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VI. MĀORI FEMINISM & BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH: The power of self-definition

HELENE CONNOR

This paper[1] examines the appropriateness of the biographical research methodology for research underpinned by a Māori feminist theoretical perspective. It also offers ten principles which could contribute towards developing discursive definitions of what might constitute Māori feminism. The paper has been written with the explicit intention that it contributes to the wider kete (basket) of knowledge being produced by Māori feminist writers and researchers. Such a position can pose a dilemma for Māori academics, grappling with concurrent agendas – how to satisfy the academy and how to satisfy the Māori community. Ultimately however, when writing from a Māori standpoint, the Māori perspective will dominate and will come to represent the 'heart' of the work, as is the case of this paper.

Biographical Research: an Appropriate Methodology for Māori Feminist Research

Biographical research methodology has considerable potential to be cross-fertilised with indigenous feminisms, methodologies and epistemologies. This process of cross-fertilisation ultimately creates a new cultural hybrid. Weedon (1999) suggests the idea of cultural hybridity can challenge existing binary oppositions and hierarchies and can have a profound and empowering effect on the diaspora experience, which is not that dissimilar to experiences of colonisation:

> Cultural hybridity, the fusion of cultures and coming together of difference, the 'border crossing' that marks diasporic survival, signifies change, hope of newness, and space for creativity. But in the search for rootedness – a 'place called home' – these women, in the process of self-identification, dis-identify with an excluding, racist British colonizing culture. They articulate instead a multi-faceted discontinuous black identity that marks their difference (p. 196).

The search for 'rootedness and a place called home' are central themes in the narratives of many Māori. The metaphor of 'home' can also be extended to the context of academic research and Māori scholars are well positioned both to challenge the authority of dominant Western models of research and to engage with the productive potential of hybridity from a position of cultural strength (Hoskins, 2000a; Irwin, 1993; Mohanty, 1991). The struggles with developing research practice for Māori have frequently centred around disrupting Western research models and legitimising Māori research models and epistemologies. Biographical research methodologies draw from multidisciplinary approaches and have the potential to employ a Kaupapa Māori framework. As Mead (1996) points out, Kaupapa Māori research can 'weave' in and out of both Māori and Western ways of knowing, and biographical research methodologies lend themselves well to such a process. At the same time, they have the potential to constitute a challenge to Western positivistic models of research. Writing about the feminist challenge to positivism, Mead (1996) advances the notion of the emancipatory potential of research for women, and discusses the importance of critiquing research methodologies and developing new methodologies and alternative ways of knowing. Central concerns for Māori feminist research have been to locate, develop and initiate appropriate methods, methodologies and epistemologies for research for and about Māori women and to acknowledge the problems of 'voice' and 'visibility' and 'silence' and 'invisibility' (Irwin, 1993; Johnston, 1998; Mead, 1996; Te Awekotuku, 1993). Research methodologies utilising biography and narrative are eminently suited to such endeavours. Biographical research gives a voice to the invisible, provides space for difference and the multiple experiences of what it means to be wahine Māori, and provides an avenue for representing our identity.

Biographical research methodologies when situated in a framework supported by Māori feminism and Kaupapa Māori theory provide vehicles through which our diverse identities as Māori women can be articulated and asserted. Differences in iwi and hapū, socialisation in a variety of whānau contexts and geographic locations, sexuality, political affiliations, religious and spiritual beliefs, educational experiences, knowledge of te reo Māori and ngā tikanga Māori and so on are all part of the experience of what

it means to be wāhine Māori. Biographical research provides the space where these differences can be celebrated, while at the same time affirming our collective visions as Māori women.

Biographical methodology is a powerful research device for Māori women to utilise. Telling our stories and personal narratives constitutes a political act and is potentially transforming at both an individual and collective level (Etter-Lewis, 1991; Passerini, 1989; Watson & Smith, 1992). Biography and the use of personal narratives are empowering methods for telling those 'histories from below', the everyday histories of struggle and resistance.

As with any methodology, biographical and narrative research practices have limitations. The method is best suited to small-scale, qualitative research though large-scale projects, particularly those seeking to tell collective stories, are not inconceivable with adequate funding (Erben, 1998). Nevertheless, embedded within biographical methods are radical potentialities for making our differences as Māori women visible and for allowing us to define our lives and create our own social landscape. Biographical research into the narratives of Māori women has the potential to reclaim and reinterpret both historical and contemporary issues of culture, gender, spirituality and conceptualisations of the self, as articulated by the biographical subject. Biographies produced by self-identified wahine Māori, women of colour and third-world women challenge traditional Eurocentric theories of selfhood and sociality (Etter Lewis, 1991; Mohanty, 1991; Personal Narratives Group, 1989). Keating (1996) suggests the narratives produced in the biographies of women of colour and third-world women do not focus exclusively on the development of a unified, individual self, but instead notions of collective selves are articulated which include socio-political and historical memories and, generally, a spiritual dimension. Notions of a collective self including a spiritual component are also likely to occur in the narratives of Māori women. Potentially, such narratives are transformational for identity politics.

