The Price of Milk:
Dairy Farming as Colonialism in Aotearoa New Zealand

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Abstract This paper critically analyses the history and culture of dairy production in Aotearoa New Zealand through a historical-materialist approach. It is argued that the violence of settler colonisation in Aotearoa New Zealand is pervasive and multifaceted. In historicizing the production and ideological maintenance of pastoralism and dairy farming in Aotearoa New Zealand, I argue that this has resulted in ongoing interspecies violence. A decolonial perspective is adopted, focusing on how pastoralism was the bedrock for animal agriculture and the alienation of Māori from their land and ways of being. The first part of this paper explores the development and growth of dairying in Aotearoa New Zealand, arguing that this was enabled in large part due to the confiscation of Māori land by the British colonial government. Following this, insights from postcolonial theory and critical animal studies are applied to examine the ongoing effects of capitalist colonisation and dairy expansion on the environment, the cows themselves, and Māori. Critical discourse analysis is then employed to explore dominant colonial ideologies of dairy farming that have persisted into the present day.

Keywords Dairy farming, decolonisation, Aotearoa New Zealand, interspecies harm, pastoralism, colonisation, dairy ideologies, Māori ontologies, environment

Introduction

This paper traces British colonisation and expansion in Aotearoa New Zealand, specifically with reference to the development of pastoralism and dairy farming. An historical materialist approach is taken to focus on the primacy of the economic mode of production in shaping social change. This lens emphasises that land and labour were central to the extractive capitalism that was the driving force behind settler colonialism in Aotearoa NZ, a 'distinct mode of domination producing specific social formations' (Piterberg and Veracini 458).

Extractive capitalism continues to threaten the sovereignty (or tino rangatiratanga) of Māori over their lands. The history of exploitation of Māori and their lands by white British settlers is deepened through an expanded focus on interspecies relations, 'the relations between different forms of biosocial life and their political affects' (Livingston and Puar 3). Here, the human is decentred and human supremacy challenged, and the focus becomes the relations between humans, nonhumans and the more-than-human world. This approach recognises the centrality and intrinsic value of animals and their experiences as opposed to their being cast in terms of their utilitarian value (Livingston and Puar). It supports an unravelling of the multifaceted dimensions of colonisation and their ongoing effects on Indigenous people, the environment, free-living and domesticated nonhuman animals.

Pastoral agriculture and dairy farming in Aotearoa New Zealand are built upon stolen lands which were confiscated by British settlers from Māori during land wars between 1845- 72 (Banner; Belich; King; Monin; Sinclair; Wynyard). The associated translocation of European modes of animal agriculture and pastoralism has enabled widespread and ongoing violence against free-living animals, domesticated animals and Māori. Violence may be understood in this paper as 'the unethical and chauvinistic treatment of other inhabitants of the planet' (Nibert 4). For dairy cows and their offspring this violence takes the form of systemic enslavement; use of their flesh and milk; killing and removal of calves from their mothers.

Interspecies harm caused by pastoralism and dairying is illustrated through a discussion of the history of political and economic marginalisation of Māori and the exploitation of nonhuman animals and the environment. This includes the destruction of ancient indigenous forest; the debasement of waterways and wetlands and their inhabitants; the loss of birds and other species of free-living animals; and the transformation of the landscape to predominantly pasture for grazing domesticated animals. Cows are also harmed and exploited through dairying processes which operate to reduce them to objects and 'lively commodities', illustrating their loss of agency and self-determination (Saha).

Capitalist colonial ideologies of white superiority and progress will be explored to illustrate how they served to uphold imperial power and the desecration of the natural world and harm to Māori. There is a focus on ideologies that supported pastoralism and dairying as constitutive of burgeoning and ongoing national identity formation in Aotearoa.

Decolonial and critical animal studies perspectives are used to analyse the continuing legacy of multidimensional settler colonial violence in Aotearoa. The discussion explores the entangled and 'pervasive violence of pastoralism' (Nibert 5), with a specific focus on dairying. This focus addresses one of the critiques of critical animal studies, that it fails to 'ground its perspectives within anti-colonial analyses. For example, many practices it critiques, such as factory farming and animal experimentation, occur on stolen land seized through colonization, with its widespread and violent impacts on Indigenous people'(Corman).

By exploring the historical and ongoing development of dairy farming through decolonial and critical animal studies lenses, this paper aims to contribute to recent critical scholarship on pastoralism and dairy farming (Belcourt; Chagani; Cohen; Krásná; Montford and Taylor; Nibert; Probyn-Rapsey and Rusell, 'Indigenous, Settler, Animal'; 'Tools, Troops or Escapees?'; Saha; Wadiwel). Developments in critical animal studies on animal colonialism and dairying suggest that cows were enlisted by colonisers as tools of colonialism. For example, Krásná argues that 'nonhuman animals need to be taken seriously as colonial subjects' (62). Nonhuman animals such as cows, suggests Krásná, are involuntary

tools of colonisation, enabling the 'invasion, expansion, and erasure of free-living animals and indigenous peoples' (64). She argues that the centrality of the use of nonhuman animals in the colonial project deserves to be highlighted in postcolonial studies. Cohen also highlights the use of the domesticated animal as a 'conquering colonial commodity'.

