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TE AWA ATUA, TE AWA TAPU, TE AWA WAHINE

**An examination of stories, ceremonies and practices
regarding menstruation in the pre-colonial Māori world**

By

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ARIĀ: ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Māori cosmological stories, ceremonies, and traditional practices regarding menstruation in pre-colonial Māori society. I use kaupapa Māori and mana wahine as a theoretical and methodological framework, contextualising these stories within Māori cultural paradigms. This is important because menstruation has been framed within deeply misogynist, colonial ideologies in some ethnographic accounts, distorting menstrual rites and practices beyond recognition. These interpretations have been used to inform colonialist narratives of female inferiority in traditional Māori society, attempting to change Native constructs of womanhood. Such narratives have been perpetuated in contemporary literature, reinforcing powerful discourses of menstrual pollution and female inferiority.

This thesis is a challenge to such representations. By examining menstrual stories located in Māori cosmologies, and investigating tribal histories, oral literatures, ceremonies and rites, I argue that menstruation was seen as a medium of whakapapa (genealogy) that connected Māori women to our pantheon of atua (supernatural beings). A study of ancient menstrual rites, recorded in tribal songs and chants, reveal that menstrual blood was used for psychic and spiritual protection. These examples unveil striking Indigenous constructs of womanhood that transform colonialist interpretations and radically challenge notions of female inferiority and menstrual pollution.

I maintain in this thesis that presenting menstruation and menstrual blood as putrid is a politically motivated act of colonial violence that specifically targets the source of our continuity as Indigenous People, the *whare tangata* (house of humanity – womb of women). I pose the question ‘if menstrual blood symbolises whakapapa, what does it mean to present it as ‘unclean’ and how do such representations cut across the politics of *tino rangatiratanga* (autonomy)?’

Through in-depth semi-structured interviews, kōrero (dialogue), and wānanga (series of conversations) with Māori women, including cultural experts, scholars, artists, and mana wahine exponents, I gather a collection of ceremonies, stories, and wisdoms that reclaim Māori spiritualities which celebrate menstruation as divine. Within the context of a colonial history of marginalisation, this work is an activist site of political resistance which takes a step towards re-threading the feminine strands in the spiritual fabric of our world, torn asunder by the ideological imposition of a colonial, Christian male god. I argue, that menstruation is a *potent* site of decolonisation, cultural reclamation, and resistance toward the perpetuation of colonial hegemony.

Ko Tawhiuau te Maunga
Ko Rangitaiki te Awa
Ko Rangipo te Wehenga o te Tuna
Ko Ngāti Hui te Hapū
Ko Ngāti Manawa te Iwi
Ko Tangiharuru te Tangata

Ko Panekire te Maunga
Ko Waikare te Moana
Ko Waikaretaheke te Awa
Ko Ngāti Hinanga, Ko Ngāti Hika ngā Hapū
Ko Ngāti Ruapani te Iwi
Ko Haumapuhia te Tuoro
o ngā Hapū ki Waikaremoana

*Kauria ai e kui
te ara o tō uha
Ka puta ai Tāne
Ki te ao marama*

*Surging out
on the primordial waters
Tāne did discover
The realm of light*

*Ikura,
i ahuahua ai koe
e Hine,
la te rere o te awa tapu*

*From the menstrual earth
You were formed
oh Hineahuone
and the fertile waters flowed*

*Maui tikitiki
te natinga ōu
ki te awa atua
itanga ira tangata*

*Maui tikitiki
vanquished
Begot the divine river
Confirming the lineage
of humanity¹*

¹Composed by Enoka Muphy in collaboration with the author, 2011.

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Figure 1. Ipu Hue (Carved Gourds, 2010) by Ngāhina Hohaia

(Source: Photographed by Ngāhina Hohaia)

Kei ngā wāhine hautoa, ngā manu ngangahu o te motu

O ngā rā o mua, me ō nāianeī

Tau tonu ki ngā whakatipuranga

kei te heke...

He Whai Kanohi Me Ka Pohea

Te ra e hara mai ra,
Rere kura, rere toro hai,
Te marama e rere mai ra,
Rere kura, rere toro hai,
Ka whekite,
Ka whekaro, te kahui tupua,
Nau mai ki waho;
Te ritorito,
Te wai whero;
Tupu te ora,
He ora, ora.

The sun arising, flying red,
Seeking its journey,
The moon arising, flying red,
Seeking its journey,
One sees it dimly,
For the first time, the supernatural being,
Welcome, come forward;
The potential of life,
The menstrual blood;
Let life grow,
Life itself.

(Grey, 1853, p. 281)²

² Composer and tribal origin unknown. Translated by Enoka Murphy, 2010.

CHAPTER ONE

HE KŌRERO TĀTAKI: INTRODUCTION

There is a sequence to transformation and it begins with interpretation. This idea is at the core of what inspires Indigenous scholars to revise the history books so they include Indigenous experience, understanding and awareness (Tangaro, 2007, p. vi).

This thesis aims to retrieve stories about menstruation and menstrual blood from the world of our³ ancestors. These stories reflect the physical, spiritual, and political significance of Māori⁴ women, constructed within the cosmogonic and metaphysical universe of our ancestors. I aim to rediscover how our ancestors' conceptualised menstruation and what ritual practices were associated with it. Did our ancestresses mark menarche as a rite of passage? What significance did these rites hold within the whānau⁵ and hapū?⁶ How were knowledges related to menstruation handed down the generations and what comprised these knowledges? Did our tīpuna (ancestors) perceive the blood as 'pollutive' or potent? What might an exploration into pre-colonial menstrual practices

³ Similar to Leonie Pihama (2001), Te Kawehau Hoskins (2000), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1992), Naomi Simmonds (2009) and others, I will use personal pronouns us, our, and we throughout this thesis. In doing so I position myself explicitly in the work as Tangata Whenua (People of the land), rejecting notions of objective and neutral research. This thesis represents another strand woven into the collective fabric that is our stories of survival, struggle, resistance, and resilience as Indigenous People in a colonised country.

⁴ Like Te Kawehau Hoskins (2001) Leonie Pihama (2001) and Naomi Simmonds (2009), I use the term Māori "as a political concept that identifies collectively the Indigenous Peoples of this land" (Pihama 2001, p. 1). I acknowledge, however, that 'Māori' as a people are made up of distinct and culturally autonomous tribal nations that have diverse histories and genealogies.

⁵ Extended family. Significantly this word also means 'to birth', providing a powerful example of the celebration of the reproductive body of Māori women within the Māori language.

⁶ Hapū means a collection of Māori whānau related through a common ancestor. It also means to be pregnant. Once again this example demonstrates the centrality with which the reproductive body of Māori women was recognised.

reveal about the multifaceted roles of Māori women? What can be gained for Māori women in contemporary society by retrieving such knowledges?

Exploring⁷ these questions is crucial because menstruation has been portrayed as demonic⁸ in some colonial ethnographic literature. This has reframed discourses about Māori women's bodies within highly political narratives of pollution that contradict central Māori philosophical and spiritual paradigms (Mikaere, 2003; Norman, 1992; Pere, 1982; Pihama, 2001). Menstruation is, therefore, a powerful site where colonialist assertions of menstrual putridity collide with Indigenous⁹ narratives of continuity through the *whare tangata*.

Presenting menstruation as a source of contamination has been a key element of colonialist ethnographic reports that proclaim the inferior status of women in traditional Māori society (Best, 1904, 1924; Goldie, 1904). Within the broader context of cultural reclamation many Māori have returned to colonial ethnographic sources for information, uncritically subscribing, in some instances, to deeply contentious and contradictory colonial re-interpretations of menstruation and the role of women (Yates-Smith, 1998). The result has been ambivalence toward the Māori female body and an antagonism toward menstruation. Themes of female inferiority continue to be reiterated in both scholarly works (Salmond, 1975; Walker, 1990) and in modern fiction (Ihimaera, 1986, 2009), while contemporary attitudes toward menstruation and Māori women's reproductive bodies have created situations in Māori contexts which have

⁷ I recognize this is a potentially contested term when used in a landscape of colonial invasion. However, I apply it as a descendant of a maritime people who confidently navigated throughout the largest, and most remote, ocean on the planet using sophisticated voyaging technologies, centuries before the colonizing powers began their first cautious explorations (Howe, 2008, p. 11). I celebrate this history by deliberately employing the terms 'exploration' and 'explore' and I displace the hegemony of Western knowledge by privileging a Polynesian perspective.

⁸ See Goldie (1904); Best (1924a); Shortland (1882).

⁹ I use a capital for Indigenous in this thesis to support the assertion of the autonomy of Indigenous Peoples within colonised states.

excluded¹⁰ Māori women, limiting our capacity to engage with our own culture. Ngahuia Te Awekotuku shares an example, referring to a personal experience in which she considered applying for a curatorial position in a provincial museum. Before she had even applied, the response from the interviewing kaumātua (elder) was “*Don’t bother girl. It is wrong for women to touch our taonga. We will not have it*” (Te Awekotuku as cited in Nikora & Robertson, 1999, p. 59). The justification for such a stance was that “it was *unseemly* for women to be engaged in certain types of museum work, *because they bleed*” (*sic*) (Te Awekotuku as cited in Nikora & Robertson, 1999, p. 59).

Although Māori women, in reclaiming discourses of mana wahine over the past thirty years, have challenged the construction of menstruation in Māori contexts as unclean, positing instead that in traditional times the blood was regarded as tapu (sacred), no one to date has performed a comprehensive investigation of how Māori conceptualised menstruation in pre-colonial contexts including ceremonies, rites of passage, and menstrual practices.

This thesis attempts to untangle contradictory ethnographic accounts and compare them to Māori oral literature related to menstruation.

Contextualising menstrual practices, stories and rituals within Māori cosmologies led to a very different interpretation from that reached by colonial ethnographers. It has also been necessary to engage with Māori cultural experts to develop a deeper understanding of traditional Māori concepts. I also draw from my own experiences as a Ngāti Manawa, Ngāti Ruapani woman whose analysis is informed by conversations over many years with marae-based (tribal meeting place) and city dwelling

¹⁰ In November 2010 a national hui of Māori women gathered in Hauraki to condemn the exclusion of Māori women from national, regional, and local Māori political fora. The national hui, the first called in thirty years, challenged the leadership of those Māori men who continue to collude with the Crown, courting a colonialist, capitalist agenda at the expense of whānau and hapū well-being (Messiter, 2010). The group’s formation illustrates both the perpetuation of female marginalization from socio-political space, and the continuation of Māori female leadership.

Māori women, rangatahi (youth) and kaumātua, activists and artists, and my own personal history as a facilitator of ceremonies of empowerment for women.

In examining the origins of menstrual pollution narratives I deduce a political agenda behind the historic construction of menstruation as pollutive and posit questions about who has benefited from such discourses. What have been the wider socio-cultural, political and philosophical implications of such narratives? Have these narratives been challenged in the past? If so, in what ways and by whom? This thesis is primarily concerned with retrieving pre-colonial menstrual philosophies in the hope that this may facilitate an uprooting of damaging menstrual discourses that have embedded themselves into Māori spaces. It is also important to consider who benefits from the regulation of Māori women's reproductive bodies in contemporary contexts and what is at stake for Māori women who challenge prevailing understandings.

I argue in this thesis that the interpretation and construction of menstrual blood as 'pollutive' is highly political and synonymous with the historical subjugation of female power. How menstrual blood is regarded in a society is highly symbolic of the regard for women in general in that society. The exploration into pre-colonial Māori menstrual lore is therefore more than a reclamation and reconstruction of 'spiritual' discourses. It is a deliberate political act, a reassertion of our power as life givers to uphold the laws of balance. Our wisdom and knowledge as Māori women has been silenced by the patriarchal nature of colonisation, and continues to be marginalised within the current political climate in both the Pākehā (non-Māori) and Māori world (Irwin, 1992a; Messiter, 2010; Mikaere, 2003, 2010; Pihama, 2001; Smith, 1992, 1999; Sykes, 2010; Te Awekotuku, 1991, 1992, 1999). The consequences of this have been, and continue to be, devastating for Māori whānau, for our primordial parents Ranginui (the sky father) and Papatūānuku (the earth mother), and our elders of the natural world. Until

we address this issue at a fundamental level, tino rangatiratanga¹¹ will remain elusive. I maintain in this thesis that menstrual blood represents power, not pollution, and discourses of pollution seek to progress a colonialist patriarchal agenda that cuts across the politics of tino rangatiratanga.

Theories

My research is situated within the theoretical frameworks of kaupapa Māori that celebrates Māori language, traditions, philosophies, spirituality and world-view. Kaupapa Māori uses these taonga as a whāriki (woven mat) for the articulation of theoretical paradigms, discourses, and methodologies that advance Māori development and aspirations for tino rangatiratanga over our own lives (Bishop, 1996, 1999, 2005, 2008; Smith, G. 1990, 2003; Smith, L. 1999). Kaupapa Māori as a theoretical and methodological framework emerged from within the wider context of Māori cultural revival and politicisation (Bishop, 2005, 2008) and also in response to a long:

history of people putting Māori under a microscope in the same way a scientist looks at an insect. The ones doing the looking are giving themselves the power to define (Mita as cited in Smith, 1999, p.58).

This history of cultural redefinition by Pākehā has distorted Māori epistemologies, silencing our voices and ways of knowing the world. As Merata Mita articulated, it also robbed Māori of the power to define our world for ourselves. Kaupapa Māori then is an important Indigenous initiative because it carves out a space for Māori to articulate for ourselves our own multiple identities and realities in ways that are culturally

¹¹ The tino rangatiratanga flag, which represents Māori political, social, cultural, and economic autonomy, is a powerful symbol of gender balance. The black represents Ranginui, the primordial sky father and the divine male element within the universe. The red represents Papatūānuku, the primordial mother, and the divine female element. The white koru unfurling between them represents the divine child, renewal, and regeneration within the realm of Te Ao Mārama, the physical world of light. The flag to me represents the true essence of tino rangatiratanga, which extends well beyond Māori autonomy. It represents harmony and balance between genders and between generations. It represents living in balance with the earth and sky and all other creatures we share this realm with, whom we are connected to, through whakapapa (Murphy, 2008).

appropriate for us (Bishop, 1996). Situating my research within the frameworks of kaupapa Māori is relevant because I am motivated to reclaim and assert our voices and produce knowledges that benefit our own communities. This research works ultimately toward the goal of decolonisation.

Taking charge of the production of our own knowledge as Indigenous People (Smith, 1999) is fundamentally motivated by “activist agendas working toward social justice, sovereignty, self determination, and emancipatory goals” (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008, p. 23). Kaupapa Māori is an activist site engaged in the ‘chant down of Babylon’, providing a platform for the marginalised to “retrench in the margins” (Smith, 1999, p. 4) transforming spaces of marginalisation into “spaces of resistance and hope” (Smith, 1999, p. 4). Celebrating our stories, our spirit, and survival as Indigenous People within legacies of colonial invasion is an important dimension of creating these spaces. Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg (2008, p. 145) argue that:

While it is vital that we understand the nature of oppression of indigenous peoples and the subjugation of their knowledges, it is also crucial that students of indigeneity and indigenous knowledge not see them only through the lens of subjugation.

