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COMPARING RELATIONS: WHAKAPAPA AND GENEALOGICAL METHOD

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ABSTRACT: While relational thinking is currently in vogue across the academy, the relations scholars have in mind are often of a certain kind. As anthropologist Marilyn Strathern observes, the idea of relations as connections has a distinct pedigree, one that can work to obscure different (kinds of) relations within and among different (kinds of) things. Here I discuss some implications of these insights by setting them alongside relational methodologies developed in early twentieth-century Aotearoa New Zealand by the statesman and scholar Sir Apirana Ngata. Ngata’s mobilisation of anthropology in the service of an ambitious programme of Māori artistic, cultural and economic revitalisation serves as a powerful precedent for rethinking and reworking relations through ethnography in theory as well as in practice. His advancement of ethnographic methods that deliberately mobilised perspectives constituted by whakapapa ‘Māori relatedness’ is brought into relation with recent discussions about anthropological methods and politics. In particular, whereas critics of some “post-relational” approaches diagnose a lack of both political traction and practical application in these efforts to investigate different modes of relatedness, Ngata’s example points to such experiments’ potential to help challenge and materially transform institutional and popular conceptions, as well as the day-to-day living conditions of marginalised peoples.

Keywords: Māori, indigenous anthropology, relational methodology, genealogical method, ontology

*He iwi kē, he iwi kē
Titiro atu, titiro mai*

One group and another
Exchanging perspectives

—from a *haka* ‘action song’ by Merimeri Penfold

Imagine for a moment that anthropology, a discipline founded to advance Europe’s colonial ambitions, was taken over by a group of indigenous leaders early in its history. Instead of serving only imperial interests, anthropologists were put to work on projects designed to ameliorate the social and economic effects of colonisation. National museums seconded

research staff, provided state-of-the art equipment, made collections and generated scholarly publications in support of these aims. A board supervising anthropologists' activities allocated funding from indigenous sources for ethnographic fieldwork and for publications geared to informing cultural and economic renewal. The merits of different projects and theories, assessed by native authorities and their allies, were judged on their potential to advance colonised people's aspirations. Some of these leaders, well versed in anthropological scholarship, became prominent academic figures in the international discipline as well as politicians on the national stage. Their practical and theoretical work combined to materially reconfigure sociopolitical relations in their corner of Empire, while addressing kinship theory and Pacific migrations along the way.

This is what happened in Aotearoa New Zealand, between about 1900 and World War II, though it is largely forgotten in the annals of the discipline. A close-knit group of Māori intellectuals led by lawyer and politician Apirana Ngata became interested in anthropology, soon coming to regard the nascent discipline as instrumental to Māori cultural and economic renewal. Leveraging his position in Parliament, Ngata established a national Board of Maori Ethnological Research called Te Poari Whakapapa, as detailed in McCarthy and Tapsell (this issue) and took over publication of the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, the scholarly organ of a group of amateur ethnologists with a distinguished international readership.¹ Members of the Society were appointed to the Board, which channelled funds from unclaimed Māori land rentals into ethnographic fieldwork among *iwi* 'tribal groups', work undertaken by museum professionals and students of ethnology, and resulting publications. News of these developments and research results were published in popular Māori-language magazines and newspapers, such as *Te Wananga* and *Te Toa Takitini*, which circulated in cities and towns and within tribal settlements around the country (McCarthy 2014). The Board also sponsored the research of select anthropologists further afield with a view to better governing New Zealand's Pacific colonial dependencies (Cameron and McCarthy 2015; McCarthy 2015). But its activities were primarily geared to supporting a domestic programme of cultural regeneration and economic development initiatives designed to re-establish the *mana* 'personal authority, efficacy', vitality and viability of Māori kin groups.

While some distinguished products of that regime's shepherding of scholarly talent are well remembered in disciplinary histories, among them Felix Keesing and Raymond Firth, even specialists in Pacific anthropology are seldom aware of the degree to which Māori leaders dominated the New Zealand-based discipline during the early twentieth century. In drawing attention to this exceptional constellation of events and personalities, the aim here is not just to correct historical accounts known to privilege the activities

of white European men. Rather, a primary hope is to draw out something of the substance of these indigenous scholars' contributions to fields in which they were active and well-regarded participants, and to look at how they bent anthropology to the wheel of their own ambitions, not least by offering alternative ways of thinking about relations between Māori and non-Māori and of challenging popular and scholarly ideas about indigenous culture and social organisation.

Ngata and his associates' deployment of ethnographic methods and theory to develop programmes of health reform, land consolidation, agricultural investment and artistic revitalisation had major impacts—largely positive but not unequivocally so—on Māori communities, on government and on the country as a whole, many effects of which still reverberate in the present. Throughout this work Ngata in particular applied anthropological methods and ideas reconstituted within *whakapapa* 'Māori genealogy'-defined perspectives in ways that recursively transformed the terms of the scholarly and governmental debates in which he participated. His reworking of problems of "race" and of "culture" into matters best addressed through *tikanga Māori* 'Māori principles and practices' were deliberately grounded in a distinct approach to kinship and relatedness (George 2010; McCarthy 2016) in ways that resonate with current "post-relational" discussions in anthropological theory, as explored toward the end of this paper.