However, this representation of cows as 'tools', even if involuntary, has been challenged by Probyn-Rapsey and Russell ('Tools'). They argue that this reading of cows as tools implicates them as co-colonisers, frames them as mere tools or weapons and denies their agency. This inadvertently replicates the anthropocentric logic of colonialism and Western Enlightenment thought. Accordingly, this paper rejects this framing of cows as 'tools of colonialism', whilst acknowledging that they were part of the logic of pastoralism. This paper foregrounds the political and economic logic of pastoralism as a tool of colonialism in Aotearoa New Zealand with a focus on dairy farming. Dairy farming, while initially small scale in Aotearoa New Zealand, increasingly became a dominant economic interest. For the sake of clarity, some points regarding colonialism/decolonialism and how they are used in this paper will be discussed now. Colonialism has been defined broadly as 'the conquest and control of other people's lands and goods' (Loomba 20). While colonialism is not homogenous across time and space, the focus on exploitative relations is consistent. In Aotearoa New Zealand, this exploitative character manifested in the subjugation of the Indigenous Māori people to British powers. Māori had almost all their lands taken from them between 1840 and 1900 in the interests of converting it to pasture for animal agriculture (Monin). This harmed not only Māori but also many endemic species that relied on the vast rainforests and wetlands that existed prior to British colonisation.

The term decolonial is being employed to analyse and challenge colonial domination and its legacy; here, particularly as it pertains to the development of dairying as a dominant economic interest in Aotearoa New Zealand. Colonialism in Aotearoa New Zealand has resulted in ecological destruction unparalleled in rapidity and species extinction globally (Wolfe). The theft of Māori lands by the British may be understood as the bedrock upon which this interspecies violence unfolded. As this paper establishes, colonial violence is an

interspecies issue. A decolonial lens is helpful to both analyse and challenge the ways in which colonial violence manifested and continues to manifest.

This discussion also sets out to be what Probyn-Rapsey and Russell ('Indigenous') describe as 'triadic'. Its triad involves the analysis of such scholarship as is place-based (Aotearoa New Zealand), rejects anthropocentrism, and engages with Indigenous knowledges. There is a dearth of research on dairy farming in Aotearoa New Zealand through this triadic perspective. This article hopes to begin to address this gap.

The history and culture of dairy production in Aotearoa New Zealand

A Marxist reading of the political economy of colonisation focuses on an international division of labour between the metropole and colonies. The colonies produced surpluses of food and materials. In Aotearoa New Zealand, timber and flax were harvested to support wars in Europe, while whales and seals were hunted for their oil for industrial needs in European cities (King; Wynyard). Increasingly, as the fertile soils of Aotearoa New Zealand were cleared, pastoral agriculture became the dominant focus for early British colonists. Indigenous vegetation was replaced by English grasses, prompting the title 'Empires of Grass' (Pawson and Brooking). Initially, sheep farming formed the backbone of Aotearoa's agricultural economy, and this lasted until the 1990s when dairying became dominant (Stringleman and Peden).

Aotearoa New Zealand is now a major player in dairy exports on the global front, but the beginnings were small. The farming of cows in Aotearoa New Zealand began in 1814, when missionary Samuel Marsden brought cows from a New South Wales herd to mission stations in Pēowhairangi (the Bay of Islands) (Stringleman and Scrimgeour, 'Dairying and Dairy Products – Beginnings'). From then on, most early European settlers kept a few domestic cows on bush blocks and farmed them for their milk and related products including butter, cream and cheese, although butter was the only product with a marketable value (Stringleman and Scrimgeour, 'Beginnings').

The first cows in Aotearoa New Zealand were a domesticated breed called the Milking Shorthorn, known at the time as Durhams. This cow was said to have a dual purpose in the production of butter fat and their flesh. Dairy farmers also farmed pigs alongside cows to make profit from the skim milk, which was fed to the pigs. Jerseys were also favoured as a cow breed due to the high yellow fat content of their milk. Later, Friesian cows became more popular because they produced a higher milk yield, illustrating the increasing commodification of cows (Stringleman and Scimgeour, 'Beginnings').

In the early colonial days in Aotearoa New Zealand, cow milk and its products were consumed locally or bartered with shopkeepers for household necessities (Burton; Stringleman and Scimgeour, 'Beginnings'). The cow was milked in the paddock and this was usually considered the work of children or women. Milk was strained through a fine mesh by hand and allowed to settle so that the cream rose and could be skimmed off. This was made into butter. Cheese was made by curdling whole milk with either the lining of a calf's stomach or lactic acid (Stringleman and Scrimgeour, 'Beginnings').

Figure 1. Display at Mercury Bay Museum in Whitianga, New Zealand in March 2025. The museum was once a dairy factory built in 1934. The first suppliers sent cream from cows to the factory by pack horse and launch. Photo credit: Lynley Tulloch

The advent of refrigeration equipment (rail links with refrigerated wagons and storage) in the early 1880s enabled the expansion of the dairy industry (Stringleman and Scrimgeour, 'Dairying and Dairy Products – Expansion of Dairying'). From the 1880s cow milk and 'meat' products began to be shipped to Britain including frozen butter (Stringleman and Scrimgeour, 'Dairying and Dairy Products – Dairy Exports'). By 1884 twenty cheese and butter factories had been built, where farmers sent milk to be processed (Stringleman and Scrimgeour, 'Dairy Exports'). Of note is that the first dairy factories were opened in the mid 1880s in Taranaki and Waikato, two areas where the fertile land had been confiscated from Māori in the land wars (Sinclair).

The way was cleared for the growth of dairying in the Waikato region following the land confiscations by proclamation of Governor George Grey in December 1864 (Swarbrick, 'Waikato Region – Pākehā Impact'). Previously, flax had grown copiously on the Waikato plains and flax mills were operating up until the 1880s (Norris). The wetlands of the Waikato area were extensively drained in order to create pasture suitable for cows. From the early 1880s dairy farming began to expand due in part to the work of James Runicman. Runciman suggested at a meeting of farmers in 1882 that:

> farmers within a radius of four or five miles of Steele's corner (now Hillcrest) should each guarantee to supply a factory with thirty gallons of milk a day, for six days a week, for eight months of the year. This guarantee should warrant an investment of £1,000 in a bacon and cheese factory. (Norris 122)

From here, the growth of dairying in the Waikato expanded through the setting up of numerous cheese factories (Norris).

