

# A Counter-Colonial Speculation on Elizabeth Rata's -ism

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*In Maori thought, the possibility exists for a sort of lateral thinking that does not necessarily directly respond to another's utterance or opinion but that considers some of the creative and arbitrary themes that arise. In this article, I employ this counter-colonial speculation, keeping in mind a Maori worldview whilst thinking in the wake of Elizabeth Rata's "Ethnic Ideologies in New Zealand Education: What's Wrong with Kaupapa Maori?" The speculative powers that Maori have at our disposal here have undoubtedly been employed in a number of ways throughout Maori history; here, I use them in a way that does not directly respond to a prompt. Although Rata's true aim is to critique kaupapa Maori, she inadvertently brings my attention to a particular characteristic of her writing—the suffix -ism. The fact that it saturates her writing in this article leads me to consider the broader issues associated with instrumentalist language, and the impact of the -ism on a Maori relationship with things in the world. It emerges that, although Rata may be controversial for Maori in her views, her writing is useful for some unintended reasons, as it prompts some thinking around the appropriateness of the -ism for Maori.*

Keywords: Rata, Maori, worldview, language, -ism, kaupapa Maori

## 1 Introduction

Those of us working in the academy are bound by the constraints of research outputs, that much is for sure, but for the indigenous scholar this dilemma has its perverse enchantments. It means that the indigenous scholar must encounter wildly racist or Eurocentric statements more frequently. There seems little comfort in the fact those sorts of utterances flourish—and we probably shouldn't laugh—but from my perspective there is a sense of joy about them because their writers are almost helpless as they give vent. Whilst it would be more appropriate that we express sympathy for those who are so thoroughly weighed down by the burden of racist thinking that they cannot help expressing it, there is also every reason to rejoice at the fact that we exist enough in their consciousness for them to feel the discomfort they need to feel. But they serve a more important function than just *Schadenfreude*: they open up possibilities for our own, indigenous thinking. In some cases, there may be a sort of truth to what they say insofar as they reveal the potential for a more creative process of speculation. Of course, how each individual indigenous scholar decides to respond is up to them and their communities. It is with a particular kind of ebullience, and with a critical ontology in mind—and here I draw

on the terminology and concept of Kincheloe (2011)<sup>1</sup>—that I adopt a *counter-colonial* response to one article by a New Zealand academic, Elizabeth Rata<sup>2</sup>.

Much of Rata's work reacts to the concept and practice of '*kaupapa Maori*.' Kaupapa Maori is a generic phrase that captures a Maori way of theorizing and researching. Rata's (2006)<sup>3</sup> 'Ethnic Ideologies in New Zealand Education: What's Wrong with *Kaupapa Maori*?' attempts to critique *kaupapa Maori* and invokes some of the delight I allude to above. It will undoubtedly strike many Maori audiences as racist, yet it is (in my view, at least) amusing for its attempts at being rational through academic language; it uses sensationalistic terminology, but inspires a critique that is meaningful from a Maori perspective; and it both races over key in-depth Maori concepts and nevertheless attracts Maori attention for that very hastiness. I hone in on her article by articulating how it is productive, whilst keeping at the forefront a Maori worldview, by referring to the *-ism* that arises so frequently in this work. Upon reading the article, one finds that the certainty of the *-ism* is peppered throughout the article. It is a suffix that tends to stabilize meaning and, from a Maori perspective, simultaneously evens out things in the world. Of course, my approach requires that I take into account my subjectivity, which is a self-reflexive part of any writing that Rata may well suggest needs to be left out of academic text. I therefore acknowledge my own biases in this article: they are, that I probably pay much more attention to the assumptions underpinning Rata's language and argument more than I normally would, because I am keen to critique it; and also I recognize and give credence to a Maori realm of mystery that her article disdains. As I show, however, I am grateful to Rata for having added to the huge stockpiles of literature that the era of publishing does encourage, as her article is perhaps more beneficial than most. With that aim in mind, I start by discussing what I mean by 'counter-colonial speculation' and highlight the lateral thinking that it attends to (Section 2). I then show how it brings to my regard some issues that Maori should address, with the *-ism* at the forefront of that discussion (Section 3). Finally, it becomes clear that we should embrace the scholarship of Rata's ilk, as even those works that we take most exception to on behalf of our communities can be extremely useful for our own, culturally appropriate theorizing.

