

Chapter Ten

Getting Out From Down Under: *Maori* Women, Education and the Struggles for *Mana Wahine*.¹

Introduction.

This chapter has previously been published however some minor changes have been made for the thesis to avoid repetition. The piece was originally written with a more 'international' audience in mind, and in contrast to the previous chapter, is somewhat more descriptive of cultural concepts. What the chapter illustrates however, is an attempt by a group of Maori girls and women to re-imagine a new place within a school for Maori values, language and cultural practices to take place. It gives one example, where attempts to recentre being Maori, create some of the conditions which are necessary for a reformulation and recoding of alternative ways of knowing.

The chapter also illustrates the difficulties which occur at the intersection of gender and race when, in a school of predominantly Pakeha women, Maori issues are contested. The building of a marae complex in a school does introduce new possibilities for different ways of knowing, learning and teaching to emerge. The chapter raises those possibilities in terms of the conditions which need to be struggled for in order that new possibilities can emerge. The contrast to Te Kohanga Reo, of this case study, is that the school whare is situated institutionally inside a large Pakeha school. What this means is that Maori teachers and

¹ First published as Smith, L.T., 1993. 'Getting out from Down Under: *Maori* Women, Education, and the Struggles for *Mana Wahine*', in *Feminism and Social Justice in Education*, eds. M. Arnot, K. Weiler, London, Falmer Press, pp.58-78.

*students still have to negotiate daily with the wider institution. There is no control over classes that students must attend or that teachers must teach, there is no control over assessment, or timetabling or the cultural life of the wider school.*²

This chapter critically examines the educational and schooling processes within which *Maori* women, the indigenous women of New Zealand, struggle to resist colonisation. The discussion is located in a specific case study example of the establishment of a *Maori* cultural complex in a single-sex, predominantly white or *Pakeha* girls' secondary school, and the multiple tensions and struggles which underpinned this particular attempt to develop a bicultural schooling initiative. State schools have been significant sites of struggle for *Maori* people because of the clear intentions of colonial administrators to use education as an instrument of colonisation and cultural annihilation.

Schooling for *Maori* children was viewed by the more liberal politicians of the nineteenth century as an efficient and humanitarian way for bringing civilisation and social control to a population of indigenous people who still had the audacity to believe, in the 1860s, that they were a sovereign people. That audacity has remained an important feature of *Maori* resistance to the ways in which colonisation structured a new British society in the Pacific and to the racist ideological trappings which were used to justify attempts to destroy indigenous, *Maori* society.

Whilst the agenda of colonisation has been about the construction of a society built on British settler myths about their own importance, *Maori* resistance to this agenda has consistently been based on an enduring belief that the people and the land are inseparable. In *Maori* epistemology the universe was created and ordered by the eponymous ancestors of *Maori* people. In this story women were highly visible as creators, protectors and active participants in the politics of life and the eventual journeys by *Maori* people across the Pacific ocean. *Maori* people share a polynesian heritage with other nations in the Pacific.

Maori society remains a culturally distinct society which still has its own ways of defining

² Additional notes added since this was first published will be indicated with a date.

itself, its members and its universe. *Maori* women belong to different tribal groupings. Their status and roles differ according to tribe, to age, to genealogical relationships and to individual talents. Specific contexts determine the importance or lack of importance of their gender.³ The interweaving of ancient and contemporary, kinship and non-kinship, traditional and post-colonial, rural and urban, religious and political threads all contribute to a rich and complex pattern of tensions, positions and relationships between *Maori* women themselves, and between *Maori* women generally and *Pakeha* women.

For *Maori* girls and women the persistent failure of education to deliver equality of opportunity has had far reaching implications for a wider socio-economic crisis in which *Maori* women often see themselves as 'being at the bottom of the heap'.⁴ *Maori* girls leave schools in disproportionate numbers without any school qualifications, many 'leave school' before the legal leaving age is reached and others never really get to school at all. *Maori* truancy rates are high and rates for expulsion and suspension are also disproportionately greater for *Maori* than for other groups of children. Others stay at school to go through the cycle of poor results in national examinations and restricted access into tertiary education. School achievement patterns show a wide gap between the rates for *Maori* and those for *Pakeha*.

In schools, *Maori* girls are often regarded as presenting serious behavioural problems, many are labelled at an early age as being lazy, recalcitrant and 'too smart for their own good'.⁵ Being 'too smart' is usually a reference to girls who have the ability to assert their own will in a classroom, who argue with teachers, and who defy the authority of the school.⁶ Because a greater proportion of *Maori* students are streamed or grouped in the lower ranks of their

³ *Mahuika, A., 1975. 'Leadership Inherited and Achieved', in Te Ao Hurihuri, The World Moves On. ed. M. King, Auckland, Longman.*

⁴ *Nepe, T., 1989. 'The Conscientization and Politicization of Maori Women', paper presented to Education Department, University of Auckland, reprinted in part in 1992. Te Pua, 1, pp.15-19.*

⁵ *Marks, M., 1984. 'The Frustrations of Being a Maori Language Teacher', in Proceedings of the Maori Education Development Conference. ed. R. Walker, Centre for Continuing Education, University of Auckland, p.43.*

⁶ *In other words girls who 'talk back' and/or 'answer back'. Another word often used was 'defiant'. (note added 1995)*

classes at secondary school they are frequently regarded as being troublesome and difficult to teach. Generations of *Maori* students have left school feeling alienated and 'dumb'. The powerful role of the peer group has been targetted by some educationalists as an explanation for *Maori* students, who do show early signs of success, eventually succumbing to the pattern of underachievement. This explanation is simply one of a number of reasons advanced by educationalists and politicians for the failure of schools to deliver educational achievement. Many of these explanations are still driven by notions of cultural deprivation and linguistic and experiential deficits. This victim-blaming ideology is hotly contested by *Maori* people, who accuse schools of failing to educate *Maori* children and of perpetrating systematic violence against these children through racist policies and practices.

