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Myth, Māori and two cartoons: A semiotic analysis

In May 2013, two cartoons depicting Māori people were published in two newspapers in Aotearoa New Zealand. Māori politicians condemned the cartoons as perpetuating racism, while the Race Relations Commissioner said the cartoons were offensive but not racist. The purpose of this paper is to critique those two cultural artefacts. We draw upon Barthesian criticism to conduct a semiotic analysis as an oppositional response to challenge the dominant colonial social order. By default, this essay is a form of ideological demystification – a tool to deconstruct what is taken for granted as natural and normal – in this instance: the representation of Māori.

Keywords: Māori, racism, stereotyping, representation, semiotics, cartoons

‘The newspapers there tell us that the colonizer alone is qualified to speak of the colony’
Jean-Paul Sartre (cited in Memmi 2003: 17)

Although located in a different context, the epigraph of this paper epitomises the media representation of Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand. A recent case in point concerns two cartoons depicting Māori people, which were published in May 2013 in two newspapers owned by Fairfax New Zealand Limited. Māori politicians condemned the cartoons as perpetuating racism, while the Race Relations Commissioner said the cartoons were offensive but not racist. In May 2017, the Human Rights Review Tribunal ruled that the cartoons did not breach the Human Rights Act. Despite the tribunal’s ruling, this case highlights ethical issues concerning the representation of Māori in news media. The purpose of this paper is to critique those two cultural artefacts, which have been normalised and legitimised as part of hegemonic discursive practices in Aotearoa New Zealand. We draw upon Barthesian criticism to conduct a semiotic analysis of the two cartoons as an oppositional response to challenge the dominant colonial social order. A fundamental tenet of semiotic analysis is that cultural artefacts are signs which convey meaning and, for Barthesian criticism, it is the second-order signification, or connotative plane, from where myth is operational. Therefore, as a semiotic analysis, by default this essay is a form of ideological demystification – a tool to deconstruct what is taken for granted as natural and normal – in this instance: the representation of Māori people.

The structure of this essay follows a thematic logic. First, a concise discussion of Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand will be sketched out to provide a contextual background to articulate the social realities of Māori. This leads into a discussion of racism and representation in media discourse, followed by a brief discussion of editorial cartoons. Then, the cartoons will be presented as cultural artefacts before we discuss Barthesian criticism (semiotics), which is outlined as the method for analysing cultural artefacts and signifying practices. This will be followed by our semiotic analysis and then discussion where we seek to explicate meaning from the cultural artefacts and, by doing so, will discuss how the values of the dominant colonial and social system are embedded within the cultural artefacts of study.

The realities of colonisation
Māori are believed to have arrived in Aotearoa New Zealand from Polynesian islands between AD 1210 and AD 1385 (Moon 2013). As indigenous peoples, Māori were nga kaitiaki (guardians) of Aotearoa New Zealand for several hundred years until the ‘European invasion and settlement of New Zealand’ (Page et al. 2013: 365). From the early 1800s, the British progressively settled in Aotearoa New Zealand (Keih and Moon 2008) and they brought with them ‘viral dysentery, influenza, whooping cough, measles, typhoid, venereal diseases and the various forms of tuberculosis and similar diseases’ (Belich 1996: 173), as well as alcohol and tobacco which they encouraged Māori to consume (Lange 1999). In 1840, Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) was signed between representatives of the Crown and Māori chiefs (Moon 2002), and while discrepancies exist between the Māori and English language versions (May 2012), it was used by the Crown to usurp sovereignty from Māori (Dorie, M. 1998). At the time of the signing of the treaty, the
Māori population was believed to be between 70,000 to 90,000 while the Pākehā population was just 2,000 (Dalziel 1999). According to King (1999: 10), Pākehā is ‘is derived from the word “pakepakehā”, meaning fair-skinned folk. It simply denotes people and influences that derive originally from Europe but which are no longer “European”’. However, the Pākehā population outnumbered Māori by 1858, and the Pākehā population reached 256,000 in 1872, and half a million by 1881 (Gordon and Trudgill 2004).

