

## Chapter Nine

### *Maori Women; Discourses, Projects and Mana Wahine.*<sup>1</sup>

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#### *Introduction*

*This chapter was written in 1989 and published in 1990. At the time of writing this chapter, there was very little published material on **Maori** women, dealing with **Maori** women's issues and by **Maori** women. The absence of such a literature reflected, in my view, a reluctance by **Maori** to confront many of the social issues in which women were, for the most part, the victims. To raise such issues was to give voice to and worse, to unleash a 'hidden discourse' of internal violence and abuse. It was also, for the speaker of such things, an invitation to being attacked for 'not knowing' about being **Maori** or not knowing the politics of being **Maori**. This was because many of the **Maori** women working in the 'new' social issues area of 'violence against women' or 'rape crisis' or 'incest survival' were often themselves marginalised, urbanised and young.*

*There were well established **Maori** women who were seen as strong advocates for **Maori** women. Women such as Donna Awatere, Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, Ripeka Evans and Dame Mira Szarszy had been on the 'women's scene' since the 1970s but in the 1980s the development of **Te Kohanga Reo** had brought a new grouping of **Maori** women into **Maori** politics. Their interests had not been previously captured or inspired by established organisations such as the **Maori Women's Welfare League** or **District Maori Councils** or by women's groups generally. There was a sense that the scene in relation to **Maori** women was fragmented and disorganised with disparate groups working in **Te Kohanga Reo**, Rape crises*

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<sup>1</sup> First published as Smith, L.T., 1990. '**Maori Women; Discourses, Projects and Mana Wahine**'. in Women and Education in Aotearoa, eds. S. Middleton, A. Jones, Wellington, Bridget Williams Press.

and anti-violence groups, lesbian women's networks, iwi development, pre-employment and training courses, health collectives and **Waitangi** project groups, with little dialogue between any of the groups. My own work and networks did cross many of these groupings. I had already been involved in the 1970s political activist group of **Nga Tamatoa**, was a teacher and counsellor, and had become active in **Te Kohanga Reo**. My work as a counsellor had drawn me into various projects dealing with incest survival, glue sniffing, street kids and violence against women. I had worked in establishing community networks and still kept strong ties with my own **whanau** and **iwi**.

Other than **Te Kohanga Reo**, which had gained the 'high moral ground' in terms of what counted as political and cultural activism, the **Maori** political scene was also changing in relation to the policies of devolution which the fourth Labour Government was promoting after it was elected in 1984. In terms of this chapter, the significance of the discourses of devolution to **Maori** women was that, at one level, the policies appeared to offer greater empowerment opportunities for **iwi** to take control of their own programmes and socio-economic development. Given the argument by many **Maori** women that our 'traditional' structures were equal and complementary to that for males this, in theory, should have given **Maori** women increased opportunities to participate within our own **iwi** structures at all levels. It did not and it has not, which accounts in large part for the claim currently being taken to the **Waitangi** Tribunal on behalf of **Maori** women.<sup>2</sup> In 1989 when this chapter was written there were distinct groupings of **Maori** women doing different things in the community, all of which were worthwhile, but with little time left for critical reflection either of what they themselves were doing, or of what was being done to them.

This paper was my attempt to make sense of this scene and bring together the different 'projects' in which **Maori** women were engaged. By 'projects' I meant a combination of politics, work, orientations, and organisation of the activities in which **Maori** women were grouped. Together, these produced particular discourses, which were often contested when **Maori** issues were discussed. I thought it important that time be taken to reflect upon this work and create some spaces for dialogue amongst ourselves as **Maori** women. It did in fact

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<sup>2</sup> Refer to chapter five.

have that effect, but obviously not on its own. At the same time this was being written, my colleague Kathie Irwin, had also written on the need to develop **Maori** feminist theories. Although now in retrospect, I may write about these issues differently, the identification of the different projects and discourses did connect, not only with what was happening at the time but what has developed since then. For example, there is a very distinct set of interests around issues of sovereignty and our relationship with the state. **Maori** women are involved on two sides of this debate. There are **Maori** women in the public service advising Government and **Maori** women, such as Maori lawyer Annette Sykes, who are providing an oppositional voice. There are another set of interests by **Maori** women in rediscovering their spirituality and/or applying such concepts to health and healing. A third grouping of women is still concerned with **whanau** issues and basic social welfare and community based programmes.

