

Two anthropological assemblages: Maori 'culture areas' and 'adaptation' in New Zealand museums and government policy

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Abstract

In this paper we investigate two anthropological assemblages in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the 1920s and 1930s and how each were used in the adjudication of forms of governmental regulation of Māori populations. We explore the radically different agencements and socio-technical arrangements of people, things and ideas that were formulated within these contexts. Henry Devenish Skinner, curator of the Otago Museum and Anthropology lecturer at the University of Otago, Dunedin, formulated his assemblages based on archaeological fieldwork, ethnology and Wissler's culture area concept. Indigenous anthropologist Peter Buck and his associates the politicians Āpirana Ngata and Māui Pōmare formulated their distinct assemblages for operating on the Māori social according to living performative culture and anthropological fieldwork. Through these contrasting collecting, fieldwork and ordering regimes, different views of Māori as liberal subjects emerged to articulate ways the Indigenous population could enter into the cultural life of the emerging nation. Indigenous agency was ultimately to become of paramount importance in liberal governance.

Keywords: Museums, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Skinner, Culture areas, adaptation, Ngata, Buck, Māori, liberal government

In July 1923 a meeting was held to establish a Board of Māori Ethnological Research in Wellington, New Zealand. Those present congratulated themselves on establishing this body responsible for 'the study and investigation of the ancient arts and crafts, language, customs, history, tradition, and antiquities of the Māori and other cognate races of the South Pacific Ocean'.¹ The members included the Prime Minister, and other Pakeha (European) notables, along with the four Māori MPs, Peter Buck (or Te Rangihīroa, then a medical officer but later to become a well-known anthropologist) and Āpirana Ngata (who had called the meeting and steered the proposal through parliament).

However, there was one glaring absence, namely Henry Devenish Skinner. Cambridge-trained Skinner was the foundation lecturer in ethnology at Otago University and curator at the Otago Museum. He was undoubtedly the best qualified ethnologist in the country. Why wasn't he at the meeting? A few days later Ngata wrote to Skinner's father, William Henry Skinner, who was the President of the Polynesian Society. 'The meeting was very enthusiastic and will I am sure mark the turning point in the history of Māori and Polynesian research work in this country,' he wrote. 'The following morning Buck and I met your son and also Dr Gregory of the Bishop Museum. They heartily approved the new movement...' Despite these pleasantries, in the ensuing correspondence it becomes evident that while Skinner was grateful for extra funding for publications he did not agree with all of Ngata's plans for taking over the management of ethnological research and there was considerable tension, not least the fact his son was overlooked.² A private letter from Elsdon Best from Dominion Museum, who was on the Board, confirmed that it was 'controlled by natives' and that he was 'careful to say nothing at meetings.' 'Skinner's name was never mentioned even, he added, 'He was admitted at the last moment by special mention of his father, who came down the coast to meet Ngata for that purpose'.³

This article explores two anthropological assemblages, the first that of HD Skinner, centred on the University and Museum, and archaeology, and second, the 'applied' anthropology of Ngata and Buck, which was concerned with government administration, fieldwork and material culture but also intimately connected with tribal communities. Fiona Cameron (2014) has contrasted their different approaches to ethnology, with Skinner focused on 'culture areas' and adaptive capacities and strategies gleaned primarily from material culture and archaeological fieldwork, whereas Ngata and Buck were interested in anthropological research, the 'mentality' of Māori and other Pacific peoples, cultural revival and the blending of Māori and Pakeha culture. Unlike Skinner, these 'home-grown' anthropologists were largely self-taught, and moved between two generations of scholars, an earlier generation of Māori-speaking amateurs like Elsdon Best and later trained professionals like Skinner, Raymond Firth, Felix Keesing and Ernest Beaglehole (Sorrenson 1982).

Yet in harnessing anthropological research for tribal ends, and for a time at least taking a leading role in applying its results among their people, Ngata and Buck were unique among colonised peoples of the British Empire. Skinner and Buck in particular had quite different views, Skinner being dubious about the reliability of tribal traditions collected by the Board, and Buck complaining about Skinner's museum cataloguing of 'dead' artifacts unconnected to the 'living culture of the people'.⁴ Essentially Buck was more in tune with contemporary Māori views that cultural treasures (*taonga tuku iho*) are part of a performative culture, living embodiments of their ancestors which were handed on to succeeding generations and which therefore have an ongoing, active role in ensuring that kinship ties through *whakapapa* (genealogy) remain intact (Tapsell 1997; Henare 2007).

On the other hand, Henry Devenish Skinner's archaeological fieldwork and anthropological courses were set up after World War One, when New Zealand was focused on creating a national settler identity, and building its economic base through farming and related primary industries. Heavily influenced by Americanist anthropology, the American Historical School, Clark Wissler's (1917; 1923; 1926) and Alfred Kroeber's (1923) culture area concept and German American Edward Sapir's (1916) methods, these knowledge practices were integral to the adjudication of forms of governmental regulation of Māori populations. Defining regional Māori cultural complexes in this manner was intended to address problems of Māori socio-economic disadvantage and for verifying land claims, but was employed in quite different ways to Buck, and Ngata in particular, who appropriated ethnology to underpin tribal social and economic development. In their work, it is possible to discern a notion of culture as something changeable, adaptive and plastic, more akin to the ideas of Franz Boas, whose work had an interesting uptake in New Zealand at this time (Bennett, Dibley and Harrison 2014).

This article teases out the differences and similarities between these plural anthropological assemblages in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1920s and 1930s, at times competing and at times coalescing, and describes how each were used in the adjudication of forms of governmental regulation of Māori populations. In doing so we use fresh theoretical frameworks, assemblage theory and ANT (Actor Network Theory), and in particular the work of Bruno Latour and Michel Callon, which has only recently been applied to museums through the writing of scholars such as Tony Bennett. Drawing on concepts such as 'anthropological assemblages' (Bennett 2011), and 'agencements' (Callon 2005), we explore the markedly different socio-technical arrangements of people, things and ideas that were formulated within these contexts, and consider how they were deployed in the governmental regulation of Māori populations but also were shaped by Māori actors. Applied to an extraordinary episode in the history of museum anthropology, this framework brings to light a fascinating example of indigenous agency.

