



He Whare, He Taonga: Hauraki Wāhine and the Fight for Housing Sovereignty

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Te Whāriki Manawāhine o Hauraki

Abstract

Wāhine Māori (women), through Te Whariki Manawahine O Hauraki in the Waikato region of the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, are asserting their right to secure housing on their whenua (land), resisting a system that has long denied them stability, dignity, and tino rangatiratanga (autonomy). For generations, kāinga (home) has been central to Māori wellbeing, yet colonisation, state-imposed violence, and economic exclusion have dismantled communal housing structures. Grounded in a research project *He Whare, He Taonga* (A House, A

Treasure), this article amplifies the voices of wāhine Māori who are grandmothers and great-grandmothers, knowledge holders who have witnessed both housing insecurity and whānau (family) led resilience. Using Mana Wāhine methodology and Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū thematic analysis, it situates their experiences within broader Indigenous housing struggles, highlighting the intersections of housing poverty and whānau violence. While state initiatives continue to fail, papakāinga (original home, village or communal Māori land) and multigenerational living offer tangible solutions. Restoring kāinga is not just an aspiration but a right under Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) and an urgent necessity for Hauraki whānau.

Wāhine Māori are not only resisting systemic failures but leading the fight for tino rangatiratanga driven, Māori led, housing justice.

Keywords: Hauraki, Māori, wāhine, housing sovereignty, kāinga, papakāinga, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, tino rangatiratanga

Introduction

"Home isn't just four walls and a roof...it's where you feel safe, where your people are, where your heart is."

For Hauraki wāhine and their whānau, kāinga is more than a place to live; it is a foundation for wellbeing, whānau, whenua (land), and whakapapa (genealogy connections). Yet, for many, stable housing has become increasingly out of reach, replaced by displacement, emergency housing, and state-imposed barriers that sever connections to kāinga. This ongoing struggle is rooted in a history of land dispossession, discriminatory policies, and economic marginalisation that have systematically restricted Māori access to secure housing (Wilson, Mikahere-Hall, Sherwood, Cootes & Jackson, 2019).

This article emerges from a wider research project, *He Whare, He Taonga*, which explored the intersections between housing poverty and whānau violence (Te

Whāriki Manawāhine Research, 2024). The study applied a Mana Wāhine methodology (Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011) and utilised manually coded themes analysed through the Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū framework (Moyle, 2025a). Here, however, the focus is on the pūrākau (stories) of wāhine in Hauraki, particularly grandmothers and great-grandmothers who serve as intergenerational carriers of wisdom and cultural revitalisation.

As kaumātua (elders), they provide critical insights into kāinga and the erosion of housing security, shaped by systemic inequities, poverty, and colonisation. Their experiences reflect the dismantling of communal living and land-based sustenance through policies like the 1955 Māori Affairs Amendment Act (Waitangi Tribunal, 2006) and neoliberal housing reforms of the 1980s, which disproportionately impacted Māori (Cram, Berghan, Adcock, & Fowler, 2023).

Yet, amidst struggle, there is resilience. Wāhine and their whānau actively resist and reimagine housing solutions based on whānau, whakapapa, whenua, and tino rangatiratanga. This article centres their lived realities and aspirations for Māori-led housing policy, asserting kāinga as essential to identity, belonging, and Hauraki whānau wellbeing.

Housing Insecurity and Indigenous Women

Housing insecurity remains a significant challenge globally, disproportionately impacting Indigenous women and older women. Research shows that housing instability is deeply linked to systemic inequities, economic deprivation, and the ongoing effects of colonisation (Phipps, Dalton, Maxwell, & Cleary, 2019; Bhattacharjee & Narayan, 2024).

International research demonstrates that women experience heightened housing insecurity due to economic disparities, social exclusion, and discrimination in housing markets (Fraser et al., 2021; Pathak et al., 2019). Particularly vulnerable groups include older women, women with disabilities, and those from culturally diverse backgrounds who face barriers such as inadequate income and restricted pathways to homeownership (Bassuk et al., 1996; Jury et al., 2017).

