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MĀMĀ

Caitlin Donnelly

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MĀMĀ**Caitlin Donnelly****INTRODUCTION**

Ko Uruao te waka.
 Ko Ūpoko o Tahumatā te mauka.
 Ko Kāi Tahu rātou ko Kāti Mamoe ko Pākehā ōku iwi.
 Ko Kāti Irakehu tōku hapū.
 Ko Tukuwaha rāua ko William Thomas ōku tupuna. I te taha tōku *Māmā*.
 Nō Waihōpai ahua. E noho ana ahua I te Waikaka.
 Ko Sutton rāua ko Henderson ōku mātua, engari ko Donnelly ōku mātua whāngai.
 Tokorua āku tamariki.
 Ko Caitlin Rose Donnelly tāku Ikoa.
 Ko *Māmā* tāku mahi.¹

First, we start with where we come from.² My pepeha connects me with my tupuna and the whenua. Kei te tika te korero i ō tatou tupuna; ka mua, ka muri. This means walking backwards into the future – the idea that we should look to the past to inform the future. This project started at the end of my Honours project, *Trace* (2015). For this article, I will walk you back through the journey that is *Māmā*, my Master's project that I worked on over six years. *Māmā* was made in response to three critical markers of my identity: Māori, wāhine, and kowhaea.³

HE MANA TE MATAURAKA

In 2015, I connected to my whakapapa and started engaging as Māori and, in doing so, came to terms with my previous dislocation as an adoptee and an identity of “iwi unknown.” I started *Māmā* by making trips to explore my heritage. The following statement by Areta Wilkinson helps to describe my experience of building relationships with my iwi: “Although I identify as a jeweller of Kai Tahu descent, I did not reside with my hapū or iwi in the South Island until I undertook this study journey. In the first instance, I had to acknowledge my outsider status and become part of the community with the aim of forging authentic relationships that would go beyond this project.”⁴

I experienced barriers when it came to claiming an identity as Māori (more so from non-Māori), to claiming an identity as a person outside the imposed mother role, and in claiming any identity outside the family farm, set within a traditional farming community. However, overcoming these obstacles and making connections grounded me in the place I had grown up, Waihōpai – the place all my bloodlines and adoptive lines trace back to – in Te Waipounamu/ the South Island.

As I visited sites and landscapes significant to my whakapapa, I felt a connection between forms in nature and moko designs from tupuna and kowhaiwhai panels. I began drawing these in my sketchbook, along with other forms familiar from my everyday life, to consider the stories they could tell and to find connections between everyday personal objects and the land. These all had a whakapapa before I even started.

Struggling with finding spare time and lack of sleep, with a second baby and shifting to another rural community – these things all became a big part of my life during this period and I took a break from study between 2016 and 2019. During that time my husband and I started a contract milking business, and I became a volunteer firefighter. I continued establishing relationships with my newfound whanau and learning tikaka, reo and whakapapa. Also, I became increasingly aware of sexism and racism around me. In exploring my identity, my work has been fuelled by my experiences. Sexism and racism are issues that have affected me personally. Some sample diary entries:

I was helping paint murals at a kids' group. I said Waikaka for whatever reason, and a woman said, "Oh no, it is Waikacka." I said "Waikaka," she said, "no, it is waikacka." I said, "A.E.I.O.U, pretty sure that makes it Waikaka"; she again said "no, waikacka" and left.

He waited until my husband had gone to the toilet after the meeting to ask me, "How is your study going?" It was clear he had no interest; instead, it was a lead-in. I said "good," feeling like I had somehow permitted whatever was said next. He said, "because that is taking you off the farm." I was baffled; whoever said my place was on the farm!⁵

I came back to study in 2019 and I was hōhā and felt exasperated about being dehumanised. At the same time, I was learning to stand strong in my feminist and Kai Tahu identity. Knowing my past and my genealogy led to my empowerment. I felt more freedom from the unknown floating feeling, now that I was anchored by tupuna. He mana te matauraka. The framework provided by intersectional feminism helped me to examine three personal identity markers: Māori, wāhine and kowhaea.

