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Whiteness: Naivety, Void and Control

There is in this hatred of the present or the immediate past a dangerous tendency to invoke a completely mythical past.¹

CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: USES AND MISUSES OF INDIGENOUS “TRADITION” IN A CANADIAN UNIVERSITY

Spring, 2001: A renowned architect has agreed to travel to the University of Alberta to engage in a *visioning session*, led by the University of Alberta’s Native Student Services, for a proposed “Lodge of Learning.” The session is meant to allow “all our spirits to come together in a good way with the blessings of the Creator” (the architect’s words). The session begins in what we are told is “the traditional way”², part of which involves a smudging ceremony. Most of us partake in the event and, afterwards, the architect prattles on for a bit about being a warrior and “finding your warrior within.” I stifle a yawn as my eyes wander over to the food trays, looking for any cheese Danishes that might have escaped the many eager fingers attending this meeting. He finishes his opening remarks, and an eagle feather (another “traditional” device) is produced to act as a “talking stick” allowing you to speak, uninterrupted, when it’s in your hand. I amuse myself by trying to imagine any of my seven uncles – huge, labour-hardened men – requiring a talking stick to make themselves heard, or to make others listen. Oh well...my family and I are Métis, and this seems to be a Cree thing. And when in Rome...The process begins and the feather is passed from hand to hand and voice to voice, in a clockwise direction (which, we are told, is also traditional).

There are subtle undercurrents at play in the visioning session. According to others on the University of Alberta Aboriginal Council, the School of Native Studies has failed to jump on the “indigenous worldview” wagon. Perhaps, more importantly, the “indigenous worldview” forwarded by these members has seemingly been accepted by several key administrators as the vehicle to ensure future Aboriginal student success and external funding initiatives. But, the School of Native Studies’ opposition has annoyed administrators, comfortable in their knowledge that Aboriginal students are “broken” (as opposed to just broke) and require

immersion in an indigenous worldview to fix them. A \$50 million “Indigenous Centre” is, apparently, the first step in this healing journey. Perhaps, uncoincidentally, administrators might soon be able to brag to their counterparts at other universities – “See? Look what we are doing for our Natives!” The School has been strongly “encouraged” to join in this vision. Certain Native groups on campus have allied themselves with well-intentioned (and need I say, white) administrators who, it must be said, are sincerely interested in understanding the “problems” of on-campus Aboriginal students. After all, Aboriginal students – like Aboriginal people more broadly – are primarily problems to be dealt with, aren’t they? As though on cue, an undergrad student proceeds to embarrass the School of Native Studies (the unit I am a part of) by relating how many Native students, apparently themselves too frightened to speak, have asked him to relate the “emotional holocaust” they endure while taking our courses. They are victimised and violated, and leave scarred by the School’s lack of respect for the “indigenous worldview.”

A Māori colleague of mine is visiting Canada on sabbatical from New Zealand. He attends the meeting and is seated between me and the “holocaust” student. As his turn comes he holds the feather and, seeing that I’m about to blow a gasket, decides to greet the room using Māori tradition, reciting the genealogy of his iwi (tribe). For about five minutes his performance, almost entirely in te reo (the Māori language), seizes control of the room; we are mesmerised. His cultural confidence rakes against the discourses of victimisation and violation, which characterise our “vision” thus far. If we care to listen, his performance is telling us that there are other ways to think about “being indigenous” than those presented and perpetuated in the visioning session.

Now the feather is in my hands. It’s my turn to speak. I know what I’m supposed to say, the platitudes I’m supposed to mouth. But as I begin to speak, my mouth fills with gravel, my tongue feels heavy. I’m sick of playing this “indigenous” game with Native people who, although uttering “traditional” platitudes, have, with the apathetic approval of certain administrators, attempted to hijack the School’s vision and the mandate which justifies its existence. Isn’t it our job to teach students *how*, rather than *what*, to think, and to make them intellectually uncomfortable in doing so? How else does one learn?

