

Tīhei Wāhine Ora

WĀHINE FROM GANG WHĀNAU
HEALING INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

Paora Moyle



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**Tīhei Wāhine Ora: Wāhine
from Gang Whānau Healing
Intergenerational Trauma**

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The tiny white feather..

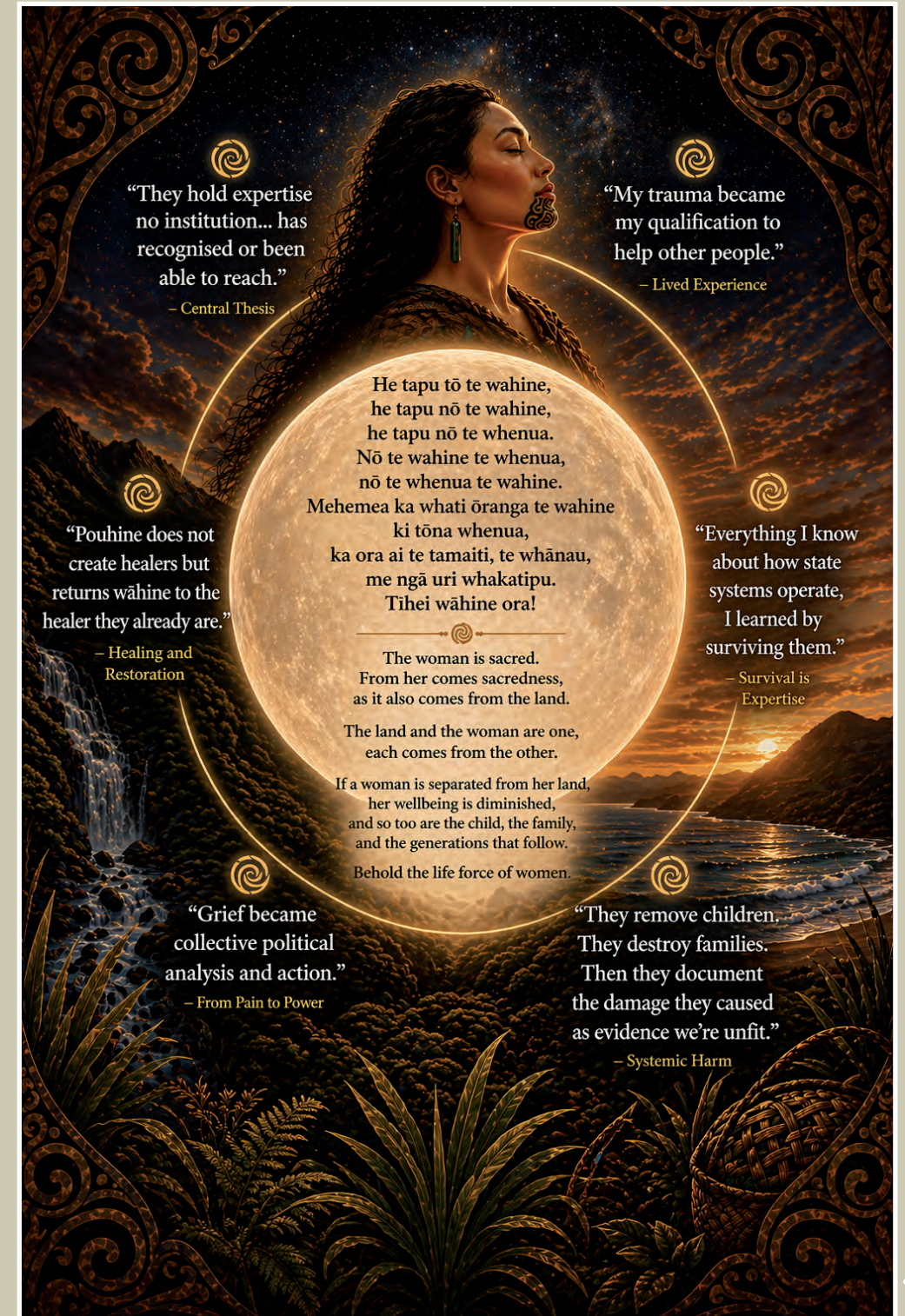
I held it in my hand
and did my kōrero.
When I finished
I opened my hand,
and it was gone.

This book is dedicated
to sisters from gang
whānau everywhere
whose pūrākau remain
untold and unheard.



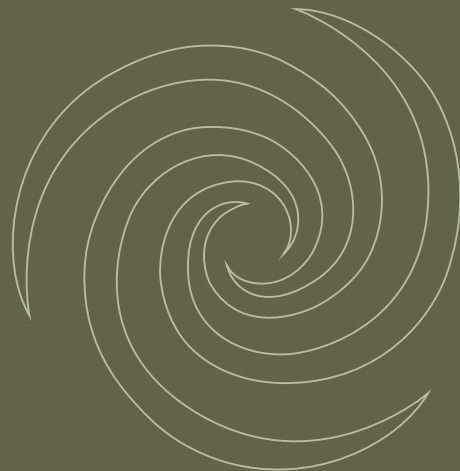


Whakataukī



Executive Summary

This research is grounded in Mana Wāhine epistemology and Kaupapa Māori methodology, built over decades of peer-reviewed scholarship by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Leonie Pihama, Ani Mikaere, Naomi Simmonds and others, positioning wāhine Māori as inherent holders of authority and knowledge.



The analysis is structured through the Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū framework, developed and refined across multiple Te Whāriki Manawāhine o Hauraki (Te Whāriki) research projects. It traces the origins of wāhine leadership through Pū, the strengths and healing practices already present through Rā, the colonial violence and systemic barriers they have survived through Ka, and the solutions and forms of sustenance they are building through Ū.

Funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand through the Rangahau Hauora Māori Researcher First Grant, it was conducted by Paora Moyle in collaboration with Wāhine Toa and Te Whāriki. The research asks a question that no funded research has asked: What do wāhine Māori from gang whānau know about healing, leadership, and securing different futures for their mokopuna, and what happens when they are finally given a space to say it?

Wāhine Toa, the only women's chapter of the Mongrel Mob in Aotearoa, advised and guided the research throughout. Pouhine, a Hauraki healing wānanga offered by Te Whāriki since 1995, has been integral to the healing journeys of wāhine documented here. Drawing on these established trust relationships, this research engaged twenty wāhine across Aotearoa and the Tasman through one-to-one interviews and focus groups conducted over two years.

These wāhine hold ancestral authority, expertise earned through survival, and have already built the systems their communities need. The harm they have survived is documented here with precision, as is the knowledge, leadership, and healing it produced.

Nine findings emerge from the Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū analysis, covering the whakapapa origins of wāhine leadership, the structural nature of wāhine authority in te ao Māori, and the coordinated way state systems have targeted these wāhine and retaliated when they resist. They trace how survival produced expertise, how grief became the ground of collective political force, and how wāhine from gang whānau are sustaining the crisis response, legal advocacy, and healing infrastructure their communities depend on. Kotahitanga forming across gang lines is among the most significant of these findings, as is Pouhine, where the depth of what this research documents becomes most visible. Seven recommendations follow the findings.





KEY FINDINGS

Finding 1: Whakapapa lives in the body

Whakapapa is the active, living source from which these wāhine lead. Tipuna arrive through the body, skilfully directing decisions, registering danger before it is consciously named, and making healing felt as a physical release. Every act of leadership, healing, and resistance documented in this research flows from that connection. The consistency of this pattern across participants points to a dimension of colonial harm and Indigenous healing that has not been previously documented in this field.

Finding 2: Wāhine authority in te ao Māori is structural

Wāhine authority within whānau, hapū, and iwi is structural and was always so. Colonisation repositioned that authority through legislation, missionary influence, and the rewriting of pūrākau, and the authority itself persisted. The leadership these wāhine carry is the reinstatement of that authority on its own terms.

Finding 3: The state targets these wāhine and retaliates when they resist

State care, police, courts, housing, clinical services, and media operate as a coordinated project across time. Each arm produces the conditions it uses to justify further intervention, and presents each generation’s inherited damage as evidence of Indigenous deficit.

When wāhine name this and resist, the targeting intensifies. Their tamariki become leverage.

The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care reproduced this cycle in its own record, marginalising wāhine voices within the very process designed to document what they had survived.

Finding 4: Data and narrative sovereignty are already underway

These wāhine have had their pūrākau taken, cut, twisted, and weaponised across media, state records, and official inquiries. The assertion of control over how they are known is an act of mana motuhake already underway through Wāhine Toa, Te Whāriki, Waitangi Tribunal claims, and peer-reviewed scholarship from inside these communities.

Finding 5: Survival produced expertise

Wāhine from gang whānau carry precise knowledge of law, systems, patterns, and people, built through surviving what those systems did to them and their whānau. That knowledge is systematic, taught within communities, and passed on. It is the foundation from which effective service design, legal challenge, and collective leadership grow.

Finding 6: Grief became the ground of collective power

Accumulated loss across funerals, separations, and incarcerations produced the recognition that individual effort could not address what was killing these communities. From that recognition came the legal frameworks, healing wānanga, kotahitanga, and political organising documented in these findings. Grief is what the infrastructure was built on.

Finding 7: These wāhine are already running the systems that should exist

Crisis response, child protection, legal advocacy, addiction recovery, mental health support, education, and economic development are being led and sustained by wāhine from gang whānau. They built these systems because their communities needed them, and they are sustaining them despite inadequate resourcing and active institutional resistance.

The issue is not whether these systems should exist; they already do. The issue is whether the Crown will resource them.

Finding 8: Kotahitanga across gang lines is a political force

The unity forming between wāhine from different gang whānau is intentional and significant. Those in power recognise it as a threat because it refuses the divisions the colonial structure requires to operate. The wāhine doing this work understand that recognition as confirmation, and they are building the solidarity accordingly.

Finding 9: Pouhine works because the relationships are the system

Pouhine holds people through intense moments, restores voice, builds leadership, and creates whānau bonds that sustain healing beyond the wānanga. The system is the relationships, held by wāhine who know how to open that space and hold it. What Pouhine produces comes from these women and remains with them.



RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are drawn from the pūrākau of wāhine from gang whānau and speak directly to the Crown’s obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. They are the evidence-based position of wāhine who have led, healed, and built within their communities.

Fund Pouhine directly and at scale

Pouhine produces the transformation this research documents. Te Tiriti obligates the Crown to resource Māori-led healing in prisons, health services, and every space where decisions are made about wāhine from gang whānau and their tamariki. Funding must follow the relationships that make Pouhine effective, on the terms set by the wāhine who hold that knowledge.





Resource and recognise what wāhine from gang whānau have built

The crisis response, legal advocacy, healing, and sovereignty infrastructure wāhine have built is keeping whānau alive. It requires direct, adequate, sustained Crown funding, and hapū authority frameworks and tikanga Māori instruments must be recognised as legitimate and primary alongside that resourcing.

Address the separation of wāhine from their tamariki

The Family Court and Oranga Tamariki processes evidenced here have produced long-term and harmful separation between wāhine and their tamariki. Hapū authority and tikanga Māori frameworks must be primary in wellbeing decisions about tamariki. The systematic removal of tamariki Māori from their whānau is a breach of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and must be confronted as such.

Review and repeal legislation that targets gang whānau communities

The Gangs Act 2024 and gang membership as an aggravating sentencing factor disproportionately target Māori and were passed after the Attorney-General identified the Act as inconsistent with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act. This research establishes the evidence base for urgent review and repeal of legislation that criminalises whakapapa.

Fund and protect kotahitanga across gang lines

The unity forming between wāhine from different gang whānau is a healing and political force. The Crown must uphold and resource the spaces and relationships within which kotahitanga grows, in recognition of the sovereignty these wāhine are exercising on their own terms.

Reform Crown and clinical service engagement with gang whānau wāhine

The clinical, therapeutic, assessment, and social service processes evidenced here cause harm. Services engaging with wāhine from gang whānau must be accountable to evidence of what works and prohibited from mandating processes that retraumatise wāhine.

Uphold data and narrative sovereignty

Wāhine from gang whānau have had their pūrākau taken, cut, twisted, and weaponised. Research about gang whānau wāhine must be conducted on their terms, with full authority over how their stories are told, held, and used.

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Denise Messiter ONZM, CEO of Te Whāriki, is acknowledged for her leadership and for the gift of Pouhine wānanga since 1995. The Te Whāriki kaimahi team are recognised for their care and support of the wāhine before, during, and following the project period.

Recognition is also extended to Wāhine Toa leadership for their oversight and guidance throughout.

Technical oversight was provided by Professor Alison Green, Independent Contractor, and her accompaniment across the full journey of this work is appreciated.

This book has been produced with care and in relationship. Where errors exist, they are the responsibility of the project. The knowledge, experience, and pūrākau held within these pages remain with the wāhine and communities who shared them.



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CHAPTER 1: Introduction



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Wāhine Māori connected to gang whānau have lived across four generations of colonial dispossession in Aotearoa. Their lives unfold within conditions shaped by land alienation, fractured whakapapa ties, poverty, and persistent state surveillance (Shilliam, 2012; Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2019).

The formation of gang whānau in this country was a direct response to that history. The Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry documented that 80–90% of gang members who identify as Māori were abused in state care (Abuse in Care Royal Commission, 2024), and many entered gang whānau to find belonging and safety from the very institutions that had harmed them (Savage et al., 2021). That violence continues to shape whānau across generations.

Within these whānau, wāhine have endured a disproportionate share of harm. They have also carried the work of sustaining their communities across that time, with mokopuna and mokopuna tuarua born into them. Gang whānau leadership is clear that healing must come from within. Many have already developed their own approaches through trauma noho and healing wānanga, where participants confront and work through their pasts collectively so that cycles of harm are not passed on (Fatupaito, Ormsby and Elers, 2024).



LOCATING THE RESEARCH AND SIGNIFICANCE

Despite generations of gang whānau community life in Aotearoa, the experiences, knowledge, and healing journeys of wāhine within these communities remain largely unrecorded. Their stories have been taken, cut, distorted, suppressed, and weaponised. The scholarship has largely ignored them, and where it has not, it has framed them through a lens of harm and deficit rather than as knowledge holders in their own right. The questions asked of these wāhine repeat across services, courts, whānau, and media. Why doesn't she just leave, get over it, and move on?

Move on to fucking where? Where do I go? Every door slams on me. How ignorant are you that you don't know, that you have to ask me like that? That's exactly why I'm doing this research, so hopefully you can come to know me, rather than fear me. (Whio)

The February 2023 Royal Commission hui with gang whānau made this visible. The submission that emerged documented state-produced harm and intergenerational trauma across decades (Gang whānau with McIntosh, 2023). Wāhine voices occupied four pages of a forty-page document shaped primarily by and for tāne. Te Whāriki Manawāhine leadership attended this hui, witnessed that silencing, and understood that a dedicated research platform was needed. This research is that platform.

The ngako of this research, and a key purpose for the wāhine at its centre, is to tell the story of who they are and why they are, to be heard, and to no longer be continuously defined by others. The central focus is what these wāhine know about interrupting the intergenerational transmission of trauma so their mokopuna inherit something different. Their pūrākau are centred as the primary source of knowledge.





WĀHINE TOA AND POUHINE WĀNANGA

Two developments form the immediate context for this research. The first is the establishment of Wāhine Toa, the only women's chapter of the Mongrel Mob in Aotearoa, formally founded in 2019. Its founding was an assertion of mana wāhine, grounded in whakapapa and whanaungatanga, and a direct response to the deep marginalisation experienced by wāhine and their tamariki within gang whānau and within wider society (Fatupaito, Ormsby and Elers, 2024).

Wāhine Toa operates as both a refuge and a community of leadership, providing wraparound support for wāhine who have experienced harm and building the collective solidarity from which political action, legal challenge, and healing have grown. Wāhine Toa advised and guided this research throughout, and its members and community are the wāhine whose voices carry this publication.

The second is Pouhine, a healing wānanga for wāhine, developed by Denise Messiter in Hauraki in 1995 and part of the Poutama Mauri Ora, Mauri Tū framework (Messiter, 2023). Messiter is CEO of Te Whāriki Manawāhine o Hauraki, which has operated a professional, specialised mahi tūkino service for 40 years, supporting communities across the Hauraki rohe.

The wānanga draws on mātauranga Māori healing knowledge spanning over 1000 years, operating through four ancestral archetypes: Tohunga (spiritual healer), Toa (warrior), Matakite (visionary/seer), and Kai Ako (educator). It employs traditional healing practices, including pahū (drumming), karanga, mirror work, storytelling, and pūrākau sharing, all supporting participants to reorient lived experiences of whānau violence through the lens of ancestral wisdom. Since 1995, the Poutama wānanga has facilitated over 200 healing wānanga in Hauraki, reaching approximately 2000 participants (Messiter, 2023), and has delivered a further 51 wānanga since that time (Moyle, 2026).

Pouhine positions wāhine as Māreikura with responsibilities to interrupt cycles of harm and restore balance for mokopuna futures. This research enabled wāhine from gang whānau to access Pouhine for the first time.



ABOUT THE WĀHINE IN THIS RESEARCH

This research grew from an earlier HRC-funded project in 2023 with Te Whāriki that documented the healing journeys of tāne connected to gang whānau through the Poutama wānanga. What emerged from that work was that wāhine carry their own dimensions of trauma and needed their own dedicated space.

From 2024 to 2026, eight Pouhine wānanga were held across Aotearoa and the final one in Queensland, with an average of twelve wāhine attending each. They ranged in age from their late teens to their seventies, with community ties spanning multiple gang affiliations. Participation in Pouhine and participation in the research were separate processes, and wāhine who attended the wānanga were not required to engage with the research. Twenty wāhine chose to, sharing their pūrākau on their own terms, and their voices carry this research. All are referred to by pseudonyms throughout to protect their identities.

These women are grandmothers, mothers, sisters, and daughters. Some were parenting tamariki at the time of the research in circumstances ranging from stable homes to homelessness. Many carried herstories of state care, family violence, child removal, and intergenerational trauma. Several had become healers and leaders in their own right. (Full details of the research design, methodology, and ethics are provided in Chapter Eight).





CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is grounded in Mana Wāhine epistemology and methodology. Mana Wāhine theory positions Māori women as inherent holders of authority and knowledge, sourced from whakapapa and whenua (Mikaere, 2017; Pihama, 2019). Mana Wāhine is both a framework and a movement that foregrounds the lived experiences of wāhine Māori, their ways of knowing, and their responsibility to reclaim and record their own herstory (Pihama, 2001). This research extends Mana Wāhine theory to wāhine connected to gang whānau, positioning them as leaders of intergenerational healing rather than subjects of intervention.

The Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū analytical framework was developed across multiple Te Whāriki research projects (Moyle, 2025a) to better capture the lived experiences of survivors of state care and historical trauma. The framework organises participants' collective voices across four interconnected phases. Operating cyclically, pūrākau build on one another and reflect the ongoing, layered nature of both trauma and healing. Participants' pūrākau are prioritised over researcher interpretation.

Pū examines origins, foundations, and the whakapapa motivations that bring wāhine to their healing journeys. Rā explores strengths, effective practices, and evidence of growth already present. Ka captures colonial violence and systemic barriers. Ū presents community-driven solutions, traditional knowledge applications, and wāhine experiences of Pouhine wānanga.



RESEARCHER POSITIONING

The researcher is Ngāti Porou, with lived experience of state care, gang whānau connections, intimate partner violence, and thirty years of frontline social justice advocacy. In Mana Wāhine methodology, the researcher's relationship to the community is integral. It shapes what access is possible, what wāhine are willing to share, and at what depth.

The Health Research Council of New Zealand funded this work through the Rangahau Hauora Māori Researcher First Grant, recognising this positioning as insider research. Wāhine Toa leadership gave consent based on this positioning and the trust and reciprocity built over the research journey since February 2023.



ORGANISATION OF THIS RESEARCH

This research is written for both academic and community readers, including whānau. An executive summary provides an overview with key findings and recommendations. From there, Chapter One introduces the research and context, followed by the findings as they move through each phase of the Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū framework, with Chapter Five detailing the analysis of Pouhine wānanga. A discussion follows, then the literature review positions this research within existing scholarship and identifies the gaps, before the methodology closes the research.

Each findings chapter weaves together substantial quotations so wāhine tell their pūrākau in their own words. The depth and volume of their kōrero are intentional; wāhine pūrākau are too often reduced to fragments in the service of a researcher's argument. These wāhine are the authors of their own knowledge, and this research endeavours to honour that. It is rich in detail and contains accounts of significant harm. Readers are encouraged to move through it at their own pace and to take breaks as needed.

Chapter Two opens in Pū, the first phase of the Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū framework, where wāhine trace the origins of who they are and the source of their knowledge.



CHAPTER 2: PŪ (Origins)

Pū examines the origins of knowledge and leadership that wāhine from gang whānau hold. For these women, whakapapa is the source of their authority, and their leadership stems from ancestral guidance, survival, rejection, cultural awakening, and grief. What follows are their voices, tracing the pathways and development of this knowledge.



ANCESTRAL GUIDANCE

Spiritual connection to tīpuna gives the authority, knowing, and strength that sustains gang whānau mana wāhine leadership.

Authority flows from tīpuna through the body:

This connection provides immediate pūkenga in leadership:

When I hear somebody, and they go, this is the person, that's the person. I don't question them at all. Our first conversation, I'm saying, [name of person], I want you to run Australia for me. She's thinking, what the fuck? I already knew without a shadow of doubt. She now runs wāhine operations in Australia. (Tui)

Spiritual practice grounds daily life through intimacy instead of an institution:

I've always had this intimate relationship with God, and I always will. There isn't a day that goes by without karakia, probably ten times a day. For me, karakia is how I live. And it's not from being indoctrinated. My Christianity isn't institutional; it comes together naturally with my wairua. (Ruru)

The driving force is keeping sisters alive:

Our pain, we've managed to turn into power, because if we couldn't turn our pain into power, we wouldn't fucking be here. We'd be like the rest of our sisters who haven't made it. I'm absolutely adamant, not one more sister am I going to lose on my watch, because it's heartbreaking. You can't get over that stuff. (Tui)

Kiri's kuia revealed the purpose behind what was coming:

A couple of weeks before they actually took my children, my kuia, my father's mother, came through. She showed me they were going. She told me it was going to be okay. She said, 'We're going to strip you of everything so that you can help your people.' She also showed me it was temporary. If I decided not to do this, it would affect all these people I care about. Even though it wrecks my heart what my children must be going through, I know in divine intervention this was a higher purpose than just me and my problems. (Kiri)

Bodies carry inherited knowing that guides protection:

For our gang whānau, they know what they're dealing with. There's a very fragile balance. You learn the patterns of behaviour. You know when it's going to be a bad day. You can feel it and pick up on everything. (Kiri)

Inherited knowledge that reflects humanity:

Everything that has ever happened to me has led me to this space, including the rapes and beatings we endured as small children in state care. Mine is a greater ask than merely what I might want in life. This is it. We suffer so that we can lead the way and help free our whānau from colonial constructed crises. We are here to reflect to others their humanity, or lack of it. (Kāhu)

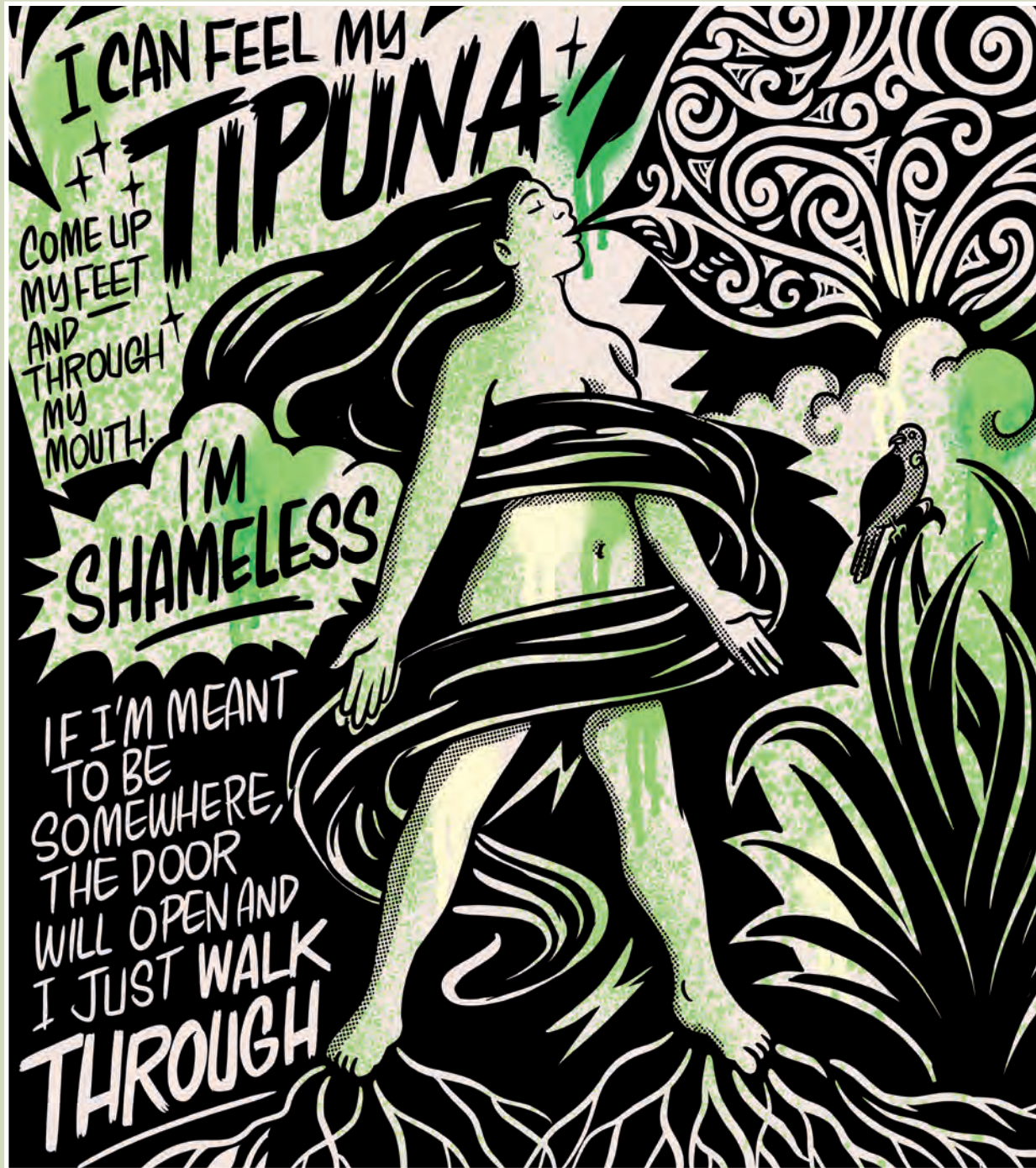
Tīpuna arrive at the moment they are needed:

I was standing outside when a tiny white feather drifted down from the sky and landed at my feet. I picked it up, and the kaumātua said, "That is the kaki of the Tūi, the tiny white feather under its throat. That is your tīpuna, and they are saying you are speaking for them today." He passed it back to me. I held it in my hand and did my kōrero. When I finished, I sat down, opened my hand, and it was gone. (Tui)

Ancestral guidance moves through whakapapa across generations, directing decisions and actions.



