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# Re-indigenising kuku (green-lipped mussel) economies in Aotearoa (New Zealand)

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Dominant<sup>1</sup> conceptualisations of modern-day Indigenous economies commonly misrepresent the underlying forms of these economies as some variant of capitalism. Competing mobilisations of ‘the economy’ are bound into different political projects, visions of national futures, and understandings of related possibilities. State agencies and allied actors, such as management consultancies, are actively defining and working to grow a singular homogenous and essentialised Māori (Indigenous people of New Zealand)<sup>2</sup> economy. This conception assembles actors, resources, social relations, meanings, and objectives into analogues of dominant understandings of ‘the Māori economy’. While Indigenous economies involve capitalist practices, they are not entirely capitalocentric. In Aotearoa, for example, there is a significant debate about what is meant by ‘the Māori economy’ at a time when the nation is waking up to the importance of Māori assets, investments, and aspirations. The asset base of ‘the Māori economy’ is currently estimated to be approximately \$70 billion (Nana et al., 2021). This number is significant because it highlights the importance of Māori ownership and financial activities. However, making this claim as an analytical conclusion or ontological fact is problematic. Not only is it fraught with inaccuracy,

<sup>1</sup> The use of “dominant” throughout this Chapter is inspired by Liboiron (2021) who distinguishes *dominant science* from *western science* to address uneven power relations and highlight the fact that not all western science is dominant. The same goes for economies. Not all western conceptualisations of economies are dominant, for example, Gibson-Graham’s (2005, 2008) diverse economies and community economies scholarship.

<sup>2</sup> Translations of te reo Māori words are provided in parentheses on first use. All te reo translations are tailored for their specific context within this Chapter and may not serve well as universal definitions.

but it is a distraction that misses much of what economy ‘is’, what is special about Māori economy, and works to deny the rights and possibilities of Māori economic self-determination.

The widely touted idea of ‘the Māori economy’ requires re-framing to better reflect Māori economic thought and practice and to inform and actualise thriving Māori and national futures. A productive and politically fertile starting point is to recognise that Māori economies, as a sphere of social practice, are always multiple (Amoamo et al., 2018; Scobie & Sturman, 2024), have distinctive foundations, and produce diverse material worlds. To understand Māori economies as a distinctive form of social practice and approach to mobilising resources to enhance livelihoods requires a different conceptual starting point. Recent scholarship argues that this starting point must lie in Māori worlds (Amoamo et al., 2018; Dell et al., 2018; Tau & Rout, 2018).

Māori economic scholars and development practitioners are adding new elements to the critical literature, calling for alternative theories of economy and their enactment (Amoamo et al., 2018; Bargh, 2011, 2012; Dell et al., 2018). These different calls for re-imagining and taking back the economy begin from a shared position that economy is a set of social practices that mobilise and steward resources to generate livelihoods. For example, Amoamo (2018) drew on Mitchell (2008) to re-frame Māori economies as the “diverse processes and interrelations through which we [Māori] constitute livelihoods” (p. 70). This reading of economy as process and practice differs markedly from the dominant, scientised conception of ‘the economy’, as an independent sphere of action composed of products and the acts and moments of their production, distribution, consumption, and conversion into finance for reinvestment. ‘The economy’ in these terms can be represented by objective measures and managed by economic expertise to yield or even maximise growth. Indeed, Mitchell (1995) argues that ‘the economy’ as a concept is less an objective and independent sphere in its own right and is more the outcome of a project to rekindle growth by targeted government investment during the great depression.

Although it is clear that as a category of power-knowledge, ‘the economy’ has become intimately entangled in neo-colonial projects of government and resource management, our interest in this Chapter on Whakatōhea kuku economies lies less in why the term ‘economy’ came to be used in dominant economics and more in how reclaiming economy as social process (Amoamo et al., 2018; Mitchell, 1995, 1998, 2008) can help direct attention to the distinctiveness and potentiality of Māori economies. Using a whakapapa (commonly simplified as genealogy, whakapapa is a Māori epistemology which sees all things and beings as interconnected) framework as a guiding methodology (McLellan et al., 2025 Forthcoming), this Chapter explores the social relations and practices involved in gathering and harvesting kuku and the various ways kuku enhance the livelihoods of the descendants of Whakatōhea (a tribe situated on the east coast of New Zealand). Kuku (green-lipped mussels) are a shellfish native to Aotearoa. Kuku have been harvested by Māori groups for hundreds of years and are now intensively farmed throughout Aotearoa. We use the case of kuku economies to illustrate the value of a radical, Indigenous theorisation

of economy that begins from the position that Māori economies have distinctive foundations, ideologies, objectives, and social relations and materialise in multiple, often misrecognised, forms. Māori economic development and the resourcing of thriving Māori futures requires a radical re-thinking of the economy.

