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KO TE WHAEA TE TAKERE O TE WAKA

Māori mothers reclaiming tūpuna knowledges for the next generations

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Abstract

Mātauranga Māori has been severely impacted by settler-colonial agendas; however, continued efforts by Māori have supported mātauranga revival. This article examines interviews with 10 māmā and their journeys to reclaim ancestral knowledges for their tamariki. Māmā described reclaiming ancestral practices, including birthing traditions, wairuatanga, tikanga Māori, te reo Māori, rongoā Māori, weaving and food cultivation. Drawing on a whakapapa approach and the Hautū Waka framework, thematic analysis revealed a journey into the unknown, guided by tohu and shaped by challenges and resilience. These journeys involved ongoing cycles of connection and reconnection, reflecting efforts to embody tūpuna while forging pathways for mokopuna. Whakapapa and politics of love emerged as central to sustaining hope, highlighting how everyday acts of reclamation contribute towards processes of decolonisation.

Keywords

decolonisation, māmā, reclamation, tamariki, whakapapa

Introduction

Colonisation has had a deep and enduring negative effect on Māori communities, steadily diminishing Māori well-being, aspirations and potential, particularly since the 1860s (Moewaka-Barnes & McCreanor, 2019). The confiscation of land broke the vital connection to whenua, disrupting the identities of whānau, hapū and iwi that were tied to specific lands. This upheaval disrupted traditional knowledge and practices around land use, fostering dependence on colonial economic systems and weakening the foundations of Māori society (Walker, 1990). The impact, however, extends beyond material loss, also affecting Māori emotional and psychological well-being. The effects include widespread trauma along with damage to identity and the attempted eradication of Māori cultural practices and norms (Moewaka-Barnes & McCreanor, 2019).

Land grabs and confiscations have separated tangata whenua from their whenua, destabilising place-based whānau, hapū and iwi identities, breaking long-established knowledge practices around land use (Walker, 1990). This has resulted

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in dependence on colonial economic systems, undermining the very fabric of Māori society (Walker 1990). The compounding effects of settler hegemony extended to governance, policy and law to attack mātauranga Māori. Simmonds (2011) asserts that the 1907 Tohunga Suppression Act was one of the most forceful attacks on wairua knowledge because its primary aim was to determine what kinds of knowledge were considered valid and important. This law effectively banned a whole class of Māori intellectuals, denying our tūpuna the right to consult their own cultural and spiritual experts (Smith, 1996, as cited in Simmonds, 2011). Colonisers viewed wairua knowledge as superstitions and tales then (Johnston, 1998, as cited in Simmons, 2011), and this harmful narrative has continued today (Simmonds, 2011). Consequently, limited access to mātauranga has affected the vitality and well-being of Māori, impacting cultural identity and place belonging (Hawaikirangi-Pere, 2013).

Among the many long-established practices that have been threatened is a pā harakeke village approach to child-rearing. As argued by Pihama (2022, as cited in Rokx et al., 1999), tamariki are a vital aspect of "an ongoing whakapapa, their contributions simultaneously fed into the past, present and future" (p. 2), informing a collective approach to child-rearing. A whānau-based approach that extends to tūpuna and other relatives not only supports the well-being of parents and māmā (Simmonds, 2019) but also nurtures tamariki development, allowing for a wealth of knowledge building and sharing of stories as taonga tuku iho (Pihama, 2022). With many Māori living away from whenua, pā harakeke is difficult to maintain, often leaving many māmā to carry more load.

However, where Indigenous challenges and settler-colonial violence exist, Indigenous hope and resistance also lie. Chairperson of Te Taura Whiri i Te Reo Māori | Māori Language Commission Professor Rawinia Higgins acknowledges that it takes one generation to lose an Indigenous language and three generations to restore it ("Revitalising Te Reo", 2020). As a response to such hegemony, and a dire need to retain what we had left of the language, in the past 50 years, out of love for tamariki, there has been a drive to hoki whakamuri kia anaga whakamua, to walk backwards into the future and turn to tūpuna guidance throughout reclamation. There has been a resurgence of mātauranga through the likes of te reo Māori and culture, highlighted by the creation of Māori-language educational institutions such as Te Kōhanga Reo, Kura Kaupapa Māori, wharekura, and wānanga (reo Māori tertiary setting) (Hawaikirangi-Pere, 2013).

