



## **14: peace**

July 2011

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**Postcolonial Peace**

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## Postcolonial Peace

*In modern philosophical thought and European political practice and imaginary, the colony represents the site where sovereignty consists fundamentally in the exercise of a power outside the law (ab legibus solutus) and where 'peace' is more likely to take on the face of a 'war without end.'*

Achille Mbembe "Necropolitics" 2003.<sup>1</sup>

For those familiar with Māori Studies, Ranginui Walker's *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End* is one of those seminal texts that academics in the field return to time and time again.<sup>2</sup> Its title reverberates with Achille Mbembe's construction of colonial peace as a 'war without end.' Often peace and war are states that humans find themselves 'in,' and are seldom thought of as being tied to identity. In this article, however, we argue that postcolonial *occupation*, which may be framed as 'postcolonial peace,' underpins postcolonial identity construction. Here we theorise postcolonial peace as that "state inscribed in an 'economy of violence'" where exclusion forms the identity construction of both indigenous and non-indigenous alike.<sup>3</sup> In this article we examine the Derridian notion of an 'economy of violence' to help to understand the current violence based on exclusion and demarcation that is occurring in the interstitial space of postcolonial identity politics.

Coming from the field of Māori Studies or more loosely Indigenous Studies, this article finds itself in the awkward position of proffering poststructuralism as a general theoretical position to help Māori and indigenous people think about cultural formations.<sup>4</sup> The alignment of de- or anti-colonial thinkers with poststructuralism is not surprising given the scepticism of poststructuralists regarding the Enlightenment view that reason provides the foundation for deciding between truth and falsehood and, consequently, that through reason the world is intrinsically knowable. Poststructuralism suggests that such a premise is inherently 'cultural' and dwells instead on dissimilarity, difference and unpredictability. The allure of poststructuralism to indigenous theorists is its intrinsic acceptance of alternative epistemologies and difference, and its ridicule of the Enlightenment's universalism. And here, as a bridge, we think of Māori tribal history in relation to Lyotard's *petit récit*, in that Māori tribal history never pretended to assert universal truth, merely its own.<sup>5</sup> This is not to say, however, that poststructuralist thought would accept the dogma of postcolonial indigenous cultural formations. A productive tension remains.

## PEACE IN THE COLONIES

Prior to examining the concept of postcolonial peace, it is important to locate the notion of 'peace' in the colonies — for peace becomes a conflicted site of meaning within the state of violent impasse that occurs when more than one culture attempts to call one place 'home.' Mbembe defines colonial *occupation* as "a matter of seizing, delimiting, and asserting control over a physical geographical area — of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations ... [and] the manufacturing of a large reservoir of cultural imaginaries."<sup>6</sup> For many reasons, Michel Foucault's translation of power in Europe as a genealogical transformation of the sovereign right to kill holds little water in the colonies. As Mbembe points out, the sovereign right to kill was actualised in distinct ways in the colonies where war and thus peace had a different etiology. That is, war in the colonies was less governed by the rules associated with managing 'humans' and, as a consequence, was not considered war at all. Mbembe explains:

colonies are similar to the frontiers. They are inhabited by 'savages.' The colonies are not organized in a state form and have not created a human world. Their armies do not form a distinct entity, and their wars are not wars between regular armies. They do not imply the mobilization of sovereign subjects (citizens) who respect each other as enemies. They do not establish a distinction between combatants and noncombatants, or again between an 'enemy' and a 'criminal.' It is thus impossible to conclude peace with them.<sup>7</sup>

For Mbembe, "[p]eace is not necessarily the natural outcome of a colonial war ... All manifestations of war and hostility that had been marginalized by a European legal imaginary find a place to re-emerge in the colonies."<sup>8</sup> Simply put, as war in the colonies was not between civilised Europeans, the normal 'fictions' that wars in Europe typically produced collapsed and, thus, so too did "the fiction that war functions as a rule-governed contest, as opposed to pure slaughter without risk or instrumental justification."<sup>9</sup> The ashes of colonisation held no celebratory exile of maniacal regimes.

The lack of what was considered to be a legitimate war in the colonies and the arbitrary fluidity in the movement from colony to country also meant that 'peace' was not a concept that developed 'post' colonially. If we may, however, congeal such an unnatural term as 'postcolonial peace,' for indigenous communities such a state was in reality a matter of a paradigmatic shift from a temporary to eternal physical and epistemological *occupation*. The term 'postcolonial' indicates the shifting of states and also of identity, with the indigenous population perceived to have moved from a state of resistance to acceptance; resulting in a state of peace between the coloniser and the colonised. The term 'occupation' is significant here, for whilst it is endemically used for those 'real' wars in Europe where, for instance, 'Germany occupied France' was an intelligible concept to the discourses of war, what is less intelligible is the continued *occupation* of indigenous lands in postcolonial settler societies, a permanent state of exception, where the violent cultural synthesis associated with the assimilation of the indigenous populace into the general population and, subsequently, the biopolitical normalisation of the population at large reflected the process of European countries in 'peacetime.'<sup>10</sup> That is, while the postcolonial context may have lacked those physical trappings of war easily coded as 'war,' for indigenous peoples, colonial biopolitical management effected physical, spiritual and cultural devastation. In turn, such destruction has often led to a simile with war (for example: post-traumatic disorder). For indigenous populations then, postcolonial peace was violent cultural synthesis, which quickly transformed epistemic knowledge into cultural trinkets.