As power became entrenched in the hands of the colonialisits, Māori were subjected to massive land losses (Kingi 2008; McCann 2001) including raupatu (land confiscations) which drastically reduced their economic base. Te reo Māori (Māori language) was banned in schools (Ka’ai-Mahuta 2011) which meant children were punished for speaking Māori there (Durie, A. 1999). The loss of lands and language meant a loss of culture because land, language and culture are intertwined for indigenous peoples (Naden and Havea 2014). For example, the purpose of renaming indigenous lands is to erase the indigeneity associated with the land (Walters et al. 2011) and to remove indigeneous identity systematically (Berg and Kearns 2009). As Ngūgí wa Thiong’o (1994:15) asserted: ‘Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people’s experience in history,’ and by replacing the indigenous language with the colonising language, the colonised people are forced to accept the mindset, values and ideology of the colonising power (Fanon 1967).

Consequently, the impact of colonisation in Aotearoa New Zealand is well-established (Robson 2007). As Mason Durie (2003:21) stated: ‘There are no surprises. On almost any indicator, such as health, education, employment, offending, home ownership, or income levels, Māori performance is substantially worse.’ The health and social statistics bear similarities to those of other indigenous peoples who share the same histories of colonisation (Etamead 2007; Lashley 2006). This is perhaps unsurprising given that oppression and marginalisation are detrimental to health and wellbeing (Nairn et al. 2006). Furthermore, indigenous peoples share similar experiences of racism (Chakma 2001), which has been said to be both an ally and a product of colonisation (Stam and Spence 1983). According to van Dijk (1993), racism as a system of white group dominance is reproduced through discourse and communication. In Aotearoa New Zealand, examples of racist discourse can be found in the media’s ‘negative and stereotypical depictions of Māori’ (Moewaka Barnes et al. 2013: 65).

Racist media discourse
Racist stereotyping often reflects societal racism (Downing and Husband 2005) and is reproduced by the media (van Dijk 1991) in a momentum that keeps the cycle going. Spoonley (1990: 31) summarised the relationship between the media and society, stating: ‘If the media are racist, then it will be because the wider society is racist. The media will reflect and appeal to commonly held values to varying degrees. If racism is part of New Zealand society, then it would be unusual not to find it represented in the media.’ Accordingly, research has shown the extent of anti-Māori racist media discourse in studies of newspapers from the late 1800s to early 1900s (Will 1973), 1949 to 1950 (Thompson 1953, 1954a, 1954b, 1955), and 2000s (Moewaka Barnes et al. 2012). More specifically, Māori are framed in the media as either the ‘Native/ Inferior Other’, the ‘Deficient/Depraved/Negative Other’ or the ‘Activist/Radical/Excessive Other’ (Pihama 1996).

An example of negative Māori stereotyping in the news media is the over-reporting of child abuse cases involving Māori. Merchant (2010) found a 1 to 1.1 ratio between Pākehā and Māori in actual incidents of child abuse, but a 1 to 1.9 ratio in terms of the news print media coverage of Pākehā and Māori child abuse. The over-reporting of Māori child abuse contributes to the commonly-held perception that child abuse is a ‘Māori problem’ (Keenan 2000; Warner 2015). This is a matter of some concern given that the media are a primary source of information about cultural groups other than one’s own (Hartmann and Husband 1974; Steuter and Wills 2011; van Dijk 1987). As Cindy Kiro (former Children’s Commissioner) stated: ‘If we were to believe everything we read, we’d think Māori were bad, sad or mad’ (Massey University 2010: para 3).

Moreover, the negative stereotypical depictions of Māori are not restricted to news media, as a recent study found that Māori were under-represented in all commercial forms of television advertisements. But they did feature in government and community advertisements for ‘drink-driving, gambling, smoking, family violence, and literacy problems’ (Rubie-Davies et al. 2013: 191). It is, therefore, unsurprising that research since the 1950s has consistently shown that Pākehā are considered ‘successful, hardworking, intelligent and self-centred’, while Māori are viewed as ‘trouble-makers,
lazy, unintelligent, dirty, aggressive, easy-going and friendly’ (Holmes et al 2001: 79). The discursive practice of negatively framing Māori positions them as inferior to Pākehā, and aligns with Bhabha’s (1994: 70) assertion of colonial discourse which construes the colonised as ‘degenerate types’ in what is essentially a vulgar display of power and ideology. The dominant ideology is embedded in media discourse which shapes negative perceptions of Māori to wider society. It even influences Māori self-perceptions which can manifest as internalised racism (Moewaka Barnes et al 2013) where they incorporate ‘into his or her own self-schema the dehumanizing messages of his or her own in-group made by others’ (Gamst et al 2011: 251). The media use dehumanising messages to construct oppositions (Hamelink 2016), and one way this is achieved is through editorial or political cartoons in newspapers (Steuter and Wills 2011).