In particular, Ngata's advocacy of the "Genealogical Method" developed by W.H.R. Rivers, which Ngata grounded in *whakapapa* 'Māori relatedness' and applied in theory and in practice to Māori social organisation and development (see below), was advanced as a potent alternative to theories of culture contact and assimilation that were in his time invariably framed in terms of race. Ngata developed these critical interventions in academia and in political discourse partly in dialogue with his friend and colleague Peter Buck (Te Rangihīroa), a collaboration that continued after Buck moved to Hawai'i in 1927 to work as a professional anthropologist. While Buck and Ngata often resorted to race theory and terminology in their long-running correspondence—especially when diagnosing what they called "the Maori problem" and its potential remedies—it is clear that throughout his life, Ngata in particular continued to think about the postcolonial predicament of his people and what to do about it in the quite different relational register of *whakapapa*. Whereas Buck, a medical doctor, tended to see the merging of Māori and Pākehā 'settler' lineages as biologically inevitable (Sorenson 1982: 25), Ngata became increasingly convinced that Māori could and should retain distinct spheres of autonomy grounded in their traditional kin-based groupings of *iwi* 'tribe', *hapū* 'sub-tribe' and *whānau* 'extended family'. His practical work engaged Māori people on these terms, not those of race or biology.

Taken together, Ngata's development schemes as well as his correspondence with Buck and other writings offer rich insights into the depth of thought and experimental practice involved in their attempts to account for and ameliorate the problems Māori faced, which for a long time threatened their existence. Ngata's scholarly interest in anthropology, like Buck's, was motivated not least by the need for a *scientific* vocabulary to explain the Māori predicament to parliamentary peers and civil servants, one geared to attracting material support for their schemes from Pākehā colleagues who might have found an overtly *political* diagnosis of the situation less compelling. But these indigenous scholars' use of the discipline was more than strategic. They deployed its methods and concepts not only to help their people negotiate one of the most turbulent periods in imperial history, but also to enquire into new ways of thinking and being Māori that challenged old orthodoxies even while ensuring the persistence of *Māoritanga* 'Māoriness and Māori unity'² beyond the present. In so doing they helped lay the foundations and support structures of many institutions central to Māori society and culture today.

In calling into question the very terms in which socioeconomic problems were diagnosed, furthermore, and devising remedies based on different ways of relating, Ngata's work is relevant to current anthropological debates about the study of social relations, explored at the end of this piece. His correspondence with Buck and their practical achievements are indicative of the high stakes often involved in projects to challenge "commonsense" notions of what brings people together and what makes them different, while their efforts to implement solutions woven out of alternative relational modalities drawn from whakapapa speak to the discipline's potential to impact upon material conditions. Their example shows, indeed, that reconfiguring the very basis of how relations are imagined can be a matter of life and death. Yet their contributions to such enduring disciplinary quandaries were also intellectual. Buck and Ngata's praxis and reflections speak to differences between Māori kinship or whakapapa and biological notions of race in ways that are illuminating and important in their own right as well as in terms of their "real-world" effects. Of particular interest in this regard are Ngata's attempts to bring whakapapa to bear on kinship theory and on ethnographic practice.

THE "GENEALOGICAL METHOD"

In 1928 Ngata gave a talk to the Wellington branch of the New Zealand Historical Association called "The Genealogical Method as Applied to the Early History of New Zealand" (Ngata 1928a). In it, he argued forcefully in favour of using records of whakapapa or genealogies, preserved by Māori *tohunga* 'ritual experts' over centuries, as authoritative primary evidence of New Zealand's early history. By casting light on Māori life and habits

before, during and after the early days of colonial settlement, he maintained, these records—and the methods of research they enabled—could transform understandings not only of the past but also of the present predicament and future prospects of his own “race”, the Māori people.

In the title for his lecture, Ngata acknowledged a debt to the Cambridge scholar W.H.R. Rivers, a medical doctor and a founding father of British social anthropology who became an authority on the study of kinship in “primitive” societies through the “Genealogical Method” (Rivers 1910) he devised while participating in the University of Cambridge’s 1898 expedition to the Torres Strait. Rivers visited New Zealand in 1915 on his way home from an Australian meeting of the British Association of the Advancement of Science, and presented a paper in Wellington, “The Peopling of Polynesia”. He may have met Ngata, who was much stimulated by the Cambridge scholar’s published work and who conscientiously took up the challenge Rivers laid down in his lecture for New Zealand “to undertake a full ethnographic survey of the indigenous races over which she rules” (Rivers 1926: 261).³ It was not least Rivers’s use of genealogies “to reconstruct the social organisation of the Torres Strait Islanders” that made Ngata think of whakapapa as both a method and a methodology that could facilitate his people’s sociocultural and economic renewal.⁴ The politician indeed began writing a doctoral thesis on this topic (discussed further below) but ultimately dedicated himself to the practical and institutional application of his own genealogical method. What Ngata did in effect was take over the discipline of anthropology in New Zealand for a period, harnessing it to a wide-ranging and ambitious programme of Māori cultural and socioeconomic reinvigoration. In the process he developed, in dialogue with his friend and colleague, the professional anthropologist Peter Buck, a nuanced critique of the discipline’s workings. In place of an exclusively objectifying science, overdetermined by what they saw as European cultural assumptions and models, these Māori scholars offered an alternative. Their “home-made” anthropology (Sorenson 1982) insisted on the importance of being able to compare from within perspectives constituted by the relational fabric under study, as well as being able to look at it from different angles, objectively. Their anthropology turned, in other words, on an ability to *exchange perspectives*—to have an “inside angle” but also “to see ourselves as others see us” (Buck in Sorenson 1986: 48, 116)—a capacity fundamental to the workings of whakapapa or Māori relatedness.

