



# Te Pā Tū Rangatira:

## A Kaupapa and Framework for Mokopuna Protection and Potential

Written by André Ngāpō

Ngāti Tamaterā, Ngāti Porou ki Hauraki, Ngāti Awa, Raukawa Te Au ki te Tonga, Raukawa ki uta, Ngāti Wehi Wehi, Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāpuhi

BSocSci, DipTeAupikitanga, DipMedArts, GradDipTch | Brainwave Trust Learning Designer and National Coach

*Nau mai, haere mai ki Te Pā Tū Rangatira! This article introduces Te Pā Tū Rangatira, a powerful framework and kaupapa centred around a symbolic pā – a space and community dedicated to the hauora of mokopuna. Drawing from mātauranga Māori and western research, Te Pā Tū Rangatira highlights the protective strength of collective aroha. It recognises the power of connection – to each other, to the wisdom of te ao Māori, to our wider world, and through wairua – to strengthen mokopuna, whānau and communities, and as rongoā to help mend the harms caused by risk factors from within and beyond the pā.*



## *The whare in the pā: a symbol of collective care*

*Picture a small whare – a house standing steady within the protective walls of a pā, a traditional fortified village. Inside the whare sits a group of mokopuna – tamariki (children) and taiohi (adolescents) – warming themselves alongside whānau by the heat of a fire.*

*Inside and out, the mauri (life force) of this whare and the people within glow bright and vibrant – mauri ora. Tonight, like most nights, there is lightness and laughter. The whare flows with energy, and as whānau settle to sleep, it is filled with calm – mauri tau. Moving gently among them is the hau*

*– the breath of life, an unseen current that weaves through the whare and its people, carrying warmth and wairua, vitality and balance.*

*The mokopuna are happy and well.*

*Surrounding the wider pā are the palisade walls, marked with pou (carved posts) standing like protective guardians, and within are other whare filled with aunties and uncles, cousins and elders, all watching, all caring. The rhythms of daily life in the pā reflect matua rautia – a way of raising mokopuna where everyone contributes with aroha to their growth and wellbeing. In this place, the wellbeing of every moko, of every person, and every whare is a responsibility for all.*

## Introduction

In te ao Māori, the imagery of a whare standing as a symbol of wellbeing, located within the pā – the traditional village space and the collective within it – offers a powerful metaphor for understanding what supports mokopuna to thrive.

More than simply a physical space and surrounding structure, a fortified pā (pā tūwatata) embodied protection, kinship, and leadership, carefully designed to hold and sustain its people. Our tūpuna knew that a single whare standing alone can be vulnerable, but when encircled by the collective strength and values of a community – the pā – it is more likely to flourish.<sup>1</sup>

This article brings to life the symbolic *Pā Tū Rangatira* – a model pā: a flexible, culturally grounded kaupapa (guiding philosophy), analogy and framework founded on the understanding of *matua rautia*<sup>2</sup>: the principle that it takes a collective/pā to raise a moko. Through this practice of *matua rautia*, the people of the pā sustain hauora – the outward vitality of body, mind, spirit and whānau.

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Hauora is an expression of a healthy hau, which is the vital essence of a person, place or object, and an unseen current of energy that passes between all things, binding them in a constant flow of reciprocity. When hau is flowing from a place of aroha (loving action), this positive current allows the mauri and wairua of one person to positively affect the mauri and wairua of another.<sup>3</sup> It is within a nurturing hau that the people of the pā flourish in mauri ora – a state of vibrant life-force.<sup>4</sup>

The pā is built upon the metaphorical whenua (land) of mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge systems),

supported by western research. *Te Pā Tū Rangatira* can help to guide how we as whānau, kaimahi, professionals, and communities encircle mokopuna with protection, support, and aroha – so they may grow to stand strong in their mana motuhake (autonomy).

Tū Rangatira means to stand in a way that reflects the strength, integrity, and consideration of a rangatira. Within the name *Te Pā Tū Rangatira*, there is a dual aspiration.

- **Pakeke (adults) standing with aroha as rangatira for mokopuna**

*A Pā Tū Rangatira* can be seen as a community where pakeke uphold a tikanga of aroha towards mokopuna. They work together to protect and nurture wellbeing and potential, guided by practices that hold both the values of the whānau and the uniqueness of each moko in ways that are tika – appropriate, fair, just, respectful, and true to the values of the pā. This is how each of us can stand as rangatira – not through status, but through action – stepping up together as a collective, for the wellbeing of our children and youth.

- **Mokopuna growing into their own rangatiratanga and mana motuhake**

Within the *Pā Tū Rangatira* the mana motuhake of each moko – their unique identity and autonomy – is nurtured. Pakeke support tamariki and taiohi/rangatahi to grow in their rangatiratanga, embodying the qualities of a rangatira who acts with consideration for themselves and others.

In this way, *Te Pā Tū Rangatira* is both a symbol and a framework – a way of seeing and a way of being. It invites us all to take our place in the pā, and to stand together, for the protection and potential of our mokopuna.

## The pou of *Te Pā Tū Rangatira*

*With the sun high in the sky now, the mokopuna look out towards the carved pou embedded deep into the whenua. Koro (grandfather) says that the pou do more than just mark boundaries and reinforce the palisade walls – they have been chosen as kaitiaki to the people within the pā. One pou hums with aroha – love expressed through daily acts of care. Others reflect essential aspects of the child's being: whakapapa, anchoring the moko to their lineage; mana,*

their spiritual power and potential; *tapu*, their sacredness under the protection of *atua*; and *mauri*, the living essence of their wellbeing. Others show the values of the pā. These pou stand tall for all to see, declaring the pā's promise: to honour the unique nature of every mokopuna and to uphold the values that protect them.



*Aroha is expressed through action; through a nurturing hau – an active, reciprocal flow of loving energy.*

The boundaries of a pā are often marked by pou (carved posts). *Pou whenua* are posts embedded into the land around the pā for such purposes as marking boundaries, proclaiming *mana whenua* (authority), and showing the history of the people. *Pou whakarae* are carved palisade posts that provide strength and reinforcement, and can symbolise leadership, authority, and protection.

