

Refusing the ‘Foolish Wisdom of Resignation’: Kaupapa Māori in conversation with Adorno

European Journal of Social Theory

2020, Vol. 23(4) 532–549

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DOI: 10.1177/1368431019872140

journals.sagepub.com/home/est**Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach** *University of Konstanz, Konstanz, Germany***Carl Mika***University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand*

Abstract

Drawing on select works of Adorno, we will first rehearse his reasons for a rejuvenation of philosophy and apply them to philosophers working on world philosophical traditions. We will then analyse Adorno's arguments pertaining to the theory–praxis relation to ascertain whether his thought could accommodate a study of world philosophical traditions for the simple reason that they are present in a particular society. Shifting our focus slightly, we reflect upon how current ways of professional philosophizing affect the study of world philosophical traditions. As the example of Māori philosophy demonstrates, current philosophical practices seem to delimit the search for the unconventional in academic philosophy. Through its philosophical appropriation, the so-called unconventional tends to mimic conventional patterns in academic philosophy. We will then attempt to find reasons to critique this process within the Adornoian framework itself. The conclusion draws together different strands of the discussion and delineates some paths to take forward the world philosophies project in an Adornoian spirit.

Keywords

Academic philosophy, Adorno, conceptual decolonization, Māori philosophy, non-conceptual, world philosophies

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In this article, we seek Theodor W. Adorno as a ‘moral contemporary’ (Allen, 2016, p. 225), who could through his work in German theory allow us – a Māori philosopher and an Indo-German philosopher – to think through some aspects of conceptual decolonization as it relates to our work in cross-cultural philosophy. Broadly understood, conceptual decolonization gestures toward a destabilization of conventional portrayals of a centred, universal knower from whom alone knowledge emanates. Using Adorno’s thought for our specific, limited purpose, we intend to braid together George Steinmetz’s call to decolonize ‘German theory’ (Steinmetz, 2006, p. 3) with insights from cross-cultural philosophy, which attempts to move beyond the Euro-American paradigm in academic philosophy. Following Steinmetz, ‘German theory’ will be understood as ‘theory generated in German cultural and linguistic spaces’ (Steinmetz, 2006, p. 3). Adorno’s influential position within the so-called Frankfurt School and his critique of standard practices in academic philosophy make him an apt candidate for our long-term project in decolonizing German theory. This focus neither binds us to a conventional, exegetical interpretation of Adorno nor binds us to being prescribed by his more explicit thought. Rather, we feel motivated to creatively use some of his thoughts to think alongside him or with a response to him in mind. Relatedly, our extension of the term philosophy to other non-Euro-American contexts is not arbitrary, even within the scope of this article. While Adorno may have had Eurocentric leanings,¹ and from this standpoint could have possibly not wholly endorsed our extension of the term, we do not believe that our appropriation of some of his work goes against his own project. We deploy the term philosophy in contexts related to world philosophies keeping his own words in mind. Adorno wrote: If one ‘conceives of philosophy as a mode of consciousness that does not let the boundaries of a specific discipline be forced upon it, one gains the freedom to use words originating in the domain of philosophy in places where conventional usage does not expect philosophy’ (Adorno, 1991: 196). We will use the term world philosophies in all those cultural contexts in which people have sought, and seek, to make sense of their philosophical experience using the concepts available to them.

One example of a world philosophy is Indigenous Māori philosophy. A compelling reading of Indigenous philosophy generally is that it gives equal importance to infinite worlds, whether these are seen or unseen, human or non-human (Deloria, 2001; Marsden, 2003; Mika, 2017; Wildcat, 2001). This decentring of the human self has significant consequences for critical theory, which, we soon argue, has both enabled but limited this fundamental Māori philosophy. Thus, Horkheimer’s proposition that critical theory ‘has as its object human beings as producers of their own historical form of life’ (Horkheimer, cited in Bohman, 2016, n.p.) flies directly in the face of Indigenous philosophical notions of mystery through its inability to escape the idea of the strongly agentic human.

Drawing on some select works of Adorno, we will first rehearse his reasons for a rejuvenation of philosophy and apply them to philosophers working on world philosophical traditions. Adorno’s emphasis of the non-conceptual as well as of the nonconformist bent in philosophizing would be appealing to cross-cultural philosophers, who on account of their specialization seem to be deviating from a conventional understanding of academic philosophy. We will then draw upon Adorno’s arguments on the theory–praxis relation to ascertain whether Adorno’s thought could accommodate a study of

world philosophical traditions for the simple reason that they are present in a particular society. The question driving our inquiry in this section will be: If Adorno's theory guides practice, how (if at all) would it make room for those traditions, which in their own self-image are philosophical but continue to be excluded from academy? In other words: Would their philosophical worth have to be determined by professional philosophers or does it suffice that they have been looked upon as sources of philosophical wisdom by their communities? Shifting our focus slightly in the next section, we will reflect upon the manner in which current ways of professional philosophizing affect the study of world philosophical traditions. As the example of Māori philosophy demonstrates, current philosophical practices seem to delimit the search for the unconventional. Through its philosophical appropriation, the so-called unconventional tends to mimic conventional patterns in academic philosophy. As we briefly sketch, however, we can find reasons to critique this process within the Adornoian framework itself. The concluding remarks in the final section draw together different strands of the discussion and delineate some ways which could possibly take forward the world philosophies project in an Adornoian spirit.

