The Construction of Place: Maori Feminism and Nationalism in Aotearoa/New Zealand

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In his fascinating chapter of “Traveling Theory” in The World, the Text, and the Critic Edward Said speculates on how theoretical frameworks born in response to a particular event or political situation reemerge in a different manifestation when they shift from one place to another, one time to another. The passage through time and space results in overlays of contexts and resistances until the theory is transformed in the new time, place, and context. I want to test Said’s argument here by asking, How pertinent are theoretical frameworks produced in the more densely populated Northern hemisphere, with routinely mobile academics, to those of us living in the Southern hemisphere? This population differential has significantly contributed to the hegemony of scholars and theoretical frameworks produced in the North. The scholar in the South is faced with a difficult choice—either use frameworks that reveal their Northern bias, or only be read locally.

It is with these cautionary words that I want to embark on the topic of Maori (indigenous) feminism, which in my view is a construction of Maori nationalism rather than derivative of the feminist movement in Aotearoa/New Zealand. I will begin by posing a series of questions.

Besides the use of those theoretical frameworks which are inflected with nomadism and produced in the North, other questions that arise at this juncture are: What part does a person’s relationship to the (imagined) contours of land and place play in any discourse on nationalism? What are the specific roles played by women and the women’s movement in the rhetoric of the nation? Is Maori nationalism constructed on the basis of identity or difference? Though this essay is about Maori feminism, the first section will be devoted to answering these questions and setting up my argument. In the second, longer section of the essay, I will analyze Maori feminism in Aotearoa/New Zealand within the national context.

Metropolitan Paradigms of the Northern Hemisphere: Multiculturalism versus Biculturalism

I want to place my discussion of indigenous feminism within the intellectual ambit of two central and well-cited essays, Chandra Mohanty’s “Cartographies of Struggle” and Ella Shohat’s “Notes on the
‘Post-colonial,’” essays that shed light on what indigenousness entails.\(^2\) Mohanty’s essay, among other things, attempts to redefine Third World women, not within any geographical boudaries, but within “particular socio-historical conjunctures” (2). Mohanty perceives a commonality in the struggle of women in the Third World and women of color in the First World, viewing them all as products of the “internationalization of economies and of labour” (2).

With the rise of transnational corporations which dominate and organize the contemporary economic system . . . factories have migrated in search of cheap labour, and the nation-state is no longer an appropriate unit for analysis. In addition, the massive migration of ex-colonial populations to the industrial metropolises of Europe to fill the need for cheap labour has created new kinds of multiethnic and multiracial social formations similar to those in the U.S. Contemporary postindustrial societies, thus, invite cross-national and cross-cultural analyses for explanation of their own internal features and socio-economic constitution. (2)

Mohanty’s argument, empowering though it is to Third World women, is problematic on two counts. First, in its haste to demarcate itself from First World feminism, the argument symptomatically reproduces the same homogenization of the concept “Third World” that Mohanty herself finds problematic in “Under Western Eyes.” Her use of the conditions produced by the global economy as a defining principle, while it takes care of the problematic division of the two hemispheres (Western and non-Western), once more reaffirms Third World women as poor and united in their struggle for survival regardless of their location on the globe. The very structure against which Mohanty argues in “Under Western Eyes”—a homogenized Third World and an equivalent First World—somehow remanifests itself in “Cartographies of Struggle.”

Second, while an alliance based on commonality of struggle is particularly meaningful in a multicultural, ethnically diverse country such as the US, it does not resonate in the same way in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The last census taken here, in 1991, revealed a total population of around 3.5 million: Pakeha (white, Anglo-Celt) New Zealanders accounted for about 80 percent, Maori (indigenous) New Zealanders for about 10 to 12 percent of the population, the rest (consisting of Pacific Islanders, Asians, and non-Anglo-Celt white New Zealanders) being categorized as other. Attention must be drawn to the population breakdown because New Zealand is the only white-settler nation (other than South Africa) that contains a large proportion of indigenous people. This ethnic balance has resulted in a call for biculturalism\(^3\) or partnership sharing, upholding the treaty between Maori and Pakeha, distinguishing New Zealand from Australia, which, because of its greater ethnic diversity and decimated Aboriginal population (between 1–2 percent), has gone the way of multiculturalism.
If Mohanty's concept of a common context of struggle held sway, then we would see the forging of alliances between the various "blacks"—Maori, Asian, Pacific Islander women in Aotearoa/New Zealand. But no such alliances exist. Rather, Asians in particular are perceived as usurpers of that which rightfully belongs to the Maori rather than as kindred victims of the global economy. The prevailing feeling among the Maori has been that including Asian women in the equation will bring about multiculturalism in New Zealand, thus completely bypassing biculturalism and indigenous rights. Multiculturalism would be regarded by the Maori as repositioning them from their tangata whenua, or "first people," status and repositioning them as just another minority. It is their special status in Aotearoa/New Zealand that makes Maori feminists build alliances with Pakeha feminists rather than with their Asian or Pacific Islander counterparts.4

