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NO LIMIT:
IMAGINING THE
BOUNDARIES
OF AUTONOMY IN
A POST-FORDIST
COLONIAL
SETTLER STATE

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THESIS SUBMISSION FOR A MASTER
OF FINE ARTS (FINE ARTS)

THESIS TITLE:
NO LIMIT: IMAGINING THE
BOUNDARIES OF AUTONOMY
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I firstly would like to acknowledge where this research was carried out. Massey University Te Kunenga Ki Pūrehuroa, where I researched as a student, is on stolen or unfairly confiscated land, the rohe of Te Ātiawa/Taranaki ki Te Upoko o Te Ika mana whenua to Te Whanganui-a-tara. Although Treaty settlements are often seen as means of “reconciliation” between Pākehā and Māori, they are merely an acknowledgement of a crime—you cannot undo the process of colonisation, but you can acknowledge it. The loaded sites we live and work on in Aotearoa have painful histories that have been neither erased nor rightfully acknowledged. A common whakataukī from my iwi, Waikato-Tainui, relating to confiscations, “I riro whenua atu me hoki whenua mai, ko te moni hei utu mō te hara” (“As land was taken so must it be returned, the money is an acknowledgement of the crime”)¹ comes to mind when discussing what Treaty Settlements and Postcolonial Aotearoa means for Māori. However I would be doing a disservice if I did not mention that it is not only these histories that need to be acknowledged, but also Māori cultural values and their significance to our culture. For instance we do not have governance over decisions around our taonga such as flora, fauna etc nor are we able to protect our intellectual and cultural property and language nor do we have influence over the transmission of our cultural values through western education systems. Iwi and hapū are kaitiaki over our taonga, which is central to our survival as a people, but we have not yet been granted the agency to be guardians over this taonga.

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¹ Mutu, *The State of Māori rights*, 25

Without these people I would not have completed my MFA

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Kia hora te marino

Kia whakapapa pounamu te moana

Hei huarahi mā tātou i te rangi nei

Aroha atu, aroha mai

Tātou i a tātou katoa

Hui e! Tāiki e!

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ABSTRACT

This exegesis will address the context of being a young, Māori artist living in a Post-Fordist colonial settler state. It will centre what these conditions what labour and the production of art looks like in Aotearoa, by analysing the ways in which our labour now fails to distinguish between ‘work’ and ‘occupation’. It will look at the way in which autonomy has been stripped through the tokenisation of a certain kind of indigenous practice that forces Māori artists into both performing indigeneity for Pākehā, as well as existing within individualistic imperial narrative that is toxic, colonising and alienating. I will discuss how this attempts to diminish the collaborative and intuitive approach to making art that is inherent within a larger history of contemporary Māori art by referring to senior wahine toa artists such as Shona Rapira-Davies. This research is explicitly centered around how the building of healthy, meaningful, ongoing working relationships with people I love has helped me redefine who my practice is for in spaces outside of the white cube. It will blend ideas garnered from both Western and indigenous frameworks, citing writing from theorists and artists including Hito Steyerl, Martha Rosler, Paolo Virno, Faith Wilson, Jenny Holzer and Natasha Matila-Smith (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāti Hine). It is hoped that in writing this exegesis I can articulate some adequate solutions to the current model for the production of art, which I believe is unsustainable and centered around ties to very colonial ideas of ‘community’ and of collaboration, particularly with the sharing of ideas and space.

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