Transforming translations (part I)
"The owner of these bones"

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Recent writing associated with anthropology's "ontological turn" has worked to transform the familiar trope of ethnography as a mode of translation. In place of popular conceptions of social anthropology as the more-or-less faithful transmission of other peoples' cultural meanings, these approaches frame the ethnographer's task as that of generating novel concepts and terminology—ones that are "peculiarly ours" rather than "theirs"—through a creative synthesis of philosophy and field experience. Within this scheme, the roles that "native thinking" (and indeed "native thinkers") are invited to play in this burgeoning discourse remain unclear. Here I address this issue ethnographically, through an ongoing initiative on the part of Te Aitanga a Hauiti Māori people in New Zealand to build a digital repository of tribal *taonga* (ancestral artifacts, images, knowledge). In an account written with the purposes of their project in mind, I consider what Hauiti's efforts to translate their *whakapapa* (genealogies and oral histories) into digital forms might imply for an anthropology that would seek to reframe questions of difference by mobilizing such native "anthropologies" in the service of disciplinary self-renewal. These ethnographic insights then set the scene for a second discussion—to appear in the following issue of *HAU*—of how ontological approaches are seeking to transform anthropology, considered in relation to earlier debates on the difficulties of translating cultural and ontological alterity.

Keywords: ethnographic translation, ontological turn, Māori, digital anthropology, cultural invention, incommensurability

> *Today it is undoubtedly commonplace to say that cultural translation is our discipline's distinctive task. But the problem is knowing what precisely is, can, or should be a translation, and how to carry such an operation out. . . . To translate is always to betray, as the Italian saying goes. However, a good translation is one that allows alien concepts to deform and subvert the translator's conceptual toolbox so that the* intentio *of the original language can be expressed within the new one.*
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> —Eduardo Viveiros de Castro

> *All we have to go by are our misunderstandings of others' views—our initial descriptions of their statements and practices. What we then produce, if we are to avoid projection, is a series of concepts that imitate those statements and practices . . . but are nevertheless peculiarly ours. . . . [A]nthropology is not about "how we think they think." It is about how we could learn to think, given what they say and do.*
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> —Martin Holbraad

Recent writing associated with anthropology's "ontological turn"[1] has transformed the familiar trope of ethnography as a mode of translation, while seeking to move the discipline on from its association with cultures conceived as bounded, language-like entities. Building both more and less directly on poststructuralist and postcolonial insights into the nature and politics of alterity, an appealing self-image is being crafted for social anthropologists as creative philosophers, lending their genius to the impossible (though far from futile) task of making sense of others, as a means of improving ourselves. In place of popular conceptions of ethnography as the more-or-less faithful transmission of other peoples' cultural meanings, these approaches frame the ethnographer's task as that of generating novel concepts and terminology—ones that are "peculiarly ours" rather than "theirs"—through a creative synthesis of philosophy and field experience. Instead of asserting the ability to accurately reproduce native habits and ideas for nonnative audiences, these writers often foreground incommensurabilities—the very practices, ideas, and things encountered in the course of fieldwork that most confound their own descriptive capabilities. In this frame, ethnographic translation appears as something of an art form, a philosophical mode that seeks to infect familiar ways of thinking with otherness, as a means of stimulating analytic creativity.

Within this potentially attractive scenario, however, a certain lack of clarity remains with regard to the roles "native thinking" (and indeed "native thinkers") are invited to play in this burgeoning discourse. In the Italian saying *traduttore, traditore*—invoked by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro above—there is an enticing liberty implied by the inevitability of the translator's betrayal. Whether it is taken to mean simply that the standard of fidelity to an original is generally set too high, or that translation inherently attempts the impossible (like carving out shared space across different scales), it seems that a degree of creative license is being sanctioned. That is alluring indeed for ethnographers, if all we have to go on are "our misunderstandings of others' views." Acknowledging our own limitations lets us off the hook in a number of ways. One convenient effect of this particular absolution, as mobilized in the approaches mentioned here, is that it opens up a seemingly infinite range of resources—the artifacts of recursive ethnographic analysis—to be deployed in the "game" of creative concept generation. But who else might lay claim to such resources? Whom or what do we betray in our transforming translations, and to whom or what are we no longer trying (so hard) to be faithful?

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1. Later in this article, and in the second part (to be published in the next issue of *HAU*) I consider what is meant by this term, including critiques of the very idea of thinking about current preoccupations with ontological questions as a "turn" within the discipline.

These questions might be asked by a native intellectual, someone concerned perhaps with cultural property rights and the exploitation by metropolitan scholars of self-consciously "indigenous" knowledge, but I put them for different reasons. First, because my own ethnographic relationships demand that I reflect on such matters, and second because these questions are begged, I think, by the ways in which arguments in favor of ethnography as "controlled equivocation" (Viveiros de Castro 2004) or as "inventive definition" (Holbraad 2008, 2009, 2012) foreground the importance of their ethnographic commitments. As articulated in one manifesto, the basic idea advanced by such approaches is to let things encountered in the course of fieldwork recursively "dictate the terms of their own analysis" (Henare [Salmond], Holbraad, and Wastell 2007: 4).[2] Instead of involving the mere accumulation of data against which to test existing theories, fieldwork ought to encourage anthropologists to generate insights that are "novel" and "peculiarly our own" but that clearly owe something to the field experience. To rephrase the question then, what might be owed, and to whom, in a recursive anthropology? Clearly, in the first instance at least, the answer must be sought recursively.

What I propose here, then, in line with the sort of methodology prescribed above, is to address my query about recursive analysis ethnographically, in the terms of my own field experience. The aim is to see what happens when such approaches are inflected—and perhaps even "deformed and subverted"—by a different constellation of ethnographic relationships. Later, in a second article to appear in the following issue of this journal, I explore the implications of this ethnographic experiment for the ways in which ontological approaches are currently being articulated. In recalling a number of earlier discussions about the challenges of translating cultural and ontological alterity, I show how the language deployed by present-day anthropological ontologists invites critiques of a kind that have already been leveled at earlier scholars who grappled with notions such as "different worlds" and "ontological alterity." Applying the insights generated through the ethnography presented in the present article, I suggest that the ontologists' commitment to ethnographic engagement might inoculate their approaches against many of these charges but nonetheless begs questions about the precise nature of their ethnographic investments.

In the present article, then, I explore by way of example what might be at stake in the kinds of artifacts anthropologists produce in New Zealand, where ethnographic relationships can entail special kinds of expectations and commitments. Part of the story inevitably turns on cultural politics, but more to the point is the specificity of the ties in which one becomes enmeshed as an ethnographer, and the obligations, as well as inspiration, that may extend from them. In applying this recursive methodology, I draw on relationships with members of Te Aitanga a Hauiti, a Māori *iwi* (tribal kin group) based in Uawa (Tolaga Bay) on the East

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2. As Holbraad is at pains to point out, this phrasing sits uncomfortably with his more recent iterations of ontologies as emphatically "not phenomena out there to be found," but rather "analytic artifices" (2012: 255) along the lines of Roy Wagner's "cultural invention," which we ethnographers posit to account for what appear to us as "conceptual divergences" between our informants and ourselves. He nonetheless remains strongly committed to the principle of analytic recursivity, which he describes in terms of allowing the "substance" or "content" of ethnography to impact on the terms of its own analysis.

Coast of New Zealand's North Island. Working through an ongoing initiative to build a digital repository of tribal *taonga* (ancestral artifacts, images, knowledge), I consider what Hauiti's efforts to translate their *whakapapa* (genealogies and oral histories) into digital forms might imply for an anthropology that would seek to reframe questions of difference by mobilizing such native "anthropologies" (Viveiros de Castro 2004) in the service of disciplinary self-renewal.

"The owner of these bones"

> *Besides the firm outline of tribal constitution and crystallised cultural items which form the skeleton, besides the data of daily life and ordinary behaviour, which are, so to speak, its flesh and blood, there is still to be recorded the spirit—the natives' views and opinions and utterances.*
>
> —Bronislaw Malinowski

> *Iwi (n.) 1. Bone. . . . 4. Nation, people.*
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> —Herbert William Williams, *A dictionary of the Maori language*

Anthropological[3] attempts to translate the beliefs, practices, and languages of Pacific peoples may be traced to Europe's Age of Discovery, when voyages of exploration ventured into unfamiliar waters with a view to knowing and exploiting that vast ocean's seemingly infinite resources (Smith 1992). When James Cook reached New Zealand in 1769, bringing with him the Tahitian priest-navigator Tupaia, part of the country's coastline had been marked on European maps for over two centuries, yet virtually nothing was known of its inhabitants. A skilled linguist, Tupaia was able to communicate in his native language with the people they met, and played an indispensable role as the *Endeavour*'s chief translator, broker, and cultural advisor, mediating what appeared to many of Cook's men as encounters with radical alterity (Salmond 2003).

