Towards Anti-Colonial Commemorative Landscapes through Indigenous Collective Remembering in Wānanga

Liana MacDonald

Abstract: Statues and monuments are permanent forms of commemoration that interpret and reconstruct public memory in colonial settler societies. Representation through memorialisation is attributed to a genealogy of Western collective remembering that reflects the values, narratives, and experiences of the dominant settler population. Yet, collective remembering and memory can change. This article reports on Indigenous collective remembering practices that were observed in a local government intervention in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Boulcott Memorial Research Project sought iwi Māori (Indigenous Māori tribes) perspectives of the battle of Boulcott’s Farm to change a one-sided colonial memorial that was erected to honour British militia who died in the conflict. Iwi kaipūrākau (representatives) from Te Atiawa, Ngāti Tama, Ngāti Rangatāhi, Ngāti Haua, and Ngāti Toa Rangatira relayed their perspective of the battle through wānanga (a Māori oral tradition). In wānanga, kaipūrākau were perceived to remember relationally, outside colonial time, and through contemporary concerns and political interests, to advance tribal autonomy and self-determination. In this paper, I show how collective remembering in wānanga offers an anti-colonial ethic and intervention for building commemorative landscapes that can redirect public remembrance beyond the limitations of settler colonial memory and towards perspectives that are in tune with Indigenous peoples’ lived realities.

Keywords: collective remembering; collective memory; public memory; Indigenous methodologies; Māori; wānanga; oral traditions; oral history; anti-colonial; the battle of Boulcott’s Farm

1. Introduction

Twenty minutes by car from Wellington city sits a large grey boulder on the side of the road. I’ve driven down this Lower Hutt street several times in the years I’ve lived in the Wellington region, but the presence of the boulder hasn’t registered with me before. It’s a monument to one of the two main clashes of the Wellington War fought in 1846. In May that year, Ngāti Rangatāhi and their allies launched a surprise attack on a British outpost at Boulcott’s Farm, in retaliation for the false purchase and sale of their lands. Eight British troops were killed. The underwhelming memorial to this event melts into the grey tarmac of the road and many locals do not know it is there or what it represents. (MacDonald 2022a)

In 2020, I visited the Boulcott’s Farm memorial in Te Awa Kairangi ki Tai Lower Hutt, in Aotearoa New Zealand, with a First Nation scholar from Canada. At the time, I was a postgraduate research fellow conducting field work for a project about how New Zealand society remembers and forgets its difficult histories. Once the shock that this nondescript boulder was indeed the memorial we were looking for passed, we marvelled at how the blatantly one-sided plaque inscriptions had laid there in public view for nearly a century (see Figure 1).
The memorial commemorates the battle of Boulcott’s Farm, fought at the site of a British military post in the Hutt Valley on 16 May 1846. It was the result of hostilities arising out of the New Zealand Company’s disputed land purchases in the region and the decision of Governor George Grey to declare martial law and evict all Māori living in the Hutt Valley (O’Malley 2019). In the 1920s, the Boulcott memorial was erected on the corner of High Street and Military Road to honour the British soldiers who died during the battle.

Māori iwi (tribes) Te Atiawa, Ngāti Rangatahi, Ngāti Tama, Ngāti Haua, and Ngāti Toa Rangatira have connections to land in Te Awa Kairangi that precedes European arrival, yet their perspectives of the battle are omitted and misrepresented by inscriptions on the monument that project Māori as villains (see Appendix A).

For some years, it has been identified by members of the local community that the current memorial does not accurately reflect iwi Māori perspectives. In 2022, I was commissioned by the Hutt City Council to lead a small research team for the Boulcott Memorial Research Project to investigate various Māori and Pākehā accounts of the battle and provide recommendations about how the current memorial may be adapted to acknowledge a wider view of all groups involved in the conflict. The research formed part of a report that was delivered to the Hutt City Council in September 2023 (MacDonald et al. 2023).

Unlike the Hutt City Council report, which focused on the content of what was recalled by iwi kaipūrākau (tribal representatives), this paper reports on practices and processes that distinguish Indigenous collective remembering from standard approaches (termed Western collective remembering in this paper) and the implications of the former for building anti-colonial commemorative landscapes. In the Boulcott Memorial Research Project, wānanga provided the research context for kaipūrākau remembrance. Wānanga are an oral Māori tradition that, in modern times, is employed for various purposes (Mahuika and Mahuika 2020). I observed three dimensions of collective remembering in wānanga: relational remembering, leading with contemporary concerns and political interests, and remembering outside time. In this paper, I discuss each of these in turn before considering how report writing was influenced by the research process. Finally, I argue that collective remembering in wānanga engaged an anti-colonial ethic for reshaping public memory that moves colonial settler societies beyond the limitations of a genealogy of Western collective remembering towards a remembering process that is more in tune with Indigenous peoples’ lifeworlds (Walter et al. 2022).
The next section identifies traits of Western collective remembering practice before considering how anti-colonial commemorative landscapes can be achieved by recovering Indigenous collective remembering in public memory practice.

2. Western Collective Remembering and Public Memory in Colonial Settler Societies

Collective remembering is a social process by which collective memory is formed and recalled (Wertsch and Roediger 2008). The way the past is interpreted and reconstructed is influenced by the values, narratives, experiences, and interests of a group. This process and the collective memories that result serve to strengthen collective identity (Halbwachs 1992; Zerubavel 2003; Larkin 2012).

