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‘DIRTY LAUNDRY’ IN MĀORI EDUCATION HISTORY? ANOTHER SPIN FOR WASHDAY AT THE PĀ

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Abstract

*In 1957, Ans Westra immigrated, as a young adult, from her native Holland to Aotearoa-New Zealand, where she eventually became one of the nation’s foremost photographers, and perhaps the pre-eminent photographer of Māori people and events. Early in her career, before she became a famous photographer, Westra worked on contract developing classroom readers for the state education publisher, which were distributed to every school in the country. On its release in May 1964, one such book written by Westra, *Washday at the Pā*, became the subject of protest led by the Māori Women’s Welfare League (MWWL). In response, in August 1964, the Minister of Education ordered all 38,000 copies recalled and destroyed. This incident ignited a national controversy, which has in turn generated some scholarship over the decades, mainly centred on themes of art and censorship. To date, Roger Openshaw (2005) is the most prominent educational scholar to write about this fascinating episode in the history of education in Aotearoa-New Zealand, so some critical analysis from a Māori education perspective seems warranted. This article presents a Kaupapa Māori reading of the book and the controversy, considered in the light of previous scholarship, in particular Openshaw (2005). This research explores the larger, ongoing meanings and learnings to be drawn from the eventful history of this controversial school journal.*

Keywords

Ans Westra; Kaupapa Māori; Māori educational publishing; *Washday at the Pā*



Introduction: Book-burning in Godzone?

During August and September of 1964, the whole of New Zealand was talking about a book, and whether or not it ought to have been withdrawn from the schools. The book was written and published in this country, and dealt with a most agreeable New Zealand subject—the happy life of a rural Māori family with nine children. In photographs and fictional text it portrayed their life against the background of an old-style ‘Māori house’ (a colonial cottage in need of a paint), from which the family were soon to move to a State house nearer town. (Westra, 1964, Publisher’s Note, p. 1)

Washday at the Pā was a school book containing a photo-essay written and illustrated by Ans Westra. She took the photographs on which she based the accompanying story as a classroom reading resource during a chance visit with a Māori family in 1963. The journal was published in May 1964 by the Department of Education, Wellington, Aotearoa-New Zealand, and sets of copies distributed to every school in the country, as was usual for school journals (in this article, *Washday* will be referred to as a ‘journal’, ‘bulletin’, or ‘reader’, which are used as generic terms meaning a book designed to be read by school children). The unprecedented, unanticipated protest that erupted against the use of *Washday* in primary classrooms was led by the Māori Womens Welfare League (MWWL), and resulted in the Minister of Education ordering, in August 1964, for all 38,000 copies to be recalled and “guillotined (the modern form of book-burning)” (Westra, 1964, Publisher’s Note, p. 1).

In response, a wide range of commentators aired their views, as noted in the opening epigraph above, through channels such as letters, columns and editorials of newspapers throughout the country. Debate turned mainly around the binary question, ‘should the book have been recalled, or not?’ Strong views were expressed on both sides, with the decision to withdraw the book from schools criticised by many Pākehā and some Māori commentators, mostly for ‘giving in’ to what were widely seen by Pākehā commentators as ignorant (Māori could not appreciate the art value of the photographs), mendacious (MWWL claimed the living conditions shown in *Washday* were ‘not typical’ for Māori families) or mischievous (causing state resources to be wasted without good cause) objections by Māori. Perhaps unsurprisingly in such a charged atmosphere, this discussion was coloured by Pākehā airing their own ‘dirty laundry’ in the form of their ‘passion for ignorance’ concerning the perspectives of their Treaty partner and subjugated ‘other’ namely Māori (Jones, 2001). One of the purposes of this research, therefore, is to clearly outline the reasons behind the Māori protest against the book.

Before the end of 1964, Caxton Press published a revised edition of *Washday* (Westra, 1964), which is the version found in libraries and referred to in this article, since the original school journal does not (officially) exist. There were a few minor differences from the original in the Caxton version: one being the deletion of the photograph of a state house to which the family in the story were soon to move; and the addition of an informative Publisher’s Note as a separate leaflet, stapled inside the book. Today, copies of both 1964 editions sell online for hundreds of dollars. In 2011, a new version of *Washday* was published by Suite, a company that offers a range of Ans Westra works for sale via their website. The Suite version of *Washday* features the original photographs, but omits the school journal story, with a new text by Mark Amery about the book’s history, including ‘whatever happened to’ snippets, some new photographs of the *Washday* children as adults, and discussion of the family’s bemused reactions to the controversy.

