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# Interrogating Speech in Colonial Encounters Native Women and Voice

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation is an examination of Maori women's relationship to feminism within the current postcolonial dilemma of New Zealand politics. It interrogates the voice of native women and the location of this articulation. I investigate the efficacy of 'speaking-out' under conditions of colonial renewal and advance stages of late-capitalism. I ask 'what role does mainstream feminist politics play in the reproduction of 'images' that express native women's subjectivity in the Pacific'? And subsequently, 'how have Maori women responded'? If the point is to have a voice, what does it mean for those of us who have been silenced to be 'given' a voice? The limits of feminism as the presumed destination of native women will be seen to reflect the double-bind proposed by Maori women unable to return 'home', to that space designated, 'indigenous theory'. The irony and contradictory inevitability of postcolonial politics produces a moment, event, that Native women have no option but to negotiate as part of the colonial encounter we all inhabit.

## **Acknowledgements**

For Ruby and Rose Bain

This dissertation originated in part from a personal desire to make explicit the limits of feminism in constructing a 'space' of liberation that could 'speak' to the lives of Maori women. My life, and the lives of the many women in my family, could not be easily contained within the myriad of representations that spoke for us. The death of two of my aunts within a short time of each other last year made what I was trying to achieve in my writing appear utterly useless. This grief will remain with me always as a reminder of the deep offence done to us as women and native.

There are so many who have made an impression on me and the directions I have taken in this dissertation. Any faults, however, are certainly mine. I would especially like to acknowledge my supervisor Lynne Alice for steering me through to the end and never letting me lose faith. Thank you for believing in me. Thanks also to Maud for sharing with me the postcolonial irony of our predicament as women in a settled society.

Finally I would like to acknowledge all my family who, at the end of the day, I remain accountable to; Riki, Roderick, Susie, Elizabeth, Lee, Jane, Bonney, Maria, Rachel and Kiri-Dawn. I thank especially Winnie and Matt for reminding me that my feminism is extremely contradictory, and Toni for being so patient. Most of all, however, I want to acknowledge my mother and father who always knew the world was not as it appeared.



## Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Introduction	1
The Debates	1
Choking on the 'Word'	4
The Context	7
Laughter as Resistance	9
Irony and Complicity	11
Chapter 1: The Limits of Representation	15
That ain't native theory	16
Structuring Subaltern Speech	18
What's In A Name?	19
Oppositional Speech & Nationalist Discourse	21
De-centring the Margin	25
The Space For Maori Women's Voices	27
Chapter 2: Watching 'Them' Watching 'Me'	30
Constructing Difference	32
Native Author(ity)	33
White Native' Information	37
Feminist 'Mistakes' and Native 'Problems'	39
Chapter 3: 'Native' Representations, 'Pure Spaces' and 'Indigenous' Theories	44
Maori Women's Use Of Genealogical Stories	45
Negotiating Feminist Agendas And Cultural Imperialism	48
Gendered Ethnicities and Anti-colonial Gestures	51
Indigenous Spaces	54
Confused Privileges and Illegitimate Marginality	56
Chapter 4: Uncertain Locations	58
Who Benefits from 'Inclusion'?	59
Gender and Nationalism in Colonial Discourses	60
Reverse Imperialism And The Authentic Insurgent	64
The Politics Of 'difference' In Contestations Of Colonialism	66

Chapter 5: Colonialism in the classroom and as pedagogy	69
The Glass Ceiling of Representations and Dialogue	73
Enabling Violations And Representation	78
Conclusion	86
Selected Bibliography	91

## Introduction

It is precisely the inevitable failure of any such notion of representation as this that makes a representation a representation - something, that is, which is constituted through a *relation* between itself and something else, independent of it, which it claims to represent. The issue is not the possibility/impossibility of a 'pure' or pre-discursive access to objects, but what criteria of 'truthfulness' are suitable for which forms of representation and for what purposes, ... as limits, in all our dealings with the world. <sup>1</sup>

### The debates

I begin with a quote from Gayatri Spivak whose caution to all of us involved in feminist theorising is intended to remind us of the limits to our re-presentations. I am thus reminded as I write and speak of my 'purposes' here. What criteria of 'truthfulness' can I appeal to as I slide into that space of identification that I am about to critique? This dissertation is concerned with contemporary responses to Maori woman's *absence*, and current demands for *her* visibility, unproblematically answered as Maori - woman-talking. The focus here is intended to reveal the ways in which our desire for voice, and the subsequent response, feeds into someone else's agenda. If there is one thing I have noticed of late, it is the saturation of Maori woman's image as official image in state advertising. In fact it is difficult to walk down the street without being confronted with 'her' representation. The contradictions implied by this have yet to be acknowledged.

Writings by Maori women discussed here consistently focus on the need for feminist theories that are responsive to our daily lives. Embracing this notion of 'lived experience', we are often encouraged to write from a position that represents a Maori world-view that is experiential and as such, often supportive of a search for a truly indigenous, (authentic) feminism. <sup>2</sup> In its search for a uniquely indigenous viewpoint Pakeha feminist hegemony tends to look to Maori women to provide a basis for them. The issue here is that the notion of 'authenticity', a term invented by modernism, incorporates assumptions that pre-determine the rules of the game. Ironically, all native authenticity will be duly judged by its distance from Pakeha. In this way it is supposedly easy to spot the 'frauds' as those

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<sup>1</sup>Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Remembering the Limits: Difference, Identity and Practice', *Socialism and the Limits of Liberalism*, P. Osborne, ed. (London: Verso, 1991) 208

<sup>2</sup>Kathie Irwin, Towards theories of Maori Feminisms., *Feminist Voices, Women's Studies Texts for Aotearoa/ New Zealand*, Rosemary Du Plessis et al. eds., (Auckland, New Zealand: Oxford University Press, 1992) 1-21; Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, *Mana Wahine Maori*, (Auckland, New Zealand: New Women's Press, 1991); Ripeka Evans, 'The Negation of Powerlessness: Maori Feminism, a Perspective', *Hecate*, XX, (ii), (1994); As a Special Issue around New Zealand feminisms this volume contains many examples of those texts I intend to discuss.

resembling the coloniser. The 'real' ones will be recognised by the vehemence and disdain they have for Others - for intruders.

Post-colonialism is perhaps the sign of an increasing awareness that it is not feasible to extract a culture, a history, a language, an identity, from the wider, transforming currents of the increasingly cosmopolitan world. It is impossible to 'go home' again. <sup>3</sup>

In this dissertation I examine how as a Maori women we are told that we are Iwi (tribal) before all else, that our history with the land is what creates us and sets us apart from Tauwi (foreigners), and it is this that authenticates our difference over all Others. However it is the troubling designation of 'authentic otherness' that needs to be examined in relation to our place in feminism. Located in this manner, native woman can be identified as a visible sign of a much larger exclusion. The discomfort aroused by the complicitous relationship between Pakeha and Maori women illustrates the way in which her freedom contributes to and justifies particular silent Others. The inherent exclusions enable the establishment of hierarchical boundaries for the nationalisation of feminism in New Zealand.

Linked with such programs as Kaupapa Wahine Maori is the awareness that to develop a truly Aotearoa Women's Studies programme, reflecting our time and place, more attention must be given to those like us. <sup>4</sup>

I analyse the notion of 'Maori world-view' and the 'us' of Te Awekotuku's work, examining what I perceive as a fundamental slip in much of the rhetoric produced here. If problems of exclusion can be answered through a proliferation of Maori women's experiences, then it is perhaps an understanding of how experience is constituted historically and politically that will allow us access to what I see as the troubling designation of Maori woman's subjectivity. This is also an exploration of the terms of authorisation implied by these readings, paying particular attention to the way in which these voices support a much larger project.

Central to texts under examination here is the notion of a shared Maori experience that then supports a particular vision or world-view. What may be especially appealing for many readers here is the supposed promise of something indigenous offered in these texts; a promise that seems inevitably to feed a much larger sense of loss for New

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<sup>3</sup>Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, (London: Routledge, 1994) 74

<sup>4</sup>Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 'Some Notes on 'Being Constructed': The View from my Grandmother's Verandah', *Te Pua 1*, 1 (1), (Te Whare o Tamaki Makaurau, Auckland University, New Zealand: Puawaitanga, September 1992) 52

Zealanders. For while many of the texts here make reference to self-loss experienced under and within colonialism, the theoretical connections I wish to make explicit here in terms of fracture and desire, will hopefully illustrate the symbiotic complexities of postcolonial subjectivities. It is a relationship identified through its ability to access the surplus value of one group of women defined as Maori, for the purposes of another group of women, Pakeha, no longer British, and distinctly indigenous to New Zealand. For me the politicisation of a Pakeha identity alongside that of Maori women, consolidates and reproduces Pakeha women's privilege.

Anxiety about Pakeha identity was especially apparent during the symbolic cultural severance of the British umbilical cord. When the Empire's embrace returned home to feed off the European Economic Community. This particular yearning was to later conceal itself in the anti-colonial logic of Maori women's responses to feminism.<sup>5</sup> This desire for belonging, for nation-hood had turned her gaze sideways, and has since strived to align herself with Maori women, attempting in this movement of sororial benevolence, to bask in the reflection on an indigenous sovereignty, as a buffer against international feminist intrusions.

In this sense I am perhaps a little nervous of Te Awekotuku's assertions. For while I am sympathetic to her project of interruption into the ways that Women's Studies programs are formulated here, I am concerned that an uncomplicated valorisation of 'us', as an equally unproblematic entity, will fail to alter the exclusionary ground on which feminist claims are made. That perhaps the easy inclusion of an 'us' may in fact legitimate the continued exclusion of difference as contestatory claims. As Maori women we need to continually ask what *difference* our difference makes? And who has the most to gain from 'our' insertion into feminist texts? Why is it that uncontested claims from selected (Maori) groups at the margins are viewed as representative of the silent Other?

Creeds of nationalism that owe their existence to an imperial centre, in turn reproduce the terms under which colonialism and her twin sister de-colonisation are discussed. Feminism as an unproblematic western category herself, takes her place alongside Native women in a rather complex set of relationships that are self-validating. Recognition for Maori women is thus concomitant with endorsing Pakeha women's status. This pairing of two 'apparently distinct' categories, is further entrenched in the state's appropriation of meanings around the Treaty of Waitangi.<sup>6</sup> A treaty appearing more useful for contemporary productions of nationalistic agendas that consolidate, rather than challenge,

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<sup>5</sup> See responses by Pakeha feminists to selections of Donna Awatere's 'Maori Sovereignty' in the feminist magazine *Broadsheet*. All issues. (1982)

<sup>6</sup> The Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840 between Maori chiefs representing their regions and representatives of the British crown. It was not until the 1980s that the government officially recognised the Treaty as a founding document or implied partnership between Pakeha and Maori.

Pakeha hegemonic processes. These procedures of national authority, strategically evoked by the state in its use of the Treaty of Waitangi, subsequently manage and structure relationships of identity-formation-legitimation in New Zealand. It is however a rather conscious sleight of hand on the part of the state as 'the people' that situates Maori as Other. As the silent other-partner, our position is necessary to thwart claims of exclusionary practices, while simultaneously sliding over issues of inequality and continued marginalisation of the state Other.

[T]he modern West has produced not only its servile imitators and admirers but also its circus-tamed opponents and its tragic counter players performing their last gladiator-like acts in front of appreciative Caesars.<sup>7</sup>

The arguments that follow deal with the complex issue of Maori Woman and the site of her articulation. It is a self-conscious exercise insofar as it relates to a series of historical moments in the life of the author and the ways in which I have attempted to re-negotiate and name my reality by being attentive to the way in which I and others are positioned. These experiences are acknowledged as part of those moments acted out within the subjective reality of the Self, theorised in relation to how I am positioned as a Maori and as Woman. Conscious of the way in which Maori women's experiences are often used as texts of 'authorisation', that is, mired within a larger discourse of identity politics that states Who you are, is related to what you can know, foregrounds some of the difficulties of writing about the Self. In examining the positionality of Maori Woman, I am also aware of the way in which the 'personal' can sometimes conceal, and avert attention away from the political ramifications of 'speaking out'. Who is listening ? And how is it that what I say can be used to support an agenda I do not intend ?

### **Choking on the 'Word'**

It soon became apparent in my research that 'writing' or 'speaking', while an intensely personal exercise, is not something that can be readily contained at that site of production. At times my frustration with needing to articulate something, my awareness that other's interpretations of what I have to say, tended to leave me between a rock and a hard place. Opt out and say nothing, or ignore the way in which my voice is positioned and plead instead that 'they have misinterpreted me'. The dangers of speaking under these conditions when often there is no language space with which to articulate your concerns, requires a circular focus. Attentive to structures of my own positionality and a recognition of those histories that locate the 'listener'. Feminist response in New Zealand is to

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<sup>7</sup> Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, (Dehli: Oxford University Press, 1983) xiv



construct an 'alternate' space designated 'indigenous' for Maori women to speak. It seems clearly problematic for me as 'native-woman' to take up a position inside this 'space' under the illusion that it is 'untainted'.

This language space referred to earlier is a space already inhabited by those particular literary conventions and histories that produce speaking subjects. The impossibility aroused through immersion in the language of the coloniser encourages a reflexive movement that must remain vigilant towards the structures that produce speaking subjects.

Because this traffic in textuality specifically enables the appropriation of speech into other contexts. The 'word' is always an interpretation, ever subject to a different set of ideological translations. As a Maori woman socialised into 'English' language codes, I often reflect on the possibility of different interpretations of my speaking if I could write and speak in Maori. I wonder if Te Reo (language) would allow me the type of liminality I attempt in my writing. This longing for liminality in speech is predicated on my desire to inhabit and contest simultaneously those aspects of my life that elucidate the greatest contradictions.

Part of this contradiction is the realisation that no language is so vigilant or self-conscious that it can talk outside of those language codes that construct meaning within the structures that this production takes place. Indeed the fact that Te Reo has been constructed within the linguistic codes of the 'west', indicate that the problems of translation are always tainted by interpretation. That language is continually being re-invented to fit contemporary use reveals the intensity of official interest in this endeavour, through the establishment of a legitimate Maori language commission. As with most state apparatus, this commission will reflect the political economy that created it.

Because linguistic coding is one way in which we use language to articulate ourselves, official definitions will develop accordingly. Resistance to political structures within a postcolonial context cannot be easily answered through the use of Maori language. This is not intended to infer that I am against Te Reo. On the contrary, I am incensed that this has been excluded from my life. My point is that very few Maori have this option, and it is this that alerts us to the violence of colonialism. A belief that language loss is generational cannot be sustained, and is perhaps more an indication of regional politics rather than age. Proficiency in Te Reo is more an indication of your ability to access those resources that higher education affords, which again is dependent on regional priorities. Making Te Reo a condition of resistance in postcolonial New Zealand is extremely elitist and exclusionary. This said I will conclude by reiterating that all languages participate in the official coding of meaning.

Staying with this understanding of how official codes structure language meanings, I discuss some ways that this works to evoke particular responses, and the resulting exclusions that this enables. One of those moments that highlights this tendency for me was during a seminar entitled 'Not So Nice Coloured Girls'.<sup>8</sup> In this instance audience participation and speech was enabled through transcending histories and political locations as an effect of colonialism. The dominant code here relied on the audience's participation in Art theory and the filmic event produced by the Aboriginal film-maker Tracy Moffatt. In this way the problematic status of Aboriginal women represented here could be contained within the text that constructed them. Subsequently the outside-event, our participation as viewer, permitted the audience to indulge in those language-codes that privileged their position as the only positionality present.

The dominant reading here was that because the women in the film 'ripped off' the 'captains' by getting them drunk, this was an example of Aboriginal women's contradictory role in colonialism. It was noted that these women were 'not so nice' after all! The presenter, using postcolonial theory to argue her case, at one point validated her reading by drawing attention to her ethnicity as a 'coloured girl', hastily adding that of course she did not share these women's experience of prostitution. Looking around I was perturbed at the laughter this comment elicited, angry that the audience, (not coloured)<sup>9</sup> was enabled in their response through their knowledge of those codes and frames of reference. Examples of meaning-making as a structuring code are numerous. Certainly an ability to have a conversation that makes sense to all involved is loyalty to specific language structures. Even if we beg to differ in opinion, these structures are such that they also contain their own dissent. Taking up an argument outside of these codes may appear untranslatable, and this is my point; codes and structures produce their own interpretations.

While it may be debated that feminists have taken heed of the messy politics of representation and ostensibly opted out of the contest to represent Maori woman within the feminist project, it will be clear that they, (Pakeha) have not relinquished the terrain on which this representation is to be made and I discuss the complexities of this issue.

The contest for the right to representation needs to be challenged as theoretically contradictory. Its foundational premise necessarily presumes that there is a 'thing' called Maori woman. This has assumed that all we need to do is shake off the trappings of

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<sup>8</sup>This is of course a play on Tracey Moffatt's title, 'Nice Coloured Girls'.

<sup>9</sup>Certainly I am cognisant of the political non-colouring of white. See Helen (Charles), 'Whiteness - The Relevance of Politically Colouring the 'Non'', H. Hinds et al., eds. *Working Out: New Directions for Women's Studies*, (London: Palmer Press, 1992) 29-35



colonialism, and she'll be there in all her former natural/experiential glory. The truth is we have never always *just been*. Meanings around Woman are contestable, psychically, culturally, and politically. Therefore the double-bind of two unstable categories, *Maori + Woman* requires closer examination. It can be that only through releasing the category 'Maori Woman' from this oxymoronic interpellation that something like 'agency' becomes possible. The fear of shedding representations, or calling an assumption into question is not the same as doing away with it. It is, hopefully, to free it up from its usual location in order to occupy and serve different political aims.

### **The context**

In this dissertation I speak from the specific politics of my location as a Ngai Tahu woman. Presently there is an anxiety receiving a lot of attention among Kai Tahu.<sup>10</sup> This concerns their status as inauthentic, not 'dark' enough or not really Maori. During a meeting of Kai Tahu whanau on campus, one mature woman began her mihimihi by mentioning that her hapu (sub-tribe), Irakehu, are often referred to as Ira-kehua (ghosts). The unstated meaning here relates to the fact that ghosts are supposed to be white! However, rather than challenging this assumption of black and white, she immediately follows with the statement; "Kai Tahu are white". I look up at her and laugh to draw her attention, to remind her that I, as a Tahu woman am more than a little tanned. No-one else challenges this woman's statement and I am left wondering if they actually believe that Kai Tahu are white. I need not go into great detail about this event except to say that it all felt really weird. To hear whiteness claimed as an alibi for marginality just blew me away ... I thought hell ! I'm at a white power meeting, a sort of proud-to-be-white-thing.

I recognised in this discussion the debilitating effects of enduring colonial representations within a capitalist economy that allows only a limited access. This caused me to think about the discursive ways in which the culture of colonialism is reproduced. Also problematic for me, and explored in the text, was the failure to engage with colonial discourses and how the dynamics of class and gender inflect on representations of Maori women.

Yet how was I to begin to highlight contradictions around the construction of Maori feminisms within a postcolonial context? The enterprise itself is fraught with all manner of offence, both in its first imaginings and as a response to the larger feminist project. It

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<sup>10</sup>Throughout this dissertation I will be using the terms 'Ngai Tahu - Kai Tahu - Tahu' interchangeably. Ngai Tahu are the Iwi whose boundaries begin just under Blenheim and Picton at the top of the South Island in New Zealand, and extend right down into Rakiura (Stewart Island) in the south. Kai Tahu is the use of the 'K' instead of the 'Ng' recognisable as a southern dialect that is more prevalent further south. Tahu is a term Iwi use among ourselves.

must always be a highly self-conscious exercise, an attempt to invert the anonymity of theorising in a way that doesn't simply reinstate 'experience' as the only alternative.

Often theorising conjures up an image of someone in a privileged position. It assumes an image of intellectual activity, usually immobile, and often solitary, estranged from the actual 'reality' of the event and often represented in feminist theories as an act that bears no relation to the subject of the event it tries to represent. Often we pride ourselves with an ability to peel back the layers of representations, to see the 'real' behind the facade, to state the obvious. The problem with this is that 'the obvious' is never there, but is part of the mythology that enables representations to gain their efficacy through the viewers' complicity in making sense of what they allegedly see.

Now while I have no difficulty in 'seeing' the privilege that enables contemplative acts, I disagree that representations of contemplation are an unproblematic category of privilege. When I say contemplation, I am referring to my desire to theorise what Maori feminisms are, and what impact they may have on the wider society in which Maori women are located. By challenging the stereotype of the 'privileged' Maori woman academic, I also draw attention to my own feelings of unease and discomfort; emotions that unsettle as well as challenge meanings about such positionality.

I am unable to deny that certain privileges that accrue as a result of my location within academe and I discuss this positionality at length. I cannot overlook the fact that I am in a position where I have increasing access to those modes of production from which meanings are elicited. Still, I am cautious of my location being misinterpreted as representative of Maori woman. The contradictions around this location of privileged Maori woman academic, are touched upon by bell hooks when she makes reference to the 'unmonied-aristocracy', those with position and very little else.

Recently I attended a seminar on effective teaching using the format of Lectures. During this course we were asked to sum up in one word our impressions of lectures attended as students. The first woman to speak declared 'patriarchal'. There was an immediate hush in the room as the words took effect. My private response to this was 'make your mark girl after all feminism belongs to You'. When asked for my opinion I replied, 'imperialist, a game where the rules were already named'.

By invoking 'patriarchy' this woman laid down the terms, however narrow, from which meanings around her subjectivity were to be read. She clothed herself in the 'protective' robes of a White feminist discourse that subsequently compelled people to address her personally whenever the topic of women came up. The type of violence enacted in that moment of 'voice' effectively excluded me as a Maori woman from appropriating

feminism as my political location. It became a location that was already appropriated/owned. There is no *terra nullius*. Pakeha have written on every space, including the 'vacant' space they invite native women to inhabit.

Frequently my 'offence' yields to self-reflection, that is, after I have sufficiently shocked myself with the crudity of my own observations. In this instance it was an analogy of dogs pissing, marking out boundaries that led me to realise that I must have felt extremely violated by this exclusion to conjure such a vile image. It also caused me to question my need to claim feminism as a political space for Maori women. Was her reaction not dissimilar from a 'bitch' with a counter-claim? And indeed, what relevance is 'my' struggle to Maori women outside the academy?

In this anxious and fractured moment of the present, what strategies of communal identification and what systems of cultural signification are made possible that can acknowledge, negotiate and counter the ever present danger of imperialism? What strategies can be put in place to resist the easy sliding together of identity and culture that reproduce the violence of colonialism? These are questions underpinning my research.

### **Laughter as Resistance**

Have you ever been to one of those 'lunch time lecture series' held within various departments? Let me put it another way, have you ever imagined what it feels like to be a Maori woman attending an Anthropology seminar, listening to the way that academics speak to each other in that shared cultural way that both excludes and teases you with the promise of inclusion? My intention is not to subsume all anthropologists here, it is simply a matter of not wishing to *name* all those involved. After all some of my best friends are anthropologists, truly. In fact while I am on the subject of anthropologists and friends, I'll begin by sharing parts of a conversation that may validate my intention not to confuse anthropology with anthropologists.

Following this particular seminar, I turned to my friend and asked her why she was an anthropologist. She seemed confused, maybe disturbed; traumatised like myself from what we had just sat through. I decided to clarify my question; "Why are you involved in a discipline that drips colonialism?" At this point she appeared hurt and confused and could only utter my name through a sharp intake of breath as if I had intentionally wounded her. I responded, equally dazed; "You know YOU are not anthropology". As is often the pattern with conversations, we are not always privy to each other's internal responses, therefore dialogue suffers from a propensity to slide into a conversation with one-self. Now perhaps I have my story inside out because I now need to recount some of what happened directly preceding our talk. I do this to construct a geo-political-intellectual

space for myself, and to try to understand and track the differing ways I chose to make sense of my version of reality.

