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# Reading the 'ghost book': Māori talk about *Washday at the Pā*, by Ans Westra

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## Abstract

*Washday at the Pā* was an old school journal - a book designed for young readers, containing a photo-story of a typical day at home for a Māori mother and her children. *Washday* was published in 1964 by School Publications (the publishing arm of the Department of Education) on behalf of the government of Aotearoa New Zealand, as part of its educational publishing programme to support universal state schooling provision, in the post-WWII modernist era of national expansion and Māori urbanisation. A few months after its national distribution to primary schools, the book became the target of Māori protest, resulting in the mandatory return and destruction of all 38,000 copies. This outcome, in turn, generated a larger national controversy in the form of a flurry of opinions expressed over several months through the editorials and letter columns of newspapers throughout the country - the social media of the times. Many commentators objected to what they saw as unnecessary censorship, pandering to Māori 'sensitivities', and a senseless waste of valuable educational resources. The purpose of this video research article is to present bilingual (English and Māori) oral and written Kaupapa Māori discussions and readings of the book and its history, which incorporate critical Māori perspectives and Māori language and knowledge, and extend on from our previous investigations of the *Washday* controversy from Kaupapa Māori educational perspectives (Stewart, *Educ Philos Theory* 1–9, 2017b; Stewart and Dale, *Waikato J Educ* 21:5–15, 2016).

**Keywords:** Ans Westra, Māori educational publishing, Māori photography, Māori poverty, *Washday at the Pā*

## Introducing *Washday at the Pā* – The controversial schoolbook

*Washday at the Pā* was the title of an old school picture book, photographed and written by Ans Westra, and published in 1964 by the government of Aotearoa New Zealand, as part of its educational publishing activities in support of universal schooling provision, in the post-WWII modernist era of national expansion and Māori urbanisation. Following its national distribution to primary schools, *Washday* became the target of protests led by the Māori Women's Welfare League (MWWL), resulting in its mandatory re-collection for destruction, a few months after its release. This outcome, in turn, generated a national controversy in the form of a flurry of opinions over several months, expressed in the editorials and letter columns of newspapers around the country - the social media of the times. Many commentators objected to what they saw as unnecessary censorship and wastefulness in the book's withdrawal from schools. This article presents multi-dimensional discussions of the history of the book from

critical Māori perspectives, extending on from our recent research (Stewart 2017a, 2017b; Stewart and Dale 2016).

Although a brief account of the background story is given below readers whose interest in *Washday* is sparked by this article are encouraged to refer to the online archive that includes the famous images, as well as interviews and articles about the book and its history (Bieringa and Bieringa 2006; Suite Publishing 2014; Te Papa Tongarewa 1998b). An important disclaimer is that this research is local to Aotearoa-New Zealand, and has no interest in comparative studies or generalizability. Little appears in this article below, therefore, about similar situations elsewhere. The story at the heart of this research carries its own justification, however, and our research approach incorporating oral discussions in an endangered indigenous language, is an attempt to allow indigenous philosophy to guide research practice, as discussed further in the following section below.

To write about this book *Washday* is a bit like writing about a 'ghost' or apparition, since it was withdrawn, and no longer officially exists. The original booklet is shown in the five short video clips made for this article, but not listed in its references. References to *Washday* itself are to the revised version (Westra 1964), which was privately published by Caxton, a few months after the original school version was destroyed. This publication history highlights the fact that the Māori protest was based on the status of the book as a state school reading book for young children. A recent third version with the same title (Westra and Amery 2011) retains the original photographs, but substitutes a completely different text of reflections and 'whatever happened to' updates about the *Washday* family, instead of the dated children's story.

A wealth of information has been published about Ans Westra and her photography, including her account of how *Washday* came about, and her experience of the controversy it catalysed (Brookes 2000). An online documentary (Bieringa and Bieringa 2006), an interview article (Art New Zealand 2016) and several webpages (Suite Publishing 2014; Te Papa Tongarewa 1998a, 1998b) are illustrated with examples from Westra's remarkable oeuvre of photographs of Māori. The *Washday* story has been kept alive over the past five decades and more (Pardington and Leonard 1988; Stuart 2013), as Westra has risen to prominence as a photographer of national importance. Nevertheless, as a significant event in the history of Māori education, the *Washday* controversy has been neglected by most Māori (Ihimaera 1985) and non-Māori educational researchers, except for Roger Openshaw, who included it within his larger programme of scholarship on the place of Māori in national education policy (2001, 2005). Yet, to recapitulate our previous work, Openshaw made significant errors of interpretation, by which his three main arguments fall.

