He Whare Takata: Wāhine Māori Reproductive Justice in the Child Protection System

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: Reproductive justice in Aotearoa must be centred in Indigenous reproductive justice, challenging social and government systems that seek to maintain control of wāhine Māori[1] bodies in contradiction to our role as *"he whare takata"*[2], the house of humanity. This paper seeks to answer the question: What is the relationship between Indigenous women's reproductive justice rights and child removal in the Aotearoa New Zealand child protection system?

APPROACH: Through centring our atua wāhine pūrākau knowledge, I look at the shift from wāhine as the holders of whakapapa[3], through birthing practices and knowledge keepers, to the focus of the Aotearoa[4] colonial project where women and children are controlled and punished. This article is a reflective, historical and contemporary analysis of complicit social work and settler state intervention on Māori bodies, with particular focus on wāhine and the child protection system.

CONTRIBUTION: The article draws on the research and knowledge collected by wāhine researchers in the last 30 years, alongside my doctoral study locating Kāi Tahu wāhine narratives, post-child-protection system. Attention is paid to the colonial agenda which started prior to Te Tiriti o Waitangi (te Tiriti) in the clearly scripted story that usurped wāhine and continues today in multiple forms, including the child-protection system.

Keywords: Mana[5] wāhine; Indigenous; settler colonialism; reproductive justice; child protection

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What is the relationship between Indigenous women's reproductive justice rights and child removal in the Aotearoa New Zealand child-protection system?

I seek to answer this question, drawing the clear connection between wāhine as *"he whare takata"* (the house of humanity) and the current child removal practice. I review the current system changes against a growing body of knowledge that supports the need to disrupt the status quo where wāhine are othered and managed in ways that transgress who we are. The premise of this article is the right to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, visioning devolution, decolonising and creating systems where wāhine have reproductive justice. The approach taken is to support both devolution and decolonising while minimising harm in the current child-protection system transformation.

Settler colonial child-protection systems internationally continue to be exposed for discriminatory responses to Indigenous populations and continued high rates

of removal of Indigenous children from families and communities (Blackstock et al., 2023). In the Aotearoa context, child protection sits within imperialist systems of established and repeated colonial violence where Māori ways of parenting were intentionally broken, the role of wāhine re-written to fit western ideologies and where paternalistic interpersonal violence is normalised (Jenkins & Harte, 2011). Indigenous peoples have navigated the shifting iterations of colonial violence in global parallel experiences for centuries, with multiple overlaps and mirroring across settler colonial Indigenous populations (L. T. Smith, 2013).

In the international Indigenous context, Aotearoa shares experiences of over-representation in the state foster system, disproportionately high rates of Indigenous baby removal, refusal to work with Indigenous constructions of family and, at the heart, the continued subjugation of Indigenous women (Blackstock et al., 2020; Krakouer et al., 2023; Whānau Ora Commissioning Agency, 2020). In this context and amongst rising Indigenous resistance in Aotearoa, following the media exposure of a Māori baby uplift now referred to as the Hawkes Bay uplift, several independent and significant inquiries were commissioned with resulting reports. The reports referred to are *Te Kuku o te Manawa* (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2020a, 2020b); *Ko Te Wā Whakawhiti: it's time for change: A Māori inquiry into Oranga Tamariki* (Whānau Ora Commissioning Agency, 2020); and *He Pāharakeke, He Rito Whakakīkinga Whāruarua Oranga Tamariki Urgent Inquiry* (The Waitangi Tribunal, 2021). These reports expose the state as biased and unable to provide a service that understands Māori as Māori. They tell the story of a system that traumatises, stigmatises, and blames children and families in the system and our Māori communities for macro-level social inequity issues including poverty and violence. These inequities are embedded in our systemically racist colonial structures

further complicating practice and policy responses which seek to address whānau dynamics while ignoring structural injustice (Ministerial Advisory Committee, 1986; Tinirau et al., 2021).

Wāhine relationship to colonial power and control

A nation is not conquered

Until the hearts of its women

Are on the ground

Then it is done, no matter how brave its warriors

Nor how strong its weapons.
(Mikaere, 2022, p. 5)

This Cheyenne saying relays the significance of women in Indigenous societies, holding together the ability to create life and therefore collectively survive. Removal of women's power in the colonial project is the only way it might succeed—when you remove women from power and authority you oppress the next generations (Atkinson, 2003). The removal of wāhine from power, colonising our knowledge, corrupting our stories, and binding our cosmological narratives to the patriarchy, severs our relationships in whakapapa to each other and to the land. This disruption creates confusion of rights and responsibilities in decision making, leadership and parenting, enacting violence that re-genders wāhine, tāne (Māori men) and tākatapui (Māori LGBTQI++) in complex ways that are difficult to unbind (Mikaere, 2022). The success of the colonial project is never guaranteed while wāhine continue to resist, as we survive as Indigenous, dispossessed, and controlled in the active colonisation *process*. This includes renewed subtle acts of violence that deny our Indigenous bodies full freedom and full status as human (Jackson, 2020). In Aotearoa, as we grapple with what a te Tiriti compliant society looks like, visioned in *Matike Mai* and *He Puapua*