The seminar in question was given by a woman currently writing a biography of a Pacific woman and attended by staff from both Anthropology and History. The woman was introduced as an expert on all aspects of this particular Island, the strength of her authority punctuated throughout her talk by a continued reference to important persons involved in the politics of this Island's culture. During her discussion the Woman speaker tended to look in my direction, avoiding 'my gaze' at the point when she was discussing the problem of the 'lying native-informant' with another member of the audience. It never ceases to amaze me that my presence at these venues never goes unnoticed. I have never been able to just slip quietly in and hide myself among the audience without being stared at constantly. At the end of her talk she immediately leaned over to enquire of my friend seated next to me if I was Tongan? This was just too much for me and I laughed.

To laugh in the face of offence was not to forgo resistance, but rather was a response that illustrated the form of agency available to me within this context. To be sure I could have responded in a way that was both verbal and articulate, but I chose instead to laugh, both at the incredible offence that she was unable to distinguish between Polynesians given her stated authority and also at the horror of my own complicity vis a vis the academy in which I am located. I wondered how we were positioned.

Often being the only 'native' present places a huge burden to respond. It is anticipated by those who gaze, even expected. Later my friend had asked me why I didn't challenge those speaking. I questioned her own silence and asked her to examine the differing layers of offence as it impacted on her as an anthropologist. Was her offence only in defence of me or was she also offended as I was by the authorising of questionable behaviours in an academic setting? My concern, however, was not to underwrite my criticism or collapse it into a personal native response towards racist and colonial practices.

This type of academic dishonesty and misrepresentation certainly needed challenging. What was obvious for me from this encounter was the way in which articulation is already marked, packaged and produced. If I speak I am always already spoken for. The history that is written on my body by others pre-empt my speech and determines how I will be read/heard. If I had spoken out within that particular context, my speaking would not have had the same effect as my laughter. My intention was to make them conscious of themselves, to realise that an other was gazing at them. This need not mean that speech is

impossible, rather, it is a reminder that we need to remain attentive to the 'limited and limiting terms within which resistance can be spoken'.<sup>11</sup>

## Irony and Complicity

In the following chapters I will be investigating what happens when native women choose to speak under conditions of untheorised benevolence. What follows is a collection of experiences that help ground my suspicions revealing native participation as an inevitably ironic act of complicity. It will be seen that for Maori woman speaking remains fraught with all manner of offence. Too often our complicity with contemporary modes of speaking deflects attention away from the modes of production in which articulation is framed, and focuses instead on Who is allowed to speak on behalf of Whom. The heightened sense of complicity revealed through a politics of location, itself enables the beginnings of a critique of postcolonial theories that seek to examine the space in which voice is articulated. Theorising the possibilities enabled and at times dis-abled through the articulation of voice demands an 'interrogation of its own positionality'.<sup>12</sup>

My attempt to interrogate the positionality of Maori Woman and the site of her articulation therefore necessitates remaining alert to the discursive character of resistance and its potential for appropriation. One of the most insistent critiques against the destabilisation of the subject is a sense of actually losing a location from which to mount a specific politics. It is important to note that just at that 'auspicious' moment when Maori Woman is being called on to speak, postmodern and postcolonial critiques are contesting meanings around subjectivity and voice, often supporting the present aphasia with an appeal that the silence is already talking. On the other hand while 'speaking-silences' have the potential for incredible offence towards marginalised groups, I do feel we need to ask ourselves what it means for those who have been silenced to be suddenly called on to speak. I wonder too at the silent response that often accompanies a Maori Woman speaking. Who is listening? These are some of the factors that inform my own inquiry of Maori Woman's positionality and voice.

My resistance to the possibility of fetishisation that occurs when a Maori Woman talks often makes me hesitant to speak out, even when I am angered. This self-consciousness and attendance to the way my voice is framed by a larger discourse of hegemony about

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<sup>11</sup>Indira Karamcheti, 'The Geographics of Marginality: Place and Textuality in Simone Schwarz-Bart and Anita Desai', *Reconfigured Spheres: Feminist Explorations of Literary Space*, M. R. Higonet & J. Templeton, eds. (University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst, 1994) 125-46

<sup>12</sup>R. Radhakrishnan, 'Negotiating Subject Positions in an Uneven World', *Feminism & Institutions, Dialogues on Feminist Theory*, Linda Kauffman, ed. (Basil Blackwell: London, 1989) 276-90.



native women interrupts any possibility of simply speaking-out. This became clear to me last year during a conference in Melbourne. Regrettably this story concerned another anthropologist. I say regrettably because I wonder if I am beginning to sound as if I have a personal gain in highlighting their inadequacies. It is simply that this event stands out so clearly for me as instances that caused me to question my own location and experiences.

To return to my story. This presentation was a joint venture by an anthropologist and a Koori woman, the latter who features as part of the former's study of Aboriginal women. Also present was an older Koori woman who sat in her wheel-chair beside the other two. The anthropologist began by outlining her methodology that allowed her to become part of the community that she studied. She then introduced the younger Koori woman and called on her to speak. The Koori woman told the audience about her early life separated from her mother by state legislation that saw the forced removal of mixed-bloods.

During this time her mother said nothing but silently wept as did the majority of people in the audience. Throughout this woman's presentation she was interrupted by the anthropologist who responded by 'filling in the bits' and applying her sense of theoretical analysis to what the Koori woman had said.

Some of the women in the audience responded by way of apology to the Koori woman and harangued the Australian government as racist. Many just wiped their tears and prepared themselves for the next speaker. My sense of horror at what had transpired caused me to examine the way in which this Koori woman was given voice. My immediate response was to interrogate the anthropologist and question her motives for creating a spectacle of the Koori woman. I did speak to this incident later during my own talk. To criticise what had transpired was difficult given the sense of subaltern voice brought to speech that this was to have represented. The realisation of our complicity as audience/voyeur, and a strong call from indigenous groups present to "let us speak" prevented us from engaging on a theoretical level. I felt keenly the agency of this Koori woman and her attempt to articulate her positionality. It made me consider how everyone else was positioned and whether our agency constituted the same type of problematic. It was not simply a matter of one woman speaking, but rather how we were all part of a particular production of articulatory politics.

To adequately counter a discourse that undermines the agency of woman speaking is to consider how a gendered subjectivity is constructed to express resistance. As an icon of representation native women serve a double purpose in this context of including and conjoining, both woman and native. This elision enables contradictory relations of power that in turn reproduces the colonialism it sets out to disturb. Dialogue inside existing hegemonic conditions becomes a conscious desire to turn back the gaze that has allowed

her objectification, to focus attention instead on the theoretical framing of voice under existing conditions. Speaking-out about our oppression as Maori Woman is too easily accommodated, in fact often demanded. You can speak, but only with a voice that is anticipated, oppressed and always victim; our agency circumscribed and concomitant to established meanings in which articulation takes place, often subsumed beneath a theatre of 'gladiator-like acts in front of appreciative Caesars'.<sup>13</sup> The awkwardness afforded by this then reproduces the self-same terms of engagement and legitimates the superiority of those one would criticise.

Given the always already problematic subject-status of Maori Woman, and contemporary moves that 'allow' the proliferation of her voice, interrogating the location of articulation is a tentative act that must take into account its own tendency to undermine the agency of Maori Woman's positionality. It calls for rigorous adherence to the way in which this criticism is itself framed by a larger discourse of postcoloniality, and the attendant rhetoric of 'location'. The need to ground analysis, to locate the voice, has resulted in the containment of Maori Woman to a particular address. This elision or postcolonial slide conceals the fact that affiliations are multiple, contingent and frequently contradictory.<sup>14</sup> It is also important to understand that a critique of Maori Woman's subjectivity is not a negation or repudiation, but rather opens up further possibilities for native women to challenge our production as a pre-given or foundational premise.

The postmodern move to destabilise the notion of subjects for some poses a threat to marginalised groups in society who are just beginning to write their "selves" into history. At the same time this also allows some to appeal to notions of cultural relativism that effectively depoliticises moves to decentre dominant discourses. Just as Biculturalism was the buzz-word of the 80's, the notion of 'Treaty-based Practice' is upon us in as we prepare to enter the 21st century. Similar to biculturalism, treaty-based practice merely reinforces the position of Pakeha as valid. It will be seen that the endorsement of treaty-based practices did not open the sluice gates of political reform, instead it has proved a pivotal event in the development of a legitimating *language* of reform.

I begin my examination in Chapter One by making explicit the limits of representations in a postcolonial context and the implications of this for Maori women's voice. In Chapter Two I will be focussing on the production of native women as 'information', 'inside' feminist theories in New Zealand. Chapter Three exhibits a shift in my analysis from Pakeha feminist theories. Here I examine selected writing from Maori women responding

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<sup>13</sup> Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy; Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, (Oxford University Press: Dehli, 1983)p. xiv

<sup>14</sup> Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *Real and Imagined Women; Gender Culture and Postcolonialism*, (Routledge: London, New York, 1993) 8

to feminism as it is currently articulated in this country. I will be questioning whether in fact Maori women are in danger of reproducing the colonial 'other' in our texts and use this as a reminder of the limits of feminism in a 'settled' society.

In Chapter Four I theorise the efficacy of a 'politics of location' and the impact of this on Maori women's ability to speak-out. I will be questioning what I have identified as the 'subalternisation' of native women in feminist theories here at 'home'. Chapter Five is an analysis of colonialism as a structuring principle of epistemology that impacts on subsequent pedagogical practises within the academy. I examine my relationship to these structures as a student and teacher and highlight the double-bind of native women who desire feminist-academic and class-mobility.

In conclusion I will be tying together what may at first appear to be an intensely fractured analysis that is in danger of spinning out of control. For me however it will be simply be an 'other clue' to the irony of voice in the postcolonial moment. Finally I will suggest a strategy for feminist theoretical politics as we move into the next millennium, stained always by the mark of our collective imperial genesis.



## Chapter 1

### The Limits of Representation

[M]y aim is not that of attacking the "ambiguous" or "problematic" moral stance ... Rather, it is to point out the ever-changing but ever-present complicity between our articulation and the political environment at which that articulation is directed. [W]henver the oppressed, the native, the subaltern, and so forth are used to represent the point of "authenticity" for our critical discourse, they become at the same time the place of myth-making and an escape from the impure nature of political realities.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the political implications for Maori women's voices under conditions of postcolonialism. I examine the ways in which speech is contingent with and dependent upon those structures already present within the context of decolonisation as it is currently articulated in New Zealand. *Decolonisation* as I am using it here refers to the current demand for an authentic representation of the native and those academic programmes aimed at resurrecting her from the messy reality of the effects of colonial settlement. The emergence of programmes within academic institutions that produce a 'Maori perspective' of particular disciplines, presumed to benefit the 'formerly excluded' is the focus of my critique. As an official representation of de-colonisation politics, such programmes tend to reproduce colonial desires for a pure native subject and this in turn subverts our ability for subject-making under conditions of postcoloniality.

If as I suggest colonialism is the primary organising principle that structures attempts at de-colonisation, then to be effective resistance must take account of how particular the representations and voices that are empowered by this system are produced. The impossibility of speaking outside of this system of arrangements and nomenclature, rather than isolating the individual, compels me to imagine the possibilities enabled by 'negotiating the structures of violence'.<sup>2</sup>

My interest in the strategic use of contemporary theoretical knowledge by critics outside the context of New Zealand reflects my suspicion of nationalist boundaries that insulate as well as conceal the structures that one immediately inhabits. A rejection of postcolonial theories

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<sup>1</sup>Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*, (Indiana University Press: Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1993) 44

<sup>2</sup>Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Negotiating the Structures of Violence', *The Post-Colonial Critic Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, Sarah Harasym, ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 1990) 138-151

supported by the notion that New Zealand is a settler society, while a legitimate reminder of the uses and abuses of any theories when applied to this context, is a misreading of current political directives that seek to accommodate and manage the crisis implied by the Treaty of Waitangi. Thus the efficacy of postcolonial theories for me is precisely their ability to critically intervene in much of what passes in the New Zealand context as strategies for decolonisation. It seems to me that calls for 'indigenous' theory under current political structures need further attention. If the presence of our speaking is an occasion for celebration then why do I remain so sceptical at my entrance into the "knowledge factory"? What does it mean when Pakeha students tell me my theory ain't indigenous? We might begin this inquiry by posing the most basic of questions. Who benefits from those strategies aimed at decolonisation? Postcolonialism is, afterall, an acknowledgment that colonialism is alive and kicking.

### **That ain't native theory**

.. look; I have sat in at every lecture so far and still I don't get it, I thought this was about indigenous theories of social work, so where is the Maori stuff? .. <sup>3</sup>

The burden of producing a truly indigenous theory of feminism, or anything else for that matter, under conditions of global and local imperialism, as if the settler has gone 'home', or even more insidious, 'was never here!' highlights for me the usefulness of postcoloniality at a local level.<sup>4</sup> Similarly the idea that claims postcolonialism works to reinscribe colonialism as the primary referent that ensures the native's invisibility, misrecognises the contingency and permeability of presumed dichotomies.<sup>5</sup> Given the history of cultural contacts, is it really possible to differentiate between coloniser/native on such a grand scale? For me especially the answer is not always so obvious. My stated agenda is to critique how colonialism structures the system we are mired in and I am mindful that it is a structure that we all inhabit. No-one is outside or untainted, which is why I continue to be disturbed with strategies that position Maori women outside the political imperative of colonial history. As passive victims and visible icons of an oppressive history, we earn our contemporary credibility through the objectification of our deprivation. In this way the global damage of imperialism is on the backs of native women, who in turn become the focus for insistent intervention into their lives. At the same time those structures that continue to reproduce inequalities remain unchanged.

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<sup>3</sup>Personal communication with a student (1996)

<sup>4</sup>See statement by Bobbi Sykes, " ..have they gone?.."; cited in Lynne Alice, 'Unlearning Privilege as our Loss : Postcolonial Writing and Textual production' *New Zealand Women's Studies Journal*, 9, (1), (March, 1993)

<sup>5</sup>Leonie Pihama, (OUP email discussion list, 1996)

Thus *postcolonialism*, in the sense that I intend to use it, is a theoretical tool that makes explicit the relationship of the native subject to the colonial object. This is an important factor underwriting and impacting on my particular excursions with postcolonial theories. If, as I have mentioned elsewhere, the term 'Maori' owes its contemporary meaning to its relationship with colonialism, then colonialism as event, or as an instance of imperial durability, cannot be so easily concealed by the presence of an other.<sup>6</sup> I will be employing work from theorists of postcoloniality such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Rey Chow, Ashis Nandy et al. alongside Maori women such as Linda Smith, Ngahuia Te Awekotuku and Donna Awatere who are writing inside the postcolonial structure of feminist politics in New Zealand. This is a conscious strategy that will hopefully resist the homogenising tendencies of decolonisation and nationalist discourses to conceal its relationship to global politics.<sup>7</sup>

Nationalist discourses in this context comprise those representations and voices of nativism that sit comfortably alongside state rhetoric as visible signs of partnership speech. Intended as a challenge to dominant hegemony these discourses tend to legitimate the state while also claiming the right of definition in relation to Maori. As such their ability to exclude and reproduce neocolonial tendency remains a central part of this discussion.

However nationalist discourses cannot be simply located at the site of textual production but are, more readily identified as those ideological mechanisms that in turn induce a particular form of self-censorship at a personal level. This does not negate the efficacy of structural factors to define the terrain in which cultural production takes place, but rather alerts us to the ways in which resistance to colonial representations is easily absorbed into current systems of thought and practice. My mistrust of nationalism is that it inevitably provides an alibi for colonialism which ostensibly ceases to oppress the native through overt forms of hierarchical separation. Instead nationalist strategies of decolonisation take her place as the authentic mode of representation. The supposed sovereignty of the native and her self-representation is thus confined to a particularising field of definitions too easily recognised to pose any real challenge to the colonialist structuring of society and discourse. One example is the way that strict divisions of difference are drawn between cultures whereby Maori, according to one 'informed' source I was exposed to during my time as a student,

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<sup>6</sup>Donna Matahaere, 'The 'Eternally Compromised Noun': Complicity, Contradictions, and Postcolonial Identities in the Age of Biculturalism', *New Zealand Women's Studies Journal*, 11, 1/2, (August, 1995) 15-24

<sup>7</sup>Donna Awatere, *Maori Sovereignty*, (1984); Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, 'He Whiriwhiri Wahine: Framing Women's Studies for Aotearoa', *Te Pua I*, 1 (1), (Puawaitanga: Te Whare o Tamaki Makaurau, Sept. 1992) 46-58; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 'Some Notes on 'Being Constructed': The view from my grandmother's verandah', (1992) 59-64; See also; Cheryl W Smith & Mereana Taki, 'Hoihoi Wahine Pakeha', *Te Komako: Social Work Review*, 7 (1), (Palmerston North: Wandering Quill, 1995) 17-18.

asserted that Maori tend to think more with their puku (stomachs), while Pakeha thought with their heads!

### Structuring Subaltern Speech

Structuralists question humanism by exposing its hero - the sovereign subject as author, the subject of authority, legitimacy and power.<sup>8</sup>

...to see Others not as ontologically but as historically constituted would be to erode the exclusive biases we so often ascribe to cultures, our own not the least.<sup>9</sup>

Subaltern speech, in the way that I wish to explore here, refers to those mechanisms of political discourse in New Zealand where anxieties around inclusion produced out of Treaty rhetoric and local democratic rights demand to hear the voice of those deemed to be on the margins.<sup>10</sup> Thus the invocation of particular voices from marginalised groups is a necessary part in legitimising status quo politics. The subaltern under these conditions is to all extents and purposes a postcolonial fiction that effectively conceals the historical conditions of its own articulation. As representatives of subalternity, or the voiceless masses, our privilege must be made explicit. If we are to resist the exploitative tendencies that characterise representations, then the unequal power relations that are produced in speaking for 'them' need to be acknowledged.

The ability to enter into meaningful dialogue, to participate in conversations in a way that is meaningful, is contingent with and subject to systematic forms of classification and hierarchies of power. Intervention into current modes of representation must take account of those mechanisms that structure discourses in particular ways. One example of this is the ways in which resistance by native people in New Zealand is framed within a larger discourse of 'Treaty rhetoric'. Accordingly Iwi Maori, (Maori Tribal groups) must represent themselves as self contained units, as 'valid representations' of historical signatories to the Treaty of Waitangi. Internal diaspora and fractured identities cannot be part of the 'conversations'. What is demanded and what can be included in these representations is a particular discourse that is already part of the inherited colonial

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<sup>8</sup>Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, (New York: Methuen, 1987) 202

<sup>9</sup>Edward Said, 'Representing the Colonised, Anthropology's Interlocuters', *Critical Inquiry*, 15 (Winter, 1989) 225

<sup>10</sup>See G. C. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, C. Nelson & L. Grossberg, eds. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994) 271-313. As a 'recovered', representative voice the subaltern would not be subaltern anymore but a relief for mainstream anxieties concerned with legitimating the status quo.

structure. In other words you must speak to the colonial mythology or risk undermining the carefully coded authenticity of Treaty negotiations.

These discursive fields of structured meanings, linguistic clarities and rational humanisms signify the produced sovereignty of the native subject. Sovereignty under these conditions is already determined according to current definitions and significations that inhabit the contemporary nature of colonial structures. When applied to Maori women it is obvious that in order to participate in the economy of speech she must also inhabit a colonial language structure which privileges her difference as 'other' and consequently reinstates non-Maori women as the norm. When Native woman speaks she must talk in a way that is easily recognised as other. Draped in an identifiable ontology of difference her authenticity will be judged accordingly. Thus contemporary interpolations by native women seeking to disrupt the sovereign status of Woman in a postcolonial context run the risk of resurrecting modernity's most enduring alibi - the (Hu)man.

In attempting to speak for women, feminism often seems to presuppose that it knows what women truly are, but such an assumption is foolhardy given that every source of knowledge about women has been contaminated with misogyny and sexism.<sup>11</sup>

As such, merely presenting the subject as self-evident, - a pure entity imbued with agency and voice - does not represent a real challenge to the ways in which *humans* have been, and continue to be, produced. If the 'human' is itself revealed as a conflictual concept, she can no longer, with any degree of certainty, be presented as an undisturbed ethical subject. Thus an assumed authority usually attached to authorial presence, implied by an uncomplicated sovereignty attached to Maori woman, glosses over the mechanisms of language that produce speaking subjects. Misrecognising the way that subjects are constituted within coded boundaries of acceptable resistance results in an inability to identify neo-colonialism's capacity to absorb all into itself as legitimator of subjects. Yet despite the obvious barriers to speech that I outline here, it is not my intention to thwart the continued production of self-representations by Maori women.

### **What's In A Name?**

I remain suspicious and angry at the exploitative effects that ensue as a result of an unproblematic adoption of the name (Maori Woman) to represent the Subaltern. Similar to Spivak I firmly believe that because legitimacy is contingent with the need for a name, it is simply not possible for me to speak without the messy sovereign status implied by the term

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<sup>11</sup>Linda Alcoff, 'Cultural Feminism versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory', *Signs*, 13, (1988) 406



"Maori woman". In spite of the obvious violence that is done to our sense of identity, ethnicity for us cannot be "voluntary" within the discursive character of political structures that we inhabit. As a group, Maori women's ethnicity is inevitable, is a result of the postcolonial structure we inherit or, as Rey Chow contends 'a matter of history rather than choice'.<sup>12</sup> Therefore this moment of marking the anxiety, by keeping the name intact against all disavowals to the contrary, is a particular strategy that we have no option but to adopt as a lever to open up and expose ideological investments of state hegemonic discourses.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless we who have access to and are able to exploit the possibilities enabled by this nomenclature must work to resist the ways in which our voices are often made to stand in exclusively for subaltern-speech.

...For feminist individualism in the age of imperialism, is precisely the making of human beings, the constitution and 'interpellation' of the subject not only as individual but as 'individualist'.<sup>14</sup>

Participation in those structures of acceptable speech insists that we remain loyal to official recognitions of the native 'problem', where the incredible burden of talking for the silent others produces a voice literally dripping oppression. This then effectively stands in as a legitimate representation championing the cause of the subaltern. The unequal relationship that is constructed between 'us' who speak on behalf of and, the 'them' who we represent, hampers any concerted effort to challenge those structures that historically produce the silencing of so many. I am arguing here for the need for academics to own our privilege and to resist the tendency to sentimentalise a situation that for many of us is far removed from the world we inhabit on a daily basis. We need to make clear that our presence today, while historically and certainly politically connected to the debilitating effects under which the majority of Maori women live, is simply not the same. Commenting on this relationship between diasporic individuals in the west and those 'back home', Chow explains it in this way;

Such attempts will also be expediently assimilated within the plenitude of the hegemonic establishment, with all the rewards that that entails. No one can do without some of the rewards. What one can do without is the illusion that, through privileged speech, one is helping to save the wretched of the earth.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora*, (1993) 139

<sup>13</sup>Gayatri Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, (Routledge: New York, 1993) 135

<sup>14</sup>Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism", *The feminist reader. Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, Jane Moore et al., eds., (London: Macmillan Press, 1989) 175-95

<sup>15</sup>Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora*, (1993) 119

This does not mean that we cease to highlight the unequal status of Maori women in society, or stop making their 'images' a central part of our own speech. What becomes clear is our relationship to the very structures that produce these inequalities. If our status as representative gets its legitimacy from the 'voicelessness' of others, then support however well intended, will always mean support for those structures that produce our speaking. Thus our capacity to represent the subaltern offers a critical edge 'only insofar as it permanently regenerates the reality of social injustice rather than its dissolution'.<sup>16</sup> This condition of impossibility for all of us involved in the messy politics of speaking-out is what makes clear to me the structuring of language within a postcolonial predicament. Therefore until we recognise the circumstances under which our voices are produced and take seriously the challenges involved here, the disabling effects of our interventions into hegemonic discourses will continue to haunt us. Those strategies we choose to take on board as a way to thwart the tendencies of neo-colonial absorption will depend very much on our ability to recognise how and when our speaking feeds into state regulated forms of dissent.

### **Oppositional Speech & Nationalist Discourse**

Maori women have, as Linda Smith indicates, been at the 'cutting edge of theory' that sought to make visible the particular ethnocentrism of feminist agendas.<sup>17</sup> Often these texts exhibited a virulent attack on Pakeha feminists' inability to examine their complicity with forms of colonial domination. One example is the following quote which continues to evoke a strong response in Pakeha women. However over the years I have noted that this response often never moves past personal considerations and rarely ever shifts to a focus on political structures.