The act of writing, of engaging with language that affirms and revitalises, opens up possibilities for change. Biographical writing has the potential to position its subject, the social actors contained in the text, on that threshold where a pluralised self can evolve. A pluralised self-identity, as Keating (1996) suggests, is capable of interacting with many worlds. Writing a biographical subject as

a flexible, evolving identity assumes complex speaking positions enabling points of similarity and difference among readers of diverse backgrounds. Writing Betty Wark[2] as the biographical subject in section two of my doctoral thesis (Connor, 2006), for example, enabled her to reflect on her evolving identity as a woman of mixed ethnic descent who came to position herself primarily as wahine Māori as she became more immersed in te ao Māori (the Māori world).

One of the tasks of a biographical narrative is to sort out themes and patterns, as opposed to mundane calendar events and dates (Edel, 1981). Such a task results in a struggle between a biographer and the subject to locate the concealed self and the revealed self, the public and the private and to work with these tensions with delicacy and skill. Language and narrative alter biography from a fact-neutral to value-interpretative text (Nadel, 1994). Biography from this perspective not only partakes in, but becomes a form of cultural discourse. Biography can also illustrate ways in which the power of social values can either entrap or free the individual. One reading of Betty Wark's biography is to study the impact of the social values attached to the cultural discourses on the meanings of Māori. For Betty, the disruption of monoculturalistic discourse brought about a re-imagined, reconstructed way of being that affirmed being Māori. In the wider context of New Zealand culture, collective discourses around race relations filtered out monocultural values and established an alternative – biculturalism.

Biographical research also addresses the notion of authenticity and the reclamation of cultural and historic traditions as being an important means to rediscover what may have previously been erased. Keating (1996) argues that an emphasis on authenticity reinforces the belief in self-contained identities and replicates existing divisions. In her view, the rhetoric of authenticity associated with ethnic identity relies on unitary notions of an authentic past where previously erased cultural and historic traditions are claimed to be rediscovered. Such an undertaking can, however, also be problematic. Judith Binney (2001), for example, in her work on the life history of the nineteenth-century Māori leader Te Kooti, found that the narratives that were told about Te Kooti unearthed previously erased cultural and historic traditions and asserted Māori autonomy, but were mostly 'myth-narratives or chronicles of the impossible' (p. 90).

Irwin (1993) also views the notion of authenticity as being contentious. She raises the point that Māori women's stories need to be accepted without making a value judgement as to whether or not they can be read as authentic. In Betty Wark's narrative her ethnic identity straddled the two worlds of being Māori and being Pākehā. Yet she actively sought to create what could be viewed as an authentic Māori identity demonstrating Keating's (1996) assertion that authentic identities are constructed.

> I wanted so much to learn and be with Māori people. I wanted to know what it meant to be Māori and so I spent as much time as I could at the Ponsonby Community Centre learning from these lovely old kuia (B. Wark, personal communication, September 9, 1996).

One of the strengths of biographical research for Māori women is that it provides a context for different voices to dialogue with such issues as authenticity and identity. Despite Keating's (1996) and Irwin's (1993) insights that an emphasis on authenticity can actually have a divisive effect on identity politics, the need for a forum to voice these and other concerns is vital.

Despite the potentially contentious issue of authenticity, biographical and autobiographical writing gives voice to the subject, substantiating and validating the lived experience (Nadel, 1984). For Māori women, biographical writing not only positions us as the subjects of our own inquiry but also provides a space for articulating our multiple lives and identities. Writing about lived experience for Māori feminists has evolved through our history of colonisation and the need to subvert the social relations of dominance and subordination that came with colonisation. Narratives of Māori women articulated in biographical research can demonstrate the complex interconnections between our past and present, illustrating the continuous shifts in our cultural identities. As Keating (1996) argues, cultural identities have histories and undergo continual transformations in complex interactions with other categories of meaning; individual and collective identities are hybrid creations, not organic pre-existing discoveries. By writing about Māori subjects we exert control over the ways our/their lives are represented. In terms of a Kaupapa Māori research practice our methodologies must be informed by a collective kaupapa. For Māori feminists any theoretical underpinnings of our research must be compatible with our kaupapa.

Ten Principles that could constitute Māori Feminism

In Kathie Irwin's seminal work in the early 1990s, 'Towards Theories of Māori Feminism' she argued:

> Theory is a powerful intangible tool which harnesses the powers of the mind, heart and soul: te ngakau, te hinengaro, te wairua. With the right theory as a tool we can take the right to our tino rangatiratanga, our sovereignty as Māori women, to be in control of making sense of our world and our future, ourselves. We can and must design new tools – Māori feminist theories, to ensure that we have control over making sense of our world and future (Irwin, 1993, p. 5).

