

TROUBLE ON THE FRONTIER:

HUNT FOR THE WILDERPEOPLE, SOVEREIGNTY, AND STATE VIOLENCE

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HE TOHU MAHARA: DEDICATION

He tohu mahara tēnei ki ngā whānau nō roto o Ruatoki me Tāneatua, pērā i ngā whānau Teepa, whānau Harawira anō hoki. Āku mihi maioha ki a koutou mō ā koutou manaaki, awhi hoki i ahau me aku mahi.

ABSTRACT

*In this essay, I use Taika Waititi's 2016 *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* as a lens through which to discuss the management of Indigenous life by the settler colonial state, whereby certain Indigenous subjectivities are 'let to die' for the overall health of the body politic. I then turn to examine how the theatrical paramilitarised performances in the film are reflected in the on-going nature of colonial violence directed towards the Ngāi Tūhoe people, exemplified in the 2007 'anti-terror' raids codenamed 'Operation 8', and the more recent (but less well known) raids that have targeted Tūhoe since 2007. I stipulate that such raids demonstrate a return to sites of 'originary violence' as per Irene Watson's thesis (2009), where Crown sovereignty is violently reinscribed upon the frontier to reinforce the supremacy of the state. This discussion continues Vijay Devadas' argument that Operation 8 revealed a 'racialised sovereignty' that constitutes the 'legitimacy and power of state sovereignty ... in Aotearoa' (2008, 124).*

Keywords: Operation 8; Tūhoe; *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*; Indigenous; Aotearoa New Zealand

INTRODUCTION

Taika Waititi's creative and hilarious 2016 film *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* is a timely reflection on paramilitarism, colonial violence, and institutional child

welfare in Aotearoa New Zealand. Waititi is known for his ‘high-quality, quirky films with a local focus’ (Flux 2016, 19), and this uniquely Aotearoa New Zealand film, based on Barry Crump’s famous novel *Wild Pork and Watercress* (2016 [1986]), is the fifth in his auteurist repertoire. Adorned with vivid cinematography and punctuated with a distinctly Kiwi sense of humour, *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* traces the adventure of Ricky Baker (Julian Dennison), an urban Māori youth, and his Uncle Hec (Sam Neill), a prickly Pākehā (*New Zealander of European descent*) bushman, who, following the death of beloved Auntie Bella (Rima Te Wiata), flee into the mountains to evade the demand that Ricky be relinquished into state care. To this end, an unrelenting paramilitarised manhunt is initiated to apprehend the duo, spearheaded by Child Welfare Services’ Paula Hall (Rachel House). The excessive nature of this pursuit was intentionally farcical, as Waititi explains, ‘because I didn’t want to ignore the ludicrous nature of their journey and how far it got’ (Lambie 2016). In the film’s portrayal of state violence as tipping into comic absurdity, the ability for such violence to escalate in rural spaces – that remain unseen by Pākehā society – draws attention to the thresholds, and what I go on to define as biopolitical caesuras, of ‘acceptable’ forms of intervention and surveillance of Māori communities.²

Using a Foucauldian theoretical framework, I use *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* to open a conversation about the management of Indigenous life by the New Zealand settler colonial state, whereby certain Indigenous subjectivities are ‘let to die’ for the betterment and purity of the overall body politic. In this discussion, I compare the state’s militant pursuit of Ricky and Uncle Hec in the film to the historically vicious mistreatment of Māori youth in institutional child welfare in New Zealand. The logic of ‘purification’ undergirds the on-going maintenance of state sovereignty: white settler domination was not achieved by a singular event, but rather is realised through repetitious acts of violent legitimation. This is what Irene Watson describes as ‘re-enactments of originary violence’ (2009, 48), as the state reaffirms its sovereign right to exist. These re-enactments typically occur at the outer edges of society – the frontier – where state authority is most visibly threatened. *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*’s paramilitaristic overtures allude to the gravity of originary violence as enacted by the state, through the numerous paramilitary raids that have targeted the Ngāi Tūhoe people over the last century, epitomised in recent memory by the 2007 anti-terror raids codenamed ‘Operation 8’ (Devadas 2008; Jackson 2008; Keenan 2008; Sluka 2010).

I begin by setting out the theoretical foundations of my essay, principally drawn from the work of Indigenous Australian scholars, before exploring

these themes in an analysis of *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* and Aotearoa New Zealand's institutional child welfare system. By using Indigenous Australian scholarship as my basis, I am able to draw parallels between instances of state violence in both trans-Tasman countries that are undergirded by the same colonial logic. Secondly, this helps me promote Indigenous Australian scholarship in Aotearoa New Zealand's Indigenous context, which, from my experience, has not been widely picked up in the Indigenous Studies programmes of the latter. From here, I turn to discuss the numerous Police raids upon Tūhoe over the last century – which have overwhelmingly targeted the Ruatoki Valley – to illuminate the on-going nature of how state sovereignty violently reasserts its power and domination over Indigenous peoples. Building on Watson's thesis, I suggest that Te Urewera (Tūhoe's ancestral homeland) endures today as a frontier space saturated with colonial violence, where Crown supremacy is aggressively reinscribed upon the landscape. To conclude, I offer a critical counterpoint to the logics of biopower by comparing it to the cultural values underpinning the socio-political organisation of Tūhoe and Māori society.

