

Inadvertent Suffrage: Maori Women and the New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union

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In his *Nations and States*, the British historian Hugh Seton-Watson wrote: "I am driven to the conclusion that no 'scientific definition' of the nation can be devised; yet the phenomenon has existed and exists."¹ This paradox of "the nation" certainly exists for the country of New Zealand, whose history as a settler society nation is often embedded within an imperial framework. By the late nineteenth century, New Zealand was officially a self-governing colony, yet not considered equal in status or given a place in the League of Nations until the 1920s. James Belich defines New Zealand in the nineteenth century as a "recolonial" nation—technically independent of Britain, yet culturally still a colony.² In this paper, I will investigate a particular historical moment which illustrates the local intersection of imperial and transnational forces: the role of indigenous Maori women in the New Zealand's women's suffrage movement of the late nineteenth century. First, New Zealand's indigenous-settler relations during this time period were noticeably distinct from—and influenced by—those of Australia. The suffrage movement itself was spearheaded by the Women's Christian Temperance Union, which was modeled after the founding organization in the United States. Finally, the entire governmental and political process of the suffrage movement existed under the eyes of the British Empire. The Australian scholar Patricia Grimshaw assesses this simultaneously trans-national, bicultural, and imperial phenomenon of race, temperance, and representation, concluding that Maori women's inclusion in New Zealand's equal suffrage bill was practically inconsequential. My aim is to add the literature of Women's Christian Temperance Union to the story, which I see as a valuable component to understanding this historical juncture. I will begin by examining the theme of New Zealand nationalism and outlining several components of the historical narrative: the women's suffrage movement, Maori rights and representation, and indigenous forms of government. From here, I will examine the intersection of Maori women and the Women's Christian Temperance Union,

¹ Hugh Seton-Watson, *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1977), 5.

² James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2001): 53.

focusing on the portrayal of Maori women in both meeting notes and the union's primary publication, *The White Ribbon*.

New Zealand's Suffrage Movement

According to Peter Gibbons, most historians in the early twentieth century emphasized New Zealand's colonial origins and British ties.³ Later scholars, however, "preferred to think of New Zealand and New Zealanders in the twentieth century as transcending their British origins, outgrowing their colonial beginnings, not just aspiring to but achieving national identity and independence."⁴ In this way later New Zealand historiography often designates "the nation" as its primary narrative. In her introduction to *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, Giselle Byrnes condemns this tendency of progressive and evolutionary history writing.⁵ She argues that this approach is often celebratory and triumphant, and "national identity" is a way for historians to minimize British imperial influences.

The emergence of the women's suffrage movement is one of many events in New Zealand's history that reflects this triumphant and self-congratulatory rhetoric. Kate Sheppard, a leader in the fight for women's suffrage, is honored on the New Zealand ten-dollar bill, and various memorials are scattered across the country that honor the movement. On September 19, 1893, Governor Lord Glasgow passed the Electoral Bill, which was the first piece of legislation to grant all women the right to vote. This right was granted to both Maori (the indigenous Polynesian population of New Zealand) and Pakeha women (of European descent) alike. In most scholarly literature on the women's suffrage movement, this inclusion of Maori women is mentioned as another indicator of New Zealand's progressive evolution. However, there are certain reasons why Maori women were included, and even more complexities in the racial and sexual divides that affected Maori women's participation. By looking at the literature published by the New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union—the organization that spearheaded the women's suffrage movement—I shall argue that the W.C.T.U. was interested in advocating for Maori women only in terms of social and moral purification, rather than political empowerment and equal status. Despite their history of involvement with the W.C.T.U., Maori members were consistently placed in a different category than W.C.T.U. women of European descent.

For the most part, the origins of the women's suffrage movement lay in the hands of a single organization—the Women's Christian Temperance Union, which was the only national organization for women at the time. Founded in 1886, the W.C.T.U.'s ideology was derived from its parent

³ Peter Gibbons, "Cultural Colonization and National Identity," *New Zealand Journal of History* 36 (2002): 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Giselle Byrnes, *The New Oxford History of New Zealand* (South Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.

organization in the United States.⁶ Indeed, Mary Clement Leavitt, an American missionary, had arrived in New Zealand in 1885. She toured the country for several months, preaching that “the home is woman’s kingdom” and urging women to “attack their natural enemy, alcohol.” While Leavitt’s primary undertaking was the abolition of alcohol, in her campaigning she stressed the common issues women faced and the ways they could tackle them by working together. New Zealand audiences were extremely receptive to Leavitt’s ideology, and the first national convention for the New Zealand W.C.T.U. was held the following year in 1886. The New Zealand branch had a similar mission as the American organization—to promote temperance, Christian values, and social reform through the abolition of alcohol. All women who joined the W.C.T.U. took a short pledge to “solemnly promise, God helping me, to abstain from all intoxicating liquors, including wine, beer, and cider, and to employ all proper means to discourage the use of, and traffic in the same.”⁷

