

IN THE WAITANGI TRIBUNAL
THE MANA WAHINE KAUPAPA INQUIRY

WAI 2700
WAI 1837

IN THE MATTER OF

the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975

AND

the Mana Wāhine Kaupapa Inquiry

AND

a claim by Deirdre Nehua for and on behalf of the
whānau, hapū and iwi of Te Tai Tokerau (Wai
1837)

BRIEF OF EVIDENCE OF DEIRDRE NEHUA

Dated 20 January 2021

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Waitangi Tribunal

28 Jan 2021

Ministry of Justice
WELLINGTON

MAY IT PLEASE THE TRIBUNAL

Introduction

1. My name is **DEIRDRE NEHUA**. I am 71 years old.
2. This Brief of Evidence is filed for my claim in the Mana Wahine inquiry, Wai 1837, being a claim on behalf of myself, my whānau, and the whānau, hapū and iwi of Te Tai Tokerau.

Background

3. I was nurtured by my grandmother Ani Kaaro Nehua Strongman and my grandfather Ihaka Pita Strongman in Whangaruru Harbour in the humble 3 roomed galvanised iron home where they bought up their 9 children. The evidence I am giving are the learnings, stories, and observations I received at the feet of my tupuna, in what was, I now realise, a very privileged upbringing.
4. My grandfather was an outstanding storyteller and constantly told me stories as I walked the hills and valleys with him. Stories about our surroundings in the bush, the land and on the ocean that fed us. Stories of battles that took place in our rohe, where the trenches of war still existed, how these battles were fought, how we won and lost them, how to hide in the trenches and be invisible and to leap on the enemy as they came and how to swing across the valley on supplejack vines to escape. He told me who fought who and the outcomes of those battles.
5. It was the stories my grandmother told me that I found most intriguing. She told me about my whakapapa and where I came from, who I was connected to, and in particular she passed on her knowledge to me about growing up as a female in the Māori world today as compared to that of our tupuna wahine. Wonderful stories of strong independent Māori women all of whom I was related to in some way, both those from this world and from Te Ao Kohatu.
6. I trailed around wherever my grandmother went, visiting her friends and family in Whakapara and Whangarei, visiting her sisters and brothers who lived all over the North, to Marae, hui and was present many times when she assisted to lay out bodies when a whānau member died. It was watching and listening to her that shaped the woman I was to become. The evidence given here therefore are her stories.

Wahine Māori traditions

7. This is my understanding of where I come from, this is my grandmothers korero:

“In the knowledge of our tupuna, all is connected. We are the sacred children who descend from Ranginui the sky father and his wahine, our mother the beautiful Papatuanuku. Our whakapapa traces us back to the universe and the stars and the planets within it, this is how our people knew so much about the planets that cannot be seen with the naked eye, we are part of the universe and we carry this ancestral knowledge within us. It was handed down from our tupuna for generations right up until today. The children of Ranginui and Papatuanuku are many and were Atua in their own right.

When people were created these children, all gave gifts to making us living breathing people. They gifted different organs and body parts and personality traits. There are too many to list, but some examples are Tawhiri Matea who gifted our lungs Tūmatauenga who among other things gifted us anger/rage, to make us strong in times of war and most important for wahine, Tangaroa who gave the body fluids and the birthing waters of the womb. The greatest gift of all for in the gifting, wahine became the Creators here on earth.”

8. This is the gift that makes the whare tangata, and hence wahine scared. The myriad of stars within the sky reflect the myriads of birthing stars within the womb of wahine. Thus, the time of a kotiro coming into moon is a time of great wonder, power and reverence for it marks her passage into the world as a goddess whose time has come to be able to be the greatest thing she can – the creator of the next generation to walk in the footsteps of our tupuna. During moontime our wahine were placed under tapu not as a negative thing, but because this is the time when we are at our greatest power. We took time out to reconnect with Papatuanuku and ask her in humility to share her wisdom with us. The cycle of moontime reflects the cycle of the moon reinforcing our connectedness to the universe. It is a time to honour our bodies as women and our beauty as women to allow the Goddess within us to grow
9. The pure ocean spray that comes off the sea blown in by Tawhirimatea, lifted back from the tops of the waves, is a reflection of the sperm within the body of man ever seeking to unite with the birthing stars of the whare tangata. Hence in the time of the divine, his sap rises to the pull of her moon in the same way the ocean rises to the pull of the moon, all is connected. Her body creates the river current which pulls his essence of the creation on an irrevocable course to the

divine union which ignites the joining of their wairua spiritually and physically - his ocean to her moon. It is the story of the creation of the universe played out again and again within the whare tangata of wahine.