By 1890 there were 150 dairy factories nationwide, and of these 40% were cooperatives (Stringleman and Scrimgeour, 'Dairying and Dairy Products – Cooperatives and Centralisation'). At this time (between 1880 to 1920) factories operated a creamery system where the milk was weighed and then put into separators to extract the cream. 'A

share of skim milk was returned to the farmer to feed their pigs and calves' (Stringleman and Scrimgeour, 'Cooperatives').

In 1927, Horace Belshaw reviewed the dairy industry in Aotearoa New Zealand, remarking that 'The history of the industry may be conveniently divided into three periods: before 1882, the period of stagnation and depression; 1882-1895, the period of establishment; 1895-1921, the period of rapid growth'(Belshaw 281). Rapid growth from the 1880s occurred as a response to both increasing access to refrigeration and transport, mechanisation of the dairy industry, and availability of confiscated and fertile Māori land.

Figure 2. Development of milking machines enabled the rapid expansion of dairying. Photo credit: Lynley Tulloch.

Aotearoa New Zealand as 'The World's Milkman'

In 1920 there was a peak in factory numbers of 600, and 85% of them were cooperatives. Factories grew larger and cooperatives continued to merge (Stringleman and Scrimgeour, 'Cooperatives'). Over the twentieth century, milk factories became increasingly owned as cooperatives (Stringleman and Scrimgeour, 'Expansion'). By the end of the twentieth century, only three cooperatives remained: Fonterra Co-operative Group, Westland Milk Products and Tatua Co-operative dairy (Stringleman and Scrimgeour, 'Expansion'). Fonterra is the largest milk coperative in Aotearoa New Zealand. For most of its history, the dairy industry in Aotearoa New Zealand exported to the United Kingdom 'home' market. However, since its merger in 2001 Fonterra has focused on expanding its international market (Tulloch and Judge).

Aotearoa New Zealand had moved from farming one or two cows on small scale family farms in the 1940s to 'being the world's largest trader of milk powder across national borders' currently (Sharp, Rayne and Lewis 1619). In a report by Anna Benny (2021) for the Kellogg Rural Leadership Programme, Aotearoa New Zealand was described as 'The World's Milkman' (Benny). In 2025, at the time of writing this paper, cow numbers have now reached 4.7 million (Livestock Impovement Corporation; Dairy NZ). The country's largest company is Fonterra, with 9000 farming families within the cooperative.

It is interesting to note that countries which do not have a long history of milk consumption are currently its biggest exporters, including Aotearoa New Zealand which is on the top ten list of cow milk producers in the world (Cohen). Cohen argues that before the modern colonisation era, animal milk consumption was confined to a few areas: 'Central and Northern Europe, the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Indian subcontinent' – areas with a long history of animal domestication (269). Cohen argues that 'lactase intolerance' (the inability to digest lactose from milk) occurs in about 75 per cent of the world's population. The remaining 25 % display lactase persistence due to population genetics. Montford and Taylor also suggest that milk is a postcolonial issue because 'its consumption as a "pure," "white" beverage has long been taken as a cause of European racial

superiority, with people of colour purportedly being weaker and less virile because many are lactose-intolerant' (Montford and Taylor 37). Of interest, many non-milk-drinking cultures regard milk as akin to urine and an unclean animal fluid (Valenze). Globalisation of cow milk production and consumption is now based on a sterile commercial image (Valenze).

Dairying and interspecies harm

The conversion of primary vegetation to farmland in Aotearoa New Zealand precipitated serious environmental issues. This was discussed by Kenneth B. Cumberland as early as 1941 when he wrote:

> What in Europe took twenty centuries, and in North America four, has been accomplished in New Zealand within a single century-in little more than one full lifetime … Destruction of natural vegetation, animal life, and soil properties has been widespread, and nature's revenge is in evidence – and at an ever-increasing rate. (Cumberland 529)

The multidimensional environmental issues arising from the conversion of the land for farming and forestry and the introduction of non-native species by European colonists, especially since 1840, are enduring. A once-vibrant world of bird song and evergreen forest, New Zealand had by 2001 lost 'forty per cent of its terrestrial birds' (Clout 415). In addition, '>40 % of remaining bird species [were] classified as threatened: a higher proportion than any other country' (Clout, 415). Only 22 % of the original extent of primary vegetation remained (Myers et al.) and many endemic invertebrates, reptiles and plants were also threatened (Clout). More recent research corroborates these devastating figures:

> Today, 80 per cent of native birds, 88 per cent of lizards, and 100 per cent of frogs are threatened with extinction. Between 1996 and 2012 there was a net loss of 71,000 hectares of indigenous habitat, mostly in areas of lowlands, wetlands and coastal habitat. (Biodiversity Collaborative Group New Zealand)

European colonisation first began in Aotearoa New Zealand in the late 1700s. At this time, Aotearoa New Zealand was mostly covered in dense ancient forests (colloquially called 'bush') with a high level of endemic biodiversity (Knight; Peden and Holland). Geographically speaking, Aotearoa New Zealand was the 'most isolated large archipelago on the planet' (Towns and Ballantine 452). Aotearoa New Zealand long existed in almost total isolation from humans and the rest of the world after breaking from the ancient supercontinent Gondwana 80 million years ago.

