

**Māori Communities Raising Children:  
The Roles of Extended Whānau in Child Rearing in Māori  
Society**

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## **ABOUT**

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Natanahira was supervised by Dr Fleur Te Aho (Ngāti Mutunga ki Taranaki), lecturer at the University of Auckland, whose research interests include criminal law and indigenous legal issues. Natanahira was mentored by Kingi Snelgar (Ngā Puhi, Te Whakatohea, Ngāti Whakaue, Ngāi Tahu), a criminal defence lawyer.

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## I Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to review the academic literature on the roles of Māori community members in raising children. The scope of the discussion is not limited to the early nineteenth century whānau, but will also include discussion of whānau in the twentieth century. The information collated in this paper illustrates the collective nature of child raising practices in traditional Māori society, and the role that wider members of the whānau played in raising children.

The literature reviewed in this paper comes from a variety of sources. The website for the Journal of Polynesian Society offered a database which helped with preliminary searches, however, the results with information relevant to this paper were limited. I was referred to many of the sources analysed in this writing by the academic staff in the Māori Department of the University of Auckland. The sources discussed in this paper are a collection of publications from anthropologists, ethnographers, experts in Te Ao Māori, a thesis written by a Māori legal academic and reports from Government department. This paper contains information from various sources on the traditional whānau from settler accounts, anecdotes and personal stories as recorded in interviews and observations made by academics in this field.

The paper proceeds in six sections. Section II provides a brief introduction to Māori worldviews to inform the discussion that follows. Section III defines the whānau unit. Section IV examines child rearing practices within the whānau unit. Section V examines the shared nature of caregiving roles regarding children within the whānau unit. Section VI explains the different roles played by whānau members in raising children. The final section, Section VII, offers some conclusions.

## II Māori Worldviews

The entire order of the Māori world depends on the balance between the roles of men and women, with each playing significant parts in Māori society from the beginning of time. Early accounts from European anthropologists and ethnographers assumed that in traditional times, Māori men played more dominant roles in society, while women were relegated to less important ones. This can be seen when Orbell discusses men and women, and states “[a]mong persons of similar rank males were always vastly superior to females and were, generally speaking, in control of them.”<sup>1</sup> This could not be further from the truth. Mikaere posits that the roles performed by both women and men were integral to the survival of the collective and therefore valued.<sup>2</sup> In fact, according to the Māori creation story, female and male elements were essential to the creation of the Māori universe. The story also highlights the dependence of the male and female elements on one another – it is only *together* that the male and female element have the tremendous power to create.

### A The Role of the Male and Female Elements in the Creation of the Māori Universe

The Māori creation story dealt with three distinct periods that occurred sequentially: the creation of the cosmos as Māori saw it, the creation of their gods, and the creation of human beings. There were a number of versions of the creation story, distinct to the many iwi (nations) of Aotearoa. The principal creation stories referred to in this section are based on a

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Orbell *The Family in Traditional Society* (1978) FNZS at 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ani Mikaere *Maori Women: Caught in the Contradictions of a Colonised Reality* (1994) [https://www.waikato.ac.nz/law/research/waikato\\_law\\_review/pubs/volume\\_2\\_1994/7](https://www.waikato.ac.nz/law/research/waikato_law_review/pubs/volume_2_1994/7).

collection of papers and research by Sir Peter Buck (Ngāti Mutunga), also known as Te Rangi Hiroa, which were collated into the book *The Coming of the Māori*.<sup>3</sup> Buck was, amongst other things, a renowned ethnographer on Māori culture. His works on Māori history, customs and traditions and social organisation are highly authoritative.

According to Buck, the creation stories fall into two categories. One category is the exoteric or general public's creation story, generally known to the public and expert genealogists. The other is the esoteric, less-known creation story, which was apparently taught only to an exclusive class of priests because it was a superior level of sacredness.<sup>4</sup>

In the general public's creation story Buck divided the creation of the universe into three periods: *te kore*, *te pō* and *te ao mārama*.<sup>5</sup> The first period of 'te kore' (nothingness) expresses the idea that there was a period where absolutely nothing existed. The second period was that of 'te pō' (the darkness). This period has also been described as a womb.<sup>6</sup> It is believed that it is in this period that the primal beings developed and were personified as the earth-mother, Papatuanuku, and the sky-father, Ranginui. The night period did not end here, it continued while Ranginui and Papatuanuku embraced in indefinite matrimony, while their offspring (the gods) were conceived and dwelled in a confined state between the two. It was not until their offspring grew tired of living in a cramped state between their parents that the 'te ao mārama' (the light) was brought into existence. They decided that they would separate their parents, and so Tāne put his legs into the chest of his father and shoulders in the chest of his mother, and sprung Ranginui upward. This is when their offspring became free and began to shape and mould the environment as we see it today. This allegorical version of creation illustrates the way all things came into existence. But what is of particular significance to this paper is the important roles both the female element (Papatuanuku) and the male element (Ranginui) played in creating the gods, who ultimately shaped the universe.

