CENTERING MANA WAHINE: GENDER AND TRANSCONTINENTAL COLONIAL POWER
IN MĀORI WOMEN’S EPISTEMOLOGY

AN HONORS THESIS
SUBMITTED ON THE SIXTH OF MAY, 2022
TO THE PROGRAM OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
OF THE HONORS PROGRAM
OF NEWCOMB-TULANE COLLEGE
TULANE UNIVERSITY
FOR THE DEGREE OF
BACHELOR OF ARTS
WITH HONORS IN GENDER AND SEXUALITY STUDIES

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This thesis analyzes “mana wahine,” an Indigenous feminist epistemology from Aotearoa New Zealand. The aim is to articulate its unique intersectional understanding of white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy and draw connections to women of color feminism outside of Aotearoa. First, I review tenets of mana wahine that highlight its intersectional perspective and utility for de-colonizing white feminist approaches. The themes I analyze are traditional Māori family structures (whānau), discussions of traditional gender roles, Māori feminist alliances with Māori men (mana tāne), reclamation of cosmological feminist figures, and Māori “herstory.” In the second section, I look at moments where mana wahine thinkers directly engage with women of color feminists abroad. I find commonalities between mana wahine and women of color critiques of white feminism and its analysis of the Western institution of motherhood, white privilege in educational curriculum, and tokenism. This section is not a cross-cultural comparison, but rather draws analytical linkages between the epistemologies’ shared understandings of power. Cross-cultural comparisons often construct a monolithic Other, against which a normative perspective is affirmed and uplifted. Instead, I identify connective tissue between mana wahine and women of color feminism, with attention to difference, to provide a basis for ideological solidarity against white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy. By examining contemporary feminist thought that is rooted in centuries of analysis of the relationship between European patriarchal systems, settler colonialism and racialized capitalism, this thesis creates transnational analytical linkages that are understudied yet necessary to understanding contemporary relations of power.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Summary and Context</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Summary</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aotearoa New Zealand: National Historical Context</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining “Mana Wahine”</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Glossary</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Core Themes of Mana Wahine</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whānau (family): Māori Kinship Networks</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Gender in Māori Societies, Pre-Colonization</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mana Tāne</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosmology and Mana Wahine</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori “Herstories”: Tribal Leaders and Contemporary Activism</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Mana Wahine and Women of Color Feminisms</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women of Color Feminism</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References to Women of Color Feminisms in Mana Wahine Theory</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersectionality</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Introduction**

Honor your whakapapa...Because, do you know, you are the descendants of geniuses? And we have been so brainwashed into thinking that we were primitive savages who were so fortunate to be colonized... that we have been trained not to value, and honor, thousands and thousands of years of knowledge and wisdom that have been passed down to us...If you honor your whakapapa, then you know that your ancestors had the answers.

Donna Awatere Huata, Waitangi Day Festival, Forum Tent, 2020

Donna Awatere Huata, a Māori activist who has led de-colonial activism in Aotearoa New Zealand for more than fifty years, delivered an impassioned call to action at the 2020 Waitangi Day Festival.¹ Located on the grounds where the Treaty of Waitangi was signed between British colonizers and Māori chiefs in 1840, the event is a bold and bright blend of political dissent, advocacy, debate, celebration, food, and community.² Awatere Huata delivered her speech in the Forum Tent, to an audience including notorious Māori activists Annette Sykes and Tame Iti, as well as Māori citizens, community leaders, and Pākehā allies. Through humor, anger, reflection, and storytelling, Awatere Huata encourages listeners to come together under shared love and respect for ancestral knowledge. She urges them to unite and reject colonially imposed positionings of Māori men against Māori women. Although Awatere Huata has been fighting for Māori liberation for decades, and her speech was delivered to Indigenous community leaders, only one recording of her message circulates online with a mere 200 views on YouTube, and a few thousand shares on Facebook.

Just a few paces away from Awatere Huata, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern was serving barbecue to Waitangi Day festival goers. National news media celebrated her participation, with

an image of Ardern holding Māori liberation activist Titewhai Harawira’s hand circulating widely. Ardern is lauded as a feminist icon in international journalism, and her policies have earned New Zealand the colloquial title of “Woman’s Land.” Celebrated feminist policy changes under her leadership include introducing free menstrual products to public schools nationally, extending paid parental leave, and passing the Equal Pay Amendment Bill in July 2020.

The juxtaposition of Awatere Huata’s passionate call to action and Ardern’s nearby cheerful participation exemplifies a broader discrepancy in Aotearoa New Zealand -- the simultaneous groundbreaking feminist policy making, and the persistent inequality and silencing that Māori women face. In 2011, a UN report on domestic violence rates in Organisation for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) countries ranked New Zealand as having nearly the highest rates of domestic violence compared to other respondents, with only one country ranking worse. New Zealand also had the highest rate of sexual violence among respondents. One third of the country’s women reported experiencing intimate partner violence between 2000-2010, and this number is expected to be an underestimation due to a lack of reporting. More recently, research from the New Zealand Ministry for Women in 2015 reported Māori women are twice as

likely to experience violence in New Zealand compared to Pākeha (white) women. This thesis seeks to answer the questions: How is it possible that a country seemingly leading the OECD in feminist policymaking is also home to some of the highest rates of gender-based violence? Why isn’t feminist policy making uplifting women in New Zealand?

I contend the feminist policies introduced in New Zealand are ineffective because they utilize a white feminist approach, rather than centering Indigenous perspectives. White feminism is a-historical or selectively historical because its focus on gender and sexuality lacks an analysis of race and colonization; it analyzes and normalizes experiences of sexism as imbedded primarily in systems of gender and sexuality without proper attention to white supremacy and colonialism. Patriarchal domination is always a colonial project. In order for feminism to address and eliminate conditions that perpetuate domination and subordination it must have an analysis of the ways in which colonial desires, practices, beliefs and institutions continue to operate in contemporary gender and sexual relations. Feminist policy making in New Zealand has tackled gender oppression as a single-axis issue, approaching the problem as only related to the privileging of masculinity over femininity. New Zealand as a recently colonized space must tend to patriarchy as a product and tool of British colonial expansion. Mana wahine -- Māori women’s epistemology -- offers direction for historically contextualized and multi-axis feminist strategy in New Zealand.

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Awatere Huata’s speech implores activists to turn to Māori values and frameworks for constructing de-colonial approaches for changemaking. Heeding this call to action, this thesis explores Māori women’s epistemology as a de-colonial alternative to white feminism. Awatere Huata’s speeches and publications are part of a constellation of poems, articles, paintings, and images that constitute “mana wahine,” which literally translates to “Māori women’s power,” a definition that I will explicate over the course of this thesis. Mana wahine is an epistemology and feminist knowledge that conceptualizes power from the unique lived experience of generations of women who have been multiply marginalized along lines of Indigeneity, race, gender, and class. Unlike white feminist analyses of power, which have long given primacy to understanding gender dynamics, Mana wahine analyses insist on understanding contemporary gender dynamics as always constituted by European economic projects of expansion and colonization. In this thesis I will explain key insights of Mana wahine and examine analytical linkages between mana wahine and women of color feminists, who also broaden their analysis of power beyond gender. Through this focus, I will reveal critical relationships between systems of gender-based, economic and racial oppression. This thesis utilizes secondary sources, mana wahine literature, as primary sources. I investigate mana wahine’s epistemological approach, identifying sources of knowledge that the authors value, and sifting out their ideological approaches for conceptualizing white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy. I understand this to be an important step in liberating dominant feminist discourse from colonized logics and generating a more accurate and complete analysis of power in colonized spaces.

**Chapter 1: Summary and Context**

Chapter 1 will review foundational mana wahine texts, identifying core themes and values that Māori thinkers have developed since the field crystallized in academia in the 1980’s
These central themes include Māori kinship networks/whānau, narratives of pre-colonial gender dynamics, mana tāne (Māori men’s involvement in mana wahine), wahine in Māori cosmology, and Māori women’s “herstory.” Rooted in germinal texts, many of which are collected in two mana wahine readers, the literature review will identify critical questions, values, and political approaches that define the epistemology and align with women of color feminist thought transnationally. ⁸

Accurately reviewing central tenets of mana wahine requires utilizing te reo Māori (Māori language). For ease of use, Chapter 1 contains a glossary of key te reo Māori terms and translations. I will not italicize words in te reo Māori, following in the practice of mana wahine theorists. De-italicizing te reo Māori is a political act of normalization, pushing back against histories of language oppression and erasure and privileging te reo Māori as “taken for granted.” ⁹

I will also incorporate te reo Māori terms into my writing without offering a translation at every point. This choice follows in the practice of mana wahine scholars themselves, who often integrate te reo Māori into their work without translations. Including te reo Māori without repeated translation is another mode for speaking from a “taken for granted” position.

Mana wahine literature speaks directly to Māori readers and meaningfully engages with Pākeha feminists in New Zealand. Many of the articles compiled in mana wahine readers open

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with a proverb or poem in te reo Māori. These introductions can only be understood by native
speakers of te reo Māori, creating distance between Pākeha or non-native readers and intimate
ancestral knowledge. Even with the use of a te reo Māori dictionary, one could not understand
the proverbs without familiarity with the layered and complex meanings of the vocabulary and
cultural references that are imbued into the text. This practice is an application of the
epistemology itself -- a decisively Māori-focused dialogue that is situated within Māori
perspectives. Simmonds explains: “Mana wahine, as an extension of Kaupapa Māori, is located
in the wider indigenous struggle that has emerged because ‘we’ were unwilling to continue to try
and ‘find’ ourselves in the words, texts and images of others.”10 While mana wahine scholars
articulate critiques of Pākeha feminism and directly engage with it in writing, the prioritized
audience is Māori women, and the authors do not compromise centering Māori perspectives to
accommodate non-native speakers.

The literature review includes foundational Mana Wahine texts written in Aotearoa New
Zealand. This includes both volumes of *Mana Wahine Reader* compiled by the Te Kotahi
Research Institute, in addition to books and articles by prominent mana wahine thinkers such as
Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, Donna Awatere Huata, Kathie Irwin, Leonie Pihama, Linda Tuhiwai
Smith, and Naomi Simmonds.11 These theoreticians offer foundational definitions and
frameworks for understanding mana wahine and applying it as a lens for feminist changemaking
and de-colonization. They highlight key tensions between Māori and Pākeha feminist
approaches, celebrate and identify moments of Māori women’s leadership, and point to areas for

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11 The Te Kotahi Research Institute is a branch of Waikato University dedicated to researching and publishing Māori and Indigenous knowledge.
further research. Heeding the call of Awatere Huata which introduced this chapter, the literature review turns towards Māori culture and ancestry as the center of knowledge for dismantling white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy.