   In Queen Charlotte Sound, for instance, after some months spent in New Zealand waters, Cook and some sailors explored the coastline together with the Tahitian and the gentleman naturalist Joseph Banks. Rowing across the Sound, they saw the body of a woman floating in the water, and upon reaching shore, Tupaia asked some local people about her. According to Banks, they "told Tupia that the woman was a relation of theirs" (Beaglehole 1962: 455). As the Tahitian spoke with them, his companions wandered about the cove. A dog was baking in an earth oven, with provision baskets heaped beside it. Poking in one of these baskets, a member of Cook's group saw two clean-picked bones that seemed to be human, a discovery that created immediate consternation among the *Endeavour* party, including Tupaia. He questioned the local people, asking

> What bones are these? they answerd, The bones of a man. —And have you eat the flesh? —Yes. —Have you none of it left? —No. Why did not you eat the woman who we saw today in the water? —She was our relation. —Who is that you do eat? —Those who are killd in war. —And

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3. In the sense of grounded in a concept of the *anthropos.*

> who is the man whose bones these are? —5 days ago a boat of our enemies came into this bay and of them we killd 7, of whom the owner of these bones was one. (Beaglehole 1962: 455)

Banks' account of the exchange suggests that while these bones, as apparent traces of Māori cannibalism, sparked an immediate and visceral reaction in Tupaia and the *Endeavour*'s sailors, for others including Banks and Cook, they supplied empirical confirmation of preformed hypotheses about the scale of humanity's differences:

> The horrour that apeard in the countenances of the seamen on hearing [Tupaia's] discourse which was immediately translated for the good of the company is better conceivd that describd. For ourselves and myself in particular we were before too well convincd of the existence of such a custom to be surprizd, tho we were pleasd at having so strong a proof of a custom which human nature holds in too great abhorrence to give easy credit to (Beaglehole 1962: 455).

Through his conduct and writing, Banks—like many later ethnographers—translated otherness into affinity by encompassing his Polynesian interlocutors within the brotherhood of Man, resolving alterity through appeal to a common humanity. In this sense, his posture of untroubled equanimity in the face of what seemed to most of the crew inhuman behavior may be read as a self-consciously Enlightened response that prefigured that of much contemporary anthropology to the problem of cultural difference. While his moral philosophy may have been generous toward "savages" when compared to that of many of his contemporaries, however, it was no less geared to an imperial agenda. The purpose of cultivating "friendship and alliance" with local people and "inviting them to Traffick," as Cook had been instructed, was to secure the "Consent of the Natives to take Possession for His Majesty" of their lands "by setting up Proper Marks and Inscriptions, as first discoverers and possessors" (Beaglehole 1955: 514). Here, translation was an instrumental means by which a transfer of ownership could be effected; Banks' accounts of the local people and their "Genius, Temper [and] Disposition" (Beaglehole 1955: 514) had unequivocally appropriative intentions.

Positioned in direct opposition to such imperialist aims, the modern image of anthropologists as translators of culture has been cultivated in part as a corrective to the discipline's enduring reputation as the "handmaiden of colonialism." Whereas ethnology in the British tradition emphasized socio-cultural differences with a view to governing diverse colonial subjects, it is claimed, anthropology as an international discipline is now dedicated to promoting equal participation in the global order for all the world's peoples. With this in mind, the proper attitude toward difference, having defined it, would seem to be to seek its resolution, and this indeed is where many anthropologists have positioned themselves politically, working (philosophically or practically) in support of minority rights, humanitarianism, conflict resolution, and the general promotion of intercultural communication. In this instrumental register too, cultural translation is a tool with which difference may be uncovered, engaged, transcended, and resolved through appeals to common goals and shared meanings. Much ethnography has thus proceeded on the basis of a hopeful humanism that seeks to cultivate the seeds of mutual understanding in the common ground of human nature.

Yet recent (and not-so-recent) scholarship across the social sciences and humanities has pointed to the moral ambiguities—and continuities with Enlightenment thinking—entailed by such a project; issues that have acquired pertinence and moral complexity in relation to ongoing Euro-American attempts to enforce particular brands of liberal democratic humanism upon those regarded as other, at home and internationally. In philosophy and translation studies, for example, the work of cultural translators, including anthropologists, has been closely interrogated over a period of decades, and its political effects have become the focus of intense analytic scrutiny in fields like indigenous studies and postcolonial literary criticism, as well as within anthropology (Asad 1993; Buden et al. 2009). At the center of these discussions is the question of difference, and whether the aim of translation ought to be to *resolve* differences of the kind we are accustomed to thinking of as cultural—if this is even possible—or to take difference seriously in different ways. In its activist voice, such work has drawn explicit attention to the practical and philosophical violence executed against people(s) regarded as other in the name of projects of commensuration, as well as differentiation (Povinelli 2002). In place of a "common sense" vision of translation as the transmission of meaning across linguistic and cultural boundaries to create shared communities of understanding, it offers an alternative role for the translator as a creative agent who finds inspiration in the very impossibility of their task; in misunderstanding, impasse, and "the crisis of failing to know otherness" (Budick 1996: 10).

Many anthropologists too have become concerned by the ease with which their own discipline—among institutions that deal in culture—claims to know its other. A body of scholarship has emerged that seeks to foreground differences of the kind that may be swept aside or resolved in advance by the concept of the *anthropos*. Here the remedy proposed is ethnographic; by paying close attention to how others handle difference differently, it is suggested, we may be able to imagine new ways of dealing with difference ourselves. One way in which this analytic move has been articulated is as a shift from primarily epistemological concerns (comparing people's differences as different knowledges about the world) toward ontology (comparing the ways in which people compare differences as artifacts of difference itself).[4]

Here some effects of these moves on the aims and practice of ethnographic translation are considered, in an attempt to draw out from the following example of translation-in-action some implications for ethnographic theory and methodology. Although in many ways the so-called ontological turn constitutes a radical and productive reworking of the task of ethnography, I suggest, the privileged role it reserves for ethnographers as interpreters of other people's lives may put it at odds with some of the native anthropologies it identifies as resources for disciplinary self-renewal.

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4. For example Argyrou (1999, 2002); Henare [Salmond], Holbraad, and Wastell (2007); Holbraad (2012); Viveiros de Castro (1998).

Te Rauata: A digital *taonga* repository

Titirangi mountain was shrouded in mist as we rounded the final bend in the road, driving into Uawa one winter's morning in July 2010. In Tolaga Bay township—a scattering of shops along a wide main street—we stopped for coffee before heading in convoy to the marae *to film the final stage of our* haerenga, *or journey.*

In front of the ancestor/meeting house Ruakapanga, a crew of Te Aitanga a Hauiti rangatahi *(young people) were rehearsing one of the many action-songs composed in their* rohe *(tribal area) last century. We women wrapped scarves around our waists for the* pōwhiri *or welcome, as our group was summoned with* karanga *(ritual calls) onto the* marae *proper, the grassy lawn in front of the house's carved facade. Speeches followed in Māori, greeting the ancestors present and laying down the* kaupapa *or purpose of the day's activities. Formalities over, we got to work on filming the documentary, which recalled an earlier expedition to the area by members of the Dominion Museum ethnographic team in 1923. Commissioned by the local tribal leader, national politician, and anthropologist Sir Apirana Ngata, a group of Māori and* pākeha *(non-Māori) ethnologists, inclu-ding my great-great grandfather James McDonald—a filmmaker and photographer for the museum—had traveled to the area to record songs, chants, and technologies that Ngata feared were in danger of being forgotten (Henare [Salmond] 2007). Now our film crew, led by two Māori directors, was retracing their steps, talking to descendants of the people the Dominion Museum team had met and filmed, photographed and recorded, using the latest technologies of their day. Inside the meeting house, Dr Wayne Ngata—Apirana's great-nephew—intoned one of the* mōteatea *(chants) etched into wax cylinders during that earlier expedition. Afterward he was interviewed on camera by my mother Anne Salmond, an anthro-pologist with lifelong ties to the East Coast through her work with my godparents, the elders Amiria and Eruera Stirling, and through our extended family in the nearby city of Gisborne.*

I had been to Uawa several times before. The first time I remember was in 2003, on a visit with my family to attend the unveiling of the gravestone of Irihapeti Walters. "Auntie Bessie," as she was widely known, had introduced many people, including me, to Māori taonga *(treasures) in her role as Kaiarahi or guide at the national museum. I met her there through a research project I was doing at univer-sity, and she was a formative influence on my decision to study anthropology. Her knowledge of the collections was unparalleled, and she told me of the unpre-dictable antics of certain artifacts that had been reluctant to enter the museum, but had settled down because they are "used to us now." A staunch adherent of the Mormon faith, her black granite tombstone was etched with an image of the church's temple in Salt Lake City.*

It was through Auntie Bessie that I came to work closely with her whanaunga *(relatives) Wayne Ngata and his niece Hera Ngata-Gibson, both members of Toi Hauiti, a working group of the Te Aitanga a Hauiti tribal Trust. A visit to an exhi-bition they had organized called Te Pou o te Kani, with a group of Māori curators from the national museum, led to further exchanges with the University of Cam-bridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology where I was working as a cur-ator. A series of reciprocal visits followed, including a delegation of Hauiti de-*

scendants coming to the UK, which eventually led to a formal partnership with the Museum on the Artefacts of Encounter project, launched in April 2010.