ORIGINARY VIOLENCE AND THE NORTHERN TERRITORY INTERVENTION

Allow me to first outline some of the theoretical anchors of my discussion, sourced from Irene Watson, a Tanganekald, Meintangk-Bunganditj scholar, and Aileen Moreton-Robinson, a scholar of Goenpul descent. Writing in the context of the Northern Territory Intervention by the Howard-led Coalition government in 2007, Watson explains that the

foundation of the Australian colonial project lies within an 'originary violence', in which the state retains a vested interest in maintaining the founding order of things. Inequalities and iniquities are maintained for the purpose of sustaining the life and continuity of the state. (2009, 45)

The 'Intervention', as it has come to be known, was a military operation that targeted Aboriginal communities in Australia's Northern Territory, in response to the alleged violence and sexual abuse outlined in the *Little Children Are Scared* report (Moreton-Robinson 2015, 153; Watson 2009, 45; Wild and Anderson 2007). This crisis was fuelled by sensational media reporting, which helped mobilise a discourse of protection that justified the state's violent methods of 'intervention'. The role of news media in rationalising biopolitical forms of state intervention into child welfare, in so-called 'remote' or rural places that are often only known to white society through news media representation, is likewise demonstrated in *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*, as I explore later.

During the Intervention, police and army forces were deployed into seventy-three communities, and the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* was suspended 'to protect the state from litigation on the basis that the intervention was racist' (Moreton-Robinson 2015, 161). The Intervention, stipulates Watson (2009), was a contemporary iteration of the 'colonial project ... which has continued unabated from the time of the landing and invasion by the British in 1788'. The year 1788 demarcates the inauguration of the colonial project in the lands now described as Australia, whereby 'a state [was] founded on colonial or "originary" violence' (p. 46). This originary violence is periodically re-enacted to reinforce the state's sovereign right to exist, where such moments are understood not as abnormalities, but instead as routine functions of the settler colonial state (pp. 46–8). For Indigenous communities, this manifests in acute bursts of violence exemplified by the 2007 Intervention. As Rebecca Stringer has noted, the Intervention 'must be regarded as a neocolonial moment, a moment in which the objectives, relations and effects of the colonial syndrome do not merely reverberate but resurge' (2007, 7).³

SOVEREIGNTY, STATE RACISM AND 'PERMANENT PURIFICATION'

Moreton-Robinson's (2015) thesis on the possessive logics of patriarchal white sovereignty expands this analysis of originary violence. 'It takes a great deal of work to maintain Canada, the United States, Hawai'i, New Zealand, and Australia as white possessions', she explains, as 'these nation-states [busily reaffirm and reproduce] this possessiveness through a process of perpetual Indigenous dispossession' (p. xi). In line with Watson's argument, Moreton-Robinson explains how the state exhibits an 'excessive desire to invest in reproducing ... [its] ownership, control, and domination' (p. xii). Therefore, state sovereignty is articulated through on-going acts of violent legitimation.

In particular, she adopts Foucault's approach of using war as a method to analyse politics, in offering an explanation of how Indigenous peoples exist at the behest of the sovereign right 'to make live and to let die' (Moreton-Robinson 2015, 157; Foucault 2003a, 241). For Foucault, war is a 'disequilibrium of forces', and political power became the 'silent war to reinscribe that relationship of force ... in institutions, economic inequalities, language, and even the bodies of individuals.' Foucault postulates that 'politics is the continuation of war by other means' (Foucault 2003a, 15–6; see also MacDonald and Gillis, this issue).⁴ In other words, the suffering, trauma, and violence that characterises war is continued – and sanctioned – in modern nation states through the machinations of political power. In the early nineteenth century, this became articulated through 'State racism' – distinct from 'ethnic racism' – where the earlier

discourse of race and the war between races ('the English against the Spanish', for instance) transformed into a 'racism that society ... direct[ed] against itself ... [An] internal racism of permanent purification' (Foucault 2003a, 60–2; 2003b, 316–8). He goes on to explain:

This racism [...] is a struggle in the biological sense: the differentiation of species, natural selection, and the survival of the fittest species. Similarly, the theme of the binary society which is divided into two races or two groups with different languages, laws and so on will be replaced by that of a society that is, in contrast, biologically monist. Its only problem is this: it is threatened by a certain number of heterogeneous elements [...] Hence the idea that foreigners have infiltrated this society [...] the State is no longer an instrument that one race uses against another: the State is, and must be, the protector of the integrity, the superiority, and the purity of the race. State sovereignty thus becomes the imperative to protect the race. (Foucault 2003a, 80–1)

State racism divides the population between those deemed worthy of life, and those bereft of this privilege, 'establishing a biological-type caesura' predicated on the evolutionary logic of superior and inferior races (Foucault 2003a, 60–1, 255, 254–8). Moreton-Robinson demonstrates how Indigenous peoples continue to live beneath the ever-present spectre of state racism, enunciated through generations of colonial violence (2015). This form of racism constitutes a technology of population management which seeks to '[achieve] an overall equilibrium that protects the security of the whole from internal dangers' (p. 249). This is the operation of what Foucault terms 'biopower', the regulation of the population through techniques of normalisation (pp. 252–3). Normalisation infers a 'racism against the abnormal, against individuals, who, as carriers of a condition, a stigmata, or any defect whatsoever, may ... transmit to their heirs the unpredictable consequences of the evil, or rather of the non-normal' (Foucault 2003b, 316–7). In other words, state racism weeds out undesirable components of the population, for the survival and betterment of the overall body politic (Stoler 1995, 62). This thinking helps respond to the fundamental contradiction of how the state can justify eliminating (killing), with impunity, elements of its own constituent whole. 'The more inferior species die out', explains Foucault, 'the more abnormal individuals are eliminated, the fewer degenerates there will be in the species as a whole, and the more I ... can live, the stronger I will be, the more vigorous I will be' (2003a, 255). The 'true race' has the power to define what the norm is, and those 'who deviate from that norm ... pose a threat to the biological heritage' (p. 61). This is what is meant by the

sovereign right to ‘make live and let die’: some life is more legitimate than other (non-)life, the latter of which is deemed necessary to eradicate in pursuit of the overall wellbeing of the population. Such eradication does not exclusively refer to the killing of aberrant bodies, but entails ‘every form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on’ (p. 256). Consider, for example, the structural violence embedded within government institutions here in Aotearoa New Zealand, that has contributed to our shocking statistics in rampant child poverty, substandard housing, and the highest youth suicide rate in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) with rangatahi Māori (*Māori youth*) the most affected (Bradley 2017; Forbes 2017; Frykberg 2017).