This chapter illustrates a number of different intersections. At one level there is the intersection between **Maori** and gender, and the difficulties confronted by **Maori** women, particularly when working within **whanau** and community. One of the failings of early feminist theory was to see a universal condition suffered by all women, and to see that as being distinct from issues of race or ethnicity. The tendency to dichotomise **Maori** and/or women created overly simplistic forms of analyses. Although we can recognise that there is an intersection of race and gender, **Maori** women live in that intersection and have to make sense of it in order to live. There is another intersection between the 'past' or the 'traditional' and the ways **Maori** women have chosen to work today. This intersection is discussed briefly in relation to the **whanau** project. The **whanau**, I argue, is a significant site of struggle for women rather than the **marae**. It is at this level that social relations are struggled over and rules of practice established. The fragmentary nature of our lives and work was illustrated in chapter four, this chapter gives a different view of a similar picture, that is the fragmented-ness of being **Maori**. The chapter attempts to establish some new priorities or ways of organising ourselves. It identifies some sites within which the possibilities exist for **Maori** ways of knowing to be reformulated and recoded as more explicit sites of resistance. The text is mostly original, based on one which was originally submitted for publication. The changes made subsequently are in relation to the formatting for this

*thesis, the highlighting of Maori words, and some grammatical improvements.*<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter I have set myself the task of drawing together the work that is being done by *Maori* women into an analysis of what it means to be someone who is a *Maori* woman. I believe this task is necessary as a means to assume control by *Maori* women over our struggle and over the interpretation of that struggle wider afield.

Subsuming our struggle as *Maori* women under existing feminist analyses is to deny the centrality of *Maori* identity or *rangatiratanga* and the specific historical and cultural reality which we endure. The time for us to fit ourselves into someone else's reflection or live in someone else's metatheory is over. The time has come for us to challenge the interpretation of our struggle by men and by women who have not shared in our history and who do not participate in our struggles.

Neither can we assume that because we are all *Maori* women we share the same interests or are engaged in the same kind of struggle. We can not simplify our task by rendering invisible the very real differences which exist between us. To begin with the assumption that as *Maori* women we are a clearly defined group, is to begin by accepting the label of our colonisers 'maori-something common or ordinary'. If we accept the label then how do we live with it, how do we define it?

Beyond the label there lies the lived realities of generations of women. These lived realities have been grounded in specific sets of experiences and informed by specific knowledges. While the women we tend to look up to have had rich experiences in *Maori* families and communities, we can not deny the validity and power of the experiences being lived by young women in the 'post-urban-drift' world of towns and cities, or the young women whose lives have involved oppression and abuse within dysfunctional *whanau*, or the women who have been parented by the state through Social Welfare 'care'.

The different interests of *Maori* women make for distinctly different kinds of discourses and

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<sup>3</sup> *The original piece had no footnotes or endnotes. I have added footnotes and explanatory notes or commentaries. The references are the same as the original unless otherwise indicated.*

projects. While some of us seek an understanding of cultural traditions, others seek redress for historical oppression. While some seek a clarification of meanings and symbols which exist in our world-view, others seek to reclaim and uphold the validity of ancient *tikanga*. In many ways the perceived legitimacy of some tasks over others (by, for example, *Maori* women 'leaders' or organisations such as the *Maori* Women's Welfare League) has marginalised certain categories of discourse (and real live women as well), from mainstream debate of *Maori* women's issues. The categorisation used to label women as 'radical' or 'lesbian' or both has perpetuated powerful hegemonies which serve the interests of the *Pakeha* far more than they do the interests of *Maori*. What should make discourses on *mana wahine* significant is their potential to transform the lives of *Maori* women in politically and culturally meaningful ways.

In this paper I have conceptualised four strands of *mana wahine* discourse. I have described these strands as 'projects' primarily because I see them as discourses or theories in action. Women are already working at these projects in a variety of ways. There is also a collective consciousness about these projects which is beginning to be articulated. In some cases the message has been carried by key individuals. Women like *Rangimarie* Rose *Pere*, *Vapi Kupenga*, *Rina Rata*, *Tuki Nepe*, *Ngahua Te Awekotuku*, *Mira* Szaszy, *Donna Awatere*, *Ripeka* Evans, and *Kathy Irwin*, to name but a few, describe the forms and contexts of oppression which are being confronted by *Maori* women.<sup>4</sup>

Almost without exception these women have been unable to ignore the impact made by colonisation on the role of women in *Maori* society, and of *Maori* women in *Pakeha* society. There exist some real differences, in terms of the focus of the struggle, between some of the writers mentioned and between groups of *Maori* women generally. Clearly there is some tension between a position which locates the oppression in *Te Ao Pakeha* (argued for example by *Atareta Poananga*), and a position which locates it in *Te Ao Maori* (argued more