Assemblage, agencement and colonial government

In analysing the dynamical relations between government policy, museums, anthropology and indigenous people, we draw on Michel Callon's notion of *agencement* (2005: 4) as put to use in his analysis of financial markets. Callon suggests that meaning-making takes place in hybrid collectives that incorporate 'material and technical devices, texts' as well as humans (2005: 4). The term 'agencement,' often preferred to the English term 'assemblage' because it retains something of the original French implication of agency and inter-connections, deliberately

disrupts conventional sociological understandings of power, agency and meaning that have tended to be attributed largely to human will, intentionality and action. Bennett (2009; 2013) has drawn on this notion to interpret the relations between museums, the early phase of fieldwork anthropology and colonial government as a series of socio-technical arrangements and interactions between heterogeneous actors both human and non-human whose agency arises from, and is distributed across, these various assemblages.

Alongside these theories we also explore ideas about Indigenous agency developed from the work of Rodney Harrison, which suggests that it is performed, emergent and connected with other forms of social and material agency (Harrison 2013). In museum studies, anthropology and related fields scholars are now showing that indigenous people were active in shaping museum collections in the past as well as being active participants in collaborative exhibition projects in the present (Henare 2005; McCarthy 2007; Gosden, Larsen and Petch 2007; Harrison, Byrne, Torrence and Clarke 2011; Harrison, Byrne and Clarke 2013). However, much remains to be done in exploring how indigenous actors became involved in the intertwined histories of museums, fieldwork, and ethnographic research, especially in relation to colonial government, thereby presenting a more complex view of the history of museums and anthropology than hitherto suggested in scholarly research.

In this article we discuss the ways in which HD Skinner deployed the Americanist culture areas concept through the specific figurations of Wissler, Kroeber and Sapir and how agency in this respect was configured in relation to specific socio-technical arrangements that brought them together as fieldwork agencements. We also look at the other anthropological assemblage operating at the time, centred on Ngata and Buck, which similarly deployed a range of things, people, practices and institutions through which the slightly different but related idea of cultural adaptation was disseminated.

To make the link between archaeological, anthropological, and indigenous expertise and authority and governing processes, we draw on two notions of assemblage. Firstly the culture area assemblage as a metaphor of society which illustrates the functional units of culture. Second, Deleuze and Guattari's idea of assemblage (1983) where the groupings that HD Skinner, and Ngata and Buck, formulated are not just a function of the components themselves but made up of heterogeneous elements that exercise agency distributed across and through the assemblage. Flowing from the field, to the museum and laboratory and on to university teaching programs, these assemblages were subsequently put into wider circulation through books, scientific networks and government administrative structures.

This article also throws light on the question of colonial governmentality in the Pacific context (see also: Cameron 2014; McCarthy 2014). Michel Foucault (2008) argues that Liberal government operates according to a series of apparatuses which work through different regimes of truth to formulate different types of freedom that act as interfaces through which the relations between governing practices and population are organised (see Bennett 2012). In this article we draw on Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory to explore the ways in which Māori were configured simultaneously as objects of knowledge and government where museum collections, ethnographic fieldwork and other scientific activities were folded into a series of practices, discourses, and methods that that operated on the colonial social through one formal scientific assemblage, but also how Māori in turn exercised agency through a second governmental assemblage which was antagonistic to the first. Lastly, we prefer the use of 'the social' from Latourian sociology (Latour 2005), rather than the more usual 'culture' or society, because it conveys a sense not of organic constructed wholes but heterogeneous elements which are assembled, disassembled and reassembled.

Skinner and the 'culture area' assemblage

Henry Devenish Skinner completed a BA in Anthropology at Christ's College, Cambridge with AC Haddon. Haddon initiated Skinner's interest in ethnology and taxonomic studies of material culture. In 1918 he was appointed ethnologist at the Otago Museum in Dunedin and taught a course in anthropology at Otago University in 1919, the first in the British Empire outside the UK.⁵

Skinner was a great admirer of anthropologists Clark Wissler and Alfred Kroeber's work on the material culture of Native American Indians and the enunciation of their cultural

history according to the division of the continent into culture areas (for a discussion of culture areas see Wissler 1975; Kroeber 1931, 1939). As Wissler (1927: 881) explains, the concept of culture area and the derivation of naturally given culture aggregates as regional types, for example South-western USA, was an approach to cultural history popular in the New World. The culture area concept and its methods was geared to defining a comparative social evolutionary history that according to Wissler (1923: 289) could demonstrate how 'different races had different inherent potential for cultural achievement' (Ross 1985: 23). The application of the culture area concept inculcated Skinner's representations of Māori history and culture with social evolutionist principles. The main thrust of Skinner's analysis was on the inferential historical reconstruction in respect to the origins of Māori culture overall. Clusters of behaviour, adaptive strategies and cultural patterns were identified through a range of cultural traits both material and immaterial. These natural cultural aggregates in space and time were defined as distinctive, regional Māori cultures.

Skinner corresponded with Wissler and gathered images, maps, photographs and lantern slides of Indian physical types and lifestyles from him to demonstrate principal culture areas in his teaching.⁶ He was also guided by the methods of Edward Sapir. Sapir, a student of Franz Boas, worked closely with Kroeber as well (Sapir 1916: 1). Sapir's methods were taught in Skinner's popular and degree anthropology courses, guided his fieldwork methods and the analysis and organisation of his teaching collections at the Otago Museum.⁷ Skinner's association with the American Historical School was strengthened when in the 1920s Wissler came to New Zealand, and then Skinner took a post-graduate session at Yale under Wissler and another at Berkeley with Robert Lowie and Alfred Kroeber.⁸

Back in New Zealand, Skinner put these theories into practice but was somewhat at odds with other scholars working in the field. Much to the annoyance of Elsdon Best and others from the Polynesian Society, Skinner had little regard for traditional Māori knowledge due to what he believed was the prevalence of inaccurate oral accounts.⁹ He insisted that the Māori past could most convincingly be reconstructed through material evidence and archaeological fieldwork, writing that 'the best evidence is the material objects which people of past generations have made with their hands; for the immaterial things handed down by word of mouth have undergone change from their original oral text' (Skinner n.d. Lecture notes 2; Skinner 1953). This view was in contrast to scholars such as Best and Stephenson Percy Smith who published material in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* (JPS) compiled from manuscripts written down by elders from the *whare wānanga* or traditional schools of learning.

