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In the Path of the Ancestresses:  
A Philosophical Exploration of Mana Wahine Maori.

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There is a distinctly female dimension to Maori ethics. Revealed in traditional narratives about the ancestresses, this philosophy emphasises the autonomy and status of Maori women as equal to but different from that of Maori men. In particular, aroha is highlighted rather than utu, noa rather than tapu, and the mana of women is featured as a complementary aspect of a balanced whole.



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This study of concepts within the Maori world view has been undertaken using Western philosophical techniques and written sources. I acknowledge that the necessity for English translation from Maori means this exploration of Maori concepts has been vulnerable to inadequate translation of some statements.

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**Glossary**

Aroha:	love, sympathy.
Kawa:	formal rules, marae etiquette.
Mana:	authority, standing.
Mauri:	life principle, character.
Mauri ora:	healthy or thriving life force.
Noa:	free from tapu.
Ora:	alive, well.
Tane:	man, male.
Tapu:	sacred, restricted.
Tikanga/tika:	natural, appropriate or correct.
Uha:	female essence.
Utu:	acts of a reciprocal nature e.g. revenge.
Wahine:	woman, female.
Waiata:	song.
Wairua:	spirit, in some aspects akin to a soul.
Whenua:	land.

### **Introduction:**

Some customs and beliefs within Maori tradition appear to countenance a view of the subordinate status of Maori women. For instance, it is customary for women to sit at a lower level than men during formal occasions on the marae. There is also a general belief that while men are tapu (frequently translated as meaning sacred) women are tapu only in "special circumstances" (Schwimmer 1966:20). In a similar vein, it is claimed that moral and spiritual matters are the prerogative of Maori males while Maori women are responsible for the physical or material aspects of life (Barlow 1991:147-148). I intend to establish that if Maori ethics is based on precedent (Patterson 1992:155) then the view of Maori women as a group being subordinate to their men is inappropriate. The deeds of the ancestors, handed down through the generations within the traditional narratives, provide the models for correct behaviour. These models do not support a view of female inferiority but confirm a female status and authority which is equal to but different from that attributed to males. ✓

It is, I believe, unnecessary to the purpose of this thesis to challenge the metaphysical aspects of the Maori world view. As a Pakeha using Western philosophical techniques to explore Maori concepts, it would be inappropriate for me to do so. More importantly for this writer, there are many Maori women who regard traditional, spiritually based customs and beliefs as the means by which they and their families may retain Maori cultural identity. My aim is to establish that even in traditional terms, the notion of female subordination runs counter to the ethical ideals established by the ancestors and ancestresses. I will argue that a distinctively female approach to determining ethical ideals is not only desirable but required by precedent within Maori ethics. It is tika (appropriate or correct) for Maori women to follow in the steps of their ancestresses and those who do so will in turn be remembered, their deeds related, identifiable as ethical models. The publicly held principle of conjoining morality and spirituality as an exclusively male concern may be an ethical interpretation, but not an appropriate one, as evidenced by the concept, mana wahine Maori.

First, I intend to discuss the principal female subjects of the traditional Creation narratives and then explore aspects of life commonly attributed to Maori women, with the intention of establishing close links between these and the ancestresses, links which may be viewed in terms of precedent. I will explore more closely the concepts of mana, tapu and noa in order to portray the distinctiveness of mana wahine, and its contribution to the universal balance or equilibrium required by Maori ethics. The power and influence attributed to the female within the tradition is such that it is unsurprising men may have, aggressively or defensively, attempted to promote the notion of female inferiority. Being noa, I argue, is not only part of female identity, but empowers the female. Mana wahine rightly challenges (male) mana.

## **Principal Female Subjects of the Creation Narrative.**

### **Papatuanuku:**

From the beginning, from Te Kore the Nothingness came Te Po the Dark. Te Kore may also be described as the Void or vacuum in nature while Te Po is also known as the Unknown or period of ignorance (Buck 1949:434). In general, Te Po is regarded as neither male nor female. Kahukiwa and Grace however, have instead suggested that Te Po is female: "In [Te Po's] womb lay Papatuanuku who was conceived in Darkness, born into Darkness - and who matured in Darkness" (1984:16). In the ancient genealogies, the second group of phases featuring Te Po belongs to the "Nights of the labour of Te Po" (1984:64). Using this interpretation, it may be seen that this darkness of Te Po is more positively viewed as generative or productive.

A somewhat different view of Te Po is presented by Best: Ranginui the Sky (male) and Papatuanuku the Earth (female) "appeared from chaos ... progenitors of the race" (1976:1:57). Despite this and other differences, the division into sexes - the duality - is made clear in all versions. While Papa and Rangi were still united, their many offspring remained in the darkness, in ignorance, until they were exhausted by the continuing dark and desperate to know the world of Light. Six of these children decided to separate their parents in order to let the light through. Eventually Tane mahuta forced the protesting parents apart. "Thus was the first setting apart of the roles of male and female" (Ihimaera 1986:3) and all the trees, plants, fish and animals that had never before known the light were uncovered. Despite the fact that their children's actions had enabled life to progress, Rangi and Papa were distressed by their enforced separation. Ranginui showed this in his great anger, which he tried to attenuate by assisting Tawhiri to war against Tane and the children of Tane's realm. Traditionally, the act of killing a person may serve to allay a relative's grief through an act of utu. Utu may be simplistically described as revenge, but means much more, both negatively and positively, and in this respect is more accurately described in terms of reciprocation. In this particular case, utu refers to Rangi's attempt to restore the balance of mana, to regain a lost

position (Patterson 1992:117). Papa's grief, on the other hand, lead her to save her most peaceful children, the gods of Rongo and Haumia (the sweet potato and fern root) hiding them in the dark of herself to mature, as she herself had been able to within Te Po.

So the list of oppositional pairs grows: male and female, light and dark, union and separation or division, destruction and protection, security and fear. What is already beginning to emerge is the need for these pairs to be balanced. All darkness and no light required action in order for life to progress. Similarly, destruction without any protection would have resulted in annihilation, yet some destruction was necessary for progression. The balancing of such complementary dualities is tika and as such an important feature of the Maori world view. Further reference will be made to this during this work.

Many ethical precedents, while not yet firmly established, are strongly suggested by this single dramatic episode from this particular Creation narrative. For instance, Papatuanuku's grief caused by her children's acts did not result in her seeking revenge as Ranginui did. In my view, Papa was the first to accept that children must sometimes force their parents to accept change, in order that the world might progress. "The ideal of the perfect offspring would have us always showing our elders the respect they deserve, but at the same time we would remain undeveloped" (Patterson 1992:170). In Papa's successful attempt to save her children Rongo and Haumia, she showed the need to protect and care for kin, especially those who are least able to defend themselves against attack ("her most peaceful children") despite any personal grievance she felt. Even Tu matauenga, the son who had been in favour of killing his parents rather than parting them, was able to take advantage of the security afforded by his mother: "He placed his feet securely on the breast of the Earth his mother, and was safe" (Alpers 1964:18).

There is a further message to her descendants: in protecting her children, Papa also ensured that future generations were provided with precious food resources. As will be shown, the practical

significance of ethical principles is readily acknowledged by Maori women. Papatuanuku's concern was not merely with her immediate children, but for the survival and security of all her descendants. It is interesting to note that neither their separation nor the utu executed on his behalf diminished Rangi's grief over the loss of Papa; his copious tears threatened to cover all the land. Their children elected to overturn Papatuanuku, so she and Ranginui would no longer watch each other in their grieving and life again might flourish. This may be seen as a precedent for women to be flexible in order to survive, just as women today may let "the formal kawa encroach on their daily lives" (Te Aho O Te Rangi Welsh 1985:42), in order that a wider vision be accepted. For instance, in some tribes the protocol of the marae is taught solely to men in traditional schools of learning (whare wananga) and women are denied access to the arena of debate. It has proved difficult to discover whether this is a case of women being denied the opportunity to learn the necessary skills so they are not eligible to debate, or whether women are denied the chance to formally learn the skills because they are not, as women, eligible to debate. For either reason, it may be seen that women's lives may be affected by their lack of public voice at an important time, yet they continue to be flexible and cope with this in alternative ways, in order that the wider vision of the importance of Maori tradition be sustained. Rangimarie Turuki Pere speaks of "Nga taonga a o tatou matua tipuna - the highly prized practices and beliefs of our forebears, our ancestors" and goes on to say that the "culture a child is born into is likened to an ancient path that is well sign posted for the child to walk along"; a person's future development requires understanding and acceptance of the 'roots' of the past (1991:28).

Alternatively, and rather more simply, this Creation episode might be suggesting that progress is better served if women follow the example of Papa and turn their backs on men. On those marae where women do not take a public speaking role, if women strongly disapprove of a speaker, they may signal this by presenting their backsides to the offender (Schwimmer 1966:41). However, as with Papa, the turning away does not mean that the responsibilities of kinship and aroha are totally set aside. Dame



Joan Metge relates a story about a marae guest who spoke scathingly and rudely, embarrassing his disapproving hosts and his own family. Nevertheless, after he had been forced to sit down, the young man greeted a female relative and she did not turn from him as others did, but "responded with a hug and a kiss" (1986:16). Although she was hurt and shamed by his actions, she did not act against him, but acknowledged their kinship and in doing so, went some way to protecting him from the disapproval of the others present. Through their identification with Papatuanuku, Maori women have a special role to play in generally supporting and nurturing life and especially in doing so for close kin and those of the extended family.

Rangi's response to seek utu and Papa's response to act with aroha is a divergence of some importance. Rangi was attempting to restore the balance, to return the state of things to the way they were prior to the separation. Unlike Pakeha revenge, utu involves a strong element of necessity - once someone is entitled to take utu then it is their obligation to do so, at some time, in some way. This makes Papa's aroha an even more distinctive response. Perhaps if women follow solely in the footsteps of Papatuanuku, then it may be inappropriate for them to seek utu, and instead opt for acts of aroha. According to Patterson, if utu is used to restore lost mana, in this regard it may be seen as a virtue (1992:119). In the light of Papa's acts, I would instead suggest this is an attempt to restore male mana and utu, if it is a virtue, is a distinctively male virtue. To support, nurture, love and sympathise is to demonstrate aroha and Papa's actions may be seen to typify aroha.

This response evokes the feminine ethic of care and responsibility described by Carol Gilligan (1982), but this is not fully applicable to Maori ethics with its emphasis on balance and reciprocity. For instance, the 'male voice' she discusses is very much from a European rather than a Maori viewpoint, and does not account for the Maori concept of kinship which necessitates valuing care, responsibility etc. in a way that is quite different from any in a Western view (see discussion on kinship below). However, Gilligan's identification of the tendency to ignore the ethic of care

by regarding it as pre-moral may be valuable in identifying the tendency of Maori males to view Papa's acts as passive rather than active.

Tawhiri showed his reluctance to separate the parents, not out of any special sense of parental love but because he feared his kingdom of winds and storms would be overthrown in any change of order. He was especially jealous of his brother Tane enhancing their mother Earth by exposing her to the Light: "Tawhiri feared that the Earth would become too fair and beautiful. For he was jealous now ... of all that Tane had procured" (Alpers 1964:18). That Papa and all her children would be victims of his taking utu against Tane was less important to Tawhiri than taking revenge for the perceived threat to his status. His mana would be diminished by non-retaliation. If in fact his mana had not been diminished, acts of utu would still have been appropriate. Similarly, Buck speaks of tribal mana making it "a vital point of honour to avenge a defeat ... and it was better still to establish a credit balance by an extra victory" (1949:388).

Papatuanuku is portrayed as the mother of everything and everyone on earth, and therefore deserving of love and respect (Marsden 1988:22) but this account seems to fail to give Papa her full due. Within the tradition, while important ancestors are always owed respect, it is important to remember why the deeds and characteristics of certain ancestors are retold throughout the generations. Rangimarie Rose Pere (1979:25) conveys something more of Papatuanuku's influence when she says this affects the way in which the earth is treated; the land and all the earth's environment, all living people and things have a mauri or life force, which is related to, and interacts with, the earth's forces.

This interaction is emphasised by the term *whenua*, which refers to both the land and the placenta. "The land ... has the same significance as the placenta that surrounds the embryo in the womb" (Pere 1979:25). The link between birth and earth is stressed further by the practice, after a woman has given birth, of returning the placenta to the land, "thereby earthing the child's

mana tangata or personal dignity" (Kupenga, Rata & Nepe 1990:8).

It is through women's close links with Papatuanuku that an explanation is found for the apparently subordinate seating arrangement of women on the marae. In sitting below the men, Maori women may be aware that they sit closer to their natural realm of Papatuanuku, just as men sit higher and closer to their realm of Ranginui the Sky Father. In some tribal groups, however, this seating arrangement is deemed unnecessary; according to Heni Sunderland, those who are entitled to speak know who they are and when to stand up (Binney & Chaplin 1986:127). It seems more than possible that the male/higher and female/lower seating arrangement is a male-based custom and men use the female association with the earth to mask the more obvious interpretation.

In one particular narrative cited by Best, Papatuanuku also took responsibility for all her children after their deaths. "I brought them forth to the world of life; let them come back and rest with me as spiritual children." Since that time, people have been buried within the body of Papa (1924:88). This version endorses the protective and supportive aspects of Papa already discussed, however the role of caring for those who have died is more generally attributed to one of Papa's descendants, as will be discussed. At the very least, Papa signifies the resting place for the physical selves after death: "the earth is the elemental womb to which we must all return. Folded within her, carefully placed, bones complete the cycle; for as she gives, so does she receive" (Te Awekotuku 1991:70).

### **Hine ahu one:**

Although from the beginning everything had a male and female component, humankind did not exist except, according to the tradition, as wairua i.e. the spirit of humanity; "the form ... was not fitted to dwell on the earth" (Tikao 1990:32). There are several different versions of this part of the Creation narrative e.g. Best (1924:119-125) and Buck (1950:449-452), but most agree that the first human was female and the task of bringing about her existence was given to Tane. In the most widely disseminated versions of this event, after producing different life forms such as trees, birds and plants, Tane set about fashioning the shape of a woman out of the red clay of Papa's pubic area, and breathed life into the form. She was Hine ahu one, the Earth Formed Maid. It is intriguing that she is customarily represented in the narratives as little more than a passive repository for the sexual activities of Tane, yet her first independent action, a sneeze of life, was greeted by Tane in a way that continues to be imitated: "Tihe mauri ora!" This greeting to the newborn also serves to signal a man's desire to speak formally, to claim his (rightful) place on the marae; the link with this first woman of earth may be seen to emphasise the independence, or individuality of each person's life force, exhibited first by Hine ahu one.

Buck states that "the creation of the first woman from earth is certainly an ancient concept, as proved by its wide distribution and by the fact that in the various versions her name is a compound of 'one' (earth or sand)". Despite this certainty, Buck also states that "which sex came first in the original story is a matter for conjecture"(1958:452). The above interpretation of the birth of Hine ahu one is one which mirrors aspects of the biblical Creation story in that the male preceded the female and was personally involved in the creation of woman; this perhaps owes more to the beliefs of the early European visitors than is immediately obvious. Many similar versions also mention Io, a supreme Creator of life, who bears a marked resemblance to the God of biblical tradition, and the cult of Io as pre-European has been questioned, in particular by Buck (1958:526). However, it is the differences rather than the similarities between these two Creation stories which I wish to emphasise here. In the biblical

version, Adam was the first person of earth and Eve was created from part of Adam, woman being of man. This Maori narrative instead emphasises the difference between, and separateness of, male and female. The necessary uha, or female essence could not be found in the male. Tane could not complete his task without this female element and this may be seen to stress the complementary aspect of the male/female difference, whereas Eve was created because "It is not good for man to live alone" (Genesis 2.18) - a reason which fails to acknowledge the necessity of the female.