We start by teasing out key insights from efforts to re-imagine and re-enact economy from both Timothy Mitchell's (1995) insights on the subject and diverse economies' traditions (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013) in the global literature. This literature offers an important language of difference which Māori economies scholars draw upon. It is also part of a wider project to 'take back the economy' from the interests and expertise vested in mainstream conceptions of the economy, a project that can be mobilised to support Māori aspirations, and to which Māori economies scholarship can bring inspiration, credibility, and authority. Māori economies scholarship has much to say about 'taking back the economy' (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013) and enabling the possibility of a new world (Roelvink et al., 2015). This is most clearly apparent in the work of Māori scholars on diverse economies (Amoamo et al., 2018; Bargh, 2011, 2012; Bargh & Otter, 2009). It is also evident in the notion of economies of mana (Henare, 2014; Scobie & Sturman, 2020) as a way of capturing the distinctive social relations that underpin Māori economies.

## Re-imagining economies

The notion of a singular and quantifiable Māori economy has gained momentum in Aotearoa alongside the increase in economic assets controlled by Māori within trusts and incorporations (Nana et al., 2021). This growing asset base has become valuable to the public and private sectors in Aotearoa as it has the potential to generate revenue streams (Fitzherbert, 2015). However, Māori scholars (Amoamo et al., 2018; Bargh & Otter, 2009; Dell et al., 2018; Tau & Rout, 2018) have highlighted the capitolocentric nature of what is represented as 'the Māori economy' in private and public sector reporting (Chapman Tripp, 2018; Chen, 2023; Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler New Zealand, 2016; Māori Economic Development Panel, 2012). They insist that this representation of 'the Māori economy' as a quantifiable asset devoid of meaning and place-based relations obscures the diversity of Māori economies and their underlying social relations. Such measures subsume the complex realities of Māori livelihoods and "contradict the heterogeneity of how Māori think about themselves, ... how they see themselves connected to resources available to them ... and therefore how they use those resources" (Amoamo et al., 2018, p. 68). Māori scholars (Amoamo et al., 2018; Dell et al., 2018) have called for a re-conceptualisation of Māori economies away from dominant understandings and towards one grounded in Māori worlds that recognises the multiplicity of the actualised economies in which Māori participate and control.

This challenge echoes a broad and epistemologically diverse critique of the dominant conceptualisations of economy in the global literature. As Jones (2019) puts it:

The domain of the 'economic' is much broader than the blinkered boundaries of what is too often taken unproblematically as capitalism. There is no singular 'economy', a monolithic entity that organises the provision of needs and wants through market exchange. Rather, economies exist in the plural, embedded in social systems, and refer to the diverse ways in which communities meet material needs and labour to make a livelihood. (p. 12)

Mitchell (1995) posited that the notion of 'the economy' emerged in the 1930s, displacing earlier conceptions that focused less on measuring production and more on the "proper husbanding and circulation of goods" (p. 9). Altman (2009), similarly accents "the complex set of activities or social relations" (p. 1) that underpin production, distribution and consumption rather than production itself, while the diverse economies tradition goes further to argue that the capitalist practices are not the singular or even dominant form of livelihood generation globally (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008, 2020; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013).

Diverse economies scholars provide useful ways of re-thinking capitalism and economies more generally (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008, 2020; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). They understand and examine capitalism in terms of capitalist practices, for example, waged labour, commodity production, private enterprise, private property and institutional finance (Gibson-Graham, 2020). Diverse economies scholars also coined the term capitalocentrism, which they use to describe the dominance of capitalist practices within modern economies (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Capitalocentrism privileges supply and demand, capital accumulation and individual self-interest while undermining diverse economic practices (Gibson-Graham, 2020). Diverse economies scholars broaden understandings of economy by highlighting the diversity of economic practices which generate livelihoods (Gibson-Graham & Miller, 2015).

A number of Māori scholars have drawn on diverse and community economies scholarship to help articulate their re-imaginings of Māori economies (Amoamo et al., 2018; Bargh, 2011, 2012, 2014; Bargh & Otter, 2009). Diverse economies approaches encourage scholars to acknowledge activities that are often hidden and marginalised through a dominant lens, for example, non-capitalist processes and practices, and previously existing connections between social and economic worlds that have been extracted and abstracted through capitalocentrism. Māori scholars have increasingly come to argue that Māori economies are inherently diverse (Amoamo et al., 2018; Bargh, 2011, 2012, 2014).

Indigenous scholars have interpreted Indigenous economies in much the same way.

For example, Sámi scholar Kuokkanen (2011) understands economy as practices based on commitments to long-term mutually supportive relationships between humans and nature—reciprocity and intergenerational sustainability rather than profit and self-interest. Antoinette Helmer in Kuokkanen (2011) positions land nature and social relations at the centre of Indigenous economies: “Profit to Natives means a good life derived from the land and sea, that’s what we are all about ... The land we hold in trust is our wealth. It is the only wealth we could pass on to our children.” (p. 1).

The notion of mobilising and stewarding resources for generating livelihoods is central within Indigenous economic understandings. Kuokkanen (2011) states that economies revolve around “the sustenance of individuals, families and the community” (p. 215) and Droz (2019) posits that economy means “the way a people provide for themselves to live and thrive” (para. 2). Similarly, Māori scholars Amoamo et al. (2018) posit economy as the “diverse processes and interrelations through which we constitute livelihoods” (p. 70). Below, we discuss the strategies that Māori scholars have used to reimagine Māori-led economies.

