

Māori People as Primary Representations of Māori History

by
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1. Introduction

The title of this paper is somewhat inaccurate in conveying my real intention. Suggestively, it is a little more "political" in tone than I hoped because what I would like to speak about is the subjective journeys and pathways taken by Māori individuals and their communities toward knowledge of their past. Hence, my thoughts alight upon this rather spiritual occupation and not the hardened, intellectual banter associated with articulating Māori rights in the field of New Zealand Historiography, important as this is.

Having said that, however, I need to articulate something that is a little critical in tone as it is here that we find the explanation for the title of this paper. As I was reading the programme for this conference, I perused the theme entitled "Constructing ourselves through history". This title was appended by the following explanation: *the different forms history is taking - museum exhibitions, Waitangi Tribunal reports, television series, films - approaches and interpretations.*

I was struck by this theme title for two reasons. Firstly, it perpetuates the view that history becomes history only when it is recorded. "The different forms history is taking" implies this view. However, in my view, history is history: the past, time before the present. How we choose to encounter it, is the domain of the representations of history, whatever form they take. Which leads to my second point. For some reason, human beings were left off the list. Humans are still not considered as representations of history, despite the rise of oral history in world historiography.

It is these views (among others), which are implied and expressed everywhere in New Zealand society, that, to my mind, cause real problems for Māori. These views somehow devalue the journey Māori take toward knowledge of their past and their representation, their custodian or kaitiaki role of their history. It alienates humans from their history. Technology is seen as history, not humans.

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This view remains despite the clear understanding by all that books, films and the like are useless without people. It is people who think up books, research them, write them and read them. Despite this irrefutable fact, books especially, retain their hallowed status. I have even seen organisations in New Zealand describe books as the repositories of New Zealand culture. I disagree entirely. People are the repositories of New Zealand culture. I think we need to halt the view that books can represent the entirety of human experience. Don't get me wrong, books are important, but not for this reason.

Certainly, books may contain information unknown by contemporary generations, however, it is only humans who can render that information useful and relevant.

The consequences of this exclusive technological view for a colonised culture are numerous, one such being the relentless and subtle undermining of the estate of the individual. Where once Māori individuals in traditional society were lauded as *maunga kōrero* repositories of stories, *pūkenga* learned individuals and *pātaka iringa kōrero*, storehouses of knowledge, today individuals are encouraged to view technology, latterly computers, as those repositories.

The consequences continue further. The absence of human beings on the list demonstrates the ongoing failure of the dominant culture of this country to see history as a healer, as an empowering force. Yet this is precisely the dominant theme of this late 20th century Māori cultural renaissance. Everywhere we find evidence of the ability of Māori history, when repatriated to Māori, to raise self-esteem, self-worth, to heal. Sometimes the evidence shows the healing power of Māori history to be extraordinary as in the case of those Māori who return from the abyss of abuse and other dreadful social circumstances.

My intention today is to remind us of this phenomena, to talk a little about the repatriation of Māori history to Māori people and to promote the idea of Māori as primary representations of Māori history.

2. Journeys and Pathways

The common Western term for research procedures is methodology. I like to use the terms pathways and journeys because these two terms hold strong, clear images in the mind. Methodology, as a term, takes a bit of work to see the idea in ones mind. Upon hearing journeys and pathways, the image is immediate. Journeys and pathways also have an element of mystery about them. And it is the mystery perhaps that excites us a little. Methodology, no doubt, has a healthy intellectual pedigree but it remains formidable, even to pronounce.

We all understand that research into ones personal background and identity represents a very different kind of research to say investigation of the 1917 flu epidemic or Māori educational achievement in the years 1975 - 1980, although the latter may fall into the former. However, despite their obvious differences, they each possess research pathways and journeys.

My concern is with the pathway a Māori individual takes toward knowledge of his/her own background. Further, I like to explore the mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) explanations and analyses of this journey.

We are told time and again of the centrality of *whakapapa* (genealogy) to a Māori understanding of the past. Indeed whakapapa is posited *as* history. If this is so, the first step for the learner/researcher is to understand their relationships with those living who are most closely related to them. Obviously this includes parents, siblings, cousins, grand-parents and so on. This often involves understanding relationships between the dead as well. Through this close-to-home investigation, slowly a view of the *whānau* (family) draws into focus.

In essence, this is an investigation of one's whakapapa. There are simple procedures here to follow that will hold meaning and be relevant to inquiry into hapū and iwi history. However, the same principles hold. That is, connections between the living and the dead, connections within generations and between generations, the need to find good guidance and the essential spiritual nature of the inquiry.

It follows, therefore, that the researcher then draws a picture of his/her *hapū* (subtribe) and then *iwi* and then *waka* (canoe). The backbone of this picture is whakapapa and the stories, traditions and narratives associated with the people noted in the whakapapa forms the body of information which is part of the estate of those people. Fragments of information, both oral and written, are woven together to form this fabric of storytelling which verifies, enhances and exposes relationships between people.