The *Washday* affair is the clearest example in the history of Aotearoa-New Zealand of a case of book censorship, usually associated with extreme politics and revolutions, rather than sleepy little Aotearoa-New Zealand of the 1960s. That the controversy was generated by a state education text is highly significant: *Washday* would hardly have caused a fuss if it had been published privately in the first place. The story has remained in national consciousness over the years, as Westra went on to become one of the most famous photographers of all time in Aotearoa-New Zealand: yet she was recently quoted as referring to *Washday* as “the highlight of my work” (Westra & Amery, 2011, p. 2). Some fifty years on, there exists a small corpus of academic (though not educational) scholarship about the *Washday* controversy, and it has been mentioned in many publications and events featuring Ans Westra, including, for example, a recent exhibition about her work at Te Papa Tongarewa, the national museum in Wellington (Te Papa Tongarewa, 2014).

This article is based on a theoretical form of Kaupapa Māori research, in the sense that it involves no collection of primary empirical data. The principles of Kaupapa Māori research inform the critiques undertaken in this article (Smith, 2003; L. T. Smith, 2012), which uses the methods of philosophical critique known as critical discourse analysis (CDA) based on Foucault's poststructuralist notion of discourse (Locke, 2004; McHoul & Grace, 1998). This research approach capitalises on the alignment between Kaupapa Māori theory and CDA methodology, based on philosophical analysis using secondary data collected from the textual archive of education. The aim of this form of research is to gain insight by re-reading selected events in Māori education history. The educational potential of the *Washday* controversy makes it a highly appropriate topic of study in this way, not only for Kaupapa Māori educators, but also for all educators and education researchers.

To date, Roger Openshaw is the most prominent educational researcher to have written about the *Washday* controversy (Openshaw, 2001, 2005). As one of the best book controversies in the history of Aotearoa-New Zealand, it is equally a fascinating episode in Māori education history. Yet, there is very little published Māori scholarship on *Washday* to be found, except for some comments by Witi Ihimaera, discussed below. This article offers a Kaupapa Māori commentary on the *Washday* story and its larger significance. In her chapter about the controversy, historian Barbara Brookes (2000) used the phrase 'dirty laundry'—but only in describing how the mother in the *Washday* story washed the family's clothes outdoors. Re-drawing the conclusions reached by Openshaw, this research finds there is more still to be learned by both Pākehā and Māori from the *Washday* controversy.

The next main section of the article uses original readings of existing scholarship to offer a novel account of the controversy through Māori eyes, organised under seven themes in the debate, which overlap and merge as discussion proceeds. The conclusion draws together these discussions to consider the ongoing significance of this 50-year old controversy. An important note about this article is that key Māori words, in particular 'Māori' itself and also 'pā' appear throughout in the standard orthography at the time of writing (i.e. 2016) for formatting consistency, and with recognition that orthography changes over time, while the words themselves do not. Changes in how we write these words reflect larger changes, including changes in reading and writing technologies. This methodological choice is based on our understanding that no absolutely correct spelling exists for te reo Māori, which until recently was an oral language. Standardising the orthography causes no change of meaning, nor any difficulty with comprehension. These decisions are not without significance, given that there is an explicit language argument included in this debate: the use of the word 'pā' is the first theme discussed in the following section.

What was all the fuss about? *Washday* in the history of Māori education

Four substantive accounts of the *Washday* controversy are among the major references on which this article draws in re-reading the controversy. Two articles about *Washday* featured in a special issue of a photography art magazine on the theme of 'The South Pacific'. In the first of these two articles, Neil Pardington and Robert Leonard (1988) present a Pākehā art-centred version of the history, which included many long quotes from the debates. Pardington and Leonard place *Washday* in a tradition of photo-humanism, and discuss the value of 'opportunism' to photographers working in that tradition, in relation to how Westra collected her photographs. From a Māori perspective, someone odd or strange is likely to be completely ignored, which seems to have been the case with Westra and the *Washday* family. This article includes the "ugly" photograph of the state house, which is useful, as it has otherwise disappeared from view, deleted in the later versions of the book.

