

Puhi: Memories and experiences in their ceremonial role in traditional and contemporary Māori worlds

Ariana Simpson

Abstract: According to early writers, Puhi are described as the treasured daughters of chiefs, were of high rank, endowed with aristocracy, and fiercely protected and respected by the tribe. They were renowned for their beauty, their courage and leadership. Although very little information and knowledge on the function and the role of Puhi is available, information has been sought from early and contemporary writings, tribal narratives, oral histories and memories and experiences of women in their ceremonial role as puhi in traditional and contemporary times. Of interest for this research is the value and belief system in which the role and function of Puhi has survived and exists today, given that in today's society, Maori women and their children are the primary victims of domestic violence in Aotearoa. This research aims to identify and highlight the importance of kotiro in traditional and contemporary times and to provide a clearer understanding of Puhi by documenting and recording experiences, memories and early writings.

Keywords: aristocracy. female, Māori leadership, puhi

Introduction

Māori history has been recorded by early Pākehā writers, Māori composers, orators and tohunga. Waiata, (*Moteatea, waiata oriori, tangi, whakautu*), oral language, (*whai korero, karakia, whakatauaki, pepeha, tauparapara, patere, mihimihi, purakau*), carvings (*whakairo, poupou, koruru, poutokomanawa, waka, heke, pare, amo*), sculptures; (*kohatu, pounamu*), inscriptions on skin, (*ta moko, pukanohi, puhoro, kauae moko, rape, pae tuara, tara whakairo*), and weaving (*raranga, whariki, korowai, piupiu, tutukutuku, taniko, kete*) are all ways in which early accounts of Māori life, traditions and practices have been recorded.

Characteristics of Puhi: Traditional

Early Pākehā writers such as Elsdon Best, Percy Smith, Gilbert Mair, Hobson, and Grey, describe Puhi as being a female maiden from ariki (high rank, chiefly lines), in other words, daughters of chiefs or a woman of rank.

Because she was a puhi, a highly tapu first-born daughter of a chief...A betrothed girl was known as a *puhi* in some districts, but among the Mataatua tribes of the Bay of Plenty this term was applied to a girl of rank who was appointed as a person of importance, a leading woman of the tribe or clan. (Best, p.102).

These early descriptions are also supported by tribal histories such as *Nga Moteatea*. The following waiata oriori, composed by Hinekitawhiti for her granddaughter tells the young child she has inherited her tapu from her ancestors, Tuariki and Porouhorea, and that this tapu is very great. It also states that she comes from chiefly lines, and exhorts her not to “*descend too near to common places...*” (Ngata & Te Hurinui, p. 2-5, 1988).

Kia tapu ra koe na Tuariki
Kia tapu ra koe na Porouhorea

E rapa e Hine I Te Kauwhau mua I a Hinemakaho
Hai a Hinerautu, hai a Tikitikiorangi,
Hai kona ra korua (Ngata, 1988, pp. 2,3).

Another characteristic described by early writers and tribal stories is that Puhi led a well protected and privileged life. This protection, would afford her certain safety's and assurances. However, as we see later, this 'specialness' would also place a lot of responsibility on Puhi, especially around times of warfare and survival. So respected was she, that she was nearly always guaranteed safe passage. She had attendants who gathered and prepared food for her and would attend to her every need.

She was a puhi, a highly tapu first born daughter of a chief, hence it was not good form for her to take part in the procuring and preparation of food (Best, 1996, p.68)

Such a young woman was provided with a special residence and female attendants, and was exempt from all ordinary labours (Best, 1996, p.48)

In some instances, accounts have shown that some Puhi are tapu (sacred) to such an extent, that they require special residence, usually away from other people and have attendants to gather and provide food for them. Puhi in this instance is described by early writers as being "*a positive force, associated with life, immortality, masculine objects and women of the highest rank*". (<http://www.Māori.info/Māori>). This was the case with Hine-matioro, who was of Ngati-Kahungunu descent. She was elevated to the position of high priestess, or queen. Descriptions of Hine-matioro according to Mitchell (1997), tell how she was highly respected and revered because of her aristocratic descent. The following is an extract from these accounts:

She was set apart by her people and strenuously guarded by them. Her life was always made safe, from an attacking force, or war party, and safe conduct was always offered to her and her guardians. She had very great privileges and was looked upon as a divine person.....All the food planted by the people by the people was for her benefit alone. Such was the law of the tribe with respect to her. Whatever food was procured, whether from the sea or forest, was all taken to her. She did no cultivating nor any other work, but all her needs were supplied by the people (Mitchell, 1997, p. 148).

Puhi were also renowned for their beauty and courage as shown in the case of Hinerau and Wairaka. Early accounts show that suitors would often come from afar to win the favour of the beautiful maiden. In Wairaka's case, her beauty resulted in her being tricked by, Maiurenu, a visitor from Taranaki. On finding out Wairaka's adoration for his handsome companion, Maiurenu persuaded his friend to change sleeping places, knowing that Wairaka would think he was his companion and scratch his face, the sign to her father (Toroa) that she had chosen a lover and companion (Grace, 1970). On seeing her mistake, Wairaka cried, "*O what have I done in the darkness which has brought confusion to Wairaka*" (Grace, 1970, pg 101). This saying is quoted in the waiata as '*Po i rarua ia a Wairaka*'.

