Biculturalism, Women’s Collectives, Māori Feminism and Mana Wāhine Māori De-Storying Narratives of Mono-culturalism within Postcolonial Aotearoa/New Zealand

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On 6th February 1840, Governor Hobson proclaimed: “he iwi kotahi tātou” ‘we are one people’ as Māori rangatira signed Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
He iwi kotahi tātou – We are one people?

The beginning of Mono-culturalism in Aotearoa/New Zealand
We are one people?

• Became a rationale for assimilation policies and mono-culturalism.

• Hobson’s words epitomised European attitudes towards Māori. European colonists and Māori were to become one people, one culture and live under one law, a European law, where Māori were to become brown Pākehā and assimilated into European culture.
The Māori Renaissance

- Amalgamation and assimilation policies alienated Māori from their own culture and language until the Māori Renaissance of the 1970s revived the Māori culture and language
Feminism in New Zealand

- First wave concentrated on the suffragette movement
- 1893: Pākehā and Māori women won the right to vote in general elections and Elizabeth Yates became New Zealand's first woman mayor in the British Empire
- 1949: Iriaka Ratana becomes the first Māori woman elected to Parliament
The Personal is Political!

Women’s Liberation

Second wave – Radical feminism and Women’s liberation ‘the personal is political’
Context of Social Movements

• Māori Renaissance and Feminism created a space for dialogue about biculturalism

• A major focus of the early women’s activist groups was the development of bicultural relations between Māori and non-Māori. This focus on Pākehā and Māori and biculturalism reflects the distinctive historical trajectories within Aotearoa/New Zealand and discourses of partnership promoted in the Treaty of Waitangi
Destorying racism and mono-culturalism

Māori and Pacific women issued a challenge to the women's movement at the United Women's Convention in 1979. Donna Awatere (left) and Mona Papali'i (right) accused the movement of racism, arguing that Pakeha feminists ignored the issues most important to Māori women.
Māori feminists have argued that

• biculturalism needs to form a foundation in the first instance rather than focusing on multiculturalism which would bypass indigenous rights.

• A bicultural positioning emphasises cultural and ethnic differences, between Māori and Pākehā ethnicities within wider debates about ethnicity, colonisation and political struggles in Aotearoa/New Zealand.
Highlighting the relationship between

- Māori and Pākehā and biculturalism acknowledges the history of colonization and the commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi (founding document of Aotearoa/New Zealand which guaranteed *tino rangatiratanga* to Māori (self determination for Māori) with its *kaupapa* (philosophy) of partnership between Māori and Pākehā.

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De-storying narratives of mono-culturalism

• Has been an important aspect of feminism within the context of postcolonial Aotearoa/New Zealand in order to create space for biculturalism and distinct Māori feminist frameworks such as *Mana wāhine Māori*, a Māori feminist discourse which affirms Māori women as critical actors for social change.
Mana wāhine Māori ,

• a theory which acknowledges and affirms the mana of Māori women.

• Mana wahine remembers our female ancestors, female deities and affirms Māori women and our herstories within Māori society and within iwi and hapu (Pihama).
Mana wahine theory

- is also referred to as Māori feminist discourses, a theoretical and methodological approach that explicitly examines the intersection of being Māori and female and validates mātauranga wāhine (Māori women’s knowledge) (Simmonds)
Both Maori and Pakeha Women’s groups/collectives

- Actively de-storied and contested monoculturalism via writing, discussion, protest and political activism.
- Several articles on Maori Sovereignty written by Donna Awatere in 1982 and published in the feminist periodical, Broadsheet provided an impetus for debate and discussion.
Women for Aotearoa

• was a group of 10 Pakeha women with a variety of feminist backgrounds who organised around the theory in Donna's articles on Māori sovereignty (Simpkin)

• The group were intellectually stimulated by Donna's Māori-identified politics which challenged them as Pakeha feminists.

• One woman placed Maori sovereignty within the context of feminist theory. She saw New Zealand feminism as having lost its radical potential, and that Maori women radicals were transforming Pakeha society as they were transforming Maori society.
Maori sovereignty articles

• And the interest they engendered coincided with the rise of anti-racist groups and what was happening politically elsewhere.

• 1981 had been the year of the Springbok tour and protests against it.