Privilege in critiquing academic privilege: Adorno's understanding of philosophy

We dive into Adorno's thought with *Negative Dialectics*, which in the words of the author may be called an 'anti-system' (Adorno, 1973, p. xx). Adorno's exploration of negative dialectics begins with a warning to philosophers that their critical self-reflection should not halt before the highest achievements of the discipline's past (Adorno, 1973, p. 14). Having gone down this route for too long, academic philosophy has come close to wholly chopping off its own roots. Adorno is convinced that this philosophical naiveté has to come to an end. To this effect, he suggests a revisitation of the subject matter of philosophizing. Matters of true philosophical interest, he firmly states, are found in non-conceptual particulars. Philosophy should concentrate on the contingent, on qualities, which in its history have been degraded as being negligible but which are not forever available to philosophy: ideally, concepts would be used to 'unseal' (Adorno, 1973, p. 19) the non-conceptual, without doing away with the difference between them.

But are concepts able to achieve this at all? Yes, definitely. Concepts, even philosophical ones, refer to the non-conceptual. Concepts are 'on their part [...] moments of the reality that requires their formation, primarily for the control of nature' (Adorno, 1973, p. 11). One way to activate philosophy, then, is to bring back the playful element into the discipline, which scientification seeks to exorcise. Once this element is back, the discipline would become more inclusive and diverse. Philosophy would stop being restricted to a limited number of fixed theorems (cf. Adorno, 1973, pp. 13–14). It would make room for a variety of objects which impinge upon it or which it seeks, without using them to mirror its own concrete image. Philosophy would then simply be 'unreduced experience in the medium of conceptual reflection' (Adorno, 1973, p. 13). Only then would it be able to go down its course of 'ceaseless self-renewal' (Adorno, 1973, p. 33). Adorno is optimistic that such a reformed, and rejuvenated, philosophy would actively engage with areas which have been excluded from modern philosophy. Notably, an engagement with

these fields can, he believes, be carried out meaningfully without having to abandon one of the main tools of the trade: conceptual stringency. 'Only an expressed thought is succinct, rendered succinct by its presentation in language; what is vaguely put is poorly thought' (Adorno, 1973, p. 18).

Against the backdrop of these ruminations, let us make some exploratory claims on how Adorno's thought can be fruitfully implemented in our own context. For one, the exclusion of world philosophies from the academy is arbitrary and contingent, brought about by the pre-scientizing of experience and philosophy's implementation of the 'cunning of reason' to assert itself in a crucial moment of its history (Adorno, 1973, p. 22). For another, their inclusion could abet a renewal of the discipline. Let us see how.

In philosophy's attempt at constructing and presenting itself as a science, a community of individual knowledge seekers arose. Knowledge was produced in a particular context through their discursive interactions. Philosophical knowledge was modelled along the lines of science. As a result, the non-conceptual was explicitly excluded from philosophy. Generated through discursive exchanges within this community, this particular knowledge was, furthermore, tested, transmitted and modified. In other words, meaning about the conceptual realm was made with others within the bounds of a particular spatiotemporal and socio-material setting. Philosophy was then defined as a discipline which solely engaged with the conceptual and became exclusivist. Only those who were ready to exclude the non-conceptual were considered to be trustworthy sources of philosophical knowledge claims. Others who did (or chose) not (to) toe the line were dismissed for bandying around 'pre-scientific nomenclature' (Adorno, 1973, p. 211). The community became dogmatic and prohibited critical thinking through 'Denkverbot[e]' (Adorno, 1970, p. 145).

This exclusion arose with the formation of philosophy as a new, scientific discipline. Simultaneously, we see that this truncation between theory and praxis left theory 'paralyzed' and 'impotent' (Adorno, 1973, p. 143). Theory manoeuvred itself into a dead end such that it can no longer guide practice today. Given the impotency of conventional academic philosophy in our own times, we must reassess the situation and seek to rectify our mistakes. One way out of the impasse would be to return to the non-conceptual – the humus from which philosophical activity grows. But how can we return to it if its study has been ignored for so long? Would we have any appropriate tools for the task at all? If the non-conceptual has been marginalized (and almost eliminated from) our own Euro-American philosophical tradition, one could search for it in contexts which have been – and are – either spatially, temporarily or both separated from the scientification process. A study of world philosophies could be one possibility in this regard.

A thorough engagement with world philosophies could be fruitful in illustrating how, if at all, other philosophical traditions have dealt, and come to terms, with the non-conceptual. Such a study would allow us to find answers to the following questions: Have the practitioners of other philosophical traditions attempted to master and yoke the conceptual world through a postulation of a similar realm of pure reason? Have they truncated the conceptual from the non-conceptual to this end? Or have they been more tolerant of experience seeping into concepts? If so, have they used other resources to articulate that philosophy is wrought by experience through and through? How do they deal with the contingent? With ceaseless change in phenomena? Have they been able to

develop more sophisticated methods with which the qualitative side of philosophical experience can be accounted?

If an engagement with these philosophies reveals other, untried, perhaps even better, ways of dealing with these issues, and thus with the ubiquity of the non-conceptual, these ways could be of particular interest to those seeking for changes within the academy today. They could, in the long run, possibly free academic philosophy from the corset it finds itself in. They could, theoretically at least, show the way out of academic philosophy's self-inflicted 'emptiness', 'stupidity' and 'primitivity'. Furthermore, if one were to – in a further step – bring into the fold different ways of thinking about 'unreduced experience', one would have contributed to making philosophy less homogeneous. Under its banner, then, a whole body of doctrines/worldviews would be included, which may not necessarily cohere with each other.