BUCK AND NGATA’S ANTHROPOLOGY

Ngata’s interest in the discipline may be traced to his student days at Canterbury College in New Zealand, where he attended lectures by John Macmillan Brown, an authority on English literature and classics who in later years developed an intense amateur passion for the ethnology of the

Pacific. A committed eugenicist, the professor was outspoken—like many leading anthropologists of the day—about the dangers of race-mixing or “miscegenation” and the threat it posed to Europeans and their subject peoples. Ngata, like Buck, was highly sceptical of the older man’s idiosyncratic theories on Polynesian origins but was quite taken with ideas about the perils of “inter-breeding” and culture-blending. Soon after graduating Ngata gave an impassioned speech before a mainly Māori audience at the 1897 conference of the Te Aute Students’ Association in which he advocated resistance to the threat of racial amalgamation. Instead of merely contributing to “the all conquering, all devouring Anglo Saxon, a fresh strain of blood”, the young lawyer offered “a vision of a Maori race ... possessed of a strong national sentiment, conscious ... of a distinct and separate existence, but nonetheless subject to law and government, loyal to the flag that protects it” (Ngata in Sorrenson 1986: 17).

Ngata’s hope that Māori would retain a strong degree of autonomy within the nation-state persisted throughout his life, though his confidence was often tested, and for many years he publicly advocated selective assimilation.⁵ Together with fellow ex-students of Te Aute College, a boarding school that produced a whole generation of prominent Māori scholars, politicians and clerics, he formed an organisation called the Young Maori Party,⁶ dedicated to advancing a distinctive vision of indigenous priorities and aspirations. These were made explicit in the Party’s draft manifesto in 1909, which asserted:

Since it is destructive to the self-respect of any race to suddenly break with the traditions of its past, it is one of the aims of the Party ... to preserve the language, poetry, traditions and such of the customs and arts of the Maori as may be desirable and by promoting research in the Anthropology and Ethnology of the Polynesian race to contribute to science and provide a fund of material which should enrich Literature and Art of the future. (Ngata 1909)

An early highlight of this campaign was the 1906–7 Christchurch International Exhibition (Fig. 1), where a model *pā* ‘fortified village’ proposed for inclusion by the Te Aute Students’ Association became an important nexus for artistic revival and diplomatic exchanges involving Māori iwi as well as visiting Pacific Island groups (Henare 2005; McCarthy 2009). An interregnum followed during World War I, which saw Buck away fighting and acting as medical officer for the Māori Battalion that he and Ngata had energetically helped recruit. On hospital duty in Britain, Buck met Sir Arthur Keith of the London Hunterian Museum and the eugenicist Karl Pearson, both of whom encouraged his interest in physical anthropology, loaning him instruments to measure the men under his command (Luomala 1952: 39). Returning to New Zealand with the Battalion in 1919, Buck just missed participating in the Hui Aroha (a large gathering of love and mourning) organised by Ngata

at Gisborne to welcome the soldiers and the spirits of their dead comrades home from the war. This event provided the occasion for the first of four ethnographic expeditions supported by Ngata and funded and organised by New Zealand's national museum (Henare 2005, 2007).

The Dominion Museum expeditions extended the Young Maori Party's programme of cultural revitalisation into the tribal heartlands of New Zealand's North Island, not least by encouraging iwi to "vie with one another to produce good stuff to put on record" (Buck 1923a). They also helped Buck and Ngata to make waves in international academia, aided by a series of films and lantern slides that were produced in the field along with publications showcasing their state-of-the-art ethnographic research, modelled on the Cambridge Torres Strait expedition. As with the model pā project, the national museum's staff played vital roles. Ethnologist Elsdon Best was the most experienced member of the core party of researchers, which also included the Museum's photographer and filmmaker James McDonald and Johannes



Figure 1. Gathering of people at the Māori pā, New Zealand International Exhibition, Christchurch, 1906. Courtesy of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa MU0523/006/0025.

Andersen of the Alexander Turnbull Library, a keen amateur ethnologist with a passion for music and string games. Buck joined the team regularly in the field, and it was during these expeditions that he systematically developed his lifelong and later professional interest in material culture.

After the trip to Gisborne, where contacts among local people had been set up by Ngata via the office of the Minister of Native Affairs (commonly referred to as the Native Minister), the next expedition was to Rotorua in 1920 to record a large Māori gathering to formally welcome the visiting Prince of Wales (later Edward VIII). Ngata once again encouraged the trip, eager for Best, Andersen and McDonald to “continue their researches” (Gibbons 1992: 188). In 1921 the team set out up the Whanganui River, where they spent several weeks collecting records of traditional skills and knowledge as well as a number of artefacts. They were joined at Koriniti by Buck, eager to apply in the field the anthropometric techniques he had picked up in Britain. The fourth expedition of the Dominion Museum ethnographers was in 1923, when Ngata invited McDonald, Best, Andersen and Buck to his home at Waiomatatini on the East Coast, so that records could be obtained of the traditional skills and technologies of his Ngāti Porou people (Dennis 1996: 292). There the team was assisted by many senior *kaumātua* ‘elders’ of the district, who “considered the recording of their arts and crafts and tribal lore as a matter of considerable importance” (New Zealand Film Archive 1987; see also Robertson, and Salmond and Lythberg, this issue). At towns with electricity, films from the Whanganui expedition were shown to the locals (New Zealand Film Archive 1987). Buck had suggested this in a letter to McDonald as a way of stirring up intertribal competition, a strategy that was evidently very successful.