The first loyalty of white women is always to White Culture and the White Way. This is true as much for those who define themselves as feminists as for any other white woman.<sup>18</sup>

While Awatere's words clashed loudly with Pakeha feminist sensibilities at that time, nearly sixteen years on the impact on feminist politics in New Zealand is yet to be realised. On behalf of Maori women Awatere was positioned as a voice in opposition and subsequently

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<sup>16</sup>ibid, 104

<sup>17</sup>Linda Smith, cited in Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, 'He Whiriwhiri Wahine: Framing Women's Studies for Aotearoa', (1992) 54 ; For a critique of Pakeha Feminists see also; Donna Awatere, *Maori Sovereignty* (1984); Cheryl W Smith & Mereana Taki, 'Hoihoi Wahine Pakeha', (1995) 17-18.

<sup>18</sup>Donna Awatere, (1984) 42

represented a particular challenge to postcolonial offence. Officially sanctioned through the publication of her 'Maori Sovereignty' articles by a feminist collective, Awatere remains an example of subaltern representational politics here in New Zealand. The postcolonial fiction produced by her tirade towards Pakeha women authorised a particular space for angry Maori women. Positioned thus Awatere could figuratively assault the 'enemy' in a fairly comforting manner that also concealed her distance from the women she claimed to represent.

Years later as a spokesperson for the Right-of-centre political party ACT, Awatere visited Otago university in 1996 to gather support for the upcoming political elections. It did not surprise me that the largest crowds who turned out to listen to her were white female students. Neither was I surprised at their disappointment after she spoke. They had come to hear the subaltern speak and Awatere failed to come through for them. This instance for me personally was quite humorous and I fleetingly felt a connection to Awatere, pleased with the contradiction she provided to the spectacle of eager white women out for a quick fix. This event also helped clarify for me the way in which Maori women's voices are positioned to pacify the need for a subaltern. It seems to me that now when Awatere's individualist politics are much more explicit, she is denied the privileged space of Maori woman. Comments made that day indicated that many of these white women considered her speech unrepresentative. I have no problem with this position, but I do have a problem with the structuring of our voices to meet the needs of others.

Still my concern with native women writing and speaking is not to revisit the historical justification of Maori women's responses, but rather to focus instead on the construction of Maori woman as an unproblematic identity conceived within, and alongside 'dialogues of opposition'. The apparent ease with which Maori women's voices are seen to exist alongside resident feminist voices is a clue to her displacement as an agent of change. If, as S. P. Mohanty has pointed out, one of the functions of political criticism is to identify the social interests that reading and writing serve, more attention needs to be given to the ways in which Maori women's voices are produced. It is my attention to how my voice is positioned that plagues my ability to articulate freely within the confines of public speech. The immense difficulty of speaking out and making clear my own opposition to current modes of representations compels me to criticise what is in effect an unavoidable and impossible situation for postcolonial native women. The emotional intensity that I feel as a Maori woman towards colonial structures that dominate and produce my speaking can never be overstated.

Positioned in feminist discourses as oppositional, Maori woman's voice is easily located at an identifiable political address. In this way her speech is often pre-empted, where loyalties to an assumed standard re-position and inflect upon her voice. An example of this is that



despite my overt feminist agenda and criticism of class, many of the students I taught continued to assume that a political response to social service delivery was Maori workers for Maori clients. For me a notion of indigenous theory or strategies for decolonisation that allow the state to opt out of the picture effectively depoliticises resistance. My voice, framed as it is within those structures of acceptable and identifiable resistance was effectively drowned out because what I was saying did not appear rational. Indeed many students complained that they just did not understand where I was coming from. To many I did not appear to be speaking a Maori perspective of social work at all.

Under these circumstances, the necessity for and efficacy of oppositional dialogue in challenging forms of hegemonic representation requires constant negotiation to thwart their re-absorption under language structures that are constantly being produced as "conversations". Discussing the postcolonial effects of this in an Indian context, Ashis Nandy outlines the way that anxieties towards decolonisation result in a reproduction of colonial structuring modes whereby;

[i]t is possible to become anti-colonial in a way which is specified and promoted by the modern world view as 'proper', 'sane', and 'rational'.<sup>19</sup>

In this way it can be seen that resistance to colonialism as an official doctrine reinstates boundaries of acceptability. There exists within New Zealand an oppositional discourse that is a recognisably 'proper', 'sane' and 'rational' mode of dissent. So that 'it colours even this interpretation of interpretation' which I write.<sup>20</sup> For how does one become oppositional without reproducing the 'White Mythology'?<sup>21</sup> If, as I have argued thus far, resistance is dependent on its ability to be understood within the economy in which it is articulated, then for me the crisis implied by this demands a vigilance that must of necessity defy itself; a project that effectively works to undo its own desire for absorption into the centre. The contradiction implied here can best be explained through my insistence that I not be seen as representative. Thus whenever I have had the opportunity to speak, to intervene in popular knowledges about Maori women, it seems to me that it is precisely at those moments when the audience appears to agree, to become comfortable is when I feel I have failed.

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<sup>19</sup>Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, (Oxford University Press: Delhi, 1983) xx

<sup>20</sup>ibid

<sup>21</sup>I have borrowed this term from Jacques Derrida, see; *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981) 213

When we consider these effects in relation to the Treaty of Waitangi and its ability to sit comfortably alongside the durability of colonial structures of rationalism, then it becomes clearer how these formations set down the terms under which conversations are determined. Commenting on Derrida's work, Spivak highlights the ways in which speech operates by way of a code that instructs in its absence.<sup>22</sup> This structure of required conversations is legitimated and supported in the New Zealand context through contemporary responses to the Treaty of Waitangi, which ensures dialogue reflects a particular partnership. Maori women's ability to enter into alliances with those women not included in this partnership language is thus undercut. My feelings of "displacement" as a native woman presumed to be at "home" lose their possibility of connection to the experiences of women outside the benevolent biculturalism of Treaty politics. Imagining the theoretical implications and problematics of this "illegitimate connection" is perhaps part of the "post-Treaty" language that threatens our current position as Maori women. Instead we are positioned in a struggle with Pakeha women to ensure our voices will be part of those ruling conversations.<sup>23</sup> Couched in this way, our attention is always diverted towards an imaginary centre that evokes a passion on the part of Maori women for access. This longing for a share of the power to represent women passes over the messy politics attached to representations in favour of an equally messy desire for the right to define.

Maori woman's voice structured within the boundaries of Treaty language can thus be represented as 'partnership-speech'. As Spivak has noted, these language codes are performed in a particular way to elicit and decode not only *apriori*, but also *inabsentia*. The effect of this is that while a space is provided in which resistance speech is encouraged, there are very strict rules connected to Who can speak. Within this context the demand for difference has an othering effect for Maori women. Thus the freedom that is implied in speech, is confined to specific agendas of resistance that are themselves pre-determined and enabled by her imagined displacement from contemporary colonialism. A displacement that works to ignore her production inside a postcolonial society, at times it seems that even when being in opposition, her dissent remains predictable and controlled.

Nevertheless given our contemporary status as a *settled society*, the contradictions presented by my obvious ambivalence towards 'self-representations' requires engagement on a number of levels. Therefore, while the production of voice is important, the contested terrain on which this production takes place is decisive and should not be overlooked. If the problem is frequently defined as one of 'silence' or 'absence', then the standard response is

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<sup>22</sup>G. Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic*, (1990) 35-49

<sup>23</sup>There has been over the years some debate about what constitutes "Pakeha". Hegemonically and for the purpose of Treaty language, Pakeha usually denotes those people of British origin, i. e. "New Zealanders". As such it has always appeared to me to be much more exclusionary than the term "Maori", which under more utopian political structures would indeed be more inclusive.

always her unproblematised inclusion. Certainly many Maori women writing have demanded this and have fought long and hard to these ends. Yet I cannot overstate my discomfort at the apparent ease of our entrance. It is an entrance that has been negotiated by strict codes of authenticity that shape our voices and the ways in which we are heard. My discomfort is felt most urgently since we have only begun to take seriously the notion of contested ontologies. It seems to me that the discomfiting valorisation of Maori woman at this historical moment is precisely that which will undercut her ability to challenge those structures that continue to exclude Others.

### **De-centring the Margin**

It is clear to me when I speak that a feeling of loss traces my words, that I consistently bang my head on the 'glass ceiling' of language, yet it is also a not so gentle reminder of the limits of speech. This speaking must always betray its own failings even as we struggle against the possibility of error or misrecognition. For if part of the discourse of opposition's stated agenda is to centralise the margins, then we need to be clear exactly who and what we mean by 'centre' and 'margin', and what is to be achieved by this ideological movement. In this light what does it mean to make Maori women the central focus of our work? The difficulty facing us, it seems to me, is not so much the fictive politics of 'privileged guilt' that requires our continuous invocation of the subaltern and her predicament; instead we need to pay more attention to our unproblematic use of representations that continue to speak in her place. Otherwise our speaking can legitimate a gaze that yearns to touch the other and bask in the reflection of her ordeal, a speaking that attempts to qualify 'us' as the objects of our discourse. However merely substituting the image for something more 'positive' often perceived as the staple diet for subverting representations, results in another distortion that re-makes the subaltern in our own likeness. An example of this is the way in which our speech becomes an occasion for Her retrieval into the realms of pious conversation. We cannot easily ignore the fact that our position as academic women, with all the privilege that this implies, can also be represented unproblematically as a position of marginality. Alongside this is the assumption that all who are non-Maori are necessarily connected to the centre. Similar to our connections to the margin these links are at best often tenuous. Because our location is always measured in relation to Pakeha women we never have to interrogate our relationship to other Maori women. Therefore in our desire to speak on behalf of our silenced sisters, we may be in danger of participating in their continued exclusion.

Participation in forms of representation such as conferences, journal articles and community health groups help blur the boundaries between margin and centre and allow us to examine the growing distance from others that these activities may produce. The impoverished conditions of Maori women have currency in this age of partnership speech and she is often

invoked to justify our own speaking. As representatives, we collude in their silencing through our ability to demand a voice by virtue of their absence. This of course is true of most academics. At least twice a year I am solicited for information about Maori women in education, in health, and solicited to comment on the socio-economic position of Maori women. My response is to tell these academics to go and speak to groups in the community. While I could offer my own interpretations of 'their' predicament, I am not psychic and I don't know what Maori women are thinking. Yet within the postcolonial predicament have I luxury not to speak?

Seriously now, what is it about us Maori women who hang out in the centre? In this instance I am referring to the academic empire we call the university. What is it about us that provokes non-Maori to see us as representative? I would suggest that it is our relationship to this centre we inhabit that makes us appear less threatening than, say, a Maori woman living on the southside of Invercargill. Our visible presence encourages a particularising access that assumes our availability and knowledge to speak on any issue that Maori women confront in their day to day lives. The ability to participate in these conversations must be seen as a product of the location we inhabit. I am not suggesting that we remain silent; this is an abuse of the privilege we accrue as academic women. However in our readiness to speak on behalf of Maori women we must be attentive to those mechanisms of power that produce speaking subjects. The effect of this is it that while it allows us to appropriate the surplus value of those we represent, it also distances us further from other Maori women.

As academic women we tend to carry the burden of representation whether we like it or not, and it is this contradiction I feel that reminds me most urgently of colonialism's ability to reproduce itself. Certainly we cannot easily ignore our access to the centre and do often become quite adept at exploiting our location in a way that ensures others benefit. My point however is that we do need to be very clear about our relationship to the centre whenever we speak. This frustration compels me to assert quite strongly that I am not Her, I am not the subaltern and I will not ease this problem of representation for you by speaking in her stead. I am very aware that when I speak my voice betrays the history of its articulation as a product of those structures I have been able to penetrate. As such I bear the trace of colonialism in a manner quite different from my sisters back home, and as they are quick to point out, in a way that is much more enabling.

Examining the discursive contingency of voice within existing structures of ideological violence, requires an interrogation of the space in which speech is articulated. As an important variant in the production of voice, it is imperative that we problematise this locality. If as it has already been suggested, the subject of language is not an ethical end in itself but rather an implication of an excess, then that cannot be readily contained at the site



of emergent representations. Speaking-out under these conditions of fragmentation must be understood as contributing towards increased marginalisation. The deluge of publications by Maori that began in the early 1980s, while a welcome and recognisable change to the obvious breach in political representations, has in my opinion resulted in a charity of acceptability, which places resistance as sanctioned performance, comfortably alongside state political rhetoric.

To clarify the arguments I have been making thus far, I will attempt to draw attention to the ways in which my own speaking remains tied to those specific agendas I wish to challenge. For while I am sensitised to the ways in which Maori women are excluded, this 'exclusion' has far deeper implications for me than our physical absence suggests.

### **The Space For Maori Women's Voices**

It often follows that when a woman writes, the impossible illusion of autonomy agency in the mode of romanticism, free and unimpeded, makes little sense. Consequently to read the writings of individuals from marginalised groups as representative, is to miss the particular nuances I wish to make. Attention to saturation in the wider political and historical contexts in which this writing of self is located, demands a close critical reading that must resist meanings of individual explanations. Subjective rationalisations on my part should be read as part of those political and linguistic structures in which these claims are produced. The impossibility of any outright rejection for me to inhabit the 'objective space' from which to articulate my concerns, a space usually designated 'Maori Woman Speaking', also demonstrates the failure of representations to contain the trace suggested by native woman's presence. This is an excess that always threatens to leak and smudge the ink of her textuality before it has had a chance to dry.

My concern for a self-reflexive speech that can straddle the gap between myself and my sisters back home requires a deliberate care that is not only sensitive to them but also my own location. By drawing attention to this distance between me and the women I grew up alongside I am in essence recognising their status as subaltern. As a group of women historically and politically situated outside current representations of native women, they also offer a legitimate and powerful challenge to official discourses that enable comfortable recognitions of Maori women. Because current beliefs concerning urbanisation under colonial conditions are offered as an explanation for economic deprivation, we have not considered the implications for some women who never migrated and were not part of the internal native diaspora. This is especially pertinent in relation to southern Ngai Tahu who remained at 'home', and now are unable to participate in official conversations of displacement. For many southern women our history has never been captured by anthropologists or historians. The names of tipuna recorded in census are our only clue to a

past that produces our presence here today. Yet it is also a presence that denies our particularity as Maori women who while 'landless' have never moved from the land of our ancestors.

Today when urban Maori authorities attempt to create new tribes<sup>24</sup> based on their geographical and newly acquired historical distance from Iwi and whenua, the sense of shared diasporic history remains out of reach for southern woman. She can never be included in this postcolonial identity that demands recompense for colonial wrongs and as such, her offence remains unarticulated. Instead she must participate in the contradiction of ethnic spectatorship, caught between the gaze that represents "her" and an image that is supposed to be her. This ambiguity is often realised by a misunderstanding that is often attached to her when she comments on an inability and lack of desire to embrace things 'Maori'.<sup>25</sup> She cannot feel a nostalgia for an image that was never her and is wary of an official discourse that continues to falsify and re-invent her reality as "Maori woman". Thus the authentic unauthenticity that frames southern Tahu identity is exactly that which has the propensity to reveal the continued ethnicisation of Maori women under colonisation.

Reflecting on the distinctive nature of southern Maori women alongside my contemporary relationship to my extended family is certainly demanding but is also a necessary part in naming our differences from each other. My claim for subaltern status for these women is premised on Spivak's contention that 'the subaltern cannot speak'.<sup>26</sup> As a group outside representation, it is not that they cannot speak but that there is no position of articulation that they can inhabit within current constraints of representational politics. Yet precisely because of this 'voicelessness' she will always be spoken for and it is my ability to draw attention to this 'silence' that demands an interrogation of my location. For although I am southern Ngai Tahu woman, the fact that I can speak reveals a certain distance from the location I attempt to highlight. As Spivak says, 'if the subaltern can speak then thank God,

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<sup>24</sup>The basis of these "new tribes" is dependent on the fact that because of colonisation and the resultant urban-drift many Maori do not know their Iwi or, because of their geographic distance, either feel unable to benefit from current government compensations to Iwi authorities or, are being penalised because they do not reside in their tribal areas. See also Roger Maaka, 'The New Tribe: Conflicts and Continuities in the Social Organisation of Urban Maori', *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 6, No. 1, (Fall, 1994) 311-36. While Maaka is sympathetic to Iwi outside tribal boundaries and the necessity for organisation based on a shared identity, he is quick to point out the problematics of this in relation to certain protocols that need to be put in place between the tribe back home and the that of the host tribe.

<sup>25</sup>A rejection by many women in the south to participate in tribal ritual is often a central part of the conversations I share when I am at home. A rejection that is always misinterpreted to mean that she is somehow more colonised than other Maori woman. I have even heard some attribute this to the "humility" or "shame" of southern Tahu ! See Hana O'Regan, 'Ko te Mate Kurupopo - The Festering Wound', *NZWSJ*, (August, 1995) 53-61. In this essay O'Regan opens up discussion around the politics of representation in a Ngai Tahu context hinting that for southern Maori the coloniser may not always be presumed as "white".

<sup>26</sup>Gayatri C. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', (1988) 271-313

the subaltern is not a subaltern anymore'.<sup>27</sup> Thus my complicity with the 'centre' as a speaking subject, forces me to occupy a position of catachresis, the location of fictional representation and contradictory desires. It is as Spivak has pointed out a location that we cannot not want to inhabit, that has the propensity to offer the greatest possibilities as well as the greatest offence.<sup>28</sup> The way in which my voice has/is positioned within a set of different but related contexts allows me to reflect on the enabling and disabling effects of my speaking.

If as I have already suggested earlier, it is colonial structures that compel and create the notion of a pure space for native resistance, effective programmes for decolonisation need to reject the notion that there is a 'home' that we can inhabit that will protect us from the continuing effects of colonisation. This for me is simply a romantic myth that is especially offensive given the realisation that this conceals the very real effects of colonisation. It also reminds me that I do not have a home to return to that was not inhabited years ago. I am an intensely suspicious woman and not easily satisfied by the promise of reforms, least of all when decolonisation is weighed in favour of those we are meant to be resisting.

Thus Maori women's lives, in the contemporary sense that I wish to focus my attention, are made invisible under the pretence of greater visibility. Her visage is transposed by a messy sort of romantic gesture that always looks backwards and never has to confront the contemporary image of native woman's rejection as she sits nervously in Income Support Centres nationwide. It seems to me that what gets formulated in terms of Maori woman's image neglects the production of her position under those stages of advanced global capitalism. The unimproved and fast declining status of these women we are presumed to represent should force us to reconsider in what way does our speaking enable others to exploit the impossible conditions of their lives?

In the following chapter I will be examining what happens when those who historically have been silenced are 'given voice'. I will also investigate those discrepancies that produce the postcolonial event where the native becomes a spectator at her own representation.

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<sup>27</sup>Gayatri C. Spivak, *Postcolonial Critic*, (1990) 58

<sup>28</sup>Gayatri C. Spivak, *Outside In the Teaching Machine*, (1993)

## Chapter 2

### Watching 'Them' Watching 'Me': The Predicament of Native Informants

The remarkable realism of such displays made a strange civilisation into an object the visitor could almost touch. Yet to the observing eye, surrounded by the display but distinguished from it by the status of visitor, it remained a mere representation, the picture of some strange reality. ... The representation was set apart from the real political reality it claimed to portray as the observing mind was set apart from what it observed.<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

The displacement experienced by people viewing 'their representation' under conditions of colonialism has been articulated as a type of uncomfortable spectatorship. This form of native-spectatorship is, as Mitchell illustrates, produced out of imperialism's endeavour to bring the 'empire home'. I would like to stay with Mitchell's analysis for the moment as it offers me a certain leverage into local contexts of native representations in New Zealand. It seems to me that as I read feminist texts produced in this context I am overwhelmed by a sense of desire to bring feminism 'home'. This desire has yet to be theorised and articulated as a complex set of relations and inevitable product of our postcolonial present. As such the anxieties generated out of this context tend to explicate themselves in ways that bypass and uncomplicate what is an impossible set of contradictions. Subsequently what gets produced in those feminist texts examined here is a curious brand of inclusivity that reproduces a particular set of colonial relations. The sense of history that frames relationships between women in New Zealand must not be lost in the desire to bring feminism 'home'.

Those contradictions that reveal themselves as enabling complicities on the part of native women cannot be dragged out as evidence to underwrite non-Maori women's legitimacy. In this chapter I will be discussing the production of Maori woman's 'strange reality' as 'native informant' inside feminist texts of collaboration. How have feminists negotiated the structures of empire to produce a peculiar brand of feminism that would set us apart and stake out a claim for indigenous theory? The disjunction produced out of native woman's relationship to feminist theory as it is articulated in New Zealand will be examined alongside resultant effects of native-spectatorship. This spectatorship is the consequence of a discursive range of unproblematic positionings inside settler communities that for the purpose of my discussion will be examined on two levels. The first level is the 'presence' of Maori woman as a representation for indigenous feminisms. The second is the sense of

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<sup>1</sup>Timothy Mitchell, 'Egypt as Exhibition', *Colonising Egypt*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1988) 9



'strange reality' that this effects when it is positioned outside the 'political reality' it claims to portray.

Feminism in New Zealand like any political endeavour is extremely contradictory. As one representation of Woman's place in the political economy, feminism is a concept that denotes particular concern for women as a category. Differences between women have historically been well documented on behalf of those women who it was felt were ill served by the notion of feminism as a viable representation of women's interests in New Zealand.<sup>2</sup> In this section however I attempt to go beyond these early challenges and investigate Pakeha feminists' response to Maori women's protest. I will be arguing that some of these responses have simply appropriated the demand for native woman's voice and consequently reproduced those power relations recognisable as 'native information'. In conclusion I will be arguing for a self-reflexive theory of feminism that retains its 'self-consciousness' as an enabling moment of impossibility; a moment that reveals and locates particular sites of feminist imperialism then subsequently refuses the legitimating comfort of native endorsement.

For many women feminism is acknowledged as extremely heterogenous. Certainly it is not always possible to speak about feminism in New Zealand without taking into account the often discrepant and contested character of this area of study. While I have no argument with the notion of heterogeneity, the possibility for differentiation between feminisms as either 'good' or 'bad' within the diverse range of political activities that they propel is not at issue here. Neither is it my intention to valorise one form of feminism as the preferred destination for Maori women. What I wish to deal with here is the notion that 'feminism' in all her discursivity, tends to imply a particular 'place' for the construction of women's liberation. With this in mind I will begin my examination with a close reading of my own relationship to feminism under conditions of colonial renewal. The anxieties for women like myself who feel keenly the seduction of feminist theory often compel us towards a rigorous critique of what this 'attraction' means in terms of our contemporary location inside a settler society. Clothed in the 'skin' of native woman the discomfort of my alliance with feminist thought produces its own set of tensions for me. These tensions arising out of a historical context of colonialism must always contradict and complicate my desire for feminist clarity.

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<sup>2</sup>In this instance I am thinking about Maori women's responses, see; Donna Awatere, *Maori Sovereignty*, (Auckland: Broadsheet Magazine Ltd, 1984) 41-45; Kathie Irwin, 'Towards Theories of Maori Feminisms', *Feminist Voices Women's Studies Texts for Aotearoa/New Zealand*, ed. Rosemary Du Plessis et al. (Oxford University Press) 1-21

## Constructing Difference

This native unease is often misrecognised as a form of 'cultural inappropriateness' where the sense of anxiety felt by Maori women is explained in terms of our 'difference' from the presumed culture of feminist politics. Explanations like this rather than disrupting the way in which feminism is conceived and articulated in the New Zealand context, continually reposition Maori women as 'other'. The contrariness of the other produces a sense of 'difference' that is also the site of desire or unfulfilled longing. This is because her appearance can be marked as a visible sign in texts to deflect criticism away from the political reality of Pakeha / Maori relations. Thus the legitimating 'presence' of native information inside texts of collaboration is a highly complex operation that deserves attention.