## 2 Counter-Colonial Speculation

Before I move to Rata's article, however, I consider what I mean by 'counter-colonial.' It can mean many things, but I suggest it essentially refers to the need for thinking that reflects a cultural metaphysics of the writer's group whilst reacting to another's voice. This voice need not be from outside of the writer's group—after all, sometimes some quite reactive material emerges from one's own membership—but generally it does originate from foreign authors and speakers. Kincheloe (2011) also discusses this ontological critique but rather than emphasizing the brush with the other as helpful in itself, he instead prefers to think of critical ontology as an assessment of the assumptions underpinning commonsense. It should be made clear that in both my and Kincheloe's (2011) versions, it is important to critique the basis of assertions from the vantage point of one's own worldview; in my approach, however, I also advocate that the thinker can deliberately encounter and respond to the opposite of his or her own ontology. In some cases, this is a necessary part of counter-colonial thinking because some worldviews have strong oppositional narratives and metaphysical entities in their creation stories. So, for instance, in Maori philosophical thought there exists voidness that is both complementary and contrary to the positive nature of an entity (Mika 2012)<sup>4</sup>. Not only does this metaphysics reference cosmogony, it additionally imposes its dually negative and present signature on thinking and one's engagement with, and assessment of, phenomena. It indicates that one must grapple with an issue in synchronicity with thinking that looks to otherness; it tries to sustain the ontology of uncertainty that Mika

(2012) argues Maori privilege (and that thus resists making final statements about an issue, preferring instead to leave the theme open for continuing debate without trying to alight on a permanent, ultimate ground); and, whilst it concerns itself with abstract matters, it sees this aspect of existence as one that is immediately socially based as well.

### *A Counter-Colonial Ontological Approach Through Language*

A Maori counter-colonial approach hence reads an assertion that is made in literature through holistic eyes, and assesses whether it supports, or derogates from, that worldview of holistic oneness. It becomes necessary to think about the role of language here, especially the nature of language itself because, as we shall see, terms disclose the invisible worlds as much as the realms of presence. Very little in Maori circles has generated as much heated discussion as language. The widespread detriment to the Maori language has been well documented<sup>5</sup> and need not be recounted here, but the attempts of modernity to extinguish Maori philosophies of language—to prevent thought on what the essence is of language, along with its relationship is to other things in the world, and to threaten a Maori approach to these issues—have not been so thoroughly explored. Language loss and philosophical assault are both brutal and may indeed be related but the latter one is submerged within much more essential and hidden recesses and so tends to be glossed over. Yet it may well have been the Maori practice of calling language a spiritual phenomenon (Pere 1982; Browne 2005)<sup>6</sup> that modernity found especially threatening, because it is so intimately linked to some general primordial fears that the West has held about Maori, one of which is that they tend to be inextricably linked to nature and the unknown. Throughout colonized nations in general, an ousting of other knowledge forms would inevitably follow (Te Awakotuku 1991; Laduke 1999; Wilmer 1993)<sup>7</sup>, including those that held fast to a holistic belief about language and its world.

This postcolonial condition of the West rests alongside some dominant philosophical assumptions. Obviously care must be exercised when using ‘West’ as a homogenizing term. Cohen (1999: 209)<sup>8</sup>, for instance, highlights the diversity in Western thought when he examines the expulsion of Spanish philosophy, and scathingly asserts that “the English, in particular, set their grey, cold, pinched faces against [the vital importance of subjectivity], and proclaimed instead the centrality of ‘analysis’ and importance of detachment.” Certainly the analytic method of philosophy, in which Maori notions of language as an otherworldly event would also be sidelined, contributes to the problem (for indigenous peoples at least) of modernity. Indeed, the insertion of the human self into all possible affairs resides at base of most practices, with Ball (1990)<sup>9</sup> showing that even innate to the language of education—a seemingly innocuous branch of practice and thought—there exists a deep link with discipline and forcing learning into a child. At the heart of these and other sorts of practices in modernity is an obsession with what the mind can conceive of, and what will (and will not) inevitably amount to a neat package of knowledge.

Modernity, if thought of as a bundle of ideas that sets the human self at the center of the entire world, may be attributed to Descartes (Bowers 2007)<sup>10</sup>, but in fact Plato was responsible for clearing the path for the former’s thinking. Placing the rational faculty of the mind at center would also become a mainstay of language philosophy in the West, with the 18<sup>th</sup> century heralding a view of language as instrument through the minds of Locke, Hobbes and Condillac (Taylor 1995)<sup>11</sup>. Descartes’ project of the strong self would be emphasized; in this positing of language, terms “are given meaning by being attached to the things represented via the ideas that represent them” (Taylor 1995: 102). Language is therefore entirely self-driven and gains its validity from the truth of the ideas to which it attaches; modernity is glossy and uniform (Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew & Hunt

2015)<sup>12</sup>, and language contributes to its faultlessness in its economical representation of the world, conducted by the ascendant self.