Educational and social policies based on a platform of multiculturalism, for example, were dismissed by *Maori* interests as a ploy for denying difference by denying the historical context in which the legitimacy for *Pakeha* control was acquired through the illegitimate processes of colonisation. Multicultural policies were viewed by *Maori* as a continuation of the 'divide and rule' strategies of colonisation and represented a further attempt to maintain *Pakeha* domination over social and economic structures by forcing minority groups, under the guise of 'multiculturalism' to compete amongst each other for crumbs. *Maori* people have argued, for example, that in the New Zealand context biculturalism must be a prior step towards multiculturalism. Other than *Maori* people, the most significant 'brown' ethnic minorities are people from various Pacific nations who share in the same polynesian traditions as *Maori*. New Zealand's past immigration policies have consistently limited the access of non-British and especially non-white minorities. In most socio-economic indices it is *Maori* people who consistently appear as the most disadvantaged and oppressed group in New Zealand society.

It is within this context that *Maori* women have struggled to escape from the 'down under' of New Zealand society. *Maori* women have tended to articulate the issues within their own cultural framework. Cultural institutions, such as the *whanau* or extended family and the *marae*, are sites of struggle in which *Maori* interests are continually reshaped, and from which *Maori* interests contest the ideological dominance of *Pakeha* society. The work of *Pakeha* feminists have often been regarded with deep suspicion by *Maori* women although

some feminist groups have actively promoted the issues of *Maori* women. Some *Maori* women have argued, for example, that *Pakeha* women are as much the beneficiaries of colonisation as *Pakeha* men. Others use the 'bottom of the heap' metaphor to argue that *Maori* women are on their own, and that alliances with other groups such as *Maori* men, *Pakeha* women and *Pakeha* men will always be problematic. There are tensions between the ways in which *Maori* women view their realities and their struggles and the ways in which *Pakeha* feminists have defined feminist projects.

The current term used by *Maori* women to define and describe what it means to be *Maori* women in a *Pakeha* society, and to be women in a *Maori* society, is *Mana Wahine Maori*. *Wahine* means woman. *Mana* is a concept related to notions of power, strength, status and collective acknowledgement of merit. The *Mana Wahine Maori* term is broad enough to embrace a wide range of womens' activities and perspectives. It is a strong cultural concept which situates *Maori* women in relation to each other and upholds their *mana* as women of particular genealogical groupings. It also situates *Maori* women in relation to the outside world and reaffirms their *mana* as *Maori*, indigenous women.

Mana Wahine Maori and Education.

One site where these multiple interests and tensions, positions and relationships intersect each other is state education and schooling. The impact of schooling was experienced by generations of *Maori* children across all tribal and regional boundaries. There is a shared memory of these experiences and the impact this has had on *Maori* knowledge, language and culture. As *Ngahuia Te Awekotuku* writes, 'I passionately, passionately hated that school'.⁷ Another woman writes, 'We have to speak English. *Kui*, you must not speak *Maori* to me again. I will get the strap if I am caught speaking *Maori*'.⁸ There is a shared anger and suspicion of schools.

⁷ *Te Awekotuku, N., 1988. 'He Whare Tangata: He Whare Kura? What's Happening to our Maori Girls?', in Women and Education in Aotearoa. ed. S. Middleton, Auckland, Allen & Unwin, pp.89-96.*

⁸ *Edwards, M., 1990. Mihipeka, The Early Years. Auckland, Penguin, p.33.*

Although increasing numbers of *Maori* women are involved in education as teachers, they are still under-represented in all sectors. There are only two *Maori* women who hold doctorate degrees and are employed in a New Zealand university. One other doctoral graduate is retired and actually did her teaching in the United States. Very few *Maori* women are principals and very few are on career tracks which will qualify them to be principals.⁹ Where *Maori* women do have a presence in the educational bureaucracy their effectiveness is always problematic, and their scope to work for the interests of *Maori* women is often limited.¹⁰

This is not to deny that *Maori* women in education are not busy, in fact the absolute reverse applies. The women are often employed in positions which require the kind of busy work which keeps them out on the margins. For example, it is not unusual to find young *Maori* women teachers two or three years out from teachers training college, being asked to establish bilingual classes, teach difficult classes of *Maori* children, train the *Maori* cultural club, take the staff for *Taha Maori* lessons, take the rest of the school to a *marae* and take on curriculum responsibility for all *Maori* topics.¹¹ This is work for which they get no extra remuneration, no promotion and frequently no support.¹² Their added extra curricula activities include handling *Maori* disciplinary cases, speaking to *Maori* parents, taking *Maori* girls aside for personal hygiene lessons, inviting *Maori* community people in to the school on behalf of other teachers, and raising money for school projects. This is frequently done in addition to other extra curricula activities regarded more highly by schools such as music, drama and sport. Furthermore, it is an added burden for women whose extended family and cultural obligations are also time consuming and often stressful; if they are the only member of the family with sufficient knowledge of *Pakeha* structures to rescue younger relatives from the police, negotiate with the coroners for a dead relative, attend family conferences for youngsters who have got into difficulties.