The historical legacy of colonialism is such that the impossibility for Maori women to enter into feminist theory as 'free' and unencumbered is not without its own set of contradictions. As such the untheorisation of her immediate 'appearance' in feminist texts has yet to be fully acknowledged. If in former times our voices were not valued as part of a feminist mission inside New Zealand, then we need to be cautious about who has the most to gain from our inclusion. It seems to me that what gets reproduced has a particular affinity to the cultural accumulation that bears the trace of western imperialism. In an age of increasing capital gain the collection of 'words' and the inherent value of this transaction produces a particularly exploitative environment. Under these conditions calls for Maori women's inclusion have a propensity to replicate earlier ethnographic imperatives, where the presence of native informants eases the discomfort of historical memory for non-Maori women.

Native woman's 'absence' in theories of feminism has been articulated as a self-consciousness on the part of many Pakeha feminists whose personal discomfort becomes the impetus for our entrance into mainstream feminist theory.<sup>3</sup> For many Pakeha women confrontation with their own image produces a desire for the presence of Maori women to ease their anxiety at 'seeing the self'. This longing should be recognised as the product of the postcolonial context in which these gestures are made. The subsequent insertion of 'native informant' as 'naked presence', without the garb of colonialism, results in an uncritical set of assumptions and sign values that project this uncritical self-consciousness onto the body of Maori woman.

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<sup>3</sup>For an example of this self-consciousness see; Sue Middleton, 'Towards an Indigenous University Women's Studies for Aotearoa: A Pakeha Educationist's Perspective', *Feminist Voices Women's Studies Text for Aotearoa/ New Zealand*, eds. R. Du Plessis et al. (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992) 22-44

Such naked presence positioned at that juncture between desire and the quest for self realisation is draped in the cloth of colonial mythology, concealing the trace of capitalist incursion and imperial penetration that fractures her sense of reality. It is an elision effected by contradictory relations of amicability between Pakeha and Maori under heightened conditions of colonial self-legitimacy. Still the legacy of historical encroachment and contemporary realisation precedes and structures relations in such a way that it impossible not to remain attentive to how these tensions re-work and diffuse themselves in the desires and demands for native woman's presence. Despite sincere attempts by Pakeha feminists, unless the dynamic potential of this relationship is recognised, all best efforts to expose the mis-representations of the 'native' woman have the propensity for further offence. It is an offence that is realised in the contemporary production of Maori women as the source of 'native information'.

Contemporary constructions of academic feminisms or Women's Studies in New Zealand operate as a site for the production of knowledge. It is also the site that implies a sense of development for Maori women, a 'home' that suggests a 'freedom from oppression'. Our tenancy at this location needs to be problematised if we are not to simply bear witness to the legitimacy of Pakeha woman's place within indigenous theories of feminism. This sense of freedom from oppression for Maori women, articulated as a form of feminist development, resonates with earlier colonial assumptions that sought to 'liberate' native women. Maori woman's appearance here will ultimately conceal existing relations of power by providing an alibi for Pakeha woman's position in colonial productions. Inequalities that exist today because of colonial encroachment cannot be easily disguised by the movement of native women into the space of feminist academics.

An example of native woman's codified oppression and 'freedom' within feminist texts can be observed in the articles I am about to discuss. Presented as instances of Maori woman's participation in feminist debates, the resulting comments from Pakeha feminists have tended to encourage a sense of legitimacy not only for themselves but for feminism as a liberatory force for 'all women' in New Zealand. The anxiety of colonial reality and inequality for many women is glossed over by the appearance of Maori women whose presence can also be authenticating a much larger distortion.

### **Native Author(ity)**

I tried to develop a way of questioning the colonial orientation of our feminist perspectives. I wanted the book to be grounded in this country. Academic texts usually start with an authoritative overview by the editor, who locates the various chapters within theoretical traditions and perspectives of the discipline or field. But to do that would be to locate myself in debates which were taking place overseas, to

remove myself conceptually and spatially from my lived world. I invited Rangimarie Rose Pere to begin the book, in Maori, with a waiata. <sup>4</sup>

It will be apparent from my reading here that Middleton has effectively removed herself both 'conceptually' and 'spatially' from the context in which she desires to be 'grounded'. This is because her concern for 'colonial orientation' translates as a particular self-consciousness that is subsequently eased by the textually produced presence of 'native informant' as 'authoritative overview'. The real authority here is Middleton, whose attempt at concealing her authority as editor is effected by the strategic placing of an other's voice. Considering the theme of her article that reveals itself as a text authored by a post-war indigenous New Zealander, I am disappointed with Middleton's need to ground herself on the back of a Maori woman.

Middleton's placing of a waiata at the beginning of her book reminds me of the use of karanga in ritual encounter. My discomfort is brought about by the reproduction of native hierarchy used in support of Pakeha women. It seems to me that Middleton replicates the symbolic position of Maori male to Maori woman. Throughout her text there is a reference to Maori women's role as traditional and therefore distant from herself as 'modern' woman. Later on in her conclusion Middleton calls on other Pakeha feminists to support the development of 'separate courses in Maori Women's Studies'. These, it is stated, will provide for provisions and 'encounters' of Maori and Pakeha experiences. <sup>5</sup> As an article that purports to be 'grounded in this country', one is left with the impression that Maori and Pakeha women evolved in separate spaces, 'indigenous women's thought in the mist of time' and Pakeha women 'whose perspectives have originated elsewhere'. <sup>6</sup>

This is where Mitchell's sense of 'strange reality' becomes useful for examining relationships at a local level. Because if Pakeha women's thinking came from 'elsewhere', then one presumes that intellectually there has been no contact? Reading Middleton's article I am disturbed by the strangeness of what I feel is in some parts a confessional narrative. In the first instance there is an explicit reference and apologetic tone concerning Pakeha women's relationship to colonialism. Yet at the same time within Middleton's acknowledgment of differences between Maori and Pakeha women, an elision is effected in such a way that this shared history becomes fractured by an assumption that we have yet to actually encounter each another. More specifically that the most appropriate space for this meeting is a 'bicultural Women's Studies courses'.<sup>7</sup> There is no recognition that

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<sup>4</sup>ibid. 34

<sup>5</sup>ibid. 36

<sup>6</sup>ibid.

<sup>7</sup>ibid.

colonialism in fact effected an 'encounter' that is quite simply inseparable from today's postcolonial reality. And it is an 'encounter' that I would argue subsequently produces the self-consciousness of colonial relations in feminist perspectives. As Chow has already suggested;

.. it is actually the colonizer who feels looked at by the native's gaze. This gaze, which is neither a threat nor a retaliation, makes the colonizer "conscious" of himself, henceforth reflected in the native-object.<sup>8</sup>

Rather than being presented as a particular signature that problematises representations of indigenous feminisms, the 'native-object' in Middleton's text works as an informant that announces the construction of her subjectivisation as 'white native'.

To underpin these concerns I will now examine a review of Middleton's 'Women in Education in Aotearoa', authored by Ann Yates. Excerpts of this review were cited in the Middleton's article just under discussion.<sup>9</sup> As well as supporting Middleton's unproblematic use of Maori woman's voice, Yates' glowing commentary of Middleton's book arguably exhibits a limited understanding of race relations in the colonial Pacific.

discussions of race and gender are undertaken on a different basis in [New Zealand] than in the UK or in New Zealand's neighbouring country, Australia ... But in New Zealand, in contrast to Australia, the indigenous (Maori) population remains both numerically strong and a relatively prominent issue in the debate about schooling ...[The chapters by Maori women contain both] relatively familiar issues of colonialism and racism ...but as well ...can be read a different sort of story: of feminist strengths...<sup>10</sup>

Yates' commentary confuses Maori inclusion at the site of textual production as evidence of New Zealand's political inclusiveness. In the interest of uncritical inclusiveness, differences that exist politically between Pakeha and Maori women collapse into notions of shared 'feminist strengths'. Important for my argument here, however, is the capital value gained in terms of the benefits that accrue both to Middleton and New Zealand society as examples of exemplary behaviour towards Maori. It would appear that the credibility of feminist analyses as they are articulated in New Zealand has provided the most eloquent of alibis ,

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<sup>8</sup>Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora*, (1993) 51

<sup>9</sup>Ann Yates, cited in Sue Middleton, 'Towards an Indigenous University Women's Studies for Aotearoa', (1992) 34-5

<sup>10</sup>*ibid.*



the presence of 'native informants' who can attest to New Zealand's determination to work through issues of 'race and gender'.

Common also to both Yates and Middleton is a tenuous connection between Maori women's 'development' articulated by Middleton as her presence in 'bicultural Women's Studies courses' <sup>11</sup> and by Yates, as familiar 'feminist strengths'. Yates translation of Maori women's story of 'relatively familiar issues of colonialism and racism' as the 'different' yet 'familiar' feminist mode, is particularly disturbing. It seems to me that what gets produced is a peculiar history of colonialism, a history that is 'relatively familiar' yet one that also presumes one set of primary characters in other words, Maori. As well as providing Pakeha women with a 'different' story as if they were not there, the surplus value of Maori women's stories as 'native information', is effectively cannibalised and transferred like all capital gain to be ruthlessly exploited for its maximum profit potential. My criticism of Middleton and Yates must be read not as a personal indictment of their sincerity but, as an example of how 'sincerity' within the current political reality of postcolonial settlement, makes Maori women's participation extremely problematic. Like Middleton I also desire a space where Maori women can be free to articulate and develop feminist strategies that are relevant for our needs. Yet my concern for how colonial relations get reproduced within feminist desires for inclusion, compels me to interrogate precisely that which I cannot not want. This double-bind would suggest that feminist theorising of those politics concerned with 'adding' native information, need to re-consider the implications and complexities that this involves.

The next two readings that I will discuss exhibit my concern with feminism's inability to take seriously the efficacy of colonialism and the contemporary reality of postcolonialism as native negotiation inside settler societies. As examples of feminist theory in New Zealand both these articles effect a particular slip that in itself places an unacceptable burden on the 'agency' of women. As such the structure or environment in which women's lives are located, and in this case it is colonialism, is presented as a 'stage', inert and merely peripheral. The actions of individual women are pulled out of their contexts to act as 'native' information and 'noble women' unproblematically placed to authenticate the sincerity of feminist desires. I need to repeat at this time that my concern is not about 'good' or 'bad' women, but the way in which histories are used to invalidate criticism. I am also disturbed by a perceived need to resuscitate instances of 'kindness' to deflect accusations from Maori women who refuse the sincerity of Pakeha feminists.

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<sup>11</sup>ibid. 36

## **'White Native' Information**

The first article concerns four well known women from New Zealand's colonial history, Sarah Selwyn, Lady Martin, Ellen Ellis and Suzanne Aubert. According to the authors these women have,

.. complex positioning as colonists involved in imperial strategies and as critics of government appropriation of land parallels attempts by contemporary feminists to challenge the legacies of colonialism <sup>12</sup>

Here the reader is being asked to consider the notion that 'contemporary feminists' like their antecedents are engaged in 'active struggle' against colonialism. It seems to me that Laing's and Coleman's analyses present a number of extremely complex issues that cannot be answered in what I perceive as the 'good woman' scenario. For me it is not only whether these women's actions parallel today's feminists in 'significantly disrupt[ing] the project of colonialism', <sup>13</sup> but rather, is it possible to read the lives of these women outside the context in which they 'acted up'? Subsequently can their actions be transported to confirm the sincerity of feminist politics today?

To attempt to answer the first question we need to examine what Laing and Coleman mean when they assert that 'a feminist analytical stance enables us to appreciate the writings' of these historical figures. <sup>14</sup> Applying feminist historical analyses concerned with theorising white women's location in the colonies, Laing and Coleman come to the conclusion early on in their narrative that 'white women, like indigenous peoples, were victims of patriarchy'. Any reference to women as agents of colonial change tends to be described as a 'paradox'. The different reading enabled here refers to my earlier suggestion that what this article presents is a particular 'good woman' scenario. Accordingly what I read is a particular challenge not to colonialism but to the construction of 'white woman' as responsible for the ruin-of-the-empire.

The purpose of my reading here is not to argue with Laing and Coleman's presentation of these women's discomfort with the effects of colonialism on native people. What is of concern to me however is my contention that Laing and Coleman have not paid sufficient attention to the context in which these women lived. Instead we are submitted to a fairly consistent decontextualisation of these women's lives and relationships to a people under

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<sup>12</sup>Tricia Laing and Jenny Coleman, 'A Crack in the Imperial Text: Constructions of 'White Women' at the Intersections of Feminisms and Colonialisms', Rosemary du Plessis & Lynne Alice, eds., (1997)

<sup>13</sup>ibid. 2

<sup>14</sup>ibid.

colonial rule. As agents of colonialism living in a particular era it is not so much that they were sincere but rather that their sense of rightness was enabled by colonial injustice.

Paradoxically, however, they were interested in offering Maori a vision of a colonial future in which Pakeha knowledge could be used for Maori advantage.<sup>15</sup>

The paradox for me is Laing's and Coleman's inability to see the larger picture and to take account of the contemporary disadvantages that result in the colonial present. It is because of this greater offence that we need to remember that it is not simply about good intentions but rather outcomes.

When context is mentioned in their article it is made to stand in as an explanation for 'old fashioned' bigotry, as if evolutionary ideas discussed here have no value in the present.

While Lady Martin saw Maori as savages emerging from barbarianism this was in the context of the universal evolution of mankind.<sup>16</sup>

I can't help but feel Laing's and Coleman's essay suffers as a result of an exclusion of analysis around those issues of power that produced such blatant feelings of colonial superiority. This lack of theoretical rigour results in a type of knee-jerk response typical of those Pakeha feminists who are unable to come to terms with the effects of colonialism despite a contemporary desire for improved relations with native women.

Possibilities for other feminist readings tend to be deflected by Laing's and Coleman's problematic use of context. On one hand there is an acknowledgment that these women are products of their immediate history, yet at the same time this context is separated out from the subsequent actions of Lady Martin as a 'stage' onto which woman's agency is framed. As a consequence Laing and Coleman are able to claim that these women as 'mother educators .. worked .. for the liberty and equality of indigenous people'. I am hard pressed to find evidence in Laing and Coleman's text that it was colonialism that enabled and structured the particular agency of early New Zealand women. It is not a matter of whether Sarah Selwyn, Lady Martin, Ellen Ellis or Suzanne Aubert as individuals are 'good' or 'bad' colonial agents. It is colonialism as physical and ideological violence that is the problem. Complicities and contradictions are relations produced out of colonial contexts and need to be examined if we are to take seriously the challenge involved with reading woman's agency. Margaret Jolly has articulated this set of problematics in this way;

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<sup>15</sup>ibid. 7

<sup>16</sup>ibid. 9

white women are on one hand recuperated as actors in the colonies, but simultaneously seen as the victims of colonial ideologies, which appear to be exclusively authored by men. This is problematic not so much because it absolves women from the burden of past colonial associations and elides their authorial voices in creating colonial culture, but because it obscures the particular ways in which white women were colonial actors.<sup>17</sup>

Attention to the political context of colonialism both past and present would enable Laing and Coleman to move past the seductive alibi of patriarchy to question the power that exists between women as a result of our colonial history. Until this ideological movement is made Maori women will continue to question Pakeha feminists' 'commit[ment] to working for the liberty and equality of indigenous people'.<sup>18</sup> As Jolly suggests, '[c]olonizing women concern me because they are a contemporary presence and not an ancient absence'.<sup>19</sup>

### **Feminist 'Mistakes' and Native 'Problems'**

Remaining with Jolly's notion of 'contemporary presence' and Mitchell's 'strange reality', I will now turn to an article that was part of a special edition of New Zealand women writers published in 1994 by the Australian feminist journal *Hecate*. Similar to the last two articles I have been reading, the first essay in this collection by Prue Hyman raises some fairly contentious issues in respect to feminist theory in New Zealand. As a brief history of feminist thought since 1984 Hyman claims quite problematically that 'criticism of identity politics has gone too far'.<sup>20</sup> For Hyman once these problems are recognised nothing should stand in the way of coalition politics and a 'celebration of difference' will create the common ground required for all women to work together. Differences as 'problems' or 'mistakes' undermining feminism is present throughout her article.

However the reality of coalition politics is of course vastly more complicated than a simple affirmation of each other's difference. This is because 'coalition' would seem to imply a vision of shared power, not affirmation. More importantly perhaps, to be at all effective, coalition politics must also concern itself with theorising how differences that exist between

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<sup>17</sup>Margaret Jolly, 'Colonizing Women: The maternal body and the empire', *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*, eds. Sneja Gunew & Anna Yeatman, (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1993) 103

<sup>18</sup>Laing & Coleman, (1997) 13

<sup>19</sup>Margaret Jolly, (1993) 104; For a particularly incisive critique of feminist interpretations of women in the colonies, see, Jane Haggis, 'Gendering Colonialism or Colonising Gender?: Recent Women's Studies Approaches to White Women and the History of British Colonialism', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 13 1-2, (1990) 105-15

<sup>20</sup>Prue Hyman, 'New Zealand Since 1984: Economic Restructuring - Feminist Responses, Activity and Theory', *Hecate*, XX, (ii), (1994) 27

women are constructed to ensure that power is distributed in appropriate ways. Therefore recognising the provisional nature of identity does not mean that 'identity' no longer exists or is not relevant for feminist theory. The fact that identity is provisional alerts us to the structural imperatives and context in which these identities are produced. Thus for Maori women and for any other woman for that matter, identity invokes political rather than personal concerns.

In my view Hyman has misread the more profound challenges that feminist poststructuralism offers us and has herself gone too far in dismissing the validity of identity politics. This is because she has not recognised the political nature of identity politics within postcolonial resistance. Instead Hyman dismisses this criticism as personal game playing in which recognition of 'the most oppressed' is like an ultimate prize. Colonialism as the primary structuring principle for relations between women in a settled society is not analysed. Identifying difference as 'ancient absence', Hyman is then able to imply by her own contemporary presence that she was not in fact 'there'. The 'there' of course also implies that colonialism was an event in the past and not a contemporary reality that she along with everyone else actively participates in. This 'strange reality' that Hyman presents to the reader can be witnessed in the following quote.

The ignoring of differences between women mentioned by Lynne Alice is now recognised by most feminists in New Zealand and elsewhere as having been a mistake made by early white middle class heterosexual feminists universalising their own experience.<sup>21</sup>

Considering the reference to 'feminists universalising their own experiences', I feel that this comment cannot be left hanging unsupported in Hyman's narrative. It is quite simply unacceptable to speak about ignoring differences between women as a 'mistake'. Colonialism is not a 'mistake' but the result of some fairly sophisticated self-generating strategies and tactics of that are not easily forsaken because there are very real issues of power at stake it is certainly not a case of mistaken identity.

Discussing whether there is a theory of feminism unique to New Zealand, Hyman casts her gaze towards Maori women.<sup>22</sup> It is at this point that colonialism is described as an issue of particular concern only in relation to native women. My impatience with writers who continually separate out colonialism as a phenomenon that only Maori women need to consider cannot be overstated. Similarly the expectation that native women will provide feminism with 'indigenous theory' is surely a disavowal of the impact of colonialism.

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<sup>21</sup>ibid.

<sup>22</sup>ibid. 28



There is nothing indigenous about claims to the Waitangi tribunal. This is an instance created and enabled by colonialism; unless of course Hyman confuses the noun with the adjective? I personally would have liked to have seen an analysis of feminist theory in relation to the contemporary position of Maori women. In particular, when discussing Maori women's contribution, it would have been more useful for Hyman to have examined what difference our contribution provokes within feminism. Instead it appears that Hyman has simply pulled out the most obvious snippets of native information to ensure her distance from the 'early white heterosexuals'.

Hyman's treatment of New Zealand feminists in general is fairly scathing, claiming that non-Maori are placed at an 'interface of theory, analysis, and application', not really there at all.<sup>23</sup> Hyman then proceeds to describe what she sees as those points of women's 'intersection';

violence, the law, the labour market, and the family, together with discussions of how economic and social theories, systems, and policies produce these outcomes. However, there is probably less high, abstract or pure theory .. less whole or coauthored books at the theory end of the spectrum rather than collections of linked or disparate articles.<sup>24</sup>

The manner in which Hyman de-intellectualises New Zealand women's contribution to feminist theory is arrogant in the extreme. Her own lack of theoretical analysis, of a feminism bred in the lap of colonial settlers and nurtured by contemporary durability, is stark and dismissive. Nowhere does she offer a theoretical analysis that would support her contention that feminist writing in New Zealand is not considered to be at or include the 'theory end of the spectrum'. Instead it is phrased in the context of New Zealand feminist's 'natural' distance from conceptual thinking and 'pure theory'.<sup>25</sup>

On the whole I find Hyman's analysis of that decade from 1984-94 descriptive rather than analytical. This is particularly relevant in her use of native woman information. It is fairly apparent that it is no longer acceptable to not mention Maori women when writing about women in New Zealand, yet not only is it extremely problematic to 'place' us inside someone else's narrative, but also, as Hyman's article illustrates, neither is it particularly insightful to present native women as a 'descriptive difference'. As descriptive difference we colour a text at a particular juncture and do not seriously alter or disrupt the author's overall agenda. The 'naked presence' referred to earlier is reproduced here by Hyman as a

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<sup>23</sup>ibid. 29

<sup>24</sup>ibid.

<sup>25</sup>ibid.

voice that does not actually speak, a presence that is displayed as a promise of indigenous theory that has yet to come. Presented in this way, Maori woman is not intended to sully Hyman's narrative with the explicit mark of colonialism.

Those texts that I have examined here are but a drop in the ocean and I am aware that they do not represent, nor can ever stand in as a representation of feminism as it is presently articulated in New Zealand. Still the underlying theme of desire for a more inclusive feminism is certainly present in contemporary writings by women and it is this notion of desire and her peculiar articulations that I wished to discuss here. These texts inescapably exhibit what Mary E. John has referred to as 'curious coincidences or analogical detours' in feminist theories. John articulates this notion by explaining the curious ways that feminists take a 'detour, as it were, through the history of colonialism', where native people's subjectification can then be made to stand in for and speak to contemporary feminist politics.<sup>26</sup> The detour of course is deliberate rather than part of the historical reality and as such shifts the analysis away from the possibilities of 'encounter' that this provokes.

The complexities compelled by an engagement with feminist theories at a personal level thus provide me with a tangled web of theoretical imperatives that further complicate and problematise my speaking inside a feminist space. Seeing my self reflected within the desires of feminist scholarship encourages me to pull back and examine why I am so uncomfortable positioned inside this space, and why I am suspicious with what is often our only opportunity to say our piece and be heard. It is clear to me however that despite my initial intentions and resistances my inevitable slide into feminist politics always positions me at a particular juncture I don't want be at. This juncture is that space between feminism and contemporary reality which sets native women adrift from a history that would reveal why and how we come to be placed in such an unenviable location.

Thus it is the inevitability of native-spectatorship, of watching others watching me and the impression of Maori woman's entrance into feminist texts as unproblematic that frustrates our ability to create feminist theories that are remotely different. Instead we continue to produce theories that work to ease our discomfort, that attempt to assuage the reality of postcolonial offence and the challenges that this imposes on our day to day lives. Where a Maori woman talking remains the solution and can be presented as the difference that feminism craves to cover over past 'mistakes'. A problem that unreflexively translates as the 'native problem' that conceals the much larger problem of colonial inheritance. Differences that exist between women are reproduced and at times re-invented by the existence of 'other' voices that ease the anxiety of historical exclusions. As such the space for Maori Women's voices under pre-conditions of de-colonisation is fractured by her

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<sup>26</sup>Mary E. John, *Discrepant Dislocations*, (Berkeley & Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1996) 87

attempt to make sense of her location and propensity for exploitation on a number of levels. Commenting on similar issues I would concur with Ian Chambers when he says;

The multiple representations and voices of the once excluded, ... of [the] discriminated ... in contemporary culture, history and society, for example do not simply exist in creating a space for them, of widening academic disciplines, political institutions, and adopting a pluralist gaze. It lies ... in reworking the very sense of history, culture, society and language that had previously excluded or silenced such voices, such presence.<sup>27</sup>

For me especially, the discomfort of my easy entrance into feminist politics has tended to conceal the exclusionary nature of feminism at a local site. Where my concern for the privilege that this position offers and, my desire to sustain a self-conscious politics may in fact blind me to the possibilities that enable a particularising alibi for non-Maori women.