Following this assertion, whilst I am committed to teasing out the clash of narratives surrounding the reproductive bodies of Māori women, I am motivated most by the transformative opportunity to retrieve from the margins of history the voices of our ancestresses. By examining pre-colonial narratives about menstruation and menstrual blood I seek to reclaim matrilineal knowledge and ritual traditions that have been smothered by Christianity and the patriarchal nature of colonisation.

Theories of mana wahine¹² facilitate this process as they are concerned with the way patriarchal, colonialist attitudes continue to impact on the

¹² Mana wahine references the power and authority of Māori women. I agree with Leonie Pihama (2001), Merata Mita (1994) and others who point out that mana wahine is an

lives of Māori women (Irwin, 1992a, 1992b, 1995; Mikaere, 2000, 2003, 2010; Pihama, 1994, 2001; Pihama & Johnston, 1994; Smith, 1992a, 1999; Te Awekotuku, 1991, 2003, 2007a; Yates-Smith, 1998). Leonie Pihama writes that Māori women's knowledges, roles, and status has been redefined by the coloniser (Pihama, 2001). Through this process Māori women have inherited derogatory discourses regarding our reproductive bodies, supplanting paradigms which link us back to cosmological accounts that centralise the reproductive power of Māori women (Mikaere, 2003; Norman, 1992; Yates-Smith, 1998). The displacement of Indigenous epistemologies, which include Māori women's paradigms of knowledge, has been a pervasive and continuing form of colonisation. Thus Kathie Irwin (1992a) articulates the need for us to design theoretical tools that seize back control of articulating and determining our own embodied lives and realities.

Theorising from a Māori women's embodied perspective challenges the hegemony of western discourses of knowledge (Simmonds, 2009) constructed from what bell hooks describes as the "politic of domination" (as cited in Riley, 1996, p. 349). The 'politic of domination' is the politically imbued gendered dualisms that order the western universe according to a hierarchy that privileges the white able-bodied heterosexual male as the unmarked norm, subordinating women, children, Indigenous Peoples, the earth, and the body as the uncivilised and inferior 'Other' (Grosz, 1994; Johnston, 2005; Longhurst, 2005; Ras & Grace, 1997; Riley, 1996). Feminist geographers engaged in destabilising the hegemony of gendered dualisms by focusing on 'the geography closest in - the body' (Rich, 1986) inform my critical analysis of the body as a site of resistance which is marginalised as a space, and within space, by masculinist discourses

ancient concept from the Māori world. Whilst I have heard the argument that mana wahine is a recent theoretical development that was not discussed by our ancestors, I maintain that it may not have been necessary to articulate mana wahine in former times as it was an embodied reality, finding expression through a multiplicity of tribal practices. The patriarchal nature of colonization has eroded these practices, however, which has meant that Māori women now have to define mana wahine as part of an anti-colonial political project.

(Grosz, 1994; Longhurst, 2005; Johnston, 2005; Ras & Grace 1997). Marion de Ras and Victoria Grace (1997, p. 9) enquire, “How do we read the body as a social and cultural text?” This is a key question as I explore pre-colonial and colonial ethnographic narratives about menstruation and how these discourses reflect the deeper socio-political roles and status of Māori women.

Wiccan and eco-feminist theorists such as Kathryn Rountree (2004), Paula Gunn Allen (1991, 1992) and Shamara Shantu Riley (1996) provide another layer of interpretation regarding the historical and contemporary marginalisation of women’s reproductive bodies, describing the subordination of women’s bodies within a wider framework of subordination of the earth and the divine feminine, theories that parallel work done by Aroha Yates-Smith (1998), Ani Mikaere (2003) and Jessica Hutchings (2002). Whilst Wiccan and eco-feminist theories parallel with theories of mana wahine in celebrating women’s specific relationship to the earth, feminist geographers situate this relationship within gendered hierarchical dualisms that have justified the oppression of women. These crossovers are important to flesh out as, whilst our ancestors did celebrate the reproductive cycles of Māori women’s bodies as a human counterpart to Papatūānuku, colonial ethnographers and historians have reinterpreted this relationship within a politically imbued dichotomy to justify the subordination of Māori women. An examination of historical accounts of Māori women as fighters and the roles of menstrual blood in war rites, however, transcends this binary as Māori women move well beyond the domestic realm and into the domain of warfare.

Methodology

Preparing the ground to plant the seeds of my research began with a humble ceremony under my lovely tōtara tree at home. This provided me with the opportunity to begin my research with the blessing, guidance, and protection of my tīpuna and kaitiaki (spiritual guardians) and to recognise that research and the pursuit of knowledge is a sacred undertaking. The ceremony was also a careful acknowledgement of entering into a

relationship of reciprocity with my tīpuna and kaitiaki, trusting that they will reveal to me what is appropriate to share, and what is not, guiding me on my research journey as I encounter realms of tapu.

Gustavo Gutierrez proclaims “our methodology is our spirituality” (as cited in Dillard, 2008, p. 286), providing the framework for our research endeavours. This is where I situate myself in this research journey which is an embodied expression of my own spirituality and political convictions. Jill Bevan Brown (1998, p. 232) points out that the interrelated nature of the secular and spiritual worlds has implications in terms of research content and process for those who share a holistic worldview. She identifies Kathie Irwin, Hine Timutimu-Thorpe, and Ngahuia Te Awekotuku as all having articulated elements of exchange with the spiritual realms in their research endeavours. Te Ahukaramu Royal speaks to the nature of knowledge and its retention as being a spiritual matter specifically in regards to tribal history (1993, p. 41- 42). Beginning my research by eliciting the cooperation of the spirit world speaks to my belief as a Ngāti Manawa, Waikaremoana woman that the spirit world and physical world are inter-connected and a valid source of support, protection, and inspiration. Beginning with ceremony acknowledged the research as a healing and decolonising tool, unleashing the voices of our ancestresses whose stories, knowledges, and wisdoms were silenced through the colonisers’ pen.

Engaging with tribal histories housed in incantation, song, chant, proverb, and narrative, I have tread carefully and conscientiously, respecting the nature of this material as alive and inter-dimensional, imbued with its own life-force, being a transmitter of history and whakapapa. Gathering narratives through semi-structured in-depth interviews demanded the same caution. Questions of age, language proficiency, and appropriateness in receiving certain knowledges has been a crucial methodological consideration that I have carefully negotiated in this research (Bevan-Brown, 1998; Royal, 1993; Te Awekotuku, 2007). Intersecting this is the contradiction of questioning elders in a cultural context where questioning was not the way to receive information.

Questioning elders was further complicated by the nature of this research and the silence/censoring that surrounds this subject.

These are some of the many complexities that I have faced embarking on this research, which I humbly feel, chose me. I employed kaupapa Māori and mana wahine as methodological frameworks to inform and assist me in negotiating these complexities. By situating my research thus, I locate it within a wider socio-political and historic framework, a part of a bigger story, encapsulating the hopes, dreams, and struggles of our ancestors.

I have used Indigenous autoethnography and the collection of stories as a research method, merging personal narrative and storytelling with academic research (Houston, 2007, p. 45). Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes that stories “serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story” (Smith, 1999, p. 145). Given that Māori women have been relegated to the ‘bit parts’ (Smith, 1992) by others in the retelling of our stories, re-centering the voices of Māori women is a powerful reclamation of space. Telling our stories about menstruation and menstrual blood creates in the telling a ceremony that has been all but broken by the infiltration of Christian doctrine. Privileging our voices and stories challenges the hegemonic discourses surrounding the definition of legitimate knowledge production and those who maintain their power by monopolising those discourses. My own personal narratives are woven throughout, reflecting on paper, in this moment, the culmination of my multiple realities as an Indigenous academic and political artist, a mother, sister, partner, and daughter, and a Ngāti Manawa, Ruapani ki Waikaremoana woman.

Chapter Outline

In this chapter I provide a rationale for this research by highlighting the way menstruation has been presented as symbolically pollutive by some colonial ethnographers who have used this interpretation to inform wider discourses of female inferiority in pre-colonial Māori society. The aim of this thesis, therefore, is to compare these colonial accounts alongside Māori oral literature to expose the contradictions and inconsistencies. It is

also important to locate the political imperative behind narratives of menstrual putridity, which I argue, cut across politics of Māori autonomy. I intend to revisit menstrual practices, rituals, and stories from a kaupapa Māori and mana wahine perspective in order to locate them within Māori cultural paradigms. I also draw on my own experiences as a Ngāti Manawa, Ngāti Ruapani woman, locating myself within this research journey.

Chapter two discusses the theories that inform my research. Kaupapa Māori, mana wahine, feminist geographies on the body, and Wiccan and eco-feminist theories are woven together to create a tapestry of ideas that highlight the politics of colonial hegemony and patriarchy operating within narratives of menstrual pollution. I position this research, in particular, within mana wahine theories that seek to reclaim and reconstruct stories that empower Māori women and work towards an activist agenda of decolonisation.

Chapter three focuses on the methodological considerations of this research, which includes the idea that research can be a collaborative and decolonising medium of transformation through an embodied, subjective approach. Coming to research from this perspective displaces the 'Pākehā expert' and challenges the hegemony of western knowledge production. I speak to my own research journey as a ceremony, gathering stories and matrilineal knowledges that have the capacity to heal, empower, and decolonise Māori whānau.

Chapter four is almost exclusively informed by my research participant, and cultural expert, Dr Rangimārie Rose Pere who shares a menstrual origin story located within our cosmologies that presents menstruation as a medium of whakapapa that connects Māori back to our atua. This story challenges notions of menstrual pollution and exposes the politics of cultural genocide embedded in such arguments. I also discuss the consequences of textual legacies of censorship that have created both a 'lost vocabulary' about the power of menstruation and a hostility toward menstruating bodies. Dr Rangimārie Rose Pere's examples of gender

balance in traditional Māori society provide an appropriate cultural paradigm for engaging stories, practices, and rituals regarding menstruation and menstrual blood.

In chapter five I return to cosmological stories about Kurawaka and examine colonial interpretations that use language couched in the politics of conquest which attempts to erase the vocabulary around women's sexuality and power. I revisit Kurawaka from a mana wahine perspective and discover it as an important site of matrilineal knowledges and ceremonies that celebrate menstruation. I then turn to detail menstrual ceremonies and rites of passage and their significance within the whānau and hapū. I discuss menstrual restrictions which, when approached from a mana wahine perspective, provide striking traditions of respect and nurturance toward menstruation as a symbol of whakapapa and whānau continuity. Woven within these accounts is a critique of the role of Christianity in breaking matrilineal rituals and knowledge traditions.

In chapter six I examine a collection of mōteatea (tribal songs and chants) that reveal dramatic menstrual rites which reflect a complexity about the way our tīpuna regarded menstruation and menstrual blood. I also analyse menstrual practices recorded in tribal and colonial ethnographic historical accounts, alongside incantations that speak to menstrual blood as a potent medium of protection. The theme of protection is prominent and I follow it across interview kōrero with Dr Rangimārie Rose Pere, which leads me into the historical accounts of women in war.

Finally, chapter seven offers a summary of my main findings and research conclusions. I revisit the aims of my thesis and identify potential research pathways for future work. This includes a deeper investigation into Māori women's matrilineal ritual traditions and the consequences of the breakdown of such practices as a result of colonisation. Menstrual spaces as educational and political spaces in former times also demand a closer inspection to determine their significance. Finally I suggest the tikanga (traditions) surrounding menstruating and pregnant women working in museum environments might also be a topic worthy of closer examination.

CHAPTER TWO

PŪTEA WHAKAIRO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It is time to dismantle, deconstruct, and decolonize western epistemologies from within (Denzin, Norman K & Yvonna S. Lincoln, 2008, p. ix).

Kaupapa Māori: Gate-crashing the Academy

A vast amount of work has been done by Tangata Whenua¹³ over the past thirty years investigating the different impacts of colonisation in Aotearoa.¹⁴ Much of this work has focused on the external impacts including the Crown confiscation of Māori lands and resources, the implementation of racist legislation, the breakdown of hapū and iwi (tribal nation), and the destruction of Māori cultural values and traditions.¹⁵ My work explores the impacts of colonisation on the body, in particular the menstruating body of Māori women. Māori women's menstruating bodies are a critical political site, where colonial discourse and traditional concepts and values collide. As 'house of the people' (te whare tangata) Māori women's reproductive bodies reflect our histories of colonial oppression and resistance. During the years of colonial impact in the 19th century, which witnessed war, disease, land alienation, and starvation, our population declined so severely it was widely assumed we were headed for extinction (Pool, 1991). The fertility 'free fall' of Māori women was hardly commiserated by the coloniser, many of whom believed Māori were

¹³ Tangata Whenua translates as People of the Land. It is a term that celebrates Māori Indigeneity and speaks to our specific genealogies back to the land. Following Chief Judge Edward Durie's assertion that Pākehā have a right to be in Aotearoa through Te Tiriti o Waitangi, some Pākehā who support Māori in our struggle for autonomy identify themselves as Tangata Tiriti (cited in Murphy, 2003, p. 71).

¹⁴ Aotearoa is the Indigenous name for New Zealand. It encompasses both the North and South Island, which we refer to as Te Ika a Māui, and Te Wai Pounamu respectively. In identifying this country by its Indigenous name I acknowledge the land as a text of Indigenous history, a history that has been smothered through the colonisers' renaming of the landscape.

¹⁵ Examples include Binney (2009); Durie (1998); Hohaia (2001); Walker (1990).

simply “being supplanted by a superior race” (Poole, 1991, p. 67). Our stories of decimation and survival are written in the fertile blood of Māori women.

Using kaupapa Māori and mana wahine theories I aim to untangle some of the contradictory dialogues about menstruation. I also intend to expose the politics of colonial hegemony and patriarchy operating within discourses of menstrual pollution. Situating my subject within kaupapa Māori theories grounds my research in a broader intergenerational history of struggle and cultural revival. Kaupapa Māori represents a ‘flax roots’ Māori conscientisation movement that over the last three decades has been developed by Māori scholars within academia (Bishop, 1996, 1999; Smith, G. 2003; Smith, L. 1999; Smith & Reid, 2000). Bishop and Glynn describe kaupapa Māori theories as the “flourishing of a proactive Māori political discourse” (cited in Smith & Reid, 2000, p. 6) that critically engages issues that affect Māori (Bishop, 1999; Smith, 2003). Central to kaupapa Māori theories is the potential to create transformation through research and the production of knowledge. A key kaupapa Māori question according to Linda Tuhiwai Smith is always ‘What is the transformative potential of this for Māori?’ (L. Smith, personal communication, June 8, 2010). Kaupapa Māori research is capable of operationalising tino rangatiratanga, in that it claims a space for Māori to articulate our realities, producing and performing research in ways which are culturally appropriate for us and informed by our own values and epistemologies (Bishop, 1999; Lee, 2005; Smith, G. 2003; Smith, L. 1999). The needs of Māori communities are privileged through a kaupapa Māori approach and those communities are often involved at a participatory level in the research process (Bishop, 1999; Lee, 2005; Smith, 2003).