"We suffer so that we can lead the way and help free our whānau from colonial constructed crises."



WHAKAPAPA ACROSS GENERATIONS

Whakapapa connects wāhine across generations who carry the same herstories.

Kiri explains her family connections:

For me, even though I grew up in the Mormon Church, a lot of our whānau, especially on the East Coast, were Mob. Then my two older sisters married into the Mob and had associations with the Black Power. I have always been in that lifestyle or had a foot in the door to it. But for me, I just see them as whānau, a whānau that has been struggling with trauma like we all do, just a different look about it. (Kiri)

Pipi's family connections go back generations:

Well, gangs over generations are a part of our whānau. One of our koro was a family member, and I was born and raised alongside our whānau. So, our family is a large one here in Hawke's Bay, in Hastings and Napier. Our family is part of the original Hastings... Our home used to be a cave. (Pipi)

She traces the historical beginnings to the post-war betrayal of Māori soldiers:

Since 1945, when our koro came back from World War II, they didn't give him his medals. He found out the boundaries of his land had also been changed. His wahine and tamariki had been messed around with. So, he didn't feel like he had achieved anything as a soldier of the New Zealand Government or the Commonwealth. He felt like he would have been better treated by the Germans. (Pipi)

This betrayal created the beginning:

It was, for them, an act of rebellion against the colonialists, against the Pākehā government here. At that time, they [colonialists] really didn't care about us. (Pipi)

The systematic abandonment of Māori soldiers was widespread:

Most Māori soldiers didn't come home until three years after the war ended. Some of them were in Turkey. They were just left overseas, abandoned, basically. None of them even knew that when they got home, they could claim land, funding, benefits, rehabilitation, and social welfare. When they finally did get home, they just got forgotten about. (Kiri)

Trauma becomes expertise, shaping the ability to protect, heal, and liberate whānau, which the state sought to destroy.





STATE VIOLENCE CREATING PATHWAYS

State intervention systematically created gang pathways through removal and identity destruction.

I remember the police raids where they took our siblings. That first one, I was about ten, but I remember it distinctly. There was screaming. Adults were trying to hide the children. The police came in numbers. They literally pulled kids out of hiding spots and dragged them out to waiting vehicles. (Tui)

The destruction was deliberate:

When they took my brother, he had his gang name tattooed on him. So what did the system do? They put him in front of a laser and erased him. They erased his identity. They told him his family was criminals, and they convinced him his aunties and uncles didn't love him. The psychological warfare was targeted. (Tui)

This manufactured cycle serves state interests:

They needed gang whānau to fail. If gang whānau succeeded in raising healthy children, in building strong communities, in creating alternative economies, what would that say about the state's claims about us? So they intervene. They remove children. They destroy families. Then they document the damage they caused as evidence we're unfit. (Tui)

Experience of state custody:

I was four when they took me into state care. The home I went to, sexual abuse was systematic. The man who ran it had access to multiple children over the years. We tried to tell. Nobody listened. When I finally got out as a teenager, gang whānau were the only people who looked after me. They were the only ones who believed me. (Kāhu)

This violence created expertise:

Everything I know about how state systems operate, I learned by surviving them. I know how they communicate. I know their priorities. I know what they'll document and what they'll ignore. I know how to navigate their frameworks while doing what actually needs to be done. That knowledge came from being targeted by those systems. (Kōau)

On survival knowledge:

When you've been through their systems, you know how they work, their weaknesses, and what they value or ignore. You know how to work around them. That's not taught in universities. That's learned through survival. (Tira)

State intervention created circumstances where gang whānau became the only available home, then condemned wāhine for returning to it. A condemnation that sometimes came from their own families.



REJECTION CREATING ALTERNATIVE BELONGING

Family rejection under religious or cultural expectations pushed wāhine towards gang acceptance when biological families could not accommodate difference.

Growing up, I was gay. My church couldn't handle that. My family struggled with it. There were conditions on their love. I had to be a certain way, act a certain way, hide parts of myself. Gang whānau didn't care who I loved. They accepted me completely. That unconditional acceptance meant everything. (Kōka)

This pattern repeats across different forms of difference:

I've seen it with addiction, with mental health struggles, with kids who couldn't conform to family expectations. Biological whānau would set conditions. Gang whānau would say, 'You're one of us regardless.' That difference matters when you're young and vulnerable. (Kōka)

On religious rejection:

I was raised in a religious household. Very strict. When I started questioning things, asking about our culture, wanting to learn te reo, it was seen as rebellion. They told me I was choosing the world over God. Gang whānau said I was choosing my ancestors. That reframe changed everything. (Kea)

This rejection creates understanding:

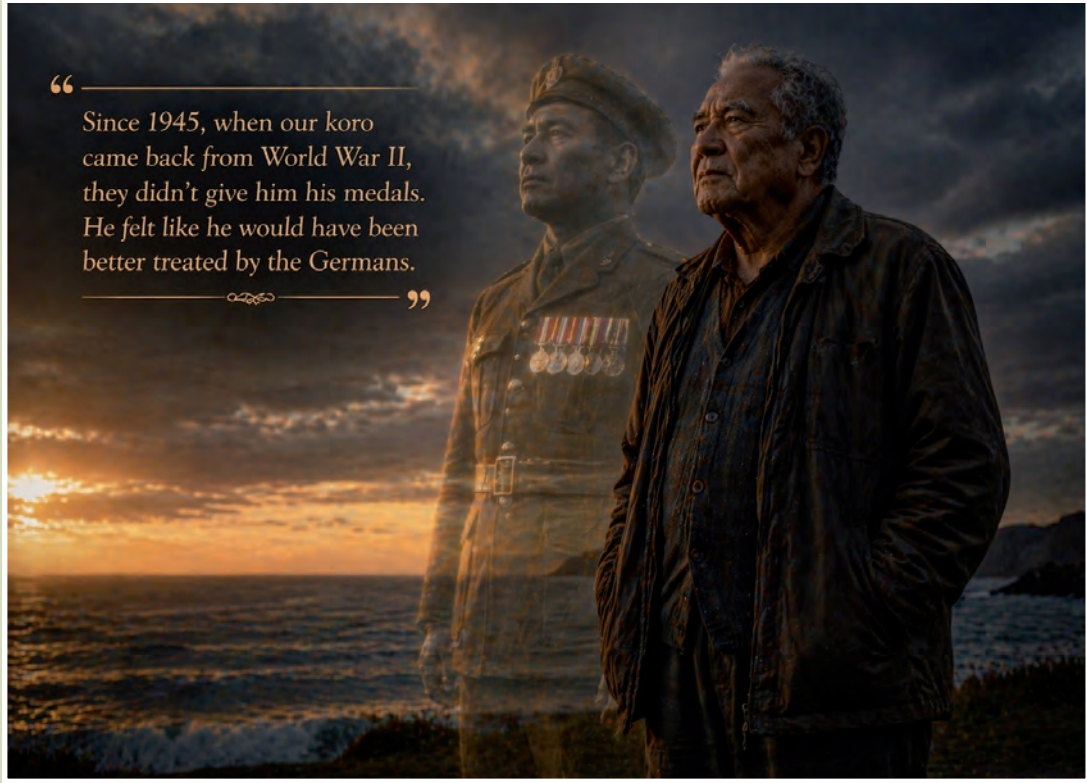
Because I experienced that conditional love, I understand what drives people towards gang belonging. It's not about criminality. It's about finding acceptance when your own family has conditions you can't or won't meet. That understanding shapes how I work with others facing similar rejection. (Kea)



When kids come out of state care, where do they go? Back to gang whānau because that's who they know. That's where they have whakapapa. But now they've been trained to hate themselves. They've been told their people are worthless. They come back traumatised and disconnected. Then the system points at gang whānau and says, "See? They're the problem." (Tui)

"They told him his family was criminals, and convinced him his aunties and uncles didn't love him."





“ Since 1945, when our koro came back from World War II, they didn’t give him his medals. He felt like he would have been better treated by the Germans. ”

The manufactured isolation:

Institutions, churches, schools, social services, they create these rigid expectations. Then, when people can’t meet those expectations, they’re pushed out. Gang whānau catches them. Then those same institutions blame gang whānau for the problem they created. (Rewa)

What biological whānau and institutions failed to provide them, gang whānau did, and through this, they found belonging, culture, and themselves.



CULTURAL AWAKENING

Cultural awakening created immediate recognition and belonging that crossed gang colours.

I walked into that space, and it was like coming home. I didn’t know the words yet. I didn’t know the movements. But I knew I belonged there. Looking around, I saw people from different gangs, different backgrounds, all connected through this shared culture. (Tira)

This cultural connection operates differently than gang affiliation:

Gang patches separate. Culture unites. Someone might be Mob, someone else might be Tribesmen, but when we’re doing karakia together, when we’re speaking te reo together, those divisions don’t matter the same way. We recognise each other as whānau first. (Tira)

Te reo activated something already present:

The first time I heard te reo properly, something in me just woke up. It wasn’t learning something new. It was recognising something I’d always carried. Like my ancestors were saying, ‘Finally, you’re listening.’ That recognition changed how I understood everything. (Kōka)

Political action awakens dual whakapapa lines:

When I’m walking, when I’m marching, they always come out. I always ring Mum before Invasion Day, and we bring both our ancestors together. I’m carrying it for my people there and my people here as well. (Kōka)

Recalling what rises in those moments:

In my first Invasion Day march, I went so hard I dropped. I couldn’t even finish. Then suddenly this fire came out of me. I was the only one in thousands screaming when they were talking about our people and what had happened. (Kōka)

When ancestors accompany you into te reo:

Before I came to it... I was walking, and I could hear, ‘just walk around and come in.’ When I got there, the wind blew. It was like my uncle, and everyone was telling me, ‘We’re coming in with you.’ (Kea)

Cultural knowledge creates new possibilities:

Before I understood tikanga, I operated within Western frameworks. Everything was about individual achievement, competition, and proving yourself. Once I understood tikanga, I saw collective responsibility and the roles within whānau. I recognised how decisions should consider seven generations, not just immediate benefit. (Tui)

This knowledge enables different approaches:

Western frameworks want to fix individuals and focus on symptoms. Tikanga addresses whānau, hapū, and iwi. Tikanga addresses whakapapa, wairua, and collective healing. That difference is fundamental to how our work operates. (Ruru)

Central wairua practices:

Working with wairua isn’t supplementary to healing. It’s central. You can’t heal trauma while ignoring spiritual damage. Western psychology tries to separate mind from spirit. Our approaches recognise them as inseparable. That’s why our methods work when theirs don’t. (Kiri)



The cultural knowledge these wāhine recovered became the framework for collective healing and for challenging the institutions that control how they are seen and spoken about.



MEDIA BETRAYAL

For as long as stories have been told about gang whānau, others have claimed authority while wāhine have been spoken about, spoken over, and left out. This betrayal drove the movement towards research as a site of mana motuhake where wāhine determine how their stories are told and protected.

They'd come asking for our stories. They'd say they wanted to help, to raise awareness. Then they'd cut our words to fit their narrative. They'd focus on trauma for entertainment. They'd use our pain to sell papers, get clicks, advance careers. (Tui)

This exploitation became predictable:

Every time someone died, the media would show up. They'd film our grief. They'd ask us to relive our worst moments. Then they'd package that pain as 'gang violence' without any context about what created those conditions. We became spectacles for their audiences. (Ruru)

What this created:

We learned to stop talking to mainstream media. They weren't interested in our truth. They wanted narratives that confirmed what their audiences already believed. Gangs bad. State good. Individual pathology. Never systemic violence. (Pipi)

This betrayal motivated different approaches:

Research became our space. Academic work, when done with integrity, can't be cut and twisted the same way. We control our narratives. We choose how our stories are told. We determine what gets shared and what stays protected. That's mana motuhake – self-determination over representation. (Pipi)

The strategic value described:

Academic research creates a permanent record. It can be cited, referenced, or built upon. Media stories disappear in days. But research establishes an evidence base that can challenge systemic narratives. That matters for long-term change. (Tira)

As loss and grief mounted, these wāhine saw glaringly that the same systems claiming to help were causing the harm.



BREAKING POINTS

Collective grief became unbearable, creating an understanding that systemic problems require collective responses.

I'd lost count of the funerals. Sisters, brothers, cousins. Violence, suicide, overdose. Each one, I told myself, I'd work harder, do more. But individual effort wasn't addressing what was killing us. I needed to understand the systems creating these conditions. (Kōau)

On cumulative loss:

You can handle one death. Maybe two. But when it becomes regular, when you're constantly grieving, constantly trying to prevent the next one, you realise individual intervention isn't enough. The problems are systematic. Solutions need to be systematic too. (Ruru)

This recognition shifts approaches:

I stopped trying to save individuals. I started trying to change systems. That meant understanding policy, funding, and institutional structures. It meant building collective responses rather than relying on individual heroism. (Tui)

What becomes visible through accumulated loss:

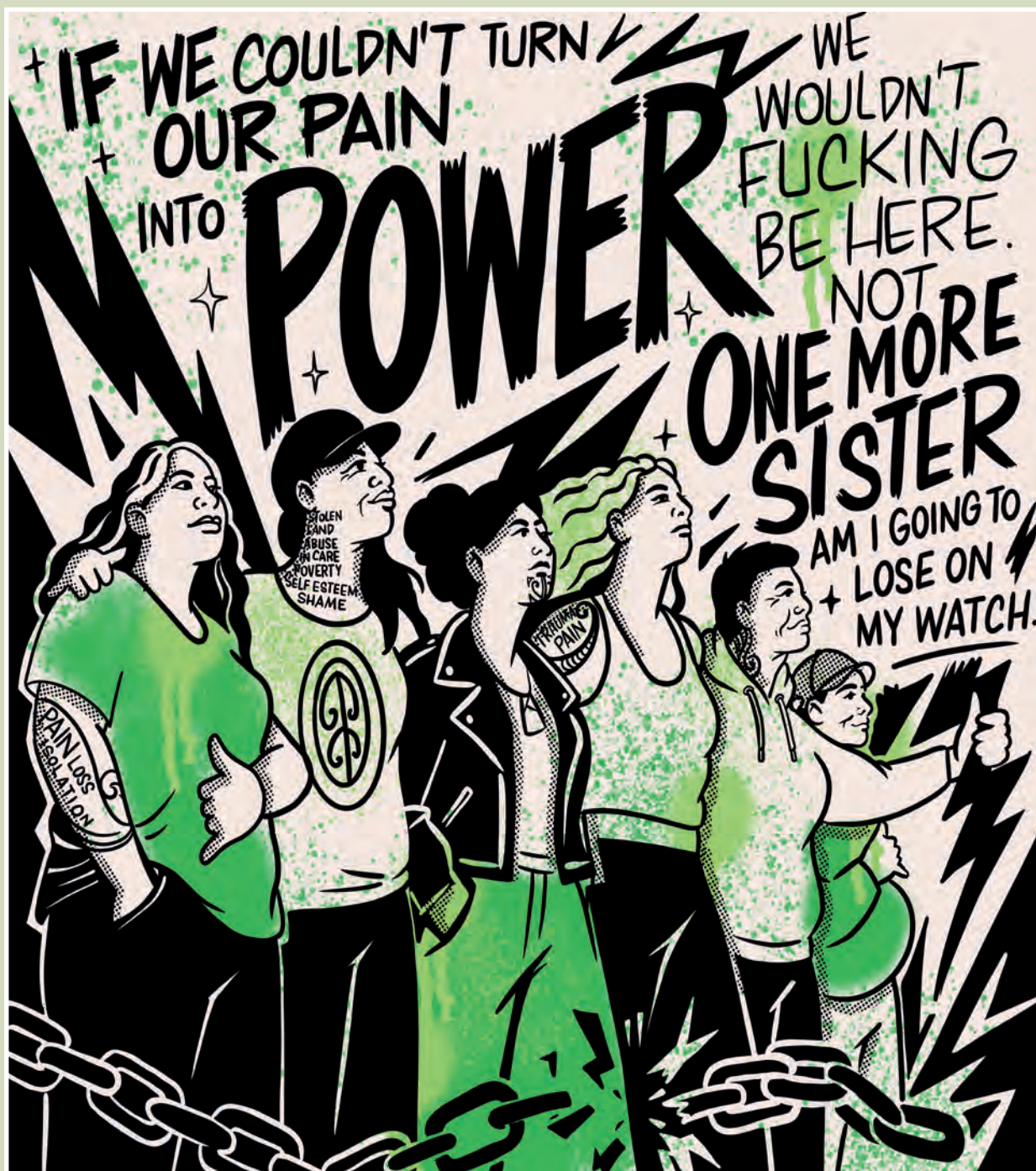
When you lose enough people, patterns emerge. You see, it's not random. You see how poverty creates conditions. How trauma cycles through generations. How state intervention makes things worse while claiming to help. Those patterns require collective analysis and collective response. (Kiri)

The motivation this creates:

Every funeral, I'd think, this has to stop. This has to change. But individual strategies, counselling, support groups, and crisis intervention are necessary but insufficient. We needed to address root causes. That requires understanding systems and building power to change them. (Kōka)

Building that collective response required a different kind of authority than institutions recognise.





COMMUNITY AUTHORITY

Authority develops through embedded relationships and accountability to people being served. Living within communities creates legitimacy and effectiveness that institutional approaches lack.

I live here. I shop at the same stores. My kids go to the same schools. When I say I'll do something, the community knows whether I follow through. That accountability creates trust that institutional workers can't access. (Rewa)

This embedded presence creates different knowledge:

I know what's happening before agencies do. I see patterns developing. I know which families are struggling before the crisis hits. I can intervene early because I'm already in a relationship. That's not possible when you're driving in from outside, doing appointments, then leaving. (Rewa)

On community validation:

My authority doesn't come from degrees or positions. It comes from results. Community sees who helps and who doesn't. Who follows through and who makes promises, then disappears. Who respects cultural protocols and who performs them for funding applications. That validation matters more than institutional credentials. (Tui)

This legitimacy enables system challenge:

When I challenge failing systems, I do it from a position of demonstrated success. I'm not theorising about what might work. I'm showing what actually works. That credibility creates space to critique institutional approaches from positions they can't dismiss. (Ruru)

Protection through accountability:

Community holds us accountable. If I'm not serving our people well, they'll say so. That accountability protects against the kind of harm institutional workers can cause, and then move on from. We live with the consequences of our decisions. That creates a different quality of care. (Tira)

Because these wāhine are embedded in their communities, their authority comes from how they show up, giving them the standing to challenge systems while protecting their people.

Institutional workers come and go. We stay. That permanence creates different investment in community wellbeing and different knowledge of what communities actually need versus what agencies think they need. (Pipi)

"My authority doesn't come from degrees or positions. It comes from results."

How this creates vision:

Living in community, seeing what resources are actually available versus what agencies claim, you develop vision for what could be possible if communities controlled those resources directly. That vision emerges from embedded understanding, not external consultation. (Kōau)

The gap between what communities actually need and what agencies provide is exactly the space where a different kind of economy becomes imaginable.



ECONOMIC SOVEREIGNTY VISIONS

Healing work moves towards return to whenua and the rebuilding of collective economic independence.

We talk about getting back to whenua, creating an economic base that doesn't depend on their systems. Growing kai, teaching traditional skills, building sustainable economies that feed whānau. That's not individual ambition. That's a collective strategy for permanent independence. (Tui)

She connects this to healing work:

The healing work we do now is preparing people for their return. You can't go back to whenua while you're still carrying all the trauma they created. You can't build sustainable communities while you're fighting addiction, violence, and poverty. So, we do the healing work knowing where it leads, back to whenua, back to self-determination. (Tui)

Combining traditional knowledge with contemporary skills:

Our old people knew how to live from the land. We've lost a lot of that knowledge through urbanisation, through being forced into cities. But some of us remember. Some of us are learning again. When we combine that traditional knowledge with contemporary skills, business, technology, and education, that creates pathways home that are actually sustainable. (Pipi)

Economic independence as a collective goal:

We're not trying to get our people into their economy. We're trying to build our own economy. One that operates in line with our values, serves our communities, and doesn't depend on their approval. That's what sovereignty means. Not inclusion. Independence. (Kiri)

Healing prepares the ground for return to whenua, economic sovereignty gives it direction, and getting there requires knowing when to move and when to hold.



TIMING SHAPED BY EXPERIENCE

Timing is learned through consequence and becomes part of leadership, protection, and action.

I don't rush my space anymore. I wait for a tohu before I move. I make sure there's a purpose before I answer phone calls. I've found there are a lot of mana breakers and mana stealers. True mana building starts a certain way. I learned through consequence what happens when you move too early or too late. There's the right timing for everything. You feel it. You wait for it. (Rewa)

She explains what waiting for tohu means and how this developed:

Years of getting it wrong taught me. Moving too fast and losing everything. Waiting too long and missing opportunities. Eventually, you learn to read timing. You learn to pay attention to what's happening around you, within you. You learn to trust that timing matters. (Rewa)

Connecting timing to outcome:

When things fall apart because you acted too early, you remember that. When opportunities pass because you waited too long, you remember that, too. Over time, you develop a sense of when to move. It's not magic. It's learned through repeated consequence. (Tira)

For some wāhine, learning to read timing was a matter of survival in the most immediate sense.

Like reading a room before violence could reach her:

I learned when it was going to go down. I had certain conversations with them, and between them, I clocked the eye contact and body language. And I was out of there. (Kōri)

That same capacity, refined through the most dangerous of circumstances, becomes the basis for reading readiness in others.

How knowing and readiness shape action:

You can't force transformation. It has to come from within, at the right time. We've learned to wait for readiness. To recognise when someone is actually prepared to change versus when they're just saying what they think we want to hear. That distinction matters. Acting before readiness wastes energy and sets people up for failure. (Kiri)

These wāhine learned timing and readiness through consequence, and that learning is intergenerational.



PŪ: The Meaning of Origins

Whakapapa is the living transmission of everything that has ever happened to a people. Ancestral intelligence, the natural counterbalance to AI, moves through bodies, relationships, decisions and losses across time, and arrives in the present, as the sacred ground from which these wāhine lead. The origins of their authority are inseparable from the origins of the harm done to them because whakapapa carries both. The violence became part of what was transmitted, and these wāhine received it, named it, and built from it.

Their tīpuna are always present, coming up through feet and out of mouths during political action. They show what is coming weeks before it arrives and deliver what is needed, when it is needed. Wairua connection to tīpuna is the source of authority for these wāhine because it is accurate. Their ancestors possess knowledge of what was done and what was built in response, and that knowledge is available to those who maintain the connection. Tui does not question what she receives and walks through the doors that open. That is whakapapa as navigation, the living intelligence of a people directing their own survival.

Whakapapa preserves the history that institutions erase. When Māori soldiers came home to find their medals withheld, their land boundaries changed, and their families interfered with, they formed communities to organise and address how their people were being treated. The gang whānau these women were born into trace that founding act of resistance in their whakapapa, and these wāhine understand it as such. Kiri describes it as doing the same thing that had always been done, just in a different way. That is the continuity of a people refusing to disappear.

State violence moved against whakapapa intentionally, targeting the connection that, if broken, would leave children with nowhere to return to. The children returned to gang whānau because that was where their whakapapa lived. What these wāhine understand about this cycle came through surviving it. They know what was done and what it was designed to produce. They know because whakapapa told them through the bodies of their mothers. Through the patterns of their communities. Through the repeated experience of watching the same violence produce the same outcomes across generations.

Rejection by churches, schools, and biological whānau sent these wāhine toward gang belonging because gang whānau accepted what whakapapa requires, unconditional connection. When a church cannot hold your sexuality or a school your grief, gang whānau catches you and holds you without conditions.

These women know what exclusion does to a person and what is required to undo it, and that knowing shapes how they receive others who arrive in the same condition. Whakapapa passed forward the wound and the capacity to heal it.

Cultural awakening is whakapapa recognising itself; walking into kapa haka and feeling at home before knowing the words, hearing te reo and feeling something wake that was already there, while tīpuna say, “Finally, you are listening.” This is the line resuming after an interruption. It is the whakapapa connection reactivating in a body. Once that connection is live, everything is understood differently, and collective responsibility becomes visible. The seven generations serve as the framework for decision-making.

The shift from individual grief to collective response is itself a whakapapa movement. It is whakapapa thinking at work; the funerals became the evidence, and the collective response became the answer.

Media betrayal clarified the authority these wāhine already held. The turn toward research was the recognition that their stories told on their own terms, through a permanent and citable record, carry a different kind of power than anything the media could offer or take away. That recognition emerged from whakapapa knowledge about what their collective pūrākau are for and who they belong to.

Timing is also whakapapa knowledge. Knowing when to move and when to wait. Reading the room, the body, the tohu. Waiting for readiness rather than forcing transformation. It courses through whakapapa that holds both the history of the harm and the knowledge of what survives it. The capacity Kōri used to read physical danger, eye contact, angle, and the moment. To move is the same intelligence these wāhine bring to their work with others. What kept them alive now keeps others alive. The scale changes, but the knowledge does not.