⁹ Taylor, K.M., 1991. *Kei Hea Nga Wahine Rangatira?* Report for the Ministry of Education, Wellington.

¹⁰ Smith, L.T., 1990. *Mana Wahine, Mana Maori.* Report for the Ministry of Education, Wellington.

¹¹ *Taha Maori* will be examined in detail in the following section. In this context it referred to those aspects of the curriculum which had *Maori* content. At third and fourth form this generally meant Social Studies. (note added 1995)

¹² Marks, p.14.

In an article expressing her frustrations as a teacher, Maiki Marks has written, '*If the teacher is given any extra role in the school by the principal, that role is likely to be to hand on gimmicks and tricks to her Pakeha colleagues on how to control Maori kids*'.¹³ Marks also comments on the frustrations which occur for *Maori* teachers when they are part of a system they are unable to change. In her eyes, the *Maori* teachers 'every day faces the victims of the system..the *Maori* girls'. She calls them the 'saddest victims' who come to school with their, '*selves battered and bruised after eight years in the system...They have little confidence. Their behaviour often reflects pain and confusion*'.¹⁴ This hurt, pain and confusion which confronts *Maori* teachers in their classrooms, absorbs them into a wider system in which they too are powerless. There is a contradiction for *Maori* teachers between supporting *Maori* students and, at the same time, supporting the very structures which turn *Maori* students into 'victims'. Since the early eighties recognition of this contradiction has helped politicise *Maori* teachers into making greater demands on schools and on their own teacher unions. They have been very strong in their support of alternative educational options for *Maori* students, and have come together with other *Maori* activist groups to demand recognition of Treaty rights and '*tino rangatiratanga*' self-determination.

Multiple Roles and Multiple Struggles: The Development of a *Marae* in a Girls' School.

The *Marae* As A Representation of Difference.

It is difficult to generalise about the range of frustrations which *Maori* women face as educators in state schools. What many of them express in terms of frustration, anger or exhaustion is symptomatic of the deeper structural relations in which *Maori* women are situated. *Maori* women have multiple roles, not just as women who may be mothers, partners, daughters and grandmothers, but also as women who are descendents of tribal ancestries, women who may be expert singers, weavers, workers, healers, *kaikaranga*, *kaiwaiata*, women who may be the only member of their community or family with skills to negotiate with the police, the doctor, the nurse or the school principal, women who may also be major caregivers

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.14.

of their children, their neices and nephews, their grandchildren and other people's children.¹⁵ The following case study provides one example of how these multiple roles, tensions and struggles are played out in a particular context. This is a case study of a school's *marae* project. It was a project in which I was involved as a *Maori* woman staff member.

The *marae* is one of the few *Maori* institutions to have survived into this century. It is a complex of buildings and grounds used as a forum for collective rituals and practices. It is where the 'systems of tribal (*iwi*), sub-tribal (*hapu*) and extended family (*whanau*) are expressed' and where some of the patterns of behaviours which maintain these systems can be observed.¹⁶ On a *marae* there is usually a meeting house or *whare*, which is often carved in traditional style and in which people gather to talk, to sing, to debate, to mourn, to celebrate and to sleep. It almost always carries the name of an ancestress or ancestor (*tipuna*) and is regarded as the manifestation of that particular individual. The carvings and layout symbolise the parts of a human body and are carved with explicit representations of the human body. There is also a separate dining room and a toilet and washroom area. In modern times these areas may sometimes be delineated by separate buildings. In front of the meeting house is clear ground known as the *marae atea*. The siting of the buildings and areas are based on *Maori* beliefs about space and place, congruence and incongruence.

The *marae* has many purposes, it is an expression of collective identity and a site where this identity is often contested and recreated. It is one place where the *Maori* language is still likely to be heard. People come together on a *marae* to farewell the dead, to argue, to do business, to negotiate, to share, to honour, to do things together. When they first assemble for a *hui* or meeting, certain rituals take place which are considered necessary for the occasion. In these rituals boundaries between visitors and hosts, spiritual and physical, food and waste, bodies and food, elders and the young, men and women, become extremely significant. Rituals are conducted which in part reduce these differences in order that the occasion can take place within a context of peacefulness. The way this is done, and how these differences

¹⁵ *Trans. kaikaranga* are women who 'call' visitors on to a *marae*, *kaiwaiata*, women who sing in support of the main speaker on a *marae* during a welcome ceremony and on other occasions.

¹⁶ Salmond, A., 1975. *Hui, A Study of Maori Ceremonial Gatherings*. Wellington, A.H. & A. W. Reed.

are interpreted, mediated or negotiated, is dependent on the *kawa*, or body of knowledge held to be important by the group of that specific *marae* and sub-tribe.

As a surviving pre-European institution, the *marae* is a powerful symbol of *Maori* identity. It is one of the few places where *Maori* people still believe they exercise their *tino rangatiratanga* or sovereignty, where they have control over what happens and how it happens. The *marae* is a dynamic institution and is, in itself, a site of struggle by *Maori* interest groups. It is a forum for public debate and one in which *mana* is defended and claimed. In arguing for recognition of *Maori* cultural difference and status as the *tangata whenua* or indigenous people of the land, the idea of having *marae* in schools has been put forward by schools and *Maori* groups as a way of making differences visible, and as a solution to the cultural alienation experienced in schooling by *Maori* children.