Hinerau was famed for her beauty and was courted by men of noble birth from the surrounding villages (Reed, 1992)

The fame and beauty of Wairaka had reached the ears of the inhabitants of the surrounding districts. When the young men heard of this attractive news, they came in great numbers, in the hope of winning the handsome maiden of Hawaiki. (Mitchell, 1997, pg 179)

Wairaka was not only renowned for her beauty, but also, for her courage. The following legend tells of Wairaka saving the waka, Mataatua. As the story goes, the waka was paddled up the river to a spot known as Te Punga O Mataatua and left on the shores with the women while the men went off to explore the new land. Before too long the tide started to rise and the mooring of the waka became loose. On noticing the Mataatua drifting out to sea, Wairaka, rose and cried *‘‘E! Kia Whakatane ake au i ahau’’* (Let me act the part of a man). She then jumped into the waka and paddled it back to safety (Grace, 1970, p.95; Mitchell, 1997).

It is clear from these accounts that Māori women were revered in traditional times. Other such examples of early feats performed by Māori women are Hinemoa, who swam across Lake Rotorua to be with Tutanekai and Mahinarangi who traversed many miles while extremely hapu to be with Turongo.

Early depictions of Māori women also included accounts of courage during wartime. Te Ao Kapurangi a chieftainess of Te Arawa, was married to Te Wera a chief of Nga Puhi who had travelled with Hongi Hika to Rotorua to exact revenge on Tuhourangi of Tarawera and Whakaue of Te Pukeroa. She beseeched Hongi Hika to spare her relations who were from Ngatiawa. Hongi Hika conditioned that;

...all those she wanted to save (from death) must pass between her thighs. She went to the island in Hongi Hika's canoe and as the force prepared for the assault she ran to the large meeting house, which belonged to her tribe and standing above the doorway and straddling it, shouted to her people to enter the house (Grace, 1970, p.275).

To this day, Te Ao Kapurangi's courage is always remembered and honored through the saying *‘‘Ano ko te whare whaowhao o Te Ao’’* -- this is the crowded house of Te Ao Kapurangi”.

Finally, many accounts describe Puhi as being a “treasured virgin”. This notion is supported by the practice of Puhi being set apart from other people and given special attendants. Furthermore, Puhi were frequently betrothed, sometimes as early as birth. This would require her to be of a high quality, both virginally and in lineage. The expression ‘treasured virgin’, suggests that this is someone who is zealously protected, not only from harm, but also from ‘impurity’. This account is confirmed from today's writers, one particular version is that of Te Awekotuku (1991) who describes the sexual restrictions and tribal responsibilities placed upon Puhi.

Until she married women usually enjoyed considerable sexual freedom. The exception to this was the Puhi, a high-ranking young women whose marital future was arranged in the interest of the tribe to confirm peace, or seal political alliances. Betrothal at birth or during childhood, for political or kinship reasons, also determined sexual activity. (p. 95).

It was customary for the kahui ariki to arrange marriages. This was not solely to preserve genealogical equality or ‘purity’ although that was often the justification. It was far more a way of creating or strengthening useful alliances among families and tribes (King, 1990, p. 35).

Another example of a Puhi being described as “*a treasured virgin until marriage*” (1988), is the story of Maata Te Taiawatea Rangitukehu who was born in 1848 or 49, brought up near Lake Tarawera by her mothers people of Tuhourangi-Te Arawa. Maata was the only child of Rangitowhare, the daughter of the Tuhourangi chief – Rangiheuea and his first wife Te Tonga. Rangiheuea was the son of Tumuwhare and Hatua a direct descendant of Wairaka, daughter of Toroa.

Role of Puhi: Traditional

Just as the protection of Puhi, appeared to have been the responsibility of the whole tribe, so too, was the making of decisions. Not only were these decisions based around the upbringing of their Puhi, it largely included the well-being and future of the tribe. As a result, Puhi were frequently betrothed to strengthen the mana (status) of the tribe. This was done in a number of ways.

A betrothed girl was known as a puhi in some districts, but among the Mataatua tribes of the Bay of Plenty this term was applied to a girl of rank who was appointed as a person of importance, a leading woman of the tribe or clan. (Best, p. 102)

I invite you all to speak, for Mahinarangi is a daughter of the tribe. She is as much your child as mine.’ Each in his turn, the tribal orators spoke, and it was evident that the union of Turongo and Mahinarangi found favour among the tribe (Best, p. 37).

Firstly, Puhi were commonly used to strengthen whakapapa (lineage). There are a number of accounts of Puhi being betrothed to specific chiefs or tribes in order to strengthen whakapapa lines.

The norm was that marriage should be between people of equal status. This was important, not only in terms of personal mana, but also for the perpetuation of the mana of a particular line (Mahuika, 1981, p 67 cited in King, 1981).

