

## Some Observations on the Status of Maori Women

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THESE COMMENTS arise from conversations with women who grew up within the community traditions of the Ringatu people in the 1920s and 1930s. They were originally presented as an informal talk to the History Workshop in London in April 1988, and this informality is carried through into this essay. The women whom I visited over a number of years included the great-granddaughters of the founder of the Ringatu faith, Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki, who wove together from the scriptures and Maori ontology new beliefs and a new church. They also included the daughters of the prophet Rua Kenana Hepetipa, the visionary leader of the next generation, who claimed to be Te Kooti's predicted successor and the Maori messiah. Others were women who also had been brought up by the 'old people', as they called them, their grandparents or other close kin, who lived with Te Kooti. Some of those elders had been with him on Wharekaui, where he was imprisoned between 1866 and 1868, while others joined him as guerrilla fighters, or when he took sanctuary in the King Country between 1872-83. The informants from the communities of the East Coast and Bay of Plenty were taught the history of their communities and their faith orally. Some of what they narrated to me has already been published in two books: *Mihaia* (1979), a biography of Rua, and *Nga Morehu* (1986), an oral history of the lives of eight of the women.<sup>1</sup>

Together with the photographer Gillian Chaplin, I visited the women in their own homes and on their local marae. Today the world they inhabit is a dual one. All participate in the modern Pakeha-structured society, whether rural or urban. Yet all betray a 'colonization of the mind' with their acceptance of poverty as inevitable for the Maori, at least in the times in which they grew up. They also accept the proletarianization of their men, themselves, and their close relatives as unexceptional. When they talked about the past, all contrasted their present homes with those of their childhood, or 'growing up in the kauta' as they called it. The kauta is the external, earth-floor, separate cooking shelter that all their families then used. This phrase is not simply a statement about poverty, although it is certainly intended to be understood in that way. It is also a statement that their families maintained the practice of separating cooked food, both in its preparation and eating, from all other activities. Such a practice derives from the Maori

<sup>1</sup> *Mihaia: The Prophet Rua Kenana and his Community at Maungapohatu*, with Gillian Chaplin and Craig Wallace, Wellington, 1979; *Nga Morehu: The Survivors*, with Gillian Chaplin, Auckland, 1986.

cosmological system in which cooked food was seen as inimical to tapu, or the state in which the gods were present. Since families relied upon their ancestor gods for spiritual protection, it was dangerous to damage the tapu of the household in any way, because this could leave them vulnerable to spiritual attack. In their domestic arrangements at least, the Ringatu retained the traditional ontological ordering of the pre-European Maori world.

By the 1980s none maintained such a strict separation in their daily lives. Even photographs of their ancestors (precious records that they are) might now be placed on a table used for food, although the plates of biscuits and cups of tea would usually be pushed aside. Telling the narratives of the tipuna in the domestic environment, and breaking for meals or cups of tea, is a statement that the days of the old tapu are ended. Nevertheless, bringing the photographs into the house is as if the tipuna themselves had come into the presence of the living. The dead and the living share this world in Maori thought, and that link remains unbroken. When we first brought a photograph of Pinepine Te Rika, Rua's first wife, to Materoa Roberts, whom Pinepine had mothered, Materoa lamented and sang directly to the photograph. She talked to Pinepine as though she was with us in the room. We were all momentarily in the presence of her tipuna.

For Maori women it is inevitable, and indeed logical, that their history is remembered and narrated with reference to the women who have gone before, as well as to the men. Maori systems of explanation — that is, the ways in which Maori individuals find meaning in events — are derived from the ancestral past. Maori history is told by reference to the actions of the tipuna. From conversations with women, and from the stories they narrate concerning their tipuna, there emerges the unmistakable evidence that women's lives were richer and more varied than has ever been suggested in the 'received' anthropological literature.

