

SPECIAL ARTICLE

Autonomía, the *vā*, *tino rangatiratanga* and the design of space

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In this brief reflection in response to the call for papers, we want to juxtapose relational forms as they occur in our part of the world – between embrace, dis-engagement and re-engagement – with what we understand *autonomía* to mean in Latin American contexts. The point is to think about reasons and options in the wake of enforced, traumatic change under colonialism and globalisation. Colonial impact in the Pacific has been less entrenched than in Latin America, of course. In Samoa, for example, colonisation began in 1899 and ended in 1962. In other places in the Pacific, colonisation has developed into settler, or Fourth World societies. Strategies and concepts developed in response are therefore different in different places. In much of the Pacific, the notion of *vā* (space between) describes an approach to relations that tends to incorporate whatever is encountered. This space brings together, appropriates and reveals an “individual person/creature/thing” in terms of *vā* relationships (Wendt, 1996). *Vā* operates predominantly internally, within groups and families, but it also immediately affects relationship with the outside. Thus, Samoans treated the first European visitors on their shores as people who already belonged to their system of relationships, allocating to them ranks and functions.¹ Once incorporated into the *vā*, one becomes entangled into the tension organising the whole (cosmos).

Vā could be seen as the opposite of *autonomía*, with its apparent emphasis on difference and independence. Yet, this opposition is far from absolute. To demonstrate and perhaps even perform this relationship, let us introduce another local term that sounds more like *autonomía*: *tino rangatiratanga*. In Aotearoa, it predates Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi, 1840), first occurring around 1835 in the context of He Whakaputunga (Declaration of Independence).² Rangatira is composed of two words: *ranga* (to weave) and *tira* (a group of people) (Mikaere, 2010). It was only in Te Tiriti o Waitangi discourses, starting in the 1980s, that *tino rangatiratanga* gained its current meanings of sovereignty, independence and self-determination.³

Chiara Del Gaudio commented on “*Vā* could be seen as the opposite of *autonomía*, with its apparent emphasis on difference and independence”:

Can you tell more about the emphasis on difference and independence? I would like to understand how it manifests itself. In my current understanding and interpretation of both concepts, there is not an opposition.

¹ See Tcherkézoff (2008, p. 157) on appropriation in hierarchical societies in the Pacific.

² In 1935, 34 rangatira (leaders) signed He Whakaputunga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tirene (Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand), pledging to assemble annually at Waitangi to legislate. They asked British King William IV for protection of their “infant state”, which was granted by the Colonial Office (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/page/declaration-independence-signed-northern-chiefs>). Five years later, in 1840, 461 Māori leaders signed Te Tiriti o Waitangi with the British Crown in Māori – only 39 of the signatories signed English versions (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/treaty/making-the-treaty/signing-the-treaty>). Te Tiriti guaranteed Māori “*te tino rangatiratanga*” or the unqualified exercise of their chieftainship over their lands, villages, and all their property and treasures” (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/treaty/read-the-treaty/differences-between-the-texts>), see also, more generally, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/treaty-of-waitangi> and http://ndhadeliver.natlib.govt.nz/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE24566690). The treaty was, in many ways, extraordinary: the rangatira did not cede sovereignty and “*taonga katoa*”, according to the widely accepted translation of Hugh Kawharu, refers to “refers to all dimensions of a tribal group’s estate, material and non-material heirlooms and *wahi tapu* (sacred places), ancestral lore and *whakapapa* (genealogies), etc.” (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/files/documents/treaty-kawharau-footnotes>). The guarantee of *tino rangatiratanga* or, in the original English version, “full exclusive and undisturbed possession” of their *taonga*, amounts to an early protection of cultural heritage, decades before equivalent legislation in, for instance, Europe. One might assume that this history is well known in Aotearoa-New Zealand, but Bob and Joanna Condesine found in 2000 that 88% of 397 teacher trainees they surveyed had never heard about He Whakaputunga and that 61% were not familiar with the differences between the Māori and English versions of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Condesine and Condesine, 2001, p. 136). Nevertheless, Te Tiriti is increasingly accepted as a founding document of the New Zealand state, and it is the source for crucially important findings by Te Rōpū Whakamana i Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Waitangi Tribunal (<https://www.waitangitribunal.govt.nz>), which hears claims brought by Māori concerning breaches of Te Tiriti and makes recommendations. The tribunal hearings have “produced a rich historical record – and some reparation for past wrongs” (<https://teara.govt.nz/en/waitangi-tribunal-te-ropu-whakamana>).

