



An Overview of Tohungatanga in the 21st Century

Table of Contents

An Overview of Tohungatanga in the 21 st Century.....	1
Table of Contents.....	2
Acknowledgements	3
Introduction.....	4
What is Mātauranga Māori?	5
Overview.....	6
Tohunga Knowledge	10
Te Reo.....	11
Whakapapa.....	13
Conclusion	15
References.....	16

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Introduction

The concepts of Mātauranga Māori (indigenous Māori knowledge) relate to the continuum of Tohungatanga (priestly knowledge), the loss of which has left many scars on the holistic health and well being of the people, the land, the waters, the air, the bush, and the wildlife. The preservation and transmission of Tohunga (high priest/ess) knowledge (tohungatanga) is vital to sustain the future generations of all living and non living things in the metaphysical world of Māori. There is no doubt that the enforcement of Christianity together with the Tohunga Suppression Act has played a dominant role in the obstruction of traditional Māori healing practises. In fact, colonisation has had a huge impact on the dis-connection of many of the indigenous peoples to their body, mind and spirit as well as the natural concept of one-ness with the ancient ancestors that reside above and below. The paper will firstly determine what mātauranga Māori is from a Māori world view. It will provide an overview of a reading from the book 'Tohunga, Hohepa Kereopa' and cover some of the principles therein.

The late Hohepa Kereopa discussed how he was unable to find an appropriate vessel to house this traditional knowledge so instead of taking his taonga (treasure) to his grave as many other elders of his ilk had done therefore he chose to preserve his mātauranga in written form (Moon. 2003; Stirling & Salmond, 1980). Consequently, the paper will examine the position of Paul Moon as the author of the book and provide an explanation of the position of Kereopa as the co-author of this book through his uninterrupted dialogue. The two most important aspects of tohungatanga therefore will be identified as te reo Māori (language) and whakapapa (genealogy).

What is Mātauranga Māori?

The tangata whenua (people of the land) seem to have adopted the name 'Māori' which means natural or ordinary (Pere, R. Personal Communication. Tuai. 2004) even though the original source of the word came from the first settlers of Europeans to describe the people of Aotearoa (New Zealand) (Aranga, 2002). The word *Mātau* means to 'know' or have an 'understanding' while the word *ranga* derives from the action to weave (Aranga, 2002). Mātauranga Māori is therefore defined as the process of '*weaving an understanding*' of Māori indigenous knowledge (Aranga, 2002. p.7).

Winiata declares that Māori constructed a knowledge system that was inclusive of spiritual knowledge to explain their understanding of the world: *The explanation of human behaviour that is based upon traditional concepts handed down through the generations*' (Royal,1998. p.76). Mātauranga Māori is inclusive of all knowledge that pertains specifically to the Māori culture in verbal and non verbals forms like for example; *hanga whare* (house building), *raranga* (weaving), *waiata* (songs), *whakapapa* (genealogy), *whakairo* (carving), *whakatauki* (proverbs), (Wiri, 2001), *ngā Atua* (Gods/esses), *romiromi* (deep tissue bodywork), *mirimiri* (spiritual healing), *rongoā* (a range of natural healing therapies and medicine), *haputanga* (fertility), *karanga* (spiritual calling), *ngā whetu* (reading the stars), *pūrākau* of historical events (stories), *whai-korero* (speech making), *tangihanga* (rituals of death), *powhiri* (welcoming rituals), *waka* (the lores of canoe), *tohungatanga* (Māori spiritual healing rituals), to name but a few and there are so many more.

In a narrative to Salmond, Eruera Stirling claimed that Mātauranga was a blessing that guided one to do things the right way (Stirling & Salmond, 1980). Traditional learning came about through observation and participation (Pere, 2003) but with the colonising of the tangata whenua (people of the land), much of the beliefs, customs and rituals of the indigenous people were replaced with what was considered to be a superior knowledge base. The academic writers of those times classified the metaphysical relationship Māori had with their ancestors who were landscaped in our natural environment as mythological through their lack of understanding and cultural indifference (Aranga, 2002). One such Tohunga (high priest) who lived and breathed a life of genealogical oneness with all that exists in the universe was Hohepa Kereopa.