### **Re-imagining Māori-led economies**

Māori scholars Dell et al. (2018) and Amoamo et al. (2018) posit that if we are going to think about development in Māori worlds and resourcing Māori economic futures, we need to understand Māori economies in a way that aligns with a Māori-orientated outlook. Dell et al. (2018) construct a research agenda for re-framing Māori economies: “we need to re-imagine and redefine our future based on authentic Māori values, world views and capabilities” (p. 60). Amoamo et al. (2018) present a set of strategies for re-imagining Māori economies as grounded in people and livelihoods and suggest that borrowing diverse economic perspectives from Gibson-Graham (2006) will lead to alternative “development pathways that increase Indigenous wellbeing” (Amoamo et al., 2018, p. 70). Amoamo et al. (2018) state that we need to start thinking about Māori economies in a way that works to highlight the “Māori communities that maintain consistency of mātauranga (Māori knowledge) and tikanga (Māori customs)” and that reinstating knowledge back into conceptualisations of Māori economies will open up pathways to explore the multi-dimensionality of Māori economies (p. 67). One example of how these strategies might hold together is found in Henare’s (2014) economies of mana. Mana in its broader meaning can be understood as “the potent human state with the profound ability to impact upon, affect and form the lives of others” (Dell, 2017, p. 93). However, it is more commonly defined as prestige, authority, and influence.

### **Economies of mana: A central concept**

Mānuka Henare (2014) conceptualised traditional Māori economies as economies of mana. Dell et al. (2018), who worked closely with Henare, define the economy of mana as “An economic system in which decisions regarding investment, production, consumption and wealth distribution are influenced by the interplay of mana enhancing interactions between people and the environment” (p. 55).

Economies of mana revolve around a particular set of values which differ significantly from those within modern-day dominant economies. Henare (2014) posited that the main intent of actions within the economy of mana was to enhance the mana of others, whether they be human or more-than-human. Within the economy of mana, economic activity is driven by “spiritual, ecological, social and cultural considerations that allow for re-distribution”, which differs greatly from dominant understandings of economy as defined by “resource scarcity, constraint and inefficiency” (Henare, 2014, pp. 65–66). The economy of mana prioritises well-being over profit maximisation and is not subject to capitalocentrism or uneven power relations (Henare, 2014). The idea of an economy of mana provides an alternative, non-capitalist lens through which to view Māori economies. It focuses attention first and foremost on practices and what underpins them, rather than financial measures and production-oriented, scalar, or commodity-based boundaries. Māori economies materialise around relations of mana. In what follows, we use the case of Whakatōhea kuku economies to extend this conceptualisation to an additional set of dimensions that we argue underpin Māori economies.

## Thinking through economies with whakapapa-guided methodology

Whakatōhea are an iwi (Māori tribe) consisting of six sub-tribes situated on the east coast of Te-Ika-a-Māui (The North Island) in Aotearoa. Whakatōhea descendants have a longstanding whakapapa-based relationship with kuku, and kuku have enhanced their livelihoods for a very long time (Lyll, 1979; McLellan, 2020; Walker, 2007). Kuku are regarded as one of *Ngā Tamahine a Te Whakatōhea* (the daughters of Whakatōhea), along with pipi (a type of shellfish), and cockles (Waka huia, 2014). Whakatōhea descendants have always gathered kuku in their tribal area and it is still common practice to gather kuku today (McLellan, 2020; Walker, 2007). Te Tāwharau o Te Whakatōhea (hereafter TTW) is the entity responsible for managing Whakatōhea post-settlement assets. TTW controls aquaculture space off the coast of Ōpōtiki, a town within the Whakatōhea tribal area. They also hold partial ownership of Whakatōhea Mussels Ōpōtiki Limited, which operates both the TTW kuku farm and a kuku processing factory in Ōpōtiki (McLellan, 2020).

This chapter forms part of the lead author's PhD thesis. As a Whakatōhea descendant, she is ancestrally connected to the case study area, research participants, and the kuku themselves. For her, this research represents a return home to learn, reconnect and repair lost relations rather than simply collect data. Her ancestral connections also shape her exploration and examination of Whakatōhea kuku economies. While there are tensions surrounding large-scale kuku production in the Whakatōhea area, she takes a measured approach to analysing these issues because the industry is owned (partially), operated and staffed by her relations, and emerged from her ancestors' aspirations. Though these tensions are discussed within her PhD

thesis, this Chapter focuses specifically on the kuku processes and practices which generate livelihoods for Whakatōhea people.

In her PhD thesis, the lead author develops a whakapapa methodology to examine Whakatōhea kuku economies from a Māori perspective. Whakapapa is commonly thought of as physical genealogical connections, but it is better understood in practice as a lens through which Māori see the world (Mikaere, 2011). The concept draws connections between all phenomena that have ever existed and ever will exist (Mikaere, 2011). The whakapapa methodology draws from key pieces of whakapapa literature, namely Painting and Burgess (2020). It consists of four key tenets for pre-figuring Indigenous Māori economies.

The first key tenet is Dimensions. Whakapapa, while often understood through the metaphor of layering (Mikaere, 2011; Painting & Burgess, 2020; Roberts, 2013), is better conceptualised as multi-dimensional as it paints the world as intimately connected across multiple temporalities and networks of relations. This dimensionality enables whakapapa to function as a transformative economic methodology that paints economies as multi-dimensional and enables the uncovering of these dimensions.