I dwell on Mohanty's essays because they are symptomatic of the notion of multiculturalism practiced particularly in the United States. For instance, multiculturalism as defined by the Chicago Cultural Studies Group functions "to rethink canons in the humanities—to rethink both their boundaries and their function . . . to find the cultural and political norms appropriate to more heterogenous societies within and across nations, including norms for the production and transmission of knowledges" (531). As M. Berube indicates in "Public Image Limited," multiculturalism includes ethnics such as Asians, Latino/as, blacks, and indigenous peoples along with a motley assortment of other disenfranchised groups who are united in their opposition to Western values, the West, and Eurocentrism. Older ethnic groups, such as Italians, Eastern Europeans, and Jews, are assumed here to have been assimilated within the dominant group in the United States. Underpinning the notion of multiculturalism in the United States thus is the desire for racial equality across its population. Only such an interpretation of multiculturalism (as the equality of all racial groups) would even allow for a generalized oppositionality to Eurocentrism. It is also this underlying understanding of multiculturalism that allows Mohanty to see alliances among all the disenfranchised women of the world, who are all victims of Eurocentrism. From this point of view, Native American women make up one minority group among others.

The Antipodes, however, particularly Australia and New Zealand, locate multiculturalism not within issues of race and racism as in the US but within migration patterns that manifest themselves racially. Within the context of Australian multiculturalism, Sneja Gunew comments that "racism is constructed as much in terms of those who are non-Anglo as referring to those who are non-white. It is worth remembering that Italians used to be called 'blacks' and that Arab-Australians still are; one even hears of Greek-Australians speak of themselves as 'black'" (455). Black-
ness or race, then, is a category that serves to indicate recentness of migration to Australia; it is more than a matter of color. Multiculturalism in Australia therefore functions not so much against Eurocentrism (or Anglocentrism) as for "ethnic diversity." It is precisely this definition of multiculturalism based on ethnic immigrants that has demoted Aboriginal Australians to the status of an ethnicity, bypassing the central issue of their land rights. And it is precisely the centrality of land rights to the indigenous Maori and the historical migration pattern specific to Aotearoa/New Zealand that allows the Maori to demand a definition of the state as bicultural rather than multicultural. As mentioned earlier, the high percentage of Maori in New Zealand, in addition to an immigrant population predominantly from Great Britain (80 percent), allows New Zealand to bypass multiculturalism altogether. Furthermore, in New Zealand the distinction between Maori and Pakeha is based on the provisions of the Treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840, which made Aotearoa/New Zealand part of the British Empire. To put it another way, what is meaningful and sensible (within limitations) in the American context and within Mohanty's argument is historically specific only to the United States and does not transfer itself well into another framework with a different history.

Ella Shohat raises similar questions regarding the usage of terms and frameworks in "Notes on the 'Post-colonial.'" Shohat indicates that the old terminology of the Third World has now been superseded by the new term "post-colonial." Addressing the problems attendant on replacing the old term with the new, Shohat points out that the term "postcolonial" collapses very different national-racial formations—the United States, Australia, and Canada, on the one hand, and Nigeria, Jamaica, and India on the other—as equally "post-colonial." Positioning Australia and India, for example, in relation to an imperial center, simply because they are both colonies, equates the relations of the colonized white settlers to the Europeans at the "center" with that of the colonized indigenous populations to the Europeans. (102)

Shohat's challenge to the concept denoted by the term postcolonial is a pertinent response to Mohanty's notion of Third World feminism in that the latter leaves no space for the struggles of Native American women dominated by both American multinational corporations and other feminists of color. In other words, Mohanty's postcolonial feminism, in the name of the common context of struggle, once again erases Native American specificity in a different form of hegemonic violence.

Shohat's essay is satisfying to the Antipodean reader especially when she acknowledges the failure of metropolitan syncretism. She states,

Post-colonial theory's celebration of hybridity risks an anti-essentialist condescension towards those communities obliged by circumstances to assert, for their very survival, a lost and even irretrievable past. In such cases, the asser-
Shohat castigates the promotion of the notion of hybridity so intrinsic to postcolonial strategies of identity formation and reads it within a context of syncretism. She rightly points out that the retrieval of an originary past goes hand in hand with the postmodern awareness of the fact that the originary past is a retroactive construct. This dichotomy is especially evident when the indigene reevokes a glorious and lost past culture, anachronistically skewing chronology by using the technology of the late twentieth century to do so. For instance, as Shohat indicates, the indigenous Kayapo in the Amazon use video cameras to preserve a memory of their culture. Such a move on the indigene’s part ironically underscores the deliberatly retroactive nature of the culture thus preserved, and the indigene herself is as much a product of syncretism as are hybrid/syncretic theorists such as Chandra Mohanty.

While Shohat’s criticism of postcolonial theory’s condescension toward nativism is warranted given the political agenda of indigenous peoples, there is nonetheless a glaring problem with her argument. In disturbing clear-cut distinctions between postcolonials (who are read as hybrids) and indigenes (normally with a nostalgia for a glorious, prelap-sarian past), Shohat situates the latter as postmodern and syncretic as well, and in so doing she displaces them from their traditional relationship to the land, disrupting patterns of identity formation based on landscape and place.