What was perhaps most challenging for the colonizer, who directed the rudder of modernity full tilt at indigenous peoples, was the latter's sustained, stubborn belief that the world was not in fact fragmented but something other than that, and did not entirely originate from human beings. Far from being a spiritual event, language as an autonomous yet occasionally human phenomenon was attributed to the everyday, and indeed may still participate in a sort of mystery despite the influence of modernity on Maori. Thus, a Maori ontological approach to language might focus on a single term and appraise it according to whether it supports this correspondence with mystery or, instead, whether it aims to single out the world with complete precision. Unlike dominant forms of critical discourse analysis, which tend to view categories as socially constructed (Wood, and Kroger 2000)<sup>13</sup>, a Maori counter-colonial rendering will posit the language that gives rise to various expressions as already having a life-force of its own. This proposition about language as one entity of many, where language would ordinarily have been described as merely a linguistic tool, sits well with Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008:151)<sup>14</sup>, who argue:

[I]t appears that Cartesian-Newtonian-Baconian epistemologies and many indigenous knowledge systems differ in the very way they define life—moving, thus, from the epistemological to the ontological realm [...]. Many indigenous peoples have traditionally seen all life on the planet as so multidimensionally entwined that they have not been so quick to distinguish the living from the non-living [...]. [T]he Andean peasants' and other indigenous people's belief that the rivers, mountains, land, soil, lakes, rocks, and animals are sentient may not be as preposterous as Westerners first perceived it.

It also resonates with Maori academic Rose Pere (1982: 54), who noted of traditional times that “nothing was done or attempted without some thought being given to the spiritual side of things.” Language is thus an entity as real and vibrant as any other, human or non-human. In that reading, a term will carry its own particular disclosure of the world by virtue of its life-force, perhaps to be apprehended alongside its subsequent social construction but not to be supplanted by the latter. To ascertain the relationship of a term to a metaphysics of holism, the Maori counter-colonialist may look to the etymology of a term and consider that term's origins in relation to what it primordially proposes for Maori holism. He or she may then speculate on the progress of that term through history but always with an unswerving regard for its innate characteristics. Because a term reverberates with its own worlded properties (Mika 2013; Raerino 2000)<sup>15</sup>, it will expose itself according to how it intends to reveal phenomena in the world. Whilst from a Maori perspective it is true that language itself has a life-force, this essence is most likely varied from term to term, and it is the task of the Maori counter-colonial thinker to approach the term with an open mind but to remain on guard as to its ability to reflect a Maori worldview. Thus, the self should be capable of theorizing on how a particular term accrues meaning to it throughout the history of its use *and* on the way it more essentially opens up a certain materiality of the world. Importantly, as Kincheloe (2011) notes, there are also indigenous propositions that need to be critiqued; here, one may be called to theorize on the impact of, say, the colonizing translation or intended meaning of a Maori term on the Maori term itself. This latter instance has rather tricky implications and involves a good deal of tact on the part of the counter-colonialist as he or she remains uncertain in their evaluation and attempts to protect the nature of the term whilst critiquing its possible colonization.

Alongside the fine granularity of the term (both spoken and written), chunks of both sorts of text also have their own consequences for a Maori ontology. Here, there is another origin of sorts to attend to but it is up to the Maori counter-colonial reader to ascertain the crux of what is being said, or to reveal the true intent

of the colonialist writer. The Maori reader will then look to various philosophical and historical texts to affirm the ontology of that distilled assumption. In that sense, the exercise is not too different from a Foucaultian excavation into “the subsoil of our modern consciousness” (Foucault 1998: 263)<sup>16</sup>; however, as a Maori critic in this method I would then have to consider the possibility that the discourse being promoted is entitized with its own solid properties and materiality (Mika, and Stewart 2015)<sup>17</sup>. I would also have to be aware that proposing something in opposition to that discourse carries with it the responsibility of bringing that counter-proposition to life: language materializes things and their worlds, including ideas and discourses (*ibid*). There are hence ethical (from a Maori perspective) possibilities to speculate about: these can either be voiced directly in the text or retained as a focus whilst I am writing.

In both cases—the etymology of the term and/or the fragment of intention that is excavated from a tract of writing—the Maori counter-colonialist may at some stage leave them to discuss further aspects of them or to oppose them. In other words, I may not simply react to or with Rata; I would stay near her for a while but then move away, while keeping her text in mind. It is to Rata’s “Ethnic Ideologies in New Zealand Education: What’s Wrong with Kaupapa Maori?” that I now turn, intending as I do to both review her work and to explore the tensions that her work brings about for my discussion, through her continued use of the *-ism* (Rata 2006).

### 3 Counter-Colonialising Rata’s *-ism*

Rata’s fundamental position is that *kaupapa Maori*, which can economically be thought of as an articulation of a Maori way of knowing and being, is an ideology that does not serve the interests of Maori generally but instead merely assists what she terms “the neotribal capitalist elite” (2006: 29). Thus there is an agenda at work with *kaupapa Maori* that she aims to identify in the article. She argues that the motive for *kaupapa Maori* comprises four significant aspects: that it is aimed at delineating a boundary between what she terms “ethnic” groups; that it is premised on the belief that there is a disadvantage experienced by Maori in the face of Pakeha oppression; that it seeks to validate genuinely Maori “ways of knowing” (*ibid*: 30); and that a sort of “cultural idealism” (*ibid*.) results in which the lived reality of what *kaupapa Maori* is meant to represent is not, in fact, reflected.