Buck is critical of the esoteric creation story. He describes propositions by Best from 1924 and Smith from 1931, who wrote in detail on this category of creation, as 'confused and contradictory'.<sup>7</sup> Best and Smith were two Pākehā ethnographers who wrote extensively on their observations of Māori. Buck said that this 'esoteric' version was a consequence not of the more superior nature of the knowledge, but a reflection of the state of mind of the writers who attempted to construct a more pretentious version consisting of a Supreme Being called Io, which he noted bore 'interesting similarity to the cosmogony in the first chapter of the Genesis'.<sup>8</sup> Ani Mikaere (Ngāti Raukawa and Ngāti Porou), who is a professor of law, is extremely critical of the esoteric version. In her Masters of Jurisprudence thesis Mikaere stated that the esoteric version, in relegating the cosmogonic genealogy to after the first creation, destroyed the balance between male and female.<sup>9</sup>

## B The Role of the Male and Female Elements in the Creation of Human Beings

Male and female elements were also central to the creation of the first human being. Although Best states that most of the offspring from the primal gods were males, he also

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<sup>3</sup> Sir Peter Buck (Te Rangi Hiroa) *The Coming of the Maori* (3rd ed, Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd, Christchurch, 1952).

<sup>4</sup> At 433.

<sup>5</sup> At 434.

<sup>6</sup> Robyn Kahukiwa and Patricia Grace *Wahine Toa: Women of Maori Myth* (Viking Pacific, Auckland, 1991) at 28.

<sup>7</sup> Buck, Above n 3, at 435.

<sup>8</sup> 438.

<sup>9</sup> Ani Mikaere *The Balance Destroyed: Consequences for Maori Women of the Colonisation of Tikanga Maori* (Masters of Jurisprudence Thesis, University of Waikato, 2003) at 76.

acknowledges that there were female beings at that time.<sup>10</sup> However, if one were to procreate with the other, there would still be no human, for there is no human element. Once his parents were separated Tāne experimented with many different beings in an attempt to bring about human life, and these unions resulted in many things, but none resulted in that which was intended.

It was not until Tāne sought guidance from his mother, who directed him to her pubic region, called Kurawaka, where he was told he would find the uha,<sup>11</sup> the female element to compliment his maleness, thus enabling the creation of humanity. Tāne took this clay and proceeded to shape Hineahuone from the clay found at Kurawaka. He then breathed life into her. After much experimentation, they found how to procreate, and so Hine Titama was conceived. This was the creation of the first human. Again, the importance of both the male and the female element is emphasised.

### C The Regulating Force of Tapu and Noa

While men and women play equally valuable roles in the Māori universe, including in its very creation, this does not necessarily mean that the roles of men and women are the same. In Māori society, the roles of men and women are shaped by the institutions of tapu and noa, a culmination of spirituality and law that regulated the everyday traditional interpersonal interactions of Māori.<sup>12</sup> Moana Jackson (Ngāti Kahungunu and Ngāti Porou), one of Māoridom's most important scholars, explains the role played by tapu and noa in regulating Māori social order in his seminal *He Whai Paanga Hou* report.<sup>13</sup> Tapu and noa informed men and women of their roles in all aspects of social life, including their roles in their whānau and in raising children.

### III Defining Whānau

There is no universal definition of the term 'whānau'. This section discusses some of the meanings that can be attached to the term, as a precursor to discussions on the role of the whānau in raising children. The definitions discussed in this section are only those relevant for the purposes of this paper. Much of the discussion in this section is guided by the work of Joan Metge. Metge is a Pākehā ethnographer well known for her cross-cultural awareness and research on 'whānau'. According to Metge:<sup>14</sup>

When a whānau functions as a unit, adult members describe each other's children as 'ā mātou tamariki' (the children of us many), as distinct from 'ā māua tamariki' (the children of us two) and take an active interest in their raising.

This quotation suggests that raising children was a responsibility of the whānau as a whole, not just the parents of the particular child. Accordingly, it is important to have a sense of who are included as members of the 'whānau'.

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<sup>10</sup> Mikaere, above n 9, at 37.

