

 This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0

Paola Della Valle

### Ecofeminism from a Māori Perspective: *Mana Wāhine* and Contemporary Women's Poetry in Aotearoa New Zealand

**Abstract I:** Il movimento *mana wāhine* può essere letto come una versione māori di ecofemminismo. Questa definizione, però, ne limita la portata e il significato profondo, che possono essere compresi solo alla luce di un diverso paradigma culturale. La silloge poetica *Tātai Whetū*, in māori e inglese, confluita poi nel volume *Matariki, sciame di stelle*, con annessa traduzione italiana, costituisce un esempio di poesia scritta nella tradizione *mana wāhine*, ovvero un genere letterario che declina attivismo politico, ambientalismo, femminismo e uno stretto legame con le radici culturali māori.

**Abstract II:** The *mana wāhine* movement can be seen as a Māori version of ecofeminism. This definition, however, limits its valence and profound meaning, which can be understood only in the light of a different cultural paradigm. The poetry collection *Tātai Whetū*, in Māori and English, translated into Italian in the volume *Matariki, sciame di stelle*, exemplifies writing in the tradition of *mana wāhine*, that is, a literary genre that inflects political activism, environmentalism, feminism and a deep bond with Māori cultural roots.

**Keywords:** Māori poetry, ecofeminism, *mana wāhine*, *Tātai Whetū*, *Matariki, sciame di stelle*.

#### Decolonising Indigenous Ecofeminism: *Mana Wāhine*<sup>1</sup>

In 2018 the New Zealand publisher Seraph Press issued a bilingual collection of poetry, in English and Māori, edited by Maraea Rakuraku and Vana Manasiadis: *Tātai Whetū: Seven Māori Women Poets in Translation*. The anthology was later translated from English into Italian by Antonella Sarti Evans, in collaboration with Francesca Benocci and Eleonora Bello. The new volume with English-Italian parallel text (and the Māori version of some poems) came out in 2020 under the title *Matariki, sciame di stelle*<sup>2</sup> and also includes the works of other contemporary Māori poetesses. Both collections are a good example of Māori women's writing in the tradition of *mana wāhine*, a specifically Māori form of ecofeminism that, since its beginning in the 1980s, has conjugated an ecologically conscious attitude together with gender issues and political activism for Māori rights. In this article I will demonstrate how

<sup>1</sup> The movement's name is also written *mana wahine* (without macron on 'a') in some texts.

<sup>2</sup> *Matariki* is the indigenous term for New Year's day, corresponding to the apparition of the Pleiades (called *Matariki* in Māori) in the austral sky.

feminism, ecocriticism and activism converge in *mana wāhine* writings in a form that is only apparently tied to their Western equivalents but finds its purpose and meaning in a deeply-rooted cultural dimension, that is, *mātauranga* Māori<sup>3</sup>.

The 1980s are the culmination of the Māori Renaissance. The movement started in the 1960s and aimed at obtaining full citizenship for the indigenous population of Aotearoa New Zealand<sup>4</sup>. Many important political goals were achieved such as the restitution of ancestral land to some tribes, the recognition of Māori as the second official language in the country, and the establishment of schools with a Māori curriculum. More generally, it was a period which saw the flourishing of Māori arts and culture, and a growing influence of the Māori view on the political agenda of the country, as regards to civil rights and environmental issues. Women took an important part in that movement as leaders in activist groups. One for all, elderly Whina Cooper, who led the Land March in 1975 from Te Hāpua, in the far north of the country, to the parliament in Wellington “to dramatise a national Māori determination not to lose any further land to Pākehā<sup>5</sup> ownership”, in King’s words (King 2001: 107). In his poem “Rain-maker’s Song for Whina”, acclaimed poet Hone Tuwhare celebrates the Māori *Pasionaria*’s rhetoric by reporting one of her speeches, in which she defined the march as “Sacred”.

*No more lollies! We been sucking the pākehā lolly  
for one hundred and fifty years.  
Look at what’s happened. Look at what we got left.  
Only two million acres. Yes, that’s right. Two million  
acres out of sixty six million acres. [...]*

*So you listen, now. This is a Sacred March. We are  
marching because we want to hold on to what is left.  
You must understand this. And you must think of your  
tūpuna<sup>6</sup>. They are marching beside you (Tuwhare 1987: 18).*

The poem highlights two crucial aspects. First, the importance of the land not just as material property or a political issue but as an identity constituent carrying a religious meaning. Second, the centrality of ancestry and genealogy in Māori culture. The ancestors (*tūpuna*) are marching with the people and they are blessing their enterprise.