The next article in the same issue was by Lawrence McDonald (1988) who stated: "*Washday at the Pā* belongs to a scripto-visual genre I will call ethnographic fabulation for the child" (p. 20). This useful definition can be further unpacked: a text type with both images and words, written for children, which presents a fictional story, but one that nevertheless has ethnographic validity. McDonald concludes that, "inescapably, *Washday's* meaning is inseparable from the force field of inter-ethnic reading communities in early 1960s New Zealand" and that studying the controversy is "still instructive" (p. 23), advice taken seriously in the writing of this article. The educational value of paradox and controversy has long been recognised, which means the *Washday* story is of immense educational value as a sort of parable: a teaching story with a relevant lasting message, whose value does not diminish over time.

The third academic account of the controversy was by Barbara Brookes (2000) who wrote a chapter about *Washday* in her edited collection on the history of houses in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Brookes examined the clash of values represented in the *Washday* images between the pressure then being exerted on families to present the ‘white picket fence’ of decency and respectability, while at the same time, in a rapidly modernising world, people were looking back to an earlier time that seemed simpler and better. Hence the title of her chapter included the phrase “nostalgia for innocent homely pleasures” (Brookes, 2000, p. 210). Brookes gives a more feminist reading of the historical events, which is more sympathetic to the work the MWWL was doing in the 1960s on behalf of Māori women and children in particular, and how *Washday* unwittingly damaged that work.

The fourth important account of the controversy is the Publisher’s Note added to the Caxton Press version of *Washday* (Westra, 1964), which has already been quoted from above. The Publisher’s Note includes a summary of the events, and a selection of comments from newspaper letters and editorials, and from professional statements by academics and formal groups including teachers’ unions and the New Zealand Māori Council.

Drawing on these and other relevant sources, discussion of the controversy is presented below in seven sections, dealing in turn with themes from the debate: the title; whether the family was ‘typical’; *Washday* as art; censorship; tikanga Māori; mana wahine and tino rangatiratanga; and aroha. The first five themes cover the major points and principles highlighted in the 1964 controversy and subsequent accounts. The latter two themes arise from our overall reflections in an attempt to understand the historical events from a critical Kaupapa Māori educational perspective.

The title: *Washday at the Pā*

The first problem with *Washday at the Pā* is its title, a very important part of any text. During the course of the controversy, significant disapproval of *Washday* was expressed on the grounds that the title was “incorrect” (Brookes, 2000, p. 249) because “the photographs were not taken in a pā* but in the ‘yard of a private house’” (Westra, 1964, Publisher’s Note, p. 2). The asterisk reproduced in this quote points to a useful footnote on the same page: “The Māori word ‘pā’ which originally meant a fortified village, is today loosely applied in New Zealand to any Māori village standing on a traditional site”. In other words, ‘pā’ has been appropriated into New Zealand English to refer to a Māori place of residence: it is sometimes used as a synonym for ‘marae’ (a traditional Māori community centre); and presumably could also refer to private houses on Māori land, which might indeed be the case with the house in *Washday*.

But the use of the term ‘Māori village’ in this explanatory footnote is telling, as it betrays the dominant (Pākehā) worldview of 1964 Aotearoa-New Zealand. To categorise the society in which one lives as containing ‘Māori places’ and other places shows the racialised mindset of dominant Pākehā-centred views of the social world of Aotearoa-New Zealand. That this worldview spoke through an official primary school reader in the pages of *Washday* was unacceptable in 1964, within living memory of the role played in defence of Empire by Māori soldiers in WWII, and at a time when the reputation for having the ‘best race relations in the world’ had become cemented as part of the national self-image (New Zealand History, 2015). The run-down old house with no modern conveniences, shown in the photographs, was a stark visual reminder of the conditions of material poverty in which many or most Māori lived. This image of impoverished Māori life contradicted the claims made by the Minister of Education and others about how state housing policies were providing Māori with modern homes to live in, by means of which the national dream of ‘racial equality’ would finally come true (Pearson, 1990).

Strikingly, the title *Washday at the Pā* echoes that of the earlier school bulletin, *Life in the Pā* (Chapman-Taylor, 1948), which had portrayed ‘Māori life’ to an earlier generation of school children. The title *Washday at the Pā* uses the word ‘pā’ with artistic licence—a ‘loose application’—just as its images make art from the lives of a poor Māori family. Discursively speaking, the purpose of the word ‘pā’ in the book’s title is to signal its Māori setting. In a short, poetic phrase, the title conveys the meaning of ‘a typical day in modern Māori life’. The phrase ‘the pā’ in the title continues the use of what can be called the ‘anthropological singular’ (‘the native’, ‘the Māori’) widely seen in earlier so-

called scientific works on Māori (see, for example, Firth, 1972). The formulation of this title succinctly suggests that the story represents all Māori.