In Aotearoa, housing insecurity is acute, with wāhine Māori experiencing significantly higher instability than Pākehā (Europeans) due to land alienation, economic marginalisation, and discriminatory housing policies (Fanslow et al., 2010). Many Māori tenants endure substandard conditions including overcrowding, dampness, and

unaffordability, particularly in Northland, Waikato, Hauraki, and Bay of Plenty (BRANZ, 2023).

In Hauraki specifically, wāhine Māori face financial constraints from historical employment discrimination and intergenerational dispossession (Te Whāriki Manawāhine o Hauraki, 2021). Housing insecurity severely impacts kuia and koroua (female and male elders), contributing to high rates of respiratory illness, cardiovascular disease, and mental distress (Te Whāriki Manawāhine Research, 2024).

Policy Failures and Systemic Barriers

Current housing policies in Aotearoa disadvantage wāhine Māori through restrictive eligibility criteria, deficit-based approaches to service provision, and failure to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations (Wilson et al., 2019). The removal of tamariki Māori (children) from wāhine due to poor housing exemplifies systemic entrapment, where state intervention prioritises punitive measures over meaningful support.

Reports from the Waitangi Tribunal (2006) and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing (2020) highlight breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in housing provision for Māori. The

government has failed to consult Māori in housing strategies, invest in Māori-led housing initiatives, or reform social housing policies that disproportionately exclude Māori.

Methodology

Elevating Wāhine Māori Voices in Hauraki

This research draws on Mana Wāhine methodology (Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2011) to elevate the voices of Wāhine Māori in Hauraki and examine the connection between mahi tūkino (violence) and housing poverty. A pūrākau (narrative) approach was used for qualitative data collection (Lee, 2009), alongside the 'Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū' analytical framework (adapted from Wirihana, 2012), and two original methods 'Brown Paper Bag' and 'Waha Pikitia' discussed further. Ethical approval was granted by Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC), 22 February 2023, Ethics application number: 2023-100.

A Framework and a Movement

"Mana Wāhine is a theoretical and methodological approach that explicitly examines the intersection of being Māori and female" (Simmonds, 2011, p. 11). It enables Māori women to define themselves through their own whenua-scape, rejecting external definitions (Simmonds, 2011).

This framework embodies both resistance against colonial violence and aspirations for liberation (Moyle, 2014). By centering Wāhine Māori in housing discussions, this study reveals critical insights into systemic barriers while honouring wāhine tīpuna (female ancestors') legacy. The participants demonstrated this reclamation through their participation and resilience despite limited resources.

Brown Paper Bag Method

The Brown Paper Bag method emerged during the research when standard materials were unavailable, requiring the team to repurpose brown grocery bags as writing surfaces during wānanga (learning and consultation) sessions (Moyle, 2025b). This practical adaptation developed into a methodological framework where participants and researchers used the bags to document experiences, thoughts, and solutions. The method operates as both metaphor and process guide: the bags served as accessible writing materials that could be transformed and reused, mirroring how knowledge and stories can be reshaped. Participants used the bags to capture their housing experiences in their own words, whilst the research team used them during analysis sessions to organise themes and insights. The approach reflects the resourcefulness of Wāhine Māori navigating housing poverty with limited

resources, turning constraint into creative methodology.

Waha Pikitia Method

Waha Pikitia is an original visual method incorporating photography, infographics, and multimedia to document the lives of marginalised communities (Moyle, 2025c). Wāhine asked for ways to see themselves beyond just quotes or transcripts. This led to the creation of Waha Pikitia, based on the idea that "a picture is worth a thousand words." It offers an accessible, self-determined way of communicating lived experience, adding to the decolonising aims of the research by enabling participants to speak through visual storytelling.