<sup>3</sup> *Mātauranga* means wisdom, knowledge, understanding. See: <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=Matauranga> (consulted on 26/9/2021).

<sup>4</sup> The double name of the country, Māori and English, dates back to that time. Aotearoa means “the land of the long white cloud”, which is a reference to what the first Polynesian explorers saw from their canoes when they arrived, presumably in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. See King 2001: 16 and *Te Ara: the Encyclopedia of New Zealand*: <https://teara.govt.nz/en/history/page-1.AD> (consulted on 26/9/2021).

<sup>5</sup> The term *Pākehā* is used for New-Zealanders of European descent. Originally, it meant “the alien, the foreigner” in Māori.

<sup>6</sup> *Tūpuna*: ancestors.

Whina Cooper supported many causes until her death at the age of 98 and is a typical example of *mana wahine*. According to the *Reed Concise Māori Dictionary*, *mana* means “authority, influence, power, prestige” (Reed 2001: 41). The *Te Ara Online Māori Dictionary* confirms this definition and completes the meaning by adding: “spiritual power, charisma – *mana* is a supernatural force in a person, place or object. *Mana* goes hand in hand with *tapu* [sacred], one affecting the other”<sup>7</sup>. *Wahine* (plural *wāhine*) means “wife, woman, female, bride” (Reed 2001: 90). The movement of *mana wāhine*, therefore, represents the enterprises of charismatic women, whose battles are not just merely political but also endowed with cultural and spiritual valences. Defending the earth is one of them.

The bond between women and the land in Māori culture is evident in the word *whenua*, which means “land” and “placenta”. Both the land and women carry the principles of life-giving and nurturing. Moreover, in Māori cosmology a fundamental role is given to Papatūānuku (the earth mother), progenitor together with Rangi (the sky father) of all the living creatures and natural elements of the universe, that is, all things which are animate and inanimate. Originally, Papa and Rangi were embraced so tightly that their offspring could not see the light and grow. It was one of their children, Tāne (god of trees, birds and insects, and also of man), who separated them by pushing hard, head-down, with his feet against the sky father. In the open environment, all living things, included the ancestors of humans, could therefore flourish. The idea of the universe as an extended family is implicit in the Māori vision, as Boyes underlines:

Māori have a fundamental belief that humans are part of a broader understanding of family that incorporates the environment and humanity, where all things are interconnected. This is clearly seen in the Māori legend of creation where there is belief in the oneness of environment, ancestors and people (Boyes 2010: 3).

The foundational role of Papatūānuku can be evinced in the name itself, as explained by Margaret Orbell:

Papa, the first woman, is the earth. She is also a personification: the word *papa* can be used for anything broad and hard, such as a flat rock or the floor of a house, and it can mean ‘foundation’, either literally or figuratively, so that her name is best translated as Foundation (quoted in Wood 2007: 113).

Wood pinpoints that the word *papa* also occurs in the term *whakapapa* (genealogy), which can be transliterated as “to turn towards Papa”, thus indicating “the way Papatūānuku’s role has come to be located as central or fundamental to identity in Aotearoa New Zealand” (Wood 2007: 113). Being able to recite one’s *whakapapa* is crucial in order to explore the complexities of cultural identity, to locate oneself as part of a community and to define the bond and interdependence with the natural world. *Whakapapa* is also a literary genre in

<sup>7</sup> <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=mana> (consulted on 26/9/2021).

Māori traditional oral literature, where history and myth overlap. The narrative of Māori cosmogony, for example, is formulated as a *whakapapa*.

Furthermore, the word *wahine* (woman) includes *hine*, which is the term used for 'girl' and is found in the names of two goddesses and ancestresses, Hine-ahu-one and Hine-nui-te-pō, who are central figures in Māori mythology. The former is described by Jahnke as "a woman earth-formed by Tāne from the body of Papatūānuku and endowed by Tāne with the *ira tangata* – the life principle" (quoted in Wood 2007: 109). Basically, she is the first daughter of the mother-earth and progenitor of all women. The latter is the goddess of night and death, sometimes seen as a mature manifestation of Hine-ahu-one. The relevance of female figures in Māori myth is shown by these two ancestresses, whose roles define the life-cycle of humankind, from birth to death.