Mana wahine and many North American women of color feminist approaches reject the positivist assumption that research can be truly unbiased and neutral.\(^\text{12}\) Similarly, a literature review should not be understood as an unbiased summary. As the author, I select some essays over others, and emphasize particular aspects of mana wahine to study. Describing Black feminist epistemology, Patricia Hill Collins writes, “Not only must individuals develop their knowledge claims through dialogue and present them in a style proving their concern for their ideas, but people are expected to be accountable for their knowledge claims…Every idea has an owner and that owner’s identity matters.”\(^\text{13}\) My own positionality as a white American woman informs my research concerning national belonging, race, ethnicity, gender and marginalization. In order to de-center my own perspective, I have made it a central mission of this thesis to call attention to mana wahine’s critiques of white feminism. In the literature review, I point out ways in which mana wahine reveals and confronts manifestations of white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy in mainstream feminism. In chapter two, I locate critiques of white feminism that mana wahine and women of color feminism share.

I chose to highlight elements of mana wahine in the literature review which fit the following criteria: (1) Mana wahine thinkers identify the theme as important through repetition, essay/section titles in mana wahine publications, or overt declarations; (2) topics which resonate


with women of color feminism transnationally. The literature review and subsequent synthesis with mostly North American women of color feminist theory serves the ultimate goal of understanding how systems of oppression define and constitute one another in ways that white feminist perspectives leave out. In addition, the chapters serve to identify how colonization, and therefore white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy, manifests in white mainstream feminisms. By centering what mana wahine and women of color feminists believe is important in the literature review, I hope to de-center my own colonized approach to feminism in favor of intersectional approaches.

To animate the white feminist pitfalls I am describing, I offer a common example mana wahine scholars evoke: discussions about speaking rights of Māori women on the marae (community meeting center) between Māori and Pākeha women (white European New Zealanders). Pākeha feminist thinkers in Aotearoa have historically criticized marae tikanga (traditions for community meetings/ceremonies) for only allowing men to perform whaikōrero (formal speeches). Pākeha feminists claim that this tikanga silences Māori women and can be attributed to sexism inherent to Māori culture. Kathie Irwin, a prominent Māori academic, points out that this critique of Māori tikanga is flattening and inaccurate, because it operates without understanding Māori definitions of speech, empowerment, and equality. The Pākeha argument begins with the assumption that Māori women do not speak in the marae. In reality, Māori women do not participate in the particular tradition of whaikōrero, but speak through other

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tikanga such as chants, songs, and greetings that are of no less value than whaikōrero.\textsuperscript{17} In addition, the Pākeha argument is predicated upon the assumption that men and women must do the exact same thing in order to achieve equality -- a claim that does not resonate in Māori culture, where individuals of different relational positions are seen as having different, but equally important roles.\textsuperscript{18} In this case, Pākeha feminist thinkers map onto Māori culture an understanding of gender, power, and speech that distorts Māori tikanga and reinforces a stereotype of Māori culture as sexist. This example animates the central aim of this thesis -- to listen and center Mana wahine and women of color feminist perspectives in order to more accurately conceptualize relationships between systems of oppression. In the example offered, the Pākeha feminists overlayed their own experiences within European culture onto Māori culture and as a result communicated a distorted understanding of power and autonomy.

**Chapter 2: Summary**

Mana wahine scholars engage with women of color feminist theory developed outside of Aotearoa New Zealand in their writing. Several of the foundational texts I review in Chapter 1 include quotations and analyses of writings by Black feminists, Indigenous feminists, and women of color feminists. In Chapter 2, I review these transnational feminist engagements, identifying shared analytical approaches to understanding and dismantling racialized colonial heteropatriarchy. Mana wahine scholars identify their work as aligning with the group “women of color,” not as a biological determination or physiological grouping, but rather as an act of solidarity, forming a unified political front against white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy.

\textsuperscript{17} Tuhiiwai Smith, “Māori Women: Discourses,” 73.

\textsuperscript{18} Tuhiiwai Smith, “Māori Women: Discourses,” 74.
Chapter 2 seeks to articulate the political utility of this solidarity. The chapter answers the questions: What does mana wahine gain by aligning with women of color feminism? What are the shared ideological and epistemological approaches that inspire connectivity between mana wahine and women of color movements in disparate geographic locations? What do these connections reveal about how power operates in colonized spaces? Extending quotations mana wahine scholars offer from women of color feminist publications, I establish connections between the two epistemologies. The aim of Chapter 2 is to crystallize a unique understanding of relationality between systems of oppression that can only be gleaned through synthesizing mana wahine and women of color feminism.

While women of color feminism analyzes racism as an axis of oppression, mana wahine epistemology almost exclusively discusses racism as interconnected with white supremacy and colonization, rather than describing Māori people as racialized in the New Zealand context. Mana wahine epistemology discusses the implementation of white supremacist heteropatriarchy through colonization, rather than analyzing the construction of race in Aotearoa and beyond. I do not address race as a tool of analysis as much as white supremacy or colonization following in the epistemological approaches articulated in mana wahine literature.

**Aotearoa New Zealand: National Historical Context**

In order to understand mana wahine theory, one must develop at least a basic knowledge of kaupapa Māori (Māori approaches/perspectives). Mana wahine’s roots in kaupapa Māori, according to mana wahine scholars, is what differentiates the approach from Pākeha feminism. In their article “What Counts as Difference and what Differences Count: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Difference,” Johnston and Pihama explain: “Critical to Māori women’s frameworks is
the validation of te reo ngā tikanga Māori (Māori language and custom/practice), and in particular the reassertion of the status of Māori women within a Māori context and wider society generally (translations added).” Mana wahine and Māori women’s liberation cannot be conceptualized outside of Māori sovereignty and liberation. In line with this directive, I offer here an abridged and simplified history of Māori settlement and the Aotearoa colonization process. When moving through this brief narrative, I invite readers to consider “history” not as an objective term. This rendition of New Zealand history was sourced from a governmentally funded satirical radio show. The series, “The Citizen’s Handbook”, was designed to help New Zealand citizens take responsibility for and reckon with their national history and is pro-Māori and anti-colonization in its politics. This abridged history begins with Māori settlement in Aotearoa, but a full Māori history would begin with cosmological tales of the origins of humankind.

Ancestors of modern Māori communities settled in Aotearoa/New Zealand between 1200 and 1300 AD. Māori originally settled in coastal regions but moved inland for agriculture and became tangata whenua (people of the land). Disputes in land use and agriculture led to the development of Māori tikanga, or ritual/traditions. Battles were waged between iwi (tribe/nation), but very few casualties ensued. The structure of the traditional Māori community is as follows: a hapū (clan/tribe), is comprised of whānau (family/extended kinship networks).

Hapū with shared ancestry, or whakapapa, combine to form an iwi (tribe/nation).22 Rangatira (leaders/chiefs) of these communities were both men and women, since the times of early settlement.23 Māori communities and economies were robust in the seventeenth century, and hapū traded minerals, food, goods, ran flour mills and exported products to Australia.24 Europeans first arrived in 1642, with small settler communities emerging over the next century, increasing trade steadily.25 In 1831, Māori leaders from the North Island wrote He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tirene, known in English as The Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand, establishing a Māori nation.26

Increasing numbers of British settlers moved to Aotearoa, necessitating a formal political agreement between the British and Māori. Te Tiriti o Waitangi, or The Treaty of Waitangi, was signed by 500 Māori leaders and a representative of the British crown in 1840.27 Mana wahine thinkers have pointed out that many of the Māori leaders who signed the treaty were women, although most women rangatira were prohibited by the British from signing the document -- an early imposition of patriarchal gender norms on Māori society.28 The treaty, in its English form, authorized British rule and law in Aotearoa/New Zealand. However, according to Māori tradition

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22 Translations sourced from Māoridictionary.co.nz. Historical content from Radio New Zealand, “Tangata Whenua.”
it was mistranslated to Māori rangatira, resulting in the seizing of Māori land shortly after signing. The English version of the treaty authorized British “sovereignty” over the land and its people, while the Māori translation granted British “government” over land that belonged to Māori, in exchange for protection.29 Debates over Te Tiriti o Waitangi color Māori and Pākeha relations to this day. Existing within and shaped by the larger national context, mana wahine is as much a movement towards Māori sovereignty as it is towards Māori women’s liberation. Mana wahine seeks to de-colonize and reclaim traditional Māori understandings of gender, identity, and relationality, requiring Māori sovereignty in order to free the Māori woman.30

**Defining “Mana Wahine”:**

According to Māori scholars, defining or translating mana wahine begins with an understanding of the two terms--‘mana’ and ‘wahine’--separately. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, mana is “a concept related to notions of power, strength, status and collective acknowledgement of merit.”31 It is a quality of strength and respect that is both inherent to Māori people and earned through nurturing relationships and shared responsibilities. According to Leonie Pihama, “It is both internal and external…It is both relationships with others and with ourselves, our fundamental ways of being in the world and our treatment of others…Beyond any singular translation.” She continues: “Mana is multi-dimensional and requires an understanding of wider tikanga (Māori cultural practices and protocols) and of the many contexts within which we bring tikanga practice into our lives…Mana is integral to all aspects of our cultural world as

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Māori.” While often mana is translated simply to ‘power’, a more expansive definition describes mana as respect and dignity that is essential or earned.

The term “wahine” translates directly to “women”, but, like most vocabulary in te reo Māori (Māori language), the term has layered and complex meanings. Leonie Pihama defines the term: “The term Wāhine designates a certain time and space for Māori women but is by no means a universal term like the term woman in English. There are many times and spaces Māori women move through, in our lives, Wāhine is one of those. There are others…. From birth we journey through those spaces.” In other words, wahine does not translate simply to ‘woman,’ but rather describes a social location. While a normative and reductive approach to gender understands “woman” as a stable and essential category that is sustained throughout the lifecycle, “wahine” describes not an unchanging individual but rather the role that an individual plays in relationship to the people around them, the community, and the universe. While one may be identified as “wahine” during a portion of their life, they may be understood to hold different identities at different life junctures given the role they hold in the family or community. Understanding “wahine” as a spatial and relational term rather than an essential gender or sex category serves both to situate mana wahine theory within kaupapa Māori and to reveal liberatory Māori understandings of gender that have been erased through colonization.

