The Closed Circle

Seven Generations, One Declaration — A Kaupapa Māori Case Study in Multigenerational Transmission and Historical Trauma Recovery

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Whakapapa of Colonisation Series — Restoration

Abstract

This kaupapa Māori autoethnographic case study examines the author's account of rupture and restoration across nine generations of whakapapa, taking the end of formal teaching at Te Rāwheoro as a historical point of departure. Bowen's (1978) multigenerational transmission process and historical trauma theory (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Duran & Duran, 1995) provide interpretive lenses; they do not establish the experiences of each intervening generation. Three personally significant appearances of whitu (seven) are read as convergent meaning within this account, without a claim of statistical independence. The author interprets her declaration against violence and poverty as a Generation 7 act of differentiation. Generation 8 concerns the gifts she sees becoming visible in her children; Generation 9 names her hope that her mokopuna will inherit fluency in both worlds as an ordinary starting point. That final outcome remains prospective. The case distinguishes historical record, family knowledge and first-person interpretation, and identifies archival and whenua-based research into Nōpera Rangīūia, Te Rāwheoro and the mōteatea as a next phase.

Keywords: multigenerational transmission, historical trauma, whakapapa, kaupapa Māori research, autoethnography, Te Poutama Ora

1. Introduction

This article sits within the Whakapapa of Colonisation series and examines the author's interpretation of an intergenerational pattern beginning with the end of formal teaching at Te Rāwheoro. The historical circumstances and precise date of that ending, including Nōpera Rangīūia's role, require further investigation. The author places herself seven generations downstream and identifies three appearances of whitu in her whakapapa and learning pathways. These form part of her meaning-making, while the family history and institutional records need to be considered on their own terms.

The aim is to document the author's account and examine how family systems theory and historical trauma theory illuminate it, while separating documented events, theoretical interpretations and whakapapa meaning. It also asks what changes when recovery in one generation becomes an inheritance in the next two.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Multigenerational Transmission Process

Bowen's (1978) family systems theory describes the multigenerational transmission process: the mechanism by which anxiety, unresolved conflict, and undifferentiated emotional material move through a family system across generations, typically without conscious intent on the part of any single generation. Material that is not processed — Bowen's language is that it is not 'differentiated' — is passed to the next generation largely intact, where it combines with that generation's own unprocessed material before being passed on again. The process requires no single generation to act in bad faith; it requires only that no generation does the work of differentiation.

In this account, the 'unopened case' names what the author understands as an inherited burden. Bowen offers a way to consider possible family processes; without evidence from each intervening generation, the theory cannot establish how the particular experiences travelled from Nōpera's time to the present.

2.2 Historical and Intergenerational Trauma

Where Bowen's model is generic to family systems, historical trauma theory specifies the colonial dimension. Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998) define historical trauma as cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, both over the lifespan and across generations, resulting from a group's experience of colonisation. Duran and Duran (1995) extend this with the concept of the 'soul wound' — a wound to spiritual and cultural identity inflicted by colonial suppression of Indigenous knowledge systems and spiritual practice.

The end of formal teaching at Te Rāwheoro can be considered within the broader transformation of Māori knowledge transmission during colonisation and Christianisation. The record presented here does not establish a direct causal link to the Tohunga Suppression Act 1907, or establish that Nōpera personally ordered the closure. Historical trauma theory helps interpret the significance of a disrupted knowledge line for this descendant; the precise historical sequence remains a question for further research.

2.3 Seven Generations as Comparative Context

Seven carries particular whakapapa meaning in this account through the author's generational count, Ariki number and Rōpū Whitu learning pathway. Clarkson, Morrissette, and Regallet (1992) discuss responsibility to future generations in an Indigenous sustainable development context. That comparison does not establish a shared Māori doctrine of seven generations or independently corroborate this whakapapa count. The meaning of whitu here rests on the author's own account and sources.

2.4 Developmental Staging and the Declaration as Differentiation

Levinson's (1978) account of adult transitions and Bowen's (1978) account of differentiation offer two possible ways of reading the author's declaration that violence and poverty would stop with her. The declaration is a first-person event; whether or how family patterns changed over time requires evidence beyond the declaration itself.

3. Methodology

This single-case autoethnography centres the author's lived experience and whakapapa within kaupapa Māori research praxis (Bishop, 1996; Smith, 2021). Materials described include family whakapapa, records of the author's reo and Mahi Wairua pathways, and her personal account of a declaration. The historical account of Te Rāwheoro, details of the intervening generations, and outcomes for descendants have different evidentiary bases and are identified accordingly. Further work with archival records and appropriate Ngāti Porou knowledge holders is needed before presenting a full reconstruction of Nōpera's life or the mōteatea attributed to him.