This development is critical because research and the production of knowledge have been used as a colonial tool to enforce and maintain the cultural superiority of the colonisers, positing Māori as inferior and unable to control our own lives (Bishop, 1999; Lee, 2005; Smith, 1999). Linda Tuhiwai Smith remarks that research has been a process that has dehumanised Māori and denied the legitimacy of Māori language, culture

and knowledge (1999, p. 183). This denial, and the positioning of Māori as inferior, justified the political marginalisation of Māori, excluding Māori from positions of power sharing envisioned in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the founding document of Aotearoa (Bishop, 1999).

Kaupapa Māori in its commitment to Māori autonomy and the production of Māori-centred transformative research, informed by Māori philosophies and cultural values, speaks to the motivating features of my own work. Dialogues of menstrual pollution in the Māori world, framed within narratives of female inferiority, work against Māori aspirations for autonomy. Kathie Irwin, in discussing the partnership that Te Tiriti o Waitangi envisioned between Māori and Pākehā, points out that the first partnership that needs rectifying is the partnership between Māori men and Māori women (Irwin, 1992a), a point I thoroughly support. Whilst discourses of female pollution continue to block Māori women from full participation within Māori society, without a coherent explanation informed by Māori spiritual and cultural values, Irwin's argument, I argue, will remain valid.

Mana Wahine: Our Story is Written in Our Blood

The theoretical expression of mana wahine out of kaupapa Māori addresses the patriarchal nature of colonisation, which has impacted on Māori women and girls differently to that of Māori men and boys (Pihama, 2001). Linda Tuhiwai Smith points out:

Colonisation did serve to legitimate the power of Māori men. The first colonisers were men. They dealt with men and observed and studied men. The roles played by Māori women were marginalised because of the ethnocentric and phallogocentric views of these early colonisers (Smith, 1992. p. 48).

Similarly, Leonie Pihama details the marginalisation of Māori women's knowledge and roles in colonial ethnographic texts stating:

Māori women's knowledge has been made secondary to Māori men's knowledge and Māori women's roles redefined in line with colonial

notions of gender relations. Information related to Māori women has been ignored or rewritten to become more conducive to colonial belief systems (Pihama, 1994, p.39).

The distortion and subordination of Māori women's knowledge, roles, and status has created a legacy of marginalisation which mana wahine theories seek to address and dismantle.¹⁶ Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1981, 1991, 2007a), Kathie Irwin (1992a, 1992b), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1992, 1994, 1999), Ani Mikaere (2000, 2003, 2010), and Leonie Pihama (1994a, 1994b, 2001) are some of the Māori women who have challenged the internalisation of patriarchal values within Māori society and the development of 'tikanga' (customs) which exclude Māori women. Kathie Irwin (1992a) notes that whilst 'tikanga' has evolved to accommodate Pākehā men speaking on the marae the same cannot be said for Māori women whose tikanga roles seem to have "petrified, like a slab of rock" (p. 12) amidst the whirl of rapid change. I agree with Leonie Pihama who asserts "I am under no doubt that much of what is expressed today as the role of Māori women is directly linked to notions of social control and power" (Pihama, 2001, p. 261). Within the context of my own work I am concerned with the development of 'tikanga' and kōrero (talk) that denies the mana and tapu of Māori women's reproductive bodies. Like Leonie¹⁷ I

¹⁶ Maori women who have written about this include Kathie Irwin (1992a, 1992b); Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1981, 1983, 1991, 1992, 2007a); Ripeka Evans (1994a, 1994b); Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1992a, 1992b, 1994, 1999); Ani Mikaere (2000, 2003); Leonie Pihama (1992, 1994a, 1994b, 2001); and Leonie Pihama & Patricia Johnston (1994, 1995). This list is far from exhaustive. It is also important to point out as Leonie Pihama (2001) and others have done that the development of mana wahine within academia was part of a wider reclamation and celebration by Māori women of female leadership and authority. Māori women outside of the academy who have been pivotal exponents of mana wahine include the late Tuaiwa Rickard, Hana Jackson, Jan Dobson, Irihapeti Ramsden, Merata Mita, and Mahinekura Reinfield. The work of Rose Pere, Annette Sykes, Titewhai & Hilda Harawira, and Mereana Pittman has also been influential. Ngāhina Hohaia, Regan Balzer, Tere Harrison, Te Whenua Harawira, and Chanz Mikaere are examples of a new generation of Māori women who, through art, activism, and education, are nurturing the multi pathways of mana wahine into the future.

¹⁷ Throughout this thesis I use first names to disrupt academic conventions that perpetuate disembodied and disconnected knowledge production. One of the devastating consequences of colonisation has been the severance of relationships within whānau, and hapū, but also across creation. Māori are born into an intricate whakapapa web that links us to all things. I will often refer to authors and people within this thesis by their first

suspect such dialogues are linked with maintaining notions of social control and power and are a manifestation of the internalisation of patriarchal and Christian values and discourses.

For well over one hundred years Māori women have been spoken for and about by (often hostile) others. We have had very little control over the way we have been represented and imaged.¹⁸ Leonie Pihama (2001) argues that we have been silenced for far too long. Searching for ourselves within desiccated colonial descriptions has placed us in a perpetual space of 'Other' (Pihama, 2001; Smith, 1992). Many of us have felt like internal exiles searching to find ourselves amidst colonial, racist and sexist representations. Kathie Irwin (1992a) points out that the development of theories which provide space for Māori women is no academic luxury but a necessary revolutionary tool within the context of abysmal statistics that represent the struggles of Māori women in contemporary society.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1992), and the Crow wise-woman Pretty Shield (as cited in Allen, 1989) both point out that the power to control stories about ourselves is the power to control our own lives: "The one who tells the stories rules the world" (Shield as cited in Allen, 1989, p. 27). Claiming control over the stories regarding our menstruating bodies as Māori women is a personal, critical site of struggle. This thesis is concerned with that struggle. In exploring menstrual blood and menstruation through the lens of mana wahine I hope to uproot the damaging discourses which perpetuate oppressive experiences for Māori women and replace them with stories of power located within our cosmologies and the matrilineal traditions of our tīpuna whāea.

name to honor those whakapapa connections and create more embodied ways of performing and producing knowledge.

¹⁸ Merata Mita (1994); Leonie Pihama (1994a, 1994b, 2001); Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1992, 1999); Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1992, 2007a); and Ripeka Evans (1994), are some Māori women who have discussed the misrepresentation of Māori women by others.

Ani Mikaere's *The Balance Destroyed: Consequences for Māori women of the colonisation of tikanga Māori* (2003) is an invaluable source of material regarding such traditions. Ani's work reclaims ancient philosophical and spiritual concepts from Māori cosmologies, which celebrate the power of Māori women's sexuality. Ani points to the consistency with which the creation stories reference the power and supremacy of the female genitalia, and notes like Aroha Yates Smith (1998) before her, that such stories provided the blue print for social relations, values and belief systems. Through an exploration of historical events across the different waka traditions, Ani provides examples that demonstrate how cosmological narratives of female power were lived out amongst the people. These historical events and the deep philosophical and spiritual beliefs which underpin them, contradict notions of female inferiority, asserting instead the extraordinary power of the female genitalia in determining life or death (Mikaere, 2003, p. 31).

Such stories provide a cultural context for re-examining menstrual narratives with the ability to overturn discourses of female pollution and inferiority. Drawing out narratives which speak to the tapu of Māori women's reproductive organs challenges colonial ethnographers, and recent authors, who consistently portray the female genitalia as devoid of tapu and the source of female inferiority.¹⁹ As I will argue in this thesis the political imperative behind such argumentation, which proceeds to frame menstrual blood and menstruation within the same negative discourses, maintains the hegemony of a colonial patriarchal order.

In her thesis *Hine! E Hine! Rediscovering the feminine in Māori spirituality* (1998), Aroha Yates-Smith documents the submergence of Māori women's matrilineal knowledge traditions through Christian and colonial processes. Knowledge relating to the divine feminine, knowledge that was seen as too graphic, too extraordinary, or that challenged colonial

¹⁹ Examples of such authors include Best (1924a, 1924b, 1925, 1975, 1976); Cowan (1930); Shortland (1856); and Tregear (1926). More recent authors include Heuer (1972); Kent & Besley (1990); and Reed (2004).

ideologies, particularly in relation to women, was changed or simply omitted by some male ethnographers (Yates-Smith, 1998, p. 114). Māori men, Aroha points out, were hesitant to share with Pākehā men knowledge traditions 'belonging' to Māori women, an observation also made by Laguna Pueblo/Sioux Paula Gunn Allen (1992) within the Native American colonial context. Māori women themselves were also hesitant to share their knowledge with foreign men (Yates-Smith, 1998, p. 114). Consequently this space was hijacked by colonial ethnographers whose misogynist, Victorian, and Christian ideologies represented Māori women in a way which was not reflective of Māori worldviews. Nowhere else is this misogynist lens more glaringly apparent, I argue, than in colonial ethnographic representations of 'traditional' Māori menstrual narratives. Here, Māori women's reproductive bodies are often contextualised as unclean and inferior, at best. At worst they are represented as demonic, recapturing hysteric language reminiscent of 'The Burning Times'²⁰ of Britain and Europe. There is a significant connection here, which I explore in chapter four.

The Politics of Domination

It is important to expose the political imperative behind discourses of menstrual pollution and female inferiority in order to 'lay siege' to those discourses. It is also important to know the mind of the coloniser, to trace the politics of domination to a set of ideologies and values in order to recognise, infiltrate, and transcend them. I draw on the works of feminist scholars to aid in identifying those political imperatives and ideologies.

Feminist theorists focusing on the body are engaged in troubling the sexist and racist dualisms that underpin western systems of knowledge. Lynda Johnston (2005) quotes Genevieve Lloyd who states "since the inception

²⁰ Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance* (1979) is a critical work of Wiccan scholarship that speaks to the history of (mainly) female torture and murder during the witch-hunts of Europe. In *The Wise Wound* (1986) Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove argue that Witchcraft is the craft of women who understand their own menstrual cycles as a subjective experience. They have coined the phrase 'Nine Million Menstrual Murders' to describe The Burning Times as a violent attempt to repress and destroy the wisdom and power women possessed about their fertile bodies.

of philosophy as a discipline in Greece, maleness has been associated with reason, the mind and abstraction, and femaleness with irrationality, the body and materiality” (cited in Johnston, 2005, p. 121). According to Elizabeth Grosz this has enabled men to claim dominion over the development of culture and the production of knowledge, marginalising women to the devalued domestic sphere (Grosz, 1994). Grosz argues “Dichotomous thinking necessarily hierarchizes and ranks the two polarized terms so that one becomes the privileged term and the other its suppressed, subordinated, negative counterpart” (Grosz, 1994, p. 3). The following table provides a demonstration:

male / female
superior / inferior
culture / nature
self / other
logic / illogic
mind / body
reason / hysteria
civilised / savage
Christian / heathen
Heaven / Earth
spiritual / physical

Dualisms, purported as neutral and natural categories, are far from it. Rather they maintain politics of power and control, dominance and subordination (Grosz, 1994; Johnston, 2005; Longhurst, 2001; Ras & Grace, 1997).

Christian doctrines have contributed to dualist thinking aligning men with morality, immortality, and spiritual transcendence, and women with flesh,

decay, mortality, the earth, and sin (Blackford, 1999; Grosz, 1994; Ruether, 1996). Women's reproductive sexual bodies in particular have been imaged as evil, threatening mortal corruptibility to the disembodied and transcendent male spirit (Ruether, 1996, p. 327). Robyn Longhurst (2001) drawing on the work of Elizabeth Grosz points out that if men are associated with rationality, control, and the mind, and women with irrationality, fluidity, and the body, it is women's bleeding, lactating, reproductive bodies that emphasise this difference (Longhurst, 2001, p. 41). Women's reproductive bodies and menstruation, in particular, provoke fear of female uncontainability, threatening to collapse boundaries enforced by men in order to maintain social control (Barrett, 2007; Blackford, 1999; Longhurst; 2001, 2005). Holly Blackford argues, "Inherent in the ability to bleed is the power to horrify a culture that oppresses women" (1999, p. 22). The fear and disgust that menstruation represents for many men in the west is inextricably tied to a history of female subordination and male hegemony, supported, informed, and maintained by dualist ideologies.

Understanding dualisms is facing the ideologies that informed the violent expansion of the British colonial empire into Indigenous territories 'as of right' (A. Greensill, personal communication, November 12, 2006). Leonie Pihama and Patricia Johnston (1994, 1995) interrogate dualisms as a racist construct, extending gendered binaries into racist essentialist discourses of white supremacy and native/black/coloured inferiority. Situating Indigenous, Black, and Coloured People as 'Other' to 'Self', and as savage to civilised, provided justification for the invasion of Indigenous lands and the subjugation and extermination of those populations. Similarly presenting divinity as beyond the earth (and women's bodies), and locating it somewhere in the sky has justified the plundering of the earth (and Indigenous) resources within discourses of 'civilisation', 'progress' and 'development', a point argued by ecofeminists and Wiccan scholars (Rountree; 2004, Ruether, 1996; Starhawk, 1979).

Dualist ideologies, created and maintained to perpetuate white male hegemony, provided the lens through which the colonial historians and

ethnographers reinterpreted the Māori world (Pihama, 1994, 2001). Central Māori philosophies were redefined in line with the dualisms that underpinned the colonialist ways of thinking and being. In this way tapu and noa, a central Māori concept which provided the conceptual framework for social relations, were redefined as an untraversable, separate and gendered hierarchical polarity (Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001). Time and time again, within the ethnographic records, Māori women are categorised as inferior 'daughters of the earth', aligned with mortality, the body, and noa (which colonial ethnographers have translated as profane). Men are posited as occupying a superior status as tapu (translated by the colonial ethnographers as sacred) 'sons of the heavens'.²¹ Such constructions deny the cosmogonic accounts of Māori that describe the evolution of the earth mother Papatūānuku and the sky father Ranginui alongside one another within the wombspace of Te Pō (Royal, 2003). Dominance and subordination are not characteristic of the evolution of the primordial parents of humanity. Similarly the presentation of Māori women as inferior through our matrilineal descent from Papatūānuku, the earth, is incongruous with Māori conceptions of Papatūānuku, which value her as Te Ūkaipō, beloved nurturer of humanity (Pere, 1982; Stokes, 2002; Williams, 2004; Yates-Smith, 1998).