10. Whakapapa does not just include the genealogies but also the many wairua stories that flesh out the genealogical backbone. As wahine, we stand in the power of the Mana of the Atua Wahine, right down to our own personal mana which has been handed down as our birth right.
11. From Papatuanuku we learn to stand on the solid ground of our own identity, from her we learn enduring love, and how to withstand the pain of separation. She teaches us to nurture and love our children regardless of the challenges they put us through.
12. Hineahuone, the mother of Ira Tangata (human) formed from the sacred earth of Kurawaka. It is from her that the awesome sexual power of wahine is derived, a power that men in power have tried to suppress since time immemorial. Through her we ascend beyond the ordinary to connect with the divine world of Atua. She enables us to go into that stillness within where there is knowing that is pure. Here we can tap into this pure light and figuratively extend it to encompass and protect through the karanga.
13. Hine Titama, first light of the morning sun. she of breath taking beauty. It is from her that we obtain the strength and courage of our convictions, she is the gamechanger, the shapeshifter. She who enacts self-determination. There are times when we need to stand in our own power and step into that place of courage to make the call that is needed and to do so without hesitation, to follow that unbidden surge of power that takes courage and conviction.
14. Hine Nui Te Po, she who waits in the shadows to Rorohenga to welcome us home. Not the one to be feared as she is often portrayed, but the loving mother with open arms. She gives us a knowing that death is part of the journey and that we will never be alone. The guardian to the entranceway, the protector of those present and past, she who lights the spiritual fires to protect the people.
15. These are just a small sample of the many stories from my grandmother when I asked the question Ko Wai Au?

Wahine Māori rangatiratanga

16. So how does this connect down to today and this claim called the Mana Wahine Inquiry? It started in denying many Rangatira wahine Māori the right to be a signatory to the Treaty of Waitangi. Although it was signed in the end by a known 13 wahine, Pākehā could not and would not accept that wahine Māori held important leadership roles within the Hapū, therefore they actively prevented many Wahine Rangatira from signing. This one act which was based on the Pākehā belief that (their) women were merely chattels and the property of their husbands has disenfranchised wahine Māori of their rights which have been systematically eroded to all but non-existent today.
17. The rights that we do have as wahine Māori have been retained, because we have fought hard to hold on to them. Historically we were Rangatira in our own right. We were owners of vast tracts of land. We held equal status with men. We were healers, educators, midwives, decision makers in the affairs of the hapū and Iwi, warriors, Matakite, tohunga, kaitiake of the sacred knowledge and much much more.
18. I recall clearly my grandmother telling me:

“We are not the same as men, why would we want to be, we are not men, but the way that our people do things is that men and women are equal. We have very different roles, but we are equal in everything we do. Wahine and Tane do not walk-in front of each other they walk together, and any decisions made are made together and as one”.
19. It did not take long after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi for the rights of wahine Māori to begin to be eroded away. The Pākehā would only negotiate things of importance with Māori men, and our men it seems often saw this as a good thing, and why wouldn't they? It elevated them to a status that they did not previously hold, i.e. the whole sole decision maker of what went on within the hapū. It also gave them perceived power in the Pākehā world which inevitably was eventually transferred to the home.
20. Early history, and spirituality which was written by Pākehā and seen through a Pākehā lens has distorted our history, and as a result many of the stories written about the early Māori have a Pākehā/Christian spin, to the detriment of our tikanga and wahine Māori. More importantly our spirituality took on a heavy Christian flavour, as a result of the teachings of missionaries, and this began the watering down of the teachings about our Atua who were relegated to the place

of Myth and Legend. Early Māori Land Court records hold many instances where wahine Māori lost their rights to land, which was taken by their Pākehā husbands, thus leading to it being sold out of the hapū or Iwi. Later, when Pākehā had established their laws on this land, ownership was transferred to Māori husbands who were not from the same hapū but ended up inheriting the lands owned by wahine. Huge tracts of tribal lands were lost to the hapū in this manner.