Her virtue was guarded day and night by female attendants. This made her more desirable as a bride when her father sought a political alliance with a powerful chief” (p.66, Walker, 1990) Ka whawhai tonu matou.

Secondly, Puhi were used to form alliances with neighboring or warring tribes – i.e. peacekeeping and political alliances.

It was not uncommon for marriages to be arranged between high-born members of different hapu to give strength to an alliance between two groups (King, 1981, p.67).

Being a peacemaker sometimes meant being given to another tribe to strengthen those alliances and to settle wars... Sometimes after severe fighting, the defeated party might give women to the victorious chief, to initiate peace. Where possible daughters of chiefs, particularly puhi (tribal – virgin) or other high ranking women would be offered in such transactions. This greatly enhanced the prestige of the victorious chief (Heuer, 1972,).

Finally, Puhi were used in the lifting of tapu or restriction from a particular place. Best describes this task as “*destroying or removing the tapu or restriction from the pa so that any person can enter it and even pass near the place where the mauri lies*” (1995, p.150). According to Best,

one reason given for employing women with the task of lifting tapu was because it was a woman (Hine-ahu-one) who first brought man into the world. From this comes the notion that woman should have the mana of lifting tapu. Phillips also highlights this responsibility in his account of a Puhī opening a pa;

On the opening of a new pa the woman entered first. An unmarried girl of high rank was usually chosen...after chanting by the priest everyone entered and greeted the girl who later went inside the chief house and lifted the tapu by kneeling at the base of the rear post (Phillips, 1973).

For the ceremony of taking the tapu off a new pa, a young unmarried woman was selected to takahi or tread the forbidden place, and who was the first woman to enter it...The girl selected was usually a daughter or grand daughter, of the principal chief of the place (Best, 1995, p. 148).

The mana of a high born female was regarded as particularly potent in negating or neutralising tapu (King, 1981, p. 149).

Tapairu

Distinct from Puhī, the title of tapairu, a reference reserved for the first-born daughter of a chief, were extremely revered and tapu (sacred). According to Mitchell, these women “*attained special honour, occupying the position of temporal queens, and as such their lives were carefully guarded by their people*” (Mitchell, 1997, p. 49). Mitchell goes on to name Hine Matoro the grandmother of Te Kani a Takirau as an example of a tapairu whose genealogy descended from very aristocratic lines - Kahungunu and Rongomaiwahine.

Other terms were employed to denote a high chief, some, no doubt, representing local usages. In regard to women, the title of tapairu was applied to the first-born female of a superior family. In the Kahungunu district the term mariekura was applied to a woman of the highest rank, and kahurangi to one of somewhat inferior rank. (Best, p.89).

He ruahine or tapairu of the tribe (the senior women by descent of the senior family) accompanied by the tohunga and other members of the tribe, entered to “takahi” (trample under foot) the tapu of the gods whose mana the building had been placed during construction. This neutralised it and decontaminated it of tapu. (King, 1981, p. 149).

Tamatea was 25th in decent line from the youngest brother Maui. On suspicion of his wife's infidelity, Tamatea threatened to kill the first born child of his wife. Later on he would eventually adopt the child as his own, discounting any suspicions of dishonor against his wife. He afforded this girl child status of ‘tapaeru’ (Smith, 1997, p. 175). In his accounts of customary practices, Smith mentions the title being given to the first born girl child of a chief. He also makes reference to her level of tapu or mana, her status being of such a high degree that she was afforded the respect offered a rangatira:

Eventually adopting the child according to the honours tapaeru or eldest born daughter who had functions of a peculiar and semi-sacerdotal character (Smith, 1997, p. 175).

Our most well known and recent tapairu is Dame Te Aitarangi Kahu who was raised up at a whakawahi ceremony on the funeral day of her father and bestowed with the title of queen (Commemorating the Silver Jubilee of Te Arikinui Te Atairangikahu, 1991). Princess Piki (as

she was formerly known) was not in favour of this title: *Queen*, but instead wanted a Māori title in line with that of ariki tapairu. The late ariki had no male heirs except for his two daughters. Princess Piki was the eldest of the two.

The current research sets out to identify and highlight the importance of kotiro in traditional and contemporary times, through the role of Puihi. A review of early writings, tribal narratives and Nga Moteatea was undertaken to examine the different roles and functions of Puihi in traditional times. Emphasis was placed on exploring common and divergent features and roles of Puihi and Tapairu across accounts. Interviews with kaumatua and Puihi were also undertaken to examine contemporary accounts of Puihi by documenting experiences and memories.

Methodology

Participants

Five participants from, Mataatua – Ngatiawa and Te Whanau-a-Apanui and Te Arawa participated in this study. Two puihi one kuia, one koroua and one tribal rangatira were recruited through personal contacts to participate in this study.

