

# Coloniality, institutional racism and white fragility: A wero to higher education

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Coloniality in Aotearoa's education systems has persisted by forcing Māori to assimilate into Western norms, tracking Māori into subordinate occupational roles, and constraining Māori self-determination. Through use of storytelling, we demonstrate how these trends carry on in present-day tertiary education settings. We also issue to colleagues and management in the tertiary education sector a *wero* (challenge) to inspect dimensions of white fragility. Our *wero* challenges colleagues to move beyond their pedagogical comfort zones by learning and incorporating Indigenous knowledges into their teaching beyond surface level. For university management, our *wero* call on leadership to lead institutional conversations on white privileges and white fragilities, such that academic staff cannot perform a white agility by nimbly dancing around decolonial education initiatives.

**Keywords:** coloniality, white fragility, Indigenous knowledges, higher education

## Introduction

Between 1867 and 1969, the New Zealand government established its Native Schools system, which sought to “civilise” the Indigenous Māori population through processes of assimilation and to track Indigenous students into unskilled professions. Māori students were forced to shed their cultural values and acquire those deemed superior by British educators. Established “at a time when the state was attempting to consolidate power over Māori after more than a decade of struggle over land and sovereignty which culminated in war” (Timutimu et al., 1998, p. 119), Native Schools functioned as part of a colonial context and were central to Britain's colonial project that implemented racist notions of cultural superiority and inferiority to build a dominant settler community (Russell, 2001).

Contemporary education systems have evolved. Today, *te reo* and *tikanga* Māori (Māori language and customs) are centred in immersion educational settings (Rona & McLachlan, 2018). Still, Smith (2012) reminds us that Indigenous scholarship is rendered secondary or invisible relative to Western epistemologies, reflecting a deep coloniality. As explained by Quijano (2007), after colonialism ended as an overt system of domination, “European culture was made seductive: it gave access to power” (p. 169)

and coerced Indigenous peoples to associate European knowledge with Western notions of development. As such, coloniality functions through Western control over racialised hierarchies of knowledge which are connected to land appropriation and labour exploitation (Mignolo, 2007, p. 478).

Contemporary scholarship demonstrates how coloniality persists in higher education (HE). Dancy and colleagues (2018) discuss the structural arrangements traced to colonialism and slavery that continue to shape American universities through patterned ill treatment of Black scholars and their scholarship. In Aotearoa's education systems, coloniality transpires across three planes that began in the mid-1800s. The first comprises strategies of assimilation that drive Māori into Western culture, the most obvious example being attempts to extinguish *te reo* through education policy enacted in the 1867 *Native Schools Act*. However, assimilation also includes the broader loss of *tikanga* Māori and the over-arching privileging of Western knowledge (Kēpa & Manu'atu, 2011; Smith, 2012). Secondly, educational coloniality materialises through tracking Māori into unskilled labour and away from HE (Hokowhitu, 2004), a phenomenon still seen through Māori under-representation among university graduates (Theodore et al., 2016) and the funnelling of Māori academic staff into under-valued labour (Henry, 2012), where Māori and Pacific female staff remain systemically under-paid (McAllister et al., 2020). The final way educational coloniality persists is through the loss of Māori *tino rangatiratanga* (Hawksley & Howson, 2011), exemplified by the under-representation of Māori in positions of authority and the inability of universities to move beyond tokenistic representations of indigeneity (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

Notions of *tino rangatiratanga* are complex and best expressed through *te reo* Māori. While "rangatiratanga" describes chiefly (non-gendered) or to act in a noble way (Williams, 1997), the qualifying term "tino" –essential/self/veritable/very –elevates the term *tino rangatiratanga* beyond an individual descriptor to a set of ideas expressing Māori self-determination, sovereignty and autonomy. Since the Māori Renaissance of the 1970s, *tino rangatiratanga* as a collectivising movement centres returning political self-determination, autonomy and sovereignty by Māori people over Māori concerns. Within this complexity, we conceptualise *tino rangatiratanga* as collective opposition to colonial control, making space for Māori collective decision-making within the HE context.

We examine our experiences as Indigenous academics and allies to Indigenous peoples, in context with our positionality and access to social privilege. In reflecting on our experiences where we have challenged persistent organisational coloniality, we have also noticed encounters with institutionalised white fragility, or the repetitive anxieties displayed when we expose and challenge ongoing coloniality.