Explicating the definitions of “mana” and “wahine” serves a larger purpose of the movement,

which is to reclaim traditional Māori understandings of gender and power that colonization obscures, and which often appear in white feminist theory.\textsuperscript{35}

In addition to offering capacious translations of ‘mana’ and ‘wahine,’ mana wahine scholars have long debated what the term includes and how it can be defined. In her 1993 article “Getting Out from Down Under,” Linda Tuhiwai Smith defines mana wahine: “Mana Wahine Māori is the preferred Māori label for what counts as Māori feminism. It is a term which addresses both the issues of race and gender as well as locates the struggle for Māori women within two distinct societies.”\textsuperscript{36} According to Smith, mana wahine addresses misogyny that Māori women face in their own communities, in addition to racism that they face outside of Māori communities. Mana wahine offers a de-colonial approach for pushing back against both locations of oppression at once. In her 1994 article “Māori Women: Caught in the Contradictions of a Colonised Reality,” mana wahine thinker Annie Mikaere makes this point clear:

The challenge for Māori, women and men, is to rediscover and reassert tikanga Māori within our whānau, and to understand than an existence where men have power and authority over women and children is not in accordance with tikanga Māori. Such an existence stems instead from an ancient common law tradition which has been imposed upon us, a tradition with which we have no affinity and which we have every reason to reject.\textsuperscript{37}

By reclaiming the more equitable understandings of gender from traditional Māori culture, mana wahine is uniquely positioned for confronting the intersectional nature of Māori women’s oppression. The name mana wahine pushes back against the double bind of Māori women’s realities - addressing misogyny in Māori communities by identifying with historical gender

\textsuperscript{35} Tuhiwai Smith, “Māori Women: Discourses,” 50.


\textsuperscript{37} Mikaere, “Māori Women,” 154.
equality and pushing back against Pākeha culture by identifying strongly as a Māori approach and removing the ideological distortions of colonization.

Mana wahine is also marked by a deliberate distancing from ‘Western,’ white, or mainstream feminisms. Many mana wahine thinkers have explicitly rejected the term “Māori feminism” to describe Māori women’s activist work. In her 2005 essay “Mana Wahine Theory: Creating Space for Māori Women’s Theories,” Leonie Pihama directly identifies mana wahine as separate from “Western feminist analyses,” arguing these approaches “are inadequate in providing in-depth analysis of Māori women’s experiences.” She rejects the term “Māori Feminism”, explaining:

The label Māori Feminism is problematic for many Māori women. This problematic is located within an analysis that identifies a fundamental contradiction in the use of the label in relation to Māori women’s analyses and theories of the world. Much of the criticism is based in an idea that the terms Māori and Feminism do not sit comfortably together, and that for some Māori women their experiences of Feminism and/or what is often termed the ‘Women’s Movement’ has not been a healthy one but has mirrored their experiences of wider Pākehā society, where Māori ideas and concepts have been marginalized and denied and Māori women’s voices been silenced…Representation and definitions of Māori women have been, in many instances, historically constituted through the voices of the colonizer. We have been defined, painted, filmed, researched, imaged within dominant Pākehā frameworks and assumptions.  

In this excerpt, Pihama articulates two key dimensions in which Western feminisms fail Māori women. Firstly, Māori women have historically experienced silencing and marginalization in Pākehā feminist spaces. Secondly, Pākehā and Western feminisms too often work within colonized understandings of gender, family, relationality, and identity. According to Pihama, it is critical that Māori women develop theory separate from Western feminist theory, generating

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knowledge from a position of lived experience, ancestral knowledge, and de-colonial politics. Considering this claim, a translation of Mana Wahine as “Māori Feminism” would be inaccurate. In this thesis, mana wahine will be referred to as such, or as Māori women’s knowledge/theories, rather than Māori feminism.

In the following chapter, I will identify and explain core themes found in mana wahine texts. In chapter two, I will examine ideological similarities between mana wahine and women of color feminism, identifying transnational patterns of white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy and articulating a powerful and needed analytical approach to feminist changemaking that emerges from the discourse. Finally, the thesis will identify areas for further research, and reiterate mana wahine’s implications for generating radically de-colonized feminist thought.

Chapter Glossary:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hapū</td>
<td>Be pregnant, sub-tribe; extended kin group, consisting of many whānau</td>
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<td>Iwi</td>
<td>Tribe, people; descent group, consisting of many hapū</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kaupapa</td>
<td>Philosophy, purpose, topic, subject, theme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mana</td>
<td>Power, prestige, reputation, standing, authority, control, influence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mana wahine</td>
<td>Women’s status; theoretical and methodological approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pākehā</td>
<td>English, foreign, European</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rangatiratanga</td>
<td>Chieftainship, sovereignty, self-determination, right to exercise authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tāngata whenua</td>
<td>People of the land...Indigenous peoples</td>
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<tr>
<td>Te reo Māori</td>
<td>The Māori language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tikanga</td>
<td>Traditions, Māori philosophies, Māori law, procedure, custom, practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whānau</td>
<td>Extended family, kin group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whakapapa</td>
<td>Genealogical links, decent ties, genealogy39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter One: Core Themes of Mana Wahine

In this chapter, I summarize and analyze major themes that I have found in more than 50 mana wahine publications from the years 1975-2019. I select themes which serve the larger purpose of this thesis -- to articulate Māori women’s intersectional perspective on the mutually constitutive relationship between colonization, patriarchy, and white supremacy. The texts I draw from in this section include narrative essays, formal academic writings by Māori women, journalistic accounts of Māori women’s hui (gatherings/conventions), and activist speeches, which Māori feminist academics have collected in readers and anthologies for the purpose of establishing the epistemology in New Zealand academia.

Mana wahine is a term that crystallized in academia, but the texts comprising prominent anthologies on the subject are not traditionally academic in writing style. Rather than privileging objectivity, mana wahine theory offers experiential knowledge, cultural storytelling and personal perspectives. The inclusion of a wide range of knowledge production as theoretically important draws in a great diversity of thinkers, rejecting the marginalization and silencing that Māori women have historically faced in academic settings, and creating texts which are accessible for a broad range of Māori readers.

In the literature review, I use the term “intersectional” to refer to themes which highlight the interconnectedness of patriarchy, colonization and white supremacy. Black feminist scholar Jennifer Christine Nash points defines “intersectionality” as an analytic for understanding how gender and race discrimination have a combined effect on Black women. Finding meaning in this usage, Mana wahine scholars claim the term “intersectionality” to describe Māori women’s

experiences of combined marginalization on the basis of Indigeneity and gender. Nash calls for intersectional theorists to use the term as a starting point for analyses of intersecting systems of oppression. Following this directive, I use the term “intersectionality” not only as a descriptor for multiply marginalized women’s experiences, but also as a tool for drawing attention to themes in mana wahine discourse that articulate an understanding of patriarchy as always interconnected with European colonial expansion.

The themes I identify as central to Mana wahine are whānau (extended kinship networks), Māori gender systems pre-colonization, mana tāne (Māori men), cosmology, and Māori herstory. Mana wahine is an epistemology developed over centuries, and there are more topics and approaches than one could possibly give attention to in a project of this size. For example, this chapter does not review weaving, poi, or haka -- art forms that are a defining feature of Māori women’s theory. For the purposes of this thesis, I analyze subjects and approaches that directly analyze socioeconomic power dynamics--colonization, white supremacy, patriarchy and their relatedness. This is not to say that other topics could not inform my study of their analysis of power and patriarchal domination, only that the areas of gender, spirituality, and the family are ripe starting points for my interests. Each of the five themes offers a Māori-specific approach for understanding colonization, racism, and patriarchy as ideologies that structure and inform one another.

While offering my own analysis of mana wahine, my goal is to preserve the words and language Māori thinkers themselves use. Many te reo Māori words have several meanings that are lost in English translations. In addition, mana wahine thinkers explain that white feminists are often unable to truly articulate or understand Māori women’s approaches because their approach lacks vocabulary to do so accurately. Following this directive, I utilize both English
and te reo Māori vocabulary throughout my own analysis to ensure I am conveying mana wahine accurately and completely.

**Whānau (family): Māori Kinship Networks**

The whānau is the foundation of traditional Māori communities, and a defining feature of many Māori women’s lives.\(^{41}\) Whānau, literally translated as “family,” describes extended networks of shared responsibility between individuals across boundaries of the immediate family. I analyze whānau because it is a concrete rejection of colonially imposed patriarchal family structures, favoring shared responsibility over male-dominated households. Whānau relationships shed light upon the interrelatedness of colonization and patriarchy by positioning the former not only as an imposition of British law but also as an establishment of gender and family order.\(^{42}\) When British colonizers settled in Aotearoa, they ruptured the whānau system in order to establish British power on the national level.\(^{43}\) The logic of state-level colonialism is that the subjects of the crown produce goods for governmental gain. A patriarchal family structure recreates this dynamic on a smaller scale, with the father acting as the king of the home, ruling over his wife and children. Mikaere offers evidence for this claim, “According to the English common law, the head of the family (the husband/father) was in control of the household, ‘women and children were chattels to be used and abused by the paterfamilias as he chose’ (Quoted in Scutt, *Even in the Best of Homes*, 1983).”\(^{44}\) While a single-axis feminist approach

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\(^{41}\) Tuhiwai Smith, “Getting Out from Under,” 44.
\(^{43}\) Mikaere, “Māori Women,” 144.
\(^{44}\) Mikaere, “Māori Women,” 141.
attacks the patriarchal family structure in the home, it does not acknowledge colonization as an overarching mission that requires and instills patriarchy. It follows that whānau structures, by rejecting the nuclear family structure, reject colonization more broadly.

While in traditional communities “whānau” referred to extended kinship networks, in the contemporary many Māori families use the term to refer to nuclear family units. Mana wahine thinkers invoke pre-colonial definitions of whānau as an invitation to return to a more equitable family system, in which mothers are not considered the sole caretakers and responsibility is fairly shared. The institutionalization of white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy, which assumes the two-parent heterosexual home and confers privilege on the basis of this norm, makes the whānau system nearly impossible to uphold. For example, British colonial adoption laws assume that when a child is left without biological parents, the child must be re-housed to a new nuclear family unit. In contrast, Māori tradition holds that a child’s whānau could care for them if biological parents are not able to. Mikaere explains this phenomenon: “there was no substitution of parents, no sense in which a mythical nuclear family had to be recreated. The child was born and remained a child of the whānau.” Through codification in family and adoption law, British colonial rule imposed patriarchal family formats onto Māori communities. Annie Mikaere articulates this point:

One of the most damaging effects of colonisation for Māori women was the destruction of the whānau. It was clear right from the outset that Māori collectivism was philosophically at odds with the settler ethic of individualism. As Māori had their cultural and economic base wrested from them and as they were ravaged by introduced diseases their social structures were inevitably undermined. The

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45 I use the term “traditional” to describe Māori communities pre colonization because that is how the authors cited in Mana Wahine Reader, volumes I and II refer to the centuries of Māori life before colonial contact.
46 Mikaere, “Māori Women,” 145.
disruption of Māori social organisation was no mere by-product of colonisation, but an integral part of the process.47

Colonial family law literally imposes patriarchal family structures onto the Māori home, and in doing so simultaneously arranges a new gendered hierarchy and de-stabilizes the relational foundations of Māori life. By requiring that men act as head of household, colonial family law creates a social hierarchy between Māori women and Māori men. This hierarchy serves colonization by modeling exploitative rule on a smaller scale. In addition, the pre-colonial whānau system was a strategy for community survival, interconnecting individuals and supporting mothers. Dismantling whānau systems served to disconnect Māori from one another, purposefully disempowering them and facilitating the national transition to British reign.