Hence the importance of Foucault's notion of biopolitical management re-emerges in the post-colony, as peace is coded to mean the normalisation of both non-indigenous and indigenous populations. The 'violence' of postcolonial peace reflects what Foucault refers to as 'biopower,' that is:

a power whose task ... to take charge of life needs continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms ... such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise and hierarchize, rather than display itself in its murderous splendour ... [the] juridical institution is increasingly incorporated into a continuum of apparatuses whose functions are for the most part regulatory.<sup>11</sup>

The relevance of Foucault's theorisation to physical and metaphysical colonisation is due to his explanation of power via 'sovereignty' as a genealogical hangover from the days of kings. Sovereignty refers to the power to 'give life' and conversely to 'let die' or what Mbembe describes as 'necropolitics.' The aftermath that followed colonial war/invasion necessitated the biopolitical management of life in order for the state to be seen to be acting in the best interests of the entire population, exercising power in a productive manner, with the result of its actions being the corporeal and symbolic death of its citizens/subjectivities and, in particular, the death of indigenous life as they knew it. For Foucault then, power was manifested as a generalised war most evident in times of peace:

[I]sn't power simply a form of warlike domination? Shouldn't one therefore conceive all problems of power in terms of relations of war? Isn't power a sort of generalized war which assumes at particular moments the forms of peace and the State? Peace would then be a form of war, and the state a means of waging it.<sup>12</sup>

Biopolitical management of postcolonial populations (as in Europe where Foucault situated his analyses) aimed to normalise. The synthesis of colonial culture, that is, the creation of a singular 'we' mentality (for example, the creation of 'kiwi' culture in New Zealand) inherently excluded indigenous epistemic knowledge, whilst European culture translated to the colonies was formally given life through its inscription into state law and its continued maintenance.

Here then, the genealogical statement that postcolonial peace in actuality refers to a 'war without end' is grounded on the violent biopolitical normalisation of culture through the state, which produced the everyday postcolonial conditions by which the universal postcolonial citizen abides.

## POSTCOLONIAL PEACE AND AN ECONOMY OF VIOLENCE

According to Hegel, a human being becomes a subject in the struggle through which he or she confronts death. Hegel's 'power of negation' helps explain the omnipresent duality of consciousness underpinning such notions as 'struggle without end', by which colonised indigenous populations come to define themselves through resistance to the colonisers. Here the colonised and the coloniser, as Hegel puts it, "prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle."<sup>13</sup> To become a subject presupposes upholding the work of death.<sup>14</sup> In the 'Preface' to Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Jean-Paul Sartre argues that death is the centre of humanity and how one relates to death is relative. The coloniser, for example, finds his or her humanity "this side of death and despair; [the colonised] finds it beyond torture and death."<sup>15</sup> Mamdani states that, for Fanon, proof of the native's humanity consists not in the willingness to kill settlers, but in the willingness to risk his or her life.<sup>16</sup> This notion of a death drive is further discussed by Jacques Derrida in terms of willingness to risk life for life: "life has absolute value only if it is worth more than life."<sup>17</sup>

Postcolonial indigenous subjectivity, then, emerges from its confrontation with the death associated with colonisation. Jean Paul Sartre argues that to witness the 'irrepressible' violence committed by subjugated populations is actually to witness humans reconstructing themselves. It is witnessing an attempt to achieve subjectivity: "The colonized – becoming a child of violence – draws from violence his humanity."<sup>18</sup> Sartre argues that reconstructed humans know that their life begins with death. It is therefore only the threat of death that provides the possibility to become human. Unlike the coloniser, who becomes human through exercising sovereignty (the power to make live

and to let die), the colonised become human (according to Sartre's interpretation of Fanon) through their "ever-present desire to kill" the coloniser.<sup>19</sup> By way of introduction to an 'economy of violence,' Sartre and Fanon's recourse to violence as the precursor to subjectivity is a salient notion to help unpack the idea of 'postcolonial peace.'

To understand this form of 'postcolonial peace' within *occupied* colonial states, Derrida's questioning of the fundamental metaphysics by which meaning has been coded is helpful. Derridian deconstructive analysis enables us to examine the conditions of experience, and specifically here, the indigenous experience as authentic. Derrida deconstructs the logic involved in the ascribing of positive values to terms within a dualism or binary that defines an order of dependency. This process reveals pre-conceived dualistic hierarchies and an irreversible logic of dependency that privileges one term before the other, and informs us as to what we must include, the primary, originary term, and what we must exclude, the negative, secondary term that follows it: self-other, pure-impure, simple-complex, peace-violence. For Derrida there is no 'outside to violence'; in making decisions with regards to what is always an unknown future, violence marks the possibility of every relationship between the self and the other, and the self's relation to itself. Derridian deconstruction is a framework through which we can question the assumptions regarding the order of concepts and the existence of an originary good or primary source, to which we strive to return, and to which it is possible to return. In the occupied event of postcolonial peace this framework calls into question the possibility for an alternative path outside of ordering. Nick Mansfield states:

in the autoimmune complex of culture, in which specific cultures emerge only in relation to that which also exceeds them, there is no simple refuge from violence. There is no culture so un-violent that it deserves to be allowed to pursue its own trajectory without being subject to critique, and thus change.<sup>20</sup>

That is, although specific discursive cultures emerge, for instance 'democracy,' 'egalitarianism,' 'humanitarianism,' and 'peace', the loss of alterity due to prescription ultimately means cultures ideologically defined are necessarily violent. On the other hand, as Mansfield goes on to explain, there is nothing universal to human nature "that is itself so pure of violence that it can be trusted as an ultimate resort."<sup>21</sup> Within this economy of violence, the desire to return to pre-colonial peace following de-colonial violence is based on false premises. Derrida complicates the accepted relationship between peace and violence where violence is logically taken to be a corrupted "derivative of a primary peace," as Martin Hägglund explains:

The possibility of violence can thus be accounted for only in terms of a Fall, that is, in terms of a fatal corruption of a pure origin. By deconstructing this figure of thought, Derrida seeks to elucidate why violence is not merely an empirical accident that befalls something that precedes it. Rather, violence stems from an essential impropriety that does not allow anything to be sheltered from death and forgetting. ... All divergences from the positively valued term are thus explained away as symptoms of 'alienation,' and the desirable is conceived as the return to what supposedly has been lost or corrupted.<sup>22</sup>

Hägglund believes the challenge of Derrida's thinking is that he undermines the notion of an ideal justice where the classical concept of emancipation is underpinned by an absolute peace or the return to an original state of non-violence.<sup>23</sup> Derrida argues against the logic of opposition used to propose the simplicity of original peace and the corrupted complexity of war. Furthermore, these oppositional binaries do not translate to the occupied postcolonial state. In the postcolonial state the logic of opposition described as the origin prior to any deterioration or accident cannot be seen as something pure and normal existing prior to the corruption of the coloniser. As Fanon explains, if decolonisation is the 'program' then there is nothing for it but 'absolute violence':

The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it. For if the last shall be first, this will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between the two protagonists ... The native who decides to put the program into practice, and to become its moving force, is ready for violence at all times. From birth it is clear to him that this narrow world, strewn with prohibitions, can only be called in question by absolute violence.<sup>24</sup>

Derrida and Fanon demonstrate that peace is not the absence of violence but is premised on the illusion of an original peace which itself is prefaced on what Derrida refers to as the ethico-theoretical decisions of Western metaphysics. In essence, Derrida argues against the possibility of absolute peace. For many, a world without the possibility of absolute peace is as unimaginable as is the illusion of this possibility; the illusion of the 'ideal origin' (*arkhe* or *telos*) that must be the prevailing goal of humanity. It is thus not merely the impossibility of absolute peace that Derrida takes issue with, it is its desirability: "In a state of being where all violent change is precluded, nothing can ever happen. Absolute peace is thus inseparable from absolute violence."<sup>25</sup> In other words, life itself is sustained by change, and any absolute ideology that enables a universal non-violence "would end the possibility of life in general."<sup>26</sup>

Derrida's thought resonates with the 'struggle without end' of postcolonial peace because it helps us envisage postcolonial 'peace' as not merely the absence of war but the suppression of change, the suppression of indigenous alterity, and the complicity with biopolitical normality that is in reality violent. It starts to become apparent that the violence of the 'struggle without end' pervades indigenous resistance because the 'decolonial' movement is premised on an idealised pre-colonial state that, once *occupied*, became lost or corrupted. Accordingly, the symptoms of colonisation are 'explained away as symptoms of alienation,' while the authentic and traditional indigene has 'supposedly been lost.' The Derridian deconstruction of the logic of identity helps us to explain how the self becomes a site of violence through its attempts to unify and then conserve an imagined authenticity.

## POSTCOLONIAL PEACE AND IDENTITY

The state of postcolonial peace or *occupation* fundamentally impacts on the psyche of indigenous populations. Since the advent of the global revolution against the dominant culture of white-heteropatriarchy in the late 1960s, indigenous people have written extensively on the history of oppression, ostensibly at the expense of theorising their existentiality. That is, indigenous ontology has tended to reify and lament the past at the expense of theorising the present and future. The state of postcolonial peace for indigenous peoples has come to mean an eternal struggle – a fight without end – framed by resistance to the biopolitical management of life by the neo-colonial state. Thus, postcolonial peace has etched upon the indigenous psyche an eternal defiance to an omnipresent coloniser. This pattern can be traced across all occupied postcolonial cultures. As Mohawk scholar and activist Gerald Alfred articulates, "It has been said that being born Indian is being born into politics. I believe this to be true; because being born a Mohawk of Kahnawake, I do not remember a time free from the impact of political conflict."<sup>27</sup>

In this context of the impossibility of an originary peace, one of the central themes that arises is the pointlessness of the notion of 'decolonisation'. The search for classic conceptions of Māori and indigenous cultures continues to drive the majority of studies undertaken by both indigenous and non-indigenous researchers in these fields. As we have shown Derridian analysis suggests that the *telos* of decolonisation and the striving towards an ideal pre-colonial origin is futile and

indeed impossible. Decolonisation and indigenous cultural renaissance, remain however, the two key rationales driving Indigenous Studies, both ideas fundamentally premised on a return to pre-colonial culture. Moreover, such ideals are endemic to indigenous ontology. As already suggested, the endemic violence of biopolitical normalisation in the postcolonial state has established decolonisation as teleological justice. The impossibility of decolonisation itself, however, like Derrida's thought on absolute peace, is not the key problem; it is the desirability of decolonisation and what this ostensibly means in terms of notions of authenticity and tradition that haunt indigenous cultural formations. For instance, what do the processes of authentication of indigenous cultural forms mean for indigenous peoples who have little access or desire to understand themselves as traditionally indigenous through these constructions? What does it mean for a Māori growing up in a geographically dislocated area in terms of *hapū* and *iwitanga*, and without access to *tikanga* and *reo*? Do the identity scales derived by heavy-weight Māori academics such as Sir Mason Durie serve only to violently exclude indigenous peoples from postcolonial constructions of an 'authentic' Māori ontology?<sup>28</sup> That is, to further exclude the most disenfranchised.