³ While, for a long time, *rangatira* (leader) or *mana* (authority, influence) remained more common than *rangatiratanga*, it is likely most Māori, if pressed on the meaning of *tino rangatiratanga* in 1835–1837, would have embraced “independent chiefly authority and power, and separateness in the sense of Māori primacy over things Māori” (Hirschfeld, C., pers. comm., 19/04/2018).

Rangatira, then, originally referred to high-order leadership and the ability to bring people and others together. Only later, as part of tino rangatiratanga (and in exchanges with colonizers/settlers in an English speaking environment), did it come to refer to a distinct form of Indigenous being in a settler state. The discourses and politics of tino rangatiratanga often deployed a strategic essentialism that created solidarity amongst Māori. It also helped biculturalism succeed in introducing Māori culture into the centre of government institutions (Barclay, 2005, p. 224), and to win substantive rights and resources via the Waitangi Tribunal. However, this strategy proved less useful when it came to distribute these resources amongst co-contenders. Perhaps more gravely, the emphasis on separate sovereignty or autonomy can erode Māori value orientations with their powerful imperative of relationship and responsibility (Hoskins, 2012, p. 85). "In Māori thinking, a 'hoa riri'—literally, an angry friend—is someone with whom I fight but whose mana in defending their position is respected" (Hoskins, 2012, p. 94).

The term 'relational autonomy' (Maaka and Fleras, 2000, 2017) reflects the fact that "autonomy is partially constituted by a relation to others", and that "autonomy and authenticity only gain their fullness [...] through these relations" (Barclay, 2005, p. 250). In Aotearoa, where the Treaty partners have no choice but to work things out, the nature of all human spaces, which are constituted "by their relationality to something outside of them" (Barclay, 2005, p. 255), compels everyone to engage with both their inside and their constitutional outside – in a dynamic tension that preserves difference in the negotiation of ambivalent kinships (Teaiwa and Mallon, 2005).

Despite apparent differences between *vā*, *autonomía/comunalidad* and tino rangatiratanga, we believe they also share a dialectic that is expressed by notions such as relational autonomy. In it, there is a closing in, by asserting identity to impact political positions and to safeguard cultural survival (Hoskins, 2012, p. 95).⁴ Its opposite movement, an opening out to engage with what was excluded, prevents orthodoxy and isolation (which diminish rather than open up space) and produces space for connections and explorative engagement (Sommerville, 2011, p. 65). Too great a stress on the first movement (in the context of this discussion, *autonomía*), risks lapsing attention to the second (*comunalidad*) – be that amongst Indigenous groups or towards the colonial or global outsider. In Maturana and Varela's terms, too great an emphasis on autopoiesis can lead to a lack of attention to structural coupling – in an environment that (whether good or bad) supports or hinders the self-creation of an organism or organisation.⁵ If the goal is to create "a world where many worlds fit",⁶

understanding of in- and outward movements and adaptations is crucial.

Here in Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland, we ask: how can we hold on to both the connecting and separating aspects of *vā* and tino rangatiratanga? When is one more productive than the other? And what do these forces mean for design? Design in the *vā* has to consider processes of change that have always been, and still are, part of traditions. In Samoa, the design of a fale tele (great, meeting house), with its large roof sheltering the participating community representatives, keeps social processes both in place and moving – "knot[ting] together lines and threads of co-belonging in the *fono (alofisa)*" through the production of faciality (Refiti, 2015, p. 192). This face-to-face politics (kanohi ki te kanohi in Aotearoa) "works to challenge—and to keep open—political stabilisations" (Hoskins, 2012, p. 93).

In the Auckland diaspora, the design of Pacific spaces involving professionals mostly takes place in and for

Tina Engels-Schwarzpaul answered:

No, that's right - they are both describing one side of the relationship. On the other side would be kinship and collaboration. Does this become clearer later on or do you need us to rephrase this?

Andrea Botero added:

I think it becomes apparent later and this little dialogue here might also help the reader. Do you mind we keep it in the final version? :). I mean on conversation here.