The Role of Gender in Māori Societies, Pre-Colonization:

According to several mana wahine scholars, in traditional Māori communities gender was not understood as a social hierarchy. Rather, gender was understood as an element of the self that changed in nature over the life-course, in relationship with other identities, creating a whole community.48 Positioning pre-colonial gender history as non-patriarchal addresses the double bind that Māori women face -- discrimination on the basis of gender by Māori men, and racism at the hands of white feminist women. By returning to a historical moment in which gender was not understood as hierarchical, mana wahine scholars evidence the claim that patriarchy is a Pākeha imposition, and that feminist resistance, by pushing back against patriarchy, is also de-

colonial Māori resistance.⁴⁹ In the context of my thesis argument, which seeks to articulate mana wahine’s unique intersectional contribution, analyzing pre-colonial understandings of gender reveals patriarchy as layered onto Indigenous communities as a component part of colonization. To reject patriarchy is to reject colonization.

Analyzing te reo Māori proverbs and grammar, mana wahine thinkers seek to understand how gender relationships that existed in traditional communities were distinct from those imposed by white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy. Many authors claim Māori communities did not conceptualize gender as a hierarchy, but rather as an ecosystem in which all contribute fairly. In her article “Māori Women: Caught in the Contradictions of a Colonised Reality,” Annie Mikaere argues “there was no hierarchy of the sexes.” She explains:

The roles of men and women in traditional Māori society can be understood only in the context of the Māori world view, which acknowledged the natural order of the universe, the interrelationship or whānaungatanga of all living things to one another and to the environment, and the over-arching principle of balance. Both men and women were essential parts in the collective whole, both formed part of the whakapapa that linked Māori people back to the beginning of the world, and women in particular played a key role in linking the past with the present and the future. The very survival of the whole was absolutely dependent upon everyone who made it up, and therefore each and every person within the group had his or her own intrinsic value. They were all a part of the collective; it was therefore a collective responsibility to see that their respective roles were valued and protected.⁵⁰

In other words, Mikaere describes ‘women’ as traditionally understood not in an oppositional relationship to the category of ‘men,’ but rather as one of many categories of life forms, human and non-human, which make up the universe. By describing pre-colonial gender roles as non-hierarchical, Mikaere argues that patriarchal gender hierarchies were imposed on Māori

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communities. Her historical description serves the argument that patriarchy and colonization are mutually constitutive.

In addition to Mikaere, Tomlins Jahnke and Simmonds argue that a hierarchical gender dynamic did not operate in traditional Māori society. These authors claim that a non-hierarchical gender system is reflected in te reo Māori (Māori language). Tomlins Jahnke finds evidence in vocabulary descriptors for women and the te reo Māori pronoun system:

The high regard with which women were held in society is exemplified by the non-sexist nature of the Māori language. It is significant that there are no demeaning terms for ‘woman’. Kinship terms denote a person's status or endearment. For example, a wife or husband, is known by the phrase tuku hoa rangatira, ‘my executive partner’. Pronouns like ‘he/she’ and ‘his/her’ are non-gendered terms, ia and tana/tōna. The term tuahine refers to a revered relationship extended by men to their sisters or female cousins (Kupenga et al, 1990:10). Today this term is used as a mark of respect accorded to women by men of the same generation who are not necessarily linked by kinship ties.51

In this excerpt, Tomlins Jahnke claims the non-gendered nature of pronouns and kinship terms in te reo Māori reveal that gender was not understood in hierarchical or oppositional terms before colonization. Using a linguistic lens, Tomlins Jahnke supports the claim that patriarchy and colonization operated simultaneously and supported one another. Simmonds (2011) makes a similar argument, claiming mana wahine as an epistemology “is premised on the argument that pre-colonisation, mana wahine and mana tane existed as complementary parts.” 52 She continues:

The roles of men and women, while distinct, were not mutually exclusive or necessarily hierarchical. This is evidenced by the lack of gendered pronouns in the Māori language - ‘ia’ meaning both he or she and tona/tana his or hers...That is not to suggest that pre-colonial Māori gender relations were a utopia of equality, and it is difficult to definitively argue that no form of sexism existed pre-colonisation. Power (or rather mana) existed, as did hierarchy; however, it was likely to be through claims to whakapapa rather than gender.53

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Her argument, like Tomlins Jahnke’s, serves to emphasize the role colonization plays in establishing patriarchal gender hierarchies within Māori communities.

While invoking pre-colonial understandings of gender in Māori communities may seem like a primarily historical endeavor, mana wahine scholars use historical narrative as a political tool. Māori tradition is often construed as sexist in white feminist spaces due to misinterpretation of Indigenous practices. In addition, Māori women in Māori community spaces often come up against resistance from Māori men when supporting feminism, because it is seen as a divisive movement, incompatible with Māori liberation. Describing Māori tradition as non-patriarchal and equitable addresses both predicaments -- the narrative rejects stereotypes of sexist Māori tradition, and positions feminist action as removing the colonial yoke of patriarchy, making it compatible with greater Māori liberation.

Mana wahine authors describe women’s roles as equal but differentiated from men’s roles in traditional-society, often defined by caretaking and generational transmission of tradition. While perhaps women’s roles were valued as highly as men’s in pre-colonial Aotearoa, contemporary authors’ descriptions still reflect a gender binary -- women and men have distinct and separate roles that complement one another. In addition, of the more than 60 articles collected in two volumes of Mana Wahine Readers, trans identity is not addressed by any mana wahine scholars. Coupled with the binary understanding of gender that is layered onto a historical narrative of equality, Māori feminist analyses of traditional gender arrangements

54 Rose Pere, “To Us the Dreamers Are Important,” 8.
successfully debunk stereotypes of Māori tradition as sexist, but do not describe non-binary approaches. While the gender system described may be non-hierarchical, it still operates within a gender binary. While some of the pronouns Tomlins Jahnke identifies are without gender (e.g., ia and tana), many traditional te reo Māori pronouns did hold gendered meanings (e.g., tuahine).

For this reason, I contend the historical positioning of traditional Māori gender systems as always equitable should be considered for the political utility it serves for mana wahine rather than its historical salience or non-binary future potentialities. Understanding why mana wahine scholars employ the narrative of traditional gender equality reveals mana wahine’s effort to identify patriarchy as a colonial tool.

**Mana Tāne**

The non-stratified gender landscape Simmonds and others describe is also found in several authors’ discussion of mana tāne (Māori men’s power). Mana wahine thinkers explain that, unlike normative ‘Western’ feminist approaches which focus on empowering women to reject oppression at the hands of men, mana wahine is not a movement against men’s power. Tāne (men) are seen as important political partners for mana wahine, allies in rejecting colonization rather than an antagonistic group. For example, Māori education scholar Margie Hohepa identifies mana tāne as a component part of mana wahine movements. She explains:

> For me, mana wahine is part of something that also recognises and incorporates mana tane. Who I am is also inextricably located within my roles and relationships with others, including my father and grandfathers, my brothers, my sons, my husband. I am wahine Māori, I am mokopuna, I am tamahine, tuakana, teina, whaea, hoa wahine. And I look forward (though hopefully not in this century) to
being karani. We draw our descent from both male and female ancestors, through the way they connected to and from each other.  

By emphasizing the importance of tāne to mana wahine, activists effectively undermine oppositional notions of gender, calling for solidarity amongst Māori women and men. Leonie Pihama elucidates this point, explaining:

There is not, as we are often presented with, a simplistic dualistic or oppositional relationship between Māori women and Māori men but there are varying ways in which roles and relationships are negotiated. This means that analysis that relates to Māori women cannot be simplistic, but needs to recognise that relationships within Māori society are multiple.

Similar to historical narratives of gender equality in traditional Māori communities, identifying tāne Māori as partners in Māori women’s liberation rejects stereotypes of Māori communities as sexist, and positions feminism as de-colonial and non-divisive. It is radically intersectional, rejecting normative expectations that Māori women must choose either feminism, or allegiance with Māori men. Theoretical emphasis on mana tāne found in mana wahine scholarship turns attention towards the intersectional approach to power the epistemology offers, in which patriarchy is understood as an ideology imposed upon both women and men, through colonization.

**Cosmology and Mana Wahine**

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58 Rose Pere, “To Us the Dreamers Are Important,” 8.


60 Tuhiwai Smith, “Māori Women: Discourses,” 51.
During the colonial process, white settlers re-told and recorded Māori myths and cosmologies through a patriarchal lens, erasing noteworthy female characters and obscuring storylines in favor of sexist tropes.\textsuperscript{61} Mana wahine epistemology rescues feminist spiritual figures from pre-colonial Māori cosmology, and describes how they have been warped by colonial patriarchal retellings.\textsuperscript{62} Mana wahine authors draw attention to this obfuscation as a means of reconnecting with “mana wairua,” which translates to spiritual power or wellbeing of Māori people. According to Evans, “the destruction of Mana Wairua was a prerequisite to successful colonisation” and “was replaced by Judeo-Christian beliefs and practices.”\textsuperscript{63} In the case of Māori goddesses, warped retellings are an example of patriarchal means towards colonial ends. By erasing women’s power, colonial authors severed Māori connection mana wairua, and imposed a patriarchal understanding of gender onto Indigenous community tradition. Patriarchal domination of women’s cosmology is a particularly clear example of the overlapping nature of patriarchal and colonial domination, severing Indigenous spiritual connection through the introduction of gender hierarchy.

Locating feminist figures in Māori cosmology is a critical focus of mana wahine because British colonial authors and anthropologists actively colonized and retold ancestral stories in ways that imposed white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy. Mikaere presents a quotation

\textsuperscript{61} Johnston and Waitere, “Echoed Silences,” 96.