Thus for Maori women feminism as it tends to be articulated in New Zealand, while offering up the possibility of speech as a vehicle for women's voices, is in its current form an inadequate instrument for subversive politics. This is because, like all other relations of power feminism, it is also a product of the colonial context in which it is mired. It seems to me that for feminism to be effective 'she' must refuse the desire to represent herself as the preferred destination for all women and come to terms with her contemporary production inside a settler society. Confronted by this I remain both a spectator and actor on a stage that has no props (colonial backdrop) to alert others to the context and history that produce my speaking.

In this chapter I have tried to take a number of related issues and deal with them in relation to native-information collecting and the sense of native spectatorship that is subsequently produced. To achieve this I have focussed my examination on particular feminist responses to colonialism and the resultant problematic inclusion of Maori women. As a consequence I have also brought into question the efficacy of assuming feminism (Women's Studies) as a space of liberation for native women. In the next section I will be focussing on selected writings by Maori women and how these texts, rather than disrupting hegemonic discourses on women, tend to provoke newer forms of control for native women.

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<sup>27</sup>Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1994) 126

## Chapter 3

### 'Native' Representations, 'Pure Spaces' and 'Indigenous' Theories

How would we write this space [occupied by the native in postcolonial discourses] in such a way as to refuse the facile turn of sanctifying the defiled image with pieties and thus enriching ourselves precisely with what can be called the surplus value of the oppressed, a surplus value that results from *exchanging* the defiled image for something more noble? <sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Filling the space made absent by imperialism with Maori women's voices as I have argued, tends to cover over important clues. These clues, while alerting us to the hidden structures of feminist collusion, also highlight the limits of feminist politics when applied to Maori women. If native woman's voice can only drip with the piety of oppression that slides over our own forms of complicity and negotiation within current structures, then we run the risk of supplying an alibi for historical violations. This is not the same as saying that native women cannot speak as such, but rather that her speaking cannot fulfil colonialism's need for inclusion. Therefore, while some non-Maori women have worked to ensure our participation at this privileged site of representation, our inclusion as it is currently articulated has yet to make any real difference to the ways in which Maori women continue to be excluded from the political economy in which we live.

It seems to me that when a Maori woman writes her text is made to stand in both as representative and as an instance of indigenous feminism, the authenticity of the native and her representation is to some extent unassailable, part of the hegemony or colonial logic that legitimates texts precisely because these images and ideas are already in circulation. Yet I am more than a little confused with this quest for an indigenous feminism and the subsequent logic that assumes Maori women will provide theories that will illustrate New Zealand women's difference from the global community. This is because, as I have shown in the previous chapter, colonialism effected an encounter that irrevocably altered notions of indigeneity so that it is no longer possible to retrieve an indigenous presence that is not the product of this earlier encounter. Weighed down by a contemporary reversal of the 'white man's burden', Maori women are being asked to provide an image of ourselves that is supported by a theoretical framework that pretends colonialism doesn't exist or is no longer binding.

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<sup>1</sup>Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora*, (1993) 30. See especially her chapter entitled 'Where have all the natives gone', 27-54

In this chapter I examine how Maori women negotiate and respond to feminist theorising in New Zealand. As part of this examination I will also be analysing my own responses and related experiences as a student and teacher of feminist theories. Initially I will be analysing an article written by two Maori women that exhibits a particular theme relevant to my discussion. The use of genealogy, stories about ancestors, is fairly constant among writers who seek to legitimate the importance of Maori women and indigenous theories.

### **Maori Women's Use of Genealogical Stories**

My need to be critical of this theme or movement in texts that looks 'backwards', is extremely complex and the caution with which I approach my critique requires a certain delicacy that I am not at all confident I achieve. As a people whose history has been silenced it does not appear to be appropriate to criticise the use of genealogy by Maori women. However the discomfort I feel can be articulated in the following ways. Firstly it appears to me that the construction of indigenous theories inside settler societies is dependent on retrieving a 'lost' history, before colonisation. And secondly this movement backwards in time can only produce at best a fractured sense of reality that does not have to negotiate with the present reality of colonial offence. At the same time, ideas of native women as more 'traditional' and 'uncomfortable' with modernity are ideas that already circulate as part of the colonial mythology.

Therefore my criticisms are not about Maori women's use of genealogical stories but rather how local feminist desires for indigenous theories are assumed to help us make sense of our lives, lead us in a direction that positions Maori women 'outside' the political context in which we live. Contemporary feminist theories of postcoloniality from 'outside' that attempt to make sense of the impact of the global connections of imperialism's durability at local sites, when 'brought home' are dismissed as irrelevant. If colonialism as a 'past event' is about encounters, then today it seems to me that it is now concerned with constructing false boundaries that presume a type of 'splendid isolation'. In relation to native women this 'isolation' tends to be reproduced by retrieving 'native woman' from a time and space that is believed to be 'pure'. This sense of purity subsequently exempts colonialism from its own violence and reinforces evolutionary ideas of native people as 'impure' and 'losing connection' under conditions of modernity. Reading is of course both incredibly subjective and always an interpretation.

This is why I am uncomfortable with the following quote that presumes to offer Maori women freedom of expression through a 'reconstruction of our present position'. Pihama's and Johnson's reference to Te Ao Marama evokes in me a sense that Maori women's stories and analyses are located somewhere in Te Po, the world of Darkness, before time began:



There is a vast number of Maori women's stories and analyses which must be brought into this Te Ao Marama, the world of light. Stories of culture, stories of our history, stories of *who we are* and where we come from, stories of Maori women in all aspects of Maori society. It is these stories that provide the basis for the reconstruction of our present position, and which challenge and contest dominant Pakeha definitions and discourses related to Maori women. And it is Maori women who will ultimately ensure this, as it is we who have the most to gain; *we gain knowledge about ourselves.* <sup>2</sup>

(My italics)

Initially I was disturbed by my own feelings of anger evoked in response to Johnson's and Pihama's assertions; an anger that suggests a more troubling reality for me as Iwi Maori. The ethical dilemma implied by my censuring of 'others' theoretical positions necessitates my attention to more structural issues of how Maori women's voices are produced in feminist texts. The use of 'we' while appearing inclusionary slides over political and theoretical differences that alter specific meanings and exclude those women who would challenge the assumptions outlined above.

Leaving aside for the moment the way in which differences between Maori women are ignored, let us first examine how colonial representations of the 'lost native' are reproduced in narratives of resistance. Disturbing for me in this instance is the contradictory way in which Maori women are presented as the 'most lost' in terms of their self-image, and conversely conflated as the ones most likely to resist colonialism. There is little to suggest our overall distance from those political structures that continue to speak on behalf of native women.

Similarly there is no acknowledgment of how Maori women today continually negotiate with the structures of violence that daily write their reality for them. Instead, Johnson and Pihama systematically participate in those structures of silencing because they are unable to recognise native women's agency as contemporary experience. There is an over-riding assumption here that there are Maori women who do not 'know who we are'. However as the authors of this article suggest, 'we' will find ourselves through a proliferation of other Maori women's stories. Difference here is collapsed under the construction of a collective consciousness that 'we' as Maori women are presumed to share. As well as feeding into current hegemony that views 'natives' as 'lost', Pihama and Johnson consequently encourage the iconisation of native woman as representation. Now while I have no problem with wahine Tipuna (ancestors) and am acutely aware of how their early

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<sup>2</sup>Leonie Pihama & Trish Johnson, *Hecate*, XX, (ii), (1994) 96

struggles have to a certain extent laid out the historical frameworks for contemporary struggles, I am uncomfortable with the way in which this can work to gloss over and reproduce the original offence of Maori woman's absence.

Within the terms that Johnson and Pihama outline for the retrieval of Maori woman's humanity lies an offensive gesture towards Maori women today whose struggle to survive within the confines of postcolonial society provides them with a particular way of understanding the world and subsequently, an ability to know exactly who they are. The ability to know oneself in relation to history as a process of un-folding is part of the colonial logic that permeates and structures our use of genealogy. Rather than posing a threat to the way Maori women are represented, Johnson and Pihama merely legitimate existing structures of violence as dominant, through representations of Maori women as 'unknowing' and therefore powerless. Instead of reproducing the colonial need for 'rational' and explicit representations of 'our' lives, it is the actual fragmentation and survival of Maori women under the late stages of capitalism that demands our attention.

The reconstruction of Maori women's reality in the way that Pihama and Johnson prescribe tends to reproduce a logic that works into, rather than against current ideology. As such it does not allow us to adequately dismantle the ways in which Maori women continue to be perceived. Iain Chambers examining the powerful appeal of nativism that 'curiously mirrors' older stereotypes explains it in this way;

This deliberately adopted black 'other' reconfirms the position already prescribed for him and her and reinforces the binary opposition between a completely black reality and that of the white world, as though history [...] had not had a profound impact on both cultures and their composite sense of identity.<sup>3</sup>

It is this 'impact' that most interests me because an attention to cultural encounters allows us to see who is most likely to benefit from Maori women's attention being diverted elsewhere.

Similar to Chambers I believe that there is something palpably familiar in the way that native authenticity is simultaneously demanded and proscribed. This familiarity is explicit in the way that Pihama and Johnson continue to idealise Maori women as a particular image that needs to be reconstructed. Also critical of reconstructive responses to representations, Rey Chow has argued that 'the most important aspect of the image - its power precisely as image and nothing else - is thus bypassed and left untouched'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Iain Chambers, (1994) 73

<sup>4</sup>Rey Chow, (1993) 29

Therefore it is in this problematic of the image as the bad thing to be replaced that evoked my initial discomfort with Johnson's and Pihama's writing. I believe that it is precisely this type of project, of retrieving Maori women's 'true-self', which is so assimilable to an imperial agenda. It is an agenda that reproduces itself through the construction of a space for resistance and then measures its authenticity in terms of its assumed distance from contemporary reality.

I do not mean to suggest that there is a correct way of challenging the way that Maori women are represented. Like Chow I am more concerned with the politics implied by images and furthermore, I am increasingly frustrated by the new hegemony this seems to create. The accompanying piety that envelops Maori women's image has become increasingly problematic in relation to questioning the postcolonial condition of our lives, as if refusing the Madonna-like status will do harm to our already fractured state. Likewise the unstated refusal among my peers to consider the implication of postcolonialism results in an inability to develop particular strategies that speak to native women's lives. This is because her production as a symbol or image, as I have described, is not even part of the conversation.

In spite of those issues I have outlined in relation to the reconstruction of Maori woman, it is not an easy matter for me to simply refuse this 'space' of image-identification. The popular option presumed for me as a Maori woman in terms of habitation is endorsed by Pihama's and Johnson's representation and reconstruction of a mythical home. This 'home' is presented as a place where Maori women can return and pretend that colonialism is not the real imperative to this symbolic form of segregation. However I am often reminded in my day to day experiences that my refusal to 'paint myself thick with authenticity' may actually work against me because of the particular logic that is being privileged here.<sup>5</sup> My immersion in 'western' theories is not recognised as a negotiation of those structures of violence that threaten to absorb me in peculiar ways. The perversity of colonialism of course is such that to resist I must appear to 'conform'. This conformity is recognisable by the silence that accompanies certain offences, where my anger is not articulated because it is precisely what is expected.

### **Negotiating feminist agendas and Cultural imperialism**

Today when 'Westernisation' has become a pejorative word, there have appeared on the stage subtler and more sophisticated means of acculturation. They produce not merely models of conformity but also models of 'official' dissent.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Trinh Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other, Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989) 88

During my time in Maori studies, I was often dis-credited on the grounds that I was privileging western knowledge codes seen to be elite and not relevant to Maori. These allegations were not taken lightly and I spent many soul-searching moments re-evaluating and examining my own claims. If my entrance into the academy was also forged by a desire to examine existing knowledges about Maori women then I needed to ask myself if I was not now becoming complicit in her exclusion through my assimilation of a decidedly feminist agenda.

At what point did my immersion into a feminist agenda slide into 'cultural imperialism'? And if there is a fine line, which side should I be on? An impatience with the artificiality of borders placed me in a self-imposed margin.

My intention to remain silent in classes was futile. Denied the voice of authentic Maori woman, my muteness could be translated in a way that easily reconciled the inconsistency of both my presence and voice. The inability and often outright refusal to address questions of gender and class related to physical and ideological violence alongside deepening economic poverty, illustrates the inadequacy of 'race' alone to circumvent and take account of Maori women's interests. At times like this I felt overwhelmed by a sense of learned helplessness that accompanies accusations of 'sleeping with the enemy'. The enemy of course in this context is gendered and feminism cannot be part of the universal language of marginalisation. My 'defiance' against colonialism was not recognised because it did not take a particular shape. As Ashis Nandy reminds us;

No colonialism could be complete unless it 'universalised' and enriched its ethnic stereotypes by appropriating the language of defiance of its victims.<sup>7</sup>

When I first mentioned my suspicion with mythological representations of women as unable to stand in on behalf of women's deepening marginal status, I was dismissed by one lecturer of not really understanding tikanga, (cultural method) suggesting a need for me to de-colonise my thinking. The anxious demand and equally contagious burden to be perfectly non-western, revealed to me a peculiar sense of self-loathing that masquerades as a confused sort of narcissism among my perfect peers. This narcissism is similar to an imagistic imagination that promotes a universalism within mental images. In this way the mental image of an authentic prototype, located before regional colonisation, can be projected untouched into this era. For me the deceptiveness of nostalgia indicated by the need to de-colonise, then becomes a denial of the self - as - survivor under colonialism.

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<sup>6</sup>Ashis Nandy, (1983) xii

<sup>7</sup>ibid. 73

Responsibility for self definition under postcolonialism subsequently forces Maori women to stress only those parts of our culture which are assumed to be contrary to the west. The result is that those parts that we share, and which remain outside of colonial definitions are concealed. This pressure to be exterior, that is outside the west, not only distorts individual memories of colonialism and the antagonistic allegiances made under these conditions, but also, effectively dismisses the event itself! Thus colonialism's durability - the creation of a space for oppositional discourses, where the standard mode of transgressing native stereotypes is to reverse western images, is not so readily identified as such.

Issues of class and gender structure racial, colonial and postcolonial discourses in such a way that it is increasingly difficult to speak about 'traditional/oral histories' as impartial conduits or narratives of truth. The apparent substitution of written material with oral sources, however, is a fairly unsophisticated sleight-of-hand that ignores the bulk of oral evidence underpinning historically topical narratives. The possibilities for deeper exclusions here are increased and partly validated by the specificities associated with testimonies. Disclaimers regarding full representation often work to legitimate their own presence as 'truth' rather than encouraging critical readings of partialities.

However my difficulty was not one of written versus oral. Indeed we would need at some point to identify when speech and speaking converge to become text, forcing a re-examination of the political significance of these disparities. My objections then, as now, to an easy acceptance of oral testimony, pivot around a belief that *representations are the problem*, not the truth value of oral narratives. The desirability of authenticity evoked through notions of oral transmission as tradition, clearly needs to be placed within a wider political context of voice and representation. Merely tampering with their method of delivery cannot effectively challenge existing structures, neither does it alter perceptions. The knee-jerk reaction that seeks to reverse formerly negative representations of Maori without altering the structures in which representations are made inevitably reproduces an image that is already part of the colonial mythology.

What is required to counter the seduction of 'new improved' images is an engagement with feminist and postcolonial discourses that actively construct and support a discourse of difference. Not the binary difference of western imagination but the production of differences that refuse what Ashis Nandy refers to as a 'non-West which is itself a construction of the West'.<sup>8</sup> If as Nandy has suggested, 'the West is now everywhere, within the West and outside,' then it is pointless to expect a critique to come from some

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<sup>8</sup>ibid. 64



uncontaminated postcolonial experience.<sup>9</sup> In a similar way constructing a 'pure' voice of native resistance can work as a panacea for enduring exclusions. Unexamined and left unattended native voices can only gloss over colonial relations because our position works precisely to ameliorate the discomfort of historical memory.

### **Gendered Ethnicities and Anti-colonial Gestures**

My time in the Maori department was always marked by my status as feminist, a term loaded with heavy symbolic significance. Nevertheless I refused to give up this identifying trait even as I resisted the assumptions that accompany its use. In one way I was amused at how I was perceived as it helped materialise for me many of the contradictions that informed my life at that time. On the other hand I would become extremely agitated at the incredible misconceptions that being a feminist evoked. I found it quite remarkable that it was only during my time in this department that I should carry this name of feminist. In my Women's Studies classes where all are assumed to be feminist, I was perceived as 'Maori woman'. Still it is this incommensurability that revealed to me the negotiability of subject positions. 'Maori woman' has a subjectivity that always carries the trace of colonialism with her.

What this highlights for me is that feminism, despite the increased participation of Maori women in New Zealand, is still uncritically perceived by many as a western phenomena. Indeed a hui for Maori students organised during suffrage year came to just this conclusion during one particularly heated debate. Viewing feminism as western becomes, for me, a self-fulfilling prophecy insofar as it reinstates western women's concerns over and above those of all other women. Alongside this perception is the unspoken assumption that as Maori women we lack an ability to articulate the specificity of our position and are merely duped by feminism(white women?). Perceptions of feminism as 'western' sustain their own hegemony because of representations that appear to favour white women.

Drawing attention to certain disparities in relation to how Maori women are represented in Maori studies drew vocal criticism from my peers. I was often reminded that this was not Women's studies. As a consequence my interruptions were viewed by many not as a concern for representations but as radical feminist disruptions. Given the absence of feminist analyses and the accompanying belief that feminists are all white and male-hating, feminist critique was openly dismissed. To validate this belief the lecturer at one point distributed a particular article written by Maori women entitled, "Hoihoi Wahine Pakeha".<sup>10</sup> This brief item tended to evoke a response in students that supported their

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<sup>9</sup>ibid. xi

belief that feminism was indeed a 'white thing'. As the title suggests, it is a call for Pakeha women to 'hush up'. Similar to Awatere's "Maori Sovereignty", this article outlines the ways in which Pakeha women collude with Pakeha men in oppressing Maori.

An important insight for me from 'Hoihoi Wahine Pakeha' by Smith and Taki, was the type of voice Maori women were allowed to express. It seems to me that as women we must constantly reproduce our oppression when speaking so as to be acknowledged as different; a difference that uncritically accepts romantic descriptions of our relationships with men.

Pakeha women occupy a subordinate position within a Pakeha society, they have to reactively grab power from Pakeha men. [...] But Maaori women's experiences are quite different. Maaori women historically and in the contemporary context have always held political power within Maaori society.<sup>11</sup>

Statements like this need to be explored further. An interesting fact is that nowhere within this article do Smith and Taki provide evidence of what they are saying. While they cite some authors by name, they do not actually provide any references. I am left wondering about the particular codes of knowledge they assume for the reader. So while I do agree with the notion of different experiences, the homogeneity on which they posit Maori women's experiences is necessary for the construction needed to define a monolithic category deemed Pakeha women. The particular form of ideological violence that this perpetrates against Maori women's diversity is regrettable, given Smith and Taki's desire to draw attention to feminist agendas in New Zealand.

However I am concerned with how inequalities between Maori, in terms of gender, Iwi, and regional politics (class) are dismissed here as irrelevant and non-existent. From the perspective of one who rebelled as a teenager against the notion of civic equality in New Zealand, despite official rhetoric to the contrary, I am appalled that Maori women are in the business of reproducing this liberalism from nativist positions. It seems to me that Smith and Taki's desire for Pakeha women to hush is undermined precisely because the tone of their essay is directed towards Pakeha women rather than Maori women. While their assumed audience is Maori, there is little in their essay to suggest, or encourage Maori women to discuss in an open and honest manner, those issues that impact on us as a result of our postcolonial positioning.

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<sup>10</sup>Cheryl W. Smith & Mereana Taki, 'Hoihoi Wahine Pakeha', (January, 1995) 17-19

<sup>11</sup>ibid, 18

If colonialism is coded in such a manner as to produce imperial subjects (Pakeha), then Maori (objects) as victim, are ever subordinate to the fancies of neo-colonialism because our position is already spoken for. Our attentions are continually diverted towards the imaginary centre (Pakeha), that in turn impedes our ability to recognise colonialism as systems of power that produce their own forms of complicity. Indeed participation in the political economy, at all levels, is never outside those structures of power. Recognising this irony provides Maori women with a particular insight into how our lives are vulnerable to commodification and representational politics. This is at the heart of Smith and Taki's article.

Although it is not always that explicit, the essay appears to be a critique of 'Pakeha feminist analysis' in relation to issues about power. Yet the authors do not actually say what analysis they refer to. From my own reading this would suggest that it is the power to represent the interests of Maori which is the real issue; however this is not immediately clear. As such I am more interested in the way that Smith and Taki conceal their overall desire to represent the interests of Maori. For me this particularly disturbing as it situates Maori women in the same way that colonialism positioned her, in need of rescue. That some Maori women are located in a position to represent other Maori women needs to be made more explicit if we are to examine relations of power under postcolonialism.

Swamping the market of feminist publications in New Zealand with Maori women's voices, particularly within the genre of 'difference', leads to an elusive sort of inclusionary politics; a politics that allows us to imagine that the last 200 or so years of settlement has actually made no difference to human relations. In this way Maori women appear, as Rey Chow has indicated, 'as our equals', a position that conceals specific relations of power that highlight her construction within contemporary theories of liberation. The desire for voice and resistance under these conditions, cannot be effective if the territory in which these demands are made is unable to recognise itself as a site of production. In this way we need to ask as Chow does, if we are in fact ;

avoiding the genuine problem of the native's status as object by providing *something* that is more manageable and comforting - namely, a phantom history in which natives appear as our equals and our images, in our shapes and our forms? <sup>12</sup>

Writings by Maori women discussed here consistently focus on the need for feminist theories that are responsive to our daily lives. Embracing this notion of 'lived experience', we are often encouraged to write from a position that represents a Maori world-view, that is experiential and as such, often supportive of a search for a truly indigenous, (authentic)

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<sup>12</sup> Rey Chow, (1993) 37

feminism. What is not discussed among these writings is the production of Maori authenticity to support a politics of difference in feminist theory. Colonial hegemony that constructs natives as different is reproduced to ensure that feminism can make some claim for being grounded in a political context. The onus is on Maori women to provide feminism with 'proper' indigenous theories that subsequently collapse themselves inside a feminist framework. Positioned here, the diversity implied by Maori women's location inside feminist theories permits a comfortable alliance that fails to alter the ground on which these claims are made.

Difference has to be properly recognised before we can claim diversity. This 'proper difference' as I have explained in an earlier chapter is related to colonialism (Treaty) and by association Maori women's inclusion will provide this. However, it is this troubling designation of 'authentic otherness' that needs to be examined in relation to our place in feminism. Located in this manner, we can be identified as a visible sign of a much larger exclusion. The discomfort aroused by complicitous relationships between Pakeha and Maori women illustrates the way in which our 'proper difference' contributes to and justifies particular silent Others; exclusions that enable the construction of 'containments' that nationalise feminism at a local site and 'insulate' Maori women from the reality of colonial encounters.

### **Indigenous Spaces**

I shall now turn to this notion of an indigenous world space where it is assumed Maori women will be able to develop feminist theories that reflect a 'truly Aotearoa Women's studies programme'. This theme of 'place' and 'time' reproduced by Ngahuia Te Awekotuku in the following excerpt is a recurring topic in texts written by native women and, as such, results in what I perceive as a fundamental slip in much of the rhetoric produced here.

Linked with such programs as Kaupapa Wahine Maori is the awareness that to develop a truly Aotearoa Women's Studies programme, reflecting our time and place, more attention must be given to those like us.<sup>13</sup>

For me this 'time' and 'place' needs to take account of our relationships with those structures of colonialism that produce our reality today. Therefore while I am in agreement with Te Awekotuku insofar as it is just not possible to talk about 'woman' in New Zealand without taking account of Maori women, I am left a little uncomfortable with the implications, as I read them, that a focus on Maori women's lives will provide

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<sup>13</sup> Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, *Te Pua 1*, (1992) 52

feminism with an indigenous model. If we are serious about indigenous feminism then to be successful this 'attention' must include attention to colonialism and its role in the production of cultural representations of native women and how calls for more attention to 'those like us', may feed into current ideas that continue to distance cultures as developing in another 'time' and 'place' waiting to be recovered. My concern with this is that it presumes that because Maori women's interests have not been given attention, we have not also been the target of many political and economic reforms since day one of the colonial encounter.