When I returned to Uawa in 2012 for a digital technology *wānanga* (workshop) hosted by Toi Hauiti, it was thus to maintain and strengthen these relationships. Led by the group's Chairperson, Wayne Ngata, the Hauiti people are currently developing a repository in which to store their digital *taonga*—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). To be included in the digital system—named Te Rauata ("the gathering together of images")—are visual and textual records of early encounters that took place in Uawa between their ancestors and crew on Captain James Cook's first two Pacific voyages of discovery in 1769 and 1773 (during the first of which the Tahitian translator Tupaia played a prominent role). Oral historical accounts of these visits, too, later recorded by missionaries and others, are to be combined in the repository with film footage, sound recordings, photographs, and maps made of Hauiti landscapes, artifacts, and people, through a project named Te Ataakura for an ancestress descended from Hauiti, the *iwi*'s eponymous progenitor (Ngata, Ngata-Gibson, and Salmond 2012).

The purpose of the January *wānanga* was to discuss with Te Rauata's technical developers (software writers) and scholarly collaborators (anthropologists and art historians) the principles that would shape the system's formal architecture, and the kinds of data that would populate it. At the time it was not yet clear what sorts of digital entities would exist within the repository's databases, the tabulated "objects" to which the different file-types (JPEGs, MP3s, PDFs, etc.) could be linked and made searchable through the tracing and tranching of different kinds of digital relationships. In order to establish the database schema, the developers needed Toi Hauiti to tell them what they wanted to put into the system, how these data would be related, and how they want users to access it. It emerged that Toi Hauiti not only want to include their *whakapapa* in the form of genealogies and oral histories within Te Rauata, they also want *whakapapa* to generate the structure of the database and the ontology of the system itself.[5]

Whakapapa (lit.: "to generate layers") is a Māori-language term usually translated as "genealogy," though it has migrated into everyday New Zealand English to signify distinctively Māori ways of reckoning relations of descent. In common parlance, one's *whakapapa* is one's family tree, and to have Scottish, Welsh, and Māori *whakapapa* is to descend from all those peoples, while using the term "*whakapapa*" as opposed to, say, "lineage" or "family history" indicates familiarity with Māori notions of relatedness. 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

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5. In information science, "ontologies" are taxonomic hierarchies designed to enable data to be shared across diverse systems and platforms. This usage differs substantially from deployments of the term in anthropology (Amiria Salmond 2012).

with, genealogy. As a number of anthropologists have observed, indeed, *whaka-papa* is a relational field—or fabric—of cosmogonic proportions (Prytz-Johansen 1954: 9; Sahlins 1985a: 195; Salmond 1991: 39–44; Tapsell 1997) encompassing everything there is: animals, plants, landscapes, and inanimate objects, as well as people. According to Marshall Sahlins, indeed, it constitutes a "veritable ontology" (1985b: 14). *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.

As it arose in the workshop, though, the *whakapapa* that would generate Toi Hauiti's digital repository appeared less as an aspect of Māoritanga (Māori ways) in general than as a defining characteristic of "Hauititanga," as Toi Hauiti call it, in particular—an especially "Hauitian" approach to the task at hand. Rather than emphasizing their distinctiveness in terms of being Māori, as opposed to the *pākeha* (non-Māori, European) anthropologists and software developers present, Hauiti were keen to convey their *whakapapa* on their own terms, to their own peo-ple—especially younger generations—as well as to those who were, in different ways, accustomed to thinking about relatedness rather differently. The problem that became the focus of the workshop was how to translate Hauiti's *whakapapa* into a relational database schema, which would ultimately be rendered in the binary logic of code. The developers were being asked to perform a complex feat of onto-logical articulation—to write software that would reproduce and extend the ontology of Hauiti's *whakapapa*, allowing it to encompass and continue to generate novel (in this case, digital) forms.

This was not a new type of problem for Hauiti, who have been appropriating novel technologies and artifacts through *whakapapa* since long before the arrival of Cook's first voyage at Uawa in the late eighteenth century. But it was new in the sense that this particular technology is explicitly concerned with the formalization, as well as generation, of relationships. The *relational* character of both *whakapapa* and relational databases created grounds for potential misunderstanding, since it was not yet clear *whether they could be relational in the same way*. Together with Toi Hauiti, the anthropologists' role was to help translate Hauiti *whakapapa* for the developers and to observe and participate in the project of building the Te Rauata system as a whole.

Helpfully for us, questions of whether different ontologies may be compared and translated—and how to tackle this ethnographically—is currently a hot topic of debate in anthropology and related disciplines (Alberti and Bray 2009; Alberti et al. 2011; Jensen 2010; Henare [Salmond], Holbraad, and Wastell 2007; Holbraad 2012; Latour 2009; Lloyd 2010; Pedersen 2011; Scott 2007, 2013; Venkatesan 2010; Paleček and Risjord 2012). Although some critics have associated these developments with a move away from the grounded realities of fieldwork toward theory of increasing degrees of abstraction (e.g., Geismar 2011: 214; Laidlaw 2012), a more engaged reading acknowledges the pivotal role accorded ethno-graphy as the primary source of anthropologically distinctive insights into matters of ontological difference (e.g., Crook and Shaffner 2011). In the Uawa workshop, certainly, the issue arose as a practical problem posed by Toi Hauiti, which all participants (including anthropologists) were recruited to address; how to render one dynamic complex of practices, processes, and artifacts (*whakapapa*) in terms of

another (relational databases). The conceptual and practical challenges of this task, including the potential incommensurabilities—or untranslatability—of these different relational modes were immediately clear to all concerned.

Another form of received wisdom about anthropology's newfound interest in ontological matters is that it concerns forms of difference that bear a striking resemblance to those customarily grouped under the rubric of culture. True, those exploring the ethnographic potential of ontological approaches are interested in differences of the kind we are accustomed to thinking of as cultural, but their aim is precisely to redefine these in order to get past the culture concept's well-rehearsed limitations—to come up with newly ethnographic ways of addressing "the difficult problem of how this difference is to be located, situated, delimited" (Candea 2010), as opposed to resolving such differences in advance—*dis*solving them—by invoking familiar concepts. "Ontologies" as a heuristic may not ultimately prove the best way forward, but these debates at least tackle the problems of culture head-on, instead of placing them to one side as if those earlier discussions had never happened.

At present, furthermore, there is a productive lack of consensus as to what an "ontology" might be, anthropologically speaking, beyond the view (shared at least by those who use the term) that it is not "just another word for culture" (Venkatesan 2010). In our January workshop, certainly, the ontological differences that presented themselves did not map in any straightforward way onto cultures—Toi Hauiti were at pains to assert the particularity of *their whakapapa* as "Hauitian" (not simply Māori), and the software developers were mobilizing highly specialized terms and practices, many of which remained quite incomprehensible to the anthropologists (who, as fellow *pākeha*, might have been taken as cultural allies). The challenges of translation and comparison did not appear in cultural (or even culture-like) terms.

It quickly emerged that the task of translating Hauiti *whakapapa* into digital form was to proceed simultaneously on a number of fronts and would involve a certain division of labor. While the schema of the database was being generated through the writing of software, work could begin on translating nondigital records—such as documents and photographic prints—into electronic files, by scanning and rephotographing them digitally. A mass of material already collated and conserved "under people's beds" would be brought out and converted into digital formats ready for incorporation into the system. At the same time, records produced by and for Toi Hauiti and already in digital form, such as video- and sound-recordings of significant events and performances, would be prepared for uploading, while new records of present-day events were continually being created.

The software developers needed to work closely with Toi Hauiti to ensure that the system being generated in code would indeed translate their *whakapapa* in the manner desired, allowing it to reproduce and extend itself in the form of digital and digitized artifacts and relationships. The developers requested a list of translations of key Māori terms being used during the workshop and in Te Rauata's development. And Toi Hauiti themselves (including a Hauitian web designer not present at the workshop) would take the lead in translating/transforming the repository's contents into web-based applications designed to engage a broader community of users. The anthropologists' role in all this was thus a minor one, concerned primarily with supporting Toi Hauiti's ongoing efforts to translate their

whakapapa verbally and practically into terms that would facilitate the work of the developers. The discussion presented here is both about, and part of, that continuing process.