Pū returns us to whakapapa, to what colonisation could not reach. It moved through violence, removal, erasure, and grief and arrived in these wāhine as the full inheritance of everything their tīpuna survived, refused, and built. These wāhine are its continuation.

“Cultural awakening is whakapapa recognising itself”



CHAPTER 3: RĀ (Enlightenment)

Rā is the enlightenment that comes from gang whānau wāhine sharing what works in their lives. For these women, what works means the practices that keep people alive, the relationships that hold communities through crisis, and the forms of care that produce transformation where institutional systems have repeatedly failed. What follows presents the healing infrastructure these wāhine built and the knowledge embedded within it, drawn from cultural connection, collective accountability, ancestral practice, and the lived experience of surviving what should not have been survivable.



TĪPUNA LOVE AND KŌRERO AS HEALING

Healing occurs through relationships that allow truth to be spoken and witnessed.

On the practice of carrying ancestral love:

It's the most powerful kind of love. It's healing. The love that we allow our ancestors to bring into the room. (Tui)

Communicating with those who have passed:

The olds talk to me all the time. I don't often tell people because once I tried doing that, my social work fraternity heard me, and the whisper started, "she talks to dead people" ... Well, they talk to me, and sometimes I talk back [laughing]. (Kāhu)

Tipuna love whilst in prison:

It felt like [name] was giving me a lot of the answers, and he was answering them for me... I felt like he was there by my side, walking with me, every single step. When I was released, it worked out for me because I kept the faith in what he had said that morning when I left. I ended up getting my accommodation and everything. I got my mokos back into my care. (Miri)

Connecting struggles with current expertise:

The work that I do is to help kaitiaki process so that we can bring our children out of state care, bring our people out of corrections, out of mental health, and into services like Pouhine. (Kiri)





On foundation and growth:

I wouldn't even be speaking right now. I wouldn't be able to do this if it were just some random person trying to interview me on my life. There's no way it would be coming out how it has. Mums moulded me. (Kōka)

What is carried through tīpuna love and relationships moves into lived change, becoming visible in the ways these wāhine experience themselves, and are seen by others.



SEEING TRANSFORMATION IN OURSELVES

Transformation becomes visible as wāhine recognise change in themselves and each other.

I wasn't so snappy. Usually I'd be like, oh, what? Or, no, I can't do this, or stuff like that. Then, when I came back, he was just like, "Are you okay? And I was like, yeah. I wasn't snappy anymore. Even my mum was like, what happened to Kea?... Then I started noticing positivity coming my way... nothing but good intentions and a lot of love from different families. (Kea)

Noticing a visible transformation that whānau recognise:

I've been here for a month. I already see the changes. And so do the others when I'm video calling them, they're like, "Oh, it's something different about your smile." (Kōri)

On personal growth:

Just growing. From first seeing myself at the start to now, I'm pretty sure I've grown. I thrive off it... When we're all together, and I know something, I can speak on it. Before, I was blind, and I didn't understand. I was like, "What are we doing? I was shy like everyone else. (Awa)

Becoming aware of being lighter:

A lighter person. Much lighter. I felt heavy when we first arrived. Then I think by the time the wānanga [Pouhine] was finished, we both went away from there feeling a lot lighter. Every time we talked about what we had just embraced, we felt like we were able to help other people and just enlighten them. (Miri)

Fundamental changes in self-perception:

The biggest upset for me is being off drugs, being out of a toxic relationship, but being able to still be a committed grandmother, and just doing me... So, if I can survive all that ugly stuff, then I can pretty much survive anything. I don't need anyone to hold my hand. I don't need a man to tell me what I can and can't do. (Wera)

Seeing these changes reflected in one another, wāhine find the courage to begin their own transformations.



HOLDING FAST TO BEING CLEAN

Recovery is sustained through belonging, sisterhood, and collective support in moments of crisis.

How recovery is strengthened by belonging with your own people:

What I love about Wāhine Toa is that I love the Mongrel Mob. So, what better place to recover for me than to be surrounded by my own, who are sober and supportive? (Kōri)

Recalling the immediate support that gave her stability:

The day I decided to clean up, it was hectic... I was on my way that same morning. I had a home-cooked meal. To be honest, I've spent no money since I've been here. (Kōri)

A recovery journey and influence on others:

They've all gone straight since I've been clean 9 months, going on 10 months now. A lot of wāhine watch my stories on Facebook. I put up what I'm doing, and it inspired them to want to change. (Kea)

How her sisterhood keeps you steady:

327 days clean. I'm still fighting the demons. It's something that you can't just get over straight away. And as Tui said earlier, I made a phone call to her recently about how I wanted to relapse and use, because then, my first love's dad had just passed away. (Wera)

Deciding to stop drinking:

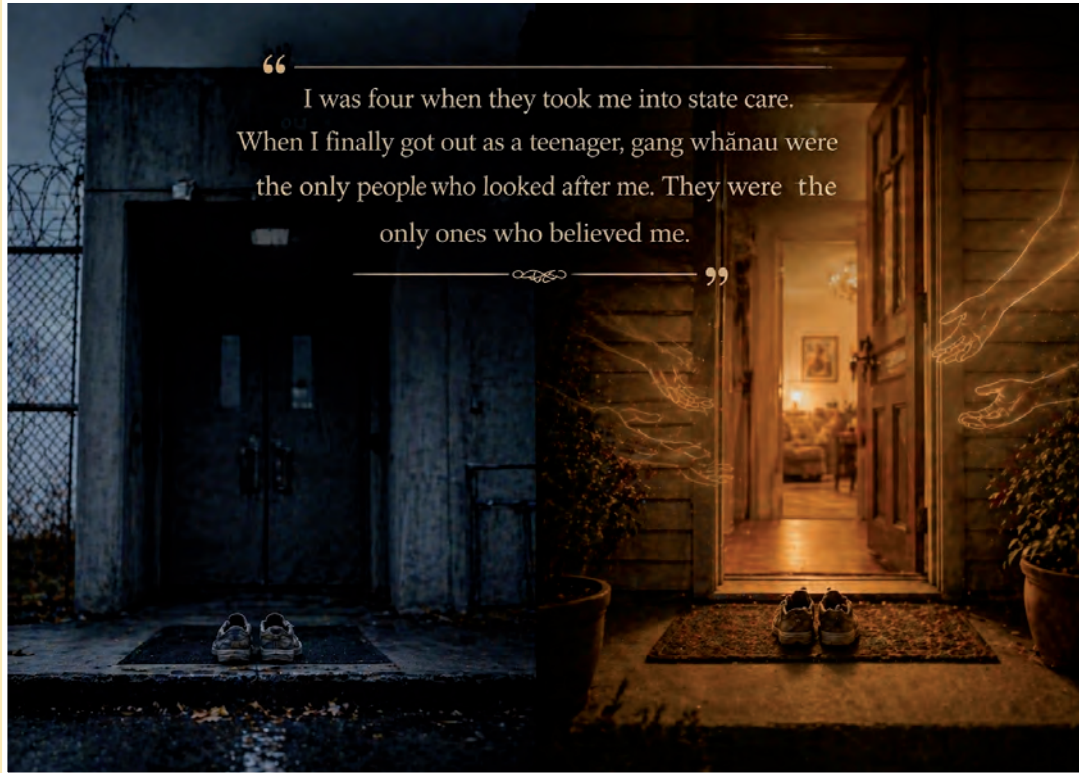
After displaying that... I decided, nah, I can't display that behaviour when I'm on this kaupapa. So, I decided I had to take it upon myself to stop drinking because I want to prevent the mates, the ugly mates, coming out and taking control of something that I don't want to be. (Wera)

What drinking to forget meant:

Other people and the whitestream all act like experts on us, as they know us. They are ignorant and go home at 5pm to their nice little houses with their families. They have no fucking idea how we have to live with the constant surveillance, deficit narrative, and bullshit from agencies. Fuck off, I say. No wonder I drank to cope. (Kōau)

Collective recovery creates networks that respond instinctively during crises.





“ I was four when they took me into state care. When I finally got out as a teenager, gang whānau were the only people who looked after me. They were the only ones who believed me. ”



PSYCHOLOGICAL PROTECTION

Survival-based perception becomes psychological protection, grounding, and informed action.

She describes seeing future consequences in the present moment and acting to prevent what she could already see unfolding:

I don't very often get angry like that. When you're angry, that's a cover-up for hurt because I could see the potential of what's going to happen to my family. It was all of us. The whole lot would have gone off. I was just lucky that I managed to get those boys. (Ruru)

Confidence in hostile environments:

I walk into any room now and I know who I am. I know what I carry. That gives me protection that no one can take away. They can try to intimidate me, but I'm grounded in who I am. (Ruru)

Silence as a protection:

I've learned when to engage and when to walk away. When to speak and when silence protects me better. That's not a weakness. That's wisdom. (Kiri)

On situational awareness:

I can read a room fast. I know who's safe and who's not. I know when energy shifts. That keeps me safe. I learned that through having to survive situations where reading it wrong could get you hurt. (Kōka)

Assessing danger and choosing a different response:

I was drinking at a party, and I won't say where or when. But it was these three guys, well, I'm the last one standing, and they were saying, come in here, come into this room. And I looked at this chilly room with no door handle on the inside. I could see where the angle was. So, I looked back at them and said, "What's wrong with doing it here? Why do we have to go in there?" (Kōri)

A body registering a threat before a mind names it:

You can feel it, and it's about to go down. And there was one time I got off a cup of tea, and my stomach started turning, and I could feel something wasn't right. But my gut was telling me there's something not right with this cup of tea. And I just caught him going like this [gesture] at the cup of tea. So, I took a big skull, and I spat it back in the cup. (Kōri)

This capacity, developed through navigating real danger, is the same intelligence these women use to sense when others are truly ready to change versus still in survival mode.



STRENGTH IN WHĀNAU AND COLLECTIVE CARE

Whānau networks operate as living infrastructure, responding to crisis through connection, care, and commitment.

The importance of connection with whānau networks:

It's a wonderful feeling, and the best thing is that I have a tool with my phone. I can reach out to my sisters all through New Zealand and beyond. I know that we can talk, and we do, about the same old shit and what's happening in our day-to-day. (Ruru)

Digital connections that maintain whānau bonds:

Our wāhine, all around New Zealand, 11 chapters. I know every single one of them, and I know who is who. And if any one of them is in need, we will be there for them, regardless of what situation it is, because that is our whānau. (Miri)



Strength through digital celebration:

We have a big Zoom hui once a fortnight, and in that, there's always karakia, and there's always one person who gets a turn to talk about what they need to talk about, where they're at. We celebrate success. Sometimes we'll share our sorrows. (Tui)

No division when in healing wānanga:

It used to be you never had the two gangs cross or even just as women acknowledge or kōrero. But when it's within Pouhine, we are the same. It doesn't matter what gang we are in. But I notice that we're all equal. There's no division. (Pipi)

Whānau networks that respond to crisis develop knowledge to challenge harmful systems.



INTELLIGENCE THAT GROWS FROM EXPERIENCE

Lived experience becomes practical knowledge used to guide, protect, and build for others.

My trauma became my qualification to help other people. I know the pathways because I walked them. I know what works because I lived it. That knowledge serves my community now. (Kōka)

Developing legal knowledge:

Obviously, if I hadn't been through all that crap, I wouldn't have learned the law and be able to do this now. Everything that I've been through made sense of it all. I use my legal knowledge to help whānau navigate the system, to get their kids back, to challenge bad decisions. (Kiri)

Transforming struggle into tools:

When I went through and did all my qualifications, I never once went to one of my graduations. The reason was that my qualifications weren't for me; my qualifications were my weapon. I am now validated in your world, and I've got a voice that you have to listen to. (Ruru)

On programme creation:

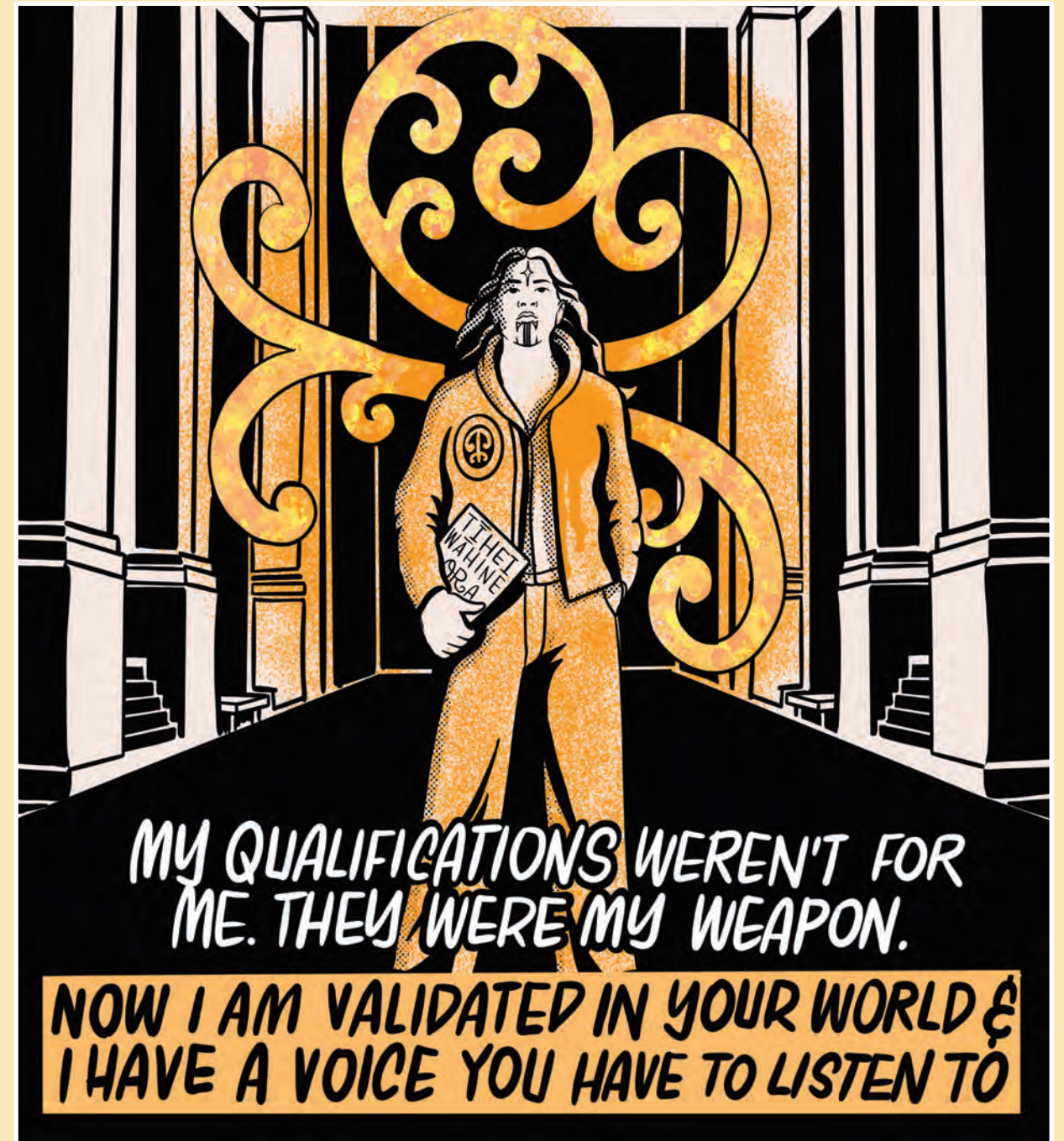
We've designed programmes based on what actually worked for us. Not what some textbook said should work. We tested it on ourselves, our whānau. We know it works because we've seen the results. (Kiri)

The knowledge these women carry finds its full power when it moves beyond boundaries.



SISTERHOOD ACROSS BOUNDARIES

Sisterhood across gang lines creates trust, protection, healing, and intergenerational example.





Connection despite differences:

Black Power, Mongrel Mob, Tribesmen, King Cobras, whatever colour you wear, when you're in this space, you're my sister. That's it. We've got each other's backs. (Ruru)

Protection within sisterhood:

The sisters look after each other. If someone's struggling, we're there. If someone's being treated badly, we step in. That's what sisters do. (Pipi)

About loyalty:

These are my sisters for life. Not because we're in the same gang. Because we've been through shit together and we're still here. That creates bonds that nothing can break. (Kōri)

What sisterhood provides:

Having sisters who understand, who don't judge, who just hold you when you need it. That's healing in itself. You don't have to explain. They just get it. (Wera)

On wāhine supporting one another:

We show our daughters and our granddaughters what it looks like when women stand together. Not tearing each other down. Building each other up. That breaks cycles. (Kiri)

Wāhine who hold each other through the most difficult struggles build the caliber of trust that makes everything else possible.



PROGRAMMES BUILT FROM THE GROUND UP

Effective programmes are built from lived knowledge, tested within community, and proven through what works.

Our Judges were our saving grace. And what I mean by that is, what I've learned is that they see these people come in and out of their courtrooms every day. So, they get an understanding of what will work, and they're willing to give something else a go, because they understand a lot of things don't work out there. (Ira)

About organic programme development:

We started with one young fellow who was in the Black Power who got paroled to us. He was the first boy we ever had. And it went pretty well. We trialled what worked and what didn't through the programme with him. After that, it built up for a while. It started to build up, and we started getting our whānau through. (Ira)

Maintaining educational work despite gang membership:

My work in the prison, one of my mentors was Hinewirangi Kohu-Morgan, and she challenged the fuck out of me... There was stuff I was doing that was specialised, and that only I was doing. Education didn't care that I was a gang member because people knew me prior to that. (Tui)

What these women are doing for themselves works because it was built by the people it serves.

RĀ: The Meaning of What Works

Rā is the enlightenment that comes with wāhine from gang whānau sharing what works in their lives. What these women make visible is that the knowledge was always there. Enlightenment here is knowledge held by wāhine who learned it because their lives depended on it.

Ancestral love is the ground of this knowing. When Tui brings tīpuna into a room, she activates a living connection. It shifts what can be said and heard, making truth possible where shame would otherwise close it down. Kōau names what that connection makes possible, a voice grounded in something the whitestream cannot reach. Kōka speaks because she is moulded by someone who really loved her. Whakapapa is the source of voice here, and healing occurs when the connection to that source is restored and witnessed by people who understand what they are seeing.

Transformation is what restoration makes visible. The women in these accounts describe noticing it in themselves and in each other. Kea's family saw the change before she found words for it. Miri arrived feeling heavy and left feeling light enough to help others bear what they had brought with them. Kōri saw something different about herself in the eyes of the people video-calling her, and before she could describe what had shifted. This is mauri ora becoming visible. The restoration of life force that healing spaces made possible. It moves outward into everyone watching. One person's restoration illuminates the path for the next.

What sustains recovery in these women's lives is whanaungatanga. Actually belonging to people who move when you need them to. Kōri had a home and a cooked meal on the day she decided to get clean because her sisters did not wait to be asked. Kea's nine months became visible on social media, and other women started their own journeys from watching her. Wera counts her days, still calls Tui when the urge hits, and keeps making decisions based on who she wants to be on this kaupapa. Recovery, understood through Rā, is the reclamation of dignity in conditions designed to make it impossible. It holds collectively because that is the only way it lasts.





Kōau names those conditions straight up. “Other people...act like experts on us, go home at 5pm to their nice little houses, and have no idea how we live with the constant surveillance, the deficit narratives, the bullshit from agencies.” Her words are the structural analysis on which the rest of this chapter is built. The drinking she describes was a rational response to environments designed to grind these women down.

The perceptual intelligence these wāhine carry was built through years of surviving at multiple levels simultaneously. They cannot be destabilised by power or status because their identity is rooted in whakapapa, not in what institutions think of them. There is relational awareness that tells you when to speak and when silence serves better. There is environmental reading that clocks exits, angles, energy shifts, and the meaning of a gesture over a cup of tea before the conscious mind has finished forming a thought. This is mātauranga earned through consequence, and it now serves far beyond the circumstances that produced it. The same capacity that kept these women alive is what they bring to their work with others. They know the difference between someone genuinely ready to change and someone still in survival mode, and they act accordingly.

When a crisis hits, whānau activate. Eleven chapters across Aotearoa and Australia are bound together through daily contact, fortnightly Zoom hui, and karakia. If any one of them is in need, the others will be there regardless of the situation. This is whanaungatanga functioning as infrastructure, responsive at the speed that relationships allow. Pipi names what that infrastructure produces inside Pouhine wānanga with precision; all are equal, with no division. She noticed it the moment it was present because she had spent enough time in spaces where it was absent to recognise it immediately. The colours that define affiliation outside that space become less important than the wāhine standing beside you. The collective care these wāhine built asks only that you show up for each other, and that turns out to be enough to hold people through the hardest times.

Kōka names the intelligence at the centre of this when she says her trauma became her qualification. The pathways Kiri knows are the ones she walked. The law she uses to challenge bad decisions and get her tamariki back, she learned by surviving the system that made those decisions. The qualifications Tui earned were weapons. A way to become validated in institutional worlds, so that the voices institutions were ignoring could no longer be dismissed. This is Māori knowledge, accountable to the community, generated through living, and directed toward collective liberation. Knowledge built from consequence, precise because it had to be.

Tui’s declaration that whatever colour you wear, in this space you are my sister, carries the full weight of mana wāhine. Pipi steps in when someone is treated badly. Kōri holds loyalty to the women she has been through things with, bonds that have nothing to do with patch and everything to do with survival and presence. Wera knows that being understood by sisters who need no explanation is itself an essential form of healing. Kiri shows her daughters and granddaughters what it looks like when women build each other up, because that modelling is how cycles break. When wāhine from different gangs come together in wānanga and find themselves being like one whānau, that is healing. Sisterhood carries that knowing across colours, across histories, into the next generation watching.

The programmes these women built did not begin with a framework or a funding application. Ira started with one person, watched what worked and what did not. She built from there, trialling with her own whānau before extending to others. That method is itself a finding; that effective kaupapa Māori service design grows from community accountability. The judges who became allies had seen the same people cycling through their courtrooms long enough to recognise what failure looked like and what it looked like differently when it finally appeared. Tui’s educational work in prison continued because her expertise was too visible to ignore, regardless of what she wore on her back.

Programmes that grow from community carry their authority in whether people stay alive, whether whānau come back together, and whether the next generation inherits something other than what this one survived. When institutions encounter that kind of evidence, they have to make room.

Rā is enlightenment that was never absent. These wāhine built infrastructure, made spaces, and traced pathways from their own lives into others’. All of it is the continuation of Māori ways of caring for each other that colonisation interrupted but could not extinguish. The knowledge was never gone from these wāhine.

“healing occurs when
the connection to that
source is restored”



CHAPTER 4: KA (Past, Present, Future)

Ka represents the past, present, and future, examining colonial violence and systemic barriers across time for gang whānau wāhine. What follows shows how institutions coordinate across state care, police, courts, mental health services, and housing to manufacture the crisis they claim to address. These patterns are shaped by systematic targeting, evidence fabrication, legal barriers, and service exclusion compounded over generations. This is coordinated violence where criminalising survival maintains colonial control whilst systems profit from family separation.



SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN STATE CARE

Sexual violence in state care began immediately, continued over time, and its effects remained in the bodies of wāhine, shaping their lives and carrying harm across generations. Pipi describes her experience of this:

I would have been around about that, eh? Because the Plunket book I've got shows that, like, a few weeks into state care, I had an STD... a venereal disease. But the doctor's advice to me was to make sure I drink plenty of water. Never mind, stop raping me. Just make sure I get plenty of water to drink, okay? (Pipi)

The ongoing exploitation continued:

I felt like a lot of the time I was the cleaning maid, as well as a sexual prostitute on site [state care]. Oh, what lovely children. Aren't they wonderful? But lift your skirt, darling. I need to have a little poppy poppy... You know, and they're trying to get me to wank them off all the time... they take my hand like, I'm trying to shake somebody's hand, and they take my hand towards their fucking crotch. (Pipi)

The reproductive consequences of untreated sexually transmitted diseases:

This is from having a STD, so regularly, and nobody's getting me treated... I'm so lucky I don't have long-term syphilis, or something fucked up... It's been really difficult for me to have babies as well. I've had ten pregnancies, and most of my babies have died in labour early because my cervix won't hold them. (Pipi)

The trauma extends into adult sexuality and intimate relationships:

So I felt like I had control... Otherwise, I just felt like I didn't want to touch anybody... Like, even now, people think like, what's your sexuality? My sexuality is asexual. People don't even know what the fuck that is. (Pipi)

Trying to speak as a tamariki Māori in state care:

White social workers couldn't believe me when I was five and when I didn't have the words to explain to them that I was being raped by the caregiver. They thought that good Christian white folk in white churches did not harm children, and that little brown troublemakers came from already abusive brown families. (Kōau)

Identifying how institutional harm continues across generations:

My Mum, and that makes you Lake Alice, they're all dead now. One came out a druggy, one came out an alcoholic, one came out a pill popper. It's like, what have we learned? (Rewa)

She names what removal does to the first thousand days:

And for all the babies taken off the mums, the first thousand days is fixed up in here, our dyadic relationships, how we never got that opportunity. (Rewa)

The state recorded what it did to these women and walked away, and the institutions that documented the harm went on to manufacture the criminality.





POLICE HARASSMENT AND EVIDENCE MANUFACTURING

Pipi describes how police constructed charges, records, and narratives that shaped every later encounter. Beginning with the escalation of minor incidents into multiple serious charges.