Ngata and Buck participated actively, demonstrating many of the ancient technologies and art forms that were, through their efforts, in the process of being widely revived (Fig. 2). Soon after the East Coast trip, Buck showed films and slides shot on the expedition at the 1923 Pan-Pacific Science Congress in Australia, to audiences that included Alfred Haddon of the University of Cambridge. Buck reported to Ngata that Haddon “paid high tribute to the ethnological work done in New Zealand” and expressed “a desire to obtain sets of slides illustrating Maori arts and crafts”. He added:

[I]n the public lecture I showed slides ... [of] the typical carved house, lintels etc., hekes [‘rafters’], poupous [‘carved figures’] and the tukutuku [‘latticework panels’] of Porourangi [Ngata’s own ancestral meeting house]. Then two slides showing two University graduates keeping alive the ancient arts and crafts. When I introduced one as the Hon Mr A.T. Ngata M.A. L.L.B., there was loud applause. (Buck 1923b)



Figure 2. Ngata and Buck (Te Rangihīroa) working on a *tukutuku* ‘latticework panel’, Waiomatatini, 1923. Photograph by James McDonald. Courtesy of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa A.4046.

In reaction to Buck’s emphasis on the active role played by Māori themselves in the expeditions, he noted Haddon even “said he regretted that he wasn’t a Maori!” (in Buck 1923b).

These ethnographic expeditions were part and parcel of Ngata’s strategy to employ “nga rakau a te Pakeha” (the tools of Europeans) in the recording of traditional practices and forms of knowledge (Henare 2007) which, as the other contributions to this special issue demonstrate, would have been impossible without his own deep knowledge and wide-ranging network of relationships with tribal scholars expert in the teachings and workings of whakapapa. The research provided material that was used in Ngata and Buck’s interventions into anthropological scholarship and toward the Young Maori Party’s efforts to refigure policies of governance while implementing grassroots programmes of reform and development. Many of the most important changes they sought to bring about required, as they saw it, not just physical work on the ground but also active engagement in scholarly debates and the reorientation of administrative policy. Ngata and his colleagues’

intellectual labours were thus an integral part of the material transformations they sought to effect, calibrated to inflect scientific orthodoxy with insights they understood as distinctively Māori. Their objective was to carve out political and scholarly spaces in which tikanga Māori could come to the fore, a *kaupapa* ‘project, body of work’ that self-consciously mobilised the constant exchanging of perspectives required to operate within whakapapa as both its method and its methodology (George 2010; McCarthy 2016).

RACE AND WHAKAPAPA

In 1928, the year of his address on “The Genealogical Method”, Ngata wrote to Buck expressing “deep interest” in the work of another English anthropologist by the name of Rivers, this time the then highly regarded Oxford ethnologist G.H.L.F. Pitt-Rivers,⁷ whose writings Buck had recommended and who, Ngata noted approvingly, built a strident case against culture-mixing and miscegenation. Pitt-Rivers had also journeyed the Whanganui River in the company of Elsdon Best (just before the fourth and final Dominion Museum expedition to the East Coast), and his subsequent article, “A Visit to a Maori Village: Being Some Observations on the Passing of the Maori Race and the Decay of Maori Culture”, appeared in 1924 in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*. The paper was reprinted in the Oxford scholar’s book *The Clash of Culture and the Contact of Races* (1927), and it was this publication about which Buck wrote enthusiastically to Ngata.⁸ In response, Ngata emphasised the importance of his own and Buck’s applied anthropological work to date in rebuilding a cultural base for Māori, one strong enough to resist the imposition of Pākehā “culture-forms”, which, he lamented, had already led to considerable degeneration. He drew support from Pitt-Rivers’s thesis for his own view that, instead of allowing themselves to be passively assimilated, Māori must strategically control the absorption only of those aspects of European culture they deemed useful into their own:

Such a work as that of Pitt-Rivers opens up a very wide field to chaps like myself, who are perforce immersed in the problems of today yet are desirous of touching bottom, of recovering from the phases that survive and persist today something of the polity of the pre-pakeha days. ... [We] must acknowledge that our hearts are not with this policy of imposing pakeha culture-forms on our people. Our recent activities would indicate a contrary determination to preserve the old culture-forms as the foundations on which to reconstruct Maori life and hopes. (Ngata in Sorrenson 1986: 123; see also Ngata 1928b)⁹

The “recent activities” to which Ngata referred included the Dominion Museum expeditions as well as Buck’s metamorphosis from public health official to professional anthropologist, newly appointed to the Bishop

Museum in Hawai‘i. Ngata’s own scholarly initiatives, including his paper on the “Genealogical Method”, and their application in government policy and legislation were also at the front of his mind. A crowning achievement of the Young Maori Party’s campaign had been the foundation by Act of Parliament of Ngata’s national Board of Maori Ethnological Research (BMER) in 1923, called in Māori “Te Poari Whakapapa” (The Whakapapa Board) (see McCarthy and Tapsell this issue). This body enabled Buck and Ngata to effectively assume control of the bulk of anthropological research and publication being carried out in New Zealand and to help fund Buck’s Pacific fieldwork (Cameron and McCarthy 2015; McCarthy 2014). The Board’s Māori name pointed not only to the importance of genealogies and oral histories as potent forms of evidence, as emphasised in Ngata’s Historical Association address, but toward Ngata’s vision of how whakapapa was to be brought to bear on the workings and structure of the discipline. As he wrote to the Native Minister’s secretary, Te Raumoia Balneavis, while setting up the Board: “I believe that an arrangement such as our whakapapa could eventually be evolved to show at a glance the relative position of each branch of research” (Ngata 1923).