as constitutional reform, wāhine remain excluded from focus (Charters et al., 2019; Jackson 2020; Sykes 2022). Intersectionally, wāhine, shadowing global Indigenous and Black women experiences remain located as the *Other,* defined and represented by patriarchally embedded privilege that preferences 'Man', white women and then tāne, while continuing to deny wāhine recognition of rights and protections (Collins, 2022; Pihama, 2020). This power dynamic, control and authority has usurped wāhine in the current environment where Aotearoa exists.

He Whare Takaka

Reproductive justice is not just the ability to make equitable decisions about having, or not having, children; it is also the ability to care for children following birth as a choice (Ross, 2017). Focusing on wāhine recognises that at the centre of child protection are wāhine as *"he whare takata"*, the house of humanity. Centring wāhine is in alignment with the rights of mokopuna (children) and incorporates the understanding in the whakatauki (proverb) *"he kuru pounamu",* children as the most precious treasure (Pihama et al., 2015). Mokopuna as taoka (treasures) are an extension of mana wāhine (wāhine knowledges and authority), the importance of wāhine and the preciousness of children are inter-woven, one cannot exist without the other (Mikaere, 2017; Murphy, 2013). The co-existence of the intergenerational erasure of wāhine rakatirataka (leadership and self-determination) and the imposition of western parenting norms created the current loss of societal safeguards, knowledge transference and the relationship between *"he whare takata"* and *"he kuru pounamu"* (Pihama et al., 2022a).

The child-protection system in Aotearoa has continuously viewed wāhine as vessels for babies rather than rights holders, with the system perpetuating harm and conferring the brunt of the blame on wāhine

for state removal processes (The Waitangi Tribunal, 2021; Whānau Ora Commissioning Agency, 2020). The child-protection system is the most recent iteration of an axis of subjugation on wāhine, as part of a whole of system history (Blackstock et al, 2023; Connor, 2014). The following literature review and analysis outlines wāhine pre- and post-colonial reproductive injustice experiences. The intersection of mana wāhine and state systems frames the connection between contemporary realities of wāhine reproductive injustices and the intentional colonial agenda.

Methodology

Mana Wāhine theory is the active claiming of wāhine in the Māori world with distinctive theory and analysis (knowing, being and doing) that incorporates the imposed colonial and structural experiences on wāhine, our experiences of decolonising and the enactment of tino rakatirataka (Pihama, 2005, 2020). Pihama (2020) stated Mana Wāhine is about collective responsibility and wellbeing while Jahnke (2013) drew on the connection between wāhine and whenua (land) reminding us, through the whakatauki "He wāhine, he whenua, ka ngaro ai te tangata", that without women and land we will perish. Mana Wāhine is the representation of our tupuna (ancestors) wāhine, historical and contemporary, as leaders resisting both their own and future generational erasure of self and collective wellbeing. The many ways in which wāhine define and incorporate Mana Wāhine theory into research and practice reflects the multitude of realities that we live as wāhine.

Centring Mana Wāhine theory, *her*story is prioritised in an act of resistance against the patriarchy and white supremacy, to illuminate the woven experiences of wāhine in our reproductive journeys. This draws on wāhine work as the foundation recognising that it is wāhine who have sought out and claimed back *her*story from the deep analysis of passed down whānau stories, from

snippets of written recordings, waiata, art and whakapapa.

Therefore, the methodological approach utilised sits under the epistemological position of Mana Wāhine theory, an umbrella term for wāhine analysis and our "complex lived realities" (Pihama, 2005). In using Mana Wāhine theory I intentionally draw on wāhine *her*stories and narratives, incorporating the importance of wāhine in pathways to a flourishing society. Embracing Mana Wāhine theory, a foundation of pūrākau wāhine atua (female creation stories) provides a mātauraka (knowledge) Māori understanding of pregnancy, birth, and post-birth. Utilising these narratives and the established work of Irwin and Du Plessis (1992), Mikaere (2017), Murphy (2013) and Pihama (2020), I present a Māori understanding of wāhine as "he whare takata".

The foundation of "he whare tangata"—the house of humanity

Wāhine hold reproductive power that is gifted through our whakapapa from wāhine atua, with the responsibility for continuing future generations (Mikaere, 2017; Murphy, 2013; Pihama, 2005). Our wāhine bodies are vessels of both tapu and noa (sacred and normal) and hold knowledges and strength (Pere, 1982). The efforts of settler colonialism, driven by white supremacist and imperialist notions of class, gender and race superiority, have not erased the truths held in our whakapapa that we are the house of humanity (Moreton-Robinson, 2000; L. T. Smith, 2013; Trask, 1999).