The Western origins of collective remembering are generally attributed to French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, whose 1925 seminal work *La mémoire collective* | Collective memory made a significant impact in the field of memory studies. Given the breadth of the field and the dearth of scholarship about Indigenous memory-making processes (Kennedy and Radstone 2013), this section outlines some key characteristics of collective remembering from a Western perspective before considering its relationship with public memory in colonial settler societies.

The nature of the ‘collective’ in collective memory and remembering is a contested and variable concept. Halbwachs himself was not consistent with usage, fluctuating between discussing the collective as a standalone phenomenon (in line with Émile Durkheim) or as a collection of socially framed individual memories (Olick 1999). Jeffrey Olick (1999) distinguishes these divergent yet related ways of approaching collective memory by whether one “sees culture as a subjective category of meanings contained in people’s minds versus one that sees culture as patterns of publicly available symbols objectified in society.” (p. 330) This paper is concerned with the latter; however, as we will see in the following section, Indigenous people approach the ‘collective’ from yet another angle.

Consistent with the idea of the collective as a standalone phenomenon, memory emerges through a wide variety of socially constructed mnemonic products and practices (Larkin 2012; Olick 1999). Larkin (2012) writes the following:

> Memory is defined as a perpetual mnemonic process; interacting with history reciprocally, while encoded and reproduced culturally. It is an ongoing negotiation of past and present, selection and erasure, power and contestation; reflected in changing narrative discourses and trajectories. (p. 17)

Through this multifaceted and dynamic remembering process, groups reconstruct their collective memory of the past as present-day interests and concerns shift and change (Wertsch 2009). Moreover, unique temporal and cultural frameworks shape dominant narratives, personal experience, and collective identity (Larkin 2012). Yet, how this process may also be the product of cultural and epistemological biases is rarely examined.

In this paper, I identify three interconnected attributes of Western collective remembering to highlight that the interpretation and reconstruction of public memory in colonial settler societies is not a culturally neutral practice. The first distinguishing feature is the recall of historical events or phenomena (Nora 1989; Tamm 2015). Specific to societies marked by settler colonialism, collective remembering and forgetting can lead to widespread selective amnesia of colonial invasion and the subsequent establishment of colonial administration systems and laws on Indigenous territories (Kidman and O’Malley 2022; Light 2023). Historical amnesia of colonial violence, including the New Zealand Wars, is a well-documented phenomenon that affects how Indigenous–settler relations are conceptualised in Aotearoa New Zealand today (O’Malley 2016, 2019). A sanitised collective memory that privileges a history of benign and unproblematic settlement thus emerges, focusing on positive aspects of race relations to relieve anxieties about colonial history for settler migrants and their descendants (Veracini 2010). Collective remembering and forgetting are culturally embedded and performed through everyday interactions that support the dominant settler population, maintaining a sense of belonging and a legitimate...
connection to unceded Indigenous territories (MacDonald 2022c; MacDonald et al. 2022; Simon 2023).

Another pitfall of event-focused remembrance is that it alternatively overemphasises trauma and violence (Darian-Smith and Hamilton 2013; Vermeulen et al. 2012). Indigenous memory-making processes are poorly understood and conspicuously absent from the longstanding field of memory studies (Kennedy and Radstone 2013). The field “seeks to acknowledge and do justice to a past shadowed by a history of violence committed against Indigenous communities” (Kennedy and Radstone 2013, p. 238), yet without consulting Indigenous remembering practices and processes and the resulting memories. Indeed, there is a significant body of Western scholarship devoted to how remembering impacts the historical interpretations of an event (Assmann 1998). While mnemohistory raises critical insights about how a historical phenomenon or event is impacted by the consequences of history and their 'haunting effect' (Tamm 2015), the approach assumes that event-focused recall is the standard by which all communities remember.

A third dimension of Western collective remembering is that linear and progressive conceptions of time are considered the primary basis for making and analysing memory (Hristova et al. 2020). Māori scholars Burgess and Moko-Painting (2020) articulate the process by which linear time upholds a selective and events-focused view of the past:

The settler colonial past is one we move away from along the arrow of time. Events, by happening, become fixed, ‘accurately’ recorded on the enumerated timeline and called ‘history’. The people of the past are an afterthought, understood in relation to these events, and become similarly fixed in time. History is deliberately taught to seem unrelated to ourselves, and our sense of self. (p. 223)

Hristova et al. (2020) note that although there have been some challenges to the dominance of linear time, “the past, the present and the future is still implicit in the majority of memory studies”. (p. 778)

While collective memory is negotiated in wide-ranging ways by the interests of groups or communities, public memory “is a process which is worked out in the public areas. This is achieved through various practices of remembrance and commemoration intended to reify public memory by turning it into visual spectacle” (Light and Young 2015, p. 234). Public memory, therefore, concentrates attributes of Western collective remembering through commemorative practices like festivals and ceremonies and more common and permanent forms like statues, urban landmarks, street and building names, memorials, and monuments.