Within Ngati Awa tradition, Tane's ineffectual search for the uha, or female element, resulted in Ranginui directing him to the Earth: "The realm of misfortune (whare o aitua) is below; the realm of life (whare o te ora) is above". In his discussion, Best goes on to say that the "ominous inferiority is represented by this world, the earth, by the female sex, and by the female organ of generation, which holds dread powers of destruction" (1924:1:121). It seems likely that although this world is female in essence, any 'destructive power' could not be attributed to womankind at this time within the Creation narrative, for the destruction up to this point had been wrought wholly by male descendants. Furthermore, in other versions of the narrative, Tane sought the advice of Papatuanuku rather than Ranginui as to the whereabouts of the necessary uha in his quest to make a human being e.g. Irwin (1984:15) and Kahukiwa & Grace (1984:22). According to this tale, Papa deliberately kept the uha hidden until Tane had mated with the various forms and produced a land fit for human life. Without vegetation and animal life, human life would not have been sustainable for Papatuanuku's descendants.

This portrayal of Papatuanuku fits well the image of protector and nurturer which was earlier established. In addition, it seems much more appropriate that Tane would have chosen to seek Papa's advice rather than his father's; Tane's concern was with progress and this world - he was attempting to justify his harsh act of separation, and to return to his father without the desired result would have resulted in a loss of mana. As Metge states, "To

have mana is to succeed in the undertaking for which it is supplied... [loss of mana] implies a letting down of not merely of oneself, but of the sources of power" (1986:76). Tane's source of power was Rangi, firstly by inheritance, and secondly by earning it at the time when he put Rangi at a disadvantage. His mother, on the other hand, had already shown her preparedness to fulfil her children's needs, and even more importantly, Papa was the essential female. Where better to search?



### **Hine titama / Hine nui Te Po**

Hine titama (the Dawn Maid) was the daughter of Tane and Hine ahu one. When Hine titama matured and became a mother, she discovered that her husband Tane was also her father. When she asked about the identity of her father, Tane replied: "Ask the posts of the house". Metge states that whakamaa (loosely translated as shame) is a state which may result in a person withdrawing from direct communication (1986:25). Tane's evasiveness of response suggests something of the whakamaa he would have felt.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the fact that Hine titama was shamed by Tane's acts rather than ashamed of her own participation, her reaction was one of withdrawal. Her lack of prior knowledge did not lessen the shame of the discovery for her mana had been reduced. Mana is power to act, delegated by the atua (early ancestors, sometimes referred to as gods). The delegation occurs firstly at birth, inherited through the descent lines and this may be extended or reduced during life, depending on how effectively the person uses that power or status. The importance of mana provides a strong incentive to live one's life effectively and behave correctly. Even if inadvertently, the power is not used appropriately, this effectively reduces the capacity for power. Hine's position was as clear to her as it is to her descendants: "When you have this whakamaa, you have to make atonement, or compensate or restore the balance" (Paora Palmer cited in Metge 1986:95). Hine titama atoned by removing herself from the world, by leaving the world of light, Te Ao; by retiring "to Te Po, the world below ... the path of death was created" (Alpers 1964:23). Tane attempted to follow her as she fled to the world of the unknown, but Hine's ultimate concern was not for herself and the ramifications of her (unwitting) wrongdoing but for the protection of their children. Hine titama told Tane to remain and protect them (and all children) in this world, as she would do in the next stage of existence, in the world of Te Po, the life after mortal death. She became known as Hine nui Te Po. Despite the fact that she had to suffer because of the very circumstances of her children's existence, Hine nui acted as her grandmother Papa had done before her. She directed Tane (man) to responsible and effective action. She was concerned not

only for her own children, but also for generations to come, yet the departure from this world, in itself, was insufficient to restore the necessary balance. According to Metge, if the underlying cause of whakamaa is the loss of mana, the essential ingredient of healing is aroha (love and/or concern) (1986:103). Hine nui Te Po demonstrates aroha as she continues to await, welcome, care and support those who must eventually move into the other (spiritual) world (Kahukiwa & Grace 1984).

This portrayal of Hine nui balances another commonly held. Teone Tikao, for instance, related this narrative very differently; according to him, Hine told Tane, " 'go back and rear our children, and I will proceed and drag them down to me,' and so mankind is dragged down to death" (1990:33). Similarly, Barlow describes Hine nui Te Po as "the goddess of the night, of death and sorrow" (1991:147). It seems most likely that Best's comment (above) about the "ominous inferiority" of women stems from this version of this event in the narrative rather than the time of Tane's search for the uha. The *whare o aitua* (house of misfortune) Irwin explains as a term used synonymously for death, the earth and the female vagina (1984:16). This may be because of the very human fear of mortal death and the unknown in general. If this is so, then this raises an inconsistency; if the spiritual realm is to be regarded as superior to this natural world of misfortune, then Hine nui Te Po, who created the path for humankind to follow in order to enter that spiritual realm, ought to be viewed in a positive way by all. Hine nui's path to death is more consistently viewed as a sign of aroha, a gift of continual existence. It was Tane who searched for humankind, people of earth rather than spiritual beings, and anything made of earth is necessarily mortal; it was Hine nui Te Po who "prevented the death or destruction of the human soul (*wairua*)" (Best 1976:129). The precedent of life leading inevitably to death is jointly created by Tane and Hine; if Tane had not taken her as his mate, her departure from life would not have been required, nor the initiation of the daily re-creation. However, Tane's actions resulted from his ethically unacceptable behaviour, whereas Hine acted to balance or redress that wrong. This narrative provides some very clear precedents for those who follow. Not only is Hine



nui's principal concern for her children and those who will follow, but people must take responsibility for acts which may not have been their fault. (Again this will be discussed more fully below, in reference to kinship.) This tale also sets the precedent for one way of dealing with shame: withdrawal. "When whakamaa is extreme, holding back is not enough: the person concerned may remove himself bodily from the whakamaa-producing situation" (Metge 1986:111).

Despite this positive view of Hine nui, the link between Hine nui Te Po and death nevertheless remains and there is a further incident in the traditional narratives which strengthens this. I refer now to the tale of Maui and his quest for immortality. Death was still to be experienced, for Hine nui, as said above, did not activate death on her flight from the earth, but created the pathway to another form of existence. It was the demigod Maui who finally effected the appropriate balance of mortal life and death. His mother had told him that "Some day the very threshold of your great ancestress Hine nui Te Po shall be crossed by you. And when that happens death shall be vanquished, and will have no power over man" (Alpers 1964:40). Unfortunately for Maui, at the ceremony in which he had been dedicated to the gods (tohi), an error had been made during the recitation of the *karakia*. This incantation addressed to the ancestors of the spiritual realm must be recited in accordance with the tradition to obtain protection or support. Maui was told of this error by his father who knew that Maui's attempt to fulfil the prophecy was thus doomed to fail. Undeterred, Maui ventured to overcome the process of death by trying to reverse the birth process. He hoped to achieve this by entering Hine nui Te Po through her vagina, pass through her womb and exit alive through her mouth - "an un-birth rather than a re-birth" (Patterson 1992:174). In what might be seen as the ultimate of foregone conclusions, Hine nui was aware of Maui and his bid for immortality, crushed him between her legs and Maui's life on this earth came to an end.

There is more than one precedent which may be drawn from this narrative. For example, there is a clear signal that *karakia* must be recited in a particular way, otherwise the desired effect is

nullified. This might be seen as a sign that the power of the atua is not to be tampered with or debased by humankind. The plausibility of this speculation is backed by the comment that Hine nui knew of "Maui's [earlier] dangerous trickery ... and was resolved to protect her other descendants from further mischief of this kind" (Alpers 1964:67). Maui had been prepared to use his atua delegated power (mana) inappropriately and this had to be balanced by some form of atonement.

For Maori women, it might also be taken from this incident that they have ultimate control over men's behaviour, the power of death. It seems this may be the reason why in many versions of this event, Hine nui's crushing of Maui is presented as an almost involuntary act e.g. "Maui's wriggles ... made the fantail giggle and the other birds joined in, and the sound awakened her with such dire results to Maui that he never appeared again" (Tikao 1990:21). I believe this and similar failures to acknowledge Hine nui's conscious decision to overpower Maui indicates the extent of male understanding and fear of female mana. (Such beliefs and emotions are understandably seldom, if ever, expressed.)

At the very least, it may be drawn from this narrative that there is a precedent for women to take action against those who overreach the bounds of their authority. It certainly demonstrated, in what must be seen as an essentially female act, that ruthless or feckless ambition is to be held in check. If a woman is extremely angry with a man, she can show her contempt by exposing her backside to him, reminding him of the power invested in women by Hine nui Te Po. This has to be the ultimate insult for it symbolically kills his mana (Schwimmer 1966:41). Patricia Grace, however, chooses to emphasise the complementary aspect of the episode; she describes Maui's death as an opportunity for Hine nui and Maui to share in the great gift to those left on earth, not of immortality but of homecoming (Kahukiwa & Grace 1984:58).

### **Features of Female Life:**

Although there will continue to be references to the traditional narratives throughout this exploration, I wish now to discuss specific features, activities and experiences which are generally ascribed, and largely confined, to Maori women. These include practices such as weaving, karanga, waiata and poi dance. (Men on the other hand are generally confined to carving, oration and haka.) I will then consider the experiences of menstruation, childbirth and childcare, and the trait of flexibility which generally tends to be identified as a female rather than male characteristic. The concepts of kinship and time, concepts which are very different from those in a Pakeha world view will also be discussed.

In drawing on these features of the lives of Maori women, I am attempting to show how the distinctively female life experiences which affect beliefs and activities signal not only what is tika for Maori women, but the character of mana wahine. While there are important general ethical principles which may apply to all Maori, notably the principle of balance, the tradition seems to present a male-Maori rather than a Maori view, a contradiction of the principle of balance. It has been shown that there are distinctively female interpretations of the ethical messages of the Creation narrative which have not traditionally been presented as Maori. I will continue to highlight the differing approaches and begin to trace a way in which the two views, male and female, may be accommodated in Maori ethics.

### **Weaving:**

Erenora Puketapu-Hetet describes weaving as much more than a purely manual craft. "Weaving is endowed with the very essence of spiritual values of Maori people ... The artist is a vehicle through whom the gods create. Art is sacred and interrelated with the concepts of mauri, mana and tapu" (1989:2). If this is so, then Maori weaving has both a metaphysical and an ethical significance. It is, for example, through their links to Papatuanuku that weavers enforce strict care of resources and standards. Flax fibres are a gift from Papa, the earth, and must be treated with due respect; the way in which the flax is gathered is very important, since the mauri or life-force of the plant must not be damaged. Similarly, the scraps after an item has been woven must be returned to the earth. The practical import of this, as with many other traditions frequently couched in metaphysical terms, is readily acknowledged by the weavers. Careful gathering of flax allows for readily available future resources, and mulch from the scraps assists Papa to enrich the soil. Nevertheless, there seems a further dimension not so readily explicable. The belief that plants have mauri, just as people do, is significant. Plants descend from the same ancestors as all people and are entitled to respect for that reason alone. The concept of mauri in this respect might be easier to understand when translated as 'life-principle'. A plant's mauri can be damaged by ill-considered treatment i.e. someone hinders the plant from fulfilling its life purpose, which is to grow healthily by feeding from the earth and other 'inhabitants' e.g. water, and then in turn to be a resource so others may flourish. It can be readily seen that to accept the concept of mauri results in accepting a high standard of care for the environment. Quite simply, not only must people care for plants because they are useful, but because the plants are living relatives, fellow descendants of Papa and Tane, and as such entitled to be treated with respect.

Mrs. Puketapu-Hetet also speaks of weaving having its own life force, and the need to recognise the wairua of weaving. Woven items may be held as living taonga (relics or highly prized properties) until they are returned to earth to begin a new life cycle (1989:1-5). Wairua, like mauri, is a concept difficult to

understand from a Pakeha viewpoint, however the metaphysical aspect of wairua tends to play a secondary role to its ethical import, in this reference at least: "By caring for the material, the weaving and for someone else [by giving the first piece to a respected family member] the wairua of weaving is being acknowledged" (Puketapu-Hetet 1989:5). Although the process of weaving has wairua, it does not necessarily follow that all woven items or weaving occasions recognise this spirit; the weaver must take the appropriate steps within the process, choose materials, patterns, dyes etc. carefully, be patient and painstaking and observe the relevant tapu. Tapu will be discussed more fully below, but may be briefly explained as a state of being which is often described in terms of its results (Hanson 1983:50) e.g. the restrictions surrounding a person, place or object which is under the protection of the ancestors. The ethical message is to create the best product one can and respect what nature provides.

The link between practical and ethical aspects of life is further emphasised by the tapu which restricts a menstruating woman from going to the Pa Harakeke (flax plantation). The gathering of flax requires physical and mental effort, so the well-being of the weaver is of some importance. During menstruation, when women may tire more easily, "physically, mentally and spiritually they are not always in tune. Once a woman is back in balance" she may work with more energy and inspiration (Puketapu-Hetet 1989:3). This remark underlines the dynamic aspect, rather than the passive sense, of balance within the self, just as the cyclical nature of Papa's natural resources accentuates the dynamic balance of the world.

It is tika or correct practice to collect the flax, as with all harvesting, 'when the fruits of nature are ripe'. Commonly referred to as "nga tapu tapu", such customs are better understood as a person gains greater expertise in a particular area, but the benefits of adhering to the practices are broader. "By respecting customs, a beginner develops a greater awareness of 'self' and her or his place in creation" (Puketapu-Hetet 1989:3). The notion of self in relation to the universe is fundamental to the Maori world view; wairua, for instance, is one way of viewing



persons, events or objects that enables them to be identified as individuals within a total process in which time has no relevance. When a person's wairua is acknowledged, the clear distinctions between mortal life and death become blurred or peripheral; what really matters is the wairua's continuing existence, with or without material presence. The self in relation to the universe is, in Maori terms, supported by the principle that life continues after mortal death and that each life continues to have significance: "The Maori have a different time concept, which means we cannot separate ourselves from our ancestors or the generations in front of us. Our past is our future and is also our present, like the eternal circle" (Puketapu-Hetet 1989:5). Similarly, Irwin states that the past is not left behind in terms of Te Ao Hurihuri: "It gathers it up and moves forward. This is not a static view of history as each person is added to the story (whakapapa) and moves forward in the growing community of past, present and that which is to come" (1983:7). Identity is more readily found in belonging, in relating oneself to others and events in the universe and in accepting one's place in that mighty scheme of things. It is unsurprising that the concept of tapu, involving as it does the continuing interest of the ancestors (and potential ancestors), is invoked to support such a belief.