She suggested theories of Māori feminism could be developed from four central Māori sources of data, outlined as follows:

> Māori society, both te ao hou and te ao tawhito, the present and the past; te reo Māori, the Māori language; Māori women's her-stories, the stories of the lives of our women; and nga tikanga Māori, Māori customary practices (Irwin, 1993, pp. 5–6).

The potentialities of Māori feminist theory, as outlined by Irwin, offered a viable framework in which Māori feminist scholarship could ferment and develop. Māori feminism is dynamic and evolving and hence inherently difficult to define. Nevertheless, there are at least ten principles which are compatible with and can build on Irwin's four central Māori sources of data. These principles do not represent a definitive and authoritative theoretical model. They are offered as additional strands to weave into the collective kete and the discourses of what could constitute Māori feminism.

1. *Maintains a collective vision for all wahine Māori and advocates the right to self-determination for all Māori women.*

A collective vision determining what could exist for Māori women is of paramount concern for Māori feminism. Charlotte Bunch (1983) defines vision as the process by which we establish principles or values and set goals. Her definition has particular relevance to the kōrero [discussion] around a collective vision for Māori women:

> In taking action to bring about change, we operate consciously or unconsciously out of certain assumptions about what is right or what we value (principles), and of our sense of what society ought to be (goals). This aspect of theory involves making a conscious choice about those

> principles in order to make our visions and goals concrete (Bunch, 1983, p. 252).

Actions that Māori women can undertake in order to bring about change include: writing our biographical texts, personal narratives and her-stories, empowering ourselves by revitalising te reo Māori and carrying out our research from a Kaupapa Māori perspective, (Irwin, 1993; Johnston, 1998; Smith, 1992). Self-determination for Māori women affirms mana wāhine and is achieved through connection to our land, language and culture. For those women (and men) who lived through assimilationist policies of the early twentieth century the right to self-determination was, for many, fraught with difficulties. As has been well documented, the right to speak our own language, practice our own spiritual beliefs and live our own tikanga was frequently denied (Walker, 1990a). Nevertheless, experiences differed from iwi to iwi and some iwi such as Tuhoe, who tended to live in exclusively Māori communities in often isolated areas, were not as affected by assimilation as those iwi who have had more contact with Pākehā (McIntosh, 2001).

In the biographical research project of which Betty Wark was the dominant subject, her narrative illustrated the need for maintaining a collective vision through such initiatives as the kohanga reo movement and the Māori Women's Welfare League. She also advocated the right to self-determination for all Māori and sought to educate herself and the young people she worked with on such issues as Māori land rights, the Treaty of Waitangi and other examples of political activism.

2. *Acknowledges a finely-tuned balance between the individual and the whānau.*

Traditional Māori society was communal – the whānau and the extended whānau took precedence over the individual. The emphasis on kinship contrasts markedly with the liberal ideology of individualism. Although at an individual level it is important that Māori women achieve their personal goals, it is also important to stress that individual success for Māori reflects on the whole whānau, hapū and iwi. Biographical research, for example, although centred on an individual, has the potential to include the collective identity of Māori women by acknowledging the whānau, hapū and iwi and united mahi [work] of women.

Linda Smith's articulation of what she terms the whānau discourse is also particularly relevant to this principle:

> It requires the seeking of knowledge which is whanau, hapu and iwi-specific. It seeks an understanding of a specific set or foundation of knowledge and practice. It seeks to empower young Māori women by reconnecting them to a genealogy and a geography which is undeniably theirs. And it seeks to protect women by filling in the details of their identity; by providing the genealogical template upon which relationships make sense. This is a discourse which has engaged the energies of younger women. It needs the guidance of older women (Smith, 1992, p. 39).

A whānau discourse encompasses women, men, children, kaumatua [older man of standing] and kuia [older woman of standing] (Smith, 1992). Whānau and whanaungatanga [relationships] are implicit to the framework of whakapapa and are critical to encouraging and sustaining self-sufficient Māori initiatives such as Māori feminism. Whānau is not necessarily connected by blood ties and may be based on the concept of whanaungatanga, where relationships are sustained through Māori initiatives and models and where there is a finely-tuned balance between the individual and his or her responsibilities to the whānau or collective.

The whānau discourse evident in Betty's biographical text also demonstrates that whānau are not necessarily connected by blood ties. Her way of working with youth at risk was essentially based on the concept of whanaungatanga (as defined in the preceding paragraph).