The unique geographical isolation of Aotearoa New Zealand has resulted in a high degree of endemism, making it a 'biodiversity hotspot' (rich in taxonomically unusual species) (Myers et al.). A lively description of 'the bush' around 1840 is offered by Cumberland:

> The New Zealand forest was highly endemic and essentially an evergreen rain forest … the forest was very dense. It included a mass of tall, somber timber trees, an intricate tangle of medium-sized trees, looped lianas, massive epiphytes, and tree ferns, and a low maze of shrubs, seedlings, rotting logs, raised roots, and moist mounds of humus masked by bryophytes and filmy ferns. (Cumberland 531-532)

These ancient forests, the homes of a lively entanglement of unique endemic flora and fauna, were cleared by early European settlers in the nineteenth century by fire and milling. The land was converted to pasture for the farming of land mammals (mostly sheep and cows) and to build new settlements (Knight). Knight has argued that in the mid-1800s the landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand was vastly different from today and has undergone a dramatic transformation due to deforestation and conversion of lands to pasture. Peden and Holland also discuss the early conversion by English settlers of extensive shrub lands, wetlands, fernland and forests of the eastern flanks of both the North and South Islands of Aotearoa New Zealand to agriculture and pastoral lands. A joint report by the Ministry for the Environment and Statistics New Zealand reports that 'Lowland indigenous forests, grasslands and wetlands were largely replaced by agricultural landscapes, predominantly

exotic grasses used for pasture, including dairy' (Ministry for the Environment and Statistics New Zealand 15).

Dairy farming has intensified significantly over the last 30 years, and this has exacerbated enduring issues of environmental harm including degraded freshwater quality and associated biodiversity loss (Carr et al.; Dibley; Sharp, Rayne, and Lewis). Recent research has demonstrated that 'higher dairy stocking rates and total cattle numbers are linked to increased nitrate pollution at regional and district levels' (Carr et al. 131).

The intensification of dairy farming in Aoteroa New Zealand has occurred significantly in the South Island. The Canterbury plains in particular have grown considerably as a dairying area since water irrigation schemes took water from rivers and groundwater to support pasture growth (Joy, 'The Environmental and Human Health Impacts'). Increased use of nitrates on stony and permeable soil means that large amounts are leaked into the surrounding waterways, leading to a crisis in water quality (Joy, 'The Environmental').

Case studies of interspecies harm and dairy farming expansionism

Colonialism as an interspecies issue can be illustrated by studying how specific areas in Aotearoa New Zealand were transformed through dairying. In this section, two areas are offered as examples of how dairy farming expansionism in Aotearoa New Zealand exploits Indigenous peoples and local ecosystems. Aka Aka in South Auckland will be discussed first, followed by Eketāhuna in the Wairarapa near Wellington.

Land in Aka Aka near Waiuku in South Auckland became a dairying hub from the late 1800s. Prior to this it was primarily a dense kahikatea swamp forest, containing a variety of habitats for endemic and native birds, fish and invertebrates (Johnson). Transforming this land to pasture for cows involved draining of vast areas of this kahikatea swamp forest and wetlands. This below image (fig. 3) is startling because the land in Aka Aka was once a wetland with an abundance of flora and fauna, including endemic and native fish, frogs,

lizards, insects and birds ('The Man Who Restored a River'). It was also a thoroughfare for Māori pre-1860s trade routes along the waterways. As Joy writes, 'Wetlands were fundamental to Māori as their food store, pharmacy and fibre supply. Not so for European settlers' (*Polluted Inheritance* 9).

Figure 3. Cows on drained kahikatea swamp forest in Aka Aka, South Auckland. Photo credit: Lynley Tulloch

Remnants of kahikatea remain, as is demonstrated in this picture (fig. 4), foregrounded by bales of sileage for feeding out to cows when the pasture is low. Aka Aka is now drained of its lifeblood – the wetlands, streams, rivulets and ponds that nourished an abundance of life for millions of years. Once supporting giant and ancient endemic kahikatea trees, the land now bears the hoofprints of cows and the gumboot prints of the dairy farmer.

Figure 4. A remnant kahikatea stands foregrounded by bales of sileage to feed out to cows. Photo credit: Lynley Tulloch

Christian ideologies favoured the notion of 'hard work' as a moral characteristic. For example, the settling of Eketāhuna in the Wairarapa near Wellington involved the clearing of the 'seventy-mile bush' by early settlers. This bush tract is said to have been 'forty miles wide and seventy miles long … the only access to the bush was by river or along tracks used for centuries by Māori' (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa). The New Zealand Government enticed Scandinavian settlers, who were considered 'industrious and of good moral character', to clear the dense seventy-mile bush by offering 40 acres of land in return for their work. In addition, the new settlements would be named in recognition of the Scandinavian culture – for example Norsewood (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa).

Figure 5: 'Ecatahuna' [Eketahuna], The Forty Mile Bush, NZ.
From the album: Views of New Zealand Scenery / Views of England,
N. America, Hawaii and N.Z., circa 1875,
Eketāhuna, by James Bragge. Te Papa (O.011671)

The above image (fig.5) illustrates the level of deforestation that took place at Eketāhuna by early settlers. A dairy factory was established in Eketāhuna in the early 1900s, and dairying remains one of the main forms of farming here today.

'Land of milk and honey': ideologies and agrarian colonisation of Aotearoa New Zealand

As has been discussed so far, colonialism and pastoralism altered natural landscapes and ecosystems irredeemably, causing the reduction (and in some cases extinction) of distinctive endemic fauna and flora. This process was multilayered and played out in diverse and complex ways. However, one thing is consistent – the acquisition of indigenous land by the

early settlers was achieved as part of the project of agrarian colonisation. In addition, the transference of land to the British settlers was coupled with the translocation of European farming practices, including dairy farming.