Drawing from this imagery, *Te Pā Tū Rangatira* uses symbolic pou as guardians of mokopuna wellbeing. Surrounding the pā, the pou embedded into the *Pā Tū Rangatira* symbolise two main kaupapa:

1. **To represent and honour aspects of the mokopuna's holistic being:** Reminding us of the essential qualities all mokopuna are born with, such as their *mana* (power and potential), *tapu* (sacredness), and *mauri* (life force).
2. **To represent and highlight the pā's shared values:** Showing what is most important to that specific whānau or community, such as *manaakitanga* (care), *pono* (truth) or *kotahitanga* (unity).

These pou are not merely decorative – they are powerful reminders to the adults within and beyond the pā to protect, nurture, and honour each moko, drawing upon the ancestral energies that align with each pou to act as kaitiaki for the pā.

Because every whānau and community is unique, these pou are adaptable and chosen by the community itself.

### *Te pou o te aroha*

Although the combination of pou embedded within each *Pā Tū Rangatira* may change from one group or kaupapa to the next, one pou remains ever-present and foundational: *aroha*.

The importance of *aroha* is portrayed beautifully in the karakia, *Ko te Aroha Te Pou*:

*Ko te aroha te pou  
Poupoua kia mau  
Ko te aroha te pou  
Tiritiria kia ū  
Kia mau, kia ū te pou o te aroha  
i roto i tēnei whānau  
Whakamaua ki a tīna! Tīna!  
Haumi ē! Hui ē! Taiki ē!  
nā Katarina Mataira*

This karakia reinforces that *aroha* is not just a feeling – it is a pou. It is something to return to, again and again; something to embed, nourish, and hold firm within our whānau, our whare, and within our pā.

*Aroha* is expressed through action; through a nurturing hau – an active, reciprocal flow of loving energy. One example is when showing *ngākau aroha* – empathy and compassion – through unconditional

regard of ngā kare-a-roto (feelings), the holding of boundaries without judgement, and a caring, safe, and supportive presence.<sup>5</sup> Showing ngākau aroha to mokopuna can build within them a foundation of emotional security and mauri tau (a balanced and settled energy and life force), while for pakeke (adults), ngākau aroha can help us to remain open and receptive to other states of energy the tamaiti/taiohi may be experiencing, like mauri oho (from energised through to agitated and distressed) and mauri noho (from restful through to languishing).<sup>6</sup>

From this perspective, aroha is a vital source of the pā's energy, and the quality of its presence is a tohu of how well a pā is holding firm to the aspiration of standing as rangatira for mokopuna, to nurture their hauora, mana motuhake and rangatiratanga.

## *The pou of He Hīkoi Māhara*

An example of a set of pou that can work alongside aroha in the *Pā Tū Rangatira* can be seen in the interactive wānanga *He Hīkoi Māhara*, hosted by Brainwave Trust Aotearoa across the motu.

During this wānanga, whānau kōrero about the historical ways and wisdom of our tūpuna Māori, making links to their own positive stories and experiences of childhood and parenting, exploring how ancestral insights can support whānau in raising their tamariki today.<sup>7</sup>

The wānanga draws on four pou, each representing a foundational aspect of a child's being, all of which can be nurtured and upheld within the *Pā Tū Rangatira*.

- **Whakapapa** is the foundation of te ao Māori, connecting tamariki to tūpuna, atua, and all things in the physical and spiritual worlds. It is more than a family tree or historical account – it is a living map of a child's place within a deep web of interconnected relationships, and responsibilities, linking each person to the natural world, to people past and present, and to those yet to come. This principle of connection extends to all things – animate and inanimate, physical and spiritual – giving a lineage to our stories, places, knowledge, tikanga, and mātauranga

Strengthening whakapapa links for mokopuna, such as through the passing down of important pūrākau (for example, stories about the creation of natural landmarks) and pepehā (sayings related to people and places of connection),

can reinforce a sense of belonging and tūranga-waewae – a place to stand; not just a location, but a source of identity itself through whakapapa and kinship. In this worldview, one's sense of self is inseparable from the mountains, rivers, and lands of their ancestors, creating a deep and reciprocal bond.<sup>8</sup>

A strong connection to whakapapa can act as a powerful protective factor in many areas, for example, fostering identity and confidence that supports mental health and wellbeing.<sup>9</sup>

- **Tapu** is the sacredness inherited from the atua, recognising mokopuna as taonga to be honoured and protected. It reflects their divine connection and spiritual protection and carries an expectation that pakeke uphold and respect this sacred status.<sup>10</sup>

Tapu can be understood as a protective spiritual force that requires the creation of tikanga and environments which safeguard physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing.<sup>11</sup> This protection is both individual and collective, shaping obligations within the whānau, hapū, and iwi to act in ways that preserve the mana and wairua of the child, while sustaining harmony with the wider natural and spiritual worlds.

- **Mana** is the enduring spiritual power inherited from the atua (deities) and tupuna (ancestors). It is reflected in a child's uniqueness, abilities, and potential.

“Because of their intrinsic relationship to these spiritual worlds, the children inherited their mana (power, prestige). They were treated with loving care (aroha) and indulgence.”<sup>12</sup>

The community plays a critical role in upholding the mana of mokopuna through whakamana or mana-enhancing practices that can foster confidence, self-discipline, and a sense of responsibility.<sup>13</sup> As they grow through childhood and into adolescence, mana is increasingly expressed through mana motuhake (autonomy and independence), self-reliance, courage (*mana tū*), and for many rangatahi Māori the ability to navigate multiple worlds of intersecting cultures and identities (*mana tangatarua*).<sup>14</sup>

- **Mauri** is the unique life force within each moko, animating their body, thoughts, and emotions. It is an energy, a vital essence, and the spark of life – a dynamic force that exists within

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and between all living and non-living things, binding the body and *wairua* (spiritual essence), its vitality expressed through the flow of *hau* (the breath of life).

The *mauri* of mokopuna is influenced by both their surroundings and their relationships (*mauri tangata*). It is strengthened by positive actions like *manaakitanga* (kindness and generosity) but is diminished by harm and conflict. While nurturing relationships build up a child's *mauri* and their sense of belonging, harmful or neglectful relationships can weaken it.<sup>15</sup> This highlights the vital role of a caring whānau and community.

For mokopuna, a flourishing *mauri* is seen in *tohu mauri* – indicators of wellbeing such as good physical and mental health, and positive relationships.