There are varying theories for the origins of the W.C.T.U.’s franchise campaign. Most historians agree that the women of the W.C.T.U. wanted a say in the moral stability of their country and needed the vote to legitimize these demands. According to Charlotte MacDonald, “the evangelical roots of temperance stressed the link between the spiritual transformation of the individual and the moral transformation of society.”⁸ Other scholars, such as Raewyn Dalziel, argue that New Zealand women’s work had more economic significance, and women truly wanted a more elevated, political role in society as a consequence.⁹ Richard Evans chooses to contextualize the achievement in terms of New Zealand’s weak political structure.¹⁰

Regardless of motive, the demand for suffrage came early. Kate Sheppard spearheaded the movement within the W.C.T.U., publishing pamphlets such as *Ten Reasons Why the Women of New Zealand Should Vote* in 1888, collecting signatures for parliamentary petitions (from both Pakeha and Maori women), and starting branches in Wellington, Dunedin, and Christchurch. The Liberal government of New Zealand was divided on the issue of women’s franchise. While certain politicians were known to be sympathetic to the W.C.T.U.’s cause, some members of parliament supported the liquor industry, and others opposed the idea of women in politics. In 1891

⁶ Phillida Bunkle and Beryl Hughes, *Women in New Zealand Society* (Auckland: G. Allen & Unwin, 1980), 55.

⁷ New Zealand Women’s Christian Temperance Union, *Meeting Minutes*, September 1, 1886.

⁸ MacDonald, 33.

⁹ Raewyn Dalziel, “The Colonial Helpmeet: Women’s Role and the Vote in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 11:2 (1977), 114.

¹⁰ Richard Evans, *The Feminists: Women’s Emancipation Movements in Europe, America, and Australasia, 1840-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 6.

and 1892, the Lower House passed electoral bills that would have enfranchised all women of New Zealand, but they were sabotaged by members of the more conservative upper house, the Legislative Council. Regardless of such opposition, on September 8, 1893, the bill was passed by twenty to eighteen, and it was signed into law by Lord Glasgow on September 19.

It is worth noting that with the passage of this law, all Maori women were also given the right to vote. Most accounts reference this event with a pleasant anecdote, as with Dorothy Page's *The Suffragists: Women Who Worked for the Vote* of 1993, which stated that: "When it was asked in the House of Representatives whether voting rights should be extended to Maori women, there was a roar of unanimous approval."¹¹ This simplifies a much larger story. The general attitude towards Maori women was not one of amiability—in fact, when the bill was first passed in the Lower House two years earlier, newspapers expressed their disapproval at the unanticipated Maori provision:

*It surely was never expected that Maori women would be put on a footing with their European sisters... In view of the time—which is not far distant—when there will be no political distinction between the races, it is certainly a mistake to give Maori women even a prospect of a seat in Parliament.*¹²

The writer's reassurance that Maori and Pakeha people would someday be equal in political agency reflects a typical colonialist attitude—eventually, equality would prevail, but only at some undefined moment of the future. Additionally, it is worth noting that Maori women were involved in two suffrage movements at the same time. They sought the right to vote as both members of the New Zealand Parliament House of Representatives and members of Te Kotahitanga, the Maori Parliament. However, they were similarly rejected by male members of their own community; Tania Rei states that no member of Maori parliament was particularly eager to vouch for Maori women's suffrage.¹³ Finally, when it came to the passage of the 1893 Electoral bill, Maori women's enfranchisement would not have much influence within the parliament system. To examine these complexities, it is important to understand a brief background of Maori-Pakeha relations, as well as Maori male and female political involvement.

Indigenous Rights and Representation

Within New Zealand's nationalist historical narrative, indigenous-settler relations are often favorably compared to those of Australia. According to Patricia Grimshaw, the Maori were never under the strict control of a settler

¹¹ Dorothy Page, *The Suffragists: Women Who Worked for the Vote* (Wellington: B. Williams, 1993), 22.

¹² Untitled, *Daily Telegraph*, Issue 6244, 4 September 1891.

¹³ Tania Rei, *Māori Women and the Vote* (Wellington: Huia, 1993), 32.

regime like the Aborigines of Australia.¹⁴ Grimshaw cites two main reasons for this claim: the Maori people's relatively peaceful adoption of Christianity and their capacity for military defense.¹⁵ Christian missionaries had arrived in New Zealand long before the British takeover, so Maori adoption of Christianity during the colonial period was under less forceful circumstances than the Aborigines'. In 1840, Maori chiefs signed the Treaty of Waitangi, which to the British meant that Maori had yielded all power in exchange for the protection of their lands and resources. Many chiefs, however, were aware of the British occupation of the Australian Aborigines, and they demanded privileges that were similar or equal to those of the Europeans.