Intersectional feminism, based on standpoint theory, identifies how interlocking systems of power affect those most marginalised in society.⁶ I explored colonisation from the viewpoint of my tupuna, which led me to study Kaupapa Māori theory. In a 1990 paper, Professor Graham Hingangaroa Smith set out six principles or components of Kaupapa Māori theory to counteract the colonial world view. "Hegemony is a way of thinking – it occurs when oppressed groups take on dominant group thinking and ideas uncritically and as 'common sense,' even though those ideas may in fact be contributing to forming their own oppression. It is the ultimate way to colonise a people; you have the colonised colonising themselves!"⁷ In 1997 Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith expanded on these points. Other theorists have also contributed to the development and growth of Kaupapa Māori theory.⁸

Postcolonialism, like intersectional feminism, explores the interconnections formed by overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination that describe relations between the Coloniser and the Colonised, or the Other and the Self. Professor Masood Raja explains the multiple threads considered by postcolonial studies: intersectional, complex and situational.⁹



Figure 1. Caitlin Donnelly, *Studio wall right*, 2020. This collage contains images of my work, sketchbook drawings from nature, documentation of a trip to meet my birth father and a crocheted woolen square as an off-take of a knitted blanket made for me by my birth mother.



Figure 2. Caitlin Donnelly, *Whakaputu* (detail), 2021, bedsheets, acrylic paint and primer; 110 x 230 x 190cm (approx.)

Feminist postcolonial writer Trinh T Minh-ha has been another crucial influence on my thinking. Trinh is a Vietnamese filmmaker, writer, literary theorist, composer and professor. She breaks down dominant language practices and insists on removing inherited categories so that hybrids and in-betweens can have more space. Her practice is cross-disciplinary, and she advocates for fluidity. In her 1989 book *Woman, Native, Other*, she critiqued language as being made by and for men. She looked at the power dynamics in her relevant fields and situations and teased them out, an approach which I found helpful in relating to my own situations.¹⁰

In an interview, Trinh claimed that intersectionality was at the centre of her book:

This arose from a strong commitment to understanding how, in relations of power, the embedded questions of gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, religion and culture overlap and intertwine. This approach was already at the core of my book *Woman, Native, Other* in the early 1980s and the term is now popularised among feminists when referring to a more diverse and inclusive praxis. It's not new, but the fact that 'intersectional' has received widespread attention today could perhaps help the struggle to regain momentum among intellectuals, artists and activists alike.¹¹

Exploring my identity within this context helped articulate my ongoing experiences as they relate to race, gender and place.

After June 2020, my works shifted away from being paintings on the wall as I explored the strengths and limitations of 'painted' scrunched bedsheets, using a performative process whereby cotton sheets were washed in diluted paint, rung out and left to dry on a line. Elastic strips torn from a fitted sheet were valued for their umbilical nature. They found their way into reflective works that referenced korowai, braids, putiputi and the Union Jack. The addition of other pieces of clothing and materials such as red-band socks and cloth nappies to the braids marked another change of direction as this korero developed.

MĀMĀ – THE WORKS

Rauru is connected to the gallery floor; to the ground and symbolically to Papatāūnuku. Land, whenua, is not passive; it is gods, people and our tupuna. Therefore, it is a vital connection. *Rauru* is patterned like poi strings, as I know them, and draws lines creating a boundary separating the other works in this space. Reflecting my earlier journey, I think of this work as drawing a line in the sand. I chose three of these pieces to represent Māori, wāhine and kowhaea. The cords are wound up, strung up and pulled with tension. At the wall are figure-eight knots I learned in fire training – knotted sheets.

Ūkaipō connects with the ground and is dyed in hues of red by the 'washing in paint' process and shaped into folds in the drying process. I think of this work as a tupuna to the others, a mountain connected to whenua and also connected to womanhood. The domestic actions of horoi / laundry / making clean (soaking, scrubbing, wringing and hanging out) refer to my daily chore as a mother and female in rural Aotearoa. Clothing and sheets are intimate things connected to bodies; the



Figure 3. Caitlin Donnelly, *Māmā: Rauru*, 2021, bedsheets, cloth nappies, red-band socks, acrylic paint and primer, 160 x 170 x 510cm (approx.)