Wāhine and Interviews

Twenty-three wāhine Māori took part in the study through a random selection process. Eight were key informants working in social services or local government, recommended by other agencies. The remaining fifteen participants were recruited using an anonymised random selection process from a list of thirty eligible women in the Te Whāriki client database. Each had an established relationship with their Te Whāriki support worker, who facilitated engagement with the research interviewer. At the time of

interview, 15 participants were in varied housing situations: seven in emergency housing or a safehouse, three on whānau whenua, one in a caravan, one in her car, and three in private rentals. Semi-structured interviews ran for 40 to 80 minutes and covered background, concepts of home, safety and wellbeing, housing journeys, and aspirations. Whanaungatanga (developing relationships), karakia (prayer), and kai (food) supported rapport building, and in some cases Te Whāriki kaimahi (support workers) were present. Koha (donation) was provided, transcripts were de-identified, and each participant was assigned a code.

Causal Layered and Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū Analysis

Causal Layered Analysis (Inayatullah, 2019) and Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū (Wirihana, 2012) were used together to analyse participants' pūrākau (stories). The combination allowed for a deeper exploration of how systemic, historical, and cultural factors shape the present. The visual metaphor of a Kauri tree underpinned this analysis: leaves represent present-day issues, the trunk symbolises leadership, roots reflect long-term causes, the layered earth holds worldviews, and rocks embody enduring metaphors. Together, these frameworks created a three-dimensional view of the

relationship between mahi tūkino and housing poverty. Themes were shaped from verbatim quotes, enabling wāhine to speak directly to the study's overarching question through their own words and lived insights (Moyle, 2025a).

'Kāinga' as Collective Wellbeing

For older wāhine in this research, kāinga was more than a physical space; it was a living, breathing connection to whānau, whakapapa, and whenua. It was a place where mokopuna (grandchildren) ran freely, and where nannies passed down knowledge through pūrākau. The wisdom of kuia, as keepers of intergenerational knowledge, offers insight into the security, sustenance, and collective care that kāinga once provided.

Well after the gathering of my family on the one side of me, i te taha o tōku pāpā (my father's side), what was strong and evident in our home was the stories. We grew up on those stories, our history, and the principles we were raised with.

These reflections remind us that Māori have long lived in thriving kāinga, sustained by whenua and communal living, before these structures were systematically dismantled.

Kāinga Kaha

For many of the wāhine in this research, kāinga was not just one place, it was wherever whānau were.

Growing up, we moved all around the country, all around the North Island. We were always in Housing Corp homes, so that also meant we were in different places, sometimes in rough areas. But you know, we also lived in amazing areas where people knew one another, where neighbours shared kai, where the nannies and aunties next door would keep an eye on us. We belonged there, wherever we were, we belonged.

Some recall growing up in multigenerational households where whenua (land) as a living generous being, provided everything they needed.

Cause that's what I loved about our old house. We had feijoas, avocado, apricots, grapes, lemons, mandarins. We didn't buy fruit, we had everything we needed right there. My daughter could ride her bike around, we had a trampoline, a little pool. It wasn't a big house, just a two-bedroom backhouse, but it was enough. We didn't need much because we had each other, and we had our whenua.

For others, home was a place of safety, warmth, and laughter.

Home was always filled with people. Aunties, uncles, cousins...there was never just one family in the house. We had old mattresses stacked up against the walls for when more whānau would come to stay. My mum would make huge pots of kai, and if people turned up, there was always a plate for them too. We were poor, but we were rich in the way that mattered.

This collective approach to living meant that no one went without. Mokopuna were raised by multigenerational whānau, and kuia played a central role in passing down tikanga (correct ways) and mātauranga (knowledge).

Once you give whānau the ability to look after one another...where nanny looks after the moko, and the moko learn from their nannies...then the house is safer, and everyone thrives. We need more of that.

However, these ways of living were systematically and intentionally undermined.

Disruptions to Housing Security

Kuia recalled when home was stable, but that stability was undermined by land loss, government policies, and economic shifts.

Most of our houses were railway homes, or Housing Corp homes. Our people were workers of the railways, and those houses were built for us. When the railways closed down, Housing NZ took them over, and then everything changed. Those houses were meant to be for our whānau, but when the government stopped looking after them, they started falling apart. Then, the rents went up. We were being pushed out of our own homes.