When settler land acquisition and misappropriation became a noticeable burden to the Maori people, who lived and worked in a land-based, horticulturalist society, they used military force and warfare to assert control. For decades, Maori tribal groups had been politically and militarily organized and had experimented with European weapons.¹⁶ Grimshaw notes that settlers were "frankly fearful of violent retaliation from Maori for many decades," particularly during the 1860s Land Wars. As a result, British settlers had to decide how to cooperate with the Maori people, specifically in terms of political involvement and voting rights. According to Julie Evans, "Maori were too suspicious and warlike to be placed under a settler minority or to be debarred from the franchise."¹⁷ The British governor of New Zealand feared that if Maori men were excluded from voting, their discontent might lead to further hostilities. Yet because the Maori population was so substantial (despite increasing mortality rates as a result of European diseases), they had the potential to influence the outcome of an election. This was an even more frightening idea to the British governor since it theoretically could harm the "supremacy of white interests in the legislature."¹⁸ The resulting compromise was the Maori Representation Act of 1867, in which Maori men were allocated four seats—three in the North Island, and one in the South Island—in the House of Representatives. Adult Maori males over the age of twenty-one were eligible to vote for these four seats. Although a relatively weak amount of political representation, compromising measures such as this act were what distinguished New Zealand indigenous-settler history from Australia's. Grimshaw concludes that the Maori had a few more rights and

¹⁴ Patricia Grimshaw, "Interracial Marriages and Colonial Regimes in Victoria and Aotearoa/New Zealand," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 23.3 (2002), 21.

¹⁵ Patricia Grimshaw, "Settler Anxieties, Indigenous Peoples, and Women's Suffrage in the Colonies of Australia, New Zealand, and Hawai'i, 1888 to 1902," *Pacific Historical Review* 69.4 (2000), 556.

¹⁶ Julie Evans, Patricia Grimshaw, David Phillips, and Shurlee Swain, *Equal Subjects, Unequal Rights: Indigenous Peoples in British Settler Colonies, 1830s-1910* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 72.

¹⁷ Evans, Grimshaw, Phillip, and Swain, 74.

¹⁸ Grimshaw, *Settler Regimes*, 562.

privileges than the Aborigines, who were forced to endure colonial influence for much longer.¹⁹ New Zealand officials, on the other hand, could not understand how Maori people could be unhappy with their position. The British Governor Browne told Maori chiefs in 1857, “New Zealand is the only Colony where the Aborigines have been treated with unvarying kindness.”²⁰

When it came to suffrage for women of New Zealand, then, the disparate settler histories of New Zealand and Australia played a major role. Grimshaw writes:

*In New Zealand, settler fears of men of color had led to the incorporation of Maori men into the mainstream political system; hence, Maori women could readily be incorporated as well when the women's vote was on the agenda. Settler fears of men of color in Australia, however, led to their exclusion from mainstream politics at the very time that women's suffrage was on the national agenda.*²¹

While all women could vote in New Zealand by 1893, Australia's Commonwealth Franchise Act was not passed until 1902, which granted female suffrage to white women only. Maori women's enfranchisement therefore soon became another celebratory achievement in New Zealand's progressive and nationalist narrative. In 1919, the *Taranaki Daily News* reported a women's suffrage event held at Carnegie Hall in New York.²² Emmeline Pankhurst, a leading British suffragette, brought three Maori women to the event and showcased them as an example of New Zealand's modern advances. She states: “If the native women of New Zealand are considered good enough to have a vote, then I say it is time the white women of England are emancipated and allowed the same privilege.”

Grimshaw, however, implies that the inclusion of Maori women in the electoral bill of 1893 may have been more than a coincidence than other historical accounts, such as the above article, recognize. She writes:

When the Parliaments of 1890 to 1893, therefore, considered the women's vote, there was little or no question of excluding Maori women. The electoral settlement had occurred twenty-five years earlier. Maori women's political rights could be accommodated by their allocation to the same four Maori electorates. Universal women's enfranchisement in 1893 thus did not unsettle the system previously designed to protect settlers from potential renewed Maori military aggression and Maori political power.

Because the enfranchisement of Maori women did not “unsettle the system,” or provide an opportunity for Maori members of parliament to gain more agency, their inclusion was not as groundbreaking as it appeared. Most

¹⁹ Grimshaw, *Interracial Marriages*, 21.

²⁰ Quoted in Evans, Grimshaw, Phillip, and Swain, 79.

²¹ Grimshaw, *Settler Anxieties*, 562.