Figure 4. Caitlin Donnelly, *Māmā: Ūkaipō*, 2021, bedsheets, acrylic paint and primer, 270 x 170 x 40cm (approx.)

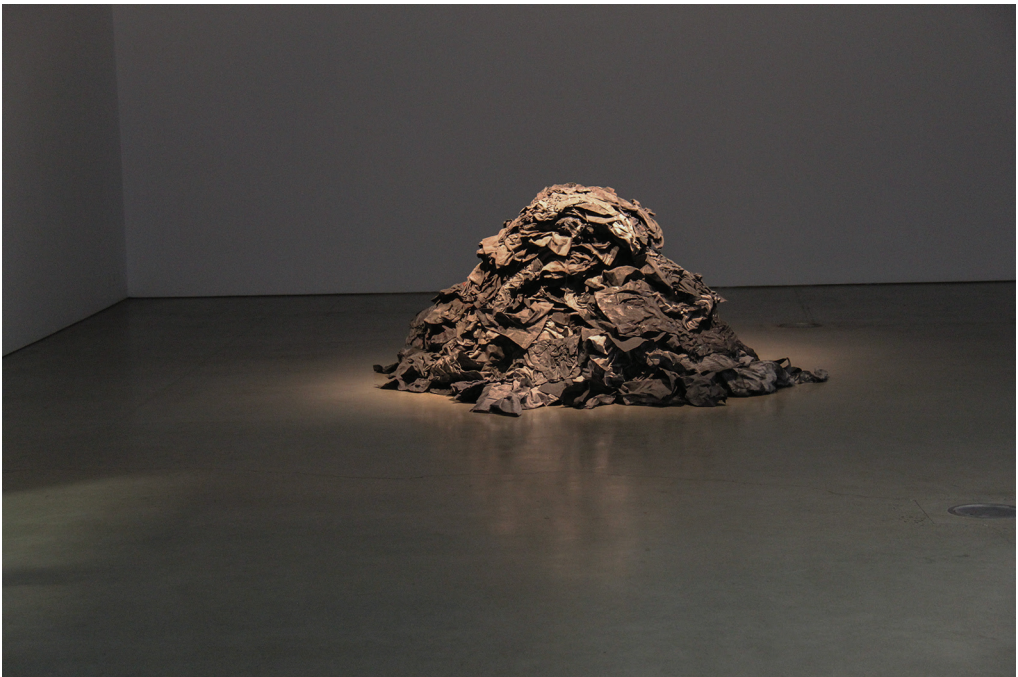


Figure 6. Caitlin Donnelly, *Māmā: Whakaputu*, 2021, bedsheets, acrylic paint and primer, 110 x 230 x 190cm (approx.)



Figure 5: Caitlin Donnelly, *Māmā: Ūkaipō* (detail), 2021, bedsheets, acrylic paint and primer, 270 x 170 x 40cm (approx.)

related exhibition expressed my reactions, thoughts and feelings of not fitting the situations I occupy. My research acknowledges historical trauma while responding to matters of domesticity. It looks backwards to look forward, to explore my identity markers of Māori, wāhine and kowhāea.

Māmā is an identity project where I have explored my growing understanding of being Kāi Tahu Māori, a mother, a woman in rural Aotearoa, and an adoptee. It is a trace of the invisible, repeated drudgery of the daily chore, a mark of my identity left visible.