Adorno alerts us to another aspect which could buttress this claim. Socialization processes, especially educational ones, tend to 'prune and often cripple the forces of mental productivity' (Adorno, 1973, p. 41). Collectives possess the power to make their members conform to its beliefs. The latter are forced to become members, possibly against their own will; they become 'Zwangsmitglieder' (Adorno, 1970, p. 49). A collective could through its 'Denkverbote' blind its members to the 'contamination' of concepts by experience and, in fact, even by one's own class. If this is true, socialization in the dominant Euro-American philosophical tradition will, in itself, be probably unable to open up a whole new critical space through which such a critique can be articulated fully. Nevertheless, not all members of a society are moulded by their social environment to the same degree. Due to a 'stroke of undeserved luck', some members do seem to be able to withstand the pressure to conform to prevailing norms (Adorno, 1973, p. 41). Adorno encourages these people to take up the 'moral responsibility' of speaking up against erroneous, majoritarian views.

Applied to our context, these individuals conversant in Euro-American philosophy have had, for whatever reasons, a 'stroke of undeserved luck' and studied world philosophies too. In addition, they would be inclined to be undaunted by the non-conceptual. Their study of world philosophies could have led to an acquaintance with the manner in which other traditions deal with the qualitative side of philosophical experience, more precisely: how these traditions engage with the non-conceptual. These philosophers, we would say with Adorno, are the potential harbingers of change. They could possibly show the way out of the impasse. Not having succumbed to the pressures of their (academic) collectives, they may have the potential to get the discipline out of this isolation. They could open up paths of reconciliation with the non-conceptual (cf. Kirloskar-Steinbach, 2019).

If our interpretation is plausible so far, it suggests the following: Those who are familiar with other philosophical traditions and their dealings with the non-conceptual should initiate changes within the academy. In a first step, they should conduct research on a tradition of their specialization to ascertain exactly how the studied tradition deals with the non-conceptual, and whether this would rectify practices extant since the onset of modern philosophy. If there is an indication that the studied philosophical tradition will not reveal another perspective on this matter, its further study can be abandoned without further loss. It does not have to be included in the academy. If, however, a

tradition clears this first hurdle, its full inclusion in the academy should be sought. One could then pursue its transmission to the next generation. As we see, it is possible to make a case for a study of *select* world philosophies within the academy using Adornoian thought along the lines suggested here.² Nevertheless, some philosophies are bound not to make it across the threshold.

But how about including world philosophical traditions in the academy simply because these traditions are present within a society in a given period of time? Can Adorno's thoughts be meaningfully employed to argue that certain traditions – like Indigenous ones – must be studied philosophically given that they inform a part of a particular society's world views? Let us turn to this question now by examining his understanding of the relation between theory and praxis.

Discontinuity of theory and praxis

In Adorno's assessment, philosophy's separation from praxis has had a strong impact on society too.³ Theory's insistence on pressing experience into a preconceived mould of fixed conceptual categories has not only blocked experience, but it has also damaged praxis. Praxis 'is therefore longed for, distorted, and desperately overvalued' (Adorno, 2005a, p. 260). Sundered from an instance which could contain it in the past, a 'conceptless praxis' goes berserk. It 'acknowledges no other measure other than itself' (Adorno, 2005a, p. 261). It becomes tyrannical in a world which is subjected to 'economic expansion tendencies' (Adorno, 2005a, p. 261). Praxis deploys 'violent gestures' to indicate that it alone can change the status quo and that it can lead one out of theory's self-isolation (Adorno, 2005a, pp. 259–260). It defines itself through action and posits theory as its passive Other. It profits from theory's absence and ceaselessly 'animates the division' between itself and theory. Theory, caught up in its self-imposed exile, can only passively witness the events happening in the world. It has long ceased to make sense of the changing experiences of society's members. On account of this divide, theory becomes 'powerless', praxis 'arbitrary' (Adorno, 2005a, p. 261).

Especially given economic expansionist tendencies, it is in the interest of societal members that the communication between the two does not become 'prey of blind fate' (Adorno, 2005a, p. 261); the wedge between the two must be bridged. But how? Again, those members, who are not numbed by the 'opiate of collectivity' (Adorno, 2005a, p. 276), should step forward. The task at hand befits especially those philosophers who are steeped in the history of their discipline. They will know from their work how closely theory and praxis were wedded with each other in the past. These people can play a crucial role in making theory become a 'guarantor of freedom' again. By working upon it, they may make theory guide praxis again (Adorno, 2005a, p. 263). To do so, Adorno suggests, they should attempt to 'attach' spontaneity – which Adorno understands to be present in the totality of experience – to the 'vulnerable places of rigidified reality, where the ruptures caused by the pressure of rigidification appear externally' (Adorno, 2005a, p. 266). Praxis would, Adorno believes, allow for this change inasmuch as it, by definition, seeks to succeed.

Let us apply some of these thoughts to our own context. Many of us live in highly complex, diverse societies; most of us live in an interdependent world. Following

Adorno, one could claim that today's academic philosophy has yet to sufficiently make sense of this diversity (see Kirloskar-Steinbach, 2019). To some extent, this has to do with the manner in which habituated ways of understanding are posited as being the sole way of understanding a phenomenon. As a result, select, relatively homogenous conceptual framework(s) are deployed to understand all relevant aspects of human experience in this world.