What then becomes recoverable is a particular discourse that is assimilable to imperialism. That is the production of Maori woman as a signifier of difference, a special 'third world' category in our own backyard. Non-Maori women need not bother themselves with how this 'difference' impacts on their projects because it is framed as 'distant' and cloaked in a 'piety' that accompanies the contemporary retrieval of indigenous theories. Feminists simply indicate in the frequent 'unproblematic' tone that Maori women are busy constructing our own theories and go about business as usual. It seems to me that Te Awekotuku's call can be easily used to support mainstream feminists inability to come to terms with contemporary structures of exclusion, while the provision of Kaupapa Wahine programmes designated as a space for native women further legitimates the present absence of Maori women as teachers and students in women's studies courses nationwide.

It is just not possible to focus our attention at a particular site while the rest of the world continues to enrich itself at our expense. We provide non-Maori feminists with the ultimate in postcolonial legitimacy by allowing the mainstream to opt out of the 'time' and 'place' that has shaped colonial relations between women here in New Zealand. The earlier promise of 'separate' spaces that would protect women and permit them to nurture specific political aims has not been realised. The recurring need exhibited in 'separate' spaces for Maori women's studies should alert us to the unchanging nature of feminist politics that requires native women to seek out a site for the construction of our theories. That many non-Maori women appear so joyous, even encourage this separation is an example of the particular relief some feminists feel at not having to examine the real differences that our presence suggests.<sup>14</sup>

Contained at the site of 'indigenous' theories Maori women are not viewed as particularly threatening to mainstream politics. What is especially appealing for many is the promise of something indigenous offered in these texts. Located in that 'space' apart from mainstream feminism this longed for 'non-encounter' that will allow us to finally meet

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<sup>14</sup> Sue Middleton, (1992) 36



one another under specified conditions of 'east meets west' will be realised. The irony for Maori women however is that no amount of 'indigenous space' will ever permit the possibility of 'returning home'.

To return, ... that is to apparently turn back and return, ... in pursuit of a displaced and dispersed authenticity today seems hardly feasible. The impossible mission that seeks to preserve the singularity of a culture must paradoxically negate its fundamental element: its historical dynamic.<sup>15</sup>

And it is the 'historical dynamic' that has been ignored in this 'turning' by Maori women towards a 'space' that carries the propensity to deny our 'self under conditions of colonialism'. Our ability to negotiate the structures of colonialism compels us to unsettle the mainstream with our continued presence.

### **Confused Privileges and Illegitimate Marginality**

It seems to me that while privileged feminists (I am referring to all of us who have access to forms of representation as opposed to women whose voices do not participate in public conversations) have begun to seriously question who we are in terms of who we come to represent. This does not appear to have altered the structures of power that we attempt to work through. Thus the impetus to 'unlearn our privilege as a loss'<sup>16</sup> while commendable, cannot effectively make a difference to how each of us is situated. Instead it may provide us with a false sense of comfort that in itself endorses rather than disrupts unequal relations. 'Unlearning privilege' in a colonial setting can never entirely be about conceptual change. What is required is attention to structural analyses and committed activism, a connection that many Women's Studies programmes fail to make.

Privilege as an identifying term tends to evoke a sense of discomfort in all of us who at specific times are reminded of our distance from a silent majority. Yet it would reproduce this offence to pretend that my discomfort actually makes a difference or conversely, that my history somehow places me outside of this particular critique of privilege. As a Maori woman brought up in what is loosely termed, a southern working-class home, I am increasingly aware of how I cannot return to that 'home', that my right to represent the interests of women located at that destination is as contestable as any other. So while I have a loyalty of sorts to those women I grew up with, and will always share in the offence of the violence done to the subaltern, I am not she.

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<sup>15</sup> Iain Chambers, (1994) 74

<sup>16</sup> Gayatri Spivak, 1989.

Feminist theorising of the 'politics of location' formed part of the ideological shift that made possible an examination of one's personal affiliations and the privileges accompanying specific locations. This was extremely important for creating strategies where women from diverse locations could meet and discuss issues that affected their daily lives. Differences were made explicit in ways that supposedly enabled women to consciously elicit their agendas in relation to this dialogue. Therefore as part of a movement along a continuum, personal recognition of differently located selves was a vast improvement in feminist relations at that stage and increasingly important given the inability of feminism to represent itself as the voice of Women.

However, rather than enabling the positioning of categories both as fluid and contingently located, politicising identity tends to validate earlier more static notions of identity and as a result tended to de-historicise specific political locations. This in turn produced its own form of 'legitimate marginality', conflating particular identities while concealing others. Thus a black middle-class woman could claim oppression based on her colour, and, a white woman could claim oppression on the basis of her sexuality. For me there are few examinations of those locations that are particularly enabling in specific contexts. Furthermore notions of race and sexuality became entrenched as categories in their own right rather than historically, culturally and politically constituted.

The necessity to inhabit those positions one speaks about is part of the messy politics ascribed to particular locations. It seems to me that contamination, in terms of complicity with those structures that one criticises needs to be made more explicit if we are to produce anything remotely resistant. Occupying the high moral ground that 'locational alibis' provide enables a false sense of marginality that in turn allows the wheels of colonialism to turn unimpeded. An interruption demands that we acknowledge our own negotiations within the systems that we speak from. Positioned inside the academy I am no longer working-class, (though still unmonied) my status provides me with access to those resources that secure me against certain violations.

In this chapter I have tried to illustrate the contradictions explicit in Maori women's participation in feminist discourses. These contradictions are of course produced out of our relationship to contemporary forms of colonialism that cannot be easily covered over by locating ourselves in narratives of resistance. Neither is it particularly helpful for Maori women to attempt to position ourselves in a more 'comforting' space. As I have discovered, this space is also bound by strict codes of behaviour that are not at all comforting. In the next chapter I will be focussing more explicitly on the politics of location and what this means in terms of our postcolonial condition.

## Chapter 4

### Uncertain Locations

The risk of rejection by one's own kind, by one's family, when one exceeds the limits laid out or the self-definition of the group, is not made easy ... The assumption of, or desire for, another safe place like "home" is challenged by the realisation that "unity" -interpersonal as well as political - is itself necessarily fragmentary, ... chosen, and hence unstable by definition; it is not based on "sameness" and there is no perfect fit. But there is agency.<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The politics of location can be seen as an attempt to ground particular representations and the politics attached to them. This locational subscription then works to reveal the particularising base, where articulations in turn validate existing representations. However images can never hope to contain the event, that is to say that the content is always incomplete. In spite of this Maori women's voices are often located in a way that uncritically positions us as 'subaltern'. However, as Martin and Mohanty suggest in the quote just cited, locations are more 'fragmentary' and 'unstable' than we imagine and in some cases can work to conceal newer forms of power. It is my contention that this type of locational speaking, rather than affording intellectual security instead *secures* Maori woman at a particular address; an address that then frames her speech in relation to the audience who listens. In this chapter I will be examining what happens when Maori woman's voice is contained at a specific location. Located here we become 'caught' between feminist desires and national myth-making. It will be seen that native woman's status as 'subaltern' in feminist theories in New Zealand reflects feminism's inability to come to terms with notions of 'difference'. While theorising difference has resulted in an attention to Maori women's voices, it is the type of voice that is articulated that is of concern to me.

The unproblematic attachment of marginality that accompanies Maori woman speaking is similar to what Spivak has termed 'epistemic violence', where her status as subaltern is highly determined, already named, and often has no reality outside of the representation. As such she fulfills colonialism's desire to cover its tracks by producing an image that is assimilable to contemporary neo-colonial reform. To resist the appropriation of our images we must underscore the capacity of political power not merely to address preexistent constituencies, but to reconstitute them, or even generate new ones. The

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<sup>1</sup>Biddy Martin & Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'What's Home Got To Do With It?', *Feminist Studies Critical Studies*, Teresa de Lauretis, ed. (The Regents of the University of Wisconsin, 1986) 208-9

'subaltern' cannot be represented in official discourses but can only be recognised by her absence.

### **Who Benefits from 'Inclusion'?**

An inability to recognise class issues among Maori is regrettable and also extremely dangerous for political action and similar to an insistence by one male friend that 'gender' is a peculiar topic for a Maori women interested in advancing her 'people'. Class as a category is often overlooked, even dismissed as a relevant analysis for native oppression under colonialism. We never have to ask ourselves 'Who are the group of people most likely to benefit from strategies aimed at inclusion'? Or, whose children provide the small quota of Maori youth representative in tertiary statistics? In this sense I need to ask what it means to be marginal under these conditions of exclusion.

Recently, during a staff meeting, a colleague of mine commented on the ethnicity of graduate students in Commerce, claiming that there was only a handful of 'New Zealanders' represented among a large Asian group. I wondered then what part of this comment I was to identify as offensive. I could only laugh at the irony and complexity of this remark. For me the incident highlighted issues of class rather than ethnicity, and I couldn't help wondering if the absence of children of poor folk ever provoked a scandal. As if to draw me into the conversation my colleague proceeded to place his comments in relation to Maori students, indicating that Asians were filling places that could result in less positions for Maori. To end the conversation I replied that the 'threat' was a class thing and his children had more reason to be concerned than mine.

Examples like this reveal to me the ways in which class is glossed over by the sanctity of race relations in this country. As a topic of great interest in New Zealand, providing its own state appointment, race relations inside settler societies tend to colour our perceptions of what is termed problematic. The structuring hierarchies that produce class differences are what actually inform differences in both race and gender. Separating out categories in relation to race can only result in a change of skin colour for those strategically placed to reproduce their privilege. Thus marginality and privilege become two sides of the same coin, iconically representative of a benevolent race relations philosophy.

While teaching the 'Maori Perspective' in a social work course I was struck by student's responses to those case studies that mentioned Maori clients. Considering that I had laboured quite strongly on issues of power in relation to 'workers' and 'clients', many of the students felt that placing a Maori worker with a Maori client provided a solution to power dynamics. It was clear to me then that colonialism as power was perceived as a 'white-thing', and most students had no conscious knowledge of Iwi politics under

contemporary postcolonial conditions. As a second year course I felt incredibly frustrated with what I perceived as the power of dominant Maori representations that stand in for a Maori perspective.

The difficulty of encouraging critique of Maori authors among a predominant Pakeha audience presented many problems for me. To offset this predicament I used the analogy of how the concept of 'Woman' is debated in feminist theory and encouraged students to examine issues of class from this vantage point. Similar to race, gender tended towards the same effect, with students positioning women workers alongside women clients. Still, when speaking about Maori clients, students found it difficult to assimilate feminist literature in relation to Maori women. My attempts to place women at the centre of analysis for Maori clients was negated by an unspoken hegemony that feminism was somehow anathema to considering the plight of Maori women as clients in welfare discourses.

The relationship of women to colonialism has yet to be fully articulated in New Zealand in response to contemporary literature about welfare. As I stand in front of the class I am aware of the large number of women who for a number of complex reasons, undertake studies in social work. The gendering of helping professions has not responded to critiques in this manner, neither have they been analysed in relation to the colonial project. Thus the issue of gender that I tried to highlight in classes was my attempt to make obvious these connections, and the durability of categories that produce some women always in the position of needing help.

### **Gender and Nationalism in Colonial Discourses**

Colonial discourses rely heavily on gendered language to articulate a mission of progress, in turn underpinning anti-colonial critiques that often unashamedly invoke tropes of 'distressed maidens', with which to foreground nationalistic objections. Within this misconception much of Maori women's political and socio-economic poverty can be laid at the feet of colonialism. Maori women's impoverished condition is more or less accepted as a by-product of a much larger offence, and as such their status is never considered an adequate bench-mark for analysis. Instead nationalist discourses extract the surplus value from native women's location to validate their own claims of exclusion from civic participation.

This is not intended to elide the intensity of colonial violence, rather it is to point out inconsistencies in anti-colonial rhetoric and to state quite categorically that colonialism affected and continues to affect native men and women differently. The appropriative gesture implied by nationalist discourses in relation to women's role, not only



subordinates native women to male desires, but by positing the 'nation' as a haven for Maori women, anti-colonialism has clung to a masculinist fantasy of rescue. As such, calls for solidarity around issues of Tino Rangatiratanga (sovereignty) fall short, in my opinion, of effectively changing the status of Maori women, because they are unable to perceive women as agents of their own liberation.

The contemporary revival of old 'rescue' narratives forms part of the ideological apparatus of nationalist discourse. Ideologies of 'rescue' are prevalent in anti-colonial discourses, where the success of nationalism is placed squarely on the shoulders of women, whose capacity for reproduction induces a need for protection. In this way nationalism parallels colonial justification for intervention into native women's lives, through narratives of 'protection'. A noticeable part of anti-colonial rhetoric pivots around the need to free up access to native women's bodies. Ownership of native women's bodies is part of the concept of value to be negotiated between men in their struggle for freedom. Power is thus recognised by freedom of access to those modes of human reproduction, represented by woman as transferable.

Women haven't had an easy relationship with nationalism. Even when they have suffered abuse at the hands of colonialists and racists, they have often been treated more as symbols than as active participants by nationalist movements organised to end colonialism and racism.<sup>2</sup>

Freedom to articulate the inability of nationalist discourses to prioritise the specific concerns of women have yet to be engaged with in any serious manner in New Zealand. Caught between an imperial desire and the masculinised gaze of nationalism, Maori women do not often have the privilege to be publicly outspoken. Belonging to a group whose civic status is continually being undermined and re-defined makes it extremely difficult for us as women to accuse our 'leaders' of capitalising on the surplus value of our position. This dynamic is made more complex by our awareness of the political structure in which this critique is to be produced. Here I am referring to the notion of the marae as a place for dialogue. It needs to be understood that protocols vary among Iwi and across regions. Still, while in my own area, Te Waka o Aoraki, (South Island) there is very little sympathy for nationalist discourse, the regional politics are diverse enough to mark out quite dramatically boundaries between Haapu (sub tribes).

However because of the particularity of postcolonial irony, some Tahu (people belonging to the local tribe) in the far south tend towards extreme pragmatism in relation to

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<sup>2</sup>Cynthia Enloe, 'Nationalism and Masculinity', *Bananas Beaches & Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, (Berkely, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990) 42

designated gender roles. I am referring to that group in the south who actively participate in marae (meeting place) politics, namely, Kai Karanga, (women who initiate tribal ritual encounters) local Iwi representatives and so on. They are not to be confused with women working in the kitchen or the great majority of Tahu women who do not involve themselves in any aspect of marae activity. I say this not to imply that other Iwi are more liberal but to point out some of the reasons why women in this area may not be in a position to access local political structures of representation. It is the subalternity of southern Kai Tahu women that fuels my unease with unexamined representations of Maori women at this historical point. It seems to me that it is *her* absence within colonial ethnography that enables a particularising silence in contemporary times. Deemed the most inauthentic in terms of nativeness, southern Tahu women were never positioned to benefit from strategies and programmes assumed to benefit Maori.<sup>3</sup>

The current use of chromatics and linguistic guides to define Maori has effectively displaced many southern Tahu women from positioning themselves so as to exploit the 'Maori card'. The regional politics that inform political representation at a national and even global level, between North and South, parallel this type of disenfranchisement experienced by women in the South. Recuperative texts that re-write southern Maori history support this erasure by failing to take account of the specificity of colonialism in relation to women. This is evident within Evison's book, a study endorsed by the now defunct Ngai Tahu Trust Board,<sup>4</sup> where the only time he focuses on women is in a footnote, and then it is to cite those published sources that reproduce strict gender divisions.<sup>5</sup>

Now my point here is not to complain about the lack of published sources on southern Tahu women, instead it is to indicate the way that representations of Maori women are dependent on colonial historical accounts. Her identification in contemporary times is dependent on her assimilability to colonial representations. The fate of Maori women who were not part of the internal diaspora (urban-drift theory), who never migrated but negotiated survival within the context of the urbanisation of their 'home', situates her

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<sup>3</sup> As part of the founding committee for Iwi Radio in Murihiku (Southland) I was part of a negotiating team that set out to access funding. An application for funding was turned down as it was felt that the south island was catered for by the location of Iwi Radio in Christchurch. Comments were made that an investment in the far south was a 'lost cause'.

<sup>4</sup> Early on this century the government created Tribal Trust Boards to oversee local concerns. As an arm of the Department of Maori Affairs, these Boards were extremely paternal and often dependent on the whims of Ministers of Maori Affairs. In 1997 the Ngai Tahu Bill was passed, allowing for a more tribally directed Board now known as Te Runanganui o Ngai Tahu (The prime Council). Members are representatives of regional Maori councils or Runanga. Whether this is to have any major impact on Maori is yet to be seen.

<sup>5</sup> Harry C. Evison, *Te Wai Pounamu, The Greenstone Island: A history of the southern Maori during the European Colonization of New Zealand*, (Christchurch, New Zealand: Aoraki Press, 1993) 17

outside the official hegemony of colonisation. As such her authentic-unauthenticity places her in the vulnerable position of needing to 're-make' herself to be able to participate in official (legitimated) discourses of representation. This re-making is what produces the pragmatic traditionalism referred to earlier.

Spivak's use of 'catachresis' is relevant here for theorising the specificity of southern Tahu experience under colonialism. A catachresis is, technically, the incorrect use of words or the abuse of a trope or metaphor.<sup>6</sup> As such it involves a deliberate wresting of a term from its 'proper significance', as in a mixed metaphor. This incompatible mixing, whereby two different paradigms are forced to inhabit the same space represents the postcolonial condition. It is also the space that the postcolonial does not want to, but has no option to, inhabit. These concept-metaphors are at the basis of, and help illustrate the double-bind or condition of postcoloniality. In relation to the majority of southern Tahu women her location as not quite Maori, not really white, can be described in the following way.

There is always a space in the new nation that cannot share in the energy of this [colonial] reversal. This space has no established agency of traffic with the *culture* of imperialism. Paradoxically, this space is also outside of organised labour, below the attempted reversals of capital logic. Conventionally, the space is described as the habitat of the *subproletariat* or the *subaltern*.<sup>7</sup>

Thus southern Tahu woman's position (outside marae politics) as inauthentic offers up the possibility of 'uncontamination'; the 'native' who can escape the double-bind of reverse-imperialism (neo-colonialism), implied by de-colonisation. She has not been imbued with the culture and therefore the ideology of postcoloniality as unnatural. Southern Tahu woman is not placed to participate in the de-colonisation of her psyche as something to be re-modelled. This means she is actually in a position to engage in an active displacement of the Empire-Nation as her central focus. She is in fact the 'authentic' insurgent nationalist.

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<sup>6</sup>Gayatri Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic*, (1990) 154; For an example of how Spivak uses this term see also, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, (1993) 61

<sup>7</sup>Gayatri Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, (1993) 78

## Reverse imperialism and the authentic insurgent

For me personally, the vulnerability implied by authentic-unauthenticity is what marks the trace of postcolonialism. A trace that works as a sign-post, to remind us of the effects of colonialism that cannot be easily covered. In this way I find southern Tahu displacement from representations a cause for celebration, an ironic gesture of defiance in the face of offensive calls for de-colonisation. I recall my aunt's remarks about never being able to be Maori. At that time she was seventy years old and had spent the better part of her life fundraising for, and then working in the kitchen of our local marae. Her words were not ones of regret, but rather amazement at the spectacle she was expected to inhabit.

Therefore my reaction to calls to de-colonise my thinking are never taken lightly. Nevertheless, articulating a response is not an easy option available to me given my heightened awareness of how my voice is located, or more specifically not located inside the space of resistance. Still I was fascinated with the way that Maori woman as feminist was positioned in Maori studies as the voice of 'contamination'. This notion of defilement tends to reflect the general misappropriation of meanings around women's relationship to tapu (sacred), often passed off as traditional.<sup>8</sup> Indeed misunderstandings of tapu and noa (free) that position women as contaminated for bodily reasons, appear to have attached themselves to a more recent view of contamination situated in te hinengaro (thought). Accordingly, while Maori have been critical of colonial representations, I remain disturbed at how easily the trope of 'noble savages' continues to reinscribe contemporary images.

Often notions of women's contaminated state are blamed on the misunderstandings of 19th century ethnographers. Uncritically posed as a recognisable and understandable error, (they were not Maori), has not lead to any substantial deconstruction and hopeful disintegration of 'traditional' thought and practice. The easy slide from 'promiscuous maiden' to a conflation of Maori women as icons of 'natural existence' by virtue of their indigenous status indicates for me a fairly simplistic reversal in the 'ignoble savage'. The issue of our status as object is merely transcribed as a sort of innocent inquiry and validated by the adoption of similar metaphors in nationalist rhetoric to counter representation.

That look was thought for a long time to be a stolen one because it was that of a stranger, from outside the home and the city. For several decades now, as one nationalism after another is successful, one realises that inside the Orient delivered

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<sup>8</sup>For a particular critique of the notion of Tapu see, A. F. Hanson, 'Female Pollution in Polynesia', *Journal of Polynesian Society*, 91, (1982) 335-91

unto itself, the image of woman is no differently perceived: by the father, the husband, and in a way more troubling still, by the brother and the son.<sup>9</sup>

So while it can be argued that white men infused with the peculiar repression of Victorian morality legitimated their own perversions and pornographic tendencies through studying Polynesian female sexuality, the problem for me is that this view effectively positions this 'misunderstanding' as an event in the past. As such, it also plays down the role of Polynesian men in reinforcing these misrecognitions, many whose own fantasies of self-importance were conflated by their privileged role as informants. The predominant use of male informants in most areas of ethnography covered during my time in Maori studies, did not in itself engender much reflection.

Contrarily the use of Maori women as informants needs to be theorised in relation to the contemporary production of 'truth texts'. Part of this problematic resulted from the wholesale use of male informants. However, feminist criticism tends to focus solely on the gender of the informant. Articulated as a problem of women's absence, attention is diverted away from examining the truth value produced in texts of native informants.<sup>10</sup> On another level, Maori interpolation into modes of representation has as its primary focus the legitimation of text by virtue of the ethnicity of the writer. This situation is prevalent in all areas of academic research, where the anxiety to produce the truth is much more visible. This desire for truth does not recognise its capacity to construct its own veracity and as such it at this point that I take issue.

Accusations of tokenism in relation to Maori informants is not new; however this appears to have had little impact on researchers. So while I am critical of how our voices are used it seems to me that it is a disavowal of those academic codes that structure texts of authenticity, that allows for the construction of an effect to stand in for the problem. Thus the obvious tampering, implied by the insertion of ethnicity as a signifier for truth, bypasses the greater difficulty of representation as the manufacturing of privilege. Feminist attempts to counter the patriarchal tendencies of nationalist discourse to re-write history, through the use of Woman's voice, can only support existing paradigms of knowledge.

The problems outlined above however cannot be easily resolved through polemical discussion. I listen to my son as he defines for me what bell hooks meant when she spoke about 'black womanhood' and for reasons not immediately obvious to him I am

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<sup>9</sup> Assia Djebar, cited in Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem* translation, Myrna Godzich and Wlad Godzich, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) xxii.

<sup>10</sup> Joan W. Scott has focused feminist attention towards these issues in relation to 'agency' and 'experience'. See for example her essay 'Experience', *Feminists Theorize the Political*, J. Butler and J. W. Scott, eds., (New York: Routledge, 1992) 22-40



disturbed. He senses it and attempts apologetically to get me to interpret for him what it should be. I shrug him off with the statement "I am an eternally ungrateful native". But these feelings increasingly unsettle me. If I was to take a political stand on the subjectivity of Maori women, how then is this possible given that Maori woman as a subject doesn't really exist? Certainly there is an image out there that is Maori woman, and there are the women I grew up with, who sort of look like me/H(h)er/You, but is that it? Who is She? and will I/We recognise Her as *like* Us?

### **The Politics Of 'difference' In Contestations Of Colonialism**

Participation in the feminist project has created a need, an anxious moment, whereby Maori women must now make visible their right to enter the 'universal' culture of feminist politics. Clarifying about 'participation' is crucial for understanding what is being negotiated here. The desire to enter into feminist politics, on our own terms, as a distinct category that would represent Maori woman's specificity, enables the construction of plural feminisms as a response to the immediate gesture of inclusion. This however has failed to alter the territorial boundaries of feminism, and as such is in danger of ignoring the exclusionary nature of feminist politics. Exclusions which often haunt feminist attempts at plurality gloss over this offence and obscure the recognition of the totalising impetus of Pakeha feminism's grand illusions.