²² “MRS PANKHURST AND THE MAORIS,” *Taranaki Daily News*, Volume LII Issue 264, December 1919.

members of parliament who did support equal suffrage still made a distinction between Maori and Pakeha women. In August of 1893, cabinet member Charles H. Mills pointed out that “while the great advance made by women might entitle them to a voice at the polling booth, their Maori sisters had made no such progress in education.”²³ While Maori women were not “entitled” to the vote like Pakeha women, they were not excluded from it since their inclusion would have no consequence on their people’s representation in parliament.

Maori Women and the W.C.T.U.

Women in New Zealand—Maori and Pakeha alike—faced a variety of societal burdens during the late nineteenth century. In many women’s lives, alcohol abuse was connected to many social and economic problems. The formation of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, therefore, was of interest to Maori women, who began joining the organization in the late 1880s. Upon joining, Maori women were required to give up a sacred part of Maori culture: they signed a pledge that prohibited their practice of *tā moko*, or the tradition of bodily tattoos which symbolized rank.²⁴ In the following section, I will examine the intricacies of the relationship between W.C.T.U. and Maori women, specifically focusing on how the W.C.T.U. viewed Maori women’s political and suffrage rights.

In most scholarly literature about the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, mentions of Maori women involvement are quite brief. Bronwyn Dalley and Yvonne Robertson state that the Union did “extend its concern over the use of alcohol to Maori women,” and even established a few temperance groups.²⁵ However, Dalley and Robertson add that the W.C.T.U. was not very active in Maori communities until 1894, when a special Maori Department was created. The details of this department are not specified. In terms of Maori involvement in the W.C.T.U.’s suffrage movement, Dorothy Page includes but one sentence, noting that: “Maori women are not recorded as having played a major role in the activities of the W.C.T.U. or the franchise leagues, and the issue of their enfranchisement had not been pressed by Maori members.”²⁶ Did Maori women not “play a major role,” or did the W.C.T.U. not allow them to have one? Was the relationship between Maori women and the W.C.T.U. a beneficial one, or perhaps only beneficial in certain contexts? A later comment by Page certainly raises these questions: “the union was disturbed at evidence of alcohol abuse among Maori and placed great emphasis on proselytizing Maori women.” The W.C.T.U.’s “great emphasis”

²³ “Parliamentary Gossip,” *Auckland Star*, Volume XXIV Issue 187, 9 August 1893.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁵ Bronwyn Dalley and Yvonne Margret Robinson, *Unsexed Women: The Nineteenth Century Women’s Movement and the Background to Suffrage in New Zealand* (Dunedin, NZ: University of Otago Press, 1994), 10.

²⁶ Page, *The Suffragists*, 39.

on correcting the Maori community's social problems through the values of Christianity is certainly part of the reason that these scholars mention little of Maori women and political empowerment.

Patricia Grimshaw writes that the W.C.T.U. adopted an international humanitarian mission of including women of different ethnicities. She cites Jessie Ackerman's (leader of the Australian W.C.T.U.) proclamation at the organization's second national convention in Sydney in 1894: "Our banner floats in forty-seven lands, and in forty-seven languages can we read our motto 'For God and Home and Every Land'."²⁷ Yet when it came to indigenous women's political rights, the W.C.T.U. evaluated these women in a different category—by "the steps they had made in 'progress' toward Western educational, religious, and cultural norms."²⁸ In other words, if the women of New Zealand's W.C.T.U. wanted to improve Maori women's social conditions, they did so by means of Peter Gibbons' term "cultural colonization": they attempted to improve them to British settler standards. In the passage below, Grimshaw eloquently links this idea with the reasons why Maori women inadvertently won the right to vote:

When [suffrage activists in the white societies of New Zealand] presented their case for women's entry into political rights, they eschewed the racism of many fellow colonists. These women were nevertheless part of a privileged social group who colluded in the creation of an historical narrative that presented colonization in a positive light. It was a version of history that had justified, and continued to justify, differential treatment of indigenous peoples. When the suffragists' cause reached the platforms of those holding political power, politicians made decisions based on not just the supposed outcomes on gender relations but on the vote's implications for the colonial project as a whole. They manipulated women's civil rights in ways that would diminish indigenous people's impact on settlers' political dominance. Thus New Zealand legislators in 1893 were prepared to admit Maori women as well as white women to the vote because Maori women's influence would be contained within preexisting Maori-only electorate.²⁹

In the remainder of my paper, I will test Patricia Grimshaw's above argument in the context of the W.T.C.U.'s annual meeting minutes as well as *The White Ribbon*, the organization's primary publication from 1895 to 1960. Focusing on the years from 1885 to 1900, I will examine the W.C.T.U.'s view of Maori women, locating examples of indigenous patronization, Western

²⁷ Cited in Grimshaw, *Settler Anxieties*; W.C.T.U. of Australia, Minutes of the Second Triennial Convention (Sydney, 1894), 199-214.