Key tenet two is multiple temporalities. Through a whakapapa lens, time is circular (Lo & Houkamau, 2012; Painting & Burgess, 2020). This means that past and future economies are just as important as contemporary ones, and the aspirations and practices of ancestors and descendants play a key role in contemporary economies.

Key tenet three is connections and relationships. Whakapapa positions all human and non-human phenomena that have ever existed and ever will exist within an interconnected network (Painting & Burgess, 2020). Therefore, through a whakapapa lens, Māori economies are understood as infinitely connected and in relation, both within themselves and to other phenomena. Examining and acknowledging these relations, especially those with more-than-human phenomena, can help to re-indigenise Māori economies.

The final key tenet is obligations. A whakapapa lens suggests that through knowing our relations to other phenomena, we can come to know our obligations toward them (Forster, 2019; Mikaere, 2011; Painting & Burgess, 2020; Scobie et al., 2023). When viewed through a whakapapa lens, Māori economies consist of specific sets of intersecting obligations. The whakapapa methodology guided data collection processes for this research project.

Before primary data collection, the lead author, with the support of three summer scholar research assistants, two of which are named as co-authors, undertook a secondary source analysis. Paying particular attention to the key tenets of the whakapapa methodology, the team reviewed various documents, including academic publications, newspaper articles, and documentaries, to explore Māori relationships with kuku over time. This first research phase provided a single layer of information about how kuku have historically contributed to Māori livelihoods. The lead author then spent several months collecting primary data in Ōpōtiki examining Whakatōhea kuku economies through a whakapapa lens. Primary data was collected via field notes, a questionnaire and informal interviews.

The whakapapa methodology encouraged both the lead author and the research participants to consider the diverse dimensions of livelihood creation within Whakatōhea kuku economies. The lead author also used the whakapapa methodology to conduct thematic data analysis and explore the various dimensions of livelihood creation within Whakatōhea kuku economies over time. The following section discusses these dimensions. Because this Chapter is part of a book published on the other side of the world in a place that is far removed from Whakatōhea and Whakatōhea people, we have left participant quotes out of this book Chapter. This is out of respect for participant kōrero (conversations) which we treat as taonga (treasured phenomena). All contributions to the findings section are referenced with a participant's name or pseudonym.

## Dimensions of Whakatōhea kuku economies

We worked with participants to identify the various ways in which kuku have enhanced the livelihoods of Whakatōhea descendants over time paying particular attention to the non-dominant forms of economy as “hidden, alternative and informal types of economy ... have more impact on social well-being than capitalism does” (Amoamo et al., 2018, p. 70). The ten dimensions of Whakatōhea kuku economies which are defined and discussed below are taha tinana (physical wellbeing), taha hinengaro (intellectual wellbeing), taha wairua (spiritual wellbeing), mana (authority and prestige), rauemi (resource or material), manaakitanga (hospitality and generosity), mauri (life force), whanaungatanga (relationship building), kaitiakitanga (environmental stewardship) and pūtea (money). Below, we will give an account of Whakatōhea kuku economies, focusing on these ten dimensions, which together form a set of practice-based understandings of economy that move beyond descriptions of diverse understandings of Māori economies in the literature and are grounded in real-world relations.

### Taha tinana (physical wellbeing)

Taha tinana can be translated as *physical wellbeing*. Kuku, in their various forms, have long played a role in enhancing the taha tinana of Whakatōhea. Kuku are a healthy source of protein and, over time, have been considered a staple part of the Whakatōhea diet, especially for Whakatōhea ancestors who enjoyed them regularly (McLellan, 2020; Walker, 2007). One research participant reminisced about diving for kuku and cooking them on the beach as a child (Participant 6 Questionnaire, 2022). Whakatōhea descendants have always gathered kuku from various locations around the Whakatōhea area and can now purchase them directly from the local Ōpōtiki supermarket and other seafood distributors in the area. Whakatōhea Mussels Ōpōtiki Limited sell kuku throughout Aotearoa, so Whakatōhea families living outside the area can purchase them. Preserving kuku was common practice for Whakatōhea ancestors; they would



soak them in water or dry them out and preserve them in fat and some Whakatōhea families still ferment kuku today (Participant 6 Questionnaire, 2022).

In addition to being a reliable source of protein, kuku also uplift Whakatōhea taha tinana through their medicinal properties. Kuku oil and powder are well-known nutraceuticals used worldwide to treat arthritis (Cobb & Ernst, 2006). Whakatōhea ancestors utilised kuku for their medicinal properties long before they were produced for global markets. For example, one participant remembered one of her kuia (female elders) taking kuku to treat her swollen feet (Participant M Interview, 2022). Another participant discussed the benefits of the physical exercise that comes with diving for kuku and how it nourishes their taha tinana (Kimberley Maxwell Interview, 2022).

### **Taha hinengaro (intellectual wellbeing)**

Kuku enhance Whakatōhea taha hinengaro or intellectual well-being as they provide an opportunity for holding and sharing mātauranga-a-Whakatōhea (knowledge specific to Whakatōhea) and other forms of knowledge. Mātauranga-ā-Whakatōhea regarding kuku includes intergenerational knowledge of different kuku gathering locations and the different types of kuku found across their coastal marine area (Danny Arapera Paruru Interview, 2022).