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<sup>4</sup> See for example, (i) *Awatere*, D., 1984. *Maori Sovereignty*. Auckland, Broadsheet, (ii) *Evans*, R., 1985. 'Analyse History and Get a Whole Vision of Society', in *Women's Studies Journal*, August, pp.2-13, (iii) *Kupenga*, V., *R. Rata*, *T. Nepe*, 1988. 'Whaia te Iti Kahurangi: Maori Women Reclaiming Autonomy', in *Proceedings of the Joint Conference with New Zealand Planning Council*, ed. P. Saunders, A. Jamrozik, Social Welfare Research Centre, University of New South Wales, (iv) *Irwin*, K., 1988. 'Maori, Feminist, Academic', in *Sites*, v.17, pp.30-38, (v) *Pere*, R., 1988. 'Te Wheke: Whaia te Maramatanga me te Aroha', in *Women and Education in Aotearoa*, ed. S. Middleton, Wellington, Allen & Unwin.

recently by *Merata Mita*).<sup>5</sup>

This kind of debate, however, is extremely useful because we are not dealing with a simple set of problems or with simple people. Addressing *Maori* issues *from a Maori woman's perspective* in a deliberate way, is part of a wider attempt to develop, possibly, a new set of strategies, to deal with the subtleties of on-going oppression. At one level, the increased influence being exercised by *Pakeha* women can be seen as a new form of colonisation, because *Pakeha* women are now in a better position politically, from which they can define us as a people, and deal with us according to their own perceptions of who we are and how we live. This power can be seen in its raw state when, for job applications, *Maori* men compete with *Pakeha* women, and the issues of gender are ranked above those of race. I have also seen it revealed in terms of *marae* protocol and the refusal by some *Pakeha* women to attend *hui* because they regard the *marae* as a 'sexist' institution.

Responding to external definitions of ourselves continues to absorb our energies and resources in an activity which history would suggest is an inordinate waste of time. The problem is that it is frequently unavoidable. Some examples of this have occurred at women's conferences where a single *Maori* woman has been put into the problematic position of starting the conference with a *Maori* 'welcome'. It is problematic because the *powhiri* ritual, in which a formal 'welcome' sits, fulfils important cultural obligations and responsibilities. Whilst women can and have on many, many occasions welcomed visitors in *Maori* settings without the presence of men, the explanations for these occasions have little to do with the actual and deliberate exclusion of men from the ritual. In playing along with a *kaupapa* which seeks to exclude people on gender terms from rituals and cultural practices, in which gender dynamics and reciprocities play a critical role, it may be that as *Maori* women we fall into the trap of constructing cultural forms which suit the interests of a dominant group first, rather than our own interests.

This does not deny that *Maori* women had space to control their own activities and power to exclude men. The point is simply that where those cultural practices exist they should be

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<sup>5</sup> Legat, N., 1986. 'Atareta Poananga and Te Ahi Kaa', in *Metro, March*, pp.44-58. Mita, M., 1990. 'Maori Women and Rangatiratanga', in *Te Whakamarama, The Maori Law Bulletin*, Wellington Legal Service, no.2.

invoked, but in ways which are controlled by *Maori* world-views, and not by the force of *Pakeha*-defined expectations. Replacing male puppets with female puppets simply perpetuates the unequal power relations which separate *Maori* people from *Tauitiwi*.<sup>6</sup>

The *Whanau* Project.

Powerful images maintain the sense of belonging. They carry across time and contexts. They reinforce our shared humanity, our belonging to the land, and our belonging to a set of relationships and obligations. The images are not always warm and fuzzy. Sometimes they are puzzling, contradictory, hurtful and confusing. They can also be disconnected from our day to day existence, like shadows hovering just out of reach. They test our understanding and force us to reflect.

Our identity as *Maori* is irrefutably tied to our *whakapapa*. It is embedded in a *whanau* and *hapu* based view of the world, an epistemology, or body of knowledge and experience, which marks out the boundaries and the geography over which our collective struggles, as *Maori* women are fought. We are related to each other, not just because we are women, but because we are part of a complex genealogical template. We can't even claim to be sisters or part of a global sisterhood in the way that other women have claimed. It is not our sisterliness which is necessarily meaningful or important. We are *tuakana* or *teina* to other women, we have sets of responsibilities or obligations according to these culturally defined relationships.