## White fragility and white privilege

White fragility refers to the prolonged anxiety that many white people experience and showcase when confronted with examples of racism; it is the "lack of racial stamina" (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 56), or an inability for white people to engage in lengthy, meaningful interactions that unpack the complex ways that racism persists in society. White fragility is the defensiveness that some white people showcase when confronted with their racial biases, or their resistance to centre racism as a significant structural variable that shapes society's organisation. White fragility is not a fleeting sense of anxiety or discomfort, but rather an extended reluctance to explore how racism embeds itself into our social structure (Liebow & Glazer, 2019). Thus, white people who hold elements of white fragility are more apt to discontinue or exit conversations addressing racism, which re-establishes for them a comfortable social equilibrium.

White fragility is upheld by white privilege, which speaks to "an invisible package of unearned assets" (McIntosh, 1989, p. 10) that white people enjoy in societies entrenched with racism. Much of white

privilege entails not having to cope with interpersonal or institutionalised racism. However, white privilege also includes benefiting from whiteness standing as the legitimate mode of doing things (Evans-Winters & Hines, 2019). Consequently, Indigenous peoples must learn white customs, while relinquishing their own; white people are not required to reciprocate. Within a HE context, white fragility is the resistance by non-Indigenous peoples (most of whom are white) to acknowledge the varied ways coloniality infiltrates university systems, coupled with reluctance to respectfully engage with tikanga Māori, to push back when Indigenous knowledges are centred, to manipulate Indigenous leadership, and to limit Māori tino rangatiritanga.

Pushback oftentimes appears subtle and not indicative of overt coloniality. In fact, most who express white and/or settler fragility do not hold glaringly racist attitudes and abhor white supremacy. However, as Parasram (2019) asserts, “white fragility, while different from openly violent white supremacy, plays a vital role in normalizing the structural conditions of white supremacy” (p. 196). When white people showcase fragilities, they are straying away from uncomfortable interactions that confront colonial legacies, in turn missing opportunities to dismantle fundamental colonial systems. In other words, Eurocentrism remains the structural norm, giving white supremacists cultural space to maintain extremist views.

## Storytelling from the sidelines

Our perspectives are informed by our work contesting settler-colonial elitism in the academy (Kidman & Chu, 2019) through our involvement in initiatives to indigenise university spaces, such as “Stoking the Fires for Māori & Pacific Student Success in Psychology” (Waiari et al., 2021), the He Vaka Moana Fellowship (Wolfgramm-Foliaki & Smith, 2020), the Talatalanoa series (Fonua, 2020) and decolonial video projects (University of Auckland, 2020a; 2020b) that aim to address the “unequal social worlds of education” in higher education (Kidman & Chu, 2019, p. 490). While we have developed mutually supportive and collaborative relationships through this work, we are situated in relation to the academy through diverse histories, socio-cultural contexts, identities, structuring differences in access to social, epistemic and material privilege. Two of us are Māori and Indigenous to Aotearoa; one of us is a white woman married into a Tongan family; and one a half-Japanese, half-European male originally from the United States. We do not share the same types or levels of oppression. In fact, some of us enjoy privilege (e.g., white privilege, male privilege). Yet, through early and informal conversations about our distinctive research projects and activism in different contexts, we noticed recurring themes in our struggles to progress our initiatives, pinpointing DiAngelo’s (2011) notion of white fragility as a particularly salient issue.

Our provisional conversations developed into more formal meetings led by Hinekura, where we drew upon a storytelling method to share reflections on our experiences with white fragility in institutional contexts, or what Evans-Winters & Hines (2019) might name “counter storytelling”. Storytelling is a methodological practice employed by and with Indigenous peoples in Hawai’i (Lipe & Lipe, 2017), Canada (Corntassel et al., 2009), Australia (Geia et al., 2013) and Aotearoa (Forster et al., 2016; Tocker, 2017). Sharing narratives of personal experience, our resonances to this, and bearing witness to one another’s struggles was incredibly validating.

Storytelling offers a way to centre Indigenous experience, creating a context for uncomfortable conversations and an opportunity to share our insights with readers who can connect to these ideas and push the decolonial dialogue further (Datta, 2018; Sium & Ritskes, 2013). Storytelling can be a liberating

methodology that can create new ways of understanding existing issues, and through reflexive dialogue strengthen solidarity with Indigenous peoples (Beltrán & Begun, 2014; Wachowich & Scobie, 2010). In this context, sharing our narratives beyond the safe space of our small and organically grown research group, and writing this up for publication, presented an opportunity to contribute to and extend scholarship that critiques coloniality and racism in contemporary university settings (Henry, 2012; Henry et al., 2017; Samuel & Wane, 2005; Trask, 1992) and to support Indigenous initiatives and activism in HE.