One upshot is that at least some members believe that extant conceptual categories of their society do not wholly, or sufficiently, make sense of their experiences in these situations (Mika, 2017). Bits of their experience seem to fall between the cracks of extant conceptual frameworks. Some examples: What is the best way to treat non-human beings? Is the unique worth ascribed to a human life categorical? Or is it conceivable that the interests of future generations have to, in certain situations, be set in relation, and be weighed against, the interests of non-human beings? Given that theory seems to be unable to reliably guide societal members in such situations, these members seem to have at least two options: They can either accept the purported philosophical insignificance of their own experiences in these situations or turn to other societal groups which seem to be more willing to help interpret them. Sensing the absence of a theory-driven orientation in these situations, these groups could press forward in staking their sole claim at interpreting the phenomenon at hand. It is easy to anticipate how the problems of praxis, clearly identified by Adorno, will rear their head in such situations.

Some societal members (e.g. cross-cultural philosophers well-versed in Adorno's thought) could be prompted by Adorno's views on the relationship between theory and practice to initiate more inclusive ways of meaning making in such a society. They could reason that meaning-making activity is not restricted to our own specific context. Even a cursory glance at other spatiotemporal and socio-material contexts would disclose that there is nothing unique about it. Other people from near and far have attempted to make sense of their own worlds, albeit in different ways. One way for theory to guide societal praxis would be to integrate different understandings of meaning making in the academy. These would then radiate and inform the decisions of those seeking guidance in situations, from which theory has currently absented itself.

These philosophers could, furthermore, underscore their claim by pointing out that this integration has an added asset too: It would in its wake possibly unravel other ways of instantiating spontaneity. How so? Concepts located in a non-Euro-American philosophical tradition, for example, have the potential to insert 'the silver rib of the foreign [tradition] into the body of our [philosophical] language' (Adorno, 1991, p. 187). They can disrupt the equilibrium, the status quo and point to phenomena located outside the conventional framework. Not being trapped within the 'network of socialization and communication', they can lead us to attend to phenomena which are yet to be tracked by the extant conceptual framework. It is precisely their 'disparateness' from, and within, this framework that can draw our attention to 'suffering in language' and 'suffering in reality' (Adorno, 1991, pp. 187–188). These silver ribs can become new sources of reflective spontaneity, sources that highlight why this suffering needs to be addressed by theory. Spontaneity can, as we have seen above, be an effective antidote to the discipline's 'rigidification'.

In addition, cross-cultural philosophers, who use foreign concepts to this end, could focus on those sources within non-Euro-American traditions (see the discussion about Kaupapa Māori below), which explicitly seek to maintain a distance from the thrall of conceptual categories. Now, if such sources were to be studied in the academy, we would be able to glean multiple ways of retaining the spontaneous, and with them, perhaps other ways of resisting the tyranny of conceptual categories.

Notice, however, that this argument parallels the first argument. Whether a hitherto excluded world philosophical tradition will be included in the academy depends on professional philosophers (of a nonconformist bent), as we saw above. A similar thread seems to run through this argument too. Although Adorno explicitly seeks to develop an understanding of theory which can guide praxis, this understanding of theory seems to operate with a preconceived conception of what philosophy (theory) is. Moreover, it is the philosopher who determines just how substantively the discipline should be modified. Accordingly, claims made by proponents of traditions (like Indigenous traditions), which in their own understanding transport philosophical content, may not, on their own, generate further academic interest. Even though these traditions may be considered to be sources of philosophical wisdom by their members, this factor alone does not seem to suffice. Their philosophical significance will have to be vetted by professional philosophers.

Let us step back and assess the traversed path. Adorno seeks to surmount conceptual fetishism and servitude to method which, in his view, are largely responsible for the impotence of theory. He believes that theory could be rejuvenated, made more alive and responsible to societal praxis through a radical reset. To this end, he sets his sights on the playful. This element would make room for heterogeneity within the discipline. One could argue that Indigenous philosophies could be one useful resource in rejuvenating theory. They have an ancient philosophical pedigree; ironically, their arbitrary (but systematic) exclusion from the academy over a long time could be taken as an indication that they would probably not mirror the concrete image of academic philosophy. Thus, the chances are high that they possess, in a certain sense, ‘unfiltered’ sources of assessing the non-conceptual. If they were to be included in the academy today, these philosophies could perhaps illustrate different understandings of the non-conceptual, its integration into conceptual categories, how spontaneity can be retained and so on.

And yet, our discussion above indicates that Adorno’s thoughts do not prompt an easy, and uncomplicated, inclusion of Indigenous traditions. As we saw, the work of individual philosophers determines whether world philosophical traditions can cross the academic threshold. If they decide that a particular tradition does not have the potential to modify, or challenge, extant philosophical practice, they may choose not to include this tradition in the philosophical fold. As our discussion in this section reveals, these philosophers also seem to influence whether the interest of their professional community should be directed towards other traditions present in the larger society. Albeit being on the search for the unconventional, these professionally trained personnel of the philosophical collective will determine how they understand the unconventional. Proponents of traditions already present within a society cannot offer their traditions as viable alternatives in this regard, unless, of course, they are trained philosophers too.

Note how Adorno's conception reverberates with the view that the unconventional is highly salient in maintaining freedom. Only by adopting a hitherto new perspective can we resist the tyranny of our (academic) collectives. However, a closer look at this argument reveals that if other societal groups were, on their own, to offer their help in this resistance, this offer does not necessarily have to be accepted. The main drivers of change are solitary members of the philosophy collective. With their 'uncompromising mind' and readiness to flout the rules of the collective, they initiate change when they step out into unsteady waters. They may consult other societal groups in their search for alternatives, but do not need to do so. For: 'One must have [philosophical] tradition in oneself, to hate it properly' (Adorno, 2005b, p. 52).