Research by Te Ipukarea (2020) followed highly proficient te reo Māori speakers to explore successful language transmission in their whānau unit. The study focused on families who possess strong te reo Māori skills, have tamariki under five years old and are actively using the language to raise them in Māori medium environments. Their study outlined common challenges the whānau met and strategies they used to navigate them, such as planning for situations that could hinder the language acquisition. Reviving the language has contributed to a decolonial Māori future as a form of healing.

Other research that explores (re)learning mātauranga includes studies on reclaiming Māori maternal knowledges (Simmonds, 2017), Māori child-rearing practices (Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2022) and traditional Māori weaving practices (New Zealand Maritime Museum, 2025), among others. It is apparent that wāhine are often the drivers of these decisions about caring for culture and the environment (Stats NZ, 2020); however, there is limited research on māmā as change makers, from beginner levels without mentors, reclaiming a range of stolen knowledge.

This article describes the research project titled "Ko te whaea te takere o te waka: Māori mothers reclaiming tūpuna knowledges for the next generations" and draws attention to the similarities between the Hautū Waka navigation framework (Taniwha-Pao'o & Hoeta, 2024) and the phases that māmā navigate during their reclamation journeys. The project title is a whakataukī that translates in essence to "Mothers are like the hull of the canoe, they keep the family together" (Morrison, 2022, para. 2). I wanted to explore the ways in which māmā, as creators of whakapapa, led change for their tamariki. I also sought to find out about the challenges they met and surmounted as they reclaimed mātauranga. Further, if we know that it only takes one generation to eliminate an Indigenous language, and a minimum of three to revive it, then it is important to understand how whānau can remain hopeful throughout the challenging aspects of reclamation by noticing and celebrating the positive signs of progress.

Whakapapa reclamation and tamariki mokopuna

When it comes to mātauranga reclamation, I feel drawn to Moana Jackson's (2020) assertion that drawing upon whakapapa is a cornerstone

to an "ethic of restoration" in Aotearoa New Zealand, which incorporates but is not limited to constitutional transformation (Matike Mai, 2016). Restoration (and arguably reclamation) is grounded within a politics of love "where love is seen as both critical and constructive" (Jackson, 2020, p. 153), which works to recentre Papatūānuku, and interrelatedly, whakapapa. Jackson (2020) proposes the "ethic of restoration" (p. 149) as a more relevant term than "decolonization" that offers a hopeful political framework for the context of settler-colonial Aotearoa. This concept gives emphasis to the possibilities that could emerge through whakapapa reclamation. Guided by an ethos of love and hope, Jackson demonstrates how an ethic of restoration reflects the diverse ways Māori are creating flourishing futures. Examples include through engaging with whakapapa stories sustained in whānau and relationships with whenua—with Papatūānuku. An ethos of love and hope, I believe, is the very reason why whānau embark on reclamation journeys, to reconnect to Māori ways of knowing, doing and being to restore love that has been threatened, attacked and stripped across generations. It is important to then highlight how central love is to the way tamariki are viewed in te ao Māori:

> Tama is derived from Tamanuiterā the central sun, the divine spark. Ariki refers to senior most status, and riki on its own can mean smaller version. Tamariki is the Māori word used for children. Children are the greatest legacy the world community has. (Pere, 1991, p. 4)

As Kiri West (2025) explains:

> Whakapapa and pepeha are the first gifts bestowed on newborns as they enter Te Ao Mārama, arguably before. Whakapapa is the story we tell before we can speak and the story we tell when we feel like we cannot speak. It is a foundational element of Māori identity and existence. (p. 13)

As māmā, creators of those babies, creators of whakapapa, it is an act of love to reclaim knowledges and practices that centre them as "smaller versions of a divine spark" (Pere, 1991).

Methods

This is a qualitative Kaupapa Māori project that included 10 māmā from my own networks who were on a journey of reclaiming some form of mātauranga Māori for their pēpi, tamaiti or tamariki. The research questions were:

- What forms of mātauranga Māori are māmā reclaiming for their tamariki mokopuna?
- How are māmā leading change for their whānau?
- What challenges do māmā face as they reclaim mātauranga? And how do they surmount them?
- How do māmā remain hopeful in their reclamation journeys?

I wanted to ensure that these were people I already knew so they felt safe to have me in their space with their tamariki and whānau while they shared their stories with me.