The *whanau* or *hapu* project is frequently overlooked as being important to the understanding of what it means to be *Maori* and female. It is not that *Maori* women writers do not acknowledge their *whakapapa* or heritage. They are in fact powerful writers who portray strong images of women. They are so certain, so sure, so assertive. Their strength lies in the validity of their own experiences. They are older, they speak *Maori* as native speakers, they are together spiritually and they know the rules. In their strength there are few vulnerabilities. They are the role models for a younger generation of women, ones who are vulnerable, whose experiences have been problematic to say the least.

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<sup>6</sup> *Trans. strangers, used instead of Pakeha.*

The *whanau* project is about lighting the runway for the next generation so that they may see a pathway through the shadow world. It is a project of conscientisation. It is a project which is unashamedly about the past. It requires the seeking of knowledge which is *whanau*, *hapu* and *iwi* specific. It seeks an understanding of a specific foundation of knowledge and practice. It seeks to empower young *Maori* women by reconnecting them to a genealogy and a geography which is undeniably theirs. It seeks to protect women by filling in the details of their identity, by providing the genealogical template so that relationships make sense. This is a project which will engage young women. It needs the guidance of older women.

The *whanau* project is also about locating the *whanau*, and its associated structures such as the *marae*, as a central site for the contestation of *mana wahine*. The fact that there are clearly tribal and *hapu* variations in the role of women might suggest that in the past women were able to win and maintain power at this level. One example in recent history is the role that some women played on the *marae* during the years of the Second World War. It could be, that in *whanau* where women did gain key leadership roles, possibly through sheer force of individual achievement, then this model was simply taken as the norm and maintained. *Marae kawa* has been the focus of contestation already by some *Maori* women, in particular *Mira Szarszy*.

This project has been underway for some time. *Matua whangai*, *marae*-based employment training programmes, *iwi* organisation, immersion *hui*, health *hui*, family reunions are all sites in which this project can occur.<sup>7</sup> Every *Maori* home takes part in the project. However, these are not always settings where the needs of women are addressed or given space. They need to be regarded as sites of struggle, sites where the role of women is being constantly defined and recreated. It is not enough to understand that *Maori* women are at the bottom of the social heap. Understanding does not prevent violence, sexual abuse or other forms of oppression which are occurring within *whanau*. The *whanau* project is about *whanau*, therefore it is also about men, about children, about *kaumatua* and *kuia*. It is an inclusive project.

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<sup>7</sup> *Matua whangai* was operated through the Department of Social Welfare. It was designed to keep *Maori* children, who came before the Courts or through Social Welfare, within their own kin based networks as much as possible.



## The Spiritual Project.

Most of the literature in feminist and women's studies which comes out of the mainstream of white women's scholarship does not focus on spirituality. I take it that they regard it as being unimportant to the physical realities of women's lives. However, *Maori* women's realities are spiritual as well as physical. Our unwaged labour is not just in domestic activity but in spiritual activity. I would like to suggest that a fundamental part of our struggle as *Maori* women is a spiritual one, hence the spiritual project.

As the human manifestation of the female elements, women have been engaged in a monumental and mythological spiritual struggle. It is marked by significant events; the wrenching apart of *Papatuanuku* from *Ranginui*, the turning over of *Papatuanuku* so that her sights and thoughts would look forever downwards, the creation of *Hine Ahu One*, the transformation of *Hine Titama* into *Hine Nui Te Po*, the deeds of *Maui* against his grandmothers. This spiritual struggle continues to be fought in our role as mediators of *tapu*.<sup>8</sup>

Some women have argued, that our traditional roles can best be described as being complementary to the role of males. If this is the case then the spiritual project involves a struggle to establish equilibrium or balance with the male elements. It is a struggle because our spirituality is dynamic; it waxes and wanes, it ebbs and flows, it transforms itself. In order to achieve states of complementarity the female elements have to be active, they have to neutralise, they have to procreate and at times they have to destroy.

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<sup>8</sup> *These stories are all from our creation stories but have often been written in ways which have subsumed the existence of women. Papatuanuku is the earth mother, Ranginui the sky father. These were the original parents who lived in close embrace. Their numerous children became uncomfortable in the dark enclosure and plotted to separate their parents. This they did but because the parents continued to mourn and weep for each other the children turned Papatuanuku over so that she did not have to look at Ranginui. Hine Ahu One was the first woman, created from the earth, by Tane-nui-a-rangi, one of the sons of Ranginui and Papatuanuku. Their daughter was Hine Titama (the mist maiden). Tane-nui-a-rangi married his own daughter and when she discovered that her husband was also her father she fled to the underworld leaving Tane to look after their children above the earth while she would look after them when they died. In leaving the upper world she changed her name to Hine-nui-te-po (the woman of the darkness). The concept of tapu is important because women were also regarded as being mediators of tapu, in other words they could 'break' tapu. This has been interpreted or mis-interpreted to mean that because men were tapu and women were not always tapu then men were more important. There were for example, occasions when men were not tapu, they had to be given tapu status through special karakia and had to have it removed by other karakia.(note added 1995)*