Monuments and memorials are powerful physical symbols that unite and divide communities through a narrative that is open to several interpretations (Prescotta and Lahti 2022). For some groups, memorials are a means to support unjust episodes of colonial violence to continue living in the present (Wright 2022). Yet, public memory is constructed in a particular political context and is therefore subject to political change and open to reinterpretation (Light and Young 2015; Nora 1989). Citing Jane Haggis (2005), Darian-Smith and Hamilton (2013) observe that “institutionalising memory in Australia is now a highly politicised process involving a complex array of stakeholders, such as governments, museum professionals, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities’ (p. 5)” (p. 375). This insight resonates with my experience of the Boulcott Memorial Research Project, which we turn to next.

3. The Boulcott Memorial Research Project

Although the Boulcott Memorial Research Project officially began in 2022, much work had been undertaken several years prior by various local historians and Hutt City councillors to raise awareness about the one-sided and dated inscription on the Boulcott memorial (Boyack 2021; Morris 2015). Citizens in other regions had similarly expressed disdain for local monuments. For example, a Captain James Cook statue in Gisborne was twice defaced with swastikas and protest graffiti that read “Black Lives Matter and so do Māori” and “Take this racist headstone of my people down before I do.” (The New
Zealand Herald 2019, 2020) The reference to Black Lives Matter connected the Aotearoa New Zealand protests to a wider international movement to transform and decolonise symbols and institutions shaped by colonialism and overturn the erasure of Indigenous history (Carlson and Terri 2022; Hayes 2019).

Bottom-up, creative, and participatory counter-monument projects were occurring in Australia and involved the approval, participation, and involvement of Indigenous people (Scates and Yu 2022). ‘Truth-telling’ was understood to be particularly important in the process of reparative justice. Morris (2020) noted that public memorialisation “‘teaches citizens about injustices of their history [and] it is supposed to help survivors and relatives of victims to live with their trauma by honouring those who suffered’”. (As cited in Scates and Yu 2022, p. 503.)

The Hutt City Council specified that the research team was to engage with and collect the oral histories of Ngāti Haua, Ngāti Toa Rangatira, Ngāti Rangatāhi, Ngāti Tama, and Te Āti Awa. I would deliver īwi perspectives about the battle of Boulcott’s Farm and recommendations about how the Boulcott memorial may be changed in a report at a council meeting. While standard written accounts of the battle nowadays centre on colonial wrongdoing, they rarely engage tribal perspectives in a deep and informed manner, as demonstrated by my own writing (MacDonald 2022b):

Fighting in the region followed duplicitous attempts by the New Zealand Company in 1839 to purchase land ‘stretching all the way from Mōkau in northern Taranaki to the Hurunui River in North Canterbury’. Hutt Valley mana whenua, Ngāti Tama and Ngāti Rangatāhi, were not part of any land sale agreement. However, the pressure to house thousands of settlers who had purchased lands from the company in good faith gave Governor George Grey a reason to bring military reinforcements to Wellington in February 1846 to assert ‘the Crown’s authority over the Cook Strait region’ and destroy Māori independence.

After Māori in the district were effectively driven from their lands, Te Mamaku (also known as Te Karamu) and 200 other Ngāti Haua-te-Rangi warriors retaliated. On 16 May 1846, a taua attacked a garrison of troops from the 58th Regiment stationed at Boulcott’s Farm. The British were overpowered and Māori withdrew unhampered. Although Te Rangihaeata of Ngāti Toa Rangatira was not present at the battle, he and his tribe been prominent in resisting Crown efforts to drive Māori from their lands and was accused of plotting the attack on British troops. On 23 July 1846 senior Ngāti Toa Rangatira leader Te Rauparaha was seized under Grey’s orders at Taupō Pā, in present-day Plimmerton. British forces and their allies then moved against Te Rangihaeata, forcing him from Mataitaua, his pā (fortified village) at Pāuatahanui, into steeper country further up Horokiri. Grey’s determination to eliminate Te Rangihaeata ‘as a threat to Crown authority in the region’ ultimately led British forces up Battle Hill, 6–13 August 1846, in pursuit of the rangatira and his supporters. The British eventually retreated due to the difficult terrain and weather conditions leaving their Māori allies to engage in a half-hearted pursuit. (pp. 47–48)

Between March and July of 2023, I met with kaipūrākau from the five īwi and descendants from the Boulcott whānau to see if and how their perspectives deviated from written accounts. In the months leading up to their formal involvement, numerous email exchanges, phone calls, and kanohi-ki-te-kanohi hui (face-to-face meetings) had transpired to determine the date, time, and method for engaging the oral histories.


Wānanga, a foundational Māori oral tradition (Walker 1986), were the context in which kaipūrākau relayed their remembrance of the battle of Boulcott’s Farm. Wānanga are employed for various reasons in Māori society today, including intergenerational knowledge transmission, composing and shaping knowledge, collective thinking and
problem-solving, and as a research methodology (Mahuika and Mahuika 2020). Thinking deeply about issues through wānanga can evoke ambiguous, synchronistic, and complex interpretive meanings that challenge conventional thinking about mundane and accepted realities (Matamua et al. 2023). Moreover, wānanga proved to be a powerful context for exploring the practices and processes of Indigenous collective remembering.

Unlike memorials, which are powerful physical symbols that can fix Western collective memory in place, making it harder to contest and revise (Light and Young 2015), wānanga places tribal contexts, traditions, and mātauranga at the centre of research involving community recall. Māori history scholar Nēpia Mahuika (2019b) draws a strong connection between oral traditions (like wānanga), oral history, and collective memory, so that the distinction between the three is almost, if not completely, indivisible from an Indigenous perspective. This intertwined relationship contrasts with how memory and history operate in largely separate spheres with different intentions in Western scholarship (Wertsch and Roediger 2008). Wertsch and Roediger (2008) explain that history strives to provide a supposedly accurate and neutral account of the past, while collective memory is entangled with the collective identity and shared representations, interpretations, and recollections of a group. For Māori, remembering in wānanga generates oral history and collective memory concurrently.