Skinner acquired his archaeological and material culture predilection for the construction of cultural history from Clark Wissler. Wissler (1927: 889) firmly believed that the study of artefacts and their distribution in the first instance could make culture areas more objective. When he arrived at the Otago Museum, Skinner began work on defining regional differentiation in Māori culture and exploring his material focus and predilections for arranging collection objects. For the first time in New Zealand, he used the culture area concept and formulated the notion of Māori cultural history as comprising distinctive regional cultures of trait complexes. Following Wissler and Sapir, Skinner sought to gather together a range of cultural traits that could depict cultural complexes, and hence regional Māori cultures.

In doing so, Skinner drew on private collections donated to the Museum by Charles Haines, James Murdoch, Murray Thompson, Sir Frederick Chapman and Willi Fels (Harsant 1987: 11). Collecting expeditions were conducted in the northern South Island and the North Island (Skinner 1974: 11-12). Skinner gathered his cultural traits that included domestic arts, paints, knives, saws, hammers, weapons, clothing, ornaments, stone spear points, tattooing implements fishing and agricultural implements as well as canoe paddles, images of buildings, fittings and carvings from all parts of New Zealand detailing regional variations in carvings to illustrate his regional cultures. He collected Māori skeletal material to support his thesis of Māori origins and locality, to detail racial distribution and for the teaching of physical anthropology. He also recorded linguistic variations as examples of regional dialects.¹⁰

Archaeological fieldwork was conducted by Skinner for the first time on many sites across Southern New Zealand between 1919 and the late 1920s. He carefully recorded the placement of material according to their stratigraphic relations and gathered locality collections critical in the construction of culture complexes according to space distribution and the concentration of

cultural phenomena as they were found in situ. Such a technique had its origins in the biological sciences as explained by Kroeber (1923: 128) where culture assemblages were seen as akin to organisms. Distributional studies of plants and the characteristics of geographical regions provided Skinner with an environmental backdrop to assist him in defining his culture areas, cultural change, environmental adaptation and living styles (Skinner 1921: 71). Where possible, Skinner included ethnographical information as it related to social organisation, religion and language in these culture areas to supplement his material indicators (Skinner 1974: 19).

As Skinner explained, the 'material collected by museums is intended to demonstrate truths not through words but directly to the eye...'.¹¹ At the Otago Museum, objects were examined, measured and described on the basis of their physical attributes such as shapes, sizes and materials such as stone, bone and wood. Decorative motifs on objects were recorded according to locality and culture traits inferred from ethnographical sources. Skinner then combined these objects with linguistic forms, images and maps and put them in what he considered their proper relations to one another to depict eight different Māori cultures and their cultural complexes. He attempted to define a cultural centre where the culture was developing most typically, using fieldwork to support his thesis. Skinner followed Wissler's (1927: 886) scheme by developing his culture areas according to constituent tribal groups and verified them against known tribal boundaries (Skinner 1974: 21-22). The culture areas had a significant impact on the later development of anthropology and archaeology in New Zealand, and also shaped the work of Māori scholars such as Hirini Moko Mead whose categories of Māori visual art draw on the areas to define regional styles of carving (1986).



Figure 1. HD Skinner (third from left) setting out on an expedition with other scientists in 1924 to the Chatham Islands, 800 kilometres east of New Zealand. There Skinner analysed Moriori material culture, dismissing claims based on oral traditions that Moriori had settled the mainland before Māori. Hocken Collections Reference: S14-138g

The culture areas were as follows

- 1 The Moriori Culture Area (Chatham islands);
- 2 Murihiku Culture Area (Southland, Otago and southern Canterbury);
- 3 Kaiapoi Culture Area (West Coast and Canterbury);

- 4 Wakatu Culture Area (northern South Island and southern North Island);
- 5 West Coast Culture Area (north of the Rangitīkei River to the Mōkau River);
- 6 East Coast Culture Area (southern Wairarapa to the Māhia peninsula);
- 7 Central Culture Area (central North Island to Auckland)
- 8 Northern Culture Area (Northland)

Skinner's culture areas were used to write a national narrative of Māori history as a means of federating Māori people into the nation state. His culture areas correlated with *iwi* or tribal groups, a social unit and territorial arrangement which was arguably created by the government to produce a coherent social order (Ballara 1998; Hill 2004). Of course, 'understanding the other' in the colonial state field became the dominant currency as Steinmetz notes (2008: 594). The Otago University and Museum anthropology courses and Skinner's culture area assemblages became integral to the development of new forms of agency within scientific, economic and colonial administrative ensembles for acting on the Māori colonial social. The ability to govern more effectively could be achieved by training administrators in anthropology because 'teaching anthropology does not achieve real success unless it turns out workers in the field—students who will go out collecting among primitive people'.¹² Regulatory practices adjudicated through Skinner's courses were therefore directed towards the production of good administrators and instilling paternalistic sympathetic dispositions towards their governed subjects. Skinner told his students that '... a knowledge of the social and religious systems of primitive man is the greatest importance to all who are called on to administer law and justice among backward peoples...'¹³

The Board of Māori Ethnological Research

Though they agreed on many points, Skinner's epistemological position was in opposition to an emerging and influential group of Indigenous scholar-politicians who were connected with the Young Māori Party: Āpirana Ngata, Peter Buck, Māui Pōmare and others. Together they represented another assemblage that operated in/under and across a series of institutions: the Dominion Museum, the Polynesian Society and, behind them all, the key body that funded and managed publishing and other activities, the Board of Māori Ethnological Research (BMER) (McCarthy 2014: 285-6).

