



2011 PUBLIC SEMINAR SERIES

Pākehā women and Māori protocol: The politics of criticising other cultures

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Is it wrong to criticise practices of other cultures? The question of whether objecting to gendered customs and practices identified with other cultural groups is appropriate has been fiercely debated among feminists. Both staying silent and expressing criticism of gendered practices can be seen as problematic, even racist, choices. Scholars such as Martha Nussbaum have proposed that outsiders should feel confident when objecting to practices that are criticised by women within the cultural group. They reason that outsiders who look for internal criticism before voicing their own cannot be accused of simply imposing their own ethnocentric norms on others.

This paper analyses the public reaction to two non-Māori women who spoke out against Māori ceremonial protocol that they saw as sexist. These women were particularly concerned about the roles available to women in Māori ceremonies performed within public sector workplaces. Although there is a history of Māori women formulating critiques of the gender roles in Māori ceremonies, the public response from Māori women to the stance taken by these non-Māori women was overwhelmingly negative. The outsiders' criticism was understood as an attack on the incorporation of Māori cultural expression into the public sector, rather than as a gesture of support or solidarity. My analysis of this case casts doubt on the idea that the presence of internal criticism licenses political intervention by outsiders.

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The Seminar Room, NARU, 23 Ellengowan Drive, Brinkin

This seminar is free and open to the public

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