The risks of translating their *whakapapa* into digital form were a major concern to Toi Hauiti, balanced with the technology's positive potential, imagined especially in terms of its capacity to capture the interest of their young people, many of whom are enthusiastic digital citizens. Translation's transformative effects, its capacity to "deform and subvert" the nature and significance of its object, is a factor of which the group is acutely aware. They are keen to exploit the distributed and generative character of web-based technologies to create multiple copies of digital objects in disparate locations, but are equally aware of its potential misuses. Throughout the development of Te Rauata, indeed, Toi Hauiti have been explicit about the importance of maintaining ownership, *mana*, and control over every aspect of the process, from the servers on which the database resides (located at a school within their tribal area), to determining who gets access to what levels of the system, to articles written about the project as a result of their collaboration with technical developers, Pacific art historians, and ethnographers.

The involvement of anthropologists in the project was at Toi Hauiti's direct initiative. Over the past two decades, the group has conceived and delivered a series of events and projects designed to revitalize their local economy and to stimulate cultural and artistic development among their people (Ngata, Ngata-Gibson, and Salmond 2012). Far off the main transit routes, Uawa is a small and relatively isolated coastal settlement with a population of around 700, dominated by descendants of Hauiti, a fighting chief who lived there in the sixteenth century. Once a prosperous agricultural center with a renowned *whare wānanga* (house of learning)—Te Rāwheoro, established centuries ago by Hauiti's father Hinganga-roa—the community had fallen on hard times in the late twentieth century when coastal shipping was abandoned in favor of inland roads as the preferred means of transporting goods and people between the North Island's main centers. In an effort to improve the lives and prospects of the local community, especially their young people, Toi Hauiti was formed in 2000 as a working group of the Te Aitanga a Hauiti Charitable Trust, and charged with promoting and capitalizing on the *iwi*'s history of artistic and cultural excellence. Focusing on the legacy of Te Rāwheoro in the form of traditions of carving, weaving, oratory, performing arts, and tattoo that had survived the *wānanga*'s official closure in the mid-nineteenth century, the group swiftly launched a series of initiatives to attract outside interest and support, to reconnect with their dispersed *taonga* (ancestral treasures including carved and woven artifacts now in museums around the world) and to mobilize *whakapapa* connections with around 5,000 of Hauiti's descendants living away from their tribal territories, throughout New Zealand and abroad. Among the first of these projects was *Te Pou o Te Kani*, the temporary exhibition I had visited of tribal artifacts and contemporary artworks drawn from local private collections and loans from museums, mounted in a local house on the main street of Tolaga Bay township for three months in 2003.

While the primary aim of *Te Pou o Te Kani* was to build capacity within the *iwi*, showcasing the skills of local weavers, painters, and carvers, it also attracted national and international interest as possibly the first Māori tribal cultural center to open to the public. Among the visitors to the exhibition were anthropologists

and curators from metropolitan museums and universities as far afield as the UK. Following the exhibition's closure, Toi Hauiti resolved to expand the relationships thus established by launching a further series of initiatives in collaboration with a number of overseas institutions. These include a venture currently underway with botanists at Kew Gardens and the Natural History Museum in London to replant their riverbank with seeds that are the *uri* (descendants) of those collected in Uawa by Joseph Banks and by George and Reinhold Forster (naturalists on Cook's second Pacific voyage). The Te Ataakura digital repository, being developed with the involvement of anthropologists and other staff at the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA), is another of these collaborative projects.

Translating *Māoritanga*

Anthropology's image as a discipline specialized in cultural translation was not insignificant in Toi Hauiti's decision to work with ethnographers. A substantial part of the group's practical work involves attracting outside funding for their various community-based activities, and among obvious potential sources are monies earmarked for anthropological research and related "cultural" projects. Recognizing this, they approached Cambridge, activating existing ties with a view to collaborating on an initiative that would further their own continuing efforts to reconnect with the dispersed artifacts of Te Rāwheoro's legacy in overseas museums, including *taonga* collected at Uawa during the Cook voyages. A formal partnership was established, and Toi Hauiti worked closely with the Museum during and after their first visit to Cambridge to draft a major grant application that expressed their aims in a form designed to appeal to UK funding bodies. This was a "successful" translation, economically speaking, as it provided funding to support travel for more Hauiti people to visit their *taonga* in overseas collections and attend international workshops, as well as technical equipment and expertise necessary to build the repository. It was clear, however, that for an initiative like Te Rauata to succeed, further resources would be needed to underwrite Toi Hauiti's commitment to the project. A second grant application was submitted, this time conveying the group's aspirations in the rather different terms required by Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga, a national body for Māori research funding in New Zealand. This award funded Te Ataakura, the research project led by Toi Hauiti, through which the group would produce their relational database in collaboration with technical developers as well as anthropologists and art historians from the universities of Auckland and Cambridge.

In terms of the "ownership" of, and *mana* (authority, control) over the processes and artifacts of ethnographic translation, it is important to note that—unlike in other places, perhaps—Toi Hauiti's decision to work with anthropologists was far from obvious. In New Zealand, and especially among Māori, the discipline of anthropology has long been regarded with considerable suspicion. From the 1970s, non-Māori scholars writing about Māori society have been vigorously challenged in seminar rooms and in print to justify their right and competence to translate cultural others, and departments of Māori Studies, employing many Māori academics, were established in New Zealand's universities via wide-ranging programs of intellectual and political self-determination. In 1975, in response to

growing indigenous pressure, the Waitangi Tribunal was founded by the government to hear Māori claims about specific failures to honor the terms of the Treaty of Waitangi, a document signed by tribal leaders and representatives of the British Crown in 1840, through which New Zealand was formally accessioned as a British colony. Since 1985, when the Tribunal gained retrospective jurisdiction to consider claims about breaches as far back as the mid-nineteenth century, anthropologists have been routinely recruited alongside sociologists and historians as expert witnesses by either claimants or the Crown,[6] to give evidence in the Tribunal's adversarial setting. Research priorities shifted into activist mode, as scholars took sides, spurred on by lawyers and their own loyalties to undermine each other's testimony, leading to a certain segregation of "academic" from "Tribunal" scholarship, and to the emergence of historiographic and anthropological critiques questioning the objectivity and evidential status of "Treaty-centered histories" (Sharp and McHugh 2001: 4; van Meijl 2009).

Today, few university-based anthropologists in New Zealand list contemporary Māori topics among their academic research interests (they work mainly on historical subjects or in Pacific islands and further afield). Further, although a significant number of distinguished Māori scholars trained as anthropologists during the twentieth century, few Māori students are following in their footsteps (Henare [Salmond] 2007), finding more direct routes to tribal advocacy and leadership—or simply better career prospects—in professional degrees such as law and commerce or the burgeoning range of *iwi* management qualifications offered by tertiary institutions. Although most Māori Studies departments began life as anthropological enclaves populated by (Māori and non-Māori) linguists and ethnographers, furthermore, many have since become oriented toward indigenous activism, maintaining a strong focus on the "decolonization" of scholarship. The few anthropologists who continue to publish on contemporary Māori topics tend to be based outside New Zealand, and their work is sometimes critical of these and related developments, rendering them through various brands of political-economic theory as by-products of an "ideology of traditionalism" (Webster 1998, 2002), as examples of strategic (or naïve) cultural construction (Kolig 2002), or as emblematic of "increasing hostility of Māori to foreign interest and research in Māori culture" (van Meijl 2009: 343).[7]

Looking at the scope of scholarly discourse about contemporary Māori culture, indeed, it is as if at least two quite separate conversations are going on that are mutually unintelligible—even untranslatable—in the sense that neither seems able to take the other's claims seriously. One, playing out in Māori Studies departments, as well as in schools, government bodies, and other institutions charged with implementing cultural policy, takes Māoritanga ("Māoriness") to be a range of received tenets, practices, and "spiritual" principles handed down from ancestors that remain fundamentally relevant today and that are held to define Te Ao Māori

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6. Now represented by the New Zealand government.

7. This does not of course exhaustively describe current ethnographic scholarship on Māori subjects. Scholars based outside New Zealand whose work does not conform to this characterization include Haidy Geismar, Ilana Gershon, Daniel Rosenblatt, and Gregory Schrempp.

(often translated as "the Māori world view"). This version of Māori culture forms the basis of government policy with regard to Māori arts, education, healthcare, and in areas such as social welfare and the penal system. It is also implemented, by Māori and others, in a wide range of research programs and organizations (including Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga, which funded Hauiti's digital repository project) under the influential banner of Kaupapa Māori (Māori values) research, exponents of which have been strongly critical of anthropology, advocating instead a "by Māori, for Māori" approach in which indigenous subjects maintain authority and control over the research process and its outputs (Tuhiwai-Smith 1999).