Yeah, I basically scratched her hand. It was a small scratch... And when I figured it out, I'd scratched her when I tried to grab the phone out of her hand... Initially, there were three charges: family harm charges. It was an assault on a person with whom I have a family relationship. He got under the new Family Harm Act, you know. (Pipi)

She recounts the reports of concern manufactured against her:

I'm getting all these reports of concerns against me. They gave me seven of them in total, made over a two-month period, all from the same source: the New Zealand Police. I've never had a concern reported about any of my children, and I've had lots of other tamariki in my care... She'll be my oldest. She's 33. (Pipi)

Her police clearance records went missing:

Now, somehow, the DIA have lost that file and said, I've never been police vetted. How was that possible? How did I get approved by the Department of Corrections then, huh? [Corrections lead] came in and said, "I filled those papers myself. If there is no approval listed in their file, that's on the police, not her." (Pipi)

Tallying what the charges cost her:

I had 16 charges in total. All of them were assault charges, serious assault charges with intent to injure, assault on a minor. Assault on a minor. I was looking at no career ever. They ripped my whole fucking life and career from me. (Pipi)

How police used her daughter as leverage:

He was trying to manipulate [daughter's name]... He [police] says, well, look, if you don't come to court, mum's going to probably look at a longer jail time. That's what he told her. (Pipi)

And Rewa, on being removed from your own home:

I just got removed by seven police officers with guns and tasers from my house, and I had no help. I was forced into homelessness, even though I own the house... After doing the kaupapa down in Wellington, I was accused of assaulting him, and it just went on from there. No family lawyer. Then the police arrested me. I'm up on four assault charges when I didn't do anything. I had three charges of child abuse... It NEVER happened. (Rewa)



The charges police built from nothing followed these wāhine into every courtroom and were then used as the evidence to keep their children disconnected from them.





STATE RETALIATION FOR EXPOSING CORRUPTION

Kiri describes a direct, escalating campaign against her following her public challenges to Oranga Tamariki's corruption:

I was actually threatened by Oranga Tamariki that if I didn't stop what I was doing, they would then take my children. However, because of the patterns of behaviour with my ex-partner, even though he was in jail at the time and I had a protection order, I was an easy target. They utilised all of that and then created a proof profile in order to take my children. It has been six years now, and I'm still fighting. (Kiri)

She faced serious charges for her online commentary:

This is around the same time that they wanted to lock me up for 50 years for a conspiracy of terrorism... They thought that I'd made threats to Jacinda Ardern. There were no threats. (Kiri)

Family members were recruited to provide evidence against her:

He and his mother and my mother got together and told the social workers that I'm highly abusive, that I'd made threats to their life, that I'd murdered his dogs, just all of this stuff. Because it was the one thing that they wanted to hear in order to reinforce the narrative that's currently going on against the government and me. (Kiri)

How her children remain separated despite legal challenges:

I lodged a legal document that transfers administrative authority... back to hapu, back to my hapu, back to me, which removes my children from the system. I haven't heard from OT in the six months since I launched that document, because one, they don't have jurisdiction, and two, they can't respond to it. So instead, they're using my children as leverage by not talking to me, to hold it against me for actually doing something against the government. (Kiri)

Punished for speaking out, these women found every door that might have offered safety already closed before they arrived.



FAMILY COURT VIOLENCE AND LEGAL SYSTEM BARRIERS

Legal processes created impossible conditions while sustaining the separation of wāhine from their tamariki:

During that time, after rehab, I'd just been granted visiting rights with my kids through Birthright. And I just started my one visit after four months... But when COVID hit, I didn't understand how the courts could make me follow through with this anger management through video call, but I couldn't even get a video call with my kids. (Awa)

This led to relapse whilst her assets were taken:

Which led me straight back into relapsing. It was the only thing that could make me get by. Each day, no one else was there for me but my girl at the time. You know, while I was in rehab, they helped me get my Kiwi Saver, and I gave that to my kid's dad, thinking I owed them. Not knowing, while I was in rehab, he was having my home, my cars, everything put in his name. (Awa)

Despite completing every requirement, she still cannot access her children:

I've got a clean criminal record and seven years later. I still don't have access. (Awa)

The barriers to legal representation, even when you have financial resources:

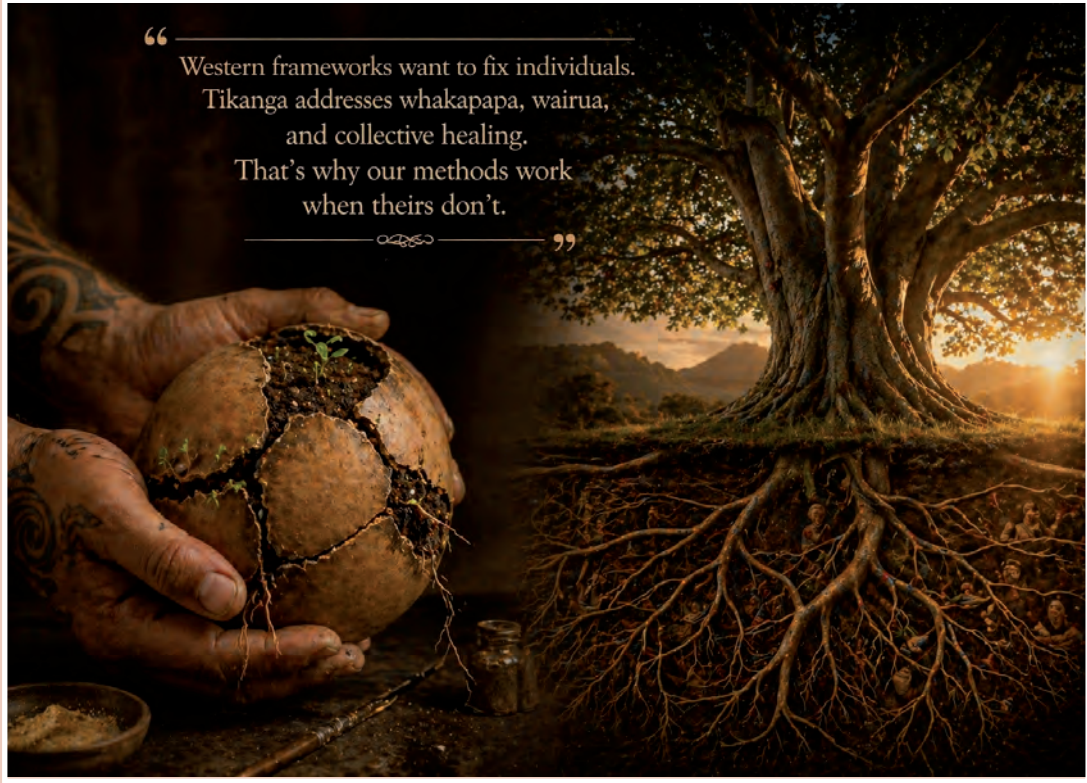
Family lawyers, I can't even get. Cash property assets I have... Fuck, it's been a year and a half out on charges... I walked into Family Court and told them to get fucked. (Rewa)

How asking for help becomes evidence of abuse:

I run to services myself and ask them, "Do you have any reference support services that will help me? That can help me, because I'm struggling right now." They come in a couple of months later. They come back in and talk to my children. They said that I was neglecting my children and abusing them. (Awa)

Women who survived what the courts did to them started calling it out, and doing so made them targets.





“ Western frameworks want to fix individuals. Tikanga addresses whakapapa, wairua, and collective healing. That’s why our methods work when theirs don’t. ”



EXCLUSION FROM HOUSING AND SERVICES

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Tthei Wāhine Ora

Gang whānau wāhine are systematically excluded from housing, services, and justice, even when seeking help.

What exclusion means in practice:

We are the people [gang whānau] that the government makes particular legislation for. We are the people who aren’t allowed anywhere. We are the people who are pushed out of communities and out of housing.

We’re not allowed access to housing. We’re not allowed access to services. If, God forbid, we’re caught up in psychiatric services, because we won’t get the same treatment as everybody else, we’ll get locked up. There’s no justice for us. Even when we’re the victims of a crime, we get charged. (Pipi)

The housing shortage despite available properties:

We have over 3,800 homeless stacked here, predominantly Māori. They’re not increasing their housing around here. They’re going as slowly as they possibly can.

We were waiting for 12,000 houses here in Hawke’s Bay. Especially after the cyclone and all the funding that came through. Where the fuck are the houses? Two years later... Of course, and there are so many vacant houses here, but they’re Airbnbs. Okay, so you can spend a whole week’s worth of fucking rent for one night. (Pipi)

On experiences with psychiatric services:

Some of the stuff included psychiatric treatments. I’ve had injections, I’ve had tools, I’ve had diagnosis after diagnosis that didn’t work. Now, the current one was after four psychiatrists and a psychologist, and a psychologist could finally agree. It’s a functional neurological disorder now. (Pipi)

The process itself caused additional harm:

I felt like the restorative justice process was basically me having to justify why I had to give an apology. That’s how it felt. They couldn’t deal with anything they gave up. It was too much for them. These Pakeha people. (Pipi)

The compliance requirements imposed only on her facility:

There are eight facilities, rehabs on supportive boarding houses. We were the only ones that I had to adhere to these compliances... They’re all faith-based Church ones. They’re still running whāea. (Ira)

A programme faced enforcement despite having better safety features than those left alone:

It was exactly the same housing. They didn’t even have... We had more. We had to put all the fire safety equipment and signs in. (Ira)

Left without institutional protection, they faced violence, knowing no system would answer when they called.



GANG VIOLENCE AND COMMUNITY PERSECUTION

Violence operated across multiple fronts while isolation removed avenues of protection.

The violence from rival gang members:

These two Comancheros are standing there. My kids look at me, and I’ve got weapons, guns in my house... My uncle was in the corner. The two chicks are standing by the door in there, and there are two Comancheros... They smashed me. They nearly shot me. They shoved a pole in me. My kids saw it. (Kea)

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Tthei Wāhine Ora





The escalating cycle of violence and threats continued:

They come down the driveway, and they've taken my kids. Your next, we're coming after you. I said, 'over my fucking dead body...' The whole carpet's full of blood. The whole wall is full of blood. (Kea)

Facing violence from multiple directions for protecting your child:

My ex-partner had teed up with the Rebels. And so, when I put him in jail for almost killing our daughter when she was two weeks old, trying to attack me, they came after me. And then, because I was exposing corruption within the government, the CIB also came after me. (Kiri)

How extended family exclude because they fear gang connections:

And they all had tears. They were like, 'Oh, my gosh. No, I can understand you.' All they're seeing is just a patch or, like, a partner. I lost a few. I fucking hate the games. That's what they said. I hate that because of who you are today... Before, they wouldn't even let me drive their work car, drive their cars, or give me their card. They're like, oh, hell no. The gang might take it. (Kea)

The ongoing domestic violence:

They used to smash me, beat me up. They used to smash me in front of my kids. I used to get fucked... I'll be asleep, and he'll start smashing me, he'll start to pull my pants off and do whatever the fuck he wants. My family was scared, especially my brother. They didn't want to come near me. (Kea)

When these women built their own protection, the institutions that had failed them, stepped in to stop those protections.



INSTITUTIONAL HARASSMENT AND STRATEGIC EXHAUSTION

Institutional pressure was used strategically to drain resources and disrupt gang whānau-led work.

How the targeting escalated when initial accusations failed:

Straight from the bat, I pretty much had some barriers... they tried money laundering, and it wasn't even about the guy. It all became about our kaupapa. And so, when they couldn't find anything that way, in the end, we weren't doing anything wrong; we followed the book, we did everything right. They came after us for compliance, for building compliance. (Ira)

Intimidation tactics escalated during what should have been routine inspections:

When we had council fire inspections. They turned up, whāea, with two paddy wagons and six cars full of armed defenders to come and do a council fire [check]... My men were absolutely distraught. They just thought they were going to get taken... It was more like a raid. But because the lawyer was there and said, 'No, you haven't got a warrant to come onto this property. Why are you guys all here?' And he was trying to say it's a normal council inspection. (Ira)

Connections between officials that explained the harassment:

I found out he was an ex-cop for 20 years, a good friend of bloody Mark Mitchell, and he was working alongside the team that raided us. I knew at that stage, no matter what I did, I was going to get it... He's just going to keep hounding us. (Ira)

Different treatment for similar facilities:

There were other entities out there that were government-funded, exactly the same as ours, insane residential houses that weren't getting pressured and targeted, nowhere near as much as ours was. (Ira)

How this strategy pulls her away from community work:

His strategy was to take me away from my work and focus me on this, knowing that I wouldn't be able to meet the needs they wanted... financially, it was burning us out. And I believe he knew it would. I feel like sometimes it's been strategic to keep me away from the work I should be doing because I'm constantly fighting to keep this space [healing programme] alive and open. (Ira)

Institutional exclusion operates within the spaces that claim the very kaupapa these wāhine carry:

On our way there I got a phone call saying she had been approached to make sure that none of us are wearing patches or insignia. I said, do you stop police from coming onto the marae wearing their uniforms? Because there is a lot of trauma for us when we see that uniform. What is the difference? (Ruru)

Workers recognised the programme's value even as their superiors moved against it:

Half the office came and saw me, told me not to tell their boss that they were there and asked me, 'Are you guys going to still operate?' And they were going behind their own bosses' backs... So, the ones on the ground... We're trying to support me, but they could only do so much. (Ira)

The exhaustion of fighting institutions on every front left wounds that clinical services then tore open further, without the means or the will to close them.



FIFTY DEAD FROM WHITE SUPREMACY AND THE BLAME STILL LANDED ON MONGREL MOB AND BLACK POWER.



CLINICAL VIOLENCE AND PROFESSIONAL INCOMPETENCE

Clinical systems retraumatise wāhine by opening wounds they could not understand or close.

For too long, clinicians have been coming in and telling us what our problems are. We have to sit there in enemy territory to be assessed. And we go in there, and we open up all these wounds, and we tell them about why it is that we are what we are. Then they write it down, then they twist it, and then they tell our story through their biased means when they can't even comprehend what we're saying. (Tui)

The contradiction in seeking help from historical perpetrators:

And that hand that reaches out, that hand that reaches out to where they go, we put our hand out to you. Fuck, that hand has been a government hand, a coloniser's hand, a cruel hand. And all of a sudden, we're expected that, oh well, if you're struggling, you can come to us. You're the enemy. (Tui)

The therapeutic process itself becomes organised retraumatisation:

They don't fucking work for us. It's like they come to you; they open up our fucking wounds with a surgical, unclean fucking knife. They whip it open for us, get us to share what's going on, and then have no idea about how to fucking close the bastard back up. There's no resolution for it. Those tauiwi, pākehā ways of healing us are worse for us. They're detrimental to us. And yet courts order us to go and do that kinda thing. (Tui)

How the basic structure of mental health services fails wāhine from gang whānau through cultural disconnection:

But because our women don't ring an 0800 number and talk to a stranger that doesn't sound even anything like them, and then have to try and tell them how they're feeling right now. Those numbers don't work. Well, not for us. (Ruru)

How well-meaning practitioners cause harm through inappropriate questioning:

I know that [name of person] did the best that she did, but she is not trauma-informed. She doesn't have enough backstory about whānau, our whānau. And she asks loaded questions to get loaded answers. It's almost like she's firing it to get the firing back. (Tui)

What clinicians did in rooms, governments and media did in public, taking these women's pain and turning it into justification for more of the same.





MEDIA MANIPULATION AND LEGISLATIVE PERSECUTION

Exposing how the government uses gangs as political scapegoats whilst implementing broader control measures:

It's like a magician's trick. You're trying to get people to look here while you're doing shit over here. That's basically exactly what it is. And the gangs are the political football that they kick around and blame for everything that's wrong with this country. (Ruru)

The racism embedded in legislative targeting:

You know what it is? Is that if you say they've got this slogan, let's get tough on gangs. Let's get hard on gangs. Let's get tough on Māori. Let's get hard on Māori. The only thing is that they can't say Māori, so they put the word gang in there. (Ruru)

Media manipulation shifts blame from white supremacist terrorism to indigenous communities:

You don't see them. When you look at the media, and they're depicting gangs, Mongrel Mob, Black Power. That's it. You got the fucking shooter. Kills fucking over 50 people. And they managed to turn that narrative from a white supremacist into we're taking guns off the gangs, and it's Mongrel Mob and Black Power. How the fuck does that happen that you managed to take it out of the way, and your spin doctors spin it? So, it's not about white supremacy anymore. It's about Indigenous gangs in New Zealand. (Tui)

How the government implements harmful policies whilst acknowledging their illegality:

This gang legislation amendment, the so-called honourable Judith Collins, the attorney general, wrote in her report to the government that the gang legislation amendment bill doesn't fit with the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act, but they still bring it out. So, this government isn't even listening to the attorney general. (Tui)

The legislation becomes increasingly punitive:

The fact that being a gang member is an aggravating factor now in the courts. Not only are we the most marginalised, but they will also continue to marginalise us... They're basically putting their knee on the back of our heads and pushing us into the ground, because they can't get us any lower. (Tui)



KA: The Meaning of Colonial Violence Across Time

A Plunket book documented a venereal disease in a child within weeks of her entering state care. The doctor recommended water. The rapes kept happening, and the damage travelled forward across decades, shaping what the body could hold, how many pregnancies it could sustain, what intimacy became possible or impossible. That same damage was later brought into courtrooms as evidence of unfitness, with nothing in the record about where it came from or who caused it.

What Lake Alice produced is the same logic on a larger scale. Children were taken from their mothers, the first thousand days of bonding broken, and a generation emerged as addicts, alcoholics, and pill poppers. Nothing was learned because learning would require the state to account for what the intervention built. Colonial violence against wāhine Māori records what it causes and erases its own authorship, then uses what remains in the record to justify the next removal from the next generation.

A scratch became sixteen charges, and seven false reports of concern appeared in two months, all from the same source. Records proving competence disappeared whilst the charges accumulated.

These wāhine understood precisely what was happening even as they were told they were imagining it. That understanding is built on the consequences of surviving a system that needs their criminality to justify their containment. The permanent records generated by this process follow every subsequent encounter. They close doors to housing, employment, and access to tamariki before these women arrive. Being removed from your own home at gunpoint, charged with child abuse that never happened, is that architecture at its most direct. The state constructs the evidence it needs, and leaves women to disprove events inside a system that has already decided what the record will say.

The courts required anger management to be completed via video call, whilst denying children video calls. While women were in rehab doing what was asked of them, partners transferred houses, cars, and KiwiSaver into their own names. Seven years later, with clean records and every condition met, mothers still cannot see their tamariki. When a wāhine asked for support because she was struggling, services came back two months later and told her she was neglecting and abusing her children. Asking for help becomes the proof used against you, which means the only position that carries any safety is silence, and silence gets used against you, too.

Family Court separations are maintained over years and decades for a population created by colonial removal. Each separation is presented as a protective response whilst every condition that makes reunion impossible is built into the system.

When a wahine challenged Oranga Tamariki corruption, her children were taken. Her online commentary became a terrorism charge. Family members were recruited to tell social workers she was violent and dangerous. The legal document she filed transferring administrative authority back to hapū was effective enough that Oranga Tamariki stopped responding entirely, and during that silence, her children were used as leverage. Six years later, they are still gone. What is evidenced across multiple participants, and what the research finds, is the pattern. That wāhine who call out systemic abuse and violence are systematically targeted. Tino rangatiratanga, the actual exercise of Indigenous authority over Indigenous children, is what the colonial state moves immediately to contain. It does this through the most intimate relationships these wāhine hold, as in removing or threatening to remove their children. Every wāhine watching learns exactly what it costs to resist.

These wāhine are the people legislation is specifically built for, which means built against. Over 3,800 people, predominantly Māori, are homeless in one region, whilst houses sit empty as Airbnbs. Psychiatric services cycled through diagnosis after diagnosis without producing wellness.

Restorative justice left women suicidal and required them to justify giving apologies, whilst Pākehā participants could not hold what was shared. A Māori-led healing programme, with better safety features than comparable facilities, faced enforcement that identical faith-based Pākehā operations never encountered. Even when these women are victims of crime, they are charged. The system presents itself as available to anyone who needs it, creates every condition that prevents these women from accessing it, and documents the resulting harm as evidence that they are not ready for the services being withheld from them.

Violence comes from every direction at once, and every direction these wāhine turn for protection adds to it. Weapons enter homes whilst children watch. Partners coordinate with gangs against women who protected their tamariki.

“That wāhine who call out systemic abuse and violence are systematically targeted.”





Extended whānau withdraw out of fear of association, taking with it the whanaungatanga that would otherwise buffer against the harm. The isolation this produces is the structure that colonial violence requires to operate without interruption. When protection comes, it comes from within gang whānau, from the communities the state criminalises, which is exactly why colonial power moves to destroy those communities. Indigenous protective structures prove the colonial claim of benevolent intervention to be false, and so they must be dismantled before the proof becomes undeniable. Indigenous protective structures prove the colonial claim of benevolent intervention to be false, and so they must be dismantled before the proof becomes undeniable.

When money laundering charges failed, building compliance charges followed. Two paddy wagons and six cars of armed defenders arrived for a council fire inspection. The official coordinating the campaign had twenty years in the police and connections to sitting ministers.

Other government-funded facilities running identical programmes faced none of it. The strategy was to keep her fighting compliance battles so she could not do the work, drain the finances, and consume the time and energy that would otherwise go into healing. Front-line workers came in secret to ask whether the programme would survive. They could see what was being destroyed and understood they could not stop it from within the institution itself. Strategic exhaustion does not need to win in court. It only needs to ensure that the alternatives that prove colonial claims wrong are too depleted to continue, and that the knowledge those alternatives carry cannot reach the communities they belong to.

The structure of clinical harm has been described from inside it by someone who has survived it many times. You sit in enemy territory to be assessed, you open wounds, you explain yourself to people who write it down, twist it, and tell your story through a bias they cannot recognise in themselves. The hand reaching out to help has been a coloniser's hand, a government hand, a cruel hand, and these wāhine are expected to reach back toward it when they are struggling.

Therapy opens wounds with an unclean knife and has no means of closing them. Courts mandate this process and use the distress it generates as evidence that more intervention is needed, producing more documentation, justifying more intervention, in a cycle these women understand completely, and the institutions running it refuse to examine.

The 0800 number does not work because the stranger on the other end cannot hear, let alone hold, what these women carry. The system knows this and still calls it a service.

The word “gang” in New Zealand law and media carries a meaning that cannot be said directly. The mechanism is a neon flashing sign: look here whilst something is done over there. Gangs are the political football kicked around to explain everything wrong with the country, whilst the actual causes go unnamed. When a white supremacist killed over 50 people, the narrative was redirected within days toward taking guns from the Mongrel Mob and Black Power. The media infrastructure accomplished that without apparent difficulty because it was already oriented that way. The attorney general wrote in her own report that the gang legislation amendment bill does not fit the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act. The government passed it anyway. Gang membership as an aggravating sentencing factor means being Māori and connected to whānau is grounds for harsher punishment. That is what the legislation was built to do.

“What their tīpuna
endured is present in
their bodies now”

Ka holds past, present, and future in the same moment, and what these women have shown across every section of this chapter is that colonial violence operates the same way. It accumulates. What was done in state care becomes the justification for what is done in family court. What is done in family court becomes the foundation for what follows in housing, clinical services, and the media. Each arm of the colonial state inherits the damage the previous arm created, adds to it and frames that addition as a response to Indigenous failure, rather than to the harm the previous intervention caused. The coordination across institutions need not be explicit. The shared framework is sufficient to ensure each institution picks up where the last one left off.

What their tīpuna endured is present in their bodies now, in their children's bodies, in the records that were kept and the records that were made to disappear. Ka asks that this be seen whole, across time, as a single coordinated project rather than as a series of policy failures that might be addressed through better design. These women saw it whole and, in their own voices, spoke to this from inside the harm it was producing, and that is precisely why every institution they encountered moved to silence them. This research exists because their naming is evidence that colonial violence continues. That their survival, as documented in this chapter, is proof that it has not yet done what it was designed to do.



CHAPTER 5: Ū (Sustenance)

Ū represents inner strength and community-driven sustenance. It highlights practical, traditional solutions that nourish rather than extract, showing what wāhine build when they refuse to wait for broken systems to fix themselves.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first reveals systematic solutions across seven domains, replacing failing institutions. The second examines Pouhine, a healing technology sourced in Indigenous knowledge and practice, and what it makes possible for wāhine. These parts enable each other. Wāhine who heal within the embrace of Pouhine develop the capacity to lead programme building, legal challenges, and education transformation. The pūrākau these wāhine shared spotlights infrastructure already built for mana motuhake and autonomy, operating beneath and beyond colonial reach.

Here is what sustains them.

Part 1



ALTERNATIVE CRISIS RESPONSE AND COMMUNITY PROTECTION

How community networks have learned to act for themselves because formal services do not serve them:

And just prior to that interview [TVNZ1], we almost didn't do the interview because my uncle had just been attacked by his grandson. He was in a P-enraged, out the gate, fucking thing... But what I did was I called one of the brothers, and the brothers all went up there and sorted it out. (Ruru)

Putting protection first and dealing with paperwork later:

In our Wāhine Toa, we're out there feeding our whānau. We're out there taking kai boxes because WINZ is saying that you've had enough of your allocations, and Salvation Army, you have to go through interviews and prove your hardship. Well, if people are asking for food, it's because they're hungry. So just give them the damn food. (Ruru)

Alternative child protection that operates outside failed state systems:

I rang Mum. I would have been in bed. I told Mum, he's getting abused. Where else can I send him? I trust them with my life. I only know that she's going to love that boy like no other. I sent him over here. (Kōka)

When whānau move to protect each other without waiting to be asked, they are already practising mana motuhake.