Recent scholarship in Aotearoa has exposed the under-representation of Māori and Pacific scholars in HE (Barber & Naepi, 2020; McAllister et al., 2019; Naepi, 2019) and an ongoing disregard of non-Western knowledge (Thomsen et al., 2021). Further instances of entrenched coloniality have risen the ire of Indigenous academics and those working in solidarity across the tertiary sector: a proposal to cap Māori and Pacific student entry into the University of Otago's medical faculty without Māori and Pacific input (Hurihanganui, 2020), debate over handling of white supremacy at the University of Auckland (Scotcher, 2019), and structural racism at the University of Waikato exemplified by "Māori expertise being ignored, tokenism, lower pay for Māori staff and no meaningful commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi" (Hurihanganui & Dunlap, 2020). We are working in a time and space of potential change, across a groundswell of activism, and share our stories in this broader context, to stand in solidarity with Indigenous scholar activists (Kidman, 2020).

Frankenberg's (1993) assertion that "the oppressed can see with the greatest clarity not only their own position but also that of the oppressor/privileged, and indeed the shape of social systems as a whole" (p. 8) informs our approach to privilege Hinekura's and Jade's stories by layering them first. Sonia's and David's narratives continue some of these threads and lines of thought to explore how non-Indigenous peoples can connect with Indigenous colleagues while working in anti-colonial spaces. We write with cautious optimism, hoping that sharing our stories encourages university staff like us to embark on storytelling exercises that forge solidarity, while ensuring occupational and emotional safety.

To wero is to cast a small spear or dart, generally understood as laying down a challenge. At the beginning of a formal Māori welcome ceremony a small carved dart, or *taki*, is placed on the ground to ascertain a visiting group's purpose. The manner and attitude of the person who picks up the taki signals to the hosts the visitors' intentions. For example, a taki picked up by the handle suggests a forthcoming confrontation and desire to battle, whereas respectfully taking up the taki by the blade expresses humility and an expectation of productive conversation. From our experiences, we each lay down our taki as a wero or challenge to specific spaces in HE and wait to see how these challenges are taken up—by the blade, by the handle, or stepped over and once again ignored. Does HE even see the taki or is it just a piece of wood on the ground to be kicked aside?

## Hinekura: Calling out white fragility – one vowel sound at a time

I am a *Kaupapa* Māori (a Māori-centric approach to research that is by Māori, for Māori and with Māori aspirations, language and values at its centre) researcher (Te Rarawa, Ngā Puhī and Te Ati Awa), whose life's journey is an entanglement of decolonising education, reclaiming language and identity, and challenging racist structures that inhibit Māori tino rangatiratanga. I am an academic developer supporting mostly non-Indigenous staff around te reo Māori and cultural competencies. While our institution expounds "a special relationship with Māori under the Treaty of Waitangi" (University of Auckland, 2012, p. 3), the commitment to implement policy into meaningful practice is glaringly absent. Here I share aspects of white fragility from my experience of teaching in HE and how this fragility,

whether individually or institutionally enabled, limits my agency as a Māori educationalist to transform change for Māori.

When asked about my encounters with white fragility in the tertiary space, I wonder where to begin. Do I start with institutional *pōwhiri* (formal Māori welcoming process), conducted in English so non-Māori can equate being “welcome” with “feeling safe”? Is it the selective cultural acceptance of singing “Te Aroha” (a beautiful, simple eight-word Māori song) for the thousandth time so that “everybody” (mostly non-Māori) feels included? Maybe it is being asked to bring a “Māori perspective” to a research project, but being excluded from its conceptualisation, funded workload, methodology development, analysis or dissemination? If you are Māori (or Indigenous), do these examples resonate and can you add your own? If you are not, do you feel upset, offended, a little fragile?

Simply to discuss white fragility invokes my own fragilities, both academic and personal. I am a Māori woman with white skin. My whole life, my white skin has afforded me privilege in white spaces, particularly in education, until my views and positionality out me as the “other”. To be clear, I use the term “white” less to signal skin colour (although skin colour is a powerful factor in systemic racism) and more to describe the complex entanglement of “whiteness” as power, a Eurocentric “right way” of colonial and oppressive thinking (DiAngelo, 2011).

Naming whiteness and its fragility draws out the often unspoken but omnipresent normality of whiteness in HE. Ann Milne (2017) uses the metaphor of a child’s colouring-in book to describe “whitestream education” as those spaces that require Māori students “to be someone else” (p. 5) in order to succeed:

We think of the page as blank. It’s actually not blank, it is white. The white background is just there and we don’t think much about it. Not only is the background uniformly white, the lines are already in place and they dictate where the color is allowed. (pp. 5–6)

It is the constant work of drawing attention to “the white background and its unspoken privilege” (Milne, 2017, p. 6) that is exhausting but, ultimately, necessary in the continuing effort to decolonise HE.