In wānanga, collective memory emerges through dynamic and active community exchanges. Unlike Olick’s (1999) view of ‘collected memory’ as a collection of individual memories and ‘collective memory’ as a phenomenon that exists outside of individuals, Māori societies choose custodians and specialists of iwi history to remember on behalf of the community (Mahuika 2019b). What iwi historians remember is significant to the collective memory of the tribe as a whole. Mahuika (2019b) writes the following:

> Although most [Western] oral historians focus on the individual and collective memory binary in memory theory, Ngāti Porou oral history initially considers the indigenous and colonial distinctions in the tribe’s collective memory before personal nuances. Thus, what is forgotten or remembered, and what is considered history or tradition, are highly political acts, and viewed as inextricably linked and often interchangeable. (p. 148)

In view of the collectivist nature of Indigenous communities, individuals can engage in remembering practices and processes in wānanga that reflect the collective memory of entire communities. However, in line with Olick’s thinking, a more rigorous collectivist approach could involve numerous tribal members freely remembering tribal histories and narratives in wānanga, without outside prompts (Kukutai et al. 2020).

In the Boulcott Memorial Research Project, kaipūrākau elected to share their perspectives through three kinds of wānanga: field trips to sites of significance (two iwi) or seated at a workplace or home environment (three iwi). Regarding the latter, Te Atiawa wished only to wānanga amongst whānau, so a tribal member joined the research team for this purpose. It was explicitly stated to iwi from the outset that the research sought their view of the battle of Boulcott’s Farm. Once the wānanga were underway, I rarely prompted or directed discussion towards the battle, and it transpired that four of the five kaipūrākau groups barely or minimally mentioned the event. When it was discussed, Boulcott’s Farm was positioned adjacent to more pressing matters in tribal memory and contemporary concerns. In line with insights about Māori oral history and collective memory, iwi remembered the battle at Boulcott’s Farm in ways that advance tribal self-determination in present times.

The following three sections convey three dimensions of Indigenous collective remembering in wānanga from iwi Māori perspectives. The first two sections, relational remembering and leading with contemporary concerns and political interests, have been observed in Indigenous history and sociology research studies. The third section, remembering outside time, draws largely from Indigenous philosophy. Although these three aspects are intertwined and practiced together in wānanga, they are separated in this paper to illustrate their function and for the purpose of distinguishing Indigenous collective remembering from the Western approaches outlined previously in this paper.
5. Relational Remembering

Whakapapa is an epistemology and relational framework that influences and shapes Māori communities and lifeworlds (Kukutai 2021). Māori sociologist Tahu Kukutai (2021) writes that whakapapa encompasses “long and rich oral traditions of retaining and transmitting genealogical knowledge, situating human relationships, both living and past, in a broader constellation of connections with lands, water, celestial bodies, and nonhuman species.” (p. 3) For Māori, the world is ordered and understood by whakapapa.

As a genealogical approach, whakapapa informs the roles and identities of Māori communities (Mahuika 2019a). Tribal identities are understood and reaffirmed through whakapapa connections between forebears and living descendants to ground Māori with a great sense of being (Te Rito 2007). Intergenerational relationships are shaped and formulated in ways that sustain the mana (authority or power) of iwi or hapū (tribal sub-groups) and their tūpuna (ancestors) (Tau 1999). Therefore, Māori history and collective memory can be interpreted and analysed through whakapapa, in accordance with upholding the mana and collective identity of a community (Mahuika 2019b; Ware et al. 2018).

Unlike Western collective remembering, which views the past in an episodic and limited manner, whakapapa strives for relationships and connections between multiple entities. Two levels of relational remembering were observed: First, through the environment in which the wānanga were held, to demonstrate how oral history, tradition, and genealogy merge through practice (Mahuika 2019b). Second, through the volume of narrative remembrance, which highlights the limitations of the standard written account noted in a previous section. These points will be considered in the following description of my wānanga with Ngāti Toa Rangatira and then Te Ātiawa:

I met two Ngāti Toa Rangatira kaipūrākau in one of the tribe’s headquarters. During introductions and before the more formal part of the wānanga, one of the two acknowledged my own genealogical connection to the iwi and pointed out that we were standing in my whare (house) too. Once formal remembering was underway, the two kaipūrākau approached the narrative as a tag team: one provided narrative pivots from one significant event to the next, while the other imparted depth and detail to the framework. I sat in silence and listened for nearly two hours while they relayed a continuous chain of collective memory. A younger tribal member—the namesake of a paramount chief—also sat nearby listening, a reminder that a purpose of collective remembering is also the transmission of tribal knowledge to ensure cultural survival.

