

***The Impression of Hybridised Indigeneity: A History of the United Nations' Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Emergence of a Globalised Construction of Indigeneity***

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to examine how the work of the United Nations (UN) nurtures hybridised constructs of indigeneity, especially through the activities of the United Nations' Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII). This article surveys particular aspects of the literature relating to cultural and indigenous hybridisation, and then applies this to the activities of the UNPFII as a means of interpreting the contribution of the organisation's work and objectives to portrayals of indigeneity, drawing in the experiences New Zealand's indigenous Maori as a case study. It concludes that the UNPFII—as a globalising agent—simultaneously promotes the rights of indigenous peoples while masking many of the cultural differences between its constituent members, resulting in a broad conception presented to outsiders of a single, hybridised indigeneity in the international sphere, which is defined and only exists in the hegemonic space created by the UN.

**Dimensions of Indigeneity**

The emphasis in this article is not on the hybridisation of indigenous cultures per se (that is, through encounters at a domestic level between indigenous cultures and the usually dominant culture of the colonising other (Said 1979)—although elements of that phenomenon inevitably surface at certain points). However, what is evident, and is addressed in relation to the emergence of supra-state hybridity in the United Nations (UN), is that the roots of this hybridity can be found in the development of forms of indigenous political activism within nation-states, which then spill over into international forums as activists seek redress or attention to their concerns outside the nation-state. To a degree, indigenous groups can therefore be complicit in the manifestation of a hybridised indigeneity, of the sort that has been fostered through the work of the UNPFII.

In the case of indigenous Maori identity, the emergence in recent decades of Maori health providers (under the state system), mandatory Maori representation in local authorities, Maori television and radio stations, Maori educational institutions, Maori social services, and Maori businesses have given the impression of a revived sense of Maori indigeneity. However, these developments have generally been of a pan-tribal nature and, therefore, have hybridised the notion of Maori itself (Durie 1995; Stuart 2003).



Whereas on European arrival, Maori identified, not as a single people, but according to their iwi (tribe) or hapu (sub-tribe) (Mutu 2005; Te Rito 2007), the emergence of a generic Maori identity could be seen as a preconditioning phase for adopting wider forms of indigeneity. In this case of hybridised indigeneity, it is as though what colonisation set in train, the indigenous people have subsequently embraced and advanced: a case of indigenous agency using identities formulated largely by the coloniser.

Indigenous political activism in New Zealand, particularly in the form of Nga Tamatoa (an activist group that fought racism and advocated for greater Maori rights), which emerged in the 1970s, was in some ways a catalyst for the hybridisation (Sissons 1993; Simmons et al. 2008). Nga Tamatoa largely disregarded iwi and hapu politics in favour of establishing a national framework for protest. The strength gained through numbers meant that a pan-tribal approach ensured that the group achieved greater political influence. It is a short conceptual step from this approach to seeking similar political recognition in other fora, through overlooking differences in the constituent groups for the sake of a combined approach to shared challenges and objectives. What is significant about this is that the trend to hybridity is driven, to some extent, by the indigenous groups themselves as a means of securing greater political influence.

The term ‘hybridity’ has its origins in and is most commonly associated with horticulture. It describes the cross-breeding of two species to form a third, distinct ‘hybrid’ species. The focus, here, is on how indigenous groups are increasingly portrayed internationally as a single, homogenous entity to non-indigenous outsiders (in this context, an outsider is any individual or group that is not identified by the indigenous group themselves as part of the indigenous rubric).

This sort of indigenous hybridisation, nurtured by the UNPFII, tends to produce “...new transcultural rather than multicultural...forms within the space produced by colonisation” (Wisker 2007, 189). The ubiquitous use of the term ‘indigenous’ in UNPFII documentation (together with the near absence of reference to specific indigenous groups) indicates the extent to which this process of hybridisation has triumphed at the expense of the diversity of the hundreds of distinct indigenous cultures that the UNPFII speaks on behalf of. It is an example of transculturalism ascending at the expense of multiculturalism, resulting in unique, variegated indigenous identities being discarded in favour of a single, hybridised model.