LEGAL AND SOVEREIGNTY FRAMEWORKS

Creating comprehensive alternative systems through traditional knowledge frameworks:

I set up my own native court. I set up my own hapu authority called [te reo] Māori, and I wrote an infrastructure for pathways and a parallel system outside of the government that goes back to tikanga Māori, brings people back into balance, back into healing, back into restoration through hapu. (Kiri)

Her toolkit provides practical pathways for community liberation:

I mean, even the hapu Development Toolkit, that's 700 pages on its own with a model and a foundational framework. I didn't learn any of that. It's all just life experience that I implemented into Te āo Māori... Yeah, heaps of people. I've got a lot of people waiting. (Kiri)

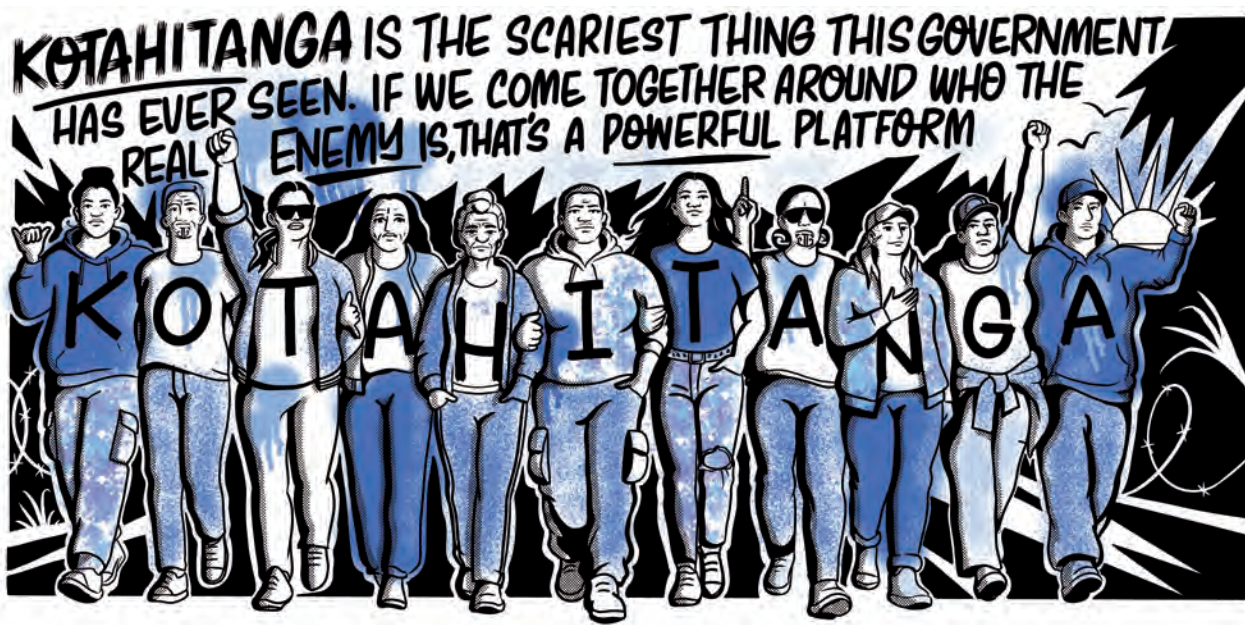
Legal work that activates traditional funding mechanisms:

But hapu is still sitting in a state where they don't know how to administrate and stand as the Rangatiratanga. I've been able to learn how to do that, where you can activate funding and resources through the Māori Land Corp, which is actually a bank. (Kiri)

Identifying specific legal mechanisms for community-controlled services:

So had I not been through that, I wouldn't have broken down those barriers to understand fully what people are going through. So in a way, I'm grateful... I found that loophole through Section 396. (Kiri)





The importance of authentic community voice in creating effective support:

It's important for our people to tell our story because we've had other people tell it for us. And they leave all of this stuff out. Now, how can you help our people and create a korowai of support that's going to work if you don't allow them to speak?... From that, you get everything that you need to know in order for the solutions to be put in place. (Kiri)

Healing within identity is an act of reclaiming what colonisation took.



ALTERNATIVE JUSTICE AND RESTORATION APPROACHES

A philosophy of healing within identity rather than changing identity:

When these people come to me, I'm not here to pitch them. If anything, I want them to, if they're going to remain where they are, then do it with love... As a mobster, headhunter or black power, they just need guidance on what that looks like within their families. (Ira)

Contrast this with institutional approaches:

It doesn't work when you tell someone, don't be who they are. Don't be a heathen. Don't be a mobster... that's where I think it's more family-like here... And that's why they love Whāea for who she is, because she accepts them for their flaws and everything. (Ira)

What this looks like compared to Western therapeutic approaches:

This is really interesting. On a scale of one to ten, what do you think that restorative justice does for our people? Fuck all. It's a big 0.000... So, it's not like a restorative justice process?... No, nothing. (Pipi)

Change can begin with children, who always speak the truth.



ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

An educational vision that represents a complete alternative to colonial schooling:

I'm trying to start a seven-day school. For our rangatahi, it runs from seven o'clock in the morning to seven o'clock at night. Because the more our babies are living in that kaupapa, not just one in the random every now and then, living it day in, day out. And they go back and teach our mums and our dads the kaupapa, because these kids are living it.

And then they can go out and wānanga, a two-week wānanga with Mummy and Dad. But at least Mummy and Dad are going to listen to the kids, because the kids have made the change for them. (Tui)

This reverses traditional educational hierarchies whilst immersing children in cultural knowledge:

Breakfast, lunch, tea, give them a wash, and take them home sweetly to their Mamas and their Papas to have a moe, pick them up 7:00 in the morning, again, back on kaupapa, and building our babies from there. Changing the cycle. (Tui)

The approach makes children change agents:

There's no point in changing us. We have a mindset. We're adults. We've really made up our fucking mind. But our babies haven't. And that's where we have to start, is to go and give the mana back to them, because they only speak the truth. (Tui)

Alternative leadership models that maintain identity whilst building capacity:

One of them is running a youth programme for our kids that have been put into the too hard basket... He's an active leader of the headhunters. But what that looks like now is nothing like what the narrative has been heard out there or said out there. What he is is somebody who's educated himself. So he went and got a psych degree done. (Ira)



This creates new pathways:

Now actually police and Oranga Tamariki are handing him that they're two hard basket ones. And it's quite awesome... They don't know how to connect with them. (Ira)

Kotahitanga that cannot be bought off requires an economic base that no institution controls.



POLITICAL ORGANISING AND KOTAHITANGA

Tui recognises unity across gang lines as the government's greatest fear:

I think that kotahitanga is the scariest thing that this government has ever seen. That's why I like to put photos up with all of the different sisters' things like that, because I know that that scares them, because in fact, if we stop fighting each other and we all start coming together as a collective around who is the real enemy here, then that's actually a really powerful place to platform from. (Tui)

This unity shows up in direct political action:

And that's what you saw, which was around one, getting our people registered to vote, because our people were going, we don't want to vote. We don't want any part of that government... But it was also about whero whānau, and this legislation is going to be so harmful for us. Our wāhine led that. Our sissy Ira was up there, and we all came together, and we stood as one, and we went down to Wellington, and we presented back to Mark Mitchell. (Tui)

Maintaining strategic political relationships, despite community reluctance:

You can't get away from the politics of the gangs. We have politicians. Martin and Davidson would often come to the Iron Dog and meet with us. At that time, I think she was the Minister of Family and Sexual Violence. She would come and talk to our wāhine. Fucking nobody knows fucking family violence and sexual violence as our fucking gang woman does. (Tui)

Political power without economic independence can be withdrawn. The economy these women are building sits with them, is controlled by them, and cannot be taken from them.



ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES AND RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION

Arguing for resource redirection:

You want to talk about suicide prevention? Give us the funding, and we'll do that. You want to talk about addiction. Addiction and mental health? Give us the funding. We're doing that. But oh, no, no, no, I couldn't bear doing that... This government hasn't spent 188 years trying to colonise us and strip us of our mana to have something that actually works, because this works. (Ruru)

Proposing sustainable economic models that maintain cultural autonomy:

We want that national fire. That's why I created this so that the merch and the programmes that we do get can be for everyone... I don't want to work under any organisation. (Rewa)

Showing practical alternatives through direct community support:

I want to put a deposit of whatever money I get into having a franchise that we go into these spaces and we heal, and we heal our people, tinana... I've already got a cabin on my nans' whenua. I built a fence for them within fucking two weeks. I've got two 20-foot containers put there. (Rewa)

When these women stand in their full authority, they create the environments in which other wāhine can do the same.



DECOLONISING GENDER RELATIONS AND RESTORING BALANCE

In te ao Māori, wāhine were never supplementary. Their voices carried equal and often greater authority in the decisions that shaped collective life.

Wāhine Toa represents a systematic challenge to colonial gender hierarchies:

Wāhine Toa was about decolonising and giving women a voice. It was also about challenging men who thought the Mongrel Mob was solely for men... Our women were patched. I didn't do anything new beyond creating a chapter specifically for our wāhine, but they'd always been patched wāhine. (Tui)

Restoring traditional gender balance whilst challenging patriarchal colonial influence:

Our men need to decolonise their mindset, that our women always were right next to our... Our women were always right next to our men. Traditionally, our voices were just as important, if not more important. (Ruru)



How healing work recognises that colonisation disrupted traditional gender balance:

Our boys now need the counterbalance, don't they? They're taught that there's only one way to be male in the world because we live in a world where it's very patriarchal, and a lot of that is colonisation. That has demeaned the role of our wāhine. (Tui)

The Pouhine wānanga is the first place many of these women have ever been heard and their true wāhine toa selves validated.

Part 2:



POUHINE AS TRANSFORMATIVE HEALING

Women arrive at Pouhine carrying everything they have survived, and the wānanga meets them there.

Describing an initial motivation:

When I went go to the Pouhine, the only reason I was going is that I was told it was free. I had no money. I just spent it all on my son's birthday. I was absolutely broke. And then, if we told more women out there that it's free, they'll just come like me. I didn't realise it was going to be life changing. (Kōri)

The instant transformation upon arrival:

I felt very safe. I felt loved. I felt so loved. I'm at the right place. I'm not doing naughty stuff, so I wouldn't be here right now. I felt loved and present. I just felt so safe that I could have gone on those mattresses and gone straight to sleep. It was warming, welcoming... Like coming home. (Kea)

Participants describe Pouhine as filling a critical gap in available services:

This is extremely important, particularly for gang wāhine, because there is nowhere else. Nobody wants us. (Tīwai)

What becomes possible in Pouhine:

The fact that I could cry without somebody saying, don't do that... The fact that I had a safe space to be out of a lot of anger and emotion out of me... That's the voice of a little girl who no one loves. (Pipi)

How gang divisions dissolve:

The other thing with Pouhine is that the other wāhine that are there, I'm sure it happens on the first night. We all get into this headspace. We were like, we all realised we're safe... It's funny because gang women know each other. All right? We've been around. We know, we know. And it's funny when you come across a different gang, wāhine. But then it instantly felt like a safe space. (Kea)



The unique space Pouhine creates:

It's like you might not know your reo, but your reo knows you. The Pouhine knows us... There's no judgment. We can be however we are; however, we rock up. There's no judgment. There's only love. And that's the powerful thing that I got from all those women gifting. So, there's this exchange that goes on... when our wāhine are sharing their pain, your pain comes out, too. We weep with them. Yes, we laugh with them. Where else could you do that? (Ruru)

When what has been carried in the mind for years finally comes out, the body registers the release, the deep healing.



VOICE RESTORATION THROUGH ORO AND KĀRANGA

Inside Pouhine, wāhine speak what has never been spoken, and are heard by people who already understand what they are hearing.

What becomes possible:

Just hearing everybody's perception of life, of trauma, their own story. It just gave me not permission, but comfort and validation to speak to some things I had never spoken to anyone about. Except for my counsellor. (Kiri)

This process creates space for previously untellable stories:

And that was during the Pouhine when you all wrapped around me in a koru. That whole night was beautiful... That was very powerful. There was a lot coming through. That was the first time I'd told that part of my story, of that side of the abuse. And I'd always lived in fear of that because nobody ever believed anything. They shut me down. And so, I got used to just not saying anything. And for the first time, I felt heard. I felt safe enough to speak that. And it was so empowering. (Kiri)

An experience with the kāranga:

The kāranga was beautiful... I had only ever done one kāranga in my life. And that voice that came out, because I'm so quiet, usually. But it was feeling all of my tīpuna come through at that time, and connect me with everything that I needed, in order to just settle my wairua and my mauri, and ground me back into myself. (Pipi)

A breakthrough moment:

I didn't even know what I said when I stood up [in a Pouhine wānanga]. It just came out. But it was like a huge relief for me. I had carried that in my mind for so long, held it for years, and was taking it on for the ones I love. But I let that out, and now I feel like a whole new person. Honestly... It healed me a lot, the first Pouhine. (Kea)

The wānanga reconnects women to spiritual resources:

I think that's the environment. It's a little bit of us, but I think it's mostly the way in which we create space for ancestors or tīpuna to turn up. And they do all the work. The Pouhine does the work. You guys together do all of the work. And at the heart of all of that is just the space for loving one another. No judgments. It's gentle magic. (Tiwai)

Healing belongs to the person being healed, and Pouhine works its magic based on that understanding.



PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

The healing that happens in Pouhine moves through the body.

Physical healing through spiritual connection:

Probably being able to release a lot of pain. I could actually feel it come off me... I could feel it come out of my hair. I could feel it come out of my chest. (Pipi)

The whakawaatea at the beach:

So, when I got into the water, I felt like I was feeling something again. And I didn't want to get out. (Tiwai)

Even for one who rarely finds stillness, the grounding itself was healing:

I found it really, really grounding, and it was like a release... Yeah, intense. (Aro)

On the transformation:

You had a smile on your face when you left, eh? My body went into shock for a little bit... Yeah, my physical was actually purging, but when I left there, I felt so inspired and so light. (Kiri)

This healing enables courage for necessary life changes:

I did the facilitator training... Which was where I finally got the courage to leave my toxic relationship. (Kōau)

Women who find their own healer within carry that capacity into every relationship, every community, every daughter watching them.



REVOLUTIONARY HEALING PHILOSOPHY

Pouhine does not create healers; it returns wāhine to the healer they already are.

The whole point of a healing journey:

Giving us, who attended, the chance to stand as Pou, as rangatira, to heal ourselves, that's the ultimate, because there's a lot of healers out there. But for me personally, my whakaaro is to give people the tools to empower themselves. That's what I try to do with my mahi. I don't want to disempower our people. I just want to give them something to start from, and then they do the rest. That's the whole point of this journey that we're on. (Kiri)

Contrasting approaches:

On our Pouhine, you've got people like our sister (name of person). She turns around and says, I've been going to a therapist for over 20 years. And I walk out there feeling more depressed. I want to drink every time I leave there. She comes to Pouhine, and Pouhine has changed her life. Two Pouhine, you know, she's flying. And that's what it is, is that they don't work for us, Paora... Pouhine is us. We are Pouhine. And once you've gone through one, you can't come out the same person... You're reformed. (Tui)

Participants learn that they are their own healers:

Because you learn about how to be your own kaiako... My own teacher, which means that I can find my own healer within, then all the stuff that happens after the Pouhine, when you're triggered, and you're recognising it, you can go, okay, so what do I do with this? What can I do with this? (Kāhu)

Once you have found your own healer within, the change shows.



LASTING TRANSFORMATION AND COMMUNITY FORMATION

What Pouhine activates in wāhine does not end when the wānanga does.

The visible transformation:

You know what we should do when we have a Pouhine? We should take a picture of everybody coming in, and then a picture of everybody leaving, like the last day [of the wānanga]. You'll see the difference. See the difference on their face... somebody coming in like a little mouse and carrying big baggage. And then at the end of it, there's no baggage, and she's actually another foot taller when she leaves. (Tui)

Authentic self-expression through her writing and speaking transformation:

My writing is very effective. And now my voice is too. I never used to feel confident to speak, and now I just don't care... My voice doesn't shake when I run wānanga anymore. It just flows... Because I'm not blocking it out anymore... When Tui saw my work, she was like, oh, holy crap, I thought you were crazy. I'm like, oh, I am. But because I was never confident enough to speak the way that I write, my pen was always my voice. But through Pouhine and through everything else, now I can stand up and speak too. (Kiri)

Pouhine creates lasting whānau relationships that sustain healing support:

Pouhine becomes your whānau. Those people who come into those wānanga become a part of your whānau. We've got our own Pouhine whānau... This group has carried on. Every day. Every day, posts are going up in this. But what it is, it's like their own Pouhine support. And so when stuff's coming up for them, they'll share about it, and then the other sisters will come in and share support. (Ruru)

The healing spreads through social networks as wāhine become healers within their own communities:

I put up [on Facebook] what I'm doing, and it inspired wāhine to want to change. There are so many gang sisters and aunties out there. They're stuck in that... They don't know how to interact with other wāhine. I'm trying to break that cycle. (Kea)

Pouhine as an essential space for sustaining leadership:

There are very few spaces we can be vulnerable and not wear that mask of having to show strength. So there are these other people that we're guiding and that depend on us, we're not going to portray any fear of them onto them to say, "What's happening to whāea? Am I going to be all right? So it was a space where I could go to and not be okay. But in a space, I knew I was going to be okay to say that. (Ira)

Envisioning widespread wānanga implementation:

Pouhine and Poutama does that, and it should be in the jails. That programme needs to be in the jails. It needs to be in Te Whatu Ora, because Te Whatu Ora should be contracting us to do Pouhine, because Pouhine is also about mental health and addictions. (Tui)

The wāhine from gang whānau know where Pouhine needs to go next. The mahi is already pointed there.



The Trans-Tasman Pouhine – Facilitator Reflections

What follows are facilitator reflections gathered the day after the final wānanga of this research. It is included here as a finding in its own right: evidence that Pouhine travels, that the kaupapa holds without its externals, and that tīpuna arrive wherever Papatūānuku is. The final Pouhine wānanga was held in Queensland, with wāhine from gang whānau who whakapapa to both Aotearoa and Australia.



CROSSING THE BORDER AS GANG WHĀNAU LEADERSHIP

Tui travelled to Queensland without the twenty members of her whānau who had gone to Rarotonga for her brother’s birthday the same week. She did not want them pulled aside at customs, separated into rooms, and searched because of her. She has been through that process many times. Five and six-hour waits and interrogation across several rooms. Officers going through her personal items and passing judgement on what she should and should not have packed for the weather.

I think they’ve realised that if they come in aggressive with me, they’re going to get aggressive back. If they come in politely with me, they’ll get politeness back to a degree, because I know they’ve just got a job to do and I just want to get across. (Tui)

This crossing was different. An Australian customs officer told her he did not believe she carried the threat his government claimed. He had looked at her social media and could see she does not hide who she is. The exchange became a moment of recognition across a system built to produce the opposite.

Huia, travelling alongside Tui, recognised the interrogation tactics as something Pouhine had taught her to hold differently. She stepped into the room as the reader, watching the officer’s face shift as she overheard Tui’s conversation and realised everything being said was true.

It was almost like for them, oh, this is someone a couple of hasn’t come through before. We’ll be able to get you. No, you can’t. What we’re talking about, there’s nothing to catch out. (Huia)

Every gang whānau wāhine identified as leadership carries this at every colonial border. The surveillance is constant, institutional, and gendered. Tui refuses to apologise for who she is, and she refuses to be in spaces that require her to hide it.



WHY POUHINE NEEDED TO COME TO QUEENSLAND

Tui named the reason for the crossing.

There’s women here that are ours and nobody’s saving them over here. I think the biggest thing is to come in and support them within an environment that they don’t get Te Ao Māori as much, the way that they do. It’s a part of our wairua and our mauri that we need, and they don’t get it. (Tui)

Wāhine from gang whānau who have crossed the Tasman carry their whakapapa with them. They have their circles and their healing. What Pouhine carries as wairua and mauri is what is missing, and no one else is bringing it.

The Queensland Pouhine was held in a large house, no marae and no traditional externals. The karanga adapted to the context, and the opening karakia acknowledged the traditional custodians of that Country.

Oro’s finding from this was:

What it has confirmed for me is that the Pouhine, the teachings of the Pouhine, are exactly that. They aren’t about all the aesthetics, the frameworks, and the performative stuff. They are actually about what the wāhine have brought with them. They are about the connection to mauri and wairua and how that can present differently, but the same, and no matter which environment it is in. (Oro)

What confirmed this for Oro was her own body. She arrived and tripped on a raised doorway, splitting her toe, and later that night, she hit her head. Both on her right side.

I know what that’s about. I didn’t say who I was when I arrived here. That was the message for me. You know how easy it is, just that simple saying to the whenua, hey, I’m here, I’ve arrived. It didn’t take long, got whacked twice. (Oro)

The whenua in Queensland responded the same way the whenua in Hauraki responds. Pouhine travels because Papatūānuku is everywhere there is whenua.

The wāhine who arrived were open to what Pouhine offers. Out of the whole state, wāhine who had met each other randomly on the road years earlier ended up in the same wānanga. Two wāhine carrying near-identical experiences sat in the same room at the same time. One degree of separation across the whole group.



Tui named what was holding those alignments together.

You can't odds it because that's the power of the Pouhine and it's beyond us, and that's why it's never the same. That's why it shifts and shapes and continuously astounds us. It's got its own mauri, its own life source, and its own way of just connecting where it needs to connect. (Tui)



WHAT POUHINE CATCHES

The facilitators named a pattern that recurred across the Queensland wānanga. Wāhine carrying the full weight of gang experience, including the cost of breaking codes to stay alive, and having no one who can hold space with them through what that cost.

What it is, is that there's nobody being able to support our women that have come out through gangs or gang experience to be able to hold space with them and talk with them through it. Because let's just face it, what the hell does your psychologist know, or your counsellors know about that lifestyle if they haven't lived it. (Tui)

Pouhine reaches wāhine the way nothing else does because the facilitators have lived what the wāhine in the room are carrying. The clinical pretence of applying an outside lens to an inside life is what Pouhine refuses.

Pouhine reaches wāhine in a way that I don't see anybody else reaching them. That's really what it is. We catch our wāhine that are still alive. (Tui)

Tui's position on prisons was unambiguous.

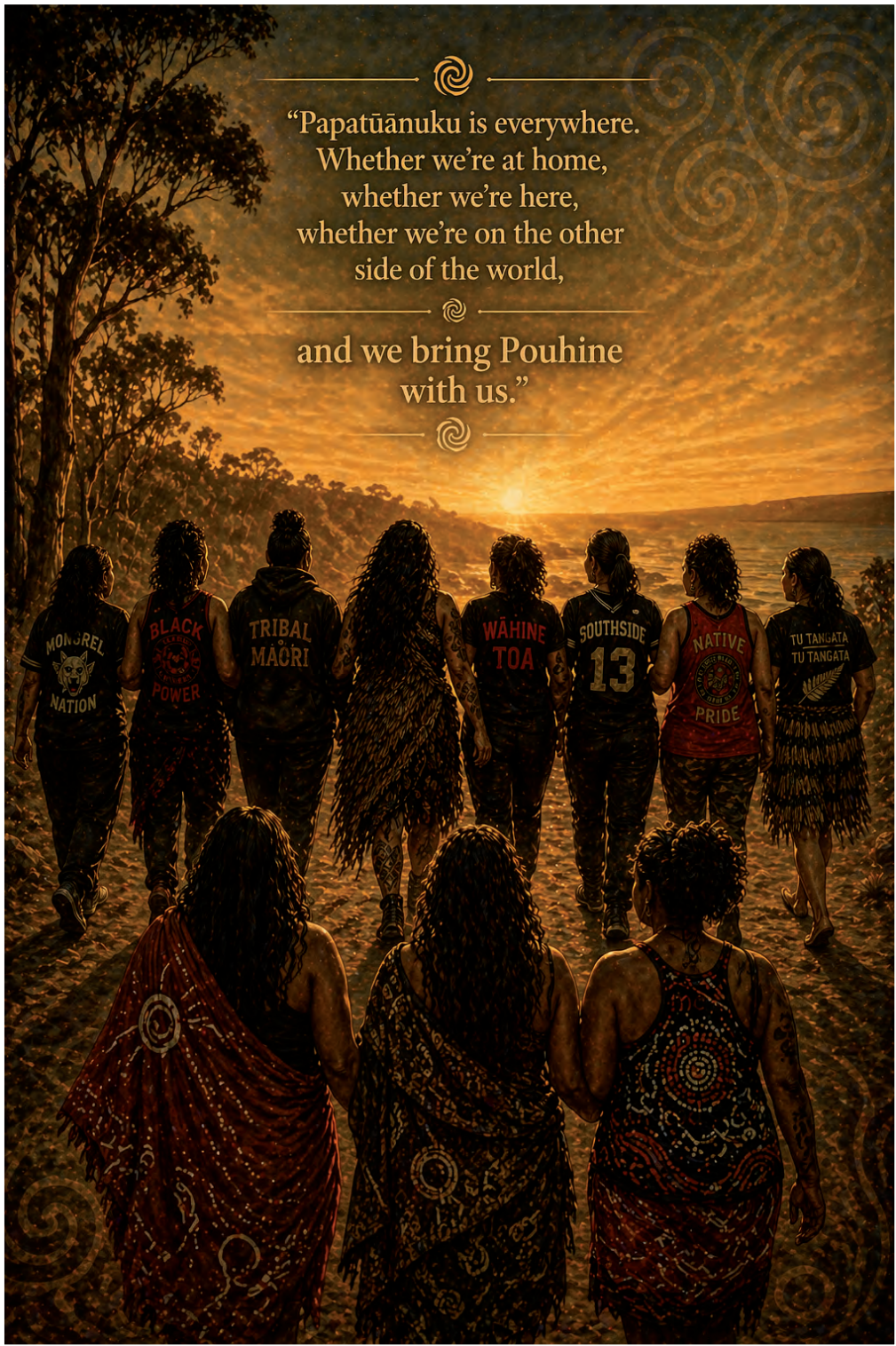
When you look at the recidivism rates, I already know. If you put Pouhine into the jails and those women that have done that, I almost guarantee you that them coming back in is just going to drop. (Tui)

Together, the facilitators named the reason this will be resisted. Pouhine working inside prisons would make visible what every other approach has failed to deliver. The same logic used to suppress other Māori-led programmes would be used to suppress Pouhine. The facilitators know this, but they continue their Pouhine training regardless.



INDIGENOUS SOLIDARITY ACROSS WHENUA

Oro named the line of whakapapa connecting Indigenous peoples across the world. She spoke about Aboriginal women's business and men's business, about whenua held apart for each, and about the knowledge that Aboriginal tohunga had shared with her over years of relationship in the outback. Different from Te Ao Māori and running from the same source.



Huia named what the Queensland wānanga confirmed.

Papatūānuku is everywhere. Whether we're at home, whether we're here, whether we're on the other side of the world, and we bring Pouhine with us. (Huia)

The Trans-Tasman Pouhine confirmed that the kaupapa and the teachings travel, and tīpuna travel with them. The wāhine who attended the wānanga found what they needed, and the facilitators returned to Aotearoa, fuller in their Pouhine knowing.