The extensive narrative relayed by kaipūrākau in response to the research focus demonstrated that the battle of Boulcott’s Farm could not be understood without being connected to a broader set of relations. A Ngāpuhi taua (war party) travelled to Kapiti in late 1819, which ultimately led to northern Taranaki tribes and Ngāti Toa Rangatira migrating southwards and dispersing across the southwest coast of Wellington and across to Akatarawa and the Wairarapa; “there you have our first exposure to that piece of land over there, in Awa Kairangi.” Ngāti Toa returned to Kāwhia in 1820 and sought out allies (other iwi, hapū, and whānau) to join them on their migration back down south. Led by Te Rauparaha and Te Rangihaeata, the Ngāti Toa group, who planned to permanently settle in Kapiti, encountered resistance from other rangatira (tribal chiefs) and iwi. While kaipūrākau recounted several battles, there was an explicit focus on the Battle of Waiorua that took place in 1824:

The Battle of Waiorua would have given us pure dominance over the rohe. Right down here to Porirua across the Cook Straight, the Wairau, and then over to Whakatū. Even down further to the edges of the awa and back up the coast. So that’s a huge piece of land and it was known by our people. We still sing about it, waiata with those things in mind. At that period in time, Ngāti Toa had taken and driven that stake of prominence in the area, and in the rohe across the Cook Strait.
Like Ngāti Toa Rangatira, Te Atiawa relayed a view of tribal settlement that upheld their authority in the region. They similarly referenced the northern migration from Taranaki, intertribal conflict, and settler pressures in Te Whanganui-a-Tara. Yet, Te Atiawa kaipūrākau attributed their leadership to “that longer story of Ngāti Mutunga leaving to go to Wharekauri or Rékohu” alongside wars in Kāpiti. Despite all iwi emphasising different aspects of historical settlement in the area, there was much agreement about the tūpuna they shared and historical and relationship details, as over time iwi had fought for and against each other and “share the same whakapapa.” One Te Atiawa iwi member said the following:

Often [Boulcott Farm] is looked at in isolation when actually it just can’t be. It’s got to be seen in the context of what was happening around the region, and in particular, in Wellington in the Hutt Valley.

During initial discussions, Te Atiawa asked to conduct their wānanga with a Te Atiawa researcher instead of the research team. Regarding the battle at Boulcott’s Farm, Te Atiawa were distinguished from the other four iwi by the seemingly collaborative role they assumed with Crown representatives and the British militia. However, during wānanga, kaipūrākau maintained that their alliance with the Crown in 1846 was to assert their leadership over other iwi because they were considered a greater threat to tribal authority in the region at that time. In many standard written historical accounts of fighting and battles, Māori who fought with the British militia are known as kūpapa (traitors), and this view overshadows tribal reasons for the alliance (Kukutai et al. 2020). Te Atiawa may have wanted additional whānau representation and support in the research process to ensure that their collective memory of the battle was relayed with integrity, particularly because of the commonly held stigma that had been created around kūpapa.

In wānanga, many factors contribute to relational remembering, and only some have been expressed here. I observed that it was important for kaipūrākau to associate the battle of Boulcott’s Farm with multiple events and relationships; to distinguish a whakapapa that connects the conflict to questions of mana motuhake and tino rangatiratanga within Te Awa Kairangi and Te Whanganui-a-Tara more broadly.

6. Leading with Contemporary Concerns and Political Interests

As noted in the previous section, relational remembering was attributed to whakapapa and negotiated in ways that asserted tribal autonomy in Te Whanganui-a-Tara. These stories of belonging, surviving, and thriving in the region were also observed to coalesce around contemporary concerns and political interests as iwi engaged in the remembrance (or lack thereof) of Boulcott’s Farm.

Storytelling is a popular oral tradition that has received widespread attention among Indigenous scholars examining how Indigenous communities assert tribal knowledge, practices, and worldviews (Mahuika 2019b). Themes of resistance, family, land, and work were prevalent in tribal accounts that aimed to counter state attempts at minimising a legacy of Indigenous genocide (Corntassel 2009; MacDonald 2021). The process of storytelling, of sharing Indigenous knowledge to strengthen ties to communities and traditions, also supported Indigenous communities to recover and heal from the effects of colonisation (Archibald 2008; Iseke 2013; Thomas 2005). Implicit in storytelling practice is collective remembering.

A Ngāti Tipa oral history research project found that kaumātua (elders) articulated their lives through survivance narratives, such as the transfer of tūpuna names, whānau practices, and connections to land and waterways (Kukutai et al. 2020). Kukutai et al. (2020) observed that numerous tribal members engaged in remembering “not simply as individuals, but as part of a collective intergenerational chorus of inherited histories.” (Kukutai et al. 2020, p. 316) Negotiated through whakapapa, survivance narratives place Indigenous experiences of colonialism and cultural practices at the centre of stories that express “ongoing mana and autonomy and of familial and tribal identities that assert ‘we’ survived and are still here.” (p. 317)
Survivance narratives were similarly at the forefront of collective remembering for two iwi who elected to wānanga at sites of tribal significance. Ngāti Hāua invited me to attend a field trip that had been organised in support of their Tiriti o Waitangi settlement negotiations. The Crown had acknowledged that they were wrong to execute two rangatira (tribal leaders) not long after the battle of Boulcott’s Farm had taken place, and Ngāti Hāua were seeking further acknowledgement for other historical grievances and legal status as occupants in Te Awa Kairangi. One stop on the field trip was beside the Te Awa Kairanga River and Boulcott Farm, down from a current substation, where a Ngāti Tama stronghold, Maraenuku Pā, once lay. Motutawa Pā, the home of Ngāti Rangatahi, was once close by. The kaipūrākau swept their arm across the surrounding area and spoke about how the people of Ngāti Hāua had tended 300 acres of rich, fertile mara (gardens) alongside their Ngāti Rangatahi and Ngāti Tama relations at that spot. They explained that the Crown “can’t put us in a box” because in the Boulcott area, Ngāti Hāua whakapapa to the rangatira of Ngāti Tama, Ngāti Rangatahi, and Ngāti Hāua.