In general, Maori women have been said never to have possessed formal power in either the religious or political spheres. Nor were they considered tapu (sacred); rather they were categorized as being noa, 'without tapu' or 'ordinary', in the dual polarities of the Maori world. Women are usually said to have contaminated tapu by their presence. A number of rituals for lifting tapu involved women, and this fact has been traditionally interpreted as a statement of their dangerous capacity to pollute tapu, although this assumption has recently been forcibly questioned by Allan Hanson.<sup>2</sup> It is also commonly argued that women never attended the schools of higher learning, the whare wananga, where the tribal histories and genealogies were taught. That knowledge was 'men's knowledge'. These categories of separate kinds of knowledge and of different status for men and women were described as virtually impermeable. Only occasional women of rank were recognized to have crossed these dividing thresholds, and such women were treated as inherently tapu.

2 F. Allan Hanson's article, 'Female Pollution in Polynesia?', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, LXXXI, 3 (1982), challenged the standard explanations. Basing himself extensively on Maori material, he argued that tapu was inherent in chiefly women, and was a quality possessed by all women during childbirth. Women, rather than polluting tapu, were considered to be a channel, or portal, between the mortal world and the divine. For this reason they possessed a unique affinity with the gods, rather than repelling them. Those Maori rituals which involved woman acting as tapu-lifting agents make more sense from this framework of understanding.

Finally, in the literature about modern New Zealand society, a new generalization about Maori women has developed: that they are the most marginalized of all 'categories' of people in the society. It is said to be axiomatic that indigenous women living in a society that is structured by a numerically predominant European culture, itself based on male gender dominance, will inevitably form the most oppressed stratum in that society. Yet, talking with the Ringatu women, whose ages and individual experiences spanned at least three generations (the oldest of those with whom we talked being 93 at the time of the dialogues), started to throw up serious doubts about the orthodoxies on gender currently purveyed about traditional, colonial, and even modern Maori society. For Ringatu women, not one of the generalizations stated above held true.

In this paper I do not intend to develop an elaborate analysis of all these points. Instead, I would prefer simply to show, from portions of the women's narratives, the ways in which these basic questions about gender in Maori society were initially brought into the open by hearing what the women were actually saying.

Heni Brown from Whatatutu, Poverty Bay, talked about her great-grandmother, Meri Puru, who had been a prisoner with Te Kooti on Wharekauri. Meri lived until 1944, and was thought to be about 101 when she died. Heni herself was born in 1919, and was brought up by Meri:

As I told you, I was brought up in the tapu, real sacredness. My great-grandmother was a kuia tapu. Te Kooti made her like that. When we have our kai, she doesn't have kai like us — she only has a little bit, just a cupful outside by herself. She was very sacred — to herself. But she can cook! Anything for us! But for her to eat like us, No! She has her own rautao. Because she was with Te Kooti all her life. You see her daughter? That's the only child was given to her. I said to her, 'Why didn't you get more kids?' She said, 'No. Na Te Kooti i here taku wharetamariki.' Wharetamariki — that means her womb. The baby was Kenu. She had it in the whata, you know, those houses of theirs on the ground. They put the whariki, mat, down and then they have a church. She never had pains like I did, she said. When her baby came, when it was born, Te Kooti got hold of her wharetamariki [placenta] and he put it in a cloak, he kakahu, and they hung it up over the fireplace. Ana. Whakamaroke. The smoke, underneath, dried it up. Then they took it and buried it. And he said to her, 'Kahi koe e whai uri', that means she will never bear another child, but from this child you will have generation after generation. It will multiply. It's true today! That's the prophecy Te Kooti told my great-grandmother. From her, it's my mother and me, and then my big family. It was the offering, ka hereia. But she always said to me, 'Engari koe, taku mokopuna. Ka nui te tamariki ki a koe', and she was right. I am the one with a lot of children. It was a prophecy — nga poropiti, ne?