Later on, Alfredo Gutierrez Borrero wrote:

Dear Tina (and Albert and all) After reading the slightly revised version of the piece of conversation by Albert and you, and I am thinking that perhaps for Aotearoa and Polynesia savvy people, just as you two, the meaningfulness of Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) and its present day resurgence and echoes (starting more than fifty years ago) are very evident indeed (Waitangi Tribunal etc.). But it does not happen the same way with a wider group of readers around the world (of which we hope to have some in this SDRJ Special Issue). Do you think it is possible to give a brief additional information about it? I mean, about the importance of such a Treaty for Maori peoples given the processes ongoing to the present day? (I think an extra endnote could work well, what do you think?). For me it is quite related to the issue of autonomy and the possibilities of an autonomous design, right?

Tina Engels-Schwarzpaul replied:

Yes, you are right, and I had been wondering about that. I have now added an endnote - which may be too long, so you are welcome to edit it down for the purposes of this publication.

Ann Light commented on "The term [...] these relations":

Such an important point in all of this.

⁴ This closing-in tendency, which Ezio Manzini (this issue) identifies in the reactions of "communities of fear and hate", can be fed by many causes. Certainly, those participating in Europe's (and global) new right movements are often driven by fears producing hate. However, we need to be very specific about context, history and aims. Even if the vocabularies and values of Māori and Pacific indigenous groups sometimes appear to overlap with, for instance, German neo-fascist groups, there is a huge differential of power and position between them (despite the fact that most members of right-wing groups belong to populations marginalised under neo-liberalism). The conflation of fascist and indigenous lines of thought belongs to a long-running cognitive and political problem: "Blut und Boden" (whakapapa and whenua, blood and land) are important aspects of debates in Germany and in Aotearoa, but in very different ways. In European history, it has been argued, the political Left disdained and ignored "irrational" responses to capitalist threats, like fear of loss of *Heimat* (home country) and traditional life styles in early C20, leaving them to the political Right to exploit for their own purposes. Land, people, *Heimat* became central codes of Nazi ideology (and they remain so in current neo-Nazi propaganda) (Geisler, 1985; see also Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2001, p. 122, 210-211; Zipes, 1983). Such histories probably still taint our understanding of community, place and tradition world-wide, all the more important are specific discussions. While it is easy for us (Tina and Albert) to imagine neo-fascist German "communities of fear and hate" (or, for that matter, Italian and Hungarian ones), we find it difficult to associate this term with Māori or Pacific communities who want to protect their moana (ocean), whenua/fonua (land) and tangata/tagata (people and their culture).

⁵ Maturana seems to have noted that autopoiesis, in the literal sense, works only at the first order, cellular level (T. Hearn, pers. comm., March 2018). With third order autopoietic situations that are relevant for design, we must be careful to consider what structural coupling means at that level, and under which conditions an organisation self-preserved or changes.

⁶ Zapatista slogan, cited in Escobar (2017, p. 5).

institutions. In the process, collective identities are often first forged and then addressed. This process can be problematic when essentialism and conventional notions of authenticity are foregrounded.⁷ For, in their traditional context, Pacific community spaces are ritual spaces honouring the ancestors. In the diaspora, by contrast, they become rarefied icons, both symbolic of and instrumental for identity formations. Nevertheless, insofar as the iconic process turns both inward (integrating different communities of origin) and outward (facing the mainstream neo-colonial and neo-liberal milieux), it can support "autonomous forms of existence and decision making" (Escobar, 2018, p. 173) by creating spaces or neighbourhoods in which collectives can congregate and collaborate. In vā neighbourhoods, decisions and actions do not occur in isolation; rather, they transmit effects outwards, upwards and downwards.⁸

In our Vā Moana/Pacific Spaces research cluster at AUT (<http://www.pacificspaces.com/>), we explore under which conditions the design of spaces, be they outwardly iconic or not, can help "change tradition traditionally" – even "changing the ways we change" (Escobar, 2018, p. 172–173). Guided by Māori and Pacific concepts and relationships, we try to enact mutually invested and appropriate co-creations between Indigenous Pacific and Western thoughts and practices. This, we believe, is not only crucial for local politics but also a contribution to a global search for alternatives in negotiating the creation and distribution of space in the face of climate change. The refugee crisis in Europe two years ago shows that little is so far available to deal with these challenges, and Aotearoa, due to its geographical location, is likely to have to find solutions earlier than some other places (RNZ, 2018a). Winner-take-all-democracies in the Anglo/US traditions are not likely to be useful in the process, and alternative, power sharing approaches, which build confidence and a sense of security, are needed (RNZ, 2018b). Our hunch is that, if spaces take form through vā relationships, and if they are held open by the ongoing play of opposing tendencies such as autonomy and relationality, authenticity and hybridity, they also support tino rangatiratanga, autonomía and comunalidad. Of course, our theorising of a poetics and politics of localisation for Pacific people in a Sea of Islands – of Oceania in us, to continue from Epeli Hau'ofa (2005) – has only started.

