NŌKU TE AO
LIKE MINDS

SERIES 3

MĀORI : A SPIRITUAL PEOPLE

TE RAU ORA

TE KETE POUNAMU

SERIES THREE

MĀORI : A SPIRITUAL PEOPLE

Māori are the indigenous people of Aotearoa who once lived a life that celebrated their spiritual attributes and emphasised connections between physical and spiritual elements of the world (Barlow, 1991) Reminiscent in the term 'tangata whenua' (people of the land) Māori were deeply rooted within an indigenous cultural belief system that included Papatuanuku (earth mother), being the source of all life, of nourishment and shelter (Shirres,1998). From this relationship, the spiritual connection and association between Māori and their whenua (land or mother earth) was imperative to ones wellbeing. Often revered in customary practices such as in the burying of a child's whenua (after birth) or the return of a deceased person to one's ancestral land to ensure the strong link with ones whenua and whakapapa aimed to continue the spiritual ties. The subsequent impact of land loss experienced by generations of Māori has had a significant and negative effect upon Māori spirituality.

Spiritual beings with supernatural features, or atua were part of the belief system of Māori, some atua and their personifications were common to all Māori and there were more exclusive atua within hapū (Pere,2006). The term atua was applied to ancestral spirits, the spirit of the unborn child, primal forces or beings and natural phenomena. It later became a term adopted after Pākehā missionaries arrived to denote the (Christian) god (Pere,2006).

Ranginui (Sky father) and Papatuanuku (Earth mother), the primeval parents and their tamariki (children) were atua. Procreation that took place between Ranginui and Papatuanuku occurred in a world of darkness. To let light into that world, Tane Mahuta separated his parents Ranginui and Papatuanuku, which then formed the world that man now lives in.

"I te kore, ke te po, ki te ao mārama"

Out of the nothingness, into the night, into the world of light (Barlow, 1991)

Each atua possessed a range of roles and skills, which they became known for; for example, Tane Mahuta atua of forests, birds, Tangaroa of the sea, Tawhirimatea of winds and elements, Rongomatane of the kumara and cultivated crops, Haumiatiketike of the fernroot and wild fruits and herbs, Tūmatauenga of man and war and Whiro of evil, disease, and pestilence (Barlow, 1991, p11).

This cultural construct of atua and primeval beginnings provided a foundation of which various principles amongst Māori were practiced in everyday activities to seek guidance from atua, and care was taken to preserve, protect and maintain the association with them (Shirres, 1998). Customary practices (tikanga) demonstrated and upheld a set of rules for living, and maintained relationships with others within a system of social control, which also had deep spiritual meaning.

Based upon the traditional Māori belief system, all life is created spiritually first then physically. Everybody has wairua (spirit) as it is implanted at birth in the mother's womb, and is bound to a person for life (Moko-Mead, 2003, p55).

When a person dies, the binding power of the mauri (life essence) is withdrawn from atua. The mauri is disconnected and the wairua takes flight to the summit of death. As the wairua of the deceased returns to atua, it enters a place of darkness and awaits the arrival of its guardians who will lead them through to whei ao – the state of transition to the world of light beyond, the spirit world (Barlow, 1991, p149).

He manawa ka whitikia, he mauri ka mau te hono, ko koutou te hunga mate, kua wehi koutou i te hono, kokiri wairua ki te tihi o mauri aitua

The heart of a person has a limited temporal function, but the mauri is the power that binds the spiritual and the physical (Barlow, 1991, p148).

According to Moko Mead (2003), a person's wairua can detach itself during dreams and may warn of impending danger through visions. It is the wairua thought to be subject to damage through the bad deeds of others such as abuse, neglect, violence and makutu.

This overall traditional worldview reflects a culturally bound philosophy, ideals and norms of a people who adhered to a worldview about creation, and concepts such as tapu, mana and noa further informing their system of tikanga and cultural practices.

