

Our Ancestors

Early observations of whānau

The following observations made by some of the European men who first visited New Zealand paint a picture of generally harmonious Māori family life where children were nurtured with a great deal of love and patience, and fathers had a key role in parenting.



Reverend Samuel Marsden (1765–1838)

CHAPLAIN, MAGISTRATE, AGRICULTURALIST, MISSIONARY

"I saw no quarrelling while I was there. They are kind to their women and children. I never observed either with a mark of violence upon them, nor did I ever see a child struck."

"The children are generally very easy, open and familiar at the first interview, and show an anxiety to pay every little attention in their power to the strangers. There can be no finer children than those of the New Zealanders in any part of the world. Their parents are very indulgent, and they appear always happy and playful and very active."

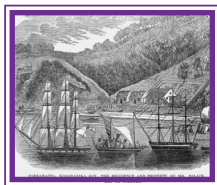
"The chiefs take their children from their mother's breast to all their public assemblies, where they hear all that is said upon politics, religion, war etc., by the oldest men. Children will frequently ask questions in public conversation and are answered by the chiefs. I have often been surprised to see children sitting amongst the chiefs and paying close attention to what was said. The children never appear under any embarrassment when they address a stranger whom they never saw. In every village the children, as soon as they learned any of our names, came up to us and spake to us with the greatest familiarity."



Richard Taylor (1805–1873)

MISSIONARY

"One of the finest traits I have noticed in the New Zealanders is that of parental love; the men appear chiefly to nurse their children, and are generally to be seen with one on their back covered up under their mats, the little things appear likewise sensible of their fathers' love for they seem principally to cling to them." (1839)



Joel Polack (1807–1882)

TRADER, LAND SPECULATOR, WRITER, ARTIST

"The boys are brought up almost entirely by the men; and it is not uncommon to see young children of tender years sitting next to their parents in the war councils, apparently listening with the great attention..."

"They also ask questions in the most numerous attended assemblies of chiefs, who answer them with an air of respect, as is they were of a corresponding age to themselves. I do not remember a request of an infant being treated with neglect or a demand from one of them being slighted."

"The children are seldom or never punished;"

"The father performs the duty of a nurse; and any foul action the embryo warrior may be guilty of, causes rather a smile than a tear from the devoted parent."

"...He (the father) generally bore the burden of carrying them continually within his mat, whose rugged texture must be very annoying to the tender infant"

Edward Shortland (182?–1893)

DOCTOR, ADMINISTRATOR, SCHOLAR, LINGUIST

“The chief aim, therefore in the education of children being to make them bold, brave, and independent in thought and act, a parent is seldom seen to chastise his child...”



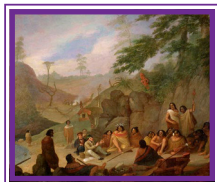
George French Angas (1822–1886)

ARTIST, WRITER, NATURALIST

“Both parents are almost idolatrously fond of their children; and the father frequently spends a considerable portion of his time in nursing his infant, who nestles in his blanket, and is lulled to rest by some native song...”

“The children are cheerful and lively little creatures, full of vivacity and intelligence. They pass their early years almost without restraint, amusing themselves with the various games of the country”

(Above) **Hone Wiremu Heke Pokai and Eruera Maihi Patuone** – This lithograph of a painting by George French Angas appeared in *The New Zealanders illustrated*, published in 1847



Augustus Earle (1793–1838)

ARTIST, TRAVELLER, WRITER

“They are kind and hospitable to strangers, and are excessively fond of their children. On a journey, it is more usual to see the father carrying his infant than the mother; and all the little offices of a nurse are performed by him with the tenderest care and good humour.” (1832)

(Above) **Meeting of the artist and Hongi at the Bay of Islands, November 1827**

John Savage

TRAVELLER, WRITER, SURGEON

— WHO WROTE THE FOLLOWING IN “*SOME ACCOUNT OF NEW ZEALAND, PARTICULARLY THE BAY OF ISLANDS AND SURROUNDING COUNTRY*” (1807):

“The children here appear to be treated with a great degree of parental affection. They are robust, lively, and possess, in general, pleasing countenances; their actions are totally unrestrained by clothing, or bandage, which must undoubtedly lay the foundation of their future hardihood and healthy constitution.”