If to be fragile is to be delicate, brittle, vulnerable, easily broken, shattered or lacking in force, then I am certain that the power and privilege that comes with being white in Aotearoa, cannot be fragile as it is never at risk within a system that actively protects and reproduces its own (white) power (Freire, 2014). The white fragility I speak of is not delicate or vulnerable, but omnipotent and omnipresent. DiAngelo (2011) describes white fragility as follows:

A state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium (p. 54).

DiAngelo’s examples of the fragile white ego are reflected in my experience of teaching basic Māori pronunciation to predominantly non-Māori university staff. Enrolment in my workshops is optional. At the beginning of each series I ask, “Why should Māori words be pronounced correctly?”. Responses such as the following are typical, some of which are verbatim:

- I choose to live and work here. I feel a responsibility to respect the Māori as Indigenous people of this country.
- Aotearoa has a long and shameful colonised history. Learning about Māori language is one small step towards healing that history.
- Te reo Māori is unique to Aotearoa New Zealand. If it is lost here it cannot be found anywhere else in the world and it will be lost forever.
- Māori is a big part of what makes us New Zealanders. Learning Māori makes me proud to call myself a New Zealander.
- I have seen how Māori people respond positively when I use Māori greetings and say words properly. It helps build relationships and that's important.

Where the comments above exemplify an openness to learn and connect outside of the respondents' white norm, the following comments demonstrate levels of defensiveness and anxiety:

- I don't want to cause offence so I just mispronounce Māori words like everyone else.
- Why should I? I am not a Māori.
- I don't want to sound like a try hard.
- I have lived here all my life and we ALWAYS say Wong-a-ray. Why should I change now?
- I know a Māori and even he says it wrong.
- Someone laughed at me once [in the early 80s] when I tried to pronounce a Māori word correctly so I never did it again!
- This is just PC crap gone mad!

After teaching for 25 years, one learns to read white fragility's body language: crossed arms, twitching legs, sighs, tears, interruptions, distracting questions. It feels like discomfort and disengagement, but if you look closer it looks like fragility. "I might get it wrong and embarrass myself" translated as, "What if I don't look like an expert here?". "I don't want to offend Māori" translated as, "I don't want to look ignorant so it's easier not to try". While a focus on vowel sounds seems incredibly simplistic (but trust me, getting your vowels correct is the secret), the real intention of the workshops is to scratch below the surface of the whitestream (Kidman & Chu, 2017) and do the hard work of talking through the fragility, of engaging with things Māori in HE.

Why our institution does not insist on every employee correctly pronouncing Māori words is an interesting question. Imagine if all job applicants were required to meet simple Māori language expectations – not anywhere near the expectation we have for students' English language proficiency – just simple Māori pronunciation and greetings in the country's official Indigenous language. And let's imagine that if applicants did not meet those basic expectations, they were required to develop professionally before re-applying. Imagine the time and financial resources that would be freed in the university. Imagine how much of the invisible cultural workload carried by Māori academics would disappear so that we, like our non-Māori colleagues, could focus our time and energy on research and

teaching. Imagine the difference it could make to the Māori student experience, as students tell us that hearing their names and language pronounced correctly is important (Smith et al., 2019; Tesiram et al., 2015).

My wero is to HE leadership. What minimum expectations do you set for staff around Māori cultural competencies, such as the simple requirement to pronounce Māori words correctly? How do you understand your role in enabling the type of white fragility that allows you and your staff to avoid engaging in culturally uncomfortable spaces? Working to address white fragility amongst HE staff is difficult, risky and ultimately exhausting for Māori staff. HE institutions need to step-up to their strategic and moral obligations as Treaty partners. Until then, the burden remains firmly resting upon Māori shoulders.

## Jade: Dismantling colonial machinery

On my mother's side I am Ngāi Tūpoto hapū, of Te Rarawa; Ngati Korokoro, Ngati Wharara, Te Pouka hapū, of Ngā Puhī; and Tarara (Croatian and Māori). On my father's side I am *Pākehā* (New Zealand European). I grew up in Horeke in the broader isthmus of my rural *papakāinga*, Hokianga. I also grew up in Auckland's North Shore, providing diverging contexts for social life, and the interplay of culture, race, class, and gender in the constitution of lived experience. My father's shift-work in extrusion manufacturing at a local factory serves as a tangible reminder of working-class oppression, despite substantive unionised efforts to create humane working conditions. To look at, I am ethnically ambiguous. Like Hinekura, I have experiences of people assuming I am *Pākehā*, but sometimes people treat me with disdain for reasons I struggle to comprehend.