Tapu

Tapu is the 'sacred' or 'to be set apart' (Barlow, 1991) condition in which a person, place or thing are set aside by purposeful dedication to atua and removal from profane use. Faith an important element of Tapu (Shirres, 1998) traces back to the primeval parents Ranginui and Papatuanuku and their tamariki. Tapu was considered to be everywhere in the world, as sanctioned by atua (Moko-Mead, 2003; Marsden, 2003), every part of creation would be linked with atua. Each hapū had their own understanding of tapu, although pervasive, tapu could be viewed as an unseen personal force field which could be felt and sensed by others (Moko-Mead, 2003, p46).

Tapu was the force that entered and controlled most activities of Māori life, some tapu were completely sacrosanct, instigating Māori to conduct series of actions to respect certain restrictions or actions. If Māori violated the law of tapu, the protection of the atua were taken from them; so, they would be punished, or they would experience some type of trouble, which usually would be observed by sickness, misfortune, or death (Marsden, 2003).

In cases where illness could not be explained or cured, Māori would attribute it to being an affliction from evil spirits or mate atua (Dansey, 1992). Bad influences or spirits would also be the reason given for a violent death. Māori considered that spirits would be waiting; ready to attack anyone whose defenses were weakened by a breach of tapu (Dansey, 1992). Should a breach of tapu occur even accidently, the atua could withdraw their protection, and something negative would occur. This belief system informed the Māori perspective for some illnesses and deaths, as being of a spiritual cause. It was also possible for tapu to be reflected by the state of the whole person. So, Māori life was lived often by protecting one's personal tapu and in doing so the person would be in balance physically, socially, mentally, and spiritually (Moko-Mead, 2003, p46). Tapu was inseparable from mana and incorporated within all Māori cultural practices (tikanga).

Mana

Mana refers to power, authority, or prestige (Barlow, 1991); from the Māori perspective every person is born with mana, and is closely related to personal tapu (Moko-Mead, 2003, p51). Mana is inherited from birth, and it can be enhanced during one's life time as a person achieves well personally through good work and by uplifting the mana of others (Moko-Mead, 2003, p51). Conversely, if a person behaves dishonestly their personal mana would diminish. Mana is the realisation and authority of tapu, it would be observed within whānau, hapū or Iwi as Māori accepted and performed various responsibilities and constraints expected or permitted by their kin. Without mana people would be unable to carry out their roles.

Noa

Noa is another concept which has been defined as ordinary, free from tapu and common (Moko-Mead, 2003). It is considered to be counter to tapu, requiring no protective restrictions. The observance with noa is noted by Māori customary practices that reduce or remove tapu to make it (noa or) common (whakanoa), such as viewed in a Powhiri. There are various Māori cultural concepts and principles, and tikanga (cultural practices) utilised to institute the sense of balance between tapu, mana, noa and cultural elements (Shirres, 1998).

Māori in their traditional belief made offerings to their multiple atua because of the mana they held over them, and the utility to the protection and survival of their people. When Pākehā arrived in Aotearoa, Māori were thrown into an imbalance of their relationships with their atua, environment, and one another (Mikaere, 2003). Over time Māori traditional thought and lifestyle struggled to hold onto the old ways, especially as new experiences undermined rangatira and tohunga. No more so was this apparent than when Māori used to seek assistance for their wellbeing, where Māori used karakia and practiced rituals to secure ones safety from makutu.

Makutu

Makutu was understood by Māori to be one source to disease and death (Te Hiroa, 1910), caused by sorcery (Moko-Mead, 2003) a curse, or calling up of spirits by means of incantation employed to cause harm to a person or disaster of a supernatural kind (Te Hiroa, 1910, Blake-Palmer, 1954, Durie,1998). If a person had caused offence, or had done wrong to another person it was thought it could bring about sickness or death (Marsden, 2003).