. . . She was a makutu old lady, and I didn't realize it until I grew up and they told me that my great-grandmother had some mana. Some power. She could destroy, you know — some kind of prayer that she uses and it reacts on to that person. But I didn't know until when she was dying and she told my granduncle to bury her upside down — her body — put her body like that in the coffin. And her hair — pango moto, *black* hair — it was right down to her legs. They covered her back. They made it like that — across. They had to cross it on her back. They had to get her hair like that. All her korowais and everything went with her. They had to be buried. I wasn't allowed to touch any of her belongings. It is to do with the mana she had. So her spirit, her power, her evil, or something, won't come back. It will stop it from coming to destroy the living. Hori Gage [a Ringatu faith-healer] was the one who told me, because he knew I was the mokopuna. He didn't want

to hurt me, and he said it in a nice way: 'Heni, I had to do that.' 'WHY?' 'It goes back into the earth. If I didn't, her mana, her power, will come back.'

That power was given to her by Te Kooti. He bestowed it upon her. According to her, it was when she was a young lady of 13 or 14, during the war at Waerenga a Hika [1865]. Because she was in there, with her mother. And Te Kooti gave her all those powers; she could use the mana for good or for evil.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of tapu, then, was clearly integral to Meri all her adult life. In this narrative it is described as a quality bestowed upon her specifically by Te Kooti, when she was a young woman. In this historical tradition, Te Kooti is seen as a prophet of God; he is the Maori Moses. The power he dispensed was therefore considered divine in its origin. On Meri Puru's volition this power was returned to the earth at her death.

Meri Puru possessed the tapu that women of rank had held in pre-European Maori society, the power of being directly under the influence of the gods.<sup>4</sup> Her sleeping place was tapu, her head was particularly tapu, and she ate her meals alone. But now the source of her power, her mana, had changed. Her tapu derived from the Old Testament God. His supremacy over the ancestral Maori gods had apparently been demonstrated with the extensive colonization of the Maori and their military defeats. Therefore, Maori mana had to be asserted as being derived from him. The particular relationship with God which the Ringatu embraced, following the scriptural traditions of the Israelites, carried with it the promise of the ultimate restitution of the Maori autonomy in their own land.

In the pre-European Maori world there had been a number of Maori women visionaries or mediums, who communicated with the spirit world. One of the more famous was Taimania of Hokianga, the ancestress from whom the early nineteenth-century tohunga and visionary Papahurihia claimed his descent.<sup>5</sup> In the nineteenth century, if Te Kooti was seen as Moses, the women leaders were seen as Miriam, Moses' sister, who was also a prophetess (Exodus 15: xx). Rimana Hii, a prophetess of the 1880s in Waihou in the Hokianga, was regarded in that light. Within the Ringatu faith itself, however, while the formal leadership remained male, certain women did become bearers of divine authority or mana in their own right. Waioka Brown of Puha was sent to one of the last whare wananga in Poverty Bay to learn the genealogies and the tribal history of Te Aitanga a Mahaki, and was considered deeply knowledgeable in the sacred doctrines of the Ringatu. In addition to Meri Puru, Pinepine Te Rika was another within the faith who was made tapu.

3 *Nga Morehu*, pp.41, 38. Kuia tapu: tapu old woman. Kai: food. Rautao: platter of leaves. 'Na Te Kooti i here taku wharetamariki': 'Te Kooti bound my womb'. Ana. Whakamaroke: There. To dry it up. 'Kahi koe e whai uri': 'You will never bear another child'. 'Engari koe, taku mokopuna. Ka nui te tamariki ki a koe': 'But you, my grandchild. You will have many children'. Makutu: possessing powers of black magic. Korowai: cloak. Mokopuna: grandchild.

4 Hanson, p.369.

5 Taimania was a female ancestress living three generations before Papahurihia's mother, Tuhoehoe. It was from Taimania, together with his mother (as well as his father, Te Whareti), that Papahurihia is said to have derived his skills. Taimania is the one who is particularly remembered, and as a consequence has often (erroneously) been described as his mother.