\textsuperscript{62} In “Towards a Theory of Mana Wahine,” Huia Tomlins Jahnke suggests scholars use the term cosmology rather than mythology to describe oral tradition relating to Māori gods. She explains in an endnote: “Although not the case here, generally speaking the negative connotation of the term myth meaning fictitious or untrue is problematic when discussing concepts that are a cultural reality. My preference is for the term cosmology which suggests a broad interpretation that does not undermine or denigrate a world view that is often times in conflict with a western cultural imperative.” Heeding this directive, I will refer to Māori ancestral stories as “cosmology” in this thesis.

from Jenkins’ “Working Paper on Māori Women and Social Policy” which summarizes this point:

Western civilization when it arrived on Aotearoa’s shore, did not allow its womenfolk any power at all - they were merely chattels in some cases less worthy than the men’s horses. What the colonizer found was a land of noble savages narrating ... stories of the wonder of women. Their myths and beliefs had to be reshaped and retold. The missionaries were hell-bent (heaven-bent) on destroying their pagan ways. Hence, in the re-telling of our myths, by Māori male informants to Pākehā male writers who lacked the understanding and significance of Māori cultural beliefs, Māori women find their mana wahine destroyed.\(^{64}\)

When translating and re-telling cosmological narratives, “Western civilization” distorted and minimized powerful female figures, and, in doing so, robbed Māori communities of mana wairua. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, the colonization of cosmology “has turned Māori history into mythology and the Māori women within those histories into distant and passive old crones whose presence in the ‘story’ was to add interest to an otherwise male adventure.”\(^{65}\) The acknowledgement and active reclaiming of feminist cosmology is then an intersectional, de-colonial device, which reveals the interconnectedness of the subordination of women and colonization. Rejecting patriarchal retellings is a reclamation of Māori women’s power, and a valuable example for understanding how mana wahine conceptualizes colonial workings of power.

The nature in which scholars tell goddesses’ stories reflects mana wahine’s larger political aim of dismantling colonial patriarchy. The goddesses are often described as having equal power to male gods, aligning with the historical gender equality narrative that mana


\(^{65}\) Tuhiwai Smith, “Māori Women: Discourses,” 40.
wahine thinkers describe elsewhere. Biographer Kuni Jenkins introduces the position Māori women hold in cosmology:

Māori women in their mythology occupy an important role. While biologically the Māori male occupies a position of great physical strength from which to oppress the female, women assume the balance of power in the psychological dominance they achieve through the knowledge they have of the universe. They have the power to control its forces. They enter freely the spirit world and return to their earthly natures with few restrictions or demeanours. They have the power to permit access to forbidden domains such as the underworld or the heavenly portals to those males wishing to travel. They not only controlled the power, they also had the control of resources.66

In her description of Māori goddesses, Jenkins describes a state of gender equality in the pre-colonial context. The equality operates within a gender binary, gods and goddesses holding equal but distinct roles and powers. This framing supports the claim that colonization imposed a patriarchal gender hierarchy, as female cosmological figures were equal protagonists prior to colonial retellings of their stories. Mikaere approaches iterations of the creation story with a similar approach, explaining the equal gender roles that existed in cosmology pre-colonization that were obscured by colonial storytelling:

Re-telling of Māori cosmogony by Māori males to Pākehā ethnographers led to a shift in emphasis, away from the powerful female influence in the stories and towards the male characters. Instead of creation beginning with the womb symbolism of Te Kore and Te Pō, and the female-male partnership of Papatūānuku and Ranginui, the balance was turned on its head by the introduction of a supreme male god, Io. The cosmogonic genealogies were relegated to a phase occurring after the initial creation at the hands of Io. Io created all by sheer force of his willpower, and free from the female taint of any birthing process. Consequently, the balance between the male and female elements was destroyed, male power was inflated and female energy neutralised.

Mikaere claims Pakeha ethnographers erased the gender equality that existed in cosmology pre-colonization and replaced important female figures with all-powerful men. Colonial versions of

the creation story apply a patriarchal power structure: the “supreme male god” rules over the less-important female characters.

Hine-nui te-po (also known as Hine-ti-tama), the Goddess of death, is a cosmological figure who mana wahine thinkers identify as least obscured by patriarchal retellings. Kuni Jenkins shares Hine Nui Te Po’s story. Hine-nui te-po lives in the underworld and is the goddess of death.

Maui, among his many antics tried to conquer her by entering through her vagina to kill her from within (and thus grant mankind immortality). He fails however, because of the twittering fantail whose laughter arouses Hine nui-te-po. She closes her legs on Maui and he dies from suffocation.

Ngahuia Te Awekotuku and other mana wahine activists refer to Hine-nui te-po’s story as one of immense feminine sexual power. Mikaere points out that, in the case of Hine-nui te-po, it was more challenging for colonizing anthropologists to erase her role in the story, so instead she was portrayed as “evil and destructive,” which “fitted in nicely with biblical notions of woman being responsible for sin” and “Old Testament notions of women being unclean.” In both Jenkins’ and Mikaere’s cosmological retellings, women’s power is obscured by colonization -- a claim that understands patriarchy and violence against Māori people as a unified force.

Identifying the overlap of colonization and patriarchy in cosmology also informs critique of white feminist epistemologies which discredit spiritual knowledge. After establishing women’s cosmological erasure as a colonial patriarchal effort, similar cosmological erasure that

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67 Some mana wahine texts which cite the story of Hine-nui Te Po include: Mikaere, “Māori Women;” Te Awekotuku, “Kia Mau, Kia Manawanui;” Yates-Smith, “Reclaiming the Ancient Feminine;” Sykes, “Constitutional Reform;” and Murphy, “Te Awa Atua.”
appears in white feminist publications can be understood as a manifestation of similar colonial white supremacy. Linda Tuhiwai Smith evidences this claim:

Most of the literature in feminist and women’s studies on education which comes out of the mainstream of white women’s scholarship does not focus on spirituality. It has been regarded either as a peripheral and unimportant part of state education or has been lumped in with religion and church as a contested part of a visible curriculum. However, Māori women’s realities are spiritual as well as physical.\(^7\)

Many Māori women’s experiences and identities are deeply connected to spirituality and ancestral heritage. As an epistemology, mana wahine values spiritual knowledge as much as or even more than empirical knowledge. The quest for empirical and objective information is a hallmark of mainstream white academia, and mana wahine seeks to disrupt this tendency in favor of generationally and spiritually interconnected ways of knowing. By disallowing spiritual approaches in mainstream feminist knowledge production, white feminism perpetuates colonial efforts to sever Indigenous communities from spiritual knowledge. In doing so, white feminist epistemologies are perpetuating white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy, as cosmological erasure is an act that simultaneously obscures spiritual connection and imposes gender stratification.

**Māori “Herstories”: Tribal Leaders and Contemporary Activism**

Another common practice in mana wahine theory is recalling and celebrating women leadership figures throughout Māori history. This includes identifying women in leadership positions pre-colonization and recognizing the efforts and achievements of Māori activist women in the contemporary. The citation of Māori “herstories,” as they are often referred to in the literature, serves a similar purpose as cosmological storytelling. Firstly, identifying women in

\(^7\) Tuhiwai Smith, “Getting Out from Under,” 46.
leadership roles undermines stereotypes and assumptions that Māori communities are sexist or overly-traditional. Secondly, the practice of celebrating Māori herstory is also de-colonial, as one colonizing strategy of the British was undermining and rejecting the authority of Māori female chiefs. Discussion of “herstory” is also critical for mana wahine because the figures have genealogical and ancestral links to all Māori women, and this spiritual knowledge is a source of connectivity and empowerment. In this section, I will review two Māori herstory discussions that appear in mana wahine -- the role of female chiefs in signing the Treaty of Waitangi, and Māori women’s activist groups which have spearheaded broader Māori liberation efforts.

In her essay “Towards Theories of Māori Feminisms,” Kathie Irwin foregrounds the importance of retelling Māori herstories:

As women we have a right to our herstories. Throughout our story as a people, Māori women have been successful innovators and leaders. Our work and deeds have had a significant impact on Māori culture and society, breaking new ground, often in radical ways. And yet, our women, and their stories, have been buried deeper and deeper in the annals of time by the processes of oppression that seek to render us invisible and keep us out of the records. In order to make sense of the reality of Māori women’s lives, our herstories must be told.

According to Irwin and many authors of mana wahine theoretical work, including Māori women’s herstories is a political act, which both rejects colonial gender hierarchies and expectations of women’s behavior, and asserts the power of Māori women within their own communities. Herstory is celebrated in opposition to white supremacist stereotypes of Māori

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72 Te Awekotuku, Wahine Māori: Selected Writings on Māori Women's Art, Culture and Politics, 26.
73 Mikaere, “Māori Women: Caught in the Contradictions,” 143.
74 Irwin, “Becoming an Academic,” 54.
75 Irwin, “Towards Theories of Māori Feminism,” 67.
communities as sexist and emphasizes the interconnectedness of patriarchal domination and the British colonial project.

Mana wahine authors often discuss the prowess and expertise of female Māori tribal chiefs as evidence that traditional Māori communities did not approach gender as a hierarchical binary. For example, several mana wahine authors discuss the figure of Wairaka, a leader who lived in the period of Māori migration to Aotearoa. Wairaka is remembered for saving a canoe, by instructing the crew to paddle to safety, or in some iterations by gathering remarkable strength and dragging the canoe into land.76 Another example of a chiefly female figure is “Hinemoa of the Rotarua region,” “who is remembered for her great swimming in order to achieve her heart’s desire.” Jenkins explains: “Against the odds and advice of her people she followed her love. I often think about Tutaneikai and wonder why he didn’t organise himself to row over and fetch Hinemona instead of leaving all the initiative to her. Hinemona reflects the determination and stamina that women are capable of.”77 Like gendered language analyses and cosmological stories discussed earlier, Māori herstories allude to a pre-colonial time when Māori men and women were equals. To Te Awekotuku, Hinemoa represents not only female strength, but also the potential for queer retellings of historical Māori narratives. She explains: “Lesbians and gay men need to consider our inheritance…Hinemona, the determined, valorous, superbly athletic woman - my ancestress - who took the initiative herself, swam the midnight waters of the lake to reach him, and interestingly, consciously and deliberately masqueraded as a man, as a warrior, to lure him to her arms.”78 In citing the stories of Wairaka and Hinemoa, authors of mana wahine

76 Jenkins, “Reflections on the Status of Māori Women;” Te Awekotuku, “Kia Mau, Kia Manawanui;” Mikaere, “Colonisation and the Imposition of Patriarchy;” and Irwin, “Towards Theories of Māori Feminisms;” discuss Wairaka, although Irwin argues the canoe story should be attributed to Muriwai, of the Matatua canoe.
78 Te Awekotuku, Wahine Māori: Selected Writings on Māori Women’s Art, Culture and Politics, 37.
literature find identification and empowerment, and reject the historical colonial erasure of
women in translations of Māori history.