A 'typical' Māori family?

The question of whether or not *Washday* represented, or was intended to represent, a 'typical' Māori family was one of the most hotly-debated points, and a cornerstone of the objections raised by the MWWL, who felt it presented an impoverished image of Māori life that undermined their work. The Minister of Education quickly backpedalled:

The objections refer mainly to the family's living conditions, which are said to be untypical. They were not intended to be regarded as completely typical, and in fact, the bulletin included a photograph of a new house into which the family was shortly to move. (Minister Kinsella, cited in Westra, 1964, Publisher's Note, p. 3)

Debate was lively through editorials and letters columns over whether or not *Washday* did in fact represent a 'typical' Māori family: whether or not the portrayal was "accurate" (Openshaw, 2005, p. 34). The Minister's above-quoted dissimulation splits hairs using the phrase 'completely typical' and thereby dodges the question. Openshaw is in no doubt: he states that *Washday* "dealt with a 'typical' Māori family" (p. 32) and recounts the controversy as a deplorable example of the triumph of censorship and "tame compliance" (p. 35) over truth, or science:

It was all to no avail. Political interference and government sensibilities had effectively eliminated the first attempt in New Zealand social studies to portray contemporary Māori life in a realistic manner. (Openshaw, 2005, p. 35)

Yet this argument is flawed, since it ignores the fact that *Washday* was produced as a primary classroom reader: a storybook designed to engage early readers. The argument over whether or not it was 'accurate' or 'realistic' was made after the fact: its rationale or usefulness in the classroom had little if anything to do with its scientific validity or 'truth'.

From a social studies perspective, Openshaw argues that *Washday* presented a sociologically truthful picture of contemporary Māori life. As a school text, therefore, according to his argument, since the school curriculum is based on valid or 'truthful' knowledge (Pinar, 2012), *Washday* is of value and should not have been withdrawn. From an art perspective, the Caxton Publisher's Note surmised that the artistic values in *Washday* were the real cause of the Māori protest, since the purported Māori objection, namely that the photographs were 'not typical' of Māori living conditions, flew in the face of common sense. This comment recognised the artistic 'power' of the images. Many have wondered about the effect of the *Washday* photographs on primary school children, compared with their effect on adults. As is widely acknowledged, though not, it turns out, by Openshaw (2005), since it does not suit his argument, the book would not have caused protest had it not been published for use in primary classrooms (Westra, 1964, Publisher's Note). Logically speaking, the *Washday* controversy came about because the relevant people in the school publications office made an error of judgement in approving its production as a primary school journal. It is a lapse of scholarship for Openshaw to discuss *Washday* as if it were a sociological text, rather than a primary classroom text, in order to fit his argument that the government capitulated to the Māori protest out of so-called 'political correctness'.

The central issue of the living conditions shown in the book was navigated by inserting a photograph showing the new state house to which the family in the story were soon to move. This insertion seems to have been an editorial work-around: a way of making the setting of the story in the old house acceptable, whilst also promoting the government's enlightened social policies for Māori. The fact that Westra did not like the photograph of the state house is clearly indicated in the Caxton version:

the publishers have, with a shudder and with the author's full concurrence (on artistic grounds alone), removed the only ugly photograph the bulletin contained—that showing the uncompleted house which symbolises the material advance of all the Māori families being rehoused today with State assistance. (Westra, 1964, Publisher's Note, p. 7)

It is ironic that despite so firmly rejecting the photograph, Caxton in this quote expressed support for the process of Māori urbanisation that it visually represented. The quote by Minister Kinsella, above, shows how the ‘new house’ was the first line of defence when the book came under public scrutiny. Thus, the line between fact and fiction was strategically blurred, as part of the process of political spin, and in the heat of being called to account. The *Washday* photographs clearly show a Māori family living in poverty, a harsh ‘truth’ that was softened in the text of the story by the narrative that the family was soon to move to a ‘brand new’ state house. Whether or not the real family whose images appear in *Washday* were actually to move to this or any other new house was irrelevant for the purposes of the book. And by his careful choice of words, the Minister dodged the question of whether or not *Washday* was a realistic portrayal of contemporary Māori life. In the wake of the controversy, the narrative about the state house became the more important story, overshadowing the intended story for emergent readers in primary classrooms. Most commentators have taken the narrative about the family’s imminent move to a new house at face value: factually correct, ethically right and proper, and conveniently reinforcing the dominant Pākehā sense of comfortable righteousness and superiority in their dealings with Māori.