The first row of taniko weaving is called aho tapu; the tapu applies here because of the need to protect both the weaver and the weaving from interruption (or disruption) and to allow the necessary amount of concentration to be applied. Without this private start to the work, the article is unlikely to reflect the quality demanded of the weaver by herself and others who recognise its mauri and wairua. Although the aho tapu is presented as a restriction upon the weaver, it advantages the weaver by respecting her needs, a point acknowledged at least by the more experienced weavers. Another restriction which clearly protects the carefully woven article arises from the tapu affecting menstruating weavers. Even if a woman believes she is sufficiently in balance to cope with the finer points of her weaving, there remains a risk of staining the work, especially with larger items which need to be spread out and knelt upon. The metaphysical aspect of tapu is relegated behind practicality in

this instance. Yet even here, there is still a value message: "To accidentally stain it would be to damage it irreparably and cause the project indescribable shame" (Te Awekotuku 1991:68). The work reflects its community to such an extent that all participants would be *whakamaa* if damage occurred. All work and effort should be acknowledged as valuable, especially that which reflects the values of the community.

Before moving to other features of the lives of Maori women, I would like to quote, once again, Erenora Puketapu-Hetet whose writings show others some of the complexity of taking one's rightful place in the Maori world. When she was young and just beginning to learn to weave, she asked her aunts whether a discoloured *harakeke* could be used for a *rourou* (traditional food basket). The reply provides an example of the role women may play in passing on ethical principles by way of everyday opportunities down through the generations: "People are not perfect. We all need each other. We all hold together, just as one *harakeke* in a *rourou* does. Take the spotted or discoloured ones out and your *rourou* will fall to pieces!" (1989:59). Each person is only one within a community, which is closely woven both to support each other and to work as an effective unit. However, this positive principle which supports the position of the less able or skilled within a group can also work negatively for the community: "When the actions of your group don't come up to scratch, *ka mate i te whakamaa* [You feel sick with *whakamaa*]. You feel some of the blame" (Eru Awatea cited in Metge 1986:56).

The frequency with which Maori women use the images of weaving to express matters of ethical import suggests that not only do Maori women believe they have a responsibility to deal with moral issues, but also that they have a distinctively female way of addressing those issues. (To use images of carving would not be as appropriate for Maori women.) A selection of speeches given by Te Arikiniui (the Maori Queen) Dame Te Atairangikaahu have been published and entitled "*He Rourou Iti*" (1992). In the particular speech with that title, Dame Te Ata uses the three weaving strands of the *rourou* to symbolize the interweaving of Maori, Pakeha and spirituality. She also uses the image of the two

handles of the finished product to stress the importance of Maori and Pakeha moving forward together: "I trust that you and your descendants will hold one handle of our rourou while I and my people hold the other, forever" (1992:68).

The ancestress most associated with weaving is, according to Best, Hine te iwa iwa (1982:285). No further explanation for this given, but it may be because Hine te iwa iwa is known as the offspring of Tane and Hinerauamoa and flax is also the offspring of Tane. Another narrative which may serve as a precedent for women as weavers is that of Niwareka and Mataora. Niwareka was of the Turehu people, who lived in the spirit world, fair skinned descendants of Hine nui Te Po and Ruamoko (ancestor of earthquakes). According to Makereti, "Albinism occurred among the Maori but very seldom ... [One] came from Ngapuhi. She always spoke of her father as an atua, a Turehu, one of the fair haired people who lived in the mist" (1986:123). Traditionally, Turehu folk were free to visit this world where Niwareka met and married Mataora, and after he struck her she returned home in grief to her own world. (The ethical message here is sent via her father and brothers, who made it clear to Mataora that to hurt his wife was shameful. Furthermore, it was very much their business to support Niwareka in this way. This message may also be linked with one provided by the Hinauri/Tinirau episode, discussed later.) Mataora followed Niwareka in distress, and on his arrival she was found weaving a cloak. After their reconciliation, they were eventually permitted to pass the threshold of the two worlds and rejoin this world, carrying the famous cloak - Rangi haupapa- "which was the pattern from which all garments of this world were made" (Best 1982:229). The significance of this narrative in relation to the art of weaving is not entirely clear, but it does cement the view that weaving may symbolise all aspects of existence, linking different worlds and times, the ancestral past with the present. If weaving is regarded as a gift of the atua, then this signals the need to respect both the process and the products, in addition to the respect due to Papatuanuku's provision of resources.



### **Karanga:**

Women who perform the karanga (call or summons) on the marae find a precedent in the welcoming role of Hine nui Te Po, "the mother who embraces us at our physical death" (Pere 1991:46). Those who perform the karanga provide the welcome to the special world of the marae. Both worlds are involved with the spiritual aspect of existence and until the karanga is heard, there is no progress for without the invitation, no visitor may formally enter and nothing may be discussed.

Those who are chosen to perform the karanga are the first to remind all in attendance of their ancestors, as they invite the wairua of the ancestors to be present at the event, although Pere says that the kaikaranga communicate whatever they wish to, there are no set messages (1991:46). According to some reports, the presence of the ancestral wairua is almost palpable (Salmond 1975; Metge 1976:251). In Maori tradition, the death of the body does not alter the life of the person, even if that life is not the earthly life of which people can be more directly aware. This is why ancestral wairua are acknowledged during formal occasions; to fail to do so would ignore their presence and authority. This view of wairua also highlights some of the difference between mauri and wairua, which Best says are possibly interchangeable, applying to the same quality (1900:12). This seems to stem more from Best's view of spirit as a soul than from a Maori view. Wairua is often discussed in terms of independent activity (from both dead and living bodies); activities such as noting potential danger, returning with warnings, remembering, and acting rather like a 'sixth sense' have all been attributed to the work of wairua (Metge 1967:58; Best 1900:10; Greschat 1980:102-3). Yet "if that mauri departed [the body], the person died" (Tikao 1990:76), so the two may be distinguished in this way. The invitation to the wairua of the ancestors fosters in Maori an awareness of their place in the universe, rather in the way that the recitation of whakapapa does. It reminds everyone that they and their deeds have significance, and will continue to have significance long after their mortal life has ended.

The role of welcoming the visitors and inviting the presence of the wairua is therefore very much a spiritual concern. The women who are chosen to perform the karanga are generally post-menopausal. This means that they do not carry the additional 'dangerous powers' attached to the tapu time of menstruation, which might act to dissipate the spirituality of this time on the marae. This seems to raise an inconsistency, for it is being placed in a tapu state which identifies something or someone as being under the ancestors' protection and here it seems that the spiritual world is to be protected from that state. Alternatively, it may be the axiom that someone or something in a state of tapu must not be put to common use which is the basis for this restriction. However, the performance of the karanga is scarcely that, involving as it does the integration of the physical and spiritual worlds. It is part of a highly ritualistic event which recognizes the special (tapu) state of the marae and those who tread there.

It seems more likely that the direct link to this natural 'earthly' feature of human nature is too strong for those who profess a primarily spiritual role and menstruation is regarded as making a woman unworthy of the occasion. Given the traditional 'mystery' surrounding menstruation from a male point of view, this might be seen as a conflicting message to women from their men. If it is tika for women to represent the physical balance of life, then it ought not to be inappropriate for them to exemplify that state.

For a simpler explanation, perhaps Mrs. Puketapu-Hetet's comments (above) about the need for weavers to feel at their best in order to perform certain activities, may well apply here. In order to respect the wairua of the karanga itself, women must be in harmony within themselves and with the environment, and at menstruation time, the physical self requires extra nurturing to achieve that balance or harmony. Since the karanga is a highly specialised responsibility, it seems sensible to give this to women who will never be distracted from that responsibility by any menstrual discomfort or tiredness. That this is a plausible interpretation is backed by the move in recent times for younger women, presumably with effective medication working for them,

to assist the kuia in the karanga. However, this practice is not widespread, so either older women are anxious not to have their mana as respected elders diminished in any way, or men continue to explain the tapu restrictions only metaphysically, not acknowledging the basis as understood by Mrs. Puketapu-Hetet.

There may be another reason why older women tend to retain the responsibility for the karanga and this relates to the question of the dissemination of specialised knowledge within the tradition. The 'rule-of-thumb' answer is 'Don't!' The holding of such knowledge is a source of mana and anything which might affect one's mana detrimentally is to be avoided. Quite clearly, though, there must be a timely promulgation if customs are to be continued. (The emphasis on continuity is characterised by the relative importance of the whakapapa and the strength of the oral tradition.) Teone Tikao makes this point about being asked, at the age of forty one, to explain the nature of mana. He said in later years, "I did not feel called upon to do so ... did not see why I should reveal my learning on the matter but now ... I wish to tell what I know about it and not let my knowledge die with me" (1990:95). Perhaps this is the basis for Maori women to be 'of a certain age' in order to perform the karanga.

The karanga is a positive statement, not only in its summoning of the ancestors, but also in its welcome to the more material audience. It may be seen in contrast to another activity which precedes it: the wero (formal challenge). Warriors (male) are sent out to halt the visitors' approach and to test their nerve with a spirited show of aggression. This is to ensure that the visitors are aware of their readiness to fight and it is incumbent upon the new arrivals to declare their peaceful intent otherwise they will not be welcomed. The moment this is done, however, the karanga begins and all may move together in unity on to the marae. The female is thus associated with peace and unity in contrast to the male association with aggression and separation, as set by precedent in the earliest times of Ranginui and Papatuanuku. On that occasion, the unity had negative effects for the children and they sought enlightenment via separation, but in the challenge/welcome process the unity may be viewed positively.

This emphasises the balance of separation and unity as being dynamic; neither male separation nor female unity can be deemed always to be negative or positive.

On formal occasions on the marae, while women may call upon the ancestors directly, alerting them to the gathering of kin, men appear to refer to the ancestors in acknowledgement. This is a fine distinction, but one which may relate to the position of the female in relation to the material and spiritual worlds. Through their identification with Hine nui Te Po, women have a direct link with both worlds. Men however do not generally have the same link with both worlds. Instead, it is their role to send the wairua of the mortally departed on to life in the next world, just as Hine nui directed Tane to do long ago. The recitation of whakapapa on such occasions is also a male role; this too connects the ancestors with those present, but in a different way from that undertaken by women.

### **Waiata and Dance:**

Poi dance is principally a game requiring adroitness of wrist and should be presented with graceful body movement, according to the rhythm of the accompanying song or chant. That does not mean, however, that there is no benefit other than entertainment. Ngahuia Te Awekotuku claims it was also used to reinforce the skills necessary for martial arts, especially mau patu - single handed weapons (1991:126). The proverb that proclaims 'He puta taua ke te tane, he whanau tama ki te wahine - the battlefield for men, childbirth for women' may well refer to the norm in times of war, but if the warriors were defeated, the women and slaves of the villages would have had to face the enemy in their turn.

The narrative "How Kae stole Tutunui" describes how Hinauri (wife of Tinirau), Raukatauri, Rekareka and Raukatamea were among a group of women who travelled by canoe to Haruru in order to capture Kae. Tactically, the women accepted hospitality, and then used song and the Waitoremi dance to assist them in his capture (Alpers 1964:94). In another narrative, it is said that "laments were sung by the women to stir up the feelings of the warriors" as the war canoe was built (Alpers 1964:99). Referring to motivation of behaviour in general, Te Aho O Te Rangi Welsh says Te Arawa women have always "injected emotion when ... [the men's] spirits have flagged" (1984:42). Similarly, Heni Sunderland states that it is women who "really motivate our men" (Binney & Chaplin 1986:126). Maori women's motivation of behaviour clearly has ethical significance, not only for themselves but also for their men, although this is unlikely to be readily acknowledged. As Mrs. Sunderland adds, "They [the men] wouldn't like me saying that" (Binney & Chaplin 1986:126).

The waiata contain Maori history, both collective and individual and refer to events and suffering of persons and groups. Metge mentions waiata as one of the traditional ways in which Maori have articulated their views and resentments (1976:329). The laments, in particular, have a "strength, power and endurance" within them which serves to remind people of the survival of Maori and their place in history: "When we chant our waiata ...



[powerlessness] shifts inside the head ... Our tupuna (ancestors) make us the vehicles for their grievances, the injustices, a vehicle for generations to carry the claim" (Cameron 1990:18). An impressive assertion, although difficult for Pakeha to fully understand, however, it generally seems to claim that the chanting of waiata (the same waiata that the ancestors have chanted in earlier times) brings people closer to understanding the grievances of their forebears and thus understanding better how to deal with the present injustices, which are based on those past. This seems to fit well with the concept of the past always being ahead, discussed earlier. If identity partly lies in relating oneself to those who have gone before and those who will come later, then the waiata which are carried over these generations may be a symbol of that identity, both collective and individual.

"Oral history relates that te haka Maori, Maori dance, began with a shimmer of light upon green forest leaves - te wiriwiri a Hine Raumati, the quivering dance of the Summer Goddess; the haze at the edge of the rainbow, Hine te Aniwaniwa" (Te Awekotuku 1991:125). Best also says that posture dance originated with the haka a Raumati (dancing of Summer) which is the "quivering appearance seen on a hot summer days" (1983:2:285). It might come as no surprise that the fierce (and predominantly male) haka's connection with these goddesses is played down or denied by some; instead the haka is linked with Tanerore, the son of Hine-raumati - Te haka a Tanerore (Best 1982:2:310). It appears that women's non-entertainment performances of the haka link mostly with women inciting the warriors to fight harder, and those occasions when women had to fight in the men's absence, although there is a report of young Waimate women who used "postural and action songs ... so seductive that the watching Waikato-Maniapoto warriors were too enamoured to continue fighting" (Heuer 1972:51-52). This contradicts the female role as represented in a lullaby sung to baby girls: 'Kei pikipiki koe i te paepae tapu, I te kaha no Tu - Do not cross the threshold leading to the trail of Tu (the war god)'. Traditional recreational performances of the haka include women, and although in some tribes e.g. Te Arawa, female posture tends to be subdued, women in other tribes e.g. Ngati Porou, exhibit the same exuberant

aggression required of their male counterparts. Some traditional gestures are particularly female and confirm the aggressive haka to be part of wahine Maori custom.

Te Awekotuku says that for her, "This substance is the mauri, the affirmation of one's Maori self, the energy of the haka, the grace of the poi"(1991:134). Mauri here may be likened to an unseen power, the outward or material sign of which may be found in the activities of haka and poi. Scorn is likely to be heaped upon those who do not reach certain standards of commitment and quality, without which the dances fail to evoke the appropriate sense of self in relation to the whakapapa, to the ancestors who have executed the dances before and those who will sustain the mauri in years to come. The unseen power may well be the force for life, but it ought not to be ignored, for as already noted in the discussion on weaving, unless the mauri is respected it may be damaged. As with other features of the Maori world view, there appears to be a balancing factor here; the mauri enables life and yet must be affirmed and respected to retain its vitality. In this tradition largely associated with the female aspect of life, there are ethical messages to send and to receive, both directly through the words and gestures as well as indirectly through the quality of, and commitment to, the performance.

### **Menstruation and Childbirth:**

It is immediately obvious that menstruation and the process of giving birth are physically or naturally distinctively female concerns. That these are spiritual concerns as well is not so readily seen in Western scientific terms, nor readily acknowledged by Maori (male) tradition. From the time that Papa's blood flowed into the soil (evidenced by the red ochre at her pubic area at Kurawaka) the female in particular continues to be associated with human lifeblood. The uha of Hine ahu one drawn from Kurawaka enabled her to give birth to Hine titama. When a woman wished to conceive, a karakia was performed to the effect that "a woman be endowed with the powers of Hine ahu one, the power of child bearing" (Best 1929:10). Makereti speaks of mate wahine or mate marama to refer to the monthly menstruation, the cyclic nature being emphasised by links with the moon ancestresses, Hine te iwa iwa and Hine korako (1986:119). The periodic 'sickness' of the moon during its dark phases seems to provide the connection for this association (Best 1924:97). Childbirth was also under the care of these ancestresses.