<sup>11</sup> At 17.

<sup>12</sup> Moana Jackson *The Maori and the Criminal Justice System, A New Perspective: He Whai Paanga Hou, Part II* (1988) at 40.

<sup>13</sup> At 40.

<sup>14</sup> Joan Metge *New Growth from Old: The Whānau in the Modern World* (1st ed, GP Print, Wellington, 1995) at 134.

The meaning of the word whānau, as part of a living language, is subject to constant change. The online version of John Moorfield's *Te Aka Māori-English, English-Māori Dictionary and Index* defines the verb 'whānau' as 'to be born, give birth' and the noun as:<sup>15</sup>

extended family, family group, a familiar term of address to a number of people – the primary economic unit of traditional Māori society. In the modern context the term is sometimes used to include friends who may not have any kinship ties to other members.

Herbert Williams' *A Dictionary of the Māori Language* offers a similar definition.<sup>16</sup> While the term has different meanings, it is primarily concerned with describing those who are born into kinship.

Keri Lawson-Te Aho, a scholar in Māori health, states that traditional whānau was based on whakapapa, where membership is based on descent.<sup>17</sup> The element of descent is explained by Metge as those who descend from a common progenitor deceased within living memory, but she also extends the meaning to include those who live within a community, together with their spouses and adopted children.<sup>18</sup> Metge, in a later publication notes that there are Māori experts who believe that the word whānau originally referred to a set of siblings (brothers and sisters) born from the same parents.<sup>19</sup> However, she also states that there are early European accounts from visitors to Aotearoa that identified the whānau as 'the basic social unit of society' in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>20</sup> They described it as a domestic unit which was comprised of several parent-child families related by descent and engaged in a number of productive activities under the leadership of a kaumātua.<sup>21</sup> The latter shows a more communal style of living than the earlier definition provided to her, where whānau was used to refer to a parent-child unit only.

This notion of a whānau consisting of many families living communally is supported by Margaret Mutu (Ngāti Kahu, Te Rarawa, Ngāti Whātua), Professor of Māori studies at the University of Auckland, who suggests that there are two roles in a whānau. The first being the role of the mātua and whāea, who are the senior members of the extended family, and the second being the tamariki and mokopuna, the younger members of the extended family.<sup>22</sup> This is a rather narrow allocation of the roles that exist in a whānau.

Hone Sadler, a Ngāpuhi elder and senior lecturer of Māori studies at the University of Auckland, extends the description provided by Mutu. In an expert witness cultural report prepared for the Family Court in Nelson, Sadler provides a wider insight into the different roles of members in a whānau. He states that the whānau consists of tūpuna (kaumātua and kuia), mātua and whāea (parents, aunts and uncles), tuakana (elder relative of the same generation), teina (younger relative of the same generation), tuahine (referring to a sister by a brother), tungāne (referring to a brother by a sister) and tamariki and mokopuna (youngest generation and grandchildren).<sup>23</sup> This more nuanced construction of the different roles still includes the senior and junior members of the whānau explanation, but it is more precise in

<sup>15</sup> *Māori Dictionary* <<https://maoridictionary.co.nz/>>. The online version of John C Moorfield *Te Aka Māori-English, English-Māori Dictionary and Index* (2011, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, Longman/Pearson Education New Zealand).

<sup>16</sup> Herbert Williams *A Dictionary of the Māori Language* (Government Printer, Wellington, 1957) at 487.

<sup>17</sup> Keri Lawson Te Aho *Family Commission Defining Whānau a Review of Selected Literature* (The Families Commission, Families Commission Report, April 2010) at 24.

<sup>18</sup> Joan Metge "The Rakau Maori Studies a Review Article" (1958) 67 JPS 352 at 356.

<sup>19</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 52.

<sup>20</sup> At 16.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Margaret Mutu *Ngati Kahu Portrait of a Sovereign Nation* (Huia Publishers, Wellington, 2017) at 178.

<sup>23</sup> Held on file by Author from Family Law case in 2000 given to me with names suppressed.

its allocation of roles. These more particular roles in a whānau will be useful for later discussions on the responsibility of each role in raising children of the whānau.

While there is no single definition for the term whānau, the information above indicates that it can be used to refer to a collection of extended family members, such as grandchildren, nieces and nephews, siblings and cousins and parents and their siblings. ‘Whānau’ also includes those who are members of the family other than by birth, such as spouses and adopted children.<sup>24</sup>

#### IV Child Rearing Practices within the Whānau

Some basic conclusions regarding child rearing practices within the whānau can be drawn from the literature. This section examines those practices. Notably, the literature shows the collective nature of the traditional child raising practices of Māori. It is important to bear in mind that many of the observations in the literature, from which this discussion is drawn, are based upon parenting practices from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first subsection will discuss the underlying principles that Metge identifies as regulating child rearing within Māori society. The second subsection will introduce the role of parents in child rearing and the overriding decision-making power that kaumātua possessed.