In Adorno's defence, one could maintain that there is at least one reason for not abandoning a preconceived understanding of philosophy – even when considering efforts targeted at revamping the discipline. Philosophy has a symbiotic relationship with science. It cannot completely break away from the latter without falling into dogmatism or mythology. If Indigenous traditions, for instance, were to be included in the academy on the grounds that they have been sources of philosophical wisdom to their members, this inclusion could possibly open up philosophy's path towards dogmatism and mythology. As a discipline, philosophy must retain its scientific ethos; to progress, however, it must find means to articulate that which is excluded from science. Precisely for this reason, every single inclusion of a hitherto excluded tradition within the academy will, and must, go through a philosophical vetting process. This possible defence would, in fact, be close to – and reflect – Adorno's own views on the subject. However, as we will see in the next section, this vetting process is not merely a theoretical possibility. It might be taking place right now. While this process is crucial in bringing under philosophy's scrutiny hitherto excluded traditions, it may also impact upon, and modify, salient characteristics of the traditions studied. Through philosophical vetting, the studied traditions may lose precisely those aspects, which could have made them interesting candidates for a philosophical renewal. Let us turn to Kaupapa Māori as one such candidate.

Critical theory and Kaupapa Māori

A Māori metaphysics most fundamentally references the unity of the human and non-human realms, to the extent that the world as a whole constitutes every human act and vice versa. Among other things, this holistic metaphysics evolves from a philosophy of 'whakapapa' (very loosely defined as 'genealogy'), which affirms the deep interconnection between things (Mika, 2015; Mika, 2017; Pihama, 2001). This concept of total interrelationship would have to include the processes, outcomes and terrains of research, along with the ultimate selfhood of the researcher. Māori metaphysics' privileging of the unseen world, the fragility of the human self in relation to the natural world (Thrupp & Mika, 2012) and infinite dimensions means that those apparently rationalistic or empirical activities, including research, belong to beyond-human realms. The human dimension plays a part, it is true, but only because the self is contingent on all things in the world.

This fundamental philosophy has waxed and waned through time, contributed to in large part by political contexts, and Māori metaphysics scholarship seems to have flourished more than it does currently. Anecdotally speaking, the 1980s – a time of especially rigorous Māori renaissance – and early 1990s appear to be characterized by their continued reference to a holistic Māori worldview. Some of this could be termed ‘Kaupapa Māori’ research, which is based on a Māori specific approach to theory and research that aims to privilege Māori epistemologies. Admittedly, the references to Māori metaphysics in this research, delineating the most basic stance of Māori in relation to colonizing Pakeha (European) thought, varied in scope but the Māori view of humanity in relation to nature was generally noted as a massive divergence from dominant Euro-American philosophy. Perhaps the most well-known writer in this fashion was Māori Marsden, who identified that Māori in general adhered to a holistic worldview, with things in the world having their own form of life force (see Marsden, 1985), whereas Euro-America tended to fragment things. His work was formative in that it marked metaphysical difference as a very real issue. Undoubtedly in reaction to over a 100 years of brutal colonizing practices, Māori writers on this area were primarily concerned with a Euro-American focus on demarcation of things: Māori scholars such as Marsden and Pere (1982) identified reflecting on ontological contingencies as the most basic form of identity by placing Pakeha tendencies to fragment and alienate the self from the rest of the world ‘over there’, while acknowledging colonization.

Additionally, political concerns in the 1980s were fed by the philosophical insights of Marsden and others. Māori found themselves at a crucial point in history, in which the powers of the Waitangi Tribunal – a quasi-judicial forum that hears grievances of Māori against the Crown – were extended by the Labour Government so that Māori could submit claims that referred back to 1840. We suspect it became more important than ever to *philosophically* identify what distinguished the colonizer from the colonized, and indeed most fundamentally and materially separated one from the other: It became a crucial exercise for Māori to actually articulate these differences so that the *political* strategies and concerns could then be similarly identified. In other words, we speculate that the philosophical difference demarcated for Māori how the political injustices occurred. A timely blow was dealt to the legal system in 1988, too, when Jackson released his report detailing the ultimate problem of western law, in its highly racist dealings with Māori, with those same first assumptions as Pere and Marsden (see Jackson, 1988) as his support. In all these writings, the self was seen as inseparable from the world as an entity of totality. Moreover, a mode of critique recognized that all those things, including the self, were inseparable. For the purpose of our article, what is significant about this era is that spiritual discourses were readily endorsed as the basis for Māori theorizing. The metaphysical themes evolving in the 1980s especially but also the early 1990s, were politicized, uttered with a drive towards liberation. They were therefore explored for the spiritual and social benefit of Māori as both ontological and ethical (Arola, 2011).