Editorial cartoons
Cartoons are drawings which caricature an event or personage (Danesi 2009) and are distinctive cultural artefacts (Warburton and Saunders 1996) because they offer a ‘glimpse into various points of view operating during particular times and places’ (Ferri and Connor 2006: 76), thereby revealing information about the society that created it. Cartoons in newspapers, also known as editorial cartoons or political cartoons (hereinafter referred to as ‘cartoons’), intersect between popular and political culture and, according to Steuter and Wills (2008), are visual commentary pieces on current events from an ideological perspective. Cartoons are considered less factual than photographs in newspapers (van Leeuwen 2005) but yield power because more people consume their news from cartoons than from full-length news articles (Steuter and Wills 2011). However, while cartoons are commonly perceived as emancipatory and a way of holding the powerful to account, they are often deployed as a weapon against the powerless (Murawska-Muthesius 2009).

MacDonald (1995) discussed cartoons as a means of oppressing and exploiting Māori in his study of cartoons in newspapers in Aotearoa New Zealand from the 1800s to 1930s. He found that a large percentage of cartoons ‘depicted Māori as clowns, savages, drunk, layabouts and as being generally uncivilised people who were holding up Pākehā progress by not allowing any more of their land to be alienated’ (ibid: ii). MacDonald’s study is the only research concerning Māori representation in cartoons in Aotearoa New Zealand as the nature of inquiry given to cartoons is generally located within the study of media effects and the role of humour (Dines 1995). For example, the recent articles by Brown Pulu (2013) and Foster (2014) briefly discussed, but did not undertake an analysis of, two cartoons that depicted Māori people – which are the subjects of inquiry for this paper and will be presented next.

The cultural artefacts
The Marlborough Express and the Christchurch-based The Press are newspapers owned by Fairfax New Zealand Limited (Fairfax). The shareholder-owned company is one of two key players in the print newspaper and online news market in Aotearoa New Zealand; the other being New Zealand Media and Entertainment (Myllylahti 2016). On 29 May 2013, the Marlborough Express published a cartoon (Figure 1) while the following day, The Press published a cartoon (Figure 2), both illustrated by Scottish-born cartoonist Al Nisbet. The cartoons have been widely circulated on the internet, published in scholarly journals (Brown Pulu 2013; Foster 2014) and in court documents (Wall v Fairfax New Zealand Ltd 2017) and are, therefore, in the public domain. Following each cartoon, to provide a description of them, we have directly quoted the Human Rights Tribunal (Ibid). The descriptions serve as the first order of signification, or denotation.

It depicts a group of four adults and four children. All are dressed in school uniform heading to school with bowls in hand. In the background is a direction sign pointing the way to ‘free school meals’. Two of the adults are thin, plainly elderly and well above the New Zealand superannuation age of 65. The other two adults are much younger and obese. The female has
Barthesian criticism
Roland Barthes (1915-1980) was one of the key figures responsible for the development of semiotics (Bruce and Yearley 2006). ‘Semiotics’ and ‘semiology’ are often used interchangeably (Etherington-Wright and Doughty 2011). Semiology is the ‘science of the study of signs and of the communication of meaning through signs’ (Milner 2005: 68). Barthes wrote: ‘What is semiology for me? It is an adventure – it is what advenes: what comes to me from the Signifier’ (Barthes 1988: 4). In Saussurean semiology, the signifier is one of two components of the sign; the other being the signified (Barthes 1988). Saussure (1959) posited that the signifier is the sound-image or form, while the mental representation of the idea or concept of the signified is the signified, which together form the sign. Barthes used semiology to critique notions of power and ideology; his analysis of the Paris-Match magazine cover is an example:

On the cover, a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour. All this is the meaning of the picture. But, whether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors. I am therefore again faced with a greater semiological system: there is a signifier, itself already formed with a previous system (a black soldier is giving the French salute); there is a signified (it is here a purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness); finally, there is a presence of the signified through the signifier (Barthes 1972: 115).