21. Wahine Māori were the keepers of sacred knowledge within the Hapū and Iwi, as were Māori men, but the roles were different. It was our wahine who birthed new life into this world and were the midwives who took care of the delivery and all associated with it. My grandmother told me stories of the birthing of her own children which was done by either her mother or mother-in-law, depending on who was available at the time. This was something that was taught at a very young age and I recall throughout my childhood being present with my grandmother when she was “midwife” for other wahine. My grandfather’s sister Lillian Hoskins, who is grandmother to well-known writer Briar Grace Smith, was one of the first Pākehā qualified “midwives” who went on horseback all over the east coast in the early 1920s delivering babies. The fact that the Pākehā health system determined that in all matters to do with health we had to have a Pākehā qualification was the beginning of the end of wahine Māori being the people responsible for the transition of our babies into this world, and indeed for our own health.

Rongoā and wahine Māori

22. As a child, all of my health needs were met by the rongoā which my grandfather picked from certain special places in the bush, and my grandmother made up and dosed us with. This covered every illness that we as children had. It has only been in recent times that we have begun to take back our knowledge of traditional rongoā and to use it again. Unfortunately, in the time that it has taken us to make a comeback from the Suppression of Tohunga Act, many Pākehā have stolen our traditional knowledge of rongoā, patented it and used it for commercial gain. This was at the basis for the Wai 262 claim for our rongoā to the Waitangi Tribunal which I assisted Dell Wihongi, Saana Murry, and Moana Jackson to write some 30 odd years ago. Sadly, again when it comes to our health, our traditional knowledge has taken a back seat to the Pākehā health system, and we now have to be so called qualified to practise any form of healing.

23. Healing was the domain of wahine, and it is sad to see that because of the interference of Pākehā into our traditional roles, that much of the day-to-day knowledge that wahine Māori shared as a matter of course has all but disappeared. When I was at high school in the early 60s it was my fervent wish to become a doctor. My grandparents thought it would be a good career given the background knowledge I had in traditional medicine. In those days you had to see a careers advisor to determine which direction you were streamed into for the 5th form. I was told in no uncertain terms by the careers advisor that Māori girls could not be doctors, and that if I was lucky, I might make a competent nurse. Those were the days when not too many people challenged the system, especially old people, and so it was that I became a nurse instead of a doctor. It has taken another generation for us to have a doctor in my immediate whānau, as none of my children showed a leaning towards rongoā or medicine, but my mokopuna has. What a long time to wait to have a dream realised. We do not have the luxury of this kind of time. It is only thanks to a handful of competent practitioners, predominantly wahine that the knowledge of rongoā Māori is making a comeback, but it has not been an easy journey and they have had to fight hard against the system for its return to our hands.
24. As a child I frequently went with my grandmother and her sisters whose mahi it was to care for the dying and to assist to lay out the bodies of the dead. Before their death it was considered a sacred duty to obtain whatever it was the dying person wanted, no matter how hard or how far away. I recall when my grandmother's cousin Uncle Ponto was dying all he wanted to eat was sprats. Witi McMath and I left in the early hours of the morning to go get sprats, bought them home for him, had them fried up, only to have him eat one. No matter, his last request for the kai that he loved was met, and it was our privilege to do this.
25. The role of our wahine was to usher the newborn child into this world and to be the ones who saw our people out at the end of their lives and to take care of the tupapaku. Thus, I learned from my grandmother how to take care of the bodies of the newly deceased, a skill that I have never used as an adult because today our tupapaku are whisked away by this person called an undertaker, who is of course Pākehā qualified. For me as a child it was unheard of for our beloved to go to an undertaker and have them exposed to the indignities that they are today. We had our own ways of using rongoa and preparing the bodies of our loved ones. It has saddened me to be present in modern times when someone has died and see the fear in the faces of the whānau of the deceased who have no idea what to do. This was such an important role for wahine and the greatest honour to care for someone at the end of their life.