Richard Cruise

MILITARY MAN

— WHO WROTE THE FOLLOWING IN “*JOURNAL OF A TEN MONTHS’ RESIDENCE IN NEW ZEALAND*” (1924):

“In the manner of rearing children, and in the remarkable tenderness and solicitous care bestowed upon them by the parents, no partiality on account of sex was in any instance observed. The infant is no sooner weaned than a considerable part of its care devolves upon the father: it is taught to twine its arms round his neck, and in this posture it remains the whole day, asleep or awake.”

Our Ancestors

Our ancestors were loving parents

The information we have about our ancestors tells us that a child's place in the world was secure and celebrated and it was central to the wellbeing of whānau, hapū and iwi. Children were raised to feel loved, confident and safe.

Tamariki were cherished and celebrated as precious additions to whānau, hapū and iwi

Traditions, legends, whakapapa and karakia helped to establish and nurture the role and place of children. A range of rituals and ceremonies marked the birth of a child, symbolising their importance within the whānau and binding them together.

Waiata oriori (lullabies) were composed (often by the child's grandparents or parents) and sung to babies to help reinforce the whakapapa, spiritual connections, expectations and importance of this new life.

"It was sung repeatedly so that all listeners learned it and knew the whakapapa and qualities of the child and thus, the special treatment they required. They were a poetic and repetitive way to fix personal, whānau and cultural messages in the minds of the listeners."

Helen M Harte and K Jenkins (2012 Traditional Māori Parenting – Literature Review).

These lullabies were often inspirational and also instructional – highlighting desired behaviours and reinforcing whakapapa and identity to the children and also to the adults listening.

Parents nurtured tamariki to feel safe, secure and confident

The loving care given to babies and children by parents (and all adults) is reflected in a number of observations by early European settlers.

"The children here appear to be treated with a great degree of parental affection. They are robust, lively, and possess, in general, pleasing countenances; their actions are totally unrestrained by clothing, or bandage, which must undoubtedly lay the foundation of their future hardihood and healthy constitution."

John Savage (1770 –?) surgeon, traveller, writer

"The children are generally very easy, open and familiar at the first interview, and show an anxiety to pay every little attention in their power to the strangers. There can be no finer children than those of the New Zealanders in any part of the world. Their parents are very indulgent, and they appear always happy and playful and very active."

Reverent Samuel Marsden (1765-1838) chaplain, magistrate, agriculturalist, missionary

“Both parents are almost idolatrously fond of their children; and the father frequently spends a considerable portion of his time in nursing his infant, who nestles in his blanket, and is lulled to rest by some native song...The children are cheerful and lively little creatures, full of vivacity and intelligence. They pass their early years almost without restraint, amusing themselves with the various games of the country”

George French Angas (1822 –1886) Artist, naturalist, writer

Tamariki were included in public life and encouraged to learn, to question and participate. Their connection and importance to the past and the future was acknowledged and respected. This was a very different parenting approach to the prevailing Western viewpoint at that time – that ‘good’ children were ‘seen but not heard’ – and so was surprising to these observers.

“The chiefs take their children from their mother’s breast to all their public assemblies, where they hear all that is said upon politics, religion, war etc., by the oldest men. Children will frequently ask questions in public conversation and are answered by the chiefs. I have often been surprised to see children sitting amongst the chiefs and paying close attention to what was said. The children never appear under any embarrassment when they address a stranger whom they never saw. In every village the children, as soon as they learned any of our names, came up to us and spake to us with the greatest familiarity.”

Reverend Samuel Marsden

“The chief aim, therefore in the education of children being to make them bold, brave, and independent in thought and act, a parent is seldom seen to chastise his child...”

Edward Shortland (1812? –1893) Doctor, administrator, scholar, linguist

Violence against children was not condoned

Violence against children was not condoned or sanctioned, and any violence against an individual was experienced as violence against the whānau and the hapū. Violence also harmed the atua (spiritual world).

“... the pre-contact socialisation methods of children were based on philosophical beliefs which begin in the spiritual world. All Māori whakapapa to Io Matua and nga atua. This relationship meant that, for children, they were ata ahua – they were the face of Io, of the supreme being. Children therefore were perfect underneath everything. This belief was what stopped any maltreatment of the child. To harm the child was to harm the atua. Fundamentally, the child was considered tapu, the more closely and directly he or she was linked to the atua. The child represented the atua, the tipuna who have gone before and the children who are to come. This meant that the kaumatua treated them with respect and consideration.”