One of the seminal works in the field of cultural hybridisation is Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (1994). Bhabha explored various dimensions of post-colonial, cultural hybridity, including the way in which it offers new sites of political agency, the way in which it acts as a force for cultural transformation, how it brings into being places of political tension and cultural ambivalence, and its potential to produce cultural ‘mutation’ among those indigenous cultures that are a party to the processes of hybridisation (Bhabha 1994).

To help illustrate the nature of this cultural hybridity, Bhabha drew on the works of the author VS Naipaul, whose fictional characters he describes as “...revealing hybrid forms of life and art that do not have a prior existence within the discrete world of any single culture or language” (Bhabha, 1994, xiii). It is as though what originally defined an indigenous culture has been replaced with a construction of hybridised indigeneity

that has little basis in history, geography, language, ethnicity, and all of those other bases of culture. And when it comes to participation in international fora, as much as indigenous peoples may feel that they are challenging Western hegemony in their activism, to the same extent, Bhabha suggests that, conversely, they are creating a new colonial space for themselves, (Bhabha 1994, 169)—one that is, at least partially, marked out by the very hegemonic system they are attempting to confront.

In describing the ambivalence that emerges at the heart of this cultural hybridity (and in colonial discourse more generally), Bhabha employs Jacques Lacan's (1977) conception of mimicry, in which indigenous groups acquire traits of the non-indigenous other as a form of camouflage: "It is not a question of harmonizing with the background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled" (Lacan 1977, 99).

Various writers have since applied aspects of cultural hybridity to literature, the arts, history, economics, linguistics, and a range of other fields. One of the areas that has particular significance, in the context of this article, is the notion of hybridised race. Robert Young (1995), for example, has argued that there is no such thing as 'race' in any purist sense of the world, concluding that the world is in a state of 'raceless chaos' (1995, 25). In a similar vein, Paul Gilroy has advocated for "the wholesale renunciation of race", and has proposed "the imminence of a 'postracial' world" (Gilroy 2000, 41, 37). Millennia of migrations have led to a situation now where racial hybridity is the norm, and where racial purity does not exist (Acheraiou, 2011), if indeed it ever did.

What tends to emerge from such analyses—albeit seldom explicitly—is the muddying of the waters between notions of racial purity and those of cultural purity. The former is principally a genetic issue, while the latter is a social conception. What needs to be determined for the purpose of examining phenomena of hybridised indigeneity is whether it is possible to speak of indigenous 'purity' in the contemporary world in a cultural sense. Cultural purity is associated with inherent or inferred traits of exclusivity and absoluteness, and, when used in reference to indigenous groups, it can conjure impressions of physical isolation, as if contact with the 'outside world' would irreversibly contaminate that purity (Hitching 1997).

However, there is a crucial distinction between racial and indigenous cultural purity that has an important bearing on notions of hybridity: the former is bound by the strictures of immutable scientific laws, while the authenticity of the latter is determined finally by the members of the indigenous group themselves. The so-called purity of the culture of an indigenous group does not have to be immutable; it does not have to verify its cultural purity by classifying it and then preventing it from altering in any way, as though it was some sort of museum exhibit. On the contrary, it is not only entirely possible, but the norm, for indigenous cultures to share all of those traits of modernity that non-indigenous cultures possess, and yet still be regarded as entirely indigenous by its members.

So what constitutes the essence of an indigenous culture? One approach to the answer rests in a particular construction of global pluralism, in which indigeneity is pitted against notions of the developed, or modern (Canessa 2006). In addition to such a view discounting the possibility of modern indigeneity, it inevitably makes aspects of the definition of indigeneity political in some areas, particularly as it is accompanied by

narratives of social, political, cultural and economic struggle. To examine indigeneity from this standpoint is not simply to describe it ‘as it really is’, but to explore it in the context of “how difference is produced culturally and politically” (García 2008, 217).