The desire for decolonisation has in ontological terms translated to cultural signifiers, such as 'being-Māori,' that are based on an imagined precolonial state. This desire has, to varying degrees, further translated to a kind of 'ethnic formalisation' based on the idealism of pre-colonial culture. That is, in the formation of postcolonial indigenous identities the variety of indigenous subjectivities underwent the processes of necropolitics when they appeared to be a threat to those strategic indigenous identities being conceived. In the occupied state of postcolonial peace multiple subjectivities are permitted as long as they do not violate certain agreed understandings of the colonial state. Again Derrida's conception of violence helps explicate this idea further. Derrida argues that "violence and discrimination are not opposed to justice, but inextricable from its very possibility."<sup>29</sup> Thus violence is inherent in all decision making, regardless of intent. The point here is not the acquiescence to violence, rather that, when any identity is formed, exclusion or violence must occur. Such a notion calls for a profound reconfiguration of postcolonial indigenous identity formation, resistance and in turn what we desire in terms of postcolonial peace. These are the goals of indigenous postcolonial ethics and politics.

One of the most intriguing Derridian concepts for thinking about postcolonial identity formation is the idea of 'hauntology' (*hantologie*), a play on Western metaphysical philosophy's concentration on 'ontology.' As identities form, as conditions for inclusion are met, and as the violence of exclusion prevails, what comes to haunt one's identity are those subjectivities excluded. The ethnic formalisation of indigenous identity is one etched by an economy of violence. The strategic cultural essentialism that occurs at this interstitial space of postcolonial identity formation is necessarily one underpinned by violence, by exclusion of the various indigenous subjectivities that flout understandings of 'tradition' and 'authenticity.' Postcolonial indigenous identity is, therefore, "threatened by what it cannot integrate in itself – haunted by the negated, the neglected, and the unforeseeable."<sup>30</sup>

The essentialised culture that results from the struggle for decolonisation is, hence, not the struggle for postcolonial peace, but at best an ontology premised on what Hägglund refers to as "lesser violence."<sup>31</sup> That is, decolonisation as a *telos* demands the violence of exclusion. According to Robert Niezen a simple logic underpins such 'ethnic formalisation:'

the more human groups are displaced, removed from familiar relationships and strategies of power-accumulation and peacemaking, the more they will attach themselves to leaders, organizations, and social movements that offer stability and self-esteem through the reinventions of their past, often making social belonging more exclusive and sharply defined.<sup>32</sup>

In New Zealand, the burgeoning classical 'pre-colonial' Māori identity came to view itself as 'one culture' in resistance to and in dual consciousness with its other, the Pākehā colonist and oppressor. Thenceforth, when Māori (as a political polity) have been mobilised they have done so in resistance to that other who lies both outside and within their colonial consciousness.<sup>33</sup>

As an example, Ranginui Walker contends that, as a consequence of the 1975 Land March in New Zealand, "Māori people throughout the land were politicised in a unity of purpose to a level unprecedented in modern times, in the endless struggle against colonisation."<sup>34</sup> Walker describes a singular political voice opposed to the colonial other. Today, the omnipresence of 'Māori' as a positive marker of identity has become so conventional, that indigenous people of New Zealand seldom conceptualise its inauthenticity, and the discourses to which it is shackled.

The search and desire for classical indigenous culture was necessitated by cultural insecurity; the unprincipled, immoral, unethical, anarchical cultural void left in colonisation's wake. Unmistakably then, a sense of loss, and a desire for origin was colonisation's etch on the indigenous psyche. Later, postcolonial indigenous identities were made distinct by their constitutional opposition to the annexation and subjugation of their unique lands and cultures. As Clea Te Kawehau Hoskins critically points out in the New Zealand context:

Te Reo and tikanga are understood by Maori as central to any meaningful reclamation and reconstruction of a distinct and *authentic* identity ... they are recognised (especially Te Reo) as a largely unpolluted source of insight and knowledge into the thinking/worldview of our tupuna and therefore to a time and knowledge base understood by the forces of colonialism. [From here] we can retrieve and reconstruct an *authentic* Maori identity/ies and cultural life.<sup>35</sup> (emphasis added)

In other words, the renaissance of classical indigenous culture involved the search for a pre-colonial authentic culture, and the re-construction of pre-colonial indigenous language and culture as 'unpolluted,' as 'pure,' as 'traditional' and, importantly, lacking an alterity that may threaten or challenge an authentic self. The reference to Hoskins may appear obscure, yet in our search of Māori commentators Hoskins' 1997 article remains one of the few pieces of academic writing brave enough to challenge the fabric of Māori Studies, that is, the temporal location of an authentic Māori ontology in the past.

Here the impact of a constitutive finitude leaves its mark. For, when threatened by the very real possibility of destruction, and in the absence of familiar cultural markers, what is left for an indigenous population is only a return to the past. For indigenous populations, ethnic formalisation (or what might be conceived of in a Spivakian sense 'strategic essentialism') has been configured through the notion of 'sovereignty,' which in this context means "rights based on group membership" or "a society of individuals who collectively constitute a de facto sovereign authority."<sup>36</sup> We have argued that this pre-colonised subjectivity is not desirable, and does not operate nor present as an authentic self. As Mamdani explains, for Fanon: "Native violence ... was the violence of yesterday's victims, people who had cast aside their victimhood to become masters of their own lives."<sup>37</sup> It is violence that opens the possibility of a new empowered indigenous identity independent of the past. For indigenous New Zealanders, the catch-cry for rights became 'tino rangatiratanga' (the sovereignty of chiefs), which, ironically, has gained the common nomenclature 'self-determination' and, accordingly, its teleological employment reflects the concept of a Western based concept of 'individual rights' that is also tied to a notion of citizenship.

