmond, the author of this essay, is Anne Salmond's daughter). As an internationally influential Polynesianist, Sahlins' structuralist interests were pervasive at University of Auckland in Anne Salmond's time, drawing several other Māori as well as Pākehā specialists in Māori culture into his postmodernist form of structuralist history (Webster 1989; 1998, 238–239).

Prytz-Johansen, in the first lines of the first chapter of the work Salmond cites, does extol Māori *kinship* as cosmological: 'The whole cosmos of the Māori unfolds itself as a gigantic "kin", in which heaven and earth are first parents of all beings and things, such as the sea, the sand on the beach, the wood, the birds, and man' (1954, 1). However, nowhere else in the two chapters devoted to kinship and ancestors (Ch. 1 and 7) does he return to this characterisation, instead using these words 'kin' or 'genealogy' in their ordinary English senses. The word 'whakapapa' appears only once in these chapters (1954, Ch. 1 p. 13), not with regard to the cosmos of Māori kin, but in the citation of a source in

Māori (*kei he nga whakapapa*, translated as 'lest it be said our genealogical descent has erred'). Surely 'whakapapa' cannot be casually conflated with this one description of Māori 'kin' without careful argument. Nevertheless, Prytz-Johansen's introductory flourish with regard to kinship appears to have been sufficient for Sahlins and his followers to later assume he was really describing whakapapa. Conveniently, this repeated assumption may have also laid a promisingly structuralist groundwork for Hauiti's systematic digitalisation of whakapapa. In view of Holman's reconsideration of the assumed pre-contact authenticity of esoteric Māori concepts derived from Best, it is significant that Prytz-Johansen often relied on Best and Percy Smith for his own understanding of such concepts.

Salmond is also inclined to reject the work of scholars who tend to be 'based outside New Zealand' and use 'various brands of political-economic theory' to explain what they see as forms of neo-tribalisation or decolonisation in the Māori identity movement (2013, 13). Against these scholars (I am one of the three cited, although based in Auckland since 1972), Salmond favours students of Māori culture '(Māori and non-Māori)' who reside in New Zealand and talk to, rather than about, Māori, many of whom 'have since become oriented toward indigenous activism, maintaining a strong focus on the "decolonization" of scholarship' especially that attributed to anthropology. She avoids the reactionary nativism implied here with a footnote emphasising that 'of course' not all scholars based outside of New Zealand are political-economic critics of the decolonising movement, favourably citing among them four Pākehā academics (Haidy Geismar, Ilana Gershon, Daniel Rosenblatt, and Gregory Schrempp). It must also be noted that two anthropologists whom Salmond cites as first to appreciate the cosmogonic proportions of whakapapa were not New Zealanders (Prytz-Johanson was a Dane and Sahlins is a United States of America 'American') while only one is ethnically Māori (Tapsell). It is also comforting that although 'in New Zealand, and especially among Māori, the discipline of anthropology has long been regarded with considerable suspicion' (2013, 12), all these scholars, like Salmond herself, are anthropologists as well as Pākehā.

Alongside the patrons of Māori indigeneity that Salmond accepts I must admit that she has a point, and that I may owe them, as well as some Māori 'activists' a cultural cringe. While the range of political-economic or historical critics of Māori indigeneity is wide, including reactionary as well as revolutionary activists (and often welcomed by the equally wide range of Māori activism), I do find myself among a lot of long-resident foreigners who cannot even claim to be Pākehā, in its apparently authentic nativist sense. As we were warned by our British immigrant hosts when we immigrated from the United States of

America in 1972 (they had come in the 1950s), we might never be accepted as real New Zealanders by some Pākehā (however, Māori, as is their etiquette especially with foreigners, have invariably welcomed us on their marae and furthermore patiently indulged our naivete).

On the other hand, the Salmonds' own Pākehā whakapapa would enjoy mana and virtual *tūrangawaewae*, proud 'standing-room', on any marae in the country. Ameria is closely bound with Māori through her great-great grandfather and his leadership in the Dominion Museum, her mother Anne (who is fluent in the language) and their extended family from Gisborne, and her well-known Māori god-parents, from whom she derives her name, Ameria (2013, 7). The dramatic ethnographic form described earlier with which Salmond introduces her account of Te Aitanga a Hauiti, includes these biographical details as part of an account of her family's ceremonial (and filmed) *haerenga* (journey) to the iwi settlement of Uawa, Tolaga Bay. Implicitly paralleling Cook's encounter with 'these bones' and later visits to Tolaga Bay, this journey recalled the earlier Dominion Museum expedition that had been organised in 1923 by Apirana Ngata, ancestor of their contemporary host and chairperson of Toi Hauiti, and which included Salmond's great-great grandfather (and probably Elsdon Best as well). However, I have also learned from Tūhoe Māori that mana or true nobility is humble, and respect for mana is *toa* or forthright and brave. More prosaically, in pursuit of the truth, it has been said that if it is not given due respect, it will turn around 'and bite you on the ass' (personal communication 1983, Rongonui Tahi translating the rangatira Hikawera Te Kurapa's advice regarding oral tradition).

CONCLUSION

Some of us, on the other side of Ameria Salmond's discriminations between scholarly approaches to the contemporary Māori, might reject their ethnic, nativist, or nationalist undertones, and even find them patronising of Māori. Nevertheless, she makes a good case that the impasse between what she approximates as a 'conceptual opposition of timeless cultural integrity on one hand and strategic cultural identity construction on the other' is '[…] mutually unintelligible – even untranslatable – in the sense that neither seems able to take the other's claims seriously' (2013, 13). Insofar as there is no assumption that Māori (or Pākehā 'oriented toward indigenous activism') somehow escape this dilemma, I would agree. Nevertheless, I would argue that the ontological turn in ethnography, perhaps especially the recursive reform of it Salmond introduces with the example of the Hauiti whakapapa project, continues to straddle this impasse. But, unlike alternative forms of the ontological turn from which she

has distanced herself, her's cannot be dismissed as 'essentially a form of philosophical Idealism', as does Graeber (2015, 3) because it is inextricably bound up with the insightful paradox of creativity and politics that he has developed.