It is deeply ironic that the women/nature/body polarity that has perpetuated women's historic oppression in the west should provide fertile ground for my own investigations. I am interested in exploring how Māori women's reproductive bodies contributed to the creation of culture in pre-colonial society. I am interested in how whānau and hapū may have engaged the reproductive bodies of Māori women in community rituals to fulfill certain purposes. I am also interested in how Māori women's reproductive bodies were engaged in the politics of peace and war. Whilst within western binaries the alignment of women with nature/earth is an essentialist discourse that promotes the politics of power and control, within Māori cultural and spiritual traditions this relationship links us to a

²¹ Elsdon Best (1924,1976) provides classic examples.

pantheon of atua wāhine whose narratives provide counter discourses to dialogues of pollution.²²

Atua Wāhine

A central mana wahine theme and a critical theme within my work is reclaiming atua wāhine and reinterpreting their stories through a mana wahine lens.²³ Pre-colonial menstrual narratives cannot be understood outside of Māori cultural constructions of womanhood that stem from the stories of atua wāhine (Buckley & Gottlieb, 1988; Hutchings, 2002; Mikaere, 2003; Yates-Smith, 1998). The symbology, ritual practices and attitudes toward menstruation in pre-colonial times are contextualised within cosmological narratives which provide the lens through which to decipher often obscure tikanga practices and concepts. I aim to use the stories about atua wāhine to understand menstrual narratives, restrictions, and ritual practices. Within the ethnographic accounts, menstrual restrictions and ritual practices have been interpreted through a dualist ideology. This has meant that they have been represented within a framework of female subordination that reinforces male hegemony

²² Leonie Pihama and Patricia Johnston point out reclaiming narratives that speak to cultural essences does not automatically equate with essentialism, but rather to cultural constructions of identity (Pihama & Johnston, 1995, p. 84). Indigenous academics Joe Kincheloe and Shirley Steinberg (2008) note that genealogies that link Indigenous People to the earth are claimed as integral to constructions of Indigenous identity (2008, p. 144). They note that essentialisms have often been employed strategically by disempowered Indigenous communities who claim cultural characteristics as a matter of survival within continued histories of cultural annihilation. Whilst essentialist discourse located within dualisms has threatened to homogenise Indigenous identities, Indigenous Peoples have articulated cultural characteristics to counter white hegemony. Essentialisms, Indigenous people have claimed, do not stem from racist and sexist binaries but from within Indigenous epistemologies and spiritualities. This presents a crucial difference. Diana Fuss (1989) refers to the work of Gayatri Spivak who coined the term 'strategic essentialism'. According to Gayatri the employment of strategic essentialisms by the dispossessed can act as a political focal point and a place to regroup temporarily for political purposes (cited in Fuss, 1989, p. 32). Diana Fuss argues, as I do above, that the permissibility of essentialisms is determined by the "subject-position from which one speaks" (1989, 32) and the motivation behind employment. The strategic use of essentialisms becomes dangerous for Indigenous People only when we fail to acknowledge and provide space for diversity and variety, which has always been a feature within our communities.

²³ Aroha Yates Smith (1998); Rose Pere (1982, 1987, 1994); Robyn Kahukiwa & Patricia Grace (1984); Kuni Jenkins (1992); Ani Mikaere (2003); Ngahua Te Awekotuku (1981, 1983, 1991, 1992); and Jessica Hutchings (2002), have made crucial contributions to the reclamation of atua wahine and Māori women's spirituality.

(Buckley & Gottlieb, 1988). It is important then to revisit menstrual restrictions through a mana wahine lens in order to contextualise those restrictions within appropriate cultural philosophies and spiritual systems.

Within the vast pantheon of atua wāhine, Hinetītama, the daughter of Hineahuone (Hinehauone), the first human, provides a wealth of material toward understanding Māori concepts related to Māori women and menstruation. Hinetītama, the daughter born of the union of Tāne and Hineahuone is by nature one who straddles the worlds, one who transforms notions of duality. Hinetītama of the dawn sits between the worlds of night and day (Hutchings, 2002; Kahukiwa & Grace, 1984; Sykes, 1994). When challenged by the incestuous transgression of her lineage, Hinetītama invokes her power as one born between worlds to shape-shift, transforming into Hinenuitepō. In doing so she claims dominion over the realm of death (Kahukiwa & Grace, 1984; Mikaere, 2003). From dawn and life, to night and death, Hinetītama/Hinenuitepō represents a deity who controls the 'space in-between', a space long associated with changing consciousness and changing form, the traditional space of magic.²⁴

Charles Royal articulates that Hine's energy symbolises the threshold, transformation, and passing through doorways (Royal, 2007). One cultural expression of this energy is the ancient women's ritual art of karanga (a high pitched call) where kaikaranga (women who perform the call) stand upon the threshold between the worlds, calling the dead to unite with the living (N. Dixon, personal communication, 8 November, 2009; A. Yates-Smith, personal communication, 8 November, 2009). This role, central to Māori ceremony and social organisation, is facilitated by women because of the female reproductive organs, which are culturally constructed as a doorway between the worlds (Hanson & Hanson, 1983; Mikaere, 2003; Smith, 1974).

²⁴ Wiccan theorists have written about this space 'in between worlds'. See Zsuzsanna Budapest (1980); Starhawk (1979); Juliet Batten (1995); and Kathryn Rountree (2004).

Ani Mikaere (2003) and Kuni Jenkins (1992) point to the courage of Hinētītama in assuming control of her own destiny, a courage that rewards her by gaining dominion over the realm of death. This is a point worth making when the prolific emphasis of this historic event is on Hinētītama's shame; a shame inherited according to some, by her descendants, Māori women. Contrary to legacies of shame, a closer inspection of Hinētītama's story through a mana wahine lens reveals courage, the power of transformation, of overcoming diversity, of assuming control of one's destiny. Hinenuitepō stamped her authority within the consciousness of humanity by crushing and killing Māui when he ventured 'between her thighs' in pursuit of immortality. Although all the recorded stories about Māui end here, his story, according to some traditions, continue. I rediscover and represent this story in chapter four.

Aroha Yates Smith points out the killing of Māui, through the genital force of Hinenuitepō, created a new dynamic to te whare tangata (the house of humanity). From this event the house of humanity also became known as te whare o aituā (the house of destruction) thus conceptualising the power of women with life and death, creation and destruction (Yates-Smith, 1998, p. 141). Menstrual blood symbolises this power of creation and destruction, for whilst it is a sign of fertility, it also signals the failed attempt of a tipuna to be conceived (A. Greensill cited in August, 2004; Norman, 1992). I am interested in exploring how our tīpuna whāea traversed this space 'in between', using the dual power in a multiplicity of ways, which saw them cross backwards and forwards, transcending the realms of tapu and noa. I am interested in whether menstruation played a role in the fluidity of Māori women's conceptual border crossings between states of tapu and noa.

Māori women are easily celebrated within whare tangata discourses, which in some ways, perpetuate western dualisms, aligning women with nature and fertility. But what about the legacies which speak to Māori women as fierce fighters, military strategists, and seers, whose visions catapulted iwi into battle? Understanding the narratives of our tīpuna whāea within these contexts begins to collapse colonial binaries imposed

on the metaphors of tapu and noa. These binaries have locked the roles of Māori women within the devalued domestic realm and denied it as a space that produces and transmits culture. As te whare tangata and te whare o aituā Māori women were (and are) clearly engaged in the production of culture. Our reproductive bodies represent the continuation of whakapapa, and the survival of whānau, hapū, and iwi (Mikaere, 2003; Pere, 1984; Pihama, 2001). Consistent with this role is the prolific oral compositions of Māori women that recount tribal histories (Mikaere, 2003, Ngata & Jones, 2004). Wars, political alliances, births, deaths, love affairs, and significant historic events are documented and maintained by Māori women through the composition of song, chant, and prose (Mikaere, 2003; Ngata & Jones, 2004).

It is important to note the diversity of opinion, version, and tradition within the Māori world which reflects a heterogeneity characteristic of Māori as tribal, historically Oceanic peoples. Each whānau, hapū and iwi maintains their own unique histories and within those tribal accounts there are multiple variations. Mana wahine and kaupapa Māori theories similarly reflect this diversity (Hoskins, 2000; Hutchings, 2002; Irwin, 1992; Mikaere, 2003; Pihama, 2001; Simmonds, 2009; Smith, 1999). In exploring the cosmological accounts for themes relating to menstruation and the reproductive bodies of Māori women, I do not seek to homogenise our stories, but follow in Ani Mikaere's footsteps by laying a general foundation for further whānau, hapū, and iwi based research (Mikaere, 2003, p. 12). Similar to Aroha Yates-Smith (1998), whilst my research canvasses the different waka traditions, I endeavour to pay particular attention to my own traditions.

According to my own ancestral traditions from Waikaremoana, relayed by my Aunty Rose Pere, Hine, the first human was a woman created from the genital organs of her mother, Papatūānuku. Aunty Rose explains that this is harmonious with natural law as all things are born from the womb of Woman (Pere, 1994, p. 167). Hine, according to Aroha Yates-Smith (1998) was imbued with her own autonomous power inherited from her mother's genital organs. Hine represents the divine feminine and houses

within herself “the generative power of the universe” (Yates-Smith, 1998, p. ii). Hine’s female descendants, wa-hine Māori, perpetuate her divinity, carrying her name as a constant reminder of their divine whakapapa origins (Pere, 1987, p. 59).

Tāne, who searched the world for the human element, found it within the folds of his own birthplace (Yates-Smith, 1998, p. 134; Mikaere, 2003, p. 17). Kurawaka, the place of the sacred red soil that created a medium for human life to enter the world, provides profound clues toward Māori constructs of womanhood in Māori cosmology and the role of menstrual blood in creation. This is an important theme, which I will explore further in chapter five.

Examining other colonised Indigenous women’s stories about menstruation provides a profound source of insight and solidarity. In the chapter ‘Amazons in Appalachia’ (1999) Awiakta shares stories of her Cherokee grandmothers who, like my own Ngāti Manawa and Tuhoe grandmothers, were famed fighters in times of war. In negotiating treaties with the Whites, Cherokee women always constituted part of the Native delegation, symbolising their prowess in council and war alongside their mana as the human counterpoint to mother earth. Their presence was a symbol of honour and respect toward their treaty partner. This honour was never reciprocated which prompted the question “Where are your women?” (Awiakta, 1999, p. 91). Implicit in the question Awiakta tells us is the question “Where is your balance?” “What is your intent?” (Awiakta, 1999, p. 91). With no women among them the Whites raised deep suspicion amongst their Native treaty partner who intuited “the mentality of destruction” (Awiakta, 1999, p. 91).

Contextualising Cherokee women’s political power and leadership within their matrilineal lineage to the earth raises significant questions for me in my work. I am interested in discovering whether our tīpuna whāea were accorded similar mana, tapu, and political clout as daughters of Papatūānuku. For example, did our tīpuna whāea inherit political responsibilities and obligations through their matrilineal whakapapa to the

earth?²⁵ The political leadership which Cherokee women wielded according to Awiakta (1999) was nurtured within the sacred menstrual lodges of the women. Here plans were made and decided upon. Cassie Steele observes “The Cherokee girl’s initiation into womanhood is simultaneously an initiation into politics, history, and the public sphere” (1999, p. 10). This collapses the gendered hierarchical dualism that domesticates women’s bodies and excludes them from producing culture.

The question ‘did our ancestresses maintain their own menstrual spaces?’ is one I seek to address in chapter five. Some of my participants confirmed the existence of menstrual spaces, being the whare kōhanga, the birth houses of women in former times. This was described to me as a whare wānanga for women. It was a place where matrilineal knowledges were handed down. This needs to be researched further, particularly if and how this space provided a forum for political and social strategising. Our tīpuna whaea were, like the Cherokee women, renowned fighters and military strategists. The manu ngangahu traditions, which equipped certain women to occupy the frontline in war, represent women in battle and their role in inciting the enemy and inspiring their tribal brothers (T. Maxwell, personal communication, June 20, 2009; Te Awekotuku, 2007b). Menstrual blood had a significant role in warfare rites in former times; I examine this in chapter six.

Paula Gunn Allen in her revelatory work *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the feminine in American Indian traditions* (1992) interrogates discourses which posit menstruation as ‘unclean’ in a culture that actively initiated the different phases of a woman’s reproductive cycle in community ceremonies. Similarly, discourses of menstrual contamination in Māori contexts contradict cultural paradigms about the central significance of the whare tangata. Colonial ethnographic assertions that our ancestors did not

²⁵ Jessica Hutchings (2002) argues that Māori women’s whakapapa to the earth speaks to us as *being the earth* that she then points out provides Māori women with a specific political platform in arguing issues related to ‘the environment’. I thoroughly agree with this position and am reminded of my Aunty Rose Pere who asserts: “The Earth is you! The Whenua is you!” (R. Pere, personal communication, November 18, 2009).

acknowledge menarche is also inconsistent when examining the wealth of rituals and ceremonies recorded which marks every other aspect of the *whare tangata* (see Best, 1906, 1929 for examples). I think Paula's insightful assertion that "The old ones were empowered by their certain knowledge that the power to make life is the source and model for all ritual magic and that no other power can gainsay it" (Gunn-Allen, 1992, p.28) provides a clue to the political imperative behind framing menstrual blood and menstruation within discourses of pollution in order to subordinate that power.

An Agenda for Decolonisation

I locate the reclamation of pre-colonial menstrual narratives within the wider movement of decolonisation. Decolonisation according to decolonisation facilitator Takawai Murphy entails:

the stripping away of the unwanted layers of another people's culture, accumulated over generations, to expose and rediscover the vivid colours of one's own cultural heritage (Murphy, 2003, p. 2).

Working through the layers is an embodied and transformative process which, using Linda Tuhiwai-Smith's expression, "will engage our minds and energies all our lives" (Smith, 1992, p. 50). According to Jessica Hutchings (2002), a decolonising analysis is a significant theme within *mana wahine* theories that recognises the on-going process of colonisation and its very specific impacts on Māori women. Leonie Pihama (2001, p. 288) states:

our colonial experience has been one of denial. Denial of our *reo*, denial of our *tikanga*, denial of our *whenua*, denial of our *taonga*, denial of our *whakapapa*. Colonial forces have attempted to deny us all of those things that contribute to our notions of who we are and where we fit in the world ... Decolonisation then includes a peeling back of the layers. Layer by layer. Constantly reflecting on what we find.