Similarly, from an historical perspective (and one which unavoidably informs present perceptions), indigeneity is a contingent formulation that “...emerges from contested social fields of difference and sameness” (Postero 2013, 108; Friedlander 1975), relying on processes of cultural reconstruction that are both discursive and symbolic, and, consequently, have important material and symbolic repercussions both within and beyond the countries where these indigenous peoples reside (Harris 1995). Indigeneity, in such a context, can be viewed primarily as a social concept whose dimensions are the product of negotiation with the non-indigenous other. In practice, the lines are blurred in the UN (and elsewhere). As an example, Maori culture is regarded as indigenous in all of the UN, whereas the indigenous cultures of the Balkan states of Montenegro, Bosnia, Macedonia, and Serbia have no such presence or recognition (Pieroni et al 2011; Tonta 2009). Therefore, to some extent, indigeneity is in the eye of the beholder.

Mahdavi Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha take a more reductionist view of indigenous purity. Rather than focussing on the significance of the other in defining indigeneity, they suggest that it can be located principally among what they term as “ecosystem people” (Gadgil and Guha 1995, 3); that is, those “small, indigenous, remnant populations pinned to land-based subsistence economies in isolated shrinking areas” (Buell 2003, 184). This categorisation, in itself, is arguably the very type of colonised approach that permits the framing of indigeneity only in the settings that resemble pre-European-contact contexts. Indigenous groups unavoidably have adapted (to varying degrees of success) to colonisation, yet such reductionist definitions require notions of indigeneity to be lodged predominately in pre-colonised contexts.

For the purposes of this article, a slightly more expansive definition of indigeneity is employed. One of the principal criteria that helps to define indigeneity—in addition to the historical struggle against the colonial other—is that of indigenous self-identification. That is, how indigenous peoples constitute their own identity in specifically indigenous terms. This indigenous self-identification can range from something as slight as ticking a category on a census form, through to exhibiting as many traits that are perceived as indigenous as possible (sometimes as an act of cultural defiance against the forces of assimilation) (Weaver 2001). Moreover, indigenous self-identification typically extends beyond individual assertions of identity and into the realm of community identity. Indigenous community identity requires being “...connected to a sense of peoplehood inseparably linked to sacred traditions, traditional homelands, and a shared history as indigenous people” (Weaver 2001). Often, an individual must be integrated into such a community in order to be regarded as fully indigenous (Durham 1993). Belonging to an indigenous community is not necessarily an attestation of indigenous exclusivity though and does not, for example, preclude membership of other communities and groups, including even membership of the non-indigenous other.

A critical element of membership of an indigenous community is that it is confirmed by others who claim the same identity. This shared sense of belonging can be enhanced by affiliation to a particular area of land, which often has sacred status for the

indigenous group (Griffin-Pierce 1997), and a claim to having a unique language and, particularly, a unique status in the country—often by virtue of the fact that their presence predates that of the other (Weavers 2001, 245).

A related aspect of indigeneity is its frequent coupling with conceptions of traditional knowledge, in which elements of such knowledge become sanctified by virtue of their antiquity and the belief that they have been passed down through generations in a largely unaltered state (Battiste 2002). Such knowledge is often inadvertently presented as being of value more as a relic of the culture in a previous age, than as a form of knowledge with inherent value in applicability in the present age. This has a resonance with the ‘eco-system people’ notion of indigeneity suggested by Gadgil and Guha (1995). Eurocentric representations of knowledge (Healey and Tagak 2014) create a polarity between indigenous/traditional knowledge on the one side and modern knowledge on the other, with no provision for the integration of the two as long as knowledge remains for either party one of the bases of their identity.