Within the logic of violence and the biopolitical normalisation of populations (that we have shown to be inherent to a postcolonial location), the increased rights of minority groups within a larger



population are perceived by a majority to trespass on the rights of citizens as a whole. This is because, as Derrida suggests, identity formation is a violent process, which necessitates discrimination. As Hägglund argues, the violence of discrimination happens in two directions:

discrimination has to be regarded as a constitutive condition. Without divisional marks – which is to say: without segregating borders – there would be nothing at all. ... On the one hand, it is necessary to draw boundaries, to demarcate, in order to form any community whatsoever. On the other hand, it is precisely because of these excluding borders that every kind of community is characterized by a more or less palpable instability.<sup>38</sup>

Discrimination is, thus, clearly relevant to what Niezen refers to as “ethnic formalisation.”<sup>39</sup> In New Zealand, such discrimination has led to a number of ‘Māoriness’ scales being published by indigenous scholars, closely related to the earlier anthropological scales produced by James Ritchie and Joan Metge.<sup>40</sup> Hana O’Regan, for instance, outlines the quantification of ‘Māoriness’ as an enabler of social reality: “By accepting that people may possess varying levels or degrees of identity we engage in a process of redefining and revaluing the criteria of cultural identity in order to accommodate the social and cultural reality.”<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Mason Durie suggests:

[t]he concept of a secure identity rests on definite self-identification as Māori together with quantifiable involvement in, and/or knowledge of, whakapapa, marae participation, whānau, whenua tipu (ancestral land), contacts with Māori people, and Māori language.<sup>42</sup>

In relation to these, Durie goes on to list ‘secure,’ ‘positive,’ ‘notional,’ and ‘compromised’ identity profiles as descending categories. Central then to the ethnic formalisation process is a process of demarcation that excludes those indigenous subjectivities that threaten the ‘security’ of an imagined authenticity. For both O’Regan and Durie the formalisation of Māori ethnicity is undoubtedly a strategy to enable indigenous peoples to gain a stronger foothold to say ‘I am Māori.’ The cost of this strategy is of course the death of those indigenous subjectivities that threaten strategic traditionalism. A different form of violence is enacted; one from within, that closes down other ways of being indigenous. The Derridian logic of oppositions that we are employing here leads us to suggest that these kinds of ethnic formalisation of Māori culture as a strategy inevitably led to violence, or the closing down of other ways of being indigenous.<sup>43</sup> The pursuit of decolonisation, that is, the pursuit of ‘indigenous rights’ in the wake of postcolonial peace has meant “defining in particular terms who is the beneficiary of those rights and who is not ... [and] calls for clearly defined subjects attached to specific communities.”<sup>44</sup> Therefore we argue that within the impossibility of postcolonial peace, decolonisation as a stated objective and uniting goal of indigenous populations threatens to exclude and destroy alterity in violation of a constructed ideal pre-colonial self.

## POSTCOLONIAL PEACE AND VULNERABLE WHITENESS

The formation of postcolonial indigenous identity within an economy of violence is of course only one side of the coloniser/colonised binary. It is the *contre-histoire* of colonial dispossession that has become the stock in trade of Indigenous Studies and that (without apology) demarcates and excludes those genealogical beneficiaries of colonial perpetration. As Albert Memmi writes in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*:

the bond between colonizer and colonized is thus destructive and creative. It destroys and re-creates the two partners of colonization into colonizer and colonized. One is disfigured into an oppressor ... the other into an oppressed creature.<sup>45</sup>

Unsurprisingly then, non-indigenous white right backlashes against indigenous claims to rights as themselves violent demarcations have been the more recent hallmark of dominant discourses.

In New Zealand, where the biopolitical management of life in general produces a highly normative and potentially oppressive culture of 'kiwiness,' backlashes against indigenous rights and alterity have manifested in terms of the perceived encroachment upon the common rights of all. This affirms Goldberg's contention that the fight for alterity can be reframed as the violent transgression of the domain of sovereign autonomy:

we have come this century to conceive all human beings as bearing the inalienable – the natural or human – right to choose individually and equally how to lead their own atomic lives without disadvantaging anyone else (and so violating their rights). A right, then, is understood minimally as the conjunction of the freedom to do whatever one chooses and the claim to be protected from the interference by others ... each individual is taken equally as occupying a domain of sovereign autonomy free from trespass or transgression by others.<sup>46</sup>

Such a re-articulation of power is plain to see in the National Party slogans prior to the New Zealand 2008 general election, 'Kiwi not iwi,' which bluntly articulated the growing and misguided paranoia surrounding indigenous rights in New Zealand.