Eight of the interviews were kanohi ki te kanohi, and two were online because of geographic location. Nine māmā were already parents and one was hapū with her first child. For interviews that were kanohi ki te kanohi, we met at their home, my home or a public space such as a café or local park. All interviews were in the form of casual discussion and some in the form of a playdate at māmā's homes, or a park where the adults talked while the tamariki played and came back and forth as they needed. I welcomed this approach to "interviewing" as seeing tamariki having their needs met rather than as "interrupting" the research process.

I conducted two types of analyses for different purposes. The first was based on the stories that included various types of mātauranga that māmā were reclaiming. These stories were grouped into themes that formed a zine for distribution to whānau Māori spaces specifically for māmā (Funaki-Cole, 2024). These knowledges included wairuatanga, hapūtanga and Māori birthing practices, tikanga Māori, tūpuna child-rearing, food cultivating, weaving, rongoā Māori and te reo Māori. A future article will outline the process of creating the zine from the data analysis, collaborating with Māori artists, the design and dissemination. These discussions, however, are outside the scope of this article.

The second thematic analysis, which is what this article is based on, looked at the overall trends and themes across the stories māmā shared. The data revealed key concepts that shaped the trends, including stages such as (re)imagining desires, researching needs, relearning childhood knowledge, returning home where they whakapapa, overcoming challenges, reconnecting with whānau, reviving learned skills and reclaiming knowledge, to name a few. These concepts are further unpacked below in the conceptual framework section and are visible in the findings and discussion sections.

Conceptual framework

I drew on two bodies of work to form the conceptual framework for this study. The first is the navigation framework (Taniwha-Pao'o & Hoeta, 2024), and the second is a whakapapa approach, drawing on the concepts of onamata, anamata (Burgess & Painting, 2020). These are discussed below.

Hautū Waka

Many concepts that formed the trends used the prefix "re", which comes from Latin and means "again and again" or "to go back and repeat" (Dictionary.com, 2012). This idea of repetition resonates with the journeys described by these mothers, such as returning to study te reo Māori or relearning knowledge they once (k)new (Edwards, 2009), now with a deeper appreciation as adults and parents, as well as returning home to where they have relational connection.

I drew inspiration from these movements as a planned voyage, navigating the vast Moana-nui-a-Kiwa just as our ancestors did before discovering Aotearoa. These themes of movement aligned with voyaging. To guide my understanding, I used the Hautū Waka framework (see Figure 1) as a lens to view their travels, helping me connect the phases of voyaging to the experiences māmā were undergoing in their own journeys.

Explanation of each phase

Phase 1 is Te Whakaritirite, when the crew prepares for the voyage. In this phase, māmā (and those they have in their waka on the same journey) reflected on their desired destinations, considered what was needed to attain those desires, and assessed whether they had the resources necessary to embark on the journey.

Phase 2, Te Rapunga, marks the moment when māmā step into the unknown, bringing all their strengths and resources. This phase can arguably be the most challenging, as it requires transitioning from planning to action. Venturing into unfamiliar territory can feel daunting, creating significant barriers along the way.

Te Kitenga is the following phase when, in the unknown, voyagers rely on what they have learned so far and trust in Indigenous ways of knowing, such as intuition (Cameron, 2008) and tohu (Smith, 2019), that they could be heading in the right direction.

The next phase, Te Whāinga, involves exploring the tohu and testing their reliability. This phase may involve wrong turns and challenges, requiring them to reorient and adapt as they progress.

The fourth phase is Te Whiwhinga. This is at the intersection between where the tohu have led, and having the end in sight, with work still to complete. This is when confidence overcomes doubts as they notice the gains they have made throughout their travels and persevere through the challenges.

And finally, the last phase is Te Rawenga, when they reach the desired destination and celebrate the wins. The tohu that led them there showed they were reliable markers that can be replicated