Procedures

Each participant was contacted via email or face to face by the researcher and asked if they would like to participate. All those approached said yes, and were sent an information sheet (appendix one), an interview schedule (appendix two) and a consent form (appendix three). Contact was then followed up by the researcher to arrange times and dates for the interview. One participant chose to have his interview over the telephone, three preferred face to face interviews while another invited the researcher to attend and observe a 'tohi rite' ceremony.

Data analysis

All interviews were transcribed then analysed for common and divergent themes and patterns around the role and characteristics of Puihi. These themes are discussed in relation to the interview schedule and the literature review.

Results

Memories and Experiences: Understanding the Role of Puihi

On being asked if they understood the role of Puihi, only one of the participants stated that Puihi were 'respected, treated well and looked after' (Wairaka- Mataatua- Puihi). The other participant stated that she was simply told to do this role (be a Puihi) and knew that it was to do with enhancing the mana of the marae (Mataatua – Tuhoe – Puihi). She didn't question this responsibility instead got on with the job and did what was needed. Her level of commitment was maintained by the knowledge that the mana of the marae needed to be upheld. This particular participant affirms the feeling of specialness that goes with the role of Puihi. She recounts how she is still referred to as 'the Puihi of the marae' (over twenty years later) and consequently, is still afforded a great deal of respect, acceptance and special privilege

Sometimes I walk into Mataatua and if there are new crowds there, the comment will often be passed, oh whose that? And the reply will always come, oh that's the puihi of this marae. I feel comfortable to just call in, and see what's happening. That's a very special privilege, so having said that, anyone from Mataatua, who wants to go there for renewal reasons or to just stay at the marae, should feel comfortable to do so (Mataatua – Tuhoe - Puihi).

“I realized that, if I knew that the prerequisite of taking on the role of puhi meant being a virgin, I felt horribly exposed. And I knew that everyone else knew too. I played a role to preserve the mana of the marae, and the role I played was under a particular directive that you simply did not question. In doing that I saw it as a commitment to my marae, and in to the future. It’s not until later down the track that you realise what you’ve done. I constructed that as a responsibility to my marae, and a responsibility to the care of our marae. (Mataatua- Tuhoe - Puhi).

Other than these comments, both Puhi were not told very much about this role or given much time to prepare. Another participant stated that Puhi of today did not have the same responsibilities as puhi of old. Like our two other participants, she remembers that Puhi were treated with the greatest respect, were special, had houses built for them and were well protected by her people for marriage (Te Maru o Hinemaka – Whanau-a-Apanui – Kuia)

Today the puhi doesn’t have the responsibilities of puhi from the old days. Puhi from old days, were treated with great respect by the people and treated special. They would have maids and houses were usually built for them, and she was guarded for her marriage partner who was from a principal chiefly line. But her marriage was always arranged by the elders of the tribe. There were many great women in the old days, like, Hinematoro, Hinerupe, Mihi kotukutuku, Rongomaiwahine, oh theres a lot of them. Not like today though (Te Maru o Hinemaka – Whanau-a-Apanui – Kuia).

One Kaumatua recalls that he didn’t have any say around the role of Puhi and focused more on the role of the men, as his daughter was the Puhi for that event (Mataatua – Tuhoe – Kaumatua). He recalls that the kuia took care of the Puhi side of the event while he and the other men folk were responsible for setting up the process for the day such as karakia, procedure and welcoming of manuhiri.

Men were responsible for the setting up of the process. Welcome the manuhiri, and decide what the process will be on the day. The tohunga takes it from there. Karakia specifically concerning the opening are performed by the tohunga. These days, very few know the karakia. Recalls those who know it today, (Pou Temara, Ching Tutua, Rangi Tahuri, a Ringatu minister, who is in great demand. (Mataatua – Tuhoe – Kaumatua).

Another participant, in his whaikorero at the tohi rite ceremony, discussed what would happen traditionally in times like this. He told the crowd gathering that during these times, the news of the birth of the child would travel to other tribes. They would then come to ‘tono’ (betrothal of the child to one of their children) for the child. These visiting tribes would have looked at the child’s descent lines (skill, aristocracy, resources, and alliances), with the view to strengthening their own whakapapa and political alliances. He also went on to explain the notion of Puhi in regards to Ngati Awa traditions and termed female children as being Puhi Mareikura and male children as Puhi Whatukura. (Mataatua – Te Tawera – Rangatira).

Memories and Experiences: Notions of Virginity and Purity

One salient memory and experience remembered by participants is the notion of virginity and purity. Notions of virginity and purity were discussed by four of the participants, in particular as being a prerequisite for a Puhi. The following participant recalls being told that she had to be a virgin for the role of Puhi, she was 16 at the time. She remembers being cautioned about mixing with young boys and how they were responsible for looking after each other:

They said to me, I had to be more or less virginal. I told them I'm still young. Today, half these kids today gotta wait till they are 21, when they get the key to the door, but most of our young girls are not virgins. It was impressed upon us to look after one another, and we weren't to go outside when there was a young boy outside (Wairaka – Ngati Awa – Puhi).