²⁸ Grimshaw, *Settler Anxieties*, 566.

²⁹ Grimshaw, *Settler Anxieties*, 572.

idealism, and evangelical “uplifting” that limited these women’s opportunities for empowerment and political engagement.

Most references to Maori women in W.C.T.U. publications before 1893 (the year of the passage of the franchise bill) are found in the Union’s annual meeting notes. While regional branches held more frequent meetings, the meetings from these notes were held annually in one of the major W.C.T.U. hubs—Auckland, Wellington, Dunedin, Christchurch, or Invercargill. In the first meeting in Christchurch on February 23rd, 1886, Maori women are reported in the context of temperance efforts:

*Good work has been done among the Maoris. Miss Williams has charge of a school for Maori girls, and is doing good work among them. Amongst the Maoris themselves there are active workers in the Temperance cause, and Temperance meetings have been held by the Natives in several villages in this district. Paora Ropiha, of Waipawa, has worked zealously in Hawke’s Bay, as well as in other parts of the North Island, and has induced a large number of the Maoris to take the pledge and don the Blue Ribbon.*³⁰

Here it is apparent that the W.T.C.U. was actively attempting to recruit Maori members. While having more members certainly helped the organization to grow, Maori members could also help to create what Grimshaw defines as the W.T.C.U.’s “heritage of humanitarianism.”³¹ These recruitment efforts continued for the next several years. In the notes from the meeting on February 22nd, 1888 in Dunedin, a “Reverend Mr. Rowse, of Waimate” is thanked for translating a pamphlet titled “Twentieth Century Women” to Maori, “for distribution amongst intelligent Maori women.”³²

Of course, Maori outreach was simply one part of an extensive agenda for the Union. Other topics of these meetings included debate over the use of unfermented wine at the Communion table, enforcement of Bible-reading in schools, and the Union’s future claim to fame: the franchise movement. For the next few years, the franchise movement became the Union’s objective, and most meetings dealt with parliamentary petitions and connections with politicians rather than Maori work. Members of the W.T.C.U. did, however, ask for Maori signatures on petitions from 1892 and 1893 for evidence of significant numbers of women wanting to vote.³³ After the passage of the Electoral Bill in September of 1893, the organization could refocus their efforts on the original missions of temperance and social purity. In her address to the Ninth Annual Meeting in Invercargill on February 27th, 1894, President Annie Schnackenberg states:

³⁰ New Zealand W.C.T.U. Annual Meeting Minutes, February 23rd, 1886.

³¹ Grimshaw, *Settler Anxieties*, 566.

³² New Zealand W.C.T.U. Annual Minutes, February 22nd 1888

³³ Tina Rei, 9.

*Now that the Electoral Bill, giving women the right to vote, has passed, we are in a position to ask for such measures as shall, in our opinion, tend to raise the moral standards of the country. Reform must begin with the youngest members of this young nation, and, entering our schools, teach righteousness and temperance.*³⁴

Maori people, in addition to the younger generation, were also subject to this moral purification. Examples of this intention are present in writing of the W.T.C.U.'s primary publication, *The White Ribbon*, founded in 1895.

Before the W.C.T.U. raised enough funds to publish their own journal, they would contribute articles to *The Prohibitionist*, a publication primarily read by men.³⁵ The first issue of the *White Ribbon* in May 1895 (two years after the passage of the enfranchisement bill) signified the W.C.T.U.'s total independence and designated an emphasis on women's interests. These interests took the form of articles on the latest ideas in health, childcare, divorcee rights, nutrition, dress, ex-prisoner's rights, and equality within the marriage. *The White Ribbon* was published monthly for several decades until it changed to the present quarterly publication called *The White Ribbon Digest*.

In the first *White Ribbon* issue from May 1895, an article titled "Report of Work Among Maoris" informs readers about the distribution of pledge cards and the circulation of a pamphlet called "Health for the Maori," which had "been met with great enthusiasm."³⁶ Local branches of the Union were encouraged to start Maori outreach committees. In the November issue six months later, one of these local branches reported:

This department of W.C.T.U. work has been started and carried on by the superintendent, Mrs Duff Hewett, whose attention to the Maoris was first attracted by a circumstance which was the result of wearing the blue ribbon. The little bow of blue attracted and aroused the indignation of some tipsy Maoris. The ringleader pointed at Mrs Hewett, making grimaces, and saying "No good the blue ribbon;" and instead of retiring from this formidable person, Mrs Hewett returned the compliment by pointing at him, and said, "No good the Waipero (alcohol);" and then, advancing towards him, she touched his arm and said "If you take too much Waipero you go down there (pointing downwards); you will never see the beautiful heaven and a beautiful Christ (pointing upwards). You will go down down to be with Issou (Satan)." He looked surprised (as also did the others) at being talked to in this way, and said "I want the blue ribbon now!" Mrs Hewett said "You must come come and talk to me at my house, and he went the following Sunday, and signed the pledge."³⁷

³⁴ "The President's Address" to the Ninth Annual Meeting in Invercargill on February 27th, 1894

³⁵ Grimshaw, *Women's Suffrage*, 38.