The role and function of the movement *mana wāhine* cannot thus be contained in the usual formulas of Western feminism, ecofeminism or ecocriticism, nor can it simply be seen as a reaction to Western knowledge. *Mana wāhine* must first be interpreted within an indigenous conceptual framework grounded in Māori knowledge and guided by *Kaupapa Māori* (purpose). As Simmonds underlines:

Mana wahine, as art, as theory, as method, and as practice [...] enables the exploration of diverse Māori realities from a position of power rather than having to talk or write 'back'. [...] It extends Kaupapa Māori theory by explicitly exploring the intersection of being Māori and female and all of the diverse and complex things being located in this intersecting space can mean (Simmonds 2011: 11).

The ecologically conscious attitude of Māori women writers and activists – for these two roles often coincide – stems from their obligation towards an ancestor, Papatūānuku, who represents the primeval female principle. Even an apparently convergent objective between Western ecofeminism and *mana wāhine*, that is to say the will to overcome male-female dualism that has led to gendered hierarchy throughout time – is formulated in a different way.

Huia Jahnke has written of *mana wāhine* as a movement restoring balance between gendered hierarchies in Māori life. Indeed, customs did not perceive relations between sexes in terms of male dominance over women:

An understanding of a Māori orientation to the world, provides significant insights into a world view that customarily did not perceive relations between men and women in terms of gendered hierarchies of power that privileged men over women. The cosmological narratives as a starting point provide such insights along with strong messages about the position, status and role women held prior to colonisation (Jahnke 2019: 184).

Jahnke explains that women were highly regarded in society, as demonstrated in *whakataukī* (proverbs), another traditional genre of Māori oral literature, and in *te reo* (Māori language). In the proverb "*Ko te whenua te wai-u mō ngā uri whakatipu*", the land is "likened

to a woman who sustains her young with milk from her breast", while "*He wahine, he whenua ka ngaro ai te tangata*" can be literally translated as "humanity is lost without women and land" (Jahnke 2019: 185). The nurturing role of women, associated with procreation and sustenance, and the equivalence with the land, make women essential to the wellbeing of humankind. To prove her argument, Jahnke underlines the non-sexist nature of Māori language, the importance of descentance and kinship in determining status for both men and women, the right of women to inherit property and land, which allowed them to gain economic power, and the basic complementarity and interdependence between the sexes:

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 *taku 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 [...]. After marriage women retained their independence, identity and social power. They kept their own name and all their inherited rights to land and property [...] which gave them economic power. "With the exception of slaves (male and female), the women were never regarded as chattels or possessions" (Pere 1988: 9). Indeed, power relations between women and men emphasised principles of complementarity and interdependence that were necessary for survival. Survival included the means to procreate (Jahnke 2019: 186).

The *mana wāhine* principles illustrated above cannot be ascribed to Western ecofeminism or considered a reaction to it, as will be explained in the next section.

### Western Ecofeminism: A Brief History

Ecofeminism has its conceptual origin in Western feminist theory. In 1952, Simon de Beauvoir highlighted the equivalence between women and nature as "other" in the logic of patriarchy. In 1974 Françoise d'Eaubonne coined the term "l'eco-féminisme" to argue that the phallic order was the source of a double threat to human beings: overpopulation and the depletion of natural resources. The exploitation of female reproductive power caused an excess of births; the exploitation of nature due to over-production was threatening the survival of the earth (Glazebrook 2002: 12). In the same years the bond between feminism and ecology was also being elaborated in North America. In 1974 Sandra Marburg and Lisa Watson hosted a conference at Berkeley entitled "Women and the Environment" and in 1980 Carolyn Merchant published *The Death of Nature*, a landmark in ecofeminism.

Historically, the emergence of ecofeminism is also linked to "deep ecology", a term coined by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess to describe an approach in ecology whose aim is to go deep into the conceptual roots of the environmental crisis, investigating underlying problematic assumptions, concepts, values and beliefs (Naess 1972). Both deep ecology and ecofeminism criticise the canonical Western philosophy's dualism, grounded in the culture/nature divide, that is, its anthropocentric (human-centred) view. Ecofeminism, however, goes further by highlighting that, in actual fact, anthropocentrism has always equated with

a male-dominated society. The link between deep ecology and ecofeminism, therefore, was later contested by ecofeminist thinkers that charged deep ecology with androcentrism (male-centred thinking) and sexism (Glazebrook 2002: 15).