It is fitting at this juncture to explore the exemplification of these themes within *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*. Ricky, an urban Māori youth, has long been institutionalised in state care, and conveys the stark realities of this to Uncle Hec: ‘There’s no more home, just juvie! ... Juvenile prison. They don’t care about kids like me. They just keep moving us around until something happens’. Social worker Paula describes Ricky to Aunty Bella as a delinquent youth, a ‘real bad egg’ prone to ‘stealing, spitting’ and disobedience.

Following the death of his Aunty Bella, Ricky receives word from Paula that he is to be remanded back into child welfare. Fiercely opposed to this, Ricky flees into the bush to evade capture and – with the help of Uncle Hec – succeeds, much to Paula’s pointed frustration. Sensational news media in the film depicts Uncle Hec both as mentally unstable and as an ‘armed and dangerous’ threat to Ricky’s safety, justifying the need for violent state intervention, and mobilising its ‘sledgehammer to crack a walnut’ tactics. Here, the film illustrates the crucial role of the news media in re-presenting Ricky and Uncle Hec as problematic subjects, in ‘remote’ spaces, in need of intervention. Paula proceeds to initiate a gargantuan paramilitary manhunt to apprehend the pair, deploying dozens of Armed Offenders Squad (AOS) troopers,⁵ army soldiers, and a fleet of helicopters, trucks, and Light Armoured Vehicles (LAVs) for their campaign. The film culminates in the armada giving chase to the duo aboard their red ute (*utility vehicle*), Crumpy, piloted by Ricky.⁶ As the horizon comes into focus, Ricky glimpses a squadron of LAVs and a regiment of soldiers blockading their path. Panicking, he exclaims ‘Uncle Hec! Uncle Hec, that’s the actual army. This is like an actual war, like, for real!’. He about-faces and speeds off, but as they become increasingly encircled by the paramilitary flotilla, he crashes the ute, ending their pursuit in a ‘blaze of glory’. As they disembark the upturned Crumpy, Uncle Hec concedes defeat: ‘Ricky, this isn’t a game. That’s real over

there. They're never gonna stop chasing, ever. We're done.

The full force of the New Zealand settler colonial state is brought sharply into view in these final scenes of *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*. Uncle Hec's capitulatory utterance of defeat signals the state's monopoly on violence which, as Foucault observed, is used to both produce and maintain a 'disequilibrium of forces'. Waititi's exaggerated use of combat imagery invites us to reflect on how the conduct of state institutions – even those predicated on the 'care' of children – can constitute a continuation of war by other means. Under the pretence of 'care', Paula treats the institutionalisation of children as a literal war, mobilising huge military efforts to uphold her mantra of 'no child left behind'. In light of this, I postulate that the state's treatment of Ricky in the film can be read as a comment on how such subjectivities – urban Māori youth, disconnected from their whakapapa (*family and sense of place*), and constantly in and out of child welfare – are 'let to die' for the purification of the body politic. Ricky's subjectification as a wayward, disobedient urban Māori youth, failing to conform to what is considered 'acceptable Indigenous behaviour', is the 'abnormal' – the 'stigmata' in Foucauldian terms – that must not be allowed to proliferate. In turn, this justifies a heavy-handed approach in the management and elimination of such a threat, exemplified by Paula's paramilitary crusade to force Ricky into juvenile detention. The eradication of this type of body exemplifies the biopolitical operations of state racism for the supposed betterment of the overall population (Foucault 2003a, 60–2). Indeed, this racialised subjectivity is what *Society Must be Defended* from.

What is particularly salient here is that Ricky does not identify with his iwi (*tribal affiliations*). As Brendan Hokowhitu (2013) might argue, the failure of Māori to identify with an iwi is punishable by the state because they cannot be re-subjectified as 'Treaty partners', with whom the state can do business. However, the state also has a vested interest in reproducing such subjects because Māori who remain iwi-less are not subject to a state-brokered Treaty relationship – the prerequisite condition for Indigeneity in Aotearoa's context – and are thus unentitled to the benefits that flow from this. Reproducing this form of subjectification is in the interests of the state because so long as this reality endures, the less the state has to provide to uphold its Treaty responsibilities. Thus, the fragmentation of iwi, achieved through mechanisms such as mass incarceration and the violent removal of Māori children from their whānau, assists the state to legitimate its own sovereignty. In this context, there are 'Good Māori', who identify with their iwi (and are therefore involved in the Treaty-industrial complex), are educated, and are constituent productive parts of a neoliberal economy, and there are 'Bad Māori' who fail to meet this

criteria. A caesura splits the Māori population between these two camps, the latter of which are violently disciplined towards state ends, under the guise of ‘care’ and ‘protection’, while being reproduced as ‘bad’ subjects by the very same mechanisms used to discipline them.

GENEALOGIES OF STATE VIOLENCE

Abuse in State Care under the Mandate of Protection

The theatrical performance of the state’s approach to child welfare in *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* reflects the historic maltreatment, neglect and abuse of children in state care in Aotearoa New Zealand. This is especially so for Māori children, who are (and have been) far more likely than their Pākehā counterparts to be removed from their homes and institutionalised, a phenomenon comprehensively documented by criminologist Elizabeth Stanley (2016). This is an example of what Foucault means by the practice of purification, and particularly his qualification that ‘every form of indirect murder’ is equally constitutive of this process. In other words, ‘purification’ is a multifaceted process that unfolds in a variety of ways, and the predilection to institutionalise Māori children into state care is but one of these methods. Stanley outlines the historically punitive approach taken towards Māori youth which has led to their disproportionate representation in welfare institutions. During the 1970s and 1980s, differential policing resulted in Māori youth being repeatedly incarcerated for mundane offences like ‘being out [on] the street, truancing, maybe stealing a bit of milk money. Once they were identified they were very quickly escalated into the system’ (Smale 2016).