We heard in the introduction how Skinner was excluded by Ngata and his colleagues from the first meeting of the BMER, but that he was later added after protests from his father. Though Skinner was an active member of the Board and supported its aims, the different approaches and tensions remain visible. The minutes from the meeting on 30 October, 1923 records a comment by Judge Jones that he 'was sure that the work to be done by the board at this and future meetings would be for the benefit of the Māoris and their descendants and add greatly to the sum of human knowledge.' It was moved by Mr Skinner and seconded by Archdeacon Williams that the board expresses its appreciation of the annual expeditions sent out by the Hon. Min of Internal Affairs for field work in connection with Māori Ethnology which is of inestimable value in research work and should be continued.¹⁴ Once again we sense, in these comments by different members of the Board, two different strands of thinking about the use of anthropology, one allied to contemporary Māori welfare and tribal purposes, and the other focused on scholarly pursuits for their own sake.

In private there was little love lost between Ngata and Buck on the one hand, and Skinner on the other. In their letters to one another the two Māori referred to Skinner's shortcomings, Ngata calling him a '*taurekareka*' (scoundrel) who was '*mōhio tonu*' (clever) but little use on the Board (Sorrenson 1986: 97). Buck was angry about Skinner's criticism of Best and said he had become '*hōhā*' (annoyed, bored) with him (Sorrenson 1986: 100-1, 116). Ultimately of course, the younger man's academic criticism of Best's theories about early settlement, based on oral traditions, proved well founded (Freeman 1959). Needless to say the Board did not approve Skinner's proposals for publication, such as the manuscripts of Herries Beattie on South Island Māori which supported Skinner's work on material culture.¹⁵

These differences may be explained in part by the different background and motivation

of Māori scholars involved in ethnological fieldwork. According to the archival record, plans for the Board were drawn up in 1920, and culminated in its establishment as part of The Native Land Amendment Act in 1923. It carried on to 1935 when it was taken over by the Māori Purposes Fund Board (Walker 2001: 202-5, 221-4). The idea of a central body for the management of ethnological research seems to have developed from the interest among a younger generation of Māori intellectuals in the 1900s which dates back to meetings of the Te Aute Students Association, itself the forerunner of the Young Māori Party. Ngata, Buck, and Pōmare visited museums, attended exhibitions, read anthropology texts, and committed themselves to gathering up and recording aspects of customary culture (Sorrenson 1982). For Ngata and his colleagues, ethnology paralleled and enabled an indigenous revival of their cultural heritage, which was articulated in the modern concept of *Māoritanga* (Māoriness) (see McCarthy 2014).



Figure 2. Āpirana Ngata (left) and Peter Buck (Te Rangihīroa) on the Dominion Museum ethnological expedition to the East Coast in 1923. They are seen working on tukutuku or lattice work panels, one of the many Māori arts and crafts which were revival through cultural development programmes underpinned by their research. Alexander Turnbull Library Ref: 1/2-007887-F.

Buck enthusiastically joined in the Dominion Museum's ethnological expeditions which were undertaken between 1919 and 1923, alongside Best and James Macdonald from the Dominion Museum and Johannes Andersen from the Alexander Turnbull Library (Henare 2005). Ngata encouraged them from the side lines and hosted one trip to his own Ngāti Porou tribe on the East Coast. MacDonald, acting director of the Museum, explained that Ngata was 'very desirous' they visit the district to 'obtain records from his people' and added 'we would have the help and sympathy of leading Māoris who regard the passing of their arts and crafts and tribal lore as a matter of considerable importance'.¹⁶

From these expeditions there is a movement of objects, notes, photographs, films and sound recordings from the field back to the museum and library in Wellington, and in turn to government machinery, and native policy—what Latour calls the centres of ‘collection’ and ‘calculation’ (1989)—which is to be expected given the close physical proximity of the museum right next to parliament buildings. The scientific associations of the data can be traced as they find their way into the public domain. One newspaper noted that ‘the records of their labours are diffused in many directions,’ mentioning books, pamphlets, and journal articles.¹⁷ Findings from Whanganui and the East Coast expeditions found their way into papers by Buck, James MacDonald and Johannes Anderson at the Science Congress in Sydney in 1923, public talks by Buck in Auckland, and Best’s many publications for the BMER. For example in 1923 a reporter reviewed a lecture by Buck which included screenings of films about weaving, fishing, making fire, divinatory rites, gardening and other ‘valuable data and records [which] were collected’ for the Museum. His presentation made quite an impression on the reporter, whose reference to current Māori aspirations built on a treasuring of the past, reveal the speaker’s clear message to his audience. ‘Standing on the threshold of a new day, awaiting the dawn of knowledge that would enable them to play a new and important part in civilization,’ he wrote, ‘the Māoris looked to the Anglo-Saxons, because with the latter their destinies were blended inextricably. (‘The Old Māori’ 1923)

Māori themselves were not only involved in the fieldwork—participating on both sides in collecting, demonstrating and recording of practices—but seem to have responded positively to the expeditions. Dr Tūtere Wi Repa of Te Araroa wrote a long article in the *Gisborne Times* reviewing the work of the East Coast expedition which he saw first-hand, expressing an interest in the benefits of ethnography, not least to himself as a scholar of his own tribal tradition. He wrote that the ‘Poetry’ of Ngāti Porou was captured by ‘scientific phonograph,’ so the ‘living voices’ of the tribe can be heard ‘whenever desired’ by asking the museum for records, ensuring that the ‘living traces’ of them will be preserved for the benefit of their relatives’ (‘Māori Folklore’ 1923).

This connection to communities and the stress on maintaining living traditions and practices is to the fore in Ngata’s original proposal for the BMER, which indeed may itself have been one of the chief outputs of the expeditions. In support of his reforms, Ngata cited the ‘appeal’ of the Polynesian Society for increased revenue to publish its Journal, the allegation that there is an ‘ever increasing accumulation of valuable material awaiting publication,’ and the increasing worldwide interest in ‘ethnic problems of the Pacific’.¹⁸ In assuming responsibility for the Dominion Museum Bulletins, bringing the governance of the Polynesian Society alongside the BMER and shifting its HQ and library to Wellington, funding the JPS and taking over the Society’s monographs and other material, supporting ethnological fieldwork and research in New Zealand and the Pacific. Best, whose manuscripts had languished unpublished at the museum for several years due to lack of funds, was delighted to have his work finally appear. In the JPS, which was also supported by funding from the Board, he expressed his gratitude in glowing terms: ‘It is a highly gratifying thing to note that our Māori friends have at length seen the desirability of putting their racial and tribal lore on permanent record’ (Condliffe 1971: 148).

