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Authenticating Māori Physicality: Translations of 'Games' and 'Pastimes' by Early Travellers and Missionaries to New Zealand

Brendan Hokowhitu

This paper theorizes how knowledge of indigenous tribal epistemologies was made 'knowable' through Enlightenment rationalism in an early colonial context. Specifically, the paper determines how and what knowledge of Māori tribal physical activities was interpreted and authenticated through early travellers' tales and missionaries' accounts in New Zealand. The central thesis argues that what was established as authentic and truthful aligned with Enlightenment rationalism, while those Māori physical practices incomprehensible to Western understandings were deemed inauthentic and, consequently, were obscured and/or discarded. Throughout, the article theorizes the translation of knowledge into meaningful Western discourses and how these translations came to be crystallized in the colonial imagination.

The earliest European recordings of Māori [1] tribal [2] physical activities (and those since) can tell us very little about the philosophical underpinnings of these cultural practices for, typically, they came from the ignorant, self-absorbed opinions written within the tales of the first European voyagers and missionaries. Yet they provide insights into the European mindset of the time, specifically, its universalizing and hierarchical nature. It is not until later, through the descriptions provided by anthropologists, and in particular those of Elsdon Best, who compiled the volume *Games and Pastimes of the Maori* in 1925, that any semblance of Māori tribal philosophical girders can be *re-interpreted*. I emphasize *re-interpreted* here to point out that, even though Best's 'recordings' are useful because they are more detailed and thus aid in the re-inscribing alternative epistemologies, his ideological interpretation of the data stemmed from what Lyotard would term a 'scientific

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narrative of emancipation' and hence was seldom concerned with interpreting Māori tribal practices from an indigenous epistemology. [3]

To introduce this article it is important to establish that the collision of epistemologies in the colonial context did, indeed, leave an inauthentic void that the Europeans, at least, desired to chart through authentication. For, in the universe of Enlightened rationalism, it was assumed that reason (i.e. European reason) could differentiate between truth and falsehood and thus the world was inherently knowable. Indigenous epistemologies challenged that knowable world and, as a result, the reason of Enlightenment rationalism. The philosophies underpinning Māori tribal physical activities, for instance, were incomprehensible to European notions of physical activity or sport. *Teka*, for example, were darts typically made from reeds approximately three feet in length. The art of dart throwing, known as *piu teka* and *toro teka*, was carried out by holding the dart with the end of the forefinger resting against the dart's butt, which was then thrown underhand to glance off a built-up mound of dirt. The cultural performances of *piu teka* and *toro teka* were not merely physical activities; they were also linked to genealogy and, as a consequence, spirituality. [4] *Teka* was typical of many Māori physical activities because it was conterminous with narratives holding significant cultural meaning. *Teka* was originally immersed within the Māui Tikitiki-o-Taranga (Māui) [5] narratives. In the chronicle related to *teka*, Māui replaces the mounds of earth with the bodies of his brothers, explaining why people have hollows along their backbones. *Teka* is also in the story of Whare-matangi, grandson of Raumati and son of Uru-te-kakara and Ngärue. In this legend, Ngärue leaves his wife's home at Awakino after being mocked by her family. Ngärue implores his wife to tell their son, Whare-matangi, to seek him by looking to the lone peak of Taranaki, [6] and to trace him by casting his dart. Subsequently, Uru-te-kakara urges Whare-matangi to practice the art of dart throwing as he grows up. When Whare-matangi became a young man, an organized competition (*hui whakataetae*) took place. The youngsters met at the *marae teka* or *marae toro teka*, or *papa pere* (names for the carefully prepared ground and venue where dart throwing was practised). Whare-matangi won the event but, like his father, was mocked because of Ngärue's ignominy and because of the unavenged and ignoble death of his grandfather, Raumati, at the hands of Te Arawa. [7] To aid Whare-matangi in finding his father, his mother took him to a lookout where they could see the Taranaki peak. Whare-matangi's mother instructed him to bounce the dart off her back, for only with the aid of the female element could he succeed in his quest. Whare-matangi cast the dart and it flew through space. He found the dart in Tīrau, and cast it again and it landed in Ōtara. Eventually, Whare-matangi cast the dart and it landed at Huirua, the home of Ngähure. Seeing the dart, Ngähure realized his son would soon arrive. [8] This account demonstrates the use of physical practices and their accompanying narratives to pass on multiple cultural concepts. The narrative communicates *utu* (revenge), *kawa* (protocol), *mana tangata* (integrity), *mana wahine* (the power and importance of women), *whānau* (the importance of family) and *whenua* (the spiritual importance of land). As a

noteworthy aside, this account demonstrates that the practice of dart throwing included intra- and inter-community competitions: unfortunately, however, with the onset of colonization the art was discouraged by missionaries because of its 'barbarity' (i.e. alignment with 'superstition') and quickly dissipated.