Washday as art

Washday’s value as art was another major strand of the debate, though one strategically ignored by Openshaw, who notes only that the book “was profusely illustrated with photographs [by] Ans Westra” (2005, p. 32). In contrast, *Washday*’s art value was used in the Caxton Publisher’s Note to explain why the problems the book would cause had not been foreseen in the process of publishing it: “the sheer artistic excellence of the book—its directness and truth, and the beauty of its photographs—carried it past the various checkpoints” (Westra, 1964, Publisher’s Note, p. 2). The Publisher’s Note concludes that the art value of the photographs may hold “a clue to the puzzle of this controversy” (p. 8). “Was it simply because Miss Westra’s little book was a *work of art*, and possessed artistic truth, that it made people feel uncomfortable?” (p. 8, emphasis in original). This question is insightful insofar as it asks if the power of the photographs caused Māori to object: somewhat different from the dominant Pākehā opinion, which was that Māori were unable to appreciate the artistic merit of the photographs.

Like science, art is notoriously difficult to adequately and succinctly define: both ultimately rest on criteria established by the relevant communities. The photographs in *Washday* are undeniably powerful, even if, as is often the case with art, it is not easy to say exactly why. It is difficult, in any case, to look at the photographs objectively once one knows about their story. Pākehā frustration was caused by failure to understand the basis of the Māori protest. Frustration is shown by the use in the debate of terms such as “puzzle” (Westra, 1964, Publisher’s Note, p. 8) and “political correctness dressed in constructivist clothing” (Openshaw, 2005, p. 36). Aspects of the Pākehā objection to the Māori protest against *Washday* included: protest at the waste involved in destroying the publication; a national distaste for censorship and political meddling; and the “general touchiness on the point at issue (the status of Maoris [sic])” (Westra, 1964, Publisher’s Note, p. 2). But it is the puzzling nature of the debate, its “contradictions and ambivalences” (McDonald, 1988, p. 23), which make *Washday* particularly useful as a teaching story, as further discussed below.

Washday and censorship

The Māori Women’s Welfare League (MWWL) members presented evidence of cases where Māori children had been teased by their Pākehā classmates after reading *Washday*: an argument that could not be countered given that it transgressed the educational equivalent of the medical principle ‘first do no harm’. There was, however, widespread condemnation following the announcement of the Minister’s decision to withdraw the book. Commentators complained about the government “bowing to the demands of a small pressure group” (Westra, 1964, Publisher’s Note, p. 7), and other similar sentiments that tended to vilify those who protested against *Washday*, labelling the MWWL “afraid” “blind” (p. 4) and “like the ostrich” (p. 5). In an ethically unsound move, the Caxton Publisher’s Note went so far as to query whether a few cases of teasing “justified the League’s request, the Minister’s

action, and all the consequences” (p. 8). This argument is significant in pointing to the larger meanings behind the controversy.

Openshaw emphasises how the Ministry succumbed to the pressure from the MWWL, but omits the larger point: according to his own article, *Washday* was produced in a history of avoiding conflict over how Māori are represented. In other words, *Washday* was published by the Ministry despite years of following a policy of “nothing objectionable or controversial” in publications concerning Māori (Openshaw, 2005, p. 25), so it is no surprise that the Minister felt obliged to withdraw it when presented with evidence that it incited bullying of Māori children. The logical conclusion is that *Washday* represents a simple but serious error of judgement: a lack of knowledge of their own business by the relevant section of the state education publisher. Despite the merits of the book, it was unfit for purpose. The debacle of *Washday* was a harsh lesson for the state education system, which probably helped to bring about more extensive consultation with Māori advisors for subsequent classroom resources on Māori topics.