Other women have argued that there was never such a notion as complementary roles. They would argue that males have asserted a position of dominance against which women have had to struggle. This interpretation may account for the variation in tribal conditions in that some women may have been able to wrest greater autonomy from males and redefine roles and relationships and traditions. This would affirm the significance of the *whanau* project. This position does not undermine the notion of a wider spiritual struggle. It would suggest that women could lay claim to a greater domain and would not have to mediate 'structures' or 'states' in order to achieve a state of balance.

Clearly the spiritual project is not one in which we can all be engaged in active and conscious ways. We are part of it however, and need to know the geography of the struggle in order to understand the wider ramifications of any new settlements that women make in our day to day realities. Some women however are engaged in spiritual journeys of their own. Perhaps the spiritual is to be left in their hands to clarify and define more fully the form this project should take than can be done here.

#### The State Project.

Structural analysis has been one way in which *Maori* women have come to understand the structural dimensions of our struggle. This analysis locates political and *Pakeha* dominant structures at the core of the struggle. The current material conditions of *Maori* women need to be seen against the history of colonisation, and the construction by various manifestations of the state of *Maori* women as an oppressed social and economic group.

The colonial state constructed *Maori* women as a group requiring domestication. Through education *Maori* girls were trained to fit the state categories of 'wives' and 'domestic workers'. In the early beginnings of New Zealand capitalism it was important to the colonial economy, which was based primarily on exploiting the land and other natural resources, that women assist this process through their unpaid labour in the homes and on farms, and through their roles as 'helpmeets' to men. An openly espoused purpose of *Maori* education was to

train *Maori* lads to be farmers and *Maori* girls to be farmers wives.<sup>9</sup> Later, educational policy was directed at producing a *Maori* population who could work with their hands, who were skilled at a technical level. An academic education for *Maori* was considered relevant only for an elite group. Women for the most part were not considered to be part of this elite pool.

The role of the state in domesticating *Maori* women was supported by the churches.<sup>10</sup> Christian teachings stressed the importance of such notions as the 'marriage', 'home', 'motherhood' and 'work'. Sexuality of course was confined to marriage. From what has been reconstructed of pre-*Pakeha Maori* society, we know that these notions were defined in quite different ways. Individual mothers were not solely responsible for childcare, homes did not need twenty four hour labour to keep clean, motherhood was probably important only as a developmental stage and at the time of birth itself, and work was communally focused. This does not deny that women had specific roles within *Maori* social organisation. However the colonial state needed to redefine the roles, in order to construct particular forms of economic units, in order that those units contribute to the growth of a new colony.

This colonial form of *Maori* womanhood was placed in an economic and social hierarchy. White women were also locked into domestic roles but their husbands held power. *Maori* women were trained by them and often worked for them as carers of children or domestic servants. However, colonial New Zealand was not sufficiently integrated to allow for the interchange of ideas or the sharing of struggle between *Pakeha* women and *Maori* women. While there were occasions where *Maori* and *Pakeha* women struggled together, for the most part *Maori* women were more frequently portrayed as the recipients or beneficiaries of white women's 'good works'.

Recent changes in the role and nature of the state need to be scrutinised just as rigorously as historical relationships. The increase of women employed within state structures, the

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<sup>9</sup> Strong, T.B., 1931. 'The Education of South Sea Island Natives', in *Maori and Education*, ed. P.M. Jackson, Wellington, Ferguson & Osborn, p.192.

<sup>10</sup> Jenkins, K., K. Morris Matthews, 1995. *Hukarere and the Politics of Maori Girls' Schooling 1875-1995*. Palmerston North, The Hukarere Board of Trustees with Te Whanau O Hukarere.

legislation relating to equal employment opportunity and pay equity, and the appointment of the new equity bureaucrats, are attempts to transform the position of all New Zealand women. While some *Maori* women are in a position to benefit immediately from these changes, most *Maori* women are not. About 13,000 *Maori* women are not in paid jobs anyway.<sup>11</sup> High proportions of *Maori* women are living on benefits, are involved in childrearing, and work in voluntary capacities. More than half of *Maori* households are headed by a single *Maori* woman. A range of social indices place *Maori* women in a continuing and tenuous social and economic position.<sup>12</sup>

The state project then is designed to transform the current social, political and economic position of *Maori* women. Some state projects may, at first glance, seem to be unlikely approaches in this struggle, *Te Kohanga Reo* for example. However out of this movement there has emerged an active and politically aware generation of *Maori* women. They have had their training outside mainstream state-supported early childhood programmes. They know how the state works at a very specific level. They have also experienced the struggle in a hands-on, day to day level. Likewise, women working in pre-employment programmes, job creation and other training programmes, have also learned, through practice, the subtle reach of the state into the lives of *Maori* people generally and *Maori* women in particular.