For those facing life's challenges, strong support from pakeke and community can help to bring wellbeing back to balance – *mauri tau*, and to nurture a vibrant and flourishing life force – *mauri ora*.<sup>16</sup>

Like all pā, *Te Pā Tū Rangatira* is designed to hold what matters most to each whānau, hapori (community) and kaupapa. Any number of pou may be chosen depending on the values and aspirations of those who stand within the pā.

### ***The strength of the pā***

*The mokopuna know the strength of the pā. They feel it in the solid tūāpapa (foundations) beneath the whare, and in the strong tūāpapa of relationships; a foundation of whanaungatanga and aroha. They see it in the pou that stand like watchful kaitiaki, unshakeable and strong. Day to day, they are sustained by the gentle flow of hau that weaves between the whare, a current of connection and security.*

*But sometimes, they feel a tremor, a moment of weakness in the pā's embrace. It is the feeling of a whati (fracture) somewhere inside – a flurry of harsh words, a string of broken promises, moments when the flow of respectful aroha is disrupted. The koro and the nannies feel this tremor too. They know that the strength of the pā is not in being unbreakable, but in their swift and intentional work to mend these fractures, to restore the integrity of their bonds and keep the pā whole.*

### ***Protective and risk factors: what strengthens or challenges the pā***

*Te Pā Tū Rangatira* is a way of understanding the conditions that protect mokopuna and help them thrive. It represents the loving people, values, whenua, and forces that surround tamariki and taiohi, offering strength, connection, and stability.

Our tūpuna understood that mokopuna could be impacted by the energies, experiences and environments around them, and the tikanga of raising

tamariki they have handed down to future generations reflects this.<sup>17</sup> Protective factors<sup>18</sup> such as strong whanaungatanga, cultural belonging, aroha, emotional warmth, and consistent support<sup>19</sup> act like tūāpapa (foundations) – conditions that support the healthy development of mokopuna, while also buffering them from harm.

This is not to suggest the traditional pā was a place without issues or conflict. However, it was a resilient community with its own tikanga, such as *muru* (restorative justice) and *hohou rongo* (peace-making processes), to mend fractures, and ceremonial *karakia* to clear negative spiritual influences. Tūpuna Māori used these practices to restore balance and wholeness when harm occurred.<sup>20</sup>

Risk factors are those experiences or conditions that increase the likelihood of poor outcomes. While not all tamariki exposed to risk will experience harm, the likelihood increases when risks are many, intense, frequent or long-lasting, and supports are few, inconsistent, intermittent or inadequate, overwhelming a child's capacity to cope and thrive.

When the tikanga of aroha breaks down among the adults entrusted with the care of tamariki, risk factors may increase the likelihood of such experiences as abuse, neglect, and exposure to whānau dysfunction.

These types of experiences for tamariki can create a *patu ngākau* – a deep emotional wound, which may include *pouritanga* and *mamae* (emotional and physical pain/distress)<sup>21</sup>. Consequently, *whati* – fractures or breakages – can form in the child's *hauora*, and in the relational tūāpapa/protective foundations that are essential for a child's wellbeing.

Such fractures are a holistic state of harm: it means a child's *matea iho* (core needs) such as safety, stability and love can go unmet; their *mana* and *tapu* are less likely to be upheld consistently or at all; and the transmission of *hau* through the flow of connected, responsive and supportive interactions is far more likely to be disrupted, which in turn affects the *mauri*, *wairua* and *hauora* of mokopuna.

In these cases, wider support from within and beyond the pā is needed to help mend fractures and restore the flow of care around the moko and their whānau.<sup>22</sup> This is especially important as a potential absence of protective factors such as support, guidance, compassion and protection can cause further *patu ngākau* and *whati*.



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It is important to recognise that many of the challenges faced within the pā – here representing Māori whānau and communities – are intergenerational consequences of weakened protective tūāpapa/foundations and tikanga practices, eroded and

fractured over time by systemic inequities and structural forces. These impacts include trauma, poverty, and disconnection from te reo Māori, whakapapa, and whenua, alongside other forms of disadvantage. Together, they have reduced the capacity of many whānau and communities to provide the consistent, culturally grounded care that mokopuna historically received and fundamentally need to thrive.<sup>23</sup>

The next section explores a set of risk factors represented by the metaphor of *ngā āwhā* – harmful storms that historically eroded the strength and integrity of the pā, leaving an aftermath of stress and pressure that continues to this day.

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## ***The storms that tested the pā***

*The elders remember a time when the tremors grew deeper, a time when the whati were not just small cracks but great fissures, torn open by āwhā, destructive storms from far beyond the palisade walls. The first was a great and unrelenting storm: the harsh gusts of colonisation. Other storms followed, carrying the cold winds of racism and disconnection, threatening to tear down the pou, shake the whare, and scatter the people who protected the tamariki within.*

### ***Ngā Āwhā***

Even the strongest pā can be tested. The arrival of colonisation brought with it many risk factors for Māori – *Ngā Āwhā*, or storms – including migration and disconnection from whenua, marginalisation of Māori practices and culture, and racism.<sup>24</sup>

Metaphorically speaking, these storms battered every part of the *Pā Tū Rangatira* – from its foundations to its palisade walls. The result in real terms for te ao Māori was deep whati (fractures) in the integrity of Māori ways of living and being, with the majority of tūpuna Māori facing barriers in their ability and agency to live according to the tikanga and mātauranga they had always known. This damage weakened the ability of iwi, hapū, and marae/pā to hold and protect tamariki and whānau.

These forces of colonisation undermined the collective capacity of Māori to tū rangatira, challenging the integrity of traditional structures within te ao Māori in both spiritual and practical ways. For tamariki and whānau, the impacts of colonisation created deep whati in the foundations of identity and belonging. These fractures manifested as a severing of connections to whakapapa, whānau, hapū and iwi, reo, tikanga, and whenua that had long provided security, aroha, and collective care.<sup>25</sup> The resulting disruption caused patu ngākau to tāngata Māori as a collective.<sup>26</sup> At an energetic level, these whati caused a profound severing and impeding of hau, impacting hauora.<sup>27</sup>

The trauma of this disconnection continues to reverberate across generations, leaving many tamariki Māori disproportionately exposed to hardship and systemic harm.<sup>28</sup>

Today, Māori children are over-represented in negative statistics, including those related to poverty, state care, youth justice, and health outcomes, reflecting the enduring impacts of colonisation and structural inequities.<sup>29</sup> Large cohort studies, such as Growing Up in New Zealand, show how these inequities manifest early, affecting mental wellbeing, educational outcomes, and overall oranga.<sup>30</sup>

## **Trauma and healing: Strengthening the pā**

Naming Ngā Āwhā helps us see the full scope of the harm they cause – physical, emotional, spiritual, and intergenerational – and reveals the ways in which systems have sustained it.