Openshaw reasoned that since the *Washday* images showed 'typical' Māori poverty, they were 'accurate' i.e. 'true' so the book should not have been withdrawn from schools (Openshaw 2005). The logic problem in this argument is that the text of *Washday* is comically inaccurate as a record of how Westra would have heard the family speaking. Second, in a jarring contrast to his conviction that most Māori of the time were impoverished, Openshaw tried to argue that the withdrawal of *Washday* in response to the MWWL protest showed that Māori had 'too much power' - despite it being manifestly obvious that as a whole Māori are relatively powerless in today's society, and have been since at least 1900. Openshaw's overall conclusion was that *Washday* represented the failed attempt by Social Studies educators to "portray contemporary Māori life in a

realistic manner” (2005, p. 35). But the problem with this argument is that *Washday* was a picture book intended as a reader for young children, not as a formal Social Studies text, and its sociological accuracy was irrelevant to its intended pedagogical purpose. Openshaw located the production of *Washday* within the education policy for citizenship of the post-WWII era, which Social Studies was designed to deliver. But the detailed history of *Washday* reveals that its origins were more adventitious and organic than planned and policy-driven.

In the online documentary about Ans Westra (Bieringa and Bieringa 2006), the *Washday* story is covered in Part Two, between 6 min 50 s and 13 min. In this section, Westra talks to camera and to James Ritchie about her memories of being young and travelling around the country, and how in 1963, the inspiration and opportunity for her to write *Washday* came about on one such trip. This segment of the documentary includes comments on the controversy from Katerina Mataira, James Ritchie and John B. Turner, but none of them articulates a clear explanation for the protest MWWL raised against *Washday*.

On submitting the drafts of *Washday*, Westra recalls how the then-editors of School Publications (the publishing arm of the state education system), James K. Baxter and Alistair Campbell, both expressed some doubts about the acceptability of the photographs to Māori. They decided that if Westra could find “someone in Māori Affairs” to give approval, they would go ahead and publish the book. Westra recalls asking Jock McEwan, the newly-appointed Secretary of Māori Affairs, whose brief verbal assent was taken as authoritative – and the rest, as they say, is history. Class sets of *Washday* were sent to every school in the country with primary classes, and soon it began to be used, whereupon Māori mothers began to report to MWWL cases of Māori children being taunted about the evocative images of Māori poverty displayed on its pages.

In the *Washday* story the family was about to move to a new house provided by the state – an experience shared by thousands of Māori in the 1960s, which was an era known for policies of ‘pepper-potting’ Māori nuclear families in suburbs dominated by Pākehā (Te Ara – The Encyclopedia of New Zealand 2017). Such policies ignored the trauma caused by the contrast from previous rural Māori homes, where families were surrounded by kin networks of social and material support. The MWWL was set up in 1951 to assist Māori women and children face the challenges of urbanisation (Māori Women’s Welfare League 2017).

At their national conference held in Wellington, July 1964, the MWWL discussed *Washday* and the reports of harm it was causing to Māori children. From their point of view it was undermining their work, inadvertently or otherwise (“Māori women incensed by bulletin issued by Education Department,” 1964). The validity of their protest was accepted by the Minister of Education, under their longstanding policy of publishing “nothing objectionable or controversial” about Māori (Openshaw 2005, p. 25). The MWWL protest showed that with *Washday* the Department of Education had failed, according to this policy driver. The Minister had no choice but to withdraw the books from schools.