Legitimizing the *mana* and authority of the Treaty of *Waitangi* has also engaged *Maori* women in a process designed to make the structural and societal change necessary to ensure that the Treaty remains a reality and a protection of our rights as *tangata whenua* or 'people of the land'. The state project is a project for those who are politically aware of the wider structures in which we live. Their awareness is sharpened by a commitment to the struggle. Their sites of struggle are the domains of the state and *Te Ao Pakeha*. Their mission is to change structures, to contest power and to wrest resources away from dominant interest groups. It is a task for the stout hearted rather than the meek.

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<sup>11</sup> These figures have changed since 1989. *Maori* unemployment figures have risen. Almost 25% of *Maori* women seeking work are unemployed. Since the economic reforms from 1984 onwards the hardest hit group in terms of unemployment has been *Maori*, both males and females, and *Maori* women.

<sup>12</sup> Horsfield, A., M. Evans, 1988. *Maori Women in the Economy*. Wellington, Ministry of Women's Affairs. Department of Statistics and Ministry of Women's Affairs, 1990. *Women in New Zealand*. Wellington.

## The Indigenous Women's Project.

White feminist theories have been struggling to take account of the conditions confronting women who are not white. These 'other' women have been variously grouped as 'women of colour', 'black women' or 'Third World women'. Labels which encompass a diverse sector of women and serve to bury the complex issues which lie within these groups of women. *Maori* women have tended to react in contradictory ways. Frequently the division has been along Government and non-Government representative lines. *Maori* women who do not work for Government agencies have had greater difficulty getting to world conferences and once there, have had to work in with other *Maori* women in order to present anything resembling a 'united front'.<sup>13</sup> This is true not just of wider world fora but also of conferences for indigenous women.

In 1989 the 'World Indigenous Conference for Indigenous Women' was hosted in Australia. A number of *Maori* women were present representing a range of organisations; *iwi*, *Maori* Women's Welfare League, Government agencies and other collectives of *Maori* women. One of the first controversial issues to hit the conference was presented by Palestinian women. *Maori* women were unprepared as a group to even deal with the Palestinian struggle. Another issue was presented by lesbian women. While lesbian *Maori* women were at the cutting edge of this debate non-lesbian *Maori* women did not have an informed response.

The indigenous women's project is concerned essentially with locating our struggle as *Maori* women within an international context. We are part of a world from which we can learn and to which we can contribute. The political and economic conditions of *Maori* women are conditions which are sustained at an international level. Oppressive regimes, capitalist, totalitarian or communist, are maintained by international alliances of which New Zealand is a part. New Zealand's economy is totally dependent on international markets. Recent reforms

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<sup>13</sup> *The desire to present a 'united front' before others is very important for Maori and is related to the concept of mana. However the political reasons for at least looking united is that, in the indigenous world, and Maori are seen as being 'government agents' because they travel with official parties. This comment was made by a visiting Cree woman lawyer, Sharon Venn, who noted the presence of the President of the Maori Women's Welfare League as part of the official New Zealand delegation at Geneva for the World Indigenous Working Group's annual meeting. (note added).*

by Government in terms of restructuring the state have been informed by a debate occurring throughout the western world. Our struggle is not just within our own *whanau* or *iwi*, it is part of a much wider struggle for freedom.

*Maori* people have sought to define identity in terms of our relationship to the land. We are *tangata whenua*. This definition is one which is shared by a number of minority and racially different indigenous populations. We share with these groups a common history of being colonised. We have lived through the processes of colonisation by church, by trade, by the gun, by the law and by the more subtle hegemonic processes of internalised self-abhorrence. We also share with them a position of numerical weakness. Our populations are disproportionately small. Our language and culture are under threat of extinction. Our struggle is to retain authenticity as a people.

