

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katou
Nō Te Umukaha ahau
Ko Ward te whānau
Ko Liv ahau
Ka nui te mihi ki a koutou
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katou.

Knowledge is power. Knowledge is privilege. Knowledge is political. With knowledge comes growth and with growth comes a better understanding of Aotearoa New Zealand. Knowledge is contested. Throughout the 2021 SARC312/412 Furniture course at Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington, we have gone through a process of unlearning the pro-colonial knowledge we have acquired in a westernised education system.

From birth, children are fed romanticised narratives of the arrival of Pākehā in Aotearoa and the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. Our formative years in the education system are rooted in Te Ao Pākehā. Te Reo is taught tokenistically, the correct history of Aotearoa New Zealand is ignored, and mātauranga Māori is pushed to the side in favour of western thought. The commemoration of the Treaty's signing arrives annually and fails to acknowledge the controversy surrounding British colonisation of Aotearoa.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi was signed on the 6th of February 1840. It is a disputed document which continues to cause negative implications for Māori today. Differences in translations between the two documents: Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the Treaty of Waitangi, laid the foundation of duplicitous intentions by the Crown towards Māori. Succeeding the signing of Te Tiriti, colonisation of Aotearoa by the Crown continued with brutal eagerness. It is many New Zealanders' belief that peace prevailed post signing, but this could not be further from the truth.

The Crown is responsible for countless breaches of Te Tiriti, through seizing of Māor landi. By 1975, 97% of land in Aotearoa was owned or stolen by the Crown. The alienation of Māori from their whenua contributed to a mass rural-urban migration. This continues to cause negative consequences for Māori today. Māori make up the majority of prison populations. Pākehā are expected to live over 7 years longer than Māori. In 2020, 18.5% of tamariki Māori lived in poverty compared with a national average of 14.6%.

The pro-colonial education system continues as a 21st century form of colonisation, inhabiting the minds of impressionable Māori and non-Māori youth. Schools rob tamariki of a true account of Aotearoa New Zealand's history and refuse to engage with Te Ao Māori. In Imagining Decolonisation, Ocean Mercier (Ngāti Porou) writes "like anything that is new and paradigm-shifting - not remote, robotic or automatic - decolonisation first begins in the mind"

Decolonisation is defined as "the withdrawal from its former colonies of colonial power." The decolonisation process is slowly starting in Aotearoa New Zealand. This is shown in a wider use of Te Reo Māori, and a recent announcement by the Aotearoa New Zealand government that NZ's history curriculum is set to change.

Whilst decolonising our nation seems like an equitable way forward to resolving treaty conflicts and growing inequalities, many non-Māori have voiced objections to this process. So why should non-Māori engage in decolonisation?

Dr Rebecca Kiddle (Ngāti Porou, Ngā Puhī) is a Senior Lecturer at the Wellington School of Architecture. Kiddle gives an answer to the question above,

"For so long Māori have had to engage/live in the world of Pākehā... If we are to honour the Treaty, non-Māori need to understand Te Ao Māori in the same way that many of us who are Māori understand Te Ao Pākehā."

Natasha Perkins (Ngāti Porou, Te Whānau-ā-Apanui) is also a Senior Lecturer at the Wellington School of Architecture. She says that the role of designers in shaping our built environment gives us the opportunity to grow and learn. When non-Māori designers work with mana whenua, this needs to be a symbiotic relationship. Perkins says that "non-Māori need to bring listening skills into a collaborative discussion with Māori."

In conversations held with friends who are Māori, they felt as though they have been raised in a western society. My peers thought it is important non-Māori engage in decolonisation to revitalise Māori culture, as Pākehā are a majority population. When decolonisation is prioritised, there will be positive outcomes for all New Zealanders.

Pākehā can be nervous to engage. Te Reo Māori advocate Alex Hotere-Barnes says this nervousness leads to fear and fear leads to Pākehā inaction and paralysis. Hotere-Barnes calls on Pākehā to acknowledge they will make mistakes, and trust they are engaging in Te Ao Māori for correct reasons. The wealth of knowledge in tikanga and Te Reo were established on Aotearoa's soils long before Pākehā arrival. Better engagement with a Māori world view, tikanga, Te Reo and mātauranga from a young age in our education system will allow non-Māori to acknowledge their paralysis and begin engaging.

Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington was the first tertiary institution in Aotearoa New Zealand to establish a marae. Te Tumu Herenga Waka, the wharenui on Te Herenga Waka Marae, was opened in 1986 to create a place unique for Māori learning. Fast forward to the present day, the marae buildings have been put to rest with a whakamoetanga, for the construction of the Living Pā. The Living Pā at Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington serves as a physical place for taura to have their mātauranga seen.

As non-Māori designers, we have a unique part to play in decolonisation. The knowledge we have acquired in this colonial institution is deeply concerned with the history of western nations. To expand our knowledge into Te Ao Māori is to diversify our learnings and honour Te Tiriti. That way we can create spaces and products that are intersectional and accessible to all.

The most important quality to remember throughout the decolonisation process is equity. An equitable education system is what our motu should strive for to decolonise our minds, mahi and place. Through the creation of the collaborative exhibition, Whawhau x To Bind, our class seeks to learn about a Māori world view, apply this knowledge, fail, and learn again.

I want to acknowledge Dr Rebecca Kiddle, Natasha Perkins and friends at Te Wāhanga Waihangā-Hoahoa - Wellington Faculty of Architecture and Design Innovation for providing their insights for this piece. As a wāhine Pākehā, I understand it is not the role of Māori to educate me on Te Ao Māori. I am forever grateful for your mahi and tautoko.



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2021