I would add that colonial processes have also denied Māori women matrilineal knowledge legacies that contain our cultural identities. Naomi

Simmonds (2009) notes the denial of such knowledges is “not a harmless omission rather it contains a political imperative that maintains the hegemony of colonialism and patriarchy” (Simmonds, 2009, p. iv). Aroha Yates-Smith (1998, p. 5) points out that the influences of Christianity and colonisation fragmented intergenerational matrilineal knowledge traditions. This is pertinent to discourses about menstrual blood and menstruation because stories regarding them are contextualised within matrilineal knowledge traditions. For example, when Eva Rickard spoke to the significance of burying the whenua of a newborn baby into the whenua of earth as a devotion to Papatūānuku, I think she spoke to a tradition that honours the reproductive blood of women (cited in Mikaere, 2003, p. 32). Colonisation infiltrated intergenerational rituals and knowledges by imposing policies and regulations which made it difficult, if not impossible, to carry out, a point well made by Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1991, p. 68).

In 1977 I was born at Rotorua Hospital and my whenua, like many others at the time, was swiftly confiscated and incinerated by hospital staff, thus breaking an intergenerational matrilineal blood rite.²⁶ In describing the burying of the placenta as a matrilineal blood rite I do not deny the significance of the participation of the whole whānau in such an occasion, or the importance of this rite in symbolising the continuation of ahi kā (a customary land tenure system that denotes continued land occupation) and mana whenua²⁷ of the hapū, merely that by nature this rite celebrates the ‘wombstuff’ of women. By identifying it as matrilineal I assert that, certainly in pre-colonial contexts, Māori women controlled and maintained embodied intergenerational knowledges relating to our own reproductive bodies. This argument is central to my thesis.

Within my work, a decolonising mana wahine lens is used to critically investigate the politics of power and control invested in terms that

²⁶ Linda Tuhiwai-Smith in *Decolonizing methodologies* (1999) speaks to this history, as does Leonie Pihama in *Tihei mauri ora: Honouring our voices* (2001).

²⁷ The mana whenua are the ‘guardians’ and maintain authority of a certain area (often struggling with local councils who transgress and ignore their authority). The mana whenua occupy this space and their identity is intimately woven into the landscape.

associate menstrual blood and menstruation with 'pollution' and 'contamination'. Reclaiming matrilineal knowledge traditions regarding menstruation, I argue, carries an explicitly political agenda within a history of female subordination through the doctrines of colonial patriarchy and Christianity (Mikaere, 2003, Pihama, 2001; Smith 1992, Yates-Smith, 1998). A decolonising mana wahine analysis also speaks to the reclamation of menstrual narratives that position Māori women within spiritual traditions. By grounding menstruation and menstrual blood in the context of creation stories, I ultimately seek to contribute to what other Māori women have worked toward; re-establishing a state of balance in the Māori world.²⁸ A decolonising mana wahine analysis recognises the continuation of legacies of female leadership and resistance. Annette Sykes (1994), Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1981, 1983, 1991), Leonie Pihama (2001), Ani Mikaere (2003) and others point out that Māori women have always been fiercely politically active and engaged, despite discourses that say otherwise. This work seeks to honour these women, these legacies, these 'bloodlines'.

²⁸ Rose Pere (1982, 1987, 1994); Aroha Yates-Smith (1998); Ani Mikaere (2003); and Kathie Irwin (1992a, 1992b), have produced material that works explicitly towards this end.

CHAPTER THREE

NGĀ HUANUI I WHĀIA: METHODOLOGY

Our Methodology is our Spirituality

Gustavo Gutierrez (as cited in Dillard, 2008, p. 286)

It is important to 'drink from our own wells', from our own experience not only as individuals but also as members of a people

Gustavo Gutierrez (as cited in Dillard, 2008, p. 286)

An Agenda of Transformation

My research began with ceremony at home to prepare for what felt a little like a sacred quest, a quest to reclaim knowledges and ceremonies associated with menstruation and Māori women in pre-colonial Māori society. Our blood rites, recorded in chant, prose, and tribal history spanning the centuries, reveal a deeper reflection on the physical, spiritual, and political significance of Māori women. This significance needs to be remembered and reclaimed in our pursuit towards tino rangatiratanga and decolonisation.

As a designer and facilitator of women's rituals and ceremonies, beginning with ceremony marked the research journey as a personal, and transformative experience and one informed by my own 'embodied history' (Aronowitz & Giroux as cited in Yukich, 2010, p. 12). Although from Mātaatua in the eastern Bay of Plenty, I grew up under the mountain Taranaki in the lands of the prophets Te Whiti O Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi²⁹ in the early 1990s during a national heatwave of Māori political

²⁹ Te Whiti and Tohu are the prophets from Parihaka who in 1867 began a strategy of passive resistance to maintain their lands from confiscation during the New Zealand sovereignty wars. In 1882 the West Coast Peace Preservation Act was passed into settler law allowing for the imprisonment of the prophets without trial. It also outlawed the congregation of more than fifty Māori at any one time in Taranaki (Hohaia, 2001).

protest.³⁰ In Taranaki the momentum was fierce, fueled by the rise of iwi radio that provided a radical³¹ conscious-raising Māori forum. My father, who had struggled for many years to reclaim te reo Māori, was the first school teacher in the country to take on the education board, demanding three months stress leave to begin reclaiming his ancestral tongue, denied him through what he argued was an inherently abusive, assimilationist education system.³² In Taranaki he became involved with others agitating for change and mobilising toward tino rangatiratanga. This was the beginning of his (in)famous decolonisation programme Te Pūmaomao, which twenty years later still travels up and down the country conscientising Māori communities and Pākehā organisations. Te Pūmaomao's teachings about decolonisation, tino rangatiratanga, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, social justice, and the land, provided the foundations for the formulation of my own political values and aspirations. They also embedded themselves in my spiritual and emotional world embracing me in a collective vision held by my whānau, my hapū and iwi, and the wider te iwi Māori.

In Taranaki my whānau were fortunate to experience the teachings of kaumātua Huirangi Waikerepuru who declared the reclamation of atua Māori paramount, and damned the effects of Christianity on the Indigenous mind (and as I argue in this thesis, the body). Around the mountain a movement to reject Christian prayers and reclaim karakia tūturu (traditional chants and incantation) was well underway. This aspiration was fostered by my father and Te Ururoa Flavell's radical

³⁰ This was a time of occupations such as those at Pākaitore in 1995, as well as national protest actions against the introduction of the infamous 'Fiscal Envelope' which purported to settle 'Treaty grievances' through a process designed exclusively by the perpetrators of injustice, the Crown.

³¹ I use this word in its original context, which is to create fundamental change.

³² My father's charge was the education system had abused him as a child by denying his Indigeneity, and schooling him to be a Pākehā. With a doctors certificate and psychologist's report supporting his request for stress leave (which he argued was the outcome of continued cultural repression in the education system), the board was forced to accept his request.

talkback radio show that challenged marae to ban Christian prayers.³³ The kaupapa was also championed by others involved in the Māori education and health sectors.

From an early age I agreed implicitly with this position. I could never understand the notion of a dominant male god in the sky when, as a young girl, the source of my spiritual nourishment and my conception of the divine was very much here on earth, within the busting colours and smells of a spring morning, in the shimmering heat of a summer afternoon, and in the loving embrace of my Pākehā Irish descendant mother. In womanhood my sense of the divinity of the earth and the mother energy in general has only deepened. I am still a nurtured daughter who celebrates maternal love as divine.

Te Ūkaipō, a beloved name for Papatūānuku, refers to the pre-dawn breastfeeding hours when a mother provides her baby physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual nourishment and sustenance through the milk. The use of the term in relation to Papatūānuku speaks to the divinity of the earth in its capacity to nurture and fulfil all the basic needs of humanity. Reconstructing menstrual ceremonies, for me, means reclaiming matrilineal traditions that uphold, honor and celebrate this connection to the earth. I argue in this thesis that menstruation is a powerful medium that connects Māori women back to our cosmologies and divinity embedded in the sacred earth and cosmos. It is a primary site of decolonisation and healing.

Andrea Smith (2005, p.5) articulates that:

Native spiritualities have always been a cornerstone of resistance struggles. These spiritualities affirm the goodness of Native

³³ At the tangi of Taranaki historian, artist, musician, and activist Te Miringa Hohaia, I observed that over the five days I did not hear one Christian prayer. The whānau pani (bereaved family) had rejected a coffin and had wrapped him in a kōpaki - a traditional mat woven of flax for this purpose. Te Miringa's tangi was a beautiful example of the reclamation of ancient incantation and traditional funerary rites. It was the culmination of a massive decolonisation campaign in which Te Miringa himself had been hugely influential.

communities when the larger society dehumanises them. They affirm the interconnectedness of all things that provides the framework of re-creating communities that are based on mutual responsibility and respect rather than violence and domination.

Native spiritualities that strive to reclaim the divine feminine within a historical context of systematic repression are a very specific site of resistance. I locate the reclamation of women's blood knowledge here. Collecting Māori women's womb-blood stories works toward re-threading the feminine strands in the spiritual fabric of our world.

Deconstructing discourses of menstrual pollution within the broader aspirations of tino rangatiratanga and decolonisation situates my work within kaupapa Māori and mana wahine methodologies (Bishop, 1999, 2005; Lee, 2005; Smith, 1999, 2005). Both are healing methodologies that Cynthia Dillard (2008) describes as an "activist praxis" (p. 286) grounded in cosmology and cultural practices that bring healing to ourselves and others. Using ceremony as part of a healing methodological process is reflective of Indigenous traditions that speak to the pursuit of knowledge as a spiritual matter which in former times demanded ritual preparation (Mead, 2003; Royal, 1993; Smith, 1999). Peat in *Blackfoot Physics* (1994) describes a crucial element of this when he explains that 'coming to know' involved "entering into a relationship with the living spirit of that knowledge" (p. 67). Similarly Shawn Wilson (2008) posits that research itself is ceremony and ceremony is ultimately about building, developing, and maintaining relationships to ideas that raise our consciousness and bring "insight into our world" (p. 11).

Ceremony

Coming into a relationship with women's blood knowledge, I reasoned, demanded the graciousness of ceremony. It provided a space to call in my tīpuna and kaitiaki to guide and protect the journey to knowledge, to remove external and internal blockages, and to assist in opening doors and drawing the appropriate people to me at appropriate times. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), drawing on the work of Kathie Irwin and Russell

Bishop, notes the importance of gathering a 'whānau' of supervisors within a kaupapa Māori research methodology, identifying that this is where research intersects with te ao Māori. I extend that to the conscious inclusion of our tīpuna and kaitiaki in the 'supervision whānau'. This is reflective of a Māori world-view whose metaphysics span the universe to interconnect the past, present and future within a gigantic web we call whakapapa (Pihama, 2001, Royal, 2003).

Creating and entering sacred ceremonial space as a young, menstruating woman was significant because of the denial of the ritual lore of menstruating Māori women.³⁴ We have inherited a "textual legacy" (Yukich, 2010, p. 34) that has defined us as domestic creatures, devoid of the knowledges, practices, and states of tapu. We are warned of the danger of the blood to 'pollute' sacred space, framed within a logic couched in discourses of female inferiority that contradict the spiritual, physical, cultural, political, and economic significance of the whare tangata. I argue that the blood contains the power to overwhelm, not pollute, and that the idea of menstrual pollution is more about controlling women than ritual transgression. I maintain that menstruation itself is a woman's ceremony (Anderson, 2007), one that was celebrated, mourned, and marked in simple, personal, and empowering rituals that symbolised our connection to Papatūānuku and our matrilineal lines. Beginning my research journey with ceremony embodied this position.

I dressed carefully for ceremony wearing red, the sacred colour of our ancestors.³⁵ I anointed myself with kōkōwai, the deep red clay that some say sculpted the first woman, Hineahuone, at the vulva of Papatūānuku. This ritual symbolised my whakapapa to Papatūānuku, through Hineahuone, across the blood-tides of history, and acknowledged my body

³⁴ Best (1924a, 1924b); Goldie (1904); Hanson (1983); Kent & Besley (1990); Makereti (1938); and Riley (1994), all provide examples of the restrictions placed upon menstruating women.

³⁵ I think it is deeply significant that the colour red was regarded as sacred and was worn and anointed to signify the sacred nature of a person or thing (Tregear, 1926). Red is rarely seen on marae these days. Black is now the standard colour. This demands a more critical reflection.

as an expression of her continuation. Through this act my body became the ceremonial space, an embodied mana wahine space, a space from which I felt I could appropriately conduct the research and come into union with the knowledge. Embodying mana wahine meant for me, aligning with an ancient female force to guide, protect and open up the pathway for the return of blood kōrero, of women's kōrero. It meant coming to know in my body that 'I am the whenua, and the whenua is me' (Hutchings, 2002; R. Pere, personal communication, 28 November 2009).

From an embodied mana wahine space I searched through the cosmological accounts, tribal histories, karakia, and mōteatea (tribal songs and laments) looking for blood narratives and broader themes of female power. From this space I came kano ki te kano (face to face) with often fierce no-nonsense Māori matriarchs, poets, activists, ritualists, and scholars. My interviews were performed in informal spaces in informal ways, allowing my participants to feel more comfortable talking about women's blood and bodies. Our kōrero were mainly one on one. Demanding and clashing schedules meant that co-coordinating group wānanga with the women was impossible. Future research on this kaupapa would benefit from this method that reflects women's spaces as ancient places of knowledge exchange.

My Participants

During the course of this research I approached eleven Māori women from across the motu whose stories reflect the different hapū and iwi traditions. Only one of the women was from my own iwi in Waikaremoana but her contribution, as one schooled in ancient teachings, saturate the pages of this thesis. All of the women I interviewed I approached because of the work they do in relation to mana wahine and their knowledge of te ao Māori. Some I approached because of their powerful critiques of patriarchy and colonisation and their unrelenting challenges to both Pākehā and Māori power structures. I spoke with four women who are practitioners of the ancient women's ceremonial art of karanga. This was important as the philosophies that underpin karanga relate directly to the ancient teachings

about the reproductive bodies of Māori women.

Only two participants were of my own generation. One I interviewed because of her participation in a Taranaki-based conscious menstrual group committed to reclaiming and celebrating lore around the blood-tides. The other was an informal participant from Tainui who is involved in traditional waka ama (outrigger canoe sports). Her passion for this kaupapa motivated her to invest time in searching through waka karakia looking for clues. I may not have encountered the karakia and waka stories regarding Tainui and the priestess Māhurangi without her commitment and love for this kaupapa.

Most of the women I knew through my whānau. Others were referred on to me because of their knowledge base. Some of my participants have given their consent to be named. Others are informal participants who shared kōrero with me but for various reasons remain anonymous. Most of the kōrero with my participants was over coffee or snatched moments at tangi, on the way to tangi, or at hui. One of the interviews was performed at a spa pool over an afternoon whilst my participant continued her art practice. Other interactions took place as on-going conversations over email. I purposefully employed a relaxed and informal attitude toward the 'interview' process so that the women would feel more comfortable canvassing intimate subjects. I think this reflects a mana wahine methodology, creating casual, sharing, wānanga environments and letting the kōrero find its way out into the light with a few prompts, but little control on my part. The difference between this approach and other more formal research approaches is that a wānanga environment is non-hierarchical. One exchanges ideas and gives and receives, rather than dictating questions in a one-sided manner.