Traditional education of wahine Māori

26. The education of the young was the role of both wahine and tane depending if the child be male or female and depending on the interest they took in any particular subject. The kaumatua and kuia would watch with interest the tamariki as they grew and determine what their skill was likely to be. Thus, it was that I ended up with my grandparents as I exhibited a skill in healing and Matakite. My grandmother was keen to take me, in order to develop this skill, and this she did. It was not at all unusual for our pakeke to do this with their mokopuna, and even today it is not unusual for kuia to have the chosen moko in tow so that they can learn from her and also learn the old ways of our people.
27. In more modern times, when Te Reo Māori was at a critical stage of being lost, it was predominantly wahine Māori all over the country who took on the role as teachers of Te Reo Māori. In garages, sheds, homes everywhere our kuia were teaching Te Reo Māori to our tamariki. This movement gained momentum very quickly and became a landslide. The government, while they like to take credit for it, were in fact shamed into supporting the movement when it gained international attention for being such an amazing initiative. Immediately, the Pākehā stepped in and decreed that all teachers of Te Reo had to have a Pākehā teaching qualification, and that all places where Te Reo Māori was taught had to have a Pākehā licence. The height of racism. No Pākehā could teach the language, and who better to do it than our kuia, we have after all been teaching it since time immemorial.
28. All the way through the development of the kohanga reo, the kura kaupapa Māori, the Kura Tuarua we have had to fight for our language. Although there is now a Māori Language Commission in existence, make no mistake it did not happen because the Pākehā thought it should be, it has been a long and at times bitter struggle, led predominantly by Wahine Māori. When education is one of our key roles as wahine we should not have to fight for that which is ours by right.
29. The Māori boys' colleges which were established to teach young Māori men the ways of our tupuna and their role in life, were started with the best intent by our tupuna who gave the land. Unfortunately, many if not all of them were established under the umbrella of the Christian churches, and heavily weighted with Pākehā Christian values to the detriment of the spirituality of Te Iwi Māori. They teach a Christianised view of the Māori world and are top heavy with a

more sanitised view of Tikanga as the Pākehā fathers of those schools saw fit, aided and abetted by Māori men, many of whom were Christianised and colonised.

30. As a result, I see many young men who come out of these schools with a skewed version of tikanga and an overtly sexist view of Māori women and our role as they perceive it in Te Ao Māori. This again reinforces the colonised view of women “knowing our place” and disrespect of wahine Māori as the sacred whare tangata, “the house from which we all descend”. It reinforces the view of the colonial fathers that women are mere chattels and second-class citizens at best. The curriculum of these schools needs to be addressed from a true tikanga Māori perspective.

Damage done to wahine Māori

31. Decision making about the future of the hapū, the land, our hunting and fishing grounds our marae, were the domain of both tane and wahine equally, and, at least in my whānau this is still the case although it would be fair to say somewhat top heavy with wahine these days. My observation is that this is the case in many hapū. Often, the marae is something of a last bastion where wahine can continue to hold equal say, with tane, albeit in the background at times. It gives me hope to see young wahine Māori today that are so strong. We have had to be, not by choice but by circumstance.
32. If I look at my own whakapapa there is no doubt that I descend from a line of (proud to say) strong stroppy Rangatira Wahine, namely, Ahuiti, (mother of Uenuku) Whakaruru,(mother of Kaharau) Ripia (grandmother to Patuone, and a tohunga in her own right) Te Kawehau (mother to Patuone) Kateao (wife of Hohaia, Patuone’s son) Te Tawaka and Ani Kaaro (mokopuna to Patuone) Te Whare Teneti Taiawa (wife of Hone Pani Tamati Waka Nene, Te Tawakas son) Ani Kaaro Nehua Strongman (my grandmother) who carried the stories of these Wahine toa and passed them on to me.
33. We have a long way to go to recompense the damage that has been done to the mana of wahine Māori, and the battle is an uphill one against racism, colonialism sexism. The resultant fallout of the degradation of the Mana of Wahine Māori shows in all of the worst statistics in health, education, prison, (in)justice, early deaths, unemployment, drug and alcohol addiction to name but a few. Until we have a nation that upholds and elevates the mana of wahine Māori, to where it should be, we will never be equal, and we will never be free from the scourges that our society faces today.

Signed this day of January 2021

Deirdre Nehua