The second conversation, proceeding mainly in the pages of anthropology journals, takes Māori culture to be the contemporary predicament of New Zealand's indigenous people as culturally marked members of a modern liberal-democratic polity, many of whom are engaged in strategic projects of identity construction for political and economic ends. This discussion sometimes takes the first as its object but with little attempt at engagement (these anthropologists write *about* Māoritanga but rarely address their arguments *to* its exponents).[8] More than this, such scholarship often presents "Māori culture" in a form that participants in the first conversation could not recognize even if they wanted to, since its practical effect is to expose the foundations of Māoritanga and "the Māori world view" as fabricated and (at least implicitly) inauthentic inventions (examples in Henare [Salmond] 2007; Friedman 1992).

In this intellectual and cultural-political milieu, Toi Hauiti's decision to work with anthropologists in translating themselves to potential supporters and technical developers was thus unconventional, an indication of their *mana* and self-confidence in their ability to maintain authority over their own representation. Although determined not to get caught up in cultural politics—scholarly or otherwise—they are conscious of working within socio-political fields partly dominated by these peculiarly disjointed conversations. For these debates are also manifest outside the academy, in national politics and in inter- and intra-*iwi* tensions. Items in broadsheet newspapers and on television in New Zealand regularly feature incidents framed as clashes between economic rationalist objectives and "the Māori world view" that invariably beg the question, more or less explicitly, of whether "traditional Māori beliefs" are being *invented* in order to press a Māori politico-economic advantage.

Much mileage is made out of such debates by politicians, with conservative party leaders successfully campaigning on the slogan "*iwi* Kiwi," for example, in the 2007 election (we are all New Zealanders; down with cultural and tribal factionalism; up with minimizing—if not abolishing—special treatment for Māori!). 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. Such conflicts have no doubt been going on for

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8. There are also some Māori critics of the "traditionalist" vision of Maoridom promulgated by Kaupapa Māori scholarship and its allies, who *do* address their arguments directly to their opponents. See for example Tau (2001), who attributes the "death" of *matauranga Māori* (Māori knowledge) among his own Ngai Tahu *iwi* (tribe) to the collapse of *whakapapa* as "the fabric that held the traditional world view together."

centuries but are now noticeably inflected by the conceptual opposition of timeless cultural integrity on one hand and strategic cultural identity construction on the other; incommensurable worlds which Māori, like all culturally marked peoples, are now routinely required to inhabit. Among my aims here is to test how a recursive approach to ethnography might help to address this impasse, arguably characteristic not only of New Zealand's postcolonial predicament but also that of much contemporary ethnography.

Translating Hauiti *whakapapa* into a relational database "ontology"

Among the issues of translation that became a focus of discussion around the table at the January *wānanga* in Uawa was how to clarify the differences between *whaka-papa* and genealogy, so that the software developers could get a handle on the kinds of digital objects (including relationships) the Te Rauata digital repository would be asked to accommodate. In identifying *whakapapa* as that which would define and dictate the inclusion of everything to be entered in the database, Toi Hauiti began by introducing the concept of *mea* as an alternative to the term "thing" (which the developers had been using deliberately because of its semantic openness) to describe the material to be entered. *Mea*, they explained, is an encompassing term that can be used to embrace all the digital objects that would go into Te Rauata, from people to carved ancestral objects to landscapes to the very ties that bind them together within Hauiti *whakapapa*.[9]

In attempting to devise how these observations should be translated into the database schema, the developers asked Toi Hauiti to elaborate on the different kinds of *mea* within their *whakapapa*, which at this stage were being thought of (by at least some of the workshop participants) as belonging to discrete categories. A table was drawn up as follows (the rough translations given in square brackets were not included at the time):

tangata / tipuna [people / ancestors]	whenua / moana [land / sea]	taonga / kōrero [ancestral treasures / knowledge]	kaupapa [projects]	whare [houses]	atua [ancestor deities]

Table 1: First attempt to define tables for *mea* within Toi Hauiti *whakapapa*

Toi Hauiti then explained that *mea* of each of these kinds could be related not only to *mea* of other kinds but also to *mea* of the same kind, so that all are (potentially) connected by the same quality of (digital) relationship. Inspired by this, the developers proposed the idea of putting all the *mea* of every kind into the same table in the database, explaining this by the analogy of a filing cabinet: rather than having six different drawers, the system could have just one:

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9. Wayne Ngata notes that the term may be considered by some to be derogatory, but was deployed "because of its characteristic as a common denominator."

tangata / *tipuna* 1
tangata / *tipuna* 2
tangata / *tipuna* 3
whenua / *moana* 1
whenua / *moana* 2
whenua / *moana* 3
Taonga / *kōrero* 1
etc . . .

Table 2: Alternative database table structure for *mea* within Toi Hauiti *whakapapa*

One of the developers then showed a series of different kinship diagrams as rendered by a popular genealogy software program on his laptop, in order to stimulate conversation about how relationships between different categories of data might be represented to Te Rauata users. Although his intention was to illustrate the fact that the same body of underlying data can be represented graphically in different ways, the images on screen immediately launched a discussion about *whakapapa* that kept circling back to the question of how it was similar or different to genealogical relatedness.

Toi Hauiti introduced their *whakapapa* by giving the names of the ancestors that define Te Aitanga a Hauiti as an *iwi* (tribal grouping), beginning with Hingangaroa, the father of Hauiti, who established the famous school of learning Te Rawheoro. They talked about important *taonga* (ancestral treasures) that had belonged to some of these ancestors, some of which remain in their tribal territories. Among their *taonga* is the *patu pounamu* (greenstone hand weapon) Kapuārangi, which was returned to them by the Tairāwhiti Museum in 1999; it had been taken from a grave site some years earlier, and its repatriation was a major catalyst in their efforts to revitalize Hingangaroa's legacy (Ngata, Ngata-Gibson, and Salmond 2012). A carved *poupou* (wall panel) associated with the ancestress Hinematioro, possibly gifted to the Tahitian Tupaia during Cook's visit to Uawa in 1769 and now held in a museum in Tübingen, Germany, was another of the *taonga* mentioned. This ancestral figure has been visited by several delegations of Hauiti people in the past few years, events that were recorded in the German media and in a documentary for Māori Television, footage from which will be incorporated into the digital repository. Each of these *mea* appeared in their accounts as a nexus or knot-like tie encompassing myriad constellations of events, names, relationships, and initiatives dedicated to the perpetuation and continuing renewal of Hauititanga—that is, of being Te Aitanga a Hauiti.

The anthropological participants in the workshop contributed to the discussion by drawing on their own knowledge of *whakapapa*, in relation to fieldwork experiences mainly among other *iwi*—albeit with close *whakapapa* ties to Te Aitanga a Hauiti—and to ethnographic and Māori scholarly literature on the subject. Recognizing, as the developers and Toi Hauiti also did, that conventional glosses of *whakapapa* as "kinship" or "genealogy" were of limited use in translating the kinds of connections Hauiti were invoking into the form of a relational database, they attempted together with Toi Hauiti to unpack what appeared as key points of contrast between *whakapapa* and genealogical relatedness. The following expands on some of the themes raised in the course of that exercise in comparative translation.

Transforming translations: *Whakapapa,* the "Woven Universe"[10]

To translate *whakapapa* into conventional ethnographic idioms such as "kinship" or "genealogy" is inevitably to objectify it, in the sense of imposing a certain form on a mode (or rather modes) of relational dynamism that admit of no such *fixed* borders in their own terms and within their own perspectives—ontologies (in the sense both of theories and ways of being) that constantly extend themselves beyond their own self-defined (and self-defining) limits as an inevitable effect of an impetus toward generative encompassment. Such resistance to ethnographic translation is not peculiar to *whakapapa*, of course, and it has not deterred scholarly commentators or Māori from attempting to translate it into terms other than its own.

As noted earlier, the notion of *whakapapa* as a relational fabric coextensive with the cosmos has been explored by a number of authorities, Māori and otherwise. Mythological accounts and *whakapapa* assembled by theologians, tribal experts, ethnographers, and other scholars together present a comprehensive and internally varied relational cosmology, versions of which have been laid out in detail by Māori scholars including the Reverend Māori Marsden (2003), Sir Āpirana Ngata and Pei Te Hurinui Jones ([1959] 2004), Mohi Ruatapu (in Reedy 1993), Teone Taare Tikao (in Beattie [1939] 1990), and H. T. Whatahoro (e.g., 1913), as well as being synthesized by ethnologists and anthropologists, notably Elsdon Best (e.g., 1924, 1982), J. Prytz-Johansen (1954), Te Rangi Hiroa (e.g., 1949), Anne Salmond (1991), and Gregory Schrempp (1992). This "monogenetic" cosmology, as Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962) called it, is ordered in *papa* or layers, linked and knotted through with descent lines extending (in its generalized form) from the origins of being in primal conception; through the stages of Te Pō (the night of cosmic potential); Te Kore (the void); the union and subsequent separation of Ranginui the sky and Papatuanuku the earth; down through their "godly" descendants to people in the present via lineages that may include whales, sweet potatoes, species of tree, and other flora and fauna.