As an additional link with Hine te iwa iwa, Makereti mentions that the "first karakia repeated over a difficult birth was repeated over Hine te iwa iwa (Ko te Tuku O Hine te iwa iwa)" (1986:121). The detail of this narrative is not given by Makereti, although other writers confirm Hine te iwa iwa's role as goddess of childbirth. However, as in any culture with an oral tradition, sometimes the specific details of narratives vary according to local interests and requirements. In the Maori tradition, tribal differences are not only acknowledged but encouraged (a matter which has some importance when the narratives provide the answers to ethical questions). In the case of this episode, there is a reference to Hine te iwa iwa in a narrative which in most versions features Hinauri, wife of Tinirau (Hanson 1983:34). Since the story illustrates difficulties associated with childbirth, it may well be the precedent referred to by Makereti. Hinauri (or Hine te iwa iwa) was mistreated, isolated and neglected during her pregnancy by her husband yet Hinauri was a woman of high rank herself and wife of a chief, holding the appropriate degree of mana. She was entitled to expect her husband to arrange for



special foods to be brought to her, as befitting Tinirau's status and thus his child's future status, but unfortunately for Hinauri, he not only neglected her but went out of his way to make her as uncomfortable as possible. That Tinirau was correct to build a temporary shelter for his wife away from the kainga (village) for her confinement is evidenced by the continuation of this practice over the generations. However, this *whare kahu* was generally made to be temporarily comfortable, a detail Tinirau ignored. He screened her shelter with poisonous nettle after her request for suitable food, building it so high that she could not get out. Either Tinirau thought Hinauri was behaving with temerity by reminding him of his duties (she had done this effectively on an earlier occasion, as will be discussed below) and this act was a form of *utu*, or Tinirau was attempting to confirm his *mana* by ensuring her disadvantage. From either viewpoint, the episode leaves Tinirau with little credit. Makereti describes the presentation of special foods to expectant mothers, especially those of high rank, more as a privilege and a way of ensuring the health and security of the child (1986:112). The Hinauri/Hine te iwa iwa assumption appears to hold, for the difficulties encountered by Hinauri were overcome and she safely delivered a son. Makereti relates how the *karakia* performed over Hine te iwa iwa served as a precedent; that *karakia* was repeated over Rangiuru as she gave birth to Tutanekai, later the husband of Hinemoa.

Best notes that during childbirth difficulties "it was the practice to repeat over [the woman] the genealogical line of descent of her husband, and sometimes that of herself. The repetition of such lists of names served to bring relief to the woman" (1924:358). (It was also claimed that this occurred only when the true *whakapapa* was recited - any lack of benefit was attributed to adultery on the part of the woman, this being a breach of *tapu* (Heuer 1972:25). Undoubtedly this may be seen as a male interpretation!) Perhaps the woman found the chanting of the genealogy, the actual sound of the chant, relaxing. Alternatively, it might be interpreted as a ritual re-enactment of the kinship sequence, appropriate to the act of childbirth. In practical terms, the mother was being reminded of the value of her contribution,

that the pain of childbirth was worth her gift of a life to the world, the addition to the whakapapa. In general, the relative mana of the two lines of descent was the deciding factor as to which side of the family was remembered at this time. It seems likely that this would have been determined to a large extent by the whenua, the land. The mana of a kin group was, to a large extent, determined by their mana over the land and its resources - the extent of the lands over which they had control. There is a proverb which illustrates this : 'Ko te whenua te wai-u mo nga uri whakatipu - The land provides the sustenance for the coming generations' (wai-u meaning literally, milk from the breast). The more land and resources over which a group had mana, the greater likelihood the group would be provided for. Therefore the kin group which had the greater resources would be chosen for the ritual re-enactment. Although the translation given is the accepted one, that the term whenua also means placenta is not inappropriate in this setting.

The release of the whenua from the womb and the cutting of the umbilical cord, suggests Barlow, "effectively destroy the life support of the mother to the child just as the children of Ranginui and Papatuanuku lost the life-sustaining support of their parents when they forced them apart" (1991:148). I regard this interpretation as a very narrow one, not reflecting the full picture of Papa within the narratives; Papatuanuku has continued to provide life sustaining support for all her children by providing them with vital resources despite humankind's ingratitude (Mihi Edwards 1990:67). While the point may be made about children asserting their independence from their parents, it may also be said that parents, no matter what their children do or where they are, should always be available to support them. Rose Rangimarie Pere says that when a child is old enough "to take over direct responsibility of his or her body, the cherishing and nurturing" by the parents and grandparents must continue (1984:17). The commitment of parent to child is not only one of sentiment but also a commitment to following in the steps of the ancestors and ancestresses. Furthermore, there is a reciprocal aspect to this since children also have a commitment to their parents, elders, ancestors and ancestresses. The spiritual link

with Papatuanuku and birth is very strong. The original mother of all, Papa is "female in essence... and [this] moves within the consciousness" (Te Awekotuku 1991:70).

Best states that the condition of menstruation is tapu "and so possessed of an extremely harmful influence" (1982:614). Possibly the same applies to the time before and after birth. There does not appear to be a single specific explanation of why this time should be tapu, however there is more than one possibility to explore. Firstly there is the tapu surrounding blood itself, and in this sense of tapu, life blood is sacred and therefore any place blood is spilled may be tapu. This is particularly so if the blood is spilled from a highly tapu person (Best 1982:25). Secondly it may be that the tapu surrounding spirituality in general applies during menstruation and childbirth when the natural and spiritual worlds have the closest connection, through the association of womb and wairua. "The discharge was regarded as a type of embryo, an undeveloped human being" (Heuer 1972:30). Thirdly, the tapu may result from the direct link between the female genital area and Hine nui Te Po's very female way of disposing of Maui and his ambitions to immortality. Any process or event which carries the connotation of death or misfortune, te whare o aitua, is likely to involve some form of protection (in this case, tapu).

It may be seen, therefore, that traditionally for Maori women, the physical matters of the menstrual cycle and childbirth necessarily involve them in spiritual matters. There appears to be a contradiction involved in the idea that women in their most distinctively female states are deemed tapu, which is generally regarded as a male prerogative. The concept of tapu, however, is not readily explicable and this will be further discussed below.

### Childcare:

Based on the notion that the female realm is that of the physical/natural, the responsibilities for childcare are often regarded as a strictly female concern. "A woman's primary role is to nurse a child until it grows into maturity and independence ... She is responsible for the child's physical growth and the husband or father is responsible for the child's spiritual and moral upbringing" (Barlow 1991:147). In the same article, Barlow states that "The father is largely responsible for the care of the wairua of the child ... while the mother is primarily responsible for the physical growth and nourishment of the child. These views are based on the traditional belief that all life is created first spiritually, and then physically" (1991:148). It might be assumed that the same point is being made both times, that women ought to have as their main role in life the physical care of children and men be responsible for children's spiritual and moral upbringing. However, this is a misleading assumption. A woman having a 'primary role to' and a mother being 'primarily responsible for' may but need not amount to the same. The first claim applies to **all** Maori women, and suggests that the female role is to bear and raise children until these are independent. The second claim applies to Maori women **who are parents**, suggesting that their focus ought to be placed on the physical or material aspects of child caregiving.

If women take Papatuanuku as the sole role model for their ethical behaviour, then bearing children and providing love, security and resources for them may be required. On the other hand, if women are, for some practical/material reason, unable to bear or care for children, then relegating their life's focus to a secondary role seems more than harsh and inappropriate, for Papa's and Hine nui's interests were and are not centred on their own immediate children but all their descendants. To follow in their footsteps is to demonstrate aroha to all one's family, both immediate and extended and all kin.

Another possibility is for women to bear children but not be the chief childcare giver or not be 'primarily responsible for' their physical care and nurturing. This option finds an interesting

precedent in the deeds of Hine titama, who told Tane to remain in the world and care for their children in the **material** world while she went to **spiritual** world to take care of their (and all) children in that realm. The role responsibilities as set out by Barlow would restrict people from following in the footsteps of these ancestors.

Nor is Hine titama the only ancestress to have taken this option. Hinauri, on leaving Tinirau, felt sorry for him and "could not bear to deprive him of his son" (Alpers 1964:83) and left her baby in the care of his father. According to Alpers' version of the narrative, however, Hinauri does later feel shame and remorse for having left her baby in this way. When she became reunited with her son, "she was overjoyed to see him and to be rid of the bad feelings she had about him" (1964:89). Metge suggests that whakamaa, although loosely translated as shame, is allied to feelings of inadequacy and hurt (1986). It seems plausible that Hinauri may have felt whakamaa, not so much for leaving her child in the care of his father, but for having to have made the decision to depart. She had been ill treated by her husband, but nevertheless felt whakamaa since she had been unable to hold his caring attention. The 'abandonment' of her child may instead be seen as an attempt to balance the whakamaa by demonstrating aroha.

This does not mean that Maori women ought not to take responsibility for the care of their children; there are numerous precedents for this choice. Nevertheless, a choice is possible; women ought not to be **required** to make child bearing and raising their primary role since there are precedents for following other paths. In addition, there is a role for them to play in the children's spiritual care, as evidenced by Hine titama/Hine nui, who made this her primary role.

There is another factor relevant to any discussion on child-rearing within Maori tradition, and this concerns the role of grandparents. From the time of Hine titama, who went to her grandmother Papa for support, grandparents have tended to be major influences in the lives of their mokopuna. The closeness of this relationship is suggested by the words 'tupuna' and



`mokopuna' to refer to grandparents and grandchildren; puna means spring of water and tu may be interpreted as `being established.' Pere's translation for tupuna is "the spring of water that is continuously being established". Similarly, moko means the tattooing or blueprint and mokopuna translates as "the blueprint of the spring of water" (1991:10). This suggests that grandchildren exhibit patterns of behaviour established by their grandparents. There is a proverb which may be applied to this close relationship and the relationship between children and all their elders and ancestors (the term tupuna may be widely applied within the kin group). "E kore e taka te parapara a ona tupuna; Tukua iho ki a ia - He cannot fail to inherit the talents of his ancestors; they must descend to him" (Karetu 1987:47). It is mostly for this reason but also in order to free parents for more active economic duties that the "Training of children was carried out by all members of the household unit, especially grandparents" (Heuer 1972:29). Buck states that grandparents are chiefly responsible for the handing down of the traditional narratives, tribal history and customs (1949:358). Many writers (including Patricia Grace, Witi Ihimaera, Amiria Stirling and Anne Salmond) have depicted this special feature of Maori family life. Mihi Edwards writes of life with her Kuia and Koro with gratitude and affection, and her story shows how effectively grandparents can pass on their wealth of knowledge to another generation (1990). So it may be seen that grandparents, and all kin, especially the more senior, also have and hold responsibility for both the physical and spiritual welfare of their mokopuna.

The separation of physical from spiritual/moral care as a matter of female nature, as Barlow describes, also ignores another important factor - that these cannot be separated when it comes to child or personal development. Everything in Maori tradition points to the inter-relatedness of the physical and spiritual aspects of existence. There might be a case for suggesting that the experience of giving birth to a child increases a woman's responsibility for the overall development of that child; giving birth is such a momentous event that it provides a person with a particular motivation for being responsible for that child, and this motivation no-one else may have (although they may well,



and very likely do, have a responsibility stemming from other motivations) (Held 1987:120-125). If so, then the claim that it is 'natural' for the mother to hand over the responsibility for the spiritual and moral development of the child seems a doubtful one. If human life is both physical and spiritual, then it is not relevant whether spiritual existence evolved prior to physical existence or otherwise. Human life, as experienced, emphasises the complementarity of both aspects and that is what mothers, fathers, grandparents, and all kin must recognize if the child is to learn to follow in the paths of the ancestors.

In choosing to ignore the complementary ethical precedents found in female traditions, Barlow also diminishes the male aspect. For instance, while the preparation of food has traditionally been a female concern, providing the food - a physical/material aspect of life - traditionally is a male responsibility. Johansen, when listing the criteria of nobility mentions "diligence and skill in obtaining food"(1954:181). Under the reciprocal terms of *aroha* and *utu*, liberal hospitality is prized, and the provision of food is a matter of honour for both male and female. That this could be explained in terms of Barlow's interpretation is unlikely. Even more difficult to explain would be the physical aspects of male traditions e.g. martial arts and carving. The physical world cannot be separated from the spiritual world in these activities, any more than they can be in childcare issues. Furthermore, the general ethical principle of balance (in all things) suggests that even where the lines can be drawn between the two aspects, the material and spiritual ought to be complementary within all activities.

### **Flexibility:**

In order to explore this facet of wahine Maori, I wish to first establish something of what it is not, by referring to certain qualities required of male leaders and those men who aspire to greatness. In his novel "The Matriarch," Witi Ihimaera gives readers a glimpse of the strength and determination required of a Maori leader. He also conveys how closely these qualities are allied to such traits as obstinacy and inflexibility. About a battle over mana, he writes, "My victory lay in crushing him entirely and forever. To accept him as human would have been to acknowledge and sympathise with his weakness" (1986:398). So the young man proceeded to formally renounce his cousin, in front of the cousin's new bride on the wedding day, puncturing his joy and bringing grief to all the family present. That it had to be done this way is justified partly by utu, and the fact that the cousin had first staked a claim to the leadership at an earlier family wedding. Largely, however, it is justifiable in terms of personal mana, and the retention and augmentation thereof. Poor leadership, according to Buck, "lowered the prestige of the tribe and the people turned to a younger brother to supply the energy ... his senior brother lacked" (1958:345). While Buck's comments refer to collective rather than personal mana, I believe in this particular situation the two are necessarily linked; if there are two leadership contenders, both having equivalent (inherited) rights to that role, then their personal mana is likely to be a feature of the battle at some stage. For instance, it would suit each if the other relinquished the claim before it could become an issue to be debated by the entire kin group. Alternatively, if the collective believed the heir did not look 'likely material' it seems plausible that another person, with similar inherited mana, might be encouraged. An uncompromising response to any such challenge would provide a clear sign of fit determination. Forcing such a withdrawal would confirm and enhance the inherited mana.

It is this type of inflexibility which is not generally attributed to (or featured as desirable in) Maori women. Quite to the contrary, when a stand-off results from two or more rigid points of view, women are those who most often resolve the dilemma, without that resolution involving loss of mana to the concerned parties.

Women must take the initiative in order that events may progress, be flexible in their thoughts and plans to find a way through the impasse. If a solution fails to please the participants in the dispute, then any peace will be short-lived. If, however, women apply a flexible and peaceable approach to the problem, the solution is likely to prove more satisfactory. There is a proverb which may be applied to this: 'He whakahou rongo wahine he tatau pounamu - Peace brought about by women is enduring'. One woman who demonstrated this was Koropiki of Te Ati Awa; her people were being starved from their pa by Waikato, so she escaped at night, making her way to her husband's people (Kawhia). While she was away, Waikato began to run short of provisions themselves and attempted to make peaceful overtures to Te Ati Awa. However, treachery was suspected and Te Ati Awa responded by killing the emissaries. Fortunately for both parties, "at that juncture, the party from Kawhia arrived and Koropiki, through her relationship to both sides, secured a truce" and lasting peace was later reached at her camp (Kelly 1949:400).