Grenier (1998) challenges presumptions about the mutual exclusivity of traditional indigenous and modern knowledge, and points out that indigenous knowledge (as opposed to the epistemological aspects of indigenous knowledge) contains within its framework the capacity for incorporating new information and beliefs. This adaptability allows indigenous knowledge to expand and accommodate additional material, often without necessarily obviating or diluting the essential indigeneity of its character. This process is distinct from indigenous hybridisation, in which a perception of the indigenous culture is determined by the outsider and where there is an emphasis—in international settings—on similarities appearing *between* indigenous cultures, as opposed to adaptations being detected *within* a single indigenous culture.

Grenier’s argument is also important in another respect: it partially transcends the overly binary constructs of purity and hybridity, and traditional and modern that have tended to emerge in some analyses. Rather than necessarily being one or the other, instead, there is a spectrum on which individuals or groups can position themselves (or be positioned by others) and there is also considerable mobility along the spectrum, with the additional feature of individuals or groups being able to occupy multiple locations simultaneously.

The final point about these dimensions of indigeneity is that the relative weightings applied to each trait of each culture will vary, not just from one indigenous group to another, but even within each group and becomes even more kaleidoscopic depending on who is doing the defining. Consequently, there is no single measure or index against which various indigeneities can be assessed or compared. This is a vital point, because almost all constructs of hybridised indigeneity rely precisely on the implicit assumption that indigenous groups, regardless of who they are, conform to roughly the same set of measurements that can be used to establish their indigenous credentials.

### **Indigenous Hybridisation**

Hybridity has developed into a ‘master trope’ (Kraidy 2002, 317) throughout the field of social and cultural studies. Some have argued that hybridity emerges as a trait of democratic struggle and resistance against colonial forces, while others have criticised

it as a neo-colonial discourse that aids the forces of globalisation and works against the interests of indigenous groups (Spivak 1999).

The conceptualisation of hybridisation is of central importance in any analysis of how it affects indigenous groups in a global setting and requires greater specificity at this juncture. As is mentioned above, hybridity addresses the processes by which (in the context of this article) discrete indigenous cultures take on, or at least appear to take on from the point of view of the non-indigenous outsider, shared traits in international settings. This, in turn, has the potential to devalue (again, from the outsider's perspective) both the status or the worth of each constituent indigenous group in the hybridised collective, as well as the collective itself. As Philipp Stockhammer (2012) has argued that, "Hybridity can only exist in opposition to purity; if we speak of hybridity, we must accept the existence of purity" (Stockhammer 2012, 3). The presumption of cultural or indigenous purity, even if it is only faintly evident, creates a juxtaposition with the implicit impurity of the hybridisation of indigenous cultures in the context of the outsider's gaze. Taken one step further, the act of indigenous hybridisation can be interpreted as being a neo-colonial method that further subjugates indigenous groups in terms of their identity in a global setting and that diminishes their power and standing in comparison to non-indigenous groups.

Using Stockhammer's construct of the impurity of hybridisation as a starting point, in international settings, hybridised indigeneity can be seen as an intermediary stage in which a collective of indigenous groups ironically 'advance' to a greater approximation of purity (in the perception of those outside this collective) by virtue of their efforts at hybridisation. This can lead to the seemingly paradoxical situation for outside observers that the greater the hybridisation, the greater the appearance of indigenous purity. It is such collective exhibitions of indigeneity that, it is suggested here, become subversive activities that undermine perceptions of individual indigenous 'purity' and that enforce the structural inequalities between a global metropolis and hybridised, indigenous groups that are positioned in an entrenched status on the periphery, while conjuring up a new, transnational notion of hybridised purity.

### **The Hegemonic Character of Globalisation**

Another aspect that can be both correlative and causative in perceptions of the hybridisation of indigeneity is the role of globalisation. Ackermann (2012) argues that "...hybridity and globalization always go together – and go together well. Both are slippery, ambiguous terms, at once literal and metaphorical, descriptive and explanatory". He further emphasises how globalisation actively promotes the "...suppression and resistance of social as well as cultural minorities" (Ackermann 2012, 5). Ironically, while such suppression of cultural minorities runs counter to the goals of the UNPFII, its inherent role in the sort of globalisation that is fostered by the UN more generally results in the uniqueness of every indigenous culture represented in the UNPFII being displaced by the trend toward a hybridised construction of indigenous identity, which has the potential to lead to the very sort of suppression Ackermann describes.