In daily life, such lineages are routinely encountered on *marae* (communal gathering complexes centered on an ancestral *whare* or meeting house, traditionally located on tribal lands but now often sited as well within schools, army barracks, and universities). They are embodied in the *whare* itself, which usually

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10. *The woven universe* (2003) is the title of the Reverend Māori Marsden's book on Māori cosmology.

carries an ancestral name, and in the carvings and photographs that may line its internal walls. During ceremonial gatherings, *whakapapa* are recited by speakers at the beginning of their formal orations as a means of establishing their right to speak on that land, especially vis-à-vis other Māori present, as the "living face" of their ancestors. Although such formalities are often dispensed with in meetings between people who see each other regularly, they remain a requisite feature of official occasions, including receptions for important visitors, significant *hui* (tribal gatherings), and *tangihanga* (funerals). Even for those who don't give formal speeches, some knowledge of "who's who" at such events is important in establishing, for example, the *tikanga* (protocol) to be followed in welcoming guests onto the *marae*, since this can vary in significant ways among different *iwi* (tribal kin groups).

For those who participate in *marae* life, then, knowledge of *whakapapa* (one's own and others') is indispensible to acting effectively and is one of several attributes that qualify one to take an active role in such proceedings.[11] While this knowledge was traditionally preserved and disseminated orally, notably within *whare wānanga* (schools of learning) such as Te Rāwheoro at Uawa, many *whakapapa* were recorded after Māori took up the technology of writing in the early nineteenth century. Today it is common for Māori people to use genealogical websites to research their *whakapapa*, and social networking sites—on which "pages" are created for particular ancestors and *marae* as well as tribal groupings—have become popular loci for debating the intricacies and authenticity of specific lineages and connections (Brown and Nicholas 2012). As Toi Hauiti's presentation of their *whakapapa* suggests, however, such lineages are mere threads within a thick and intricately knotted fabric comprising land- and seascapes, *taonga* (treasured possessions), *kōrero* (knowledge), *kaupapa* (projects), *whare* (houses), and *atua* (ancestral deities), as well as people. The *whakapapa* presented at the Uawa workshop, beginning with Hingangaroa, the father of Hauiti, for example, was later situated within a much longer lineage extending back through some forty *papa* or generations, including ancestors who had traversed the Pacific Ocean to arrive in Aotearoa (New Zealand) from homelands in Eastern Polynesia, through Tangaroa ("god" of the sea) to Papatuanuku (the earth), thus binding Hauiti's people to every aspect of Te Ao Mārama ("the world of light" or "the natural world"). At their insistence, each of these layers came to be rendered within the database as separate rows in the table, each row containing the name of a specific ancestor.

Part of the logic of putting all the *mea* in the same "drawer" of the digital "filing cabinet," indeed, was that none of these names are pure categories. "Hinematioro," for instance, is an ancestor within Hauiti's chiefly line as well as a carved *poupou* in Tübingen, and while she could thus be created and then linked as two separate digital objects within the system she is also, as a knot in the fabric of *whakapapa*, one and the same. In this sense, 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

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11. Others may include fluency in the Māori language and (with regard to oratory) gender, depending on the *marae* (women do not generally speak formally on *marae* except in some tribal areas, for example that of Whanau-a-Apanui, farther up the East Coast from Uawa).

many as such, [and having] no need whatsoever of unity in order to form a system'" (Viveiros de Castro 2009: 223–24, citing Deleuze 1968: 236). For the language of *whakapapa* is often unmistakably rhizomatic; chants recalling the origins of life invoke the growth of tubers or the germination of seeds and the unfurling of leaves and tendrils of creeping plants across the land, putting down new radicals as they expand from the original rootstock.[12] It can also be arborescent: Māori Marsden, an authority recognized by Toi Hauiti, describes how "each thing . . . had its own root foundations in the 'cosmic tree' which was sometimes depicted as having its roots in heaven and its crown on earth" (1998: 9–11).

Certainly, a Deleuzian reading of *whakapapa* would be a fascinating exercise, translating aspects of Māori relatedness in ways that would transform it, like all such evocations, in illuminating ways.[13] Yet the task with which we were charged by Toi Hauiti 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, allowing it to encompass and continue to generate novel (and especially digital) forms by way of novel (digital, anthropological) translations. The primary analytic purpose here is thus not to appropriate *whakapapa* into existing ethnographic conversations (though this is certainly an effect of these interventions), but to support Toi Hauiti's project to allow their *whakapapa* to continue to speak for—and to—itself, as Wayne Ngata emphasizes:

> The discussions, and products of the discussions like Te Rauata [the digital repository] and other publications, need to speak to us when speaking about us because we are the guardians of that body of knowledge. (Ngata, personal communication, June 26, 2012)

Here a fundamental aspect of *whakapapa* is being flagged that has not thus far arisen, namely, the responsibilities that its knowledge and belonging entails. *Whakapapa* lineages may be *taonga* in their own right; they are entrusted to certain people who act as their *kaitiaki* or guardians and who may place limits on their dissemination in whatever form. While many such lineages have been published either by or against the wishes of their caretakers, others remain closely guarded within families, often in the form of handwritten notebooks inherited from recent ancestors (Haami 2004: 23). Being translated into writing has impacted on the workings of *whakapapa*, as a number of scholars have observed, not least by making literary artifacts out of oral process. As anthropologist Joan Metge has speculated, for instance, one reason why written *whakapapa* are often regarded as *tapu* (sacred, restricted) may be because of the instrumental importance they acquired as historical documents used by colonial authorities as forms of legal evidence, especially in establishing title to land and other resources (1976: 167). Among the reasons why the *kaitiaki* of *whakapapa* wrote them down in the first place was the need to assert such rights vis-à-vis other Māori, especially rival groups but also sometimes close relatives, and in such circumstances a certain degree of discretion, even secrecy, was required.

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12. See also Prytz-Johansen (1954) on the concept of *tupu*.

13. See for example DeLoughrey (2007) who offers just such an analysis.

As the East Coast leader, politician, and ethnologist Āpirana Ngata observed, furthermore, translating oral *whakapapa* into texts affected the ways in which Māori conceived of such relationships. "If you visualize the foundation ancestors as the first generation, the next and succeeding generations are placed on them in ordered layers," he pointed out, but in "setting out genealogies in writing or print," he went on, the layers "are turned upside down . . . the foundation ancestors are placed at the top and descending lines traced downwards (cited in Salmond 1991: 345). *Take* or "root" ancestors, however, were understood to be planted in and grow from particular places, thus binding people and land together, as manifest in the burial of *iwi* (ancestral bones) or *whenua* (placentas) in the ground to generate *tangata whenua* (land people), so such an inversion had profound conceptual implications.

Writing was not able to fix or reconfigure *whakapapa* relations altogether, however. Records show that large *hui* or gatherings were held in different tribal areas during the nineteenth century expressly to compare and debate different iterations of the same *whakapapa* lines, which were routinely contested during the same period in a profusion of Māori language newspapers. In these discussions, the *mana* (efficacy, authority) of particular speakers and their arguments decided which claims were authentic, and many people edited their *whakapapa* books in light of such exchanges. These discussions continue in tribal *wānanga* today, as well as on the Internet, and *whakapapa* thus continues to dynamically assert itself, as different groups and individuals continue to affirm the authority of their lineages over others.

As a form of knowledge then, *whakapapa* is relational but not relativistic; its truths, no less than those of science, are of critical importance. What such truths are measured against is not (always) objective, however—"what really happened," which simply cannot be known as one approaches its most fundamental layers—but rather other accounts judged as more or less authoritative on the basis of a complex variety of factors, some of which are distinctively Māori (e.g., principles such as *mana*), and some of which are not (the authenticity of archival documents). This is indeed what lends *whakapapa* its distinctive relational dynamism, enabling its most learned exponents to summon up connections to anything and anyone within its prodigiously inclusive embrace. When a tie to someone far outside one's most immediate constellation of relationships is deemed expedient, for example, there are time-honored mechanisms for initiating such encompassing (and always political) relationships. Among different kin groups, for example, *taumau* (arranged) marriages, in which high-born women were gifted as *taonga*, were used well into the twentieth century to align the interests of distant relatives, even bitter enemies. Children were also sometimes gifted in this manner, although here the aim was not always to bring two lineages closer together—such prestations could be designed to ensure the continuance of a separate line that would otherwise die out or to assuage a wrong according to the principle of *utu* or just return (Henare 2003).