The School, The *Marae* And One *Maori* Woman.

In this case study *Maori* students and some staff of a single-sex girls' school in Auckland decided in 1983 to build a *marae*. It was thought that the *marae* would eventually be dedicated as a *whare wananga* or house of learning. The *whare wananga* was a pre-European educational institution in which highly specialised knowledge was taught. The school had a roll of twelve hundred girls. Although the dominant ethnic group at the school was *Pakeha* more than half of the girls at the time were not white but brown. *Maori* students made up about seventeen percent of the school roll. The other groupings were of girls from different Pacific nations and a small minority of Indian and Asian students. The school itself is over a hundred years old and was modelled on the British grammar school. As a school for girls, it has had a fine record in producing successful women.

From the beginning of the *marae* project it was clear that there were significant interest groups; the principal, who totally supported the idea, the sole *Maori* teacher who felt it was needed, former *Maori* students of the school, who had formed a support network for *Maori* girls, other staff members and some community people. Representatives of these interests were on the first steering committee. The rationale for the *marae* was related specifically to the needs of young *Maori* women and the *whare* was seen as a way of connecting with the

students' cultural backgrounds. It was hoped that by having a *whare*, the girls would stay at school longer and the community would be more attracted to the school itself. One committee member saw her role as 'ensuring that there was community, student and parent involvement and that there was a total interest taken in the lives of *Maori* students'.¹⁷

Although there was general support from staff for the *marae* or *whare wananga*, the concept of a *marae* in school contested and challenged some fundamental ideologies held by staff about ethnic differences, about the relationship between a school and its contributing communities, and about the validity of different views of the world. Some staff, for example, had strongly held beliefs about the importance of school traditions, and viewed changes to the way the school looked or operated as challenging the foundations of the school itself. Some staff saw an absolute distinction between schooling as a site for the learning of 'real knowledge' and schooling as a site of cultural struggle. These staff denied that the school was itself a product and a producer of cultural meanings, and argued for the school as a neutral site which should not be used by *Maori* interests, or any other ethnic interests to teach 'culture'. In these arguments *Pakeha* culture was represented as being non-existent and therefore not present in the school at all.

Staff resistance to the idea was not open. Rather there was an underground debate among certain groupings of staff. The sole *Maori* staff member at the time felt alienated and marginalised by a debate which she knew was going on but from which she was excluded. Discussions took place in the staffroom when she had her morning tea and during informal meetings of staff. There were clearly several groupings of opinion amongst the *Pakeha* women and conflicting submissions being made to the principal and board members. The *Maori* staff member was expected to liaise with staff and carry out a mini public relations campaign. Of all the people on the committee, she was the one most exposed to the views of those staff who were against the *marae* because she had to work alongside them.

The first sign that a *marae* was going to be a reality occurred when a prefabricated classroom arrived in the school grounds. The school was cramped on a steep hillside and the building

¹⁷ *Pipi, K., 1983. Personal Communication.*

was eventually sited near the middle of the school. This was not without contention. It was sited on an area used by the physical education teachers. Culturally, the more appropriate space would have been the lawn area at the front of the school, but this was not seriously considered as a site.

From this point the struggle over the *marae*, a very humble prefabricated building, took place primarily within the group of *Pakeha* women. The arguments for and against were contested and struggled for within this group. The principal's role was critical as she fully supported the project. I was appointed in 1984 as a guidance counsellor but also had a special brief for developing the idea of the *whare* and the reality of a humble, downright ugly classroom into a fine cultural institution. There would now be two *Maori* women on a staff of about sixty women.

The School, The *Marae* and Two *Maori* Women.

The *Maori* woman already on staff was older than me, she was from a tribal confederation who could rightly claim to have the school within its area, she was a fluent and beautiful speaker of *Maori* language and had been a teacher at the school for sixteen years. She had built up some powerful support in the school and some powerful enemies. She was also a basic grade teacher without a position of responsibility. I was younger, my tribal links were quite different, I was not a first language speaker of *Maori*. I was also an 'old-girl' of the school and an example for the older teachers (some of whom had taught me) of how good the school really was 'if only other *Maori* girls were motivated'. Finally, I had been appointed to a position of responsibility which gave me more pay and status. It was assumed that the two *Maori* staff would know each other and would 'naturally' get along with each other. But we did not know each other and it took time and effort for us to become good allies and friends.

As a younger *Maori* woman I have been educated to respect age, even when I think my elders are wrong. As a woman from another tribe, I have to maintain my tribal *mana* but respect the tribal *mana* of the other woman. As a woman whose tribes are from outside the area, I am a visitor and have a separate status from those who belong in the area regardless

of how long I have lived there. This would be the case even if I had married into the tribe. In *Maori* society a woman keeps her own lineage and tribal identity forever. As a non-fluent speaker of *Maori* language my ability to negotiate many of the cultural issues was limited. As a younger *Maori* woman I was in the position of having more seniority and pay than an older *Maori* woman, a woman who, in the *Maori* world, had the same status as my *whaea* or mother. All of these differences between us needed to be recognised and worked through. We could never be simply two *Maori* women on the teaching staff.