Such a move on Shohat’s part is theoretically sound given the criticism under which traditional anthropology has come. Arjun Appadurai, for instance, asserts that “the link between the confinement of ideology and the idea of place is that the way of thought that confines natives is itself somehow bounded, somehow tied to the circumstantiality of place” (38). Appadurai proceeds to argue that within traditional Western anthropological discourse, this notion of the native’s attachment to the fauna and flora of his or her place is tied to a perception that native patterns of thought are specifically linked to the landscape (38). This perception leads to the incarceration of the native. In an extension of this argument, Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson have indicated that to theorize natives as pure and uncontaminated prior to Western intervention is completely erroneous in that

colonialism . . . represents the displacement of one form of interconnection by another. This is not to deny that colonialism, or an expanding capitalism, does
indeed have profoundly dislocating effects on existing societies. But by always foregrounding the spatial distribution of hierarchical power relations, we can better understand the process whereby a space achieves a distinctive identity as a place. Keeping in mind that notions of locality or community refer both to a demarcated physical space and to clusters of interaction, we can see that the identity of a place emerges by the intersection of its specific involvement in a system of hierarchically organized spaces with its cultural construction as a community or locality. [9]

Gupta and Ferguson correctly indicate the involvement of traditional anthropological discourse with the hierarchization of spaces—Western as primary and non-Western as secondary.

While Gupta and Ferguson, Appadurai, and by implication Shohat make an undeniable assertion, there is an unexplained issue here. Is any attachment displayed by the native to a particular fauna, flora, and landscape merely a construction of the Western anthropologist? Most important, in what context is the native’s deliberate evocation of his or her relation to the land to be taken? In fact, there is a long and illustrious tradition of attachment to place that forms the basis of nationalistic feelings. In Imagined Communities Benedict Anderson associates the primordial sense of a culture’s identity through place with our perception of the “primordialness of language” itself. Anderson points out that “no one can give the date for the birth of any language. Each [one] looms up imperceptibly out of a horizonless past” [144]. Anderson’s statements imply not only that our sense of cultural identity is intertwined with our relationship with and rootedness in the land but also that the way we use language is, in turn, rooted in particular tracts of land. Anderson gives the example of the singing of the national anthem for our experience of place and identity: “No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, ... people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody” [145]. Thus by singing about their land, people achieve a common identity that has its basis in national boundaries and demarcation.

Our structuration of identity and our relationship to place is not limited to national anthems alone. Anderson points to our use of kinship terms such as “Motherland,” “Fatherland,” “patria,” in our definition of our cultural identity. Kinship terms indicate a bondedness through blood that characterizes our relationship to our country or place of origin. The terms we use for home—“homeland,” “heimat”—also act to territorialize our identity, denoting “something to which one is naturally tied” [Anderson 143; emphasis added]. In “National Geographic” Liisa Malkki, too, points out that the relationship between a people and a place is often established through nondiscursive as well as discursive practices, as in the custom of kissing the ground upon returning to one’s country of origin. Similarly, people often take a handful of soil from their native country when going into exile. As Malkki also points out, the rootedness of people to land is “often specifically conceived in plant metaphors” [34].
Arborescent language, for example, is used in our structuration of (ethnic) identity, according to Malkki, because of the connection between family identity (the family tree) and national identity: "Motherland and fatherland, aside from their other historical connotations, suggest that each nation is a grand genealogical tree, rooted in the soil that nourishes it. By implication, it is impossible to be part of more than one tree" (28). All this underscores that there is a naturalized relationship between one’s place and one’s self.

**Maori Sovereignty**

In so saying, I might appear to set the clock of scholarship back, ignore the ravages of colonialism, and deny the logic of late capitalism, which posits a single world economy. I merely want to state that what is posited by scholars such as Appadurai, Gupta, and Ferguson is an either-or argument—either accept the native as a construct of the metropolitan West or incarcerate him or her. I want to suggest an alternative framework in speaking of the indigenous Maori, who deliberately reconstruct and re- evoke their native identity through their relationship with their land, even if in doing so they accommodate the terms dictated by Western settlers. By deliberately mimicking the identity demanded of them by the Pakeha, they aim to achieve specific political goals. I want to look at just two examples from Aotearoa/New Zealand, both of which concern issues of land.

The first example goes back to the formation of New Zealand as a state and as part of the British Empire. This event was organized around the Treaty of Waitangi signed in New Zealand in 1840.\textsuperscript{6} Prior to Western intervention, the Maori were a heterogeneous group, consisting of a number of tribes (iwi) with chiefs. The Treaty, signed by a number of Maori chiefs (but not all of them), in Article 1 ceded “to Her Majesty, the Queen of England, absolutely and without reservation all the rights and powers of sovereignty” (Orange 40) that these chiefs exercised or possessed over their territories. In return, in Article 2 the Queen confirmed and guaranteed

> to the chiefs and tribes of New Zealand and to the respective families and individuals thereof the full exclusive and undisturbed possession of their Lands and Estates, Forests Fisheries and other properties which they may collectively or individually possess so long as it is their wish and desire to retain the same in their possession. (Orange 40)

Article 2 also demanded that Maori land be sold only to the Crown. In addition to granting the tribes the use of their lands, in Article 3 the Queen also extended her protection to the Maori and granted them “all the rights
and privileges of British subjects," namely citizenship. The Maori who signed over sovereignty/governorship did so believing that the "shadow of the land goes to the Queen but the substance remains with us" (as qtd. by the Ngapuhi Chief Nopera Panakareao in Sharp 87).