Pastoralism and the growth of the dairy industry disrupted the indigenous economies of food procurement systems and dispossessed indigenous peoples of their lands (Paterson).The process of agrarian colonialism assumes the notion of Terra Nullius – 'land belonging to no one'. It is also premised on the logic of capitalist expansionism and associated exploitation of the more-than-human world. Dominant colonial discourses in Aotearoa New Zealand followed the utilitarian and exploitative logic of capitalism, whereby the 'natural world' is reduced to 'resources' to be commodified assigned a use-value (Tulloch, 'Is Emile in the Garden of Eden?'). Capitalist ideologies were evident from the very earliest days of contact with Aotearoa New Zealand. Europeans exploited indigenous peoples and coveted 'natural resources' – both nonhuman animals and plants.

Such ideologies stand in stark contrast to Māori relational and holistic views of nature and land. The deep connections between land (or whenua) and the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand are well-documented (Ihimaera; Nuku; Wynyard). At the time of European-Māori contact and early European settlement (around late 1700s to 1840s), Māori lived in complex tribal or hapū groups based on kinship and defined by local residence and descent (Anderson). They communally owned over 60 million acres of land (Banner). For Māori, land was regarded in a communal sense; bound by tikanga, and of a deeply spiritual nature (Mead). The social organisation of Māori people at the time of European colonisation was strongly linked to the whenua or land. Accordingly:

> the social unit that is larger than the whānau is the hapū, which consists of several whānau or birth units that are bound together through common ancestors. The iwi is the next plank of the system. It consists of several hapū. The word iwi may refer to bones, one's relatives. What are left of iwi are their bones which are usually buried in caves or in the ground. This cultural practice also creates binding relationships with the land. Thus pregnancy, birth, the placenta, the umbilical cord

> and bones (hapū, whenua, pito, iwi) become enmeshed in the concept of whenua, as land. (Mead, 270)

The above discussion illustrates, to some extent, how a Māori worldview interlinks the spiritual and terrestrial (Ihimaera). The significance of this for understanding the jarring impact of colonial capitalist utilitarian ideologies of land during the early colonisation of Aotearoa New Zealand is evident (Tulloch and Judge). While European settlers considered land a resource to be used to make profit, indigenous ontologies were framed by relationality and reciprocity among human and the more-than-human world (Tulloch, 'Is Emile'). The two world views are not only misaligned but incommensurable. For Māori people the land is interwoven with their social identity, kinship organisation, language, spirituality and style of life (Mead). For the early British settler, land was a regarded in terms of its utilitarian value; it was a commodity to be bought and sold; an opportunity for a new life; a wild and untamed space to be transformed into useful pasture (Tulloch, 'Is Emile').

However, caution is needed here not to repeat the grand narrative of European conquest and destruction without considering the 'counter narrative' of Māori history by Māori people themselves (Keenan). Keenan has argued that while the colonial context is inescapable, the history of colonisation by the British is not a singular narrative. Instead, it is deep and nuanced by specific tribal histories and resistance by Māori. Keenan states that: 'As with the land itself, Māori people presented an organic barrier to the colonising aspirations of new settlers' (29).

This statement suggests that the land itself presented resistance to the colonisers, even as they sought to possess and control it. For colonists, the 'wildness' evident in both Māori and the land needed to be tamed and improved. For example, the *Taranaki Herald* (February 1859) opined that 'We are no advocates for giving the Natives a high price for their land, where a low price will suffice – the real benefit they derive from our intercourse is the introduction among them of our laws, institutions and example' (in Sinclair 5). Sinclair argues that the majority attitude of early white setters to Māori was antagonistic and

based on the idea of the 'savage' in need of civilisation. Sinclair writes: 'The idea took root that the only way of governing Maoris was by force, and that their only path to civilisation was defeat and submission' (10-11).

The loss of endemic species of plants and animals was not at the forefront of settler plans, focused as they were on the transformation of Aotearoa New Zealand's distinctive ecosystems to pasture for farming (Peden and Holland). During the initial period of colonisation, settler ideologies were shaped by the prevailing doctrine of progress, improvement, development and opportunity – the translocation of dairy farming agriculture being one aspect of this. These ideas were epitomised in the views of Edward Gibbon Wakefield (1796-1862), a British colonial promoter and coloniser of South Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. He established colonies in both places and lobbied British politicians and prospective settlers of Aotearoa New Zealand to get behind his immigration schemes, emphasising how beautiful and potentially productive the land was. This was couched in the language of romanticism. For example, Wakefield wrote in the following passage in *A View of the Art of Colonization* in 1849 about the 'beautiful but useless wilderness' of Aotearoa New Zealand:

> The glorious climate, the beautiful scenery, the noble forests, the wide plains of natural grass interspersed with trees like an English park; the fine harbour, the bright river, the fertile soil; the very property on which they mean to live and die, first, as it is now, a beautiful but useless wilderness, and then as they intend to make it, a delightful residence and profitable domain: all this passes before the greedy eyes of the intending settler, and bewitches him with satisfaction. (Wakefield 42)

This passage has its roots in European Enlightenment narratives of superiority, progress and development. The capitalistic idea of land as a 'profitable domain' was coupled with the language of romanticism to conjure up feelings of desire to immigrate in the English settlers. The idea of 'wide plains of natural grass interspersed with trees like an English park' were designed to build a connection with the home country. Philip Armstrong argues that the image of New Zealanders as farmers is a fantasy of the colonial era that has endured until the

present day. According to Armstrong, this anti-industrial Romanticism is linked to Arcadian imagery, referring to 'the ancient tradition of portraying agricultural life as a utopian form of existence' (2). He cites paintings from popular romanticism where pretty milkmaids milk cows. The notion of Aotearoa New Zealand as a 'pastoral paradise' in a land with fertile soil and a temperate climate was used by early immigration schemes, especially that of 'The New Zealand Company' (Phillips, 'Ideas in New Zealand'), spearheaded by Wakefield, to promote settlement.