The incomprehensibility between Enlightenment rationalism and Māori epistemologies can also be seen in the interrelationship between Māori physical practices and death customs. *Pōtaka tākiri* (spinning tops), *moari* (swings) and other 'games' were used in the contexts of both death and leisure. For example,

When a clan had been defeated in battle, and visitors came to condole with them, all assembled on the plaza of the village, and there chanted the lament of the dead. At the conclusion of each couplet of the song, many tops were spun, and these wailing tops helped to avenge the defeat, as the Maori puts it. [9]

'The humming tops that remained spinning for a considerable time were said to possess a long breath, which was considered desirable' [10] and, thus, it was the association of *pōtaka tākiri* with breath and breath's interconnectedness with *mauri* (life principle) that was of importance. Another example of the interrelationship between death and leisure activities can be seen with *moari*. In the narrative below, two *moari* were erected following the killing of several members of one *hapū* (sub-tribe) by another. The members of the aggrieved *hapū*

decided to equalize matters by means of one of those singular procedures that mark the Maori character, and which puzzle the European enquirer. Said old Piatini: – 'Our people were much concerned over this matter. The death of their relatives grieved them. Then the desire grew, and from the desire sprang the thought: we would avenge that disaster. Tu-kairangi, chief of the clan Tawhaki rose, and erected those two Moari, Tama-te-ngaro, and Tara-kai-korukoru. Then was composed a song to be chanted by the swingers when whirling round the staffs. And this would be the revenge for the death of our friends. No! Of course it was not blood vengeance, or even a real equivalent for our loss; it was simply to dispel our grief and end the brooding over the trouble, hence it was looked upon as avenging or equalising matters. [11]

In this discussion of epistemological collision and void, it is obvious that Descartes' mind/body dichotomy is pertinent. It does not seem that Māori conceived of physical activity as a leisure pursuit or 'pastime' (as defined by Best) divorced from other realms, such as the mind or spirituality. The holistic epistemologies of Māori tribal societies determined the non-compartmentalization of the 'physical'. As opposed to the rational European subject, in the communally oriented Māori subject the mind was not divorced from the body, nor the rational from the passions, and so forth. Indeed, it has been said that Māori located their thought in their gut. Here I refer to the 'communally defined subject' to make a distinction between the Western 'individual subject' (who has prevailed in Western thought since the Enlightenment)

whose person is comprised of a central and unique core which determines their distinct identity. The dissimilarity is important because, as opposed to a singular 'self', it indicates a Māori subjectivity that incorporates multiple identities across time, including genealogical and spiritual associations. As an example, *manu tukutuku* (kites) were sites of genealogical significance:

Kites were given special names, in many cases the names of ancestors of the owners. It would also appear that, at least in some cases, special names were assigned to the cords by which such kites were flown. Many such names of kites and their cords, of former generations, have been preserved by oral tradition. ... Te Matorohanga, of Wai-rarapa, repeated a list of forty such names that had been preserved by the tribal whare wananga ... some of these names were those of kites (*manu pakau*) made at Hawaiiki, prior to the settlement of Māori in New Zealand. [12]

To the European observer, kites belonged to the realm of the mundane and pastimes of children. Accordingly, in Best's compilation of Māori physical activities, kites were placed alongside tobogganing, swinging, skipping and the like, in the chapter entitled 'Games and Pastimes of Children', even though such a definition is clearly inept given the integration of oral history within the practice. To be fair to Best, however, how could his system of subdivision (i.e. 'the anthropological book'), which required classification into 'chapters', ever hope to reflect the holism of Māori tribal epistemologies? The book, its form and construction, is itself ideological as outlined by Michel Foucault: 'Architectonic unities ... are concerned not with the description of cultural influences, traditions, and continuities, but with internal coherencies, axioms, deductive connexions, compatibilities.' [13] The systemization of Māori cultural concepts within an ideologically Western translation creates the illusion of compatibility between Western and Māori physical practices where in actuality there is a void of comprehension.

The *manu tukutuku*, *pōtaka tākiri* and *moari* examples highlight this opacity, which also underpins the accounts of early Europeans in New Zealand. For instance, early voyager Joel Polack in 1840 suggested that

[Māori] sports are not undertaken systematically as among civilised nations, who commence when the labour of the day has passed; on the contrary, the instant one of the company is struck by a sudden whim to play a certain game, he becomes excited in an instant, and his companions are as quickly aroused to join in the amusement he has pointed out. [14]

In sum, Polack claims 'the natives have not the remotest idea of promoting health by exercise'. An early missionary, Reverend William Yate similarly concluded that Māori recreation was vastly different to European conceptions:

Their most delightful recreation is talking, and telling wonders; which exercise occupies most of their idle hours, and many of those which are shrouded in darkness and ought to be devoted to sleep. Before the introduction of the musket,

the spear was much used as a sport, to throw at small birds in the woods, or at the ducks on the lakes and rivers. Running, climbing, swimming, wrestling, flying kites, and tossing the poi ... are most of the games of native origin. [15]

Nor would it seem that the physical practices of the 'enlightened' European were intelligible to Māori sensibilities, as interpreted by the travellers themselves: 'Europeans in busy converse, walking to and fro under their veranda, that the argument, [Māori] imagine, could be equally well pursued in a sitting posture, and which they regard as a wise determination: but walking in such case, as an act of folly.' [16] Another early traveller, Arthur Thomson, similarly proposed that 'The games and amusements of the New Zealanders are chiefly sedentary. ... They cannot conceive why two Europeans prefer walking about talking to sitting down.' [17] It is hoped the above introduction has served to posit that the early colonial context was often one of epistemological incomprehensibility, leaving a void of unknowing that, by definition, 'enlightened' reason had to plug. The following section thus asks (in particular reference to the colonial context) Lyotard's famous (and rhetorical in this case) question – who decides what knowledge is? [18]

Who Decides What Knowledge Is?