³⁶ "Report of Work Among Maoris," *The White Ribbon*, May 1895.

³⁷ "Work Among Maoris," *The White Ribbon* vol. 1 no. 5, Nov. 1895: 6-7.

Here, the W.T.C.U.'s "Maori work" has more to do with spreading Christian values to the Maori people rather than working specifically to recruit Maori women members. The language surrounding this incident categorizes the Maori as simple-minded and childlike. Mrs. Hewitt is depicted as an all-knowing savior who rids the Maori chief of the evil of alcohol while preaching the principles of Christianity. The chief signing the pledge is representative of the Maori "uplifted." In summation, this anecdote serves as a form of socio-cultural colonization portrayed in a positive light by a settler society—something that Grimshaw points to as the creation of a colonialist/nationalist historical narrative.

Articles in *The White Ribbon* certainly reinforced the categorization of the Maori as an inferior people, deserving of special or differential treatment. In the same issue, a Maori chief named Te Heu Heu spoke at the Taupo branch's WCTU meeting on June 3rd, 1896. The following passage recounts the WCTU members' reactions:

The dignity of the speaker impressed all, and the politeness and refinement of the interpreter, Mr Hone Heke, M.H.R., charmed everyone. Te Heu spoke earnestly as to the evils of waipero amongst the Maoris. He called it "that great monster," devouring alike both Pakeha and Maori. He most courteously thanked the W.T.C.U. and Mrs Hewett for taking up the work, and said he would do all he could to promote the cause amongst his people, and invited Mrs Hewett to visit them at Taupo. At the close of the meeting Mrs Hewett said funds would be required for the printing in Maori of pledge cards and temperance tracts, also New Testaments and other books for distribution...The first lady to come forward with a subscription was Mrs H.D. Bell; and amongst others who have kindly contributed is our Governor's wife, the Countess of Glasgow, who has expressed in the kindest terms her sympathy with this department of W.T.C.U. work.³⁸

The Maori speaker here is deemed as respectable and earnest because of his apparently uncharacteristic manners and easy compliance with the temperance cause. Additionally, members of the Union are made to feel virtuous and empathetic by their donations to the Maori work effort. While the above passage is from a section entitled "Temperance Work Among the Maoris," it ends by praising various W.C.T.U. members. Finally, later in this passage, Mrs. Duff Hewett, the Superintendent of Work Among Maoris, explains that "this work not only stirs up activity to the more educated of the Maoris, but gives a helping hand to those who see the evils of taking alcohol but who are not strong enough to step on to the side of temperance alone."³⁹ In other

³⁸ Ibid, 7.

³⁹ Ibid.

words, only certain Maori people were viewed as educated enough to understand the merits of temperance and Christianity. Clearly Mrs. Hewett saw herself as integral to the elevation of the Maori people, particularly “those...not strong enough to step on the side of temperance alone.”

One ironic aspect of the W.C.T.U.’s temperance work with Maori people was the continuous positive presentation of colonization despite the origins of alcoholism in Maori communities. In the June 1896 issue of the *White Ribbon*, Lady Glasgow stated in a meeting at Waipu that “No one denies that the Maoris have gained much good by the advent of the white men, but, alas! in some way they have brought you much harm; the habit of drinking too much being the worst lesson you have learned from them.”⁴⁰ Ironically, European settlers introduced alcohol to Maori communities, and it was not attained by significant numbers of Maori until the 1850s.⁴¹ Lady Glasgow continues with the following explanation:

*It is the hope of all of us who are your real friends that, now you know the terrible evil it brings upon you, weakening both souls and bodies, you will join together and by God’s grace get rid of this evil out of your families and tribes, becoming again in the future what you have been in the past, both physically and mentally, one of the greatest races that flourish in the Empire of Queen Victoria.*⁴²

By distancing themselves from their colonial male counterparts, perhaps the women of the W.C.T.U. attempted to expound the virtues of temperance in a way that did not come with historically negative connotations. However, their similar objectives are cloaked by “God’s grace.” The promise of the Maori “becoming...one of the greatest races that flourish in the Empire” is questionable from the perspective of a privileged social group like the W.C.T.U.