Article 2 of the Treaty has been under intense contestation ever since 1840. Needless to say, the Crown ceased to honor the Treaty soon after it was signed, in fact directly confiscating three million acres and indirectly confiscating sixteen million acres of Maori land in the North Island during the Land Wars of the 1850s and 1860s. These confiscations disposed the Maori not only of land but also of their kin and the presence of their ancestors. A movement was formed in New Zealand in the mid-1970s to honor the treaty and make reparation for the loss and damage suffered by the Maori. A Waitangi Tribunal consisting of Maori and Pakeha representatives has been set up to investigate claims against the Crown. The concluding act of reparation will be the formal legalization of biculturalism as policy in New Zealand and the establishment of an equal partnership between the Maori as tangata whenua and the Pakeha as the dominant group of white settlers.

The second example I wish to evoke concerns the Maori practice of burying a baby's placenta and umbilical cord in ancestral ground. This practice is particularly meaningful in that the words for both land and placenta are the same, whenua. In this custom, land functions as more than a repository of memories or a signifier of economic values. It works to assign an individual identity to the Maori native as well as to indicate her place among her kin and her ancestors. In so doing, this cultural practice can be seen as what Shohat describes as a "fight against continuing forms of annihilation" (110). The meaning of this custom has grown even more poignant since Western occupation and the loss of ancestral territory that occurred in its wake. However, we can also see this custom as illustrating the "unchanging" ways of the Maori that render them "predictable" and safe.

A juxtaposition of these two examples will illustrate the strategies of Maori nationalism. The continuing tradition of burying a baby's placenta represents Maori ways as timeless and unchanging, whereas the Treaty of Waitangi suggests just the opposite—their adaptability to new ways of constructing identity. Both ploys are necessary to the bid for Maori nationalism. Oppositional nationalism, then, is a braiding of the unchanging and the changing, the predictable and the political.

Maori Feminism and Maori Nationalism

In the first part of my essay, I have pointed out the complex meaning adherent to the notion of indigene, made an argument for the derivation
of identity through land, and finally attempted to provide some background information on New Zealand. This rather long preamble has been necessary because Treaty issues in New Zealand have to be perceived as just a part, though significant, of the larger issue of Maori nationalism. Such a perception is required for two reasons: first, and most important, for biculturalism to be taken seriously. Despite the existence of the Treaty since 1840, New Zealand is not a bicultural society. Second, only an acceptance of Maori nationalism will allow me to posit the contextually specific origin and agenda of the Maori feminist movement. In this second half of my essay, I will show how Maori feminism derives from Maori nationalism, a nationalism that allows for the visibility of racial divisions [Maori vs. Pakeha] rather than gender divisions [men vs. women], on which feminism is traditionally based.

Within New Zealand, the issue of Maori sovereignty reverberates with such meaning because land and sovereignty issues are inextricably braided within the feminist movement. In her article “Maori Sovereignty: A Feminist Invention of Tradition” Michele Dominy intertextualizes the two movements by suggesting that the Maori Land March of 1975 led by Dame Whina Cooper, the Bastion Point occupation by the Maoris in 1977–78, and the protests against the South African Springbok Rugby Tour in 1981 are linked with the emergence of feminism. To recapitulate these incidents: Dame Whina Cooper started her Land March in 1975 from Te Hapua in the north to Wellington in the south (of the North Island). Basing her politics on the premise that for a Maori to be landless is tantamount to being deprived of an identity, she led other Maori and marched to Wellington to present a statement of Maori rights to the government.

The Bastion Point occupation represented a challenge to the Crown’s underhanded ways of acquiring Maori land during the late 1800s. In 1976 the government announced its plans to build a major high-income housing development on what was originally Maori land. As a result, Maori protestors occupied Bastion Point for 506 days and demanded that 180 acres of land be given back to them. Around this action, Maori women challenged their men for equality within the movement. In her article on the experience of Maori women at Bastion Point, Jan Farr states: “The women by sheer persistence, perseverance and by their over-all ability to organize, participate and show results for their efforts, managed to evolve from a merely supportive or back-up role [for men], to a dynamic role in active leadership” [21].