My questions were fluid, changing with each participant. I asked them what they thought was important about this kaupapa and what they wanted to speak to. Many of my questions were shaped in relation to the women's stories. This level of flexibility and exchange is a feature of kaupapa Māori that approaches research as a collaborative endeavour,

operationalising tino rangatiratanga in the community by providing for participants to co-determine the research pathway (Bishop, 1999; Durie, 1998; Smith, G. 1990; Smith, L. 1999). Shawn Wilson (2008) points out that this is also an Indigenous approach, performing research “within the traditions of the circle, which is inclusive, participatory, proactive” (p. 103-104).

Although I had planned to film some of the interviews I chose not to in the end. This was because I found the camera too intrusive, cutting across the relaxed and intimate environments created. Many of the interviews were spontaneous, and or snatched precious moments with busy women and so filming felt like a distraction and seemed impractical.

One revelatory discussion took place at 2 a.m. in a *whare kai* at a *tangi* with one of the *whānau pani* who chose that moment to share stories. I had been conversing with her over email for months because she was based in Canada. Our conversation was completely unplanned and dictated almost entirely by her. Her *kōrero* conveyed important traditions about menstrual spaces as women’s learning houses where knowledges were handed down. Usually I carried a dictaphone with me and transcribed the recordings as quickly as possible whilst my experience of the conversation was still fresh. I did not have a dictaphone on me on that occasion and all I was prepared for was to listen. When the *kōrero* concluded I wrote up notes of what I thought were the most striking or significant points. These included stories that both reflected and contradicted what others had said. Looking for these similarities and contradictions during my interview period and during the literature review was how my themes began to emerge.

Early on in my research, as soon as broad themes began to appear, I put them into thematic files on my computer. I added *kōrero*, references, and quotes that reflected and deepened these themes as I progressed through the research. These thematic files became the main points of the thesis. Each file took on its own unique characteristics which then became my ‘findings chapters’ – chapters four, five, and six. The story of Māui and its

analysis was one file and it now occupies an entire chapter. Framing menarche ceremonies and matrilineal knowledge traditions within the powerful cosmologies related to Kurawaka was another file. Focussing on mōteatea that reference a spectrum of ancient menstrual blood rites that speak to the power and potency of women, and the blood, claimed its own space in the final chapter.

During my research I encountered three stories about the origins of menstruation within the worlds of Māori and these stories open each chapter. The stories contain their own themes and I found a natural synchronicity in categorising my research findings within these story themes. The cosmological menstrual narratives that open each of the research findings chapters are not in chronological order. I have begun with Māui, and ended with Papatūānuku and the cosmogonic cycles of Te Pō. In this way I have actually begun with the more recent narratives and worked backwards towards the earlier stories of creation. I found that as I researched, I wrote, and the kōrero found its own natural formation and sequence.

In analysing the material I looked for striking similarities, complexities, and contradictions across the participants' kōrero and in the literature. I looked for differences that reflect the diversity across hapū and iwi. I looked for information that challenged colonial ethnographic reports of menstrual pollution and narratives of female inferiority. With Elsdon Best, in particular, I found examples in his own ethnographic reports of menstrual rites that fundamentally contradicted his own misogynist assertions. I explore some of these examples in chapters five and six. I also looked for information regarding matrilineal knowledges and ritual traditions that referenced the significance of the whare tangata. I was particularly interested in examples of Māori women as spell-crafters and historic examples of women using their talents as 'seers' and prophets to determine tribal events.³⁶ Whilst I did not include this material it helped me

³⁶ Fletcher's (2000) doctoral thesis has some excellent examples of this.

to formulate an understanding of Māori women within a metaphysical context in former times and how these understandings were grounded within whānau and hapū politics and social events.

In the process of gathering information, from people in particular, I have been very mindful of what information to put in my thesis and what to leave out. My main concerns have been keeping my participants safe and taking care in using tribal material that does not belong to me. Whilst I have used mōteatea from other tribal areas, already published within Ngata and Jones mōteatea volumes, and Grey's karakia and mōteatea collections, I have omitted karakia and tribal events that have been shared with me in personal communications. These examples were largely from Te Miringa Hohaia who died before I received formal permission to use them in this thesis. I have used his general comments as a Taranaki historian but have trusted my intuition to leave his historic examples out. All my participants received a copy of their kōrero in the context in which I was using it so they had an opportunity to change, add, or omit anything. My participants have had the final say in my use of their kōrero.

Some literature I chose to omit because whilst fascinating, I was concerned it might change the tone of the thesis. I refer to some of the mōteatea that reference the use of menstrual blood to curse in graphic and often gory detail.³⁷ Whilst I have acknowledged this history in chapter six and provided some examples, there are others I purposefully left out. It did not feel appropriate to house those examples within a work that also carries ceremonies of profound beauty like those found in chapter five.

Most of the women I approached through phone calls or email. If I did not personally know the women, those that referred me to them in the first place approached them and in one instance facilitated an initial hui. Maintaining a flexibility about meeting to kōrero was sometimes hard. One of my participants who supported the work and with whom I shared one initial hui in which significant kōrero emerged became an informal

³⁷ See Ngata & Jones *Ngā mōteatea*, (2004), p. 500-503, and p. 324-327 for examples.

participant, simply because we could not secure another time to hui. Whilst I knew that she had a tremendous amount of knowledge to offer this research I was not prepared to be pushy or harass her. My methodology has been one of trusting my kaitiaki and tīpuna that the knowledges, ceremonies, and stories contained within these pages, like the people who shared them, are appropriate for this particular time and within this academic format.

Karakia was an essential part of my methodology. I performed karakia before every hui, particularly before meeting participants for the first time. This helped to align and ground me within the real purpose of the research, which is to reclaim ceremonies and knowledges that contribute towards reinstating the divine feminine within the worlds of Māori. I took a koha of kai to each hui in the spirit of reciprocity, which is of significant value within Māori society. I also commissioned taonga to be made as gifts in exchange for the stories and knowledges that were shared with me. Once again this was to uphold the law of utu, of reciprocity, and the sacred act of giving and receiving.

I soon learnt that the research process is often unpredictable. Sometimes I was frustrated by the fluidity of it all, particularly in organising interviews which fell through at short notice. However I learned to be comfortable with relinquishing control and going with the flow, trusting in my tīpuna and kaitiaki that things were unfolding as they should. I also came to appreciate more the Indigenous understanding that knowledge is alive, it chooses you, and determines for itself what it reveals, and when, and what it hides (Peat, 1994; Royal, 1993). I learned to let go of expectations and appreciate that every one of my participants shared something of great benefit to the kaupapa, often in unexpected ways. By way of an example, one woman spoke to me about the complexities of women's power and the fear that surrounds the dark and secret nature of women's genitalia, represented in our cosmologies like the stories about Hinenuitepō. Her advice was not to deny, romanticise, or simplify these complexities but to embrace and explore them in order to deepen the work and my own analysis. Her advice inspired me to look for the contradictions and

nuances of power. This was valuable advice because whilst menstrual blood is sometimes constructed as a divine river of ancestors and descendants and a medium of atua, there are other examples of it being used to cause harm as a potent, liminal substance. I explore this in chapter six. Another participant, an artist, sent me a beautiful lunar calendar that featured her paintings of Indigenous women framed within the cyclic seasons of the earth. Another provided me with practical and personal advice related to performing provocative research from her own personal experiences.

My work was claimed by many of my research participants as belonging to all of us, shaped by all of us and for all our benefit. Catching up with some of my participants after initial kōrero produced the question 'how is our kaupapa going?' I think this response is due to a kaupapa Māori inclusive methodology as well as the intimacy of the kaupapa and our collective desire to address 'pollutive' menstrual dialogues as a form of unacceptable violence that needs to be urgently challenged. Also, by sharing very personal whānau and hapū histories, passed down by mothers and aunties, grandmothers, but also sometimes fathers, uncles, and grandfathers, my participants were personally invested in this work. Their whānau stories fill the pages of this thesis and bring it life.

Indigenous Autoethnography: Keeping the Fires Burning

A Diné (Navajo) friend once told me that her people survived the long winters in the American frontier concentration camps through their stories and their ceremonies. These were the medicines that ensured the endurance of her people against the colonisers' agenda of cultural and physical obliteration.³⁸ Indigenous political artist Graciela Sanchez reflects similar themes stating:

we are the survivors. Our stories are the ones we never see, hear,
remember, share with another. But telling our joys and fears, how we

³⁸ See Bailey, Lynn R. (1970). *Bosque Redondo: An American concentration camp* for a detailed history of the imprisonment of the Diné during the colonization of the 'Americas'.

survive, who we love, how we deal with the attacks toward our lives, how we celebrate, are the secret of our survival as a people (as cited in Solomon, 2001, p. 85).

Jennifer Houston (2007) writes about Indigenous autoethnography as a method that combines Native storytelling traditions with the practice of academic research. Jennifer points out that for Indigenous women in particular, who have endured legacies of misrepresentation by others, autoethnography provides a powerful form of “scholarly resistance” (p. 45), a way to speak our own stories and represent ourselves and our myriad realities. Indigenous autoethnography creates a space for voices and knowledges historically located in the margins. I am very careful not to say marginalised or oppressed voices as not one of the women I spoke with could be described as remotely ‘oppressed’. Whilst legacies of colonial oppression have been experienced to varying degrees, these women symbolised the continuation of female ancestral leadership, strength, vision, wisdom, and ferocity! Their voices are not voices of the marginalised and oppressed but voices of the survivors, voices of resilience, and resistance (Bishop, 2005; Pihama, 1995, 2001; Mikaere, 2003; Te Awekotuku, 1991). Jennifer writes Indigenous women’s stories:

carry within them the stories of communities and societies. These are political, historical, sociological tales embedded in class, gender, and identity struggles. Aboriginal women in particular write about personal struggles that are political battles (Houston, 2007, p. 47).

Stories, especially in Indigenous contexts of colonisation, are like the metaphorical sap in Miriam Ungunmerr-Baumann’s (2002) poem. She writes:

If you stay closely united, you are like a tree, standing in the middle of a bushfire sweeping through the timber. The leaves are scorched and the tough bark is scarred and burnt; but inside the tree the sap is still flowing, and under the ground the roots are still strong. Like that tree, you have endured the flames, and you still have the power to be reborn (Ungunmerr-Baumann, 2002, para. 22).

I waited for Matariki³⁹ to rise in winter, announcing the new year, before I journeyed out to the motu to gather stories for this work. By this time I had scoped the literature and reflected enough on the kaupapa to know the kind of stories I was looking for. I headed to Taranaki, to Parihaka, where I spent a night with Te Miringa, a male mentor I deeply respect and trust. His kōrero, as a Taranaki historian, was insightful, reminding me that, contrary to ethnographic records, it was the women who were the wisdom keepers. Women's whare wānanga were established around the mountain and photographic evidence of them remains.⁴⁰ In Taranaki, Te Miringa explained, the rangatira lines came down from the kuia, a fact reiterated in karakia. Before the spring, near the completion of my interview period, Te Miringa died. Nō reira e te pāpā, e Miri, moe mai rā ki runga i te maunga tapu, te maunga tītōhea o Taranaki e.

From Parihaka and Taranaki, the place of my childhood, I returned home to the lake, to Waikaremoana, to sit with my mountain Panekire and my Aunty Rose Pere. Our time together spanned a week. During those days I cooked, baked and chopped firewood. I lay by the fire early in the morning after breakfast, in the lazy mid afternoons and late at night to receive her teachings. At times I found that doing domestic chores meant I received her kōrero more clearly without tiring. She never tired! The work grounded me in her house, in her kōrero, and in our whanaungatanga. From this informal and intimate place I was able to receive personal narratives and kōrero about Aunty Rose's life and the lives of her mother, grandmothers, grandfathers and tribal people. Being grounded in her house meant I was able to listen, receive, and understand stories and cosmological kōrero as the ancestral teachings found a home in my body. Sitting in this space I became deeply aware that my research was not only methodologically grounded in ceremony but also a ceremony in and of itself (Wilson, 2008).

³⁹ The Pleiades constellation that heralds the ancient Māori new year for many iwi.

⁴⁰ Te Miringa pointed out that some of these photographs are of women and girls performing poi chants. The book *Parihaka: The art of passive resistance* (2005) houses them.

What was essential in receiving Aunty Rose's teachings was time - time to receive in a leisurely, open and relaxed way her stories, memories and teachings, time to contemplate and sit with the korero, time to nurture our relationship and time to reciprocate the sharing of korero by contributing to the running of the household. Throughout our days I operated a dictaphone. I had planned on using a video camera but the atmosphere was so intimate I decided against what felt intrusive. At the end of our days together Aunty Rose's daughter, my cousin Moanaroa, cooked a hākari (feast) of tītī (mutton-bird) to bring our wānanga to a close in accordance with tikanga. Our time together was so nourishing and contemplative we knew the tīpuna supported the kaupapa and the return of this kōrero and the ceremonies that accompanied it.

bell hooks' assertion that "What we seek is a way of working illumined by spirit and infused with soul" (as cited in Dillard, 2008, p. 277) describes the nature of my research journey within a decolonising kaupapa Māori and mana wahine methodology. Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008, p. 135) suggests "if research hasn't changed you as a person, then you haven't done it right". This idea extends research methodology beyond a transformative agenda (Bishop, 1999, 2005; Smith, 1999, 2005) toward an embodied experience of transformation itself through a subjective approach (Dillard, 2008). Abandoning any pretenses of 'objectivity' (Houston, 2007) and allowing my own subjectivities to inform the work meant the research was able to become a personal journey of transformation. This position reflects the wider "discursive turn" (Gergen cited in Wright, 2009, p. 6) within the social sciences towards producing embodied knowledges that disrupt the hegemony of 'legitimate', scientific, 'rational', masculinist knowledges that "seek to isolate and compartmentalize" (Wulff, 2010, p. 1292). (See also Adams, 2008; Grosz, 1994; Houston, 2007; Longhurst, 2001; Wright, 2009.) It also speaks to the rise of kaupapa Māori (and other Indigenous methodologies) that displace the 'objective' Pākehā 'expert', creating a platform for Māori to speak and represent ourselves (Bishop, 1999, 2005; Houston, 2007; Irwin, 1992a, 1992b; Pihama, 2001; Smith, 1999, 2005, Te Awakotuku, 1991,

2007), drawing upon our 'own wells' of experience to perform research that reflects our values and customs.

Philosopher and theologian Māori Marsden wrote:

The route to Māoritanga through abstract interpretation is a dead end. The way can only lie through a passionate, subjective approach ... the so-called objectivity some insist on is simply a form of arid abstraction, a model or a map. It is not the same thing as the taste of reality (cited in Royal, 2003, p. 2).