Throughout Māori epistemology we have many pūrākau (stories) demonstrating the power of wāhine and of our wāhine atua (deities); Papatūānuku, Hineahuone, Mahuika and Hinetitama to name a few (Ihimaera & Hereaka, 2019; Murphy, 2017). These pūrākau express foundational understandings of humanness spread across attributes of strength, mana,

intelligence, courage, and fertility. The pūrākau acknowledge the rights and responsibilities of childbearing while demonstrating that wāhine are not constructed pre- or post-colonially solely as vessels, or baby factories for future ancestors. While we are more than just our ability to carry and to birth, we can acknowledge the privilege and space that wāhine occupy as the house of humanity. Distinction here recognises that childrearing and the conferred rights and responsibilities were shared equally across genders and parenting responsibilities should never be framed in western "motherhood" narratives (Jenkins & Harte, 2011).

The development of our mana as wāhine in creation is best exemplified in the many pūrākau of Hinetitama and her later identity as Hine-nui-te-po. In this one wāhine atua, we understand the rights of wāhine, supported by her grandmother, to assert "my body, my choice" when Hinetitama discovers the father of her children is also her father. Standing in her rakatirataka, Hinetitama regains control and mana by becoming the bridge between Te Ao Mārama and Te Pō (world of light and world of dark) (Murphy, 2017). This act of sacrifice and service is to mokopuna as future ancestors and holds important understandings of intergenerational responsibilities. It also demonstrates that body choices have always sat with wāhine.

The second relevant pūrākau relating to Hinetitama, transformed into Hine-nui-te-po, is her granting Māui (the trickster) eternal life. Eternal life is gifted by Hine-nui-te-po squishing Māui between her thighs where he becomes the first menstruation (te awa atua) carrying forward whakapapa (genealogy) for future generations (Murphy, 2013). The whakapapa, or blueprint for humanity, is cherished in the cycle of wāhine, menstruation becoming intrinsic to the essence of being Māori and our inter-connectiveness with the whenua, land. This

is emphasised in terminology in te reo Māori (Māori language) where double-ups occur between both wāhine reproductive cycles and Māori societal structures and the land. Examples are whenua as both land and placenta and hapū as both tribal structure and pregnancy (Mikaere, 2000; Murphy, 2017).

Wāhine holding the power to create life does not pre-determine that wāhine are required to carry through every potential life, but rather that we remain the holders of the mana and responsibility, with the right to decide if the circumstances are right. Murphy (2013) argued that cultural truths of miscarriage, still-births and aborted foetuses were reframed by misogynistic colonial ethnographers as demonic—an example of shifting wāhine body choices from normal to dirty and evil. Murphy (2013) clarified that in her research the spectrum of living, potential and not living is carried in "he whare takata". Ramsden (2002) similarly describes wāhine as actors and participators with agency and refutes the idea of wāhine as chattels to breed and produce. Pregnancy, birthing, and post birth care has now been well *Re*-searched by wāhine providing Māori with *Re*-membered ceremony and rites asserting the centrality of wāhine in childbearing as more than vessels and in relationship with our whakapapa and atua (Murphy, 2013; Simmonds, 2014; Tikao, 2020).

Within te Ao Māori, following pregnancy and birth, there existed multiple ways in which the raising of a mokopuna could occur for all the reasons that exist in 2023; due to bereavement, family harm, parental separation or through whāngai, a process of strengthening kinship ties[6] (Jenkins & Harte, 2011; Mead, 1997; S. Walker, 2006). While these decisions are made at a whānau level, they were not made without consideration of the mana of wāhine. It is through colonial conquest of our tikaka (customs and protocols) and rakatirataka that these decisions have been taken and are now state-

made decisions. In response to the conquest by western systems on our knowing, being and doing, unquelled wāhine resistance has engaged in 183 years of resistance in the very spaces we were and are rendered subaltern (Spivak, 1999, 2003).

The path of resistance

In the ground-breaking work of Hawaiian scholar Haunani-Kay Trask (1999), she asserted Indigenous women continue to maintain and hold culture together in the face of systemic colonial subjugation. Acknowledging the early erasure of generational voice and agency in the new patriarchal society, without voting rights, land rights or any structural supports, Trask maintains Indigenous women in this powerless space have nothing to lose and no incentive to comply with western hegemony (Trask, 1999). She stated it is in this space that Indigenous women have continued to practise culture, engage in subversive acts of resistance, and hold together culture and identity. The denial of rights for wāhine over time has equally not diminished the collective action of wāhine. We continue to challenge the patriarchal system, call out the intersectionality of oppression and push forward towards legislation, policy and practice that returns tino rakatirataka and upholds mana wāhine.