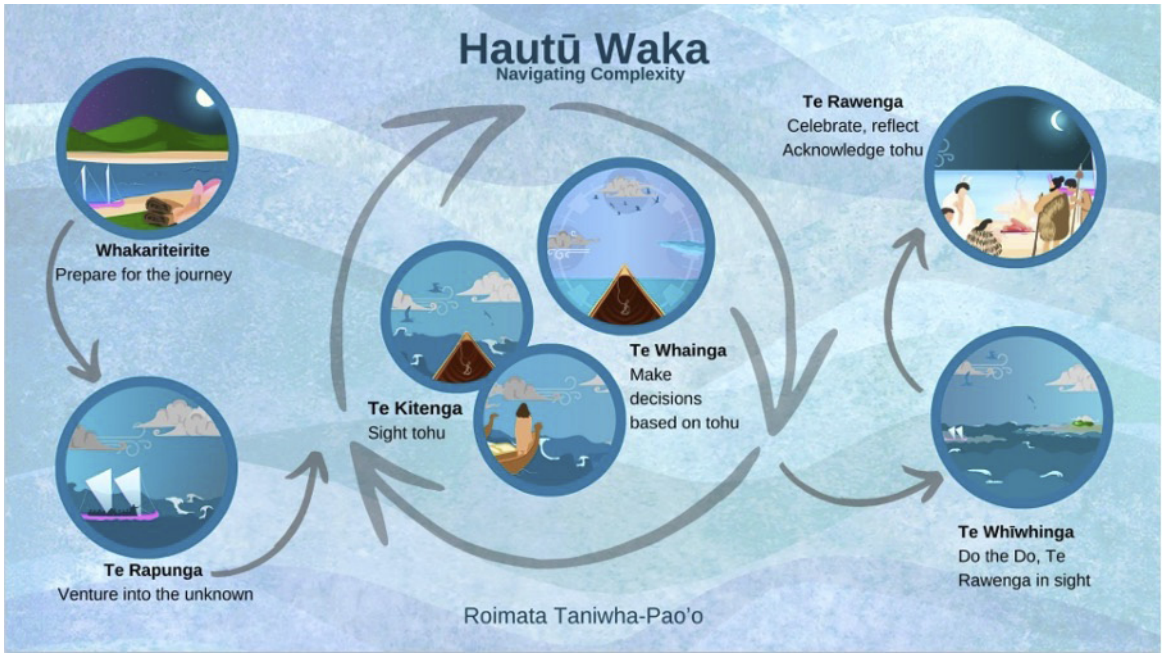

FIGURE 1 Hautū Waka framework (Taniwha-Pao'o & Hoeta, 2024)

for further travels and to pass on that knowledge for collective gain.

Whakapapa: Onamata, anamata

In addition to the Hautū Waka framework, I drew on Burgess and Painting's (2020) concepts of onamata, anamata, seeing through the eyes of our mokopuna and tūpuna. Burgess and Painting claim that, by maintaining strong connections with both past and future generations, we can perceive time more clearly—rooted in the knowledge of our whakapapa.

I see the similarities in the complexities of whakapapa, time and intergenerational connectedness. Burgess and Painting (2020) assert that whakapapa traverses time and space:

> Our existence as Māori is intergenerational, each of us intimately connected to innumerable past and future generations, our tūpuna and our mokopuna. We live as though they are here with us, seeing what we see. We are reflections of each other. (p. 214)

Burgess and Painting understand the present as "that fleeting moment where the past and the future meet. By meeting, the past and future interact. At this point of interaction, whakapapa is laid down" (p. 218).

I can see those intersections at play as māmā, both mokopuna and future tūpuna, are making mokopuna decisions and embarking on reclamation journeys, despite the fears of the unknown and the challenges they face. Additionally, I see how the journey can reconnect these māmā and their whānau, acknowledging the efforts their tūpuna have endured and fostering intergenerational healing by restoring stolen knowledges.

Findings

In this project, I sought to find out how māmā became the hull of the canoe, how they led change for their whānau. I also wanted to know what challenges they met and how they navigated them, including how they remained hopeful during the tough times. The overall aim is to be able to share these stories so that other whānau can embark on similar journeys if they feel inspired to.

How māmā led change for their tamariki mokopuna

Māmā led change for their whānau by reclaiming mātauranga Māori. These māmā learned various forms of mātauranga from beginner levels. These included rongoā Māori, te reo Māori, Māori birthing practices, tikanga Māori and many more. In terms of how they acquired these mātauranga, māmā set goals based on what they desired for their tamariki mokopuna in the near and distant future. Second, they considered strategies and explored options that might help them achieve their goals.

As a māmā of three, Sha was learning te reo Māori to show her commitment to the kōhanga and kura her tamariki attend. She added, "My goal is definitely to be able to speak the reo, and get to a point where I can confidently, fluently speak. And for it to be a norm in our whare … That's definitely my ultimate goal."

Alana was reclaiming wairuatanga as a way of seeking "collective healing" and she added:

> When you heal yourself, you're healing your tīpuna, you're healing those generations. But you're also healing the generations to come. Because if you're not doing your healing, it's passed on to the next.
>
> I really believe you just touch one person; you impact a whānau.
>
> Every single thing in our culture is healing. Every single thing. From one kupu, that's healing. From doing our waiata, from standing for kapa haka, from doing our oriori—all of that is healing and really looking after the creations that we created.