Māori frameworks insist that trauma must be understood through a Māori worldview – for example, through a lens of connectedness to whakapapa, wairua, whenua, and whanaungatanga as sources of healing.<sup>31</sup> When these relational, spiritual, environmental and cultural linkages are ruptured, balance across hinengaro (mind), tinana (body), wairua, and whānau is disturbed. Genuine healing, therefore, is not about managing symptoms but about restoring these relationships.<sup>32</sup> This holistic approach to healing is a form of rongoā – the remedies and practices that help to restore balance, wholeness and wellness.

Crucially, Māori frameworks reject deficit thinking and embrace a strengths-based approach. Healing is not about managing symptoms – instead it is about transforming the conditions of harm. This requires a holistic approach that mends the whati (fractures) at every level:

- At the **relational level**, rebuilding protective connections;
- At the **foundational level**, repairing and strengthening the tūāpapa by providing the conditions that tamariki need to thrive, while providing support to heal the patu ngākau of trauma;
- At the **systemic level**, dismantling the conditions that perpetuate harm.

This healing process can lead to a restoration of hauora, with a vibrant flow of hau reconnecting us to the mauri, wairua, and aroha of our tūpuna practices, our whenua, to each other and to our shared moemoeā. Restoring these connections helps build the conditions that support and empower tamariki.<sup>33</sup>

Importantly, through this strengths-based lens, the trauma inflicted by the āwhā can be reframed as part of Te Pō – a place/time of literal darkness which can represent a period of transformation and learning: not an endpoint, but a stage in a journey of struggle that can lead toward Te Ao Mārama (the light).<sup>34</sup>

**Māori frameworks embrace a strengths based approach to healing, with the holistic mending of harm and trauma through transformational relationships, environments and systems – from Te Pō into Te Ao Marama.**

## **Mending the foundations**

*Many moons have passed since the first āwhā swept through the pā. Still, Koro sometimes hears their echoes – the faint creak of palisades once strained, the whati that mark both pain and survival. Scars remain, etched into the life of the pā, reminders of what was endured.*

*In those first quiet days after the storm, the kaumātua turned back to the foundational pou at the heart of their pā – Aroha. There, under its shelter, they spoke of the healing still needed, and of new pou to be raised. Manawaroa, to tell of their resilience and promise to mokopuna that the pā will endure. Rangatiratanga, to guard their mana and stand watch against storms yet to come. Other pou of hope and healing.*

*And as the new pou were raised, the people of the pā remembered the long patient*

*journey of healing through Te Pō – the quiet, generative darkness – and the healing still to come as they move towards the dawn of Te Ao Mārama.*

The rongoā offered by Te Pā Tū Rangatira is not a single cure, but a commitment to a range of practical, healing actions. Rongoā, in this context, are the specific remedies and tikanga (practices) that flow from a community's chosen pou (their visible commitments), designed to mend the whati and patu ngākau caused by these storms. The following are some examples of what this rongoā might look like in response to the different āwhā.

## Colonisation (Tāmitanga)

Te Pā Tū Rangatira offers a foundational rongoā for the harms of colonisation: to intentionally rebuild the very tūāpapa – the interconnected foundations of people, place, and practice – that were weakened.

Colonisation, both as a historical event and an ongoing system, led to widespread breakdown of Māori social structures like whānau, hapū and iwi, alongside widespread land loss.<sup>35</sup> This disconnection from whenua – not just soil and scenery, but a living entity whose health is inseparable from the health of the people it sustains – disrupted important relationships, practices and support systems that upheld Māori identity and wellbeing.<sup>36</sup>

Colonisation led to the weakening of traditional collective ways of caring –matua rautia – which were increasingly replaced by Western models, such as the nuclear family.<sup>37</sup> This contributed to disconnection from collective mātauranga including te reo Māori, understandings of te taiao (environment) and maramataka (Māori lunar calendar), whakapapa, pūrākau, and tikanga-pathways that are central to Māori ways of growing identity and wellbeing.<sup>38</sup> The legacy of this shift persists, with contemporary support systems often limiting the validity of mātauranga Māori, expression of tikanga Māori and restricting options for culturally appropriate care for tamariki.<sup>39</sup>

Rongoā to address the impacts of colonisation could look like a marae komiti committed to tikanga and practices fostering the pou of *Whanaungatanga*, *Taonga tuku iho* (treasured practices passed down from our tupuna) and *kotahitanga* (unity). Guided by these values, the komiti could establish wānanga for whānau to reconnect with ancestral childrearing

practices; create community spaces that actively support matua rautia; or advocate for fair and just policies that value and address the needs of tamariki Māori and whānau.

## Migration and disconnection (Nekehanga)

At a relational level, a powerful rongoā for disconnection is to intentionally rebuild the whakapapa-based networks that traditionally supported tamariki. Migration, urbanisation, and changes to whānau structures have disrupted these vital connections.<sup>40</sup> In te ao Māori, wellbeing is seen as a balance between internal and external worlds, including meaningful spiritual and relational connections.<sup>41</sup> When tamariki are disconnected from their whenua, whakapapa kōrero and local knowledge, they may miss out on important sources of strength and protection. These disconnections, combined with structural disadvantage, have been linked to poorer mental health and wellbeing outcomes for Māori whānau, including their tamariki and rangatahi Māori.<sup>42</sup> Signs of distress (tohu) may appear and be misunderstood if these deeper causes are not recognised.<sup>43</sup>

A relational rongoā for disconnection might begin with the decision of a hapori (community) to raise pou of *Whakapapa* and *Whanaungatanga* within their *Pā Tū Rangatira*. Tikanga based on these pou can create new pathways to belonging for those whose connections have been severed. For example, forming a kaupapa whānau around a shared interest like kapa haka, or establishing mentoring relationships where kaumātua can share general mātauranga Māori and te reo, kaumātua-led trips for tamariki back to their ancestral whenua, or the creation of digital taonga, such as online archives of local stories and waiata for whānau living far from home. These practices support a safe and nurturing foundation from which tamariki and rangatahi, if and when they are ready, can begin the journey of discovering their own identity and connections.