However, with the huge surge in Māori research (including postgraduate) in the mid-to late-1990s onwards, a change took place that appears to synchronize with the increasing influence of neoliberalism in New Zealand: Research became more evidence-based and sustained reference to what Māori had identified as a most crucial maxim – the

collapse of the human and non-human worlds – appeared to abate. This withdrawal of the Māori metaphysical theme may well have been accompanied by the emerging *sangfroid* of the Māori researcher, which hitherto had not been particularly noticeable. In relation to the experience of creative literature, Majid (2010) notes about current Māori fiction that ‘the anger of the 1980s is lacking and has been replaced by a striving for harmony in the present day’ (Majid, 2010, p. 78). For Māori academic writing’s part, Smith (2012) has argued that Kaupapa Māori has lost some of its critical clout, and it may well be that Māori academic writers have lost a particular kind of anger, too. A problem arises here when we are talking about a critique based on a Māori *metaphysics* because that critique relies heavily on the world’s very real destabilizing of the (apparently) unassailable researching self. In short, the researcher is supposed to be unsettled at all points by the irruption of the world. The research will point to the contingently non-conceptual realm, where rationalism is not necessarily privileged and, indeed, truth relies more on paradox (Cooper, 2012; Marsden, 2003).

What is also notable about this era of Māori research is that a much more overtly political, deconstructive critique was being established through Kaupapa Māori. It is here that we see critical theory emerge to massage an already emerging Māori appraisal of colonization and colonized thought in general. A sweep of Māori-themed and –authored theses from this era reveals a particularly strong affinity with anti-positivist approaches to research and, indeed, a deconstruction of dominant positivist modes of thinking. Chief among critical theory’s influences was its resistance to objectifying the other in research, and although Māori scholars were aware of the insidiousness of that practice prior to its uptake, critical theory may have strongly contributed to the tools that would enable them to enunciate their own version. ‘Critique’ in its own right proliferated as a term; it had the capacity to bring colonization (and especially colonizing research) into full visibility, making it possible for dominant power structures and their discourses to be deconstructed. The Frankfurt School of critical theory, comprising as it does a constellation of approaches that are especially ‘critical’ from a Euro-American perspective, was studied closely by members of the School of Māori Education at the University of Auckland, who became the main progenitors of current Kaupapa Māori theory and practice. Critical theory, a set of ‘selected European critical theoretical approaches’ (Taki, 1996, p. 57), could be seen as useful or even necessary (Smith, 2012) for Kaupapa Māori theory because it provided a shrewd appraisal of positivism (see generally Pihama & Southey, 2015) that underpins much of dominant health models and research (see Taitimu, 2007) and education (Tooley, 2000). In acknowledging that critical theory could act ‘as a resource to emerging Kaupapa Māori theorising’ (Taki, 1996, p. 57), its Māori enthusiasts were clear that it was incomplete for Māori. It could not be expected to contribute fully, and it needed instead to be ‘localized’ (Smith, 1997).

While the likes of Gramsci appear to have been useful as a warning against adopting the accoutrements of colonizing thought and practice in research for Māori academics, senior Māori academics have dissuaded others from following critical theory too faithfully (see e.g. Smith, 1997). Yet, it is the underlying path it paves, the establishing of very first assumptions, which may have either gone unnoticed or proven too difficult to try and resolve for Māori researchers. Critical theory, despite its attempts to overcome the divorce between the subject and the object, privileges human action in the critical

endeavour. This is its primordial assumption: nowhere in critical theory are unseen worlds, in conjunction with their counterpart currently visible dimensions, described as the originators of, and yet co-inhabitants with, all thought. In relation to that human endeavour of critical theory (although not critical of it), Bohman (2016) suggests that its drive is to investigate *social* factors – not, as Māori would have argued, the so-called spiritual ones.

As we have identified with reference to Māori authors, critical theory has provided a philosophical impetus for Kaupapa Māori, which may in turn have specified and modified critical theory to fit with Māori needs but tacitly retained critical theory's key philosophical tenet of the highly agentic human. Thus, the earlier drive to discuss the Māori worldview of holism on its own account would at least be weakened in that critical theory – Kaupapa Māori translation. We stress here that critical theory has not single-handedly given rise to a colonized Māori divide between self and non-human or super/natural thing in research, but as Stewart (2016, p. 5) identifies 'Kaupapa Māori theory is a leading form of Indigenous scholarship, and shares the same philosophical foundations and links to critical theory', and there will then be striking similarities between the human-centredness of critical theory and current, dominant manifestations of Kaupapa Māori. For instance, there are numerous iterations of Kaupapa Māori principles in the literature, but they are often reified and replicated in ways that do not allow anything *outside* the human world to come to bear on research. In a broad sense, Stewart (2016) reflects on that very problem by spending some time discussing how Kaupapa Māori comes to be understood along strict lines, being read and employed too literally, confused with the fact that it is meant to be a 'strategy'. While she does not deal with the strong agency of the human self as such, she does identify that Kaupapa Māori sometimes becomes highly essentializing. Research based on that unyielding pursuit of 'Māori-ness' will become 'one way' of conducting research: The specifics are focused on and adopted, rather than its intention, with that 'way' being decided on by the (human) researcher. She goes on to explain the example of Māori university students who refuse to refer to non-Māori scholarly work when they ascribe a Māori purity to their work that necessarily involves a dogmatic approach to research.