In the first flaw she identifies, she argues that a major problem exists in *kaupapa Maori* because it “promotes ethnic primordialism” (*ibid*: 29). With this first critique, she asserts that *kaupapa Maori*, as a framework of theories, draws a sharp distinction between Maori and non-Maori. *Kaupapa Maori*, according to her, justifies the establishment of separate Maori educational institutions, which are not as successful as they are often maintained to be. But she continues that this delineation between Maori and non-Maori is unreasonable for two main reasons: first, that most Maori are not sending their children to these Maori learning institutions; and secondly, that most Maori now have a significant amount of non-Maori heritage. The second major flaw that she argues against is actually based on the first. In this problem, Maori and non-Maori are pitted “against each other” (*ibid*: 33) because *kaupapa Maori* positions Maori as the “victims of structural socio-economic injustice” (*ibid*). Her suggestion here is that *kaupapa Maori* conveniently identifies the problem and then puts itself forward as the solution. The third flaw could perhaps be seen as an extension of the others, because, according to Rata, a primordially, or fundamentally Maori “way of knowing” (*ibid*: 30) comes forward as especially important. Here, she compares *kaupapa Maori* to a number of other traditions—German Romanticism, Nazism, and Hinduism—apparently because of their tendency to hark back to a ground of true authenticity. Fourth, *kaupapa Maori* does not lend itself to the critique of Maori ideas, as they are posited as being continuous. Thus, according to her, the reality of a changing culture is not reflected in *kaupapa Maori*.



### *The Problem of the -ism*

Rata's article is replete with -isms. We see mention of fundamentalism, neo-Marxism, idealism, primordialism, German romanticism among others<sup>18</sup>. Although these terms comprise a useful shorthand for denoting an abstract tendency that we all—particularly those of us who are part of the inner sanctum of the apparently highly educated—are meant to understand, dealing with ideologies by grouping them together and then declaring their seeming predominance in a person's or culture group's thought can be a dangerous act. To begin with, there is an obvious problem in the fact that there is no one 'Romanticism' or 'idealism,' and certainly no uniform 'primordialism.' Riding thoughtlessly over the subtleties and nuances of a discipline is not normally carried out so lightly and unboundedly in academic work. Presumably in order to convey her concern at what she sees as a Maori academic tendency to limit a Maori approach to those of Maori ancestry, Rata does indeed seem to find it necessary to resort to the -ism: all of 'romanticism,' 'fundamentalism,' 'idealism' and 'primordialism' are recounted as examples to explain her view that Maori academics disdain critiques by non-Maori of *kaupapa Maori*. All of these terms might just as well be explained by the phrase 'cultural integrity.' Rata really means that Maori refer their arguments back to a notion of 'Blood and Soil' to evade critiques from outside the cultural group. However, this Maori primordialism is not born of the same cultural background as the German romanticism; although they may both emphasize what is authentically valid for the cultural group, they are both tied up with quite different cultural realities, with the former practicing their cultural values in ways that would defy modernity, and the latter distinctive for its myriad of theories *against* a dominant modernity. Each has different consequences because of their respective versions of primordialism, with primordialism hence deserving specific explanations.

Rata is not entirely incorrect in her use of primordialism, though. There is indeed a form of primordialism at work, but the term must be branched out from because it is context- and culture-specific. Thus, her use of the term is problematic from a Maori perspective. With our critical ontology in mind, what becomes more interesting is not so much the political validity of the terms and their distinctive meanings and repercussions but, instead, whether Maori thought is served by the practice of attaching an -ism to a particular phenomenon. Rata would undoubtedly not have been concerned with this side issue, but in counter-colonial Maori thinking we are led down these sorts of lateral pathways by the appearance of the words themselves, and by the impact of subterranean messages that the text brings with itself. In that light, I would question the -ism with a further speculation: what are the consequences of grouping ideas—which are meant to be living, vibrant entities—together? Here we are considering, with a view to producing thought somewhat divergent to a direct response to Rata, a thoroughly new proposition: that Maori thought is possibly not well served by the -ism. It is likely that Maori do not refer to thoughts and discourses as transparent, cognitive enterprises, and instead propose that they are equally as material as what are commonly posited, in the West, as tangible, concrete elements (Mika, and Stewart 2015). In Maori thought, ideas have their own genealogy to various entities (Mika, and Tiakiwai 2016; see also Royal 2012)<sup>19</sup>, and they are so precious that they contain all other aspects of the world to them. As entities themselves, ideas were not primarily sourced in the mind but, according to Smith (2000)<sup>20</sup>, in the entrails. Ideas were *explained* with this corporeal link, however, without limiting their fully numinous character. In other words, ideas are like all other things in the world and are interlocked with all other things to culminate in what are fundamentally unknowable phenomena. But even more importantly, the -ism does something to all those things. Somewhat contrary to the Maori worldview, the -ism treats items as featherweight, capable of being grouped together. Its etymological force is to make the phenomena it refers to, firm (Kitis, and Kitis 2015)<sup>21</sup>.