3. *Acknowledges whakapapa as something which connects Māori women to all those past and present despite all of our differences; and accordingly acknowledges both the earthly and cosmological domains – secular and spiritual.*

Māori relationships can be defined through whakapapa. Whakapapa of humankind, or the primal genealogy, can be linked back to the children of Ranginui and Papatūānuku who became ira tangata [mortal beings] once they entered the world of light (Barlow, 1993). The descendants of the first ira tangata became the ancestors of Māori people. Through whakapapa, kinship ties are cemented. Knowledge of one's whakapapa and ancestral links is at the root of Māori identity and heritage. It conveys the complexities of what it means to be a Māori woman, man or child. Whakapapa connects Māori women to

all those past and present – despite all of our differences, it is the one thing that we all have in common. The importance of the principle of whakapapa to Māori feminism is based on this kinship connection and other interrelated issues. Whakapapa is an important channel through which to consider Māori people generally. It is a culturally important concept and provides a portal of understanding about Māori society and is inscribed in virtually every aspect of a Māori worldview (Smith, 2000). In Betty's narrative she was dislocated from her whakapapa yet she undeniably had a whakapapa and in her later life was able to learn more about it. Her situation was not unique. Many Māori have little knowledge of their whakapapa, yet they still have one and it will be working at some level, even though it may not necessarily be apparent.

4. *Incorporates Kaupapa Māori theoretical principles and modes of te reo Māori (Māori language) and ngā tikanga Māori.*

Kaupapa Māori theory stresses that Māori communities must own and actively construct theory (Hoskins, 2001; Irwin, 1993). Such a strategy implies that the incorporation of Kaupapa Māori theory into a Māori feminist perspective will result in a feminist theory that has the potential to be more meaningful and appropriate to Māori who are interested in Māori feminist practice and engaged with research that is of relevance to wāhine Māori. Kaupapa theory also encourages collective theorisation, as opposed to the notion of individual intellectualisation, and as such better meets the cultural needs of whānau groups working together to strengthen Māori communities (Hoskins, 2001; Smith, 1992). Māori feminist practice incorporating Kaupapa Māori would therefore also be well suited to collaborative research projects such as qualitative investigations into a variety of lived experiences of Māori women, for example: experiences of health, education, community development initiatives and the like. Māori feminism incorporating Kaupapa Māori theory validates all things Māori and, therefore remembers, affirms and authenticates the status of wāhine Māori who in traditional society were central to Māori cosmological and historical narratives and participated at all levels of social and political affairs (Jahnke, 2002).

In Betty's narrative, her work at Arohanui Trust can be viewed as Kaupapa Māori theory in action. She felt very strongly that it was important for all Māori youth in her care to learn about Māori

language and culture. She actively sought creative ways to teach Māori youth and to help them become literate and self-actualising, including employing tutors in te reo Māori and Māori weaponry.

5. *Recognises the dimensions of taha tinana, (physical dimension) taha wairua (spiritual dimension) and taha hinengaro (conscious and unconscious parts of the mind).*

Systems of learning which incorporate taha tinana, taha hinengaro and taha wairua are examples of Māori re-claiming our own truths, our own knowledge base and our own methods of scholarship:

> Hine (female) is the conscious part of the mind and ngaro (hidden) is the subconscious. Hinengaro refers to the mental, intuitive and 'feeling' seat of the emotions. Thinking, knowing, perceiving, remembering, recognising feeling, abstracting, generalising, sensing, responding and reacting are all processes of the Hinengaro – the mind (Pere, 1991, p. 32).
>
> Taha tinana – Different forms of recreation and physical exercises are encouraged to help develop agility, dexterity, rhythm, coordination, balance, harmony, poise, stamina and the sheer joy of being human (Pere, 1991, p. 24).
>
> Wairua is an apt description of the spirit – it denotes two waters. There are both positive and negative streams for one to consider. Everything has a wairua, for example, water can give or take life. It is a matter of keeping balance (Pere, 1991, p. 16).

Rangimarie Pere's framework of education and learning incorporates many other aspects and concepts of traditional Māori society, which she presents as a model of interconnections and interrelations. Pere's central concept of education is that nothing stands in isolation; the physical, the mental and the spiritual actually merge into each other. A Māori feminist epistemology could include knowledge bases which incorporate a spiritual dimension, although this could be a problematic and contentious area and a cause for debate (Matahaere-Atariki, 1998).

A collective epistemology which incorporates oral traditions while raising a number of issues, nevertheless symbolises a potential network for connecting Māori women with one another, a common bond, despite all of our differences. However, because of the nebulous and mystical element of spirituality, its inclusion into a collective

epistemology is open to critique, from both Māori and non-Māori: 'Credibility is undermined through appeals to a "tradition" untainted by colonialism that resonate with a self-conscious rectitude indicative of someone privy to "ancient and forgotten mysteries" ' (Matahaere, 1995, as cited in Platt 1998, p. 15).