Another participant said she was never asked whether or not she was a virgin, but was aware of this being a prerequisite for the role of Puhi. She recalls that the whanau automatically assumed her state as being virginal and hence no discussion around establishing virginity was entered in to; she was 14 at this time.

I was never asked. I was aware of the prerequisite,(virginity) it was never a discussion I had prior to the event, I was never put in a position of being asked, it was simply just taken for granted, I didn't have to prove anything, jump through any hoops, it simply was something that was never talked about. If my father had to sit down and have a conversation with me about virginity, he would have died, he may have talked to others I don't know, my mother may have talked to others I don't know". (Mataatua – Tuhoe – Puhi).

Purity for one participant focused on the cleansing of negative energies from a person/ group of people, through the use of water. This was always performed in association with relevant karakia and rituals. This was to enhance ones probability of success, victory or achievement in a given event.

The total Māori process; Me kawa ki te wai. This is recorded in the moteatea. Four or five different songs. When you look at the process for betrothal, and the significance of the stream. E.g. When Ruatoki went to play in a football match, we got everyone to the marae to have a church service before they left. Then we moved to the river. Menfolk with branches, soak in river then dowse everyone. This is the fundamental notion of purification (Mataatua – Tuhoe - Kaumatua).

Memories and Experiences: The Selection Process

One participant recalls not knowing that she was selected to be a Puhi until the night before ceremony. She remembers arriving home on the Friday from Hukarere, going to help out at the marae and being whisked home to her mother. It was obvious that her mother was also just told of the decision as her mother was frantic and busy ringing around whanau for taonga that could be used in the ceremony. Her mother along with the assistance of a kuia, collected the taonga that she would wear during the ceremony; 'white kiwi feather korowai (cloak), piupiu/bodice, heitiki, feather and headband. The heitiki was from within her own whanau and was rarely ever seen and brought out. The korowai, piupiu/bodice and headband were collected by one of the kuia from within the tribe.

The opening was scheduled on the Saturday; I arrived home on the Friday night. As far as I was aware I was just helping out. I was none the wiser as to any role I was to play. So there we were down at the marae, it was pouring, I was trucking around in my gumboots, and helping out. Suddenly I was packed into the car and taken home, to a mother who was frantic and who was ringing around for kakahu. I didn't really know what was going on, other than to be told I was to be the puhi at the official opening the next day" (Mataatua – Tuhoe - Puhi).

I got a huge lecture about the family Heitiki, and not to lose it, so it was bolted to my neck. I had this kakahu which was white kiwi feather, and got a huge lecture about that (Mataatua – Tuhoe - Puhi).

She could remember her family being involved with the building of the new Mataatua Marae in Te Arawa and becoming well involved in the local Mataatua community, politics and the building of the Marae. She was 11 years old at this time (*Mataatua – Tuhoe - Puhi*). Another participant remembers also not being asked. She recollects the men having a hui, and being told “*you’re going to do this*”. The decision was made in this meeting for her to be Puhi because she was of direct lineage to Wairaka.

They had a hui at Wairaka, they reckon our line is of direct descent (Wairaka – Ngati Awa – Puhi).

Another participant recalls kuia coming to his house and informing him that his daughter would be the Puhi for the opening of the Marae. Again, like the other two participants, he also had no say in the decision, nor did he participate in the decision making process. He also said he never questioned their decision either. As we saw in the above quote, this participant also makes reference to Puhi being selected based on their ‘connection’, no doubt to a primary ancestor/s. According to this participant kuia were the major decision makers for this role.

The selection decision was resolved by the Kuia. They came to my house and said, “It’s your daughter.” “I had no say in the matter, the decision was that of the kuia, and all the other kaumatua never questioned their decision. They certainly have to be connected. The kuia of the marae sort that out. The menfolk leave it to them. You see, that is the power of the woman (Mataatua – Tuhoe - Kaumatua).

For another, the decision of who would be Puhi was discussed and decided upon by the whole whanau. The renaming of the whare kai (dining hall) from ‘Massey to Hinetera’, no doubt influenced the direction of the final choice. Two Puhi were then selected based on their lineage to principal tipuna (ancestor).

When Hinetera’s dining hall was opened, it was the marae committee who made the decision about who the puhi would be. The dining hall was called the Massey, but the day of the opening we had decided to rename it Hinetera, the wife of Pararaki, our ancestor and name of our meeting house. All of the families who are descended from Pararaki were represented on the committee. It was decided that Hinetera (a young girl, named after her ancestor) would be the Puhi. And Hinemahuru (named after the mother of Pararaki) was the older one clothed in our traditional dress and to awhi our Puhi (Whanau-a-Apanui – Kuia).

Memories and Experiences: Preparation

One participant recalls having to learn about Wairaka (her ancestor) as part of her preparation for her role as Puhi. She feels this was to help her understand the importance of her tipuna and the impact that this tipuna had on the hapu and tribe. She also remembers being instructed in etiquette and tikanga accorded to such prestigious roles and given a kakahu and various taonga from different members of her whanau. Her first instinct was to recoil in horror at the thought of wearing a cloak that was used to cover tupapaku (deceased person). The old people told her not to worry that she would be safe.