• 1982 saw a development in awareness of Maori land claims and their relationship to the Treaty of Waitangi.
Donna Awatere (left) and Ripeka Evans (right) are shown on the cover of the October 1982 issue of *Broadsheet*, a feminist periodical founded in the 1970s. Both women were heavily involved in protests against the 1981 Springbok tour and were part of the Patu Squad, a Māori group focused on undermining the tour.
Maori Sovereignty

The cover of Donna Awatere's 1984 book shows kuia (women elders) of Tai Tokerau at Waitangi National Marae on 6 February 1975. The book had originally been published in parts in the feminist journal Broadsheet.
Women’s collectives in New Zealand
• have tended to be strongly political and committed to developing community and feminist engagement with a definable community development process,
• Emerging out of the second wave of feminism in the 1970s many of the women’s collectives began to incorporate feminist-based services for women, run by women (Vanderpyl, 2004).
Bicultural Partnerships between Māori and Pākehā

• Challenges to ‘Honour the Treaty’ by Māori and Pākehā anti-racism groups in the 1970s and 1980s influenced Pākehā women in the women’s collectives, service groups to address the exclusions, racism and monocultural nature of their organisations.

• Increasingly, there were calls for the development of bicultural partnerships between Māori and Pākehā women. (Vanderpyl)
Arguments for bicultural partnership

• were usually based on the Treaty of Waitangi as the founding document of Aotearoa/New Zealand which guaranteed tino rangatiratanga to Māori

• Biculturalism in this context placed the focus on the relationship between Māori and non-Māori (Pākehā and Tau iwi)
Pākehā activist collectives

• sometimes struggled to develop bicultural partnership
• Pākehā members in the activist service groups struggled to make sense of the complex issues that needed to be addressed in developing equal partnerships between Māori and Pākehā.
Issues for Pākehā involved

- examining racism at a personal and institutional level. This entailed addressing complicity in histories of racism as Pākehā, while at the same time developing a positive identity as Pākehā.

- Groups had to work out how to share resources and power in ways that did not reassert a position of Pākehā privilege and domination (Vanderpyl)
• the attempt to bring Māori and ethnic minority women into organisations such as Women’s refuge without specifically changing the organisation

• an assumption that all women could work together and manage their differences through the feminist collective ‘women-friendly’ procedures already in place and would therefore, over time, become comfortable to all new members irrespective of ethnicity.
Te Awamutu Women’s Refuge

• Pākehā members of the Refuge had assumed that collective processes ensured that the organisation would be responsive to Māori women’s needs, and that by participating in the collective processes the Māori women would be able to contribute both as individuals and Māori.
Māori women described

• how difficult they found it to join in and challenge what they experienced as a Pākehā structure in which Pākehā women and Pākehā values remained dominant

• This Refuge example depicts some of the tensions for Māori women coming into an organisation that expects women to fit into a pre-existing framework assumed to be unmarked by ethnicity or racism. (Vanderpyl
Difficulties arose

• because the dominance of Pākehā values was not acknowledged, and the inequality structuring relationships between Māori and Pākehā members was not addressed.
Model of bicultural relations

• involved affirmative action programmes to bring Māori into an existing organisation. Often this was attempted without changing the organisation.

• groups often assumed that the radical feminist collective democratic process was open to, and inclusive of, all women
Strategies, such as:

- specifying identities, antidiscrimination training, and caucusing, were implemented by the activist service groups in order to both engage with differences and challenge relations of inequality between women.

- focus on developing bicultural relations between Māori and non-Māori was prominent in the groups
Complexities

• of de-storying narratives of monoculturalism and restorying with bicultural narratives frequently resulted in intense debates and conflicts.

• Nevertheless, feminist collectives in Aotearoa/NZ have contributed to, and continue to promote, a politics of feminist social change and a commitment to and engagement with bicultural relations.
Māori Feminism and Mana Wāhine Māori have also provided a powerful voice for De-Storying Narratives of Monoculturalism within Postcolonial Aotearoa/New Zealand. Some of those wahine Maori voices include:

Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, Leonie Pihama, Linda Smith, Te Kawehau Hoskins, Kathie Irwin, Naomi Simmonds, Ripeka Evans, Rose Pere and many others.

Image: Mana Wahine by Robyn Kahukiwa
References


• Donna Awatere's *Maori sovereignty*  

• Ripeka Evans and Donna Awatere  