## Marginalisation of Māori knowledge (Whakakore)

Te Pā Tū Rangatira can provide a systemic rongoā for the marginalisation of Māori knowledge: to create spaces where mātauranga Māori is the foundation, and to advocate for the policy changes needed to uphold this.

When Māori knowledge systems are not reflected or valued in places like schools, health services or public policy, this can affect the cultural identity and confidence of tamariki Māori.<sup>44</sup> *Whakakore* describes the ongoing marginalisation of te reo, tikanga and mātauranga Māori, shaped by a range of factors such as attitudes and beliefs, as well as past and present policies.<sup>45</sup> For tamariki, the absence of their language and knowledge in their environments can weaken their sense of belonging and pride.<sup>46</sup> International rights frameworks – including *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* and *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People* – affirm tamariki Māori rights to culture, reo, and collective care, and call on the Crown to uphold these.<sup>47</sup>

A powerful rongoā is to stand up a pou of *Mātauranga Māori*, supported by a commitment to the pou of *Mana*. From this dual commitment, a pā could create tikanga that not only treasure a child's knowledge, but actively whakamana (enhance the mana of) the child as a carrier of that knowledge. For example, this could look like reclaiming and composing oriori that speak of the child's unique potential; embedding maramataka into daily life, a practice where kaumātua pass down intergenerational knowledge to guide tamariki in observing the rhythms of their local taiao (environment), thereby honouring them as active keepers of this wisdom; or advocating for local health policies that explicitly fund and recognise rongoā Māori.

## Racism (Kaikiri)

Mending the fractures caused by racism requires a holistic rongoā of whakamana (mana enhancement), one that works at every level to build a fortress of belonging.

As both a systemic and interpersonal force, racism has ongoing effects on tamariki Māori, contributing to unequal treatment and limited access to important resources.<sup>48</sup> Māori perspectives and knowledge have often been devalued or excluded, which can impact cultural identity and wellbeing. Research shows that racism can create ongoing stress that affects learning, behaviour, and health across the lifespan.<sup>49</sup> Rangatahi Māori experience higher rates of mental distress, including depression.<sup>50</sup> These impacts can fracture mana and wairua, highlighting the importance of system-level change and reconnection to culture, identity, and belonging.<sup>51</sup> This need for system-level change is evident today, as whānau

find their relational wellbeing ruptured when seeking support from systems that lack cultural awareness and fail to uphold Māori values.<sup>52</sup>

Mending the fractures caused by racism requires a holistic rongoā of whakamana (mana enhancement). This could mean a community raises pou of *Mana* and *Tapu*, supported by a deep commitment to *pono* (truth) and *tika* (justice). From these commitments, a range of tikanga could emerge, such as:

- **Creating a fortress of belonging:** This means intentionally surrounding tamariki with stories, images, language, and people that reflect their inherent greatness as descendants of *atua*. It is a space where their cultural identity is not just tolerated, but is the celebrated norm, nurturing their pride and spiritual resilience.
- **Holding space for pono**, where the truths of our tamariki and whānau can be spoken, knowing their kōrero will be held with dignity and care.
- **Building whaikaha** (collective strength and resilience) to challenge racism wherever it appears and to advocate for a system that is truly *tika* (just).

## The breaths of wairua and wellbeing

*Inside the whare, the mokopuna rest with whānau close by, warmed by their presence and care. Outside, the pallisade walls of the pā continue to stand firm, held by two interwoven forms of strength: the anchoring power of the pou, which stand as visible commitments to their values, and the restorative flow of Hau Oranga Wairua – breaths and winds of wairua connection that nourish, protect, and restore. Moving through every corner of the pā, these currents weave through the pou, the whare, and the people, keeping the village strong and connected.*

*One breath carries the voice and wisdom of the ancestors – hau tūpuna, wrapping mokopuna in the teachings of the ancestors.*

*Another wind – hau tūhonohono – flows from the closeness of relationships within the pā and extends beyond it, carried by those people who come from outside the*

**While the pou are symbolic anchors of the pā and of embedding aroha in all interactions, the Hau Oranga Wairua are an expression of aroha in action, through wairua connection.**



*village to offer protection, to stand alongside, and to help mend the whati, and the patu ngākau.*

*A third wind, hau o te taiao flows from the natural world that envelops and surrounds the pā, grounding and sustaining them.*

*And finally, hau moemoeā – the breaths and winds of dreams and aspirations – move through the pā with persistence and quiet strength, carrying the hopes and promises that the whānau and community hold for each moko, helping to guide them towards their future.*

## ***Ngā Hau Oranga Wairua***

For our tūpuna Māori, connecting with wairua – an inherent spiritual essence, present within and between all things – was common and natural. Within the *Pā Tū Rangatira*, we can imagine this connection through the metaphor of *Ngā Hau Oranga Wairua*. These are the four life-giving breaths of hau<sup>53</sup> that flow with wairua to nurture the wellbeing of all within it.

While the pou are symbolic anchors of the pā and of embedding aroha in all interactions, the *Hau Oranga Wairua* are an expression of aroha in action, through wairua connection. They are energetic spiritual currents flowing with the warmth of aroha, and their role is to connect people within the pā:

- to our tūpuna and atua;
- to the taiao;
- to the collective dreams and aspirations of past, present, and future generations;
- to each other and those beyond the pā.

These metaphorical currents are not passive; they are dynamic and purposeful. The kōrero of our kaumātua teaches that wairua is an energy of purpose, and that hau cannot be stagnant; it is a force that must always be in motion.<sup>54</sup> This active flow of hau, infused and guided by wairua, connects and nourishes through aroha, offering hope and sustenance. It vitalises our mauri, affirms our mana and tapu, and reconnects us to our whakapapa. In this way, it sustains the hauora of all,<sup>55</sup> guiding us towards mauri ora.<sup>56</sup>

## ***Ngā Hau Tūpuna (ancestral supports and connection – the breath of the ancestors)***

*Ngā Hau Tūpuna* represent currents of hau carrying wairua from atua and tūpuna to tamariki and whānau – a connection to ancestral strength and aroha.

