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**Belonging:
Pākehā women's practices
in Aotearoa New Zealand**

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Belonging: Pākehā women's practices in Aotearoa New Zealand

Abstract

This thesis investigates practices of belonging among Pākehā women in Aotearoa New Zealand. Acknowledging their origins through British or European ancestry, the research explored their belonging using a range of methods. It concludes that women actively enabled their belonging using a range of practices, evident in everyday life.

Understanding the women's practices was assisted by combining theoretical concepts of practice with botanical metaphors to describe the complexity of belonging. Extending the metaphor enabled a deeper understanding of belonging in the Aotearoa New Zealand context as an evolving process, influenced by past practices.

Key words: Aotearoa New Zealand, belonging, gender, identity, oral history, practice, visual anthropology.

To my communities of belonging

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REFLECTIONS

The voices contained in this thesis are those of a selected group of Pākehā women who live in Whanganui. While their voices and practices may convey the sense of belonging experienced by many Pākehā women, particularly those living in the provinces, they do not necessarily represent belonging to Aotearoa New Zealand, or to Whanganui, held by **all** Pākehā women. Metropolitan women are likely to engage in similar practices, although their expressions, attachments and outcomes may differ.

The responses of Pākehā academic women scholars, particularly anthropologists, engaging with Aotearoa New Zealand, and the Whanganui River, are revealed in their writings. Their standpoints and perspectives necessarily differ from that of the research participants. They write as cultural scholars, historians and anthropologists engaging with other cultures, usually located within Aotearoa New Zealand's borders. Academics such as Dame Anne Salmond, Judith MacDonald, Judith Binney, Rosemary du Plessis, Robin McKinlay and Trish Laing (Patricia Kinloch) should be included in this scholarship, and consideration given to their practices of belonging, strongly impacted by cross-cultural engagement. I engaged with the work of Pākehā women authors such as Bonisch-Brednich (1999, 2002) and Park et al (1991), and international scholars such as Strathern (1982) and Kohn (2002) because their focus related more directly to my own investigations. I was particularly interested in how 'ordinary' Pākehā women engaged in belonging.

What stood out in the research participants' practices was the tangential nature of their relationship to Māori. The absence of the Whanganui River as an active component in their belonging puzzled me initially, as did their lack of engagement with 'iconic' city spaces with which I felt an affinity. My surprise arose partly because the river, some of its communities, and some river residents, have become part of my Whanganui experience.

Negotiating the different sets of voices, 'academic' and 'ordinary' was challenging. I did so through ongoing reflection for the duration of the project; by explaining to participants the theory behind some of my questions; and by juxtaposition of theoretical knowledge with personal and participant experience as I wrote.

I was aware of the news-mediated and political debates about Māori and Pākehā. These may have raised the awareness among Aotearoa New Zealanders of Māori practices, and impacted subtly upon Pākehā concepts in everyday life. Ultimately, it was the silences evident in, and the fears expressed through, participant practices and narrative, that enabled me to comprehend how the divide continued. For such reasons, I used Māori concepts and ideas to inform my understanding of how the Pākehā research participants practiced belonging.

Bearing in mind that many factors impact on individual belonging, **further** studies could also investigate how Pākehā scholars, female and male, and metropolitan women, practice belonging in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Penny Robinson
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