Māori and Pasifika peoples remain the disproportionate victims of this system, which considers ‘cultural backgrounds [as] aggravating factors’ (Stanley 2016, 34). For Stanley, ‘[t]he funnelling of Māori children into welfare institutions was the real start of our systemic mass imprisonment in this country’ (Smale 2016; Stanley 2016, 2017). Between the 1950s and late 1980s, more than 100,000 children were removed from their parents and institutionalised, many of whom were the victims of significant abuse in state ‘care’ (Smale 2016). Stanley describes this as the ‘brutal failings of mass institutionalisation’ in New Zealand (2016, 3), and proceeds to chart the methods of abhorrent mistreatment that came to characterise much of the child welfare system. This is reflected in the film where, at one point, Ricky unwittingly stumbles across his paramilitary pursuers, and exclaims, ‘Oh no! Ninjas! Dire wolves! Child Welfare!’ Here, Waititi likens the inherent violence of the Armed Offenders Squad to institutions of child welfare; ‘ninjas’ was (and remains) the term used by tamariki

(*children*) in the Ruatoki Valley to describe the AOs, given their comparable black-clad attire.

Māori youth – particularly ‘deviant’ urban Māori youth – are deemed a contaminant of the social body in need of resubjectification. This is achieved, in part, through the ‘indirect murder’ of being separated from their culture and whānau and placed into state ‘care’: an example of contemporary colonial politics as ‘the continuation of war by other means’ (Foucault 2003a, 16). While commenting on this through Ricky’s reincarceration after Aunty Bella’s death, the film also poignantly illustrates how Māori subjectivities such as Aunty Bella and Ricky are able to be a whānau without the need for institutional intervention. After much public and international pressure, the new Prime Minister Jacinda Adern has committed the government to an independent inquiry into the abuse of children in state care (2017). However, the previous government’s reluctance to do this is an example of violent legitimisation on behalf of the settler colonial state. By relying on survivors to come forward individually, and treating each reported instance as occurring in isolation, the state shields itself from scrutiny (McCulloch 2017; Radio New Zealand 2017). For Māori institutionalised into New Zealand’s child welfare system over the past sixty years, such an analysis helps to explain the abuse suffered by so many.

In line with this, the racialisation of Māori as unfit parents has long served to justify the coercive nature of state intervention, which is mandated in the protection of children deemed ‘vulnerable’ and ‘at risk’ – the same logic that informed the Northern Territory Intervention (Stringer 2007). In this manner, I also suggest that *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* emphasises a discourse of protection that is deployed by institutions of child welfare to justify their use of violent practices, epitomised through the numerous invasive methods adopted to apprehend Ricky and Uncle Hec. The dramatisation of this in Paula’s merciless chase, appropriating all manner of technologies to do so, emphasises these sentiments. Paula’s penultimate proclamation, ‘I’ve got him! ... Well done everybody! Now let’s get this precious child out of here!’ underscores the mobilisation of a discourse of protection that legitimises such an excessive use of force, and further exemplifies how Ricky’s subjectivity as a deviant urban Māori youth is ‘let to die’ in the state’s articulation of perpetual purification.

For Moreton-Robinson, this is the exercise of the ‘masculine attributes’ of the state, articulated through the ‘police, the army, and the judiciary’ (2015, xx). A point of clarification is important here. Paula’s characterisation as a Māori woman inhibits neither her fulfilment of the patriarchal objectives of the state, nor her role as a complicit participant in the masculinised colonial-military

complex. Indeed, I would suggest her gender and ethnicity enhances her capacity to perform and become complicit in this system, through the discourses of care that justify intervention. Her subject position helps to smooth over these apparent contradictions in the exercise of patriarchal white sovereignty. Further, Uncle Hec's characterisation as a Pākehā patriarchal figure does not in and of itself render him incapable of challenging this system. Rather, Paula and Uncle Hec's characters together highlight that diverse subject positions – along lines of race, class, ability, gender and so on – create different constraints and opportunities for individuals to both exercise and resist patriarchal white sovereignty, sometimes simultaneously.

Waititi's use of humour in *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* has the ideological effect of highlighting the state's absurd overreactions to Māori subjectivities deemed deviant by the state, particularly in the context of colonial frontiers such as Te Urewera. Though not overtly intended as a political critique, the film gestures unmistakably to the brutal, on-going, lived realities of state violence in Te Urewera through the use of humour, rendering palatable this tough political subject matter to broader audiences. My current doctoral project centres on the on-going nature of colonial violence endured by Ngāi Tūhoe. As I watched the film, I was immediately struck by the parallels between the paramilitary expedition to capture Ricky and Uncle Hec, and the heavily-armed 'anti-terror' raids upon Tūhoe communities during Operation 8.

Re-Enactments of Originary Violence and Paramilitary Raids into Tūhoe Communities

Having explored Foucault's model of war in *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* and institutional child welfare in Aotearoa New Zealand, I now turn to examine Watson's notion of the re-enactment of state sovereignty. This builds upon my argument that certain Indigenous subjectivities are 'let to die' in the process of normalisation and the purification of the social body. As I summarised earlier, settler colonial states reproduce their sovereign right of domination, and for Watson, this is intermittently re-enacted through iterations of originary violence. Echoing Watson's thesis, Moreton-Robinson (2015) points out that white domination was not secured by a singular 'one-time' event: maintaining a balance of power in favour of the 'one true race' requires constant maintenance and upkeep. Colonisation is, as Patrick Wolfe describes, a *structure*, not an event (2006, 388). The perpetual nature of this process is evidenced by the Northern Territory Intervention, and, as I continue to explore here, the numerous violent paramilitary raids that have targeted Ngāi Tūhoe over the last century.