Platt explores the apprehensions raised by Matahere, a Māori scholar, who is concerned with the uncritical promotion of taha wairua and an identity based on spirituality, illustrating the tensions and conflicts between Māori feminism (and indeed other feminist perspectives) and spirituality.

> She [Matahaere] contends that challenging the dominance of Western epistemologies and ontologies by uncritically promoting taha wairua, prevents non-Māori from understanding or theorising about an identity based on spirituality. Further, she suggests that Pakeha can use 'positive stereotypes' (such as spirituality) of Māori against them, if they are uncritically introduced as a tool against colonialism (Platt, 1998, p. 20).

Flinders (1998), however, argues that such tensions need not be irresolvable. Writing about the reconciliation of a spiritual hunger with a feminist thirst from a Western context, she states:

> Feminism catches fire when it draws upon its inherent spirituality. When it does not, it is just one more form of politics, and politics has never fed our deepest hungers. What a Gandhi knew, a Mother Teresa knew, is that when individuals are drawn to a selfless cause – the relief of human suffering, the dissolution of the barriers that separate us from one another – energy and creativity come into play that simply don't under any other circumstances (Flinders, 1998, p. 325).

Flinders' argument can readily be applied to Māori feminism. Māori feminism catches fire when it draws upon its inherent spirituality. Māori historical figures, such as Te Whiti o Rongomai[3] and Princess Te Puea,[4] knew what Gandhi and Mother Teresa would come to know – when individuals are drawn to a cause there is a dissolution of the barriers that separate us from one another and an energy and creativity manifest, something which does not occur under any other circumstances. Māori women who were/are drawn to causes such as Komiti Wahine[5] the Māori Women's Welfare League and Māori feminism have generally been motivated by a desire to achieve collective self-determination and frequently the concept of Mana Wahine encapsulating the idea that women's strength, power,

influence, beauty and the like have derived from female ancestors and female deities, is an underlying kaupapa [philosophical base] for their mahi (Sinclair, 1998). This was evident in Betty Wark's narrative. She was drawn to causes such as the Māori Women's Welfare League partially in order to contribute to the collective self-determination of Māori but also because of her personal need to embrace the concept of Mana Wahine and to delve into her own inner strength and power.

A biography underpinned by Māori feminist thought would have to acknowledge the spiritual in some way, even if it is as elementary as honouring the subject's tupuna. In Betty's biographical text the spiritual dimension of her life was particularly pertinent to her life's work, as it was her Catholicism and her Māoritanga [Māori culture and perspective] that sustained and motivated her.

6. *Recognises that the subordination of Māori women stems from the existence of inequality based on gender, race and class.*

Within the umbrella of what might constitute Māori feminism, many Māori women activists have been concerned with revealing inequalities based on gender, race and class and have established networks to identify strategies for change where Māori women can create/recreate space to exercise autonomous agency (Hoskins, 2000a).

Various Western feminist theoretical perspectives, such as liberal and Marxist feminisms, have also grappled with gendered and class inequalities. The issue of race remained an uncharted territory until Black women, such as bell hooks in the United States, critiqued white feminist theory and practice for obscuring the experiences of women of colour (hooks, 1984). hooks argues that it is essential that Black women recognise that a position of marginality enables a perspective from which to criticise the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony and then to envision and create a counter-hegemony (hooks, 1984). hooks' argument is also applicable to Māori women and, indeed, many Māori women have also been critical of Western feminist thought for locating gender as the primary and universal site of oppression, while largely ignoring factors of class and race. Māori women's status as tangata whenua [people of the land] situates Māori women in a much larger reality than that of 'women's rights' (Hoskins, 2000a; Lummis, 1987; Mohanty, 1991; Swindells, 1989).

An analysis of the subordination of Māori women which identifies the existence of inequality based on gender, race and class must also take into account the impact of the State's structural dimensions on our struggles. Linda Smith (1992) positions such an analysis within what she terms the State discourse:

> This analysis locates political and Pakeha-dominant structures at the core of the struggle. The current material conditions of Māori women need to be seen not only against the background of colonization but also against the construction via various manifestations of the State, of Māori women as an oppressed social and economic group. These manifestations include the State education, social welfare and justice systems, as well as other bureaucracies involved in economic and social planning (p. 44).

In Betty's narrative, struggles with the State are frequently articulated. One of the main reasons for her activism and involvement with local politics was to try to transform social, political and economic realities for all Māori.

7. *Recognises that colonisation has eroded Māori identity and actively promotes the resurgence of mana wāhine Māori.*

Colonisation impacted upon both Māori men and women in different ways. Māori women were subjected to a restructuring process which eroded our mana in far more insidious ways. Prior to European contact, Māori women's status and role in society was determined by the hierarchical structures of the iwi, hapu and whanau. Highborn women, for example, could own land and would not lose it upon marriage. These structures were eroded with colonisation and, consequently, there was also an erosion in mana wahine for those women (Connor, 1994).