The knowledge and practice of makutu was confined to specialist tohunga, and it was deliberately hidden from commoners (Marsden, 2003). The fear inspired by the dread of makutu would help tohunga to govern hapū (Te Hiroa, 1910). The rituals conducted by tohunga varied, although it was thought some type of personal material was needed to enact the deed of makutu (Te Hiroa, 1910). Tohunga could counteract their effects, by seeking the origin of the person's troubles and to effect a cure. The interpretation of symptoms by Māori were invariably considered supernatural features of what the person was experiencing, especially if such was against the norm at the time, and was looked upon with fear (Te Hiroa, 1910 p45). Although the person could self diagnose the problem, it was important a tohunga verified the existence of a makutu. Through assessment, the tohunga would elicit from the person if they had transgressed tapu or Māori lore's, and in consultation with atua the tohunga would make their diagnosis (Te Hiroa, 1910 p49).
It was thought that a person under makutu could go off into a deep trance, they could speak in tongues or express knowledge they were unfamiliar with previously. They may have facial changes by grimacing or intensity in their eyes (Fielding Star, 1920).

Māori Prophets

A part of the Māori traditional social system were Māori prophets or visionaries, some were also Rangatira or Ariki, some Tohunga with the gifts of Matakite (vision to see) and healing. Their task had great significance to Māori. Stories handed down amongst Māori of tohunga, visionaries and prophets who prophesized amongst their own people, had far reaching influence upon Māori (Elsmore, 1989).

Te Toiroa of Mahia would be entranced and whilst in his state he would take on the appearance of the papateretere (small brown lizard) and he would walk onto the Marae in the stance of a reptile and a voice would speak through him, predicting all sorts of happenings. It is said that Te Toiora predicted the arrival of Captain Cook and that the atua of Cooks people would be the atua of Māori. This prediction was repeated by Te Toiroa, and its knowledge spread widely throughout Aotearoa. Within three years, the prophecy had come true, for a boat with foreign people made its arrival in Aotearoa, further on the arrival of Christianity (Elsmore, 1989).

Between 1830 and 1860, Māori tried to adjust to the growing influence of the Pākehā on their world. Some Māori rejected Christian beliefs, some began exploring new religious views and reconciled them to their own beliefs. New Māori movements were developed which included Christian concepts laid upon a foundation of old tradition (Elsmore, 2011, p198).

In Northland, the prophet Te Atua Wera or Papahurihia was regarded as one of the first prophets to reject the religion of the missionaries when it was first preached to Māori (Binney, 2013). Papahurihia began his mission in 1833, after being inspired by a vision of a spirit called Te Nakahi. With the increasing feeling of alienation from their own roots felt by Māori from around 1840 onwards, Karakia Nakahi manifested itself as a revivalist movement aimed to enhance the mana of Māori.

The prophet offered an alternative vision to Māori "a heaven full of Pākehā cargo and plenty to eat", his teachings influenced the local resistance to Crown law and he was Hone Heke's war prophet in the Northern wars. It was believed Papahurihia could transport from place to place, and could call up the spirits of the deceased arranging dialogues between them and the living. Revivals of the movement sprang up periodically through the following decades as periods of dis-satisfaction occurred in the northern areas, of which his teachings were continued to inspire following generations to fight to attain their self- determination (Blake Palmer, 1954; Binney, 2013).

Māori leaders, Buck, Carroll, Ngata and Pomare, had sought to improve the social and health needs of Māori (Lange, 1999). But a significant desire persisted amongst Māori to enhance their people spiritually (Elsmore 1983, p92). Motivated by the concerns of disease and death brought in by Pākehā that swept through Māori communities in that period. Some Māori considered their atua had deserted them so created an allegiance to the Christian god. The corresponding neglect of the old ways was also considered to have failed to protect and sustain them. Māori desired for some form of supernatural deliverance from the ills which had befallen them, was still a wish wholly in keeping with their tradition. (Elsmore, 2011, p120).

Māori Healing

With the increase of disease as settlers increased in Aotearoa, the new inflictions were thought by Māori to be supernatural in origin. Drawn from traditional belief the atua brought ill health as the result of a breach of tapu or as a consequence of makutu. Māori understood if they were being overcome by ill health, it was the result of the neglect of their traditional beliefs and practices (Elsmore, 2011, p48). Consequently, their recourse to the old remedies and practices had little effect upon the Pākehā illnesses and for some Māori they were left with little hope.