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 'decolonize' and, hence, is inherently political), the allure of post-structuralism to indigenous theorists is its inherent acceptance of alternative epistemologies and difference, and its ridicule of the Enlightenment's universalism. And here, as a bridge, I 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.

The interrelational colonial context brings to the fore Lyotard's question because it spotlights the universalizing Enlightenment project. It demonstrates how Enlightenment reason, as the determinant of truth and falsehood, was applied to the untranslatable – the epistemologies of other cultures. The process involved, firstly, 'authenticating' indigenous knowledge by translating the untranslatable: that is, by encompassing and reconfiguring the incomprehensible into comprehensible forms. The authentication element in this equation is crucial because from the premise of the Enlightenment reason, knowledge was only authentic if it was known. That is, the cultural concepts from 'other' epistemologies were only authentic if they were comprehensible to Western understandings. The first principle of colonizing the

indigenous mind, then, was to bring the philosophical underpinnings of the savage under the logic of the colonizer, to authenticate the inauthentic.

In this undertaking Māori were 'lucky'. Typically, the discourse that emerged located Māori in the realm of the human (in comparison to the dehumanizing discourses that befell other colonized indigenous people, which validated slaughter), although (as briefly described below) an animalistic discourse did linger in the New Zealand context. Initially, British liberals and humanitarians, guided by Enlightenment thinking and cognizant of atrocities that occurred in other colonial contexts, demanded that colonialism in New Zealand proceed in accordance with humanitarian philosophy and practice. In essence, as Tony Mangan argues, 'the rulers could not afford to be moral cripples'. [19] The authentication of Māori as human enabled the interpretation of Māori epistemologies because they then became knowable; they could be translated into Enlightenment systems of understanding the world. The universalism of the Enlightenment ensured that the system of translation described an absolute picture of the objective world, a larger cultural/biological panoramic view including 'the Great Chain of Being'; a hierarchical vista that was increasingly racialized, within which the translation of indigenous epistemologies into understandable 'data' became just another cog in the European Enlightenment project of reducing the universe to 'truth'. In the New Zealand context, the larger discourse typically located Māori as the primitive self, an earlier pre-modern version of the Enlightened European. As primitive versions of the European then, Māori cultural concepts were intrinsically translatable into Western logic. Here, it is worth illustrating the above theorization to make plain how Māori physical activity practices were translated from the incomprehensible into the knowable, but also to show that the translation also meant loss. Concepts that could not be translated into the rationalism of the Enlightenment were discarded – what I term 'the loss of the inauthentic'.

Translating the 'New World': Traveller and Missionary Accounts

From the outset it should be stated that early European depictions of Māori were not consistent. As a corpus they were ambiguous, faltering (in the sense of an ambivalence shown towards the noble/ignoble savage – see below), not wholly 'scientific' and embroiled with 'other forms of impassioned desire captivated by novel and particular things.' [20] It is also understandable that early travellers crossed paths with indigenous peoples who contravened their expectations of primitive societies. Nevertheless, as outlined by Linda Smith, early travellers' tales and missionary accounts were an intrinsic part of the colonial discourses that developed. It is probably fair to say that missionaries were less driven by the rationalism of the Enlightenment, given 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'. Nor should it be forgotten

that the Protestant ethic contributed to the modernization of Western Europe. Similarly, in the colonial setting, the Protestant missionary aligned with Enlightenment rationalism because 'help'[ing] the child grow towards a Calvinist ideal of adulthood and maturity' [21] paralleled the panoramic view of a culturally hierarchical objective world. 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 people'. [22] The cynic would suggest the demonic descriptions of indigenous people by missionaries 'were designed as much to justify further financial support from their central base as to justify any ideological motivations. The more horrendous and evil the people, the stronger the imperative was to carry out God's work.' [23] This should not undermine the ideological importance of the missionaries' crusade, however, because the imposition of an authentic god and the obscuring of an 'other's' cosmology did, indeed, reflect the divinity of the Enlightenment project regarding truth. Introducing the diary of the early missionary, Yate, Judith Binney notes: '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.' [24]

The incongruence of Māori tribal physical practices with Western conceptualizations, such as those described above in relation to death customs, led to the outright banning of many Māori concepts of physical activity by missionaries. As a Māori elder testified, 'we were much puzzled about the new laws made for our people. We were not to spin humming tops on Sunday.' [25] In 1839, the American voyager, Charles Wilkes, confirmed the *kaumātua*'s (respected elder's) complaint: 'Social amusements are prohibited by severe penalties, although the people are evidently fond of them.' [26] In 1845, the missionary William Brown described Māori dancing and singing but noted with pride 'amongst the missionary natives they are entirely discontinued'. [27] Accordingly, *haka* became obsolete in some tribes. For instance, one tribe had to be taught *haka* by another so that they were able to host the 1934 Waitangi celebrations. [28]

Missionary education debilitated the authenticity of Māori tribal epistemologies, including concepts of physical activity, largely by authenticating the translatable (i.e. the recognizable) and inauthenticating the 'barbaric.' According to Brian Sutton-Smith, while missionaries banned many Māori 'games' outright, they showed more lenience towards 'pastimes that they recognized as the pastimes of civilised and not just heathen children.' [29] Thus Māori children were explicitly encouraged to continue playing games that were 'intelligible to the European way of life', [30] such as knucklebones, stilts, whip tops and string games, which all had 'counterparts in the unorganized play of Pakeha [31] children'. [32] Importantly, while some Māori 'games' were translated, what was lost in translation were the metaphysical underpinnings.