When Māori knowledge is marginalised, *Ngā Hau Tūpuna* can help breathe life back into it – restoring mana and tapu; re-establishing whakapapa connections and cultural strength.<sup>57</sup> These ancestral currents are carried through practices – grounded in tikanga and aroha – such as karakia, pūrākau, oriori, birth rites, the sharing of intergenerational knowledge,

and the affirmation of positive ancestral narratives.<sup>58</sup> When we perform karakia or share a pūrākau, we are activating the spiritual current of hau that allows the enduring wairua of tūpuna to flow to us and be felt by us.

For tamariki, connecting to and reflecting on their connection to tūpuna can help them understand who they are and where they come from. Reconnection with ancestral practices – supported by pou such as *Mātūranga Māori* and *Taonga tuku iho* – can help to strengthen identity, foster belonging, and build protective pathways for tamariki and whānau through whanaungatanga, intergenerational knowledge, and

cultural practices grounded in whakapapa and tikanga.<sup>59</sup> For whānau, connecting to the wairua and wisdom of tūpuna involves reclaiming and embedding ancestral parenting knowledge, recognising these practices as protective factors.

For kaimahi and professionals, recognising *Hau Tūpuna* means seeing mātauranga Māori as a valid and valuable knowledge base for supporting development and healing – not as an optional extra<sup>60</sup>, but as foundational knowledge supported by strong evidence for the effectiveness of Indigenous approaches.<sup>61</sup>

### ***Ngā Hau o te Taiao (environmental supports and connection – the breath of the environment)***

*Ngā Hau o te Taiao* represent connections to the environment, with the flow of hau bringing the vitality of the natural world into the child to enrich both their mauri (life principle) and wairua (spiritual essence). These environmental energies can help to ground tamariki and whānau, bringing their bodies into rhythm with the earth's cycles including the maramataka and the seasons – nourishing their wairua through connection to places of significance and strength such as maunga, awa, moana, ngahere and whenua.<sup>62</sup>

Because people and the environment share interdependent mauri, connection to te taiao can calm and balance mauri (mauri tau), enliven mauri (mauri ora), and re-anchor identity through tūrangawaewae.<sup>63</sup> These currents of taiao connection can help heal the disruption caused by migration and disconnection and colonisation, which often sever sacred ties to land and place.

Practices such as returning whenua (placenta) to Papatūānuku, papakāinga living, and regular engagement with ancestral places are ways to connect to *Ngā Hau o te Taiao*, reaffirming that well-being is ecological as well as relational<sup>64</sup> and that aroha is more than just a human-to-human concept.

### ***Ngā Hau Moemoeā (aspirational supports and connections – the breath of possibilities)***

*Ngā Hau Moemoeā* are the energies of shared dreams and possibility, the energy that carries our collective



***Environmental energies can help to ground tamariki and whānau, bringing their bodies into rhythm with the earth's cycles including the maramataka and the seasons – nourishing their wairua through connection to places of significance and strength such as maunga, awa, moana, ngahere and whenua.***

vision forward. Moemoeā exist as potential, as a form of collective wairua – a vision for the future. The *Hau Moemoeā* is an active, energetic current that brings that potential into the world. It is the breath of hope, inspiration, and possibility that flows from that future vision and gives us the strength to work towards it in the present.

They link the present to the future, reminding us that our identity is anchored not only in our whakapapa, but in the intergenerational potential we hold for our mokopuna. This is a breath of agency, empowerment, and self-determination for the generations to come.<sup>65</sup>

Affirming mana and tapu, speaking greatness into mokopuna (through oriori, whakatauki, and everyday encouragement), and holding high collective expectations are concrete, mana-enhancing practices that shift the focus from deficits to *tū rangatiratanga*.<sup>66</sup>

This breath of aspiration can help to counter the hurt left by marginalisation and long-standing inequities, transforming inherited struggle into courage, aspiration, and leadership.<sup>67</sup> It sustains hope, direction, and perseverance, fuelling dreams and visions toward *mauri ora*.<sup>68</sup> For kaimahi and professionals, it represents a shift from a deficit-based model to a whakamana/mana-enhancing practice that actively nurtures the *rangatiratanga* and mana motuhake of the next generation.<sup>69</sup>

### ***Ngā Hau Tūhonohono (relational supports and connections – the breath of human relationships)***

*Ngā Hau Tūhonohono* represent the metaphorical breaths of interconnected humanity – the *hau* that carries the wairua of aroha through relationships, weaving people together in reciprocity and nurturing collective hauora. Rooted in the practice of *whanaungatanga*, the wairua of people can connect, merging to form a bond of deep purpose; to uphold the collective care of tamariki and whānau. These hononga (connections/relationships) extend beyond the *pā*, to include wider support networks such as whānau whānui, hapū, iwi, NGOs and governmental departments

These aligned *hau tūhonohono* energies of human connectedness can help to foster belonging, trust, and for kaimahi and those in decision-making and policy spaces, can remind us of our responsibility to help tamariki Māori to thrive; to support tamariki and whānau resilience, healthy growth and wellbeing.<sup>70</sup>



***Affirming mana and tapu, speaking greatness into mokopuna, and holding high collective expectations are concrete, mana-enhancing practices that shift focus from deficits to *tū rangatiratanga*.***

Relational support from caring and invested adults can help tamariki in many ways, such as: buffering toxic stress and helping them to regulate their big feelings and emotions; safeguarding their mana and tapu through everyday acts of aroha; showing manaakitanga; and collective responsibility.<sup>71</sup> This is a form of *mauri tangata* in action – the influence of life force through loving relationships, restoring balance across *hinengaro* (mind), *tinana* (body), *wairua* (spirit), and *whānau* (family).<sup>72</sup>

*Ngā Hau Tūhonohono* can help counteract disconnection by rebuilding networks of support and connectivity, buffering the impacts of racism by affirming a child's mana and embedding them in relationships that help them to manage stress and foster resilience.<sup>73</sup>

The collective work of kaimahi providing relational support is visible in the many pathways of Māori well-being, education and health promotion. This work is grounded in the understanding that for mokopuna, wellbeing is the product of a strong and healthy web of relationships: to people through whanaungatanga, to place through tūrangawaewae, to the continuous, living thread of past, present, and future through whakapapa, and to the spiritual world through wairua.