Overview

Although the book 'Tohunga' was written by Paul Moon, the majority of the dialogue was spoken by Hohepa Kereopa, a world renowned tohunga of Ngai (tribal) Tuhoe descent from Waimana. The interpretation of tohunga knowledge Kereopa shared is mātauranga Māori in its essence with personal vivid stories of some of the traditional concepts and principles of Māori healing. This may well have been his last exhaustive effort to pass on his whakaaro (thoughts or opinions) of tohungatanga to fulfil his lifetime destiny as a tohunga. Kereopa spoke about the challenges he faced in finding the right vessel to not only hold the knowledge but more importantly to live by the teachings and protect the knowledge (Moon, 2003). As a result of this, Kereopa sought the expertise of Paul Moon in the quest to preserve the indigenous knowledge of tohungatanga for future generations.

The manner in which Kereopa tells his stories is simple and uncomplicated unlike some writers of esoteric lore. His dialogue is recorded exactly as he speaks using words like 'whatnot' and sometimes he tells stories in riddle form and it is only if you have experienced that exact thing would you know what he was talking about. Perhaps this is one of the ways that Kereopa managed to reserve the content of the ancient knowledge for those who could relate to what he was disclosing, those who can keep the intended knowledge secure (Moon. p. 105).

Through the lens of a Tohunga, the 'traditional, authentic Māori world view survive (Moon, 2003. p. 85).

One observation of the survival of tohungatanga was the insignificance of the 'female tohunga' perspective. In fact, the subject did not even warrant a heading throughout the entire book even though Kereopa says that women were the 'most powerful tohunga' (Moon. 2003, pp. 87- 88). Even Moon observed how 'women tohunga' are a class that have been ignored in any literature until now for Kereopa makes mention of women practicing tohungatanga for their people as though it was a passing thought;

Most people don't know today, but women are the most powerful tohunga nowadays, there are none. Not really anyway (Moon, 2003. p.28).

Irrespective of the fact that the cousin of Kereopa, Dr Arikirangi, Turuki Rangimarie, Rose Pere, an internationally acclaimed Tuhoë (tribal name) Tohunga (Keeper of the secrets) who was prophesied by Te Kooti, resides on the other side of the Urewera ranges (Ofsoske-Wyber, 2009).

Kereopa downplays the subject of tapu (sacredness) nevertheless, however small the token of acknowledgement may be, a morsel of bread in the pocket or a flick of his finger in the tea cup, the fact remains, Kereopa still practised the rituals to ensure the lores of tapu were not compromised (Moon, 2003). His explanations of mauri (life force) in healing sessions were practical and based in a physical and spiritual reality. The influence of Christianity become evident when he touches on fear and magic that the missionaries have long accused Māori tohunga of creating in their work (Moon, 2003).

The exorcism of ngangara (spiritual entity) are very rarely mentioned in academia so Kereopa was very brave to do this in public as normally this is performed but not often explained (Moon, 2003). The theory on karakia (prayer), to listen more than speak, the intent being to sacrifice something in order to effect change, was quite profound. The rest of his whakaaro (opinion) on karakia was somewhat lacking in depth though, especially seeing that karakia is such an essential part of tohungatanga. One needs only watch a films of Kereopa in action to see that he was a walking, talking encyclopaedia in terms of tohungatanga so perhaps he was purposefully withholding certain parts of the esoteric knowledge as Te Kauae Runga (Upper jawbone), reserved only for higher learning (Moon, 2003; Royal, 1998).

I believe that each person who takes out a leaf of knowledge opens themselves up to receive more knowledge, and so the things that keeps tohunga going in the end is that the knowledge survives, even though it is not passed on in the way it used to be (Moon, 2003, p.105).

Moon was an experienced writer of Māori history so I would imagine that he was well aware of his role in the metamorphosis of mātauranga huna (hidden) that reached out in written form to the entire world, not just Māori (Moon, 2003). The introduction of the book shows the position of the author with examples of academic writers who participated in the annihilation of the tohunga and the supposed obliteration of the Māori race (Moon, 2003). Moon's apprehension to reveal centuries of accumulated wisdom and insights to people who may misuse it was met with humble assurance from Kereopa and his dialogue ran as a commentary without interruptions over several months so as to ascertain '*the interconnectedness of different themes*' (Moon, 2003, p.86). In so doing, Moon was able to maintain the authenticity of the body of knowledge whilst maintaining the mana (authority) of the tohunga.

Through his dialogue Kereopa admits to testing those who wished to acquire this knowledge (Moon, 2003) but in this case, it was Kereopa who sought after the expertise of Moon, not the other way around. His position was to transmit the mātauranga huna (hidden knowledge) in writing to those who were in the right frame of mind, spiritually and mentally to receive the wisdom and knowledge of the tohunga; '*the knowledge protects itself from being exploited*' (Moon, 2003, p.12). The information that Kereopa shared is probably only a fraction of the knowledge accumulated from many lifetimes and sifted into some semblance of priority so that those working in this vocation may gain some sense of direction through the underlying themes, issues and principles that exist in the life of the tohunga (Moon, 2003).