The field trip with Ngāti Tama was in Taranaki, four hours north of Te Whanganui-a-Tara, and was similarly organised for a purpose other than the Boulcott research. The kaipūrākau are descended from the paramount chief, Te Kaeaea (also known as Taringakuri), who is given prominence in the prelude to the Battle of Boulcott’s Farm. The field trip was an opportunity for all kaipūrākau to connect in person and learn more about the life and times of Te Kaeaea while visiting Ngāti Tama sites of significance. Each stop sparked broader discussions about local history and Te Kaeaea’s expeditions, battles, actual age, various names, pā sites, and other details.

For Ngāti Hāua and Ngāti Tama, the battle of Boulcott’s Farm was connected to bigger stories about iwi legitimacy and tūpuna, emphasising survivance narratives that upheld their mana and collective identity. Leading with contemporary concerns and political interests and through a network of relations, or whakapapa, are Indigenous collective remembering processes that contrast sharply with Western events-focused practices, where memory languishes on historical colonial violence (such as the battle of Boulcott’s Farm) or fails to remember these events at all. Another distinguishing feature is the idea of time and its effect on fixing and regulating patterns of relations in juxtaposition to each other.

### 7. Remembering Outside Time

A strong corpus of scholarship views Indigenous time and temporalities as cyclical, synchronic, intergenerational, and distinct from linear Western, colonial temporalities that have restructured how we think about history, time, space, and place (Awasis 2020; Bergman 2006; Country et al. 2016; Country et al. 2020; Huebener 2015; Killback 2013; King et al. 2023; Kearney 2012; Kidman et al. 2021; Perkins 1998; Pinxten 1995; Reid et al. 2020). In Aotearoa New Zealand, Burgess and Moko-Painting (2020) employ onamata and anamata to describe the present as “that fleeting moment where the past and the future meet. By meeting, the past and future interact. At this point of interaction, whakapapa is laid down” (p. 218). The ability to ‘see’ the past (onamata) and future (anamata) in line with the present moment is a crucial part of collective memory-making for Indigenous people in colonial settler states, which are not just backwards-looking but also forward-looking and mokopuna-focused (Funaki-Coles 2023).

A related but somewhat different metaphysics posits that Indigenous people operate outside of time. When discussing the livelihoods of the Indigenous Sámi from northern Europe, Bergman (2006) argues that context and living memory function as a counterpoint to time. Noting that the Sámi lack relics and mnemonic devices to understand the past and that the dead exist contemporaneously with the living, Bergman (2006) concludes that “history is a contemporary companion, always present.” (p. 155) A sense of operating outside temporal boundaries is also considered by Mark Rifkin (2017), who, drawing from Henri Bergson, concludes that the Osage people from the Midwestern United States experience memory and relations with each other in ‘duration’. Osage duration is described as “less a specific amount of time residing on this particular ‘soil’ than a quality of inhabitance.
and relation that gives implicit historical density to contemporary perceptions.” (p. 112) The present moment is experienced as “a felt presence of Osage histories and connections to place.” (p. 112, emphasis added)

Associating memory with a sense of duration and density resonates with the Māori concept of wā. While wā can be discussed in relation to space–time to denote a realm of connection between the past, present, and future (Kidman et al. 2021; King et al. 2023), Māori philosopher Carl Mika advances a counter view that expresses wā as a state of excess or fullness that “presences the repletion of the All.” (2021, para. 12) To illustrate, Mika (2023) describes the experience where one thing is replete with all things in the following example:

Our encounter with individual objects would have been different; we might have encountered a mountain as if it were much fuller than how it appeared-again, thoroughly implicated by all other things. The thing before me would have possessed an excess, would have had a substance to it that went beyond my understanding. (28:00)

Wā was an implicit dimension of collective remembering in wānanga as kaipūrākau sought to imbue the battle of Boulcott’s Farm with a sense of being connected to and part of all other things. Certainly, whakapapa was how these relational connections were forged, yet remembering through immediate political concerns ensured that the battle would be pulled into the present moment. In the context of wānanga, conventional notions of temporality are suspended for a duration that induces “the absolute intensification of what is already intense” (Mika 2023, 31:30). Therefore, it was not possible for kaipūrākau to remember the battle in isolation because it is simultaneously in relation to and part of the human, nonhuman, and spiritual realms. Here is my description of how remembering outside time was evident in wānanga with Ngāti Rangatahi:

I arrived at the workplace and was given several documents that were part of an active Waitangi Tribunal Treaty claims inquiry (Porirua ki Manawatu, Wai-2200). The kaipūrākau began with their whakapapa from Hoturoa in the early 1300s, then discussed great female and male chiefs associated with Ngāti Rangatahi, tribal connections and differences with other iwi involved in the project, marriages and children, significant events that preceded and followed the battle of Boulcott’s Farm (for example, the Wairau Affray and Battle Hill), differences between Māori and Pākehā histories, Māori tikanga, the role of wāhine (women) in Māori society, Māori perspectives of settlers in the 1800s, the death of one of the last surviving chieftainesses of Ngāti Rangatahi in 1939, and issues connected to upcoming Waitangi Tribunal claims. Several times, the kaipūrākau attributed remembrances to his grandmother, who referred to him and their tūpuna as the same people in her stories.