Among early ecofeminist writings, *The Death of Nature* well illustrates the preoccupations of ecofeminism while offering an exhaustive and critical investigation into the bases of modern Western thinking. Merchant emphasises the importance of gender in the historiography of modern science and philosophy, and the need to look at the founding fathers of modern science – Bacon, Harvey, Descartes, Hobbes and Newton – in a different light. The “mechanical order” (Merchant 1983: 192) imposed by the Scientific Revolution of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, backed by Western empiricism and rationalism in philosophy, led to the development of capitalism and the rise of a market-oriented culture in early modern Europe. Merchant consequently investigates the connection between the environmental crisis and “the formation of a world view and a science that, by reconceptualising reality as a machine instead of a living organism, sanctioned the domination of nature and women” (Merchant 1983: xxi). The same *modus operandi* is thus identified in nature and society.

Interestingly, in the “Introduction” Merchant recognises how women’s history and the history of the environment are connected by “the ancient identity of nature as a nurturing mother” (Merchant 1983: xx) and how this cosmology was undermined by the Scientific Revolution of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, she wants to make it clear that:

It is not the purpose of this analysis to reinstate nature as the mother of humankind not to advocate that women reassume the role of nurturer dictated by that historical identity. Both need to be liberated from the anthropomorphic and stereotypic labels that degrade the serious underlying issues (Merchant 1983: xxi).

Despite the ground-breaking impact of the book, Merchant’s view is deeply ingrained in Western feminism, in the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s and, indirectly, in a rationalist perspective.

Western ecofeminism has had many different inflections (liberal, social, socialist, cultural) based on the common denominator of improving the human/nature relationship and attacking the patriarchal society, built on the domination over nature and women. Each declension has developed a different type of approach. Liberal ecofeminism aims at altering human relations with nature by reforming existing regulations and laws from within the system of governance. When women are given the same opportunities (educational, social, political) as men, they will be able to contribute to the construction of an eco-sustainable society. Social and socialist ecofeminism focuses on a thorough analysis and critique of capitalist patriarchy, underlining the exploitation of women and nature in market’s economy (Merchant 1992: 184). Cultural ecofeminism, on the other hand, is “a response to the perception that women and nature have been mutually associated and devalued in Western culture” (Merchant 1992: 190). It tends to assign positive value to some specific feminine attributes that women seemingly develop thanks to their closeness to nature (for example, through pregnancy, childbirth, nursing and menstruation cycles), leading to “intuition, an ethic of caring and web-like human-nature relationships” (Merchant 1992: 191).

Probably, a figure that has been trying to find a constructive synthesis of all the threads and concerns of ecofeminism is Karen Warren, with her *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters* (2000). Warren argues for a “transformative feminism” and replies to some of the critiques ecofeminism received. As Glazebrook summarises:

Warren’s ecofeminism matters because it uncovers how all issues of oppression and domination are interconnected and cannot be resolved in isolation, because it attends to the empirical data in order to raise questions about the global impact of poor environmental practice on women’s lives, because it shows how ecofeminist spiritualities are a source of empowerment rather than a reinscription of negative gender categories, and because it challenges philosophy to give up restrictive conceptions of reason in favour of an innovative thinking-in-progress in order to find successful ways to deal with contemporary political and environmental crises (Glazebrook 2002: 24).

Glazebrook recognises Warren’s effort to mediate between a rational/empirical approach to the environment and the valorisation of a spiritual relationship with nature, in order to overcome ancient dualisms and find a renovated perspective in Western thought.

This brief history shows how ecofeminism stems from the Western episteme and has developed through an internal oppositional dialectics. *Mana wāhine*, on the other hand, applies to a different episteme and ontology and must be understood within that paradigm. This change of perspective applies to Māori culture in general, as Thompson well explains:

Maori respect for the environment meshes with the ethics of the emergent green movement. Maori respect for the integrity of others, good or bad, makes sense in terms of Christian ideals. Maori ‘work ideals’, which involve cooperative attitudes, consensual decision-making, and respect for both labor and product, fit in a Marxist context. And Maori spiritualism has an odd kind of kinship with the various ‘Orientalized’ religious movements that are associated in the West with a reaction against materialism. But [...] the similarities are largely superficial. The deep structure of Maori values, their metaphysical underpinnings, are radically at variance with the Pakeha world view. To take merely one example, Maori respect for the environment stems from a genealogical view of the connections between mankind and the physical world. Looking after the natural world is not a matter of pragmatism, therefore, but one of obligation (Thompson 1994: 185)<sup>8</sup>.