Whakatōhea knowledge surrounding the kuku is embedded in Whakatōhea oral histories and proverbs. A well-known Whakatōhea proverb pertains to *Ngā Tamahine ā Te Whakatōhea* and refers to pipi (a type of shellfish), cockle, and kuku (Participant B Interview, 2022). Whakatōhea also hold intergenerational knowledge around gathering and managing kuku, including information about invasive species (Whetu Walker Interview, 2022). There is an important emphasis within Whakatōhea placed on sharing kuku-related knowledge with future generations, and there are increasing concerns around the potential loss of this knowledge (Whetu Walker Interview, 2022). Teaching others how to harvest and manage kuku is one way for Whakatōhea to maintain this knowledge. Whakatōhea descendants see kuku harvesting not only as a way to gather food but also as a way to enhance the taha hinengaro of others (Danny Paruru Questionnaire, 2022).

The recent kuku venture also provides a unique opportunity for Whakatōhea descendants to implement and share mātauranga-ā-Whakatōhea. Elders, for example, used traditional Whakatōhea knowledge to establish the boundaries of the original kuku farm in the area (Danny Arapera Paruru Interview, 2022). Another participant, whose father was a prominent figure in the establishment of the Whakatōhea kuku venture, discussed his father's vision for the Whakatōhea kuku farm and the importance of Whakatōhea collective taha hinengaro in setting up the kuku venture (Participant T Interview, 2023). Today, the kuku venture and Whakatōhea Mussels Ōpotiki Limited provide an important opportunity for Whakatōhea descendants to connect with and learn about kuku.

In terms of other forms of knowledge dissemination, the kuku venture has increased the amount of research and science activity in the Whakatōhea area. The Moana Project Aotearoa, for example, partnered with Whakatōhea and aimed to

improve understandings of ocean circulation, connectivity, and marine heatwaves in Aotearoa. Since their establishment, Whakatōhea Mussels Ōpotiki Limited has also generated valuable intellectual property in relation to open ocean kuku farming, such as storm survival and spat catching technology (Open Ocean Whakatōhea Mussels, 2020).

Alongside providing opportunities for enhancing science and innovation activities in the area, the kuku venture has also provided an opportunity for Whakatōhea to increase their financial knowledge, as Whakatōhea families and individuals were able to purchase shares in Whakatōhea Mussels Ōpotiki Limited. One Whakatōhea participant discussed how they used this opportunity to teach their descendants about financial growth (Participant R Interview, 2023).

### **Taha wairua (spiritual wellbeing)**

Kuku enhance the wairua of Whakatōhea people. Wairua can be loosely translated as spirit; however, this does not capture the full meaning of the term (Valentine et al., 2017). Royal (2003), for example, describes wairua as the source of being and life and a reflection of universal consciousness. Whakatōhea have a special wairua-based whakapapa relationship with kuku (Michelle Mills Interview, 2022), which has enhanced livelihoods over time. This whakapapa-based relationship means that many Whakatōhea people consider kuku to be a taonga (treasured phenomena) (Kimberley Maxwell Interview, 2022). These significant relations fundamentally change Whakatōhea responsibilities and obligations towards kuku, so much so that they are treated more like people than animals or objects (Danny Arapera Paruru Interview, 2022). Gathering, consuming, and working with kuku is a way for the people of Whakatōhea to honour this relationship and re-connect with kuku, the Whakatōhea area, and the natural environment. These interactions also provide a connection back to Hinemoana (a god of the ocean) and Tangaroa (a god of the ocean) which ultimately uplifts Whakatōhea taha wairua (Kimberley Maxwell Interview, 2022).

### **Mana (prestige, authority and influence)**

The Whakatōhea kuku venture is a vital source of mana for Whakatōhea descendants. The venture represents the materialisation of a dream that Whakatōhea elders held for decades (McLellan, 2020). There is a certain sense of pride that comes with being associated with Whakatōhea Mussels Ōpotiki Limited and the exportation of kuku grown in the Whakatōhea marine area. Whakatōhea also draw a sense of mana from the innovative nature of the venture and the new technologies involved (Graeme Riesterer Interview, 2022). Furthermore, the process of preparing kuku both in the factory and within a marae (Māori village) setting is an important job that can also enhance mana (Kimberley Maxwell Interview, 2022).

### **Rauemi (resource or material)**

Kuku contribute to Whakatōhea livelihoods through their use as rauemi which can be translated as *resource* or *material*. The kuku shell has been used as an essential resour-

ce by Māori for a very long time (Wassilieff, 2006), for example, it is one of the main tools used in Māori flax weaving (Whetu Walker Interview, 2022). One participant had a memory of her elder, weaving with the kuku shell, using the shell to scrape the fibre from the flax (Hineatua Parkinson Interview, 2022). Hineatua Parkinson (2022) also emphasised the importance of connection between weavers and their kuku shell.