Treasured *taonga*, too, named for ancestors who owned and used them, were presented by one lineage to another with similar purposes in mind. It is possible, for instance, that Hinematioro's *poupou*, now in Tübingen, was presented to the Tahitian priest-navigator Tupaia following his learned exchanges with local *tohunga*, when he recited *whakapapa* from his native island of Ra'iatea, to which Hauitian lineages were connected. Name exchanges or sexual hospitality too may have been used at Uawa, as they were by other Māori during the Cook voyages, since

descent lines in the district still carry Tupaia's name (Anne Salmond 2012). Such gifts (*taonga*, women, names) were commonly used by Māori kin groups to bind Europeans and other outsiders into their *whakapapa*. Well into colonial times, political leaders and heads of state were entrusted with ancient cloaks, adzes, pendants, and ear-ornaments, gifted in elaborate prestations in which the *whakapapa* of the *taonga*, preserved in the teachings of the *whare wānanga*, was sometimes recited by guardians who had kept this knowledge intact over many centuries. England's royal family have been the recipients of many such "gifts" over the past two centuries from Māori leaders who have persistently sought to establish *whakapapa* ties to Britain's senior chiefly line (Cory-Pearce 2006).

Whereas rhizomic analogies of tubers and gourd plants are used to evoke the filial aspects of *whakapapa*, then—descendants spreading across a landscape, putting down roots in new places—relations of alliance generated through prestation are often summoned through the more widely used vocabulary of plaiting, stitching, and weaving. Although the term *whakapapa* itself appears to have proto-Polynesian roots that may relate to techniques of barkcloth production (the principal traditional means of making cloth in island Polynesia, in which layers of softened bark are beaten together), in Māori its workings are typically elaborated in the terminology of plaited mats and hand-knotted textiles. In *whatu*, for instance—the twining technique used to make cloaks from the *muka* fiber of *harakeke* (*Phormium tenax*)—each line of wefts is an *aho*, recalling the *aho tipuna*, the lineages linking *papa* or generational layers. To *kanoi* is to weave the main thread of a garment, and it is also to recite one's own *whakapapa* (Salmond 1997: 207). *Tukutuku* panels inside meeting houses are woven by two people passing strands of split kiekie root between each other, and a *tuku* is a transaction (such as the gift of a *taonga*) establishing an ongoing reciprocal relationship. In *raranga* (plaiting), each section of a mat is a *papa*. These and other linguistic parities suggest rich homologies between such processes, their artifacts, and *whakapapa*, such that familiarity with these techniques offers purchase in attempting to translate the nature of these ties ethnographically (Henare [Salmond] 2005b).

Te Arawa anthropologist Paul Tapsell, indeed, invokes these very analogies in describing the importance of gift-giving in establishing and maintaining *whakapapa* relations:

> Each *taonga*'s ancestral pathway has woven a pattern of human interconnections upon the land for generations, forming a *korowai*, or cloak, of knowledge. (Tapsell 1997: 335)

When important *taonga* were gifted among Māori kin groups, Tapsell notes, their trajectories bound parties to the exchange into reciprocal relations sutured with threads poetically conjured in *tauparapara* or sayings that evoke the plunging and climbing flight of the tui bird, stitching sky and earth together. When *taonga* were presented in attempts to encompass outsiders, such as Europeans, however, the gift's import was often lost in translation into other relational idioms and conceptions of ownership, with the result that many potent and precious ancestral *taonga* became detached from the *whakapapa* lineages to which they were integral. Hinematioro's *poupou*, for instance, may have been appropriated by Banks following Tupaia's death at Batavia (Jakarta) in 1770, making its way via the naturalist's

prodigious collection of natural and artificial "curiosities" to Germany.[14] A similar fate met many of the precious cloaks, greenstone body adornments, and weapons presented to Cook and his men during their New Zealand sojourn by Hauiti's people and others, most of which now reside in European museums and private collections.

Taking such prestations as a transfer of property, Europeans often failed to grasp, let alone honor, the responsibilities extending from being bound into the *whakapapa* lines with which they had been invested (Henare [Salmond] 2005a). Anthropologists too, in their studies of "the gift," Tapsell argues, have struggled both to understand and convincingly translate the relationships entailed by such prestations. Often relying on secondary sources instead of first-hand ethnographic experience, he notes, they have employed familiar concepts such as "inalien-ability," "possession," and "ownership" to generalize about an "incredible diversity which continues to surround taonga prestations," describing Māori ties to their *taonga* in ways that Tapsell struggles "to reconcile with [his] Te Arawa experience" (1997: 362).

Tapsell's insistence on the specificity of his own tribal perspective, in contrast to the internally coherent "Māori culture" invoked by many other ethnographers is but one example of how being positioned within *whakapapa*'s fabric can inflect ethnographic translation. As in their treatments of the Māori gift, by contrast, anthropological analyses of Māori kinship have typically addressed *whakapapa* objectively, concerned to establish generalized definitions—notably of how various levels of relational groupings were *in fact* constituted within "traditional" Māori society. The mid-twentieth-century debate over whether *hapū* (typically glossed as subtribes) are or are not properly considered descent groups, for instance (involving Raymond Firth, Meyer Fortes, and Edmund Leach, among others), sought to refine a universally applicable terminology used to compare different kinship "systems" cross-culturally, and paid little heed to what those positioned within *whakapapa* themselves had to say on the matter (Schwimmer 1990). This discussion is ongoing (Sissons 2010, 2011; Webster 2011; van Meijl 2011), and its more recent iterations purport to demonstrate how far Māori ideologies and understandings of themselves and their culture depart from an empirically observ-able reality. These anthropologists appropriate the authority to act as cultural translators, deploying their distinctively demystifying insights to distill an objective truth out from competing (cultural, anthropological) representations.

The dynamism of *whakapapa* affiliations, in which *hapū* periodically recon-figure their relational networks, creating new *hapū* or *iwi* alliances, has thus offered intriguing puzzles to anthropologists keen to lock down universal principles behind diverse "ambilineal," "bilateral," and "optative" kinship practices. Whereas for a time it seemed possible to set aside the political context in which such trans-

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14. As Anne Salmond has noted, Banks made no secret of his proprietorial interest in Tupaia, for whom he had assumed financial responsibility when the Tahitian opted to join the *Endeavour* in the Society Islands, writing, "I do not know why I may not keep him as a curiosity, as well as some of my neighbours do lions and tygers at a larger expense than he will ever probably put me to." When Tupaia died Banks assumed ownership of his personal possessions.

formations were taking place, however, and to write as if one's generalized analyses had no direct political salience, this all changed in New Zealand when the Waitangi Tribunal gained jurisdiction over claims dating back to the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. Suddenly it became critical for Māori people to be able to prove membership of historically recognized and documented kin groups, to which present-day rights to land and other resources attached. Kinship studies were catapulted from seminar rooms into court-like settings, as anthropologists' views (alongside those of historians) on what counted as an authentic *hapū* or *iwi* were endowed with the status of impartial evidence. Māori stakeholders weighed in on debates formerly conducted in an ambience of scholarly detachment, asserting their *whakapapa* with a force commensurable with the degree to which their identity and well-being were at stake. It is in this irrevocably politicized context that scholars now write about *whakapapa*, even though some continue to attempt to assume positions of objective detachment.

While such contested settings may be seen to handicap ethnographic translation, forcing anthropologists to write with an eye to the political consequences of their work, they may also be regarded as a stimulus, impelling one to address aspects of ethnographic experience that are perhaps possible to marginalize or ignore altogether in other places. In the case of *whakapapa*, Māori interventions in what were once abstruse theoretical debates have raised important questions as to whether scholarly commentaries on matters such as kinship can ever be regarded as politically innocent. They ask, both explicitly and implicitly, whether it is desirable—let alone possible—to separate such questions out from politics and other aspects of existence, analytically, in the first place. Most importantly, from an ethnographic perspective, such interventions remind us that Māori themselves have made numerous attempts to translate *whakapapa*'s workings into a diverse range of idioms, translations that might equally be regarded as exercises in ontological articulation—creative attempts to address the incommensurabilities of *whakapapa* and genealogy, often from within *whakapapa*'s own, ever mobile, perspectives.

Aside from the work of Māori anthropologists (examples in Henare [Salmond] 2007), indeed, there are many other instances of Māori people deploying *whakapapa*'s generative cosmology to encompass and translate alterity. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example, a series of Māori "prophet movements" sprang up around New Zealand, spearheaded by charismatic leaders who, inspired by missionary teachings, espoused messages weaving Māori cosmology and Christian theology together. While some of these movements lasted a few years before fading away or were actively repressed, others endure in the present. Whereas mainstream Christian denominations too still enjoy a strong following among Māori, furthermore, Mormonism continues to attract a disproportionate share of the Māori population. Its creed about the ancient settlement of New World territories by the Lost Tribes of Israel has been extended to Polynesia, and resonances asserted between the church's teachings and Māori cultural practices and language (Barber 1995). Among the most significant perceived commonalities that have attracted Māori to the sect is the church's emphasis on recording and reassembling genealogical lineages, and their family history resources are commonly used for *whakapapa* research.