Book censorship is a draconian, inherently wasteful and repressive act. The withdrawal of *Washday* is the best, most dramatic book story in the national history of Aotearoa New Zealand. It is amazing to think about 38,000 copies of *Washday* being boxed up in schools around the country, sent back to Wellington and guillotined, in this sleepy, peaceful little nation-state in 1964. To educators, art photography scholars,

bibliophiles and others, the *Washday* story has proved an irresistible historical narrative. The national uproar that erupted when news broke of the decision to withdraw *Washday* is of even more interest to the indigenous philosopher, as a sample or 'site' of racialized discourse on 'the Māori question' at the height of the global reputation of Aotearoa New Zealand for having 'the best race relations in the world' (Human Rights Commission 2017). For MWWL, the success of their protest was mixed, since they were reviled as 'trouble makers' and received considerable negative publicity over the affair. Part of the need for continuing to research this history is that the dominant narratives and Pākehā analyses of the controversy (for example, Brookes 2000) have not been based on coherent understandings and explanations for, firstly, why the Māori protest was mounted, and, secondly, why it succeeded (see discussion in Stewart 2017b).

The section below turns to the research approach undertaken in preparing this article, with some key methodological questions and considerations. The video section follows, featuring five original videos, with succinct explanatory comments on each one. Then follows discussion of the general issue of Māori representation in relation to the history of *Washday*, and the article concludes by summarising the value of *Washday* to Aotearoa New Zealand.

### **About the methodology used in this research**

The aim of this research article is partly methodological: we explore the affordances of the video journal format for facilitating the incorporation into our research and scholarship of Māori indigenous cultural knowledge, in the oral form of te reo Māori as an endangered language, together with its associated knowledge base of narratives and tropes, values and philosophies (Jackson 1992; Smith 2000). We saw the video article format as having advantages for researching an old picture book about a Māori family, which was originally intended for reading aloud in classrooms as a pedagogical text.

This research interests itself in the cultural and linguistic gaps in understanding between Māori and Pākehā (European settlers) on the history of this enigmatic old schoolbook. This article therefore centres on the videos, which seek to work across the contested divide between data collection and analysis, strategically invoking the oral register and the subjugated language to explore, from critical Māori perspectives, the relevance and lessons of *Washday* for the lives of Māori people in the 21st century. This approach uses an active, reflexive form of data collection and analysis, using an artefact (the 'ghost book') to catalyse a conversation between two collaborators who have co-published before on this topic, and who both have years of experience working with this book as a teaching text in a Māori-medium initial teacher education degree programme.

There is a heightened sense of performativity in research using auto-video. As with any research output, the work of planning, recording, editing and preparing the videos is central and immense, yet largely invisible in the final product of this article. It would be a mistake, an over-simplification, to think that the 'method' used for collecting data in this article is to make a smartphone recording of a conversation between two old friends, even though this is an accurate enough literal description of part of the process. A major technological innovation such as a video journal brings into question anew the relationship between form and content in the production of published research outputs. Our previous research articles about *Washday* (Stewart 2017b; Stewart and Dale 2016) staked a claim for Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wahine theories in the spectrum of

perspectives on the *Washday* controversy. Analogously, this article recruits the video journal as another useful avenue for extending the evergreen learnings inspired by *Washday*.

The approach taken in researching this article invokes and blurs as many boundaries as possible, including: language medium (English and Māori), language form (oral and written), language register (conversational and socio-scientific), culture (Māori and Pākehā), institution, gender, author position, and others. By this strategy we seek to unsettle other reified binaries, such as philosophy and worldview, into more productive tension (Taubman 1993). The following paragraphs focus on two important aspects of the research that underpins this article, related to the video genre: the role of te reo Māori in this research, and the part played by Westra's photography.

### **Te reo Māori in this research**

The Māori language is part of our methodological strategy for keeping the productive tension of cultural difference in play in this work. For this reason, te reo Māori plays more than a token or 'badge of identity' role in this article. Our research methodology is based on Kaupapa Māori theory (Smith 2003), which privileges Māori language, knowledge and perspectives. To incorporate te reo Māori in this article is part of an attempt to operationalise Kaupapa Māori research methodology: to explore new ways to bring Māori indigenous knowledge into academic work (Smith 2000).

### **Ans Westra's photographs**

The artefact (the 'ghost book') that inspires this article is a conundrum: an innocent schoolbook, with pages of photographs of the highest art quality, yet doomed to mass destruction. The photographic genius of Ans Westra is evident in the power of these images, which have received widespread acclaim. In the documentary, Westra refers to *Washday* as the 'highlight of [her] work' (Bieringa and Bieringa 2006) – a remarkable statement given her subsequent fame, not to mention the intense unpleasantness she experienced as a result of the controversy. Words cannot substitute for direct experience of seeing the images: fortunately, examples from Westra's wonderful archive of Māori images are freely viewable online (Suite Publishing 2014; Te Papa Tongarewa 1998a).