This theorizing around the *-ism* only goes partway toward explaining how the latter is detrimental to any aspect of Maori existence. To understand how any representation impacts on the external world (and indeed on the self), we need to revisit an even broader Maori metaphysics. Maori notions of wellbeing are connected to the idea that all things in the world are *one*: Durie's (1994)<sup>22</sup> model of the *whare tapa wha* (house with four walls), for instance, explains this holistic nature of health, although in different terms. Further, all things culminate in all other things and are thoroughly active. It is highly likely that traditional Maori belief had no concept of fixity, and any suggestion of such may well have been met with perplexity by the holders of that belief. As it stands, my explanation is an abstract one, and if we put it through some radical paces then it becomes apparent that holism refers also to the *impactful* collapse between the human self, the world, and an idea. If, as Mika (2015)<sup>23</sup> has suggested, Maori traditional belief privileged a view of life-force inscribed in all things so that they were able to appear in their own way, according to their own methods of self-arrangement, then, presumably, ignoring that flux by approaching the world as if it is static would have some harmful consequences. In that process the delicate interplay of entities as they manifest and withdraw within any one thing is possibly overridden. With the grouping that *-ism* intends, things in the world are not *self*-grouping but instead herded together. Representing them in such a thoroughgoing way, as if they are conceptually together, deprives them of their vitality and leads to their enervation.

The *-ism* acts like a net, stretching across things and rendering them invisible. It is true that Maori valued the idea of invisible realms (Marsden 2003)<sup>24</sup>, but not the sort that this form of representation envisages. It will be recalled that Maori thought of all things in the world as simultaneously nothingness and positivity. To that end, Marsden (2003:20) states that even Being, that most nebulous of phenomena, accrues aspects of positivity while “not entirely emancipat[ing] itself from the negative.” But with the *-ism* things in the world are to be treated as if secondary to the newfound, more important, free-floating concept. Where we were encouraged to speculate on matters of Being, on the hidden and the mysterious in traditional times (Mika 2012) even if they were not apparently ‘there,’ the *-ism* tidies them up for us so that we now no longer have to theorize on their deep and ultimately inconceivable character. It is the surface meaning that we are now encouraged to rest with. Alongside resisting the notion that the world is fixed, Maori would also be bewildered by any suggestion that one simply ‘make do’ with the world of appearances. In Maori thought, for instance, there are several linguistic markers of the backdrop to an entity that can be seen. These abstract terms, such as ‘whakapapa’ (genealogy; layering; becoming earth), deliver a thing over to its fullness by disclosing a complete world within them. In the term ‘whakapapa,’ we see the continuous activity of primordial Being, ‘Papa,’ by which all things, originating in her, immediately carry with them the suggestion of all other things. This disclosure of a world is not entirely a Heideggerean one<sup>25</sup>; instead, all things are manifest within one entity, although they lie beyond perception. The ‘disclosure’ is hence equally a *presentation* of the imperceptible All, which (and this is somewhat Heideggerean) draws the self on to ever deeper thinking.

Similarly, stitching the interconnected but autonomous ideas together as it does so that they fit under a single conceptual rubric, the *-ism* wraps the world into a neat parcel that can be delivered to another, and in that act language is proposed as a highly cognitive phenomenon. I am not suggesting here that the *-ism* single-handedly configured language as a transmissive envelope, but it does certainly fit squarely with that overall reductionist idea of language. Language in Maori thought is connected with the entire world in a material sense: if I utter a word, then alongside its denotative meaning lies its active sense of connection to all things. Abrams (1996: 87)<sup>26</sup> notes in this vein that the indigenous Dogon believed “spoken language was originally a swirling garment of vapour and breath worn by the encompassing earth itself.” Written language equally does something: it has a life-force. It is impactful on the world, even if this impact cannot be sensed or experienced. Indigenous notions of language are also aware that all language that has been influenced by the West is replete

with colonization and to a large extent carries the idea of a *fixed* world with it, and indigenous peoples have to contend with that unfolding of colonization within holistic, influential language. The *-ism*, however, simply lays language out before the self as a straightforward, inanimate phenomenon that does not call for critique because it nicely carries out the job of transporting meaning between one person and another. As we have seen in Rata's case, occasionally the *-ism* is used unspecifically and hence, for Maori, problematically. If we wanted to carry out a critique of how language is dominantly perceived, we may be foiled by the use of the *-ism* because it so successfully levels out the inconsistencies and chaotic activity of the entities underneath it. It adds to the singularity of language, its self-sufficiency and its continuation as beyond the reproach of the Maori critic.

