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The New Zealand Psychological Society responds to the letter published in the *Listener* by a group of academics at the University of Auckland.

As the President of the New Zealand Psychological Society, I believe it is important that we express our disappointment in the recent letter to the [Listener](#) by professors of psychology, biological sciences and critical studies. We also wish to express our support and aroha for those who were, and continue to be, negatively affected by the letter's content. We note that the letter was not subject to established protocols of rigour and peer review and as such, the contents reflect opinion, not science. In reviewing the letter, it is readily apparent that racist tropes were used, alongside comments typical of moral panic, to justify the exclusion of Māori knowledge as a legitimate science. Responses to selected portions of the letter are outlined below:

1. The writers are dismayed at the proposed changes to the NCEA curriculum which ensures Mātauranga Māori has parity with other bodies of knowledge. They are also concerned at the proposal for a new course that aims to teach how science has been used to support the dominance of a Eurocentric view (along with its rationale for the colonisation of Māori and the suppression of Māori knowledge). The push for NCEA to reflect the worldviews of Māori within the context of the impact of colonisation and epistemic racism means that the playing field is levelled. The originators of this change are [young Māori students](#) from Otorohanga [high school](#), Leah Bell, Waimarama Anderson, and Tai Jones, who petitioned the Government to be told the truth about New Zealand history. That same desire exists with students in psychology who consistently ask to have their cultural worldviews made visible, respected, taught and valued.
2. The letter writers express their concern that science is being misunderstood at all levels of education and science funding. They further add that science itself does not colonise - while acknowledging that *'it has been used to aid colonisation, as have literature and art'*. This is similar to saying 'Guns don't kill people. People kill people'. Esteemed scholar, Professor [Linda Tuhiwai Smith](#) (and others) established that science has indeed been used, under the pretence of its own legitimacy, to colonise and commit genocide towards Māori and other Indigenous peoples. Science, in the hands of colonisers, is the literal gun. The writers fail to note the overwhelming evidence that the users of the science they favour, are also the ones who set the rules about what counts as science, where it can be taught, learned, published or funded. This issue is extremely relevant to the need to decolonise the power base held in our learning institutions.
3. *'Science is universal, and not especially western'* - here the writers state that *'western science derives from ancient Egypt, Greece, Mesopotamia, and India before developing later in the US and with a strong presence across Asia'*. They also added *'with contributions from mediaeval Islam'*. This is the trope of colonial imagination where

science develops naturally through the healthy exchange of knowledge between cultures, rather than the colonisation of these (and other) continents, the plunder of their resources, and the inextricable ties to imperialism and global expansion. As I read their narrow understanding of history, I noted the absence of the Pacific, Africa, the Americas, Greenland, and the Arctic circle, all of whom existed in relationship with their own Mātauranga science. To add to the point above, if the New Zealand curriculum intends for their future citizens to understand the world, they also need to know about hegemonies, racism, Islamophobia and the forces that use science to oppress some peoples and privilege others.

4. Inciting moral panic trope: *Science is helping us battle worldwide crises ... Covid, global warming*. The assumption here is that the science they refer to is the key to our survival and that we can't afford to mistrust science (see point one). While science is in a global debate about truth, that should not be an invitation to panic about Mātauranga Māori potentially destabilising their safety zones. Māori do have solutions to global warming, as do many other Indigenous epistemologies. These solutions center on protecting the planet as an ancestor using Indigenous science, and addressing exploitative capitalism. It is unfair to claim that we should be concerned (and therefore panic) that science won't be trusted if we teach the truth about the colonisation of peoples, or racism that occurs in New Zealand society. We should instead be concerned that viable and sustainable solutions, derived from Indigenous worldviews, are systematically ignored and marginalised because those who have benefitted from its suppression and criminalisation do not understand what it is when epistemic parity is required.
5. The White Saviour trope: This is where Māori are told which elements of our Indigenous knowledge is important and to whom. The writers, speaking for Māori, offer the opinion: *'Indigenous knowledge is critical to the perpetuation and preservation of culture and local practices and plays key roles in management and policy*. The writers (as is their inherent privilege) relegate Māori knowledge to archival value, ceremony, management and policy (although it is not clear what is meant here). Speaking for Māori ignores obligations to honour the Treaty of Waitangi, and ignores the overwhelming evidence that racism is a primary reason that Mātauranga Māori science is undervalued. Māori knowledge is indeed critical to the preservation of our culture and practices because we are resisting epistemic and cultural genocide, while also striving to flourish and develop. Speaking for Māori again, they add that *'in the discovery of empirical, universal truths, it falls far short of what we can define as science itself'*. Māori aren't asking them to define science. We have done that ourselves despite having obstacles thrown up at all stages.
6. The writers also use the trope of condescending compassion, and dangerously, the myth of the ['White man's burden'](#) where Māori need to be saved from ourselves. They comment *'to accept it as the equivalent [of western science] is to patronise and fail indigenous populations. Indigenous knowledge may help advance scientific knowledge, in some ways, but it is not real science'*. This statement of condescending compassion is also a form of gaslighting where Māori are told that believing in ourselves and our potential will fail us. Trusting our own cultural epistemologies is viewed as dangerous, and like children, we must be protected, not by our own, but by Western science. Or as the writers note, [Māori are] *'better off participating in the world's scientific enterprises'*.

Psychology has a long history of marginalising Māori knowledge, and it is concerning that two of the writers are professors of psychology. We note that the letter reinforces known

racist assumptions about the validity of Mātauranga Māori science that occurs across psychology and academia. We are particularly concerned about the wellbeing of Māori staff and students in psychology who must now navigate the fall-out of this letter. We are often expected to justify our existence, to explain or defend Indigenous knowledge of psychology, Mātauranga Māori, and kaupapa Māori theory. This is an example of Māori doing double-duty to educate others within a largely hostile system (see [McAllister, et al](#) and racism allegations at the [University of Waikato](#)). Research over 40+ years in psychology shows the impact of racism on Māori health outcomes, curriculum development, student numbers, research outputs, and staff recruitment, advancement and retention. More needs to be done, and the NCEA curriculum changes will go some way to achieving Mātauranga parity. We welcome the changes on the horizon and embrace the potential for enhanced understandings of science whatever their origins. Moving forward, we thank our colleagues across the country who have spoken up and rejected the letter - the [Royal Society of New Zealand](#), the University of Auckland, the [New Zealand Association of Scientists](#), and the [students reply to university academics](#).

Finally, in an interview with Mihingarangi Forbes on the Hui (July, 31st) one of the writers, Professor Corballis, stated: *We've tried to find out about it ... we don't know any Maori who knows what matauranga is.* My comment is we've been here all along, practicing our Mātauranga.

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