Harte and Jenkins

Early observers remarked on the gentle and loving care given to the babies and children by mothers, fathers and all adults and the lack of physical or any type of punishment.

“I saw no quarrelling while I was there. They are kind to their women and children. I never observed either with a mark of violence upon them, nor did I ever see a child struck.”

Samuel Marsden

“The children are seldom or never punished; which, consequently, causes them to commit so many annoying tricks, that continually renders them deserving of a sound, wholesome castigation”

Joel Polack (1807 –1882) author, artist, trader and cosmopolitan

Tamariki were raised and educated collectively to be independent, knowledgeable and actively involved in their whānau

In traditional society, tamariki were raised and educated in a collective manner. The communal living arrangements meant that children had easy access to parents, aunts and uncles, grandparents and others who all contributed to their upbringing and education. Children were included in whānau matters from a young age. This ensured that they accumulated a lot of knowledge about their whakapapa, values and belief systems and all of the things that sustained Māori society. It instilled confidence, identity and a sense of pride in tamariki.

Our ancestors were gentle nurturing parents...

Our ancestors recognised the special place of tamariki – their whakapapa connections and role in the future prosperity of the whānau, hapū and iwi:

- Māori children were raised and nurtured to feel loved, confident and safe
- Parents and grandparents composed and sang special waiata to tamariki from an early age to cement their bonds and whakapapa
- Tamariki were involved in whānau matters from an early age which encouraged them to feel a sense of belonging and to develop their social and intellectual skills
- Many in the whānau had a part to play in the upbringing of tamariki – this ensured that children received a broad education and knowledge making them smart, confident and inquisitive, and helping to strengthen and sustain the whānau, hapū, iwi.

Although times have changed there is a great deal of wisdom within these traditional practices that can guide our parenting today.

Our Ancestors

Our tāne ancestors were tender fathers

In pre-European times Māori men played an important nurturing role in the lives of their tamariki and whānau. There was recognition that a strong tāne could have dual roles as a warrior and as a protective father and whānau member – both were important to whānau well-being and survival.

Tāne were tender, loving fathers

There are numerous observations from early European settlers that together help to paint a picture of Māori men who were extremely gentle and affectionate towards their children and for whom childcare was a natural part of their role within the wider whānau. Māori fathers were openly loving and nurturing towards their tamariki and mokopuna.

“The New Zealand father is devotedly fond of his children, they are his pride, his boast, and peculiar delight; he generally bears the burden of carrying them continually within his mat ... The children are seldom or never punished.”

Joel Polack (1807 –1882) –Trader, land speculator, writer, artist

“They are kind and hospitable to strangers, and are excessively fond of their children. On a journey, it is more usual to see the father carrying his infant than the mother; and all the little offices of a nurse are performed by him with the tenderest care and good humour.”

Augustus Earle (1793 –1838) – Artist, traveller, writer

“One of the finest traits I have noticed in the New Zealanders is that of parental love; the men appear chiefly to nurse their children, and are generally to be seen with one on their back covered up under their mats, the little things appear likewise sensible of their fathers’ love for they seem principally to cling to them.”

Richard Taylor (1805 –1873) – Missionary

Men had an important parenting role

The shared parenting of children was also commented on as this would have been surprising to Western men at that time. It is possible that these commentators mistook other whānau members (uncles, aunties) as fathers or mothers because collective child rearing practices were unfamiliar to them. Nevertheless, whether they were fathers, uncles or other whānau members it is clear that men played a significant and loving role in the lives of tamariki. For example, historians suggest that it was common practice for fathers to assume care for baby boys after they were weaned while mothers cared for the girl babies. This is supported by early observers’ accounts.

“The father performs the duty of a nurse; and any foul action the embryo warrior may be guilty of, causes rather a smile than a tear from the devoted parent.”

Joel Polack

“He generally bore the burden of carrying them continually within his mat, whose rugged texture must be very annoying to the tender infant.”

Joel Polack

“Children were suckled until they had teeth and could walk, and their parents carried them around with them or placed them on mats or dog skins on the floor of their houses. Fathers, like mothers, looked after the physical needs of their children.”