The most widely known raids of recent times began in the early hours of October 15, 2007:

[S]quads of New Zealand police swept through an undisclosed number of locations throughout New Zealand, for the most part dressed in full riot gear, carrying machine guns, and with handguns and knives strapped to their black garments. They smashed doors, windows, and furniture, arresting people, confiscating computers, cameras electronics, files and papers, searching for materials that might lend weight to the building of charges under the [then] Terrorism Suppression Act 2002. (Keenan 2008, 18)

The raids disproportionately targeted the Ngāi Tūhoe communities living in and around the Ruatoki Valley, and it was the only location in which the entire community was ‘locked down’, where ‘people were forced out of their cars at gunpoint and photographed’, and where ‘mothers, old people and children were searched and held at gunpoint, sometimes for hours, with no pretence at respect and no potential for arrest’ (Jackson 2008, 6). I spoke with one of the whānau Moana Jackson is here referring to. After the AOS ransacked their house, toppling furniture and turning cupboards inside out, they were forcibly locked in their garage under armed guard. The whānau, consisting of Mum and her young children (one at Kōhanga Reo),⁷ were kept in the garage for nine hours, and denied access to food throughout the ordeal.

At six o’clock in the morning of October 15, the Police installed a roadblock at the entrance to Ruatoki (IPCA 2013, 41). Saturated in potent symbolism, the blockade was emplaced directly atop the confiscation line which intersects the main road, a boundary of seizure inscribed by the Crown in 1866 to punish Tūhoe for supposed acts of rebellion against the government (Binney 2009, 100–14). Although Dame Judith Binney’s encyclopaedic research (2009) demonstrates negligible evidence (if any) for such an allegation, this was outweighed by the Crown’s desire to simultaneously subjugate Tūhoe and render futile their economy (Waitangi Tribunal 2009, 162–3).

During my interviews with whānau of Ruatoki, many compared the 2007 raids with the 1916 Police assault on the prophet Rua Kenana Hepetipa’s community at Maungapōhatu (Binney 2009, 584–91). Here, fifty-seven armed officers stormed and ransacked the small community, killing two people, one of whom was Rua’s son, Toko. One of the commanding officers, John Cassells, testified that he came upon Toko’s lifeless body. Binney refutes this, implicating Cassells as Toko’s murderer by highlighting major inconsistencies in his deposition,

asserting that ‘it is probable that Cassells shot Toko in the back’ and killed him (pp. 588–9). In the immediate aftermath, Cassells actively manipulated evidence to support the Police narrative, which included ‘dictating individual police statements collected at Maungapōhatu before the expedition left’ (p. 589). The raid on Maungapōhatu ‘took place in war-time, and was [ostensibly] instigated because Rua was a “sly-grogger” and a leader who urged Tūhoe not to volunteer [for the war effort]’ (Binney 2009, 572; see also Binney, Chaplin and Wallace 1996; and Derby 2009).⁸ This, in the eyes of the government, warranted such a hostile response.

The 1866 land confiscations (referred to as ‘raupatu’) and the 1916 raid on Maungapōhatu were violently resurrected in October 2007. At that time, the confiscation line was physically painted on the bitumen itself, and erecting the roadblock on top of it amplified the historical continuity of a colonial violence long experienced by Tūhoe. In other words, the roadblock acted as a tether between earlier encounters of colonial hostility and the present, emphasising the on-going nature of this violence. In 2013, the Independent Police Conduct Authority (IPCA) deemed the road block at Ruatoki in 2007 ‘contrary to law, unjustified and unreasonable’ (IPCA 2013, 39–41).

Raids since 2007 have continued to target the Ruatoki Valley (‘the Valley’), and I examine two of them here. In February 2012, an AOS raid was conducted at Uta, a small hamlet at the termination of the state road in the Valley. The Police alleged that a ‘known and dangerous criminal’ was being harboured at Uta, and proceeded to deploy a full-scale paramilitary raid on one of the homes, in which ‘[t]ear gas was fired into the house, windows were smashed, and holes fired into cupboards and walls’ (Te Kaokao a Takapau 2012, 2). I spoke with one of the Aunties from the community, Aunty Hine, about this.⁹ She explained that the raid occurred at roughly eight o’clock in the morning, and as it was a school day, the hamlet’s tamariki were standing on the road waiting for the school bus to arrive. Uta is flanked by a mountainous ridgeline, which extends into the heart of Te Urewera, and at one point, the AOS haphazardly fired shots into the surrounding hillside. The tamariki bore witness to this, and panicked parents ushered them back inside or onto the school bus ‘to get them out of harm’s way’. Despite being indoors or aboard the bus, whānau remained anxiously worried amidst the flurry of Police activity and the discharging of weapons outside. ‘But are we really safe here?’, Aunty Hine recounts. Another kuia (*female elder, grandmother*) from the Valley, Aunty Waicy, spoke to Māori Television’s Mere McLean about the raid at Uta. This was in light of the IPCA’s (2013) report into Operation 8, following the recommendation that the Police review their procedures around raids:

2012, ka wareware rātou i wā rātou i whakarite ai. Ka tae mai anō rātou ki te kāinga o taku tūngāne ... ka puhipuhihia te whare. I wērā haora i te ono karaka i te ata, ki te iwa karaka, kei te kāinga tonu ō mātou mokopuna. [*In 2012, [the Police] forgot about what they had stipulated. They came to the home of my younger brother ... and fired shots at his house. At that time of the morning, from six to nine o'clock, our grandchildren are still at home.*] (McLean 2014)

As the raid unfolded, one of the koro (*male elder, grandfather*) exasperatedly cried out to the Police that they were raiding the wrong house, as it was his son they were pursuing, and his house that he would be at. As it transpired, however, his son had long since left the valley, rendering the raid futile. The koro continued to plead in vain; ‘Shut your mouth!’ was the only response he received. In assessing the ‘potential health hazards the whānau [now] face’ in the aftermath that followed, a Public Health official admitted their department had no experience about homes that had been tear gassed. In lieu of this, a specialist decontamination company stipulated it would cost in excess of \$12,000 to clean the home. Despite having raided the wrong house, the then Acting Area Commander explained the Police were not liable for any of the damage incurred (Te Kaokao a Takapau 2012, 2).