Pinepine had already borne Rua seven children when, in 1905, he emerged as a major prophet within the Ringatu, claiming the succession to Te Kooti. About then an event occurred which would permanently shape her life: she climbed the sacred mountain of the Tuhoe, Maungapohatu, with Rua. They had been summoned, it is told, by the Archangel Gabriel, God's messenger of peace, on to the mountain. Pinepine's daughter-in-law, Te Puhī Tatu, introduced her narrative thus:

Well, I married the son of Pinepine, Te Whatu, and his mother told me when they climbed Maungapohatu, the mountain. The road was only this wide, and foggy. She must have rested about three times before they reached the flat on the top. Pinepine said she would not relate this to any other person but me. . . . It was that thing, that diamond, that was the reason. That was the reason Tai [Rua] and Mami [Pinepine] climbed up there. Mami was telling me that it was God indeed who sent Tai to go there, to go to the top. He must take the lead. Then it was s/he saw Christ with his (Christ's) sister there, on that mountain.<sup>6</sup>

From that time Pinepine was set apart. She did not cook food for herself. For a while she was always carried outside the pa for her meals and was fed with feeding sticks, or from her own platter of leaves (rautao) by her permanent female companion and servant (hawini), Te Kuini (Marumaru). Pinepine was tapu because she had seen what Rua had seen: the hidden diamond on the mountain. It is the mauri (life stone) of Tuhoe; it is also the promise of the redemption of the people in the days to come. As a tapu woman, Pinepine henceforth lived apart from Rua, unlike all his other wives. She did not, however, remain celibate. She bore him further children. As she had become a tapairu, a woman of rank who was tapu, she was equally seen as King Solomon's wife, Pharaoh's daughter, who lived apart in her own house in the city of Jerusalem (I Kings 7-8), of which Maungapohatu was a conscious re-creation. The difficulties of grasping precisely Pinepine's status, which derived from both scriptural and Maori points of reference, is attested by the fact that Rua's third wife, Te Akakura, was called by the people of Maungapohatu 'the rangatira wife' (because of her lineage), and the Queen of Sheba, Solomon's wife to whom he gave all her desires. Pinepine lived until 1954, and brought up many children, both her own and others. Her life-history itself is now embedded in the Tuhoe historical tradition.

Maori history — whether individual, family, or tribal — will frequently be

6 Conversation with Te Puhī Tatu, Maungapohatu, 22 January 1978. The original dialogue was in Maori. This text may be found in Judith Binney, 'Maori Oral Narratives, Pakeha Printed Texts: Two Forms of Telling History', *New Zealand Journal of History*, XXI, 1 (1987), p.22. In Maori the gender distinction in the pronoun ia (he or she) is not made. However, that Whaitiri was the sister of Christ is made clear by the possessive pronoun. The diamond hidden on the mountain, which was revealed to Rua and Pinepine, is the hidden mana, or authority, of Tuhoe, but in this narrative sequence (which is discussed more fully in 'Maori Oral Narratives', pp.20-22) it also carries a redemptive power. In some versions of this myth-narrative the diamond was placed there by Te Kooti, whereas in others it has always been there; in all versions, however, it is protected from ordinary mortal gaze by his covering shawl.

narrated as an extension of mythology. Materoa Roberts talked about herself and the sacred mountain of Tuhoe in this way:

I've never been there but my dream has been up there. I saw the place where it is and the way to go. I know the way to go and I know that that mountain is a woman. . . . I saw this mountain in my dream. Nobody has told me what I saw. I know what I saw. I suppose that's why I've got a sore back, so I won't go up there. You know, I really want to go up but I'm frightened to go. It's just like the house of God, the house of the Lord, it's not for me to go up that mountain, it's not for me. I think to myself, maybe at the end of the world he'll let me go up there. If he won't, well I can't help it. I still remember what I saw in my dream. . . . I talked with the first wife of Rua [Pinepine] and I told that old lady 'So and so used to happen, you're going to be so and so', and it's all come true. That's why Rua told the people, 'If anyone "talks", it doesn't matter if it's a kid, listen'. Pinepine knew all about the blessing on to us from Maungapohatu.<sup>7</sup>