The violence that indigenous identity demarcation represents (for both indigenous and non-indigenous) accommodates a white/right backlash that invokes self-pity by re-conceptualising postcolonial whiteness as under attack. Fuelled by a deep sense of insecurity, an increasing sense of detachment from those dominant subjectivities that instructed power, and a grinding sense of privilege, one form of postcolonial whiteness reasserts its position through 'vulnerability.' In New Zealand at least, feelings of white vulnerability are transferred to the indigenous Other who is constantly constructed as the citizen ingrate, whose violent demands for identity demarcation and non-common, un-egalitarian rights are transgressions against the underlying ethos of what it means to be 'a New Zealander.' Thus, this notion of vulnerability, if conceptualised within a Levinasian ethics, results from the lack of an essential reciprocity from the Other.<sup>47</sup> Within an economy of violence vulnerability can also be conceived as perceived victimhood, as articulated by Mamdani; "ever since the colonial period, violence has been motivated by a mutual fear of victimhood. Every round of perpetrators has justified the use of violence as the only effective guarantee against being victimized yet again."<sup>48</sup>

Here it is pertinent to reflect upon Hägglund's idea of 'lesser violence' within an economy of violence, and what that might mean in the contemporary context. The exclusion (either real or imagined) of non-indigenous New Zealanders from indigenous forms of identity is clearly viewed by some as a violent transgression; perhaps however the will to alterity is a lesser form of violence than the will to include, to normalise, and to assimilate in the postcolonial context. Yet it seems there is a more radical sense of entitlement that exists and which drives a more radical turn to violence, which does not merely want death via biopolitical management, but desires death by stamping out alterity, for an assumed universal common good. This is the violence heralded by George W. Bush's call, "You're either with us or against us in the fight against terror."

Jean Baudrillard pointed out that subsequent to the 9/11 events in America there was a retrogression away from an Enlightenment morality based on autonomy and freedom:

Is it not a paradox that the West uses as a weapon against dissenters the following motto: Either you share our values or...? A democracy asserted with threats and blackmail only sabotages itself. It no longer represents the autonomous decision for freedom, but rather becomes a global imperative. This is, in effect, a perversion of Kant's categorical imperative, which implies freely chosen consent to its command.<sup>49</sup>

The whiteness of modernity was constructed on the lies of benevolence – the ethical impulse, the ethical lie; the white man's burden to civilise the world. In essence, Imperialism could not afford

to be seen to be (entirely) morally crippled. This indeed was the case in later colonies such as New Zealand. The reality of course was far from the discourse. The recent de-shackling of some forms of whiteness from Enlightenment morality, and a resulting move of this construct towards more radical forms of violence via the notion of vulnerability is what we discuss next.

## THE FREEDOM TO BE VIOLENT

Within a postcolonial economy of violence, an insecure and vulnerable whiteness no longer constructs the Other as “a site for dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions and requirements.”<sup>50</sup> The violent demarcation of indigenous identity, indigenous territory, and indigenous self-determination portends a vulnerable whiteness that perceives the Other to be much less banal, much less predictable, and much less exotic. The Other becomes formed as a radical element, a transgression within one’s own national borders, who must be defended against. The freedom of the self to be violent against such transgressions by Otherness is constructed as a derivative of justice via vulnerability.

Any notion that justice somehow protects or indeed hides us from violence is misguided. “The founding of the law is violent, since, at this moment of foundation, all prior law must be suspended and overturned ... the conservation of the law also involves violence ... since a law is a law only if it can be enforced.”<sup>51</sup> In postcolonial peace, where an economy of violence always exists, there is never a choice of nonviolence, rather only a decision of lesser violence over other forms of violence at that very point in time. As Hägglund explains:

even the most horrendous acts are justified in view of what is judged to be the lesser violence. For example, justifications of genocide clearly appeal to an argument for lesser violence, since the extinction of the group in question is claimed to be less violent than the dangers it poses to another group. The disquieting point, however, is that all decisions of justice are implicated in the logic of violence. The desire for lesser violence is never innocent, since it is a desire for violence in one form or another, and there can be no guarantee that it is in the service of perpetrating the better.<sup>52</sup>

In other words, any decision-making cannot foresee what is the best or the worst decision, and in this sense a decision towards a lesser violence is arbitrary at best. However, the underlying principle of lesser violence allows a vulnerable whiteness to be deshackled from Enlightenment discourses of humanitarianism and ultimately from its avowed desire for peace. Mbembe points out, “In such instances, power (and not necessarily state power) continuously refers and appeals to exception, emergency, and a fictionalized notion of the enemy. It also labors to produce that same exception, emergency, and fictionalized enemy.”<sup>53</sup> Or rather, under these conditions ‘peace’ is reframed and redefined as that state of ‘us;’ as that state free of threatening alterity. In this logic, vulnerability becomes a precursor to the liberation of violence against the Other, where violence against the threat of alterity is the lesser of two evils; the extreme evil being that terroristic aberration within one’s own national borders.

It is also important to realise then that, as has always been the case, the decision of what is the lesser form of violence, or the ‘moral’ form of violence, in order to restore ‘peace’ is indeed not one of morality, rather it is marked by privilege, power and control. Mbembe argues that in the production of terror discourses and vulnerable whiteness (and accordingly, the freedom for whiteness to be violent in defence of its autonomy), such recourses to ‘lesser violence’ are veiled by determinations of what is constructed as “authentic expressions of sovereignty and the actions of the enemy.”<sup>54</sup>

In this description of morality and power, we can better appreciate the warnings Foucault provided us with regard to normalising technologies. Foucault suggested that a vast ‘documentary

apparatus' would be the key to power and the transforming landscape of morality: "the power of the state to produce an increasingly totalising web of control is intertwined with, and dependent on its ability to produce an increasing specification of individuality."<sup>55</sup> In postcolonial settler societies at least, 'homeland' security can be translated into the 'war' to secure the normalisation of the social body and thus it is unsurprising that in the current climate Māori alterity has begun to be readily aligned with 'terror' in order to isolate such 'anomalies' in the social body.<sup>56</sup> For instance, clearly the October 15, 2007 'Terror Raids' in New Zealand, which legitimised State sanctioned violence against a predominantly Māori community, were subsequently framed as lesser violence, as an authentic expression of the sovereignty of 'New Zealand people' against the actions of terrorists within its own borders.