Working in psychology requires skilful movement between the domains of arts and science, and, as Sonia will reiterate, this can render epistemological differences salient. The unquestioned dominance of scientific positivism, an empirical approach that requires objectivity in the development of "valid" knowledge that can then be universally applied, presents a persistent barrier to the integration of *mātauranga* Māori (Māori knowledges) in science (Smith, 2012), including psychology. These epistemological tensions are overlaid by cumulative and ongoing negative impacts of the colonial project on Māori, and the systematic accrual of advantage by *Pākehā* (Borell, 2014). This not only leads to the proliferation of deficit-focused statistics about Māori psychological outcomes, often decontextualised from the socio-cultural contexts that have wrought persistent social issues, but produces tenuous contexts for Māori scholars to safely and effectively navigate psychological science. Here, Kaupapa Māori (Moewaka Barnes, 2000; Smith, 2012) and critical psychological theories (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Burr, 1998; Gavey, 1989; Wetherell & Mohanty, 2010) that emphasise knowledge is contextually informed and situated in relation to surrounding socio-cultural contexts can provide important resources to render the machinery of privilege and associated "regimes of truth" (Foucault, 1988) visible and open to interrogation.

Teaching in psychology can therefore require some theatrics and rhetorical strategies that provoke, agitate, and unsettle entrenched positivist paradigms and social privilege (hooks, 2014). When this is effective, teaching can be a space of hope, transformation and positive development. Watching students' eyes and minds spark with interest – processing and making new meanings of familiar subjects, concepts, material and practices. Watching Māori students take ideas from the classroom into community activism, supporting them to flourish in their own unique ways (Webber & Macfarlane, 2017). Hearing about how non-Māori students are moved to support Māori initiatives and activism, to step into politically engaged

solidarity. Watching as students weave new worlds for themselves and those around them. I can say with conviction that, based on the Māori, Pacific and allied students I have had the privilege to teach and collaborate with, the future is in safe hands.

Being an engaged teacher and mentor in psychology also requires the ability to hold a different kind of space, a space that shelters students and interfaces with institutional machinations—systems premised on a particular kind of deserving student subject (Levy, 2018), where Eurocentric curricula and pedagogy maintains its own status quo (Levy, 2002). Interfacing with colleagues who have epistemological privilege, rank and access to institutional power can bring this kind of intersectional privilege afforded by settler-colonialism into stark focus. Sometimes, I might be supported and sheltered by senior Māori and allied colleagues who take the issues I raise further and try to enact change. However, in most instances I am isolated and required to defend my position, often without background knowledge about how the system works, leaving spaces for the status quo to reproduce. Despite my best efforts, sometimes I am unsuccessful in the advocacy I aspire towards: impacting students' futures and ambitions. Furthermore, I doubt the emotional and intellectual labour associated with this work is recognised by most leadership as a positive contribution to the intellectual community.

Teaching and making space for Māori approaches to psychology curricula, and advocating for Māori and Pacific students, has caused me to reflect on the stubborn persistence of epistemological privilege (Keast, 2020), or those who refuse to consider interconnections between Māori and Pacific student outcomes and our Eurocentric curricula. Often, my attempts to outline equity considerations are treated like an intellectual football, where ideas are debated to the point that the original intent and function are lost and rendered meaningless. Other times, “free speech” is naïvely asserted as an academic right, assumed to be on equal footing, and of equal importance, with the protestations of those who are the most marginalised in our society (see Peterson, 2020). These issues create a perfect storm for settler-colonial privilege to reassert itself. Under the guise of detached objectivity, those who benefit from settler-colonial privilege are then able to disconnect from the possibility of their complicity in perpetuating these dynamics as educators, with adverse impacts on Māori and Pacific students.

To further complexify the picture of teaching into a largely Eurocentric curriculum, we are expected to seek student evaluation of our lectures. While this may seem a constructive process on the surface, this belies the challenges inherent in being a subject that dares to question the settler-colonial status quo (see Daniel, 2019, for discussion about tertiary teaching evaluations of racialised women in a Canadian context). In approximately 10% of my four sets of annual lecture evaluations, I am reminded that my teaching is not always reciprocated with the same *aroha* (love, compassion) and *manaakitanga* (generosity, practices to enhance student *mana* — potential and ancestral efficacy — as learners). My lecture content centres Māori realities, histories and theories in psychology, and I am often told I need to “work on my trauma”, “stop blaming Pākehā”, and “get over the history”. We do not deliver our curriculum in a socio-cultural vacuum. Students enter lecture theatres with pre-existing ideas about Indigenous knowledge and peoples, and it is possible that they may interpret content pertaining to coloniality and race in ways that support their social privilege (McKinley, 2020). Sadly, there is no respite from being evaluated in every course, and the solutions to these hostile responses are too narrowly defined to encompass any meaningful support. As subjects who are constituted through the same knowledge systems, we are the embodiment and often “the face” of these initiatives. We are also constituted within this affective arsenal—expected to cater to the fragility of those with more social privilege than us. White fragility is a prickly issue to resolve on its own accord. There is no need to feign fragility when you already discredit the oppressed and make them out to be the oppressor. You only need to diminish their capacity to be seen as fragile.