Weedon (1999) argues that the narratives of colonialism, particularly the narratives of civilisation and Christianisation, demonstrated an overwhelming lack of respect for difference. She suggests that both Western and so-called third-world feminisms continue to be profoundly affected by the legacy of colonialism and she argues it remains an issue which needs to be confronted and explored. For Māori feminists the colonial history of Aotearoa/New Zealand has served as a force against which an anti-colonial Māori identity has been defined, based on traditional constructions of selfhood and dependent upon 'difference'. Implicit in Māori feminist politics is the confrontation and exploration of colonialism. Māori biographical

subjects' self-conceived constructions of the self will in some way be affected by colonial constructions of Māori. Biographical research can be conceptualised as an agent of decolonisation, confronting negative stereotypes and offering positive constructions of selfhood and collective Māori identities.

One of the most insidious ways colonisation has impacted upon Māori women has been through the notion of embodied oppression where the differential ciphering of the Māori body, through racialising and sexualising discourses, transformed gender roles and relations, eroding and destabilising Māori women's bases of power (Hoskins, 2001). One of the agendas of Māori feminism is to re-inscribe the Māori female body and re-establish bases of power for wahine Māori. Discourses around the body as articulate and transforming are situated within notions of decolonisation (Hoskins, 2001). Biographical and autobiographical texts have the potential to counter negative discourses about the Māori female body and to reinterpret and reconstitute the colonised body which rendered Māori women as being too short, stocky, unattractive and unfeminine (Bell, 1992; Hoskins, 2000a). A vivid example of such a contesting discourse can be seen in the autobiographical text, *My Journey*, authored by former Māori politician Donna Awatere Huata:

> I have warrior thighs. I am descended from women who fought in battle with taiaha (long weapon), patu (short weapon) and mere (club), and I look like it. My legs are solid, with flat feet for gripping the ground. [My body is] a fighting machine (Awatere Huata, 1996, p. 28).

Biographical research into both historical and contemporary Māori figures can demonstrate the impact of colonisation on Māori women's lives, so that the often abhorrent events of our colonial past are not forgotten. It can also promote the resurgence of mana wahine by raising awareness of the accomplishments of Māori women and providing revisionist her-stories which demonstrate the power and status of Māori women prior to colonisation. One example is *The Old Time Māori,* originally written in 1930 by Makere, a rare example of an ethnographic text researched and authored by a Māori woman of that era (Makereti, 1930/1986). Reprinted in 1986 with an introduction by Māori scholar Dr Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, it is now celebrated as a classic reference for information on traditional Māori society, particularly with regard to matters pertaining to women such as menstruation, marriage, childbirth and child rearing.

Discourses of decolonisation have actively promoted the resurgence of mana wāhine Māori and have challenged the ways in which Māori women are positioned in relation to Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Pihama, 2001). The controversial 1993 Māori women's claim to the Waitangi Tribunal, in which prominent Māori women asserted the necessity of women's representation in decision-making relating to Māori economic and cultural development, is one example (Rei, 1998).

Māori women have always had mana. The historical experiences of colonisation, with its tiers of patriarchy, racism and capitalism, resulted in a temporary suppression of mana for many Māori women, but by no means for all. The resurgence of mana wahine Māori evident in contemporary society is indicative of decolonisation and the collective resistance of all indigenous people who are attempting to dismantle power structures that marginalised and eroded our cultural identity. Biographical research offers a method that makes it possible for Māori to reclaim cultural identity and mana. It offers a vehicle through which to represent the thoughts and experiences of people who have been colonised and dominated and characterised as being primitive and inferior. Biographical research provides a space for reclaiming an indigenous voice and vision within the arts, humanities and social sciences and a place for what Battiste (2000) terms 'unfolding the lessons of colonisation' (p. xvi). As Betty's narrative unfolded it became evident that the theme of 'home' could be read as one way she sought to reclaim her cultural identity and mana. The remnants of colonisation had stripped her of her language and culture in her early life but as she matured she reclaimed these taonga [treasures] and consequently felt at 'home'.

8. *Seeks to create its own theories and discourse*

The term 'Māori feminism' is problematic for many Māori women (Pihama, 2001). Nevertheless, it is a term that signals a particular standpoint and expression of feminism. Māori feminism can be grouped under the umbrella of feminist theoretical perspectives of women of colour – a body of scholarship which refers to the rich and vast literature from indigenous women, 'third world' women and women who have experienced a history of colonisation and slavery. Women of colour have challenged white, middle-class, feminist theory as being 'race' blind and have been critical of white feminists

for overlooking the experiences of non-white women:

> Black feminism has provided a space and a framework for the articulation of our diverse identities as black women from different ethnicities, classes and sexualities, even though at times that space had to be fought for and negotiated. To assert an individual and collective identity of black women has been a necessary historical process both empowering and strengthening (Parmar, 1989, p. 58).