The following section is in evidence of mana wāhine and presents the conflict between two world views. The resistance and insistence of wāhine to be recognised as "he whare takata" as understood in tikaka and *her*story is outlined. This is contrasted with the state system attempts to assert a continued colonial care discourse where wāhine require saving. When not deemed saveable, the state swings to intervening to "rescue" children. A chronological account of child protection *her*story since the arrival of Pākehā on our shores is presented below. The following account is a refusal to be the subaltern.

First encounters, Wāhine in the early colonial contact period, 1830s–

Strategies to enforce white supremacy on wāhine cleverly pivoted and changed according to the resistance and environment of the day. Wāhine moved through these pivots as community leaders in the early settler occupancy through advocacy for tāne Māori political inclusion, as land law/lore experts, as health advocates and, when required, as societal activists all underpinned by whānau, hapū and hāpori mauriora[7] (wellbeing) (Else, 1993; Pihama, 2005; Ramsden, 2002).

In the early years, from the 1830s, whānau societal structures across most of Aotearoa remained intact and wāhine focused on whānau and the implications of colonisation. These included impacts from inter-racial marriages, loss of lands and rising rates of illness (Else, 1993; Walter, 2017; Wanhalla, 2015). Inter-racial marriage and/or sexual abuse was fuelled by representations of wāhine as the exotic other. For example, the postcard trade of Indigenous women incorporated images of our wāhine tupuna as both sexualised bodies and available for marriage (Cleaver, 2020). Kāi Tahu historian Angela Wanhalla (2015) highlighted the outcomes of the resulting high rates of interracial marriage in the south which often left Kāi Tahu wāhine without their whānau and landless following their settler husbands abandoning them upon transfer of lands and resources. Through this time nationally, wāhine were self-advocating through the Native land courts for return of lands, demonstrating continued rakatirataka practice and expectations that marriage did not cede rights and responsibilities to land (Walter, 2017).

While an abundance of non-Māori children required care and protection from the 1840s due to parental death, abandonment, and high poverty situations, mokopuna Māori continued to be cared for in Māori communities (Tennant, 2007; Whānau Ora Commissioning Agency, 2020). There was the belief by the settler state that Māori would die out and a lack of policy and practice directed towards relief in Māori communities guaranteed this as a likelihood. By the 1890s the mortality rate of mokopuna Māori was so high that 40% did not make it to their first birthdays (Else, 1993). The life expectancy of wāhine at this time was 25, three years earlier than tāne, Māori men. This increased in the following decade to 30 but with an increase in gap between wāhine and tāne then being five years. Locally, in Te Waipounamu (South Island), all our land had been sold or taken by the Crown with agreements that hospitals and services would be provided in our communities (Te Kereme, 1991). This was not delivered on, and exemplifies the colonial agenda targeting wāhine and mokopuna.

Assimilation, eugenics and social care, wāhine demanding space

In the early 1900s, social work was well established in other western and settler colonial countries while it was not until the 1950s that social work was formally introduced in Aotearoa. Prior to this, social supports were predominantly provided by nurses, teachers, and religious charity groups. These groups were dominated by non-Māori with a focus on settler communities and white society (Tennant, 2007). Wāhine were not visible across these sectors until much later with the Native School Act (1967) implementation actively denying access to tertiary education systems and defining wāhine as servants in the lower class (G. H. Smith, 2000). The native school system additionally eroded traditional wāhine practices enforcing western expectations of pregnancy, birth, and childrearing, including the shifting of birth practices to hospitals (Connor, 2014). This affected the ability to deliver the rights and responsibilities of "he whare takata" where defining need, access and delivery was predetermined by non-Māori and wāhine were excluded from a rakatirataka role.

Early examples of exclusion, systemic racism and eugenic approaches to pregnancy, birth and post-birth can be found in Truby King's development of Plunket in 1906 (Connor, 2014). King advocated for selected race-based breeding programmes to protect the health and wellbeing of desirable women and children (Richardson, 2004). With this belief, the reduction of birth rates in Aotearoa and Australia at this time were met with legislation that incentivised non-Indigenous women with payments to have babies, while Indigenous wāhine were not included (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Resistance and strength of wāhine at this time, was demonstrated through the work of Ria Tikini and Mere Harper, two Kāi Tahu midwives who negotiated and worked with Truby King for wāhine and mokopuna wellbeing (Manchester, 2020). We are often called on as wāhine to walk in conflictual spaces where we are not acknowledged as rakatira but required in service to our communities and our roles and responsibilities for future generations. These wāhine exemplify sacrifice and the rakatirataka of "he whare takata".