Barthes’ analysis employed the two orders of signification: denotation and connotation, which were concepts borrowed from Hjelmslev (1959) (Barthes 1967, 1974, 1983). In the Paris-Match example, denotation or what was literally present in the image, was a black soldier saluting the French flag. However, at the connotative level, the image ‘acts as a signifier in ideological systems of meaning about colonialism, nationalism and patriotism’ (Ali 2012: 292). Thus, denotation, the first order of signification, is the literal description of the meaning of words or things, while connotation, the second order of signification, is the meaning that is generated by involving cultural meanings (Berger 1999, 2010).
It is at the level of the second-order signification, or connotative level, from where myth is operational. For Barthes, myth is a synonym for ideology and refers to ‘the body of beliefs and representations that sustain and legitimate current power relationships’ (Sériol 2016: 407). Accordingly, Allen (2003) says it is the role of the ‘mythologist’ to ‘expose, or often simply to remind us, of the artificial and constructed nature of such images’ – referring to Barthes’ analyses of images. Therefore, we are influenced by Barthes’ theory of semiology/semiotics to conduct a semiotic analysis as a form of ideological demystification – a tool to deconstruct what is taken for granted as natural and normal – in this instance: the representation of Māori people in the two cultural artefacts.

In the earlier section, the two cartoons were presented as Figure 1 and Figure 2, and we provided a description from Wall v Fairfax New Zealand Limited (2017). That description serves as the first order of signification (denotation), and here we will undertake a reading of the images at the second order of signification (connotation). However, there are three important disclaimers to our study. First, we have full knowledge of the sociopolitical context from where the cartoons were situated, as we are both avid consumers of news media. Second, our analysis concerns the cartoons themselves and not the intentions of the cartoonist. As Chandler (2007) rightly asserted, meaning cannot be reduced to the intention of the communicator as we regularly communicate information to others without being aware of doing so. Therefore, the cartoonist’s intentions are irrelevant for a semiotic analysis. Third, as Barthes (1977: 38-39) stated: ‘All images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a “floating chain” of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others.’ Our analysis is simply that, our analysis.

A semiotic analysis
Myth functions in cultural codes that carry negative associations and meanings – the cartoons provocatively stereotype Māori. Thus, we start by examining the physical characteristics that are portrayed. While the main characters seem to be Māori, we notice that Figure 1 includes Pākehā characters. The two children in the front left appear to be Pākehā, although the ambiguous nature of ethnicity means they could also be Māori. However, the totality of the image suggests those two characters represent an out-group when their appearance would suggest they are Pākehā. They are looking at the Māori characters with suspicion, signaling the Māori characters’ status as being untrustworthy, perhaps dangerous – people to avoid. The Pākehā characters are school children, not fraudulent Māori adults. And more importantly, the Pākehā children are worthy of help – they are deserving. It is not their fault that they are poor; they are innocent children who are used as props to signal ‘Othering’. The ‘Other’ is an important code of the cartoons which functions through a system of binary classification as an organising principle to distinguish the ‘Other’ from the rest of society. The inclusion of Pākehā children in Figure 1 differentiates between the good and bad, skinny and fat, and the deserving and undeserving. Or in other words, Pākehā and Māori: us and them.

In Figure 2, although some characters have light or red hair, we read this image as a family gathered around a table at home, thereby reinforcing the idea that the characters are Māori and not Pākehā. The caption in Figure 2 includes the possessive pronoun in ‘eases our poverty’ which suggests one unit. Their inclusion brings attention to the lighter shades of Māori which is an attempt to erase ambiguity in the white-brown world of New Zealand and to dismiss race and ethnicity as erroneous concepts. More importantly, it is a reminder that the growing ‘white Māori’ population are also the ‘Other’. A form of ‘Othering’ that presents itself is the exaggeration of the characters’ physical features which works to create a distance between them and the audience to reinforce negative stereotypes. The characters’ eyes are close together to emphasise dumbness and docility, while the size of many of the characters conjures notions associated with obesity such as laziness, gluttonous, hedonism and lack of self-control. They are representations which reaffirm stereotypical perceptions of the fat, lazy and dumb Māori. The grammatical error in the caption ‘And puts something in you kids’ bellies’ is used to reaffirm stupidity. Obesity is stigmatised while the idealised figures of whiteness gain visibility and status. The inclusion of tā moko (traditional Māori tattoo), while not clearly recognisable but present nonetheless, is used as a cultural identifier on one of the characters in Figure 1 and serves as a code so there can be no misconstruction as to who these people are. The tā moko is scribbled on disrespectfully, to devalue the lower-classed body and to trample over Māori culture.