Kuku are also used for catching and preparing food. One survey participant mentioned that their elders used kuku as burley and bait for catching fish (Participant 3 Questionnaire, 2022). Kuku shells can be used as cutting tools when gathering seafood, such as eels (Billy Waugh Interview, 2022). Many participants discussed how they use kuku shells as utensils, with one participant reporting how their family uses the kuku shell to cut open babies' gums when they are teething to shorten their teething period and prevent fever (Participant O Interview, 2023). Hineatua Parkinson (2022) reminisced about their earliest memory of using a kuku shell: to scrape the hair off pigs and prepare them for cooking.

### **Manaakitanga (hospitality and generosity)**

Kuku provide opportunities for Whakatōhea descendants to share and receive manaakitanga in diverse ways. The word manaakitanga is commonly translated as hospitality and generosity. Manaakitanga is about being a generous host towards your guests and working to uplift their mana. Food is often used as a vessel for sharing manaakitanga (Mika, 2013). Danny Paruru noted that wild kuku embody manaakitanga because the time and effort required to collect them elevates their significance as an offering (Danny Arapera Paruru Interview, 2022). The establishment of Whakatōhea Mussels Ōpotiki Limited offers an alternative way of gifting kuku for those who are unable to gather them. This activates a different kind of manaakitanga but still offers an important way to honour others (Danny Arapera Paruru Interview, 2022).

Along with providing kuku for purchase, the kuku venture provides other opportunities for practicing manaakitanga. For example, Whakatōhea Fisheries Trust (the company which manages Whakatōhea fisheries assets), Whakatōhea Mussels Ōpotiki Limited, and Te Ohu Kaimoana (an organisation which manages Māori fisheries assets) have arranged to provide kuku for significant Whakatōhea events such as meetings and funerals. This means that the company is able to care for Whakatōhea families during times of grieving (Danny Arapera Paruru Interview, 2022). Manaakitanga is also evident in the everyday operations of the Whakatōhea kuku factory; staff are given one free meal while on shift, and Whakatōhea descendants are provided with employment opportunities that they may not have had access to if: a) Whakatōhea Mussels Ōpotiki Limited didn't exist and b) TTW did not play such a significant role in the operations of the company.

### **Mauri (life force)**

Mauri is commonly known as life force (Morgan, 2009) or vitality. It represents the life-supporting capacity of all beings (Rout et al., 2021). Kuku enhance the Mauri of Whakatōhea descendants in several ways. Firstly, simply eating kuku has the poten-

tial to uplift mauri. Participant Kimberley Maxwell discussed how consuming kuku or seeing kuku in the supermarket or out in the environment allowed her to feel grounded and reminded her of home, uplifting her mauri (Kimberley Maxwell Interview, 2022).

Whakatōhea Mussels Ōpotiki Limited provides further opportunities to access kuku and uplift the mauri of Whakatōhea. One participant mentioned that revenue from the kuku venture could potentially enhance mauri in other areas, such as health and education for Whakatōhea descendants (Hineatua Parkinson Interview, 2022). The kuku venture enhances access to farmed kuku in the region and in turn has the potential to reduce harvesting pressure on wild stocks, enhancing their mauri and their ability to provide for future generations (Danny Arapera Paruru Interview, 2022).

Kuku enhance the mauri of their environment; they are filter feeders and can clean their surrounding water by filtering heavy metals (Participant I Interview, 2022). Kuku shells can be used as a garden fertiliser (Kings Plant Barn, 2023), enhancing the mauri of their surrounding soil (Participant O Interview, 2023). Whakatōhea descendants also use a common kuku predator, the Pātangaroa (eleven-armed sea stars) as a kind of fertiliser. Whetu Walker dries out the Pātangaroa, mulches them with the lawn mower and fertilisers the garden with them (Whetu Walker Interview, 2022).

Kuku also enhance the mauri of their surrounding environments by providing habitats for other species. Kuku beds and farms provide settlement spaces and food sources for larvae and other small sea creatures (Participant I Interview, 2022). Some of these benefits are already evident in the Whakatōhea area as the number of fish has increased since the establishment of the kuku farm (McLellan, 2020). Furthermore, aquaculture farms are more environmentally friendly and produce less greenhouse gas emissions than land-based farms (Yaghubi et al., 2021).

### **Whanaungatanga (relationship building)**

Whanaungatanga can be defined as relationship-building. Painting and Burgess (2020) interpret whanaungatanga as “being in good relation” (p. 210) with both human and more-than-human kin. Kuku provide Whakatōhea descendants with opportunities for enacting whanaungatanga. Kimberley Maxwell, for example, often gathers and prepares kuku with her family, and to her, kuku represent family connections (Kimberley Maxwell Interview, 2022). The process of managing and stewarding kuku in the Whakatōhea area is generally something that is done with others and can strengthen bonds between family members.

The kuku venture has provided opportunities for Whakatōhea descendants to re-connect to the Whakatōhea area. Wharengaro Tapara-Kurei, a fresh productions supervisor at the Whakatōhea kuku factory, returned home to Ōpōtiki from Rekohu (Chatham Islands) because of the growing kuku industry (Wharengaro Tapara-Kurei Interview, 2022). She hopes that Whakatōhea descendants will continue to live in Ōpotiki and work in the kuku factory (Wharengaro Tapara-Kurei Interview, 2022).