In 1908, the first registered wāhine nurse, Akenehi Hei, was mandated to work in Māori communities and slowly a wāhine nursing and midwifery workforce was established with hospitals eventually changing racist attitudes in the 1930s to allow wāhine in hospital nurse training (Tikao, 2020). Currently, we have a wāhine midwifery workforce that is only 6% of the profession (Tikao, 2020). This statistic is a direct result of generations of obstacles preventing wāhine from professionalising, alongside non-Māori, including preventing matriculation and denying wāhine entrance to tertiary education programmes. In cognisance with generations of wāhine nurses and midwives' ability to pass on and hold wāhine at the centre of reproductive processes are current advocates such as Jean Te Huia, Naomi Simmonds, Ngahuia Murphy and Kelly Tikao who breathe life into our mana wāhine traditions, hold

the system to account and provide robust analysis of wāhine needs (Murphy, 2013; Simmonds, 2014, 2017; Tikao, 2020). Social work should learn from the advocacy demonstrated by Māori midwives.

In 1939, the introduction of the Māori quota system to educational training, led by the resistance of non-Māori to teach in native schools, enabled Māori to enter teaching, though this was mainly in native schools and dominated by Māori men (R. Walker, 2016). Education and health remain key indicators for mauriora and holistic wellbeing and wāhine participation in delivery and decision-making remain essential parts of a required shift in socio-economic disadvantage.

Parallel to the development of a social work system in Aotearoa in the 1950s, women-collectivised social care systems had been evolving through iterations of women-focused services; The Temperance Movement (1881), the Māori Women's Institute (1929), the Women's Health League (1937) and the still established Māori Women's Welfare League (MWWL) in 1951. Each version of social provision built on the previous in an intergenerational transference of dedication to the rights and needs of women, wāhine and mokopuna. Wāhine through these times continued to push for political authority, through the vote, alongside women and in attempts to influence policy and practice design. Wāhine sacrifice was again shown through these times, as women sought to restrict wāhine taking moko kauae (customary chin tattoo) in the Temperance Movement membership (Else, 1993).

The MWWL networks and resources enabled an impressive growth of membership and shared commitment to system transformation. This was responded to in a demonstration of explicit gender inequity by our own in 1953 when Māori men wrote to the Minister of Māori Affairs stating wāhine were usurping the authority of men and supported the Ministry with a withdrawal

of funding to the MWWL (Else, 1993). The critique culminated in the Hunn report (1960) which suggested wāhine were outside of the scope of a women's role in attempting to influence policy (Hunn, 1960). Never deterred, wāhine in this time of financial sanctions and paternalism, took to the pavements with survey cards and completed the first comprehensive survey of Māori housing in Aotearoa providing evidence of a Māori housing crisis and demanding urgent action (Anderson et al., 2014; Hill, 2010). The survey followed the refusal of the government to accept the word of wāhine that Māori were experiencing overcrowding, inequitable housing and health and wellbeing impacts with urban drift pushing Māori from rural communities to Auckland and other cities. A clear example of the diminishing understanding of mana wāhine.

Social work complicity, wāhine bear the brunt

State social work developed from the 1950s from earlier roles such as welfare, educational and charity officers. These early roles can only be viewed as complicit with inequitable decision making and use of power and control over Māori embedded into legislation cross-ministerially with an active refusal to even acknowledge te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Ministerial Advisory Committee, 1986). Complicity includes social work participation in the mass adopting out from the mid-1950s of mokopuna Māori when the Adoption Act (1955) became law. Many Māori whānau remain unable to connect to hapū or iwi through closed legislation restrictions that have forever stripped rights to whānau, hapū and iwi structures (Ahuriri-Driscoll et al., 2023; Haenga-Collins, 2017; Newman, 2013). Adoption numbers peaked in the mid 1960s with over 3000 babies being adopted out annually, meeting the needs of childless adults, with little regard to whakapapa and the intrinsic link between wāhine and mokopuna (Whānau Ora Commissioning Agency, 2020). The result of adoption for

wāhine was the total severing of whakapapa and breaking of relationships.

There is much we do not know of these adoption experiences as wāhine are now at ages that they are dying and earlier stories of the "fostering out" experiments have limited recording, with ethnic identity not acknowledged. The lack of choice and voice exemplifies an exploitation of wāhine in precarious living arrangements with compounding issues including poverty, housing, and violence. Inevitably in a settler colonial system where land, resources and power have been stripped from Indigenous women, we suffer the brunt of the system, becoming a precarious population manipulated and controlled. Rocha Beardall and Edwards (2021) drew the connection between women, land, and children as the sites of white supremacist efforts to displace and break the native family. The eerie similarity between the Indigenous experience in the United States, Alaska and Aotearoa is found across both countries in legislation targeting women, land, and children and in the rise of Indigenous children in fostering and adoption systems. The colonial foundation that lays way to policy and practice is the perpetuation of the narrative of *terra nullius* (nobody's land) and *filius nullius* (nobody's child) and the disconnection from wāhine, women to land and to our children (Rocha Beardall & Edwards, 2021). In the overturning of the *Roe v. Wade*, the US Supreme Court ruling particularly references the availability of childless parents and no children in the adoption pool in the United States, a dystopic reality driving legislative reform against reproductive justice. I assert that these factors have existed in multiple forms in Aotearoa and other settler colonial nations where Indigenous women fall victim to every system that could take away body choice and power from fertility decisions through to child rearing.