A key attribute of this hybridisation process is its fundamentally structural nature. At every stage in the encounter of a collection of indigenous groups with a globalising organisation (such as branches of the UN) the underlying structural nature of the

engagements results in the power in these relationships resting almost exclusively with the globalising agency. In such settings, the confluence of distinct indigenous groups, ostensibly brought together by the need to articulate common concerns or to agree on shared policy positions can result in the structural regulation of individual indigenous identity (Maddison 2013) by the external globalised agency that mediates such assemblies.

The forces of indigenous hybridisation in contemporary international fora (such as the UNPFII) can also exert their authority over the very classification of indigenous groups in ways that mimic the often violent processes of European colonisation of the non-European world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and that have reappeared in the current era in the form of neo-colonialism. Thus, globalisation—far from the popular impression of the term as a being almost interchangeable with ideals of cross-cultural cooperation—is more a contemporary iteration of earlier structural models that similarly undermined non-Western indigeneity through dominating and then dismantling aspects of indigenous identity and, at the same time, asserted Western forms of hegemony (Alfred and Corntassel 2005).

Globalisation, therefore, is not a passive or culturally neutral concept in terms of the power that it exercises over indigenous groups. Shome (1996) observes that such Western discursive practices, particularly the way that Western representations of the world are constructed, have the effect of legitimising contemporary (Western), global power structures at the expense of those without a role in exercising any hegemony in this system. The policies and practices of these globalised organisations ultimately serve to reinforce the neo-imperialism that underwrites such organisations.

### **Bipolarity Versus Multipolarity in Indigenous Encounters with Globalisation**

Bhabha's (1994) construction of the relationships between players in the processes of colonialism was more sympathetic to the practical variants that were exhibited as colonialism extended its reach into and influence over new territories and cultures from the eighteenth century onwards. In a similar vein, García-Canclini (1989) observed that these power relationships were interwoven with each other in complex patterns, rather than existing in some oversimplified binary form.

Others, however, have favoured a fundamentally binary interpretation of these relationships, which, in their most blatant forms, have the coloniser pitted against the colonised (Acheraïou, 2011), with little, if any, allowance made for various intermediary categories.

This article accepts Bhabha's more intricate and nuanced interpretation as having particular applicability, but also acknowledges that, as the process of hybridisation advances, there can be a tendency for the multipolarity that was likely to be more prevalent at the early stages of encounters between indigenous groups and, in the case of this article, the UNPFII to be displaced by a tendency to bipolarity. One of the signs of this emerging bipolarity is that clearer distinctions appear in the relationship between the globalising entity and indigenous communities.

One of the arguments proposed in this article in relation to this aspect of globalisation is that the accentuation of indigenous hybridisation, which positions indigenous groups subserviently in their relationship with the global entity, involves precisely such a transition from multipolarity to bipolarity, bolstering Western hegemony over the very definition, as well as the perception, of indigeneity.

### **The Hybridisation of Indigeneity in the UNPFII**

Formally, since 2000 (and, in a less prescribed way, in the preceding seven years), the United Nations has acted as the lead international agency advocating the rights of the world's indigenous peoples. The UNPFII is charged with a mandate to "...to discuss indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights" (United Nations' Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 2007, 6). As there is no other organisation with anywhere near the same scope, resources or membership, in terms of the representation of the world's indigenous cultures, the UNPFII serves as the most significant example (Barelli 2009) of indigenous hybridisation at a global level.