By September 1896, five Maori branch unions of the W.T.C.U. had been formed.⁴³ The areas of work for these unions were all issues of temperance, Christian morality, or societal development: “temperance, social purity, Sunday-school, Band of Hope, sewing-class, and Bible class.”⁴⁴ In this same issue of the *White Ribbon* is an article, presumably for white women, entitled “Suggested Questions For Candidates at the coming Elections.”⁴⁵ As women had been eligible to vote for the past three elections, this article guides them in how to assess a candidate: “Will you vote for the removal of all civil and political disabilities from women? Will you vote for the equality of

⁴⁰ “Temperance Work Among the Maoris,” *The White Ribbon* vol. 1 no. 12, June 1896, 5.

⁴¹ “Māori smoking, alcohol and drugs,” *Te Ara: Encyclopedia of New Zealand*. Accessed March 27, 2015.

⁴² “Temperance Work Among the Maoris,” 5.

⁴³ “Among the Maoris,” *The White Ribbon* vol. 2 no. 15, September 1896, 3-4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

conditions of divorce, making them the same for women as for men? Will you support the principle and practice of equal wages for equal work?"⁴⁶ With so much focus on sobriety and evangelism, one might overlook the fact that the W.C.T.U. was equally dedicated to informing women of their civil rights and political role in society. Yet looking at the content in these questions (all European rather than Maori issues) and the arrangement of the *White Ribbon* (all things Maori-related were in Maori-titled articles), it appears that these articles on political agency were not designated for Maori women. Even with seemingly new independence in the five new Maori branch unions, Maori members were consistently placed on a lower scale than their Pakeha counterparts. This differential treatment is further emphasized in a final article from the same issue. The writer urges the women of the W.C.T.U. to consider the fate of Armenian women during the 1896 Hamidian massacres:

*I beg to speak to you on behalf of the most desolate and unhappy women on earth—the women of Armenia...As Britons, as citizens, as Christians, do you agree to preserve peace and conserve moneyed interests by letting continue the age-long martyrdom of Armenia? Is your idea of the sisterhood of women bounded by distance, by sect, by race? If not, it is your duty to protest at once through every branch of your great organisation.*⁴⁷

The irony of this passage is that readers are urged to commiserate with the circumstances of a fellow group of women simultaneously patronizing another. Here, Christianity is the conscience behind protesting for equality, yet in Maori communities, it was a force of colonization.

In subsequent years, Maori women were able to establish more independence within the W.C.T.U., and the view of the Maori seemed to be shifting. By 1908, a Maori Congress within the Union had been formed. This article from the August 1908 issue of the *White Ribbon* provides a new window onto Maori empowerment:

*The Maori Congress which recently met in Wellington was an epoch-marking event. Never perhaps since the Treaty of Waitangi has Maori history produced anything of such deep import and so far-reaching in its probable results. The Young Maori Party, who arranged the Congress, have very evidently the welfare of their race at heart, and they ought to have the hearty sympathies of the Pakehas in their efforts to raise their people in the scale of civilisation.*⁴⁸

The Young Maori Party was not a political party, but a Maori improvement organization established by educated and westernized Maori students of Te

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁸ "The Maori Congress," *The White Ribbon* vol. 13 no. 158, August 1908, 1-2.

Aute College in 1897.⁴⁹ Over the course of the twentieth century, the party was admired and supported by many Pakeha activist groups who saw their programs as advancing the Maori race. By the 1970s, a new generation of Maori activists viewed the Young Maori Party as a “sell-out” association who subscribed to the myth of European cultural superiority. In 1908, however, the “welfare of the race” and the motive of helping the Maori’s “scale of civilization” were new ideas for the women of the W.T.C.U. The report from the *White Ribbon* also includes acknowledgement of settler imperialism and a call for action:

The capable and popular secretary of the Congress (Mr Ngata)...read the petition drawn up by Congress, to be presented to parliament that night, urging for further legislation to protect the Maoris from the curse which the white man had introduced to them...In one of his many tactful, persuasive little speeches, made a pathetic appeal, urging the Pakeha no longer to look on the Maoris from the tourists’ standpoint as curiosities, but to take them seriously as brothers and sisters who are striving to rise from the lethargy and degradation into which many of them have fallen. The Congress must have excellent results, but these results will be all the more certain and widespread if we, as the white women of New Zealand, do our duty towards our less fortunate sisters.⁵⁰

Mr. Ngata’s appeals being reported in a way that demonized “the white man” was quite a radical movement for the *White Ribbon*. It certainly is nothing like previous accounts, which constantly praise the efforts and goodwill of settler women behind the temperance movement. Additionally, by this year (1908), this Maori Congress was working with the New Zealand Parliament. Twenty years before, this had been a goal of Te Kotahitanga, the Maori Parliament. Maori political involvement within the W.C.T.U. was rising.

