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Higgins & Meredith, 2011

Te mana o te wāhine – Māori women

Leadership and activism, 1950s to 1980s

Second World War

During the Second World War, Māori women, like their Pākehā counterparts, took a role in running farms and increasingly in working in factories. While fewer than 50 Māori women were working in industry in 1926, the number increased tenfold by 1945 to around 500. This began the increasing urbanisation of Māori.



Working in a box factory

Māori Women's Welfare League

The Māori Women's Welfare League was established in 1951 to support Māori in areas such as housing, health and education. The league spread quickly throughout the country, with 300 branches formed within five years. Whina Cooper was the first president, and Mira Szaszy the first secretary. She would later also become president. Both are recognised as outstanding Māori leaders of the 20th century and their championship of the league provided it with a legacy that continued in the 2000s. The league continues to take an interest in contemporary issues for Māori society and inform whānau on issues ranging from cervical screening through to representation roles in governance.



Whina Cooper, Eva Rickard and Titewhai Harawira

Māori women and Māori rights

During the 1970s and 1980s Māori women were at the forefront of Māori protest movements about land rights, racial inequality and Māori sovereignty. A number, such as Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, Ripeka Evans and Donna Awatere, were influenced by the women's liberation movement, which critiqued the perceived patriarchal nature of traditional Māori leadership. Some Māori feminists raised the issue of Māori women's speaking rights on the marae.



Donna Awatere and Ripeka Evans

Many of these Māori women found themselves at the vanguard of the violent clashes between anti-apartheid protesters and the police during the controversial 1981 rugby tour by the South African Springbok team. These clashes were captured by prominent Māori filmmaker Merata Mita in her movie *Patu*.

Land rights

Two of the most outspoken land-rights campaigners of the 1970s were Whina Cooper and Eva Rickard. Cooper, at the age of 79, led the 1975 hīkoi (land march) from Te Hāpua to Wellington. Eva Rickard led a group of protesters in occupying the Raglan golf course, taken from its Māori owners originally for use as an airstrip in the Second World War.

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Biographies



Whina Cooper, 1895–1994



Makere Rangiatea Ralph Love, 1907–1994



Katarina Kuini Whare-rau-aruhe Te Tau, 1899–1998

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