Time and again in the narratives there are references to desperate or bewildered males taking advice and/or necessary assistance from females. After his fruitless search, Tane needed to be directed by Papa to the site of the uha; Maui required the magical jawbone of his ancestress Muri ranga whenua in order to outperform his older brothers and gain great mana for his exploits; Tawhaki needed directions from his great grandmother Whaitiri in order to find his daughter Puanga and her mother Hapai in the heavens; Hatupatu relied on a spell given to him by his grandmother (just in case he needed to overcome the disadvantage of being youngest son) in order to defeat Kura ngaituku. It seems not only that it is tika to seek advice from elders and ancestors but that women are those who provide assistance when people and/or events appear unyielding; the female has directed the male at times when change was required. Perhaps Dame Te Atairangikaahu had this in mind when she said that "our womanly influence throughout the ages has been subtle and sure, and when changes have been made, we have made them - even if men thought they did it all" (1992:34).

As highlighted earlier, a strong precedent for such flexibility and capacity for change was established by Papatuanuku; she was the one to be turned over to stop the world being flooded by Rangi's tears, and this flexibility enabled the world to progress. For the most part, the world is an unpredictable place in which people must be ready to adapt to a variety of situations. Women have a clear mandate from Papa to do so. Tilly Reedy expresses this in terms of her Maori identity: "This Maoriness, which is at once a great strength, can also be a great obstacle ... I have learnt to adapt and to adjust my urban Wellington life to fit into those values which I bring from my Maori source" (1979:43). This flexibility is particularly important in the case of families, placing a special responsibility on women in respect of the observance of customs. They must find a way between jettisoning the valuable traditions and allowing children to grow independently in a predominantly Pakeha society. When Pae Williams of Ngati Whatua was asked her views on young people in relation to the marae, she answered that there must be room for compromise. "The old rules of the marae are not working and a lot of young people are turning off. Perhaps we keep the rules but bend them slightly" (1985:48). It appears that the old rules may be not so much Maori tikanga as they are male-Maori tikanga. If the rules also reflected the female view of what is appropriate, these would, I believe, reveal the flexibility required to withstand an ever-changing world.

There is, according to Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, a major role for women in the telling of stories, the invocation of heroes and heroines past (1991:107). Yet the same story will never be told twice and she mentions flexibility as a key aspect of this art. Improvisation is a feature of the most gifted kaikaranga, and without this, "the [welcome] exchange is relatively perfunctory". From this much appreciated "dynamic flexibility inherent in the karanga" emerges the capacity of the hostess or story-teller to "present herself and her people in a deliberate and particular way" (Te Awekotuku 1991:109). The expert story-teller is the one who re-weaves a traditional story, keeping it relevant to her listeners, and in this way, women may have a markedly female input into ethical training, since the traditional narratives are the source of

ethical precedents. Te Awekotuku describes how the story of Hinemoa and Tutanekai varies in emphasis on different occasions. In one version, it may be the swimming feat which is highlighted, thus encouraging fitness and physical prowess; in another, the romance features and how human passion can affect inter-tribal relationships. Yet another version may accentuate that it was Hinemoa's (as opposed to Tutanekai's) enterprise and courage in swimming the lake which resulted in their marriage.

The connotation of flexibility includes, in Maori terms, such meanings as ingenuity, creativeness and resource. All of these were demonstrated by Te Aokapurangi during the 1823 sacking of Mokoia Island, at that time held by Te Arawa. Herself of Te Arawa descent, but married to a Ngapuhi chief, Te Aokapurangi appealed to Hongi Hika for the lives of her kin on Mokoia. Hongi retorted derisively that he would spare whomever passed between her legs during the attack, so Te Aokapurangi quickly climbed to the top of the roof of the largest building on the island and spread her thighs wide across the gable. Hundreds ran inside to safety, ignoring the tapu associated with the female genitalia, and Hongi Hika was sufficiently impressed by her ingenious response to his challenge that he spared their lives. Flexibility appears to be one of the key aspects to mana wahine and, as will be seen, of Maori values in general but all too often ignored by Maori males.



### **Kinship:**

I have not yet attempted to explore specific aspects of mana, tapu and noa within the Maori world view because it is important to stress the significance of the deeds of the ancestors. The past motivates Maori in a way that most Pakeha singularly fail to understand. A kaumatua was once asked why the Maori word for the front of an object (mua) was also the word for the past, while the back of an object (muri) also means the future. "It is because our ancestors always had their backs to the future and their eyes firmly on the past. That is what makes us different from the Pakeha" (Joe Williams 1990:14). Maori Marsden says that "All things are immersed within the stream of cosmic process ... all things occur as a succession of processes and events. There is no such thing as abstract time but only relative time" (1975:218). This is why at tangi and other hui, the only time which matters to the participants is what stage the events are at - in relation to "the fulfilment of customary obligations" (Metge 1976:69).

This understanding of past, future and the whole notion of time in general cannot be ignored if Pakeha wish to examine Maori concepts. Kant described time as a pure form of sensibility, which transcends any particular experience and, along with space, is indispensable to every sense experience. Although time in this regard is non-specific, it may be seen that to apply a linear time approach to a non-linear, relational understanding of time (and of every aspect of the universe) is inappropriate. For instance, what the wairua of the ancestors may be at mortal death is no more significant than what wairua is or are at any time that the presence of wairua is acknowledged. It does not change what wairua means, in relation to ancestors, those who live in the material world or those who will be descendants. It is one way of viewing persons, objects or events that identifies them as individuals within a total (timeless) process. Every time the ancestral wairua are acknowledged and their deeds are related serve to remind those physically present that they too have a rightful place in the universe, a role to play which will be remembered and related. This is a strong base for ethical messages - how one lives one's life has great significance. It may be seen, therefore, that the concept of wairua within the



(timeless) universe has a significant role to play in another important feature of the Maori world view, that of kinship.

Although many points relevant to this concept have already emerged (most notably that everything and everyone on earth is descended from the same ancestors and thus related) this feature requires further emphasis. For all Maori the ties or links of kinship can neither be ignored nor ought to be underrated. In order to highlight this significance, in the opening statement of his book "The Maori and his Religion," Prytz Johansen states: "If one could picture to oneself a person like Kant among the old Maoris ... one should not be surprised if to the fundamental categories of knowledge, time and space, he had added: kinship" (1954:9). He bases this observation firstly on the importance of the whakapapa in the lives of Maori and their readiness to seek out the links between people who would be, in Pakeha terms, very remote cousins. He also claims that kinship results in much more than community and solidarity. "The common will which conditions the solidarity is rooted in something much deeper, an inner solidarity in the souls" (1954:34). This is supported by Mason Durie when he says that the popular Pakeha mental health idea of 'the person in her own right' is not regarded as healthy by Maori, since it elevates the individual above the family. Ambitious and aspiring Maori individuals thus may well have a difficult lesson to learn since whanau attributes are more highly favoured than individual ones (1986:4).

Philosophically, these and similar statements make a strong claim; kinship or collectivism rather than individuality is the focus of personal identity and the world view. Whether this would be fully accepted by Maori is a debatable point; a sense of belonging might be regarded as the initial but not sole 'step' in personal identity and it is only in being secure in one context (the whanau) that people become free to explore identity beyond this (Reedy 1979:47). In reply it might be argued that this does not affect the cardinal value of kinship - any such exploration beyond the whanau may be acknowledged, even lauded, but is still attributable to the whanau, for without kin the self would not be. The individualistic conception of identity in which individuals are

self made, through their choices arising from their desires, will and effort is not generally applicable. Perhaps this is an indication of the difficulties faced when attempting to impose Western style philosophy on a Maori world view. There is a fundamental difference between the two; for Pakeha, personal identity is just about persons but for Maori, the division of the person from the non-person underestimates the relationships between people, ancestors, descendants, rivers, plants, all objects and even processes within the world. The relationships are often thought about in terms of wairua; it has been claimed, for instance, that 'communication' amongst the different (but related) species of the earth occurs during sleep (the traditional time for the independent work undertaken by the wairua) (Best 1982:2:589). These relationships are not only genealogically based, but backed by the understanding that everyone and everything has a mauri which is to be respected. The concept of kinship is thus closely associated with mauri, wairua and mana. The extent of these associations and whether the concepts might be described as interdependent may be at least partly determined by considering Maori women and their view of kinship.

Through their identification with Papa and Hine nui Te Po, women have a special role to play in generally supporting and nurturing life. Hine nui's eternal role is particularly interesting, for this ancestress who established one of the clearest principles about the need to protect and support all kin did so as a result of a great wrong done to her, by one of her kin. Her actions might either be seen as a form of utu or of aroha, since both might result in similar acts being taken. Both these concepts involve reciprocity and balance, the former perhaps more obviously to Pakeha than the latter, utu involving as it does something of revenge. Utu is taken, in general, only when the balance between kin and outsiders (from other tribes) is upset. Although in the purest sense of kinship as explained above, everyone is kin, when utu is involved, "hopefully they will be fairly distant, distant enough to count as outsiders when compared with close kin" (Patterson 1992:118). In this instance, Hine nui's actions did have the effect of dramatically increasing her mana, an

appropriate motive for utu, so perhaps she was following in the footsteps of her grandfather Rangi who initiated utu against kin.

It seems much more plausible however, that Hine nui was acting out of aroha, which also involves obligation and responsibility. "To accept ... the caring of aroha means you give back a little more than you received" whether this is tangible or otherwise (Reedy 1979:47). Hine nui accepted the aroha of her grandmother to whom she fled and "the acceptance of aroha in any shape or form places one unequivocally under obligation to that person, that family, that group" (Reedy 1979:47). So while caring for her children was no longer tika in this earthly life, this did not lessen Hine nui's obligations to care for her children in a different way. She had to provide even greater care, and this she does in continuing to care for all in the next stage of existence. Love as aroha is thus different from love in the Western view, although some similarities may be drawn. For instance, agape of the Greek tradition distinguishes a love for another person which is not grounded in her or his attractive qualities; aroha is similarly extended even to those whose unattractive properties have resulted in harm or embarrassment to kin. However, the differences appear to be far greater than the similarities, since the acceptance and giving of aroha, unlike agape, is based on kinship principles.

It should be noted that kinship for traditional Maori was not taken upon solely patriarchal or matriarchal lines but both - kinship had (and retains) an 'ambilineal' foundation (Rankin 1986:22). In this way, a whanau (immediate and extended family) might belong to several hapu (groups of related whanau) and in turn be part of more than one iwi (tribe) although in times past, single iwi affiliation was more likely. Women in particular affected, and were affected by, this social organisation to the extent that "He wahine, he whenua, e ea ai te pakanga - for women and for land, men are prepared to do battle". Marriage contracts meant real and potential links with other groups, and were valuable as a form of access to additional land resources and more peaceful living in general. (The closer the relationship, the less likely utu would be initiated.) The right to benefit from the

resources offered by a particular area of land (never ownership as known in Western tradition) was one of the supports of social control. It is therefore interesting to note the translations offered by Pere for a similar proverb: "He wahine, he whenua, a ngaro ai te tangata - by women and land men are lost" or alternatively, "women and land both carry the same role" (1990:3). Hence it might be said that through women and land, the sanctions of social control are possible: "Before the confiscations [of the land] Maori women had authority and binding control which influenced the lives of our whanau, hapu and iwi" (Cameron 1990:18). However, Pere instead suggests that both provide sustenance, without which the descendants would be lost. This returns us to the precedent created by Papatuanuku and her nourishing self.

Attention to the physical needs of kin and responding with ready hospitality is part of wahine Maori tradition. Heuer states that even for high-born women, the extension of hospitality to visitors was a priority. "Any Maori woman knew that she would be expected to ensure there would always be ample food on hand so any unexpected arrivals could be greeted and feasted with due respect" (1972:41). However, it was the responsibility of men to procure most of the food for the whanau and hapu, and the narrative about Hinauri and Tinirau provides a precedent for this. When Tinirau failed to provide his share of food for the whanau, his wife Hinauri was humiliated by this lapse. The other women of the village brought collective pressure to bear on Hinauri and she in turn motivated Tinirau to share his resources. Because he was a chief this was especially important; even those of great mana must take note of the disapproval of kin and respond appropriately, even in the matter of everyday needs.

From the same narrative, it may be seen that a little calculated effort is quite acceptable on the part of the female when luring a desired mate. Hinauri used her knowledge of Tinirau's personal vanity in organise her initial meeting with him and was successful in this strategy. When, generations later, Hinemoa swam the lake to be with Tutanekai, she demonstrated considerable effort and tenacity in order to be with the man of her choice. However, marriage was frequently considered too



politically important to be left entirely to the choice of the young participants. The proverb "Peace brought about by women is enduring" may apply in this context too, for a marriage contract was one way of peaceably settling disputes between warring factions. Any premarital sexual licence granted to the young ceased, according to Shortland, the moment they married : "They were required to become prudent and chaste or suffer the consequences" (1856:142). Buck explains this in terms of marriage being "a formal agreement, not between two individuals but between two family groups" (1958:370). In this way, not only could a dispute be ended, but any subsequent marital offence such as infidelity could be suitably avenged by sending out a raiding party from the offended kin to exact recompense; all the kin of the offender would be held responsible for the offence. "Through their relative committing this sin, the disgrace came upon them all" (Makereti 1986:105). Buck also comments that "if a family of the offender were of a poor status, a war party would not deign to visit them" (1958:371). The offence thus involved the relative mana of the involved whanau and recompense was sought only when lost mana might be restored. Rather pragmatically, this did not mean a return to the past state i.e. a reconciliation of the married couple, was necessary although if this best suited the circumstances of the two groups, then undoubtedly it would have been demanded.

Waiata have traditionally been the channel for women's political and emotional responses to desertion by lovers or to unhappy alliances, but another, more dramatic, response was also available to women. Rather than being viewed as evidence of misery and defeat, suicide may instead be seen as a form of utu. When a woman has been deserted or forced into an unhappy marriage she no longer has control over her life. Suicide as utu is a means of reasserting control when it appears impossible to "wreak vengeance on the source of the affront ... [or when one] lacks the strength or means to retaliate directly" (Hanson 1983:143). Huritini of Te Arawa was one woman who reasserted control over her personal destiny by throwing herself into a boiling mud pool rather than continue in a miserable marriage. There is often an additional positive result from this action, in

that it also denies the kinship group her presence and a woman's brothers (or male kin generally, depending on the particular use of the term *tuahine*) would be particularly aware of this. "Whaangai i to taaua tuahine, hei tangi i a taaua - Let us look after our sister, she will mourn us" (Karetu 1987:2). This blood relationship is more highly valued than that of marriage and a woman is entitled to expect assistance from her brother. If, unlike Rupe who rescued his sister Hinauri from her unhappy marriage, a brother fails his sister in her distress, then her suicide is appropriately seen as *utu* against him as well. (This confirms the idea discussed above that acts of *utu* should not only restore the balance but preferably go a little further.) Nevertheless, even on these traditional grounds, suicide as a form of protest seems to underline the lack of options readily available to women in distress. A more cynical view might suggest that suicide in this light would have been convenient for those men who no longer had to face up to the more obvious signs of their moral turpitude.