If the relatively parochial impasse of theory regarding contemporary Māori identity that Salmond poses is seen in the broader context of this paradox, a deeper continuity can be seen between the other-worldly representations of the Hauiti whakapapa project and the modernist avantgarde's critique of the surrealist movement. Such a critique of misleadingly essentialised or mystified expressions of Māori indigeneity may have more 'capacity for political mobilization in solidarity with ethnographic subjects of all kinds' which Salmond herself seeks. I can see a range of promising results for which the Māori, as survivors of colonial settler capitalism, have long been prepared.

In immediate practical terms, the approach offered by McCormack's analysis of Māori indigeneity under neoliberal governance could result in the exposure, or even co-optation, of subversive but well-meaning government, academic, or dominant iwi patronage. Perhaps closer to the root of the problem, Graeber's understanding of the creative potential of pre-capitalist commodity fetishism could complement my critique of its fully capitalist form: together they offer possibilities of liberation from Māori alienation by creatively recovering the social basis of ordinary daily labour from its fetishised exchange value. As participants in union movements, as well as the workers who built New Zealand agriculture and industry, Māori have long experience in this sort of confrontation. Graeber's example of African fetishes turned creatively to the concrete political advantage of their practitioners as trade contracts dates back even further. I have documented how the Tuhoe turned whakapapa from potential government misuse to their own political advantage in the early 1900s, at least for a short while (Webster 2013; 2017; forthcoming, Vol.1).

Perhaps, in this era of reactionary neoliberalism rampant behind the subtleties of its global penetration, these approaches need to be backed by less confrontational forms of rebellious indigeniety. Perhaps, like the avantgarde critique of surrealism in the previous gilded age of high capitalism and its reactionary resort to fascism, aesthetic forms serve more discreetly to probe its vulnerable boundaries. So, like Brecht's, Benjamin's and Adorno's use of stage, literary, and visual forms, Salmond and the ontological developments of experimental ethnography do best to expose in art forms the illusions and lived contradictions of our times. Like Adorno's immanent critique of commodity forms through the rag-pickers of Baudelaire's Paris, the surreal digital cosmology of the Hauiti project might ethnographically expose the commodification of corporatised

iwi and thereby subvert that power to their own use. Breaking out of such self-contained narrative form, Benjamin's more open-ended 'empathy with the soul of the commodity' can provocatively outline these stark contradictions but leave their resolution to be pursued by participants who live these contradictions, as only they can, 'having the pleasure of unfolding the paper boat in the palm of their own hands'.

On the other hand, misleading essentialisations or mystifications of Māori indigeniety may continue to lie stillborn with the unfinished avant-garde critique of surrealism. There, through an 'irremediable coupling of idealistic morality with political practice […] characteristic of this whole left-wing bourgeois position', like Bataille's surrealist critique of surrealism, it may best be understood in contrast to the helpless compromises of liberal sentiment and guilt.

NOTES

1   Steven Webster is an Honorary Research Fellow in Social Anthropology at The University of Auckland, New Zealand, where he taught from 1972–1998, before retiring. He completed his PhD in cultural anthropology at the University of Washington, Seattle, immigrated with his family to Auckland in 1972, gained New Zealand citizenship in 1984, and continues to live in Ponsonby, Auckland with his family. His teaching specialisation since the 1980s has been ethnic politics, Māori land history, treaty rights, and political economy. He began field research with Ngāi Tūhoe iwi of Māori in 1972, and continues research in their ethnohistory, especially political economic implications of their kinship organisation. Between 1995 and 2001 he taught as a visitor at University of Washington, Seattle and Tacoma, Northwest Indian Tribal College, Tacoma, and Princeton University, New Jersey. In 2004 he completed ethnohistorical research for the Waitangi Tribunal on the Urewera Consolidation Scheme 1915–1926.
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2   The following synopsis of my main argument in 1990 draws primarily on the following sources (Webster 1990, 280): Walter Benjamin's original essay on Baudelaire (1973), his *Passagenarbeit* as presented with commentaries in Livingstone *et al.* (1977, 100–141), and analyses by Susan Buck-Morss (1977, 136–184) and Robert L. Kauffmann (1981). As detailed in Webster (1990), all quotations here are drawn from these sources.

3   Both of the following sections make very frequent reference to Part 1 of Amiria Salmond's essay (2013). In order to avoid overloading readers with citations for every quotatation, many of her phrases reappear verbatim in single quotes but

are cited by page number only in their first few appearances. These quotations are all drawn only from Part 1 of her essay (2013), but are often crucial to my argument as well as hers. It is hoped that the reader will readily recognise these key but uncited phrases and, if necessary, be able to find their initial citation by page number in the previous paragraphs.

4   Ryan's *Dictionary of Modern Māori* (1995) defines *kura* as 'school' and (separately) *huna* as 'conceal, moon night 11 … clandestine'; *wairua* as 'attitude, mood, spirit, soul, moss …'; *hau* as 'wind, air, atmosphere, famous, fraction, … soul, essence'; *manawa* as 'heart, breath, emotion, bowels'; and *mauri* as 'life principle, special character, moon or night 28, talisman'. The influence of the Williams dictionary (and thus perhaps of Best) on these definitions would be significant, but in the interest of simplicity and popular accessibility are not traced by Ryan.

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