In his correspondence with Buck, Ngata spoke of his Historical Association address as a “precis” of a much more substantial piece of writing he had been working on for some time, which applied the “Genealogical Method” to Māori social organisation. This work too, conceived as a prospective doctoral thesis, mobilised whakapapa as both primary evidence and methodological framework. Ngata had been collecting material relevant to the project for years and had made progress toward a synthesis, as he reported to Buck in 1928:

I am now fairly launched on an exhaustive treatise on the “Genealogical Method” On social organisation, amplifying the method and deductions used by Rivers in the Torres Strait studies, the whakapapas stand supreme. Traditions and historical notes woven round them illumine & are illuminated by them. You can take the whakapapa to pieces, arrange and rearrange them, much as you have used the material in the Evolution of Maori Clothing, and from the dissection get at the scheme or schemes of Maori social life. (Ngata in Sorrenson 1986: 114)

Ngata’s planned treatise never came together in the end, and, while many whakapapa of different families and other material he collected are held among his papers in the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington, it was long thought that none of his writing toward the dissertation had survived. In 2018, however, a short but brilliant tract came to light at the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum in Hawai‘i, where it had evidently been sent to Buck for comment, along with some additional material in the Ngata papers at the Alexander

Turnbull Library, which had also remained in the Ngata family (see Ngata and Ngata this issue). These closely typed pages contain a fascinating and detailed discussion of whakapapa terminology and the different methods of recitation through which it was recorded and transmitted, and are published for the first time in the present issue. Ngata also delivered a paper applying his version of the genealogical method to Māori social organisation at the Anthropological Section of the New Zealand Institute Science Congress in January 1929, but the manuscript of this talk has failed to materialise, despite concerted efforts to trace it.¹⁰

Many enticing hints about Ngata's approach can nonetheless be gleaned from his correspondence with Buck and from writings surrounding the BMER's activities. Together these suggest that while in earlier years Ngata often seemed to speak of whakapapa and biological kinship more or less interchangeably, as time went on he increasingly sifted ideas of race, ethnicity and biology out from those he associated with Māori relational thinking and practice. The more evidence he saw of the capacities of whānau, hapū and iwi to overcome challenges on their own terms, the more convinced he became that the solutions to his people's predicament lay neither in resisting nor embracing miscegenation and cultural assimilation but in redefining the nature of these relations altogether.¹¹

It would be disingenuous to deny Ngata and Buck's frequent use of and interest in race theory, or to finesse the unequivocally racist statements they (especially Buck) sometimes made about other Pacific peoples.¹² Yet there is another layer to these pronouncements, which is obscured by the anglophone terminology in which their correspondence was mainly (though not exclusively) conducted. From within the kinds of perspectives constituted by whakapapa, self-elevation of one's own kin group over others may be apprehended—in accordance with Ngata's own "Genealogical Method"—in terms of the workings of *tuakana/teina* 'senior/junior' kin relations. Buck noted "the importance of the status of seniority" among Polynesians and referred to "the satisfaction to the ego in being the tuakana, in having the prestige and name, in beating the other man" (Sorrenson 1986: 119, 121). The practice of whakapapa often involves games or even battles of one-upmanship between kin groups, each seeking advantage over others.

Just such an approach to Buck and Ngata's anthropology is indeed taken by Sāmoan historian Toeolesulusulu Damon Salesa (2000). In discussing their views on "half-castes" in Pacific colonies Salesa writes: "Ngata's observations, like Buck's, were genealogical, reminiscent of whakapapa." Noting that their opinions were "not dissimilar to a wider 'common-sense' view of inheritance shared by Europeans", Salesa nonetheless pinpoints a crucial distinction: "The main difference was that Ngata was emphasising the duality of [the] heritage [of the "half-caste"]", rather than fractionalising it

into halves and quarters, as Europeans tended to” (Salesa 2000: 108). Salesa’s contrast between a “duality” of perspectives and a “fractionalising” of ethnic identity underlines a signature characteristic of whakapapa that was crucial to Ngata’s anthropology, ultimately leading him to reject the divisive logic of race theory in favour of a prospective vision of Māori–Pākehā relations defined in terms of whakapapa.

As Ngata was aware, a person in whakapapa is composed as a concatenation of lineages, or—to adopt an indigenous analogy—as a knot binding different descent lines and relational substance in an all-encompassing fabric of relations. As a “living face” of their ancestors, people may render those ancestors present—depending on their own mana—for instance by assuming authority to speak at formal occasions on behalf of a group of a given ancestor’s descendants. Such presence is not considered partial (“fractionalised”) by virtue of the multiplicity of lineages of which the person is composed, but might be thought of as non-simultaneous. (For a particular line to be emphasised or brought forward, others must be momentarily eclipsed or suppressed while maintaining a kind of presence *in potentia*.) In speaking on *marae* ‘communal gathering places’, for instance, a person can switch from one ancestral “side” to another by foregrounding first one and then another of their many lines of descent (*aho tipuna* ‘ancestral threads’). They may thus alternately become the “living face” of different kin groups.¹³