It may be seen that for Maori women personal well-being cannot be separated from that of kin. Neither can it involve only the practical or material aspects of being associated with *whenua* (the land, her people and resources) since the maintenance of kinship principles also involves the recognition and understanding of *wairua*, *mana*, *mauri*, knowledge of *tikanga* and an openness to learning. Just as the land and placenta are both known as *whenua*, *hapu* may be used to refer to pregnancy and *whanau* not only means family but birth itself (Pere 1991:22). Acknowledgement of kinship not only precedes individuality (through such things as the formation of values) but is part of personal identity. Perhaps on a cautionary note, Pere says that "The *hinengaro* - the female who is both known and hidden - the mind ... [must] be free to move in an infinite direction", free from fear or interference from outside the self (1991:32). Just as the person ought not to be 'extracted' from the kinship group, so too must the kinship group's concern be with the individual members, their thoughts, intuitions, memories and reactions. If Maori women are to follow in the footsteps of their ancestresses and identify with this earth and all her inhabitants, these interdependent factors within the self/kin require that the



domain of wahine Maori be far more extensive than is often publicly suggested. I now intend to discuss aspects of tapu and noa, in order to establish whether mana wahine reflects this influence.

### **Mana, Tapu and Noa:**

A short definition of tapu is sacred, forbidden; noa means free from tapu (Ryan 1989). As with many other Maori concepts, these definitions are accurate yet ripe for misinterpretation, the succinctness belying complexities which have given rise to many, sometimes contradictory, assertions. I hope to show that such variance does not necessarily indicate lack of understanding but may instead be attributable to the nature of mana and its acquisition.

Tapu's sacredness stems from the relationship between the gods and those on this earth - that which is tapu has been marked by atua in some special way. Part of the "spiritual essence of an atua ... was communicated directly to objects which they touched ... [and] retransmitted to anything else brought into contact with these objects" (Shortland 1856:102). The laws of, or surrounding, tapu have traditionally governed the existence of Maori and few aspects of either ritualistic or everyday life were untouched by their force.

As discussed earlier, restrictions may arise from an object or process such as weaving being in a tapu state. The tapu which applies to menstruating women in relation to flax gathering or weaving has practical benefit. Similarly, aho tapu applies to the first row of weaving. The reason why Maori give both practical and metaphysical reasons for these and other restrictions seems to lie partly in the significance of weaving itself and partly in the resources required. Weaving may carry in its designs and patterns the history and culture of Maori people: "Maori weaving is full of symbolism and hidden meanings, embodied with the spiritual values and beliefs of the Maori people" (Puketapu-Hetet 1989). Because of this, tribal uniqueness in patterns has been nurtured and protected, and recognition of this fact becomes a matter of ethics. Mrs. Puketapu-Hetet expresses her concern over the appearance of a traditional 'protected' pattern ornamenting a particular brand of tissue boxes: "What has happened to the mana of this pattern?" (1989:53) Tapu in this instance may be seen as protecting mana. The pattern symbolises and exhibits the continuing interests of Maori, the values held by those who have

gone from this earth are practised within the traditions of the craft or production e.g. values relating to the resources provided by Papa, "to put back into flax what we take from it" (Te Awekotuku 1991:119). This is a metaphysical matter because flax has a mauri, a life force of its own and that mauri can deteriorate or be diminished by lack of respect for that life force. An understanding of this interrelationship of mauri, mana and tapu may be drawn from Makereti's comments about the kumara god: "Matuatonga, the kumara god ... was the mauri, the tapu life principle of the kumara ... and had great mana in the growing of the kumara" (1986:180).

The relationship seen by Maori between sickness or death and breaches of the restrictions surrounding tapu has been much documented. Makereti says that if a child became ill, "it was through something done by the mother or father in the way of desecrating tapu" (1986:148). She describes how if hair was put in a fire, it was essential to extinguish the fire immediately, otherwise "the person whose hair it was would die" (1986:147). Here it may be seen that the person who desecrated tapu did not suffer illness or death, but the one to whom the hair belonged. Perhaps this reflects the importance of the tapu of the head and hair, traditionally regarded as the site of greatest personal tapu. Yet the same pattern emerges from the first example - it was the parents' breach of tapu yet the child suffered. This was not always the case, however, for anyone who even inadvertently trespassed on a tapu place e.g. a tuahu or sacred altar, expected to die: "He did not need to be put to death, its tapu killed him". The mana of the tapu was sufficient to kill all who violated the rules (Tikao 1990:73). That others rather than the perpetrator might suffer the penalties of a breach of tapu is more likely to be attributable to kinship and collective responsibility for transgression as already discussed.

The tapu applying to the head (and hair) has an importance reflected in the number of stories which have been handed down detailing the misfortunes of those who have neglected or ignored the relevant restrictions. The tale of Parekawa is one such example. She had been cutting her father's hair, and became tapu

through this contact, but then was required to provide hospitality to unexpected visitors; her hands touched cooked food and breached the tapu. Her subsequent dementia and leap into the river was ascribed by elders to her disregard of the laws of personal tapu (Best 1982:2:480). On the other hand, the story of Maui provides an example of how a breach of this tapu may be used positively. Maui's mother Taranga believed her son was stillborn and, contrary to the custom of burying the body with the appropriate karakia, she cut off the topknot of her hair, wrapped Maui in it and placed him in the sea. Taranga was fully aware of the tapu of her hair, and believed that because of it, one day Maui would some day find her (Kahukiwa & Grace 1984:40).

Neglect of the laws of tapu, in general, were traditionally believed to anger the atua of the family (Shortland 1856:100 ff). This belief is more readily understood when we are reminded of the strong links of kinship not being affected by mortal death; the mana of the atua thus stood and fell along with the mana of their descendants. This continuing interest claimed on behalf of the ancestral wairua removes the necessity for much of the element of chance Pakeha generally attribute to life on earth (Johansen 1958:137-8). The atua are credited with those forces which are difficult to understand - to good ethical effect. It is interesting to note therefore that Te Awekotuku, in her book about mana wahine, has a chapter entitled "We Will Become Ill If We Stop Weaving". If the mana of Maori women, as a group, is largely determined by their imitation of their ancestresses and if weaving is not part of their lives, then they fail to fulfil what is tika. An offence against tikanga or correct practice conceivably falls under the laws of tapu, and thus illness or other misfortune might be seen as the inevitable result. What is likely to be explained, in Pakeha terms, as a matter of self esteem through recognised achievement and its relationship to mental health, may instead be attributed by Maori to the work and interests of the atua, and the protection of these.

Just as wairua may refer to persons, places, objects, events, states and processes, tapu may similarly be applied. This seems appropriate, given the claim that tapu is somehow a mark of the

ancestral wairua. From the writings of Best and Buck in particular, it appears that there are varying 'degrees' of tapu, some more significant than others and the effects of infringement vary correspondingly. For instance, tapu of the person is viewed as more sacrosanct than the tapu of objects, but as Buck remarks, the personal tapu of ariki (chiefs) was sometimes extended to their personal property: "In this form, tapu was a useful safeguard in protecting property from promiscuous borrowing" (1958:348). While the tapu connected with death understandably involves restriction of access to places such as burial sites, it also explains the apparent 'neglect' of the very ill, an accusation sometimes levelled at Maori. Makereti clarifies this matter with some force, reminding her readers that inexplicable illness was traditionally attributed to infringement of the laws of tapu. The Europeans brought strange new diseases into New Zealand, and in the absence of obvious cures, the Maori "tried to cope with them as his ancestors had done, by karakia at an isolated and tapu place" (1986:149). The isolation was necessary since any place of death was rendered tapu; if a person died in their usual residence, that house became tapu and could not be used again.

The relationship between the gods and tapu has been expressed as a direct one: "Ko te tapu te mana o nga atua - Tapu is the mana of the spiritual powers" (Shirres 1982:50 who cites White and a Ngai Tahu source). The sacred state of someone/thing under the patronage of the spiritual ancestors signals their authority or influence and respect or consideration given by people acknowledges that state (Johansen 1954:186). The prohibitions which are associated with tapu show an awareness of the potency of mana: "It is not the tapu that wreaks harm when breached but the mana which then becomes uncontrolled" (Irwin 1984:23). This statement goes some way to explaining why the performance of karanga has traditionally been restricted to post-menopausal women; the 'dangerous powers' attached to the menstrual time would not so much dissipate the spirituality of the occasion but augment it to the extent that people would have no control. In a somewhat similar vein, Best says that a woman chosen to be part of the ritual of the sacral school was either

barren or past child bearing, "so that the excessive tapu of the occasion should have no ill effects on the unborn child" (Johansen 1954:217).

The same idea would also explain the effectiveness of Taranga's breach of tapu when she wrapped Maui in her hair; the mana unleashed by her act became a (positive) force for Maui, sufficient to overcome the difficulties of his start in life. But as also seen in the tale of Maui, mana must be held in balance along with other features of a Maori world view. Mana comes from the ancestral gods and tapu may be seen as the means by which humans cope with that power. Seen in this way, tapu separates humans from gods, and is an acknowledgement of the inability of people to hold or take total control: "A mountain peak can be scaled by man; the waves of the ocean can be surmounted by a canoe; but the human summit cannot be scaled by man, for man is tapu" (Tutakangahau's words related to Tioke, cited by Irwin 1984:25). Tapu may be seen as a distinctively human factor, a means by which people come to terms with their limited power within the universe, by enabling them to 'tap into' the mana necessary for overcoming usual human limitation.

As suggested by the events surrounding Maui's birth, breaking the laws surrounding tapu may not always have negative effects. Tales have been told of women in the state of unwanted pregnancy deliberately breaching tapu in anticipation of fooling the gods into 'punishing' them with miscarriage. This deliberate pollution of tapu was known as taiki (Best 1982:126). Just as karakia is not performed as a hopeful request of the gods but in the expectation that a correctly executed and appropriate karakia will have the desired result, so too taiki. If tapu was polluted in this way the result had to be as desired. If this rather tricky approach failed to gain the desired effect, it was unlikely to have been assumed that this was not within the power of the gods to arrange. A more likely belief would have been that some part of the taiki was inappropriate or incorrect i.e. insufficiently polluting.



If tapu protects mana, then from the above examples it can be seen that mana itself is neither wholly positive nor wholly negative but can be a force for either. This idea is supported by the practices of highly tapu tohunga in the areas of black and/or white magic.<sup>2</sup> Not only may mana be either a positive or negative force, but Maui's bid for immortality suggests that on a single occasion mana may be a force for both positive and negative. His bold move may be positively viewed as an indication of humanity striving to overcome the obstacles of life, yet at the same time it may be negatively seen as interference in the natural 'scheme' of the universe.

In the discussion on flexibility (above) reference was made to Te Aokapurangi and her ingenuity during the 1823 Ngapuhi sacking of Mokoia Island. When her kin took advantage of the security offered by Te Aokapurangi, they ignored tapu by passing between her legs. Setting aside for now the reasons why this act constituted a breach of tapu, why did this event not have negative results for her people? One possible answer is that Te Aokapurangi's (displayed) personal mana was sufficient to overcome or 'outdo' the tapu. But if tapu is the mana of the atua, then this is a very strong claim in that her mana was somehow greater than that of the atua. Irwin states that in addition to the "Departmental and District atua ... is an extremely wide class of atua " including wairua, kaitiaki (guardians), taniwha (mythical monsters) and kehua (malicious or troublesome spirits) (1984:39). The mana of such atua as these might not prove to be superior to that exhibited by Te Aokapurangi.

Alternatively, this event might better be seen not as a negative breach of tapu, but a positive lifting or removal of tapu. Maori tend to accredit undesirable emotional responses such as fear or grief to the work of malevolent wairua or atua: "Kati te wairua te mahi te haramai - Have done, spirit, the work of intrusion" (Shortland 1856:180). Seen in this light the act of stepping between the legs of a woman was a deliberate (and effective) attempt to break the stronghold of the tapu causing the misfortune of fear in battle.

Yet another interpretation might feature a different facet of the narrative; for instance, Hongi Hika had laid down the challenge and once this had been met, his mana as leader would have been diminished had he gone back on his word. Johansen, in describing the qualities required of leaders, says that a chief is "one who stands security for the keeping of promises and agreements ... [exhibiting] reliability of honour" (1954:180-181). This was no small matter for Hongi Hika in this case. He had challenged Te Aokapurangi, expecting her to have no possible answer and her response, in effect, bested him in battle. A warrior of lesser mana might have offered his life to her in payment as did a Kaikoura man to Tau-whare, who "obligingly slew him" (Tikao 1990:132). However, while this may explain why Hongi did not kill the Arawa people, it still leaves unanswered the question of the breach of tapu. It seems possible that any loss of security resulting from the breach of tapu would have been restored via the mana gained by the successful outcome of the event. Ranginui Walker has said that trickery may be acceptable in Maori terms if it achieves a socially desirable result (1978:22). Perhaps a breach of tapu may be similarly regarded. If so, then tapu in this respect may be viewed less from a metaphysical perspective and more as an ethical device, a means by which power is kept under suitable control, in balance within the human environment.

Alternatively, the event may be viewed in light of mana wahine and tapu in general, rather than tapu as a restriction. If Te Aokapurangi was attempting to outwit Hongi Hika she was challenging his mana with her own, but not only her own. She was challenging him by drawing on the mana of an ancestress - in this case, Hine nui Te Po, the ancestress with the mana over life and death. A formidable challenge and it appears one recognised as such by Hongi Hika.

If tapu acts as a balance to uncontrolled mana, should these be classed as a complementary duality as in the cases of light and dark, unity and separation etc. which serve to balance each other? Perhaps in part, but such a classification would fail to take account of the extent of these two concepts. It is generally

held that the complementary opposite of tapu is noa and on the scale of male/female characteristics, there is little doubt that personal tapu is regarded largely (or even solely) as male while noa is distinctively female. "The most important tapu were those connected with human beings, both alive and dead. Women do not have it except in special circumstances" (Schwimmer 1966:20). It seems almost inevitable that this comes from a male source, ignoring as it does the mana of the female atua and the tapu associated with that mana. Given the tradition of a high level of respect for people and things classed as tapu, claims such as these (and there are many similar to this) clearly have considerable ethical significance for Maori women. I suspect that this is another case in which male Maori may deliberately attempt to reduce (collective) mana wahine by ignoring its value. This is reminiscent of the way in which collective mana of a tribe may be reduced by another group opting not to take utu against them, this showing the group was not considered worthy of that 'honour' ( see 'Kinship').

Although noa is defined in apparently neutral terms i.e. free from tapu, the whakanoa capacity of women is frequently perceived as a potential pollutant. (Whakanoa means to make noa, to remove tapu, to change someone/thing from a tapu state to a state of noa.) For example, it is claimed that a woman's presence at a canoe building site "would pollute the tapu and so cause the atua to withdraw their assistance and protection ... Ka oma nga atua - The gods would run away" (Best 1929:39). (There is no mention, as might now be anticipated, of a male presence being a pollutant at a (female) weaving site, however it seems likely that this would be the case, if the mana of the female atua is associated with a distinctively female tapu.) In reference to the planting of kumara, Makereti states that "No woman could take part, for fear of polluting the tapu, which would be a great insult to Rongo" (1986:178). Although the term pollution may not always be used, other statements also often imply this negative view of noa. For instance, while tapu may be referred to as sacred, noa may mean profane (Irwin 1984:29). In its strictest sense, profane (like noa) means 'not belonging to what is sacred' yet profane also means 'irreverent or blasphemous'. This appears to be one of those

concepts which do not readily translate into English, for the idea that Maori women are, as a group, irreverent is not obvious in the literature. However, this does not mean that this connotation of noa/profane does not exist, for just as the meaning of wairua sometimes has been affected by Christian (European) tradition to include a realist view of a soul, so too may noa have been affected. This might partly explain why the (male) atua take flight at the appearance of a woman.