The BMER spent thousands of pounds on reprints, editing and publishing articles and books over the next decade. These included Page-Rowe’s illustrated book on Māori art (1928), Andersen’s study of string games (1925), Ngata’s two collections of song poetry (1959; 1961), and several monographs by Best. One highlight was Felix Keesing’s *The Changing Māori* (1928), a study of cultural adaptation in the form of Māori farming on the East Coast written up from his Masters thesis with much input from Ngata.

How did this Māori-led Board get the money to do all this work? The BMER was funded by the Māori Land Boards, the Native Civil List, The Native Trustee and the Māori Purposes Fund along with money from *iwi* (tribes) Ngāti Porou, Te Arawa, Ngāi Tahu and the Taranaki Māori Trust Board. J. B. Condliffe reminds us of this Māori funding, commenting that ‘what has been done in New Zealand ethnology has been almost entirely paid for by the Māori people’ (1971: 149). It is therefore not surprising that in framing the legislation which formed the Board, its chief architect Āpirana Ngata added ‘certain conditions’ insisted on by the Māori MPs because their constituents want ‘access to published material on tradition and history, genealogical tables and song etc.’¹⁹

Given the sources of the Board’s funds, and the responsibilities that were attached, it

is not surprising that this particular anthropological assemblage was embedded in the wider Māori community and its activities. Ngata himself kept up a constant correspondence with Māori elders around the country as part of his work collecting and editing *waiata* (songs). Through its hardworking Secretary Te Raumoana Balneavis, the Board employed no less than four Māori researchers, ran its own magazine, as well as publicising its work in a Māori newspaper. It disseminated its preservation agenda widely at *hui* (tribal gatherings), major public events such as the opening of new carved meeting houses (for example *Mahinaarangi* at Ngāruawahia in 1927) and festivals of performing arts (such as at Waitangi in 1934) (see: McCarthy 2014: 287-8).

Ngata's overall cultural-political-economic strategy is clear from his published work, speeches and letters to sympathetic Pakeha. In 1934 he told Richard Smythe about the efforts of his 'circle' to restore Māori pride by fostering their language and founding 'a Māori literature'.²⁰ Ngata was pleased to point to the 'great revival' of the last decade in which 'once more the youth are sitting at the feet of their elders to acquire proficiency in all the ancient pastimes—for these have been found worthwhile as the hallmark of a racial individuality and culture, approved by the public of New Zealand'.²¹ Note here the careful inclusion of Māori culture within the mainstream society, a trade off they were prepared to make in return for state support. Thus it can be seen that this assemblage acted not just on the Māori social, but also on the settler population, creating a national imaginary that drew on a store of Indigenous imagery. Ngata reiterated this theme in a report on the Board's programmes, stressing that its ethnological research would not just revive songs for the direct benefit of communities but provide a national culture for Pakeha which *they* could claim as part of a common legacy, to 'inculcate in the people of this country a desire to perpetuate the most characteristic features of the art of the original inhabitants'.²²

In contrast, Skinner's emphasis on describing and arranging museum collections in articulating culture areas was in opposition to the Indigenous cohort's interest in living, performative culture, anthropological fieldwork and the psychological. These divergent interests became the source of animosity between Ngata, Buck and other members of the BMER. Buck told Andersen that 'It is a pity that our one professional anthropologist in New Zealand has a complex that stands in the way of whole-hearted co-operation'.²³ Buck also attacked Skinner's anthropological courses at Otago University on the basis of his armchair methods. He wrote sarcastically that 'the young university man studies theoretical anthropology and gets a system of classifying material' and then 'turns this system into active use by rearranging other people's material.' The implication was that this 'dry' academic theory could not substitute for hard work in the field, like that of Best. 'I used to think that *Peehi* (Best) was a bit hard on Skinner,' Buck recalled, 'in saying that he could not do really good Māori work without a knowledge of the Māori language'.²⁴

Together, Ngata and Buck exerted extraordinary influence on the formation of anthropology in New Zealand throughout the interwar period 1918-39. In their hands, anthropology and ethnology became instruments of colonial administration creating space and resources for separate Māori social, cultural and economic development, and simultaneously assisting Pakeha to understand and appreciate 'the Māori mind'. Native custom and the origins of social and cultural phenomena were used to demonstrate the marked differences between Māori and Pakeha mental outlook. Such differences justified the necessity for different policies particularly in terms of land title.²⁵ On the other hand Skinner's indirect role in governing metropolitan populations seeped into public consciousness through his high profile work at the Otago University and Museum over many years. In contrast to the cultural relativism associated with Boas, with its notion of culture as something malleable and even creative which licensed indigenous development and creative individualism (Stocking 1966), Skinner's application of Wissler's culture areas appeared to fix Māori identity into specific cultural traits and geographical areas less amenable to modern society. This allowed specimens to be classified and displayed in a more exact, scientific manner through Skinner's exhibits and his numerous publications. Ultimately this assemblage was directed towards enlightening the majority Pakeha population about 'primitive' pre-European Māori ways and dispositions, and, judging from public pronouncements on the state of 'our Māori' during this period, the patronising rhetoric maintained a discourse of assimilation rather than integration (Bledisloe 1935).

Native policy: From salvage to culture areas and adaptation

Having outlined Skinner's assemblage, and contrasted it with that of Ngata and Buck, we now turn to situate both within the general shift in this period from narratives of anthropological salvage in the 1890s, activated in the context of population decline and claims of a 'dying' race, to those of Māori cultural revival and adaptation in the 1920s, and how these were imbricated in government Native policies (Hill 2004). At the time, Dr ILG Sutherland described this turning point and attributed the change to Ngata's leadership and his concern for Māori welfare effected through the Māori arts and crafts movement which gave Māori 'renewed pride and hope for the future.'²⁶ Ngata himself ascribed the genesis of the cultural adaptation idea to James Carroll, the first Māori MP to become Native Minister, who successfully countered the assimilation policies of Pakeha politician William Herries in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Ngata referred to the contest of the 'Herries idea' and the 'Carroll idea,' and reflected that by 1920 the latter was in the ascendant, making possible the post-assimilationist policies pursued by Prime Minister Gordon Coates, Native Minister from 1921-8, and Ngata himself as Minister 1928-34. (Sorenson 1987: 18).