Ah, by making them comfortable and safe, we are told; by making sure we honour their cultural uniqueness and contributions, by being more culturally *sensitive*, more culturally *appropriate*. We tell them we have more than a dozen Aboriginal “cultural” groupings, not to mention the 50% non-Native students. Whose culture? What sensitivity? Which appropriateness? This must not be a problem for other units who believe fervently in a single “indigenous worldview.”

Worse still, this attempted hijacking of the School’s vision has occurred under the apathetic gaze of university administrators who wish “these people would make up their mind on the correct protocols and terminology!” and who have (apparently) come to believe in the press value of an “indigenous worldview.” Challenging this seemingly unassailable worldview clearly marks us as troublemakers.

What can I say to counter the hegemony, however uncertain, which has descended over the session, over the vision? I take a deep breath – my cynicism fades momentarily as I am caught up in fantasy about what the “Lodge” *could* be. I begin to speak; gesturing with my hands, I suggest that the building should set aside space to display pictures and artefacts from students’ communities. Not “traditional” pictures and artefacts, per se, but simply

evidence of everyday life and people, Native and non-Native. “Just think,” the words tumble out of my mouth, “howcoolitwouldbe to have students attend the university and see pictures of aunties-and-uncles-nieces-and-nephews-grandmothers-and-grandfathers-and-even” – my speech begins to slow – “current students whose families will see their pictures a generation from now.” The point I am of course attempting and, judging by the facial expressions of many others at the table, utterly failing to make is that Aboriginal culture(s) are more complex than vague references to “thinking in circles” or “mother earth.” Like all cultures, ours has changed over time. Wouldn’t it be neat to see some of that complexity, some of that change?

Few seem to be listening. My cynicism again bubbles to the surface. Others at the table are thinking, “What does this have to do with the four directions, with thinking non-linear thoughts, with ensuring a culturally safe environment, with ensuring the presence of the Creator?” Okay, I say to myself. Fuck this. If only for a moment, and against my better judgment, I tried to take this session seriously, even knowing full well how fucking false and manipulated it was. My second suggestion, I say, is based on the fact that many of us Natives (me included) are overweight. I pause; the architect cocks an eye – he is unsure where this is going. Others, who know me better, suddenly wear anxious smiles. I take a deep breath and say, “whatever else you do, make sure that you have bathroom stalls big enough to fit a wide load. There’s nothing worse than trying to take a shit when you’re touching both sides of the stall and can’t comfortably reach the toilet roll. The very least your building can do is to provide students with a safe place, a place of comfort, to take a shit in peace.” I pass the feather. A pregnant pause... Reaction to this suggestion is decidedly mixed. The architect looks as though he’s swallowed a cantaloupe. He manages to squeak out that this is a good suggestion (what else could he say?); others are clearly angered by my comments. I’m apparently not taking this visioning session seriously – my suggestion is mocking the process (evidence, no doubt, of my colonisation since by mocking these “traditions” I must be denigrating their validity). Even my own colleagues from the School titter nervously (“oh, that Chris”), not sure whether my suggestion is serious or simply irreverent.

The visioning session is the beginning of the deterioration between our unit and some of the other “Aboriginal” units on campus. Later that year, the School meets with a high-level administrator (who, for what it’s worth, is an extremely pleasant and friendly person) to discuss our apparent removal – without our consent or even knowledge – by Native Student Services from the University of Alberta Aboriginal Council. He is a doctor giving a patient bad news; he tells us that we haven’t been “removed,” we’re just “not on the council anymore.” The difference is lost on us but he assures us that there is one. He relates further that other UAAC members (one in particular) feel the School is insufficiently respectful of Aboriginal protocols and an “indigenous worldview”. We ask if our unilateral removal from the committee simply because we disagree on some issues is evidence of following the “indigenous worldview,” as they’ve stated it. We ask what, exactly, he thinks this “worldview” and these protocols consist of. His eyes briefly flash panic; he mumbles what he’s been told by the UAAC members.

He doesn’t have a clue.

However, he needs to make a decision – are we in the right, or are they?

Apparently, they are.