Not all the interests of indigenous, minority populations are the same. However where they are the same, for example in attempts to preserve the language, then we need to speak to each other in the same way that sovereign nations speak to each other. The indigenous women's project should help us develop international links with people whose interests are similar to ours. We can draw strength and creative ideas from the experience of women whose history of oppression covers centuries more than our own.

#### White Women's Projects

It would be useless to deny the influence of the feminist struggle on New Zealand women. As analysts of a particular form of oppression, feminist scholars and researchers have in the process uncovered the differential forms of patriarchy which have served to oppress groups on the basis of gender, race and class. The Cervical Cancer Inquiry at National Women's Hospital sparked by the investigative report of feminists Sandra Coney and Phillida Bunkle, drew people's attention in a very focused way to the unethical practices of medical researchers on women. In that inquiry specific attention and concern was expressed by Judge Cartwright to the needs of *Maori* women.<sup>14</sup> The Inquiry was presented with some material

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<sup>14</sup> 'The Report of the Commission of the Inquiry into Allegations Concerning the Treatment of Cervical Cancer at National Women's Hospital and Other Related Matters', 1988. (*The Cartwright Report*).

by *Maori* women however, the main media focus was on the practice of research on women in general.

One of the effects of that Inquiry on *Maori* people was to open up the debate related to issues which many *Maori* have found difficult to talk about. A powerful combination of *Maori* traditions and puritanical Christian beliefs have made it extremely difficult for *Maori* women and *Maori* men to talk about and confront issues related to their health, their pain and their bodies. By having a public debate on what had been perpetrated on all kinds of women and baby girls shocked many *Maori* males with the evidence that their own mothers, sisters and daughters could have been part of this 'unfortunate experiment'. Breaking through the psyche of the colonised man is a monumental task and although *Maori* women have assumed primary responsibility for this task, where it concerns *Maori* males, we too as *Maori* women are caught in the contradictions of a colonised reality.

There is a tension between the projects of white women and those of *Maori* women. In *Maori* Sovereignty, Donna *Awatere*'s comments on feminism are a succinct statement of that tension.<sup>15</sup> As *Maori* women we have to be on alert for the possibility of one oppressive agency simply being replaced by another. Experience should have taught us to be wary of those who bear gifts and those who may have come to rescue us. While we may value the revelations of how white patriarchy works, which have come to us from the work of white women, we have also witnessed the practice of white matriarchy. Our rage as an oppressed group is directed at dominant white structures which sit over us, this includes white women as much as white men. Our struggle as *Maori* women is our own struggle, to lose control of that struggle is to lose control of our lives. Therefore as *Maori* women we are not in a position to simply endorse or graft on to the projects of white women. We have to develop according to the reality and logic of our struggles. Race and class may continue to ensure that our alliances with white women will never be more than tenuous.

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<sup>15</sup> *Awatere*, pp.41-45. For example, *Awatere* says that 'White feminists do this by defining "feminism" for this country and by using their white power, status and privilege to ensure that their definition of "feminism" supercedes that of *Maori* women', p.42.

## What About *Maori* Men?

None of these tasks exclude necessarily the role which should be played by *Maori* men. Oppression by race is not on the surface gender specific. It does, however, have different ways of defining the roles to be played out by men and those to be played out by women. The very nature of colonisation is that it alters and distorts social and cultural organisation at the fundamental level of personal and family relationships. This includes notions of sexuality, the organisation of childrearing, control over economic resources, decision making processes and what counts as 'normal' and 'appropriate' behaviour for men, women and children.

Colonisation did serve to legitimate the power of *Maori* men. The first colonisers were men, they dealt with men, they observed and studied men. The roles played by *Maori* women were marginalised because of the ethnocentric and gendercentric views of these early colonisers. *Maori* women/girls were perceived in sexual terms as whores, prostitutes, wives and children. Women who had 'chiefly' roles were considered the exception to the rule, not the norm. They were considered attractive in the absence of a pool of white women. Their autonomy was interpreted as immorality and lack of discipline. Christianity reinforced these notions by spelling out rules of decorum, and defining spaces (the home) for the carrying out of appropriate female activities.

*Maori* men were the ones with whom the colonisers negotiated, traded and treated. *Maori whanau* were the ones against whom the colonisers waged war and ripped off resources. *Maori* men were colonised by being absorbed into the economic fabric of a new society. Even though this absorption was in terms of manual labour, it was necessary for a capitalist economy to have workers rather than thinkers. *Maori* women remained in the confines of home and family, able to work when the labour market required or more commonly, forming part of the reserve labour force. The defining of male and female roles by an essentially capitalist driven economy has made for distinctly different kinds of colonising experiences for *Maori* men and for *Maori* women.