## POSTCOLONIAL PEACE AS A PERMANENT STATE OF EXCEPTION

Everyone has the war he [sic] deserves.<sup>57</sup>

Within an economy of violence postcolonial peace has become that formalised state of exception, where varieties of indigenous subjectivities are excluded from strategic definitions of indigeneity and postcolonial whiteness congeals around feelings of insecurity and vulnerability. Both positions construct the violence of alterity as transgressions against common sovereignty and, in so doing, such exceptions enable the freedom to enact a more radical form of violence against Others. This is the state of postcolonial peace, is it not? For the part of indigenous peoples, this state of exception and violence offers food for thought. As this article is written and as Waitangi Day 2011 approaches, a Ngā Puhī group is demanding Pākehā media pay NZ\$1000 to enter onto their marae to cover the 'celebrations,' whilst according to the *New Zealand Herald* at least 'Maori media are allowed in free.' A leader from the same iwi, controversial Matarahurahu hapū chairman David Rankin, condemned such an approach suggesting the protagonists were 'village idiots:'

It is absolutely like South Africa. This is all about separatism. It is about splitting people apart. *Marae* are about bringing people together, not splitting them apart ... This is a radical faction that's raised its ugly head up. When you get a radical faction they become like crazed dogs.<sup>58</sup>

The example is relevant here as it points to the factions within indigenous communities warring over how indigeneity is to progress and be represented. Moreover, it points to the violence of exclusionary tactics, and raises questions for indigenous communities of how to strategically engage with a whiteness that uses such media reports to construct themselves as the victims of reverse-racism. Within an economy of violence then, one must consider the goal of 'decolonising,' of producing a counter-history that incriminates the coloniser. Does the assertion of indigenous self-determination in constant referral to the coloniser merely serve to re-establish the neo-imperial colonial power structures themselves?

This, however, is not a call to the violence of assimilation, to become 'us,' to become 'kiwi,' but rather to suggest that a more strategic way to progress the sovereignty of one's community is to locate identity within a constitutive temporality and in doing so, take responsibility for one's past, present and future. For as Hägglund states, "the temporal can never be in itself, but is always disjoined between being no longer and being not yet."<sup>59</sup> Hägglund's description leaves no room for a static authentic indigenous self that exists only in relation to a static non-indigenous identity. For too long indigenous scholarship has located itself within the coloniser/colonised binary. In doing so, indigenous scholars forego responsibility within the neo-colonial complex, we forget to hold indigenous people accountable for their choices, for the complicity of indigenous identity formations, and for the

necropolitics such complicity enables. In returning to the omnipresent duality of consciousness of human subjectivity, one cannot escape the essential death drive of identity formation, as Haddad explains, "...violence is rooted in the inescapable difference that inhabits anything that can be called a 'self.' Violence thus need not always, or not only, come from others — it is found already in any self's relation to itself."<sup>60</sup> Simply being indigenous or adhering to 'traditional' cultural practices or even resisting the neo-colonial State does not naturalise a sovereign space located beyond the neo-colonial complex. Moreover, while we acknowledge that neo-cultures are an implicit production of colonisation, it is imperative that notions of self-critique and responsibility underpin these new cultural spaces, and demonstrate a will to investigate what is being included and thus excluded under the name of 'indigeneity.'

## IN CONCLUSION

While we wouldn't want to conclude by suggesting that this article makes for happy reading, there is hope. Key to Judith Butler's analysis of 'Western vulnerability' is the suggestion that within an economy of violence vulnerability, instead of being perceived as somehow productive, leads to further violence through a reassertion of privilege:

The quick move to action is a way of foreclosing grief, refusing it, and even as it anaesthetizes one's own pain and sense of loss, it comes, in time, to anaesthetize us to the losses that we inflict upon others. I think that an entirely different politics would emerge if a community could learn to abide with its losses and its vulnerability. It would know better what its ties to other people are. It would know how radically dependent it is on its interrelationship with others.<sup>61</sup>

Butler's words are 'hopeful' in that they seem to call for a Levinasian primordial responsibility to the other, whomever and however they are defined, rather than to a primordial peace. It is possible, if we were to be truthful, that what 'ties us to other people' is not peace, but the way that we politically navigate and define exclusion. Perhaps if this was better understood, instead of the current practice of prefacing all negotiations on the desire for an impossible original peace, or on the violence of cultural synthesis, then alterity may be more acceptable.

- 1 Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture*, 15:1 (2003), 23.
- 2 Ranginui Walker, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End* (Auckland: Penguin, 1990).
- 3 Martin Hägglund, "The Necessity of Discrimination: Disjoining Derrida and Levinas," *diacritics*, 34:1 (2004), 47.
- 4 Editorial Note: The italicisation of Māori words and phrases in *Junctures* is not because Māori is regarded as a foreign language in Aotearoa New Zealand, but because we feel it is particularly important that these words and phrases do not get subsumed by English. We think this reason is especially important for minority languages like Māori, and particularly so for words that are in common use.
- 5 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).
- 6 Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 25-6.
- 7 Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 24.
- 8 Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 25.
- 9 Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 25.
- 10 Giorgio Agamben, *The State of Exception*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005). For further discussion of the 'state of exception' as introduced by Giorgio Agamben see Cameron Bishop's essay in this issue.
- 11 Michel Foucault cited in Paul Rabinow, "Introduction," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 20.
- 12 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 123.
- 13 Georg Hegel, cited in Michael Peters, "Cultural Studies and the Future of 'Culture'," *New Zealand Sociology*, 16:2 (2001), 34.
- 14 Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 14.
- 15 Jean-Paul Sartre, "Preface," in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 24.
- 16 Mahmood Mamdani, "A Brief History of Genocide," *Transition*, 87 (2001), 34.
- 17 Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," trans. Samuel