The last incident that contributed to forging an identity for Maori feminism according to Dominy was the Springbok Rugby Tour in 1981. Many New Zealanders were opposed to the tour of the South African team, not only because it was not integrated, but also because Maori players on the New Zealand “All Blacks” rugby team had previously been
refused permission to tour South Africa. Sir Robert Muldoon, who was then Prime Minister, despite intense opposition from both Maori and Pakeha groups, not only permitted the Springboks to tour New Zealand but also provided police and army support for the team at a cost of $8 million. While the Maori who marched against the Tour immediately saw the parallels between apartheid in South Africa and racism in New Zealand, a number of Pakeha needed some persuasion. Donna Awatere states:

The relationship between black and white political groups will in the long run depend on how well whites can identify and work against injustice to black people. Very few will. Yet racism is a global phenomenon, not particular to one country, and it must be fought globally, wherever it is. And it is here. In New Zealand. But anti-racism isn’t fashionable like feminism, or full of intrigue like anti-capitalism, although it includes both feminism and the class struggle. Emotionally, fighting overseas racism must be easier to cope with for whites. [“Rugby” 12]

Dominy points out that the protests against the Tour gave prominent roles to Maori and Pakeha women who often marched in the front lines. Both groups were physically assaulted by government forces in equal numbers (250). Furthermore, the protests against the Springbok Rugby Tour challenged the notion of a homogeneous identity for New Zealand and ripped the white nation apart. They finally made the Pakeha aware of racism right at home against the indigenous population of New Zealand and forged ties between the Maori and the Pakeha, enabling them to consider a bicultural identity for Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Maori Feminism within Pakeha Feminism?

Michele Dominy suggests that the Bastion Point occupation as well as the anti-rugby-tour movement not only reconfigured traditional gender relations for Maori but also reconstituted notions of color and race. She suggests that a direct consequence of Bastion Point was the adoption of the manifesto “Gonna Share with all our Black sisters/The Right to be Black/The right that was taken from us like the land” (248–49) at the national hui (gathering) of Maori women in 1980. Black becomes here not a racial ascription but in its inclusion of all Maoris, Pacific Islanders, and Indians, a marker of political alliance instead (249). As Jan Farr asserts, feminism becomes a black woman’s revolution and all men, Maori and Pakeha, are conflated “as owners and perpetrators of oppressive institutions, governments and systems” (Farr, qtd in Dominy 248).

As I have shown, it is a feminist commonplace to suggest a natural alliance between the disenfranchised, such as white women and people of color. This line of argument is premised on simple notions of opposition-
ality wherein the dominative (read: masculinist) power in a sociojuridical system is first located, then alliances form between all marginalized groups, who interrogate and oppose that cultural authority. While alliances among the marginalized are often undeniable and fruitful, there are at least two glaring problems with Dominy’s reframing of the indigenous rights movement in Aotearoa/New Zealand as a feminist one. First, the logic of binary opposites—men versus women—causes Maori men to become metonymic extensions of Pakeha men. Only when the argument is structured in this way can we perceive the presence of sisterhood in the Pacific or women’s oppositionality. While Dominy’s designation of Pakeha men as the hegemonic group in Aotearoa/New Zealand is appropriate, to equate Pakeha men with Maori men is inadequate within a socioeconomic category that is also a racial category. Awatere raises similar objections with regard to left-wing academics: “Left-wing groups analyze the basic contradictions in terms of the class-struggle. In their analysis issues of sovereignty, race and culture fade into marginality” (Maori Sovereignty 51). Thus in privileging gender over race and culture, Dominy foregrounds one form of difference [between men and women] at the cost of glossing over another form of disenfranchisement, that of race and culture.

Second, in this analysis the indigenous rights movement becomes framed within the feminist struggle. Dominy indicates the subordination of Maori nationalism to feminism in the following passage:

Their identities as Maori and as women share aspects of each other, and both identities at times join in opposition to white male-dominated culture. In particular Maori activist women work to redefine and recreate their cultural tradition, rejecting certain aspects of Pakeha culture and the imposition of Western aspects of ethnicity. (238; emphasis added)

In the guise of uncovering “true” Maori identity (“rejecting . . . the imposition of Western aspects of ethnicity”), Dominy here slides a hierarchy into the picture by implying that only “activist” Maori women redefine and recreate their cultural tradition. In this, activist Maori women take their cue from the feminist struggle and reinvent tradition, as do their Pakeha counterparts. Dominy thus offers a Western model of identity politics’ to explain the awakening of political awareness among Maori women. In this additive model, indigenous women in Aotearoa/New Zealand, led by their Pakeha counterparts, discover their identity as oppressed women prior to their awareness of their identity as oppressed Maori women.

Most important this unproblematic continuum between Pakeha and Maori women under the rubric of feminism reveals the underlying premise of the resitution of the latter as a minority rather than as tangata whenua, an issue central to the growing nationalism and political con-
struction of the Maori in Aotearoa. The resituation of Maori women as a minority among others subordinates the specificity of their wider struggle to women’s issues in general in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It draws attention away from the 1840 Treaty and transforms Maori into an economic and racial category like any other.

