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# An Affective Politics of National Life

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# Abstract

This thesis examines the affective politics of national life at the intersection of emotion, colonisation and privilege. Within this frame, I focus on Pākehā<sup>1</sup> experiences of two national days in Aotearoa New Zealand, Waitangi Day and Anzac Day. As occasions of 'hot' nationalism, national days provide numerous opportunities for affective meaning-making. From citizen talk, to mass media newsmaking and commemorative events, Pākehā affective-discursive practices often bring very narrow, highly selected aspects of the past into the present, promoting and protecting particular cultural interests and identities whilst simultaneously ignoring and excluding others. As such, national commemoration is a key site through which not only the ongoing nationalisation and cultural production of memory are organised, but where the affective politics of nationhood are put to work. Drawing on recent theorising in critical social psychology, I explore some of the ways these patterns unfold at sites of commemorative practice, observing *Pākehā affective privilege* (or what ordinary feelings accomplish) as and when it is (re)produced and resisted.

Three key findings are established. First, I demonstrate how newsmaking practices select received means of emoting around national commemoration in ways that both model and reinforce dominant cultural practices of Pākehā society. Waitangi Day is used to strengthen colonial power through hailing social agents into affective-discursive positions that vilify Māori, dismiss Treaty breaches, and marginalise protest action. In sharp contrast, Anzac Day protects and promotes colonial worldviews through mythologising 'the birth of the nation' and associated affective identities in Gallipoli. Representations of Anzac Day overlook the role of the Treaty of Waitangi in nation building, silence any acknowledgement of the New Zealand Wars and recurrently frame dissent as despicable and deviant.

Second, I draw on focus group data to demonstrate how participant talk is a key site in which emotional common sense is put to work. Participants repeatedly draw on contradictory yet entrenched forms of affective meaning-making to make sense of Waitangi Day and Anzac Day. For Waitangi Day, agents draw on the rhetorical pairings of being 'pissed off' and 'confused', allowing both for the expression of anger directed towards Māori alongside doing a kind of (often) wilful uncertainty around the day and its

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<sup>1</sup> New Zealander of European ancestry

purpose. For Anzac Day, agents recurrently report feeling 'grateful' and 'moved'. However, numerous emotional resources are simultaneously available that excuse agents from the hard work of attending dawn ceremonies and commemorative events. I argue that, put together, feelings around both national days are put to work in ways that reproduce colonial power, whilst allowing agents to get on with the business of 'having a day off' with little hassle or complication.

Third, drawing on video records of participants filmed on Anzac Day, I argue that the assumed racialised harmony and normative national identity work is possibly more fragmented, complicated and troubled than one may initially assume. I critically explore the role of emotion in what could be described as 'quiet resistance' to hegemonic national narratives. Indeed, Anzac Day in Aotearoa New Zealand is positioned as a day of unity, marking a proud national identity, and embracing an active, engaged citizenry. It is a moment when 'thousands rise early to remember the sacrifice for peace', and a day to honour 'those that risked their lives for our freedom'. My data suggests, however, that far beyond popular repertoires and sound-bite headlines, dwells a diverse range of emotions, positions, identities and practices.

Throughout the thesis, I highlight numerous forms of affective-discursive common sense routinely put to work by media and citizens. In exploring these in greater detail through interviews and data analysis, one is continually reminded of the degree to which resources for challenging ordinary feelings are often limited. Participants typically lacked conceptual, discursive and affective vocabularies or repertoires that could tell another, more just and sustainable story. Furthermore, given the ubiquity of normative common sense, embodied resistance is always in dialogue and negotiation with it; a dialogical back and forth. As such, resistance becomes part of a longer process of unlearning unproductive old habits, and engaging in new forms of being in the world, both of which most certainly involve practice. For Pākehā, it is this kind of grounded, everyday practice that will be a vital contribution in terms of working towards a *mutually* beneficial Treaty partnership with Māori.



# Glossary

Aotearoa	New Zealand
Haerenga Kitea	Go Along
He whakaputanga	Declaration of Independence
Hikoī	March, journey, protest
Iwi	Tribe
Kaiwhakahaere	Director
Kaupapa	Principle, concept
Kāwanatanga	Governorship
Māori	Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa
Marae	Meeting grounds
Pākehā	New Zealander of European ancestry
Rangatira	Chief
Taonga	Treasure, anything prized
Te Ika-a-Maui	North Island
Te Reo Māori	Māori Language
Te Tiriti	The Treaty (Māori Version)
Wairua	Spirit
Whaea	Aunty
Tino Rangatiratanga	Self-determination

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