During the 1980s and 1990s, neoliberal policies eroded Māori access to stable housing. Once, whānau Māori could use their family benefit to put a deposit on a house, but this was stripped away, and state housing became harder to access.

Through Māori Affairs, we could use our family benefit as a deposit for a house mortgage. My parents did that, and that's how they got their home. But all that good social investment in our people has eroded. Now, our kids can't even rent, let alone buy a home.

The rise of holiday home ownership in Hauraki pushed Māori further into precarious housing situations.

There are houses sitting empty, beautiful houses, but they belong to rich Aucklanders who only come down for the summer. Meanwhile, our people are living in garages and emergency

motels. What's fair about that? We've always been here. This is our whenua, our kāinga. But now it's like we're being told there's no room for us.

These disruptions led to generations of Māori moving from stable kāinga to unstable, state-controlled housing, often in cold, damp, or overcrowded homes.

Papakāinga: A Viable Solution

Despite these systemic shifts, the memory of papakāinga remains a solution for the future. Many older wāhine participants spoke of the deep loss that came when whānau were forced away from their whenua, but also the hope that whānau can reclaim these ways of living.

We were never meant to live like this, separated, struggling, looking for houses that don't exist. We always lived as whānau, with our kaumātua, our tamariki, everyone together. That's what we need again.

Yet, the ability to rebuild papakāinga is blocked by government policies that fail to recognise Māori land as a viable option for housing.

There are all these constraints around building on papakāinga. The white person's law has set us up to be homeless.

The whenua is yours, and you belong to it. But they make it so hard for us to actually live there.

Despite these barriers, Hauraki wāhine Māori continue to fight for housing models that honour their whakapapa and rebuild intergenerational kāinga.

If you become an owner of that property like you are now, you are wealthy... Wealth is in the land that we live upon.

For these wāhine, kāinga is more than just 'four walls', it is a connection to everything, a protective factor, a taonga (treasure), a way of life, and a source of sustenance from Papatūānuku (Earth Mother). It is central to their wellbeing.

Housing Precarity and Systemic Barriers

The security that kāinga once provided has been deliberately undermined by colonial policies, systemic barriers, housing shortages, and economic precarity. For many wāhine and their whānau in Hauraki, home has become a car, a motel room, women's refuge, or a space they must fight to keep.

There's no houses! Even renting, and the list is so long where you're even on

the Facebook pages looking for houses, and there's nothing.

Wāhine in this research speak directly to this systemic failure, describing the ongoing displacement they face. It is not just physical displacement, but also the emotional, cultural, and spiritual disconnection that comes with being denied a stable home.

The Reality of Houselessness

For many wāhine, the loss of secure housing has meant moving between temporary, unstable, and often unsafe environments.

A typical day [living in her car]... I wake up at 5am because I've gotta go to the local [town] toilets to have a quick wash down with my flannel... Have a quick wash, brush my teeth, try and clean myself up, spray myself with perfume, go back to my car, and then have a snack bar for breakfast because I didn't have dishes to carry around and stuff. Fold up my bed, fold up my stuff, so everything looks normal. Put the seat up, cover everything so it just looks like I've come from my own house and go to work. Start there at 7:30, work two jobs. After work I go back to my car. That was the daily routine.

For wāhine living in Women's Refuge, temporary housing has become their only form of stability.

Living here [Refuge], he [young son] says he wants to go home to here, because this has been our home for nearly three years. He's four, he'll be five in June. Even now, he knows he's never had a home. And he's calling this place his home. It is really quiet, it's peaceful, it's clean, it's tidy, you know... it's the little things. Yeah, you don't have to look over your shoulder. I get to the gate [Refuge], and I just look up; I'm home.

Yet, emergency housing is not a permanent solution. Many wāhine describe the uncertainty of their situation and how state-controlled housing systems fail to provide real pathways to stability.

The safe house is meant to be a short-term solution... but when there's nowhere else to go, we're stuck here. It's not healthy for our kids. We're safe here cause we got 24/7 monitoring. But we need counselling, we need therapists up in here. And not all of us are talkers. Not everybody wants to talk. But there's other therapy...and I know that's what my baby girl needs.