There is resonance here with anthropologist Marilyn Strathern’s “dividuals”: persons seen as “the plural and composite site of the relations that produced them” (Strathern 1996: 53). Yet, as Salesa points out, whakapapa’s mathematics is non-fractional; its persons and kin groups are “more than one, less than many” (De la Cadena 2017) but are not divided into “fractions of one” (Strathern 2011: 93) *per se*. This distinction is crucial to Ngata’s anthropology, as it led him ultimately away from race theory in favour of whakapapa’s impetus toward extensive and generative encompassment (Salmond 2013). Whereas racial predictions foresaw that Māoriness would either be “amalgamated” into a superior, hybrid race or “bred out” through miscegenation—“half-castes” would become “quadroons”, “octoroons” and so on—Ngata’s whakapapa-based perspective assured that Māori could continue to be fully Māori while becoming in some aspects Pākehā.

COMPARING RELATIONS

Over the course of a long career, Ngata’s comparisons of race or biological relatedness and whakapapa altered from themselves (*sensu* Holbraad and Pedersen 2017: 294). Early on he often used whakapapa and genealogy interchangeably (whether in advocating Māori resistance or acquiescence to racial and cultural assimilation). Later in life, he became increasingly convinced that the best chance for Māori persistence and autonomy lay

in shoring up whakapapa against race theory's diluting divisions. Ngata's propensity to orient his thought and action down tribal lines and to orchestrate his interventions accordingly is perhaps the best evidence of this tendency, together with his insistence on upholding principles of tikanga Māori such as *tapu* 'sacred, restricted', *manaakitanga* 'hosting guests' and *whanaungatanga* 'relationships, kinship'. Though he may not, in the end, have finished synthesising his ideas on whakapapa into a comprehensive thesis, he did begin to render such distinctions explicit in many of his writings. In a 1931 report to Parliament on his Native Land development schemes,¹⁴ for instance, Ngata cited both his former protégé Raymond Firth at length as well as Buck, before noting that Pākehā anthropologists—like his parliamentary colleagues—risked mistaking Māori selective appropriation of European habits and technologies for a wholesale abandonment of traditional values and social organisation. Instead, he argued forcefully, it was essential to recognise the underlying persistence and importance of tribal structures and chiefly authority—in other words, whakapapa relationships—in directing and facilitating successful economic and cultural adaptation.

In his writings on the "Genealogical Method" too, as we have seen, Ngata's vision of whakapapa as an ontology in every sense of the word becomes clear. And in correspondence with Buck, the question of how race relations might differ from those of whakapapa often becomes the object of reflexive observations, not least when considering how their approach contrasted with those of mainstream anthropology. Both insisted that being able to exchange perspectives—to see things *from within* whakapapa *as well as from without* its shifting comparisons—offered a different (and for them more scientific) way of approaching the kinds of questions addressed by ethnography than those reliant on the authority of a single and unified horizon of existential possibility. Seen in this light, Buck and Ngata's comparisons of whakapapa-based methodologies with those grounded in biological notions of race appear salient in regard to current anthropological discussions about relations.

For some time now, in anthropology as in other disciplines, scholars have extolled the virtues of *relational* modes of thought and action like whakapapa over those variously described as "modernist", "particulate" or "entitative." Tim Ingold, for instance, is among the most influential of a host of scholars who champion processual, embodied engagement within "a world that already coheres" over methods that assume "a world of disconnected particulars that has to be rendered coherent, or joined up after the fact, in the theoretical imagination" (Ingold 2008: 73). Ingold's polemical case that, contrary to received wisdom, "[a]nthropology is *not* ethnography", is an intervention that has helped stimulate an ongoing and vigorous reassessment of the kinds of relations on which anthropological knowledge claims turn. His argument

that ethnographic method, understood as the description of particularities, is just one aspect of a much broader philosophical exercise in “comparative generalisation” continues to provoke rich reflections on the relationship of anthropological “data” to “theory”, and how analyses might move from the particular to the general and back again. Crucial to Ingold’s case is a distinction between relations as *connections* (for instance between parts and wholes) on one hand, and relatedness as a generalised and universal condition of being on the other.

Ingold’s project is indeed one of a range of attempts, following the “science wars” of the 1990s and the rise of self-styled postmodernism, to rewrite academia’s ontological and epistemological constitution in ways that seek to elide modernism’s errors while conserving the affordances of scientific truth. In common with philosophers of science like Bruno Latour, Ingold seeks to craft a dynamic rapprochement of the arts and sciences grounded in ways of thinking about relations between things, people and other beings that are offered as alternatives to modernism’s binary, particulate logic. Such schemes are notable for being grounded in networks,¹⁵ meshworks¹⁶ or other kinds of fields pregnant with diffuse relationality. In certain offerings and readings, indeed, relations may furnish the very conditions of possibility for existence, while in others, like Ingold’s, “materials” have a presence prior to *social* relations, though not outside a phenomenological fabric of generalised relational immanence.¹⁷