Sadly, some of us do not have the luxury to be fragile. We must stand prepared to intellectually defend ourselves, our presence and our *mātauranga*. My wero is: Are you prepared to advocate for us? Hold space for us? Entertain the prospect that your unacknowledged privilege might be obstructing Māori and Pacific student outcomes? To recognise your role in upholding the machinery of settler-colonial privilege? Are you willing to dismantle the colonial machinery with us?

## Sonia: Shedding white fragility, one me at a time

In Aotearoa I identify as Pākehā and in Moana/Pacific contexts as *Pāpālangi* (*lea fakaTonga*, Tongan language, for of European descent). I am married to a migrant Tongan man and live with our children and our extended Tongan family. My lived experience and ontological and epistemological thinking are heavily shaped by my Tongan family's contemporary expressions of Tongan culture while located in Aotearoa and maintaining close ties to the Kingdom of Tonga. My research focuses primarily on Moana/Pacific student experiences, while encompassing and recognising Māori as *tangata whenua* (people of the land) in Aotearoa. Although my own studies have been in arts, I teach science in higher education, resulting in stark ontological differences between me and my colleagues regarding praxis and whose knowledges to privilege and prioritise.

Over 20 years in HE, I have witnessed the inequality of Māori and Moana/Pacific students' experiences. When first working as a tutor, it was readily apparent that Māori and Moana/Pacific students were unlikely to attend, engage in activities, or to pass, but I did not understand why. Since then, I have worked in a variety of contexts, predominantly under Indigenous leadership and with mainly Indigenous colleagues. This has gifted me an opportunity to better understand what was happening (or rather, not happening) in my earlier classes and the wider university context. Through critical self-reflection I was able to realise my ignorance, the impact of institutional racism and white fragility's pervasiveness.

My whiteness trumps any other equity positions I hold—as a woman, as someone from a lower socioeconomic background. I have benefited from my white privilege, including access to resources and understanding of systems. I love working as an educator, yet the educational experience is hugely inequitable; the system allows, enables and encourages the maintenance of a colonised status quo. On the surface, staff consider a variety of principles, initiatives and mission statements around Māori and Moana/Pacific peoples, yet there is limited institutional support for these considerations to be deep, long-lasting and result in transformational shifts so that Indigenous ways of knowing and being are privileged, visible and valued.

Across the university, most conversations where Māori and Moana/Pacific students are mentioned highlight deficit discussions of numbers: failing Māori and Moana/Pacific students, low enrolment numbers, the “challenges” of having Māori and Moana/Pacific students, and so on. Beyond these numbers are stories of people who are often struggling to exist in a system that does not recognise or value their knowledges. Despite education policy reforms attempting to make the curriculum inclusive of both Māori and Moana/Pacific cultures, non-Western knowledge is rarely acknowledged at university level.

I uphold *tino rangatiratanga* by using my power and agency to assist any institutional shifts that create spaces for Māori to lead as Māori, rather than jostling to position my expertise. For example, I recently assumed a position that determines how Māori and Moana/Pacific students are supported in my school. I consider this an absolute privilege and an opportunity to serve when I enable those with expertise, the

Māori and Moana/Pacific students themselves, to determine the *kaupapa* (purpose). My structural knowledge of the system is superseded by collectively building a model that positions Māori and Moana/Pacific students as experts, using their discipline-specific knowledge and experience to allocate resources and determine processes. My role is not to lead, but to support with opportunities, advice and encouragement.

In my experience, the idea of engaging in Māori and Moana/Pacific “things” only becomes a priority for promotion or research applications, when it should be all the time. My shift to non-Indigenous teaching and working spaces propelled me to employ relationship-building activities in my courses and present Indigenous cultural values and ways of being, knowing best practice for Māori and Pacific students. I am always concerned how non-Indigenous students and staff might respond, whether they would engage, or if these activities could isolate and negatively impact Indigenous students, perhaps triggering microaggressions. For some staff, relationship-building activities are uncomfortable, as they are accustomed to curating their presence as the expert; playing games can shift the power dynamic, requiring me to spend time preparing, reassuring and managing any resistance or fragility.