Ria wanted to grow her knowledge of a Māori worldview of pregnancy and childbirth:

> When I first got hapū, one of the biggest things for me was that I had been doing a lot of trying to understand this concept of the whare tangata and what it meant to be the creator and the sharer of whakapapa. It's kind of beautiful.

Huia was hapū with her first tamaiti. She had a list of things that she wanted to complete before her pēpi arrived:

> I wanted to publish my book; I wanted to get my first tā moko. I feel like that was something that I really wanted to do before going into having a pēpi. I wanted to swim in my awa for the first time.

Once these māmā knew what their dreams for their mokopuna were, they set plans and mapped out these visions. Strategies māmā used included researching where they could access the knowledge they were seeking, how much time would be required, travel and financial considerations, whether they could fit it in their everyday schedules and commitments.

Alana talked about using her time wisely and focusing reclamation strategies on what she had the capacity to access, stating, "I'm going to get my language back soon, but what can I do at this point in time? And [I realised] it was about sharing the kōrero that I grew up with, from where I'm from, accessing anything te reo."

The third way māmā led change for their whānau was by leaping into the unfamiliar territory (despite reservations) to begin reclamation for their tamariki. Johanna talked about wanting to learn rongoā Māori for many years before she started that process and added, "I've just got to do that right now, this year, it's now or never, and I did. It was just the most amazing, life-changing thing."

For Ria, reconnecting with her marae had been a challenging experience to navigate:

> It was really uncomfortable initially, and I was really anxious, and I came up with a million excuses why I couldn't go. But I think the thing that made it easier for me, a little bit, is that in lots of Pākehā spaces, my boy is seen as naughty. He's got too much energy, he doesn't shut up, and all those things. But on the marae, no one sees him that way—he's just another one of the tamariki playing outside and no one really cares. And if he's doing something, one of the nannies will tell him off, and he'll go, "Okay," and carry on. So, I thought, "Well he is safe in that space, so if he is safe in that space, then I am safe in that space."
>
> I think what it does is it makes me address my own identity crisis in a way that I've never had to address before … when you're confronted with having someone that you're passing this stuff to, and you have an obligation. It's made me really assess who I am in a way I've never really assessed before. It's been a bit mildly overwhelming, but really, really beautiful as well.

While it may have taken māmā some time to take that next step from the comfortable knowing, into the uncomfortable unknown, they all demonstrated gratitude for making those decisions.

Challenges and strategies māmā faced

This section highlights the challenges māmā met and surmounted throughout their reclamation journeys. Undergoing learning these (k)new knowledges (Edwards, 2009) took a toll on māmā, whether this was felt physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually or financially.

Hana recalled a time when she changed how she approached mātauranga reclamation, making it easier to engage with and less emotionally draining for herself:

> When I started learning te reo, I was hanging my entire Māori identity on it. That's a lot of pressure to put on yourself! While I love learning te reo, there has been a heaviness to it which challenged my motivation to keep learning and speaking. I realised I could diversify the way I re-connect to our whakapapa, and I didn't have to hang it all on learning te reo. Learning to weave has a fun and creative lightness and has been very accessible.

Abby had a plan in place to combat the heavy times that were involved in her reclamation journey:

> If you want to get the language back, you have to be hungry enough for it that you can get through those low points, because they're there. And it's heavy, it's a burden and they shouldn't be there, we shouldn't have to push through all these things to have our language, but that's the sad reality of it.
>
> Right when everything was going through with the kāwanatanga, we were practising with our kapa for kapa haka. And that was the rongoā where we were just singing, singing as Māori, existing as Māori, singing in Māori. It didn't matter what was happening outside.
>
> When you have a kid, you're like, "Well how many of our ancestors fought so that we could learn te reo? We could have kōhanga? We could have the Treaty of Waitangi?" So now this is actually our time to do that for them. So you've got to have that whawhai in you, that kaha in you. And you don't have to have that all the time—you can't have it all the time—but you've got to.

A key challenge highlighted by several māmā was the limited access to mentors. Abby reflected on her whānau and not having anyone close to her to be able to learn te reo from:

> Within my whānau, there wasn't really anyone to learn off. Except for, I had my great-uncles up North. And that's just a relationship that's really started, where I'm now learning Ngāpuhitanga off of them. But prior to that, it was mainly, I just want to get the language so I can understand everything else.