***Te Pā Tū Rangatira is a call to action for whānau, communities, and professionals to consciously raise the pou of aroha, weaving from it a circle of care where the hau of our mokopuna is nurtured and their hauora is made strong.***

This principle is embodied in foundational models like *Te Whare Tapa Whā*<sup>74</sup> and *Te Pae Mahutonga*<sup>75</sup>. It is powerfully illustrated by the *Te Kōhanga Reo* kaupapa, which enacts the *Pā Harakeke* metaphor<sup>76</sup>:

where the awhi rito (outer leaves) protect the rito (inner shoots), much like whānau protect tamariki.<sup>77</sup>

Indeed, numerous impactful and important kaupapa have provided frameworks and approaches – drawing on whanaungatanga and Māori values to heal and strengthen the relational fabric around tamariki.<sup>78</sup> Together, these kaupapa and the people that created them contribute to the *Hau Tūhonohono*; weaving a collective hau of aroha that nurtures and protects the wairua, mauri, mana, tapu and whakapapa of this generation of tamariki and those to come.

## Conclusion

*Te Pā Tū Rangatira* offers a way to remember, reclaim, and reimagine the collective strength that surrounds our mokopuna.

Grounded in mātauranga Māori and aligned with contemporary understandings of child development and wellbeing, it provides a pathway to navigate *ngā pikī me ngā heke* (ups and downs) of the past, present and future.

*Te Pā Tū Rangatira* is a call to action for whānau, communities, and professionals to consciously raise the pou of aroha, weaving from it a circle of care where the hau of our mokopuna is nurtured and their hauora is made strong. Alongside this, we must raise pou that honour the child's holistic being – such as whakapapa, mana, tapu, and mauri – and pou that reflect our shared values, such as manaakitanga, tika, pono, and kotahitanga. In doing so, we create a supportive and protective haven of belonging where our children and adolescents are nurtured to grow into themselves, while learning to support and care for others. We not only build a *Pā Tū Rangatira* – a village of strength, aroha, consideration and potential – but we also empower our mokopuna to stand in their own mana motuhake and rangatiratanga, growing ever autonomous, resilient, and connected.

By bringing attention to wairua that lives and breathes around us, carried on the currents of hau, we can draw from the image of a pā filled with the positive and restorative wairua energy of aroha, flowing from our tupuna and atua, our environment, our dreams and aspirations and our shared humanity – a flow that is a powerful rongoā (remedy), one that mends the whati left by the āwhā of colonisation and restores the promise of a thriving future for our mokopuna.

We honour the wisdom of our tūpuna, the strength of our whānau, and the promise of generations to come.

## Te Whakamutunga

*Enlivened once more by their connection to hau oranga wairua, the people gather at the pou of aroha and share a great hākari (feast). And later, after their waiata and karakia, the mokopuna sleep within the whare. In the gentle rhythm of their breath, their hau is settled, their mauri shines and their wairua is peaceful.*

*The pā will hold them. The people will raise them. Ngā hau oranga wairua will sustain them. Together, we all will help our tamariki mokopuna to grow well.*

## Te Pā Tū Rangatira – kia matua rautia!

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## Glossary of Māori words / terms:

**Aroha** – Love, compassion, empathy, and concern for others; a core value in Māori relationships.

**Atua** – Ancestor of continuing influence; deities or spiritual beings that have control over particular domains of the world.

**Awa** – River, stream.

**Hau** – An unseen current of energy that passes between all things, binding them in a constant flow of reciprocity. When flowing from a space of aroha (loving action), this energy allows the mauri and wairua of one person to positively affect another.

**Hauora** – A holistic state of wellbeing and vitality, encompassing the balance of body, mind, spirit, and whānau. In this framework, it is the direct expression of a healthy, flowing hau.

**Hau orangia wairua** – Life-giving spiritual breaths; the unseen currents that nourish and sustain wellbeing.

**Hau tūhono hono** – Relational breaths; the spiritual essence of connection and relationships.

**Hau tūpuna** – Ancestral breaths; the spiritual connection to ancestors and their wisdom.

**Hau moemoeā** – Aspirational breaths; the spiritual energy of dreams, vision, and future potential.

**Hapori** – Community, group, society.

**Hākari** – Feast, banquet, to celebrate with a feast.

**Hinengaro** – Mind, consciousness, intellect, and thought processes.

**Hohou rongo** – The process of peacemaking and conflict resolution.

**Kaikiri** – Racism.

**Kaimahi** – Worker, employee, staff member.

**Kaitiaki** – Guardian or carer; someone who protects and nurtures.

**Kaitiakitanga** – Guardianship, stewardship; the responsibility of care for the environment, for taonga and for people.

**Karakia** – Spiritual incantations or prayers connecting people to the spiritual world.

**Kaupapa** – A topic, purpose, initiative, or underlying philosophy.

**Kia Matua Rautia** – A whakataukī (proverb) which can be interpreted as "It takes a village/pā to raise a child," expressing the principle of collective childrearing.

**Kōhangā Reo** – A kaupapa centred on early immersion in te reo Māori me ūna tikanga, where whānau play an active role in their children's learning and the collective life of the kōhangā.

**Koro** – Grandfather, male elder.

**Kotahitanga** – Unity, solidarity, a state of collective oneness.

**Mana** – Spiritual authority, influence, status, and dignity inherited from atua and tūpuna.

**Mana motuhake** – Autonomy, independence, personal authority.

**Mana tangatarua** – The ability to navigate multiple cultural worlds and identities.

**Mana tū** – Courage, self-reliance, standing with authority.

**Manakitanga** – Kindness, generosity, and support; the act of caring for others.

**Manawaroa** – Resilience, perseverance, stamina.

**Maramataka** – The Māori lunar calendar, used to guide daily activities such as planting, fishing, gathering, and ceremony. It reflects the interconnected rhythms of people, the environment, and the wider cosmos.

**Mātauranga Māori** – A holistic Māori way of knowing, encompassing knowledge, understandings, and cultural practices that originate from past, present, and future Māori experience. It reflects Indigenous ways of engaging with the world, guided by te reo, tikanga, whakapapa, and relationships with land, ancestors, and communities.