### **Māori readings of *Washday at the Pā***

This section showcases five short original videoclips of extracts from conversations between the co-authors, discussing various aspects of *Washday* and its controversial history. As noted above, the rationale for using these videos is a deliberate strategy aimed at keeping cultural difference in play, enrolling difference as a methodological resource in qualitative educational research, underpinned by Kaupapa Māori theory as a philosophy for education (Stewart 2017a). The first two of the five videos consist of spoken dialogue in Māori, while the remaining three videos consist of spoken English dialogue. These videos are oral texts that form another layer to add to the written text of this article, working across the oral/written language binary. Just as descriptions of the power of Westra's photographs cannot replace looking at the images, this section of the written article cannot substitute for listening to the videos.

This video (Additional file 1) records the beginning of our conversation, where we turn to te reo Māori to start to discuss the book and its meanings. For international viewers and those who do not understand Māori, a detailed synopsis is given below. To start our conversation in Māori is an important step by which we establish a horizon of dialogue, within which to think critically, as Māori, about the history of *Washday* and its continuing meanings for Māori and the history of education in Aotearoa New Zealand. This step in our research process is crucial, despite our understanding that to be fit for purpose, our dialogue must soon turn to English.

*Synopsis of Video 1:* Georgina invites Hēmi to discuss *Washday*, and tells him how she acquired her (ghost) copy of the illicit original edition from an ex-teacher, who kept back this copy, hiding it at home, when in 1964 the order was given to round up all the copies for sending back to Wellington to be destroyed. Hēmi chuckles, saying he understands why the teacher saved this book, given that we both regard it as a 'valuable' (the word 'taonga' is often translated as 'treasure' though more generally it refers to any commodity or item of value) from a long time ago, whose links remain relevant today. Georgina says the history and controversy of the book contain lessons for us today, and in the future. Hēmi refers to the many issues the book raises that are relevant to Māori people and also more generally. Georgina then suggests turning to read the book *Washday* itself, and reminds Hēmi of our previous idea about translating the *Washday* text into Māori. Hēmi agrees to read it aloud in Māori by translating as he goes.

This second Māori-language video (Additional file 2) follows on from the first one, above, as Hēmi briefly introduces the book in Māori, then narrates the first page of the story, converting the English text on the page to spoken Māori, while Georgina listens. A full transcript of Video 2 with translation into English is given below.

*Transcript of Video 2:*

Hēmi: E, tuatahi pea, ko te pukapuka nei, kei te hāngai ki tētahi whānau.

*(Perhaps first I should say that this book is about a family.)*

Te whānau kei roto i te pukapuka nei, e kīia nei ko te whānau Wereta, ko ētahi e kī ana, he whakamāoritanga tērā o te ingoa 'Westra' – tērā kōrero tērā, me kī.

*(The family in this book is called the Wereta family – some believe this is a Māori version of the name 'Westra' – well, that's another story.)*

Heoi anō, ko tā tēnei pukapuka nei, he whakaatu i ngā mahi e mahingia ana, e tētahi whānau, i tētahi rā - ngā mahi o taua rā.

*(Anyway, this book describes the activities carried out by a certain family on a certain day – what they did that day.)*

Georgina: Āe (Yes).

Hēmi: Heoi anō, ka tīmata pēnei te pukapuka (*So the book starts*):

'Titiro!' te kī a Mutu, i a ia e oma ana ki te matapihi o te kihini, i tētahi ata hōtoke.

*(‘Look!’ says Mutu, running to the kitchen window, on one winter’s morning.)*

‘Anā, kua mutu te heke o te ua!’

*(‘See, it’s stopped raining!’)*

‘Ā, ka pai’ te kī a tana tuakana a Rebecca, ‘ka taea e tātou te puta ki waho, tākaro ai!’

*(‘Well that’s good,’ says her sister Rebecca, ‘it means we can go and play outside!’)*

‘Ā’ me te kī hoki a te māmā, a Mā Wereta, ‘ka taea hoki e ahau te horoi i ngā kākāhu i tēnei rā.’