We should remember that Sir Āpirana Ngata was a university graduate, lawyer and long-serving MP who was moreover a loyal Anglican supporter of King and empire. In a paper delivered to the Institute of Pacific Relations in 1927, he expressed the normative function of the colonial administration in the governing of native populations, arguing that Māori people should adjust to European ways of life, doing away with practices that did not fit the modern world while 'preserving in a modified form' elements of customary culture. 'It is in the disposition shown by legislators, educationalists, reformers, churchmen and all who have had to do with the administration of Māori affairs,' he continued, 'to examine sympathetically these elements in Native culture and to provide them so that New Zealand might be regarded as the best example of success in the government of a Native race...' (1929: 1). At the same time, Ngata saw anthropology as a tool for preserving and reviving indigenous culture, in other words acculturation not assimilation, what Sorenson later summarised as the process of 'incorporating useful elements of European culture in an enduring Māori culture.' 'Government's role,' Sorenson added, 'was to facilitate that process under Māori leadership' (Sorenson 1982: 17). The clearest expression of Ngata's own version of his pragmatic blend of anthropology and government policy was his 'Land development report' (Ngata 1931).

Adaptation to modern social and economic life became one of the dominant narratives shared by Skinner, Ngata and Buck.²⁷ In formulating the notion of adaptation as a strategy to underpin his tribal land development schemes (1931), Ngata drew on anthropologist Raymond Firth's (1929: 471) work on Māori economic life and his conclusions 'that Māori had reached the phase of adaptation.' Competing discourses of adaptation emerged during this period that expressed the different theoretical and social underpinnings of these narratives. While Skinner articulated his position by stating that New Zealand's greatest socio-economic problem was the *incorporation* of Māori people into the body of New Zealand society, the more liberal adaptation discourses articulated by Ngata and his colleagues referred to an *adjustment* of Māori society to the modern day in an *equal* relationship with Pakeha - on one hand referring to social evolutionary notions of adaptive potential and on the other reflecting a more independent notion of Māori self-determination that was post-assimilationist.²⁸ It is interesting that this latter assemblage seems to have inherited an echo of Boas' culture concept, which he developed in part during fieldwork with the Kwakiutl people in Canada - a theory more historical and environmental than evolutionary, which lent itself to indigenous claims for racial equivalence (Stocking 1966).

Ngata's approach was undoubtedly more direct than Skinner's. It was also more dangerous. In a speech in parliament in 1929 seeking more state funding for Māori farming (Ngata quoted in Sutherland 1950: 313), Ngata stated boldly that 'the whole of the Native problems are bound up with what the scientists call the problem of cultural adaptation'. That Ngata's political drive towards separate development represented a substantial threat to Pakeha hegemony is proven by his forced resignation in 1934, after an official enquiry into finances for land settlement. Ngata was, as Walker suggests (2001), probably the victim not just of his political enemies but also a system that was not ready for Māori control of Māori affairs.

Nevertheless Ngata and his policies were defended by Pakeha intellectuals such as ILG Sutherland, lecturer in Psychology at Victoria University College in Wellington, who in *The Māori Situation* (1935) mounted a scathing critique of Pakeha indifference. 'No people can really be self-respecting if it...is regarded only as a show for tourists,' wrote Sutherland, 'Nor should the Māori people be regarded as so many museum specimens' (1935: 123). This theme had its strongest articulation in Sutherland's important collection *The Māori People Today* (1940), which, besides his afterword, included three chapters by Ngata on land, tribal organisation and arts and crafts.²⁹ Ngata's vision for a dual approach combining European 'economic life' and Māori 'social life' prefigured the bicultural philosophy of the late twentieth century (Sutherland 2013: 244-5; Walker 2001: 288).

Throughout this period we find the Māori intellectuals appealing to the Native 'mentality' in advancing their claims for a degree of indigenous control over their own affairs. Anthropology and museums provided the ethnographic evidence for a distinctive Māori mental outlook thanks to the 'new psychology' then becoming popular overseas and introduced to New Zealand by Ivan Sutherland. Influenced by WHR Rivers and Radlin, his article 'The study of the Māori mind' (Sutherland 1929) disputed the idea that Māori were not capable of abstract thought, due in large part to the sophisticated tribal traditions being collected and published by the BMER (Sutherland 2013: 152-3, 157-8). Sutherland subsequently worked closely with his mentor Ngata, developing the idea of a 'Māori mentality' equal to Europeans which was harnessed to bolster development programmes. Maintaining 'Māori individuality' was the best policy, albeit with a 'blended culture' that was today partly western, because certain features of traditional Māori life were ultimately a 'psychological and social necessity' (Sutherland 1940: 37).

Though his ministerial career was over by 1935, many of Ngata's policies were continued and even expanded by later governments. Whatever their legacy, Ngata's adaptive approaches to incorporating Māori into a modern nation shaped, and were shaped by, the ethnological drive to record the 'Māori as he was', which is found in the JPS and the BMER publications. However in the hands of Ngata and Buck, compared to older fieldworkers like Best and younger professionals like Skinner, this programme was steered towards tribal and Māori objectives, and not simply the imperatives of the state. This subtle but crucial difference can be discerned in their appraisal of the local and international literature of ethnology and anthropology. Aside from Buck, Ngata was well read in this literature and frank about its usefulness (or not). In a letter to Balneavis recommending a course of background reading for his work with the Board, Ngata pointed to the value of scholars such as AC Haddon, but suggested that Polynesian research could incorporate indigenous frameworks. He wrote: 'I believe that an arrangement such as our *whakapapa* (genealogy) could eventually be evolved to show at a glance the relative position of each branch of research under headings like *whakairo*, *raranga*, *waka* etc.' (carving, weaving, canoes).³⁰

When Ngata and Buck interacted directly with anthropologists, the same independent spirit comes through. GHLF (George) Pitt-Rivers (grandson of the Pitt Rivers Museum founder) visited the Dominion Museum and toured the Māori villages on the Whanganui river with Best in 1923, giving a paper later at a Sydney conference on 'The decline and extinction of certain races in the Pacific'.³¹ In the discussion afterwards a New Zealand academic noted that 'sympathetic white government' would assuage the inevitable degeneration of natives, but Buck interjected, commenting that the Māori population was actually now *increasing* not decreasing. After reading George Pitt-Rivers' book, *The Clash of Culture and the Contact of Races* (1927), containing a chapter on his visit to New Zealand, Ngata reflected on his own acculturation, telling Buck that 'our hearts are not with this policy of imposing Pakeha cultural forms on our people. Our recent activities would indicate a contrary determination to preserve the old culture forms as the foundation on which to reconstruct Māori life and hopes' (Sorenson 1986: 123).