The historical precedents cited by the UNPFII for its emergence extend back to the 1920s. In constructing the pedigree of its evolution, the UNPFII cites the 1923 speech to the League of Nations (the UN's predecessor) by the Haudenosaunee Chief, Deskaheh, advocating for greater self-governance and an attempt to address the league by the Maori religious leader, Tahupotiki Wiremu Ratana, two years later, regarding the provisions of the Treaty of Waitangi between some Maori chiefs and the British Crown concluded in 1840.

Thus, two very distinct cultures with different outlooks on the world and differing political objectives, as well as varying, yet unique, social and political environments, are conjoined by virtue of being 'indigenous'. While the UNPFII cites this as the origins of its emergence, it is equally the genesis of hybridised indigeneity.

The proposal that a forum representing the interests of indigenous peoples be established in the United Nations came in 1993, during the International Year of the World's Indigenous People, and culminated with the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action in June of that year (Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action 1993). The focus of the declaration was predominately on the status of indigenous peoples *within* their respective countries. However, the UN soon began to address indigenous issues at a transnational (and therefore transcultural) level, which led to the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (World Conference on Human Rights 2000).

The first substantive issue addressed in the document that created the UNPFII was its membership. Emphasis was placed on "representativity [sic] and equal opportunity for all indigenous peoples" (World Conference on Human Rights 2000), which, on the surface, would have contrasted with the experiences of most indigenous groups in their respective countries, where the recognition of equal opportunity, the chance for fair representation and the expectation of appropriate consultation were seldom forthcoming from their governments.



The drive by the UNPFII, in this early stage of its history, towards indigenous hybridisation reflects the transitory nature of multipolarity in indigenous encounters with globalisation (Bhabha 1994; García-Canclini 1989). It is one of the contentions of this article that this type of nuanced multipolarity, where the status of indigenous groups in relation to the global entity is not clearly defined in practice, has a tendency to trend towards a more bipolar relationship as time passes and the hegemony of the globalised institution becomes more pervasive.

The founding document of the UNPFII also asserted that the organisation would “serve as an advisory body...with a mandate to discuss indigenous issues within the mandate of the Council relating to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health and human rights”, and further, that it would “raise awareness and promote the integration and coordination of activities relating to indigenous issues within the United Nations system” (World Conference on Human Rights 2000). This is an identifiable stage in the transition to a more bipolar approach to indigeneity. The conception of the UNPFII serving as a single entity of representatives of various indigenous groups, capable of giving uniform views on indigenous issues, represents the shift to a more bipolar model, in which intermediary categories have been removed and where power in the relationship—extending even to the structural nature of the relationship itself—is both defined and exercised by a hegemonic, globalising organisation that suppresses cultural diversity in favour of a hybridised construction of indigeneity, in order to accomplish its hegemonic objectives (Ackermann 2012; Alfred and Corntassel 2005).

How Maori fared under this approach can be seen in the case of a submission made in 2005 to the UNPFII by Maori academic, Aroha Mead, expressing the need for traditional Maori knowledge to be protected (Mead 2005). Not only did Mead conclude that UN agencies could assist in the protection of traditional Maori knowledge, but her paper on the topic was published under the umbrella of the UN’s ‘International Workshop on Traditional Knowledge’, in which the distinct Maori dimension was subsumed by the generic indigenous designation to such knowledge (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2005).

At the same time, this hybridised approach to indigeneity can become an authority that supersedes the authority of the individual, indigenous group. As an example, in 2013, a plan by the Ngati Kahangunu iwi for meeting the health needs of its members cited UNPFII positions on indigenous health as a basis for its approach, rather than anything devised by the iwi itself, using language that is specific to the iwi’s culture and needs, instead of depending on a generic statement about indigenous health produced by the UNPFII (Hawkes Bay District Health Board 2013).