Debates about difference that seek to acknowledge the heterogeneity of feminisms and by extension 'woman' slide over previous antagonisms within feminist inquiry. I refer here to feminist attempts to release 'Woman' from her location as an unproblematic signification for difference.<sup>11</sup> There have been limited successes in releasing the category Woman from its fixed referent, but the differences exposed can often be seen to have collapsed into contemporary debates and reifying of 'difference'. Articulated most often as a *difference-from*, one of the problems with this is that, rather than building on the complex insights gained during those earlier contestations, recent theorising of 'difference' has simply reconfigured an unproblematic signification of Woman as a central axis and irreducible that continues to 'other'.

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<sup>11</sup> For examples of feminist theories of 'locational politics' see also; Gloria Anzaldua, *Making Face/ Making Soul - Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1990); Linda Alcoff, 'Cultural Feminism versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 13 (Spring, 1988) 405-36; Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14 (Fall, 1988) 575-99; R. Radhakrishnan, 'Negotiating Subject Positions in an Uneven World', *Feminism and Institutions*, L. Kaufman, ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) 276-90; Adrienne Rich, 'Notes Towards a Politics of Location', *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose, 1979-1985*, (new York: Norton, 1984) 210-32

These multiple axes of difference cannot be represented in the condition of 'other', but must surely disrupt its own designation. Maori woman's heterogeneity is such that she as 'other' cannot contain the contradictions of difference at one easily identified site. It is this multiplicity of intersecting differences that we must pay attention to if we are to resist the assimilation of these multiplexes at a particular site. While we have begun to recognise the malleability of identity as culturally produced, it is this misrecognition of intersecting categories at specific historical contexts that allows for the conflation of Maori woman as different and other.

Under the sign of difference, Maori Woman illuminates a whole constellation of ideological categories and functions. As a trope, the representation of this difference serves discursively to deflect the responsibility and anxiety of imperialism. That process of deflection itself by which the other takes on the potential for inclusion functions to demystify the productive continuation of imperialist ideology. Clothed in the garb of difference, Maori Woman serves momentarily to formulate a discourse of difference from which Pakeha feminists in turn create discourses of inclusionary politics that act as rhetorical devices to protect their privilege. It is this dynamic that reproduces as well as highlights the limitations of easy alliances under conditions of postcoloniality.

As a representation of difference, this image of Maori Woman serves a double purpose of including and conjoining both Woman and Native, thus thwarting the possibility of the textual separation of this metonym, a move that would reveal its participation in colonial constructions. This elision is not only a pre-requisite but also an imperative, that conceals contradictory relations of power, and (re)produces the very colonialism it sets out to disturb. The absolute incommensurability implied by this requires a more profound acknowledgment of how postcolonialism alters and disturbs current efforts at de-colonising feminism in New Zealand.

The instability aroused through these antagonistic relations undermines the possibility of retrieving Maori woman from her fixed referent, as if there were some validating signpost pointing that would enable me to say; 'this is Her'. Yet I can't help wondering at the stakes presented by this dilemma. It seems to me that everyone wants a piece of this woman. Colonialism set out to save her from native men, native men claim her as a way to retrieve their humanity, white women want to save her from this fate, brown women claim prior ownership, and now, shit, my own son imagines it his duty to fight for the 'sistas'. It seems clear to me then that Maori woman's body is up for grabs.

Positioned as the vehicle through which feminism attempts to re-write her history and participation in contemporary politics, Maori woman as official 'subaltern' offers up the possibility for even greater offence in terms of her violation under representational

politics. Our commodification as an easily identified trope for difference is an example of colonialism's ability to absorb all difference back into itself. Feminism seeks to return to a 'beginning', no longer its own, but that of an 'other' who must now carry the burden of representing an 'authentic feminism'.

In this chapter I have tried to highlight the double-bind that inhibits Maori women's capacity to speak from that location she has been allocated by feminism's inability to take seriously the postcolonial condition. At the same time I have indicated the particular location of the subaltern whose distance from representations can only be explained in terms of 'absence'. The highly determined specificity of our location has not protected us from those who continue to define our identities and instead has increased paternalistic sentiment towards us.

In the next chapter I will discuss the notion of colonialism as a structuring principle in the formation of knowledges here in New Zealand. To achieve this I will be examining the university as a site for legitimization of the status quo. I have already illustrated many of the difficulties experienced by myself as a teacher of a Maori perspective of social work. In the following chapter I focus on my personal responses to working in the academy as student and teacher.

## Chapter 5

### Colonialism in the classroom and as pedagogy

I often come to embody the "authentic" authority and experience for many of my students; indeed, they construct me as native informant in the same way that left-liberal white students sometimes construct all people of colour as the authentic voices of their people. This is evident in the classroom when specific "differences" (of personality, posture, behaviour, etc.) of one woman of colour stand in for the difference of the whole collective, and a collective voice is assumed in place of an individual voice.<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Chandra Mohanty's quote exhibits a particular bind that Maori women face inside the academy. For me, at least as teacher and student, the burden experienced by being viewed as a representation of the 'collective' affects the ways in which I speak. At the same time it has forced me to examine how my voice is framed and to question the efficacy of the 'difference' this is intended to make. While Mohanty's essay offers an incisive critique of the impact of 'Race and Voice' in the academy, and the location of women of colour at this site, I would like to extend this discussion to examining the impact of gender on both race and voice at a more localised site. This site is of course the academy in New Zealand, and as such our focus must take account of the impact of colonialism on pedagogical practices as well as the less overt presence of epistemologies that structure knowledge and meaning.

A number of educators, both at home and abroad, have argued that the classroom is a site where meanings are contested, and as such represents a struggle over power relations.<sup>2</sup> However, the contradictions Maori women face inside the academy impact on our ability to create and maintain strategies that will be of benefit to us as we enter tertiary education. In this chapter I discuss the contradictory spaces occupied by Maori

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<sup>1</sup>Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'On Race and Voice: Challenges for Liberal Education in the 1990s', *Cultural Critique*, Vol. 14, (Winter 1989/90) 194

<sup>2</sup>J. Codd, R. Harker, R. Nash, eds., *Political Issues in New Zealand Education*, (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1990); See especially the work of Anne-Marie O'Neill and Sue Middleton in this volume; Gary McCulloch, ed., *The School Curriculum in New Zealand: History, Theory, Policy and Practice*, (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1992); Eve Cox, Kuni Jenkins et al., eds. *The Politics of Learning and Teaching in Aotearoa*, (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1994); Harvey McQueen, ed., *Education is Change: Twenty Viewpoints*, (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 1993); J. Morss & T. Linzey, eds., *Growing Up: The Politics of Human Learning*, (Auckland: Longman Paul, 1991); Ruth Fry, *It's Different for Daughters: A History of the Curriculum for Girls in New Zealand Schools, 1900 - 1975*, (Wellington: NZCER, 1985); See Kathie Irwin (?); Graham Smith and Linda Tuhiwai Smith; Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myrna Bergman Ramos, (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).

women and analyse the effects of colonialism within the academy. Part of this complexity, as I have been at pains to point out in this dissertation, is the way in which our voices, our desire to speak, are always concomitant to a discursive arrangement of factors that in turn censor or, more directly, speak in our absence. Exacerbating these issues is the very real sense that Maori studies as academic discipline, has fought a long hard battle for legitimacy. The relationship between the academy and the social, economic and political body is often understated, for it is at the site of knowledge production that society comes to know itself. For knowledge, the very act of knowing, is related to the power to self-define. Thus the emergence of Maori studies departments inside universities coincided with a shift at the political level.

This shift is important for a number of reasons and cannot be underestimated, but for the purposes of the argument I wish to pursue, I shall deal only with those dynamics that directly impact on the insertion of minority (Maori women's) discourses into the academy. That is not to deny the importance of other determinants that express themselves in a variety of ways through knowledge codes. In this instance however, my focus is centred on the effects of this political activity on the ways that Maori women's voices are circumscribed by these struggles, identifying those strategies that may resist the absorption of Maori women's voices into highly determined frameworks of resistance. I begin with an obvious contradiction that questions the over-determination of the native subject. Alongside this is Ang's contention that certain strategies result in appropriations. These questions are intended to foreground ways in which Maori women struggle and seek out strategies to enable them to contest the structures we inhabit.

The determinate is not that determined after all.<sup>3</sup>

The trouble is that such reparation strategies often end up appropriating the other rather than fully confronting the incommensurability of the difference involved.<sup>4</sup>

The incommensurability between the Maori question and gender question, for me, is best left as irreconcilable because it holds that trace or irrevocable mark of colonialism. It seems to me to be more productive to actually permit those contradictions that attach themselves to Maori women to become clearer rather than to attempt to mediate what is in effect a clue to the efficacy of colonialism. As indicated in the title of Ien Ang's article; *I am a feminist. But...*, the incongruity of simplistic appeals for difference can never entirely mediate the contradictions women inhabit. This, for me, is the problem

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<sup>3</sup>Ashis Nandy (1983) 85

<sup>4</sup>Ien Ang, "I'm a Feminist. But...", (1995) 60.



with theories of difference. Because they attempt to 'mediate' difference into something more comforting, they underwrite their ability to make visible the very difference they endorse. Attention to how women are positioned in terms of histories of political and regional arrangements of power can be explained away in terms of differences. These differences were to make themselves more explicit for me as a student in Women's Studies, despite the more obvious red herrings that confronted me.

Enrolling as an undergraduate student in Women's Studies at a University within my own rohe (region), the irony of seeking acceptance into the programme from both a North American and Pakeha woman sat uneasily with me. The part that imperialism plays in the construction of knowledge in the academy cannot be located at an interpersonal level and I do not mean to suggest that the existence of two white women is sufficient evidence of this. The irony for me as a southern Tahu woman is related more to feminists' attachment to 'Woman' and the implication that I would find 'her' in a Women's Studies course. That I was to later forge a series of relationships with these women around feminist issues has never fully stifled this unease. The structural politics of feminism in relation to Maori women, and the uses of our voice to counter resistance from those groups assumed outside of Treaty rhetoric, exacerbate conditions of comfort and congeniality. At that time however I was more concerned with engaging conversations and participating in form of dialogic that would empower me to create strategies that would make a real difference in the way that colonialism impacted on Maori women's lives.

As a woman I imagined I would find an empathy in Women's Studies that would acknowledge Maori woman as a legitimate category in her own right. It was not long before it became clear to me that 'legitimate' theorisations around her status as woman, and here I am specifically referring to Donna Awatere's essay 'Maori Sovereignty' as the required reading in relation to Maori women, appeared to unproblematically lock her inside a highly determined notion of ethnicity. As a racialised subject, Maori woman could be subsumed within generic classifications of Maori, where the specificities and particularities of her gender are easily appropriated and absorbed into a nationalist patriarchy.

My position as an educated southern Tahu woman made me increasingly suspicious of nationalist discourses that subsumed Iwi, (tribe) under the more general term of Maori. It was difficult for me to accept that the academy, as a site for knowledge production, was totally ignorant of differences between Iwi. Even now I remain uneasy with a politics of collectivity that is very different from the system under which we currently live. In general terms Iwi nationalism embraces a liberal logic that is numerical in relation to power; another numbers game. In this way I am in no doubt that calls for

solidarity between Iwi will further disenfranchise southern Tahu because of our smallness in relation to other Iwi. If Treaty issues guarantee undisturbed possession for Hapu, then in spite of nationalist rhetoric to the contrary, it seems to me that southern Tahu have a lot to lose in terms of resources. As a group whose experience of colonialism includes marginalisation by other Iwi in recent times, the use of Maori as a signifying category is not as stable as many have presumed.<sup>5</sup> Therefore Awatere's notion of 'Maori Sovereignty' that was uncritically presented as representative of Maori women did not sit comfortably with me.

As I have pointed out earlier in relation to Smith and Taki, I am concerned that texts about feminism written by Maori women tend to take as their audience non-Maori women, as if they do not need to acknowledge other Maori women and their particular experiences; we are assumed to be present in their voice. Maori women writing need to make a space for other women to intervene, to talk to us in a way that confirms our differences from each other. As a sign for Maori women's inclusion in Women's Studies, Awatere became a central focus for theorising our position. Still extremely difficult for some women in the class to read, 'Maori Sovereignty' set the tone for discussions in a way that concealed differences between Maori women. The result was that Awatere's essay in fact became the entrance point for non-Maori women to talk about themselves. These personal narratives inevitably collapsed onto issues of race and exhibited the ways in which gender and class are negated even in this context. The result reflected the usual assortment of denial, accusations and personal confessions; formations that situate knowledge at a site that privileges the experiences of non-Maori women and permit the racialisation of gender.<sup>6</sup>

During this time I was not completely ignorant of the impact my presence in classes had and for a time enjoyed the discomfort my Polynesian gaze presented. Still the anonymity of sameness that notions of gender uncritically evoke were denied me. It was clear that the privilege of my location, 'varsity' student with the promise of upward class-mobility, was unable to transcend the production of Maori woman as subaltern. Nevertheless the disjuncture between what I felt to be my reality and the incongruity of how I was perceived, became for me an enabling sort of violation that I could use strategically to further my own interests. The relegation of 'woman - native - other' to the position of pure subaltern, guaranteed attention when I spoke. That I often unashamedly participated in and capitalised on what was to all extents and purposes an

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<sup>5</sup>For a more recent and specific discussion on Ngai Tahu and our relationship to other Iwi see; Hana O'Regan, 'Ko Te Kurupopo - The Festering Wound', (1995)

<sup>6</sup>Sara Suleri, 'Woman Skin Deep: Feminism and the Postcolonial Condition', *Critical Inquiry*, 18, (Summer, 1992) 756-69 This essay is interesting as an example of how women of colour reproduce this tendency when speaking about themselves.

ontological and epistemological distortion of myself as Maori woman, illustrated for me the capacity for inclusion attached to demands for 'voice'.

Certainly I never pretended to speak on behalf of anyone else. Yet what was clear to me was that these were the questions never asked. This anomaly was to later reveal itself as a pre-requisite for speech, a situation that soon began to unravel, exposing whose interests were actually being served. My inability to control the terms within which I sought articulation soon became evident as I struggled to resist the false comfort that essentialising enabled. This dynamic presents itself again and again in terms of my relations with non-Maori women.

### **The Glass Ceiling of Representations and Dialogue**

As women our desire for dialogue cannot, as Spivak points out, stand in as a denial of history, structure and the resultant positioning of subjects.<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that dialogue is impossible, that we should not strive to make conversations. Rather it is important that when we do this, the failures of such a project must be made the focal point. The discomfort hinted at earlier relating to my friendship with those convening Women's Studies at that time, is the result of how each of us is positioned. Our recent attempt to write together highlights this notion of failure for me. Attentive to how we are to be positioned made explicit the particular nuances of failure, that for me presented themselves as an example of the limits of conversation under specific conditions. The sense of absolute helplessness that often confronted me within the boundaries of designated speech was palpable. I literally banged my head on the glass ceiling of representations whenever I attempted to move out of that space designated 'Maori woman talking'.

This frustration was not mine alone, and the impetus to discuss these limits in itself created our desired conversation. Still our ability to translate our speaking into words on paper, at each point, fell prey to a denial of history and the artificial structuring of subject positions. The limitations of writing and speaking together was an explicit example of colonialism's ability to absorb resistance. This imperial stain, which we would not want to cover over, suggests to us the pain involved in 'negotiating the structures of violence'.<sup>8</sup> Our vulnerability, revealed by our separate locations inside the political economy that structures relations in New Zealand, demands this negotiation as

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<sup>7</sup>Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic*, (1990) 72

<sup>8</sup>ibid, 138-151

fracture. A wound that reveals the impossibility of neutral dialogue, that reminds me that 'if you escape in the end you lose'.<sup>9</sup>

Turning my back on incidents like this, a turning in the manner that 'pure' resistance implies, is never an option that postcoloniality affords. Calls for a separate space where Maori women can talk unimpeded covers over the wound of colonialism. This is because all activity in this place is deemed neutral and unimpeded. My rejection of this place in terms of the 'freedom' it evokes from colonial structures, presents the sort of double-bind that I have been trying to articulate. However constructed in resistance to the inevitability of colonial structures in New Zealand, this space is a space the postcolonial must negotiate with if she is to highlight the messy complicity that her signification enables.

During my time in the Maori Department differences between Maori were rarely mentioned, while issues of rank and Iwi geography, as more salient than gender, were clearly overlooked through a highly selective and pragmatic adherence to Maori 'tradition' among the 'young guns' of the department. These notions of traditionality in respect of women tended to view the role of Maori women as complementary in a way that was translated to mean supportive of 'men's' aspirations. It was argued that women were the first voice to be heard in ritual encounter and therefore need not concern themselves with not having a voice. For me this positioned women as a timeless cultural product that ignored our contemporary reality. Tradition uncritically invoked in this context becomes 'a higher authority that one obeys, not because it commands what is *useful* to us, but because it *commands*.'<sup>10</sup> Yet precisely because culture and the traditions they enable are productions rather than products, what we must guarantee for future generations is not the preservation of tradition as unassailable products, but the capacity for cultural productions.<sup>11</sup>

This poem captures the sense of ongoing cultural production that concerns me:

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<sup>9</sup>ibid, 45

<sup>10</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, cited; R. J. Hollingdale, ed, *A Nietzsche Reader*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977) 87

<sup>11</sup>For an interesting argument on the preservation of the capacity for cultural production, see; Manuela Carneiro Da Cunha, 'Children, Politics and Culture: The Case of Brazilian Indians', *Children and the Politics of Culture*, Sharon Stephens, ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995) 282-291

Custom  
misapplied  
bastardised  
murdered  
a frankenstein  
corpse  
conveniently  
recalled  
to intimidate  
women <sup>12</sup>

As a Maori woman my body felt the weight of ideological representations alongside my persistent efforts to erase this print of propaganda. Thus my personal rejection of nationalist representations of tradition and identity politics is also informed to a large extent by a personal perception of my body as a medium for graffiti by both nationalist and neo-colonial discourses. It became obvious to me that my particular phenotype evoked specific responses within the academy. As a consequence the political and intellectual territorialism of subject-ownership that marks out theoretical boundaries in the academy saw me slide in and out of the Maori and education departments in search of a discipline that registered Her presence, as deserving its own particular attentions.

Similarly, during my time in the education department I constantly wondered at precisely what point native women entered educational discourse? The uneasy alliance between terms such as 'Woman', 'Maori' and 'Feminism' expressed a specific failure of language to mediate contradictions, where at each point something was lost. If we say Maori, this is often as generalised as 'man', while 'Woman' remains an appellation for 'non-native'. In this way the She referred to many in educational texts cannot effectively accommodate Maori woman. Subsequently she enters educational texts as a subsidiary to someone else's agenda.

Representations of Maori women within Maori studies that spoke eloquently of a complementary status often appeared to me extremely apologetic of their own male bias. I felt disturbed by the conflation of tipuna wahine as a symbol for Maori women. As a potent signifier within indigenous narratives women as historically political entities have tended to focus attention away from the contemporary location of Maori woman and her postcolonial subordination as primary care-giver to whanau. <sup>13</sup> Indeed

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<sup>12</sup>cited in Margaret Jolly, 'Specters of Unauthenticity', *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 4 No. 1, (Spring 1992) 49

<sup>13</sup>Statistics differ widely for Maori. Despite statutory stamps of legitimacy, many Iwi challenge often challenge those processes that both gather and collate figures, often arguing that many Maori do not cite Iwi affiliations. The over-representation of Maori women as sole parent caring for children alone, and on



her role as the primal life force in recent times often enlarges this role to the detriment of other equally important activities.

Objections from Maori women today, concerned with an overt manifestation of patriarchal power at important political sites, are undercut by the symbolic ordering of representations that focus primarily on woman's nurturing role. Thus the notion of Maori woman as 'historically free' has been captured by a masculinised nostalgia that conceals his desire for unchallenged access to her body and subsequently unfettered representation. Faced with the reality of women's lives, male nationalism is unable to sustain such admirable sincerity in the face of her present position.

So while we may value women who have achieved some recognisable feat, the danger is that this is read as and often stands in for representation of the majority. The accompanying nostalgia that is part of a postcolonial dilemma located inside settler societies promotes an uncritical view of the self in society. Under these terms, women presumed to be closer to nature are transformed into iconic emblems of the native womb. Such strategies of containment can be best seen in those images aimed at Maori women who are more often than not featured with pregnant bellies.<sup>14</sup> Spivak has expressed this relationship in the following way:

This stake is represented on two registers: childbearing and soul making. The first is domestic-society-through-sexual-reproduction cathected as 'companionate love'; the second is the imperialist project cathected as civil-society-through-social-mission. As the female individualist, not-quite/not-male, articulates herself in shifting relationship to what is at stake, the 'native female' as such (*within* discourse, *as* a signifier) is excluded from any share in this emerging norm.<sup>15</sup>

My entrance into the academy had been forged alongside accusations that we as Maori women continue to be excluded from participation in the construction of knowledges about 'us'. It was not apparent at first that my geographic location and Iwi affiliation would set me apart from other Maori. While I was fully cognisant of this tension, it did not occur to me that I would be struggling with this type of untheorised discrimination

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a benefit, is widely accepted. That this figure is increasing has yet to be seen. According to the Department of Statistics in Wellington, this data will not be available until March 1997. For a particular breakdown of statistics from the 1991 census, see; *New Zealanders at Home*, (Statistics NZ: Wellington, 1992)

<sup>14</sup>Many of the glossy posters concerned with passing on messages to Maori women about smoking exhibit images of women and babies. See especially that group of posters titled "Tihei Mauri Ora" with the stylised 'open window' into a pregnant womb. (Ministry of Health: Wellington, 1995)

<sup>15</sup>Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism"

within the academy, especially not when I perceived 'our' fight to be directed elsewhere. Indeed I was to realise that the 'us' and 'our', representative of a collective Maori vision had little legitimacy outside of the political rhetoric in which it is often performed. That essentially we were in effect producing a distance between ourselves that effectively positioned the silent masses as our personal 'other'.

With this understanding I prepared to embrace these violations and consciously planted myself deeper, accepting a position to teach a Maori perspective of social work. The anxious necessity to inhabit the conceptual, cultural and ideological legacy of colonialism inherent in the very forms and institutions that produce the space of decolonisation, is thus that space that Maori woman has no option to position herself.

It seems to me that despite my lengthy protestations to the contrary, I have to live with the ever-present violence of cultural identities. Even as I repeat over and over again that I am not Her, I make conscious my complicity, as resistant accomplice to my own misrepresentation. Negotiation under these terms can only ever be theoretical terrorism, a project of dis-establishing knowledges and resisting the tendency for perfect clarity and identifiable natives.

Not a watermelon and chitlin' eatin nigger down South  
But...  
A nigger that'll smack the taste from your mouth!  
(Ice-T)

Last year I wrote an article titled, "Maori: 'the eternally compromised noun', Complicity, Contradictions, and Postcolonial Identities in the Age of Biculturalism".<sup>16</sup> In this essay I attempted to challenge the view that Maori women are considered to be closer to nature. I linked this image to the tendency in Women's Studies courses to frame the 'other' as simply concerned about and less focused on theoretical reflection. My intention was not to privilege theory over practice, but rather to stimulate further exploration of the ways in which Maori women are assigned a space within feminist discourses here in New Zealand.

While I also wished to bring the notion of 'experience' to crisis as an unproblematised form of representation, it was not 'experience' per se that bothered me, but rather the way in which this concept can be used to delegitimise theoretical agency in Maori women. As I would wish to keep this anxiety of experience alive, I am left wondering how it is possible for me to talk with any authority without referring to my experiences?

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<sup>16</sup>Donna C. Matahaere, *NZWSJ* (1995) pp.

Is this simply an autobiographical exercise, a linear construction of one Maori woman's intervention into the feminist project? And what does this say about my attempt to critique the notion of Maori women as 'experiential'? The options open to me are indeed limited. Often what I have to say cannot be said. It is an unspeakability of entangled complicities that threatens to disrupt the authority of voice. For if authority, like experience, is a necessary constituent in the (re)production of knowledges for and about people, what remains for me is the often unsettling project of never being heard.