Despite their differences, both Skinner and Ngata shared these governing orientations within the existing political system, each seeking clues on how Māori could adapt their culture to modern life by detailing dispositions and forms of expertise rooted in 'old' ways of life that could be re-deployed for the modern nation. For his part, Skinner sought to detail all these things through his trait lists of material culture, his documentation of the material manifestations of the psychological and the writing of cultural histories using theories of independent invention,

diffusion and affiliation. On the other hand, Ngata sought to find these clues through the recording of living cultures, not just written accounts of tribal tradition but also speech, proverbs, and visual and performing arts. In a chapter in Sutherland's book, probably written by him at Ngata's dictation (1940), the Māori leader articulated his adaptive methodology in relation to land development where research on Māori tribal organisation and communal land tenure could then be combined with the technical equipment and modern Pakeha farming techniques to achieve a successful result.

For both Ngata and Skinner, archaeological and anthropological fieldwork and Native policy worked in tandem, gathering different assemblages of things, texts, images and discourses to construct expert knowledge of Māori forms of sociality and culture. Skinner, like Ngata, acknowledged the poor social conditions in which Māori were living, and expressed sympathy for the impact of European culture on Māori communities but sought to improve their lot by altering the social milieu in which Māori populations functioned. To this end, Skinner was interested in the retrieval of pre-colonial forms of Māori culture, customs, beliefs, traditions and economic and technological systems to reconstruct distinct social and economic conditions as a precursor to modifying practices and habits. As Skinner put it 'field anthropology is... a right understanding of the childhood of a race [which] is essential before any thorough plan of social reform is drawn up'.³²

It can be argued therefore that Skinner's work contributed to the native policy paradigm that recognised the Māori 'problem' could be improved due to their aptitude for innovation. Here a survival doctrine was folded into a Pakeha framework where Māori were seen as being able to adapt and change. Thus Skinner's work shows how cultural traits such as collections of adzes, domestic arts, agricultural implements and carvings, identified natural aptitudes, mechanical ability and manual dexterity, and detailed how these skills and competencies might be re-deployed to ascribe Māori a socio-economic status best suited for manual work, trades, industry, and working the land.³³ Likewise resolving questions of land title by determining 'traditional' tribal boundaries that mapped on to cultural areas could then aid in the induction of Māori people into national economic life.

In the introduction to his book, *Native custom and law affecting native land* (published by the BMER in 1942), Norman Smith stated that 'Title to Native Land is founded primarily upon the ancient custom and usage of the Māori people, and the knowledge of such customs and usages constitutes an essential background to the administration of the Native land laws and Native affairs generally' (Smith 1942: iv). Though Skinner saw his role as supporting the work of the Native Land Court by settling title and verifying tribal boundaries through his culture area assemblages (Skinner 1974: 19), he felt that title had routinely been determined on the basis of dubious traditional, oral evidence. 'Land courts claims and counterclaims are made through traditional evidence,' he wrote, but 'there has been faking of genealogies and traditions' (Skinner 1974: 19).

Despite these differences, the assemblages of Skinner and the Māori intellectuals were often intertwined and by the post war period ended up less in competition than in broad convergence. This is visible in the policy orientation towards integration that began in the interwar period and which prevailed until the 1960s when it was surpassed by yet another assemblage, characterised by more radical and autonomous versions of Māori sovereignty (Hill 2004). Overall then, the shift towards adaptation traced in this section can be seen as a step in a longer process of decolonisation. This narrative challenges Trigger's idea (1984: 360) that colonial archaeologists undermined indigenous claims for independent development by stressing the primitive nature of pre-European life, though there is some credence to this generalisation in Skinner's work. The attribution of cultural acumen, and hence adaptive ability, also challenges Steinmetz's (2008) idea that colonised identity is constructed through anthropology in such a way as to re-enforce the rule of colonial difference as an unbridgeable divide (also see Bennett 2012).

Conclusion

HD Skinner's travel, anthropological training, his networks with other anthropologists, his war service along with letters, images, texts and photographs, were all actants in the formation

of socio-technical arrangements that brought the culture concept and Māori together. The analysis of culture through descriptions of different geographical locations and the distribution of plants, culture area assemblages and archaeological fieldwork told stories of continuous adaptive capacity to the environment and changing economic relations. Skinner's culture area assemblages therefore illustrated the ability of Māori to adapt. Examples of material culture exhibiting hybrid qualities through these modifications demonstrated an ability and willingness to 'civilize' or adopt western practices.

On the other hand, the BMER was an Indigenous initiative that sought to manage, fund and guide Māori research in ways which supported community efforts to preserve and revive cultural heritage and underpin tribal social development. At Board meetings Skinner, Ngata and, for a time, Buck, sat and worked together to pursue common goals in advancing ethnological research. The Board operated as a space where these distinct and antagonistic anthropological assemblages came into contact. Although formulated and operationalized in various ways, their interactions can be traced through different notions of adaptation to modern social and economic life. Skinner posited this in terms of how Māori could be incorporated into modern life. The more liberal views articulated by Ngata and his colleagues referred to 'cultural adaptation' of Māori society to the modern day in a more equal relationship with Pakeha which reflected growing aspirations of Māori independence. In the spaces between these two anthropological assemblages, diverging and converging regimes of truth, types of government and practices of self-regulation are evident, and, despite the obvious constraints on Māori people, a degree of Indigenous agency. This remarkable New Zealand episode therefore deserves greater recognition in revising and complicating the colonial histories of anthropology.

