

# Anō ko te whare whawhao a Te Ao-kapurangi

Like the crowded house of Te Ao-kapurangi

Kerri Anne Hancock

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In late March this year, I was discussing the rāhui (lockdown) and the coronavirus crisis to my 6-year-old daughter. I was trying to convey the seriousness of the pandemic and why we were to stay in our mirumiru (bubble) without panicking her with apocalyptic ramblings.

Being ever solutions focused, my daughter offered me the following reassurances:

*“Karekau raru Māmā. Hei te wā ka tangi a Ranginui, ma wōna roimata te ao e horoi, kātahi ka mate te mate korona.”*

*“No problem Māmā – When Ranginui (the Sky Father) cries, his tears will cleanse the world and the coronavirus will die.”*



What I loved about this statement was that my daughters default response is to look to her taiao (environment) and her whakapapa (genealogy) for solutions. As Māori, we are intrinsically linked to our taiao through our whakapapa. Solutions are almost always found in our pūrakau (stories), our karakia (prayers), our waiata (songs) – our mātauranga (Māori knowledge).

Taking my daughter's lead, I also look to my whakapapa for answers in how we support women to get us through the crisis. And I found out that Te Arawa women are amazing in a crisis.

## **Anō ko te whare whawhao a Te Ao-kapurangi - Like the crowded house of Te Ao-kapurangi**

Some of you may have heard about the Ngāti Rangiwewehi and Tapuika chieftainess, Te Ao-kapurangi. During a battle between Ngā Puhi and Te Arawa iwi in the 1820s, she struck a deal with the enemy, Hongi Hika, to protect her people. Hika agreed that all those who passed beneath Te Ao-kapurangi's thighs would be spared from the onslaught during the battle. Faced with this crisis, Te Ao-kapurangi climbed atop a house, and had her people enter through the doorway above which she was straddling.

Not only was this innovative 'out of the box' thinking on Te Ao-kapurangi's part, it showed how when faced with a crisis, leadership that can adapt quickly is key. It's also important to know that it wasn't as simple for her people as walking into a house. In passing underneath Te Ao-kapurangi's whare tangata (womb) this went against tikanga Māori (Māori customs) where there are serious spiritual implications

in regard to highly spiritual concepts known as tapu and noa. Te Ao-kapurangi's solution was not perfect - but for the circumstances - it was courageous, brave, and effective.

Today the survival of many Te Arawa (a confederation of iwi/tribes within the Bay of Plenty) iwi during this event has been attributed to the leadership of Te Ao-kapurangi, and the ability of the iwi to adapt tikanga to protect their whakapapa.

Solutions are not always perfect - and that's ok. Te Ao-kapurangi tells us that while sometimes solutions are not perfect – sometimes we must act and do the best with what we know at the time. This pandemic has shown us this is not the time for ego or perfectionism. It's time for action.

There are women like Te Ao-kapurangi in every whānau. For me, it's my mum. Whenever there is a crisis in my family she transforms into this superwoman organising support for whānau, solving problems, delegating roles, shopping, cooking - she really is incredible. I am pretty sure she could feed 50 people a delicious meal with a bag of flour, 500g of mince and a packet of toothpicks. Beyond that, she also always asks the hard questions which many of us haven't considered.

Our female leaders are the best placed to help wāhine both survive AND thrive post COVID-19 - and it is our job to get behind them. Here in Te Arawa, we have seen unprecedented (in modern times) action and collaboration during this crisis. Yes, we have incredible male leaders, but what I have loved is seeing our female leadership weave together solutions effortlessly during this time. The compassion, aroha, and fearlessness is organic, magical, and above all, effective.

At the heart of every decision is how we support our most vulnerable in our communities – especially wāhine Māori. You do not have to look far to hear, see, and feel the mamae (grievances) which our wāhine Māori are experiencing.

### **What would Te Ao-kapurangi do?**

Inspired by Te Ao-kapurangi, here are some things we need to do to support our wāhine (and everybody else) through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

#### *Empower us to lead*

Next time you are asked to nominate someone for a taskforce, board or directorship, let your default position be to consider a woman for the position. Like Te Ao-kapurangi, we are the thinkers as well as the doers. Let us utilise our strengths as natural nurturers who are selfless and innovative under pressure. These attributes are necessary to rebuild our world post Covid-19 in order to build back better - both in an economic and infrastructure sense, but also as better human beings.

#### *The answers to a COVID-19 recovery lie in mātauranga Māori*

As a nation, we need to invest in mātauranga Māori to inform how we can navigate through the COVID-19 trauma. For example, what does the creation story 'Te Orokohanga' tell us about the importance of balance and how that can be applied to create sustainable working practices? What does Matariki (Pleiades) tell us about the upcoming year and allow us to prepare for events to come? How can maramataka (the Māori Lunar calendar) tell us about how we can look after our health and well-being? And finally, how can we utilise this knowledge to disrupt the system, our 'old way of life'?

and create mātauranga Māori solutions, embedded in aroha, that empower our wāhine to reach our potential – including one of the most incredible wahine of them all, Papatūānuku - the Earth Mother.

### *Embed mātauranga Māori in the working environment*

Let's support initiatives and role creation that allows wāhine Māori to thrive as wāhine Māori. You may have heard the term 'Te hunga pākaiahi' which is used to describe the people that keep the home fires (ahi kā) burning – Te hunga pākaiahi have an important role in looking after their marae, elders, welcoming visitors, and hosting tangihanga (funerals). What you may not be aware of is that this is a responsibility that is often performed at the expense of other employment opportunities. It can be really hard for wāhine Māori to balance these responsibilities with employment, yet these responsibilities are essential to our own wellbeing, as well as that of our hapū and iwi.

Let's support initiatives and role creation that:

- allows for shorter working weeks, and an outcomes-based approach to work so that wāhine can carry out their roles in their whānau and community, and have time for themselves as well;
- utilise Māori whenua (land) and acknowledge the empowerment that comes with working on our land and in our wider taiao;
- align to the maramataka or Māori Lunar Calendar (rather than the Monday to Friday working week) and let the environment inform when the time is right for productivity and when it is time for reflection and meditation; and
- value the transferable skills that women bring to decision making, planning, and juggling multiple priorities, because these attributes are in our nature and ready to be used just like Te Ao-kapurangi.

And lastly (just because I have this platform) let us all discontinue the practice of only asking wāhine to take the minutes during meetings. Word on the street is that men also know how to write. Let's share the load and free up time and headspace for some amazing 'Te Ao-kapurangi style' thinking.

### **What is good for the Taiao – is good for wāhine Māori**

Let us recreate what value truly is by looking back at our whakapapa, taiao and mātauranga Māori and use these to inform long-term sustainable outcomes for the future.

Let's stop talking about ideas and simply action them.

Let's be courageous.

Let's be like Te Ao-kapurangi.