The wānanga was approximately one hour, and the kaipūrākau relayed one long, unbroken, and uninterrupted narrative while I sat and listened. From my perspective, there was an intense immediacy to that moment, where time indeed felt suspended. The battle of Boulcott’s Farm was still present in my mind but now also connected to an abundance of things (Mika 2021, 2023). A feeling of excess and density occupied the space, which revealed the experience to be more than just a sharing of information. This sense of fullness in one wānanga was carried to the next, so that once meetings with all five iwi had ended, the boulder on the corner of Military Road and High Street would never again be a flat, knowable, and underwhelming memorial that blends into the side of the road, but an object heavy with histories, politics, conflict, and resistance (MacDonald and Kidman 2022).

8. Honouring the Thickening of the All: An Anti-Colonial Ethic for Reshaping Public Memory

The Hutt City Council provided a relatively straightforward brief for writing the research report, which was to collate the research “into a comprehensive narrative” and provide a “more accurate record of the site, events and stakeholders represented by the Boulcott Memorial”. However, the open nature of this task, with research involving multiple stakeholders and competing views, is challenging and politically fraught. On the
one hand, it can be easy to cause offence if some events and perspectives are privileged over others to determine some sort of ‘truth’. On the other hand, it can be an opportunity to offer something different from the Western-derived status quo.

Matamua et al. (2023) posit that wānanga can occur within individual consciousness as a deep state of inner contemplation. In research, this state is channelled to create and guide knowledge and understanding “about and investment in the phenomena under research and to challenge established thinking about everyday reality.” (p. 90) To counter Western expressions of memory and remembering, I wanted to write the report in line with the precepts of Indigenous collective remembering identified in this paper, which, in turn, would highlight the shortfalls of the current monument. To do so, I engaged an anti-colonial ethic for reshaping public memory that honours the “thickening of the All.” (Mika 2023, 34:12)

Central to honouring the thickening of the All is a whakaaro method of responsive thinking in which the researcher remains “open to the influence of things in the world whilst recognizing that any resulting thought is owed to those things.” (Mika and Southey 2018, p. 797) In accordance with whakaaro, written transcriptions of the narratives generated in wānanga with kaipūrākau were organised into topics and then themes. These themes in the section of the Boulcott Memorial Research that collated kaipūrākau feedback are the following: locating the battle of Boulcott’s Farm within a longer narrative of settlement; relationships between iwi groups; and Māori social and cultural perspectives of the battle at Boulcott’s Farm (MacDonald et al. 2023). Under each theme, I summarised some of the feedback, which was interspersed with verbatim comments from kaipūrākau.

The whakaaro process that I engaged in when generating themes and writing the report was influenced by many items, seen and unseen. On reflection, I can see how my scholarly background and understanding of differences between colonial and Indigenous metaphysics, history, and memory guided my analysis. Moreover, I had been deeply affected by the visceral and embodied experience of collective remembering in wānanga (Mahuika and Mahuika 2020; Matamua et al. 2023), whether out in the field at sites bursting with Māori history and tradition, in homes and workplaces rich in the craft of Māori storytelling, or through digital recordings of unfiltered remembrance amongst Te Ātiawa kaipūrākau. As the research progressed, the experience of being pulled into multiple accounts that associated the battle of Boulcott’s Farm with contemporary issues, iwi assertions of autonomy, self-determination, and independence, while connecting the battle to a multiplicity of things, became increasingly “enduring” and “burdensome” (Mika 2021, para. 12). Consequently, the thought that I would have to edit iwi mātauranga (knowledge) to only include information that resonated with standard written accounts of the battle never entered my mind.

Yet, this was not a completely free-flowing research process for evenly relaying iwi perspectives and histories. I was beholden to producing a report that would support the Hutt City Council in deciding whether and how they might update the memorial, so some narrative restructuring was required. In adopting an anti-colonial ethic, I sought to affirm plural iwi perspectives to unsettle and contest contemporary local histories and knowledge in the public sphere (Hunt 2016), with a longer view of working towards a future where Indigenous-centered interpretation becomes a standard practice in historical narratives and public engagement. (Arnold and Pescaia 2021)

I write this paper just as the second phase of the Boulcott Memorial Research Project is about to begin. The majority consensus amongst the five iwi and the Boulcott descendants was that the memorial should remain in its current form with the addition of pūrākau (narratives) that acknowledge other perspectives. This approach aligns with the idea of a counter-monument, where objects and structures are intentionally raised next to each other to question and challenge the values of the pre-existing monument (Scates and Yu 2022). It does seem somewhat ironic to extol the virtues of oral traditions in the same breath as celebrating a process for updating the memorial, an artefact of Western remembering. Indeed, an anti-colonial, decolonised or indigenised commemorative landscape demands
more than persisting with colonial mnemonic devices (Moulton 2021; Perera and Puglese 2023). Yet, counter-colonial commemorative landscapes that emerge from wānanga or other Indigenous oral traditions are a necessary step towards something more radical because altered counter-memorials, -statues, and -monuments remind us that much more work is needed to deconstruct the wide-ranging ways in which a genealogy of Western ideas and practices saturates our daily lives and to open spaces for other ways of being.