### **Māori Women’s Poetry in the *Mana Wāhine* Tradition**

*Tātai* means “line of descent” and “recite genealogy” (Reed 2001: 76), while *whetū* means “star” (101). The title of the original collection can also be translated as “constellation, cluster

<sup>8</sup> In this article the words Māori and Pākehā have been written without the macron on the long vowel ‘a’. This is frequent in past sources, which did not follow proper orthography.

of stars"<sup>9</sup>. *Tātai Whetū* thus defines its poetesses as descendants of the stars, including them in the vast and sacred dimension of the universe. They are parts of a whole (the universe and the collection) and equal members of a family. The anthology can also be read as a constellation of poems. The title of the Italian translation also refers to a constellation: the Pleiades, called *Matariki* in Māori.

*Matariki, sciame di stelle* (the volume from which all references to the poems are taken) includes a wide range of themes: feminist and ecological issues, claims in defence of Māori rights and ancestral land, racism, personal reflections and mythical narratives. The perception of being part of a chain (a genealogy with mythical/natural origins) and the obligations towards ancestors (*tūpuna*) and descendants (*mokopuna*) remain a constant. The images of women as nurturing mothers and their identification with the land are also frequent.

The book opens with Mary Maringikura Campbell's poems, described by Apirana Taylor as *whaka* (canoes) sailing an ocean whose underwater currents are soul-searching, pathos, love, frustration, anger and the quest for mental sanity (quoted from Sarti Evans 2021: 12). In "Consider This", Campbell defines herself in terms of natural elements, human categories and relations: she is a "fertile plain", a "mother", "her *Tūpuna*" (ancestors), a sacred entity, a member of an extended family made of human and non-human relatives (pets and wild animals), and a natural time cycle. She also exhorts the addressee – a certain "Mr Psychiatrist" – to consider all of this, when he is prescribing drugs, since she is not just a physical brain:

Consider this  
before you pump me with drugs  
I am more than a brain  
a beating heart  
I am skin and bones  
a fertile plain  
I am my *Tūpuna*  
an *ariki*<sup>10</sup>  
I am yesterday  
today and tomorrow  
I have a soul [...]  
I am *tapu*  
inside me is God  
my God  
the best of me  
I am a mother  
a daughter  
a sister

<sup>9</sup> <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=tatai+whetu> (consulted on 26/9/2021).

<sup>10</sup> *Ariki*: high chief.



an auntie  
 a grandmother  
 I have two dogs and a cat  
 and wild birds circling (Sarti Evans 2020: 30-33).

Two of Campbell's poems, "Rā, the Sun" and "Tangaroa", convey a total identification with the natural landscape. In the former, Campbell talks to the god representing the sun in Māori mythology, describing the sunset in human terms:

Tonight my sons and I  
 watched you disappear  
 into your bed of sea  
 and gracefully  
 you stretched out your arms  
 and with your fingertips  
 you pulled the waves  
 over your head  
 and went to  
 sleep ... (36-37).

In "Tangaroa" the point of view moves to Rā himself, while rising from a stormy sea (the god Tangaroa) and complaining about Tangaroa's bad manners for splashing him:

Early this morning  
 he rolled in his sleep  
 Ripples blanched my body  
 Bubbles went up  
 my nostrils  
 Washed my face  
 Left me cold  
 Shaken  
 "Tangaroa", I said,  
 "you have no manners,  
 especially  
 in bed!" (38-39).

Both are expressed in a colloquial way, as if the gods were relatives and the two scenes belonged to everyday routine.

Michelle Ngamoki's poem "Tai Pari Tai Ope", (the untranslated title means: "incoming tide, forceful tide") is an alarm cry about the flooding of many low islands and atolls in the Pacific, due to the sea-level rise caused by global warming. This topical issue has been denounced by environmental activists and the politicians of the island states at risk (for example, Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands), who are trying to defend those territories from being submerged and prevent the mass migration of their inhabitants. Here

the impending catastrophe is conducted to a mythical frame. Will the eternal memory of the earth mother last, when the island is under water? The island, which is being kidnapped from the earth mother, is a member of the world family and is addressed as a sister by the poetess, who investigates her predicament. The pronouns referring to the island and the earth (both feminine) are always capitalised:

Sister, will the land still remember You?  
That She held You for a while,  
Above the rising tide.