Materoa attributed her own gift of prescience to the fact that her dream had been on the mountain. In her ancestral traditions, her wairua had travelled there and undergone the experiences which she 'knew', that is, her inner spirit had journeyed there while she slept. Significantly, the mountain for her was itself a woman, perhaps because Whaitiri, ancestress of Tuhoe, is its guardian.

It is unquestionable that kinship loyalties order the telling of all Maori history. No individual stands alone. The priorities and the truths are all structured so as to declare the mana of the whanau (family), the hapu, and the larger tribe. It therefore follows that women also must know their ancestral history, and can tell some parts at least with equal authority as the men. But they will tell it in their own contexts. Women are often the first purveyors of history, because they are usually the composers of song (as Miriam was), and particularly of the oriori, lullabies, which are constructed so as to teach the child its particular family and tribal history. Te Kooti's great song of 1888, which recounts his betrayal by the law, derives and takes its name from an old oriori, 'Pinepine Te Kura'. Women may also directly intervene in situations where something has gone wrong — even in the formal speech-making occasions on the marae, normally a male preserve. Such an intervention can take various forms: if a man speaks for too long, for example, an older woman, who is a relative, may suddenly stand up and announce 'here is your song' and start to sing. There is now no way that he can continue to speak: his song has been sung, his time has run its course. Te Mamai Tuwairua of Tuhoe, in 1979, sat listening in the sun to the lengthy speeches of the men debating where the presentation copy of *Mihaia* for Tuapo marae should be kept: locked in Rua's tapu house, or left in the meeting-house where it could be read. In the course of the afternoon's debate, she gathered up the inscribed copy from its cushion on the ground, bound it inside her black headscarf, and placed it in her lap. Its future had, in her mind and by her actions, already been determined.

<sup>7</sup> January 1978. Quoted in Jeff Sissons, 'The Kinship "I": Some Thoughts on Maori Biography', *Te Karanga*, III, 4 (1988), pp.26-27.

In the following narrative, an example is given of another occasion when a woman was forced to intervene. Heni Sunderland, the narrator, was born in 1916. It is her rank, her line of descent, combined with her personal abilities, that have given her authority. She describes a situation on her own tribal marae, where the men, contrary to their previous particular custom, had decided to construct a permanent bench, or paepae, for the speech-makers to sit on while they waited to speak.

At home, on the Whakato marae, suddenly we were told they were going to put up this special seat for the men, and this is the paepae. I didn't think anything of it when our chairman said he was going to put a seat there, for whaikorero. I was quite happy for that to happen; but he made it a permanent seat, and I just couldn't accept it when we were told that was for men only, and no woman dare sit here. That puts a difference on it altogether. Because they are saying to us — we are tapu men; we are so special that you women cannot come and sit here. That's never been part of us. The men, the orators . . . those men just used to sit around, for they knew who they were, and they knew when they were to stand up. They never made themselves special. And when they came up with this paepae for men only, I reacted badly, because I do know something of Te Arawa custom: there, *no* women! Now, I never saw it done to my Grannies, and I don't see why it should be done to me, and why it should be done to my children, because that was never *our* way.