While early white settlers sought to colonise the lands, missionaries vied for the very souls of Māori through attempted conversion to Christianity. Christian ideologies worked hand in glove with settler rhetoric about the benefits of colonisation. The religious ideologies of early missionaries supported the process of colonisation and acted to encourage white settlers to come to Aotearoa New Zealand. In 1864, Rev. James Smith wrote a letter later published in the *Glasgow Herald* the same year that described Awhitu in Aotearoa New Zealand as a land 'flowing with milk and honey'. This biblical expression refers to Israel as the promised land for God's chosen people, with soil fertility and abundance (Levine). In fact, Levine argues that the 'bible abounds with references to milk (or milk products) and honey as luxury items, worthy items, items of trade' (44). Levine goes on to discuss how milk and honey were seen in the Old Testament as products of 'uncultivated areas' and were a 'divine gift'. However, when the Israelites entered the promised land, they 'cleared the wild forests, terraced the slopes, and converted the hills into fertile farms' (Levine 52).

The reference to Aotearoa New Zealand as a 'land of milk and honey' is suggestive of its perceived abundance on the one hand, and emptiness on the other. It was a wild space, flowing with God-given natural resources (milk) for moral and upstanding Christian people who were prepared to work hard and cultivate it. The missionaries' conversion of indigenous peoples to Christian beliefs framed the transformation of wild spaces to domesticated farmland as an act of improvement. Early colonist thought was shaped by Christian doctrines, particularly Genesis 1:28 and the idea of 'improving' that which had been 'wilderness' into the Garden of Eden (Ballantyne). Ballantyne argues that

'improvement' was a foundational colonial idea: 'almost all colonists agreed upon the necessity of 'improvement''. In the colonial imagination 'improvement' applied to both lands and indigenous peoples.

Acquiring land for clearing and converting to pasture was achieved in several ways. The acquisition of Māori land – a form of what Marx calls primitive accumulation – required the erasure of indigenous people. This included changing place names and transforming landscapes so that traditional Māori thoroughfares and ways of life were wiped out. Land purchase occurred through a range of mechanisms – often through devious and underhanded land sales and speculative land sharks (Banner). Before 1840, when the Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) was signed, early settlers and missionaries acquired land, in part, through land deeds which were signed by Māori. The different cultural understandings of land were evident in these deeds, which the Māori often interpreted in terms of reciprocity and sharing their land 'with all the privileges and responsibility that entailed' (Jones and Jenkins 93). For Māori, signing the deed did not mean handing over 'ownership' of land as the capitalistic notion of 'private property' was not part of their worldview. Purchases and signing land deeds were a way of entering a reciprocal relationship with Pākehā; one based on tying the Pākehā into the territory 'that was still under customary use' (Jones and Jenkins 94).

After the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Māori version) and The Treaty of Waitangi (English version) in 1840, the government became the sole purchaser of Māori land and oversaw the transfer of millions of acres of Māori land to settlers. This was done through both purchase and invading Māori land and waging war. By 1920 Māori held only 7 percent of the land. Of this, most held little economic value from a materialist European perspective (Monin).

Knight indicates the devastating impact that Māori land loss had on natural forest cover: 'within 60 years of European colonisation of New Zealand, native forest cover had been reduced by half' (Knight 324). Knight also goes on to say that this was seen by some as 'one of the outstanding achievements of our people' (324). This self-congratulatory

interpretation of the process of stripping the land of native bush to convert it to pasture sits alongside a benign view of the dispossession of Māori of their land. The colonial discourse of 'our people' as agents of progress in the 'promised land' served to justify the 'systematic dispossession of Māori land in the nineteenth and twentieth century' (Wynyard).

Wynyard's (2017) analysis of the conquest of Aotearoa New Zealand by British settlers argues that the alienation of Māori from their land established the 'preconditions necessary for capitalism in Aotearoa' (18). As such, it represents the process of primitive (or original) accumulation – a Marxist term that has been expanded by David Harvey in his concept of 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey). Large tracts of land communally owned by Māori were framed by colonial ideologies as 'wasted', 'idle' and 'non-productive' (Wynyard). After Māori resisted selling their land to increasing numbers of colonists, it was confiscated – especially vast tracts of fertile land in Waikato, Taranaki and the Eastern Bay of plenty (Wynyard). McAloon writes that:

> By 1862 most of the South Island, and about one-quarter of the North Island – including large areas of the Wairarapa, Hawke's Bay and Auckland – had been purchased by the Crown. Another 3.5 million acres (1.4 million hectares) were confiscated in the New Zealand wars of the 1860s. (n.p.)

These areas are now booming dairy farming regions. Waikato and Taranaki are the two largest dairy farming regions in Aotearoa New Zealand due to their favourable rainfall, fertile soil and closeness to export ports (Reeves).

The translocation of British animal agricultural practices to Aotearoa New Zealand involved a 'radical remaking of non-human animals and "nature"' (Wadiwel xvii). This remaking of nonhuman animals and 'nature' through the colonial project was premised on erasure of Māori ways of being. Pre-existing Māori relationships with the land were holistic and relational. These were fundamentally challenged by the British colonial invasion. The mechanistic, dualistic, linear and utilitarian view of 'nature' held by British settlers was (and is) incommensurable with the Māori relational worldview (Tulloch; Winter). Whereas

nature and humans are separated within a Western worldview, Māori ontologies reflect a view of circularity, unity, holism and relationality (Winter). The idea of an objectified and desacralized nature central to Western Enlightenment thought justified the desecration and destruction of ancient trees and the draining of wetlands to make way for grass and large grazing mammals.

