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*The Whitening of Māori: Pakeha Attempts to Reconstruct Māori Identity in Contemporary Settings*

Recent events have seen an increasing number of calls by Pakeha for Māori to overhaul our cultural practices and questioning the validity of our indigeneity and indigenous knowledge forms. While these are not new experiences for Māori, what is interesting about them is that they are being couched in discourses of equality, the advancement of women, and the advancement of our nation as ‘one people’.

Mohanty (1994) argues that these discourses are merely arbitrary constructions that nevertheless carry with them “the authorizing signature” of the master discourse (p. 197). Following Mohanty’s lead to challenge such constructions, this paper examines the reconstruction of Māori identity by the privileged master asking the question, who determines what is Māori and what is being Māori within Māori cultural contexts?

Drawing also from hooks (1994), this paper will argue that such reconstructions are the affectations of a privileged few who legitimate their views from their positions of power not because they themselves are engaged or interested in the struggle for Māori advancement. What eventuates is that the myriad of Māori and Māori women’s experiences becomes eclipsed by a wider discourse framed to advance the interests of the master rather than the interests of those they purport to be supporting.

The emergence of these types of liberal affectations suggest that the master discourse is becoming increasingly concerned with the rise of an “indigenous intelligentsia” (after Rata, 2004) who have arisen from the resistance movements of the 1960s, 70s and 80s to provide focus for Māori self-determination. This paper suggests that the effect of these recent challenges to Māori women, to Māori self-determination and to the Māori “intelligentsia” will not create panic and dissension among Māori. Rather, such attacks – under the guise of informed debate and progress - will intensify Māori efforts to continue utilising the master’s tools to ensure the advancement of Māori women, of Māori knowledge and Māori cultural practices, and of Māori identity.