Sister, will She still hear Your songs,  
beneath the drumming of the waves.

Sister, will She shiver with her shame,  
as her pandanus cloak is pulled aside (62-63).

Alice Te Punga Somerville's "Rākau" (tree) reminds us of the life spirit inside a tree, which can narrate its story to the carver. A tree thus speaks to the carver demanding attention for what lies inside itself and needs to be expressed:

We both know a language is waiting inside my tongue.

Please put down the adze, the skillsaw, the file:  
Speak gently to me so I can recognise what's there. [...]

The wood you're trying to carve is still a tree (92-93).

In her poem "In search of mana wahine" Anahera Gildea tells about the importance of ancestry and connection with the female origins in order to be a strong Māori woman of the present. She heard the *karanga* (call) of the *atua wahine* (ancestresses) when she was "Slung on the rigging between worlds". By re-tracing the connection with the first muscular woman, Hine-ahu-one, born from the earth and progenitor of humankind, she regains her strength.

I heard their *karanga*, the dawn voice  
centuries of women rising up [...]  
reciting the first woman,  
muscled beneath the sand  
came the cataclysmic tearing  
the first bleeding.

In the beginning there were no people. [...]  
Just the monstrous arc of her grief.  
Just she alone (56-58).

“The Yearning to Have you Back”, by Dayle Takitimu, evokes an ancient incantation to bring the spirit of her cousin, lying in a coma, back to physical life. According to Māori tradition, she occupies the space between the living realm and that of their ancestors<sup>11</sup>. These intense lines convey the author’s belief in the interconnection of animate and inanimate worlds and in the nurturing function of women (likened to gardens and gardeners), the sacredness attached to the female role and the uniqueness attributed to the individual. The poignant poem ends with an actual invocation to the goddesses Hine and Papatūānuku:

My sister, come close again amongst us  
 In love; [...]  
 Bring with you your garden to nurture  
 To be nurtured, to be grown, to be formed  
 A guiding shoot for those who need hope, who need  
 substance  
 That is you, who are of my heart  
 That is you, who holds the pulse of our ancestral  
 homeland within you  
 Of our mothers before us  
 Of our sacred gardens  
 That is you, who nurtures the seeds that have been  
 brought here to flourish [...]  
 To you, Hine  
 Throw open (and keep open) the sacred veil of your  
 people’s house of learning,  
                   of ancestral knowledge  
 To your Enchantress – Papatūānuku  
 Directly descending through an unbroken line of  
 women  
 To us, to us gathered here  
 To us delving deep; it is you –  
 We beckon you, be renewed in all that you know  
 Return to us [...]

You are me  
 I am you  
 We are each other, one being (88-90).

Dayle Takitimu is a key figure in this context, because she indeed exemplifies the role of *mana wahine*, conjugating militant activism and writing. She is an indigenous rights and environmental lawyer as well as climate campaigner, well known for her battle in 2012 against explorative oil drilling in the Raukumara basin, off the East coast, on behalf of her *iwi* (tribe), Te Whānau-a-Apanuia. The New Zealand government had granted Brazilian

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.flash-frontier.com/2019/03/07/tatai-whetu/> (consulted on 26/9/2021).

oil giant Petrobras permits for deep-sea oil and gas exploration. The *iwi* exercised their customary rights in the area and organised a 40-day flotilla protest supported by Greenpeace. Eventually the permits were handed back<sup>12</sup>.

Takitimu has presented at environmental forums locally and internationally, promoting a future that moves away from dependence on fossil fuels. She has pointed out indigenous people's ability to practise renewable energy and advocated a leading role for them in this field. In an interview to a TV network she underlined that a cultural change must soon take place. Humans should quit a "master-of-the-universe attitude" and be an integral part of the environment. She concluded by saying: "This living in competition with Papatūānuku has to stop and we have to get back to living in harmony with our environment"<sup>13</sup>.