The individual, therefore, is the contemporary, physical world expression of their whakapapa. That is why, in my view, Māori people are the primary representations of their history. We are irrefutable products of it. We are bound inextricably into whakapapa fabric. And once bound, we can not leave except by consciousness. That is, we are always physically connected to our whakapapa but we can remain ignorant of it. The researcher/learner brings together fragments of information which reconstruct the spiritual and intellectual sides of whakapapa, what I call "whakapapa consciousness". And it is the reconstruction of whakapapa consciousness that preoccupies much Māori activity today.

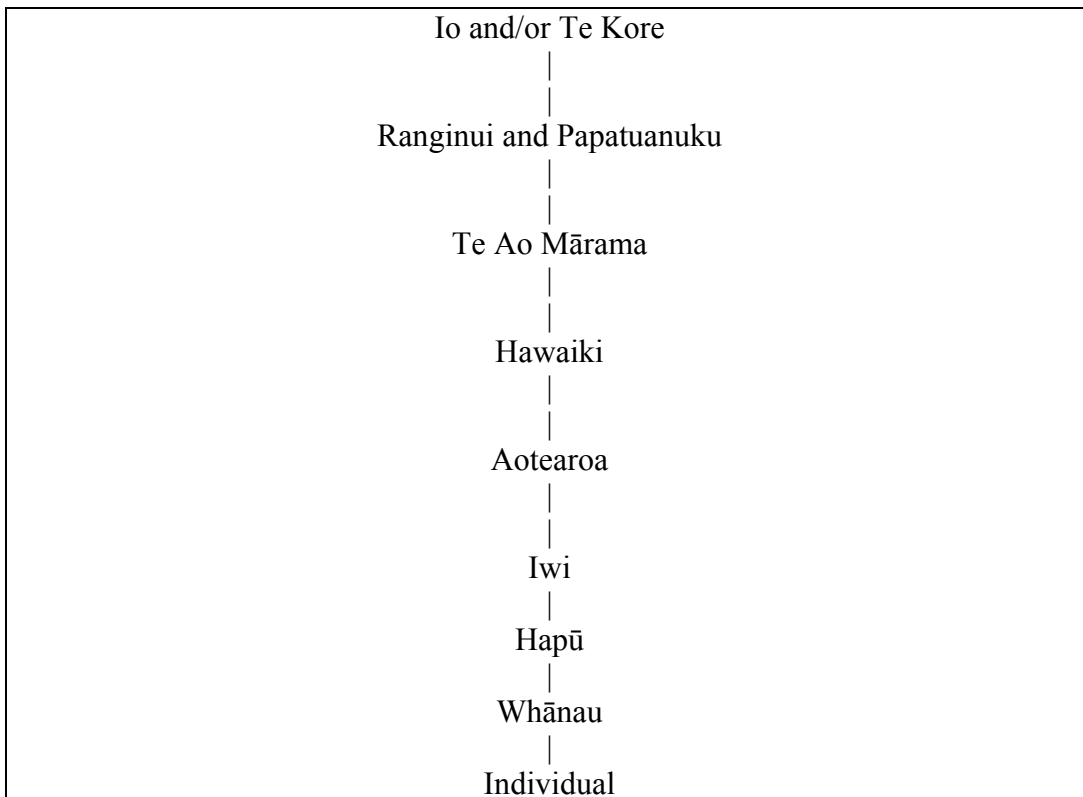
Whakapapa in traditional times, and to a certain extent today, is a tool used to analyse, rationalise and account for phenomena in a contemporary reality. An important part of the use of this tool, is the desire to locate oneself, the person using whakapapa, within the whakapapa itself. Subsequently, a relationship is established between the individual and the subject being analysed. An authority is established. This relationship then empowers the individual to develop a view on the subject he or she is analysing.

Given this principle, it is of great importance for a contemporary Māori person to locate his/herself in whakapapa when encountering his or her past. The reason for this is that so much of his/her past was created under these principles of

whakapapa. The individual is more likely to draw a closer understanding of this past if he/she operates the same principles that created that past. This is not to say that a person who has no knowledge of their whakapapa can not encounter their past, but experiencing their own whakapapa gives rise to understanding that of their subject. To this end, the view that Māori are the primary representations of Māori history assists this principle of whakapapa based inquiry.

Having researched whānau, hapū, iwi and waka history, where does the researcher proceed from there? To answer this question, we need to examine narratives and traditions relating to Hawaiki and creation. Here we find that before the arrival of waka to Aotearoa. Māori resided at Hawaiki. This is the Hawaiki period of our history and is typified by the escapades of certain culture heroes. These figures include Māui, Tāwhaki and others. Preceding the Hawaiki period is that of the "Gods" and Ranginui and Papatuanuku.

There is some debate in Māori society as to the existence of a supreme entity tradition. For our purposes here, it is not important to investigate this debate. However, it is useful to outline the periods of Māori history, the broad sweep, from creation to the present:



Hence, a whakapapa based research methodology ultimately leads the researcher towards the beginnings of time. However, the cultural symbol of such a methodology is the journey within and into Te Ao Mārama. The explanation for this is as follows.