Alongside and partly in dialogue with these attempts to rework the basis of academic knowledge and to build a better world is another quite different set of approaches taken by other anthropologists who also see the task of redefining their discipline’s aims and methodologies as urgent. One way in which this further body of scholarship has been characterised is as an “ontological turn” (Henare *et al.* 2007; Holbraad and Pedersen 2017) away from concerns about knowledge or epistemology and toward questions of realities or beings. Another nexus or thread drawing this work together in a much wider net, however, is the influence of Pacific ethnographers Roy Wagner and Marilyn Strathern.¹⁸ Taken together, these wide-ranging discussions involve Pacific specialists and anthropologists of Amazonia, as well as many other exponents of especially the British, French and Scandinavian disciplines. Participants share long-standing concerns with how anthropologists think about “connectivity” and “materiality”, yet they address these more often in terms of *relations* and of *things*. What the “recursive” ontological turn (Salmond 2014) shares with other work inspired by Strathern and Wagner is what might be called a *subjunctive* attitude to the kinds of questions begged by ethnography, and a commitment to interrogating—not taking for granted—what it could mean to approach things relationally (Salmond

2016). In contrast to Ingoldian or Latourian analyses, in which attempts are made to *resolve* questions about how things are or should be related through recourse to new ontological constitutions or to new and improved ways of being, this work seeks to *hold open* questions posed by ethnography so as to admit unanticipated insights. Rather than seeing the job of anthropologists as being to establish, once and for all, the best way of being (or of relating), then, this work addresses questions like: “Were things to be as they appear ethnographically, what else could (come to) be (related)?”

What counts as a relation is a long-running theme in Strathern’s work, one that has been picked up by many inspired by her writing (Corsin-Jiménez 2006; Holbraad 2013; Lebner 2017a). Strathern herself has addressed this question concretely, in regard to changing legal definitions of parenthood demanded by the advent of new reproductive technologies (Strathern 1992), for instance, and in discussions of the etymology of the term “relation” in English philosophical discourse (Strathern 2017). Her ethnographic descriptions at the same time pose questions about the assumptions we bring, as anthropologists and as readers, to the apprehension of such accounts as well as of their artefacts—that which they help generate (for example the now commonplace legal distinction between social and biological parents). Strathern’s observation (e.g., 2011) that the very idea of relations-as-connections itself has a distinctive pedigree, one that can work to obscure different (kinds of) relations within and among different (kinds of) things, has proved especially resonant. Drawing on this insight, a powerful critique has emerged of the notion that “relational” thought and practice necessarily involves forging and leveraging connections per se. One area of these discussions interrogates assumptions about the kinds of entities that ostensibly require relations to become mutually involved, such as persons, materials, things, landscapes and other beings, while another draws attention to the qualities of different kinds of relations, including those of detachment, conflict, analogy, contrast and comparison (Corsin-Jiménez 2014; Jensen *et al.* 2011; Lebner 2017a; Yarrow *et al.* 2015). The challenges inherent in mobilising ethnography to open up different relational possibilities, in language that carries within itself a specific concept of the relation, is a recurring theme across much of this work.

Of special concern within these debates is what Strathern identified early on as “the problem of ‘comparison’” (1991: xxviii). This begins with the insight that conventional anthropological analyses rely on “a familiar mathematic”, defined by Ashley Lebner (2017b: 10) as one in which “‘individual instances’ (societies, traits) are counted and evaluated by an ‘entity’ able to abstract and uncover, or produce a ‘theory’ about, the meaning of their similarity and difference”.

One problem with this kind of *conventional* comparison, the Strathernian argument goes, is that it demands the very sort of thinking Ingold objected to above; it requires individual instances to be thought of, in his words, as “disconnected particulars that [have] to be rendered coherent, or joined up after the fact, in the theoretical imagination” (Ingold 2008: 73). Conventional ethnographic comparison, in short, requires relations to be imagined and realised as *connections*. This rule may be seen to apply within and across scales; it defines relations among parts and between parts and wholes, whether it is “materials”, “individuals”, “societies”, “cultures”, “structures”, “systems” or even “networks” that are at stake. And, at the same time, of course, such a distinctive mathematic encourages a particular way of imagining the relationship of ethnographic “data” to anthropological “theory”.

Whereas Ingold has sought to resolve this problem, as we saw, by replacing modernism’s particulate universe with a phenomenological field of generalised relational immanence, Strathern charts a different course of action. Instead of making space for other kinds of relations to emerge through recourse to a new and improved ontology—one in which relations are not (or are not only) connections—she holds the question “what counts as a relation?” open in such a way as to admit the unanticipated possibilities that can arise through exchanges of perspective. Her experiments with alternative modes of description and different comparative devices—not least the contrast between “analogy” and “conventional comparison” itself (Lebner 2017b: 9–15)—turn on maintaining a subjunctive attitude toward what relations, and thinking and acting “relationally”, might turn out to entail. Some inspired by Strathern see in this prospective stance a means of enabling difference to assert itself politically, and derive from her work methodologies geared both more and less explicitly to this end (De la Cadena and Blaser 2018; Holbraad and Pedersen 2014; Riles 2006; Street and Copeman 2014; Wastell 2001). Ethnographic (re)descriptions, the work of these authors suggests, could work toward changing the inadequate terms in which political and economic relations are conventionally negotiated and built into institutions and infrastructures, not just how they are imagined in theory. In doing so, it is ventured, ethnographic writing might assist in materially transforming such relations themselves.

* * *

Setting these current ambitions alongside Ngata and his colleagues’ much earlier deployment of anthropology in the service of Māori cultural and economic renewal opens a range of different possibilities. Seen from within a third-person perspective, my own comparison of these different

anthropologies is conventional; it sets two examples side by side and proposes parities and disjunctures between them. Yet the materials brought together here are themselves comparative, and—as we have seen—comparative in different ways. Not limited by the terms from which the present discussion takes off, they draw momentum from different (kinds of) relations and are open to different fields of potential. The materials themselves thus work to reconfigure the terms of their own analysis, opening it up to insights not anticipated at the outset (or even the end) of this particular intervention, not least through their exchanges of perspective.