Like the less subtle practices of the missionary, travellers' tales were also influential because of their impact on the eventual settlers to the colony. Traveller books

were an increasingly significant source of representations from the sixteenth century because the development of printing and the emergence of the book as a commodity permitted their wider, although still far from extensive, circulation. Travel books ... were most popular in England ... [and] were published ... to educate and entertain, and their intended mass audience included the partially educated as well as the ruling class. [33]

They provided an ever more literate British public with dreams of other lands and further verification of themselves as an Enlightenment subject:

There were a number of books published in the nineteenth century which told the stories of life in the New Zealand colony and of contact with Māori ... their encounters with 'real life savages' continually fed the imaginations of people 'back home' ... new migrants set off for their own adventures in the colonies armed with all their newly acquired misinformation. [34]

Travellers' tales translated the 'new world' through the eyes of the intrepid voyager who was part and parcel of the Enlightenment project. Traveller tales and missionary accounts were extremely important for 'setting the scene' for the inter-ethnic relationship that was to develop in the New Zealand context.

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 elaborated by Plato and canonized by Descartes. In his 1871 book, *The Descent of Man*, Charles Darwin emphasizes the key differences in intellectual development (i.e. language, observation, curiosity, memory, imagination and reason) between primitive and civilized peoples. [35] Darwin and other evolutionary theorists played an indirect but nonetheless highly significant role in the tainting of European accounts of Māori. Māori as an 'unenlightened' culture were, logically, inherently more 'physical', ruled by their passions and less intelligent than their civilized brethren. The apparent lack of division between mind, body, spiritualism 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. In his *The Story of New Zealand: Past and Present, Savage and Civilised*, Thomson illustrates the translation of Māori intellect through Enlightened rationalism vis-à-vis Cartesian dualism:

It was ascertained by weighing the quantity of millet seed skulls contained and by measurements with tapes and compasses, that New Zealanders heads are smaller than the heads of Englishmen, consequently the New Zealanders are inferior to the English in mental capacity ... the memory they possess is the memory of boyhood; and their minds may be compared to mirrors, always ready to reflect the present, but incapable of retaining any trace of the past. ... The faculty of imagination is

not strongly developed among them, although they permitted it to run wild in believing absurd superstitions. ... Reason and judgement ... were little cultivated by the New Zealanders. ... This analysis shows that the New Zealanders have the minds of children. [36]

In relation to descriptions of Māori physical activity, most travellers' accounts adhered to the discourse evident in Thomson's analysis. Robert Loughnan, as an exception, recognized the sophistication of Māori weaponry: 'In the days of the spear, the mere [hand-held weapon] and the taiaha [hand-held staff], when they fought at close quarters, they were masters of fence and tacticians of the first order, as fertile in stratagem, as brilliant in courage.' [37] In 1845, Brown wrote: 'one of the mental exercises which they appear most fond of is the game of draughts. Many of them are admirable players, greatly superior to the white people.' [38] Such admissions of Māori superiority were infrequent. Most portrayed Māori culture as inferior and lacking the civilized graces of an Enlightened culture. Māori physical activities, especially when they had British counterparts, were inevitably described as underdeveloped, unsatisfactory and overly simple. For instance, Polack bewailed the failure of Māori to excel in the 'wholesome sport' of wrestling: 'the best performances [are] puerile, without the subtle knowledge of the art which renders it interesting'. [39] With regard to *teka*, Polack suggests that 'throwing spears and reeds at a given mark is also a favourite amusement, but they do not excel, and their attempts ... are a sad apology for the art as practised by the British'. [40]

Without the cultural insights to understand Māori epistemologies, many travellers simply translated cultural practices they witnessed into terms through which they understood and, in so doing, authenticated those simplistic understandings. Often the descriptions focused on the physicality of the performance. With reference to *haka*, Polack deduced that its enactment enabled other amusements to be largely sedentary:

[Māori] delight in the laborious dexterity inseparable to the posture changing dance. The variety in the movements, which are unceasing, actively employs the head, shoulders, arms, body, legs, hands, and even the eyes, tongues, and fingers of the performers, not to mention the horrible distortion of every feature, and the deafening shouts that accompany the whole. This overacted excitement leaves a debility that has induced the natives, agreeably to their love of ease, to practise such games from the Europeans as enable them to unite indolence with amusement. [41]

Other representations of physicality, while 'positive', helped authenticate the physicality of Māori culture. Base physical reactions and 'rhythm', for instance, were often praised. As an example, Yate describes the high degree of coordination required for physical proficiency at *tī ringa* or *matimati*:

Ti is a game with their fingers, in which they count, and are remarkably dexterous in detecting an error. He who the greatest number of times can place his fingers

instantaneously in a certain position, on the repetition of a word chosen out of a given number, at the option of the opponent, is the winner. The rapidity with which words are spoken, and the dexterity with which the hands are placed in the required position, are astonishing; practice from childhood is requisite to make a person perfect master of the game. [42]