From the 1950s, post-World War Two, Māori youth and children become the focus of the

colonial gaze and entry into state systems of punitive institutions and foster systems exponentially increased (Hyslop, 2022). Early state child-protection social work with Māori includes incarcerating our youth to experience what we now fully understand as institutions of abuse and torture in places, including Lake Alice Psychiatric Hospital and Epuni Boys home (Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care and Faith-Based Institutions, 2020). The picture of subjugation is now all encapsulating. Through the 1970s and 1980s, child-removal processes replaced earlier iterations of adoption as the new assimilation tool, leading to growing numbers of Māori in the foster system and rising concern by Māori of racism in the Department of Social Welfare (Ministerial Advisory Committee, 1986). Māori questions centred on state-system mokopuna removal to non-kin, non-Māori caregivers, actions supported by the strategies produced in the Ministry of Māori Affairs Hunn Report (Hunn, 1960). Internally, in the child protection department Māori resistance strategies included a collaboration between Māori and allies in the Women's Anti-racist Action Group (WARAG, 1985) in Auckland and Maatua Whangai care networks providing care across the country. The WARAG group shone a light on internal racism and were instrumental in setting the scene for Pūao-te-Āta tū (PtAT) (Hyslop, 2022). The Maatua Whangai networks continued to provide Māori caregivers in Māori communities, underpaid and undervalued by the state, until this was shut down overnight in 1991 (S. Walker, 2006).

Significant reports and research on Māori and the child-protection system

The work completed by WARAG and a Māori Advisory group findings of institutional racism internally to the child protection led to a Ministerial Advisory Committee remit to complete a whole-of-country analysis and report on Māori experience of the state child-protection

system, PtAT (Ministerial Advisory Committee, 1986). Pūao-te-Āta-tū provided clear evidence of institutional racism that extended across the entire public service sector and into society.

Pūao-te-Āta-tū provides a template of expectations on system transformation from 1986 until the 2019 legislation reform. This report was the backdrop to the creation of the Child, Young Persons, and Their Families Act, 1989 (CYP &F Act, 1989), which incorporated the concepts of whānau, hapū and iwi as well as direction towards engaging with Māori. The CYP & F Act (1989) is the precursor to the Oranga Tamariki Act (2019) and was revolutionary at the time, encouraging bi-cultural practice and expected opportunities of collaboration with Māori. The 2019 reforms follow decades of managerial reviews on our state foster system dating back to PtAT, cumulating in the White Paper (2012) and the Expert Panel Reports (Ministry of Social Development EP, 2015) which provided a set of recommendations to advance legislative provisions (Hyslop, 2022). All the reports between 1986 and 2019 focus on tinkering with the acknowledged broken system and implementing new managerialism and neo-liberal business and practice structures in the system (Hyslop, 2022). The system and practice tinkering sidelined growing issues of rising rates of mokopuna Māori in the system, the framing of women blaming and personal responsibility.

The Hawkes Bay uplift highlighted system and practice issues in a manner that society and government could not deny. In doing so, highlighting the enduring and continuing blaming of wāhine caught in the contradiction between "he whare takata" and colonially dispossessed. Over this time when women's rights movements were growing, PtAT, utilising a whole of Māori societal framework focused solely on whānau, hapū and iwi as the site for system inclusion and change. It is possible that this future signalled an approach of using whānau

believing this terminology would also make space for wāhine. This will be further discussed in the accompanying article "He Whare Takata: Are wāhine Māori visible in Oranga Tamariki practice guidance?" which looks at our state child-protection system, Oranga Tamariki (OT), current practice guidance as it related to wāhine (Cleaver, forthcoming).