9. Conclusions

In the Boulcott Memorial Research Project, wānanga with kaipūrākau, many of whom are regarded within their respective tribes as repositories of iwi collective memory, revealed that there are fundamental metaphysical and epistemological differences between Western and Indigenous collective remembering in colonial settler societies. I have argued that it is important to understand these differences for working towards anti-colonial commemorative landscapes that aim to shift public memory of local and national history towards previously silenced Indigenous perspectives in ways that resonate meaningfully with Indigenous peoples’ lifeworlds.

Public memory is largely determined by Western collective remembering processes and practices that are time-oriented and event-focused. This approach cultivates distance between past and present acts of colonial violence inflicted on Indigenous communities on unceded Indigenous territories. Conversely, the dynamic nature of wānanga with kaipūrākau revealed that the battle of Boulcott’s Farm is not remembered in isolation from other entities and sinks into broader tribal narratives that are bound by whakapapa and mediated through contemporary concerns and political interests. While recording tribal memories and histories through digital formats may be a positive innovation for retaining a community’s collective memory (Kearney 2012), there is still a sense of ‘fixing’ memory to a place and time in the vein of Western practice. For Indigenous communities, oral traditions and “the very act of constructing, remembering, and transmitting narratives continues to be a reassertion of autonomy.” (Cruikshank 1990, p. 418)

Healthier communities can emerge from societies that pay heed to Indigenous collective remembering practices. For as long as the battle of Boulcott’s Farm may be remembered through the memorial boulder, I am sure that the conflict will endure in the collective memories of Te Ātiawa, Ngāti Tama, Ngāti Rangatahi, Ngāti Haua, and Ngāti Toa Rangatira far longer. The battle may not take centre stage, but it will not disappear. Historical ‘events’ grow and fold into ever-present stories of Indigenous oppression, struggle, and resistance, couched within webs of complex and meaningful relationships; they become more than what they were, making the everyday places and spaces we move through both heavier and richer for the experience.

Funding: This research was funded by the Hutt City Council.

Institutional Review Board Statement: This study was conducted in accordance with Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee #0000030601 on 20 October 2022.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from the participants involved in the study to publish this paper.

Data Availability Statement: Data from the Boulcott Memorial Research Project Report are openly available at https://openaccess.wgtn.ac.nz/articles/report/Boulcott_Memorial_Project_Report/24654036/1 accessed on 22 April 2024. The datasets on which the report is based are not readily available because the data are part of an ongoing study.

Acknowledgments: I would like to acknowledge the Boulcott Memorial Research Project team members and kaipūrākau who so generously shared their mātauranga.

Conflicts of Interest: The funders played some role in the design of this study but no role in the collection, analysis, or interpretation of data or in the writing of the manuscript.
Appendix A

The memorial is made up of three marble plaques with etched inscriptions. One is set into a central stone mounted on a stepped concrete plinth. Two are set into a concrete wall behind the central stone.

Inscriptions:

- **Central inscription**
  
  To the glory of God and in Memory of men of the Imperial and Colonial Forces who fell in the Hutt Valley during the Maori War–1846.

- **Left inscription**
  
  This stone marks the site of Boulcott’s farm stockade, the most advanced post of the regular troops in 1846. Here 200 natives on the 16th May under Rangihaua’s orders and led by Te Karamu of the Ngati-Haua-Te-Rangi Upper Wanganui were repulsed by a garrison of 50 men of the 58th Regiment. The bodies of six imperial men who fell, rest nearby.

- **Right inscription**
  

Notes

1. This passage of writing was published before my involvement in the Boulcott Memorial Research Project. At that time, I was unaware of the extent to which some iwi perspectives are marginalised in popular accounts of the battle of Boulcott’s Farm.

2. The project was called **He Taonga te Wareware: Remembering and Forgetting Difficult Histories in Aotearoa New Zealand**. See https://www.difficulthistories.nz/ accessed on 1 May 2024.

3. In the context of the Boulcott Memorial Research Project, kāpūrākau is the term adopted to refer to those tribal representatives who offered to share their perspective of the battle of Boulcott’s Farm.

4. Black Lives Matter is a significant social movement that began in 2013 in response to the racist violence and deaths of young Black men by police in the USA.

5. Kukutai et al. (2020) write “The term kūpapa was initially used in the 1860s to describe neutrality, but later evolved to take on the meaning of pro-Crown supporter, and sometimes the more disparaging label of ‘traitor’ (Soutar 2001). Soutar (2001) argues that the way in which kūpapa has been used to describe Māori participation in the 1860s wars is ‘seriously flawed and needs to be revised’ p. 38.” (p. 311).

6. Te Tiriti o Waitangi | The Treaty of Waitangi claims and settlement process investigates Crown breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Te Tiriti o Waitangi was signed between Māori and the British Crown in 1840, and promised Māori could continue to own their lands, forests and fisheries for as long as they wished. The claims and settlement process also identifies those affected by treaty breaches and negotiates a deal of settlement involving compensation. See also **Mūtu (2018)**.

7. See note 5.


References


Ware, Felicity, Mary Breheny, and Margaret Forster. 2018. Kaupapa Kōrero: A Māori Cultural Approach to Narrative Inquiry. AlterNative 14: 45–53. [CrossRef]


Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.