Tarapuhi acknowledged that these journeys of reclamation require a long process of healing, and

it can take multiple generations to experience the true depth of their labour:

> This is the work of healing historical trauma is looking at each other and being like, "We don't have mentors; we have to lower our expectations and be kinder to ourselves." And I think that's where the mindset of playfulness and experimenting is really helpful for me because I do like being good at things. And so, there's not actually anyone that can come and teach us to do these things, necessarily. You can't take a course in them. You can in a way, but it's not the kind of thing that you just learn like that. And so, I think there's been something really powerful about being like, "We're not going to get it right, and that's okay." The intergenerational healing takes five generations, and we just have to do our part, and it's not as satisfying as being an excellent gardener, but we don't get to see all of the fruit straight away, and that's okay because our mokopuna will.

Reclamation requires time, among other things. Learning te reo comes at a cost, even when classes are free. Reo classes, kōhanga and kura in larger cities are often at full capacity, meaning long waitlists. While hapū, Hana planned for these challenges and considered how to maintain the reo in the home while waiting for a kōhanga vacancy:

> I'm starting to think about, how do I make sure that reo is still a big part of my world. I got some inspiration from Ngāi Tahu, from their Kotahi Mano Kāika where they get a cluster and they meet regularly. I've reached out to a couple of mates and everyone's keen.
>
> Because waitlists for kōhanga reo here are like two or three years. Everyone I know who's hapū or have little ones are keen. That's going to be the next step. Just got to find a time that works for everyone. And hopefully that's set up a bit more by the time baby comes and it can just keep running.

Further, full-time immersive reo courses mean sacrificing income to reclaim their mother tongue. Abby shared the steps she was thankful she took as a university graduate:

> I turned down a job to focus on full immersion te reo.
>
> I'm so proud that I did that back then! I knew there was something there even when everyone was like, "Go take the job, start earning money." I was like, "Nope."
>
> I'm at a real conversational stage now. I can listen to anything and I've got a real good understanding. And I just feel like I've got access to my culture in a way that I didn't have growing up, in that [our tamaiti] will never not have. He's got that key right from birth. I've got kura reo booked in for next year, so it's just now about expanding it and taking it to those next levels.
>
> And as he grows—because I know kōhanga will be a huge thing for us as a whānau. Because, particularly for my side, he'll be the first baby to go to kōhanga. So in that respect, because we made that decision that he's going to do hopefully all his schooling, but definitely kōhanga and kura, in te reo, that we fully commit to that. I'll hopefully be working there, but even if it doesn't work out for actually working there, I'll put a lot of time in anyway. Because we know how vital it is for kōhanga to have heavy whānau involvement. And I think me and my partner have good skills to contribute into that space too.

Abby also mentioned here that she planned to work at the kōhanga, offering her time and skills. So while not having a large pool of mentors for her own learning when starting out, she has taken upon herself to share what knowledge she has acquired to support the collective, much like a mentor or tuakana for others.

How māmā remained hopeful throughout their reclamation journeys

Despite challenges, these māmā saw progress throughout their reclamation. While some gains may have taken a long time to see progress, smaller victories were celebrated along the way.

Abby could see the transformative impact that her reclamation journey has had on her whānau, when reflecting on her child's reo Māori fluency:

> My dad has made a comment like, "I hope he'll learn English as well." And I sat him down and said, "Here's all the evidence, this is how community languages work."
>
> So my dad has enrolled to learn te reo this year. And similarly my mum's Pākehā and we've had similar kōrero with her too. And I was like, "You'll always love your grandson and you'll have that connection, but if you really want to know him, know him through his language. That's his language of expression."
>
> So, they've all really taken that on board. And I think they can just see how uncompromising me

> and [my partner] will be about that. But also, when you then get a kāwanatanga that comes through, "now this is really detrimental for our grandson", it changes something.

Abby also mentioned the impact her efforts as a whānau have had on her tamaiti:

> I'm so glad I put that time in, because the world that my baby's growing up in is so different to the world that I grew up in. Like he's so, he's so Māori! And his worldview is Māori, and his reo is Māori and how he expresses himself is Māori. So that's just, yeah, just beautiful.