The fear of woman's whakanoa may be used for practical benefit, according to Sir Apirana Ngata, who explained to Amiria Stirling the tapu/noa restrictions surrounding the carving of meeting houses. When a man is chosen to carve, he is blessed or made tapu to make him "clean so he can use all of his heart and hands in the carving". While in this state, he needs to be kept away from women otherwise "all sorts of funny thoughts would come into the mind and the grace of the Maori would be gone". Ngata emphasised the importance of the mind being free from distraction since the carvings are not pre-drawn but come directly from the mind (Salmond 1976:87-88). This is reminiscent of Erenora Puketapu-Hetet's comments about weaving and the practicality of the aho tapu, but there is another view which might apply, one attributed to some other cultural traditions with a taboo of the female. The need to gain control has sometimes resulted in the location of evil in others. This, it has been argued, is the reason for much of the taboo associated with women (Daly 1973). The evils of inappropriate physical desires (in the Platonic way) may be projected onto the objects of the desires e.g. women. Men must not allow themselves to be diverted from their perceived duties by the allure of the females. If these duties are perceived to be spiritual and concerned with the Good, then it is a short step to associating the physical with defilement and Evil. It seems quite plausible that if the authority associated with mana is viewed positively, the reduction of mana will be viewed negatively and it is a short step to negatively viewing the female person(s) as cause rather than the male self-distraction.

I am not suggesting, however, that there is a corresponding view of Good and Evil in Maori tradition; this is not the case. If

everything and everyone has a mauri, a life force to be respected and encouraged to flourish, then even what is regarded as bad or harmful must be respected. To Pakeha, this seems an extraordinary requirement but Maori instead believe that the presence of what is bad and what is good is no different from the presence of light and of dark, male and female, union and division etc. The principle of respect holds until that time when one or other within each duality upsets the balance. Then people may act in favour of the good, because good must also be respected: "Evil things and persons have their places, and should be left alone so long as they stay in their places, in balance with the good ... The sort of balance envisaged is a dynamic balance rather than a static balance (Patterson 1992:39). However, in a tradition which has been influenced by Pakeha, and more specifically, Christian missionary teachings, recognition and understanding of the dynamic nature of balance has been affected and perhaps Ngata's comments reflect something of this influence. On the other hand, it seems more likely that he recognised the tension between male and female aspects to be part of the dynamic challenge and response necessary to the retention of mana, and thus his comments may be seen to uphold 'mana tane'. Women might now believe that 'mana tane' has swung the balance to the point where the female is entitled to greater respect. If "Hostile forces regularly act to swing the point of balance in an unfavourable direction, and harsh measures may be taken to counterbalance the effects of these forces" (Patterson 1992:39) then the time may have arrived for Maori women to take counter-measures and demonstrate their female mana until an appropriate balance between the two is again gained.

Much more than pragmatic reasoning seems to be involved in the assertion that "should the mauri ora of a man become noa or defiled, then his physical, intellectual and spiritual welfare is seriously endangered and he is exposed to many perils" (Best 1922:23). From Best's remarks it might be taken that women do not have mauri ora. However, since this is contrary to a basic principle of mauri - that it is present in everyone and everything - his interpretation of mauri ora is highly suspect. Nevertheless, from this we may again see that the concepts of mana, tapu and



mauri are closely related, and the well-being of the mauri is inextricably bound up with personal mana, tapu and noa. The word 'defiled' clearly indicates noa as a polluting factor, so it is worth establishing some of the circumstances in which a man might be noa, or be made noa, and the sort of dangers to which he might succumb as a result.

According to the tradition, there was one class of people for which the membership automatically meant being noa - taurekareka or slaves. Gender did not feature in this classification and both the circumstances of becoming slaves and the tasks subsequently required of them would have had a bearing on this. Slaves were those who had lost in battle or war and had been captured. In general, this would indicate their lack of appreciable mana prior to or during battle, for a man of mana would expect to die if overpowered. "Warriors gained prestige from the quality of the men they killed and not the quantity" (Buck 1958:399). The victors increased their mana and did not sully their tapu state, but the captured lost what little mana they had and became unworthy of the protection afforded by tapu, so that became unavailable to them. This must have been especially unfortunate for those who were captured quite deliberately in order to solve a labour problem for a tribe (Buck 1958:338); presumably only those of great mana indeed would have received the 'compliment' of being killed in such a situation. This acknowledgement of their mana would have confirmed and probably augmented their mana, especially if they had been the first to be killed, a notably high honour.

Because slaves had already been rendered noa, among their set tasks were those which were always performed by persons in the state of noa, predominantly Maori women. The tale of Parekawa (above) and how she breached tapu by cooking food while in the tapu state, reflects some of the complexity of this area within the tradition. The precedent for the incompatibility of tapu and cooked food is found in the Creation narrative and features Tu the warrior and his revenge against his brothers. After the separation of Rangi and Papa by Tane, Tawhiri matea who had been against this act, waged war on his brothers. Tu matauenga



(god of war), whose suggestion had been to kill rather than separate the parents, was the only offspring to withstand the violent winds of Tawhiri, "for he placed his feet securely on the breast of the Earth his mother and was safe. Thus Tu alone ... stood upright and unshaken" (Alpers 1964:21). Angry with Tane and the others for not standing with him against Tawhiri, Tu snared Tane's offspring, the birds and ate them. Then he proceeded to catch Tangaroa's children (the fish), and dug up the sweet potato and fern root, the children of Rongo and Haumia that Papatuanuku had so carefully saved "and by cooking them desanctified them and made them common and he ate them" (Alpers 1964:22).

The dangers of being made noa are thus linked with loss of power, being overcome by forces outside the self, and the loss of protection afforded by tapu. Although Tu had demonstrated his courage and strength in withstanding Tawhiri, he was not content to leave it there but sought to increase his mana, by pressing his advantage over his brothers. This applied especially to Tane, who had not only demonstrated his agility and strength by severing the parents, but who had enhanced the earth and increased the number of his offspring (the trees, birds and plants). According to some versions of this narrative, Tu matauenga sought to keep his food abundant, and so assigned for each of the brothers a karakia, which might be uttered at appropriate times in the future: "The reason he sought these incantations was that his brothers might be made common by him and serve for his food" (Te Rangikaheke, translated by Grey, cited by Smith 1974:44). Thus, to pollute a man's tapu with cooked food is "to deprive him of mana and place him in the relationship of victim to his victor" (Smith 1974:36). If women are indeed mostly noa, then clearly this view places them in an unenviable position, despite the claim by Johansen that "the Maori woman is not oppressed because she is profane" (1954:214). If being a woman means being noa as discussed, subordination, at the very least, seems to be a corollary. If Johansen is correct, then other (female) views of noa need to be explored.

With this in mind, it may be seen that there is another side to Tu's narrative. Rather than viewing the event negatively as a demonstration of vengeful pollution of tapu, within the Creation narrative it may be seen as the first direct indication of the necessity for whakanoa, the ability to render something or someone noa for the sake of everyday survival. Food is a human necessity yet everything and everyone on earth has a mauri which is to be respected so, as with flax use, respect is necessary when dealing with it. The food sources represent (are the children of) the atua; the ability to render food fit for consumption so that the act of eating will not rebound on those who partake (by breach of tapu) is thus valuable. So it is for most everyday matters. The injunction that someone/thing in the state of tapu must not be put to common use suggests that the sphere in which the noa state is required is fairly extensive. During the preparation of Arawa and Tainui canoes for migration, not only was a tohunga required for navigation and to carry out certain rites in order to sail successfully, but it was also necessary that Kearoa, the wife of the tohunga, be present "so that she can desanctify the Arawa ... with an offering of seaweed" (Alpers 1964:159). Pere describes noa as the spirit of freedom, freedom from the ties and restrictions associated with the world of the atua and ritual in general (1991:56).

However, while this may put whakanoa in a positive light, "usually associated with warm, benevolent, life-giving, constructive influences" (Pere 1991:56), woman is not noa because she has to deal with food preparation or other noa activities. She deals with these because she is already noa and that noa state may be transmitted; just as the tapu was transmitted to Parekawa when she cut her father's hair, so too may noa be transmitted. As Heni Brown remarks, "If a woman goes into the kumara pit, it rots the whole kumara" (Binney & Chaplin 1986:47). Her noa state acts against the tapu of the kumara, a tapu placed precisely because of the importance of the crop and the degree of the associated tapu restriction is relative to the mana of the atua involved.

Te Awēkotuku reports a woman saying: "Doesn't it make you feel powerful, to know you can scare away the fish, rot the flax and turn the kumara crop off?" (1991:57) The greater the (male) mana, the greater the (male) tapu and the greater the effect of noa if it counteracts that tapu. The reverse case i.e. the greater the female mana, the greater the noa and the greater the effect of tapu if it counteracts that noa, which would balance the first claim, is not immediately obvious within the tradition. Since the (public) traditional narratives generally present a male view this is unsurprising. Nevertheless, there are customs which suggest this may occur. For instance, Best states that "Among weaving experts it was reckoned most unfortunate if the process of dyeing fibres was witnessed by other persons, for it meant that the experts would lose their knowledge of that art "(1982:617). It seems relevant that not only was Best writing in the early part of this century when the male view was largely assumed to encompass the female view, but Best was also translating Maori terms which are frequently non-specific as to gender. With this in mind, it is plausible that instead of "other persons" we might read 'male persons'; the traditional practices associated with weaving might well be seen as best kept to females and the 'most unfortunate' results (associated with not keeping female matters female) would occur if men were to encroach on this territory. This might well be construed as a case of tapu 'breaching' noa or male tapu polluting female tapu.

The claim that may have greatest significance is that woman "according to her nature" is noa (Johansen 1954:214). I intend to focus on those ancestors and events which provide the strongest precedents for this belief, and this should, if Maori ethics is based on ancestral precedent, explain why women, in a Maori view, are regarded in this way. First, however, I would like to point out that all babies, female and male, are born tapu. This is evident from various descriptions of ceremonies performed "to remove from the participants the tapu pertaining to birth" (Heuer 1972:26). Best states that after the tohi (dedication rite) and pure (ritual to make the mana of the child permanent) all had to undergo a tapu-removal ceremony (1975:38-39). Among the Tuhoe, "the tua rite had the effect of removing the condition of tapu from the

infant and mother, and it endowed the child with health, vigour and other desirable qualities" (1975:62). This tends to confirm Pere's view of noa as benevolent (quoted above).

I now return to a point made earlier about women and tapu, that the gods would run away should a woman pass over a highly tapu person/place/object. Those who are noa must not risk the objection of the atua whose mana is being invoked. This was purported to occur because the atua objected to the female genitalia to such an extent that they would flee the scene, and the protection afforded by the tapu would be lost. The precedent for this is found in the narrative of Hine nui Te Po and her association with life and death. As Hine titama, she passed through the vagina of her mother, Hine ahu one, to life as it is known by humankind. After she had fled the world to Te Po, Maui desired to subvert the natural life cycle by defeating death before it had begun. He met his death by entering the vagina of Hine nui Te Po, hence the term *whare o aitua* (house of misfortune) referring to both the vagina and the mortal world. Earlier in the Maui tales, it is said that the first person to be slain by Maui was the daughter of Maru te whare aitu (Alpers 1964:42). Under the terms of *utu*, it is therefore consistent that Maui's life was taken by woman, representing *te whare o aitua*. While this narrative emphasises the inevitability of death, it is also the case that it was the female, Hine nui who defeated Maui, the male of great mana. "Thus iwi are fated always to know the pain of death and to recognise the mana and tapu, the sacred authority of women" (Kupenga, Rata & Nepe 1990:8). This cements the precedent for women to represent the mortal/material side of existence, but it also suggests that the boundaries of the material and spiritual world are not easily delineated. Hine titama/Hine nui Te Po is more accurately viewed to be representative of both worlds, the ever renewing Maid of the Dawn, and the eternal Great Lady of the Night (Kahukiwa & Grace 1984:78).

As discussed earlier, if women follow in the steps of Hine nui Te Po, there are two precedents they may draw from this episode. The first is the stronger claim, that women have ultimate control over men's behaviour; the second and weaker claim is the precedent

for women to take action against those men who overreach the bounds of their authority. In the discussion on the mana of leadership, it emerged that contenders for leadership, desirous that their mana is not diminished, attempt to ensure that others of ability are not given the opportunity to 'stake their claim.' I believe that there is something of this idea involved here; either precedent may be seen as sufficiently threatening to male mana for men as a group to attempt to avoid acknowledging that the threat exists. This might be the basis for deeming women to be noa; if women's mana is acknowledged, then it becomes even more of a threat. If "Ko te tapu e mana o nga atua - Tapu is the mana of the [male] gods" then it might be said that 'Ko te noa te mana o nga atua-wahine - Noa is the mana of the female gods.' (This 'proverb' was suggested by John Patterson of Ngati Airihi.)

So it may be seen that noa need not be viewed as subordinate to tapu, or of less value, or as being necessarily disadvantageous to Maori women. On the contrary, noa represents the power of the female ancestors. Furthermore, it is by this view that both views of noa may be reconciled; there is Papatuanuku who represents earthly life and nourishment to enable humankind's freedom to grow with the necessary resources and support for good health; there is Hine ahu one as the sign of human independence and then Hine titama/Hine nui Te Po as representative of the power over life and death, the bridges from and to another kind of existence. Aspects of noa previously viewed negatively may be more positively seen as part of the challenge and response necessary for balance on a universal scale.

The view that male slaves, like females, are noa seems to pose a difficulty. It might, by this thesis, appear that when captured they lose male tapu and gain female noa. This is not necessarily the case. For women to be noa is appropriate, part of the balance between men and women, and an affirmation of their femaleness. For male slaves to be noa is not what is appropriate for them, but this is to be expected. Slavery is not a balanced state for a person, since it damages the mauri ora of the person, thus diminishing their mana as warrior males. This confirms the idea that like many other Maori concepts, tapu and noa are dynamic.



Within the tradition, there is a ritual for tapu removal from warriors after battle, in order that they be free to perform ordinary tasks. Heuer mentions that there is no indication of how the tapu, which Best said was transmitted to the ruahine (woman used in such ritual), was removed from her (1972:45). It seems to me that Best's interpretation of noa and tapu does leave such questions unanswered. Although the term ruahine is indeed used to describe women who take part in such rituals, Best and other observers have tended to invest the woman concerned with an additional and unnecessary sacredness. It may have been the case that the ruahine was of high birth, but then all the important tasks within tribes were performed by those of high mana. I am not denying the stratified social order of Maori, based on descent lines. What I am suggesting is that Ryan's translation of ruahine as 'old woman' is an appropriate one, given that all those with whakanoa i.e. all women, would have been capable of the task. The idea that 'the' tapu is transmitted and absorbed is reminiscent of some tangible substance passed from one to another. In the Maori view, as has been seen with wairua, it is the relative state of the person which is important. The tapu would not have affected her noa state because this is exactly the sort of situation for which whakanoa was needed - to bring the world back into a state of balance. At other times, this capacity of women might act against balance; the customs which prevent women from entering a special carving site suggest this. If noa is the power of the ancestresses, and the (largely) male pursuits follow the models of the ancestors, then the presence of the female introduces an element contrary to the divisions set by precedent. In appropriate opposition to this are the restrictions which prevent men from attending to certain female pursuits e.g. weaving. If tapu is the power of the ancestors, then the distinctively female pursuits are better served by the influence of the ancestresses.