I was given the task of developing the *whare* as well as my other task as a counsellor. At the time I thought this task was an exciting challenge and was keen to be involved. My first task, however, was to work out a relationship with my *Maori* colleague. As the younger woman I had to go to her and wait for her to give me support. This turned out not to be so difficult. The other teacher had become so thoroughly disillusioned with the project and the politics involved that she was more than happy to support me. The struggle over the *marae* shifted focus with my arrival, from one which involved and was shaped by the interests of the *Pakeha* women staff, to one in which my colleague and I tried to negotiate the wider cultural issues related to having a *marae* in a single-sex, girls' school.

The collective unit for a traditional *marae* is a genealogical unit such as an extended family, a sub-tribe or a tribe. This means that there are always elders and young, men and women, orators and singers, talkers and workers present to support a '*marae*'. There are individuals whose role is to attend to peoples' spiritual needs and others who attend to the physical needs. There are people who have tribal knowledge and knowledge of history. It is a collective enterprise. The *mana* of the genealogical unit depends on the ability of the unit to carry out its roles in an authentic way, to be hospitable to guests, to defend its group knowledge and traditions.

Locating a *marae*, therefore, in a school which is owned by the state, which is predominantly of one generation, where its members are not related, where there is only one gender group, and where *Maori* people do not possess *tino rangatiratanga* or autonomy over the concept, was just as problematic for *Maori* people as it was for the *Pakeha* school staff. There were issues in which the concerns of some *Pakeha* women and some *Maori* women did coincide.

One of the hopes, for example, of some of the feminist staff at the school was that the *marae atea*, (the area in front of the actual building) would provide an opportunity for the girls to speak in the fashion of *Maori* oratory. This was seen by these women as a way of liberating *Maori* girls from patriarchal structures, because many tribes do not allow women to speak during the welcoming rituals which take place on a *marae*. The fact that in most tribes men do all the speaking during this particular ritual is regarded by many women, *Maori* and *Pakeha*, as a symbol of patriarchal power relations.¹⁸ This *kawa* formed the basis of a complaint, on one occasion, by a group of *Maori* women to the Human Rights Commission in 1984. Their complaint was against the *kawa* being exercised at another *marae* in a state institution, in this case a university based *marae*. The complaint was ruled outside the jurisdiction of the Commission. Nevertheless, the issue of womens' speaking rights is a critical issue for women whose tribes have no speaking rights on the *marae atea* during the *powhiri* ritual.

I have two different tribal affiliations. One of these tribes has had renowned women speakers, the other one has no women speakers. It was thought that at least given one of my tribal backgrounds, I would be influential in setting a *kawa* which would facilitate women speaking. However, as already outlined, the constraints of age, my lack of ability in speaking *Maori* and my status as a *manuhiri*, or guest in the area, did not give me any authority to set any form of *kawa*. Nor did the other *Maori* women have authority to do this, because *kawa* is mutually agreed upon by the genealogical unit of the *marae* according to various customs and traditions. These can be contested in culturally appropriate ways, but have to be argued so in *Maori* language and with the right groupings of elders. The most that I could do was to ensure that it was on the agenda and open for discussion. There was no consensus agreement, however, among the women and the community people concerned. The women who wanted speaking rights were ones who themselves could not speak *Maori*. One very influential *Maori* woman, who was herself a former teacher at the school, fully supported the idea of women speaking on the *marae*. She had been making public statements about women's issues for many years. When she came to talk to the *marae* committee she stated that this was her hope, and that possibly she would be able to do this herself one day, but she also added the rider

¹⁸ Szarszy, M., 1973. '*Maori Women in Pakeha Society*', Auckland, United Women's Convention.

that the *marae* was essentially a *Maori* institution and would require *Maori* support to survive.

Messages were also received from various *Pakeha* women, both in the school and in the community, suggesting that they were unlikely to give support to a *marae* because they had no speaking rights. We had been warned by *Maori* colleagues in other schools that some *Pakeha* women teachers were boycotting their own school *marae* because it was seen by these women as a sexist institution. Pressure was also mounting from groups of women who wanted to use the *whare*, but who wanted to specify how their own *powhiri* or welcoming rituals would be carried out. The *Maori* staff regarded these demands as being extremely offensive and resisted any suggestion that these groups be able to dictate their own *kawa*. It became difficult when the school, through the principal, had already made a commitment to hosting the groups.

The issue of *tino rangatiratanga*, or control over how the *whare* was to be used, who could visit, who could agree to visits became increasingly problematic. Teachers wanted to use the space to run life skills discussion groups, others wanted to invite guest speakers to the *whare* rather than to their own classrooms because 'the room was more comfortable'. The school was seen as intruding more and more into a position where it was beginning to determine its own protocols for the *marae* and was making its own selection of *Maori* cultural practices and behaviours. This was interpreted as trying to gain the 'warm fuzzies' of *Maori* cultural practices rather than the more significant practices. In saying 'no' to some groups, there was always the danger of being accused of excluding *Pakeha* groups and maintaining a 'separatist' policy.

The School, The *Marae*, *Maori* Women, *Pakeha* Women: Time-out For a Redefinition.