Implicit to the authentication of Māori physicality was the evolutionary prescript, the Great Chain of Being. Inevitably, Māori were referred to as animalistic, translating their position in relation to the civilized European. For instance, referring to the raised pole seen in *mōrere*, William Wade in 1842 describes ‘boys and girls, stark naked, and the women with only a rough garment around the loins, run[ning] up the pole as readily as monkeys’. [43] Similarly, in 1845 Edward Gibbon Wakefield believed the Māori passion for storytelling had all the sensibility of a primate: ‘Nothing can remind one more forcibly of the monkey who has seen the world, than a Māori thus relating news. He is an incorrigible exaggerator, and swells each minute circumstance into an affair of state.’ [44] In 1863, Frederick Maning likened the *haka* to a ‘dance and caper’ performed by ‘mad-monkeys’. [45] Such representations offered a snapshot of the self in an unevolved condition. While the above early European interpretations of Māori tribal physical practices may seem innocuous in their subjectivity, together they initiated a discourse that, united with a universal Enlightenment discourse on indigenous savagery, has underpinned the dominant discourses surrounding Māori since. The following section begins to theorize how the translation of Māori cultural practices by early Europeans came to underpin the dominant discourses surrounding Māori that have pervaded New Zealand’s colonial history and, to a large degree, debilitated inter-ethnic relations.

Ambivalence and Māori Physicality

The translation of physicality onto Māori culture occurred through discourses on savage ignobility and nobility which, combined, provide for the ambivalence that most Pākehā hold in regard to Māori culture presently. The discontinuity between the two opposite discourses provides for a useful colonial technique because it allows for the authentication of seemingly contradictory motives based on the one discourse, as the colonial context transforms. For instance, as the antagonistic settler morphed into colonial cohabiter/assimilator, the savage discourse remained, but transformed from violent savage, to noble savage, to hued citizen. To illustrate, the violent resistance by Māori in the 1860s Civil Land Wars and their complicity with the British war effort in the First and Second World Wars promulgated both an ignoble and noble discourse of Māori violence. The ignoble discourse served to justify colonial violence, subjugation and land annexation while, later, the noble discourse served to assimilate and endear Māori to the New Zealand public; both were necessary in their respective historical contexts. The belief in noble (humanized) and

ignoble (abhorrent) forms of Māori violence led to the naturalization of an ambivalence towards it that resonates today.

What Foucault refers to as the invisible 'breath' [46] that inhabits the 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 towards understanding Māori tribal cosmologies), Māori 'savagery' was transcribed into physical terms, and thus Māori physical expressions were, at times, tied to the ignoble and abhorrent savage. For instance, during Cook's third voyage Thomas Edgar translates: 'The War dance or Heva consists of a variety of violent motions and hideous contortions of the limbs, there is something in them so uncommonly savage and terrible, their eyes appear to be starting from their head, their tongue hanging down to their chin.' [47] In his narrative of a *haka* performance, Polack uses words such as 'howling', 'demonical', 'distorted' and 'grimace', contrasting the heathen physical practice with his civilized scientific knowledge of the body – 'yelling, howling, loud and loud, that threaten hard to destroy the auricular organs'. Polack goes on to describe 'rolling the eye-balls to and for in their sockets ... as the most diabolical appearance'. [48] Likewise, Augustus Earle's narrative of a *haka* authenticates the physicality of the savage: 'They soon work themselves up to a pitch of frenzy; the distortions of their face and body are truly dreadful, and fill the mind with horror.' [49]

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, romanticized the savage 'Other' as part of a natural physical world filled with 'innocence and purity', as opposed to the 'corruption and decay' of modern Europe. [50] The noble savage offered a humanistic account of a naive and mystical life prior to industrialization. Accordingly, positive representations of the savage presented the possibility of humanism by providing colonizers a bridge to recognize good in their darker brethren (even if missionary humanism implied conversion to Christianity). Māori were often referred to as the most civilized of all savages, propagating the notion of the 'Aryan Māori'. The Aryan Māori concept originated as part of the debate surrounding the origins of Māori. According to some, Māori were linked to Hindu India through language, custom, material culture and physical appearance. Such a hypothesis genealogically tied Māori with Pākehā if the Aryan Indo-European connection was also to be assumed. [51] Regardless of the facts to prove or disprove the theory, the Aryan Māori figure entered into popular culture and served to augment the narrative that both Māori and Pākehā were relatively recent arrivals to New Zealand who could both claim noble origins. Such a narrative served to promote the humanism required for nurturing the new colony's inter-ethnic relations, while legitimizing Pākehā moral claims to New Zealand's natural resources.

By translating Māori physical practices into ‘noble’ practices, such representations offered a humanistic account of a naive, simple and mystical life prior to the reasoned and industrialized life imbued by the Enlightenment and modernity. As can be seen in the ‘canoe-surfing’ case study below, extraordinary feats of physicality authenticated Māori as noble and pure (i.e. untainted by modernity). In 1884, early traveller Weekes Skinner, while surveying the coast between the Mokau and Awakino rivers, was able to capture an invigorating tale of the ‘bronzed Māori’ competing in a long lost primordial battle against nature.