Responses from community organisations and Māori

In 2020, the Whānau Ora Commissioning Agency report, *Ko Te Wā Whakawhiti: It's time for change,* heard the voices of whānau and hāpori who had OT involvement relating to child removals (Whānau Ora Commissioning Agency, 2020). This evidenced consistent stories of wāhine experiencing whakapapa trauma, discrimination, blame for domestic violence and high levels of targeting and scrutinising (Whānau Ora Commissioning Agency, 2020). The report predominately uses the term *whānau*, incorporating a Māori view of familial relationships, though accounts featuring wāhine and young wāhine make up the majority of the stories told. The Whānau Ora report suggests whānau-centred, systems-focused, Kaupapa Māori aligned and mātauraka[8] Māori informed as the principles to underpin a way forward. A whānau-centred principle is central to a Māori worldview and understanding relationships in by Māori, for Māori, of Māori service delivery. However, I would argue, most workers in our child-protection system do not have the cultural skills necessary to understand wāhine as part of whānau, inevitably risking erasure and encompassment of a wāhine focus for a wider whānau and hapū approach.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) completed a research project resulting in two reports, Te Kuku o te Manawa (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2020a, 2020b). Like the research completed by Whānau Ora, the OCC engaged with the lived experiences of whānau affected by baby removals and with professionals working with OT. Wāhine reported interactions with OT as mana diminishing, where they felt judged and discarded when their babies were removed. The situations presented, not leading to pēpi (Māori term for baby) removal, were a result of strong advocacy from Māori social workers and midwifes. The OCC powerfully asserted mana wāhine narratives and rights, stating in Area of Change 1: "the system needs to recognise the role of mums as te whare tangata and treat them and their pēpi with humanity" (Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2020a, p. 20). This statement and the recommendations challenged the state to centre the relationship between mothers and babies. I assert an important nuance that, while centring wāhine, we must ensure we hold the state accountable for the intersectional systemic injustices of racism and sexism and recognise that our lived realities as wāhine are tied to the multiple ways we are transgressed against (Ross, 2017; Tinirau et al., 2021).

In November 2019, I led a Kāi Tahu centred participatory action research project to develop the Ngāi Tahu s.396 service, Tiaki Taoka, practice model and design. Section 396 services refer to mandated and accredited services under the Oranga Tamariki Act that take on the roles of caregiver recruitment, assessment, and support. These are minimal functions in the spectrum of the child-protection system but the piecemeal option that is open to Māori currently. Referencing the lived experiences of Ngāi Tahu foster system experienced youth and adults in roles (sometimes overlapping) of caregiver, professional, family member or youth in foster care, we heard what a Kāi Tahu service would look like meeting their needs. The principle of mana wāhine was a repeated theme through hui (meeting) and kōrero (conversations), and we heard many times that wāhine felt the brunt of the system. Wāhine asked us to design service and delivery to respond and address this. One of the insightful rakatahi (young people) told us "…it's so

much harder to put families together once they have been separated" (unpublished, Tiaki Taoka). We were told of wāhine being dropped by the system once mokopuna were removed, we heard of the impact on wāhine of this and that OT did not accept the connection between wāhine and mokopuna. Examples were provided of southern Maatua Whangai from the 1990s where wāhine were welcomed into Māori caregiver homes, maintaining relationships with their children, and supported to make the needed changes required to regain the care of their children. Mana wāhine became one of the principles included in the service design of Tiaki Taoka because of the clear and articulate messages from our community. There are Māori s.396 services across the country which are equally identifying wāhine needs and practice alignment to "he whare takata".

The Waitangi Tribunal (tribunal for hearing breaches of te Tiriti against Māori by the state) heard an urgent claim following the Hawkes Bay uplift on the matter of baby removals. Over 18 months, the Tribunal heard from community, government, and individuals on the issue of te Tiriti o Waitangi breaches. Many wāhine told stories of ill-treatment and hard-handed OT practices that took their pēpi with no opportunity for return. In the final report, *He Pāharakeke, He Rito Whakakīkinga Whāruarua*, the Tribunal summarised multiple systemic breaches affirming the claimants and contending that the state had taken over the role of Māori and infringed on the kaik (village) (The Waitangi Tribunal, 2021). They recommended that the state fund Māori to provide for our own needs and step aside. A recommendation that has still not eventuated.

The last two items mentioned in this section are the Mana Wāhine Claim and *He Puapua* (Charters et al., 2019). Both the claim and the *He Puapua* report have significance for how we move forward in child protection with an intentional inclusion of wāhine as the holders of "he whare takata". In 1993, a group of wāhine filed a claim to the Waitangi Tribunal, the Mana Wāhine Claim (Pihama et al., 2022). Finally, in 2022, the Claim moved from collecting dust on a shelf to contextual hearings, a process of assessing the status of wāhine Māori pre-colonisation to benchmark breaches post te Tiriti o Waitangi. The contextual hearings included a wide selection of evidence across the country that supported the position of wāhine as leaders with authority and rights (Waitangi Tribunal, 2022).

He Puapua (2019) (government commissioned) provided a plan to realise obligations set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (1991) (Charters et al., 2019). This report is the road map of how we shift the country from the current inequitable state of Crown authority and control to a partnership and equity of shared authority and power with hapū and iwi in a planned process over the next 17 years. *He Puapua* provides the template for how we think about child-protection transformation that supports the set-up and development of Māori organisations with the expected outcome of shared power.

Conclusion and recommendations

The evidenced *her*storical summaries demonstrate the past and current infringements of our reproductive rights as suffered in the child-protection system and more widely across government systems which enact socio-economic dis-advantage and harm on wāhine. Wāhine remain the driving force for enactment of our rights and responsibilities to whakapapa and mokopuna as future ancestors in terms of "he whare takata". The un-wavering passing on of this resistance, sacrifice and wero (challenge) is unmatched by any government recognition of wāhine as rakatira in the policy and practice space of wāhine, mokopuna and child protection. While we can appreciate our tāne efforts towards te Tiriti compliant partnership and decision

making, the *her*stories and histories are divergent rather than united when wāhine are merely the recipients of decision making or minimally included.