To finish this article, I will end with the beginning, the whakataukī:

Ka mua, Ka muri
walking backwards into the future

Caitlin Rose Donnelly is a contemporary artist who works in various media, processes, and scales, including drawing, painting, textiles, and jewellery. Her practice is concerned with researching obstructions in identity. Her work often transforms rapidly, as her practice is process-driven. Caitlin is a mother in a small rural township, an artist, a student in Te Reo, a volunteer Firefighter; a station training coordinator, and the non-farming operator of a farming business-office requirements and HR.

rawa taketake used here are all secondhand, so they required the tikaka of cleansing via wai to lift the tapu from the residue of their past lives. I followed the right tikaka after consulting with my whānau and advisors.¹² Whakapapa also led to studio tikaka.¹³ Mary Kelly has told how she developed one of her works while washing at home, emphasising that our thinking and everyday lives are not separate.¹⁴ Ūkaipō comes from a Māori and Mother narrative, of the body connected to whenua and the repetitive and bloody truth of wahine; the violent and frustrating reality of being kowhāea. The red hues speak of the process of birth and the visceral nature of motherhood.

Whakaputu is an accumulation of labour that is scaled to the human body. I choose to spotlight it as a toaka in a museum in order to gift it a high status. My experience of washing is repetitive and never-ending; I do so many daily labours in my various roles as Māori, wāhine and kowhāea. However, laundry speaks to me on emotive and symbolic levels because of the physicality, the wringing out.

CONCLUSION

Māmā explored my identity while I was developing artworks that tangibly researched the whakapapa of three identity markers through the materiality of laundry and the colours whero and maku. The



Figure 7. Caitlin Donnelly, *Māmā*, 2021, Dunedin School of Art Gallery. Photograph: McKinlay.

Works included: *Rauru*, bedsheets, cloth nappies, red-band socks, acrylic paint and primer; 160 x 170 x 510cm (approx.);

Ūkaipō, bedsheets, acrylic paint and primer; 270 x 170 x 40cm (approx.);

Whakaputu, bedsheets, acrylic paint and primer; 110 x 230 x 190cm (approx.)

GLOSSARY	
Pepeha	Māori oral tradition that acknowledges where a person comes from via their ancestors and whānau (family).
Tupuna	Ancestors
Whenua	Land, placenta.
Kei te tika te korero i ō tatou tupuna.	"As is right: the words of our ancestors."
Whakataukī	A saying, proverb handed down from tupuna (ancestors). The full stories are often lost, but these fragments remain; they are a way for our tupuna to guide us and make sense of the world.
Whakapapa	Reciting whakapapa is central to all Māori institutions. Whakapapa is genealogy, lineage and descent, but more than that, whakapapa speaks of one's ancestry, a connection, a grounding, one's essence. It is who you are based on where you have been – and not you directly, but your ancestors. Whakapapa bonds you to elders, kuia and kaumātua/ tupuna and the atua (gods) to the land – not just through past and present occupation, but through the eponymous tupuna of the mauka (mountains) and whenua (land). Whakapapa is, therefore, the background and history of one's journey.
Iwi unknown	This phrase was written in a booklet made jointly by my birth family, adopted family and the adoption agency.
Iwi	Tribe.
Waihōpai	Invercargill

Moko	Traditional Māori face tattoo
Kowhaiwhai panels	Painted scrolls in meeting houses on the marae.
Wai	Water
Whanau	Family
Tikaka	The correct protocol for doing something. (Also spelled tikanga.)
Te reo	"The language," the Māori language.
Hōhā	Fed up
He mana te matauraka	"Knowledge is power" (mātauraka = mātauranga).
Korowai	Traditional cloak made from muka – the fibres of harakeke (flax).
Putiputi	Flower; woven from harakeke.
Intersectionality	An individual in a group can experience discrimination differently from the rest of the group due to their overlapping identities/groups. Thus, intersectionality is a critical structure that allows us to interpret how social and political characteristics combine to create various forms of discrimination and privilege.
"Art practice as research" theory	Art-based research. Making art is research. Theorists of this concept include Graeme Sullivan.
Korero	Words, story; speak (vb).
Horoī	Wash, washing, to wash.
Papatūānuku	Earth mother in Māori mythology.
Poi	A percussion instrument used in storytelling. The sound produced is the earth's mother's heartbeat.
Rauru	The umbilical cord or the plaiting of three cords.
Ūkaipō	The original home, life source, mother.
Whakaputu	Layer; stack; lie in a heap or store.
Toaka	Treasure. (Also spelled taonga.)
Te Po	The dark night, one of the stages of the creation story. Te Kore came first, then Te Po.
Rawa taketake	Raw materials.
Tapu	Sacred, restricted, holy
Whero	Red
Maku	Black. (Also spelled mangu.)
Māori	Ordinary, normal. The term was used to refer to all indigenous people of Aotearoa. They lived in tribal groups and were not one group prior to colonisation.
Wāhine	Woman
Kowhaea	Mother
Aotearoa	New Zealand
The Māori creation narrative	In the beginning, Ranginui (the sky father) and Papatūānuku (the earth mother) were joined together; and their children were born between them in darkness. Then, the children decided to separate their parents to allow light to come into the world. After this, the children became gods, ruling over the various elements of the natural world.