The Kauri village was deserted by all but a few old women, who informed me that the people were on the sea beach, a short distance away. On arriving there I found the whole population gathered, taking part in, or watching and encouraging the contending parties, in a most exhilarating sport ... ‘surf-riding’ in canoes, something quite new to me. Two small handy canoes, varying in length from eighteen to twenty-five feet, were being used, in each of which were two paddlers, the steersman and one in the prow. ... Having got his canoe into the desired position, he awaited a suitable oncoming roller, just keeping a slight forward movement on the craft until the roll had approached within a few yards of the stern of the canoe, when the steersman gave a short word of command, and the two plunged their paddles into the tide, and with a few powerful strokes got the required ‘way’ on to enable it to be taken up by the roller as it caught the stern of the canoe. The rest was left to the action of the wave and the steersman. The canoe if properly handled was now rushing through the tide, keeping just roughly a little short of its own length in advance of the wave, with a cascade of water thrown off from either side of the prow, its expert helmsman, as rigid as one cast in bronze, watching intently the gradual curling of the roller (the bowman inactive with the paddle drawn in), until at the moment he judges the time has come, with a swift twist or turn of his paddle (a movement so deft and graceful that it could scarce be detected by those close at hand) the canoe was turned sharply to the right, the wave breaking as it passed beneath its keel, and riding gracefully down the outer slope of the roller, turned seaward to repeat the manoeuvre. Rangi never made a mistake in this respect. The most lasting impression made on my mind in this surfing incident, was that of the poise and skill of Te Rangi Tuataka Takere, the high born Rangatira, as he sat statue like, steering-paddle firmly grasped, his fine muscular figure and clean cut tattooed features, reproducing, with the general surroundings, a grand picture of pure Maoridom as it had been for centuries prior to AD 1884. Alas! That we were to witness such a scene never again. [52]

Similar to Skinner, George Angas associates the free play of Māori children with a carefree existence far removed from the rigour of the modern world:

The children ... pass their early years without restraint, amusing themselves with the various games of the country: such as flying kites, which are formed of leaves; the game of Maui (cat’s cradle); throwing mimic spears made of fern stalks, and sailing their tiny flax canoes on rivers, or watching them tossed about by the waves of the sea. These are the most favourite sports of these merry and interesting children. [53]

The description of the physical practices of Māori children is relevant because a further way of translating primitivity is through describing the 'Other' as a child – 'in this way the people are considered distant from the time of adult Europeans' [54] and the matured reason of the Enlightenment. Accordingly, McGregor and McMath found that early European travellers likened Māori to ignorant children for whom maturity was beyond the horizon. [55] Many of the above representations contain some inference of a childlike nature. Similar to the ambivalence created by the ignoble/noble savage, representations of childishness were an important technique because the underlying trait enabled ambivalence, for a child can be both good and naughty: 'an inferior version of maturity, less productive and ethical, and badly contaminated by the playful, irresponsible and spontaneous aspects of human nature.' [56] This section has brought Māori physicality to the fore in the early European representations of Māori to demonstrate its transcendent importance as the 'breath' beneath the ambivalence created by representations of Māori as the ignoble/noble savage and the child. To conclude thus I would like to briefly theorize how the emerging discourses discussed here have crystallized and have been re-authenticated over time.

Conclusion: Crystallizing and Re-authenticating

Smith points out that early traveller and missionary accounts are accepted as authentic depictions of Māori life and have been ingrained 'in the language and attitudes of non-indigenous people towards indigenous peoples'. [57] But how are we to theorize the ingrainings process? Did these 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 colonized land, and Enlightenment rationalism (via 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, while already authentic, needed impetus to crystallize, 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 of colonization in New Zealand at least 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 (e.g. when it became apparent that Māori were not a 'dying race' [58] and that cohabitation with them was inevitable). As already explained, Māori physicality (like the good/bad child, noble/ignoble representations) embodied the chameleon-like quality required as a colonial technique. In order to broker its reality, the early traveller and missionary representations of Māori physicality were established as authentic. 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 they were able to de-authenticate the 'Other' as a valid interpreter of their own culture. This was especially the case later in the treatment of Māori by anthropologists, as Anne Salmond explains:

European descriptions produce reliable knowledge, while Maori descriptions do not. This disparity places Maori elders and others as 'informants', while anthropologists and others act as interpreters of the information they provide. For 'Traditional Maori Society' specifically, such arguments suggest that a Western thinker with the resources of Western scholarship at his command, can rapidly and easily produce valid explanations for past Maori practices, while a Maori thinker working with the resources of Maori scholarship cannot. [59]

In his compilation of Māori 'games and pastimes', Best frequently either dismisses Māori interpretations or, when knowledge is incomprehensible, simply de-authenticates it as fanciful myth. Best used Māori as 'informants' while simultaneously discrediting their reliability. The seemingly paradoxical process was necessary to the crystallization of European knowledge as the only authentic interpretation, as in the example below. Best suggests that 'Tuta Nihoniho has explained that the sling used for stone throwing on the East Coast was called *tīpao* or *kōtaha*, that it was used by lads as a pastime, and also, he believed, in attacking a village'. [60] Later Best confounds Tuta Nihoniho's account:

It seems probable that the stone-casting sling seen used by persons of Tuta's generation was made known to the Māori by Europeans. Men [Māori people] of that generation are always liable to error, as in maintaining that certain implements, practices, etc., were pre-European, when, as a matter of fact, they had been introduced by early European visitors, traders, etc. We have an illustration of this in the case of pump drill, which certain old natives of the present time maintain was used here prior to the coming of Europeans, of which there is no reliable evidence. [61]

I should hasten to point out, however, that no representations of Māori culture are inherently truthful; no forms of Māori physicality are more authentic than others. To accept such an idea is to reinstate an Enlightenment rationale because it suggests that a single objective truth exists. Rather than proclamations of authenticity, what is more important to the decolonial project is understanding what knowledge has come to be 'privileged' and why.