It is not only students, though, who declare and protect the alleged purity of Kaupapa Māori research, and a few other personal examples are called for here that now bring us closer to the problem of the strong human conceptual self. This conceptualism relates to the presence or otherwise of human data in research, where modes of research that attempt a holistic explanation for the world – beyond the human – are ousted. Māori scholar Garrick Cooper (2012) recounted his experiences at a conference on achievement in compulsory schooling. After he presented his article, he was accosted by a Māori principal who wanted to see empirical data – *not* Māori epistemologies – as the basis of the research. This encounter was not an intellectually driven one on the part of the principal but was, by all accounts, emotional. Cooper's research, however, was never going to be data-based; it was instead philosophical, founded on a continual unfolding of an idea. This idea was based on his earlier research involving the supernatural entities Tawhaki and Māui (see Cooper, 2008), which he resorted to because he 'could not find any Kaupapa Māori theories of achievement or progress' (Cooper, 2012, p. 64). Tawhaki and Māui, according to Cooper, can inform research by potentially removing it entirely

from human action. Similarly, non-empirical, philosophical research is sometimes met with disdain by academics for being too ‘abstract’, the research too much ‘related to the analysis of words and language’. In these instances, one can delve deeper by asking how the research *couldn't* possibly be subtly related to the welfare of Māori people simply because it was ‘abstract’. The response thereafter has typically been quite simple: The research was not immediately, palpably, visibly focused on people; therefore, it couldn't be related to the overall wellbeing of people. But, as with Cooper, we can suspect that something even deeper is afoot: that, in the context of our current discussion, there is an anxiety about premising research on both interconnected non-human and human dimensions, leading to the release of a great deal of human agency. Our point in recounting his experience is that Kaupapa Māori research may well have become *too* highly people-related, specifically in relation to its method. But if its method is people-centred, then it would make sense that the researchers have also put themselves as the absolute agents of the research.

What makes our appraisal difficult here is that Kaupapa Māori does not outright ban any talk of connection with both invisible and visible world(s), and in fact Māori researchers will often allude to it. This is not surprising, given the persistent metaphysics of interrelationship that Māori do privilege at a deep level. It is not uncommon to hear of writers in the area claiming that ‘the world is interconnected’, for instance. This theoretical, abstract positioning of the writer, though, is often threatened in favour of empirical research. We can see, then, that the integration of dominant, empirically based Kaupapa Māori into the academy has come at a price. Although the fundamental divide between a Māori worldview and Euro-American philosophy was noticed early on, scholars presented this Indigenous tradition as one on which extant ‘subjectivist’ categories could be meaningfully implemented. To achieve this fit, fundamental elements of Kaupapa Māori, which could possibly have hindered the process, were at least partly patched over. As a result, the impression arose that Māori thought was human-centred too. Professional vetting, we can say, seems to have rendered much Māori thought into an academic version which differs from its own self-image. Overall, to become a philosophy, Māori thought had to be reinterpreted so that it could mirror preconceived notions of a philosophical world view. That it proposes a radically different metaphysics, to begin with, was threatened. In this case, theory seems to have dominated over praxis. In the process, it once again missed a call to guide praxis. Rather, it set out to define that very praxis itself.

If not solely human, then what?

There is one much more difficult assumption to context here – one that we have alluded to but not tackled head on. It involves research *itself* being entirely holistic. Māori philosophy contains the possibilities for the sort of holistic ontological inquiry we note here, but the dominance of empiricism in scholarship (Cooper, 2012), the traditionalizing of the Māori self (see Hokowhitu, 2012) and the general adherence to an approach of ‘pure Māori-ness’ (Stewart, 2016) in research have upraised the self in relation to other things in the world. We may therefore be too optimistic about some Indigenous philosophy as it commonly articulates itself, because it still operates in synchronicity with

those ground rules that it sometimes sets about exposing. Critical theory, while defensive of that most basic of ground rules – that it is the human that is fully responsible for decisions, liberating or otherwise – may well, quite paradoxically, understand the plight of Indigenous peoples in their drive to unsettle that rule. But it is itself not capable of letting go complete human agency, which privileges, above all, a striving to conceive of objects from the perspective of the knowing human. At stake here is a type of inquiry that deflects both other-assurance and self-assurance. Colonization, as it involves Māori, assumes that knowledge, which involves the outward-directed conceptual grasp of things, has been prioritized over inquiries into Being, in which the self and thing would be far less certain and would retain an aura of mystery (Mika, 2012).

To reiterate, the unassailable truth here – lying, it seems, also at the base of Kaupapa Māori – is that it is the human self who decides the objects to be researched. Our proposition offers a different version of truth, but more unsettling for critical theory is its de-emphasis of human control. Any proposition that either emphasizes or de-emphasizes human control, like any other attitude or utterance, in Indigenous belief is also relegated to the non-human as much as human world (Mika, 2017). This Indigenous perspective is undoubtedly even more unpalatable than another idea of truth because it defers both philosophical beliefs and subsequent discourses and understandings of them to the All of the world, rather than just keeping them to the human self.

It seems a massive illogic to suggest that research could be anything apart from a human activity. Is it difficult, or even nonsensical, to think of research as anything apart from a solely human exercise? Difficulty conceiving of something is one thing, but nonsense is another altogether (and ironically for our purposes, critical theory would especially encourage us to deal with the second on the basis of its relationship to the perversity of common sense). Let us provide some possible scenarios here: objects to be researched comprise the All, and they constitute the self (and vice versa), and invoke the human self's attention to them – precisely through their immediate relationship to the self. We do have some approach or orientation to them that evinces our *activity*, but in the first instance that motivation and movement was granted by all things. Ahenakew, Andreotti, Cooper, and Hireme (2014) understand this dilemma in bigger terms, where human survival itself is at stake. We can glean from them that a microscopic phenomenon – research – can be drawn from their universal focus. Referencing Andean philosophies, those authors posit that an existential balance is achievable through the world of the serpent ('representing internal visceral connections to the earth's cycles' [Ahenakew, Andreotti, Cooper, & Hireme, 2014, p. 227]), that of the puma (the social world) and that of the condor (the spiritual realm). Recognizing that existence cannot take place through the privileging of any one of these over the other, they acknowledge that the 'puma' seems to have taken precedence in modernity. Making their argument cogent with our own, we suggest that much Kaupapa Māori research overwhelmingly gathers to it the attributes of the puma: deeply influenced by the social sciences, its 'research methods entail standards of rigor, and [its] evidentiary strategies rel[ies] on quantification' (Glazebrook, 2012, p. 14). None of these attributes are particularly open to either the serpent's or condor's influences.