On the one hand, perhaps this series of events is remarkable for its rarity rather than because it constitutes a typical feature of the fitful presence of indigenous knowledges (and their associated politics) in a western institution like a university. Likewise, perhaps this vignette is as much the result of conflicting personalities of those involved as the result of structural deficiencies within the governance structure at the university. Even if so (I would argue that there's nothing particularly special or abnormal about these events), existing structural deficiencies at the University of Alberta exacerbated the problems and frustrations of many of those involved, both Native and non-, both "traditional" and not. For example, the School of Native Studies (now the Faculty of Native Studies) and Native Student Services (now the Aboriginal Student Services Centre) reported to the same governing authority within the university. This had the effect (in a governance context) of placing what is ostensibly a service unit on exactly the same footing as a research unit, despite the fact that we are both located within a "research-intensive" university.

This issue of the (then) School of Native Studies' position within the governance structure was (and remains) complicated by the fact that the university setting represents an environment in which no congealed sets of ideas about what represents "authentic" conditions exist. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for (usually white) administrators to settle disputes between units on campus, based on the presumption of settled protocols or stable epistemological positions held by the actors involved. Yet, it seems to me that the ability of administrators to settle such disputes precisely by taking the word of one of the disputants over that of the others is not a solution either. Moreover, it points to the power disparity within which such administrators – whose understandings of "indigenous traditions" are probably shaped by the same simplistic distortions and stereotypes which shape the views of most non-indigenous Canadians – nonetheless hold the power to entrench (and thus authenticate) isolated and (thus) decontextualised strands of such traditions. This is, as Brendan will explain below, an enduring feature of both the material and discursive colonial projects and the underlying ontological and epistemological chasms which sustain/ed their trajectories. Ultimately, the origins of the "mythical pasts," referred to by Foucault in the opening quote and used by "cultural entrepreneurs" today, are neither natural nor sustained *only* in the minds of the colonisers. Rather, if we care to look, they point to a more "totalising" system within which the production of *all* subjectivities, indigenous and non-, remains entrenched and whose symbolic power has rendered it both pervasive and largely invisible.

WHITENESS: INVOKING THE MYTHICAL PAST

The water flows
The water heals
The water drowns
I like the water
It doesn't tell me who I am

There is much in what Chris writes above that I could follow on from in relating it to the New Zealand context: the inherent problems of locating an indigenous body within a western academic institution; whiteness and its unspoken authority; contemporary colonial "divide

and rule” tactics, no longer via the deviant mercenary but by the “nice guy;” and the tensions between the notion of “traditional” identities and unmitigated indigenous identities. But I would like to pick up on what I think are two of Chris’ main points. Firstly, through *kōrero* (narrative) of my own, I describe debilitating experiences where the ideas of “tradition” and “authenticity” have been wrought by indigenous people themselves. I am going to also try and connect the contemporary authentication of indigeneity that Chris relates with authentication practices in the early colonial context. Here I attempt to theorise a process of “authentication” that resonates in today’s colonial structures where, in an academic setting for example, the apparatus continues to churn out frozen packets of authenticity through history books, archaeological digs, anthropological Othering and benevolent administrators.

Unfortunately, I cannot tell as compelling a narrative as Chris, nor one based on a single event that resonates with as many interconnected issues that his story brings forth. A couple of my own experiences do, nevertheless, spring to mind. The first occurred when my School was visiting another indigenous department in Hawai’i. I gave a talk to a mostly indigenous audience on my research into Māori masculinity. I spent close to half an hour describing the limiting colonial discourses that have served to straight-jacket the ways Māori men construct themselves. In the question and answer session that followed, the first question I received was, “Well what is a traditional Māori man then?” Silence ... More silence “Have you been listening?” I thought to myself. I was tired – I had given the same talk already that day (to a nodding, smiling, mostly white audience who reminded me of ceramic circus clowns, mouths wide open ready to unflinchingly swallow any garbage the native from New Zealand was ready to tell them; at least I didn’t get that from this audience). I had performed an hour long kapa haka (cultural group performance) concert in the roasting Honolulu heat that afternoon, it was now late, and I simply didn’t have the energy to get into the hazy area of indigeneity, authenticity and tradition. I looked to distract the audience with a comforting personal soliloquy about nothing, but the can of worms had been opened and a tirade of demands for authenticity rained down. I shuddered.