##### A Underlying Principles that Guide Child Rearing

Metge identifies four underlying principles that guide whānau practices in raising a child. They are: tamariki are uri, children are members of the whānau, the principle of communal parenting and the rights and responsibilities of the child.<sup>25</sup> Each of these principles will be discussed in turn.

##### 1 Tamariki are Uri

The first principle is that tamariki are uri. John Moorfield’s *Te Aka Māori-English, English-Māori Dictionary* states that ‘tamariki’ means ‘children’<sup>26</sup> and ‘uri’ means ‘offspring, descendant, relative, progeny, blood, blood connection, successor’.<sup>27</sup> According to Metge, this principle means that children should be valued as unique individuals, but also as descendants of their tūpuna.<sup>28</sup> This principle embraces the value of whakapapa. According to Tamati Kruger et al ‘whakapapa’:<sup>29</sup>

describes the relationships between te ao kikokiko (the physical world) and te ao wairua (the spiritual world). Whakapapa is expressed as sets of relationships, conditional obligations and privileges that determine a sense of self wellbeing between whānau, hapū and iwi and the interconnectedness between whānau, hapū and iwi and the environment. Whakapapa is broadly defined as the continuum of life that includes kinship and history.

<sup>24</sup> Metge, above n 17, at 356.

<sup>25</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 140.

<sup>26</sup> John Moorfield *Te Aka Māori English, English Māori Dictionary* (Pearson, Auckland, 2012) at 190.

<sup>27</sup> At 232.

<sup>28</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 140.

<sup>29</sup> Tamati Kruger et al *Transforming Whānau Violence – A Conceptual Framework* (Ministry of Māori Affairs, An updated version of the report from the former Second Māori Taskforce on Whānau Violence, September 2004) at 18.

Children are often referred to as ‘tāonga’, which are treasured gifts from the gods and their ancestors, given to whānau to care for and protect in trust.<sup>30</sup> This is because the child is not just an individual, but they are the physical manifestation of aeons and aeons of ancestors, and embody the achievements of those who have gone before them. Sadler states that a child’s status as a tāonga means that under Article 2 of the Treaty of Waitangi whānau are guaranteed exclusive rights to their tamariki.<sup>31</sup> This proves to be an interesting discussion in cases where there is a dispute over child custody between a Māori and a non-Māori parent, and even more so in disputes where both parties are Māori. Ultimately, it illustrates the value of a child as a treasure.

## 2 Children as Members of the Whānau

The second principle is that children belong to each whānau to whom they have access to through the whakapapa of their parents.<sup>32</sup> Membership to the whānau is qualified by whakapapa, but reinforced by regular social interaction.<sup>33</sup> This means that whakapapa is what secures whānau membership, however, this membership is still influenced by conformity to the norms of the whānau and the fulfilment of obligations derived from kinship.<sup>34</sup> The following quotation from Metge illustrates the impact kinship ties and regular participation in the child’s upbringing can have on the closeness an aunt feels about a child that may not be from her own womb:<sup>35</sup>

We see children as belonging to us regardless of whether they come from our womb. I feel as close to my nieces and nephews as to my sons and daughters, but then I call them tama and tamāhine. There is no such a thing as owning or possessing children.

‘Tama’ means ‘son, boy, nephew’, while ‘tamāhine’ means ‘daughter’.<sup>36</sup> It signals that children ‘belong’ not only to their parents, but also to the wider whānau.

## 3 Communal Parenting

The third principle is that of communal parenting. It is related to the second principle. It is concerned with the sharing of the responsibility for child rearing within the whānau between the tūpuna and mātua. Metge argues that adult members of the whānau are right to expect help from their extended whānau in times of crisis and celebration such as their child’s twenty-first birthdays, tangi, weddings and children even obtain beds from the extended whānau.<sup>37</sup>

## 4 The Rights and Responsibilities of the Child

The fourth principle concerns the rights and responsibilities a child has in the whānau. It relates to the idea of whanaungatanga. According to Hirini Moko Mead’s (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Tūhourangi) celebrated book on tikanga Maori, ‘whanaungatanga’ embraces whakapapa; the kinship ties members of the whānau share. He suggests that individual

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<sup>30</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 140.