### **Balance:**

From the time of Papatuanuku and Ranginui, the differentiation of the sexes is a fundamental part of Maori tradition. Just as with other dualities (light and dark, union and separation, security and fear, material and spiritual etc.) male and female are complementary components, and it is necessary that these be in balance in order for life to be tika (natural, appropriate, correct). The notion of complementary difference, applied to human capacities, suggests that the divergent roles of men and women are not directly comparable but may be seen to have comparable value. "There was a clearly defined reciprocal process in the performance of all activities ... Ko etahi mahi, e kore e taea e te tane, ko etahi mahi, e kore e taea e te wahine - Some tasks are more appropriately performed by men and similarly some tasks are accomplished by women" (Kupenga, Rata & Nepe 1990:10). Until this time, I have been exploring some features which are distinctively female and might be interpreted as part of fixed binary oppositions - a form which tends to limit the potential of persons within human existence since the boundaries which surround female and male become fixed (and generally confrontational) barriers. Now I wish to emphasise the dynamic rather than fixed nature of the dualities within Maori tradition, in particular that of male and female.

Rangimarie Pere, when speaking of the spiritual dimension, says that "wairua is an apt description of the spirit - it denotes two waters. There are both positive and negative streams for one to consider. Everything has a wairua, for example, water can give or take life. It is a matter of keeping balance" (1991:16). The union of Papa and Rangi was balanced by their separation; the separation was later balanced by the joining of Tane representing the spiritual life and Hine ahu one of the material world. It was Hine titama/nui Te Po who took the steps which marked the way to the natural balance of both worlds, the complement of life and death, aided by Maui. One obvious feature of balance as drawn from the narratives, is that balance does not just happen in a passive sense. It must be actively sought and constantly fostered. Hine titama had to act to redress the wrong within her life. So too did her grandmother before her; the destruction by Tu, on

behalf of Rangi, in the Creation narrative was balanced by the peacefulness of Papatuanuku, but neither may Papa be seen to be passive. She sought out her children least able to cope with their brother's onslaught, and deliberately took them into herself to care for them and for her descendants. Papatuanuku's back being turned towards man may be viewed in this light too - it was not a sign of passive acceptance on the part of the female, but of her willingness to take active part in peacemaking and progress.

Also contrary to the idea of a passive or excessively accommodating female view is the ancestress Mahuika, who controlled the use and distribution of energy in the form of fire. It was Maui, the distinctively male demigod who was warned by his mother to approach Mahuika carefully, identify himself and not to play tricks on her. (This suggestion may well set a precedent for those who pass on information to the young and/or uninitiated as to appropriate behaviour.) After taking the first part of this advice to heart, Maui attempted to trick Mahuika into losing that control, but Mahuika was more than equal to the challenge. Instead of allowing Maui to take the last of the precious energy or carrying the secret of energy to her death, Mahuika made the trees the guardians of the fire thus ensuring fire was made available to all her descendants and took revenge on Maui at the same time, since he had to suffer the indignity of running for safety.

Papa and Rangi, according to tradition, always may be seen to mourn their separation. The rain from the sky and the mists which rise from the earth are eternal reminders of the aroha which keeps them united in spirit. The intervening factor in any separation or differentiation is aroha (Tawhai 1988:859). Similarly, it may be seen that although men and women tread their own paths, they do so united in aroha, in a complementary partnership. As Pere says of her partner: "If he were to walk ahead of me or behind me, then the hand of true partnership would be lost. Sadly, some other Maori men have lost the meaning of partnership with a woman, including that with Papatuanuku the earth mother. Some European values and beliefs ... have certainly undermined Maori belief systems" (1990:4). Male and female, like

utu and aroha, are reciprocal elements within the continual balancing process. This may be seen as the reason why men may be encouraged to demonstrate aroha as their ancestress Papatuanuku did, while women may seek utu as did their ancestor Ranginui.

The balance of male and female does not apply solely to the complement of man and woman, but also to the male and female within each self. Again it is Pere who states this most clearly: "I feel very strongly within my female and male selves. Tamatane my right side (the male side that endeavours to protect me from life's storms) and Tamawahine my left side (the female side that helps to heal the bruises caused by the storms) make me both vulnerable and resistant. My strongest side is female, however, and I celebrate and rejoice within that" (1990:4). It is perhaps this view which best explains why the whakanoa of women may be viewed as aggressive, threatening towards crops, precious resources and men. There is no direct precedent which explains why women are noa, although many do suggest that women are by nature different from men. The precedent for whakanoa on the other hand may be seen to lie not just with Hine nui and her act of power over Maui but also with Tu matauenga, the ancestor of aggression, who Pere says "has no female counterpart" as Rangi has in Papa (1990:5). The principle of balance suggests that rather than viewing Tu as solely male, Tu might be viewed as representing both male and female - generic 'man' - and in this way it might be argued that it is part of the balancing of the whole self for women to reflect their ancestor Tu when aggression is required. However, it is not necessary for Tu to be viewed in this way, for as already noted, balancing the male and female aspects within each self will encourage women, on some occasions, to follow the trail of their ancestors. An example of this occurred in 1894, when Maori women organized an effective action group to prevent tourist launches from mooring in Ruapeka Bay and spoiling life within their kainga. They formed "an impenetrable line of jeering, staunch, unmoveable female bodies", and the boat owner was forced to concede (Te Awekotuku 1991:48). In a narrative related by Best, there is an example of the role women may play in teaching young men the finer points

of weaponry and how to fight: Paia's wife "sought to teach them the arts of warfare, the use of weapons, and, when proficient, she taught them how to use tools and how to hew out a canoe". This occurred as preparation for utu against their father who had marooned them; once the young men reached the mainland they attacked and killed Paia, a deed for which no revenge was sought, for his people "knew the end was well" (1982:587). In another tale, Puhihuia, after eloping with her lover, Ponga, was accepted with much celebration by his family because she demonstrated bravery and resolution. "She was maia (gift of good fortune) from the heroes bearing arms and maia like the women among the ancestors. The proverb 'She does not give up the bravery of her ancestors' is justly applied to her" (White cited by Johansen 1954:171-172).

It is equally important to note that values generally regarded as female i.e. those which are attributable to the ancestresses, may also be values for the male side of the tradition. For instance, the trait of flexibility (demonstrated first by Papatuanuku) is highly valued in leaders, be they male or female. The successful settling of disputes is one task required of rangatira and this demonstrates the ability to think upon all the issues surrounding a problem, and arrive at an equitable solution - one which results in little or no loss of mana of the parties to the dispute. Such flexibility (as discussed earlier) is seen more as a female than a male virtue, yet it is valued in great Maori leaders. Even more pertinently, it is the association of Papatuanuku and peace which is relevant to leadership. "Even though it is important that the nobleman is a victorious warrior, the importance that might be expected is not attached to warlike virtues. If anything, it is in the matters of peace that the great chief shines most brightly. 'The only way in which a man can prove himself a nobleman is by ... [doing] all that makes peace flourish' " (Johansen 1954:181). Men must also take their cue from their ancestresses, hence Pere's comment about men who have forgotten their partnership with Papa; if everything is to be in balance, male ethical behaviour ought to incorporate female ethical ideals and vice versa. When reciprocity is valued, this allows sexual difference to

be appreciated while avoiding the tensions which arise between (socially constructed) gender roles.

This understanding of mana wahine is supported by the remarks of Heni Sunderland about kawa on the marae; she emphasises the different formal customs of various tribes and argues that in her particular tribe of Ngatimarū, at Whakato, the paepae (men's seat at the front of the meeting house) was considered a recent innovation. In their tradition, "the men, the orators - and they were orators in the true sense of the word, like old Te Kani Te Ua (a major chief of Turanga) - those men just used to sit around, for they knew who they were, and they knew when they were to stand up" (Binney & Chaplin 1986:127). Perhaps these men follow the model of their ancestor Tu matauenga when he placed his feet firmly on his mother Papa and was made secure. Their custom does not affect the balance between male and female, for as Mrs. Sunderland says, "We (women) would never take their role" (Binney & Chaplin 1986:128).

The narratives of Hine titama/Hine nui Te Po present, I believe, the clearest ethical message as to the importance of tikanga and keeping the world in balance. It is she who represents both physical and spiritual worlds by her roles as the Dawn Maid and the Great Lady of Te Po. It was she who distinguished the worlds most clearly as the first to leave this world and establish the path to death. The necessity for keeping both worlds in perspective is perhaps the best reason for questioning the claim that the responsibility for the spiritual and moral welfare of Māori is held by Māori males. It was Hine nui Te Po who directed Tane as to the best course of action; it was also she who triumphed over Maui, crushing any claim man had beyond what was appropriate. Hine nui Te Po continues to be a primary symbol of the noa (power) of the female and the interaction of physical and spiritual existence.

This world is viewed as essentially female, whether it is described as Papatuanuku, te whare o aitua, or in terms of te whenua. There might be a case for suggesting that the influence of the male is better left to the other realm, that of Rangi and of the atua, to allow the female influence to reign in peace on her earth.



This however, does not reflect the notion of balance. Just as male and female must be in balance, both **as** men and women and also **within** women and men, this world must reflect both male and female elements within her. This view of the world within the tradition may be seen as the basis for ethical claims about the ecology of the world: "The female source of energy must lead the whole world for a time, in order to get the balance of nature back. Papatuanuku has been ... so badly scarred and neglected by her descendants. The present world leadership (who are mostly men) have forgotten how to respect and care for the partnership they have with Papatuanuku" (Pere 1990:5). Similarly, in her article "'Papatuanuku' 'Spaceship Earth'" Ngapare Hopa has this to say: "The emerging leadership among Maori women especially in environmental issues, is what we might expect. Papatuanuku is after all female ... The age old identification of women with nature is based on awareness of the oneness of all living forms and of their cyclical rhythms of birth and death".

The concept of male and female as divergent but complementary is most naturally seen (and thus tika) as the starting point rather than a concept for discussion within the Maori world view. Unlike Western philosophical tradition in which it may be claimed that the concept of female has evolved to mean 'other than male' or non-standard to male, there is no lengthy history to this view in Maori philosophical tradition. From the beginning, everything has been credited with a male and female component, each with its strengths and weaknesses in various situations. Moreover, authoritative female character models, the scarcity or imperceptibility of which is a concern of Pakeha feminists (Heilbrun 1979), are publicly visible within the narratives. The pervading principle within the Maori world view is one of dynamic balance; both males and females have been, and continue to be, acknowledged as having the mana necessary for inclusion in the narratives.

It has been noted by some feminist theorists that similarities exist between African and feminist moral theories, based on the idea that the differences which are found between masculine and feminine world views bear a strong similarity to the differences



found between African and European world views (Harding 1987). I am not attempting to draw a corresponding picture between Maori and feminist ethics for as Sandra Harding notes, "curious coincidences" may be all that is involved in such a comparison. It is the explanation for such correlations which needs to be considered. She regards feminine and African world views as "categories of challenge" naming what is "absent in the thinking and social activities of men and Europeans" which need to be supported by more concrete accounts of the differences (1987:308).

What I do wish to point out, however, is that the notion of balance and the role it may play in morality is one which finds favour with many feminist theorists. Elisabeth Porter, for instance, in her exploration of moral identity, argues that "the inseparability of the self in context" requires an "integrated notion of moral identity" and advocates the notion of 'self-in-relations': "This allows a vast range of character traits, differentiated ... by a conscious affirmation of the sexual component of one's identity as a moral subject". An acknowledgement of tension between male and female, she argues, is different from an acceptance of conflicting polarity, "in that it necessitates questioning of the relations between contrasts in an attempt to transcend dualism ... The need for balance, or a synthesis between alternatives [is] vital to the poignant complexity of being moral" (1991:168-170).

### **Conclusion:**

A distinctively female approach to determining ethical ideals is a necessary part of the balance within Maori ethics. Maori women as moral agents may first draw on their very female-ness in order to retain and increase their mana. Their autonomy, both individual and group, involves identifying their unique place within the universe and taking responsibility for female aspects of existence: "He rereke te mana o te wahine, he rereke te mana o te tane - the authority/prestige of women is different from that of men" (Kupenga, Rata & Nepe 1990:10).

The deeds of the ancestors and ancestresses do not endorse a view of female subordination. Although it may be customary (tika) in some tribal groups for women to appear in support of their men on formal occasions (their role within the group) subordination of the female is not reflected as laudable or desirable within the narratives, the source of Maori ethics. There is, however, evidence of a dynamic process in which male and female aspects both may exhibit strengths and weaknesses. This view is supported by the belief that everything from the very beginning of existence necessarily has both a male and female component, male and female being regarded as complementary equals.

Far from being disadvantageous to Maori women, to be noa is to reflect the mana of the ancestresses. As has been shown, the female aspect incorporates Papatuanuku and all the people, processes, objects and events within her material self, as well as Hine nui Te Po and the world of the spiritual wairua; these two models alone confirm the wide scope of female responsibility, including the mana over life and death. Barlow's claim that spiritual and moral matters are the prerogative of Maori men cannot be sustained in light of the inseparability of physical, spiritual and moral aspects of existence.

The need to re-identify the concept of mana wahine may have been prompted by a perceived disequilibrium within the world but mana wahine has always been present in the female and this is evidenced in the traditional narratives. It is tika for Maori women to follow the path of their ancestresses, for it is in this way that

they too will be remembered, their deeds related and imitated - female and moral exemplars of mana wahine Maori.

"Ma wai e kawe kawe ki tawhiti

Maaku e kii atu, e whae, ma matou ake tonu ake.

Who will convey the patterns of my chin to a faraway place?

In distant lands and times, who will remember me?

We will. Always. Forever." (Te Awekotuku 1991:14)

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Notes:

- 1 Makereti mentions that marriage "even to the third or fourth generation from a common ancestor" was considered incestuous and frowned upon by the old people (1986:86). There is a proverb, however, which offers a contrary view: "E moe i to tuahine, kia kono, e kino ana ki a koe ano - Marry your sister so that if trouble comes it will be kept to yourself". If anything goes wrong with the marriage, the matter may be dealt with in the family, thus avoiding utu with another hapu (group of related extended families). This apparent contradiction may be resolved by considering the use of the term tuahine. According to Metge, many Maori use the term tuahine (sister) for cousins of the same generation (1976:123). The close links of kinship will be further discussed, but for now it is enough to note that the status of cousin is acknowledged on a much wider scale than in Pakeha terms. Adoption (tamati whangai) is also relatively common, sometimes arranged for the welfare of the child, at other times for the purpose of bringing together kinship groups whose genealogical lines have diverged over generations (Metge 1976:145). So it may be seen that the term tuahine may be readily used within the proverb without contradicting Makereti's assertion, nevertheless Buck says that the proverb refers to "cousins who are outside the prohibited degree of first cousins" (1950:366).
- 2 Black magic, claimed to detrimentally affect the mauri or wairua of the person upon whom it is directed, is known as makutu. White magic has no single Maori term of reference; Best and other European writers have suggested that positively directed 'charms' and 'incantations' fall into this category e.g. karakia performed at sea to calm the storms. The use of the word 'magic' in this way seems to underline the differences within the two world views. Magic implies a sense of the unexpected and amazing. For Maori the correct performance of such karakia by persons of sufficient mana should result in no surprises but exactly what was desired.

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