*(‘Yes,’ says their mother, Mrs Wereta, ‘and I can wash the clothes today.’)*

Noho ai te whānau nei i tētahi kāinga, e kīia nei ki roto i te pukapuka, he ‘Pā.’

*(This family lives somewhere the book refers to as a ‘Pā.’)*

E tata ana ki te tāone o Taihape, i waenganui pū o Te Ika a Māui.

*(They live close to the town of Taihape, right in the centre of the North Island.)*

The remaining three videos consist of dialogue in English: video 3 (Additional file 3) discusses the *Washday* story in relation to the issue of Māori poverty and sub-standard housing. Through this conversation we realise that the house in *Washday* would undoubtedly be gladly accepted by many of the growing number of Māori families today who are living in cars, or worse (New Zealand Herald 2015).

We discuss the photograph of a child standing on the warm cooking stove, on which much debate has centred in the history of *Washday*. We extend this discussion to consider how tikanga Māori (Māori customs) have evolved and today are incorporated, or not, into contemporary Māori life and education settings, including not sitting on tables, saying karakia (grace) before meals, and the practice of holding pōwhiri (formal welcome ceremonies) at the beginning of a university programme (Additional file 4).

In this video (Additional file 5) we discuss the question of who has the authority (mana) to record images of Māori people and culture. While Māori interests are placed at risk by representational practices of ‘othering’ - as the *Washday* story showed - we are also mindful of the immense value for Māori today of the existence of the abundant archive of historical Pākehā recordings of Māori knowledge and language. Examples include the Māori portraits and paintings by Goldie (Te Papa Tongarewa 2017) and Lindauer (Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki 2017); the Victorian anthropology of Elsdon Best, Percy Smith and others, and so on down through the decades to also include *Washday*.

The above three paragraphs about our English-language videos are purposefully short, in line with our methodological premise that the oral texts contained in the videos form an integral part of the entire text of the article. We use our videos to extend on the qualitative research notion of the ‘layered’ research text, a methodological

approach in autoethnography (Rath 2012). In the remainder of the article below, we return to more familiar ground for a journal article, to raise the larger issue of Māori representation, before concluding with a synopsis of why we believe it is warranted to regard *Washday* as a national treasure.

### **Māori representation in educational discourses**

Since Europeans first came into contact with Māori ancestors in the late 1700s until today, there has been a continuous industry based on recording and studying Māori people and knowledge – contributing to the claim made by Linda Smith that Māori are one of the most researched of all peoples (L. T. Smith, 2012). The *Washday* controversy has captured a permanent place in the national imagination: the power of Westra's photographs is timeless, and the romance and drama of the book's story still shine brightly. Also undimmed by the years, however, is the puzzlement expressed by Westra and other Pākehā commentators about why Māori, especially the MWWL, objected so strongly to the *Washday* images. Her puzzlement is palpably clear in the documentary segment referred to in the Introduction section above. Watching Westra speak about the controversy makes it clear she meant no harm, and was personally devastated to find out that Māori considered her book unacceptable.

Westra refers to *Washday's* potential to reinforce stereotypes of Māori held by teachers, in seeking to understand why MWWL demanded its withdrawal. But this reasoning is unconvincing. The MWWL were obliged by virtue of the indigenous concept of mana wahine (women's mana, or leadership) to take action on behalf of Māori mothers whose children had been taunted by classmates over the images in the book (Stewart 2017b). There is a cultural differend of values and concepts (such as mana) involved in this explanation that creates a difficulty for many non-Māori in being able to fully comprehend. The use of kōrero (oral dialogue in Māori) helps to highlight this differend. The video format enables the inclusion of oral te reo Māori. This new journal innovation is thus significant for Māori and indigenous studies, and will likely grow rapidly in popularity amongst indigenous scholars.

From a Māori point of view it is important to know that the house in the book was located somewhere near Ruatoria (a town in the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand); and that the photographs were taken in July 1963. The name of the woman dubbed 'Mrs Wereta' was Animata Te Runa: she was 39 years old at the time the photographs were taken (McDonald 2012, p. 341, note 14), and she passed away in the 1980s. Westra has kept in touch with some of the children over the years (Westra and Amery 2011). There is a real history, personal and societal, that operates behind the narrative facade of the schoolbook story. In Patricia Grace's famous short story *Parade* (Grace 1986) the central character, Matewai, is stricken with a spiritual malaise on realizing that her whānau kapa haka (culture group) is rather like an exhibit in a museum, putting their culture on display for the entertainment of Pākehā (Stewart et al. 2015). The 'othering' of Māori that *Washday* created by fictionalising a real family's life created a similar sense of spiritual malaise for Māori at a wider level.