<sup>31</sup> Sadler Expert Witness Cultural Report held on file.

<sup>32</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 140.

<sup>33</sup> At 140.

<sup>34</sup> Metge, above n 17, at 356.

<sup>35</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 140.

<sup>36</sup> *Māori Dictionary*, above n 18.

<sup>37</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 357

members of a whānau can expect to be cared for and supported from their relatives, and the collective whānau can expect help and support from all of its individuals.<sup>38</sup>

This principle means that a child has rights, and as will be discussed later, they were often overindulged by their elders. At the same time though, these rights came with obligations, which they were expected to fulfil as members of the whānau. This is the nature of the whānau unit.

## B An Introduction to the Caregiving Roles of Parents and Kaumātua

As the literature demonstrates, a child is not confined to being raised in the exclusive parent-child unit, but they are a part of an extended family unit. Some may still assume that, at the end of the day, what is the best for the child would ultimately be decided by the child's parents. This is not the case. It was discussed in Section III that a whānau consisted of a number of parent-child families related by decent, who collectively engaged in practical and beneficial ways, under the guidance of a kaumātua. Even when it came to making decisions regarding child rearing the role of the kaumātua was pivotal.

Tamati Cairns provides an example from his experiences when he was adopted to another family member. His own natural parents were not directly involved in discussions, rather, the discussion was between his grandparents and the adopting family:<sup>39</sup>

I was raised by my old people, my kuia and koroua. I was a whāngai by way of Māori adoption. In the processes that were explained to me as to how I became that whāngai, the discussion was not made between my natural parents and my kuia and koroua, rather it was between my kuia and koroua and my adopting parents ... the decision makers for my destiny were not my parents. I was taken at one week old to my adopting parents by my grandmother and grandfather. My grandmother simply said: 'Here is your child', nothing terribly complicated, simply that.

Later, when the opportunity arose, he adopted his own sister's child under the same protocols, following the same procedure:<sup>40</sup>

My sister fell pregnant some 20 years ago and at that time she was excelling in her career ... My wife and I had no children. We saw an opportunity. However, I did not negotiate with my sister, I negotiated with my mother and father, the grandparents of the unborn child. The reason I went to my mother and father is because I related to the process that I had come through and the decision that had been made for me. Having made the negotiations, my mother and father told my sister: you are giving your child to your brother.

These extracts demonstrate the overriding power kaumātua possess as decision makers in the traditional whānau. It should also be noted that this example is concerning whāngai within the whānau. These types of adoptions are culturally accepted, and are affirmed by principles such as whanaungatanga and whakapapa. From a Māori perspective, these internally arranged adoptions between family members carry no stigma, and the birth parents are usually praised for their generosity.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Hirini Moko Mead *Tikanga Māori Living by Māori Values* (Huia Publishers, Wellington, 2003) at 28.

<sup>39</sup> Tamati Cairns, "Whāngai – Caring for a Child" in Gabrielle M. Maxwell, Ian B. Hassall and Jeremy P. Robertson (eds.), *Towards a Child and Family Policy for New Zealand* (The Office for the Commissioner for Children, Wellington, 1991) at 100-2.

<sup>40</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 101.

<sup>41</sup> At 212-213

## V *Shared Caregiving*

From a Māori worldview, parents, whether biological or foster, never had an undisputable and exclusive right to bring up their children on their own, nor did they have an overriding right to choose another to be caregiver for their child.<sup>42</sup> However, the strength of the whānau lay in the tapu of whakapapa that connected past generations to the present and future generations, and all of these generations to the gods and through them, to the environment. Therefore, for this group to function, every individual had to come together to form a collective, their contribution to the collective was to fulfil their role. This section explores how important living collectively was in the upbringing of the child.

Mikaere argues that parents were never the sole caregivers, but only a part of a system of shared parenting.<sup>43</sup> The older community, particularly the grandparents of the child, played a significant role in the upbringing of the child. This was not only because of the strong whakapapa links they possessed with the child, but it was also a more economic way of doing things.<sup>44</sup> It was more economic because the kaumātua were less capable of doing things that were physically demanding, so they were released from those duties and instead entrusted with the duty of caring for the tamariki and mokopuna.<sup>45</sup>

Metge was not as fond of the term ‘shared parenting’. She stated three reasons for this. First, it was a term used by social workers and the media to apply to situations where a divorced couple share the care and custody of a child with each other by having the child alternate between homes. Second, because the word ‘parents’ has such specificity to Pākehā that it gives rise to confusion and ambiguity. Thus, Metge preferred to use the term ‘caregiver’ because it can be applied to any person who is in charge of caregiving, irrespective of whether they are natural parents, family or non-family. Third, because there was what she called a ‘division of labour’ between other relatives with certain tasks, for reasons that will be discussed in Section VI.<sup>46</sup>

While the language used by Mikaere and Metge is different, the concept captured is the same: caring for the child should be shared. This style of caregiving is a culmination of principles such as whangaungatanga and whakapapa, which give rise to an obligation for the child to be cared for by the collective whānau.