Washday and tikanga Māori

One image¹ in particular caused objection on the grounds of tikanga Māori: that of “the lovely little Mutu warming her feet on the stove before going to bed” (Westra, 1964, Publisher’s Note, p. 4). Members of the MWWL were outraged by this portrayal of a flagrant transgression of tapu (taboo), with one quoted as stating “No Māori child [would] ever stand on a cooking stove” (Brookes, 2000, p. 220), implying the photograph had been artificially staged. Derision was heaped on Westra for her “ignorance” (Brookes, 2000, p. 251), which was ironic, because

Westra claims to have been well aware that the subject matter of this photograph constituted a violation of Tapu. But what struck her most forcibly about this situation was that the child herself did not appear to be aware of this. (McDonald, 1988, p. 22)

Some Māori critics of this photograph assumed that Westra had set up this photograph, but this seems unlikely given her naturalistic approach. Westra herself assumed that Mutu did not know she was breaking tapu by warming her feet on the stove. But a third version of the ‘truth’ of this photograph seems self-evident in the look on Mutu’s face, and her pose, ready to spring away should Mother approach, which indicates she knew perfectly well that what she was doing was naughty, but did it anyway. In this and other details of the story, accusations of ignorance and worse flew around in various directions during the controversy.

Māori writer Witi Ihimaera used a story of his own to widen the issue to one of Māori reactions to photography in general, reflecting the insight about the effects of these powerful photographs.

I was waiting to cross at the intersection of Queen Street and Victoria Street when, all of a sudden, I felt something alien. For a moment, I was literally powerless to move. It was as if somebody had touched my head or walked over my body which, in Māori terms, are great defilements of tapu. With great effort, I was able to move my neck, and I saw the source of the alien feeling. A tourist bus had drawn up at the lights. The passengers were all gaily dressed and wearing sunglasses. Four of them were chewing gum and were aiming their cameras at me like praying mantis feeding on me.

The incident lasted only a few seconds but I have never forgotten it. I have never felt so exposed in all my life. Or angered. Or saddened. I stumbled around the corner and was physically ill at this unwarranted, unasked for, unpermitted intrusion on my life. On that day, I learned about the camera as voyeur, as taker of life—and of Māori as object. It is important to indicate the depth of Māori spiritual and physical reaction to the obtrusive eye of the camera because it helps to explain why Ans Westra’s book of photography, *Washday at the Pā*, published in the 1960s, created such a controversy. (Ihimaera, 1985, pp. 5-6)

With this vignette, Ihimaera offers a valuable Māori counter-view, but his approach seems somewhat out of step, since the Māori family who were photographed for *Washday* showed absolutely no regard

¹ This photograph, and others in the book, can be viewed online by searching for the phrase “Washday at the pā”.

for the camera, and claimed never to suffer any adverse effects (Westra & Amery, 2011). Everyone, it seems, wants to claim *Washday*, with Ihimaera here styling it a photography book, while Openshaw (2005) claims it as a social studies text. From a Māori perspective, it is impossible to ignore the fact that it is a Māori family whose private lives are portrayed in *Washday*, making it (at least in part) a Māori text. In recognising Māori rights over their own images, to claim *Washday* as a Māori text aligns with the spirit of Ihimaera's thoughts about the objectification of Māori through photography, quoted above, and with the principles of Kaupapa Māori underpinned by the politics of tino rangatiratanga, as returned to in the section below.

Discussing the photograph of Mutu standing on the stove, Ihimaera concludes, "We could forgive the child its ignorance, but not the holder of the mirror" (Ihimaera, 1985, p. 6). While this insight addresses the Māori anger directed towards Westra over this particular photograph, it ignores the question of who was ultimately responsible for the book, as a state-published classroom resource. Like any other school journal, all aspects of the published book, including decisions about which photographs to include, were clearly the responsibility of the Ministry, not the photographer, nor her subjects. In the original version of *Washday*, the Ministry chose to exclude the picture of the children pretending to smoke their rolled-up lolly papers, presumably on the grounds that an image of children smoking, even in play, transgresses social norms in a way inappropriate for school classroom use. In just the same way, an image of a person standing on a stove contravenes and offends Māori social norms. Whether or not Mutu actually stood on the stove, whether or not she knew she was breaking tapu, and whether or not Westra should have taken the photo—these are all beside the point, as are the merits of the photograph itself. The image is offensive in Māori terms, and was not appropriate in a primary classroom reader. Commentary on this aspect of the controversy showcased Pākehā ignorance about the Māori symbolic and social world, as did the whole *Washday* affair. This ignorance reflects the sociological rule that the less powerful in any given social context are always obliged to understand the powerful, but not the other way round (Graeber, 2011). The point of invoking this rule is to highlight the spuriousness of the claim made by some who objected to the book's withdrawal, including Openshaw (2005), that Māori 'have too much power'.