However, the focus in Maori work never completely shifted from its original focus on temperance, morality, and piety. In the subsequent issue of the *White Ribbon* issue in September 1908, an article titled “Our Maori Sisters” urges Union members to return to Christianity as the basis of Maori involvement:

What can we do to help them? What is it our duty to do? ...Christ died for them to save and redeem them as well as the rest of the world. The time is opportune to seek to educate them and to interest them in all important matters connected with Christianity, and the sanctity of home life and parenthood. They are anxious and willing to learn better ways of living and of bringing up their children...One of the ways in which we can do this is to establish Unions amongst

⁴⁹ “Young Maori Party,” *Maori Cultural Association*, Encyclopedia Britannica Online, Accessed 26 April 2015.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

*them, taking individual pledges, visiting them whenever possible...The salvation of this people depends, humanly speaking, on the Christian people of the Dominion.*⁵¹

Rather than their portrayal in the previous article as an empowered people, the Maori here are once again depicted as helpless and vulnerable, desperately in need of Christian teaching. The writer believes they need instruction in domestic issues instead of political empowerment. As Maori work and organization continued to grow with the establishment of more Union branches, Sunday schools, and youth parties, the *White Ribbon*'s attitude constantly fluctuated between its traditional view of social purity and a more egalitarian mentality. For example, in a May 1909 article about a new Maori mission in the North Island, the W.C.T.U. writer Frances Barton described the Maori as "strong, able men and women" who "long for a chance in life to prove that they are capable of success in agricultural and other pursuits".⁵² Yet in the same article, she characterizes the people as reliant on settler assistance:

*A young Maori girl, upon returning a book entitled 'Bible Wonders,' remarked: 'Mother made me read it to her twice, and she said if the Pakeha has books like that to read, no wonder she can pray.' We might well reverse it and say if the Maori has no Bible to read no wonder she cannot pray.*⁵³

Finally, in March 1912, another restricting measure was introduced for the Maori. In certain districts, polls were given to Maori residents about the passage of a law that would make the distribution of liquor to Maori people unlawful.⁵⁴ According to the *White Ribbon*, with this law, it would "not be permissible for anyone to entertain a Native, with alcohol, even in his own private house. Not even will the housemaid be allowed to hand a glass of liquor to a Native in a proclaimed Maori District the Natives inhabiting which have carried the prohibitive proposal."⁵⁵ Even more concerning is the way this bill had already been enforced. When it was enacted in the Horouta district in December of the previous year, it had been protested by a petition signed by fifty Maori people. Yet after this petition was dismissed by three magistrates, the *White Ribbon* declared:

Henceforth, until the proclamation is revoked, no liquor can be supplied to Natives throughout the whole of that wide domain. The Natives have done their part, and the Magistrates theirs. It only now remains for those in authority to see that the law is effectively enforced.

⁵¹ "Our Maori Sisters," *The White Ribbon* vol. 13 no. 159, September 1909, 7.

⁵² Frances Barton, "The far North Maori mission," *The White Ribbon* vol. 13 no. 167, May 1909, 7-8.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ "Maori Prohibition Polls," *The White Ribbon* vol. 17 no. 201, March 1912, 9.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Despite the encouraging developments in articles before, this enforcement of temperance in authoritarian rather than spiritual way was an even more extreme form of imperial force by the W.C.T.U. After almost twenty years since Maori women were granted the right to vote, it is evident that the W.C.T.U. had much progress to make in terms of viewing Maori women as a self-sufficient group, capable of moral, political, and spiritual decision-making.

While analyzing the patronizing rhetoric of a temperance union's publication might seem quite microscopic, this resolutely local story is a small thread in a larger trans-national narrative. Temperance, an international fascination, was a way for women to have political agency in a local setting. Yet as a settler privilege, it was essentially reserved for European women. At the beginning of this paper, I located Maori women's status within the New Zealand women's suffrage movement as an intersection of various forces: race, temperance, and political representation in a local, national, and imperial context. *The White Ribbon* is an example of a local publication whose literature was influenced by larger trans-national and trans-imperial forces of Western idealism and cultural colonization. These influences, in turn, affected the attitude towards Maori women during the women's suffrage movement, thus making their inclusion in the 1893 Electoral Bill inconsequential and practically "inadvertent." Today, the New Zealand women's suffrage movement remains a celebrated yet multifaceted historical event. National celebrations that honor historic moments such as Waitangi Day and ANZAC Day contain similar issues. Waitangi Day, which commemorates the signing of the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi by British officers and Maori chiefs, is frequently protested by Maori activists, while ANZAC Day is criticized for its implied Britannic race patriotism. The complexities of these commemorative national holidays reflect the country's continued struggle to maintain a delicate balance of biculturalism, post-colonialism, and nationhood.