**Matua rautia** – A collective approach to raising children where the entire community contributes.

**Mauri** – Life force or vital essence that animates and sustains all living things.

**Mauri noho** – A restful or languishing state of the life force.

**Mauri oho** – An awakened or alert state of the life force, from excited to restless.

**Mauri ora** – State of optimal health and vitality, with a balanced and flourishing mauri.

**Mauri tau** – Balanced and settled life force; a state of harmony and peace.

**Matea Iho** – Core needs, fundamental requirements for wellbeing. Encompasses a child's fundamental needs, e.g., survival, safety, security and care, and their relational needs, e.g., trust, respect, to be seen and heard, connection.

**Moana** – Sea, ocean, large lake.

**Moemoeā** – A dream, vision, or aspiration.

**Mokopuna/Moko** – Grandchild or descendant; often used broadly for future generations.

**Ngā Āwhā** – The harmful storms; a metaphor for the destructive forces affecting Māori wellbeing.

**Ngā-kare-a-roto** – Emotions; inner feelings and emotional states.

**Ngā piki me ngā heke** – The ups and downs of life; life's challenges.

**Ngahere** – Forest, bush.

**Ngākau aroha** – Empathy, compassion, kindness, and love; a deep and genuine care for others.

**Nekehanga** – Disconnection from community as result of migration.

**Oriori** – Traditional lullabies or chants composed for children, containing whakapapa and ancestral knowledge.

**Oranga** – Wellbeing; overall health and life balance.

**Pā** – A fortified village; a symbol of community, belonging, and protection.

**Pā harakeke** – A flax bush; a metaphor for the interconnected whānau unit.

**Pakeke** – Adult/s.

**Papakāinga** – A home base or original home on ancestral land.

**Papatūānuku** – The Earth mother, Earth.

**Patu ngākau** – A deep emotional wound or heartache.

**Pepehā** – A tribal saying, motto, or formulaic expression that encapsulates ancestral knowledge and values. While it can take many forms, it is most commonly used as a formal introduction to state one's identity by connecting a person to their significant ancestral landmarks, lineage, and people.

**Pono** – Truth, sincerity, integrity.

**Pou** – Post, pillar; a symbolic marker or foundational principle.

**Poutokomanawa** – The central supporting post of a whare, often symbolic of the heart or the spiritual and emotional centre of the people within. It represents strength, balance, and core values that uphold wellbeing.

**Pūmanawa** – Natural talents, intuition, or innate gifts.

**Pūrākau** – Stories, often used to convey traditional knowledge or lessons.

**Rangatiratanga** – Leadership, authority, self-determination; exercising autonomy and leadership over one's affairs.

**Reo Māori** – The Māori language.

**Rito / Awhi Rito** – The rito is the inner shoot of the harakeke (flax plant), symbolising tamariki (children). The awhi rito are the outer leaves that shelter and protect the rito, representing the role of parents, whānau, and wider community in nurturing and safeguarding the young.

**Rōpū** – Group, party, or cluster of people.

**Taiao** – Environment, nature, Earth, natural world.

**Taiohi** – Youth or adolescent/s.

**Tamariki** – Children.

**Tāmitanga** – Colonisation.

**Tāngata Māori** – Māori people.

**Taonga** – A treasure, something prized or highly valued.

**Taonga Tuku Iho** – In this context, treasured practices and mātauranga passed down by our tūpuna.

**Tapu** – Sacredness and spiritual restriction; something set apart due to its sacred nature.

**Te Ao Mārama** – The world of light; a state of enlightenment and understanding.

**Te Ao Māori** – The Māori world; encompassing Māori worldviews, values, beliefs, customs, and traditions.

**Te Pae Mahutonga** – A health promotion framework by Sir Mason Durie (1999), symbolised by the Southern Cross. Its four central stars represent mauriora (secure cultural identity), waiora (healthy environments), toiora (healthy lifestyles), and te oranga (participation in society). Two guiding stars – ngā manukura (leadership) and te mana whaka-haere (autonomy) – support balance across these pathways.

**Te Pō** – The darkness; a period of struggle or a realm of potential.

**Te Whare Tapa Whā** – A model of health by Sir Mason Durie (1984), portraying wellbeing as a wharenui with four sides: taha wairua (spiritual), taha hinengaro (mind and emotions), taha tinana (body), and taha whānau (family and social). Whenua (land) grounds them all. When these taha are well, people thrive; when one is weakened, hauora is affected.

**Tika** – Correct, right, just.

**Tikanga** – Correct procedure, custom, rule, code, practice, convention, protocol – the customary system of values and practices that have developed over time and are deeply embedded in the social context.

**Tinana** – The physical body.

**Tino rangatiratanga** – Absolute self-determination, sovereignty.

**Tohu** – Signs, symbols, or indicators that provide insight into a person's state or the environment.

**Tohu mauri ora** – Signs of a flourishing life force; indicators of wellbeing.

**Tūāpapa** – Foundations, base. In this framework, it refers to the protective factors (such as whanaungatanga and aroha) that form the foundation of the pā.

**Tū rangatira** – To stand as a leader; embodying the qualities of a chief.

**Tūpuna / Tipuna** – Ancestors.

**Tūrangawaewae** – A place to stand; a place of belonging through ancestral connection to the land.

**Waiata** – Song, chant.

**Wairua** – Spiritual essence; the unseen force connecting all things to the spiritual realm.

**Wānanga** – To meet and discuss, deliberate, consider; a forum for tribal knowledge, lore, and learning.

**Whakapapa** – The foundation of te ao Māori; a living map of a person's place within a deep web of interconnected relationships and responsibilities, linking the past, present, and future. This principle extends to all things – animate and inanimate, physical and spiritual.

**Whakamā** – Embarrassment, shame, shyness; feeling inadequate or awkward.

**Whakataukī** – Proverb or significant saying.

**Whānau** – Family, inclusive of extended, fluid, and kin-like bonds.

**Whānau Whānui** – Extended family, the wider kinship network beyond the immediate family.

**Whanaungatanga** – Kinship, relationships, a profound sense of collective belonging.

**Whare** – House, building.

**Whati** – A fracture, a break. In this framework, a metaphor for the risk factors and impacts that weaken the relational foundations of the pā.

**Whatumanawa** – Emotional depth and intuition; the seat of emotions.

**Whenua** – Land; also refers to the placenta, symbolising the connection to Papatūānuku (Earth mother).

**Whakakore** – Marginalisation and erasure of Māori knowledge.

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