I just had to learn about our ancestors, especially Wairaka, and was told where to stand, how to carry myself, and that I was to be the first through the gate. You know, this man came to take me on a trip, and you never guess, I saw Toroa, not his face, I saw his moko, but he was a big man. I don’t remember everything about that trip, but he took me around

Wairaka and told me the history of my ancestor Wairaka, I suppose it was to help me to feel her presence and her importance to Ngati Awa.” (Wairaka – Ngati Awa – Puhi).

“The kakahu was from our whanau. We had all those things, I had a tiki from my grandmother, and somethings from different ones in the whanau, and the korowai. And I said to them, hey this thing use to cover the dead. Young aye. They said to me kei te pai no iho.. (Wairaka – Ngati Awa – Puhi).

Another participant remembers standing in the mud while it was raining as her mother gave her instruction on etiquette during the ceremony. She recalls her mother telling her how to hold herself, how to sit, where to put her hands, her posture, where to put her eyes and so on. She was also directed to follow the guidance of an aunty, a kuia:

I was briefed by my mother at the time. She told me, you will go with your aunty and you will follow what ever she tells you to do. As far as I was concerned I was to get dressed up into Mataatua haka uniform, and meet aunty the next morning. She was to bring the kakahu. Our family didn't have any at that stage. So my mother knew that I had to be dressed a particular way, to reflect favourably on the marae and to enhance the status of the marae. (Mataatua – Tuhoe – Puhi).

Then I got a huge lecture from my mother on how to carry myself, how to sit, how to hold my face what to do with my hands, my posture, keep my knees together, where I was to put my eyes. The whole works in terms of carriage. This happened while we were waiting for the official party. I was standing in the mud in my gumboots, it was still raining. (Mataatua – Tuhoe – Puhi).

Memories and Experiences: Whanau Participation

As we saw in the above sections, all participants recall memories and experiences which highlight whanau participation, most notably extended whanau such as kuia and kaumatua. One group of whanau members that seem to have been left out directly is the immediate whanau. As shown above, both Puhi were left out of the decision making process and were given little notice of this responsibility. Parents also appear to have been given little notice. Additionally, participants spoke of their whanau being intimately involved and active on the marae for a number of years

My family and I were intimately involved in the building of the new Mataatua Marae. My whole family would go down after school, work, in weekends to help out. This was for three years; I was 11 years old when we started (Mataatua – Tuhoe – Puhi).

Memories and Experiences: On the day

All participants spoke of the ceremony on the day being formal and well attended by dignitaries, kaumatua and tribal members. Both Puhi recall that tohunga were present and played a primary role in the ceremonial undertakings. They also remember either themselves being the first person to enter the wharenuī, wharekai and gateway, or the Puhi. Only one participant makes reference to the ceremony being held at dawn.

We had to walk up from the wharf in the mud, and up to the gateway, and that's when they dedicated the gateway. I think Bill Sullivan was the mayor then. The Tohunga did the karakia first, there were flags over the gateway, and the Mayor pulled the string to drop the flags, and then I walked through and everyone else followed. (Wairaka – Ngatiawa, Puhi)

A Kuia brokered the whole interaction between me and the official party. Once they arrived my mother confiscated my gumboots. We went through the powhiri process, by that time

my mother had disappeared to the opposite side of the marae, and was giving me instructions with her body language. (Drag her foot on the ground to indicate to me to put my feet under the seat). The only briefing I was given was by my mother, which was, that I was to be the first through the door and you are to walk around the house. So when the time came she (the kuia) ushered me in through the door and turned left, went right down to the back and then down the other side of the marae and waited in the corner by the door until everyone came in. The tohunga did the karakia then everyone came inside and that was that (Mataatua – Tuhoe – Puhi.)

The kaumatua welcomed all the manuhiri, the tohunga did the karakia and Hinetera was the first to walk through the door. People came from all over (Te Whanau- a Apanui - Kuia)

However the process usually takes place very early in the morning. Around 4/5am a service is held outside. Then after the karakia the puhi enters the whare, followed by the tohunga who goes around the building, and then everyone else follows (Mataatua – Tuhoe – Kaumatua).

Discussion

The current research sets out to identify and highlight the importance of kotiro in traditional and contemporary times, through the role of Puhi. As the literature has shown, it is clear from these accounts that Māori women and girls occupied very important roles and positions in all spheres of society, including military, spiritual and political. Historical accounts such as early writings and Nga Moteatea show that Puhi were usually always of high rank, daughters of chiefs, well attended, protected by the tribe (in terms of safety and purity), considered to be sacred and were beautiful and courageous.

The current study showed that only some of these characteristics were highlighted in participants' interviews. As shown in the traditional literature, all participants from the current study made reference to being of direct descent or lineage to the primary tipuna. Traditionally this role would be afforded to the daughter of a chief or in most cases the first born daughter (tapairu – tapaeu) of a chief. In contemporary times, the role of Puhi is not automatically assumed but instead is discussed and decided in a hui by tribal members. What is interesting is that the person being selected and their immediate whanau are not part of this selection process but are told of the outcome after the decision is made. This is not surprising as being a Puhi in traditional times appear to have been a 'way of life' rather than just 'a ritual' that happened whenever a new whare was erected.