Negatively associated with Māori culture by dominant assumption, gang culture is implicit in both images. Figure 1 has a character wearing a blue cap, while another character wears a
red cap in Figure 2. The caps are on backward which shows immaturity by adults. The colours of the caps represent the two largest gangs in Aotearoa New Zealand, as blue is worn by the Black Power gang, and red is worn by the Mongrel Mob gang – both are predominantly Māori (Hamilton 2014). Gangs are deviant, so too are behaviours presented in the cartoons, including smoking near children (including a baby), alcohol consumption and gambling in a family environment. Deviance is closely associated with societal conceptions of crime and this is signified in the cartoons’ captions. For example, Figure 1 includes: ‘Psst! ... if we can get away with this’ which implies not just unethical behaviour but also a criminal mentality. In this way, Māori become criminalised. The ‘Psst!’ shows that the characters know their behaviour is questionable.

The association of ‘free school food’ invokes a sense of entitlement which is embodied in the discourse of special privileges for Māori, such as ‘Māori privilege’ (Boore et al. 2009; Melhna 2015). This view of ‘privilege’ is maintained with the presence of luxury products e.g. cigarettes, alcohol, lottery tickets, and electronic items – the reader is left thinking how can those people afford luxury items? This illustrates that the ‘free school food’ case is representative of wider societal structures where Māori are given unnecessary benefits. In that regard, the body shapes of the characters signify two contrasts: the negative connotations associated with obesity as already mentioned, and the opposite: the sense that Māori are ‘privileged’ because they supposedly get extra benefits that other members of society do not receive, like ‘free school food’, which helps maintain a hefty body. Therefore, the ‘free school food’ is presented as something that Māori do not need, but also as being detrimental to their health and contributing to their privilege and ‘entitlement mentality’.

In that sense, Māori are juxtaposed as being either ‘poor’ or ‘privileged’ – the audience can choose why they dislike Māori. The descriptions of gluttony and privilege seek to remove and deny whatever it is Māori possess and desire; if Māori are overindulging then they should be moderated and controlled. On the other hand, the carrying of empty bowls (Figure 1) suggests begging which is closely related to social problems such as poverty, disease and mental illness. Around the time that the cartoons were published, some newspapers included letters to the editor and news articles about begging. For example, on 30 March 2013, under the headline ‘What’s the policy on street begging?’ (Naylor 2013) a letter to the editor in the Dominion Post highlighted the rise of beggars on the streets of Wellington. Two months later, on 18 June 2013, a news article featured in the same newspaper, titled ‘City council acts on rise in “opportunistic” begging’ (Heather 2013). While in Auckland, on 3 July 2013, a news article headlined ‘Beggar ban’ (Jones 2013) was published in the New Zealand Herald. Therefore, the suggestion of begging in Figure 1 as a code is inescapable from the contextualised social environment and acts as a cue, suggesting, once again, Māori are ‘getting something for nothing’. Moreover, Māori are happy to humiliate themselves in exchange for free food, which shows that Māori culture is moribund and has been replaced by the ‘lifestyle’ depicted in the cartoons – a reaffirmation that Māori can never be civilised.

Associated with this lack of civilisation is the Anglocentric notion of the ‘savage’. The so-called ‘dignified Māori’ (Wineguard 2012: 39) or ‘noble Māori’ (Brooking 2004: 60) no longer exists. The images constitute proof of savagery and, therefore, present a universal truth. The family in Figure 2 are burdening taxpayers by relying on ‘free school food’ because they have spent their own (welfare) money on cigarettes, alcohol, lottery tickets and electronic items – and food for their pet dog. The girl burps and thinks nothing of it as the spit leaves her mouth – indicating she is uncouth. The baby is also spitting and, like the rest of the family, the baby is obese: its eyes are close together with a facial expression of low intelligence. The baby symbolises biological determinism: this ethnic group are born this way; Māori are dehumanised and demonised. They are degenerate and cannot be saved; but worse: they are multiplying: Māori children currently comprise 25.6 percent (or 1 in 4) of all children in Aotearoa New Zealand, due to a high birth rate and this is predicted to increase (Statistics New Zealand 2016). If the cartoons signified poverty and classism, then the characters in both cartoons would be stereotypical images of poor Pākehā because there are more of them who are poor than Māori (Rashbrooke 2013). But the poor Pākehā are not the problem; Māori people are the problem. That is what the cartoons signify to us.