The Valley experienced a comparable raid in April 2014, a few kilometres north of Uta. In the early hours of the morning, the AOs raided the Teepa whānau homestead, in pursuit of suspects allegedly involved in the theft of a cache of weapons near Whakatāne (Leilua 2014). A helicopter, about ten vehicles, and dozens of black-clad AOs troopers, swooped in on the Teepa homestead to conduct the raid. Inside the home were Mum, Dad, and their tamariki and mokopuna (*grandchildren*). Waitangi describes the encounter:

I te moe noaiho mātou, kātahi ka kite au i ētahi rama, he rama mai i tētahi wakatopatopa, etāhi rama pūwhero i runga i ahau. Ka āhua tūmeke katoa ahau. [*We were just sleeping, and then I saw lights from a helicopter, and the red lights from [the scope of] a weapon pointed at me. I was startled and frightened.*] (Te Karere 2014)

At gunpoint, the whānau were ordered out of the house. In their haste, however, the AOs proceeded to raid the wrong property, echoing the blunder at Uta two years prior. ‘All they said was, “Wrong car, wrong house”, and then they just pissed off’, explains the kuia from the homestead (Te Karere 2014). These interviews highlight how the overtly theatrical display of Police power does not, in any way, translate to efficacy: on the other hand, however, this ineptitude does

not undermine the intensity of the force used. Returning to the key thematics of the film, during the chase for Ricky and Uncle Hec, a paramilitary chopper drops a platoon of black-clad AOS troopers, who cascade into the bush, brandishing their semi-automatic weaponry as they interrogate the flora and fauna for the whereabouts of the elusive duo. This kind of absurd imagery echoes the incompetence and blunders the Police have made in Te Urewera over the last five years, and Waititi's use of humour in the film is instrumental in juxtaposing the force of the State with the harmlessness of its targets. As explained earlier, the exercise of state power through the Police and paramilitary forces must continually find targets, however absurd or improbable, in order to justify and continually re-enact state sovereignty.

1916, 2007, 2012 & 2014: Perpetual State Violence

To summarise, since the punitive Crown confiscations of Tūhoe land in 1866, there have been four major paramilitary Police raids upon Tūhoe communities, the latter three of which have all targeted the Ruatoki Valley. While the nuance of context varies greatly between each raid, especially that of the 1916 invasion of Maungapōhatu and the Ruatoki raids of the last decade, I assert that each of them represents a re-enactment of originary violence in the shoring up of state sovereignty. Watson and Moreton-Robinson stipulate that such re-enactments must be regularly performed, as this process requires constant upkeep (Watson 2009, 48). For whānau of Ruatoki, the 2007, 2012, and 2014 raids were contemporary iterations of this experience, as corporeal manifestations of the on-going violent legitimisation of state sovereignty. *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* illustrates the continual nature of this violence, and how, upon its frontiers, the state will unreservedly deploy its arsenal in response to what it deems a threat. The Ruatoki raids, as Jackson explains, remain 'symptomatic of an ongoing exercise of colonising power' (2008, 6). One critic, with expertise in intelligence and security, has suggested that the 'real reasons' for the 2007 raids '[were] far more prosaic; ordinary and everyday. It was a simple Police cock up. Fuelled, I agree, by ongoing ignorance, paranoia and racism, but mostly by simple incompetence and ineptitude' (Te Putatara 2015). My discussion here does not disregard this perspective (more importantly, it is one I am not qualified to speak on), but rather highlights the dangers of seeing any of the raids upon Tūhoe as isolated events. Viewing the raids as exceptional risks ignoring the historic colonial violence experienced by Tūhoe over the last two hundred years. In line with Watson, Moreton-Robinson, and Foucault's theorisations, I argue that the raids were not exceptional, but routine functions of the settler colonial state. Therefore, while the granular detail of each raid may vary, a post-structuralist reading of Tūhoe history expresses how the state has continued to

maintain its sovereignty and dominance over Indigenous peoples through re-enactments of originary violence, exemplified in Ruatoki over the last decade.

Vijay Devadas (2008, 138–142) has already explored how the 2007 raids were reflective of the functions of biopower, state racism, and ‘purification’, whereby the Tūhoe body was excised from the populace. My discussion builds off Devadas’ argument to demonstrate how this process has vehemently continued in the decade since his publication. As he explains, ‘the arrests and media reportage [during Operation 8] are more about managing indigenous life, indigenous sovereignty, as a threat that must be violently dealt with to secure the well-being or security of the rest of the population’: these contaminant subjectivities – Tūhoe who continue to live in Ruatoki, independently of the state and largely outside of the market economy, amongst a tightly knit network of whānau, and who refuse to conform to the cultural norms of polite (white) society – are ‘let to die’ in order to purify the social body. This is potently demonstrated by the raids that have continued to target Ruatoki whānau in the years following Operation 8. Resonant with Watson and Moreton-Robinson’s remarks, Devadas stipulates that this is a fundamental ‘investment [that] ensures the continuation of a racialised state sovereignty’ (pp. 141–2), and is how the state is able to maintain its right to exist (p. 124). To repeat my earlier point, the raids cannot be understood as aberrations of Police procedure, but are instead nominal functions of the settler colonial state in the twenty-first century.