It seems to me – and this is the point of the *kōrero* – that as indigenous renaissances are emboldened, as they create momentum, the reaction/resistance to the singular universalising discourses of the coloniser reflects their anti-pluralism. Counter-hegemonic discourses can, if they are monolithic, become hegemonic in themselves. It seems to me that many indigenous people, often those in vanguard positions, constantly engage with and validate the delimiting and hegemonic notion of “authenticity” to the detriment, I believe, of cultural vitality. It is as if the will to power inherently needs the will to unify. I choose to not construct mauri (life-force) in this way.

The second event is as unremarkable as the first, but both occurred when I was in my first and second year as a lecturer, so they resonated in my then fragile eggshell mind. In my first year teaching an Indigenous Theory and Method paper, I heard through the grapevine, as one does, that two students (who were both Māori) had been complaining about the authenticity of the material they were reading in class, claiming, “Y’know Brendan’s not really a traditional Māori” (I think it may have been the Foucault readings that gave them the nod). I didn’t give too much thought to the comments, though, firstly understanding that, often when students have barriers to comprehending the complexity of ideas, there is a tendency to de-authenticate knowledge as not “traditional,” especially when it is “western.” Control desires knowledge; thus,

incomprehensible knowledge must be de-authenticated and, as Chris points out above, the coloniser is not alone – the Other in the mirror reflects the image. Secondly, de-authenticating rhetoric has been thrown at me by both Māori and Pākehā all my life. I am the vigorous hybrid offspring of a Māori father and Pākehā mother. I was brought-up close to, but ultimately outside, my tribal lands. Hence, as a diasporic half-caste, authenticity was both a burden and a gift; I didn't really fit into either world, which could be disquieting as a youth, but importantly nor was I too easy to pin down. Such a will to remain free of constructions has stayed with me. The point here is that I have been consciously and subconsciously cognisant of the delimiting yet, concurrently attractive, notions of tradition and authenticity my entire life. So the comments of these two students, although I perceived them to be intentionally hurtful and debasing, flowed like wai (water) off a duck's back. Thus, I continued to engage with these two students in discussions that problematised tradition and authenticity, but largely met with glazed looks and the dialogues turned into monodramas.

To ground oneself in the logic of tradition is an attractive idea for indigenous people still suffering from the genealogical eddy of colonisation – perhaps even necessary in a utilitarian sense – but I am concerned that the colonial and, now, self-imposed notions of tradition and authenticity have led to the development of “authenticity” gauges of indigenous peoples which are just as oppressive as their colonial derivatives. In some Māori Studies classes I have witnessed the use of an increasingly popular model that essentialises Māori authenticity through a scale of “Māoriness” stretching from being “raised on the marae (gathering place) with traditional knowledge” to “plebeian urbanite.” Such a hegemonic discourse is frightening in its rigidity and alignment with the subjugating thinking of the coloniser; it lets the oppressed become the oppressor. This is not to say, however, that we shouldn't respect those with “traditional” forms of knowledge; rather that we do not devalue the subjectivities and knowledges of others. A friend of mine once suggested, when discussing this maelstrom of indigeneity, tradition and authenticity, that Māori need to go through their own enlightenment. In this sense he was suggesting that the dissent which characterised European enlightenment thinking and its own revolution against the tyrannical monolithic forms of knowledge prescribed by the churches and monarchies similarly needs to occur in Māori society. He was off the mark, because Māori culture was “enlightened” prior to colonisation and has devolved since; but yes, Māori need to realise the “breath” of colonisation that continues to inhabit us – a difficult task when resisting within traditional colonial binaries.

THE BREATH OF COLONISATION

There is a void between indigenous epistemologies and western epistemologies – groundbreaking stuff, I know! But let us lodge the concept with Lyotard's famous (and rhetorical in this case) question – who decides what knowledge is? Or who decides what is authentic? In this section, I attempt to link the process of authentication that occurred in early colonial practice with the authentication of knowledge that continues today. As in today's context, the inter-ethnic yesteryear was characterised by a void of incomprehensibility that was “logically” filled by western conceptions of indigeneity. Firstly then, it is important to establish that there was indeed an incomprehensibility between western and indigenous epistemologies as the result of “a void of unknowing.”