Julien Crozet (1728 –1780) Lieutenant to Du Fresne on the French vessel ‘Le Mascarin’

“Both parents are almost idolatrously fond of their children; and the father frequently spends a considerable portion of his time in nursing his infant, who nestles in his blanket, and is lulled to rest by some native song”

George French Angas (1822 –1886) – Artist, writer, naturalist

“In the manner of rearing children, and in the remarkable tenderness and solicitous care bestowed upon them by the parents, no partiality on account of sex was in any instance observed. The infant is no sooner weaned than a considerable part of its care devolves upon the father: it is taught to twine its arms round his neck, and in this posture it remains the whole day, asleep or awake.”

Richard Cruise – military man (from 1824 “Journal of a Ten Months’ Residence in New Zealand”)

“The boys are brought up almost entirely by the men; and it is not uncommon to see young children of tender years sitting next to their parents in the war councils, apparently listening with the great attention...”

Joel Polack

The involvement of tāne (and all whānau members) in the lives of children from the time they were born helped to cement the bonds of whakapapa, and to create confidence in their children who felt safe, loved and a strong sense of belonging.

Our tāne ancestors were gentle, caring fathers...

In early days Māori men had an important role in parenting; European observers noted that:

- Tāne were extremely gentle, loving and good humoured with their children
- Childcare was a natural and important part of a tāne’s role within the wider whānau
- Tāne had a key role in the upbringing of the boys, carrying them around as infants and including them in many community activities from an early age
- This parenting style created happy, confident children who had a clear and respected place in family/iwi life.

Our Ancestors

Our ancestors were innovative, entrepreneurial, problem solvers

Māori have a strong heritage of innovative thinking to solve problems and forge new pathways ahead.

Maui – the original innovator!

From the mythology surrounding our earliest ancestor, Maui, we learn of how he thought and acted 'outside the box' to improve the day to day lives and conditions of all humankind. Maui was fearless, curious and steeped in entrepreneurial spirit. Some of his well-known exploits include:

- he captured and beat the sun to slow it down so that the seasons would be more favourable
- through the theft of his grandmother's fingernails he was able to bring fire to humankind
- Maui snuck aboard his brother's fishing canoe and fished up the North Island, Te Ika a Maui (the fish of Maui).

Maui had what Tawera Nikau (Rugby League legend and 21st Century entrepreneur) would describe as our UMF or 'Unique Māori Factor' – to innovate and creatively add value to the collective wellbeing of our people.

Excellent navigators

The skill, tenacity and inventiveness employed by our ancestors to journey across the Pacific to Aotearoa all of those years ago exemplifies this spirit of innovation and should not be underestimated. These perilous voyages have now achieved legendary status, requiring our ancestors to:

- create vessels that could withstand the tough ocean conditions and long distances involved
- navigate the Pacific ocean using traditional tools and a complex and highly successful navigation system based on the stars.

"It is easy to be inspired around our innovative spirit when 1000 years ago our ancestors were harnessing the natural elements and utilising celestial navigation to chart the Pacific and journey safely to New Zealand."

Potaua Biasiny-Tule (2014) The shared journey of Maori innovation, The New Zealand Herald

Smart architects and engineers

The traditional Pā was another example of our ancestor's ingenuity. These cleverly designed fortifications on hill-top locations provided a great vantage point for the inhabitants but were also very effective in terms of public health. They were located and constructed in such a way to maximise warmth and minimise damp and cold. Ample and well-designed storage facilities ensured that food was available throughout the year.

Particularly impressive were the public health considerations and design features of many Pā suggesting a quite sophisticated understanding of these issues. Typically Pā were sited near fresh water springs ensuring that the inhabitants had access to clean water. They were also designed in such a way that water would not pool and become stagnant. This helped to prevent the spread of disease as did the creation of areas specifically set aside for the disposal of human waste.

“At the time these so-called primitive PA were flourishing, many of the major cities throughout Europe had yet to appreciate their significance in terms of health and in particular the need for an effective system of sewage disposal. Chamber pots were the norm in most city dwellings (especially in London) and since no plumbing was present these were typically emptied out windows and onto the street below.”

Te Kani Kingi, Te Pūmanawa Hauora School of Māori Studies (2005) Māori Innovation, Māori Development, and Māori Models of Health.