In relation to the whāngai example provided in Section IV B, it may appear to deprive the biological parent of the right to care for their child, but this should be understood in the context of the idea of shared caregiving. Irrespective of whether the primary caregiver is the natural parent or another member of the whānau, any functional whānau is right in expecting other members to be actively diligent, protective and careful with children belonging to their whānau.<sup>47</sup>

Shared caregiving spreads the responsibility for caregiving across all members of the whānau, particularly to the elder generations, but also to those more senior relatives of the same generation. The benefits of this collective approach are illustrated through an example cited in Joan Metge’s *New Growth from Old* concerning a mother named Wi Taihiwi. Taihiwi felt comfortable going back to full-time work after she was able to name ten different nannies, uncles and aunts who would be make themselves readily available to care for her children, after the youngest of her children had started school.<sup>48</sup> She even added that the

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<sup>42</sup> At 147.

<sup>43</sup> Mikaere, above n 9, at 50.

<sup>44</sup> At 49.

<sup>45</sup> At 50.

<sup>46</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 148-149.

<sup>47</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 148.

<sup>48</sup> Mikaere, above n 9, 152.

adults enjoy the children's company in the following quote: '[e]ven Auntie Lovey, who worked at the hospital, she'd say, on her day off, "drop the kids off to me, I'm lonely, I want some mates!"'<sup>49</sup>

The idea of shared caregiving within whānau is supported by the ethnographic work of Jane and James Ritchie, professors of psychology specialising in child and family psychology. Their research focused on how Māori raised their children, especially in the first five years of a child's life. The data their work was based on was collected in Murupara in the early 1960s. According to Ritchie and Ritchie, very young babies from a functioning family were the focus of constant love and attention primarily by their parents but also by their extended whānau, including their grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings and cousins, but only for a limited time.<sup>50</sup> If they were hungry, they were fed promptly and constantly subjected to nursing if they were upset, and comfort when they were distressed.<sup>51</sup> Metge described this as the 'golden world' of the baby.<sup>52</sup>

However, from when the baby became a toddler, the focus was not as constant. Parents lessened the close interaction and delegated much of the caring to the older siblings.<sup>53</sup> This encouraged the child to look for continuous interpersonal warmth from other members of their whānau - often their grandparents and older children.<sup>54</sup> This also allowed the child to have many role models, and taught them that within the whānau, there were many different sources for love. This could be of benefit when there were problems between the parent and the child. A playful example of this was communicated to Metge where 'Moana Paiaka chuckled as she recounted how she would "pack my little suitcase and go around to Uncle Ned's when I was fed-up with my parents"'.<sup>55</sup> Ritchie and Ritchie's work confirms that the whānau traditionally provided a network of caregivers for children.

## VI Division of Labour

*'Nāu i whatu te kākahu,  
He tāniko tāku.  
You wove the body of the cloak,  
I made the tāniko border.'*<sup>56</sup>

While members of the whānau had shared caregiving roles in relation to children, these roles were not identical. This section explores the roles each whānau member played in raising a child. It follows the ordering of whakapapa, beginning by outlining the child rearing roles of the kaumātua and kuia generation, descending to the role of the mātua and whāea, further descending to the role of the tuakana. The roles of children members of the whānau who were younger than the child in question were not discussed in the literature, suggesting that they were not expected to take on a caregiving role. It should be noted that these caregiving roles will be explored in isolation of each other, which conflicts with the interrelated nature of the Māori worldview, where the entire universe is in constant interplay and interaction. The proverb above metaphorically describes child raising within the whānau. It comments on how the beauty of a tāniko cloak is enhanced where each of its

<sup>49</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 153.

<sup>50</sup> Jane and James Ritchie *Child Rearing Patterns in New Zealand* (Reeds Ltd, Auckland, 1970) at 130.

<sup>51</sup> Jane and James Ritchie *The Next Generation* (Penguin Books, Auckland, 1997) at 21.

<sup>52</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 138.

<sup>53</sup> Ritchie, above n 49 at 22 – 23.