Devadas has also discussed the racialised nature of the raids during Operation 8. Ruatoki was the only location to be physically locked down, and raids on the homes of Pākehā activists in Wellington were tremendously more restrained than the armed fiasco in Ruatoki. These ‘[d]ifferential policing techniques’ racialised ‘Maori ... as dangerous, terrifying, capable of extreme violence, re-playing (post) colonial stereotypes’ (Devadas 2008, 134–7). Since their earliest encounters with Pākehā, Ngāi Tūhoe have persistently been described as a ‘primitive’ and ‘backward’ people. In 1871, Gilbert Mair considered ‘[t]he Maungapohatu Natives ... a wild, restless set, with large shaggy heads of hair, and clad in mats made from the coarse fibres of the *Toi* (*Cordyline Indivisa*) – they bore but small resemblance to civilised beings’ (Webster 1979). Inherently racist perspectives such as these permeate early literature about Tūhoe, and are as profoundly apparent today as they were during the early contact period. This is underscored in former Prime Minister John Key’s flippant comment during a speech in 2010: ‘The good news is that I was having dinner with Ngati Porou as opposed to their neighbouring iwi, which is Tuhoe, in which case I would have been dinner’ (Radio New Zealand 2010). The haphazard execution of the 2012 and 2014 raids upon physically incorrect addresses is permissible in the opera-

tion of biopower and state sovereignty because of the racialisation of Tūhoe as an inherently dangerous people, and a threat to the overall population. Their racialisation *as* Tūhoe is evidence enough of their duplicity and collusion, even if that does not exist in fact. Again, this subjectivity, of the duplicitous, dangerous Tūhoe, is ‘let to die’ in the greater interests of the prosperity and health of the general population. As Foucault reminds us, for the greater good, some must die: ‘The more inferior species die out ... the stronger I will be’ (2003a, 255). As Devadas pointedly observed, ‘Let us recollect that it was precisely in the name of the population and of making it safe and secure that the Police Commissioner Howard Board legitimised the raids. As he remarked: “the raids were carried out in the interests of public safety”’ (2008 141; see also Tran 2007).

Frontier Violence

Foucault stressed that to understand power we need to examine

[power’s] extremities ... its outer limits ... its most regional forms and institutions, and especially at the points where this power transgresses the rules of right that organize and delineate it, oversteps those rules and is invested in institutions, is embodied in techniques and acquires the material means to intervene, sometimes in violent ways. (Foucault 2003a, 27–8)

In other words, the norm, the way of life of the ‘one true race’, is most ardently threatened at the outer edges of society, at the proverbial boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’. This site is imbued with significant violence as the border is patrolled, and normalisation is enforced. I suggest that Te Urewera is the embodiment of this threshold in the operation of state sovereignty in Aotearoa, as a space saturated with colonial violence, and as a site of ordinary violence that contributed to the establishment of New Zealand as a white colonial possession. Te Urewera has repeatedly witnessed colonial violence, where its ‘primitive’ inhabitants have been forcefully reminded of the Crown’s sovereignty over New Zealand, exemplified through invasions, raupatu, raids, and the obliteration of Tūhoe autonomy (Binney 2009). The discourses of savagery and barbarism are acutely inscribed upon the Tūhoe body, which renders such acts of violence towards them as justified in the ‘noble’ pursuit of taming an uncivilised people. Te Urewera therefore endures as a perpetual frontier within the New Zealand colonial project, where, embodying Foucault’s threshold between ‘us’ and ‘them’, Crown sovereignty and the supremacy of the state is violently reinscribed.

In light of this, the paramilitary operations in both *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* and within Tūhoe communities are more accurately described as manifestations of frontier violence. It is no accident that *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* and *Wild Pork and Watercress* are both set within Te Urewera. The subjectivities of the deviant, placeless urbanised Māori youth presented in the film, and the Tūhoe whānau living on their land in Te Urewera, outside of the market economy, who refuse to conform to white society, are both let to die for the purification of white settler society. White denial, however, tends to refute the existence of violence on the frontier, as Watson describes in the Australian context: 'On the white side of the frontier, however, it was and still is strongly contested that any frontier violence had occurred at all' (2009, 47). John Key's statement in 2014, that New Zealand was 'settled peacefully', likewise embodies Watson's frustration (and outrageously distorts New Zealand's colonial history) (Bramwell 2014).

MANAAKI: CRITIQUING BIOPOWER THROUGH CULTURAL PRACTICE

Before closing this essay, I would like to reflect on an important snapshot from my ethnographic research, regarding the exercise of manaaki (or manaakitanga) as a mode of socio-political organisation, in distinction to biopower as a form of population management. Biopower concerns the extraction of maximum productive potential from the social body, where certain bodies (white, able-bodied and so on) are valorised, while defective bodies are discarded for efficiency and 'overall health and prosperity'. Conversely, throughout my time spent in the Ruatoki Valley, elders, pakeke (*adults*) and tamariki alike have reiterated the fundamental Tūhoe value of manaaki tangata ('be kind and generous to people'), and I was a privileged recipient of significant manaaki while I was there. In Māori society more broadly, manaaki remains a fundamental cultural practice that establishes and maintains relationships over generations. Manaakitanga 'centres on the ideal of giving in order to receive and therefore maintain (or establish) authority, prestige, and status, hence manaaki being a derivative of "mana" [*authority, prestige, power, and influence*]. The more one [gives] the greater one's mana' (Kawharu 1998, 30). Thus, kin would 'become powerful [through] the capacity to negotiate mutually rewarding relationships' (Durie 2001, 82). Manaakitanga is therefore the ultimate manifestation of mana (p. 83), the practice of which served to stitch together the social and political fabric of Māori society. Two instances in the film exemplify this. At one point, Ricky and Uncle Hec risk their own safety to help a seriously ill DOC (*Department of Conservation*) ranger, and in the process, are nearly caught by Paula and her armed entourage. As Ricky leaves to contact emergency services, he comes across a local whānau who are aware that he is a fugitive, yet extend

great generosity to him by feeding and sheltering him for the night. For Tūhoe, these examples are encapsulated by the ancient proverb “Tūhoe mōumou kai” (“*Tūhoe masters of food*”), which bespeaks the great sacrifices made in the practice of manaaki tangata. This sentiment is captured through the words of Uncle Smokey of Ruatoki:

We’ve always been told to feed people from off the road, no matter what. Sick, kei te mate, he aha anō, tiaki ana. Tiakina, he tangata tērā, koirā te tikanga o taua kōrero [*Regardless of if they are sick or otherwise indisposed, be kind to them, nurse them, and feed them. That there is a person; be good to them. That’s the essence of that saying*].