While the *-ism* can therefore be critiqued, it is also extremely difficult to ignore. After all, I had to resort to one famous form of it in my introduction, 'racism,' which is a very useful term for those of us dealing with counter-colonial thinking. It also steadies that very base of 'counter-colonial.' It may well be that it corresponds closely with the much more classic metaphysical tendency of presence, which Derrida (1982:60)<sup>27</sup> identifies as inescapable and which results in attempts that "*always [amount] [...] to reconstituting the same system [of Being of presence].*" In other words, if I disdain the term 'racism' and instead describe it in terms of its nuances, I nevertheless fall prey to its deep assumptions that rest on static notions of Being and permanence and to its various, highly positive hierarchies (Biesta 2010)<sup>28</sup>. Where the *-ism* is useful, however, is in its brilliant display of its own vulnerability. This 'saving power,' alongside being a Heideggerian (1977)<sup>29</sup> concept, has a basis in the Maori dialectical metaphysics I noted earlier, where something is so highly negative as to display positive qualities. The precision associated with the etymology of the *-ism*, '*-ismos*' (Herzfeld 2002)<sup>30</sup>, shows its brittleness by drawing our attention to it in the first instance as a phenomenon possibly at odds with our own Maori thinking: it is so completely one thing as to be another at the same time. Maori thinking would associate this dual nature of the *-ism* with its inherent ability to be critiqued. As with Heidegger's view towards the problematic enframing nature of technology's essence, we would similarly accost the *-ism* for being too emphatic in its dealing with things in the world, but we would simultaneously (and somewhat perversely) be thankful to it for our critique.

In terms of how it adheres to the metaphysics of presence, though, the *-ism* joins nicely with other assumptions in Rata's article. It draws from the same essential wellspring as words such as 'blood.' Rata is critical of *kaupapa Maori* which she believes endorses a view that "only those 'of the blood' can fully understand and participate in this Maori 'way of knowing'" (2006: 33). Gillett (2009)<sup>31</sup> argues that the thinking behind that sort of proposition rests with the notion of an entity as technological. With that in mind, we can suspect that Rata has ensured that her entire article uses terms that reflect the presence that I discussed earlier: labels are assigned to phenomena, whether they are suffixed by the *-ism* or simply biological terms such as 'blood,' so that an entity is seized on as permanent and static. In our current example, what Rata wants to refer to when she mentions 'blood' is probably what Maori would refer to as 'connection to the world through a oneness with it.' Those two explanations originate from two separate metaphysics; they reflect a different notion of language, and relation of object to term. The term 'blood,' with its strong positing of things as biological, cannot suffice for a Maori explanation, yet it does perform alongside the *-ism* to level out any possible inconsistency that would participate with the view of the world as thoroughly connected and even chaotic.

Blood and the *-ism* thus seem to converge nicely on a particular view of selfhood that Maori do not share. In a most parochial way, the *-ism* takes up the baton of academic snobbery, and so it likely appeals to one's selfhood in a way that does not resonate with the Maori place of the 'I.' As I noted earlier, if I use the *-ism*, I have anticipated that *of course* you will know what I am referring to. The self is emphasized in its use. In typical Maori belief, however, the self occurs in priority down a long list of other natural phenomena so that in an introductory speech, for instance, a speaker is preceded by naming his or her mountain, lake or river, and so



on (see, for instance, Raerino 2000). The self is therefore only able to introduce themselves because of the entire world that accompanies, indeed *constructs* them and the very utterance of their introduction. In the *-ism*, though, we see a particularly detached self having a great deal of control over his or her own abstractions. With the idea belonging to a self-evolved view of knowledge, epistemology exceeds an ontological investigation because the self is suddenly in charge. Thus, Ermines (1995: 102)<sup>32</sup> highlights how a trajectory of thought (and I would argue the *-ism* belongs to it) has resulted in the ascendancy of knowledge over Being:

Ideology is one determinant of the quality of research on epistemology. Early ideas such as Destutt de Tracy's (1801) definition of ideology as the science of ideas used to distinguish science from the metaphysical suggest the Western world's direction and purpose in seeking the nature and origin of knowledge. Subsequent categorization and selective validation of knowledge by Western science has inevitably influenced Western ideology as the driving force behind knowing.

Again, I do not intend to make the *-ism* the whipping boy for epistemology's dominance, as the problem is much more fundamental and the *-ism* is merely a symptom of that grander colonizing force, but its correspondence with the full force of epistemic certainty does indeed have some consequence for Maori as it can continuously reissue that dominance. Relatedly, we cannot do away with epistemology's authority through a critique of the *-ism* either, but we can possibly acquire some momentary respite from it through our critique of it. The Maori writer, aware of the dual nature of any particular thing (concept and so on) in the world and armed with a counter-colonial response, will have at his or her disposal a nuanced way of adjusting their orientation toward a thing so that it can be critiqued.