The ancestor at the centre of this account appears in published sources under several spellings. This article uses Nōpera Te Rangīūia throughout, the form held within the author’s whakapapa.

4. Case Narrative and Analysis

4.1 Te Rāwheoro and the Question of Interrupted Transmission

The end of formal teaching at Te Rāwheoro is the historical rupture through which the author interprets her whakapapa story. Nōpera Te Rangīūia is associated with the whare and with a mōteatea for his son; the exact circumstances in which teaching ceased are not established in this case study. 'The unopened case' is the author's image for possible effects of interrupted transmission, rather than a claim that a particular emotional state can be documented in Nōpera or every descendant. Her planned research on the East Coast will examine what was interrupted and what continued in other forms.

4.2 Three Appearances of Whitu

The author identifies three appearances of seven: her count of generations from Nōpera, an Ariki number that predates this analysis, and her placement in Rōpū Whitu during Mahi Wairua study. Their convergence is meaningful to her within this whakapapa account. They are not independent statistical measures of the same phenomenon, and no probability of chance convergence is inferred. The generational count and provenance of each element can be examined further in subsequent research.

4.3 The Declaration as an Act of Differentiation

The author's declaration that violence and poverty would stop with her is read as a commitment to change. Bowen's concept of differentiation gives one lens through which to interpret that decision. Her reo and Mahi Wairua studies give the commitment a concrete cultural setting. Neither the declaration nor the shared occurrence of seven alone demonstrates that intergenerational transmission has ended; the significance of subsequent generations must be described separately.

4.4 Generation 8: Gifts Becoming Visible

In her children, the author sees what she calls Full Manifestation: gifts carried forward as a result of recovery and renewed cultural and spiritual connection. This is her first-person reading of the family relationship, rather than an independently measured outcome for her children. It shifts the focus from

interrupting harm in Generation 7 to what may become available to Generation 8. Her grandfather's promise to God and her own promise to her father give this reading a further family and spiritual meaning.

4.5 Generation 9: A Prospective Inheritance

The author hopes her mokopuna, counted here as Generation 9, will grow up fluent in both Māori and Pākehā worlds without first having to recover what was interrupted. This is a prospective claim about the conditions she and her children are helping create, not an observed outcome. Nine also has meaning in the nine-dimensional structure of Te Poutama Ora; the correspondence is symbolic within this case and does not supply an independent theoretical prediction. The proposed sequence is recovery in Generation 7, visible gifts in Generation 8, and possible ordinary inheritance in Generation 9.

4.6 September and Iwa as Personal Meaning

The author also associates the timing of her writing and studies with her mother's September birthday and middle name, Iwa (nine). These details were not selected for the analysis, and she understands them as meaningful in her family story. They do not constitute methodological triangulation or independent confirmation of the historical and generational claims.

5. Discussion

For kaupapa Māori counselling practice, this account suggests asking how a person understands inherited burdens, available gifts and the future they want for their descendants. A declaration such as the author's may help articulate an intention and guide action, but its clinical effects cannot be inferred from this single account. TPO's Takutaku declaration could be examined in future practice research as one way of making such intentions explicit.

Bowen's model can help name a possible family process, while whakapapa, tikanga and spiritual reconnection give this author's account its particular context, consistent with Durie's (1998) placing of wairua and whānau at the centre of Māori health. The interpretation should remain responsive to the person and whānau involved rather than assume that all families follow the same generational pattern.

Within the wider retrospective on Te Poutama Ora's founding questions, this account also offers a first-person answer to the framework's question of inheritance: what is passed on without being chosen, and what one generation can choose to pass on differently. A representation is offered here of what that might look like.

6. Limitations

This is a single-subject autoethnographic interpretation. It does not independently establish the cause or date of Te Rāwheoro's closure, Nōpera's intentions, the emotional experiences of each intervening generation, or future outcomes for the author's mokopuna. Numerical correspondences have personal and whakapapa significance here but no demonstrated predictive or statistical force. The author's children's experiences are described from her perspective. A future phase of research on the whenua, in

marae and church records, and with appropriate knowledge holders could test and deepen the historical account, including the provenance and interpretation of Nōpera's mōteatea.

7. Conclusion

The end of formal teaching at Te Rāwheoro and the author's place in its descendant whakapapa provide the starting point for this account. Bowen's family systems theory and historical trauma theory offer ways to interpret her declaration in Generation 7 and the gifts she sees in Generation 8. Her hope for Generation 9 is that fluency in both worlds becomes an inheritance rather than a recovery task. The convergence of whitu and iwa remains meaningful within her account without proving causation or excluding coincidence. The circle identified here therefore opens a further research question: what did Nōpera's generation carry, what was interrupted, and what survived to be transmitted?

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