The tension between *Maori* cultural values and the school became more obvious as demands for the use of the *whare* grew. It came to a crisis when a group of the top women civil servants in New Zealand arrived for a visit. It was thought by someone, not the *Maori* teachers, that it would be appropriate to welcome this group of very important women at the *whare*. They were greeted with a formal *Maori powhiri* by the principal, the *Maori* language

teacher and her class. The ignorance and arrogance of a number of these women for *Maori* cultural practices shocked the principal, the staff who were present, and the girls who had performed. Here was a small group of *Maori* women welcoming a larger group of white women who were cold and unsmiling, who did not seem to know, or care to know, what it was they were being given. One or two refused to *hongi* (traditional touching of noses) and several of them ignored the girls in the greetings. This experience was so clearly bad that a stronger policy was developed by the *marae* committee to exert more control over the ways in which the *whare* was used by outside groups.

As the pressure from groups to use the *whare* grew, some of the younger women who had formed the initial steering group for this project became impatient that the project was becoming bigger and taking longer than they had intended. Some of them felt that the focus had shifted from the *Maori* staff and students to the whole staff, many of whom were regarded by these former students as being antagonistic to the *Maori* students in the school and to *Maori* values and practices. They were particularly concerned that the *whare* might become bound up in the very school rules which alienated *Maori* girls from school in the first place. This group of young *Maori* women were quietly persistent that the *whare* be primarily a safe haven for *Maori* girls.

One of my tasks was to consult with a range of people, from building inspectors to carvers, from university 'experts' in *Maori* culture to the local tribal trust board, and from all the other *Maori* communities in the school zone to other vested interests such as former *Maori* students and the *Maori* Womens' Welfare League. While the different *Maori* groups could see the merit of a special cultural presence in the school, they were almost all uniformly cautious about a *marae*. It became very clear that among the people who had given most support to the school, including the local tribe, there was no overt support for a *marae* project. There were too many complex issues which had not been resolved at a tribal level and there was a general feeling that the school context was not the best context in which these issues could be discussed or resolved. There seemed to be a consensus among most of the *Maori* interests that, until the school proved itself, there was no room for a *marae*. The same view was held about having it called a *whare wananga*. A *whare wananga* was regarded as being too deep and too traditional for a school to delve into. One suggestion was

to call it a *whare pora*, a house of weaving but this idea was not explored in any depth.

The silence of the major *Maori* supporters led to a downplaying of a *marae concept* and a shift towards the development of a simple *whare*. A *whare* is a generic name for a building or house. This did not remove the pressures coming from other interests but it did clarify the different *Maori* positions, and as a simple act of redefinition, it gave the two of us on staff a clearer direction about where the boundaries of *Maori* interests and school interests lay. The cultural message was to abandon any notion of a school *marae* and concentrate on something more achievable and, by implication, less risky. Our next task was twofold. We had to raise funds outside the school to develop the *whare* and we had to begin the more important task of preparing our students as future hosts or *tangata whenua* of the *whare*. Both these tasks were neither simple nor straightforward. Although the school did not give us any financial support our accounts were still controlled by the school. One of the first things to happen was that all the debts that various *Maori* clubs had accumulated were all given to us to resolve. The lack of financial support given by the school was received favourably by community agencies whose views about schooling were confirmed by the school's position. They believed that schools only paid token attention to *Maori* needs and were pleased to help the *whare* proposal.

Wielding together the girls cultural skills was one of the more difficult tasks. *Maori* girls were often the group most likely to be known for their truancy, their defiance towards teachers, their poor performance, their smoking, their swearing and their glue sniffing. They came from many tribes, many of them knew no tribe because they were third or fourth generation urban, some of them were wards of the state who lived in residential homes, others lived in impoverished conditions. Some were indeed highly skilled in the correct cultural practices. It took great organisation and skill to get all these young *Maori* women into the same room and keep them there for the duration of one school period. One newsletter commented on the lack of leadership amongst the senior girls, '*leaders are not the people who yell the loudest, leadership emerges in many forms. Maori club as a whole must start to respect each other more*'.¹⁹ Later, another newsletter laments the '*gap in Maori social*

¹⁹ *Newsletters of Establishment Liaison Committee.*

skills such as being the first to rush in for a cup of tea, sitting on the benches, not tending to the needs of the *manuhiri* (visitors) and leaving the place untidy'.²⁰ However what bound the girls together was their emotional need to be identified as *Maori*. Many of them had a hunger for *Maori* knowledge and a deep need to be affirmed as young *Maori* women.

We began with a series of group sessions to learn *waiata*, or 'traditional' songs. The girls from the local tribes were pulled out of class to attend *wananga*, or learning sessions, on their own history, and the protocols they would need as the host tribe. Other girls were involved in various supporting activities, such as providing the hospitality support for visitors. The girls had started to claim their space in the *whare* at lunchtimes and took some pride in looking after it, although they had to be reminded frequently that the rule prohibiting food also prohibited chewing gum. The group of former *Maori* students who had instigated the project made frequent visits to school to talk to the current students. They had become important role models, who would listen to the girls' problems and provide suggestions for dealing with teachers, parents, sisters and boyfriends. Both seniors and juniors would go to the *whare* at lunchtime to talk or sleep or play cards. They would remove their shoes as they would in a meeting house and were beginning to establish the kinds of rules used in more traditional meeting houses. All of this was a major turn around for the *Maori* students at the school.

And Then There Were Two More...