Yet, if we are to transform teaching spaces for Māori and Moana/Pacific students, we must find ways to support change. To drive transformational change, a recent focus has been supporting other non-Indigenous science educators to start considering, and actioning, transformational change (i.e. comfortably embedding appropriate examples, perspectives and content) that would contribute positively to Māori and Moana/Pacific science learner success all the time (Fonua, 2020). From my experiences as a Pāpāangi educator, this requires self-reflection and the willingness to admit ignorance in an institution where expertise is expected (Fonua, 2018).

I interact with non-Indigenous educators and the institution in ways that expose, reveal, trigger or showcase the white fragility that is always there. Frustratingly, this can happen when individuals and the institution seem to consider surface-level engagement in Māori and Moana/Pacific ways, such as a basic understanding of language and cultural values, as adequate. Unfortunately, when they are critiqued about the depth or application of their knowledge, I have seen situations become toxic and unproductive. Their fragility has been tested as their position of knowingness is questioned and they are challenged as learners.

Yet, they should be questioned. Do we not work in a place of supposed higher learning, as critics and consciences of society? As such, my wero to any non-Indigenous educator or practitioner include: What are you doing to demonstrate your deep engagement in transformative practice? How are you indicating that Māori and Moana/Pacific cultural values and knowledge are not an “extra” to your “real” job? How are you using your power to create leadership opportunities for Māori and Moana/Pacific people and for Māori and/or Moana/Pacific ways of being and knowing to be valued and privileged?

## David: Pressed to be palatable

I was raised in Southern California, living there until I moved to Hawai‘i, where I settled for 15 years before moving to Aotearoa. My mother grew up in Southern California and is of British and German descent, though that side of our family has limited cultural connections to Europe. Likewise, the paternal, Japanese side of my family has resided in Hawai‘i for six generations and is very assimilated into American culture. In both locales my family and I benefited as settlers, for most of our lives ignorant of how we acquired privileges at the expense of Indigenous people’s seeming erasure (Fujikane & Okamura, 2008; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Upon moving to Aotearoa in 2011, I fell into a research project that shifted my academic trajectory. Three gifted postgraduate students and I interviewed 90 high-achieving Māori and Pacific university students in an attempt to flip the script, focus on the numerous Māori and Pacific tertiary students who break the stereotype and excel academically (Mayeda et al., 2014). Unsurprisingly, participants spoke fervently of the everyday colonialism they encountered at university, including Eurocentric teaching biases, that provoked their educational motivation. Following the study's dissemination, a small group of Pacific and Asian undergraduate students asked if I would build from the empirical research by working with them in production of video interviews with Māori and Pacific students regarding on-campus racism. Our *I, Too, Am Auckland* project (Tesiram et al., 2015) highlighted everyday colonialism's prevalence and garnered widespread media attention.

The videos also revealed two streams of institutionalised white fragility, the first being an administrative white fragility by university management, unwilling to admit racism might be entrenched organisationally in its systems. Rather than examine how racism persists institutionally, the university only acknowledges that racism seeps into university walls via students, either those who unintentionally express unconscious biases or via the anomalous explicitly racist student. That university staff could demonstrate coloniality through Eurocentric curricula or hold racist attitudes themselves is never addressed, nor is the possibility that university systems might reflect long-standing colonial patterns.

Thus, academic staff are lauded for studying racism, as long as racism is scrutinised outside university parameters. Conversely, staff assessing racism's multi-layered presence on campus are quickly removed from leadership positions, for they are not palatable enough to direct conversations. This form of administrative white fragility means aspects of our whiteness go unchallenged; we are never granted space to engage in uncomfortable discussions that uncover institutionalised white privilege and its detrimental impacts in the tertiary education sector (Tate & Page, 2018).

At most, discussions focus on staff members' cultural upskilling. It is celebrated when non-Indigenous and non-Pacific scholars learn te reo Māori and warm Pacific greetings. The administration offers support for colleagues who wish to learn tikanga Māori and integrate their learnings into teaching. None of us disparage such efforts (except where the primary result of cultural upskilling increases white people's cultural capital). The problem is, this is where administrative efforts cease. Those advocating for inspection into white privilege are excluded from leadership, reaffirming Lipsitz's (2002) claim: "Where minority groups secure political and economic power through collective mobilization, the terms and conditions of their collectivity and the logic of group solidarity are always influenced and intensified by the absolute value of whiteness" (p. 79).

