

Observing the Maori culture, and the traditions they honor, is an experience of observational inquiry. I had the chance to watch *Whale Rider* and observe the Maori tribe from afar. As mentioned in our notes, this experience “constitutes an inquiry into key anthropological themes including social organization and kinship, marriage and the family, the role of myth and the supernatural, and the nature of historical and cultural change, including the dynamics of leadership.” Throughout my observations of the Maori people I have noticed the importance of leadership within the tribe and its focus around the mythical “whale rider.” Paikia is the granddaughter of the chief, Koro, of the Maori tribe. Her mother and twin brother had both died during birth. The Maori people had been waiting for the new descendant of the whale rider that would lead the tribe one day. Pai has been raised by her grandparents and has upheld the traditions her grandfather has been continuing. Her entire life she has been discouraged from partaking in the traditionally male leader roles of the culture. Pai respects her culture and grandfather but has the nature gifts and calling to be a leader.

For a school performance, Pai invites her grandfather to be her guest of honor and read a speech dedicated to him to show her respect towards him. The Maori culture has a very patriarchal society where the head of the household is the position of power and respect. Pai shows leadership qualities and maturity beyond her years and continues her speech even though she is upset her grandfather does not show up to her performance. This made me question why he does not show up after everything she has done to prove her respect towards him. I also wondered how she could have so much strength to continue on with her speech even though her grandfather was not there to hear it. In the Maori culture women lead from the background while men lead upfront. All men have status, and women have power. This is evident when Pai’s grandmother supports her granddaughter even after Koro is upset with Pai for her actions. Pai shows great strength and shares her speech about being a great leader.

While observing the Maori culture and Koro, the chief, it is visible how tired a leader can become. Pai also states this in her speech. She says, “If knowledge is given to everyone then everyone can be strong and become leaders. Even the strong leaders can become tired.” This made me think about leaders in other cultures and how leaders have taken their positions and gotten to the roles they are, or were, taking. In many cultures, a leader is elected, appointed, or a natural heir to the governing position. The Maori culture has a chosen leader who shows all qualities of being a leader and a descendent to the whale rider. I also made note that both Pai’s father and her uncle have shown no desire of wanting to be the next chief. Why do they not want the chief position? Pai’s father is gone most of the time and only visits occasionally. He has adjusted to a new culture instead of embracing his own.

Paikia has fully embraced her culture and proves that she is fit to be a leader. She acknowledges the importance of her grandfather and his role in the tribe, as well as the responsibilities of a leader. How can such a young girl understand such an important role and be willing to sacrifice everything for it? While observing Pai,

and the Maori culture, I have inquired about the roles of women and men within our own American culture. Many women have become leaders within their fields of work and have become dominate in careers once led by men. I believe Paikia was also rising to accept the leadership position of her tribe as the first woman to embrace the qualities and role previously held by men in her family. Koro believes that it is not right for a girl to be in the position of leadership within the tribe, thus his opposition to Pai's natural interest and leadership qualities. The traditional gender roles are challenged as Pai has grown and embraced her true characteristics and abilities.

Participation observation is a way to be a part of another culture and see things through their eyes. Beliefs and traditions are just two of the many parts that are observable in the Maori tribe. Through observation there is inquiry and through inquiry cultural traits of other cultures, and your own, are easily brought to mind.