Since taking up an academic position within Consumer and Applied Sciences, I am constantly reminded that I occupy a theoretical as opposed to 'practice-based' site. This assumption has meant that I am continually marginalised as not quite able to deliver the 'goods' in relation to teaching Social Work. This is reflected also in my status as a part-time Assistant lecturer. Indeed my choice to opt out of the professional diploma in preference to academic study appears to have cemented this misrecognition of me even further. What disturbs me most of all however, is the way in which my resistance to popular images of Maori women has in fact worked against me, and is complicit in reproducing the original offence by my being viewed as ego-centred. I sit back and wonder at the perversity of all this and ponder the way in which my experience materialised into written words which are now being used against me. At the end of my essay in the journal, I asked the question; "Is this possible?".

Then as now, I wrote to contest the alibis written on my body by others. Even then I was acutely conscious of that moment of jeopardy, a moment of speaking that enables the annihilation of voice. In hindsight I curse my naiveté, and plan ways to get out of that corner, while my sister laughs at my arrogance. Reminding me in the friendly banter of dissin', which is part of the shared personal that we as sisters often communicate in, that at the end of the day I am 'just another nigger from down south', one of the authentic-inauthentics that inhabit the perilous positionality afforded by postcoloniality. The paradox of contestatory representations that I attempted then cannot but aid in recasting the subject as object. Reflections from my gaze turn back against me as a reminder of the limited and limiting terms within which resistance can be spoken.

### **Enabling violations and representation**

To write against the grain, exploring the possibilities of enabling violations, while maintaining some sort of integrity to literary conventions, is to place myself in a highly vulnerable position. Despite my sister's caution of the arrogance I exhibit in daring to write, I continue to write and in the process unwrite myself. This reflexivity acknowledges that what privilege I may have is always already tainted with a sense of

loss. It is a reminder to me of my own complicity and willingness to enter theoretical debates and stake out a claim; a claim that can only ever participate in the textual violence of representations.

It appears to me that rather than successfully challenging meanings constructed around Maori woman, I have simply re-designed the frame. This inevitable framing of native woman within a discourse of authenticity is a by-product of colonialism that both enables and encourages a censoring of voice, thus exposing the complicit relationship of native representations with contemporary forms of colonialism. Resistance under these terms is always tainted by the knowledge that if I am not 'her', then I must be 'you'. However the fluid nature of this frame has already anticipated that movement of recalcitrant natives who can be whipped back into line through fear that is tangible in those already dispossessed from a place to stand inside a settler community.

Part of the trick of resistance is that it can fool the resister into believing that she can slip in and out of the frame at will, thus giving her the illusion of agency. An agency that can supposedly be separated from the context in which it is produced. The liminality imagined by this sets her adrift from those she must be in alliance with to gain her status as Maori woman. However, the irony of this displacement may yet still hold the potential for movement within the confines of this offence. This is because 'she' isn't really 'you', but can only ever be a poor imitation of both Her and You. A living nightmare of miscegenation that threatens to disrupt the possibility of the 'difference' permitted here, a difference that must inevitably only ever reconfigure colonialism's frame.

The ambivalence I felt then in disputing the hegemony of 'epistemic violence' on images of Maori women, has metamorphosed into an act of cultural suicide. Those who perceive my identity as not 'practice-focused' have not changed their understanding of 'Maori Woman'. Instead I am seen as an anomaly, and as a result have relinquished all 'rights and privileges' of the 'authenticated and authorised' voice. A voice that generates authority through having a place to stand, territorially authentic and representative of the (w)hole. It is just not possible to speak from the land-less position I had mapped out. For on what 'ground' do I lay my politics as Maori woman? My ground is the hope of 'slipping in and out' of colonialism's frame, stained with the mark of an already articulated contention.

This became clear during negotiations to allow me to continue with academic study. A Maori woman social worker known to me was part of those conversations. It was difficult for me to respond in a way that did not undermine her work. Eventually we had a two-way dialogue as she appealed to me to 'pick up the wero (challenge) to heal the

whanau'. What became clear during this exchange was the way in which another Maori woman could be used as an effective resource to not only control but also delegitimise another's desires. My desire was not deemed part of the greater desire in which Maori women were located.

In the exchange there was no spoken challenge to my authenticity. The language of 'caring' implicitly shared between and among those present prevented interpretation of my verbal protests as anything other than a carefully worded antithesis. This position marked me outside of these particular shared and cultural meanings; meanings that hinted at the possibility of my eventual inclusion had I participated under those terms already laid down. Yet still, and maybe this will be read as an attempt on my part to destabilise experience in preference to theory, I cannot accept 'my' recent experiences as representing a larger reality. I am unable to imagine a self aimlessly adrift in 'experience', and bereft of the capacity to think. Nevertheless, given the often perilous position of postcoloniality and the irony of misrecognition that this enables, rather than simply dismissing assumptions that some may have concerning me, my intention is to engage with both this misrecognition, and self-imposed dis-articulation as a site from which to theorise what is at stake in claiming a space for Maori feminisms.

The contemporary location of feminist politics in New Zealand uncritically perceived as that pure space where woman is free, or in the case of Maori woman, the space where she becomes Woman, deserves attention.<sup>17</sup> As indicated earlier, the notion of 'space' is critical here in examining the efficacy of Maori woman's location as feminist and producer of theory. When, where and how do I enter into a critical space of subject-formation that resists current demands for an easily identifiable object? If, as I infer by mimesis, the problem is not Maori woman's representation but the more fundamental gesture of an enduring demand for her presence. Simply restoring to her a lost history, as suggested in the following statement, bypasses the more urgent need for theorising the site in which these representations are produced.

The person who *knows* has all the problems of selfhood. The person who is known, somehow seems not to have a problematic self. These days it is the same kind of agenda that is at work. Only the dominant self can be problematic; the self of the Other is authentic without problem, naturally available to all kinds of complications. This is very frightening.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>I am indebted to Maud Cahill and the many conversations we share for making this point so unashamedly explicit.

<sup>18</sup>Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic*, (1990) 66



Teaching a Maori perspective of social work under these circumstances has made those problematics I have tried to identify more overt. The space offered me within the program here at Otago became for me a battle-field of contested identity and voice as I sought to intervene in the way that social work theory is taught. Given the very applied nature of these courses I am often left incredibly frustrated by the way in which theory is subordinated to an imagined self-evident practice. If my job is to impart those skills that will enable graduates of the program to use in their daily work, it seemed to me that the notion of 'practice' itself needed to be theorised. More importantly this theorisation needed to be placed firmly within the contested reality of Maori as postcolonial subjects. Maori are not only resisting an historical colonialism, but are continually negotiating neo-colonial strategies that produce the space of de-colonisation in which they are encouraged to re-locate.

Certainly Maori, as a result of Treaty breaches were/are relegated to the margins of society. However our resilience in the face of structural prejudice is something to be commended, we did not simply lie down and say "yes sir", neither did we die. Today, however, the 'death' of Maori is often conceived in terms of 'lost identity', 'lost roots', whatever, the intention here of course is the relationship to death. It follows that if there are no 'genuine' Maori left in the present, then by association there can be no 'perpetrators'. So while many are prepared to acknowledge sympathy for what happened in the *past*, a time before the present, there is a difficulty in both accepting the contemporary effects, or recognising the durability and absolute need for colonialism to re-establish itself.

Prue Hyman appears to have no problem with notions of postcolonialism. As discussed earlier, her viewing of this situation as a sort of tragic 'mistake' perpetrated by individuals is now easily resolved at the personal level by recognising the diversity of women's experiences. In the same way that Hyman dismisses the structural and psychological effects of the last hundred and fifty or so years; many students feel colonialism was 'regrettable'. Now however we need to 'look forward'. What is perceived as an historical event that reflects a past error in judgement produces forms of anachronistic sympathy. This sympathy often takes the shape of a desire to know the Other, usually through literary cultural tours that are supported by an obvious Maori presence. At the same time there remains for some a resistance to examine the enduring connection between feminism at home in New Zealand and the enduring nature of colonialism.

Focusing on the contemporary effects of colonialism in relation to social work as practice; indeed my insistence that students place this at the forefront of their analyses, for me as teacher involved a pedagogical crisis. Intent on challenging liberal gestures

that would counter the personalisation of 'good intentions' as a buffer to criticism, meant that I had not anticipated the paralysing effect this would foster in students. The crisis for me initially centred on a conversation I had with a student a few weeks into the course. She had come to inform me that she had decided to opt out of doing social work. Her presence as a North American woman who often spoke out during my classes interested me, and we often spoke after lectures. Together we would talk about personal contradictions, her displacement as migrant in New Zealand and my own displacement from colonial rhetoric as part of a group who never migrated. Memories of her childhood, growing up poor and white in a predominantly black neighbourhood, filtered through many of the stories she shared with me. Still she confided that after listening to me in class she felt paralysed by the privilege of her whiteness and the ensuing fear of replicating colonial tendencies through her desire to 'help the Other'.

That many of the students were feeling disempowered by what I taught concerned me, and I decided to call for anonymous evaluations of my teaching and content. This difficulty was also undercut by the fact that there was palpable opposition to my presence, made more tangible by those who wrote fairly disparaging remarks on evaluations. These comments were racist and offensive, many challenging whether I in fact held any recognisable academic qualification. It was assumed that as Maori I had simply been brought on board as the politically correct presence. I took a long deep breath and braced myself to deal with this violation. Racism I can deal with, especially when it is so explicit. However criticism is extremely complex and I found myself defending my right to speak as a woman when challenged in class by a Maori male. The sexism of this man was not only deemed 'appropriate', but also 'authoritative' within the overall context of this class. While I could have safely sought refuge in the knowledge that many students were simply racist, this did not adequately explain why Maori men teaching in the same area as myself did not have to deal with this sort of behaviour.

It seemed to me that because I refused to teach about 'us' and instead focused our attention on colonialism as structuring knowledges, I had not stayed inside my 'frame', and was somehow perceived as threatening. Using poststructuralist critiques, I had initially encouraged them to move past the sanctity of representations and insisted they question the role of universities as knowledge producers. As such I reminded them that if colonialism is the interpretative power that redefines Iwi under the broad term of Maori, was it really possible to construct a Maori perspective of social work without reproducing colonialism? This particular focus on colonialism was resisted by many students who continued to personalise the term. On the other hand, some students embraced this notion to support their view that Maori today were not 'real'.

In presenting material to the class that questioned the way knowledge is *made* I had overlooked the crucial space of articulation. Afterall we were very much inside the academy, each in our own ways dependent on this location for our very credibility. That students needed to be able to describe culturally appropriate ways of dealing with Maori clients to actually pass the course should not have been taken so lightly by me. Yet the incommensurability of my agenda to problematise the production of Maori as clients, (why are we located thus?) with imparting practice oriented skills, required some sort of negotiation. The paralysis implied by a desire to opt-out, as the previous conversation highlighted, was itself a privilege only available to certain groups. This sense of powerlessness which often shadows my discursions inside the academy seemed to me to be part of what Spivak refers to as an unlearning of privilege as a loss.

Participation at different levels can never exempt us from privilege, but demands that we expose these uncomfortable moments as specific limits that then force us towards our own agitations. For me especially, any paralysis implies a comfort zone, a pure space of distance. Therefore addressing student concerns, I asked that they accept this discomfort as a critical tool for an analysis of their practice. In the end, for many this became an enabling moment where they were able to recognise and accept the limits of their desires and how this haunted their practice. Still there were those who sought refuge by relegating certain groups outside the construction of their own comfort zone. For them especially, the solution within the terms of Treaty rhetoric collapsed itself onto a call for Maori workers for Maori clients, utilising appropriative notions of parallel development.

Discourses intended to challenge the hegemony of social work in New Zealand inevitably focus around ideas of de-colonisation and parallel development. The ability of the state to appropriate resistance is evident in the way that parallel development has become part of the language and structure of statutory social services. Presently the Children, Young Persons and Families Service are in the process of creating Iwi social services. That many Iwi are reluctant to enter into negotiations until there are firm guarantees that any Iwi service will be resourced does not seem to deter statutory organisations as they continue to appropriate the language of the Treaty. Therefore, within the confining language of de-colonisation that pervades social and community work education, parallel development is identified as a central tenet to be pursued when discussing Maori clients. The connections between policy taught inside institutions and ensuing practices outside are therefore useful for examining the academy's role in producing particular responses. State policies coded inside social work theories are then absorbed into specific areas of teaching that effectively depoliticise their statutory challenge through their absorption into an 'alternative theory' genre. As alternative,

parallel development is perceived as an instance of community empowerment, its ability to reconstruct political and theoretical structures effectively dismantled.

This is especially revealing as many of the students I encounter are also involved in other papers that deal specifically with devolving power from the State to communities. As a department that focuses on 'Treaty-based' teaching practices,<sup>19</sup> the notion of a partnership envisaged by parallel services certainly appears attractive. Steeped in humanitarian rhetoric suggestive of most social work theory, students are not encouraged to question the efficacy of parallel development in relation to societal and ideological structures. Instead the production of another space where the Maori 'problem' could be safely located fulfils liberal ideas of equality, while never having to actually change anything. That much local social work theory in New Zealand is pre-occupied with notions of parallel services is illuminating in itself. Therefore encouraging students to examine whether or not the 'client' will benefit from migrating into the space of de-colonisation insinuated by parallelism, is partly drowned out by voices of rhetorical representation.

The difficulty for me located in the space that also presumes a mythical sort of de-colonisation is that there are certain demands that my position is meant to articulate and support. If the crisis in social work is defined in terms of our absence both as teachers and workers, then it seems to me that the insertion of Maori voices can only alleviate colonial anxieties. However, when the problem is reformulated to question our over-representation as objects in social work, the focus need not settle on 'us' as a problem. This displacement is crucial for constructing the terms of critical practice. Contradiction in my work as teacher precludes any easy resolutions of theoretical problems posed in classes. How I am perceived within the structures of colonialism that design my reality certainly impedes any effort on my part for comfort.

The option to simply pack up and leave is not available to me. I am pragmatic enough to realise that there is no space that can offer me protection from the harsh realities of our post-imperial world. At the same time the privileges that do accrue to me as a result of my location are not something I would want to give up. It seems to me that as a Maori woman the price I pay can at times feel too high. Yet my determination to survive the violent reality of my place in this 'grand scheme' along with my private selfishness to use my position to ensure that my whanau (extended family) benefit in the long-term by association, compels me. In the end I can't help but think that none of this shit matters. As my friend Lee said to me after a particularly bad tutorial where she

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<sup>19</sup>Similar to the 80s version of 'biculturalism', 'Treaty-based' teaching is the 90s response to native inclusion. That no-one has adequately defined what this means in practise highlights the ability of words to manage a crisis without actually meaning anything.

sat and listened to one student condemn me for being racist, "I wanted to say to her hey, Donna really doesn't give a shit what you think, go and bleed outside".

In this chapter I have used my experiences as both student and teacher as a point of convergence for theorising the contradictions faced by Maori women inside the academy. It is at this level that all my excursions with feminism and postcoloniality intersect and make sense, at least for the moment. The promise of freedom is always 'around the corner' and my desires are too large to contain. Resistance as I have tried to show is such a messy notion to define under conditions of colonialism. And while the tools we choose to work with can easily turn on us, the lessons learned enable me to take stock of what is really at stake for me inside the academy. In spite of all this I find that just maybe I am not so 'determined' afterall, which is not the same as saying I am not the 'determinate'.



## Conclusion

Difference itself becomes a name for the place where we are all the same - a '*name for*', because difference is not something that can be articulated, or should be articulated, as a monolithic concept. But if difference becomes a name for the place where we are all the same - if difference becomes the name for that - then it stands as a kind of warning against the fact that we *cannot not* propose identity when we engage in actual emancipatory projects.<sup>1</sup>

I began this dissertation with a quote from Gayatri Spivak and I would like to end with her assertion that we 'cannot not propose identity'. It seems to me that this is the ultimate contradiction and a problem that feminism in all her articulations has yet to really respond. Speaking about the 'limits' of 'difference', Spivak reminds us of a politics of 'defiance' involved especially for native women writing and 'speaking out' in a postcolonial context. For myself entangled in a project that for me is intended to be 'emancipatory', the recognition of the limits of my own theorising are stark. If, as I suggested in the beginning, the 'word' itself is so precarious, then in the 'end' I find myself returning to that point of departure.

Feminist theories in New Zealand have for some time been concerned with the 'absence' of Maori women's 'voices' and have endeavoured to ameliorate this condition within their work. Recognising the politics involved in publishing within New Zealand, some feminists deliberately sought out alliances with Maori women and supported their efforts to be heard. This is especially so in the case of Donna Awatere's 'Maori Sovereignty', a book that still has a major impact in Women's Studies programmes nearly fifteen years later. In a similar vein other feminists anxious about accusations of exclusion either 'included' Maori women in their texts or attempted to add them to their analyses.

In a time when 'difference' appears to be uppermost in feminist theorising at home and abroad, the rush to include native women has resulted in an inability to take account of what this means for whom and at what cost. In my dissertation I have tried to resist the tendency to 'homogenise difference' which is a focus of my critique. Whether I have been successful or not is, as Spivak asserts, a clue to the limits of difference itself. The irony and dissension of a project that seeks to destabilise the ground on which difference has flourished may be read as a retreat back into essential categories; but this would be too simple.

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<sup>1</sup>Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Remembering the Limits: Difference, Identity and Practice', (1991) 228

My attention to how feminist theories reproduce monolithic categories under the sign of difference is itself a reminder of the durability of colonialism in a postcolonial settler country such as New Zealand. Official recognition of the Treaty of Waitangi is one way in which I have sought to explicate the efficacy of colonialism in the contemporary moment. For it is an inevitable stain of imperial politics that the symbol of Maori 'sovereignty' can be appropriated to ensure State legitimacy in the 1990s. Yet how do you begin to criticise a politics that presumably acknowledges native people without sliding into the 'enemy's' camp? Throughout this dissertation I have attempted to speak the unspeakable and have shown how the limits of my speaking ties my tongue to a history that can never offer me comfort and a present that may demand my silence.

It is those language codes that structure and rationalise speaking that I have shown impede our ability to respond and alter significantly the terrain in which we are located. The durability of colonialism and its capacity to legitimate particular forms of dissent as rational as I have illustrated requires further attention. Resistance cannot afford to be simply 'oppositional' and 'different' from what it is resisting. Consequently there is no 'space' that native women can occupy that does not bear the trace of imperialism. Strategies in feminist theory that support native women's desire for a 'place of our own' inevitably maintain status quo politics and ultimately relieve the stress that our difference suggests.

The cloak of sanctity that smothers Maori women's voice in feminist texts here in New Zealand will never provide Maori women with the emancipation we seek. Instead it permits non-Maori women to avoid the necessity of an 'encounter' that even today is being denied. What is also denied is the heterogeneity of Iwi Maori. If feminist theories have in more recent times begun to take seriously the problematics implied by the category 'woman', then we really need to begin asking why 'Maori woman' has not attracted the same sort of attention. Through depicting the predicament of Tahu women I wished to draw attention to partial representation of native women in feminist theory written by Maori women. Representations of Maori women as the contemporary 'monolithic-difference' assuage feminist anxiety and provide an alibi for further exclusions.

At the same time I have attempted to focus my criticism on the feminist tendency in New Zealand to re-construct images and representations. As I have pointed out, this concern to 're-make' the image slides too quickly into a reproduction of native women as a 'problem'. As such feminism has yet to take seriously that it *is* the image and not the object that is the problem. While I am sensitive to the politics of image-identification for native women denied access to self-definitions, my personal analysis of what this

involves provides a cautious reminder to native women of our complicity with contemporary offences.

It is at this point in my analysis that I have tried to explicate the pitfalls of 'nationalism' and 'her' relationship to that which is being resisted. I contend that the search for 'indigenous feminisms' is the 90s version of nationalist thought that historically has failed to take hold in the consciousness of New Zealanders. Now however, when as a country we are still coming to grips with Tangata whenua (people of the land), feminist nationalism proposes a formula where we can validate increased non-participation of Maori women in the mainstream affairs of feminist politics. It is through authentication that we reinstate and reproduce static boundaries of identification that have no reality outside of nationalist dogma that produce them.

Throughout my research I often felt overwhelmed by the familiarity of my protest and the insistence by some feminists that Maori women would provide us with 'difference'. The production of 'othering' that was so much part of the colonial encounter has, under the sign of 'difference', taken on a renewed strength, supported by theories of feminism unable to take seriously the challenges of postcolonial crises. In this dissertation I have examined what is at stake for Maori women when feminists here at 'home' demand we speak in an other voice.

My desire to interrogate native woman's voice and location under present conditions of advanced capitalism is not easy. As a result Maori feminisms have been allowed to develop and flourish in the minds of many feminists without the usual rigour and theoretical analysis provided for other theorists in New Zealand. On a personal level my desire to critique the 'space' of Maori women has often meant that my tongue is tied at crucial moments of my analysis. This, as I have shown, is a product of the language structures we inevitably inhabit. I reiterate at this point that 'freedom' cannot be found in languages but instead in the interpretations that we 'translate' from them.

In this dissertation I have questioned the 'subalternisation' of native women and shown how this 'marginal' status undercuts our ability to examine the conditions of our lives in a settled society. If 'difference' has been homogenised then the 'subaltern' has been coded into a more comfortable package. The fact that the 'subaltern' is easily recognised by feminists in New Zealand is a clue to her production in the contemporary moment of feminist theory. As I have mentioned earlier, 'she' can only be recognised from her absence as the particularity of southern Tahu women suggests.

Feminist's theorising 'diaspora' have turned their gaze towards the academic migrant and ignored what it might mean to have never 'migrated' in a country under seige. The wealth

of theoretical implications of this insight have yet to be fully acknowledged in postcolonial countries of the South Pacific. Viewing the industrial urbanisation of the late 1950s in New Zealand as internal-diaspora is one thing, but how do we begin to theorise an event that just does not exist? In my dissertation I have related this problematic to the location of southern Tahu women as 'absence'.

Another important theme that threads itself throughout my dissertation is the notion of Maori women as accomplice to our mis-representation. By this I have drawn attention to how agency is produced and enabled under present conditions. Resistance within this context produces a peculiar form of 'opposition' that is easily absorbed into colonial structures. It is this 'effect' that is a clue to native displacement at a local site that demands a theoretical response within feminism.

If as I suggest quite strongly throughout this dissertation, the 'problem' is not native woman's 'absence', but the *demand* for her 'presence' that results in the un-complication of Maori woman's subjectivity into feminist texts, then the theoretical ramifications of this must be taken on board by mainstream feminism and not diverted elsewhere. Feminists need to consider why, if Maori women's image has undergone such widespread saturation in the media and even more problematically inside feminist's texts, feminists still speak about needing a 'Maori presence'.

Throughout this dissertation I have raised a series of related contradictions, disjunctions, and 'binds'. It is my contention that feminist theories and related practices have yet to take seriously the challenges posed by 'native-contradiction'. I would like to suggest that if the 'native', like the 'subaltern', is so easily recognised, then perhaps this is the most striking clue to her *production*, or re-making under postcolonialism. If we can pin-point the space for her articulation as 'outside' the 'living-space' in which articulatory politics are structured, then we can be assured of colonialism's durability.

So how can the 'native' speak? And where will this articulation occur?

As we come to the end of a century these questions will hopefully force a change in direction for feminist theories as they are currently articulated in New Zealand. It seems to me that the implications that these questions evoke have the propensity to alter the ways in which Maori women's 'voice' will be heard. As such the onus of representations, black woman's postcolonial burden, would change significantly. This movement requires a fundamental shift in the 'gaze', from native women to the 'ground' where voices are located. The ramifications of such a shift in our conceptual theorising would demand more radical changes in feminist behaviour towards Maori women.

More importantly this shift would permit us to theorise the enduring effects of colonialism on feminist articulations. How do we negotiate the violence done to native women's subjectivity in a way that enables us to intensify our gaze on capitalist imperialism at an 'indigenous' site? These questions have yet to be answered satisfactorily. Until such a time Maori women need to speak carefully to the 'colonial encounter'.



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