Most *Maori* women would recognise the impossibility of separating our experiences as



women from our experiences as *Maori*. However, changing social and economic circumstances have called for new strategies for dealing with the unequal power relations in which *Maori* are located. Past settlements which assumed that all *Maori* would benefit from 'change' have simply led to the maintenance of a hierarchy which placed *Maori* men on top and *Maori* women underneath. This is clearly illustrated by educational policies which fostered specific curriculum for *Maori* boys aimed at the acquisition of marketable 'skills', and those aimed at *Maori* girls which were intended to produce good wife material.

The last twenty years has seen the emergence of *Maori* women as something more than a mere social category. *Maori* women are now part and parcel of the economic and political reality of society. *Maori* women too, have been urbanised, educated and absorbed into the dynamics of an unhealthy society. This movement has enabled *Maori* women to become a critical part of the struggle for rangatiratanga. What is at stake in further colonising processes are the interests of *Maori* women as much as those of *Maori* men. On that basis alone *Maori* women need to act.

#### What About Health and Education Issues?

Our work has always meant a distinction between the symptoms of oppression and the causes of it. We are caught in that we have to deal simultaneously with both. The symptoms of oppression for *Maori* women are manifested in appalling rates of cancer and heart disease and of worsening rates of mental ill-health and a host of other diseases. *Maori* males and *Maori* children are trapped in a similar web of suffocating ill health. We are also locked into a time bomb. We could lose a third of our population to smoking related diseases in the next decade. In effect, this will mean a decapitation of our most treasured resources; *he tangata, he tangata, he tangata*.<sup>16</sup>

Some of our tasks then have a real time limit to them. There is urgency to their resolution. The four projects outlined here each address this social crisis at both the symptomatic and causal level. Solutions which are proposed now need to offer long-term possibilities as well

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<sup>16</sup> *Trans. People, people, people.*

as account for the 'here and now'. *Maori* women are already particularly active at the *whanau* level but lack support from state structures to develop systematic and well-resourced programmes which can reach out and establish more permanent structures for dealing with problems at the causal level. *Te Kohanga Reo* and *Kura Kaupapa Maori* are perhaps examples of programmes that have been able to establish themselves, but even these two are marginal and will continue to need a protective mantle wrapped around them.

The reality of our struggle is that we are caught in crises which will engage our minds and energies for all our lives. It is permanent and on-going, it is an unwritten condition for belonging to an indigenous and colonised ethnic minority. Because of the permanent nature of the struggle, there will always be a need for *Maori* people generally to contest issues of relevance to *Maori* survival. As members of *whanau*, *hapu* and *iwi*, generations of *Maori* women will continue to be caught up in one project or another or more likely several projects simultaneously.

One of the many difficulties we confront as *Maori* women is that there is so much 'real important stuff to do'. Hence doing some serious theorising about our lives as women has tended to be an activity to which we escape from time to time to replenish our inner forces. It has not been an activity regarded in itself as being essential or significant enough to warrant serious and sustained attention. And yet critical reflection or 'taking time out' has to be an important part of any struggle. It was said by one kaumatua that whilst the missionaries were teaching us to look upwards to heaven our land was being taken from under our feet. It could also be said that now that we are looking downwards to protect what we have left heaven itself has been restructured to keep us out of there as well! Part of being vigilant and proactive is being informed and reflective. That's not a privilege it's a necessity for survival.

*In Summary.*

*Although written in 1989, I think that this chapter reflects the idea of re-centering quite well in that it has identified some of the disparate strands of Maori women's politics and mapped out the connections between these activities. Having read Chandra Mohanty's essay on the 'cartographies of struggle' which was published in 1991, I have decided that the 'mapping'*

idea was quite 'original' in its time! There is a very specific audience being addressed in this article which is **Maori** women, but the publication of this article in an anthology of 'women's writings', that is, **Pakeha** women's writings, has also provided another audience, one which was not addressed so directly. Theories about **Maori** women have progressed considerably since 1989 and there is much more literature available, international and local, which supports these alternative analyses.

In relation to this section of the thesis on the 'dis-order of things', this chapter bridges the historical material of chapter eight, which examines schooling in the 1880s and its impact on concepts of childhood, and the following chapter, which resituates this section of the thesis in schooling in the 1980s, a hundred years on, and examines the attempts by **Maori** women to make space for **Maori** in a single sex secondary school. This chapter has identified sites of struggle and sites of resistance. They are also, potentially, sites which enable a reformulation of coding to take place as **Maori** women work through some of the major issues within each of those projects.