Maori Women within Maori Nationalism

Another way of analyzing the events at issue here is from within the context of the role of women within nationalism. Such a reading is warranted in that Maori feminism, as much as it has coincided with the New Zealand women’s movement, also intersected in 1970 with the formation of the Nga Tamatoa, a predominantly male action group whose primary function was to preserve Maoritanga (things Maori), and the Maori Organization for Human Rights, a protest group formed in the aftermath of the 1967 Maori Affairs Amendment Act. The growing leadership of Maori women is further demonstrated within the organization Te Roopu O te Matakite (“those with foresight”) in which Dame Whina Cooper played a part. The point underscored at this juncture is that the assertions of Maori women ought to be read within the growing pan-Maori nationalism and not merely as a metonymical extension of the white women’s movement in Aotearoa/New Zealand. While Dame Whina Cooper played the leading role in the 1975 Land March, Dominy notes that no other woman functioned as an “official” leader in either the Bastion Point occupation of 1977–78 or in the 1981 Springbok Tour. If a Maori woman played the leading role on the Maori political landscape in 1975, why not in 1977–78 or in 1981? This is not to suggest that Maori women of caliber were just unavailable in the latter two events and that Dame Whina Cooper was the only woman with recognizable leadership qualities. It is, rather, to urge that we reexamine Maori women’s leadership in light of the role of women in struggles at the national level if we hope to find a more fruitful explanation.

It is a commonplace to suggest that women function in very specific ways within a newly emergent nation-state or within a growing nationalism. Theorists such as Carole Pateman suggest that within the notion of citizenship, the state constructs men and women in gender-specific ways. In Woman-Nation-State, Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias indicate the complex relation that women have to the state. They point out that on the one hand, they are acted upon as members of collectivities, institutions or groupings, and as participants in the social forces that give the state its given political projects in any particular social and historical context. On the other hand, they are a special focus of state concerns as a social category with a specific role (particularly human reproduction). (6)
Yuval-Davis and Anthias proceed to enumerate the various functions of women within the context of the nation: as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities; as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups; as central participants in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture; as signifiers of ethnic/national differences—as a focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction, and transformation of ethnic/national categories; as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles [7]. They suggest that women are the state in that they reflect and embody its power yet also function as the site upon which the nation confirms its own masculine, powerful identity. In other words, women as members of the collectivity are the nation yet they also simultaneously function as the object, the maternal bodies upon which the state literally reproduces itself. To this extent, Dame Whina Cooper’s leadership in the Land March and the lack of “official” female leadership at Bastion Point and during the Springbok Tour go beyond questions of individual agency. The orchestration of such actions is precipitated by the requirements of the Maori nation.

Within the context of a growing Maori nationalism accompanied by the conscious formation of Maoritanga and Tikanga Maori [Maori knowledge], Maori women were natural leaders. Not only did they maintain racial/ethnic boundaries, they also transmitted Maori culture while participating in their nation’s economic and political struggles. It is within the context of women and nationalism that I wish to cite Partha Chatterjee’s influential article “The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question.” Chatterjee examines the shifting role of women in the nationalist struggle of British India to overthrow British rule. According to Chatterjee, Indian nationalism went beyond a political struggle for power and permeated every aspect of the material and spiritual life of the people [238]. Chatterjee argues that the binary opposition of colonizer/colonized or white/brown or Western/Eastern also reproduces itself in yet another dichotomy: material [outer]/spiritual [inner], with Britain identified as the visible numerator and India as the submerged denominator. He states:

The material/spiritual dichotomy, to which the terms “world” and “home” corresponded, had acquired . . . a very special significance in the nationalist mind. The world was where the European power had challenged the non-European peoples, and by virtue of its superior material culture, had subjugated them. But it had failed to colonize the inner essential identity of the East which lay in its distinctive, and superior, culture. That is where the East was undominated, sovereign, master of its own fate. For a colonized people, the world was a distressing constraint forced upon it by the fact of its material weakness. It was a place of oppression and daily humiliation, a place where the norms of the colonizer had perforce to be accepted. [239]
Chatterjee adds that within this schizoid world, the colonized had to learn Western science to match the colonizers' power over the material world. But in order to do so, "the crucial need was to protect, preserve and strengthen the inner core of its [India's] national culture, its spiritual essence. . . . In the world, imitation of and adaptation to western norms was a necessity; at home they were tantamount to annihilation of one's very identity" (239). The implications of such an outer-inner binary are obvious and apply to the construction of gender as well. Man participates in the profanity of the outer, whereas woman represents the inner and functions as caretaker and guardian of the traditional and the indigenous. Though woman may participate in the outer world, she is reinscribed within a new form of patriarchy, one inflected with colonialism as well as nationalism. My evocation of this Indian model of nationalism is not intended to suggest that it represents the only or the originary form of Third World nationalism. It is rather an attempt to understand Dominy's perception of the change that took place among Maori women faced with "either accepting traditional constraints or risking their old affiliations" (245). I would argue instead that the Maori assertion of female identity noted by Dominy is in fact a direct outcome of the nationalistic struggle for sovereignty. By playing the significant roles at the level of the nation, women gain in importance and visibility. To attribute their prominence to global feminism alone would be to erase the centrality and significance of Maori nationalism.