Social work responses in a child-protection system require allying and advancing the repair of the societal safeguards that were the foundation that allowed wāhine choice, while also provided equity in childrearing. The destabilising of western notions of motherhood that (re)produces oppressive parental practices on wāhine, mokopuna, whānau and the whenua is required. In the spaces where wāhine bear the brunt of a system seeking to place parental blame, a shift toward wāhine agency and power must be the starting step. Wāhine as leaders across these spaces with mana wāhine as the key principle is central to change. In a ideal system that upholds mana wāhine and our interwoven relationships, wāhine are supported and strengthened as rakatira.

In focusing on bring forward the *her*storical colonially bound encounters, the conflicting world views within Aotearoa between western knowledge and Māori as it plays out across policy and practice is shown. As demonstrated, these conflicts sit in legislation, practice and in our everyday constructions of gender, including assumptions of leadership or rakatirataka. Any recommendation for social work must recognise the macro way in which erasure, silencing and ignoring wāhine as rakatira is embedded across all systems and must work at restoring mana wāhine and the essential foundation of wāhine as "he whare takata".

This is an essentially theoretical approach to changing social work thinking while advocating for macro embedded changes across government. It would require training and upskilling our workforce to know and understand *her*story and be able to interpret this into practice with the nuance of accepting a takata whenua (Māori), takata moana (our Pasifika relations) or takata te Tiriti (non-Māori) position, with differing

leadership and allyship responsibilities. I would further recommend that wāhine are the only ones to lead this response, but that does not mean wāhine are responsible for the weight of the lifting. Knowing, being and doing sits with wāhine, but non-wāhine and non-Māori must authentically engage in this work if we are ever to have a just and safe community where wāhine have safe choices around our bodies, our reproductive rights, and the rights to choose parenting or not. Recognising that wāhine is inclusive of tākatapui whose value in leading work in this space is also well overdue.

In practical ways, this also requires a directed ministerial response that priorities wāhine leadership and acknowledges the foundation of wāhine and mokopuna wellbeing remains with our MWWL, Māori midwifes, Māori social workers and s.396 Māori providers. The only way to shift the power dynamic and address the past injustices is a following of the reports and recommendations following the Hawkes Bay uplift and start the process of devolution with a priority to wāhine who are already leaders in this space. A key part of this is to engage with the Mana Wāhine claim and commit to honouring the Waitangi Tribunal recommendations from this process.

This mana wāhine centred article accompanies a shorter article analysis of current OT practice and evidence centre documentation, *He Whare Takata: Are wāhine Māori visible in Oranga Tamariki practice guidance*, following the Hawkes Bay uplift, looking at how OT presents wāhine and "he whare takata" (Cleaver, forthcoming) This article exposes the continued concern that our child-protection system appears unable to pivot towards Māori ways of knowing, being and doing. The article provides evidence of continued erasure of wāhine and "he whare takata" and emphasises key internal system issues. It provides a supplementary look at the internal child-protection system and highlights the emphasis in this article that devolution and

decolonising our child protection system is essential to wāhine and mokopuna mauriora.

In concluding, the issues facing wāhine date back to the usurping of our foundations and the replacement of these with western ideologies. The righting of this wrong requires individual social work dedication to rethinking child protection but also the commitment to advocate for system change that shifts power and resources from the state and from colonial systems to the centre of the whānau, wāhine.

Notes

[1] Wāhine Māori will be referred to as *wāhine* from here on. This term in inclusive of our tākatapui Māori in line with our traditional ways and acknowledged acceptance of gender fluidity and self-identification. Non-Māori wāhine will be referred to as woman/en.

[2] Kāi Tahu dialect is used throughout the document. This replaces 'ng' with a 'k'.

[3] Whakapapa is defined as our relationships to animate, inanimate, living, and past, to each other and the environment. It includes genealogy that is both human and non-human.

[4] Aotearoa is used as one traditional name for Aotearoa.

[5] Pere definition of mana: "psychic influence, control, prestige, power, vested and acquired authority and influence, being influential or binding over others, and that quality of a person that others know she or he is".

[6] Whāngai is a Māori cultural practice of strengthening familial ties in the sharing of children to be raised either inside a wider family network or between hapū, subtribes. The key concept is that a child's family relationship is multiplied rather than transferred.

[7] Mauriora refers to the holistic wellbeing of a person, connected to culture, language, knowledge transmission, healthy environment, and their mental and physical wellbeing.

[8] Mātauraka Māori refers to the knowledge base form a Māori world view. This included but is not confined to pūrākau, wayfaring, mahi toi, waiata and whakapapa.

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