The above paragraphs have considered the five major themes evident in the controversy of 1964, and which have been canvassed in various academic and media accounts. The MWWL objected to *Washday* on the grounds of the title, the accuracy of the portrayal of Māori life, and of transgressing tikanga Māori. The dominant objections when the Minister withdrew it from schools were because of the art values of the photographs, and because it was seen as unnecessary and wasteful censorship: an example of 'political correctness gone mad'. The following two sections address themes that arise from critical Māori consideration of the overall story of *Washday*, the controversy, and the place it has since taken in national history.

Māori power: Mana wahine and tino rangatiratanga in the *Washday* controversy

The decision to withdraw *Washday* from the schools was a victory for Māori power, and an embarrassing loss for the Ministry. *Washday* presented the MWWL with an ideal target against which to test their growing strength as a political lobby group, at a time when Māori society, which up until WWII remained mostly rural and therefore somewhat apart from Pākehā society, was undergoing a further period of rapid transformation brought about by post-WWII mass urbanisation, which was in full swing by 1964. Urbanisation was bringing Māori children into Education Board schools in much greater numbers than ever before, and making the rural system of Māori Schools increasingly redundant (Simon & Smith, 2001). Classrooms in the cities and towns quickly became bi-ethnic, and teachers began to struggle (New Zealand School Publications Branch, 1971). William Tunmer and Jane Prochnow noted how the ranking of Aotearoa-New Zealand in international literacy studies "has steadily declined since 1970, from 1st to 6th to 13th to 24th" (Tunmer & Prochnow, 2009, p. 156). Speculatively, this decline may reflect the inexorable effect of increasing cultural heterogeneity in the nation's classrooms, as first Māori urbanised, then Pacific children arrived, followed by the rapid move to multiculturalism under globalisation and neoliberalism.

But in 1964, before all of that diversification of society and schools in Aotearoa-New Zealand, the MWWL was busy responding to Māori urbanisation; by supporting Māori women and their children to cope with sudden integration into mainstream Pākehā-dominated cities and towns, bereft of their

traditional kin networks of material and emotional support. The success of the MWWL protest against *Washday* deserves acclaim as an outstanding example in history of mana wahine in action. In retrospect, the *Washday* affair can also be recognised as one of the early markers of the emerging policy of tino rangatiratanga in public institutions such as education and educational publishing (May, 2012). Understood in terms of discourse, the *Washday* controversy can be seen as part of an extended battle, in the modernist post-WWII era, for Māori control of the symbolic space in which Māori were represented in nation-building processes including schooling. In a sense, the *Washday* controversy was rather like a symbolic, 20th-century version of Ruapekapeka² as a rare but important example of a time when Māori prevailed over Pākehā. Both events showcase a clash of understanding of how the world works; both are examples of Pākehā ignorance about how Māori think.

Activism such as that of the MWWL in the *Washday* controversy was part of a growing modern Māori political consciousness, which helped to pave the way for the emergence of Kura Kaupapa Māori, and Kaupapa Māori itself as a wider social and theoretical tradition (G. H. Smith, 2012). As already noted above, Kaupapa Māori theory is a philosophy that informs Māori projects in education, media, health, justice and other social domains and that builds on an ethics and politics of tino rangatiratanga or Māori indigeneity (Hoskins, 2012; Salmond, 2012).

Aroha and love in the *Washday* controversy

One of the most intriguing themes discernible in the *Washday* controversy is that of aroha, used here with its nearest English equivalent, 'love', but with due regard for the nuanced difference in meaning between these two cultural concepts. *Washday* was referred to as "warm-hearted, love-filled" (Westra, 1964, Publisher's Note, p. 5), "lovable" (p. 3) and "lovely" (p. 6) by commentators who derided the decision to withdraw and destroy it. The description of the book as being about "a most agreeable subject" (cited in the epigraph at the start of the article) aligns with the idea that the book reflected the national aroha of Pākehā towards Māori. Brookes' use of 'nostalgia' also echoes this fond feeling the book inspired in many Pākehā.

McDonald (1988) relates this theme of aroha to the ethnographic trope of the "displaced modern pastoral" that characterises contemporary "interactions between town and country, middle class and working class, and colonizer and colonized" attributed to Renato Rosaldo. Ronaldo identified the tendency of the modern pastoral to include "a peculiar civility in relationships that cross social boundaries. It permits a polite tenderness that more direct ways of acknowledging inequality could inhibit" (McDonald, 1988, p. 20).