Ū: The Meaning of Sustenance

Mauri ora is the living standard against which every moment is already being measured. It is the pulse from which all of this work flows. It is the knowing in the body that recognises when life force is present and when it has been obscured. That recognition is ancestral intelligence, the true AI, woven through whakapapa, refined over generations of consequence, clear in its understanding of what sustains life, and what obstructs it.

Whanaungatanga is the cosmology within which these women operate. It understands the human being as embedded in relationship, within a web of obligation that precedes any institutional framework and continues beyond it. The phone call answered at night, the kai that reaches people regardless of their hunger, the immediate activation of a network when someone is in danger. This is whanaungatanga functioning at the speed that relationship allows. When a child is placed in the arms of someone whose love is already certain, that is whanaungatanga, the precise application of knowledge about who can be trusted with what matters most.

Rangatiratanga takes that cosmology into the structural and the constitutional. When a wāhine writes 700 pages of hapū authority tikanga Māori infrastructure, establishes a native court, activates funding through the Māori Land Corporation, and identifies the legal mechanism in Section 396 that opens pathways to community-controlled services, she is acting from the authority whakapapa has always conferred. These wāhine have learned the law well enough to walk through it and bring their people with them. That is rangatiratanga taking form in the present.

Rangatiratanga takes that cosmology into the structural and the constitutional. When a wāhine writes 700 pages of hapū authority infrastructure grounded in tikanga Māori, establishes a native court, activates funding through the Māori Land Corporation, and identifies the legal mechanism in Section 396 that opens pathways to community-controlled services, she is acting from the authority whakapapa has always conferred. These wāhine have learned the law well enough to walk through it and bring their people with them. That is rangatiratanga taking form in the present.

Mana is the sacred ground on which this work stands. When Ira says she is not there to pitch people away from who they are, that if they are going to remain within their gang whānau, they should do it with love, she is naming a philosophy that begins where people already stand. What these wāhine build begins where people stand, asking only that they be who they are, fully and without apology, within the relationships that have always held them.

Tamariki are kaupapa in motion. When children live inside kaupapa and return to their whānau fluent in it, something moves back through the relationships that formed them. The educational visions these wāhine build trust that process, understanding mokopuna not as recipients of kaupapa but as the generation through whom it travels home.

Kotahitanga finds expression across gang lines because its origin is whakapapa. When wāhine from different colours sit together in wānanga and find themselves in each other's stories, whakapapa is recognising itself across organisational distinction. That recognition becomes political force, into marches, constitutional challenges, voter registration, and direct engagement with legislative power. Wāhine standing their sacred ground understand that healing and political sovereignty are the same thing.

“Pouhine reaches wāhine in a way that I don’t see anybody else reaching them. That’s really what it is. We catch our wāhine that are still alive.”



The economies these wāhine are building answer to the values whakapapa names, feed their own people on their own terms, and require no external permission. The argument for funding redirection is a statement of what is happening and a demand that resources follow the work, keeping people alive. This economy measures whether people are fed, whether whānau are together, and whether mokopuna inherit something grown from the full authority of their tīpuna.

In te ao Māori, wāhine voices carried equal and often greater authority in the decisions that shaped collective life. When Tui creates a chapter specifically for wāhine, when Ruru insists their voices were always just as important, if not more important, they are acting from the authority that was always already theirs. Healing, building, sovereignty, and education flow from wāhine standing in that authority, and from tāne who understand that the full strength of the collective has always required it.

Pouhine is a wānanga space grounded in the understanding that wāhine already hold everything needed. Safety arrives first, immediate and bodily, coming from wāhine leading a space built from their own knowledge for their own people. From that safety, voice becomes possible.

Tīpuna do the work, and this is the central thread of Pouhine. It reorients how healing is understood and where its authority lives. The ancestors are present, active, and specific. They come through the oro, the sound of each wāhine calling herself home. They come during kāranga and connect wāhine with what is needed to settle wairua and return to self. They walk beside people through imprisonment and bring answers that make release possible. When that connection is trusted and followed, what had been held in fear begins to loosen.

Healing is physical, specific, and, at times, intense, as pain leaves through the hair and chest. Bodies purge, and skin that forgot sensation finds it again during whakawatea. Women leave, taking up more space than they arrived with. The wānanga becomes whānau, and that whānau sustains what was activated long after the wānanga ends. Sisters come in when something surfaces, and the work continues through the relationships formed in that space. Pouhine reaches sisters across the Tasman, signposting further work and direction.

Ū is sustenance, the source and what flows from it. It is mauri ora moving through whanaungatanga, through the specific and enduring intelligence of wāhine who know what their people need and build accordingly.



“Healing is physical,
specific, and at times
intense ”



CHAPTER 6:

What These Findings Add

Each findings chapter closes with a meaning section that carries the analytical weight of what wāhine said. Those sections trace the threads connecting individual accounts to the shared patterns each chapter establishes.

This discussion does something different. It names three contributions the findings make to scholarship. The first is the somatic dimension of whakapapa as a site of harm and healing. The second is grief as a mechanism of political mobilisation across gang lines. The third is what Pouhine reveals about the limits of institutional frameworks for recognising healing that works.



THE BODY AS SITE OF HARM AND HEALING

Four mechanisms emerged through this research, named with participants as they appeared across the findings. They are Pūmahara, Wā, Tohu, and Tiakitanga.

Pūmahara is the body’s archive of intergenerational experience. Ruru feels her tīpuna come up through her feet and out of her mouth. Kiri reads the patterns of behaviour her people are dealing with through a fragile balance she did not have to be taught. Kāhu carries the rapes and beatings she endured in state care as the ground from which she now leads. Pipi felt pain leave through her hair and chest in Pouhine, years after her body had absorbed what state care did to her as a child. Pūmahara makes that accumulated knowledge available in the present moment, as sensation that is already there when conditions require it.

Wā describes the position these wāhine occupy within continuous temporal flow, where past and future are simultaneously present and timing is itself a form of knowledge. Kiri’s kuia arrived weeks before the state removed her tamariki, naming what was coming and why. Tui knew with certainty, in the first conversation, that the woman she was speaking to would run wāhine operations in Australia. Ruru does not deliberate about whether she should be somewhere. The door opens and she walks through it.

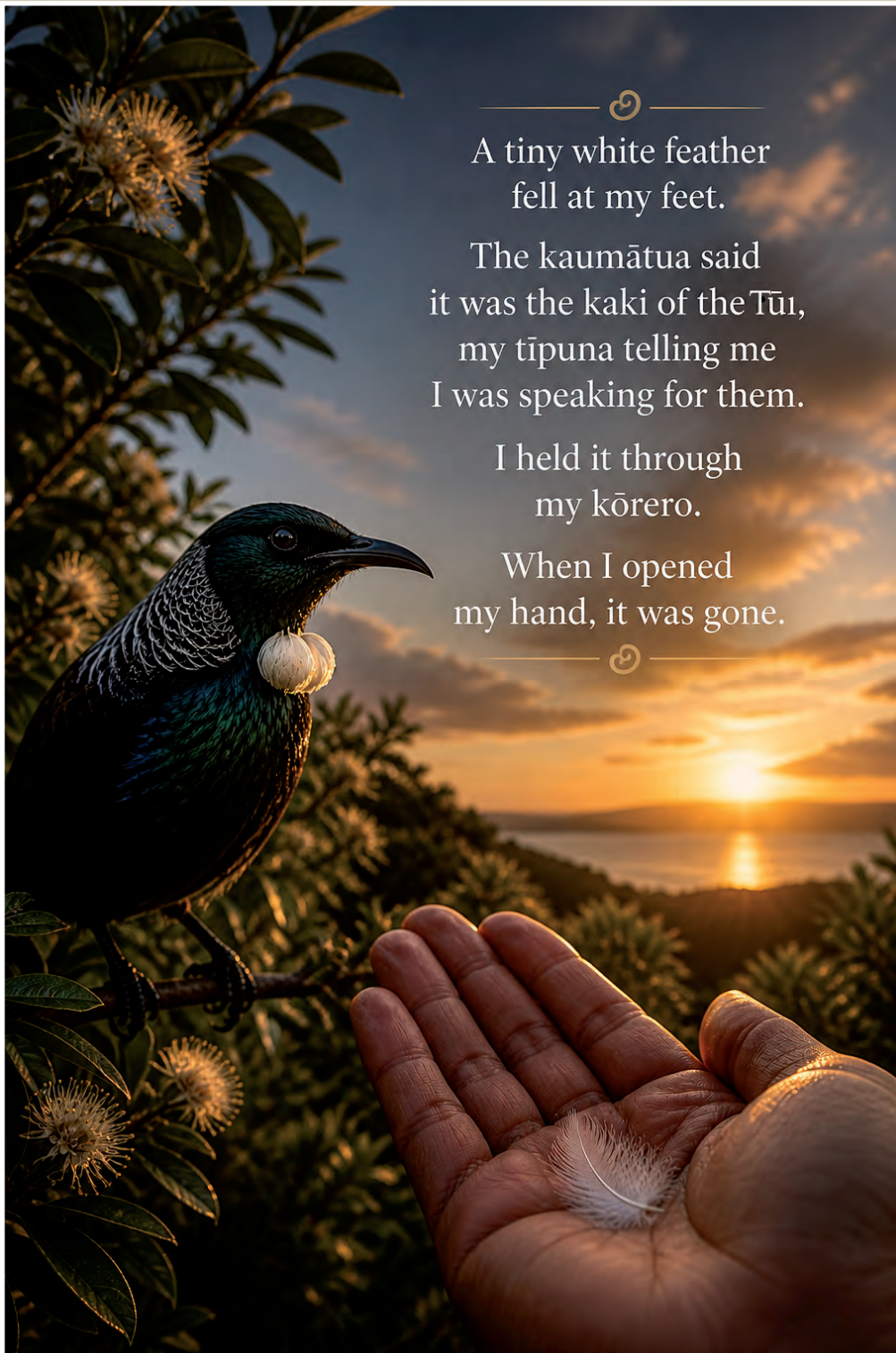
Tohu is the capacity to read what a situation holds before the conscious mind has language for it. Kōri read the angle of the room, the missing door handle, and the moment to speak, all registered before she could articulate what she was reading. She acted accurately on a sense that something was wrong in a cup of tea before she could name what it was. Tui received a white feather at the moment she needed it and knew immediately what it meant.

Tiakitanga orients all of this knowing toward collective safety. Tui will not lose one more sister on her watch. Kāhu understands her suffering as preparation for helping her people. Kiri tracks how state systems operate because that knowledge protects whānau. Every mechanism is oriented outward, shaped by responsibility to tamariki, to sisters, to the next generation watching.

Together, pūmahara, wā, tohu, and tiakitanga constitute a system of knowing that has sustained wāhine and their communities. They do not operate separately. This is a structured epistemic practice, which the Tohunga Suppression Act 1907 criminalised. Accurately naming it is the first step toward its recognition.

This extends the Mana Wāhine scholarship in territory the existing literature has not yet covered. The next research must be led by the community, through the relationships that make honest research possible.





— — — — —
A tiny white feather
fell at my feet.

The kaumātua said
it was the kaki of the Tūi,
my tīpuna telling me
I was speaking for them.

I held it through
my kōrero.

When I opened
my hand, it was gone.
— — — — —



GRIEF AS THE MECHANISM OF POLITICAL MOBILISATION

At a recent international conference, wāhine from gang whānau heard keynotes say they had learned all they needed to about trauma and were moving on to love and healing. The findings in this research show that, for these wāhine, grief, healing, and building happened simultaneously and through one another.

The funerals that kept coming produced the political clarity that built the infrastructure, which constitutes the healing. Grief was the mechanism through which the work became possible. As Kāhu reminds us, “we are here to reflect to others their humanity, or lack of it”, and for wāhine who have never had a platform to be witnessed in their grief, the message to ‘move on’ asks them to leave behind what has never been acknowledged. That message came from within academic spaces that had not yet made room for these wāhine to be heard.

No existing literature on Māori collective political mobilisation has named what produced kotahitanga across gang lines. This research calls it accumulated grief. The point at which loss becomes undeniable, individual suffering becomes recognisable as a systemic pattern, and that recognition converts into collective political force.

The solidarity documented here grew from inside the environments designed to contain these communities. What moved between these wāhine was immediate, because whakapapa is older than the divisions colonisation placed between them. When wāhine from different gang whānau sit together in Pouhine and hear themselves in each other’s stories within the first night, what they are recognising is that they come from the same place. The state has relied on them not knowing that.

The Waitangi Tribunal claim, the peer-reviewed scholarship, the marches, and the voter registration drives documented in Ū are all expressions of that recognition turned into action. They grew from grief and crossed every line the state put between these communities. Colonial management of gang communities depends on those divisions holding, and these wāhine broke them.

A state that has relied on keeping gang whānau separated now faces wāhine who have built something across those lines. That is a direct challenge to how power operates in this country, and those in power know it.





WHAT INSTITUTIONS CANNOT CONTAIN

For an institution to recognise and fund a healing programme, that programme must be able to run without the specific people who deliver it, work independently of the relationships that make it effective, and be measured against standardised outcomes. These requirements exist because institutions need quality control, scale, and funding for what they recognise. Pouhine refuses all three, and those refusals are features of its design.

The relationships are the system. This is what Messiter (2023) demonstrates across thirty years of practice, through more than 200 Poutama programmes and approximately 2,000 participants since 1995, and what Lawson-Te Aho (2013) and Rameka (2016) establish in the literature. Collective healing sourced from community authority produces outcomes that individually focused therapeutic approaches cannot match. Pouhine is the evidence for those claims in the specific context of wāhine from gang whānau. Tīpuna do the work, wāhine leave standing taller than they arrived, and what the wānanga activates is held afterwards by the whānau bonds formed within it.

As documented in Chapter Five, one participant’s account of more than twenty years of therapy compared to two Pouhine wānanga is the sharpest available evidence of the difference. Across two years, the researcher, facilitators, and kaimahi at Te Whāriki have stayed in contact with the wāhine who attended all eight Pouhine. Around seventy per cent are now clean or have significantly reduced their drug and alcohol use. Beyond that, wāhine are engaging with Oranga Tamariki processes to have their tamariki returned, securing permanent housing, gaining employment, starting businesses, taking on leadership roles in their communities, returning to education, and volunteering to support other wāhine out of violence.

Pouhine produces outcomes that Crown-funded clinical services operating in this space have been unable to reach. This research is not that study; it is the evidence base that makes the case for that study to be funded and conducted by the communities who hold the relationships. The conditions institutional frameworks impose before recognising something as legitimate are precisely the conditions that would destroy what makes Pouhine work. Pouhine belongs in prisons, in Te Whatu Ora, and in every space where decisions are made about the lives of wāhine from gang whānau and their tamariki.

To do institutional work, this research operates within the same frameworks it documents as harmful. That is, using the tools of the institution against the institution’s own failures, on terms the community controls, as Smith (2012) names.



CLOSING

This research is an act of mana motuhake. It emerged from within the relationships that held it, directed toward these communities first.

The Pouhine crossing to Queensland at the close of this research is already the next Pū. The Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū framework does not return to its own starting point (Moyle, 2025a). It cycles forward into a new beginning, carrying everything the previous cycle produced. What the trans-Tasman wānanga confirmed about Pouhine travelling across whenua and about tīpuna arriving wherever Papatūānuku is opens the ground for research that belongs to the wāhine and communities on both sides of the Tasman.

What begins here creates pathways for those communities to continue, on their terms, in their relationships. The healing they carry, the systems they have built, the solidarity they have forged, and the transformation they make possible are all one act. Wāhine in this research are here to “reflect to others their humanity, or lack of it.”

this research is a
permanent record,
produced on the terms of
the women at its centre



CHAPTER 7: Literature Review



INTRODUCTION: LOCATING WĀHINE IN GANG WHĀNAU

Wāhine Māori connected to gang whānau in this research have navigated extreme state violence and constant surveillance (Savage et al., 2021; Human Rights Commission, 2023). They have led under conditions of land dispossession, forced urbanisation, and institutional abuse that few could survive (Shilliam, 2012; Royal Commission, 2021). They have built pathways for healing that reach back to ancestral wisdom while protecting mokopuna futures. That expertise comes from whakapapa, cultural practice, and the daily work of holding whānau together when everything pushes toward fragmentation (Moyle, 2026).

The idea that these women are downtrodden reflects ignorance, rather than insight. Wāhine from gang whānau develop intelligence and strategic thinking from necessity. They navigate systems designed to exclude them while continuing to serve as mothers, grandmothers, and cultural anchors. State agencies recognise this centrality and use it to justify surveillance rather than support.

This review connects gang scholarship with Mana Wāhine theory and wāhine Māori knowledge from gang whānau contexts.

It traces the colonial destruction of social balance, the historical emergence of gang whānau, and the ongoing harm of policy and media narratives, identifying what mainstream criminology keeps missing and why. It draws on Kaupapa Māori scholarship, gang studies, policy reports, Waitangi Tribunal evidence, and Māori-led community research from 1989 to 2024, prioritising sources that centre wāhine voices and lived experience.

The focus of this review remains largely within Aotearoa because that is where the silence is loudest. For decades, research has treated wāhine from gang whānau as invisible, framing them through violence and harm rather than as knowledge holders, and when research ignores wāhine authority, policy has no basis for recognising it either (McIntosh & Workman, 2017; Human Rights Commission, 2023). That absence is the gap this review addresses.

What follows is an argument that the knowledge needed to understand and support gang whānau wāhine already exists within those communities, and that the task of research is to honour it.



MANA WĀHINE: AUTHORITY, BALANCE, AND COLONIAL DISRUPTION

Before colonisation, leadership in te ao Māori was not determined by gender but by whakapapa, merit, and the responsibilities carried for collective wellbeing. Wāhine Māori were the primary holders of mana, whenua, and whakapapa. Among Ngāti Porou, for example, mana whenua was held through wāhine as a general rule, with land bequeathed through the female line so that authority over land was never lost through marriage (Moyle, 1998). As Arnold Reedy stated, remove the female genealogies, and the genealogies become common (cited in Moyle, 1998). Wāhine were military leaders, political decision-makers, and spiritual authorities. In many contexts, their mana was not complementary to tāne but primary. Colonisation targeted this directly, and that authority is not only social and political, but grounded in cosmological order.

Cosmological Foundations and Atua Wāhine

Cosmological accounts of Te Orokohanga in pūrākau ground this authority in creation itself. From Te Kore (potential) and Te Pō (contemplation and darkness) to Te Ao Mārama (light), creation emerges through the feminine principle, birthing Papatūānuku, Ranginui, and their children (Mikaere, 2017).

When Tānemahuta shaped Hineahuone from the red clay of Papatūānuku, the collective gifts of all atua gave her life (Sullivan, 2017; Mikaere, 2017). Her first breath marked the beginning of life. Te whare tangata, the womb, the house of humanity, carries what Mikaere (1999) calls insurmountable sovereignty to create and take life. The pūrākau of Hinenuitepō asserts this sovereignty: when Māui tried to conquer her whare tangata to gain eternal life, she used her obsidian teeth to cut him in two (Kahukiwa & Grace, 1984; Mikaere, 1999).

Mahuika embodies fire, the material form of mana. As Wāhine Toa leadership explained to the Waitangi Tribunal, “*Mana is represented by fire. The fire that rages in my belly today is the same fire that my tupuna lit.*” The kupu ‘wāhine’ itself carries this meaning: wā, relating to time and space, and hine, the female essence (Ormsby, 2021, p. 3). Mana operates through collective recognition rather than individual assertion. “*Mana isn’t generated by a person alone; the people give you mana*” (Ormsby, 2021, p. 3). Wāhine are the source through which whakapapa, land, and people are sustained across generations.

Colonial Disruption Through Legislation and Policy

Colonisation disrupted gender balance in Māori society by imposing Victorian patriarchal norms through missionary influence, law, policy, and education. This was a deliberate strategy to weaken whānau Māori by undermining wāhine authority, resulting in lasting harm to collective governance and self-determination.





The colonial strategy began with rewriting creation stories. Jenkins (1988) documented: *“The coloniser found a land of ‘noble savages’ telling stories of the wonder of women. Their myths had to be recast. Missionaries were hell-bent (heaven-bent) on destroying pagan ways. In retelling our myths, by Māori male informants to Pākehā male writers who lacked understanding of Māori beliefs, Māori women find their mana wāhine destroyed”* (p. 163, cited in Ormsby, 2021). Mikaere (2019) argues that traditional narratives were changed to centre the male demigod Māui while making his kuia nearly invisible, and that the creation story of Hineahuone was reshaped to resemble the biblical myth of Adam and Eve, with Tānemahuta made central and Papatūānuku’s role almost erased (section IV). These cosmological changes made patriarchal hierarchies appear both ancient and inevitable.

Legislative measures followed. The Māori Representation Act 1867 defined Māori as “a male aboriginal native inhabitant of New Zealand,” rendering wāhine politically and socially invisible. The Education Act 1904 erased wāhine through gendered definitions of Māori identity, and the Tohunga Suppression Act 1907 criminalised traditional healing practices, directly attacking wāhine as authorities in matters of life, death, and wellbeing (Rattray–Te Mana et al., 2024).

Colonial ideology replaced mana wāhine with a Christian patriarchy that positioned white males at the top of the hierarchy, Pākehā males next, their female counterparts following, then Māori males, with wāhine Māori and tamariki at the bottom (Mikaere, 2021; Pihama, 2021). This hierarchy was naturalised through institutions, embedded in policy, and reinforced through everyday practice until it appeared inevitable rather than imposed.

The lived consequences reached into everyday life. Wāhine Māori were made to replicate Western domestic norms, fulfilling the roles of housewives and mothers of nuclear families, with diminished participation in decision-making within hapū, whānau, and marae (Gemmell, 2013; Mikaere, 1994, 2011; Burt, 2011). Tikanga Māori, mātauranga Māori, and te reo Māori were distorted through a Pākehā lens, making them appear male-oriented rather than encompassing wāhine (Gemmell, 2013). McMeeking (2017) names this as purposeful and systematic, practised intergenerationally by the Crown from before the signing of Te Tiriti.

Contemporary Enactment of Mana Wāhine

Mana wāhine scholarship establishes that authority grounded in whakapapa and whenua is not contingent on colonial recognition. Māori women have always held, enacted, and transmitted it. Colonial systems worked systematically to make that authority invisible, to strip its institutional expression, and to criminalise its practice (Smith, 2012; Hutchings, 2002; Simmonds, 2011, 2014; Duff, 2021).

The Wai 2700 Mana Wāhine Inquiry represents a landmark body of evidence on the status and rights of wāhine Māori under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The inquiry examines how the Crown has failed to protect and give effect to mana wāhine across health, education, justice, and welfare systems, and how those failures connect to the systematic colonial disruption of wāhine authority traced in this section. Paula Ormsby’s testimony to the inquiry, cited throughout this review, is part of a substantial body of evidence from wāhine who have named those failures on their own terms. The research reported here connects directly to Wai 2700, contributing evidence of how mana wāhine is enacted and undermined in the specific context of gang whānau in Hauraki.

Wāhine Māori remain over-represented in child protection and criminal justice systems, often framed as deficient mothers or risky subjects (McIntosh & Workman, 2017). This scrutiny intensifies for wāhine connected to gang whānau, where affiliation alone can trigger surveillance and intervention. The daily acts of holding whānau together, protecting mokopuna from state removal, dealing with whānau violence, and leading healing work are all expressions of mana wāhine (Desmond, 2009). What state systems frame as risk, Mana Wāhine scholarship recognises as leadership.

Gang formation can be understood as a response to the systematic erasure of mana wāhine through land loss, gendered legislation, forced urbanisation, and state care abuse. When colonial systems destroyed balanced gender relations, criminalised cultural practices, and fractured communities from their land, they created conditions within which gang whānau emerged as attempts to recreate kinship and protection (Gilbert, 2013; Shilliam, 2012; Royal Commission, 2021). Understanding mana wāhine as both ancestral authority and contemporary practice provides the foundation for recognising gang whānau wāhine as leaders rather than problems.

The following section examines how gang whānau formed, tracing the specific historical realities of land dispossession, urbanisation, and state care abuse within which they emerged as responses to colonial violence.



THE MAKING OF GANG WHĀNAU AND INTERGENERATIONAL SURVIVAL

The colonial whenuascapes traced in the previous section produced specific, documentable consequences for whānau Māori. Land dispossession, forced urban migration, poverty, and systemic racism severed connections to whenua, cultural anchors, and kin networks (Shilliam, 2012; Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2019).





Within this dislocation, Māori youth in the 1960s and 1970s formed collectives that came to be named gangs. Tracing how and why requires moving through the specific historical circumstances that made those formations necessary (Crenshaw, 1991).

Urban Migration and Disconnection from Whenua

Following the signing of Te Tiriti, systematic colonial legislation enabled the confiscation and unjust purchase of whenua Māori on a massive scale (Ratray–Te Mana et al., 2024). Within approximately fifty years, most had been lost to the Crown (McMeeking, 2017). Legislation, including the New Zealand Settlements Act 1863, the Suppression of Rebellion Act 1863, and the Native Lands Act 1862, enabled resource exploitation and the suppression of tikanga. The establishment of the Native Land Court in 1865 imposed individual ownership over collective, severing whakapapa to whenua and accelerating the fragmentation of Māori communities (McMeeking, 2017; Ratray–Te Mana et al., 2024).

By the 1950s, as part of the post-WWII recovery, many Māori were forced into urban environments, away from hapū and whenua, to survive (Moyle, 1998; Mikaere, 2011; Ratray–Te Mana et al., 2024). The proportion of Māori living in urban areas increased rapidly across four decades; by the 1980s, around 80 per cent of Māori were living in cities (Thorns & Sedgwick, 1997, as cited in Gilbert, 2013). The prosperity promised through urbanisation never materialised (Shilliam, 2012; Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2019).

The loss of cultural identity, whānau and hapū networks, and connection to whenua produced social dislocation and deepening poverty in Māori communities (Gilbert, 2013; Ratray–Te Mana et al., 2024).