Tohunga Knowledge

The traditional tohunga were repositories of Te Kauae Runga (the upper jawbone) which symbolises the celestial realms of esoteric learning (Wiri, 2001). Much of the training for tohunga worthy of higher learning was reserved for traditional whare wānanga (higher schools of learning). This learning was considered tapu (sacred) because of the type of consciousness taura (students) were guided into, involving the spirits of deceased ancestors (Royal, 1998). On reflection though, it is doubtful that the whare wānanga was the only learning institution for tohunga as there is no mention in academic writings of female Tohunga learning at whare wānanga and yet historically, the Māori culture was never gender exclusive of ariki, rangatira or tohunga.

Female tohunga still exist today in New Zealand like for instance, Dr Rose Pere from Waikaremoana, the late Te Awhina Riwaka and her mother who taught the infamous Kapi Adams, the late Olive Bullock from Wanganui, Aroha Yates Smith from Hamilton and Atarangi Muru from Auckland, most of whom have had supportive male figures in their lives at some time or rather. Nevertheless, with generations of colonizing Maori knowledge, recording tohungatanga without bias in the 19th century was a challenge for Māori male authors and Royal describes it as being; 'a philosophical minefield' (Royal, p.12).

There are no educational institutions that teach spiritual healing rituals in its entirety and there are still so many facets of tohungatanga that are not even written about like for instance: romiromi (deep tissue bodywork), takutaku (prayerful songs to invoke the Atua), mirimiri (spiritual healing), wai (use of water to holistically cleanse), matekite

(spiritual vision), whakapapa of the Atua wahine (genealogical lines of the female Goddesses), the anatomy and pressure points on the body, the origins of healing in ngā whetu (the stars), haputanga (spiritual and physical bodywork in fertility and pregnancy) and spiritual cleansing ceremonies. Through various mediums of technological media that have subliminally devalue Māori and their body of spiritual healing knowledge, the loss of metaphysical values and beliefs that once were a 'way of life' become a reality.

One such loss was evident in the exorcism that resulted in the accidental drowning of Janet Moses in a bath at her home in Wainuiomata (Simon, 2009). Even though there were kuia and koroua present at the time, no-one there understood that the spiritual cleansing rituals of a 'pure' are to be traditionally performed in the ocean or the river. In answer to this karanga (spiritual call) the revival of ancient knowledge is being sought by Māori in a quest to decolonize mātauranga Māori.

Anne Salmond, admitted that she did not record all of Eruera Stirling's traditional knowledge, as there were certain "*genealogies, karakia, patere, certain waiata and historical stories of the tribe,*" that he would not comment on so his silence was respected (Stirling & Salmond, 1980. p. 248). The reo of the old tohunga caused linguistic difficulties for Salmond as she felt that her reo was not up to task and some words were so old that they cannot be found in any of the Māori dictionaries (Stirling & Salmond, 1980).

Te Reo

The most important aspect of tohungatanga is Te Reo (the Māori language). The Māori language is not just the arrangement of kupu (words) and grammatical sentence

structures and idioms as it is seen in these contemporary times. Rather, the true *reo* of the ancestors is about the vibrations that bring about a deeper understanding and meaning to life. The late Hohepa De La Mere called this *reo* 'the unspoken voices of nature' which is often used by *tohunga* as a natural resource for intuitive diagnosis. Sir James Henare aptly describes this in the following statement:

In the grander scheme of things, the traditional understanding of the voices of nature are what Papa De La Mere likened to the 'mandelic sounds of nature' and can be experienced in the jolt of an earthquake, the piercing song of a bird, the rustling of the leaves, the rumbling of thunder before a storm, the bolt of lightning in the night sky, the towering waves of a tsunami, the babbling brook, the cry of a whale or the intangible path of a tornado. There are many more *tohu* - (*sign*) *nga* (plural) that the ancient unspoken *reo* offers us through the *mātauranga* (knowledge) of *tohunga* that are not fully accounted and are open to critique and debate.

Salmond argues that researchers must have a thorough understanding of *te reo* and must be able to speak the Māori language in order to understand the form of *mātauranga-a-tohunga* being expressed (Stirling & Salmond, 1980). While it is important to have a certain degree of understanding the spoken language of Māori, the level of fluency in the unspoken spiritual *reo* is just as equally important. There is however, no way of truly measuring the spoken or unspoken *reo* in the Māori culture.