In 2004, the UN’s General Assembly (UNGA) adopted Resolution 59/174, ushering in the second international decade of the world’s indigenous people (General Assembly 2004). This resolution represented yet a further advance towards the UN asserting its dominance, not over indigenous people per se, but over the representation of indigeneity globally to non-indigenous outsiders. The UNPFII fostered this transcultural, rather than multicultural, construction of indigeneity in a way that potentially undermined the unique dimensions of each constituent indigenous group (Wisker 2007). For example, it sought to work “for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people in such areas as culture, education, health, human rights, the

environment and social and economic development” (General Assembly 2004) without any reference whatsoever to the distinctive requirements or perspectives of various indigenous communities.

Part of this process of reducing disparate, indigenous groups into a single, hybridised form involved maintaining what Bhabha (1994) identified as a refusal to identify or evaluate cultural differences as objects of epistemological or moral contemplation, even resulting in those discrete indigenous groups ceasing to exist from the perspective of the outsider. Thus, the language of the 2004 resolution persisted in referring exclusively to generic constructs of “indigenous perspectives and activities” (General Assembly 2004). And, throughout, the irony remained that the very group that the UNPFII was attempting to assist in this resolution was a group that had no existence in this particular form outside of the confines of the UN. This made references, such as the UNPFII’s stated obligation to “full consultation and collaboration with indigenous people” (General Assembly, United Nations, 2004) a commitment that could only ever possibly be fulfilled within the hegemonic space created by the UN itself, but not in the various indigenous places and settings where distinct indigeneity actually existed. In the case of some Maori organisations and individuals, indigenous agency tended to nurture, rather than challenge, these culturally artificial constructs, with the UNPFII being seen as a place to seek redress and express concerns (Witana, 2012).

From the outsider’s perspective, as Stockhammer (2012) hypothesised in such processes, the status or the worth of each constituent indigenous group in the hybridised collective was devalued to the extent that efforts at hybridisation were advanced. Thus, hybridity emerged as a neo-colonial method of indigenous subjugation, especially when compared to the way in which non-indigenous groups were perceived by, and planned for (or, notably, not planned for), the UN at this time.

Exactly where the power lay between the UN and indigenous groups can be seen in point 15 of the 2004 resolution, in which the UNGA stated that it “*decides to include* [author’s italics] in the provisional agenda of its sixtieth session an item entitled ‘Indigenous issues’” (General Assembly 2004). Not only did such statements represent the subversion of individual indigenous groups through their enforced metamorphosis into a new, transnational hybridised form, but the decision-making about this hybridised group was not in the domain of the group itself, but rather, in the hands of a globalised metropolis in the form of the UNGA.

Possibly the most significant, single development in the history of the UNPFII was the adoption by the UNGA in 2007 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). This was the culmination of the preceding 14 years of work by the UN in addressing indigenous issues and represented a further significant advance in the UN’s bipolarisation and hybridisation of indigeneity.

On the face of it, though, parts of the UNDRIP looked to be retreating from the strong transnationalism of the 2004 UNGA resolution and more towards a focus on the rights of individual indigenous groups in their respective countries. When affirming that indigenous peoples were to be regarded as equal to all other peoples, the declaration specifically recognised “the right of all peoples to be different, to consider themselves different, and to be respected as such”. It also recognised the pressing need “to

respect and promote the inherent rights of indigenous peoples which derive from their political, economic and social structures and from their cultures, spiritual traditions, histories and philosophies” (General Assembly, 2007, 1). That these categories appeared in their plural forms indicates that some consideration was being given to the unique circumstances of each indigenous group represented by the UN; a point enforced by the hope stated in the declaration that the UNPFII would “enhance harmonious and cooperative relations between the State and indigenous peoples” (General Assembly 2007, 1-3).

Was the era of indigenous hybridisation in the UN over? Not quite. Admittedly, some of the language in the 2007 declaration addressed the importance of the relationships between each indigenous group and their respective governments and, to this extent, it seemed like a reversal of the trend towards what Gilroy (2007) had identified as a post-racial, hybridised world. However, the language in the UNDRIP soon reverted to the previous orientation towards hybridised indigeneity. For example, mention was made of the UN’s desire to promote and protect “the rights and freedoms of indigenous peoples” (General Assembly 2007, 3), with no reference to or even any evidence of any consideration of the diversity of cultural demands that various indigenous peoples might have or the different perception of rights they may possess. Rather, this was a case of indigenous rights being defined entirely in the context of those rights that were determined to be of worth by the UN. Moreover, it was an expression of rights made more in the image of the non-indigenous outsider than in the forms that various indigenous groups may have sought.