Discussion and concluding comments
We begin by summarising the events that unfolded after the publication of the cartoons. The cartoons became a focus of nationwide discussion after publication. Māori politicians from different political parties made pub-
lic statements condemning the cartoons. Te Ururoa Flavell, Member of Parliament for the Māori Party, said: ‘It’s way out of line and racist’ (Dally 2013: para 27). Tau Henare, Member of Parliament for the National Party, said: ‘It’s just gotta stop and people in positions of power like a cartoonist for a newspaper should know better’ (Dally and Dally 2013: para 54). The Mana Movement, a breakaway political party from the Māori Party, wrote to the Race Relations Commissioner requesting that action be taken (Radio New Zealand 2013). While Louisa Wall, Member of Parliament (Labour Party) for Manurewa, lodged written complaints that eventually resulted in the ruling by the Human Rights Review Tribunal in May 2017:

... it was not unlawful for the defendants to publish the two cartoons which are the subject of the present proceedings. The provisions of s 61 of the Human Rights Act 1993 were not breached. This is because the cartoons were not likely to excite hostility against or bring into contempt Māori and Pacifica (Wall v Fairfax New Zealand Limited 2017: 53).

The findings of the Human Rights Review Tribunal were unsurprising given the studies of racist media discourse in Aotearoa New Zealand (e.g. Will 1973; Thompson 1953, 1954a, 1954b, 1955; Moewaka Barnes et al. 2012) which indicate that there are no repercussions for news media when they negatively stereotype Māori. Within the media discourse, the cartoons become normalised and legitimised as part of hegemonic discursive practices in Aotearoa New Zealand. The news media are free to depict Māori however they like, as they operate within the rules and regulations of the dominant culture and its institutions. This is exemplified by the 56-page decision of the Human Rights Review Tribunal which includes references to Pākehā case law, freedom of expression, rights of editorial decision-making, freedom of the press and other colonial forms of thinking that are embodied in dominant narratives. But absent in the decision is any reference to Māori laws, rules and protocols — known as tikanga Māori; it is not seen — if it is invisible it cannot be recognised. Once again, Māori are subordinated to colonial rule, ethics and morality. The dominant group defines acceptable standards including racism. Susan Devoy, the Race Relations Commissioner, stated that the cartoons were offensive but not racist (Radio New Zealand 2013), and said that the nation needs to ‘de-myth those bunks’ (cited in Manhire 2013: AO33).

Our semiotic analysis ‘de-mythologised’ the form of representation associated to Māori. We interpreted the cartoons to signify Māori as a problem: they are poor, untrustworthy, irresponsible, criminal-minded, obese, unintelligent, ill-mannered, beneficiaries who are always looking for a handout. The cartoons also show a contradiction: that Māori have poor parenting skills which contribute to the cycle of deprivation, as shown by smoking and drinking in front of their children but, on the other hand, that Māori are born degenerate as shown by the representation of the baby caricatured as unintelligent. The representation of the ‘free school food’ reproduces the discourse of ‘Māori privilege’ (Borell et al. 2009; Meihana 2015), and indicates that Māori do not need initiatives like the free breakfast programme because they take advantage of it. The inclusion of the luxury products, such as cigarettes, alcohol, lottery tickets and electronic items, signal that this is representative of a wider structural issue, where Māori exploit unnecessary benefits. All of this serves to ‘Other’ Māori from Pākehā, in a binary opposition, which is illustrated by the inclusion of the innocent Pākehā children who are presented as deserving of help. Moreover, an important consideration is the invisibility of the historical and social conditions.

This analysis, then, unmask normalised racism in Aotearoa New Zealand. The conclusion by the Race Relations Commissioner that the cartoons are not racist and the finding by the Human Rights Review Tribunal that the cartoons were not unlawful merely serve to legitimise racist acts. Significantly, the Marlborough Express found that 7,500 people out of 10,100 participants in an online poll did not find Figure 1 offensive (Wall v Fairfax New Zealand Limited 2017). The majority rule in a colonial society. The insights of the late Māori scholar, Ranginui Walker, are relevant for this discussion:

The Fourth Estate is controlled by Pākehā. It selects the events it deems newsworthy, which usually centre on violence, conflict and competition. When these events involve Māori and Pākehā, it consistently represents the status quo, helping them to maintain their power. So long as this unequal power relationship persists, the struggle of the Māori for a just and equitable society is a struggle without end (Walker 1990: 45-46).

And what about the cartoonist? What was he thinking when he represented Māori in his drawings? He has actually commented: ‘The whole point was overlooked ... that being of a
system that gave something for nothing which could be exploited by a few' (Nisbet 2013: para 26). So, who are these few? According to Al Nisbet: 'I basically tried to work out the sort of people who would try to get away with something like that' (cited in Manhire 2013: A033). It is clear from our analysis who these people are.

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Note on the Contributors
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