Comparisons have lives of their own, that is to say, and it is beyond the scope and intention of this article to *resolve* the question of the significance of Buck and Ngata’s work, in relation to ethnography, to Māori aspirations then and now, or to anything else, for that matter. Instead, by bringing their comparisons together with others—by comparing relations—I intend to invite further comparisons, ones that might, for instance, extend the kaupapa Ngata set in motion through his genealogical method. Readers will bring their own ways of relating—and their own particular relations—to the mix.

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NOTES

1. As Conal McCarthy notes, “the words anthropology, ethnology, and ethnography were often used loosely and interchangeably” in early twentieth-century New Zealand (McCarthy 2016: note 3).
2. Māoritanga was a term coined in the early twentieth century to describe a future-oriented vision of Māoriness and Māori unity (Sissons 2000). McCarthy notes that its history is often traced to the 1920s, whereas its earliest usage may in fact have been at a 1911 *hui* ‘gathering’ at the meeting house Te Tokanga-nui-a-Noho in Te Kūiti (McCarthy 2014, 2016).

3. In a letter to Buck dated 23 June 1928, Ngata writes: “Rivers’ estimate of the part that New Zealand should take in carrying out a full ethnographic survey of the native races under its rule should be acted up to” (Sorrenson 1986: 105).
4. Sorrenson describes Rivers’s article “The Social Organisation of the Torres Straits Islanders”, published in *Man* in 1901, as Ngata’s “model” for his paper on the “Genealogical Method” (Sorrenson 1982: 13).
5. Sorrenson (1986: 17) notes that “for some years Ngata doubted whether the Maoris could retain a separate ethnic existence but from the 1920s he became increasingly confident that they could”.
6. This was not a political party as such but rather a society which, like its predecessor, the Te Aute Students’ Association, was made up of a group of Māori professionals, intellectuals and politicians dedicated to ameliorating what they saw as their people’s socioeconomic and cultural degeneration in the wake of colonisation.
7. Despite his lack of higher academic qualifications Pitt-Rivers was an active member of the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) during this period, based at Worcester College, Oxford, from 1925–27. He received numerous speaking invitations, gave academic lectures and published several articles in anthropological journals, especially *Man*. Well regarded by figures such as Haddon and Seligman, he was an intimate of Bronislaw Malinowski, described by Pitt-Rivers’s biographer as one of his “closest friends and supporters”. The eugenicist and sometime RAI president Arthur Keith, who encouraged Buck’s anthropometric work during the war, was also “a lifelong friend and supporter of Pitt-Rivers’s work” (Hart 2015).
8. Best is thanked and Buck is credited in Pitt-Rivers’s preface with providing “data and comments”.
9. Where Pitt-Rivers himself was headed with his thoughts on “culture clash” and the avoidance of racial miscegenation became clear only some time after Ngata read his book, when the Oxford anthropologist formed an alliance with Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists and found himself interned during World War II for his vocal support of German national socialism.
10. Ngata’s paper was titled “The Genealogical Method as the Basis of Investigation into the Social Organisation of the Maoris” (Sorrenson 1986: 205 fn 19).
11. Jeff Sissons has also proposed that Ngata’s thinking became more radical as time went on, as reflected for example in his comments to the 1934 commission set up to investigate the financial activities under his leadership of the Department of Native Affairs (Sissons 2000).
12. For examples see Buck on Sāmoans (Sorrenson 1986: 72) and his comments about Aboriginal Australians in a letter to Ngata following the 1923 Pan-Pacific Science Congress in Australia (Buck 1923b). Carey (2014) discusses the influence of race science on Buck’s thinking in detail.
13. See Salmond (2014) for an extended discussion of whakapapa along these lines.
14. This document (Ngata 1931) is described by Sorrenson (1996) as a “masterpiece” and (1982) as Ngata’s “most important essay in anthropology”.
15. As in Latour’s Actor–Network Theory (ANT), to give but one influential example of the use of this figure.

16. The term Ingold prefers over networks: “My contention ... is that what is commonly known as the ‘web of life’ is precisely that: not a network of connected points, but a meshwork of interwoven lines” (2011: 63). This is a point addressed directly to Latour: “Although purporting to merge the politics traditionally reserved for human society with the ecology once limited to entities deemed natural into a single field of negotiation and contestation, [Latour’s political ecology] instead offers no more than a skeleton of the affairs of real human and nonhuman organisms, bound as they are within a web of life. Latour’s is an ecology bereft of energy and materials. He has nothing to say about them. This is precisely what distinguishes the ‘network’ of Latourian Actor Network Theory (ANT) from the ‘meshwork’ of my own account” (Ingold 2012: 436–37).
17. Indeed for Ingold, the point of “purifying” materials out of the relational meshwork into which they are otherwise bound (e.g., 2007, 2012) seems to be to emphasise their very indissolubility from that fabric.
18. These scholars were themselves profoundly influenced by David Schneider’s radical challenges to the anthropology of kinship from the 1960s onwards. Schneider’s insights into how kinship “data” and “theory” configure each other opened the way for the so-called New Melanesian Ethnography, a label strongly associated with Strathern and Wagner’s work.

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