The commitments and affirmations contained in the UNDRIP were, in one sense, a hybrid form of rights. While they offered concessions in which the UNPFII, it was hoped, would ‘protect’ (that paternalist concept enacted by the neo-coloniser) the hybridised, indigenous groups that it represented, these various rights were being bestowed on a group that had no prior existence anywhere outside the UN. Moreover, the values expressed in the UNDRIP were drawn plainly from the Western tradition, which further emphasised the binary relationship between the neo-coloniser and the hybridised, indigenous group over which it was asserting its hegemony.

In certain sections of the UNDRIP, faint impressions of multipolarity remained, but they were outweighed by the continued trend towards greater bipolarity. There was nothing in the declaration, for example, that even hinted at any unique identity, history, language or location of any of the indigenous member groups. Indigeneity was reduced to being merely an ‘impure’ counterpoint to the West, as implied by the hegemonic form, structure and language the UN used in respect to indigenous groups.

Since 2007, the promotion of hybridised constructs of indigeneity in the UNPFII has continued. In its 2012 report about the eleventh session of the UNPFII, for example, there again seemed to be a reorientation to consideration of more specific cases of individual indigenous groups. However, the cases referred to in the report, such as indigenous people in Africa, indigenous children and indigenous women (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 2012), were more an example of the potential for hybridity to be divisible into smaller component parts, while maintaining its essential traits of transculturalism, transnationalism and translingualism. Similarly, in the 2013 report about the twelfth session of the UNPFII, there was a focus on sexual health and reproductive rights among indigenous peoples (United Nations Permanent

Forum on Indigenous Issues 2013), again reflecting the divisibility of hybridity that the UN's global policy on indigenous issues encouraged.

Far from being an innocuous approach to policy-formation, such reliance on hybridised notions of indigeneity has the potential, as Ackermann (2012) has observed, to actively promote the suppression of cultural minorities. In such instances, cultural anonymity amounts to cultural oblivion as far as outsiders' perceptions are concerned. Thus, indigeneity is reduced to an amorphous concept that has its home and its roots, not in any specific culture or country, but solely in the globalised setting of the UNPFII.

## Conclusions

Since its inception, the UNPFII's activities in the area of indigenous protection and advocacy have inadvertently advanced the concept of a global, hybridised indigeneity over which the UN exercises a near-full custodial role. In the case of the Maori, indigenous, political activism has extended into the international realm principally through the UNPFII and has involved tacit acquiescence by some Maori to the notion of a hybridised indigeneity.

Although there are apparent indicators, at times, that the UNPFII is moving away from its 'one-size-fits-all' construction of indigeneity and towards addressing more specific branches of the globalised indigenous community, on closer examination, it continues to lump disparate, indigenous groups into a single, hybridised form. Something that indigenous agency (as in the case of some Maori groups and individuals' participation in the UNPFII) has fostered. This denies indigenous groups elements of their singular identity and leaves the impression among non-indigenous outsiders that indigeneity in the global setting obviates any need even to identify or evaluate cultural differences among its constituent groups; at the very least in the realm of policy-formation. Thus, individual, indigenous groups cease to be objects of epistemological or moral contemplation. All that remains is a cumulative mass of indigeneity; a mass that is prescribed, shaped, quantified and even named by the globalised, neo-colonial hegemony that constructed and maintains the framework in which it operates and that provides the space where this hybridised group displays its fundamentally transcultural, transnational and translingual character. Thus, the UNPFII is indigenous in name and membership, but largely hybridised and counter-indigenous in character.

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