> And you can see it with my sister, she wants to learn te reo next year, and a lot of my cousins. So we're going to set up a hapū wānanga for te reo. So our little whānau will come together and start doing te reo. We'll probably do it online. So I think for me, te reo is the starting point and then it branches out from that. Because there are certain tikanga as Māori I think that we've never lost—manaakitanga, whanaungatanga.

Among the everyday wins that māmā shared was how reo Māori practices have become routine. Cora shared signs of the daily progress she noticed with her tamariki that brought her happiness:

> When I hear them speak to me, when I hear them come home and they're singing waiata, when I hear them asking for kupu in Māori, when they automatically choose te reo Māori as their first language.

Tarapuhi talked about celebrating the rewards that come from being in the environment and connecting with tūpuna:

> We have committed to making this (māra kai) an experimentation thing, a learning thing. Trying to take the pressure off doing it perfect and reaping all of the rewards. The rewards we've been given have been about being excited to go outside and connect with the whenua, seeing flowers grow and fruit grow, and then practising communication with each other and the kids, and teaching them.

Tarapuhi shared ways in which she and her tamariki are able to reconnect with their tūpuna:

> When you feel joy in your body, that is, you connecting with your tīpuna, because that is the point of whakapapa, right? Is that you're connected through your tinana—not just at a bones, DNA, blood level. But if you really believe that you're connected to whenua, and you are connected to your tīpuna, when you feel joy and you use your body, you're using your tīpuna's bodies as well.

Māmā were met with various challenges throughout reclamation, but they overcame those by accessing and using what knowledge they did have, by taking steps to reconnect, whether that was at the marae, with their reo or doing māra kai, and by being kind to themselves and celebrating the wins, no matter how small. In Abby's case, it was also about getting more whānau on the same waka, supporting that load that can become heavy at times.

Next, I discuss how these findings contribute to decolonisation through processes of reconnection and reclamation. I unpack the ways in which the findings align with a whakapapa approach and the Hautū Waka model and show how these everyday acts of reconnection can be understood as forms of resistance to settler-colonial harms.

Discussion

Politics of love and hope (Jackson, 2020) sit at the heart of the findings. The love these māmā hold for their tamariki is shown in the way they consider hopeful futures their tamariki mokopuna can thrive in. Their love and hope demonstrate a commitment to equipping themselves with knowledges that require long journeys to reclaim. In doing so, the aim is to undergo generational healing so that the emotional or traumatic load is not passed onto the next generations. As Alana mentioned, everything in our culture is healing, but we need to do that healing ourselves or it will get passed onto the next generations. Such responsibilities are shaped through whakapapa, where concepts like onamata and anamata locate māmā as both tūpuna and mokopuna at the intersection of where whakapapa is laid down (Burgess & Painting, 2020). In this way, whakapapa threads together not just time, but the decisions and desires these māmā make to go back to tūpuna wisdom.

It is important to acknowledge that these māmā were not just reclaiming one specific knowledge, they were undergoing transformations within themselves, and across multiple knowledges. Alana, for example, was learning about wairuatanga but also te reo Māori and tūpuna parenting. She referred to a type of kind, gentle love for tamariki, stating "really looking after the creations that we created". Here, Alana referred to whakapapa creations, as wāhine being the creators

of life. Ria also referred to māmā as the "creator and sharer of whakapapa". The way these māmā referred to their tamariki connects to the way we nurture and care for these miniature suns (Pere, 1991). It is clear there is a depth of love that māmā have for their tamariki which, I argue, motivates their reclamation journeys to begin with.

Employing the Hautū Waka model here, it is easy to align similarities between the findings and the likes of the navigation phases. In preparation for reclamation, or during the Whakariterite phase, māmā were considering what kinds of mātauranga they wanted to connect with in the hopes it would one day be the norm for their tamariki. In this phase, māmā looked to the future through the eyes of their mokopuna—through anamata. Here, they could envision celebrating the fruits of their labour. Māmā considered time, efforts, finances and support people, and had strategies to put plans in place for challenging times.

Te Whakariterite preparation phase can be in the works for several years before any further action begins. This was the case for Johanna wanting to learn about rongoā, or it could come by quickly, like it did for Huia with a list of specific milestones to achieve before her pēpi was born. But that plan is what helped māmā take the leap into the unknown of the next phase, Te Rapunga.