Additional oft-cited women in Māori herstory are the women who signed the Treaty of
Waitangi or were barred from doing so. When the British governmental representatives collected
signatures from Māori chiefs for the treaty of Waitangi, the colonial leaders did not allow most
Māori chiefs who were women to sign the document.\textsuperscript{79} Mana wahine authors have identified the
act of marginalizing Māori women chiefs in the treaty signing as a clear example of the
imposition of white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy onto Māori communities and gender
systems.\textsuperscript{80} Annette Sykes describes a situation in which the British government prohibited a
prominent female Māori leader from signing the treaty, and explains: “This is a dramatic
illustration of the imported cultural values and attitudes imposed by representatives of the
English Settler Government. It is perhaps the first recorded example of the continuing practice of
Pakeha men imposing their monoculturally based decisions and restrictions on Māori women. It
is a specific example of the place of women in the eyes of British men.”\textsuperscript{81} In this quote, Sykes
offers an analysis of female chiefs’ marginalization which speaks directly to the mutually
constitutive nature of patriarchal and colonial domination. Annie Mikaere makes a similar
argument: “The fact that the Treaty was signed predominantly by men, sometimes pointed to as a
reflection of pre-colonised Māori society’s attitudes towards women, is more an indication of the
influence of Christianity and the fact that those seeking signatories largely ignored the possibility
of women signing.”\textsuperscript{82} Māori women chiefs’ herstory provides yet another example of how

\textsuperscript{79} Mikaere, “Māori Women: Caught in the Contradictions,” 143.
\textsuperscript{80} Mikaere, “Māori Women: Caught in the Contradictions;” Sykes, “Constitutional Reform;” Irwin, “Reflections on
the Status of Māori Women;” Evans, “The Negation of Powerlessness”
\textsuperscript{81} Sykes, “Constitutional Reform,” 21.
\textsuperscript{82} Mikaere, “Māori Women: Caught in the Contradictions,” 143.
patriarchal domination and colonization intertwined. In the process of collecting signatures for
the Treaty of Waitangi, in which the British crown seized control of Māori land, Māori
community gender dynamics were disrupted and reordered.

In addition to citing herstories from the distant past, mana wahine authors also recognize
and celebrate Māori women’s recent activism, both on behalf of women and Māori liberation
efforts more broadly. This tendency serves to position mana wahine as a movement on behalf of
Māori men and women, not as an extension of Pākeha or Western feminisms. For example,
Yates-Smith describes Māori women as the driving force of broader Māori activism. She argues
that Māori women are imbued with leadership qualities from cosmological and historical
 ancestresses:

The energy and success of Māori women is evident in every sector of society. They
have been a driving force behind Māori educational and health initiatives, the
revival of our indigenous language and the education of our children through
Kohanga Reo (pre-school language nests) and immersion primary and secondary
schools.  

Johnston and Waitere also recognize Māori Women’s Welfare League as fitting into a larger
historical narrative of Māori women’s activism and leadership. They write, “By all accounts
Māori women are noisy. They have historically spoken about a variety of things, across
numerous contexts (locally, nationally and internationally) over a significant period of time.”

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83 Aroha Yates-Smith, “Reclaiming the Ancient Feminine in Māori Society,” in Mana Wahine Reader: A Collection
Institute, 2019), 79.
84 According to Johnston and Waitere, the Māori Women’s Welfare League (established in 1851) was the first
avenue for Māori women to represent themselves in the government.
85 Johnston and Waitere, “Echoed Silences,” 84. Other scholars who review the work of Māori women activists,
particularly the Māori women’s welfare league, include Annette Sykes, “Constitutional Reform;” Naomi Simmonds,
“Mana Wahine: Decolonising Politics;” and Leonie Pihama, “Mana Wahine Theory.”
Māori thinkers consistently identify mana wahine as an approach that works on behalf of the larger Māori community. They see their political work as confronting white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy in all its overlapping complexity, not as the de-contextualized fight against sexist oppression that defines white feminism.

In this section, I analyzed key themes in mana wahine in order to understand how the movement uniquely confronts white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy. I discussed whānau structures in order to highlight colonial impositions of patriarchal family structures and reviewed historical and linguistic analyses which reject stereotypes of Māori culture as sexist and position feminism as an issue of Māori liberation. A discussion of mana tāne revealed a similar political strategy, in which mana wahine thinkers emphasize alliance with Māori men to position colonization as a patriarchal project. I reviewed common mana wahine approaches to retelling cosmology, locating another instance of colonial efforts to enforce gender hierarchy, and finally analyzed use of “herstory” as a mode of distinguishing mana wahine from mainstream white feminist movements. I selected these topics because each offers an entryway for understanding the colonization of Aotearoa as an inherently gendered mission, each strategy of colonial domination defined by degradation of women and the privileging of men. In the next section, I will review women of color feminisms that are cited by mana wahine authors, and synthesize them with mana wahine, in order to contextualize mana wahine within global patterns of white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy.
Chapter 2: Mana Wahine and Women of Color Feminisms

Mana wahine scholars align their epistemological approach with those of women of color abroad, identifying shared experiences and transnational patterns of white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy. In this chapter, I will examine the connective tissue between mana wahine and the women of color feminist epistemology that they engage with. I focus on connections to women of color feminism, rather than other Indigenous or transnational feminist approaches, because “women of color feminism” is the group mana wahine scholars explicitly name as important to their epistemological approach. More than a cross-cultural comparison, identifying shared ideological approaches across women of color epistemologies sheds light upon the mutually constitutive nature of white supremacy, colonization, and patriarchy. Naming shared approaches across women of color movements elucidates common ideological underpinnings of white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy across borders. I will begin by reviewing the origins and political utility of the term “women of color.” The term is not a biological designation. Rather, “women of color” emerged out of political and historical alliances, as a call for examining the interrelatedness of oppressive systems. I will summarize discourse that is developing between mana wahine theorists and North American women of color feminisms, sifting out central themes and ideological similarities. Finally, I will discuss the implications of these connections, answering the questions: What does an integrated transnational women of color feminism reveal about how power operates in colonized spaces? What does analyzing mana wahine and women of color feminist theory reveal about mainstream feminist approaches?

Women of Color Feminism
In an educational presentation for the Western States Center, cofounder of SisterSong Reproductive Justice Collective Loretta Ross defines and historicizes the term “women of color.” She explains that the term is not a biological category, but rather a political and coalition tool for multiply marginalized women. She explains that the phrase was developed at a 1977 women’s conference, where a 200-page conference agenda contained a mere three pages addressing the status of racially marginalized women. A group of Black women attendees proposed a Black Women’s Agenda to replace the inadequate minority plank. When women from other racial minority groups heard about this action, they wanted to align themselves in political solidarity with the Black Women’s Agenda. As a result, the group re-named themselves “women of color,” in the words of Loretta Ross as a “solidarity definition” and “a commitment to work in collaboration with other oppressed women of color who have been minoritized.”

Rather than a physiological designation, the term “women of color” was created for political purposes, in order to confront white supremacy in solidarity and develop feminist theory from a place of lived experience.

Multiracial feminism is a framework similar to “women of color,” which serves to build solidarity amongst women who are oppressed by racism. In their essay “Theorizing Difference from Multiracial Feminism,” Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill define multiracial feminism as an approach that is predicated upon an intersectional and relational understanding of race, gender, power, and privilege. Similar to Loretta Ross’s definition of “women of color,” Zinn and Dill use the term ‘multiracial’ “as a way of underscoring race as a power system that interacts with other structured inequalities to shape genders.”

86 Western States Center. (2011, February 15). The Origin of the Phrase “women of color” [00:01:40].
feminism is coalition between feminist approaches for the purpose of understanding how white supremacy shapes gender oppression. Like “women of color” feminism, multiracial feminism does not exist to create a monolith of marginalized women’s experiences. Rather, multiracial feminism considers experiential differences as significant to intersectional theoretical development.88

Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s employment of “imagined communities” is another helpful approach for creating ideological solidarity between women of color, without creating a monolith of their experiences.89 She explains:

The idea of imagined communities is useful because it leads us away from essentialist notions of Third World feminist struggles, suggesting political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliance. It is not color or sex that constructs the ground for these struggles. Rather, it is the way we think about race, class and gender - the political links we choose to make between struggles.90

Rather than approaching “women of color” from an essentialist perspective, I understand mana wahine as part of the “imagined community” that refers to itself as “women of color.” I identify mana wahine thinkers who operate within a “women of color” or multiracial feminist framework, creating “imagined communities” by aligning movements with similar perspectives on how patriarchal power operates with and through other systems of oppression. I analyze similarities between mana wahine and these approaches in order to name the shared ideological underpinnings that bolster women’s oppression in disparate geographic regions. By

89 The term “imagined communities” was coined by Benedict Anderson (1936-2015) in Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, as an analytic for understanding nationhood as a limited sovereign community.
understanding how women’s experiences of marginalization are connected and related, we can better understand the overarching discursive mechanisms that perpetuate oppression.

References to Women of Color Feminisms in Mana Wahine Theory

In the 1980’s and 1990’s, many mana wahine thinkers aligned themselves and their theoretical approaches with the work of mostly North American women of color feminists. This section will identify the implications of coalition between Māori scholars and women of color feminist movements outside Aotearoa. Leonie Pihama, Hine Waitere, Patricia Johnston, and Kristen Gabel engage with women of color feminists in their work, demonstrating solidarity with multiply marginalized women abroad. Some of the women of color feminists included in their work are the Combahee River Collective, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Lee Maracle, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Audre Lorde, Huanani Kay Trask, and Patricia Hill Collins. I identify overlapping analytical approaches that mana wahine and women of color feminist epistemologies share and describe the implications of these connections. The themes I focus on are the politics of defining feminism, tokenism, intersectionality, and listening to women of color feminist perspectives. I will explicate these themes with examples from mana wahine scholarship and offer extended exploration of the women of color feminist approaches that Māori thinkers reference.

Leonie Pihama, “Mana Wahine Theory: Creating Space for Māori Women’s Theories” (2005)

In her publication “Mana Wahine Theory”, kaupapa Māori scholar Leonie Pihama highlights specific epistemological approaches from women of color feminism that speak to Māori women’s experiences. Understanding mana wahine as working in solidarity with women of color feminism emphasizes relationality between oppressive systems that marginalize both
groups. Coalition between the two movements through written work contributes to a clearer understanding of how white supremacy manifests across borders. Pihama elaborates:

The women referred to in this discussion...provided analysis of not only the ways in which Western feminisms have rendered nonwhite women invisible, but have done so in a context of recognizing the need for analysis that is incorporative of gender in ways that are connected to wider social, economic, political, and cultural realities...They promote analyses that position gender as interrelated to issues of colonization, capitalism, heterosexism, classicism and racism. For Māori women, such an analysis is absolutely essential as we live within a context of colonialism that has been both driven and justified by acts of racism and capitalist exploitation.91

In this passage, Pihama aligns mana wahine with a women of color approach to dismantling white supremacist heteropatriarchy -- one that considers sexism, racism, and colonization to be integrated with one another. She draws from women of color feminism and incorporates ideological approaches that are relevant for those marginalized by white supremacist colonization across borders. Two women of color feminist approaches that she emphasizes are: political power in defining feminist vocabulary, and experiences of tokenism within mainstream feminist movements. Pihama applies these women of color feminist approaches in her critique of “white feminism.” For Pihama, this refers to mainstream Pākeha feminism in Aotearoa. For women of color feminists that Pihama discusses, “white feminism” refers to the mainstream American Women’s Liberation movement in the 1970s.