Expolitation and commodification of cows

Figure 6: This cow called 'Peek-a-moo' is one of 60 strong 'Herd of Cows?' street art statues in Morrinsville, a dairying district. She has a hidden calf on the other side of her body. Photo credit: Lynley Tulloch

The Morrinsville 'Herd of Cows?' project is located in the Morrinsville, a provincial dairy farming town in the Waikato region. The project is illustrative of how central dairying is to the social imaginary in Aotearoa New Zealand, especially small towns based on dairying. The website declares that: 'We are the "cream of the Country" and "Dairy Capital of the World"' (Herd of Cows? Morrinsville Street Art). 'Peek-a-moo' (fig. 6) is sponsored by the vet clinic and her organs are on display to illustrate a 'real' cow. This statue illustrates

reduction of a cow is no more than the sum of her body parts. This statue suggests that this is who she really is, the 'real' cow a collection of blood, bones and organs wrapped up in skin. On the other side of her body is a hidden calf; obscured in art just as in real life. The nearly 2 million 4-10 day old bobby calves sent to slaughter each year in Aotearoa New Zealand remain buried in statistics, hidden from view and public consciousness. One cow in the collection called 'Herd a Kiwi?' was decorated with various 'kiwi' colloquialisms including 'she'll be right', 'yeah, nah bro" and even 'freezing works', meaning a slaughterhouse.

Figure 7: The Morrinsville Mega Cow (Mabel). She is one of the 60 strong 'Herd of Cows?' street art statues in Morrinsville, a dairying district. Photo credit: Lynley Tulloch.

Mabel, another Morrinsville street cow statue (fig. 7) stands 6.5 metres tall and depicts the enormity of dairying for the Morrinsville region, located in the Waikato region. Morrinsville district is 'one of the most intensively farmed in the Waikato' (Swarbrick, 'Waikato Places –

Morrinsville' 13). This photo was taken on the day that Mabel was unveiled in 2017 to a crowd of hundreds of people who lined the streets (Tanihau). Mabel's presence is designed to cement the Morrinsville territory as a dairy community, symbolising a unique dairying culture. The stories of violence that underpin the establishment of dairying in Aotearoa are erased. Mabel assumes a God-like statue that is a revered figure, akin to the settler Christian reverence toward Aotearoa New Zealand as 'paradise' and a 'promised land' of 'milk and honey' (this is discussed in more detail below). Mabel the cow still symbolises the early colonist hopes for abundance in a new land.

The centrality of dairying to current day capitalist Aotearoa New Zealand undersores the commodification of cows. When they are alive, cows are 'lively commodities' with their bodies and 'products' to be brought and sold on the global marketplace (Collard and Dempsey; Gillepsie). The logic of capital governs this exhange with profit being the driving force. Dairy farming in Aotearoa New Zealand, far from being based on the colonial dream of the small family farm is now driven by a market based, technological approach to farming animals. This is based on exponential growth and intensification of the dairy industry. Treating animals and their excretions as commodities to be traded on the global marketplace is a market-based norm. An example of this is the live exports of cows from Aotearoa New Zealand to countries such as Sri Lanka and China. In 2020 one live export ship on the way to China sank and the 5867 cows on board and 43 crew members were killed (Taunton; Tulloch). In addition to the living sentient bodies of cows, Fonterra also exports 'dairy products' around the world with dairy being the largest export product in Aotearoa New Zealand (Sharp et al.)

Dairy farming is inherently exploitative because of the for-profit motive and subjects cows and their calves to suffering on a mass basis. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the dominant ideology within policy settings is that of legal welfarism which largely has the public consent (Tulloch and Judge). Contradictory discourses circulate in dairy propaganda from Fonterra that consitute dairying as natural and 'the way things are' (Tulloch and Judge). Through television commercials by Fonterra, dairying is portrayed as a natural process, despite being

highly industrialised and unnatural (Tulloch and Judge). Links are frequently made to the natural and upspoiled environment with the farmer as a worker of the land and in harmony with nature (Tulloch and Judge). This links to early European imagery of Aotearoa New Zealand as a pastoral paradise.

The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) in Aotearoa New Zealand makes claims of high animal welfare standards (Tulloch and Judge). Yet this is based on speciesist logic that places animals on a lower scale ontologically – it is pathological and is used to justify mass suffering and killing. For example, in Aotearoa New Zealand, '[c]ows are impregnated yearly (often by artificial insemination); cow and calf are separated shortly after birth; and up to two million bobby calves are killed each year' (Tulloch and Judge 8).

Identity politics, ideology and dairy farming

In this context of European settlement, animals and their products became constitutive of national identity formation through cultural and political narratives that became normalised over time. Early settler identity in Aotearoa New Zealand was based on the 'hard-working' farmer tasked with 'taming wild and unproductive landscapes' (Tulloch and Judge). This set the scene for the conversion of indigenous lands to farms and the consequent displacement of local fauna and flora. The discursive construction of dairy farming has evolved to possess a myth-like quality, representing the quintessential 'hard working kiwi farmer' who is one with the land.

As discussed earlier, discourses promoted by early settler companies centred on Aotearoa New Zealand as a 'labourer's paradise' (Bell). They focused on its rural farming potentialities, plentiful wildlife and fertile soil and a beautiful landscape (Bell). Aotearoa New Zealand was constructed as a 'land of opportunity, of natural abundance' (Bell 146).