Attempts to articulate *whakapapa* in the terms of other relational idioms are not confined to religious or ethnographic spheres, however; considerable institutional support and public investment is now dedicated to establishing how *whakapapa*, among other principles regarded as distinctively Māori, may be brought to bear on areas of activity as diverse as criminal punishment, environmental conservation, and the science of genetic modification (Henare 2003). As such bodies of research develop, a great range of "Māori" ideas about issues such as relatedness and how they should be translated into public policy and practice is brought increasingly into view. Whereas some would take this variety as evidence of the demise of an authentically coherent "Māori" cultural perspective in the face of acculturation and hybridity, it could equally be seen as proof of *whakapapa*'s resurgent vitality. For there are strong continuities here in the ways in which the dynamic knotwork of relations never settles. What such differences throw into relief, in this light, is how many Māori people are accustomed to moving between ontological positions in which different things are possible—for instance those of "science" and "the Māori world view"—perhaps much as they routinely shift between their (say) "Te Aitanga a Hauiti" and "Ngāti Porou" identities. Such transitions, between one's several *taha* or "sides," and the ability to smoothly negotiate them, are indeed a defining characteristic of *whakapapa*-in-action (Anne Salmond 2012a).

What is generally made less explicit, at least in scholarly analyses, however, is how this inherent motility allows the "worlds" *whakapapa* encompasses and generates to proliferate and be scaled. Switching from one position to another may involve flipping between different (and more-or-less parallel) dimensions (Hauititanga > Arawatanga; Te Ao Māori > science) or shifting up and down within a scale, from lesser to greater levels of encompassment (*whanau* > *hapu* > *iwi*), or the reverse. The nature of such movements are also relationally defined, so that 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. Rather, such *whakapapa* constellations are inherently *relational*, in that what they *are* may differ in the terms of the particular lineage or nexus from which they are apprehended. Again, this does not make them *relativistic*: the seniority and *mana* of one position or line—and its ability to encompass and define others—may be defended to the death. 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.

Conclusion

Lévi-Strauss once claimed, "it is in the last resort immaterial whether . . . the thought processes of the South American Indians take place through the medium of my thought, or whether mine take shape through the medium of theirs" ([1969]

1983: 13). Despite the power of his vision of an anthropology transformed by indigenous philosophies, then, his assumption of the role of chief translator—even author—of such thinking seems to imply a degree of hubris. Although in *whakapapa*'s terms, as we have seen, shared substance—or a certain pedigree—are insufficient alone to qualify an orator to speak on behalf of others, the way one locates oneself—and is located—*within* its matrices of relationships, certainly matters. This positioning, which is indeed the *only* possible source of such authority from *whakapapa*'s perspective, is not without limits, of course, most obviously those conferred by recognized parentage. At the same time, even these factors may be contested, their significance reconfigured, and the degree to which one lives up to the demands of *mana* (personal authority, efficacy) as well as principles such as *utu* (just return, reciprocity), and *whanaungatanga* (responsibility, especially to one's closest kin), also work to determine whether one's authority to translate others' identity and thinking is recognized.

For anthropologists, *whakapapa* thus entails a commitment to building and actively maintaining ongoing relationships with one's interlocutors, who—like Toi Hauiti—may assert their own *mana* over the ethnographic process and its artifacts. Such ties obviously entail restrictions, on what can be translated, for example, as well as how and by whom, but such limitations need not be negatively construed. On the contrary, they may productively refocus one's attentions in ways that can generate insights that might not have been arrived at in other settings.

For a recursive anthropology, which would mobilize such ties in the service of disciplinary renewal, *whakapapa* thus begs some important questions, for example about the relationship of such writing to "indigenous" scholarship. So far, it seems, the main role allocated to anthropology's interlocutors within ontological approaches is that of muse—a fertile and malleable resource for the scholarly work of conceptual innovation. Yet, 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. What might purported (as)symmetries between these different "anthropologies" entail? Why are these voices silent, and silenced by omission, in current anthropological discussions of ontological alterity? What is it, exactly, about self-consciously "indigenous" voices in particular, that seem incommensurable with ontographic concerns?

The issues I am raising here are not (just) about the kinds of privileged insights "natives" may or may not have into their own culture and being (cf. Ramos 2012). Rather—to put it negatively—why should those who locate themselves self-consciously *outside* a given constellation of relations be in a better position to analyze them ethnographically than those who explicitly address their own positioning *within* those matrices as well as—or instead of—externally? Is it only anthropologists who engage in projects of what Viveiros de Castro (2004: 4) terms "external comparisons" (as opposed to those carried out "within" a given culture)? And are not all such comparisons, anyway, internal to particular, relationally defined, perspectives? Surely ethnography, by definition, requires one precisely to negotiate one's own transitions between such positions, drawing on different "sides."

Those who skillfully navigate *whakapapa*'s dynamic matrices are experienced handlers of such apparent incommensurabilities—expert translators of alterity into affinity, and of alliance into otherness. Accustomed to shifting between worlds and

to scaling their networks strategically, they are schooled in traditions geared to facilitating smooth transitions between alternative universalisms and to the creative encompassment of those who (at least initially) appear as other. Within *whakapapa*'s terms, indeed, "incommensurability" and "untranslatability"—and what might be termed "ontological alterity" in general—are relational states, open to generative transformation like all the nexi and threads (people, landscapes, *taonga*, etc.) that make up its inherently mobile fabric. How this will translate into the relational database Te Rauata remains to be seen, but it is clear that Hauiti's *whakapapa* will productively transform itself, and be transformed, in the process.

That *whakapapa* is constantly being (re)negotiated, though, does not make it relativistic, since how one is recognized in *whakapapa*'s terms is of vital importance. For anthropology this means that being defined by, and living up to the demands of, certain kinds of relationships—and addressing the unavoidably political implications of that predicament—are aspects of the ethnographic project that cannot, and need not, be set aside. Rather, approaching such conditions as productive stimuli, it might be allowed that they inflect the ways in which "culture" continues to be "translated" to a greater degree than is sometimes admitted.

In the final part of this article, to appear in the next issue of *HAU*, I apply these insights to a broader discussion looking at the recursive methodology advocated by exponents of the "ontological turn" in relation to recent criticisms leveled at their projects. Revisiting a series of earlier debates—about linguistic relativism, incommensurable paradigms, and radical translation—I consider how terminology appropriated from those (ongoing) discussions may invite people to think of current ontological approaches within social anthropology in similar terms. Yet such associations not only obscure the debt most anthropological "ontologists" acknowledge to European (post)structuralist philosophy, as opposed to the mainly North American thinkers whose arguments I rehearse. They also elide the fact that these recent approaches gain a considerable part of their momentum from a set of issues that may be thought of as distinctively postcolonial. Seen in this light, I argue, charges such as orientalism, synchronism, and excessive relativism, when leveled at the "ontological turn," may distract from more profound (and no less political) issues that its exponents must now address.

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Résumé : La contribution récente du « tournant ontologique » en anthropologie a contribué à transformer le rôle familier de l'ethnographie en un mode de traduction. En lieu et place des conceptions populaires de l'anthropologie sociale comme la transmission plus ou moins fidèle de significations culturelles des peuples autres, ces approches assignent à l'ethnographe la tâche de générer de nouveaux concepts et terminologies — ceux qui sont « nôtre singulièrement » plutôt que les « leur » — à travers une synthèse créative de la philosophie et de l'expérience de terrain. Ceci étant, le rôle que la « pensée indigène » (et même les « penseurs indigènes ») est invitée à jouer dans ce projet et ce discours en plein essor reste flou. J'aborde ici cette question par l'ethnographie d'une initiative conduite à Te Aitanga a Hauiti Māori en Nouvelle-Zélande pour construire un référentiel numérique de *taonga* tribaux (artefacts ancestraux, images, connaissances). Dans ce récit, rédigé dans l'esprit des objectifs de leur projet, je considère ce que les efforts des Hauiti pour traduire leur *whakapapa* (généalogies et histoires orales) dans des formes numériques pourraient impliquer pour une anthropologie qui chercherait à recadrer les questions de différence en mobilisant ces « anthropologies » indigènes au service d'un renouvellement disciplinaire. Ces connaissances ethnographiques plantent alors le décor pour une deuxième discussion — à paraître dans le prochain numéro de *HAU* — à propos de la manière dont les approches ontologiques cherchent à transformer l'anthropologie, ce en rapport aux débats antérieurs sur les difficultés de traduire l'altérité culturelle et ontologique.

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