## 4 Conclusion

Identifying a tendency in dominant Western thought and then excavating it is not necessarily decolonizing—most likely, nothing fully decolonizes—but it is counter-colonial, to the extent that it allows the indigenous writer to assess terms and other items of language in light of his or her metaphysics. Key to that evaluation are the following questions: does the term stack up in its essence as one that promotes a view of the interconnected or collapsed world, or does it impose a separation between things? Does it inculcate an overly strong self into the ideas being promoted? In its overall drive, is it productive for our own thinking (and is it therefore unwittingly a prompter of our own free speculation?) Indeed, it is probably this latter question which comes closest to transforming the field on which Maori academics are forced to engage with ideas, because it reconfigures the frequently racist text so that it becomes useful. Of course, the Maori self here has to be creative in his or her responses to terms and thoughts, to the extent that he or she may not know what direction they will write in. That aspect of counter-colonialism is hugely valuable because it alone validates a Maori metaphysics that privileges an unconstrained Maori response to, or encounter with, something external for their own thought.

In my approach, rather than deliberately counteracting Rata's ideas I have simply brushed up against them through her use of terms. Their primary reference is as a usefulness. This is not to say, however, that Rata's views are not dealt with in the process. There exists in Maori practice a reaction to a thought without addressing it directly. Again, we can see evidence here of an engagement with the atmosphere surrounding the thought being reacted to, rather than the thought itself. I recall often speaking with one of my elders, an aunt, who would rarely answer my questions directly (see, for instance, Mika 2013): I conceive of this counter-colonial

method as one that brings forward that approach into academia, where the original utterance or text becomes less important than the more creative aspects it encourages. Keeping the original text in mind remains important but it is an unrestrictive device that can be useful for the Maori writer if he or she wishes to grapple with antithesis.

We can therefore be cautiously thankful to Elizabeth Rata's "What's Wrong with *Kaupapa Maori*?" for its inadvertent guidance towards an unanticipated theme. Indeed, for the most part I have left Rata's article in favor of a more expansive critique, preferring instead to think on the basis of the continual, external impetus it provided. I certainly had no idea where her *-ism* would take me; this lack of knowledge concurs with an interpretative Maori ontology where the self is 'shown' the nature of things in time. Rata has guided us towards some of the associated issues that tend to coalesce around the central problem of the *-ism* and that she herself was subject to (as we all are). However, there is one final issue that needs to be addressed before we deceive ourselves that any initial prompt (in this case, Rata) has been dispensed with at a particular point in the writing. From a Maori critico-ontological perspective, the initial impetus persists despite its disappearance (Mika 2014)<sup>33</sup>, and we are left with a faint vestige of Rata in some form in the writing despite her withdrawal as a theme. A Maori critico-ontology thus needs to be cautious, inserting as it can the presence of the 'other' in one's thinking and writing: it is in its ongoing creation-destruction, however, that such work tends to become most fascinating and opens itself up for another's expansive reaction.

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- <sup>1</sup> Joe Kincheloe, "Critical Ontology and Indigenous Ways of Being," in *Key Works in Critical Pedagogy*, ed. Kecia Hayes, Shirley Steinberg, and Kenneth Tobin, 333-49 (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011).
  - <sup>2</sup> Nowhere, to my knowledge, has Rata specified her ethnicity. Leonie Pihama (2004), however, states that she is Pakeha (New Zealand European): see Scoop ("Maori and Indigenous Education (Iri) Statement," 2004; <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/ED0407/S00077.htm>; last accessed on 9 May 2016).
  - <sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Rata, "Ethnic Ideologies in New Zealand Education: What's Wrong With Kaupapa Maori?" *DELTA* 58, no. 1, (2006): 29-41.
  - <sup>4</sup> Carl Mika, "Overcoming Being in Favour of Knowledge: The Fixing Effect of mātauranga," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 44, no. 10 (2012): 1080-92.
  - <sup>5</sup> See for instance: Rawinia Higgins, and Basil Keane, "Te reo Māori—The Māori Language—Language Decline, 1900 to 1970s," 2015 (Retrieved from: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/te-reo-maori-the-maori-language/page-4>; last accessed on 9 May 2016); Makere Stewart-Harawira, *The New Imperial Order: Indigenous Responses to Globalization*, Wellington: Huia Publishers, 2005; Rachael Ka'ai-Mahuta, "The Impact of Colonisation on te reo Māori: A Critical Review of the State Education System," *Te Kabaroa: The e-Journal on Indigenous Pacific Issues* 4, no. 1, (2011): 195-225.