In terms of performing effective *karakia* or *takutaku*, it is vital that one not only understands the *kupu* but knows the nature of the *Atua* (spiritual phenomena) being invoked. However, the words and phrases recited must be matched with the intention of

the karakia and this does not mean the person has to be a fluent speaker of te reo for the karakia to be effective. Taking all these factors into account, both the unspoken and the spoken reo are vital for 'the Maori language is the most essential feature of the Māori culture' to ensure the holistic wellbeing of Maori and the survival of matauranga Māori (Dewes, 1981, p.47). Tau (cited in Wiri, 2001), believed that a solid understanding of the Māori language was a critical factor to get a complete grasp of Māori epistemology which inextricably links te reo and whakapapa within the realms of tohungatanga.

Whakapapa

An important aspect of tohungatanga is whakapapa (genealogy). Authentic tohunga are well versed in whakapapa, many of whom can whakapapa back to the Atua (Gods) and even back to the beginnings of time. Even though, Kereopa avoided the subject of whakapapa, Paul Moon observed that this was one subject that Kereopa had skated around despite his encyclopaedic knowledge (Moon, 2003). Tapsell describes whakapapa as:

Genealogy; to layer one upon the other, kin ties, systematic framework ordering descendants under common ancestors; genealogical descent lines connecting gods with all living things (cited in Wiri, 2001. p. 200).

Whakapapa has been used to explaining how the ancestors show relationships, explain the origins, classify and group different kinds of plants, animals, trees and tangible and intangible phenomena in the natural world (Royal, 1998).

In the study of tohungatanga, the whakapapa of the Atua (divine energies that reside above and below), the tipua (supernatural phenomena like the rainbows), the kaitiaki (spiritual guardians) are the ancestral healing tools. Walker explains whakapapa as a theoretical framework of the creation, the universe and the origins of the Gods that descend right down to the living ancestors of today (1996. p.169). Whakapapa has traditionally been considered tapu (sacred) with an understanding that '*the tapu of that (whakapapa) consciousness*' involves the wairua (spirit) and the mauri (life force) of the ancestors who have passed on (Royal, 1998, p.11). An understanding of whakapapa involves knowing the different roles the Atua play in the healing realms. It requires an appreciation that the Atua are not separate from us in time but rather timeless in acknowledging the past, the present and the future as one single reality (Royal, 1998).

Linking this spiritual theory with the reality of actual practice, the late Hohepa Delamere, an internationally renowned Tohunga from Whitianga, returned his student to Tangaroa (spiritual phenomena of the waters) and Hine-moana-nui (divine feminine element of the waters) for 'pure' (a holistic cleansing ceremony). Similarly, the personification of the Atua as whanau (family) members and kaitiaki (guides) explains how Dr Pere describes Tawhirimatea (spiritual phenomena of the winds) and Hinepukohurangi (divine feminine of the mist) who appear for spiritual clearings (Personal communication, Tuai, 2006).

Dr Pere once encouraged me to link into Tumatauenga, the keeper of the violet flame for healing. Not understanding this concept, I challenged her as I only knew of Tumatauenga as the God of war. Dr Pere quietly asked who had told me that Tumatauenga was the God of war and when I discovered that I had read it in a book written by some pakeha (European) man, she sighed and replied '*exactly*' (Personal

communication, Tuai, 2005). On reflection, this understanding of Tumatauenga and tohungatanga for that matter has come from the state conditioning of western educational institutions that have very little understanding of te ao Maori (world).

Conclusion

In summary, the loss of tohungatanga knowledge has been discussed. The effect this loss has had on the holistic health and wellbeing of the indigenous people of New Zealand has been examined. The relationship between the physical and personalized spiritual environment and phenomena in which we co-exist has been revealed. An example of how far removed we are as Maori from tohungatanga was made evident by the example of the death of Janet Moses and poses as an opportunity for us to learn from this experience as tangata whenua.

The quest to preserve and pass on tohungatanga as vital knowledge for future generations may still be the responsibility of tohunga, who protect the knowledge and its sacred consciousness. The study recommends that the body of tohungatanga knowledge is only meant to be handed down to those who can house, protect and secure the information as discussed in this paper. The existence of the female tohunga in academia has been examined through the overview of the book 'Tohunga; Hohepa Kereopa. Some of the key principles of tohungatanga were discussed. The spoken and unspoken aspects of te reo were defined in terms of tohungatanga and clear links were made to whakapapa as the ancestral source of tohungatanga.

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