Finally, the exportation of kuku around Aotearoa and the world has been a way for some Whakatōhea families, who live outside of the area, to connect with kuku and Whakatōhea. In this way, the commodification of kuku has provided a space

for descendants to re-connect with their Whakatōhea-tanga in new ways (Hineatua Parkinson Interview, 2022).

### **Kaitiakitanga (environmental stewardship)**

Forster (2019, p. 9) defined kaitiakitanga as “the obligation arising from the kin relationship to nurture or care for a person or thing”. In the context of Whakatōhea kuku economies, Whakatōhea descendants carry out kaitiakitanga to maintain the mauri of kuku, tend “*to their taha tinana, taha hinengaro and taha wairua*” and to ensure that the quality of kuku passed on to future generations is as good or better than it is currently (Whakatōhea Iwi, 1993, p. 9). Kaitiakitanga is a crucial dimension within Whakatōhea kuku economies because the wellbeing of Whakatōhea taonga is a reflection of the wellbeing of Whakatōhea descendants and vice versa (Whakatōhea Iwi, 1993). If Whakatōhea descendants do not carry out their kaitiakitanga obligations towards kuku, then kuku will never be able to return the favour and enhance Whakatōhea livelihoods. The ability of kuku to enhance the livelihoods of Whakatōhea descendants is dependent on Whakatōhea descendants carrying out their kaitiakitanga obligations.

### **Pūtea (money)**

Kuku enhance livelihoods through financial benefits or pūtea which can be translated as money. There are various ways in which Whakatōhea descendants receive pūtea through the kuku venture. Firstly, TTW receives lease payments through their majority ownership of Eastern Sea Farms. Secondly, TTW benefits from their partial (9.28%) (New Zealand Companies Office, 2024) ownership of Whakatōhea Mussels Ōpotiki Limited, which operates within the Whakatōhea sea space and in the Whakatōhea kuku factory. Thirdly, several Whakatōhea families and individuals own shares in Whakatōhea Mussels Ōpotiki Limited, which is currently 56.10% owned by private shareholders, not all of whom are of Whakatōhea descent (Simmons Corporate Finance, 2023).

In addition to providing pūtea through investment, the kuku venture also provides Whakatōhea descendants with pūtea through employment opportunities. Whakatōhea Mussels Ōpotiki Limited employs Whakatōhea descendants, Ōpōtiki locals, and seasonal workers (Ōpōtiki District Council, 2023). Participant B emphasised the importance of the kuku venture as central to the financial and cultural economy of Whakatōhea. They also reiterated the importance of Whakatōhea Mussels Ōpotiki Limited in the Ōpotiki job market (Participant B Interview, 2022). Whakatōhea Mussels Ōpotiki Limited provides an alternative employment option in a job market that has long been dominated by precarious employment within the kiwifruit industry.

In Ōpōtiki, several other types of businesses are needed to service the kuku industry, which means it has bolstered employment numbers within other industries in the district (Ōpōtiki District Council, 2023). Construction of the Ōpōtiki harbour has also spurred growth in the region (Ōpōtiki District Council, 2023). The Ōpōtiki CBD renewal which sits alongside the harbour construction will create even more jobs in the region (Ōpōtiki District Council, 2023).

Recently, there has been a high amount of investment in the Whakatōhea region due to the establishment and growth of the kuku industry. The New Zealand Government, for example, is Whakatōhea Mussels Ōpōtiki Limited's largest shareholder, owning 33.99% of shares (Simmons Corporate Finance, 2023). In 2020, Ōpōtiki District Council received \$79.4 million in funding through the Provincial Growth Fund. This funding combined with the \$20 million obtained through the Regional Infrastructure Fund in 2013 has enabled the construction of the new Ōpōtiki harbour (Ōpōtiki District Council, 2023). Alongside the construction of the harbour, there are also plans in place for a privately funded marine and industrial zone and expansion plans for residential development in Ōpōtiki (Ōpōtiki District Council, 2023), which will undoubtedly create employment and financial growth in the region.

## Diverse kuku economies

The discussion above illustrates that economies are less about financially derived output and more about how resources are organised to enhance livelihoods. Thinking about economy in its original sense as livelihood creation enables the rich diversity of processes and practices involved in modern day economies to emerge. The above empirical analysis speaks to the ways in which kuku have generated livelihoods for Whakatōhea descendants over time. It demonstrates the diverse and multi-temporal plurality of Whakatōhea kuku economies. It is not an all-encompassing depiction, but rather an attempt to describe what these economies look like on the ground.

Māori economic value is generated through a diversity of processes and practices, some of which sit within, and some of which sit outside of financial markets. Kuku gathering is a key non-financial practice which generates a diversity of value for Whakatōhea people. However, there is also a diversity of value generated from the kuku venture, for example, employment at the Whakatōhea kuku factory has provided opportunities for Whakatōhea members to move home and re-connect with their Whakatōhea-tanga (Whakatōhea ways of being and doing). The exploration above shows how value generated within Māori economies is not categorically bound to distinct financial and non-financial boundaries; rather, it flows across these boundaries in complex and inter-connected ways. Examining Whakatōhea kuku economies solely through a dominant lens overlooks the broader ways that kuku generate livelihoods for Whakatōhea. Similarly, failing to recognise the diversity of value generated through financial practices provides an incomplete understanding of Māori economies.