As beginner learners of whichever mātauranga they were following, māmā had to become resourceful about using what knowledge they already had and seek connection with others who had knowledge they were seeking. Many māmā expressed difficulties in not having easy access to mentors, so finding others proved challenging. For Tarapuhi, mahinga kai was not as simple as enrolling in a course. But rather, it was coming to terms with relinquishing the ideals of perfectionism—that it would be okay not to see the larger benefits in her time, but that the seeds had been sown for the mokopuna and that it was enough to celebrate the small, everyday wins of simply feeling joy outside.

Some māmā found it challenging making connections in spaces where mentors were. As Ria mentioned feeling overwhelmed and finding it difficult to reconnect with her marae, she moved through those debilitating feelings and felt that she had to overcome them for the benefit of her tamaiti. These decisions and overcoming challenges are how māmā were enacting onamata, anamata.

When journeying in the unknown, or Te Rapunga phase, māmā also had to rely on what they already had with them, and trust in the process that they could and would find some sign or tohu that they were on track. This kind of resilience would equip them for the Te Kitenga and Te Whāinga phases, in which māmā were met with many different challenges, such as limited mentors, and emotional and financial pressures. In these situations, māmā took comfort in sighting the tohu, testing them out to see if they were makers of change, signalling hope that they were on track and to continue.

And when they were able to see some sign that their hard work was showing gains, such as Cora's tamariki talking to her in te reo Māori, or the rippling effect that Abby's whānau now have in their motivation to also learn te reo, these wins were celebrated in Te Whiwhinga. This is also connected to the way Alana articulated healing through just one person, and that impacting the whole whānau.

Circling back to what West (2025) reminds us, that whakapapa and pepeha are the first gifts we give our tamariki, in Te Rawenga—those gifts are celebrated as flourishing Māori futures.

Conclusion

This article provides a snapshot of the journeys 10 māmā underwent to reclaim various forms of ancestral knowledges for the next generations. Politics of love emerged as māmā embodied tūpuna practices and made mokopuna decisions, privileging Māori futurism in response to settler-colonial attacks on mātauranga. Māmā embarked on these reclamation journeys specifically for their tamariki, often carrying the weight to bear them from inheriting that load. Each in their own way, these māmā are contributing towards decolonisation as they move backward into the future.

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Glossary

anamata	the eyes of our mokopuna
Aotearoa	New Zealand
awa	river
hapū	subtribe; pregnant
hapūtanga	pregnancy
iwi	tribe
kaha	power, strength
kanohi ki te kanohi	in person, face to face
kapa	group, team
kapa haka	Māori performing group.
Kaupapa Māori	Māori research approach
kāwanatanga	government
kitenga	observation, perception, view
kōhanga reo	Māori language nest, reo Māori early childcare
kōrero	story
kupu	word
māmā	Māori mothers
manaakitanga	respect, hospitality, kindness
marae	tribal meeting grounds
māra kai	food garden
mātauranga	knowledge, tradition, epistemology
Moana-nui-a-Kiwa	Pacific Ocean
mokopuna (mokos)	grandchildren, descendants
onamata	the eyes of our tūpuna
oriori	a song or chant composed for a pēpi at birth/lullaby
pā harakeke	flax bush; generations
Pākehā	a person of predominantly European descent
Papatūānuku	Earth Mother
pepeha	tribal saying
pēpi	baby
rapunga	search, hunt, inquiry, investigation
rongoā	traditional medicine
tamaiti	child
tamariki	children
tā moko	traditional tattooing
tangata whenua	first people of the land
taonga tuku iho	gifts handed down through generations
te ao Māori	Māori worldview
te ao mārama	the world of light
Te Kōhanga Reo	reo Māori early childcare
te reo Māori	the Māori language
tikanga	protocols, customs
tinana	body
tohu	signs
tīpuna/tūpuna	ancestors
tuakana	elder brother (of a male), elder sister (of a female); mentor
wāhine	women
Wai	Water
waiata	song/to sing
wairua	spirit, soul
wairuatanga	spiritual knowledge
waka	canoe
wānanga	reo Māori tertiary setting
whāinga	pursuit, aim, goal, objective, purpose
whakapapa	genealogy, ancestry, familial relationships; relational connection
whakariterite	arrangements, planning, preparation
whakataukī	proverb
whānau	family, nuclear/extended family
whanaungatanga	the interrelationship of Māori with their ancestors, their whānau, hapū and iwi, and the natural resources within their tribal boundaries
whare	house
wharekura	kaupapa Māori secondary school
whare tangata	house of humanity; womb, uterus
whawhai	fight, strength
whenua	land
whiwhinga	attainment, procurement

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