<sup>54</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 138.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 175

strands complements the other. According to Metge, it is for the parents to develop basic character and give their children practical skills; while it is for kaumātua, kuia, aunts and uncles to nurture self-image, language skills and help them realise their special talents.<sup>57</sup> This section also discusses the ‘tuakana’ role, or the role of the child’s older siblings or cousins.

#### A Kaumātua and Kuia (Grandfathers and Grandmothers)

As outlined in Section III, where the definitions of whānau were discussed, in traditional times the kaumātua and kuia possessed the most influential decision-making powers in the whānau. This powerful influence is illustrated in the example referred to in Section IV B concerning the child who was adopted out to extended whānau, on the authority of the grandparents, without consultation with the child’s natural parents. This demonstrates the leadership function the kaumātua occupy, but they also play a role in preparing those who will come after them for leadership.

In Mutu’s broad allocation of the term ‘mātua’, she states that the senior members of the whānau play an important role as mentors to the generation below, and play an integral role in supervising the children so that they are properly replaced as leaders when the younger generations’ time comes to fulfil the roles of kaumātua and kuia.<sup>58</sup> Although this is an instructive description, arguably the categorisation is too broad. This description is better applied to the role of ‘kaumātua’, as Sadler described it, rather than to all ‘mātua’.

As well as this supervisory role, kaumātua and kuia also play a significant role in providing the children with love and care. Grandparents from functioning whānau were usually a source of support and love, and this was expressed through words and actions. An explanation of this expression was given to Metge by Neri Paiaka when she said:<sup>59</sup>

They were always so happy to see you. There was never that angry look on their faces, always a bright smile, and they really wanted to touch you and pull you to them. The Nannies were always down low sitting on the floor, cross legged. It was nice to sit by them, and then they’d just touch your hair or put their arm around your shoulder and chat away.

This explained the affection a child received from their grandmother, the following example explains the same affection Arama Martin received from his grandfather, who’s grandmother had died when he was seven:<sup>60</sup>

He doted on me, carried me everywhere on his shoulders when I was little, put me down on the woodheap and chopped wood. He was pretty old then ... He would talk and sing to me, always in Māori. He brought us all sorts of thing we didn’t get otherwise, like biscuits. He spoilt us.

The two examples provided above show how kaumātua and kuia helped children to feel a sense of security, in addition to their decision-making and mentoring roles within the whānau.

#### B Matua and Whāea (Fathers and Mothers)

Metge argues that apart from providing necessities such as food, clothing and shelter, the child’s parents may have tended to concentrate on providing instructions for practical and

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<sup>57</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 176.

<sup>58</sup> Mutu, above n 21, at 178.

<sup>59</sup> At 176.

<sup>60</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 177.

social skills.<sup>61</sup> There was no written rule or singular law that guided a caregiver in raising a child, but it was largely learnt by way of observation from generation to generation, while still being adapted to suit the time.<sup>62</sup> Metge also notes that it became prevalent among those she interviewed, that their parents encouraged early independence and often assigned younger children to be taken care of by older siblings, but this will be discussed later in this section.<sup>63</sup> This is because the mother and the father had a responsibility to the broader collective, this is encapsulated in the following:<sup>64</sup>

The home unit was part of the whole kainga. Grandmothers, aunts and other females and male elders were responsible for rearing the children of the kainga. The natural parents were not the sole care-givers . . . The routines of the whanau were such that couples could not be isolated to lead independent lifestyles. Their communal living required constant contact and interaction with other members of the tribe in a concerted effort to keep the affairs of the group buoyant and operational.

According to Metge, a parent's role was not to praise their child, but it was to correct them. It was culturally inappropriate for a parent to praise their child, because it would be praising themselves. When parents were too critical and heavy handed though, the near proximity and collective nature of child raising in traditional Māori society meant that the child could look to others for comfort and assurance.<sup>65</sup> This became tougher to achieve in smaller families, which were described as meanly miserable, exclusively possessive, were less inclined to sharing and being generous, and more inclined to save than share.<sup>66</sup> The literature makes some differentiation between the particular roles of fathers and mothers.

## 1 Matua (Father)

Metge observed that the father plays an important role in instilling in their offspring a sense of humility, free of conceit. This is done through the avoidance of praise, and allowing for other members of the whānau to do the praising. Sometimes, a father may take pre-emptive action to actively criticise their child, to avoid being accused of conceit.<sup>67</sup> These were culturally appropriate approaches a father may take to avoid being regarded as 'whakahīhī' or arrogant, thus protecting the integrity of his whānau. However, this strict approach may only be effective in instilling humility without negatively influencing the child's self-esteem when there are alternative sources of affection that were present in the traditional functioning whānau. In the absence of the functional whānau, it is possible the child may suffer severe self-esteem issues from such active criticism.