According to Pihama, white feminist scholars cannot truly hear Māori women because mainstream feminist vocabulary is not equipped to capture their experiences. White feminist vocabulary is saturated with and structured by white supremacy and single-axis perspectives. For this reason, white feminist approaches lack the capacity for holding and understanding the experiences of multiply marginalized women. According to Pihama, this has resulted in many

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Māori women rejecting the term “feminism.” She explains: “We are constantly having to try and ‘find’ ourselves within the texts of the dominant group. We are forever trying to see ourselves in the images created by the colonizers…The voices of Māori women have been marginalized or made invisible within the power relations that exist in our colonial experience.”

Pihama is describing the lack of experiential re-articulation that women of color experience in mainstream feminist approaches. The term re-articulation refers to seeing one’s own experiences reflected back in theory. Pihama emphasizes that white feminists, by defining feminist vocabulary in terms of their own experience, privilege whiteness and marginalize others.

Pihama turns to women of color feminists in the United States for approaches for defining feminist vocabulary from diverse lived experiences. She is particularly inspired by the anthology titled *This Bridge Called my Back*, and Audre Lorde’s work within it. Pihama quotes from a letter Audre Lorde wrote to Mary Daly, included in the anthology:

> So the question arises in my mind, Mary, do you ever really read the work of black women? Did you ever read my words, or did you merely finger through them for quotations which you thought might valuably support an already-conceived idea concerning some old and distorted connection between us? This is not a rhetorical question. To me this feels like another instance of the knowledge, crone-logy and work of women of color being ghettoized by a white woman dealing only out of a patriarchal western-European frame of reference.

Pihama includes this excerpt because “Lorde highlights the invisibility of Black women in white women’s writings,” and in doing so creates “a clear place for feminist analyses that incorporate the intersections of all forms of oppression.” On a fundamental level, Pihama finds re-articulation within Lorde’s words and sees common experiences between women of color in the

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United States and Māori women. Further, Pihama finds that women of color feminism understands sexism as operating through and within white supremacist logic. In portions of the letter that Pihama does not reference, Lorde explains white authors distort Black women’s knowledge by including them only as tokens or victims.95

Māori women have experienced similar distortion in white historians’ re-telling of Māori cosmology, which erased women’s roles. In addition to shared experiences with tokenization and erasure, commonality between mana wahine and women of color feminism reveals the white supremacist ideologies which underpin white feminism in both spaces. In both locations, white women claim to create universal definitions of “womanhood,” while asserting power and domination by privileging their own experience. White women including fragmented distortions of diverse voices is actively colonial, in that they appropriate marginalized knowledge and use it to bolster an unchanged white perspective. Deepening analysis of Pihama’s discourse with Lorde reveals how white supremacy manifests in white feminisms transnationally.

The second women of color approach that Pihama appreciates is critique of tokenism, and of white feminism incorporating diverse voices as “special” and Other. Pihama praises the work of Vietnamese feminist filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha, and in doing so draws transnational connections between experiences of white supremacist marginalization within feminist movements. Pihama explains:

Trinh T. Minh-ha provides a discussion about the ways in which selected women of color become constructed in the position of ‘specialness’. In such a position a white First-World women audience expects women of color to express their differences. Specialness and difference is affirmed only if one is able to paint oneself as authentic as defined by white First-World women. The notion of specialness as the chosen ‘Other’ is one that is not uncommon to Māori women, particularly in regard to the white women’s movement.96

In other words, while white women may sometimes include women of color in feminist events and publications, they only accept women of color who represent uncontroversial diversity, rather than those who call to radically rework feminist praxis in favor of intersectionality. Including women of color in publications and conferences without integrating women of color feminist theory into the fabric of the work being done is an assertion of white power.

Bell hooks, who Pihama also invokes in this essay, provides a clear explanation of how tokenism bolsters white supremacy. She explains that, while white women may call upon women of color as “special” guests or diverse perspectives, “more often than not they are attempting to cover up the fact that they are totally unwilling to surrender their hegemonic dominance of theory and praxis, a dominance which they would not have established were this not a white supremacist, capitalist state.”97 Inviting a Māori woman or a Woman of Color to share a singular perspective without having the analytical tools to hear her and without centering her analysis in feminist work is simply an enactment of white privilege and power -- the white feminist leader has the privilege to invite a Woman of Color to the conversation, and to negotiate the terms of her speech. By invoking the work of Audre Lorde, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and bell hooks, Pihama invites into her analysis a world of discourse beyond locating similarities in experience. The solidarity between mana wahine and women of color feminism is positioned against the interlocking patriarchal, racist and classist structures that create similar experiences of marginalization transnationally.

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97 bell hooks, Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center (New York: Routledge, 2015), 53.

In their analysis of Māori women’s experiences in New Zealand academia, Waitere and Johnston align their political mission with women of color transnationally. Like Pihama, Waitere and Johnston’s analysis focuses mainly on definitions of feminism, who creates them, and what it means to hear women of color. Waitere and Johnston offer an important differentiation between “listening” to Māori women, and “hearing” them:

To not only listen (to detect sound) but to hear someone is to be actively engaged in socially constructing relational meanings. We would argue, therefore, that the ability to hear is significantly effected by shared spaces that traverse socio-political histories, linguistic, cultural and, yes -- theoretical, epistemological and ontological airwaves which connote levels of resonance or dissonance in the auditory range of the listener…Unless feminism takes account of the multiple forces of subjugation where sexism, racism, colonialism and class combine and overlap with the political aspirations for self determination, feminist studies will only ever, at best, take account of part of indigenous women’s realities.98

Waitere and Johnston explain that because white feminist approaches define key feminist vocabulary according to their own experience without considering others, they can only conceptualize patriarchy as a single-axis problem -- men always oppressing women only on the basis of gender. If white feminists continue to approach patriarchy as if sexism is the only ideological and institutionalized system that oppresses women, women of color will never truly be heard. They may be included as a special feature, but the fullness of their experience will always be distorted.

Waitere and Johnston especially resonate with bell hooks’ 1992 publication, Black Looks. In her introductory chapter, hooks describes the process of normalization in white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy which serves to de-center the experiences of Black individuals. Hooks

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explains: “Theorizing black experience in the United States is a difficult task. Socialized within white supremacist educational systems and by a racist mass media, many black people are convinced that our lives are not complex, and are therefore unworthy of sophisticated critical analysis and reflection.”99 Hooks’ claim attends to the silencing that Waitere and Johnston describe as their experience as Māori women. They explain: “Māori similarly grow up being the pseudo-other, confronted with curriculum, pedagogical and assessment practices that centre the cultural precepts of the dominant group.”100 By privileging Pākeha language, culture, and pedagogy, New Zealand educational systems deprioritize and often erase Māori language and culture. This process normalizes white experience and designates Māori knowledge as Other.

In addition to describing shared experience, this parallel analysis sheds light upon how educational strategies uphold white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy in colonized spaces. In Aotearoa, colonial education directly taught Māori girls patriarchal gender roles, instilling domestic skills and definitions of womanhood meeting hegemonic standards of colonial femininity.101 While a single axis white feminist approach describes women’s roles as a singular issue of men oppressing women, a mana wahine and women of color feminist analysis of education would identify colonization and racism as informing the patriarchal education Māori girls receive. An understanding of educational normalization and exclusion as a result of interlocking oppressive ideologies is achieved by synthesizing Waitere and Johnston’s mana wahine theory and hooks’ analyses of white supremacist education.

Intersectionality

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101 See chapter 1.
Mana wahine scholars in dialogue with women of color feminism identify intersectionality as a supremely useful analytic. Intersectionality is an analytical framework for understanding how systems of oppression interlock to create unique experiences of marginalization. The term was coined by Legal and Critical Race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1990s, although the ideological approach that the term represents circulated in Black feminist theory for decades before. While the term was originally developed to describe Black women’s experience of combined marginalization on the basis of gender and race, mana wahine scholars use the term to describe the overlapping effects of white supremacy, colonization and patriarchy that they experience. An overall appreciation for and engagement with intersectionality underpins all engagement between mana wahine and women of color feminism. Firstly, mana wahine scholars explain that white feminism cannot capture their perspectives because the movement does not have the intersectional analytical approach necessary for rearticulating non-white experiences. In addition, the main problem mana wahine and women of color feminist scholars take with white feminist definitions of “womanhood” is that their definition is not intersectional -- its perspective privileges white experience and declares it to be universal, without considering how other vectors of oppression shape diverse experiences. Below I will present examples of how intersectionality is applied to Māori women’s experiences, and I will explain how understanding mana wahine as intersectional women of color theory-making is essential for understanding white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy.

*Mana wahine and Motherhood: An Application of Intersectionality*

In her essay “Poipoia Te Tamaiti Ki Te Ūkaipō: Theorising Māori Motherhood”, Kirsten Gabel offers an analysis of Māori women’s relationship to motherhood in conversation with
women of color feminist approaches. Gabel explains that Māori women often do not align with western feminist conceptualizations of the institution of motherhood. For Māori women, motherhood is related to genealogical links, powerful goddesses and ancestresses, the maintenance of tradition, and whānau systems. Within the extended kinship network of the whānau, Māori children may have many individuals who perform motherhood responsibilities.  

In contrast, white feminist theory has identified motherhood as an often-oppressive institution. Gabel quotes Adrianne Rich’s book Of Woman Born as an example of western feminist critiques of the institution of motherhood, explaining that Rich conceptualizes it as “an oppressive institution for women because it constructs women within a role of self-sacrificing servitude.”

While Gabel expresses appreciation for Rich and others’ critique of patriarchy as it manifests in divisions of labor, she critiques Rich for failing to consider cultures in which motherhood is a vital location for transmission of traditions and community-building.

Gabel asserts solidarity with women of color feminists who also hold relationships to motherhood that are not accounted for by white feminist critiques. Gabel draws heavily from bell hooks’ essay “Revolutionary Parenting,” and Patricia Hill Collins’ “Shifting the Center: Race, Class and Feminist Theorizing about Motherhood.” Hooks and Collins identify the homeplace as a critical location for resisting racist oppression and reject the single-axis idea that motherhood is primarily a location of patriarchal oppression. Gabel also identifies with aboriginal and other Indigenous approaches to motherhood which de-prioritize single-axis critiques of motherhood, explaining: “Theorising our own Māori mothering experiences does not just form a discourse

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102 See Chapter 1, “whānau” section
that we as Māori women can draw strength from; rather, it joins a global chorus of indigenous mothering ideologies that collectively challenge Western-based mothering ideologies while empowering indigenous women.” Like Pihama and Waitere/Johnston’s theories, Gabel critiques the white feminist critiques of the Western institution of motherhood for lacking an intersectional vocabulary.