This is a concept that will be developed further below, but for now it refers simply to a space that cannot be breached when two epistemologically different worlds meet. It is not a space of comprehension or miscomprehension, of representation or misrepresentation—it is a blank void consisting of unknowing. The comprehension/miscomprehension and representation/misrepresentation of indigenous knowledge followed, and meant the epistemological colonisation of indigenous knowledges; filling the void, so to speak. The void of unknowing was an enlightenment precursor to the occipital authentication of indigenous knowledge – that is, a process which brought indigenous epistemologies under the logic of the coloniser. By definition, enlightened reason had to plug the void. In a nutshell, enlightenment rationalism privileged human reason as the foundation for deciding between truth and falsehood. In other words, through reason and observation the world was intrinsically knowable, indigenous epistemologies not excepted. Demystifying the objective world was a basic tenet of enlightenment rationalism that had to be upheld. Thus, the enlightenment project, as a universalising grand narrative, could not afford *not* to comprehend the incomprehensible. Enlightenment colonisers had to translate indigenous epistemologies (that is to say, the incomprehensible) into western ways of understanding the world (that is to say, the comprehensible), or the project would be incomplete.

Crucially, this translation involved a process of authentication. Quite simply, what was easily translatable (and thus “authentic”) had some form of comparability in the western world, and/or aligned with enlightenment notions of the ignoble/noble savage (I explain this below). Other epistemological constructions (the totally incomprehensible) were obscured and/or discarded. And here I specifically relate to Chris’ narrative, because the void of incomprehensibility remains alive and well today. Indeed, like the early colonial context where the task of translation was often left to colonial administrators, the task of deciding which knowledges are to be authenticated (promoted over other forms of knowledge) similarly falls to administrators imbued with both the privilege of their colonial institutions and with the (ironic) naivety of their “outsider-above” status. At this stage then, let us return to Lyotard’s question because it spotlights the universalising enlightenment project. For me, it reveals how enlightenment reason, as the determinant of truth and falsehood, was applied to the untranslatable – the epistemologies of Other cultures. The first principle of colonising the indigenous mind, then, was to bring the philosophical underpinnings of the savage under the logic of the coloniser, to authenticate the inauthentic.

Let us turn then to the process of “authenticating the knowable” and “the loss of the inauthentic.” With regard to the inauthentic in the early colonial context there is no better place to start than with missionaries. It is probably fair to say that missionaries were less driven by the rationalism of the enlightenment, given that their own agency was tied to the superstition that the enlightenment project was attempting to dispel. Yet, the notion of a single truth or, in the missionary case, a single god, ironically mirrored their mission to impose Christian metaphysics onto an Other’s epistemology or, in the irreverent words of Jay Leno, to replace one imaginary friend with another. The missionary project then, was less concerned with translation and more concerned with transcendence, which in the ignoble savage’s case meant emancipation from heathen barbarity. Missionary accounts were characteristically over-zealous and macabre, but they “quickly entered the language and became ways of representing and relating to indigenous peoples.”³

The ideological importance of the missionaries' crusade was that it reflected the divinity of the enlightenment project regarding "truth." Introducing the diary of the early missionary William Yate, Judith Binney notes that "in the eyes of the Evangelical missionaries, New Zealand was a world of two cultures in conflict. As divine instruments in a divine plan, they were pledged to conquer these last reaches of God's kingdom."⁴ In essence, the missionaries provided the first site of translation but, unlike later administrative translations, their task was not to recognise humanising discourses of the savage. That is, they were to dehumanise the savage to justify their ideological expansion. The notion of "humanising" the savage is important to later understandings here, because the authentication of indigenous knowledge, in the early colonial context at least, meant determining what was human (and thus authentic) and what was savage or inhuman – and thus inauthentic, incomprehensible, and discardable into the inhuman ether.