It is within this context of the misuse of the category "global feminism" that I want to draw attention to just one issue that was hotly contested during the 1980s, namely, the question of speaking rights on the marae (a far more complex version of the Town Hall but with spiritual connotations; the marae is a building and the land surrounding it whose most important function is to symbolize the tribe), where traditionally women have the specific role of greeting and men that of speaking. Pakeha women's reading these structured roles within Western paradigms of what constitutes agency (speech rather than the ritual of greeting) led to the debate regarding whether women should speak on the marae or not. As Kathie Irwin has argued in "Towards Theories of Maori Feminisms," for many Maori, having the right to speak at the marae is not an issue and never has been. It is viewed as Pakeha women's preoccupation, which is irrelevant to Maori. Irwin nonetheless breaks the nature of speaking on the marae down into several parts: karanga (greeting), waiata (song), tangi (mourning), and whaikorero (speech making). "Protagonists in this debate have recognized only whaikorero as speaking," asserts Irwin (12). In short, the forms of speech in which women participate have not been recognized by Pakeha women, since no such equivalent categories exist within Pakeha feminism. Irwin is indignant that "the frustrations of the feminist
movement were visited upon [Maori] individuals and institutions alike. The marae, the central most important institution in Maoridom, became a target for the visitation for some of this feeling" [10]. While Irwin rightly identifies the inadequacy of Pakehacentric feminism to categorize, comprehend, and explain the specificities of Maori practice, in this entire debate over the right of whaikorero at the marae what is evident is that, as in India, there has been no major shift in gender roles for the postcolonial Maori. Irwin herself admits that a Pakeha man "who is tauwi [a stranger, a foreigner], not a speaker of the language, or tangata whenua in a Maori sense of this word, is allowed to stand and whaikorero on the marae atea [the area surrounding the actual building] simply because he is a man” [17].

To clarify this point about gender roles, I will cite Chatterjee again. He continues to discuss the role assigned to woman as Indian nationalism evolved and grew stronger:

The "spirituality" of her character had also to be stressed in contrast with the innumerable surrenders which men were having to make to the pressures of the material world. The need to adjust to the new conditions outside the home had forced upon men a whole series of changes in their dress, food habits, religious observances and social relations. Each of these capitulations now had to be compensated by an assertion of spiritual purity on the part of women. They must not eat, drink or smoke in the same way as men; they must continue the observance of religious rituals which men were finding it difficult to carry out; they must observe the cohesiveness of family life and the solidarity to the kin to which men could not now devote much attention. The new patriarchy advocated by nationalism conferred upon women the honour of a new social responsibility, and by associating the task of "female emancipation" with the historical goal of sovereign nationhood, bound them to a new, and yet entirely legitimate, subordination. (248; emphasis added)

Chatterjee indicates that in the nationalistic struggle, it was necessary to mobilize women, who constituted half the brown population. Yet the mobilization for Indian emancipation did not necessarily include the emancipation of Indian women. They had to be reinscribed into a new form of patriarchy, one carrying the markers of colonialism and nationalism. The recognition of their value to the nation as Indians precluded any acknowledgment of their autonomous identity as women. Women were important or so they were told, in their complementarity to men. Similarly, in Aotearoa/New Zealand the debate over the marae did not result in any specific changes in women’s right to whaikorero. As Irwin points out, having the right to speak was not an issue. Emphasized in the marae debate was the significant complementary role that women play on the marae as well as in the maintenance of gender roles. I do not suggest that Chatterjee’s model precisely fits Maori gender roles. I want to underscore that following a heated debate, Maori women were relocated in their traditional space on the marae. The point I am making is that, both in
India and in Aotearoa/New Zealand, women function as a metaphor for the nation and therefore become the scaffolding upon which men construct national identity. In developing a concept of Indianness, Indian men constrained Indian women in specific ways. Similarly, I think Maori men have constructed the Maori nation/female to reflect their own identity. In no sphere do Maori women exercise autonomous agency; nowhere are they separate from Maori men or the Maori nation. All these issues are implicated within each other.

My conclusion will be very brief. I realize that this essay carries all the marks—in its scholarship, its analysis, and its positioning—of the fact that I am neither Pakeha nor Maori but an Asian settled in New Zealand. I have argued that the theory that has traveled does not in most cases resemble its progenitor. To that extent my use of metropolitan theories from the Northern hemisphere to critique those same theories as well as to construct my own argument has been inevitable. I have argued that feminist theories that are born from indigenous nationalisms are inevitably different from their metropolitan counterparts. Only an acknowledgment of their historical specificity will allow for any nuanced understanding of Maori feminisms.

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Notes

1. Regarding the construction of nationalism see Partha Chatterjee’s first chapter, “Whose Imagined Community,” in his recent work The Nation and Its Fragments, wherein Chatterjee argues that Benedict Anderson’s model of nationalism, a model based on identity, which arose in the West with the rise of print capitalism, is not appropriate to Asian countries that derived a national identity by deliberately positing difference not at their borders but within them. Creating a binary of outer and inner, in which “outer” reflected the world outside the home, these oppositional models of the nation made the home the locus of tradition and national identity in order to overthrow colonial rule.