Ruapekapeka Pā

Built by Warrior Chief Te Ruki Kawhiti in late 1845, Ruapekapeka Pā (a well preserved and significant site 14 kilometres southeast of Kawakawa in Te Tai Tokerau) also provides insight into the innovative engineering and design capability of our ancestors as noted by IPENZ Engineering Heritage (Institute of Professional Engineers NZ):

“Ruapekapeka may not have been the first pa to utilize trenches or to have strong palisades, but the combination of design innovations made it one of the most effective against assault by muskets and heavy artillery. At a time when British military technology led the world, this Māori reaction to the threat of artillery bombardment represents an ingenious indigenous response to European firepower and is a significant engineering innovation.

The fortifications so impressed the British that following the battle, military engineers from Britain twice surveyed the defences, built a scale model for education purposes, and tabled the plans in the House of Commons. This knowledge was used by the British in the Crimea in 1853 and led to the trench warfare of World War 1 when machine guns made underground warfare a necessity.”

A Department of Conservation brochure suggests that the site selected for this pa was also inspired:

“This type of pa was far better equipped to handle cannon fire than traditional pa, but almost as important as its innovative construction was the location. A pa built inland, a long way from European supply sources and navy ships bristling with armaments, was in a strong position. The attackers had to travel through rough, unfamiliar territory, dragging all their equipment with them and would have little choice when it came to finding a suitable base camp. As a result of its defensive success, many other tribes around New Zealand, took up and developed this pa system during conflicts over the next thirty years.”

The art of Māori adaptation

Throughout history Māori have shown great inventiveness, ingenuity and adaptability. Even in the face of hostility and the devastating effects of colonisation our ancestors drew upon their inner strengths to cope and survive. They were also quick to take up those aspects of European culture that might enhance their lives, for example using different tools and techniques to enrich their art. And they were entrepreneurial:

“... 180 years ago Māori once were integrated supply chain specialists, owning land, crops, flour mills and the ships that distributed their product internationally.”

Potaua Biasiny-Tule (2014)

Much of what we know about our early ancestors suggests that they had an innate and extraordinary ability to change, transform and grow. A number of commentators today suggest that there is a special Māori quality to these attributes and that these can also help Māori to flourish today.

“Māori innovation is a bit different to the mainstream. It’s about making connections between the old and the new; between the large and the small; between the whānau, the hapū and the iwi. It speaks to the transitional nature of change and looks to how Māori values can be retained throughout the entire process. And it is an essential part of bringing the culture into a 21st century paradigm.”

Potaua Biasiny-Tule (2014)

Our ancestors were smart, innovative, adaptable and entrepreneurial...

There are many examples of Māori innovation within our own myths and stories and in evidence throughout history:

- Maui is often held up as the original Māori innovator – thinking differently to change things for the collective better – our ancestors revered and retold his exploits!
- Our ancestors used a sophisticated celestial navigation system to cross the Pacific in strong, crafted vessels that could withstand these treacherous journeys. Some have pointed out that this was at a time when many Europeans thought that the earth was square and they would sail off the edge!
- Pā were cleverly designed and located in ways that promoted safety and public health, and prevented disease
- Ruapekapeka Pā is cited as an example of ingenious engineering innovation and was studied by the British to improve their own battle tactics.

Commentators today believe that much of Māori innovative success comes from maintaining and applying Māori strengths and values to create new ways of doing things – or the addition of what Tawera Nikau calls the UMF “Unique Māori Factor.”

Our Ancestors

Our wāhine ancestors were strong, influential and valued

If we look at Māori sources of information passed down through the generations – waiata, whakatauki, haka and iwi histories – we get an interesting sense of how wāhine participated in and influenced traditional Māori society. Powerful women feature strongly in our earliest stories, highlighting their importance in sustaining the well-being of the whānau, hapū and iwi.

Mana wāhine – women had power and influence in traditional Māori society

“Māori cosmology abounds with stories of powerful women... The tales of Maui-tikitiki-a-Taranga are particularly instructive as to the influential roles that women held. Maui acquires fire from his kuia, Mahuika. It is with the jawbone of his kuia, Muriranga-whenua, that he fishes up Te Ika a Maui (the North Island) and makes the patu with which to subdue Ra (the sun). And it is to his ancestress, Hine-nui-te-po, that he eventually succumbs when he fails in his quest to attain immortality.”