Figure 8. 'Farming Family' – celebrating the role of the ordinary farming family on Victoria Street, Waikato.
Te Ara – The Encylocpedia of new Zealand. Photo credit: Janine Faulknor

The statue above of a farming family statue of Victoria Street in Hamilton in the Waikato region depicts the centrality of farming to Pākehā identity formation (fig. 8). The idea of farming as central to Pākehā identity has been explored by Potts et al. who argue that modern New Zealand was founded on pastoral agriculture in both and economic and cultural sense. Today this enduring image of the 'promised land' is used for advertising purposes to promote dairy sales on a global scale. For example, Anchor Milk, a well-known Fonterra brand, published an advertisement directed at Middle East countries saying, 'Anchor pure and natural milk only comes from New Zealand, where cows are brought up in a healthy, natural environment and drink from pure streams of mountain springs and eat green grass' (Anchor, n.d.). Cows, in fact, do *not* drink out of pure mountain springs; dairy farming is instead implicated in deteriorating water quality across Aotearoa New Zealand (Carr et al.; Joy, *Polluted Inheritance*).

The idea of a pastoral paradise reminiscent of colonial imagery of Aotearoa New Zealand is also evident on Fonterra's website. Fonterra has created a video promoting their dairying cooperative, in which the narrator says:

> The 'land of the long white cloud' is blessed with an abundance of rainfall and sunshine, ideal for producing lush green grass making it the perfect spot for dairying. It's one of the few places in the world where cows can graze on fresh nutrient rich grass all year round as nature intended (Fonterra, n.d.)

The 'land of the long white cloud' is a reference to Ao-tea-roa which is commonly understood to mean cloud formations that helped early Polynesian navigators find Aotearoa New Zealand. The evocation in this advertisement of a 'blessing' of lush green grass and a temperature climate echoes the religious colonial ideologies of a promised land. Fonterra also promotes propaganda that pushes the image of small-scale family farms and cared-for cows from the colonial era (Tulloch and Judge). It promotes a form of agrarian nationalism that make it seem unpatriotic not to support dairying in Aotearoa New Zealand (Sharp et al.; Tulloch and Judge).

Where to now?

This paper has stressed the interconnectedness of humans, nonhuman animals and the environment – a worldview commensurate with indigenous epistemologies. It has attempted to demonstrate that dairy farming in Aotearoa New Zealand is a postcolonial issue because it is part of a history of robbing Indigenous people of their lands for agricultural purposes.

Decolonisation would involve the 'abolition of the settler state and a repatriation of land to Indigenous communities' (Belcourt). In addition, the logics of white privilege need to be deconstructed. The violence of dairying that unfolds on stolen lands is rooted in the ideologies of settler colonialism and white privilege. The cow's experience and subjectivity

should be foregrounded in the decolonialisation of this situation. Cows exist, says Belcourt, in the 'settler imaginary as geographic subjects, enervated and entrapped' (n. p.).

In Aotearoa New Zealand the logic of white settler colonialism and white superiority remains largely unchallenged within dairying. However, McKibbin has recently written an opinion piece in *The Guardian* that argues that Māori need to divest from dairying, which he says is not only unsustainable but violates Māori values. He claims that Fonterra has become adept at 'kei te pai' washing which, 'uses Māori words, concepts and imagery to exploit the association between te ao Māori (the Māori world) and environmental responsibility – almost like an "Indigenous tick of approval"' (McKibbin).

Yet many Māori are deeply embedded in the dairying sector, and this has been described as indigenous entrepreneurship (Knook, Wreford and Gow). Knook et al. have written an article arguing for embedding Māori values into dairy farming in a bid to make it more environmentally sustainable. They refer to the milk processing company Miraka (the te reo Māori word deriving from 'milk') which is owned collectively by a group of Māori trusts and corporations. They argue that Miraka is business model based on shared Māori values including kaitiakitanga (care for the land) (Knook et al. 644). The authors acknowledge that the Miraka model is introduced within the context of a 'traditional Western development economy' which they agree is problematic (Knook et al. 644). However, they fail to address that dairying is inherently extractive and profit based and harms animals, humans and the environment. As McKibbin argues, dairying is unsustaianble and violates Māori values. He calls for Māori to move away from this industry which exploits and kills cows and their calves.

Conclusion

The interspecies violence of settler colonisation in Aotearoa New Zealand is pervasive, ongoing and multifaceted. The introduction of cows and other farmed animals in Aotearoa New Zealand has been canvassed as a distinct form of colonial violence. This paper has

explored the identities of settler coloniser, Indigene and animal as a 'triad' in Aotearoa New Zealand (Probyn-Rapsey and Russell), and affirms the importance of this perspective in fully understanding of colonial violence. It has demonstrated that colonialism and pastoralism in Aotearoa New Zealand are the bedrock upon which ongoing violence to nonhuman animals and indigenous peoples rests. The centrality of pastoral agriculture and the importance of dairy farming to the colonisation of Aotearoa New Zealand are clear. Colonialism is a process of economic, biological and cultural invasion which disrupted and destroyed the lives of indigenous people and animals (both domesticated and free-living) and their environment. This paper has also highlighted that animal agriculture, and in particular dairying in Aotearoa New Zealand, has involved extensive conversion of Māori land to farm lands and is constitutive of imperial power. The paper shows that dairying is an exploitative process based on the logic of capitalism that harms not only the cows but also indigenous culture and environments. Arguably, therefore, the decolonisation of dairying in NZ would mean a transition to sustainable forms of plant-based agriculture.

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