Uncle Smokey here exemplifies the disjuncture between Tūhoe value systems and state practices of population management critiqued by Foucault. In a Tūhoe worldview, interactions with people are occasions to extend manaaki, where ‘bodies’ are not rendered as exploitable and disposable resources, but opportunities for strengthening one’s mana.

One further example illustrates this discussion. Following the botched 2014 raid on the Teepa homestead, the Police Area Commander from Whakatāne met with the Teepa whānau to offer his apologies. One of the whānau, Juanita, explained that despite the intensity of the raid, and the wake of trauma it left in its path, Mum and Dad offered manaaki to the officer and invited him in for a kai (*a meal*) and a cup of tea. The Area Commander refused, citing that as he was on duty, it would be inappropriate for him to accept. To be offered manaaki by his hosts, amidst the aftermath of a severely violent raid executed under his jurisdiction, and then for that manaaki to be refused due to the minutiae of ‘appropriate procedure’, is the height of indignity and insult. ‘[W]e’ve offered you hospitality and you’ve [thrown it in our faces]’, narrates Juanita as she recalls the encounter. ‘What does [manaakitanga] look like?’, ponders Waitangi. ‘It looks like a whānau that’s been raided, [who have then] put their feelings aside [to] host you – the person who [has] done wrong to me – to provide you with this kai; and you turn around and you spit on it.’ Waitangi’s explanation echoes that the performance of manaaki often comes at great sacrifice, which in this case exacerbates the Area Commander’s reaction. His behaviour not only represents an astonishing level of cultural ignorance and disrespect, but also reiterates how manaaki is a discrete approach to socio-political organisation that valorises *relationships*, not certain bodies at the expense of others.

CONCLUSION

My discussion throughout this essay has highlighted the different ways Indigenous life is managed by the New Zealand settler colonial state in the twenty-first century, and how, in the interests of the ‘purity’ of the social body, certain Indigenous subjectivities are ‘let to die’. Whether it be placeless, urbanised, and disobedient Māori youth, or Tūhoe who assert their right to live independently of the state and largely out of the market economy, and who refuse to conform to the norms of white society, the sovereignty of the state is violently reinforced by quarantining and expelling these subjectivities from the body politic. Waititi’s *Hunt for the Wilderpeople* is a fitting window through which to analyse these themes, and reflects the on-going experiences of colonial violence suffered particularly by Ngāi Tūhoe of the Ruatoki Valley. Through this, we can conceive of the numerous paramilitary raids on Ruatoki whānau as the corporeal process of the shoring up of state sovereignty, in which Te Urewera endures as a contemporary site of originary violence. Such re-enactments of originary violence are not exceptional, but routine functions of the settler colonial state. As Moreton-Robinson urged, the Crown retains a vested interest in the reiteration of its supremacy – a task that requires constant upkeep – and for Tūhoe, this manifests in violent reinscriptions of state authority upon the frontier of Te Urewera. It is through the lived experiences of tamariki, pakeke, kuia and koro of the Ruatoki Valley that the violent operation of state power is traumatically felt, serving as a stark reminder that the articulation of biopower, through the machinations of the settler colonial state, continues to render the Tūhoe body a disposable and expendable material. It is here that the racialised sovereignty of Aotearoa New Zealand is most vividly manifest.

NOTES

- 1 Tēnā koutou, ko Pounamu Jade Aikman ahau, he uri nō Tainui, Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāi Te Rangī, Ngāti Awa hoki. Taku whakahono ki Ngāi Tūhoe mā taku tino hoa, a Waitangi Teepa, nāna au i whai atu i tēnei kaupapa. I am a doctoral student at the School of Culture, History and Language at the Australian National University, and my research focuses upon the nexus between Indigenous sovereignty and state violence. Nei ra te mihi ki te tangata whenua o taua rohe, o ngā Ngunnawal me ngā Ngambri hoki; I here acknowledge the traditional owners of the land in the Australian Capital Territory, upon whose dispossession white Australian society was founded, and my tenure at university made possible. Ngā mihi nui rawa ki a koutou e te mana whenua.

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- 2 Humour is integral to *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*, and exploring the role and function of humour as a tool for social and political critique of state violence is a vital area of further research. However, an in-depth discussion of the role of humour is beyond the scope of this article, considering its principal aims.
- 3 However, Stringer stipulated that the ostensible reasons for the Intervention acted as a ‘Trojan Horse’ to conceal the real motives of undermining Indigenous sovereignty and land tenure (2007, pp.7–8).
- 4 Here, Foucault inverts Clausewitz’s famous aphorism that ‘war is a continuation of politics by other means’.
- 5 The Armed Offenders Squad (AOS) is the paramilitary wing of the New Zealand Police, tasked with responding to threats or actual use of firearms against the public or Police. AOS raids are not a new phenomenon: the AOS itself was established in 1963, and between 1997 and 2011 there were nearly 10,000 callouts (den Heyer 2014, 351–3). As I continue to explore in this essay, the racialised nature of AOS raids in the Ruatoki Valley is what sets them apart from those conducted elsewhere.
- 6 ‘Crumpy’ is a homage to Barry Crump, the author of the book upon which the film is based.
- 7 Kōhanga Reo are Māori language preschools.
- 8 ‘Sly-grogging’ was the illegal sale of liquor, which, at that time, was widely practiced amongst Māori and Pākehā alike.
- 9 ‘Aunty Hine’ is a pseudonym.

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