If we continue with the proposition of Ahenakew et al., Kaupapa Māori could then keep in mind the influence of the condor and the serpent and deliberately obscure how it

represents the researching self. This could be achieved through humour or bad taste, by constantly emphasizing the antithesis of a proposition – relentlessly pointing out its ‘however’ – or by undermining the rationalistic language that is in place (Mika, 2017). It could also cluster words in the vicinity of a rationalistic phrase or term, forcing the reader to deal with the association enforced by those orbital meanings. Arresting the strict certainty of an idea or term is key in all respects, with its aim of reflecting that aforementioned messiness of the total world.

Adorno’s ‘playfulness’, as it relates to Kaupapa Māori as we have described it in this article, could emerge in two ways: by a sustained reference to Adorno while we explore a Māori topic and by an equally sustained suggestion – thematically in agreement with Adorno, yet localized to an Indigenous insight so that he might not subscribe to our specific detail – that the invisible worlds and entities are pivotal in any representation.

Conclusion

Adorno philosophized at a time when the intellectual supremacy of Euro-American philosophy went largely unchallenged. Today’s socio-historical context, as well our own individual author biographies, do not give us plausible arguments to demurely accept the dominant narrative of this supremacy. This is why we chose to, somewhat mischievously, extend the scope of his broader critique to suit our purposes. We are aware that Adorno would not have necessarily endorsed conceptual decolonization in the manner in which we sketched it here. We are also aware that in using his thinking to ‘draw and theorise from ancestral legacies’ (Cooper, 2012, p. 71), we have deliberately focused on holistic metaphysics as a backdrop, thereby deploying his critique of the status quo for an outcome that may have been too mystical or mythological for him.

And yet, his ruminations on the creative potential of the non-conceptual, his emphasis on the contingent, as well as his understanding of critique give us reason to believe that Adorno, in his role as our moral contemporary, would not have a principled objection to our act of epistemic disobedience in this article. We continue to remain within the larger framework sketched by him. From our perspective, our refraction of this thought through the lens of conceptual decolonization has fulfilled the hopes we placed in him. His thoughts, we conclude, can indeed serve as one good, immanent source in decolonizing German theory.

Leaning on Adorno, we have, moreover, been able to obtain a first glimpse of the path ahead for us as a researcher team. Seen from the perspective of an individual, conceptual decolonization would enable one to become aware of the disparity between the conceptual net one casts on the phenomenal world and possible deviant personal experiences of these phenomena. The awareness of such a misfit, and with it the consequent ‘suffering in theory’, may lead one to become more attentive to other accounts of first-person experiences in the social world, and with them accounts of ‘suffering in practice’. Beyond these one-to-one relationships, work on this article has made us more aware of the social dimension of (cross-cultural) philosophy too. As our discussion of the developments in Kaupapa Māori scholarship in New Zealand indicated, even critical philosophers, who one may think, should be alert to the rigidification of philosophical discourses, may work to shore up their own rigidified discourses. This is precisely why

disobedient Adornian philosophers in our view should resist these arbitrary barriers of exclusion. In a certain sense, they owe their ‘ethics of resistance’ to the society at large; societal praxis can only succeed when theory does not wilfully absent itself from societal activities. Disobedient, yet reflective individuals seem to have the potentiality to rise to the task. But can such a conceptual decolonization, which emanates from disobedient conceptual digressions at the individual level, impact the political dimension in our interconnected world? This is a task which we as a researcher team will turn to in our future project.

Within the scope of this article, we choose to give Adorno the last word:

Thinking is not the intellectual reproduction of what already exists anyway. As long as it doesn’t break off, thinking has a secure hold on possibility. Its insatiable aspect, its aversion to being quickly and easily satisfied, refuses the foolish wisdom of resignation. [. . .] Open thinking points beyond itself. For its part, a comportment, a form of praxis, it is more akin to transformative praxis than a comportment that is a complaint for the sake of praxis. (Adorno, 2005a, pp. 292–293)

In this Adornoian spirit, we call out to our fellow (cross-cultural) philosophers to refuse the foolish wisdom of resignation and be disobedient, yet thoughtful.

Acknowledgements

Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach would like to thank her friends, colleagues and students at Oxford College of Emory University and Emory University, who allowed her to develop her ideas on conceptual and intellectual decolonization in situ.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Notes

1. See Gibson and Rubin (2002, p. 14) and Steinman (2005).
2. Does the integration of a new tradition bring in its wake an exclusion of a position, which was hitherto considered fundamental? Our reading of Adorno does not permit a conclusive reply.
3. Adorno’s broad notion of praxis combines descriptive and normative elements. In some contexts, he used the term to describe general practices found in society; in others, the term was deployed to show how these practices could be changed to make them more humane and less oppressive. In yet others, the term was a placeholder for the goal to be achieved through an emancipation from oppression. See Schweppenhäuser (2016, pp. 55–77).

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