Parmar's comments have relevance for Māori feminism which has sought to provide a space and a framework for the her-stories of Māori women, even though at times that space had to be fought for and negotiated. Biographical research complements the goals of Māori feminism in this aspiration and gives space to Māori subjects and biographers.

In order to find relevant ways to explain the nature of Māori women's experiences within contemporary contexts, it is crucial to utilise an analysis that is positioned in te ao Māori (Jahnke, 1997). For many Māori, mana wāhine expresses what counts as feminism. It is a term that is positioned within te ao Māori and incorporates Māori women's identity, philosophy and value system based on whakapapa and the origins of the geographic space of Aotearoa/New Zealand, (Irwin, 1993; Jahnke, 1997; Pihama, 2001).

The concept of mana wāhine contains two key components (Pihama, 2001): 'mana' which, according to Pere (1991), can be conceptualised as meaning control, prestige, power, vested and acquired authority, influence and also psychic influence; and 'wāhine', which means women. Pihama (2001) breaks the term of wāhine into two parts: 'wa' relates to notions of time and space and 'hine' relates to the female essence, across the life cycle from kohine [girl] to whaea [mother] and on to kuia [older woman]. Pihama (2001) asserts that Mana Wāhine theory is a particular form of Kaupapa Māori theory that validates the mana of Māori women:

> The term Mana Wāhine theory serves as an overarching term for a range of Māori women's theoretical approaches, each of which have the fundamental belief that to engage issues from a Māori women's view point is both valid and necessary. Drawing on the notion of mana wāhine as a means of naming Māori women's theories makes explicit the approach and intent. It affirms that Māori women have mana, a belief that early writers have undermined in the insidious ways in which they have described our tupuna wāhine. It affirms also a movement of uplifting the

> position of Māori women in a context where our roles and status have been systematically dismantled (Pihama, 2001, p. 255).

Mana Wāhine theory, as Pihama suggests, affirms Māori women's mana and uplifts the status of Māori women. The biographical narrative of Betty Wark unashamedly set out to embrace this kaupapa. From the outset it was intended as a celebratory work, affirming Betty's life and her mana as a Māori woman. Judith Binney's (1996) book, *Nga Morehu, The Survivors,* in which she tells the life histories of eight Māori women, is another example of biographical narrative affirming Māori women's mana. The stunning photographs by Gillian Chaplin of the women also enhance their dignity and mana, adding a visual discourse to the text. The whakapapa of each woman was also included in order to honour the tupuna of the women and again to enhance their mana and status.

An indigenous women's discourse which is concerned with locating our struggle as Māori women within an international context is compatible with what Julia Emberley (1993) terms 'a feminism of decolonisation': 'A feminism of decolonisation, produced upon the articulation of feminist and decolonial critical practices, may provide a critical theory that enables a reading of Native women's writings' (p. 4).

Māori feminist research and writing also contributes to the discourses of feminist decolonisation and, alongside other indigenous women's work, is particularly compatible with Native American women's writings.[6]

Māori lesbian feminists[7] have also been influenced by the theoretical perspectives and writings of women of colour lesbian feminists. For lesbians of colour, there can be conflicts between integrating identities of lesbianism, womanhood and being a person of colour. Understanding the nexus of racism and heterosexism demands vigorous exploration and analysis (Leslie & MacNeill, 1995).

9. *Acknowledges the need to incorporate both mana wāhine and mana tane into its philosophical base.*

Māori feminist research is concerned with privileging mana wāhine and women's experiences. Mana tane, [Māori men] our relationships with Māori males at both personal and public levels, and issues concerning Māori males are part of our experiences as Māori women.

Working with and alongside Māori men is a key element that sets Māori feminist theorising apart from most other modes of feminism (Pihama, 2001).

Betty Wark worked extensively with Māori males. For her it was essential that Māori men and women worked together for the collective benefit of Māoridom. Yet in her early days as a community worker she was feisty and at times aggressive: 'I used to use a stick. I didn't know any better but I thought I could bash some sense into those boys. But it didn't work – it didn't work' (B. Wark, personal communication, September 2, 1996). Eventually she realised she had to promote the concept of mana tane by encouraging the men she worked with to feel good about themselves through the self-development and education programmes offered at Arohanui Trust.

10. *Actively promotes research methods which complement the kaupapa (underlying belief systems) of Māori feminism.*

The final point offered in the base definition for Māori feminism, advocates that research methods which complement the kaupapa of Māori feminism should be promoted. Biographical research, story-telling and narrative analysis are all examples of research methods which complement the kaupapa of Māori feminism. A strength of biographical research methodology is that it offers possibilities for centralising the experiences of Māori women whose lives have been erased from the social and political landscape. On one level Betty Wark saw the telling of her story as a political act and potentially transformative for its readers. She envisioned that for individuals her story could be inspiring. She also saw her story as having an impact for the collective, demonstrating what can be achieved for the greater good when people work together to create a whānau which is supportive and affirming.