These pūrākau highlight the devastating impact of houselessness on wāhine and their tamariki, not just in terms of physical

shelter but also mental wellbeing, stability, and long-term healing.

The Struggle to Find a Home

Beyond houselessness, Hauraki wāhine describe the impossible challenges they face in securing stable housing, from state housing failures to racial discrimination in the rental market.

I have applied for what feels like 40 plus houses since I've been here [Refuge]. I've been to roughly 20 house viewings. The other 20 houses I applied for we didn't even make the shortlist. When I go to the viewings there's like 30+ other people there, all dying to get into this one home. I've talked to multiple homeowners on the phone. The calls start off real promising. They hear I have great credit, no criminal record. I always pay on time, clean and tidy. But as soon as they hear I'm a current MSD client, living in Women's Refuge, that's it. I don't hear back from them. Not even to say, sorry you didn't make the shortlist. Just no communication at all.

Wāhine Māori described experiencing racism and systemic discrimination that further limited their access to housing.

The one homeowner that I did meet, I got the feeling he saw that I was Māori and just wanted to make the meeting

quick. Never heard from him again. My nights are spent crying, because my family has stopped living. All I want is a home for my children.

Even Kāinga Ora, the state housing system provider, has failed to provide adequate, culturally responsive housing solutions.

Kāinga Ora said, 'Take a house in Auckland or go to the bottom of the list.' But home is Hauraki. I shouldn't have to leave my whakapapa just to have a roof over my head.

For wāhine who have left violent relationships, the housing system often forces them into impossible choices: return to unsafe environments or face houselessness.

One wāhine comes to mind... she had to leave Hauraki because that was her only option. They offered her a house in Hamilton, and if she didn't take it, she wouldn't have anywhere to live, which meant she had to return to a violent relationship.

Losing Hope in the System

For many wāhine, the repeated rejection, systemic barriers, and constant uncertainty have left them feeling defeated.

Why bother? That's how it feels. Why keep trying if it's just gonna be the same outcome? When I first came here, my goal was: find a house, find a house, find a house. Kids were in school, got my car legal, find a house...that was my goal. Since getting turned down for all of those houses, I've just pushed it aside now. I'm just waiting on Kāinga Ora. It really is, what's the word, debilitating?

The exhaustion of constantly fighting the system takes a toll, leaving many wāhine feeling like they have no choice but to accept whatever is given, even if it means unsafe, unsuitable living conditions.

They're not giving homes to our babies. And that's exactly what it is. If you're Māori, if you're a solo mum, if you're on a benefit your chances are near zero. They think we're just another 'problem to fix.

The current housing system and the housing deprivation experienced by Hauraki whānau represent a clear breach of Te Tiriti obligations, failing to uphold the dignity and sovereignty of Māori communities.

Reclaiming Kāinga: Whakapapa and Tino Rangatiratanga

We need to build kāinga again. We always lived together...our kaumātua, our babies, everyone. We need that back.

Despite the systemic barriers and displacement explored earlier, wāhine across our research projects continue to envision a future where kāinga is restored. Here, we examine the solutions wāhine and kuia have identified, from whānau-based housing models and papakāinga to policy change and self-determined housing development.

Rebuilding Papakāinga

One of the clearest solutions wāhine see is the rebuilding of papakāinga, not just as a housing model, but as a pathway to whānau wellbeing.

I'm privileged cause I come from a village. My children have often asked me, 'Mama, why don't we go to [bigger town]?' My response is that the most important gift I can give them is an intimate relationship with their nanny, their koro, their aunties, their cousins...we all grow up as one.

For wāhine, papakāinga is about more than just having a house, it's about creating

whānau-based communities where everyone contributes, learns, and thrives together.

We are evidence that it takes a village to raise a whānau. So many other whānau don't and then in our work with them, we become that village for them. We have to become their village for them because we have babies raising babies.

However, wāhine also recognise that current government policies actively block papakāinga development.