This administrative stream of white fragility propels a second stream of fragility among our community of scholars, an intellectual white fragility. Because academic staff are only encouraged to upskill in cultural competence, we are never pressured to interrogate our own prejudices and change accordingly. For instance, if academic staff learn of a voluntary course in introductory te reo Māori, they are free to publicly nod their heads in approval, but then display the easiest form of white fragility by ignoring it. Teaching that reproduces coloniality (e.g., via readings, teaching delivery, assessments) is never pressured to change. Staff who assume that scholarship derived from European thinkers is the best and only starting point are allowed to maintain such perspective, or, as Jade stated, they are allowed to uphold "epistemological privilege". White privileges are never confronted, while those who ground their scholarship in Indigenous frameworks remain relegated as second-class scholars.

My wero is directed towards university management. I challenge you to move beyond encouragement of cultural competence amongst academic staff by promoting deeper, uncomfortable conversations around racism and coloniality that pressure staff to alter their Eurocentric pedagogy.

## Discussion

Examining how indigeneity is excluded from organisational and managerial systems, Love (2019) asserts that mainstream organisations must relinquish power and share power more equitably with Indigenous peoples. However, Love subsequently asks, “But what is it to share power?” (2019, p. 12). Our collective storytelling suggests the university’s colonial machinery continues to thrive because white fragilities function across two planes where power is distributed unevenly. At the micro, interpersonal level, coloniality festers through colleagues and students who demonstrate a white agility, or a racialised ability, to evade robust adoption of Indigenous pedagogies. In these cases, those exercising white agility quickly jump over the taki, never taking it seriously, if they see it at all.

As Hinekura notices with her students (who are professional and academic staff), a good proportion consistently and conveniently dismiss the importance of learning te reo and tikanga Māori and are free to perpetrate colonial microaggressions when asked to alter their pedagogy in the slightest manner. Consequently, curricula remain static, often relying on deficit perspectives when incorporating material focused on Māori and Pacific communities (Curtis, 2016). Likewise for Jade, colleagues and students use Eurocentric epistemological privilege to evaluate her teaching, contributing to occupational isolation and marginalisation. And as Sonia adds, work that opens space for Māori students (and staff) to determine their tino rangatiratanga is defined as extra work by colleagues, peripheral to the “real” job. These interpersonal forms of everyday colonialism invalidate our work, which attempts to centre Māori and Pacific knowledges, thereby extending long-standing trends which began in the 19th century—the privileging of Eurocentric knowledge, the funnelling of Indigenous peoples (and at times, allies) into second-class positions and the loss of tino rangatiratanga.

However, the university sector refuses to inspect its whiteness with adequate depth. Instead, racism and coloniality are only said to materialise occasionally as “subtle” unconscious biases on the part of some staff and students. Such outlooks protect institutional reputation and uphold a Eurocentric foundation, precisely because staff as a whole are afforded opportunities to draw on their white privileged agilities—dancing around institutional interventions that coddle fragile white identities. Absent are institutional requirements that compel non-Indigenous staff to truly confront their colonial privileges and the ways those privileges impact pedagogy. As such, there is a luxury associated with white fragility—those with fragile white egos never have to reflect on their privileges; they never even have to acknowledge a taki exists. In turn, a “coloniality of white power keeps being re-centred because there is no interrogation of whiteness, of its political, economic, social, imaginative, epistemic and affective boundaries” (Tate & Page, 2018, p. 146).

Following Naepi and colleagues’ (2019) use of storytelling and wero on this topic, our collective wero calls on individual colleagues to pick up the taki appropriately and take personal responsibility in transforming their practices, as teachers and colleagues. To be clear, individual staff are not exonerated from responsibility to scrutinise their colonial privileges and alter their work in the tertiary sector. Granted, institutional change takes time, but individuals must engage independently in “decolonisation practices” (revisiting the history of settler colonialism, shifting one’s worldview on colonial relationships, working towards settler accountability; Huygens, 2011) and apply such efforts to their pedagogy.

More importantly, our work challenges university management to stimulate uncomfortable conversations around educational white fragilities and compel (not merely encourage) staff to upskill in Indigenous knowledges. We lay down a taiki to the institution as well, and await your intention. A culturally safe educational institution requires its teachers to continually examine their cultural biases, coupled with ongoing institutional critiques of colonial inequalities around leadership and resource distribution (Curtis et al., 2019). Among other things, a decolonised academy normalises teaching informed by Indigenous language and knowledges, nurtures relationships with Indigenous communities, supports Indigenous nation-building, and acknowledges the significance of land in university practices and policies (Smith & Smith, 2019). At present Māori staff fulfil the institution's job by making up for non-Indigenous staff who are allowed to sidestep indigenised interventions, resulting in Māori staff's loss of time, energy and tino rangatiratanga. Until central university sectors work through their own institutional fragilities, Indigenous staff and students will remain on the educational fringes, constantly searching for cracks in Eurocentric systems, struggling collectively to exercise their self-determination.

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