3. The Te Ao Mārama Wisdom Tradition

The world view held in traditional Māori society is deeply informed and influenced by a series of traditions relating to the origins of the world. Here we find the various iwi Māori unanimously subscribing to the view that the world originated in spirit and that spirit is considered “ultimate reality” as Māori Marsden has written.² There is some debate as to whether there was a supreme being tradition, however, all seem to accept the view that out of this early period arose Ranginui and Papatuanuku. Further still, tribal narratives show that Ranginui and Papatuanuku were at first clasped together but later were separated by their children.³ Ranginui went “up” and became the sky and Papatuanuku remained “below” and became the earth. The result was the creation of the world we know today, which is termed “Te Ao Mārama”.

Certainly, tribal narratives continue in detail about the creation of the natural world, flora and fauna, earthquakes and other natural phenomena, however, it is my view that this entire history took place within a framework bounded by Ranginui and Papatuanuku. They represented the stage within which all of these events took place: the creation of the forests, birds and animals and so on.

I would like to argue that that framework is known as Te Ao Mārama and that it exists to this day. It’s story, the story of Te Ao Mārama finds its “backbone” in whakapapa: all things are connected in time and in space by whakapapa. Tribal narratives maintained within families over centuries of time offer the “flesh” to the skeletal patterning of whakapapa.

Collectively, these tribal narratives, waiata, karakia, whakataukī and so on, come together to form our literary tradition which I call the Te Ao Mārama Wisdom Tradition.⁴ Whereas many cultures around the world maintain their wisdom traditions, the Biblical wisdom tradition for example, that of the Greeks or the Chinese or the Jewish Wisdom Tradition, I like to argue that our tupuna possessed such a wisdom tradition which is unique to the people of Polynesia and I call it the Te Ao Mārama Wisdom Tradition.

And it is the repatriation of the Te Ao Mārama wisdom tradition to our people that preoccupies me and arguably the bulk of Māori people today.

² See “God, Man and Universe: A Maori View” by Māori Marsden in *Te Ao Hurihuri* edited by Michael King. Longman Paul 1985.

³ See, for example, “Ngā Kōrero a Mohi Ruatapu”, edited by Anaru Reedy, p. 17. Canterbury University Press, 1993.

⁴ I came across this term “wisdom tradition” in the United States but for the life of me, can not remember where. If any one can help me concerning the origin and use of this term, I would be grateful. Write to me at Te Wānanga-o-Raukawa, P.O. Box 119, Ōtaki.

4. Implications for the field of Māori History

The implications of the Te Ao Mārama Wisdom Tradition for Māori history are many. I will try to outline a few.

- a. I do not like the term Māori history as it does not enjoy a pedigree sourced in traditional culture. I am keen to empower a world view, the Te Ao Mārama world view and apply it not only to traditional Māori culture but any phenomena, Māori and non-Māori alike.
- b. Subsequently, I am not so preoccupied with defining Māori history but rather what is the Te Ao Mārama wisdom tradition.
- c. From a Te Ao Mārama perspective, whakapapa is critical to any analysis of Māori history. In fact one would argue that whakapapa is critical and influential in about 99% of Māori history.⁵
- d. History, in the Te Ao Mārama view, commences at the beginning of time and continues to the present. Its existence is not validated by the written word.
- e. Human history is only part of the history of the universe. Whakapapa is used not only to account for humans but for everything in the universe. Hence, all things are accounted for in that whakapapa and human history is only one part of an overall universal history.

The Te Ao Mārama Wisdom Tradition possesses certain principles and philosophies useful for the analysis of any phenomena. These philosophies and principles empower a particular view on reality that may be absent from another cultural perspective and analysis. One such principle being the notion of the *uri* or descendent. All things in the universe are descendants and my view that Māori people are the primary representations of their history is drawn from this principle of the Te Ao Mārama Wisdom Tradition.

5. Conclusion

I have argued that for Māori at least, we are the primary representations and representatives of our history. We need not subscribe to the view that technology contains the primary representations of our history. Allied to this view is the need to renew and create *pūkenga*, *maunga kōrero* and *pātaka iringa kōrero* in succeeding generations and to ensure that they are as much in our future as they are in our past.

We are the primary representations and representatives of our history because we are products of whakapapa. We can not physically divorce ourselves from whakapapa, we are inextricably woven into our whakapapa, we are whakapapa, we are history.

Alienation from whakapapa takes place through consciousness only. There is much evidence available, however, demonstrating the mistake in divorcing Māori people

⁵ I think it is possible to have Māori people doing things, which form a part of Māori history, that is not informed and influenced by whakapapa. Certain parts of Māori migration to Australia, for example, could be shown to be divorced from a whakapapa reality. But then again, why not a whakapapa based analysis of this kind of phenomena anyway?

from knowledge of their past, particularly their ancestral past. Māori history and mātauranga Māori can heal and empower Māori.