## 2 Whāea (Mother)

According to Metge, a mother's role in traditional society was to bear children until it was physically impossible to do so.<sup>68</sup> This means that when a mother bears a new child, their concern for any earlier child must be pushed to the side, to focus on the newest child. While

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<sup>61</sup> At 200.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Jenkins, K "Working paper on Maori women and social policy" written for the Royal Commission of Social Policy and quoted in the Report of the Royal Commission on Social Policy (1988) Vol III, 161.

<sup>65</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 201.

<sup>66</sup> Ritchie above n 48, at 111.

<sup>67</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 160.

<sup>68</sup> Ritchie, above n 48, at 131.

a mother cooked the child would play on the floor. Makereti said that a Māori mother would suckle their child until they were able to run about.<sup>69</sup>

## C Aunts and Uncles

Metge describes how, on the spectrum of traditional child rearing responsibilities, aunts and uncles sat in the middle, between kaumātua and kuia and parents. Aunts and uncles shared some of the responsibilities of the parents, in terms of reinforcing the humility their fathers would instil, but were less likely to engage in active criticism, and they were also more generous with their time and more likely to give the child more affection like kaumātua and kuia. One accounts states that what their aunt and uncle says is as good as what their parents may say.<sup>70</sup> An illustration of the authority that aunts and uncles had in relation to children can be seen in the following quote: '[u]ncle Charlie, you only had to mention his name and the children obeyed. We were all one family.'<sup>71</sup> This next example shows the love and affection that aunts and uncles gave to children within the whānau:<sup>72</sup>

All my aunties and uncles really spoilt us, doted on us. Once they were married, they used to take us away for weekends and things like that. They were actually like mothers and fathers to us. Even when they had children of their own we got treated exactly like we were their own kids and in fact better, especially by Mum's younger brothers and sisters. We used to get royal treatment from them, better than their own own kids, and my brother and I looked forward to going to stay with them.

Another responsibility imposed upon aunts and uncles was that it would be assumed that their homes should always be open to the children.<sup>73</sup>

## D Tuakana (Elder Siblings)

Tuakana often took on responsibilities around the care of the younger children.<sup>74</sup> Ritchie and Ritchie were shocked to see adolescent boys care for young infants, even changing nappies if that was required, in their study of Murupara.<sup>75</sup> They argue that the 'play gang' at the marae was as important to the running of the marae as the adults cooking in the kitchen, and even the kaumātua and kuia on the paepae in the meeting house.<sup>76</sup> This is because if there were no 'play gangs', then adults would be forced to constantly supervise the children. The role of supervising children on the marae was entrusted with the older siblings and cousins, so the adults could fulfil their roles on the marae. This is not to say that adults were totally released from child care duties, sometimes there may not be any older children to care for the children, and adults would be required to supervise and intervene at time, for example if there were quarrels.<sup>77</sup> The caregiving role of older siblings and cousins illustrates

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<sup>69</sup> Makereti (also known as Maggie Papakura) *The Old Time Maori* (New Women's Press Ltd, Auckland, 1986) at 117.

<sup>70</sup> Metge, Above n 13, at 190.

<sup>71</sup> At 191.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> At 155.

<sup>74</sup> Ritchie, above n 48, at 133.

<sup>75</sup> Ritchie, above n 49, at 21.

<sup>76</sup> At 23.

<sup>77</sup> Metge, above n 13, at 154.

the importance of each individual member of the whānau contributing to protect the integrity of the collective.<sup>78</sup>

## *VI Conclusion*

Community members roles in raising children in traditional Māori society are informed by the value of balance that underpins the entire Māori worldview. This balance is based on the concerted contributions of both male and female, and each and every generation in order for the balance of the universe to be kept. This is relevant in the context of traditional child raising within Māori society, because a whānau relies on all of its members in order to raise a child that is humble, nourished and with strong self-esteem. The responsibility of each member depends on their role in the whānau. In a functioning whānau, a child should be able to look to their kaumātua as a source of leadership, mentoring and constant affection. The child should be able to look to their parents for necessities, but should expect their ego to be tamed too. If a new baby is born into the whānau, the earlier children are expected to be independent and to help with child care responsibilities as required. Should each member of the collective fulfil their role, like the order of the universe, the balance of the extended whānau may be maintained.

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<sup>78</sup> Ritchie, above n 49, at 23.

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