At the end of that year my colleague retired and two new *Maori* women teachers were hired. Both these women came from the local confederation of tribes, were both older, and were highly skilled in *Maori* language and performance. I went on study leave and the two new *Maori* women looked after the project. Even though they were linked closely to the local tribe, they in fact came from different areas and had very different ways of operating. It was soon apparent that these two disagreed on most things and the other staff had started to see them as a kind of 'good cop, bad cop' combination, with the one viewed as being 'good' getting more support from colleagues and the 'bad' one was labelled as being difficult, unreliable and a bitch. Not only was the staff aligned according to how they viewed these

²⁰ *Ibid.*

teachers but the *Maori* students and *Maori* communities had also become split into groups. It was an awkward year.

When I returned to school it was in a new role. Not only was I responsible for apparently difficult *Maori* students I was also responsible for apparently difficult *Maori* staff. Various submissions were made to me by *Pakeha* staff suggesting strategies for dealing with these two women. During this time the *whare* began to take on a life of its own and was known by the girls and the staff as a warm and peaceful haven. The rules of the *whare* were becoming less like those of a prefabricated classroom and more like those of a traditional meeting house. It was used in the evenings and had been the host for a number of small groups. The tension between the two staff was eventually resolved by one gaining another position elsewhere. Despite their differences they had both been effective in training a group of *Maori* girls, who were not only highly proficient in a range of cultural skills, but very proud of themselves. The students were almost ready as a group to support the *mana* of the *whare*. The *whare* in turn had been decorated with the most beautiful and delicate carvings and was ready to support the *mana* of the girls and the school. Tribal elders had discussed a name for the building and had agreed on one which had several different meanings. The remaining other *Maori* staff member had assumed the dominant role in the affairs of the *whare*.

The *whare* was officially opened, with all the protocols and rituals, three years after it had been moved as a building onto the site. Respected elders had opened it at dawn with all the appropriate rituals and many important dignitaries came to speak. The *whare* was given a *Maori* name and was deemed to have an identity and life of its own. It was no longer a *whare*, it had taken on a new name by which the school and the *Maori* girls would be known within the *Maori* world.

What Does the *Whare* Mean for *Mana Wahine Maori*?

Many struggles took place around the development of the *whare*. There were tensions between *Maori* women and *Pakeha* women, between the different cultures of school and of *Maori* society, between the deeper structures of schooling and the interests of *Maori*, and

between the different interests and positions of *Maori* women. These tensions were not merely theoretical constructs but were real enough to the women involved to cause real stress, real pain and at times, real excitement.

Developing a *marae* or a *whare*, even in the most ideal conditions, is not an easy achievement. It is more usual for projects of this nature to take many years because the process of consensus requires time, negotiation, reflection and further time. Nor is it by any means usual for a group of mainly women to develop a carved house and a supporting unit of people to support that house. This does not mean that *Maori* women have not been involved in the development of quite impressive traditional *marae*, rather that their efforts have often been considered so ordinary and normal compared to the 'extraordinary' efforts of the male carvers, that they have gone unnoticed.²¹ Most visitors to a carved meeting house see the carvings, they do not see the woven panel work or the invisible support work which has occurred in the background. Many *Maori* women cling to a vision of the past which claims that in pre-European society gender roles were complementary and work was a genuinely group effort. This remains problematic because of the virtual absence of anything other than oral accounts to support this view.

As an attempt to meet the needs of a group of young *Maori* women in a large secondary school the establishment of a *whare* represents an innovative approach to the problems faced by ethnic minority children in schools. It is potentially much more than that. The placement of the *whare* in a school provides a stark juxtaposition of unequal power relations. The school is big, the *whare* is small; the front of the school is green and elegant, the front of the *whare* is concrete and tar. What is significant is that it is there at all. That fact on its own represents a struggle in which *Maori* women were active participants rather than passive bystanders. The *whare* has a wider potential to transform the structures by developing alternative pedagogical practices and validating *Maori* forms of knowledge. The wider crisis for *Maori* education is situated in a context of continuing underachievement by *Maori* students. The wider crisis for *Maori* people is the continuing threat to the survival of *Maori* people by *Pakeha* society. Both these crises need to be addressed and there is increasing evidence that *Maori* people are

²¹ *Te Awekotuku, N., 1991. Mana Wahine Maori. Auckland, New Women's Press, p.10.*

more than prepared to go outside the state system to meet their own needs for educational excellence and cultural survival.

The wider structural relations and ideological framework of society and of schooling have to be struggled against even in the context of a single-sex girls school with a predominantly all-women staff. In a context where *Pakeha* women were making the decisions, there was never a guarantee that those decisions could or would serve the interests of *Maori* women. Race and class differences tended to struggle against any potentially common interests of gender. The school (as represented by the main body of staff) and its own organisational system, 'the school tradition', was very effective at maintaining control over its own boundaries. The front lawn was a case in point. It was one of the few grassed areas in the school grounds and it was very clear that there would never be a building of any kind sited on this patch of grass. It was never ever suggested as a possible site. While it was regarded as appropriate that young women in their physical education gear could romp around on the front lawn where visitors could see, it was viewed by the *Maori* women and students as culturally inappropriate. Most *marae* have a grassed area known as the *marae atea* and this idea was seen by one *Maori* woman in particular as being essential for the school *whare* to be on a grassed area at the front of the school. When she suggested this idea there was absolute silence, as if she had broken an unspoken rule, which she had, of course.