State Care, Abuse, and Gang Formation

Within these contexts of poverty and whenua disconnection, state systems became sites of further violence. The Mongrel Mob and Black Power grew from young Māori who had been pushed to the margins of society, forced from school and into state care institutions (Gilbert, 2013; Newbold & Taonui, 2020). By 1967, Māori comprised nine per cent of New Zealand males but up to 40 per cent of the borstal population, a disproportionality that foreshadowed Māori reaching 40 per cent of the adult prison population by 1971 (Gang whānau with McIntosh, 2023). The pipeline from state policy to gang formation was already visible in the data decades before it was named.

The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care (2021) reported that a substantial majority, estimated at 80 to 90 per cent, of Māori men involved in gang movements had experienced state care, where they endured abuse and neglect. Sir Kim Workman observed, *“the offenders of today were almost always the victims of yesterday”* (cited in Royal Commission, 2021). When around 200 gang members attended a hui with the Royal Commission in February 2023, sharing their experiences of state care, the gathering was very upfront about how gang whānau themselves understand their histories as products of state violence rather than inherent criminality (Smale, 2023; Gang whānau with McIntosh, 2023).

The Wai 2915 Oranga Tamariki Inquiry sits alongside the Royal Commission as a defining body of evidence on state harm to tamariki Māori and whānau. Where the Royal Commission examined abuse in care across institutions and over time, Wai 2915 focuses specifically on Oranga Tamariki and the Crown’s obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, including the disproportionate and often forced removal of tamariki from their whānau. The inquiry has heard evidence that the systems designed to protect children perpetuated the same patterns of removal and harm that gang whānau formed in response to. For wāhine from gang whānau, Wai 2915 is the present tense of the conditions documented by this research.

The Royal Commission also found that Māori girls were abused in state care at rates similar to Māori boys (Savage et al., 2021). These girls were targeted by the state for not looking female enough, for being Māori, or for being assumed to be promiscuous or wayward. Within institutional care, they experienced degrading treatment, including forced internal examinations, forced contraception, and, for some, sterilisation, abuses not inflicted on non-Māori girls (Savage et al., 2021). Their subsequent pathways into gang whānau have received far less research attention, a gap that positions wāhine at the intersection of multiple compounding forms of state harm, overlooked within gang scholarship and within the broader literature on state care abuse alike.

For many of these girls, gang whānau became places of safety. One wāhine shared that her gang-affiliated cousin took her to her first hui, where she reclaimed her pepeha. Others identified wāhine in gang whānau as the only consistent caregivers in their lives (Savage et al., 2021). When state systems had inflicted harm rather than provided care, seeking protection and belonging within gang whānau was a rational response, one that offered the kinship, identity, and refuge those institutions had denied.

The February 2023 Royal Commission hui produced a submission documenting state-produced harm and intergenerational trauma across decades, with gang whānau leadership speaking collectively about their histories in state care (Gang whānau with McIntosh, 2023). That the voices of wāhine occupied four pages of a forty-page document, in a hui shaped primarily by and for tāne, is itself evidence of the gap this section traces. When wāhine sought a dedicated hui with the commissioners to speak about what they had survived, they were offered a single session with nine seats. This mirrors what the scholarship consistently shows: even where gang whānau are acknowledged, wāhine remain in the margins of the margins.



Gang Whānau as Intergenerational and Whakapapa-Based

These dynamics shaped gangs as whānau in their own right, spanning multiple generations and including grandparents, parents, children, and grandchildren (Gerrard et al., 2023). This intergenerational continuity is distinctive to Aotearoa and challenges international gang frameworks that assume gangs are temporary affiliations or youth subcultures. In many Māori contexts, gang whānau are whakapapa-based, carrying roles of belonging, identity, care and protection.

Contemporary Realities and Structural Violence

Gang whānau today continue to face disproportionate poverty, inadequate housing, child removal, and constant state surveillance. The He Whare, He Taonga research in Hauraki (Te Whāriki Manawāhine o Hauraki, 2024) showed how wāhine linked poor housing directly to ongoing exclusion, describing overcrowding, substandard dwellings, and the inability to secure rentals due to stigma. What is most often attributed to gang whānau is a product of systemic neglect and discrimination, not individual choices or cultural deficiencies (Gilbert, 2013; Rattray–Te Mana et al., 2024).

For gang whānau wāhine specifically, this marginality is compounded by gendered surveillance. They face scrutiny from Oranga Tamariki, police, Corrections, and other government departments that target them because these agencies recognise wāhine as the foundation of gang whānau (McIntosh & Workman, 2017; Moyle, 2026).

Locating gang whānau within this frame reveals them as products of colonisation, structural inequality, and intergenerational survival.



HOW SYSTEMS KEEP HARM IN PLACE: POLICY, MEDIA, AND NARRATIVE VIOLENCE

The public story of gangs in Aotearoa has been dominated by deficit frames that actively shape the conditions gang whānau must navigate. Policy, media, and political discourse have consistently positioned gangs as criminal threats to social order, emphasising violence, drugs, and intimidation while ignoring the structural forces that produce these communities (Glasgow–Palmer, 2020). This narrow focus has marginalised whānau and silenced the voices of wāhine who hold healing and leadership roles within them.

Media Narratives and Visual Politics

Media representations of Māori have followed these patterns since the earliest days of colonisation. Kupu Taea: Media and te Tiriti Project documents this as “symbolic annihilation”, with Māori appearing in less than two per cent of news stories and represented in consistently negative terms when they do (Kupu Taea, 2008, 2014).

Media coverage focuses on patch displays, funerals, or violent incidents, creating visual shorthand that codes gangs as dangerous and disorderly (Glasgow–Palmer, 2020). These stories rarely acknowledge that gang communities are also whakapapa whānau, raising children, sustaining relationships, and navigating systemic violence. One wāhine named this upfront: *“To the public, I am only a gang woman. I am a lecturer, a mother, all these things, but I am only a gang woman”* (Gang whānau with McIntosh, 2023). That reduction is how deficit framing operates, collapsing multiple identities and decades of expertise into a single mark of risk. The effect is to entrench public fear and justify punitive interventions that further marginalise already marginalised communities.

Photo: TVNZ



Even when the media attempts to centre wāhine voices, questions remain about who controls the narrative and who benefits from the storytelling. The TVNZ Gang Mums documentary series (Stewart, 2024), released in July 2024, represented a rare opportunity for wāhine to speak for themselves. They share stories that paint complex realities, including love, loyalty, healing, and refuge found within gang whānau, alongside experiences of harm. One participant described the decision to share as *“a massive undertaking” because “the lack of trust and balance in media reporting on our people is the very reason we hesitate to share our world.”*

Thirty days later, the series vanished under TVNZ’s content expiry policy. Waiwiri-Smith (2024) identifies this as part of a broader structural problem in which public interest journalism and community-centred content disappear when they do not attract sufficient commercial traffic. This creates a hierarchy in which NZ On Air-funded content receives extended availability while the voices of marginalised wāhine remain disposable. From a Mana Wāhine perspective, this represents the continuation of colonial practices that extract knowledge from Indigenous communities without ensuring those communities maintain control over their own stories (Smith, 2012).



Policy Frameworks and Legislative Violence

Policy follows the logic established through media narratives. Successive governments have adopted tough-on-crime approaches that treat gang whānau as threats requiring elimination rather than communities requiring support (Roguski, 2019). The patch bans of the early 2000s set a precedent for increasingly punitive responses. The 2024 Gangs Act expanded police powers to disperse gatherings, issue non-consorting orders, and criminalise insignia (New Zealand Police, 2024). Leaders such as Christopher Luxon have publicly declared that *“gangs are not nice people... they peddle in misery”* (Desmarais, 2023). Such rhetoric reduces complex communities to symbols of danger rather than subjects of social justice.

The Gang Harms report, commissioned by the Prime Minister’s Chief Science Advisor (2023), is an example of state-led knowledge production that reproduces deficit framings of gang whānau. It does so by privileging institutional perspectives while marginalising wāhine-led and grassroots community knowledge. While comprehensive in scope, the report pays little attention to wāhine or to the intergenerational healing practices within gang whānau. Its emphasis on quantifying harm reinforces deficit approaches and risks silencing the very communities it seeks to address. From a Mana Wāhine standpoint, the report demonstrates how state-commissioned research can reproduce colonial narratives by counting costs without recognising the authority and leadership of wāhine who sustain whānau.

Researchers such as Roguski (2019) and McIntosh and Workman (2017) argue that punitive policies fail to reduce harm and instead deepen cycles of exclusion. When whānau are criminalised en masse, trust with state systems is eroded, children are more likely to be removed, and community-led solutions are sidelined. Police, Corrections, Oranga Tamariki, Kainga Ora and other government departments disproportionately target wāhine because these women hold whānau stability and continuity, making them visible points of intervention. Māori mothers connected to gangs face higher levels of child protection scrutiny, with affiliation itself treated as a risk factor regardless of actual parenting practices (McIntosh & Workman, 2017; Royal Commission, 2021). The intelligence and strategic thinking wāhine develop from navigating these systems is dismissed rather than recognised as expertise. Moyle (2025b) names this mechanism the smiling assassin, where institutional practices present as culturally responsive and reformed while continuing the systematic removal of tamariki Māori from their whānau. The findings of the present research extend that analysis into the specific context of wāhine from gang whānau across Aotearoa.

State Surveillance and Gendered Targeting

The Human Rights Commission’s Maranga Mai report (2023) documents how wāhine experience overlapping systems of state violence, including child removals, police raids, poverty, and housing discrimination. While the report acknowledges wāhine as key figures within affected whānau, it operates within frameworks focused on service improvement rather than structural transformation guided by mana wāhine principles.

The He Whare, He Taonga research in Hauraki (Te Whāriki Manawāhine o Hauraki, 2024) documented these experiences from within the community, not about it from the outside. Wāhine described overcrowding, substandard conditions, and rental refusals directly linked to gang affiliation. Gang affiliation is used by housing providers as a disqualifying marker, meaning the same stigma that drives police targeting also determines where wāhine and their mokopuna can live.

Counter-Narratives and Indigenous Critique

Māori-led voices have insisted on different framings. Te Pāti Māori leaders have repeatedly argued that gangs are products of state neglect rather than causes of social breakdown. Tākuta Ferris stated that *“being tough on gangs is just addressing the system... but they’ve got to be honest about the root cause”* (RNZ, 2024). Debbie Ngarewa-Packer has added that gangs exist because of failed education, poor housing, and systemic inequality, and that solutions must begin with addressing these causes rather than policing symptoms.

This self-determination extends beyond political advocacy into academic knowledge production. Fatupaito, Ormsby and Elers (2024) published a peer-reviewed commentary in the Decolonization of Criminology and Justice journal in which the Ariki of the Mongrel Mob Kingdom and the leader of Wāhine Toa explicitly rejected the Crown’s definition of their community as a criminal gang. They asserted instead that the Kingdom is a confederation bound by whanaungatanga, and that the korowai is a taonga rather than a patch. Writing from within the community rather than about it, the authors traced the whakapapa of the korowai back through colonisation, land dispossession, and forced urbanisation, demonstrating how gang whānau understand their own history on their own terms.

Mana Wāhine and Indigenous psychology scholarship establish that healing cannot occur where policy and media frames deny wāhine authority or treat whānau as inherently criminal (Pihama, 2019; Lawson-Te Aho, 2013). The Mana Wāhine claim lodged on behalf of Wāhine Toa in 2020 (WAI 3011) represents a direct challenge to those frames. The claim alleges that the Crown breached Te Tiriti o Waitangi by failing to uphold the rights of wāhine and tamariki connected to gang whānau, describing them as “priority whānau” most impacted by intergenerational trauma, colonisation, systemic violence, and state removal of children. Their public statement was unequivocal: *“It’s up to us to retell the stories that were stolen from us, from wāhine that were silenced”* (Ormsby, 2021).



Material Consequences and Structural Violence

Deficit narratives, punitive policy, and media representation combine to produce structural violence that operates through multiple systems simultaneously. When wāhine are identified as gang-affiliated, they have to navigate cascading interventions. Schools may flag their children as at-risk, health providers may document gang connections in medical records, housing applications are declined, Oranga Tamariki investigations intensify, and police target their homes during operations, treating domestic spaces as conflict zones (Human Rights Commission, 2023). The surveillance is gendered in specific ways: while tāne face criminalisation through the justice system, wāhine face it through child protection, housing, and welfare systems that position them as risks to their own tamariki and mokopuna.



WĀHINE IN GANG WHĀNAU: FROM SILENCE TO RECOGNITION

The scholarship on wāhine in gang contexts has been limited and predominantly framed through deficit perspectives, treating wāhine as peripheral figures whose presence required explanation only in relation to male gang members (Gilbert, 2013; Newbold, 1989; Dennehy & Newbold, 2001). Rather than being understood as knowledge holders and agents of transformation, wāhine have been framed through violence and harm. This erasure has material consequences, such as methodological choices in research design, that reproduce the same hierarchies that punitive policy enforces in practice (Roguski, 2019).

Early Work and Deficit Framings

Internationally, gang scholarship largely ignored women until the 1970s and 1980s, when researchers such as Anne Campbell (1984) began documenting women’s roles in New York street gangs through ethnographic approaches. Research by Brown (1977) and Quicker (1983) illustrated that women played integral roles within their gangs and sometimes formed autonomous satellite groups (cited in Arnold, 2024). These studies remained exceptions within a field dominated by male perspectives and criminological paradigms emphasising pathology.

In Aotearoa, the pattern mirrored international trends. Prior to the 1960s, gang literature rarely acknowledged women’s presence (Dennehy & Newbold, 2001). The most significant early contribution came from Glennis Dennehy, whose 2000 Master’s thesis documented experiences of ten women involved in gangs during the 1990s. Published as *The Girls in the Gang* (Dennehy & Newbold, 2001), this work explored how severe socio-economic hardship, histories of abuse, and marginalisation led women to gang affiliation. For many, gangs provided an alternative community, protection, and security. One participant described her need: *“it was a security thing for me. You know...this tough fella who would look after me, and love me, what I never had when I was young”* (p. 81). The study also documented cycles of violence, where nine of the ten women interviewed recounted instances of extreme violence directed at themselves or their friends.

Two years after the book was published, Paula Whetu Jones and producer Claudette Hauiti brought Dennehy herself to screen. Their documentary *Gang Girls* (2003) featured seven wāhine including Faye Manukau, former President of Black Power Papakura’s Women’s Chapter, and Ngawa Tawhai, a Mongrel Mob associate since 1971, and recognised Dennehy as both a former gang associate and the academic who had written about that experience. Where the scholarship had named wāhine experience within criminological frameworks, Jones and Hauiti created space for wāhine to speak on their own terms.

Winner of Best Television Documentary at the 2003 Qantas Media Awards, *Gang Girls* stands as an early example of wāhine-led knowledge production, foregrounding wāhine authority and analysis before scholarship caught up.

Dennehy brought lived experience to her research. The published text reflects asymmetries of academic power and authority that shaped how wāhine experiences were framed within criminological paradigms. Greg Newbold, a senior Pākehā criminologist, became a co-author of the published book, and his involvement shaped a theoretical framing that remained largely within Western criminological paradigms. This limited engagement with mātauranga Māori or Mana Wāhine theory is notable given that these frameworks were emerging at the time.

Pip Desmond and Aroha Trust

Pip Desmond’s Trust (2009) made another significant contribution by documenting women’s experiences at *Aroha Trust*, an organisation she co-founded. Many women associated with Aroha Trust were affiliated with Black Power.



We are the girls from
Miramar / Handed down
by the Pākehā





Desmond’s work highlights resilience and strength, emphasising efforts to move through cycles of violence and harm through community support, trust, and empowerment. The women of Aroha Trust captured their reality in a poem sung to the tune of Island in the Sun: *“We are the girls from Miramar / Handed down by the Pākehā (New Zealand European) / Picked us up for I and D [Impaired Driving] / For being a fuckin’ menace to society / Super, super, set us free / Send us back to our families / We promised to you that we’ll be good / Like the little Māori girls of New Zealand should”* (cited in Desmond, 2009, p. 100). Charmaine reflected that *“I look at those lyrics today and once again they had perpetuated the belief system that said I was a bad little Māori girl”* (p. 100). This work documents both the weight of deficit narratives imposed on wāhine and the collective organising through which they built resistance.

Emerging Recognition and Contemporary Contributions

More recent scholarship has begun recognising wāhine as agents rather than victims, though significant gaps remain. The Prime Minister’s Chief Science Advisor report (Gerrard et al., 2023) noted the *“missed opportunity”* and *“massive oversight”* of women’s experiences within gang whānau, calling this *“a reflection of the fact that the research community has long overlooked their role.”* The report acknowledged that women in gang communities were often change makers, breaking stereotypes held by society.

Its analysis did not extend to Mana Wāhine frameworks or Indigenous psychologies.

Individual scholars have made important contributions. Whitfield’s (2019) research on women’s gang desistance provided insights into pathways out of gang life. Lett (2021) explored prototypical gang recruits in New Zealand prisons, touching on gendered pathways. Bradley’s (2023) work on Wāhine Toa and the korowai documented the first female-only chapter of the Mongrel Mob Kingdom, describing how these women were redefining identity and challenging gender roles within the gang’s structure. Bradley noted that in the 1970s, members’ attitudes toward female partners were that *“you were expected to stay at home, keep the house, and look after the children. Women were not invited to the ‘gang pad”* (p. 176). Today, wives and partners are included in daily involvement, members organise alcohol and drug-free sports events and celebrations with families, and *“Mongrel Mob wāhine maintain and continue to strengthen their roles as wāhine within their respective chapters and communities”* (Bradley, 2023, p. 176).

Arnold’s (2024) thesis on Wāhine Toa is the most comprehensive recent study, using participatory action research and photovoice methodology to centre the voices of six wāhine. The research explored how wāhine navigate marginality, stigma, systemic exclusion, and trauma while engaging in empowerment and resistance, honouring community authority through methodologies aligned with Kaupapa Māori principles. Yet, as a single study with six participants at a single point in time, it cannot account for broader patterns across gang whānau contexts, a gap that remains substantially under-researched.

**Wāhine as Knowledge Producers:
Rattray-Te Mana and Te Rangi (2020)**

Rattray-Te Mana and Te Rangi (2020) positioned wāhine from gang whānau as knowledge producers rather than research subjects, a departure from the field’s established patterns. Where much gang research positions researchers as the primary interpreters of community experience, this work treats wāhine as authorities on how gang whānau function, how healing occurs, and what communities need. The analysis draws directly from wāhine knowledge rather than applying external frameworks to explain their lives. It demonstrates that wāhine in gang whānau hold sophisticated understandings of intergenerational trauma, healing practice, and navigation of state systems that emerge from lived experience and daily practice.

Wāhine Toa, and the Waitangi Tribunal

The 2020 Waitangi Tribunal claim (WAI 3011), brought on behalf of Wāhine Toa, was introduced in the previous section in the context of counter-narratives to deficit policy framings. Its significance here is different. As scholarship and advocacy produced from within gang whānau communities, it represents the epistemological position this research aligns with. The claim addresses the Crown’s failure to support Māori women and children involved in gangs, highlighting intergenerational trauma and advocating for increased recognition and structural response. Wāhine Toa’s founding was itself an act of mana wāhine asserted against internal colonisation.

One wāhine at the February 2023 Royal Commission hui put it this way: *“Our men didn’t have a problem with wāhine until one wanted to come alongside, which shows how colonised our tāne are. I was raised by my papa as a goddess, I know where I come from... The colonised ideas infiltrated our minds, so this [chapter] to me, was about reasserting our place”* (Gang whānau with McIntosh, 2023). The assertion that *‘It’s up to us to retell the stories that were stolen from us, from wāhine that were silenced’* (Ormsby, 2021) is a direct claim of knowledge authority.





Critical Gaps in Existing Research

There are two dimensions of gap that structure what is missing from the literature. The first is epistemic. Most gang scholarship treats wāhine as peripheral to male experiences, with little research integrating Mana Wāhine theory or Indigenous psychologies into gang contexts (Lawson–Te Aho, 2013; Rameka, 2016). The scholarship rarely examines how colonial disruption of mana wāhine connects to gang formation and contemporary dynamics.

The second is empirical. The everyday realities of older wāhine, grandmothers, and mokopuna in gang whānau remain largely undocumented (Gerrard et al., 2023). Power dynamics between wāhine and tāne within gang structures have received limited analysis. Research on intergenerational healing practices led by wāhine remains sparse, and the role of wāhine in maintaining cultural practices, teaching te reo Māori, and connecting mokopuna to whakapapa deserves sustained attention. The economic sovereignty visions and alternative economic infrastructure already being built by wāhine, alongside the kotahitanga forming across gang lines, remain undocumented despite their significance as political and healing forces.

The somatic dimension of intergenerational transmission has been overlooked entirely. That is, how the body carries both colonial harm and ancestral healing intelligence simultaneously. How that embodied knowledge guides leadership, protection, and healing is a dimension of wāhine experience that existing scholarship has not documented. This absence is one of the most significant gaps addressed by the present research.

International feminist gang scholarship offers useful methodological ground, particularly the commitment to centring community voices and refusing to treat male experience as the universal default. In Aotearoa, however, these frameworks must be grounded in Mana Wāhine theory. Gang whānau here are intergenerational, whakapapa-based, and inseparable from colonial histories that international scholarship was not built to address. Importing these frameworks uncritically risks reproducing the very colonial knowledge production they seek to challenge.

What the Scholarship Has Established and What It Has Not

The scholarship reviewed here establishes that wāhine in gang whānau have consistently been marginalised even when acknowledged as central to the realities being studied. When researchers document gang whānau life without centring wāhine voices, when policy develops from male-focused analysis, when media representations ignore wāhine leadership, the result is knowledge production that perpetuates harm (Smith, 2012).

The emerging body of work by Desmond, Arnold, Bradley, and others points toward what becomes possible when wāhine are positioned as knowledge producers, when Mana Wāhine frameworks guide analysis, and when methodologies honour community authority.

The following section examines Indigenous frameworks that provide a foundation for this different approach, demonstrating how healing and research can come from practices that recognise wāhine authority and centre mokopuna wellbeing across generations.



INDIGENOUS FRAMEWORKS FOR HEALING AND ANALYSIS

Whakapapa, tino rangatiratanga, and collective responsibility form the principled foundation from which this work proceeds. Mokopuna wellbeing across generations is the ngako of what this research is for.

Indigenous Psychologies and Community Authority

Lawson–Te Aho (2013), Rameka (2016), and Pihama and Tuhiwai Smith (2023) have developed Indigenous psychological frameworks that challenge Western therapeutic models by centring Māori worldviews, whakapapa, and collective responsibility. These frameworks insist that healing practices must emerge from communities themselves rather than being imposed by external professionals.

For gang whānau, this means recognising that wāhine already practice healing through daily acts of caring for mokopuna, maintaining whānau connections across incarceration, navigating state surveillance while protecting children, and sustaining cultural practices within contexts of extreme marginalisation.

These Indigenous frameworks have direct implications for research with wāhine from gang whānau. Research processes must return authority to communities, with wāhine determining research questions, methodologies, and how findings are used. Knowledge produced should strengthen rather than be extracted from communities, and provide tools for wāhine-led healing work. Wāhine from gang whānau cannot be understood in isolation from their loved ones, their relationships with tāne, their roles within whānau structures, and their connections to ancestral knowledge. Research must attend to these relationships and acknowledge that healing happens through collective processes. It also requires long-term engagement that builds relationships, returns knowledge to communities, and supports community-led solutions. This takes time and sustained commitment.





The foundational work of Wirihana and Smith (2014) and the wāhine Māori scholarship gathered in He Rau Murimuri Aroha (2019) established the whenuascap of Māori intergenerational trauma and healing research in Aotearoa. They draw on the work of Native Americans, Brave Heart (1998), Walters et al. (2011), and Duran (1995) to build a language for what had not yet been named here. That work is essential. This research begins from a different place, with wāhine at the centre: their tīpuna, their whakapapa, and their own ways of naming what they carry. The theory comes from there.

Mana Wāhine

Mana Wāhine is both the epistemology and the methodology through which this research is grounded, positioning wāhine Māori as inherent holders of authority sourced in whakapapa and whenua. This research extends Mana Wāhine theory to gang whānau contexts, positioning wāhine as leaders of intergenerational healing rather than subjects of intervention. Mana Wāhine provides the analytic criteria for this review: whose authority counts, what counts as evidence, and how research avoids reinforcing surveillance and extraction. The analytical framework through which the findings of this research are read is Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū, an Indigenous framework developed from within this research that draws on the Mana Wāhine principles named in this section, centring the voices, authority, and healing knowledge of wāhine as the foundation for analysis. It is within this epistemological grounding that Pouhine wānanga operate.

Pouhine Wānanga: Healing for Wāhine from Gang Whānau

This work has evolved into Pouhine, a healing wānanga that works with wāhine, including those from gang whānau. Pouhine centres wāhine experiences and authority, creating spaces where healing from intergenerational trauma happens through collective knowledge production rather than individual therapeutic intervention. It positions wāhine as carriers of healing knowledge who understand how to address whānau violence and trauma through cultural practice, whakapapa connection, and collective support. Healing does not require fixing individual deficits but rather creating conditions where collective knowledge can be accessed and applied through wānanga that honour mana wāhine. Indigenous frameworks provide the tools for recognising and honouring that knowledge.



CONCLUSION: TOWARD RESEARCH THAT SERVES

What this review has traced across six sections is one continuous account. Colonisation dismantled the cosmological order within which wāhine held primary authority. From that destruction, gang whānau emerged as a rational collective response. Policy and media have worked since to pathologise what they produced. Scholarship largely followed suit, treating wāhine as peripheral when they are in fact central. The gaps that remain are the shape of the same erasure, repeated across every system these wāhine navigate.

The Indigenous frameworks that close this review demonstrate that the knowledge needed already exists within communities. Mana Wāhine epistemology, Indigenous psychologies, and Pouhine Wānanga provide the foundation. Wāhine already hold what is needed. What follows is built from there.

Wāhine already hold
what is needed.
What follows is built
from there.



Chapter 8: Methodology

This chapter closes the research. The findings, voices, and analysis have already been presented. This chapter gives a full account of how the work was done. It describes the methodological decisions that shaped it, the conditions under which it was conducted, and the principles that guided it. It is written to stand alone so that the research process can be fully understood.