The authentic truth, once brokered, was crystallized 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. As an example of the re-authentication of 'traditional' Māori culture I first turn to Colin Deed's 1977 book *Maori Games*, a glossy narrative adorned by a series of photos of

naked Māori children, apparently typical of children at leisure in pre-European times: 'The village of my tribe, the cool and green bush with its secret places, the sparkling lakes and streams, the sandy beaches – these are our playgrounds.' [62] Here, Deed re-translates the romantic image of the noble savage child, content in the simplicity of his/her uncorrupted life. Similarly, Alan Armstrong describes a becoming scene in the *whare tāpere* – the house of amusement: 'In the summertime the village marae served as a *whare tāpere* and as darkness fell pitch pine torches would be lit and cast their fiery glare over the merry scene.' [63] In a previous text, Armstrong captures many of the techniques used to re-authenticate earlier translations of Māori culture, for example, the words 'traditional', 'civilization', 'ancient' and 'old' together convey savagery:

The sudden, tremendous upheaval of traditional ways caused by Pakeha civilisation brought to an abrupt end the old leisured life. As the Maoris began to cope-hesitantly at first and then with increasing confidence-with the demands imposed on them by the sudden impact of a new language and alien social and cultural usages, they also abandoned most of their ancient pastimes and amusements. [64]

Of particular interest here is the description of the Māori 'abandonment' of their 'ancient pastimes and amusements' The description disassociates Pākehā agency in the inauthenticity of the incomprehensible, blaming Māori for abandoning their culture. Inherent to this understanding of wilful cultural abandonment by indigenous peoples is the notion that mere contact with a more civilized culture necessitates a primitive purge as the indigene comes to 'see the light'.

Part of the 'forgetting' process of colonization is the resurrection of the self from sinner to saviour. In accordance with emancipatory Enlightenment discourses, Pākehā turned from cultural annihilators to cultural 'rescuers' of Māori 'games', as can be seen in this description by Phillip Smithells, the inaugural dean of the School of Physical Education at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand:

My colleagues on the Physical Education staff of the Education Department did an excellent job of collecting many of these games from places where they were still to be found and in some cases it can be said as a certainty, that they rescued games which were fast disappearing from our culture which by now might have been lost entirely. I can think, for instance, of a particular variety of the stick game which one of the organisers of physical education, herself part Maori, discovered in a little school called Kokaho near Waikaremoana. [65]

Smithells' role in the authentication of Māori physicality has been discussed more thoroughly elsewhere, the above excerpt serves only to highlight how discourses can be reconfigured to justify present purposes but remain haunted by past translations. It also demonstrates how easily truths are established and the inauthentic is lost. [66]

The translations of Māori tribal physical practices by early travellers and missionaries added to the initiation of 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 generalized Māori culture, a particular cultural concept, authenticity and tradition, and can be seen daily in popular culture such as sport and film. [67] I cannot dwell long on the genealogical (in the Foucauldian sense of the word) re-authentication of Māori culture as seen through the lens of Enlightenment rationalism, for the validization of the translations of Māori culture (described above) by the anthropologist Best is an article in itself. But it is worthy to conclude with the above examples as snippets of a genealogy for those nay-sayers who question the relevance of the actions of their forefathers to today's meritocracy.

Notes

- [1] Māori is a generic word that initially meant 'normal' but has come to incorrectly represent the tribal based indigenous peoples of the Pacific Islands, now called New Zealand. Mason Durie has this to say about being Māori: 'Before European contact, the word Māori simply meant normal or usual. There was no concept of a Māori identity in the sense of cultural or even national similarities. . . . The original inhabitants of New Zealand did not refer to themselves as Māori; rather they were Rangitāne or Ngāti Apa or Tūhoe or any of forty or more tribes': Durie, *Te Mana, Te Kāwanatanga*, 53.
- [2] I intentionally use the word 'tribal' here because prior to colonization the formation of a pan-Māori national identity was previously irrelevant. That is, prior to around 1840 (the year when New Zealand's founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi, was signed) there was no concept of a homogenized Māori culture. A unified culture, as such, could have only been a creation of the Pākehā imagination. That is, Māori only came to think of themselves as 'Māori' through the Pākehā gaze. Here, I recognize the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in relation to the genesis of the concept of Māori because it was the first time that Pākehā attempted to convene a unified 'Māori' voice.
- [3] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 60.
- [4] In Māori culture, genealogy or *whakapapa* is inherently linked to spirituality because Māori oral history provides genealogical ties to the gods.
- [5] Māui Tikitiki-o-Taranga (commonly referred to as 'Māui') is the most renowned (in legend) of the semi-divine Māori ancestors for his feats, such as fishing up the North Island of New Zealand, which is still known as 'Te Ika-a-Māui' (i.e. the fish of Māui).
- [6] Mount Taranaki is a well-known North Island landmark found in the province of Taranaki.
- [7] Te Arawa is a North Island tribe located in the province now known as 'Bay of Plenty'.
- [8] Translated from Best, *Games and Pastimes of the Maori* (2nd edn), 63–7.
- [9] *Ibid.*, 161.
- [10] *Ibid.*, 157.
- [11] *Ibid.*, 51–2.
- [12] *Ibid.*, 131.
- [13] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 5.
- [14] Polack, *Manners and Customs of the New Zealanders*, 165.
- [15] Yate, *An Account of New Zealand*, 112–13.
- [16] *Ibid.*, 113.
- [17] Thomson, *The Story of New Zealand*, 197.
- [18] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 8–9.
- [19] Mangan, *The Imperial Curriculum*, 10.
- [20] Thomas, *In Oceania*, 16.