But the exact nature of this putative love of Māori bears closer examination. For many decades, Māori formed most of the rural, often seasonal workforce, which powered the profits from primary industry on which the modern nation-state of Aotearoa-New Zealand was built, before the advent of mechanised farming and forestry. *Washday's* title works to suggest that Māori life happens 'at the pā': somewhere far away and very different from the classroom of the national imaginary in which children were to read this book, and the neat, modern houses to which they would return after school. In a way the book, and the feelings it inspired, appealed strongly to Pākehā *ideas of* Māori, more so than it reflected some important truth about Māori themselves.

Relatedly, the schoolbook story Westra wrote to string together the photographs had the family speaking in standard New Zealand middle-class English. Although one is aware it is fictional, the text strongly influences the reader's experience of *Washday*. But there is a marked disjunction between the text and the images, which (incidentally) destroys Openshaw's (2005) argument that *Washday* should not have been withdrawn because it was scientifically accurate. Whatever Westra heard the family saying, it would have been totally unlike the script she gave them.

From a Pākehā perspective, then, *Washday* portrayed a safe, palatable image of Māori domestic life, one that reinforced Pākehā feelings of security and superiority and brought forth fond feelings of nostalgia and simple rustic charm. The life portrayed in *Washday* is 'charming' on condition that one is not living it. The 'state house' image further represents this aroha towards Māori, expressed through

² Ruapekapeka refers to an incident in the armed phase of the 19th-century British colonisation of Aotearoa, when the British Army were defeated by their misunderstanding of Māori thinking.

state housing policies and schemes. It is particularly poignant looking back from 2016—when state housing is being rapidly dismantled, no longer regarded positively by a neoliberalised state—to the beginnings of this wonderful maternal ‘nanny state’ policy approach to providing for Māori, through the lens of the *Washday* controversy.

Conclusion: The enduring significance of *Washday at the Pā*

As the discussions above make clear, ultimately the *Washday* controversy turned on the difference between Māori and Pākehā perspectives of self and other, particularly in relation to schooling. Nation-building is a never-ending process, but the impact of this unsettled nature of citizenship on social studies is seldom discussed or accounted for in policy. Openshaw has commendably attempted to engage with the meanings of *Washday* and other events in the history of Māori education, but his arguments lack cogency, as pointed out above. This research has benefited from reading Openshaw’s work on *Washday*, but it seems his scholarship has suffered from lack of critical Māori scholarship with which to engage.

Washday was caught in the crosshairs of the intercultural hyphen: the nexus between cultures, languages, identities and changing norms in education and in society at large (Stewart, 2016a). *Washday* made an ideal target for the power of emerging urban Māori political consciousness represented by groups such as the MWWL. Yet having *Washday* withdrawn from schools was a hollow or (to continue the ‘book-burning’ metaphor) pyrrhic victory for the MWWL, since the result was to destroy something of beauty, and to arouse much antipathy against the group and their cause, in the community at large. One feels for Westra, who clearly shares great empathy and aroha with her Māori subjects. That she went on all the rest of her career thinking of *Washday* as the highlight of her work suggests how much distress she must have experienced at the time, when the book was withdrawn. She became a victim of the controversy triggered by the power of her own photographic art.

Attitudes towards biculturalism and the Treaty of Waitangi amongst the general population of Aotearoa-New Zealand are influenced and shaped by global events and regional trends (Australia, United Kingdom, United States, China); influences that are likely to go on getting stronger, given the constant global ‘connectivity’ provided by the internet. As intercultural conditions overseas deteriorate, these influences will tend to ensure that attitudes here, too, will inevitably harden and become more polarised. The history of Māori education is thickly littered with examples of how deficit and colonising attitudes have informed policy, practice and research involving Māori students and their families. If, in rejecting deficit thinking, we ignore the history of Māori education, we overlook a valuable archive, rich with opportunities for re-reading from a 21st-century, Kaupapa Māori research perspective. *Washday at the Pā* is an obvious choice as a specific example from the history of Māori education in need of this treatment. The insights unearthed in this article illustrate but do not exhaust the richness of intercultural lessons lying curled within the story of this “controversial school journal” (Stuart, 2013).

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