Like the less subtle practices of the missionary, travellers' tales were also influential because they translated the "new world" through the eyes of the intrepid voyager who was part and parcel of the enlightenment project. Key to enlightenment rationalism and its reliance on reason to know and to authenticate the objective world was its faith in the mind/body dichotomy formulated by Plato and canonised by Descartes. In his 1871 book, *The Descent of Man*, Charles Darwin emphasises the key differences in intellectual development (that is to say language, observation, curiosity, memory, imagination and reason) between primitive and civilised peoples⁵. Darwin and other evolutionary theorists played an indirect but nonetheless highly significant role in the tainting of European accounts of Māori. Māori as members of an unenlightened culture were, logically, inherently more "physical," ruled by their passions, and less intelligent than their civilised brethren. The natives' apparent lack of division between mind, body, spirituality and the external world only served to augment the belief of the early European travellers to New Zealand that they were indeed encountering a savage race.

What Foucault refers to as the invisible "breath"⁶ that inhabits these discontinuous discourses, even as they mutate, I refer to as "physicality" with reference to the ignoble/noble Māori savagery described here. For if we understand savagery from the perspective of enlightenment rationalism, then it is apparent that it portends a state of unenlightenment where reason is ruled by physical impulses and/or superstition. As a consequence (especially because early onlookers had little propensity to understand Māori tribal cosmologies), Māori "savagery" was transcribed into physical terms and, thus, Māori physical expressions were, at times, attributed to the ignoble and abhorrent savage within. The flipside of the ambivalence held towards Māori physicality can be seen in its translation into the humanity of the noble savage. A significant minority of early commentators, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, romanticised the savage Other as part of a natural physical world filled with "innocence and purity," as opposed to the "corruption and decay" of modern Europe⁷. The noble savage offered a humanistic account of a naïve and mystical life prior to industrialisation. Accordingly, positive representations of the savage presented the possibility of humanism by providing colonisers with a bridge to recognise good in their darker brethren. By translating Māori physical practices into "noble" practices, such representations offered a humanistic account of a naïve, simple and mystical life prior to the reasoned and industrialised life imbued with the enlightenment and modernity.

At this point, let us again return to Chris' kōrero, for it speaks (for me at least) to the "humanising" discourse that remains inherent in the actions of colonial administrators whose "jobs" still

entail humanising the Other. As in the colonial past, administrators serve as the buffer zone between public information and the savage, promoting the noble (humanised) savage, the understandable, the innocuous, the safe; while protecting policy, discourse, and the public from the ignoble (dehumanised) savage – the incomprehensible, the disruptive, the fragmenting, the frightening. In the politically correct academic environment, resonant of Foucault's normalising bourgeoisie, the abnormal is hidden, discarded – too frightening, too fracturing a truth to be displayed. Other ways of knowing must either conform to humanity (occipital humanism) or be imprisoned, incarcerated, made insane.

But is there more to this persistent humanising/dehumanising project? Let us return to the early colonial context. Did the subjective, faltering, over-zealous representations by travellers and missionaries actually hold any stock? The answer is quite simply, yes. Firstly, New Zealand was not the only colonised land and enlightenment rationalism (by its very nature) was being universalised; thus, discourses on Māori physicality and savagery entered a collective colonial discourse that informed future settlers to New Zealand. The discourses, whilst already authentic, needed impetus to crystallise, however. In the case of Māori physicality the impetus stemmed from the relational conditions between Pākehā and Māori that required, firstly, a degree of humanism and, secondly, a degree of abhorrent savagery. These were two preconditions for colonisation in New Zealand, because as a technique they justified different purposes in allowing the depiction of Māori (in the civil war, for instance) to be abhorrently savage and, at other times, to approach humanity (for example, when it became apparent that Māori were not a “dying race”⁸ and that cohabitation with them was inevitable). Māori physicality (like the noble/ignoble representations) embodied the chameleon-like quality required as a colonial technique. In order to broker its reality, the “authentic” representation of Māori physicality established its authority over competing forms of Māori representations. This was not difficult, for any alternative constructions of Māori epistemologies were incomprehensible to enlightenment rationalism and, therefore, inauthentic and simply obscured and/or discarded. Essentially, Pākehā determined the lenses through which truth was viewed, meaning Pākehā were able to de-authenticate the Other as a valid interpreter of their own culture.