When a cure was sought, a Tohunga would be called upon, but the power of these figures was often inadequate to affect any cure against the Pākehā diseases. The missionaries would use this as an advantage to promote the belief in the superiority of the Christian god. This then resulted in disease being blamed directly on the Pākehā god or even on the prayers of the missionaries. This made some Māori consider that the Pākehā god had protected the Pākehā over Māori.

There were various changes in the social conditions of Māori, but it was the 'spiritual' element which remained important. As many of the traditional habits of Māori eventually gave way to Pākehā methods and practices, so too did the traditional rituals associated with them begin to break down. (Elsmore, 2011, p49).

Tasks within normal daily life proceeded without the former rites and the approach to work became secular as earlier beliefs gave way to an economy based on trade rather than subsistence. As a consequence, the skills, and ritual functions of Tohunga and Rangatira were used less and so the traditional rituals went into decline.

Māori were in a spiritual dilemma. Spiritual healing was certainly known to Māori pre Pākehā, and to the removal of makutu, affected through the ministrations of a Tohunga. But the illnesses Māori were experiencing were mate Pākehā, and the appropriate agency for help seemed to be Pākehā. Recourse was usually sought and left too late, only after traditional methods failed to cure the Pākehā diseases which most often appeared to be useless as people died. Even worse, it seemed that the Pākehā god was against Māori and desired their destruction. In addition to atua Māori punishing their own people because they had abandoned their former beliefs and practices.

A revival of Māori healing approaches emerged in the 1850's onward, with some reverting to traditional methods and karakia, whilst others turned further from the old ways believing the atua to the cause of their ills was due and so followed the Pākehā Christian god.

All the same, Māori had a strong emphasis on healing which took precedence due to the great social, physical, and spiritual needs of Māori. In every area where there was a need – there was a Māori healer who would arise to administer to their people. Some Māori healers were set apart from the traditional tohunga, in that some attempted to reconcile the new christian teachings with the Māori condition. Māori leadership was based firmly on spiritual concepts, and the new healing and prophetic movements that emerged following the Pākehā were a deliberate response to a malady very much of the spirit (Elsmore, 1989. 2011). Māori continued to search for a response that suited their spiritual feelings and needs, such was obvious in Northland with one healer.

" Impressed with the rapid decline of his race, he determined to try what he could do to stem the tide and announced his commission by proceeding at once to cure by cold water and prayer all sicknesses. Wounded feet, dropsy, fever, consumption were all treated in the same way, the patient being taken to a stream and whole body to the neck kept under water till chilled; then taken back to the house and warmed by a large fire and prayers offered according to the peculiar faith of the patient. During the whole course of treatment, a strict rule of tapu is observed, any violation of which will nullify the good effects of the treatment. The patients pipe lighted at the wrong fire, food taken in the bed, or the plate or knife of the patient used by another person are quite enough for the death of the patient should it take place" (Rev. T.G. Hammond).

The principle aim of missionaries was to cancel out the belief system of Māori as it clashed with their teachings and doctrine, but the Māori belief system was highly complex and an integrated way of life, so was not entirely able to be destroyed.

By the 1900's Māori realised that the continuation of the Pākehā structured society was inevitable. The passing of generations also meant that the bible and christianity became familiar and much more acceptable. While there was still a need for Māori spirituality, Māori gradually incorporated aspects of the Christian teachings with that of their own worldview and eventually Māori worship (Mikaere, 2003; Elsmore, 2011, 198-199).

As christianity infused with Māori beliefs, makutu continued to linger as a feature and cause of illness amongst some Māori. As time progressed, criticism amongst Māori also occurred and to a point doubt of the presence of those with the mana and ability to practice makutu as did the old tohunga. Often discussions would argue the cause for a person's misfortune or death, and the potential reason for makutu to be placed on a person or a place. Avenging or punishing another person was considered the power of a few Māori who could inflict sickness or death. Killing someone due to a wrong doing was not viewed as murder until Māori became involved with Pākehā legal systems and then Māori were tried in a court of law, imprisoned, or sentenced to death (National Library of New Zealand, 1892- 1945).