As shown in the last remark, women of *mana wāhine* draw on their cultural background not only for inspiration in literature, but also for guidance in important political issues and environmental battles. The holistic Māori view encompasses their life and conduct, in private experience and public discourse, where an ecologically conscious attitude intertwines with a female perspective deeply rooted in *Kaupapa Māori*.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Boyes, Mike. 2010. Re-envisioning Nature from a New Zealand Māori Perspective. Paper presented at the European Institute for Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning (OED) conference. (Sept. 2010), Ratece-Planica, Slovenia, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315449649\\_Re-envisioning\\_nature\\_from\\_a\\_New\\_Zealand\\_Maori\\_perspective](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315449649_Re-envisioning_nature_from_a_New_Zealand_Maori_perspective) (consulted on 26/9/2021).
- Glazebrook, Trish. 2002. Karen Warren's Ecofeminism. *Ethics and the Environment*, 7, 2: 12-26.
- King, Michael. 2001. *Nga Iwi O Te Motu: 1000 Years of Māori History*. Auckland: Reed.
- Jahnke Tomlins, Huia. 2019. Towards a Theory of Mana Wahine. Pihama Leonie, Linda Tuhiwai Smith *et al.* eds. *Mana Wahine Reader. A Collection of Writings 1987-1998. Volume I*. Hamilton: Te Kotahi Research Institute, 183-196.
- Merchant, Carolyn. 1983 [1980]. *The Death of Nature*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Merchant, Carolyn. 1992. *Radical Ecology*. New York-London: Routledge.
- Naess, Arne. 1973. The Shallow and the Deep. Long-Range Ecology Movement. *Inquiry*, 16: 95-100.
- Rakuraku, Maraea & Vana Manasiadis eds. 2019. *Tātai Whetū: Seven Māori Women Poets in Translation*. Wellington: Seraph Press.
- Reed, Alexander Wyclif. 2001 [1948]. *The Reed Concise Māori Dictionary*. Auckland: Reed.
- Sarti Evans, Antonella (a cura di) 2020. *Matariki, sciame di stelle*. Roma: Ensemble.
- Simmonds, Naomi. 2011. Mana wahine: Decolonising politics. *Women's Studies Journal*, 25, 2: 11-25.

<sup>12</sup> <https://n8vdaughter.wordpress.com/2016/02/29/profile-dayle-takitimu-a-tireless-campaigner/> (consulted on 26/9/2021).

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.teaomaori.news/were-addicted-oil-dayle-takitimu> (consulted on 26/9/2021).

Thompson, Christina. 1994. Review of Exploring Maori Values by John Patterson. *Philosophy East and West*, 44, 1: 183-186.

Tuwhare, Hone. 1987. *Mihi: Collected Works*. Auckland: Penguin.

Warren, J. Karen. 2000. *Ecofeminist Philosophy. A Western Perspective on What It is and Why It Matters*. Lanham (MD): Rowman & Littlefield.

Wood, Briar. 2007. Mana Wāhine and Ecocriticism in Some Post-80s Writing by Māori Women. *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 14, 1: 107-124.

#### WEBLIOGRAPHY

Flash Frontier, <https://www.flash-frontier.com/2019/03/07/tatai-whetu/> (consulted on 26/9/2021).

Native Daughter: Culture-Indigenous-Māori-Environment, <https://n8vdaughter.wordpress.com/2016/02/29/profile-dayle-takitimu-a-tireless-campaigner/> (consulted on 26/9/2021).

Te Ao, Māori News, <https://www.teaomaori.news/were-addicted-oil-dayle-takitimu> (consulted on 26/9/2021).

Te Ara Online Māori Dictionary, <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/> (consulted on 26/9/2021).

**Paola Della Valle** is an Associate Professor at the University of Turin. She specialises in New Zealand and Pacific literature, postcolonial and gender studies. Her articles appeared in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *Textus*, *NZSA Bulletin of New Zealand Studies*, *Le Simplegadi*, *Il Castello di Elsinore*, *Anglistica Pisana*, *RiCognizioni*, *Semicerchio* and *Loxias*. She has published the monographs *From Silence to Voice: The Rise of Maori Literature* (2010), *Stevenson nel Pacifico: una lettura postcoloniale* (2013) and *Priestley e il tempo, il tempo di Priestley* (2016). She has contributed to the volumes *Contemporary Sites of Chaos in the Literatures and Arts of the Postcolonial World* (2013), *Uncommon Wealths in Postcolonial Fiction* (2018), *Antroposcenari: Storie, paesaggi, ecologie*, (2018), *Trees in Literatures and the Arts: Human Arboreal Perspectives in the Anthropocene* (2021). She is a member of the International Advisory Board of the *Journal of New Zealand and Pacific Studies*.

[paola.dellavalle@unito.it](mailto:paola.dellavalle@unito.it)