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Notes:

- ¹ Board of Māori Ethnological Research ACIH 16068 MA51/2 22 Archives New Zealand (ANZ), Wellington, New Zealand.
- ² Correspondence Ngata and WH Skinner, Ms-papers-80-115-04A/05A, Polynesian Society further records, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL), Wellington New Zealand.
- ³ Letter from Elsdon Best to TW Downes Whanganui nd early 1920s? Ms-papers-8051. ATL.
- ⁴ Peter Buck, Letter to Tarawhai (Johannes Andersen) from Magareva, Gambier Islands, November 19 1934, 'Andersen papers: Material relating to AN and Peter Buck,' MS Papers 0148-015. ATL.
- ⁵ H. D. Skinner, n.d. 'The inauguration of the teaching of Anthropology in the University of Otago. Autobiography of Skinner's professional life.' MS 1218: 6. Hocken Collections (HC), Dunedin New Zealand. It should be pointed out that Skinner's work was also shaped by WHR Rivers at Cambridge. Rivers equally influenced Best's fieldwork at the Dominion Museum. See: Amiria Henare, 2007. 'Nga rakau a te Pakeha: Reconsidering Maori anthropology,' In *Anthropologies and science: Epistemologies in practice*, edited by J. Edwards, P. Harvey and P. Wade. Oxford, New York: Berg. For an overview of Skinner's work and career, see: Freeman 1959.
- ⁶ Skinner, Henry D. Letter to Clark Wissler Department of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, New York, 14 May 1919. Correspondence Skinner, Otago Museum (OM), Dunedin.
- ⁷ H. D. Skinner. nd. Lecture 2 notes. 'Ethnological, methods – historical' Subject file 122, MS1219/083. HC.
- ⁸ Skinner. nd. MS1218: 12. HC.
- ⁹ Skinner. nd. MS1218: 9. HC.

- ¹⁰ H. D. Skinner, Otago University Museum Curator's Report for 1925-6: 9-10. OM.
- ¹¹ H. D. Skinner. Letter 31 July 1953, p.1. Correspondence etc collected by Skinner 1861-1943. MS1218. HC.
- ¹² H. D. Skinner. nd. Lecture 2 notes. 'Ethnological, methods – historical' MS1219: 13. HC.
- ¹³ H. D. Skinner. nd. Lecture 2 notes. 'Ethnological, methods – historical' MS1219: 13. HC.
- ¹⁴ H. D. Skinner's papers from the Board of Māori Ethnological Research first meeting 30th October 1923. MS1219/123. HC.
- ¹⁵ Ms-papers-0189 B.141 Māori Purposes Fund Board, ATL.
- ¹⁶ Memo James McDonald 22 October 1922, 'Museum ethnological expedition', MU 1/18/10 Te Papa Archives (TPA), Wellington New Zealand.
- ¹⁷ Unidentified newspaper clipping 6 March, 1923. 'Ethnological Expedition – East Coast, 1923' MU01/18/10 11/3/3. TPA.
- ¹⁸ 'Maori Ethnological Research Board (drafts, etc)' 1920 – 1925 ACIH 16068 MA51/2 22. ANZ.
- ¹⁹ 'Maori Ethnological Research Board (drafts, etc)' 1920 – 1925,' ACIH 16068 MA51/2 22. ANZ.
- ²⁰ Letter Āpirana Ngata to Richard Smythe April 1934, 'Maori Ethnological Research Board (drafts, etc)' 1920 – 1925,' ACIH 16068 MA51/2 22. ANZ.
- ²¹ Āpirana Ngata to Richard Smythe, April 1934, MA52/ 24. ANZ.
- ²² 'Ngata further papers: Māori articles and research relating to MBER 1909-25,' Ms-papers-7575-212. ATL.
- ²³ Peter Buck to Tarawhai (Johannes Andersen) from Magareva, Gambier Islands, 19 November 1934. 'Andersen papers: Material relating to Apirana Ngata and Peter Buck,' Ms Papers 0148-015. ATL.
- ²⁴ Te Rangihiroa (Peter Buck) to Tarawhai (J.C. Andersen) from Rarotonga, 14 October 1929. Ms Papers 0148-015. ATL.
- ²⁵ George Shephard, Chief Justice, Native Land Court, to Norman Smith 21 July 1941, p.3. 'Board of Māori Ethnological Research Board drafts etc.' ACIH 16069 MA52/ 24. ANZ.
- ²⁶ I.L.G. Sutherland? 1946. 'The Record: What has Apirana Ngata done?' p4, Andersen Papers: Material relating to Apirana Ngata and Peter Buck, Ms-papers-0148-015. ATL.
- ²⁷ Āpirana Ngata to I.L.G. Sutherland, 14 September 1936. 'Board of Māori Ethnological Research Board drafts etc,' ACIH 16068 MA51/2 22. ANZ.
- ²⁸ H. D. Skinner, 'Reviews: *The Coming of the Māori*, Te Rangi Hiroa.' *Landfall*, 4: 85-9. Ngata to Sutherland, 14 September 1936. MA51/2 22. ANZ.
- ²⁹ Actually these chapters were ghost written by Sutherland himself. See Sutherland 2013: 301.
- ³⁰ Letter Āpirana Ngata to HR Balneavis 15 Febuary 1923, 'Polynesian research', Ms-papers-0189-004 Māori Purposes Fund Board: Ngata correspondence 1909-23. ATL.

- ³¹ Captain George Pitt Rivers (1880—1966), who was a eugenicist and fascist sympathiser, was a grandson of Augustus Pitt Rivers who founded the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford, and is not to be confused with the eminent Cambridge anthropologist WHR Rivers (1864—1922).
- ³² H. D. Skinner, n.d. 'The inauguration of the teaching of Anthropology in the University of Otago. Autobiography of Skinner's professional life.' MS1218. HC.
- ³³ Memorandum for the Registrar Native Land Court, Wellington, 17 May 1939. 'Board of Māori Ethnological Research Board drafts etc.' ACIH 16069, MA 52 9a. ANZ.

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