The majority of Pākehā considered the cultural belief of makutu as superstition, a belief in witchcraft or black magic with no substance, this colonised view subsequently influenced some Māori worldviews too. Although, there were the odd examples of Pākehā who experienced unusual phenomena, they believed were due to Māori predictions of situations and occurrences.

"Old Pākehā settlers in the North have apparently adopted some of the superstitions of the Māori .....deputations have been spoken of a makutu over a place. .....it was stated there was a makutu over a farm. No one prospered on it. In [another] case it was a road" (cited in New Zealand Herald, Vol LXI, Issue 18600, 7 January 1924, p8).

The reverence for the 'sacred' embedded in the traditional Māori belief of makutu could not be entirely oppressed in the Māori worldview even in their interactions with Pākehā.

In situations when Māori presented to psychiatric hospitals with various symptoms such as seeing and hearing voices, lack of sleep, angry outbursts, disordered thoughts and seizures, some Māori claimed these were due to makutu. At times they were seen by Tohunga prior to admission, and often Police were involved as whānau worried about their loved one wandering or being involved in more serious acts (National Archive, Carrington Hospital files; YCAA 1048/1-8).

Many Māori died in psychiatric care, which seemed contributory to undetected physical health conditions, although when contrasted within a cultural perspective they may've succumbed to their belief of being cursed or being spiritually unwell. (National Archive, Carrington Hospital files; YCAA 1048/1-8).

XX "knows that he has been out of his mind but that he has been bewitched by certain Māori's'" (YCAA, 1048 / 1-8).

Terminology such as 'demonic possession' became novel public points of discussion, in regard to makutu. For example, in the Hawkes Bay in 1920, Reverend's Williams and Munro applied Christian prayer to rid a Māori woman of her evil spirits (Fielding Star, 1920). The experience presented an overlay of christian concepts with that of old Māori ways.

The woman, who could speak very little English, was brought by her whānau to Williams and Munro to exorcise the demons. She would go into trances, lose consciousness and either speak in fluent English or Māori naming evil spirits, and making claims about local people. In two incidents the woman was reportedly described as levitating in the air, on a second incident she was flung out of her chair into the air with her heals touching the floor by an invisible force requiring the frightened men to hold her down physically to prevent her from harm. After a succession of days of prayer and forbidding the demon in the name of Jesus Christ, the woman was rid of her evil spirits. The Reverends believed the woman's condition was due to being cast upon by a tohunga and a Pākehā medium (Fielding Star, 1920).

Māori believed in makutu, informed by the old beliefs and traditions, (Blake- Palmer, 1954 p151) but did not talk about it openly. As Māori increasingly were being admitted to psychiatric hospitals especially post WWII, they continued to firmly believe their illness was directly attributed to forces of evil or a curse. The root to their illnesses brought about by the machinations of enemies or from those whom they had in some way wronged or intended to wrong, suggest that spiritual beliefs remained amongst Māori for generations including a strong belief of wrongdoing that caused their mental distress. In psychiatrist Dr Blake- Palmers records, he recalled a Māori patient who attempted to self-harm because they strongly believed he'd done something wrong and was accorded a 'makutu' (Blake- Palmer, 1954 p152-153).

There is no question Christianity had an impact on the Māori belief of makutu (Puke cited in Dominion Post, 2007), although its existence had subtly gone underground amongst some Māori whānau (Walker, cited in Ling, 2007). The claims by Pākehā that makutu would die out were challenged, as the notion of its existence persisted, especially when Māori experienced symptoms of mental or spiritual distress.

Esteemed Reverend Māori Marsden was known to conduct karakia and whakawātea with people, such was the case of a woman diagnosed as having psychotic and violent features. Marsden asked for the spirit to touch her and to restore her to health and bring order to her mind, which reportedly resulted in her recovery and her lack of need for psychiatric services (Marsden, 2003 p96).