Through a subjective and passionate approach I ventured into the stories, rites, and ceremonies of our tīpuna regarding menstruation. I turn now to the teachings from Waikaremoana, from the lands of my grandmother.

CHAPTER FOUR

MĀUI



Figure 1. Te Ipu Hue o Te Uha (Carved Gourd, 2010) by Ngāhina Hohaia

(Source: Photographed by Ngāhina Hohaia)

Māui-tikitiki-a-Taranga

Yours the ultimate sacrifice

Assuring continuity

Through the tide

Of woman⁴¹

⁴¹ Authors composition, 2010.

I begin my exploration into pre-colonial Māori understandings and attitudes toward menstruation by examining a menstrual origin story from my own tribal lands of Te Urewera. With the rise of Matariki in the winter month of June I travelled through to Waikaremoana to kōrero with one of my kuia Rose Pere. Aunty Rose's story originates in the ancient teachings of Ngā Potiki, and Ngā Uri-a-Māui and her schooling within the kura huna (school of mysteries). Regarding the ancient origins of menstruation in the Māori world, Aunty Rose shared the following:

Woman is seen as the Sacred House of Humanity and the canoe that conveys one generation to the next. Before the 'River of Time' when only Atua existed, both male and female, one of the female Atua whose name is Hine-nui-te-po-te-ao, was responsible for giving woman 'Te Awa Atua', the Divine River, menstruation. Māui, a demi-god, observed that Hina-te-iwa-iwa the moon god could make her world wax and wane every month. Māui decided that he too wanted continuity like the moon, so he decided to return to the womb of the god Hine-nui-te-po-te-ao to receive immortality.

Māui went to Hine-nui-te-po-te-ao, and climbed up to her thighs. The Tiwaiwaka (fantail) flitted right up to Māui, and asked him what he was up to. Māui told the Tiwaiwaka that he wanted to go back into the womb where he was sure he could receive immortality. The Tiwaiwaka warned Māui about cutting across the natural laws, but Māui continued on his journey. The Tiwaiwaka woke the sleeping Hine-nui-te-po-te-ao up. Hine-nui-te-po-te-ao asked Māui what he was doing heading up to her groin and Māui told her about wanting to be like the Moon. Hine-nui-te-po-te-ao said she could grant Māui his wish but he was not to return to the womb; she then crushed him and made him the first menstruation to come into the world. As long as woman menstruates, Māui will live on (R. Pere, personal communication, July 11, 2010).

There are several striking themes within this story. The first is that contrary to widespread accounts, Māui did not die but achieved immortality after all, reappearing 'like the moon' in the blood-tides of woman. Flowing like an

ancient 'river of time' and binding the generations, Māui's monthly appearance signals continuity and the immortality of the people down through the generations. Ironically Māui is already closely related to time through the masculinist escapade in which he 'snarcs the sun' to slow it down in order to attain more daylight hours (Reed, 2004). Within this menstrual story Māui is once again aligned with time, but a very different notion of time, one that is lunar, not solar, and one associated with the cyclic patterns reflected in a woman's reproductive body.

This story reveals that Māui's observations of the Polynesian atua of the moon, Hinateiwaiwa (also Hinetewaiwa), began the synchronic relationship between women's reproductive bodies and the cycles of the moon of whose waxing and waning movements parallel the "monthly readying, filling, and emptying of the uterus" (Stewart, 2000, p. 141). It is significant to note that throughout Polynesia Māui is closely related to Hinateiwaiwa. As lovers, siblings, and in some versions mother and child, the two are closely linked, aligning Māui with the force of the moon and the patron of 'womanly arts' (Best, 1924, 1955).

Aunty Rose's description of menstruation as a 'river of time' speaks to menstruation as a medium of whakapapa. Whakapapa, according to Angeline Greensill is the 'foundation stone' within a Tangata Whenua perspective because it represents relationships across generations and species, with all things interconnected through a shared lineage back to our atua (cited in Cram, 2000, p. 5). Menstruation then provides humanity with a link back to our atua and the cosmos. The inherent contradiction in accepting menstruation as 'unclean' within a culture that celebrates whakapapa as a central tenet is pointed out by Leonie Pihama who writes:

If we invert the meanings of menstruation to be more in line with the value of future generations as is a part of whakapapa and whanaungatanga then we do not view menstruation as some act of defilement. Times of menstruation are then viewed as tapu, given the flowing of blood (Pihama, 2001, p. 191-192).

According to Aunty Rose the flowing blood was once known by the name māui, heard throughout Te Urewera at one time in the saying 'kua tae mai a māui' (menses has arrived). There are often multiple versions of stories, each with its own political outcome. Another version of this story speaks of Māui being caught in the vulva of Hinenuitepō and as she convulses her vaginal muscles, he scrapes down the walls of the birth canal causing Hinenuitepō to bleed. This wound blood, it is purported, is the origin of menstruation. Conceptualising menstrual blood as wound blood is physiologically inconsistent, however, and is unique amongst tribal histories that speak to menstrual blood as a living entity. As Judy Grahn (1993) writes "menstrual blood is the only source of blood that is not traumatically induced" (p. xviii). Around the world and across the centuries menstruation has therefore been regarded with awe, fear, reverence, and "holy dread, as the life essence, inexplicably shed without pain, (and) wholly foreign to male experience" (Walker, 1996, p. 635). The saying 'kua tae mai a Māui' (R. Pere, personnel communication, July 10, 2010) provides a clear indication of which version many Te Urewera women once followed.

Māui is an ancient menstrual name that is paralleled in this story by another - 'te awa atua', 'the divine river'. Aunty Rose explains that the awa atua is named so because Māui himself was an atua, who came from atua. Māui chose the womb of Hinenuitepōteao to claim immortality because she was his mother. Her womb was Māui's own birthplace so it was only appropriate that he would seek to venture that same path in his quest for immortality. According to Aunty Rose Hinenuitepōteao is not the 'goddess of death' but the originator of the blood that ensures the continuity of humanity. The 'awa atua' refers to the divinity of Māui from his mother Hinenuitepōteao, and our whakapapa to this divinity through the menstrual blood of women (R. Pere, personal communication, July 10, 2010).

Although this story is tribally specific, atua as a term for menstruation is represented across literature denoting it was widely applied. One of my participants, Te Wai Hohaia (Ngāti Moeahu, Ngāti Haupoto, Taranaki)

mentioned that this is a term she had heard growing up, noting that the atua referred to tribal, and ancient Māori deities. Thus the name awa atua denoted a woman's "time of power, a special time where women were in tune with the natural elements and were encouraged to use this time wisely" (T. W. Hohaia, personal communication, July 30, 2010). I explore some of the ways we used 'our time' in chapter five.

H.W. Williams translates atua as god, supernatural being, and menses, providing a striking clue about how our tīpuna viewed menstruation as a living force (Williams, 1991, p. 20). Our tīpuna harnessed this force in rituals for a variety of purposes that I discuss in chapter six. Goldie (1904) describes the nature of this living force, quoting a Native elder who explains that menstruation was regarded as tapu because the blood carried a living entity who would grow into a man if the blood ceased to flow (p. 89). To Aunty Rose "the name awa atua says it all. Mehemea kāore e heke mai te awa atua ki a Papatūānuku, ka noho mai anō he tīpuna, he uri" (if the divine river does not descend back to the earth then an ancestor, a descendant resides in the womb) (R. Pere, personal communication, July 10, 2010).

The story of the migratory traditions of Mātaatua waka refer to menstrual blood as an atua in the context of ancient rites in which our tīpuna named the landscape after their own body parts and personal events. Wairaka, daughter of the rangatira Toroa, bathed in the mouth of the Tarawera river and whilst swimming was overcome by her menstruation. Her father Toroa, upon sighting the blood, asked whose 'godly' blood it was, to which Wairaka responded. Toroa then named the place 'Te Awa o te Atua' (the river of the gods), and in so doing exalted the event within the tribal histories (Ngāti Awa Claims Settlement Act 2005). This provides a striking contradiction to the simplistic and generalised discourses of female pollution in that Wairaka's state is immortalised through naming. This is not the practice of a culture that believes the blood is 'unclean'. Wairaka is not ordered out of the river for fear of polluting it, nor is her situation 'an embarrassment' as writers such as Simmons (1976, p. 153) have insisted. If this was so wouldn't her father have silenced the event like

contemporary writers have attempted to do through ignoring this story completely?

Writers who have addressed the migratory traditions such as Stafford (1991, 1994, 1999) and A.W. Reed (1977) provide excellent examples of the selective erasure of histories that recount the mana and tapu of Māori women. Their nebulous accounts of the naming of Te Awa o te Atua in particular, have contributed towards a “conspiracy of silence” (Shuttle & Redgrove, 1989, p.13) that surrounds the subject of menstruation. Parallel examples of sweeping censorship can be found in colonial ethnographer Edward Shortland’s *Traditions and Superstitions of the New Zealanders* (1856) and *Maori Religion and Mythology* (1882). Shortland translates his findings on menstruation into Latin, and relegates it into appendices. This example reflects the politics of knowledge production that perpetuates colonial patriarchy by marginalising women’s realities. Women’s knowledges are reduced to a trace in the literary landscape, contributing to a lack of knowledge that impacts on Māori women today.

Legacies of Terror

The consequences of silencing menstrual narratives and presenting menstruation as ‘unclean’, ‘an embarrassment’, and in some cases ‘demonic’ (see Goldie, 1904), has created both a hostility toward the menstruating body of Māori women and a ‘lost vocabulary’. Linda Tuhiwai Smith states that for many Māori women there are no words to express what is ‘down there’ (L. Smith, personal communication, 8 June, 2010). After almost two centuries of colonial contact many Māori women shuffle around language about their reproductive body in complete contrast to our ancestresses who celebrated their sexuality through compositions that are still sung today. A famous example is the composition ‘Poia atu taku poi’ by Ngāti Raukawa tipuna Erenora Taratoa who rejoices in her sexual virility with lavish praise. However, as Ani Mikaere points out, what was once a striking example of female sexual assertiveness is also a powerful example of censorship in the substitution of the word tara (vulva) with mea

(meaning 'thing') in the first edition (1961) of Ngata and Jones *Ngā Mōteatea Part Two* (as cited in Mikaere, 2003, p. 95-96).

Such censorship is indicative of a textual history that has positioned women's reproductive organs as noa (translated as profane), inferior, and 'unclean'. By extension 'pollution', 'unclean', and 'contamination' are words systematically used in colonial literature in reference to menstrual blood and menstruating women (Goldie: 1904, Best: 1924a, Best: 1924b).

Buckley & Gottlieb in *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation* (1988, p. 4) state that:

Repeated ethnographic reports of the taboos that are seen to constrain menstruous women because of the imputed malevolence of menstrual discharge have contributed in important ways to the development of powerful general theories of pollution.

The authors argue that ethnographers have presupposed a correlation between restriction and the oppression and low status of women, treating "taboos as no more than rules prescribing certain behaviours rather than as parts of religious systems that may have wider cosmological ramifications" (p. 9). The 'one size fits all' theoretical framework of the majority of ethnographic reports of menstrual customs and beliefs, according to Buckley and Gottlieb, have produced "terse statements on 'the' meaning of menstrual blood – seen always as symbolically dangerous or otherwise defiling" (p. 4).

Ethnographers, certainly in colonial 'New Zealand' society, were influenced by the powerful general theories of 'menstrual pollution' which were pervasive within the new colonial science. Aroha Yates-Smith (1998) also observes that many of the colonial ethnographers were Christian, a religion whose teachings and doctrine regard menstruation as the 'Curse of Eve' (Buckley & Gottlieb, 1988, p. 32; Shuttle & Redgrove, 1986, p. 83). In the Old Testament menstrual blood is referred to as polluting, impure, and unclean and is accompanied by restrictions that segregate the menstruating woman from the rest of the community (Lev. 15: 19-26 King James Authorized Version). Everett Fox (1995) in his commentary on

Leviticus, the book of the Torah that refers to the pollution of menstruating women suggests:

as a male hierarchy, the priests viewed women, with their closer connections to the life process (and maybe also to previous forms of paganism in the form of goddess worship), as potentially dangerous, or at least problematic, to their system of purity. The seeming 'disorder' of women's discharges (perhaps representing 'nature') threatened the imposition of order ('culture') that is so central to priestly thinking (Fox, 1995, p. 556).

The infiltration of Christian ideologies can be clearly identified in the work of Elsdon Best who, in relation to the reproductive body of Māori women, translates tapu (which in all other contexts he translates as sacred or restricted) as a state paralleling "the condition termed 'unclean' in the Scriptures" (Best, 1924a, p. 107; Best, 1929, p. 7). Thus Best presumes to design a whole new 'kind' of tapu for women, one that is in line with Christian doctrine and one that denies the power and significance of Māori women's reproductive bodies as te whare tangata - the sacred house of humanity (R. Pere, personal communication, 10 July, 2010). According to Aunty Rose, in former times the word 'pūrē' (*sic*) was used to denote sacred, not tapu with its connotations of restriction and prohibition. However, the Māori word 'pūrē' was too close to the English word pure and its associated meanings, challenging the racist ideologies of colonial ethnographers who according to Aunty Rose could not accept notions of female embodied purity that clashed with their own Victorian gendered constructs (R. Pere, personal communication, July 11, 2010).

To Aunty Rose, "this korero about menstruation being filthy comes from Europe and is directly linked to that history of female torture and murder during the inquisition" (R. Pere, personal communication, July 12, 2010). Aunty Rose refers to the witch-hunts that raged from the 14th to the end of the 18th century across Europe and the British Isles. According to Barbara

Ehrenreich and Deidre English (1973) 'The Burning Times'⁴² were a period characterised by the torture, persecution and wide spread gynocide⁴³ of mainly women through "well organized campaigns, initiated, financed and executed by Church and State" (p. 9). These campaigns were informed by the biblical statement 'None shall suffer a witch to live' (Exodus, 22: 18), which in 1484 was taken to the extreme in the misogynist manual *The Malleus Maleficarum* or *Hammer of the Witches* (1971) that outlined how to identify, torture, and kill 'witches'. When I looked at the etymology of the word menstruation early on in my research I noted that descriptions such as "Menstruous wemen (*sic*) shall beare monsters" (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p. 609) recorded in 1535, and "defiled, nasty, and polluted menstruosity" (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p. 609) recorded in 1683 coincided with the height of 'The Burning Times' campaign of terror. Penelope Shuttle and Peter Redgrove developed the theory that 'The Burning Times' era was 'menstrual murder' on a grand scale because witchcraft is a 'womanscraft', characterised by the embodied and subjective knowledge of one's menstrual cycle (1986, p. 198). Citing anthropologist Margaret Mead, Shuttle & Redgrove point out that the image of the witch is ancient and found throughout the world. It is an image that reflects "the transforming and changing menstrual cycle" (Shuttle & Redgrove, 1986, p. 210) whose knowledge existed outside of male-centric hierarchical institutions of learning.