We want to live on our whenua, but the process to build on Māori land is so hard. All these rules, all these restrictions, yet somehow, rich Pākehā can build their million-dollar beach houses no problem.

A key solution is dismantling restrictive government regulations that prevent Māori from developing papakāinga on their own land.

There's lots of talk of 'partnering with Māori' in the housing space. Great, but we need to be developing papakāinga-style housing on state-owned whenua, not just our dwindling Māori land. That's how we grow whānau wellbeing and identity.

Kāinga as a Te Tiriti Right

Wāhine refuse to accept housing insecurity as normal; they see housing as a fundamental right under Te Tiriti o Waitangi and are calling for structural change.

Tiriti articles outline our rights as tangata whenua (indigenous people of the land), but we are consistently denied them when we try to access state housing. It sits under UNDRIP, it sits under UNCRPD, it sits under the UNHDR, and HDCR. It should be a Te Tiriti right to be housed, something that should be done naturally.

Many wāhine emphasise that housing policy must be led by Māori, with Māori, for the benefit of Māori, rather than being dictated by government agencies that have repeatedly failed Hauraki whānau.

We need to decolonise the way we are forced into this system. When we go into agencies, we look brown and are put at the bottom of the list. We need housing agencies that reflect us, that are run by our people, for our people.

The Crown keeps saying they're investing in Māori housing, but who gets the contracts? Pākehā developers. That's not tino rangatiratanga. We need full control over our housing future.

A critical solution is funding Māori-led housing projects that reflect Te Tiriti obligations and give Māori full autonomy over housing development and allocation.

Intergenerational Housing and Economic Empowerment

Alongside papakāinga and policy change, wāhine see financial empowerment as key to housing security.

We need more focus on home ownership, our own financial literacy, managing debt, saving, Kiwisaver. Our kids don't even dream of owning homes anymore, but we need to change that thinking. Affordable housing in Hauraki isn't affordable for us. It's for Pākehā. Meanwhile, our people are living in garages. What makes them think we want to live without our koroua, kuia, and mokopuna generations? Kāinga Ora builds houses for 2.5 kids and a nuclear family, but we live intergenerationally. That needs to change.

A solution is housing models that allow whānau to build intergenerational wealth through rent-to-own programmes, iwi-supported mortgages, and long-term investment in Māori-led community housing.

If we don't start owning our own land again, we will always be renters in our own country. That's not right.

Conclusion

Housing as a Pathway to Justice

For the Hauraki grandmother and great-grandmother participants in this research, housing is not simply about shelter; it is fundamentally about justice, sovereignty, and the right to live with dignity on whenua Māori. The question is no longer whether change is needed, but whether those in power (government, policymakers, and society) are prepared to listen and act. As one kuia put it:

Whenua, whānau, whakapapa, that's where the answers have always been.

Wāhine recall a time when kāinga was secure, intergenerational, and deeply connected to whānau support systems. This stability, however, was systematically

As one wāhine declared:

I refuse to let my mokopuna grow up like this. I will fight for them. Even if it's the last thing I do.

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About the Author

Paora Crawford Moyle (Ngāti Porou)

draws on over 30 years of social work, research, and advocacy experience to support Māori communities, standing with those most impacted by state systems and intergenerational harm. This work has influenced Indigenous child protection practice both here in Aotearoa and internationally. As Senior Research Fellow and Director of Research at Te Whāriki Manawāhine o Hauraki, they lead kaupapa Māori research projects that centre survivor voices, restore mana, and uphold Māori data sovereignty while building pathways to healing. Paora has developed innovative methodologies including Pū-Rā-Ka-Ū, and Waha Pikitia, now applied across housing, disaster resilience, and healing research in Aotearoa. Their work spans major inquiries, including the Waitangi Tribunal Oranga Tamariki Inquiry and the Abuse in Care Royal Commission, and informs national and local policy. Recognised with the Companion of the King's Service Order and the Health Research Council's Te Tohu Rapuora Medal, Paora also mentors the next generation of Māori researchers and practitioners, ensuring community-led knowledge continues to shape solutions for whānau and hapū.