- 6 Rangimarie Rose Pere, *Ako: Concepts and Learning in the Māori Tradition*, Hamilton: University of Waikato, 1982; Marcia Browne, *Wairua and the Relationship It Has with Learning te reo Māori within Te Ataarangi*, Palmerston North: Massey University, 2005 [Unpublished Master of Educational Administration thesis].
- 7 Ngahuia Te Awetokutu, *Mana Wahine Maori: Selected Writings on Maori Women's Art, Culture and Politics*, Auckland: New Women's Press, 1991; Winona Laduke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*, Cambridge: South End Press, 1999; Franke Wilmer, *The Indigenous Voice in World Politics*, California: Sage Publications, 1993.
- 8 Martin Cohen, *101 Philosophy Problems*, Second Edition, London: Routledge, 1999.
- 9 Stephen Ball, *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge*, London: Routledge, 1990.
- 10 Chet Bowers, "Philosophy, Language, and the Titanic Mind-Set," *Language & Ecology* 2, no. 1, (2007): 1-16.
- 11 Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, London: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- 12 Vanessa Andreotti, Sharon Stein, Cash Ahenakew, and Dallas Hunt, "Mapping Interpretations of Decolonization in the Context of Higher Education," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 4, no. 1 (2015): 21-40.
- 13 Linda Wood, and Rolf Kroger, *Doing Discourse Analysis: Methods for Studying Action in Talk and Text*, London: Sage Publications, 2000.
- 14 Joe Kincheloe, and Shirley Steinberg, "Indigenous Knowledges in Education: Complexities, Dangers, and Profound Benefits," in *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, ed. Norman Denzin, Yvonna Lincoln, and Linda Smith, 135-156 (London: Sage, 2008).
- 15 Carl Mika, *Reclaiming Mystery: A Māori Philosophy of Being, in Light of Novalis' Ontology*, Hamilton: University of Waikato, 2013 [Unpublished PhD dissertation]; Heddell Raerino, *Te ku o te kupu*, Hamilton: University of Waikato, 2000, [Unpublished Master of Arts thesis].
- 16 Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, New York: The New Press, 1998.
- 17 Carl Mika, and Georgina Stewart, 'Māori in the Kingdom of the Gaze: Subjects or Critics?' *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, (2015): 300-312, DOI: 10.1080/00131857.2015.1013017 (last accessed on 8 July 2016).
- 18 These are just some examples in her article. She refers to 'fundamentalism' to try and highlight an apparent dogma that attends kaupapa Maori; 'neo-Marxism' to explain a sort of belief that she thinks indigenous critics of science adhere to, whereby only through the resurrection of indigenous versions of science can one be liberated; 'idealism' to refer to how Maori critics apparently endorse an ascendancy of ideas over actual social and philosophical progress; 'primordialism' to suggest that Maori embrace a belief in a ground of complete authenticity; and 'German romanticism' to refer to that movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that she sees as reflecting a primordial ideology.
- 19 Carl Mika, and Sarah Jane Tiakiwai, "Tawhiao's Unstated Heteroglossia: Conversations with Bakhtin," *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, (2016): 1-12, DOI: 10.1080/00131857.2015.1135409 (last accessed on 8 July 2016); Te Ahukaramu Royal, *Māori Creation Traditions—Different Creation Traditions*, 2012 (Retrieved from <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/maori-creation-traditions/page-2>, last accessed on 9 May 2016).
- 20 Takirangi Smith, "Nga tini ahuatanga o whakapapa korero," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 32, no. 1, (2000): 53-60.
- 21 Eliza Kitis, and E. Dimitris Kitis, "Meaning Ruptures and Meaningful Eruptions in the Service of Rhetoric: Populist Flare-up Hits the Greek Political Pitch," in *The Exercise of Power in Communication: Devices, Reception and Reaction*, ed. Rainer Schulze, and Hanna Pishwa, 43-84 (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
- 22 Mason Durie, *Whaiora: Māori Health Development*, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1994.

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- <sup>23</sup> Carl Mika, "The Co-existence of Self and Thing Through "ira": A Māori Phenomenology," *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* 2, no. 1, (2015): 93-112.
- <sup>24</sup> Maori Marsden, *The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden*, Otaki: Estate of Rev. Māori Marsden, 2003.
- <sup>25</sup> Heidegger means by his phrase "world disclosure" the ways in which things become meaningful according to how the world is pre-structured. There is an element of this in my own use of 'disclosure'; the world does indeed hold meaning for the self while the world also manifests itself as a whole, materially, in an utterance or in thought. For more on Heidegger's use of the phrase see: Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie, and Edward Robinson, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967.
- <sup>26</sup> David Abrams, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, New York: Vintage Books, 1996.
- <sup>27</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Onia and Grammē*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982.
- <sup>28</sup> Gert Biesta, "Witnessing Deconstruction in Education: Why Quasi-transcendentalism Matters," in *What Do Philosophers of Education Do? (And How Do They Do It?)* ed. Claudia Ruitenberg, 73-86 (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2010).
- <sup>29</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, New York: Harper, 1977.
- <sup>30</sup> Michael Herzfeld, *Anthropology Through the Looking-Glass: Critical Ethnography in the Margins of Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002.
- <sup>31</sup> Grant Gillett, "Indigenous Knowledges: Circumspection, Metaphysics, and Scientific Ontologies," *SITES* 6, no. 1, (2009): 1-19.
- <sup>32</sup> Willie Ermine, "Aboriginal Epistemology," *First Nations Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds*, in ed. Marie Battiste, and Jean Barman, 101-12 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995).
- <sup>33</sup> Carl Mika, "Maori Thinking With a Dead White Male: Philosophizing in the Realm of Novalis," *Knowledge Cultures* 2, no. 1, (2014): 23-39.