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Andrea Botero commented on "Despite apparent [...] explorative engagement":

I wonder if this articulating Vā and *autonomía* will not help illuminate some of the problem/dissonance that Manzini seems to be uncomfortable with?

Tina Engels-Schwarzpaul replied:

I cannot recall my sources now, but there was a discussion after WW2 about the ways in which the political Left in Germany ignored deep running emotions in the population (that expressed themselves as fear of loss of Heimat and traditional life styles) in early C20 and left those notions to the political Right to appropriate. I have never thought this through fully, but it seems there is a long-running cognitive and political problem which can lead to a conflation of fascist and indigenous lines of thought – "Blut und Boden", blood and land, are very much at the centre of debate in Aotearoa *and* in Germany, but in very different ways – and perhaps that has something to do with the fact that they were attended to in Europe only by the Right, not by the Left. How does that play out in Latin America?

After a while Tina Engels-Schwarzpaul added:

I have now extended my footnote 13 to make the connection with Ezio's communities of fear and hate.

Ann Light wrote:

There has been some good writing about how the Right speaks for values and the Left has got stuck in rational argument – George Lakoff on the problems the Democrats had in the US elections I think.

Alfredo Gutierrez Borrero commented on "Nevertheless, insofar [...] can congregate and collaborate":

I participated in the 9th Meeting of Archaeological Theory of South America (TAAS) at the beginning of June 2018 in the city of Ibarra, Ecuador. This section reminds me of two concepts that communities of African ancestry that live in the province of Esmeraldas in Ecuador (border with Colombia) use. These people descend from diverse waves of black people. The first were slave groups who liberated themselves in the mid-sixteenth century (makes them one of the oldest free black population in all of Abya Yala –Latin America). These people speak of "house inside" (in Spanish "*casa adentro*") for everything related to the internal reaffirmation of their own culture. They also speak of "house outside" (in Spanish "*casa afuera*") for their relationship with people from outside the community, where own codes, allow to orient the dialogue with the others, with different ones, with the State. Without the affirmation of their culture (*casa adentro* or "house inside") as a space of inner power, the dialogue with the different (*casa afuera* or "house outside") will always be subordinate.

⁷ At least in a Modernist sense; an alternative definition measures authenticity according to the degree to which local people have control over those processes (Handler, 2014, p. 205–206). For an extended discussion of the strategic deployment of authenticity, see Engels-Schwarzpaul and Refiti (2018).

⁸ Therefore, Tim Ingold's *meshwork* better describes these processes than Latour's *networks* (Ingold, 2008, p. 209–215).

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Tina Engels-Schwarzpaul answered:

Thanks Alfredo! I had a similar conversation with Andrea Scholz in 2016, who curated an exhibition for the Humboldt Forum in Berlin at the time. Her exhibit was organised around a house form used by the people she works with in the Amazonas area. Discussing it here would lead somewhere else altogether, but there was a similar relationship between interior (and cosmological concerns) and periphery (and outer-world relations). Happy so send you a paragraph from the interview if she agrees.

Barbara Szaniecki commented on the overall paper:

The reflections made by comparing the proposal of "autonomy" with the more local concepts of "vā" and "rangatiratanga", in their similarities and differences, are very instigating. I am also a little concerned about the approximation between "autonomy" and "autopoiesis" of Maturana and Varela. It is valid but, in my view, it merits deepening. "Relational autonomy" and the perception of a "closing in" and "opening out" movement and, in particular, its application to space design in the Pacific can instigate good discussions in the field of design, especially among countries that have experienced colonialism and today experience a strongly unequal globalization. I came across this issue in recent debates about the construction of yet another major museum in Rio de Janeiro. The last two were built following international models of the great cultural business. The debate of the moment refers to the Museum of Slavery and Freedom, a very important initiative that also faces sociocultural issues that are reflected in the very conception of space: how to think of a museum focused on the Afro-descendant community and also on the international diaspora? A museum geared towards the local residents but also for creative collectives newly installed in the port region? How to relate "closing in" and "opening out"? Tina and Albert, I am very interested in continuing this debate and terms of space/territory design.