2. I pursued the etymology of the word “indigenous” in the Oxford English Dictionary and was fascinated to discover that while the origin of the word is located in the passive stem *gignere*, to be born (or to belong to a particular place), a term applicable to all people, by the late sixteenth century the word is overwhelmingly used to describe only non-Western people. In a tangent, see also Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s Racial Formation in the United States, which states that the modern concept of race (and by extension modern notions of indigenousness) did not appear
until the rise of Europe and the arrival of Europeans in the Americas. Even the hostility and suspicion with which Christian Europe viewed its two significant non-Christian "Others"—the Muslims and the Jews—cannot be viewed as more than a rehearsal for racial formation, since these antagonisms, for all their bloodletting and chauvinism, were always and everywhere religiously interpreted. [61]

3. Since the 1970s, New Zealand has debated the possibility of defining itself as a bicultural nation with equal power sharing between its Maori and Pakeha citizens in what would be a move away from the centralized Pakeha-dominated state. In his work *Racism and Ethnicity*, Paul Spoonley gives voice to the predominant opinion in Aotearoa/New Zealand:

Biculturalism acknowledges that only two New Zealand "ethnic" groups, Maori and Pakeha, are particular to New Zealand and that the recent history of this country reflects the contact between these groups. Further the Treaty of Waitangi and its inherited moral, political and social obligations requires that Maori and Pakeha negotiate a relationship which is equitable for both. [105]

While I agree that the dominant group should acknowledge the existence of the "other" group, I must argue that biculturalism has to be implemented as state policy because state policy must properly represent the people. Furthermore, Treaty of Waitangi must be upheld by the Pakeha majority, not because it is the liberal, moral thing to do, but rather because the state has reneged on the Treaty ever since it was signed in 1840.

4. I realize that my statement might be perceived as untrue given the theme of the national hui [gathering] of Maori women in 1980, whose manifesto states, "Gonna Share with all our Black sisters / The Right to be Black / The right that was taken from us like the land." While this manifesto might have indicated an oppositional political alliance in its inclusion of all Maoris, Pacific Islanders, and Indians in the 1980s, no such alliance exists in the 1990s, with biculturalism yet to pass in New Zealand. This continued delay has imbued the Maori nationalists with a sense of tremendous urgency. Furthermore, Maori women repeatedly cite the example of Australia, which in its official declaration of multiculturalism resituated Aboriginals as a minority, once more denying them first-people status in Australia.

5. Here I am influenced by Homi Bhabha's essay "Of Mimicry and Man," in which Bhabha states that this form of mimicking goes beyond Fanon's notion of the black man assuming the identity given to him by the colonizer. Bhabha points out that mimicking

problematises the signs of racial and cultural priority, so that the "national" is no longer naturalizable. What emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a writing, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, the power which supposedly makes it imitable. [87–88]
To this extent, the Maori plays the role expected of her but with some unexpected results, as I will proceed to explain.

6. There are at least four extant versions of the Treaty, two English versions of which significantly differ from their Maori counterparts. Confusion about the meaning of terms such as governorship and sovereignty makes the two versions profoundly different. The Maori believed they were giving up governorship and retaining sovereignty, but the English intended them to lose both.

7. My gratitude goes to Anna Yeatman for clarifying this point, which she explains in "Interlocking Oppressions." Briefly put, identity politics is premised on liberal notions of freedom, equality, and the Universal Subject and entails a fight against the oppression and repression of identity. The oppressed group (women, Maori, homosexuals, Pacific Islanders) previously excluded from the ranks of the Universal Subject makes itself visible, challenges the liberal society successfully, and then assumes its rightful place among the family of human beings.

8. A counterargument for my point that Maori women's leadership cannot be visible outside of Maori nationalism in Aotearoa/New Zealand could be made by citing the successful formation of the Maori Women's Welfare League in 1951. While it is undeniable that by 1951 there was a cobbling together of two distinct identities, "Maori" and "woman," reflected in the formation of this group, two aspects of the origin and reception of the Maori Women's Welfare League (MWWL) must be noted. First, this group was organized in the wake of a post-World War II mass rural-to-urban migration of Maori that created new strains on the identity of members of this ethnic group. In effect, this migration functioned to erase tribal differences among Maori, interpellating them as one people far more effectively than the 1840 treaty. This displacement and relocation of the Maori must surely have helped promote a unified sense of Maori nationhood.

Second, the MWWL was a cause for resentment among a number of Maori men. As Tania Rei, Geraldine McDonald, and Ngahuia Te Awekotuku state, "[The women's] enthusiasm was not shared . . . by their men folk. A letter to the Minister of Maori Affairs in 1953 claimed that the MWWL had usurped the authority of the men and taken over control of the pa." (9–10). Moreover, the MWWL was not a group that had merely the interests of Maori women at heart. The Maori women who formed the MWWL did so out of the sense of urgency they had as a people in diaspora. Furthermore, the way of the MWWL was viewed by Maori men proves my point that those men construct the nation and their women to reflect their own identity.

Works Cited


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