Unlike traditional times, specialness according to participants was only afforded to them during and after the ceremony. In today's world, this specialness is displayed by tribal members in the acknowledgement that they are the 'Puhi of the Marae'. With this knowledge comes an automatic assumption by people that this person is of direct lineage to the primary tipuna and that her family are well respected members of the tribe.

Notions of virginity and purity are still held in high regard today, but not as fiercely protected. Traditionally, Puhi were protected and guarded from harm, death or sexual impurity. Today, Puhi are selected based on their virginal state and descent to the primary tipuna. Unlike traditional times, Puhi of today are not protected to the same extent as they were in the past. The act of being separated from other tribal members, having houses built for them and given safe passage have all passed and are no longer performed. This is because tribal members of today are not

faced with the same threats of war, harm and death or needs, as we saw in traditional times. As a result, the role of Puhi has changed and the responsibilities placed on her are no longer to ensure the mana, survival and protection of her tribe. Today Puhi are used primarily for the purposes of lifting tapu.

In conclusion, history tells us that Māori women and kotiro were held in high regard and played significant roles of keeping the tribe protected, safe and prosperous. In doing this, they were afforded protection from the threat of harm or death through the security of tribal members. The naming of hapu and whare after these women is also a clear sign that women were well respected and revered. There are numerous accounts of women who were given a place of honour within the tribe and who feature in all aspects of tribal life. As the literature showed, women have occupied important leadership positions, including military, spiritual and political. Their feats and their courage are recorded in moteatea and tribal histories and is a reflection of their mana and status.

Relevance to Today's Community

Māori women and children feature highly in today's negative socio-economic statistics. Young Māori girls have one of the highest 'unwed' birthrates in the world, are more likely to experience domestic violence and have one of the poorest health figures for women in Aotearoa. The imposition of a colonial system and the fragmentation of tribal structures, in particular whanau, have all contributed to the loss of respect and status afforded to women and kotiro. The notion of specialness in today's world is only afforded to only those women and kotiro who have played a particular role such as Puhi. However, this recognition of specialness is confined to the person as the Puhi who opened the marae and does not spill over into other areas of her life. Protection afforded to women and children today by tribal members has been lost. Instead we see that women and children face similar threats of harm and death, not from warring tribes or rogue warriors, but from domestic violence and abuse among the few.

Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted throughout the summer months of 2005/6. As a result it was difficult finding key people to participate, as most people were on their Christmas and New Year holidays. Additionally, significant tribal members who are likely to hold information about the role of Puhi were hard to get hold of and 'pin' down for an interview as they were in such high demand locally and nationally. Also, many Māori have migrated overseas, in relation to this research, two Puhi now reside overseas and were hard to contact and organise for participation in this study.

References

- Best. E. (1975). *The Whare Kohanga and its Lore*. A. R. Shearer: Government Printer.
- Best.E. (1995). *The Pa Māori*. Te Papa Tongarewa Museum of New Zealand.
- Best. E. (1996). *Tuhoe The Children of the Mist*. Reed Publishing.
- Grace. J. (1970). *Tuwharetoa*. Wellington: A. H and A. W Reed.
- Grey, G. (1995). *Te Ao Hou. How Te Ao Kapua Saved Her People*: No. 41 December 1962., *Memories of Te Puea*: No. 3 Summer 1953. *The Love Charm of Paratene*: No. 25 December 1958, *Te Ngau*: No. 12 September 1953. Retrieved from <http://teahou.natlib.govt.nz/mao.html>.

- Heuer. B. (1972). *Māori Woman*. Wellington: A.H and A. W Reed.
- King. M. (1990). *Te Puea*. Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd.
- King. M. (1981). *Te Ao Hurihuri: Aspects of Māoritanga*. Hong Kong: Astros Printing Ltd.
- Mitchell. J., A. (1997). *Takitimu*. Christchurch: Riwi Publishers.
- Ngata. A. T., & Jones, P. Te Hurinui. (1985). *Nga Moteatea. The Songs*. Part 2. Auckland University Printing Services. New Zealand.
- Ngata. A., T & Te Hurinui. (1988). *Nga Moteatea, he Marama rere No Nga Waka Maha*. Part 1. University Printing Services. New Zealand.
- Orbell.M.(1999). *Māori Myth and Legend*. Canterbury University Press.
- Phillips. W. J. (1973). *Māori Life and Customs*. A.H and A. W Reed. Wellington: New Zealand.
- Smith. S. P. (1997). *The Lore of the Whare Wananga Teachings of the Māori*. Hamilton: Waikato College Press.
- Te Awekotuku. N. (1991). *Mana Wahine Māori: Selected Writing on Māori Women's Art, Culture and Politics*. Auckland: New Womens Press Ltd.
- Walker. R. (1990). *Ka Whawhai Tonu Mataou: Struggle without an End..* Auckland: Penguin Books, New Zealand.