Because white feminist critiques often critique the Western institution of motherhood using an analysis of gender without considering race or colonization, the approach does not capture women of color’s experiences. On a primary level, this creates a common marginalization amongst Māori women and women of color. On a conceptual level, noticing transnational patterns of marginalization in this area reveals that colonization and racism inform the white women’s experience of motherhood. According to Gabel, Māori communities were colonized through the institution of white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy in the home. As I reviewed in chapter one, British educational efforts taught Māori boys and girls patriarchal gender roles, and the British crown codified a patriarchal family structure through adoption laws. In other words, the oppressive elements of motherhood that white feminists articulate is a result of white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy. An intersectional approach to critiquing motherhood does not simply acknowledge that Māori women understand mothering differently than white women -- it analyzes how colonization and racism actually facilitate the motherhood situation that white women describe. Colonization seeks to destroy Indigenous approaches to motherhood, and replaces them with patriarchal ones, which privilege the nuclear family and rely on women’s labor. Understanding Gabel’s argument as an application of women of color

104 Gabel, “Poipoia Te Tamaiti Ki Te Ukaipo,” 169.
105 Rose Pere, “To Us the Dreamers Are Important,” 11.
feminism and intersectionality elucidates how sexism and colonization interact with one another to have the effect of oppression.

In this chapter, I reviewed mana wahine publications that engage directly with women of color Feminism. The purpose of this analysis is not cross-cultural comparison. Rather, my analysis identifies patterns of experience and analysis in order to develop an understanding of relationships between systems of oppression -- namely, colonization, racism, and patriarchy. It is not a coincidence that white women’s understandings of motherhood and feminism define mainstream women’s movements in America and New Zealand -- two colonial settler-states. The common reality of colonization and racism in both spaces serves to set white experiences as the norm. While Third Wave feminism is beginning to incorporate women of color feminist thought into conferences and conversations, Indigenous perspectives are often listed as one of many diverse opinions, offered on a reading list or as a discrete unit in feminist courses. If feminism aims to move towards radical social change, mainstream feminist authors should not merely quote women of color -- the inclusion of women of color feminist theory should fundamentally change the theory itself. In my final chapter, I will explicate this argument and the implications of de-colonial intersectional feminist theory.
**Conclusion**

I opened my introduction with a quote from Donna Awatere Huata, which she shared with Māori listeners at an annual Waitangi Treaty festival: “Honor your whakapapa. You are the descendants of geniuses.” Throughout this thesis I respond to Awatere Huata’s call to action, finding radically intersectional feminist approaches in the words of mana wahine scholars. The purpose of this project is to reject white feminism in favor of de-colonial feminist epistemology. To achieve this goal, I review prominent themes in mana wahine literature to elucidate the epistemology’s understanding of power. Mana wahine holds that colonization is not only a political and economic movement to exploit resources of its target, it also re-structures Indigenous communities by imposing patriarchal ideologies. Mana wahine thinkers explain that patriarchal family structures and gender hierarchies facilitate successful colonization and exploitation by breaking down Indigenous communities. I draw analytical connections between mana wahine and women of color feminist epistemology in order to articulate transnational linkages that are necessary for developing an accurate understandings of white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy. Establishing analytical linkages between mana wahine and women of color feminism produces an epistemology which confronts patriarchy as always implicated with colonization and white supremacy. I contend this transnational de-colonial approach must replace white feminism in order to foundationalize radical changemaking efforts in Aotearoa and beyond.

In chapter 1, Core Themes of Mana Wahine, I identify concepts integral to mana wahine which inform my larger intersectional project. The chapter analyzed whānau structures, historical narratives of traditional Māori gender systems, cosmological feminist figures, and Māori herstory as loci for conceptualizing the interconnectedness of patriarchy and colonial
domination. I first analyze Whānau structures, shedding light upon the imposition of patriarchal family structures that took place during Aotearoa’s colonization. Discussions of whānau act as an entry point for understanding the socially constructed nature of normative family structure. In addition, discussions of whānau reveal how women’s roles within the family context are products of white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy, by showing that motherhood has not always been an experience of burden, isolation, and patriarchal servitude. Rather, motherhood responsibilities in traditional Māori systems were met by an extended network of adult helpers.

Next, I analyze mana wahine discussions of traditional gender roles for the purpose of understanding how colonization seized not only Māori land, but also re-structured its gendered social system. Mana wahine scholars describe a traditional gender landscape defined by equality between men and women. Regardless of whether these historical narratives constituted complete gender equity in traditional societies, I find it important to examine why mana wahine scholars draw them into their arguments. I determine that positioning traditional gender roles as equal and just advances the mana wahine argument -- colonization imposed a gender hierarchy that did not exist before. Along the same lines, I analyze mana tāne, mana wahine scholars’ alliance with Māori men. In defending this alliance, Māori scholars explain that patriarchy is an imposition of colonization, and as a result feminism should not be understood as divisive, but rather an approach for Māori liberation. Once again, these arguments position patriarchy as inherently colonial and vice-versa.

The fourth theme I analyze is Māori women’s cosmology. In retellings of Māori cosmological stories, I locate an example of Māori women’s erasure along lines of gender and Indigeneity, and a critique of white feminism. Mana wahine scholars describe multiple-marginalization that they experience in regard to cosmology. Firstly, when white anthropologists
recorded and retold Māori cosmology, they minimized women’s roles and recast them as unimportant objects in the stories of male heroes. I frame this reality as an example of colonization’s intersectional domination, in which Māori culture is appropriated and infused with patriarchal ideologies. The second important mana wahine claim regarding cosmology is that white feminist discourses often disregard it as an unimportant body of knowledge. I identify this reality as a manifestation of white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy within mainstream feminist discourse. Both aspects of mana wahine cosmological discussions support the argument that the colonial effort (distorting or destroying cosmology) was itself structured by sexism and patriarchy (women’s erasure). The two are interconnected and cannot be understood independently. Women of color feminists offer a similar critique of white feminism, offering additional ground for bridge-building between the two epistemologies.

In a final example, I analyze mana wahine’s use of “herstory”, historical narratives from traditional and contemporary Māori culture of female leaders and activists. “Herstory” is employed by mana wahine scholars as evidence of the epistemology’s utility for Māori liberation movements more broadly. In addition, “herstory” positions mana wahine as an independent intersectional feminist approach, distinct and separate from white feminism rather than a response to it. Reviewing Māori women’s leadership over time asserts that mana wahine’s project is not the same as white feminism. While white feminism seeks to dismantle patriarchal domination at the hands of men, mana wahine confronts colonial patriarchal domination -- the effects of patriarchy that are experienced through colonization. By drawing attention to this distinction, I further crystallize mana wahine’s unique intersectional contribution to feminist work.
In chapter 2, Mana Wahine and women of color Feminisms, I analyze moments in which mana wahine thinkers directly address women of color feminists in North America. Mana wahine scholars identify under the term “women of color” as an act of solidarity with marginalized women transnationally. They use “women of color” not as a biological designation, but rather with its historicized meaning -- a consciously unified political strategy that purposefully underlines the ways in which white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchy similarly marginalizes non-white women. Māori scholars reference Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, Lee Maracle, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Huanani Kay Trask, and the Combahee River Collective as examples of women of color approaches that resonate with their own theories and experiences. I analyze and expand these conversations by engaging with the women of color feminist theories mana wahine scholars reference, with attention to ideological similarities between the two movements. The aim is not to offer cross-cultural comparison, but rather to understand the elements of these approaches that resonate with Māori scholars. By examining the analytic approaches and insights of mana wahine thought in relationship to women of color feminisms, I seek to contribute to our understanding of how gender-based systems of domination and subordination that were common in feudal Europe mutated within the context of settler colonialism, where it was infused and transformed by new dynamics of white supremacy and capitalist accumulation.

The implications of articulating a unified front against a decidedly interconnected network of oppression are far-reaching. Developing interconnected intersectional feminist theory with the understanding that systems of oppression are mutually constitutive disallows single-axis feminist theory. It creates space for feminist approaches to find coalition with attention to difference. While past feminist unification efforts have tried to connect activists under
“sisterhood” or gender, a transnational intersectional feminist approach unifies groups on the basis of mutual understanding of the nature of white supremacist colonial heteropatriarchal oppression. Drawing ideological connections between seemingly disparate feminist movements is essential work towards more fully understanding how power is manipulated to oppress in colonized spaces. This thesis answers the question of why feminism in New Zealand has not uprooted patriarchal ideologies there. Effectively addressing oppression in Aotearoa New Zealand requires an accurate conception of how power operates there. Conceptualizations of patriarchy must analyze sexist oppression as structured by and implemented through colonization and white supremacy. I contend a mana wahine analysis of New Zealand Pākeha feminist approaches is necessary in order to create substantial change in New Zealand. As mana wahine scholars point out, to address patriarchy on its own is ineffectual without contextualizing it within colonization and white supremacy.

This thesis delves into mana wahine literature in order to understand the epistemology as fully as possible, drawing transnational analytical linkages and deepening relational theoretical approaches. My research began with an immersion into mana wahine publications, and took shape based on the epistemological priorities and lessons I gathered from my study. In this way, my research engages directly with mana wahine scholars, heeding their directives for “listening” rather than merely “hearing” them. My research also speaks to American feminists, often educated under mainstream Western feminist perspectives. Too often, feminist education offers a discrete unit on Native or Indigenous feminisms, without immersing students in the body of knowledge and allowing marginalized feminist epistemologies to qualitatively alter mainstream feminist approaches to knowledge production. My research provides a template for analysis of understudied women’s epistemologies, encouraging feminist authors to engage meaningfully
with marginalized approaches in order to identify and unsettle manifestations of colonization and white supremacy in mainstream epistemological strategies.

Mana wahine literature is sparse compared to other feminist epistemologies. Researching from the United States, I was able to locate and access only two readers, about twenty articles, and a few books that directly use the term “mana wahine”. In contemporary Pākeha feminist authorship, popular news outlets, and feminist social media accounts, mana wahine is not mentioned by name. Future research should study contemporary iterations of mana wahine in Māori feminist popular media, and search for occurrences of mana wahine articulations in New Zealand University Gender Studies curriculum. Understanding how and why mana wahine is continuously marginalized in Aotearoa and transnational feminist discourse can create space for analysis of white feminism as a dominant discourse. Researchers should also examine mana wahine contributions to queer theory. The limited literature comprising mana wahine scarcely address gay, lesbian, or transgender identities, and consistently operates from a heteronormative framework. Brief references to queer potentialities in Māori cosmology can be found in a few articles and are a fruitful starting point for these discussions. Finally, researchers should analyze engagement of spirituality as a legitimate source of power in Indigenous and women of color feminist epistemologies. Identifying linkages between these epistemological approaches can help identify white supremacy as it manifests in mainstream Western feminism in Aotearoa and beyond.
Bibliography


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