This particular grounded account of diverse Māori economies where capitalist practices are not the dominant form of livelihood creation provides a distinctly Indigenous case to the diverse economies and community economies literature (Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013). Furthermore it enriches diverse Māori economies literature by demonstrating how livelihood-generating

activities, that are often hidden and marginalised within dominant accounts of economy (Amoamo et al., 2018; Bargh, 2011, 2012; Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2008; Gibson-Graham et al., 2013), materialise within everyday Māori economies. Two key insights which derive from this work are discussed below.

### **Economy as process, practice, and place**

The findings above exemplify a grounded account of how Whakatōhea kuku economies are generated through practices and processes in place. By speaking to the various ways that Whakatōhea descendants draw value from kuku, we are able to demonstrate how kuku generate livelihoods for Whakatōhea, the specific processes and practices that generate this livelihood and the importance of the role of place in these relations.

Whakatōhea kuku economies consist of diverse pathways of value creation driven by unique processes and practices which are grounded in place and founded upon longstanding relations with human and more-than-human kin. Place plays a central role in Whakatōhea kuku economies. For Whakatōhea, gathering wild kuku in their tribal area not only provides a healthy source of protein but also a platform to connect with living and non-living and human and non-human relations. The continuity of Whakatōhea descendants gathering and farming kuku in their ancestral waters means something that adds value to Whakatōhea livelihoods. Consuming or growing kuku from somewhere else cannot generate the same kind of value.

The depiction of Whakatōhea kuku economies above, situates theoretical understandings of economy as process and practice within a grounded economy which is connected to both capitalist practices and Indigenous economic traditions. We contribute to the Māori economies, Indigenous economies and alternative economies scholarship a particular place-based understanding of the processes and practices which generate livelihoods.

### **Whakapapa as a lens for understanding Māori economic relations**

A whakapapa methodology pays particular attention to the connections and relations between all phenomena (Painting & Burgess, 2020). When examining Māori economies through a whakapapa lens, the diverse processes and practices that form economies and the value drawn from them are intimately connected and in relation. These processes and practices have a specific set of connections and relations that stretch into the future and the past and often go unseen when examining economies through a dominant lens.

A whakapapa lens provides a number of significant insights for examining contemporary Māori economies. For example, it enables us to see how both financial and non-financial practices generate a diversity of livelihood values within Māori economies. It also points to the importance of temporality and place for generating value within Māori economies - for example, for Whakatōhea descendants, gathering kuku from the same rocks as their ancestors carries profound significance as it connects them to both their ancestors and their ancestral place. Whakapapa also enables us to see important connections that might otherwise remain hidden when examining

economies from conventional non-Māori perspectives. For example, the availability of farmed Whakatōhea kuku from local suppliers in Ōpōtiki reduces harvesting pressure on wild kuku populations, allowing them to replenish and remain available for future generations. Whakapapa further draws attention to the relations between financial and non-financial kuku practices—acknowledging that these kuku share the same waters and ecological systems. These relations are important for understanding how different dimensions of economies exist in relation.

The application of whakapapa as an analytical framework has significant implications for how Māori economies are understood and governed. Seeing Māori economies as intimately connected and in relation can transform how decision-makers conceptualise and enact these economies into the future. While diverse economies approaches have provided useful insights for Māori economies scholars to draw upon (Amoamo et al., 2018; Bargh, 2011, 2012), whakapapa offers a more appropriate and distinctly Indigenous framework for understanding Māori economies. Transitioning to using Indigenous frameworks for conceptualising Māori economies will allow Māori economies scholars to move beyond the limitations of non-Māori approaches and better understand and examine Māori economies.

This Chapter set out to think about Māori economies differently by using a whakapapa-based methodology and adopting diverse perspectives of economy from the literature. This whakapapa lens helped us see the diverse value exchanges involved in Whakatōhea kuku economies. Ultimately, we painted a picture of Whakatōhea economies based on the generation of livelihoods which demonstrates two key insights for re-Indigenising Māori economies: a) the processes and practices which make up Māori economies and generate Māori livelihoods are always grounded in place and b) Whakapapa is a useful framework for understanding Māori economies in a way that is grounded in te ao Māori (the Māori world).

While this Chapter highlights the positive aspects of the Whakatōhea kuku industry through its focus on livelihood generation, the key insight for Whakatōhea people is that wild kuku stocks are central to our kuku economies. Wild kuku stocks and our associated practices with them, although not included within dominant understandings of economies, form the essential foundation of Whakatōhea kuku economies. The physical act of gathering, stewarding, and eating kuku enhances livelihoods in ways that purchasing kuku within capitalist markets does not allow. A majority of the value derived from Whakatōhea kuku economies will be lost if Whakatōhea descendants can no longer access wild kuku stocks in the Whakatōhea area.

This particular account of Whakatōhea kuku economies enables Māori decision makers (tribal leaders and policy makers) to think differently about Māori economies. Although Māori economies can derive a lot of value from capitalist practices, value generated from being in good relation with taonga generates a different kind of livelihood - one that is deeply embedded in Māori relations with place. In documenting the diversity of practices that create value within Whakatōhea kuku economies, we have generated pathways for diverse economic futuring and opened opportunities for re-indigenising Māori economic processes, practices and relations.



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