Glossary

Amo	<i>Side uprights</i>
Haka	<i>traditional posture dance accompanied by rhythmic chant.</i>
Hapu	<i>Pregnant, subtribe</i>
Hawaiki	<i>traditional homeland of the Māori</i>
Heitiki	<i>a neck pendant featuring a foetus like human figure</i>
Heke	<i>exposed rafter inside meeting house</i>
Hinetera	<i>Female ancestor wife of chief Pararaki, name of dinning hall</i>
Hinematiaro	<i>High ranking Ngati Porou female ancestor</i>
Hinemoa	<i>Famed high ranking ancestor of Te Arawa.</i>
Hinerupe	<i>Female ancestor from the East Coast</i>
Hukarere	<i>Māori Girls Boarding School, Napier</i>
Iwi	<i>tribe, people</i>
Kahui Ariki	<i>member of royal family</i>
Kai	<i>food</i>
Kakahu	<i>garment, cloak</i>
Karakia	<i>prayer, incantation</i>
Kauae moko	<i>Female chin tattoo</i>
Kaumatua	<i>elder</i>
Kaupapa	<i>issue, subject</i>
Kete	<i>woven flax bag</i>
Kohatu	<i>rock</i>
Koroua	<i>grandfather</i>

Korowai	<i>finely woven flax cloak</i>
Koruru	<i>carved head of a particular shape, usually at apex of a house</i>
Kotiro	<i>girl</i>
Kuia	<i>elderly woman</i>
Mana	<i>spiritual power, prestige, authority</i>
Manuhiri	<i>visitor</i>
Marae	<i>courtyard or plaza of meeting house</i>
Mataatua	<i>Bay of plenty tribe, around whakatane area</i>
Mauri	<i>life force, unseen power</i>
Mihi Kotukutuku	<i>a chieftainess of Te Whanau – a - Apanui</i>
Moteatea	<i>traditional song/chant</i>
Ngatiawa	<i>Eastern bay tribe, around Whakatane</i>
Ngati Porou	<i>East coast tribe</i>
Pae tuara	<i>tattoo, lower back tattoo extending across to top of hips and meeting in small of back and extending upwood</i>
Pare	<i>traditional carving above doorway</i>
Piupiu	<i>woven flax skirt</i>
Pounamu	<i>greenstone</i>
Poupou	<i>posts</i>
Poutokomanawa	<i>center post</i>
Powhiri	<i>welcome</i>
Puhi	<i>young woman of high birth with ritual duties</i>
Puhi Mareikura	<i>young woman of high birth</i>
Puhi Whatukura	<i>young man of high birth</i>
Puhoro	<i>thigh tattoo</i>
Pukanohi	<i>Male full face tattoo</i>
Rangatira	<i>chiefly person, leader</i>
Ringatu Minister	<i>a Māori minister of the Ringatu faith, upright hand</i>
Rape	<i>buttock tattoo</i>
Raranga	<i>weaving</i>
Rongomaiwahine	<i>high born chieftainess from Hawkes Bay area</i>
Takahi	<i>tread, tramp</i>
Ta moko	<i>The art of Māori tattoo</i>
Tangi	<i>funeral</i>
Taniko	<i>decorative weaving technique</i>
Taonga	<i>treasure</i>
Tapairu	<i>first born female of high rank</i>
Tapu	<i>sacred, forbidden, ritually proscribed</i>
Tara whakairo	<i>female genital tattoo</i>
Taumuau	<i>betrothed person</i>
Te Maru o Hinemaka	<i>Marae at Raukokore</i>
Te Whanau-a-Apanui	<i>East coast tribe</i>
Tikanga	<i>customs</i>
Tiki	<i>necklace</i>
Tohi	<i>traditional baptism</i>
Tohunga	<i>seer, spiritual leader</i>
Tono	<i>negotiate for a future partner</i>
Tukutuku	<i>lattice weaving, usually in meeting house</i>
Tupuna	<i>ancestor</i>
Tutanekai	<i>ancestor of Te Arawa</i>
Waka	<i>canoe</i>

waiata	<i>song</i>
waiata oriori	<i>lullaby</i>
waiata whakautu	<i>a waiata in answer to a request</i>
Wairaka Mataatua	<i>ancestress of high rank, daughter of Toroa, captain of Mataatua canoe</i>
Whakapapa	<i>genealogy</i>
Whakawatea	<i>clear the way</i>
Whaikorero	<i>oratory</i>
Whariki	<i>finely woven flax floor covering, mat</i>

Author Notes

The author extends sincere appreciation to Professor Ngahuia TeAwekotuku of the School of Māori and Pacific Development, University of Waikato for supervising this project. Gratitude is also expressed to Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga, for providing the support through the research internship award.

Ariana Simpson (Ngatiawa, Te Whanau-a-Apanui) is a graduate student in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Waikato.

E-mail: ardiwaa@gmail.com