- 1 This is my pepeha. Translation: "I came from the Uruao canoe, the Ūpoko o Tahumatā ancestor and mountain. I am from Kāi Tahu, Kāti Mamoe and Pākehā tribes, and Kāti Irakehu subtribe. I descend from Tukuwaha and William Thomas, on my mother's side. I was born in Invercargill. I live in Waikaka. Sutton and Henderson are my parents; however, Donnelly are my adoptive parents. I have two children. My name is Caitlin Rose Donnelly. *Māmā* is my work [the Masters project which is the subject of this article]." Note: In the southern Māori dialect 'ng' often, but not always, gets changed to 'k' in spelling and pronunciation.
- 2 Ross Hemera, "Ko wai koe? Places that Ground You – You Need to Know the Past to Know You," paper presented at Tikaka, Culture and Creative Practice Seminar, Dunedin School of Art, Dunedin, 13 August 2015.
- 3 While wāhine and kowhaea are connected by issues affecting women, they are separated by motherhood's first-hand experience.
- 4 Areta Wilkinson, "Jewellery as Pepeha: Contemporary Jewellery Practice Informed by Māori Inquiry" (PhD diss., Massey University, 2014), 15.
- 5 Diary entries of the author.
- 6 Brittney Cooper, "Intersectionality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, eds Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 386.
- 7 Graham Hingangaroa Smith, "Kaupapa Māori Theory: Theorizing Indigenous Transformation of Education & Schooling," paper presented at Kaupapa Māori Symposium, NZARE / AARE Joint Conference, Hyatt Hotel, Auckland, December, 2003, <https://www.aare.edu.au/data/publications/2003/pih03342.pdf>.
- 8 Professor Linda Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith is professor of indigenous education at the University of Waikato in Hamilton. She is author of many books, but her *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* is considered one of the most influential texts on Indigenous research. See also "Principles of Kaupapa Māori," *Rangahau*, <http://www.rangahau.co.nz/research-idea/27> (accessed 14 April 2021).
- 9 Masood Raja, *What is Postcolonialism? (Some Basic Ideas About Postcolonial Theory) | Postcolonial Literary Theory*, 25 September 2019, YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c99SbGYKrGw>. Dr. Masood Raja is associate professor of post-colonial literature and theory in the English Department of the University of North Texas, the editor of *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies* and the founder of the Postcolonial Space website (<https://postcolonial.net>).
- 10 Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989).
- 11 Erika Balsom, "'There is No Such Thing as Documentary': An Interview with Trinh T. Minh-ha," *Frieze*, 1 November 2018, <https://www.frieze.com/article/there-no-such-thing-documentary-interview-trinh-t-minh-ha>.
- 12 Simon Kaan, private conversation, 17 April 2021.
- 13 The whakapapa of being horoi created the tikaka of cleansing via washing.
- 14 "The lint works as pigment and as an ephemeral reminder of daily life or, more specifically, of the never-ending rhythms of women's domestic labor." Jori Finkel, "Art Lurks in an Unlikely Place for Mary Keller: The Dryer," *New York Times*, 21 October 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/21/arts/mary-kelly-lint-art.html>.