Ani Mikaere (1994) 'Māori Women: Caught in the Contradictions of a Colonised Reality', Waikato Law Review (volume 2)

The mana and influence of our wāhine ancestors and their role in nurturing life and enriching whakapapa and whanaungatanga is also reflected in our language and cultural concepts:

Māori refer to women as **te whare tangata** (the house of humanity)

Whenua means both placenta and land (the two are linked through the burial process)

Hapū means to be pregnant and it also means a large kinship group

The ancestress of all Māori, **Papatūānuku**, is the earth (land is intrinsically tied to the social, cultural, spiritual and economic well-being of Māori)

The presence of women was seen as a potent form of **whakanoa** (to remove tapu, or make normal).

Women performed a wide range of roles, including leadership roles

The experiences of early Māori women were not universal with social status and other factors having an impact. However, there is a range of evidence suggesting that wāhine Māori actively participated in and influenced many aspects of life. Some have described our early ancestors as being “extremely liberated”. The collective whānau model meant that childrearing and other domestic tasks were shared and Māori men had a key role in parenting. Unlike Western women at that time our wāhine ancestors had a degree of flexibility, independence and a wide range of roles.

“She considers her Māori ancestresses, prior to the impact of Christianity, to have been ‘extremely liberated’ in comparison to her English ancestresses. She points out that Māori women were not regarded as chattels or possessions, that they retained their own names upon marriage, that their children were free to identify with the kinship group of either or both parents, that they dressed in similar garments to the men, and that conception was not associated with sin or child bearing with punishment and suffering but that these were seen to be uplifting and a normal part of life...”

Ani Mikaere (1994) talking about Rose Pere in: Māori Women: Caught in the Contradictions of a Colonised Reality

In pre-European days and throughout history there are countless stories of Māori women who occupied important positions as composers, military strategists, powerful landowners and mediators. Māori women had a say in the affairs of the tribe and could inherit land. They continued to fight for recognition of these rights following colonisation and the imposition of English laws and thinking which undermined their status.

“A newspaper editorial in 1861 noted the participation of Māori women in the rūnanga: ‘Ta te [M]aori, me hui katoa, te iti te rahi, te tāne te wāhine, te koroheke te ruruhi ... e uru katoa ana ki nga Runanga [M]aori, me o ratou whakaaro me o ratou korero; e whakatika ana tenei wāhine me ana korero ano ...’ (but with the Māori Runanga, all must assemble together, the small and the great, the husband, the wife, the old man, the old woman these all obtain admittance to the Runanga Māori, with all their thoughts and speeches ... this woman gets up and has her talk ...)’

Traditionally land was bequeathed to women, as the mana of women to give birth to descendants meant that mana whenua (authority over land) was not lost through marriage. During the Kotahitanga movement women argued that the law should recognise Māori women as land owners and leaders in their own right. The 1897 petition from the Kotahitanga to Queen Victoria was signed by Māori women and men.”

Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand

This sense of equilibrium between men and women was no doubt surprising to early English settlers who observed and commented through a Western lens:

“In many instances... I have seen the wife treated as an equal and companion.”

Augustus Earle (1793-1838) – Artist, traveller, writer

“When speaking of the dexterity of the fishermen, I should have mentioned that of the fisherwomen also; for the women here are as expert at all the useful arts as the men, sharing equally the fatigue and the danger with them upon all occasions excepting war; in which though they undergo considerable fatigue, they do not participate in the danger.”

John Savage (1807) – Traveller, writer, surgeon

“A number of women were in the heat of the action, amongst whom was Tippahee’s old wife, not much less than seventy years of age and Duaterra’s [Ruatarā’s] wife [Rahu] bearing in her hand a patoo about seven feet long, made out of the jawbone of a whale. This weapon she brandished about in the very centre of the battle, and went through all the various movements of the men, whether in retreating or advancing.”

Reverent Samuel Marsden (1765-1838) chaplain, magistrate, agriculturalist, missionary

“At the battle of Ōrākau in the King Country in 1864, Ahumai Te Paerata famously responded to the suggestion that the women and children should be allowed to leave, ‘Ki te mate ngā tāne, me mate anō ngā wāhine me ngā tamariki’ (if the men die, the women and children die also).”