We actually had a wananga over this paepae. The theme of the wananga was the protocol of the marae, so the paepae. One of our kuias was asked, what could she say about the paepae? And her answer to that was, 'I only know one paepae, that is the paepae hamuti!' The paepae hamuti is the latrine, but being who she was I was aware that she was actually putting them through the test to find out the depth of their knowledge of things Maori.<sup>8</sup> She pointed out that the older people before her time (and she is in her eighties), they would use the word nohanga for where they sat. And, she said, they sat around and they never ever made it known to whoever their visitors might be, who was who. But *they* knew who they were. Then we had this man — this was all in this wananga — he had a walking-stick, and he is dancing around there, on about this paepae, and he challenged us, as people of Rongowhakaata, to be very careful in what we do. He said to us, because if you don't do these things properly, things would happen to you people, not good things. As though that wasn't enough, he said that he would come and remove his tipunas from our house! I looked at this one, I thought, 'Oh, my good gracious me! That one! His tipunas are there, the pou tuarongo; I know who those figures, those tipunas, are.' I thought to myself, 'He ought to know better. If he considers himself an orator, a tohunga, then he should know that the tuarongo of the house is our domain, and no one else! We are the tangata whenua; we are the people who belong.' Anyway, we are sitting along there, and one Nanny says to me, 'What that man is saying is not good.' And I am saying to Nanny, 'And who is going to reply, Nan?' And I thought to myself, 'Well, you know, this is one time my tipunas, you stand beside me, because there is nobody else!' And when I say my tipunas stand beside me, I am very aware that we are very much a senior family; I am very aware of that, but I never use it — don't need to. But when you have to, then you do something about it. And when he finished all his prancing around, and dancing around,

<sup>8</sup> The paepae, a horizontal beam placed at the latrine, is specifically associated with a whakanoa, tapu-lifting, ritual. Sick people were taken to the paepae hamuti and told to 'bite the beam'; this act was believed to remove the cause of the illness, that is, a contamination from a violation of tapu. The paepae was seen as the threshold between the world of darkness and death, which lay beyond it, and the world of light and life, which lay in front of it.

and waving his walking-stick at us, he came across to shake hands with us. There and then I thought, 'What a cheek!' Aue! I jumped to my feet and I said, 'Nan', in Maori I said to her, 'I will reply to that mokopuna!' I got up; I turned to this man: 'You stay where you are! When I finish, then you come and shake hands with us!' And I let him know! There are times you must take up the challenge, there and then! If you just let it — we would all have troubled minds. And my mind was not going to be troubled by those remarks! I do really believe this, that our tipunas, spiritually, they are always with us. When the need arises they will help you. For me, at that particular time, all those tipunas all around the house, up on top of the house, and Rongowhakaata himself! — and this man who said that he would come and take them away from us, from the house!<sup>9</sup>

Ringatu Maori women do know who they are. Their individual histories are part of a collective history, which is, for them, in significant ways guided by their ancestors. Witi Ihimaera's imaginative recreation of the matriarch is a portrait of a Ringatu woman, whose actions and powerful interventions in the male world derive from her awareness of her tipuna.<sup>10</sup> Some of the Ringatu women with whom I have talked are undoubtedly economically marginalized in the modern New Zealand society. But they still project a strong sense of their identity coming from the past. The following account, given by Miria Rua in 1984 of the most feared experience for all Maori women, barrenness, or the death of a child, expresses it most forcefully. Childlessness is called *wharengaro*, or the ancestral house destroyed. That this fear has a harsh base in reality is demonstrated by the statistics on Maori post-neonatal mortality, which still remains double that of the European population. In 1984, the Maori post-neonatal deaths were 13.9 per 1000 live births in comparison with 6.1 non-Maori.<sup>11</sup> These are the statistics of poverty.

My first one was what you call a premature. Just lived a week. I was riding horses and that, not knowing how it goes. What to expect. The first one is hard. . . . I had John, my second one, right on here, right on this corner [of the meeting-house]. . . . He was seven months old when he died — at Maungapohatu. Then the old people had to go around, saying something about it, eh, losing your kids. Quite a few of us, as they said. That's the *wharengaro*, losing your child. It goes in the family. A *wharengaro* is a family that doesn't conceive. What child they have, it dies.