Summary

The ten points identified in the base definition for conceptualising Māori feminism are intended as a foundation from which to theorise. There will be agreement as well as contention around each point. As Irwin (1993) argues, Māori feminist theories must be designed in order that we have control over making sense of our world and future. Developing methodologies which are appropriate and compatible with Māori feminist ideals will ensure we have control of our own

research projects and will enable us to make sense of our own worlds and future. Within the context of my doctoral thesis the principles of Māori feminism were developed in order to create a foundation from which to theorise about biographical research as Māori feminist research and also to apply the theories to a practical project. Each of the principles has some relevance to the biographical text, as does Kaupapa Māori theory.

The biographical method has also been recognised as a research methodology that lends itself to the notion of hybridity and cross-fertilisation, which Weedon (1999) argues can create a space for creativity, the resurgence of cultural survival and notions of 'home'. These themes can also be applied to Māori in general as a colonised people wanting to create a space for creativity and articulating difference. The hybrid approach to the biographical method provides a tool for such aims. It is a Western method which can readily incorporate Māori theoretical perspectives such as Māori feminism and Kaupapa Māori theory. The preceding discussion has examined this hybrid approach while drawing from existing literature and contributing to the discourse regarding Māori feminism.

The biographical method provides a space to kōrero [speak] about individual and collective subject's sense of cultural identity and provides a mode of self-representation that is compatible with a Māori sense of self. Cultural survival and searching for that 'place called home' are themes that resonate throughout many Māori personal narratives. Biographical and autobiographical texts for Māori can also be viewed as literary extensions of whakapapa, as they provide spaces to speak about coming 'home'.

Kōrero kia rongo i tō reo rangatira
Speak so that we may hear the divine essence in
your voice (Tai, 1992, p. 43).

Notes

1 This paper has been developed from chapter two in my PhD thesis. Connor, D.H. (2006). *Writing ourselves 'home': Biographical texts: a method for contextualizing the lives of wahine Māori. Locating the story of Betty Wark.* Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Auckland, Auckland. Chapter Two provided a general discussion on the appropriateness of the biographical research method for Māori feminist research.

2 Betty Wark was born in 1924 in the Hokianga region. She was of Māori and Pākehā (European) descent and became involved in community work in the early 1960s. In 1974 she helped set up Arohanui Incorporated, a community-based organisation which aimed to provide guidance and assistance to young persons referred from the courts, prisons, Social Welfare and independent sources. Betty died in 2001 of lung cancer.

3 Te Whiti o Rongomai of Taranaki was a Māori rangatira (chief) who alongside with Tohu, a fellow rangatira, built the village of Parihaka and began preaching the doctrine of passive resistance during the 1860s. For a detailed and comprehensive history of Te Whiti and Tohu and their resistance to colonial oppression see Scott, D. (1994). *Ask that mountain: The story of Parihaka.* Auckland: Reed. For a concise portrait of Te Whiti's life see Anderton, J. (1999). *Unsung heroes: Portraits of inspiring New Zealanders.* Auckland: Random House.

4 Princess Te Puea Herangi of Tainui established land development schemes and worked to re-establish the Waikato people economically and culturally Sinclair, M. (1998), endnote 36. Also refer to King, M. (1977). *Te Puea: A biography.* Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton.

5 Ngā Komiti Wāhine (tribally based Māori Women's Committees) grew out of the Kotahitanga movement (the movement for a Māori Parliament) when, in 1893, wāhine Māori asked for the right for Māori women to be included among the electors of the Māori Parliament and to be eligible to stand as candidates (Sinclair 1998, p. 105).

6 Many Māori feminists have been influenced by a number of Native American feminist writers, including: Lee Maracle (1996) of the Stoh:lo Nation and Marie Battiste (2000) from Potlo'tek First Nations in Unama'kik, Nova Scotia. Another indigenous feminist writer who has been influential among Māori women is Haunani-Kay Trask (1993, 1991), a Hawaiian scholar.

7 Ngahuia Te Awekotuku has written extensively on Māori lesbian feminism and passionately proclaims: 'My challenge is this: to reconstruct tradition, reinterpret the oral history of this land, so skilfully manipulated by the crusading heterosexism of the missionary ethic. For we do have one word, takatāpui' (Te Awekotuku, 1993, p. 288). The term, takatāpui, meaning having a lover or special friend of the same sex, has become a marker of self-identity for many Māori lesbians and gay men. The reclaiming of this traditional concept demonstrates one way in which Māori lesbian feminism is seeking to create its own theories and discourse

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