Another small struggle took place over funding arrangements. Fundraising for the *whare* took place at the same time as the fundraising for a new centennial hall for the school. The former *Maori* staff member, who had been at school for many years, was involved in both campaigns which meant an extra drain on her time and personal resources. The centennial campaign was a very professional campaign which was a sharp contrast to the *whare* fundraising, which involved some projects which resulted in debts rather than profits, and which, more often than not, involved me as the major fundraiser going to community meetings to compete with other *Maori* organisations for small amounts of money. Funds raised were invested by the school and controlled by the school. Although these funds were protected for the use of the *whare*, they were also used as a reason for the school not needing to give any money itself to the project.

To the *Maori* women involved, the *whare* would, when developed, give the school *mana* in the eyes of the *Maori* community. It was not just for the benefit of *Maori* girls attending the school but would reach out to benefit the school as a whole. Culturally it is believed that *mana* given should be reciprocated in some way. There were many times when we, as *Maori* women, thought the school was getting far more than it deserved. At the same time there were other staff who thought the actual *whare* building was rather unattractive (which it was before the renovations) and that it took up 'valuable' space. *Mana* is contested and struggled for within *Maori* interests, but when it has to be contested with non-*Maori* interests, the struggle takes on the added dimension of a struggle for *tino rangatiratanga* or autonomy.

Sometimes this tension resulted in the *Maori* women reacting to what often appeared to the *Pakeha* women as insignificant incidents. Timetabling decisions often upset the *Maori* staff because of what was viewed as high-handed assumptions being made about space, time and people. For example, in the early days the *whare* was seen by timetablers as a 'space' suitable for classes, not as a *whare*. The *Maori* teacher initially thought this was a good idea until it was realised that several classes would be using the *whare* and that this would limit the cultural activities which could take place in the *whare*. This situation was finally resolved by a counter high-handed decision from me, to get rid of the desks which had been put in the room and to lock the room for two days so that no one could enter.

At the times of greatest stress it seemed to the *Maori* women that the personal and professional resources we had to do our jobs, to fight the battles, to get the community support, to hold the *Maori* students together, to raise money, to get along with our colleagues and each other, were stretched well beyond their means. There were times when the staffroom became a place of enormous stress, with no escape from comments or loud-asides being made about individual *Maori* students or about *Maori* issues. This does not deny that other women staff were also under stress, but for *Maori* women the stress was related not just to their individual workloads, but to the very fact that we were *Maori* women among a larger group of *Pakeha* women, in an institution which reified their knowledge and cultural backgrounds.

The life of a *whare* in the school will always be problematic simply because it represents a different world-view. This world-view separates *Maori* women from *Pakeha* women. It

celebrates and validates those differences. But at another level, it has been a forum for bringing *Maori* women and *Pakeha* women together in situations where *Pakeha* women do not have absolute control. The *whare* is still a space primarily for *Maori* girls and women. Having that space gives the notion of *mana* something concrete to defend, to struggle for and gain. It is also a place in which *Maori* women continue to exercise a degree of *tino rangatiratanga*, or autonomy, over their day to day schooling experiences.

Having a *whare* does not mean, however, that the multiple struggles in which *Maori* women teachers engage are fewer or less intense. As minority, indigenous and colonised women our struggle will endure. As women who, as a group, remain disproportionately poor, sick, uneducated and unemployed, our struggle will endure. As women who have had a tradition of political activism, *Maori* women will never just stand and watch their lives being reshaped by others. The struggle for *mana wahine Maori* is a continuing struggle for justice as *Maori*, as women, as the sick and poor of New Zealand society.

A Brief Synopsis to Section Three.

In this section I have examined the ways in which the code of imperialism, as expressed through the principle of dis-order, has had an impact on *Maori* social relations. In the introduction I explored this principle at a broad indigenous level before bringing the analysis closer to *Maori* society through an examination of age and gender. In chapter eight I looked at the ways in which Native schooling was implicated in the process of dis-ordering through the insertion of western notions of childhood and through the specific pedagogical practices of early schooling for *Maori*. In this chapter I foregrounded the experiences of one Native School, *Te Teko* to show in some detail how this dis-ordering process worked. The historical significance of the dis-ordering process is that the conditions which generated *Maori* ways of knowing, the code from which *Maori* ways of knowing drew, the principles through which it was realised, became fragmented. Chapter eight illustrated the different layers of the process of dis-ordering, for example through; language, disciplinary practices, orientation to new centres of importance, spatial separation of schools from communities. In chapter nine the focus and style of writing shifted away from childhood and the historical context, to bring together some of the disparate strands of political and cultural activities by *Maori* women. This chapter showed one form of resistance which I have called, recentering ourselves. Recentering is important for creating the conditions in which we can re-order our priorities and re-imagine ourselves by drawing from our own codes of knowing. Chapter ten returned to a school setting to discuss the politics behind the establishing of a school based *marae*. This chapter showed how a small group of *Maori* women attempted to make space for *Maori* girls and *Maori* values. The chapter illustrated the significance of a number of different points. Firstly, the significance of the multiple layers in which categories and issues intersect, (gender, age, ethnicity, *iwi*) and the multiple ways in which these differences are contested even within a locally specific site. Secondly, the significance of cultural concepts such as the *marae*, for creating conditions over which *Maori* have greater control and through which resistances can be sustained. The third point is in relation to the importance of having space through which new possibilities can be re-imagined. The notion of space will be explored further in the following section in relation to the concepts of *Taha Maori* and *Kaupapa Maori*.