- [21] Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, 15–16.
- [22] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 79.
- [23] Ibid.
- [24] Binney, 'Introduction', v.
- [25] Cited in Best, *Games and Pastimes of the Maori*, 15.
- [26] Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition*, 175.
- [27] Brown, *New Zealand and Its Aborigines*, cited in Best, *Games and Pastimes of the Maori*, 15.
- [28] Refers to the celebrations commemorating the signing of the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi between Māori and Pākehā. The Treaty of Waitangi is recognized as New Zealand's founding document.
- [29] Sutton-Smith, 'The Meeting of Maori and European Cultures', 319.
- [30] Ibid.
- [31] In recent years, the term Pākehā has been controversialized by right-wing misinterpretations of the word and its origins as having derogatory meanings such as 'evil spirit', 'pig' and 'flea.' Such misrepresentations aim to distance dominant white New Zealand culture from falling under Māori definition, and to augment the cultural divide between Māori and Pākehā. In actuality, the word 'Pākehā' stems from pre-colonial words such as 'pakepakehā' and 'pākehakeha' (and the like) common to certain parts of the Pacific, referring to 'Imaginary beings resembling men, with fair skins' (Williams, *Dictionary of the Maori Language*, 252). From this largely innocuous scopic understanding of the word and its transference onto the white colonists invading New Zealand, the word 'Pākehā' has evolved throughout colonization to commonly refer to 'New Zealander of European descent' (Moorfield, *Te Aka*, 108), forming the inverse cultural construction of the word 'Māori' in the binary relationship that has defined New Zealand bi-ethnic relations for 160-plus years.
- [32] Sutton-Smith, 'The Meeting of Maori and European Cultures', 319.
- [33] Miles, *Racism*, 21.
- [34] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 82.
- [35] Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society*.
- [36] Thomson, *The Story of New Zealand*, 81–4.
- [37] Loughnan, *New Zealand: Notes on Its Geography, Statistics, Land System, Scenery, Sport, and the Maori Race*, 106.
- [38] Brown, *New Zealand and Its Aborigines*, cited in Best, *Games and Pastimes of the Maori* (2nd edn), 181.
- [39] Polack, *Manners and Customs of the New Zealanders*, 167.
- [40] Ibid., 170.
- [41] Ibid., 165.
- [42] Yate, *An Account of New Zealand*, 38.
- [43] Wade, *A Journey in the Northern Island of New Zealand*, 157.
- [44] Wakefield, *Results of the New Zealand Inquiry*, cited in Best, *Games and Pastimes of the Maori*, 120.
- [45] Maning, *Old New Zealand*, 44.
- [46] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 28–9.
- [47] Edgar, 'Haka', cited in Best, *Games and Pastimes of the Maori* (2nd edn), 86.
- [48] Polack, *Manners and Customs of the New Zealanders*, 86–7.
- [49] Earle, *A Narrative of a Nine Months' Residence*, 62.
- [50] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 49.
- [51] See Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race*, 62–8.
- [52] Skinner, 'Surf-riding by Canoe', 35–7.
- [53] Angas, *Savage Life and Scenes*, cited in Best, *Games and Pastimes of the Maori* (2nd edn), 16.
- [54] Mills, *Discourses of Difference*, 89.

- [55] McGregor and McMath, 'Leisure'.
- [56] Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, 15–16.
- [57] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 79.
- [58] The Māori population had radically decreased from pre-colonial estimates of as high as 500,000 to a population of just 56,000 in 1857–8. In 1846, Dr Isaac Featherston, a surgeon who was later to become a member of the House of Representatives, declared that 'a barbarous and coloured race must inevitably die out by mere contact with the civilized white; our business therefore and all we can do is to smooth the pillow of the dying Maori race' (Durie, *Whaiora*, 29–30). Rapid colonization followed the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. By 1874 Māori had become 'only fourteen per cent, a minority in their own country' (Durie, *Te Mana, Te Kāwanatanga*, 53).
- [59] Salmond, 'The Study of Traditional Maori Society', 310.
- [60] Best, *Games and Pastimes of the Maori* (2nd edn), 35.
- [61] *Ibid.*, 36.
- [62] Deed, *Maori Games*, 8.
- [63] Armstrong, *Games and Dances of the Maori People*, 32.
- [64] Armstrong, *Maori Games and Haka*, 31.
- [65] Philip Smithells's papers, unpublished MSS, Hocken Library, Dunedin, New Zealand.
- [66] For further reading see Hokowhitu, 'Tackling Māori Masculinity', and Hokowhitu, 'Maori Physicality'.
- [67] For further reading on the re-authentication of 'traditional' Māori culture in film, see Hokowhitu, 'Understanding Whangara: *Whale Rider* as Simulacrum.'

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