In a similar situation, Marsden saw a young Māori man diagnosed with Schizophrenia, who with limited access to his ancestral heritage expressed hearing the voices of his great grandfather who spoke to him. Not considered unusual for Māori, Marsden discovered the man was hearing and learning his whakapapa from his deceased tupuna. When Marsden asked the man to recite his whakapapa, he did so correctly. Marsden then cited a karakia for the tupuna to rest, who then no longer appeared to the young man and the young man continued to stay well (Marsden, 2003, p97)

Māori mental health services understand whānau continue to believe in makutu and is some of the rationale for why they are so willing to care for their whanaunga, even with overt psychotic features, at their home rather than take them to mental health services (Durie, 2001 p22). As the diagnoses of Māori with mental illness increased over the years, the Māori traditional worldview continues to influence Māori. The belief in makutu exists amongst some Māori, and with it sustains the belief that the resolve can be lifted by karakia, with rituals (whakawatea), conducted by a tohunga or a kaumatua, respected and knowledgeable within the Māori community (Taonui cited in Dominion Post, 2010).

The challenge persists with how spiritual perspectives are considered in Māori distress. For example, Makutu was raised in two controversial court cases in Aotearoa.

Believed to be the first time, in a judicial court case where a judge ruled makutu as one factor that contributed to a person's unusual behaviour (Manawatu Standard, 1998). Following expert evidence, the Justice recommended a lenient sentence on a Pākehā following an assault on a woman with a crucifix, that the person be given a suspended sentence, undergo spiritual guidance from a kaumatua, and attend psychological assessments (Ling, 2007).

Skepticism from the public raised criticism of the appropriateness of stating that there was a cultural cause for the Pākehā behaviour. Besides whether makutu could have weight in cases where there is a plea of insanity (Manawatu Standard, 1998; Dominion Post, 1998). Further public reproach highlighted the ignorance in mainstream public about Māori belief in makutu, suggesting that tohunga and a belief in makutu were a step back into the Stone Age (Dominion Post, 1998).

In the case of Janet Moses (2007), a young Māori woman who accidently drowned during a water cleansing ritual conducted by her whānau, who with the meaningful intent thought she was under the influence of a makutu. Again, raised public criticism, this time amongst Māori and non Māori about whether Moses was inflicted by a makutu, and if the whānau in fact knew what they were doing to help her (Taylor. 2007b-c). The impression from this case was that although whānau had good intentions and wanted to relieve her of the makutu, they did not have the knowledge of or included experts with experience in makutu lifting (Ash, 2010).

In a different context as a result of the lack of consultation with a local iwi in the appointment of a health board director, a woman claimed she had a makutu placed on her, which caused her to be fearful for herself

and her whānau (Gray, 2000). Māori experts dismissed the fears suggesting there was no evidence of people capable of such acts, and with most Māori being christianised there was disbelief in its actuality and impact. Esteemed Ranginui Walker commented by saying that if the woman attended church, her karakia would set her right (cited in Gray, 2000). Overall, emphasizing the power of the spirit, karakia and beliefs.

For some Māori living with mental distress in this contemporary time, the thought of having a makutu is more detrimental than identifying with having a mental illness (El- Badri & Melsop ,2007). The reality is that the notion of makutu or other spiritual cause continues to be raised as the origin for mental and spiritual distress amongst Māori, with little resolve unless answers are sort from Māori. In addition, to ensuring there is easy access to Māori healers.

In Bakers (2017) doctorate study Māori posed that their wairua was in trouble when a loved one experienced a mental health issue, and would seek solutions to address their wairua by reaching into the Māori world. One of the issues for many of the participants in her study included the little to no appreciation by mental health services for the need to address the wairua of Māori or to provide access to holistic services to ensure a person's spirituality. In conclusion, Māori continue to use the language of their tupuna to describe or find a reason for their experiences, the terms used may consist of Porangi and Wairangi used to represent the relationship between the experience and the person by describing the outward appearance of an imbalance. Māori are in quest of solutions that enhance their knowledge and relationship with wairua and are deliberately seeking out solutions for healing through karakia and activities of whakawātea. Other actions include getting close to whanau as well as returning home to whenua and learning about one's whakapapa. It is within these specific actions Māori seek a connection to their tupuna and to a traditional culture that is all encompassing of being Māori and feeling whole spiritually.

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