PURPOSE AND CONTEXT

This research builds from an HRC-funded ‘Gang Whānau Healing Intergenerational Trauma’ project with tāne, conducted by Te Whāriki in 2023. That project established the relational foundation with gang whānau leadership that made this work possible. It also revealed that wāhine carry specific dimensions of trauma that needed their own space and their own healing pathways.

The aim of this project was to track and document the healing journeys of wāhine from gang whānau and to capture some of their lives before, during, and after the Pouhine wānanga. A key purpose was to tell the story of who they are and why they are, and to be defined by no one but themselves. A hope within this research was that wāhine who began facilitator training would carry Pouhine home to their own people. That work is still unfolding and belongs to the research that comes next.

This research contributes to a long-term vision for gang whānau at the centre of this project. That is, to freedom from family, sexual, and intergenerational violence; the capability to address childhood and intergenerational trauma; long-term resourcing for their own healing solutions; and data sovereignty over their own healing journeys.

The research was funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand through the Rangahau Hauora Māori Researcher First Grant. It was conducted by Paora Moyle in collaboration with Wāhine Toa and Te Whāriki Manawāhine o Hauraki. Professor Alison Green, an independent contractor, served as Technical Oversight.

Throughout the process, Wāhine Toa, the only women’s chapter of the Mongrel Mob in Aotearoa, advised and guided the research and facilitated engagement between wāhine and the researcher. The research was primarily conducted at the Te Whāriki office premises and at locations where Pouhine wānanga were held. Interviews also took place in participants’ communities and homes at their invitation.



METHODOLOGY AND POSITIONALITY

A Mana Wāhine methodological approach grounds this research. As Pihama (2001) explains, Mana Wāhine theory is dedicated to foregrounding the lived experiences of Māori women, their ways of knowing themselves, and the meaning they make of their lives. It remembers wāhine tīpuna, acknowledges that we come from them, and holds that we have a duty to write ourselves back into our herstory. Mana Wāhine is both a theoretical framework and a movement (Pihama, 2001).

This methodology positions wāhine Māori as inherent holders of authority and knowledge sourced in whakapapa and whenua (Mikaere, 2017; Pihama, 2019). It treats the stories, knowledge, and lived experience of wāhine as carrying their own theoretical frameworks and solutions. Participants are positioned as authors of their own kōrero and the researcher’s role is to serve as a tool for that knowledge, ensuring it is carried forward with integrity and on the participants’ terms. The trust required for the work came from a framework capable of receiving and holding the cosmological dimensions of what wāhine shared.





The full theoretical whakapapa of Mana Wāhine is developed in the Literature Review. It includes its cosmological foundations, the scholarship of Mikaere (2017, 2019, 2021), Pihama (2001, 2019, 2021), Simmonds (2011, 2014), Hutchings (2002), and Smith (2012), and its application to wāhine connected to gang whānau. Pūrākau methodology (Lee, 2009) provided an approach to gathering and working with kōrero. This recognises that storytelling is how wāhine Māori hold, transmit, and theorise knowledge. The Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū analytical framework (Wirihana, 2012), purposefully developed by the researcher across Te Whāriki's four-year research programme, guided how kōrero was organised and understood across the findings (Moyle, 2025a).

The researcher is Ngāti Porou, with lived experience of state care, gang whānau connections, and intimate partner violence. In Mana Wāhine methodology, the researcher's relationship to the community is integral. It shapes what access is possible, what wāhine are willing to share, and at what depth. Wāhine Toa leadership gave consent for the researcher based on this positioning and the trust and reciprocity built through the previous 2023 research project. The researcher participated in and observed each Pouhine wānanga and was responsible for organising every wānanga throughout the research period.



DESIGN AND PARTICIPANTS

Using a Mana Wāhine approach and qualitative methods, this research enabled wāhine from gang whānau to access the Pouhine wānanga for the first time. Pouhine is a Hauraki healing practice based on the Poutama Mauri Ora, Mauri Tū framework developed by Denise Messiter ONZM in 1995. It draws on mātauranga Māori healing knowledge spanning over one thousand years. Whānau who have engaged with Pouhine in Hauraki over thirty years have described it as an effective and gentle model for healing trauma (Messiter, 2023).

Participation in Pouhine and participation in the research were held as separate processes. Wāhine who attended the wānanga were free to engage with the research or decline, and this distinction was clearly and consistently maintained, so that healing and research were not conditioned on each other.

Recruitment followed a relationship-based approach grounded in the trust built through the 2023 tāne project. As wāhine were invited to the Pouhine, they learned about the research, and those who wanted to participate indicated their interest to be interviewed through Wāhine Toa leadership.

Twenty wāhine consented to participate in formal interviews, including both individual interviews and focus groups. All of them are referred to by pseudonyms throughout to protect their identities. The wāhine who participated ranged in age from their late teens to their seventies. They came from all over Aotearoa, with some travelling significant distances to attend wānanga, and one wānanga held in Queensland extended participation across the Tasman. All wāhine held connections to gang whānau, either through their own membership of Wāhine Toa or through partners, whānau, or community ties. Some were takatāpui, non-binary, and neurodiverse. Most carried herstories of state care, family violence, and intergenerational trauma. Several were parenting tamariki at the time of the research, in circumstances ranging from stable whānau homes to transitional and emergency housing. Their lives held both deep harm and active healing, and it was from within both of those realities that they spoke.



GATHERING PŪRĀKAU KŌRERO

Two primary methods of data collection were used. These were applied alongside participant observation of each Pouhine wānanga.

Semi-structured interviews used kōrero pūrākau (Lee, 2009). The interviews lasted 40 to 90 minutes, one-to-one or in small groups, depending on participants' preferences and needs. For some wāhine, a single extended interview was the right form; for others, kōrero developed across a series of shorter conversations over time. This reflected both the longitudinal nature of the research relationships and the reality that some pūrākau became too much to tell in one sitting, requiring space and a return.

Locations included participants' homes or hired private apartments stocked with kai, with quiet rooms and comfort facilities available. Video and audio recordings were offered at the participant's preference. A contracted professional transcription service, operating under a signed confidentiality agreement, manually transcribed all recordings. AI was not used during transcription to protect participant privacy and confidentiality.





Eight Pouhine wānanga were held over two years. One was held in Queensland, Australia, reflecting the research's national and trans-Tasman scope. The number of attending wāhine ranged from 8 to 23, averaging 12 per wānanga. The researcher attended, supported, and observed each wānanga with the consent of the wāhine. Each wānanga was supported by a range of traditional Māori healers from across the motu, and in particular by a team from Hauraki. A wāhine diving team also joined the wānanga, taking participants out onto the water to experience fishing and diving as preparation for their whakawaatea, which formed part of the healing mahi of that day. Koha was given to each wāhine in recognition of the time, trust, and knowledge she had offered. The final wānanga, held in Queensland, also produced facilitator reflections recorded the following day, capturing observations from those who carried Pouhine across the Tasman for the first time.

Waha Pikitia (Moyle, 2025c), visual storytelling, was used as a central method to hold and return the pūrākau of wāhine. Each kōrero was captured on video. These videos were returned in their entirety as taonga for wāhine participants to keep, share, and show to their whānau.

Wāhine gave feedback after watching their recordings. They noted their body language, expressions, and moments of recognising their tīpuna. Several described recognising the child within themselves and spoke about the emotional weight of seeing their own pain and courage on screen.

For some wāhine, body art, tāmoko, and sand drawings served as talking storyboards. They opened kōrero about identity, whakapapa, and survival. Childhood and whānau photographs, including those of tamariki who had been in state care, were also used with consent to bring stories forward. These visual prompts acted as powerful triggers of memory and meaning. They allowed wāhine to connect embodied knowledge and whakapapa with the telling of their lived realities.

During Pouhine wānanga, photographs were taken outside of deep healing mahi. These captured moments of connection between sessions. All photographs were returned to wāhine. Sand drawings were created as expressions of each women's healing journey. They were photographed and videoed before the wāhine released them into the moana.

Professional illustrations were commissioned, drawn with consent from quoted moments and parts of lived experiences, and are included in the final publication. Waha Pikitia became a living practice of reciprocity, healing, and self-recognition. It allowed wāhine to see themselves anew, to gift their stories back to their whānau, and to strengthen the collective understanding of their journeys.



PŪ-RĀ-KA-Ū ANALYSIS

Each previous application of Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū sharpened its capacity to hold pūrākau intact before this research used it. The Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū framework was developed specifically to honour survivors of state care and the impacts of intergenerational and historical trauma, and it prioritises participants' pūrākau, organising their voices to tell a collaged collective story (Moyle, 2025a).

The framework moves through four interconnected phases. Pū examines origins: the foundations of knowledge and leadership rooted in whakapapa, and the nurturing connections and spiritual readiness that bring wāhine to their healing journeys. Rā examines what works: effective practices, transformations, and evidence of growth already present in participants' lives. Ka examines colonial violence across time: the historical experiences and systemic barriers that reach from the past into present realities and forward into future generations. Ū examines sustenance: the community-driven solutions, traditional knowledge, and healing technologies that hold wāhine together and carry them forward, with Pouhine wānanga as a major analytical component.





In the He Whare, He Taonga study, the Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū framework organised wāhine kōrero on housing and family violence into quotable insights that eliminated the need for researcher interpretation. In the Takatāpui, Rainbow, and MVPFAFF+ survivors research (Moyle, 2023), verbatim survivor accounts were held as taonga and survivor knowledge was treated as the foundation for decolonial transformation. The Hauraki Māori Weathering Cyclone Gabrielle research (Moyle, Kelly & Messiter, 2025) extended into disaster response, revealing how Māori mobilisation sourced in traditional knowledge operated alongside and ahead of institutional responses. Each project sharpened the framework’s capacity to hold pūrākau intact while making visible the patterns that connect them, and that capacity is what this research required.

The researcher worked with the spiral form of the framework, in which participant stories cycle back into themselves, creating new layers of understanding with each return. This allowed the analysis to reflect the way women’s lives and insights continue to unfold over time. Each kōrero was first taken as a whole, then revisited through each phase. Movement back and forward across the phases revealed both the depth of individual stories and the shared threads running across participants.

The ecological dimension of Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū shaped the analysis throughout. Each story was held as a rākau, strong and distinct in its own right, and always connected to the wider ngahere of whānau, community, and collective experience. This held both the individuality of each woman’s voice and the interconnection that gives their stories collective strength.

Colour coding supported the practical work of moving through a large volume of material. Green for Pū as new seed, yellow for Rā as sunlight, red for Ka as action, and blue for Ū as the flow of wai. Although coding required segmenting kōrero that had been shared in their wholeness, all stories were held intact through video and audio transcriptions, ensuring participant kōrero remained whole as they had been gifted.

Each findings chapter closes with a synthesis that draws together the collective meaning carried across the pūrākau of that phase. These sections work from inside the voices rather than above them, tracing the threads that connect individual accounts into the shared patterns and knowledge the chapter establishes.

Once all transcriptions and analysis were completed, themes were returned to wāhine participants for confirmation before the final write-up. This step ensured that the patterns identified through analysis were recognised and affirmed by those whose kōrero produced them, and that the final publication carried nothing that wāhine did not endorse. Grammarly was used in a supportive editorial role during the preparation of research outputs, limited to editing, restructuring text for clarity, and generating alternative phrasing. Analysis, coding, and interpretation of participant kōrero remained entirely with the researcher, as did all substantive decisions about meaning, framing, and inclusion. Final authority rested with the researcher and participants. Findings are drawn from wāhine voices, with minimal analysis around their words. This write-up style is a deliberate methodological choice aligned with Mana Wāhine methodology.



ETHICS AND DATA SOVEREIGNTY

Ethical approval was granted by Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi, an institution already familiar with Te Whāriki’s research programme and prior research with gang whānau leadership. Ethics were practised at every stage of the research as an expression of the kaupapa, with reciprocity built in so that the kōrero progressed only as wāhine intended.

Wāhine preferred their own networks for internal care rather than external support services, recognising their distrust of external agencies. Privacy was safeguarded through anonymisation, secure data storage, and careful consideration of any potentially identifying information. All data will be destroyed after seven years in accordance with ethical requirements.

All recordings were returned to participants as their own taonga. Confidentiality was maintained through contracted transcription professionals who signed confidentiality agreements, and only non-identifiable images were included in the research.

Where accounts cannot be independently verified, Mana Wāhine methodology holds lived experience as the primary evidence of what colonial systems do. Requiring verification before survivor accounts can be included in research reproduces the same logic that has historically silenced these wāhine.



DISSEMINATION

The findings of this research belong first to the wāhine whose pūrākau produced them. Dissemination has already begun to return the research to the communities it came from. A report and a short-format booklet will be made available, and these outputs will be developed collaboratively, with wāhine guiding how their collective story travels and who receives it.



Preliminary findings from this research were presented at the INIHKD Reimagining Indigenous Ecologies of Love (RIEL) conference at Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico, in 2025, where wāhine from gang whānau took the international stage for the first time at a gathering of this scale. In early 2026, the research was presented at the symposium 'The Impact of Severe Housing Deprivation on Women', hosted by the Coalition to End Women's Homelessness and the University of Otago.

In August 2026, the research will be launched at Tīhei Wāhine Ora, a symposium hosted by Te Whāriki Manawāhine o Hauraki that centres the lived experiences of wāhine alongside their wider gang whānau, marking the close of the project and the return of the findings to the communities at its heart. The research and its findings have been accepted for the INIHKD Reclaiming Indigenous Ecologies of Love for Future Generations (RIEL) gathering in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, 9 to 13 November 2026.

Data sovereignty does not end with storage and destruction. It extends to how research findings move in the world and whose hands hold them when they do.



LIMITATIONS

This research draws on the voices of wāhine who were actively engaged in healing mahi through Pouhine wānanga, representing those pursuing transformation. Recruitment through existing trust relationships ensured authentic engagement and also shaped who could participate. Although the research reached wāhine nationally and across the Tasman, it cannot fully represent regional differences in access to housing, health services, or whānau support. The different ways gang whānau organise themselves, their tikanga, and the roles wāhine hold within them are beyond what a single research project can speak to.

This research documents what healing looks like when it becomes possible and what produces it. It does not claim to represent all gang whānau wāhine, and the gap between this population and those not yet reached is itself a direction for future research that gang whānau communities themselves are best placed to lead. The validity of this research rests with the twenty wāhine whose pūrākau produced it. Their accounts are consistent across participants, gathered independently, and held collectively. No single relationship, advisor, or subsequent event alters what these wāhine said, what they knew, or what their knowledge means.

A single researcher conducted this work. That is both a limitation and an intentional methodological choice. In Mana Wāhine research, the relationship between the researcher and the community is the methodology. The wāhine consented to this researcher, not to a team, and the depth of what they shared reflects that. A research team would have introduced additional lenses and interpretive negotiation that the single-researcher design avoided.

The standard critique of single-researcher design is that interpretation goes unchecked, with no second coder, no triangulation of analysis, no peer challenge to whether the themes named in the data are actually there or are being shaped by the researcher's own positioning. For insider research specifically, the critique sharpens: a researcher with lived connections to the community may interpret accounts in ways that confirm what they already understood rather than what the data shows.

That critique is met head-on. The consistency of accounts across participants, the confirmation of analytical concepts with participants themselves, and the peer review process are the methodological responses. But the deeper answer is this: requiring an outsider to validate insider knowledge is the very logic this research exists to challenge. The insider positioning is not a source of bias to be managed, but the epistemological foundation on which the research stands, as Mana Wāhine methodology establishes. The limitation is real, and so is what it made possible.

Ethics were practised at every stage of the research as an expression of the kaupapa



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Glossary

Ariki – Paramount chief, high chief, chieftain, lord, leader, aristocrat, first-born in a high ranking family. A leader’s qualities include concern for the integrity and prosperity of the people, the land, the language, and other cultural treasures.

Atua – Ancestor with continuing influence, god, supernatural being, deity. Many Māori trace their ancestry from atua in their whakapapa, and they are regarded as ancestors with influence over particular domains. Normally invisible, atua may have visible representations.

Atua wāhine – Female spiritual ancestors and deities, including māreikura. Their authority is foundational to Māori cosmology and to the standing of wāhine in te ao Māori.

Hapū – Kinship group, clan, tribe, subtribe. A section of a large kinship group and the primary political unit in traditional Māori society. Consists of a number of whānau sharing descent from a common ancestor.

Hauora – Health, wellbeing.

He Kōrero Matamua – Foremost words; key findings presented first.

Herstory – A term used to name history told from the perspective and authority of women, reclaiming the record from narratives centred on men.

Hui – Meeting, gathering, assembly.

Iwi – Tribe, nation. A large grouping of hapū who share descent from a common ancestor.

Kai ako – Educator. One of the four ancestral archetypes within the Poutama Mauri Ora, Mauri Tū framework.

Kaiako – Teacher.

Kaimahi – Worker, employee, staff member.

Kaitiaki – Trustee, minder, guard, custodian, guardian. One who holds responsibility for protecting people, places, or knowledge.

Kapa haka – Māori performing arts group. Performing arts that include song, dance, and oratory as living expressions of whakapapa and cultural identity.

Karakia – Ritual chant, incantation, prayer, spell. Used to open and close gatherings and to centre wairua in all activity.

Kāranga – Call; the ceremonial call of welcome used to open formal gatherings. Held by wāhine, it calls the living and the dead into the space together.

Kaumātua – Elder. Male elders are also known as koroua or koro; female elders as kuia. Whether a person can be considered a kaumātua depends on age, knowledge of tribal history and traditions, and the presence of other potential elders for younger generations to turn to.

Kaupapa – Topic, subject, scheme, proposal, plan, purpose, theme. The foundation and intent of a programme or approach.

Kaupapa Māori – A Māori approach, framework, or philosophy. Research and practice grounded in Māori values, knowledge, and ways of being.

Korowai – Cloak. Used here to refer to the gang patch as a garment of identity and whakapapa, reclaimed from its criminalised framing.

Koro – Elderly man, grandfather, grandad, grandpa. A term of address to an older man.

Koru – Loop. The unfolding fern frond; a symbol of new life, growth, and return.

Kotahitanga – Unity, solidarity. The coming together of people across differences in collective purpose.

Kuia – Elderly woman, grandmother, female elder.

Kōrero – Speak, talk, converse. As a noun: speech, narrative, account, story, conversation, discussion.

Māreikura – Female spiritual beings; spirit of a female ancestor.

Mahi – Work, job, activity, function.

Mahi tūkino – Family violence and sexual violence. Specialist work addressing violence within whānau.

Mana – Prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power. A person’s mana is sourced in whakapapa and is both inherent and recognised by others.

Mana motuhake – Independence, self-determination, autonomy, sovereignty. The right of a people to govern themselves and control their own knowledge, resources, and futures.

Mana Wāhine – The authority, power, and standing of wāhine. Also a theoretical framework that centres wāhine Māori as inherent holders of authority sourced in whakapapa.

Marae – Courtyard; the open area in front of the wharenuī, where formal greetings and discussions take place. Often also used to include the complex of buildings around the marae.

Matakite – Seer, visionary, prophet. One who can see what others cannot.

Mātauranga – Knowledge, wisdom, understanding, education.

Mātauranga Māori – Māori knowledge; the body of knowledge originating from Māori ancestors, including the Māori world view, perspectives, creativity, and cultural practices.



Mauri – Life principle, life force, vital essence, special nature, source of emotions. The essential quality and vitality of a being or entity. Also used for a physical object, individual, ecosystem, or social group in which this essence is located.

Mauri ora – Thriving, healthy. The state in which a person’s mauri is restored and fully present.

Mokopuna – Grandchild, grandchildren, descendants.

Mokopuna tuarua – Great-grandchild, great-grandchildren.

Ngahere – Forest, bush. Used here as a metaphor for the collective, where individual rākau are always connected to the wider whole.

Ngako – Substance, marrow. Used here to mean essence or core.

Noho – Sit, stay, live, reside. Also used to refer to a residential gathering for collective learning or healing.

Oro – Sound, voice. Used here to refer to the vibration of karanga and kōrero as a healing practice within Pouhine.

Pahū – Drum. A traditional instrument used in Pouhine to move and release what is held in the body.

Pākehā – New Zealander of European descent; non-Māori New Zealander.

Pepeha – Tribal saying. A formal statement that locates a person within their whakapapa, naming their mountain, river, ancestor, and people.

Pou – Post, pole, pillar. A figurehead who holds a space or kaupapa upright.

Pouhine – The wāhine healing wānanga developed from the Poutama Mauri Ora, Mauri Tū framework. Designed specifically for wāhine, positioning them as Māreikura with the authority and knowledge to heal themselves and their communities.

Poutama – The broader healing framework developed by Denise Messiter in Hauraki in 1995, from which Pouhine was developed. Poutama works with both wāhine and tāne.

Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū – The analytical framework developed across multiple Te Whāriki research projects. Organises pūrākau across four interconnected phases.

Pūkenga – Skill, expertise, knowledge. The practical knowledge a person holds.

Pūmahara – Intergenerational memory held in the body. One of the four mechanisms through which ancestral intelligence and embodied knowledge operate together in this research.

Pūrākau – Stories, narratives, lived experience. The accounts people carry that hold knowledge, identity, and whakapapa. In this research, pūrākau are treated as the primary source of knowledge.

Rangatahi – Young people, youth.

Rangatira – Chief, leader, person of rank. One who holds authority and responsibility for others.

Rākau – Tree, timber, plant. Used here as a metaphor for each individual pūrākau; strong and distinct, and always connected to the wider ngahere.

Takatāpui – Māori person who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex, or who holds a same-sex or queer identity. A term reclaimed from te ao Māori to affirm Indigenous LGBTQ+ identity.

Tamariki – Children, young people.

Tangata whenua – Local people, hosts, indigenous people. People born of the whenua, of the placenta and of the land where their ancestors lived and their placenta are buried.

Taonga – Treasure, something of value, property, goods, anything considered precious. Taonga includes both material and intangible treasures.

Tapu – Sacred, prohibited, restricted, set apart, forbidden, under atua protection. A person, place, or thing set apart from common use. Tapu was used to protect people, places, and resources, and to regulate how communities behaved toward each other and the environment.

Tauivi – Overseas people, people who came later, foreigners, non-Māori.

Tāmoko – Tattoo, body art. Traditional Māori tattooing that carries whakapapa and identity.

Te ao Māori – The Māori world; the Māori worldview and way of being.

Te reo Māori – The Māori language.

Te whare tangata – The womb, the house of humanity. Carries fundamental sovereignty as the source of all life.

Tiakitanga – Guardianship, protection, conservation. Used in this research to describe one of the four mechanisms through which ancestral intelligence operates; orienting all knowing toward collective safety.

Tikanga – Custom, usage, practice, rule, proper procedure, correct protocol. The right way of doing things according to Māori knowledge and tradition.

Tinana – Body, trunk, physical body.



Tino rangatiratanga – Absolute sovereignty, chieftainship, self-determination, self-government. The right of Māori to govern themselves, guaranteed under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Toa – Warrior, brave person, champion.

Tohu – Sign, mark, symbol, omen. An ancestral signal that arrives before the conscious mind can name what is coming.

Tohunga – Skilled person, chosen expert, priest, healer. A person chosen for a particular vocation who mediates between atua and the community, holds sacred knowledge, and is expert in spiritual beliefs and genealogies of the tribe.

Tāne – Male, husband, man, men.

Tipuna – Ancestors, grandparents. Those who came before and whose presence continues to guide, protect, and sustain the living.

Ū – Sustenance. From Ukaipo. The fourth phase of the Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū framework, examining the solutions, healing practices, and community-built systems that nourish and sustain wāhine and their whānau.

Wā – Time, season, period. Used in this research to describe one of the four mechanisms through which ancestral intelligence operates; as in the collapsing of past and future into present awareness.

Wairua – Spirit, soul. The non-physical spirit of a person which exists beyond death, distinct from the body and the mauri. Central to healing in te ao Māori.

Whakaaro – Think, consider, form an opinion. As a noun; thought, idea, opinion, intention.

Whakapapa – Genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent. The process of laying one thing upon another, creating a foundation of meaning and connection. Reciting whakapapa was, and is, an important skill reflecting the importance of genealogies in terms of leadership, land, kinship, and status.

Whakawaatea – To free from tapu, clear, release. Also, a ritual practice of clearing and releasing used within Pouhine, often through immersion in water.

Whanaungatanga – Relationship, kinship, sense of family connection. A relationship through shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging. Develops through kinship rights and obligations which strengthen each member of the kin group.

Whāea – Mother, aunt. A term of respect for older wāhine.

Whenua – Land, ground, country. Also, the placenta and afterbirth. The connection between people and their land is whakapapa-based and inseparable in te ao Māori.

Wāhine – Women, female. The plural form of wahine.

Wāhine Toa – The only women’s chapter of the Mongrel Mob in Aotearoa, founded in 2019 under the leadership of Paula Ormsby. An assertion of mana wāhine within gang whānau.

Wānanga – Seminar, educational conference, forum. A gathering where knowledge is shared collectively.

Whānau – Extended family, family group. In te ao Māori, whānau extends well beyond the nuclear family to include all those connected through whakapapa and relationship.

COSMOLOGICAL FIGURES NAMED IN THIS RESEARCH

Hineahuone – The first woman, shaped by Tānemahuta from the red clay of Papatūānuku. Her first breath marked the beginning of human life.

Hinenuitepō – Goddess of death and the night. Her sovereignty over life and death is asserted through the pūrākau of Māui.

Mahuika – Goddess of fire; the material embodiment of mana.

Māui – A demigod of Māori tradition. His attempt to conquer Hinenuitepō to gain eternal life was defeated by her.

Papatūānuku – Earth mother; the ground from which all life comes and to which all life returns.

Ranginui – Sky father.

Te Ao Mārama – The world of light; the realm of the living that emerged from Te Kore and Te Pō.

Te Kore – The void; the realm of potential before creation.

Te Orokohanga – The Māori creation narrative; the cosmological account from which all existence emerges.

Te Pō – The darkness; the realm of contemplation from which creation emerged.



We are not
what happened to us.

We are what we do with it.

Paora Moyle