The authentic truth, once brokered, was crystallised and cemented by the allegorical construction of Māori culture as pre-modern and, thus, static. This is a significant point because, at the time these translations were being authenticated, New Zealand was an embryonic colony. Therefore, the authenticated forms of Māori culture were, thereafter, seen as definitive of “traditional” Māori culture. The translations of Māori tribal physical practices by early travellers and missionaries initiated the dominant discourses that remain to frame and limit Māori today – noble and ignoble physicality; noble warrior and violent criminal; passion and unintelligence; sportsperson and deviant. These contemporary reconstructions loiter via the re-authentication of texts that establish continuity between a generalised Māori culture, a particular cultural concept, authenticity and tradition, and can be seen daily in popular culture such as sport and film.

There is an important point in this final discussion that remains pertinent to today's context. Ambivalence is crucial in authenticating one form of knowledge over another. Humanising knowledge is used to promote indigeneity within liberal discourses, designed to demonstrate their own liberality in “respecting” the views of Others. Yet, where indigenous “radicals” speak, disrupt and fragment colonial binaries, discourses of the ignoble savage can be called on; indigenous

people become ungrateful, spoilt children (“after everything we’ve done for them!”), irrational, violent, deserving of incarceration. Inherent in the colonial mindset is ambivalence; s/he can neither love nor hate the savage; s/he must feel both loving paternalism and abhorrence. Critical to administering knowledge is ambivalent distance.

CONCLUSION

The alignment of decolonial thinkers with post-structuralism is not surprising given the scepticism of post-structuralists 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. Post-structuralism suggests that such a premise is inherently “cultural” and, instead, dwells on dissimilarity, difference and unpredictability. While described as politically impotent, this critique must be taken seriously by indigenous decolonial theorists whose project is to “decolonise” and, hence, is inherently political. The allure of post-structuralism to some indigenous theorists is its inherent acceptance of alternative epistemologies and difference and its ridicule of the enlightenment’s universalism. To other indigenous academics, however, it may be just another western theory, and is, thus, deserving of scepticism. But not inherently so, for let us not fall into the traditional colonial binaries – us and them – for who is us and who is them?

And here, as a bridge, I think of Māori tribal history in relation to Lyotard’s *petit récit*, in that indigenous tribal history never pretended to assert universal truth, merely its own. In the creation of a *petit récit*, this article has brought together two indigenous scholars who both have to deal with white naivety on a daily basis. Andersen establishes, through a lucid account of an indigenous authentication process within a western institution, that the void of the unknown is still being plugged by those who really don’t know what they are doing (or do they?).

- 1 M Foucault, “Space, Knowledge, Power,” in J Faubion (ed.), *Power: Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984* (New York: New Press, 2000), 357.
- 2 I should perhaps point out that this recitation is in no way meant to denigrate traditional processes which take these rhetorical forms. Instead, my argument is that such processes lose much of their meaning when they are used in structural contexts which hold none of the traditional checks and balances that characterised these earlier protocols.
- 3 LT Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed, 1999), 79.
- 4 J Binney, “Introduction,” in W Yate, *An Account of New Zealand and of the Church Missionary Society’s Mission in the Northern Island*, 3rd ed. (Shannon: Irish University Press, 1970), v.
- 5 A Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society: Transformations of an Illusion* (London: Routledge, 1988).
- 6 M Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2002), 28-9.
- 7 Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 49.
- 8 The Māori population had radically decreased from pre-colonial estimates of as high as 500,000 to a population of just 56,000 in 1857-58. In 1846, Dr Isaac Featherston, a surgeon who was later to become a member of the House of Representatives, declared: “A barbarous and coloured race must inevitably die out by mere contact with the civilised white; our business therefore and all we can do

is to smooth the pillow of the dying Māori race.” (M Durie, *Whaiora: Māori Health Development*, 2nd ed. (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1998), 29-30. Rapid colonisation followed the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. By 1874 Māori had become “only fourteen per cent, a minority in their own country.” (M Durie, *Te Mana, Te Kāwanatanga: The Politics of Māori Self-Determination* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1998), 53.

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