So my family all got together. And that's why I got my third one. Old Tuhua, he was the eldest on my mother's side, in that family. He's the eldest of the Pari family — the Te Rika's. There was another family that had lost about, how many? — four, five kids. That's why I said it comes in our Te Rika family. It was all done in the one time, same time. These two families got together at the same time. Got all to agree to one thing. You have got to be all of one mind, not one pulling one way, one pulling the other. Tuhua came down, and they asked him. It was 1944. Each one had to get an offering, a *koha*, for their own family. He looked through the line of the family. It's always there; it's like a curse.

9 *Nga Morehu*, pp. 126–7. Whaikorero: formal speech-making on the marae. Wananga: a shortening of *whare wananga*, school of learning, a 'teach-in'. Pou tuarongo: back supporting post of the meeting-house, with carved ancestral figures. Tohunga: expert. Tangata whenua: people of the land. Aue!: oh!

10 *The Matriarch*, Auckland, 1986.

11 'Mortality and Demographic Data', National Health Statistics Centre, Wellington, 1985.

And once you understand, then you get kids.<sup>12</sup>

Miria Rua's explanation of her situation rests on a perceived conjunction between the past and the present, between the ancestors and the living. Sacrifice (through an offering) and understanding the family history offered her the solution. It is this notion of a connected history, of the links with the ancestors, which is essential to being Maori; it is also the source of their strength and a personal ability to survive. Certainly the recent (1984) Maori Women's Welfare League Report on health found that Maori women who did not know their tribal roots, and were not involved in hui (communal gatherings) and all the other activities that create a particular sense of identity, actually faced higher health and social risks.<sup>13</sup>

The women who are quoted here, by their involvement in the Ringatu faith, belong to a small minority of Maori. Not all of them identify themselves primarily as Ringatu, however, and may equally consider themselves as Church of England or Presbyterian. But all are profoundly aware of the Ringatu visionary tradition that specifically confronted the problem of Maori subordination and Pakeha domination. As women, they also experience many situations in which gender dictates what their actions are expected to be. But what has become clear from their accounts is that women's roles in pre-European and nineteenth-century Maori society were more varied and flexible than have generally been allowed for. Heni Sunderland's narrative as a 'senior' woman also reveals how Maori men could become mimic men, adopting the values and styles of other tribes, or of European males, with newly-displayed attitudes of control over women.

It is unquestionable that rank articulated with gender in pre-European Maori society. It is known, for example, that among Ngati Porou of the East Coast rank could outweigh gender. Female chiefly leaders were accepted by them, and are recalled as the eponymous founders of certain hapu.<sup>14</sup> Chiefly women are known in several other tribes as well, such as the Mataatua canoe people, Ngati Kahungunu of the Mahia peninsula, and Nga Puhi of Hokianga. Once the written records are searched and the memories of those still living are probed with the right questions it is clear that Maori women will emerge from the shadows in which the nineteenth-century European historical tradition has placed them. They will emerge in a variety of roles, and there will undoubtedly be distinct tribal and hapu differences. There will almost certainly not be a new generality to replace the accepted orthodoxies. Nevertheless, it is possible that all Maori women, whether of chiefly or non-chiefly status (except perhaps war-captives), were traditionally considered to have a particular affinity with the divine forces of this world. It is perhaps for this reason that Heni Sunderland commented: 'Without a doubt, it is the women who have the strengths. Within

12 Quoted in 'Maori Oral Narratives', p.26.

13 Elizabeth Murchie, *Rapuora: Health and Maori Women*, Wellington, 1984, p.82.

14 See Apirana Mahuika, 'Nga Wahine Kai-Hautu o Ngati Porou: The Female Leaders of Ngati Porou', MA thesis, University of Sydney. n.d.

the extended family and out on to the marae as a whanau as a whole, you will find it is we, the women, who are the ones who really motivate our men. They wouldn't like me saying that, but I do think that.'<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Nga Morehu*, p.126. Whanau: extended family.