*Washday* had a mixed reception among Māori: on one hand the MWWL expressed strong views about Māori representation: 'mā te Māori te iwi Māori e kōrero' (only Māori can speak about Māori). On the other hand, many Māori saw the protest as an



over-reaction to a simple social truth: Kataraina Mataira noted that *Washday* presented a familiar Māori reality, and Tipene O'Regan commented that the controversy was a 'storm in a teacup'.

In one of her interviews, Westra refers to the emergence of the 'Māori intelligentsia' as a sign that, for political reasons, she was no longer welcome to work among Māori. Author Michael King spoke similarly of his experience of writing his book *Moko* about the last Tainui kuia (old women) to wear moko (facial tattoo), and the negative reaction he endured from some Māori in response – despite the fact that it was Robert Mahuta (a Tainui leader of the latter decades of the twentieth century) who asked him to write the book. In seeking positive images of Māori, we must be prepared to acknowledge that just as in any politics, Māori political attitudes and protests are sometimes uninformed and unconstructive. There is a tension between promoting a Māori perspective or viewpoint, and accepting the diversity of Māori viewpoints that exist.

Binaries operate not only at the level of the socio-cultural factors (language, etc) associated with this topic, but also in the cognitive structure or argument developed in this research. Including a video component has been a 21st-century experiment in 'writing' as a research method (Richardson 2000), and an exploration of the boundaries of academic publishing (Peters et al. 2016) This article stakes a claim for video research along the 'spectrum of perspectives' (Westra and Amery 2011, p. 2) on the evergreen story of *Washday*.

### **Conclusion: *Washday at the Pā, a national treasure***

Our research reinforces the rightful place of *Washday* in the history of education in Aotearoa New Zealand, and aims to catalyse greater recognition of this fascinating story among Māori educators for its ongoing educational potential. Basing this article on oral dialogue using the video format brings the 'ghost book' back to life, and draws attention to shared reading as a dialogical and cultural process, which transcends individual engagement with a text. Our shared reading recapitulates the times when this book was used in classrooms before its destruction. Participating in this re-enactment catalysed our discussion of larger relevant themes in contemporary Māori society and education.

To call *Washday* a 'national treasure' works at a number of levels: firstly, it applies to Ans Westra herself, a photographer of international importance, who has given us so many memorable images of Māori people, though few if any that clearly surpass the "sheer artistic excellence" of the *Washday* photographs (Westra 1964, Publisher's Note, p. 2). The banned book itself deserves acclaim as a 'national treasure' for the sheer deliciousness of its story, all the copies rounded up and posted back to Wellington, there to be guillotined - let alone the fact that the kēhua (ghost) banned first edition sells online for hundreds of dollars, and to own a copy feels like owning a treasure.

At a more symbolic level, sitting apparition-like on the social and educational landscape, the story of *Washday* also deserves to be considered as a kind of national treasure, a parable or learning story, on which we can draw for thinking about biculturalism as it plays out in Aotearoa New Zealand. This intangible 'resource' finds material form in the growing corpus of scholarship about *Washday*, to which this video article contributes. Finally, the opportunity to keep learning from the story and history of this book is in itself valuable for furthering of the aims of a 'learning society' in which events in our past, such as *Washday*, continue to inspire discussions and dialogue

about the complex and ongoing nature of building a bi-ethnic, bicultural relationship between Māori and Pākehā, now and in the future.

### Additional files

- Additional file 1:** Beginning in te reo (the Māori language). (MP4 10,259 kb)
- Additional file 2:** Reading the 'ghost book'. (MP4 7569 kb)
- Additional file 3:** Māori poverty and housing. (MP4 12,390 kb)
- Additional file 4:** Tikanga Māori (Māori cultural protocol) and its transgression. (MP4 62,217 kb)
- Additional file 5:** Māori imagery and mana (power/authority). (MP4 32,084 kb)

### Abbreviations

MWWL: Māori Women's Welfare League

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