- Weber, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar (London: Routledge, 2002). See also, Samir Haddad, "A Genealogy of Violence, from Light to the Autoimmune," *diacritics*, 38(1-2) (2008), 129.
- 18 Sartre, "Preface," 24.
  - 19 Sartre, "Preface," 15.
  - 20 Nick Mansfield, "Derrida and the Culture Debate: Autoimmunity, Law and Decision," *Macquarie Law Journal*, 6, Online (2006). <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/MqLJ/2006/7.html>, accessed 10 October 2010.
  - 21 Mansfield, "Derrida and the Culture Debate."
  - 22 Hägglund, "The Necessity of Discrimination," 46.
  - 23 Hägglund, "The Necessity of Discrimination," 41.
  - 24 Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 37.
  - 25 Hägglund, "The Necessity of Discrimination," 49.
  - 26 Hägglund, "The Necessity of Discrimination," 49.
  - 27 Gerald Alfred, cited Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 110.
  - 28 Mason Durie, *Te Mana, Te Kāwanatanga: The Politics of Māori Self-determination* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1998).
  - 29 Hägglund, "The Necessity of Discrimination," 41.
  - 30 Hägglund, "The Necessity of Discrimination," 47.
  - 31 Hägglund, "The Necessity of Discrimination," 47.
  - 32 Ronald Niezen, *The Rediscovered Self: Indigenous Identity and Cultural Justice* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 176.
  - 33 Here Derrida's concept of archives is useful in describing the internal violence that occurs through suppression to enforce the singularity of indigenous identity. While fighting for alterity against the Other, the Self systematically destroys any alterity that violates the possibility for a unified identity: "archives establish themselves by gathering together the necessarily heterogeneous threads of a history into a unity. This movement of unification always involves violence... Archives suppress difference and alterity in a violent erasure so as to constitute themselves as One." Samir Haddad, "A Genealogy of Violence, from Light to the Autoimmune," *diacritics*, 38(1-2) (2008), 127. Certainly, the archive of post-colonial Indigenous Studies (that is, that archive produced on the ontology of indigeneity) has tended to concentrate around the pillars of authenticity and tradition.
  - 34 Walker, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou*, 214.
  - 35 Clea Te Kawehau Hoskins, "In the interests of Maori women? Discourses of reclamation," *Women's Studies Journal*, 13:2 (1997), 26.
  - 36 Lachy Paterson, "Mana Māori Motuhake: Challenges to 'Kāwanatanga,' 1840-1940," in *Ki te Whaiao: An Introduction to Māori Society*, eds., Tania Ka'ai, John Moorfield, Michael Reilly and Sharon Mosley (Auckland: Pearson, 2004), 163.
  - 37 Mahmood Mamdani, "A Brief History of Genocide," 33-34.
  - 38 Hägglund, "The Necessity of Discrimination," 47.
  - 39 Niezen, *The Rediscovered Self*.
  - 40 James Ritchie, *The Making of a Maori - A Case Study of a Changing Community* (Wellington: AH & AW Reed, 1963). Joan Metge, *The Maoris of New Zealand* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976).
  - 41 Hana O'Regan, *Ko Tahu, Ko Au: Kai Tahu - Tribal Identity* (Christchurch: Horomaka, 2001), 91.
  - 42 Durie, *Te Mana, Te Kāwanatanga*, 58.
  - 43 Samir Haddad, "A Genealogy of Violence," 136.
  - 44 Niezen, *The Rediscovered Self*, 10.
  - 45 Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 89.
  - 46 David Theo Goldberg, "Modernity, Race, and Morality," in *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*, ed David Theo Goldberg (Blackwell: Oxford, 1993), 19.
  - 47 Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).
  - 48 Mahmood Mamdani, "A Brief History of Genocide," 44.
  - 49 Jean Baudrillard, "This is the Fourth World War: The *Der Spiegel* Interview with Jean Baudrillard," *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, 1:1 (2004), 6.
  - 50 Homi Bhabha cited Stuart Sim, *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 201.
  - 51 Samir Haddad, "A Genealogy of Violence, from Light to the Autoimmune," 125.
  - 52 Hägglund, "The Necessity of Discrimination," 48.
  - 53 Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 16.
  - 54 Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 19.
  - 55 Paul Rabinow, "Introduction," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 22.
  - 56 Paul Rabinow, "Introduction," 21.
  - 57 Jean-Paul Sartre cited in Thomas Flynn, *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction* (London: Oxford University Press, 2006), 102.
  - 58 David Rankin cited in Hayden Donnell, "Charge for Media to Enter Waitangi Marae, 'Racist'," *New Zealand Herald*, February 2, 2011. [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=10703612](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10703612), accessed 2 February 2011.
  - 59 Hägglund, "The Necessity of Discrimination," 42.
  - 60 Haddad, "A Genealogy of Violence, from Light to the Autoimmune," 125.
  - 61 Judith Butler cited in Jill Stauffer, "Peace is Resistance to the Terrible Satisfaction of War," *The Believer*, 5 (2003), <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/judith-butler/articles/peace-is-resistance/>, accessed 21 February 2011.