Rawinia Higgins rāua ko Paul Meredith, ‘Te mana o te wāhine – Māori women’, Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand

“Most missionaries and settlers struggled to recognise the leadership of Māori women, preferring instead to deal with their male counterparts. Only 13 Māori women signed the Treaty of Waitangi (out of some 512 signatures). The daughter of Te Pēhi, a Ngāti Toa rangatira, was not allowed to sign as it was believed that women were not important enough. Angered at the insult, her husband also refused to sign.”

Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand¹

There are many examples of women as poets and composers of waiata throughout history – central to the exchange of tribal history and traditions and as expressions of social commentary. Women’s dominant role as composers in traditional Māori society is testimony to their vital role as knowledge bearers and leaders at this time.

“...Rangi Topeora, of Ngati Raukawa and Ngati Toa descent. She was a signatory to the Treaty of Waitangi, a powerful landowner, and a prolific composer of waiata. Her mother, Waitohi, was Te Rauparaha’s sister, a leader in her own right and a known military strategist.”

Ani Mikaere (1994)

Survival depended on harmony and collaboration – wāhine and tāne valued each other’s roles within the collective

The roles and relationships between tāne and wāhine were highly valued in traditional Māori society. They were an important part of the collective whole and maintaining the balance was vital to whānau strength and survival.

“Pere describes her childhood as being full of very positive female models, and how her elders set the example of men and women respecting and supporting each other, and working alongside one another.”

¹ It has also been pointed out that while the low numbers of female signatories is in large part due to colonial influence and bias, it may also be that some women have not been counted as Māori names are “gender-neutral” and therefore not obvious.

The roles of men and women in traditional Māori society can be understood only in the context of the Māori world view, which acknowledged the natural order of the universe, the interrelationship or whanaungatanga of all living things to one another and to the environment, and the over-arching principle of balance....

Both men and women were essential parts in the collective whole, both formed part of the whakapapa that linked Māori people back to the beginning of the world, and women in particular played a key role in linking the past with the present and the future. The very survival of the whole was absolutely dependent upon everyone who made it up, and therefore each and every person within the group had his or her own intrinsic value. They were all a part of the collective; it was therefore a collective responsibility to see that their respective roles were valued and protected."

Ani Mikaere (1994)

Tikanga and collective responsibility prevented violence

Some academics have pointed out that this collective responsibility served to limit violence within whānau. Violence from men towards women and children was unusual, and if it did occur there were harsh punishments according to local tikanga. The survival of the whānau and wider collective was dependent on there being harmony and collaboration.

"Instances of abuse against women and children were regarded as whānau concerns and actions would inevitably be taken against the perpetrator."

Ani Mikaere (1994)

"In pre-colonial Māori society a man's house was not his castle. The community intervened to prevent and punish violence against one's partner in a very straightforward way."

Stephanie Milroy (quoted in Ani Mikaere 1994)

"I saw no quarrelling while I was there. They are kind to their women and children. I never observed either with a mark of violence upon them, nor did I ever see a child struck."

Reverent Samuel Marsden (1765-1838) chaplain, magistrate, agriculturalist, missionary

Our wāhine ancestors were strong, influential and valued members of the collective

Our language and the stories and histories that have been passed down through the generations reflect a traditional society where wāhine Māori actively participated in and influenced many aspects of life. We know that:

- Everyone had part to play in maintaining order and balance within the universe, including our wāhine ancestors who had an influential role in the functioning, well-being and survival of the collective.
- Transgressions against this harmony, in the form of violence against women and children, were prohibited and dealt with harshly according to tikanga.
- Women had a vital role linking the present with the past and with the future; the mana associated with this is reflected in our language (*hapū, te whare tangata, whenua, Papatūānuku...*).
- Domestic duties including childrearing were shared with tāne and other members of the whānau and hapū, freeing women to perform other roles.
- Wāhine held leadership and military roles, inherited land, were revered as composers and had a say in important iwi matters.
- The power and strength of our wāhine ancestors is reflected in numerous waiata and stories which are repeated and passed down with pride through the generations.
- Māori women continue to be at the forefront of critical Māori issues such as Treaty rights, education, water and social justice.