Such knowledge threatened the hegemony of the rising male medical profession and equipped the lower classes with an independence that challenged the authority of those in power (Ehrenreich & English, 1973; Shuttle & Redgrove, 1986). Like the wise witchy women of Europe, our tīpuna whāea maintained teachings regarding the reproductive wisdom of our bodies. These teachings continue on and are reflected in Aunty Rose's kōrero - "the whare tangata is sacred, everything about her is sacred, and

⁴² This term was coined by Mary Daly (1978) and picked up by others to describe what is also referred to as a 'Women's Holocaust'.

⁴³ This term refers to the systematic killing of women.

our practices reflect that” (R. Pere, personal communication, July 10, 2010).

The centuries of torture petered out in the 18th century, coinciding with the beginning of ‘European expansion’ into the Pacific. Thus those early colonial ethnographers brought to the shores of Hawaiki Tautau (an ancient name for Aotearoa according to Aunty Rose) a long and brutal legacy of female gynocide and through this lens interpreted the mana, tapu and, more specifically, menstrual customs of our ancestresses (Burns & Maidaborn, 1984; Smith, 2005). The (mis)representations and (mis)interpretations of those early ethnographers have become the foundations of what many Māori assume are traditional values and beliefs, perpetuated in contemporary literature such as Berys Heuer (1972),⁴⁴ Jean Smith (1974) and Ann Salmond (1975). Leonie Pihama (2001) points out that Māori themselves have recycled colonial patriarchal discourse citing Witi Ihimaera’s *The Matriarch* (1986) and Ranginui Walker’s highly recommended anti-colonial work *Ka Whawhai Tonu Mātou: Struggle Without End* (1990) as examples.

Another alarming example is Kent and Besley’s (1990) *He Whakamārama: A Bicultural Resource* targeted as an educational resource for schools and community groups. Drawing on Berys Heuer (1972), the authors proclaim that Māori women and girls feel a shame toward their bodies (unlike the men) and are seen as a destructive force of low status and little power within Māori society (p. 4-5). They use the term ‘mate wahine’ in reference to menstruation, a common term these days but one I did not find in my survey of ethnographic and tribal literature.⁴⁵ The authors translate mate wahine as a ‘women’s disease’ (mate is translated as sickness and death) contributing to notions of menstrual impurity. According to Angeline Greensill her mother, the late Tuaiwa Rickard, also called menstruation

⁴⁴ Leonie Pihama (2001) provides an insightful deconstruction of Berys Heuer’s *Maori women* (1972), locating her work within a textual landscape that attempts to erase Māori women’s roles, status and multiple realities.

⁴⁵ I found the term mate marama (death of the moon) in a small sample of ethnographic literature, but not in the mōteatea or tribal histories that I surveyed.

'mate' but her explanation to her daughter was that the monthly appearance signalled the death of an ancestor, and child, whose time had not come. It was therefore a time to mourn the death of this lost potential (A. Greensill, personal communication, October 20, 2010).

Like Makereti Papakura (1938), Kent and Besley (1990, p. 11) reference the fact that in former times there was open discussion within whānau about the onset of menstruation. They observed, however, that this attitude had since changed to a hushed silence as 'one did not talk about these things' or the blood 'down there'. This reflects the internalisation of colonial violence toward Māori women and the residue effects of a long colonial history of female persecution.

Amy Brown's (Ngāti Raukawa) article 'Māori attitudes to menstruation' (1993) perpetuates a negative colonial stereotype of menstruation by focusing on menstrual restrictions without any meaningful explanation, analysis, or question. Divorced from a cultural or spiritual context, her emphasis on restriction aligns with discourses of menstrual impurity and female inferiority championed by the majority of colonial ethnographic reports (Buckley & Gottlieb, 1988). By beginning with the worn out Elsdon Best quote that women are "passive and receptive to the dominant male spirit" (p. 97), Brown positions her discussion within a colonially constructed paradigm of female insignificance. This seems somewhat ironic in a book that celebrates Aotearoa/New Zealand female leadership and equality.

In engaging with discourses of menstrual impurity my analysis has been nurtured by the insightful articulations of Andrea Smith in *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (2005). Smith draws attention to the way Native bodies have been equated with dirt and constructed as a 'pollutive' threat to the 'colonial body' in colonialist imaginings. Native women's bodies in particular "stand in the way of the continuing conquest of Native lands, endangering the continued success of colonization" (p. 79) because by giving birth they ensure the continuity of the people. As such they are "bearers of a counter-imperial order and

pose a supreme threat to the dominant culture" (p. 15). Consequently Smith points out that in the U.S. Native women's bodies have been systematically violated through colonialist strategies of genocide, which include rape and mutilation (of which she provides a shocking chronology spanning five centuries of colonial invasion), environmental pollution (whose consequences are first witnessed through the fertility/infertility of women), and forced sterilization. I locate the perpetuation of menstrual pollution narratives here as an act of war against Native sovereignty. It is an act of violence to speak of the blood that symbolises the continuity of the people as 'pollutive'. Such language is couched within discourses of cultural genocide that rely on the erasure of Indigenous peoples for the success of colonisation (Smith, 2005). Central to our survival is 'the house of humanity', the womb space of women and the blood that represents its fertility. If sexual violence in the context of colonisation "encompasses a wide range of strategies designed not only to destroy peoples, but to destroy their sense of being a people" (Smith, 2005, p. 3) what are the consequences of perpetuating narratives of menstrual pollution when it was once conceptualised as a divine river that binds the generations?

Gender Balance

Aunty Rose points out that a striking feature of the Māui origin story is the fact that the first menstruation was in fact a male. In her travelling around the world as a teacher Aunty Rose observed that no other culture she came across conceptualised menstruation in this way. For Aunty Rose this association is reflective of the gender balance our tīpuna strived for, developing archetypal representations of it within our cosmologies. Aunty Rose asserts:

Everything has a male and female side. We go together and complement one another. We share a deep bond. We are brothers and sisters before lovers or anything else ... When you look at the horizon where Rangī and Papa merge do you see separation? There is no separation ... The sacred seed and the sacred river are one (R. Pere, personal communication, July 11, 2010).

Aunty Rose's sentiments are reflected in the extraordinary writings of a Pākehā woman, sexual health campaigner Ettie Rout, who in 1926 left her post as a courtroom clerk to document the teachings of the Te Arawa tohunga Hōhepa Te Rake. The tohunga's teachings covered native science, philosophy, social values and tribal histories in the hope that the teachings would challenge the widespread Pākehā belief that Māori were savages and inferior to the whites. Through Ettie Rout's writings, Te Rake asserted:

Every Maori was kind and respectful to his mother, to his wife, to his betrothed, to his sisters, and the term sister covered all women excepting his mother and the mother of his children. Woman was not simply a creature of joy and beauty - she was the embodiment of all that was highest and most sacred in life, and her selective love was the purest and most wonderful force in nature: the only means whereby Mankind (*sic*) could improve itself (Rout, 1926, p. 70).

The working relationship between Ettie Rout and Hōhepa Te Rake is remarkable in that in 1926 a relationship between a Pākehā woman and a Te Arawa tohunga would have been extremely rare. That these two cut across the politically charged socially constructed boundaries of race, class, and gender in order to challenge racist Pākehā attitudes is notable. Compare Ettie Rout's transcriptions with her male contemporaries of the time, whose deeply misogynist interpretations have been largely accepted as authoritative representations of Māori culture. Elsdon Best, always consistently reliable in his regurgitations of patriarchal discourse, writes:

This 'house' of misfortune, of ominous inferiority, is represented by this world, by the earth, by the female sex, and by the female organ of generation, which holds dread powers of destruction and pollution (Best, 1924, p. 74).

Te Rake's assertion that women embodied 'all that was highest and most sacred in life' and 'the only means whereby Mankind (*sic*) could improve itself' provides a fundamentally different philosophy regarding women and the interplay between genders within traditional Māori society.

Approaching menstrual narratives within this paradigm exposes the political agenda inherent within discourses of menstrual uncleanliness and also equips one with the philosophical and conceptual tools necessary to transform narratives of pollution and female inferiority.

I therefore create space here to focus on some of Aunty Rose's tribal recollections that provide examples of gender balance in traditional Māori society in order to create a specific lens through which to engage menstrual narrative. According to Aunty Rose, within her tribal traditions it was the men who birthed the babies.⁴⁶ During pregnancy the men (fathers, and grandfathers) would speak to the child in the womb, recounting tribal histories, knowledges and ancient cosmological accounts. Examples of these songs, chants and lullabies sung over centuries to Māori children can be found in Ngata and Jones *Ngā Mōteatea* volumes (multiple editions) as well as Elsdon Best's *Te Whare Kohanga* karakia collections. Aunty Rose maintains:

Our tribal grandfathers and fathers told us that they envied our mothers being able to conceive and nurture the child in the womb, so that they found other ways of getting as close as they could to the child in the womb. They would tune in to the development of the 'rangatira' in the womb by communicating through waiata, stories, anything they regarded as special. My mother told me my grandfather shared his thoughts, stories, and what he saw as a part of my future with me, because he related to me as an ancient being who had gifts and insights to share with many peoples.

When I was a child I saw our tribal fathers get the best food for our mothers from the Urewera forest, and Mahia. An important food that our mothers ate during their pregnancies was kereru (native pigeon). Our

⁴⁶ During my research journey two other kuia confirmed the traditions of male midwifery in Māori society in former times. One was from Ngāti Porou and was involved in Ngā Māia, a National Māori birthing organisation, and the other was from Ngā Puhī. A fascinating research topic would be investigating how the traditions of male midwifery were impacted on by Pākehā maternity laws, and what the consequences have been for Māori men and women.

mothers ate the choice bits, and our fathers ate what was left over. When we were growing up women, especially pregnant women, and children, always ate first. The men received what was left over. I was brought up in a world where the men cooked for the women, cooked special food and meals and some of the best cooks we have are men. Go to Ruatāhuna, it's the men. My brothers are all good cooks (R. Pere, personal communication, July 11, 2010).

Aunty Rose states that the elders would talk about the kiwi that lived throughout Te Urewera noting that it was the male who nested whilst the female hunted for food. This was used as a metaphor for the role of Māori men with children and babies, encouraging active participation from pregnancy onwards. This example reveals how our ancestors looked to the wisdom of the natural world around them to provide archetypes toward developing healthy social relations for themselves. I return now to the menstrual origin story at hand and, in order to engage at a deeper level, I take a closer look at the dynamic historical figure that is Māui.

Māui the Trickster

From birth Māui the Polynesian hero was associated with menstruation. Māui-tikitiki-a-Taranga, according to the most commonly recounted version, was miscarried by his mother Taranga who wrapped this womb-matter in her hair and cast him out to sea. Alpers (1996) translates tikitiki as top knot and comments that this is strange as women did not wear their hair in top knots in earlier times. Reed (2004), however, makes the significant connection that tikitiki can also be translated as both loincloth and pad of moss “worn by women during menstruation and after childbirth” (p. 119). Thus Māui-tikitiki-a-Taranga could also refer to Māui as the menstrual loincloth of Taranga, born of blood.

At times menstrual clots would appear on women's loincloths or pads of moss. Menstrual clots in many colonial ethnographic accounts are oversimplistically presented as host to a particularly malignant demon called the atua kahukahu, whom Goldie describes as the “wasted souls of humans” (Goldie, 1904, p. 26). According to these accounts contact with

the menstrual blood in any manner would unleash the fury of these demons who loved nothing more than to attack and harass humans, having not had an opportunity to form a relationship with them in the physical world (Goldie, 1904; Shortland, 1882; Tregear, 1926). Goldie, summoning language reminiscent of *The Malleus Maleficarum* (1971) states that menstruating women were seen as dangerous mediums of potentially demonic forces and were considered highly tapu and avoided by others (Goldie, 1904, p. 91). Like Elsdon Best, Goldie translates tapu as 'unclean', comparing Māori women with Hebrew women whose movements are restricted lest they contaminate others (p. 91).

According to Goldie (1904), great care was taken in disposing of the menstrual cloth in a secret place with ceremony undertaken to render the kahukahu powerless. Makereti Papakura (1938) refers to the importance of burying the menstrual cloth in a secret place. She does not speak to the phenomena described as atua kahukahu within this context but rather talks of it as a 'malignant' atua derived from miscarried and stillborn babies, which she says are "thrown in the water" (Papakura, 1938, p. 121-122) to later become harmful influences on humans. Governor George Grey also recounts the traditions of burying with great care and ceremony, stillborn and miscarried babies, noting that if cast in the water or carelessly disposed of they would invariably become "a malicious being or spirit" (Grey, 1855, p. 209). What is curious, and somewhat contradictory, about the account of casting stillborn babies into the water⁴⁷ to become 'malignant spirits' is that our subject Māui, widely regarded as a cultural hero and demi-god throughout the Pacific, had his origins in exactly this way (Fletcher, 2000; Hanson, 1983).

Fletcher, in her doctoral thesis 'Religion, gender and rank in Māori society: A study of ritual and social practice in eighteenth and nineteenth-century documentary sources' (2000) makes the significant comment that Māui's

⁴⁷ Aroha Yates-Smith informed me that in former times, throughout the Pacific Islands, the dead were buried at sea. This seems likely given the shortage of land for burying the dead (A. Yates-Smith, personal communication, February 14, 2011).

characteristics as a mischievous and sometimes malevolent transgressor of social laws are synonymous with ethnographic representations of atua kahukahu. Her comparisons, however, are limited by her failure to extend her analysis beyond negative colonial representations of menstruation. I argue that Māui's contradictory character is synonymous with constructions of menstruation in both ancient and more contemporary times. Māui, like menstrual blood, crossed boundaries, threatened social order, transgressed societal rules and challenged the hegemony of hierarchies of power (Alpers, 1996; Blackford, 1999; Longhurst, 2001, 2005). What interests me, however, is Māui's role in the development of civilisation and how it reflects the theories espoused by Judy Grahn (1993).

In *Bread, Blood, and Roses: How Menstruation Created the World* (1993), Grahn developed a theory about the role of menstruation at the beginning of civilisation. Grahn proposed that there was a time in early human history when there was no word for wind and water. The sun and moon went unrecognised. The qualities of shape, light, color, depth, and distance, went unnamed and largely unperceived (p. 10). The development of civilisation began with an awareness of separation from external forces outside the body, and a movement toward differentiating these elements, observing their patterns and movements. The monthly menstruating body of women coincided with the movements of the moon, whose observation marked a pivotal evolutionary development in human consciousness. By sharing these observations of mathematical pattern, synchronicity, and time measurement as well as the methods they created to comprehend them, women launched the beginning of the articulation of civilisation and cultural expansion (Grahn, 1993). Similarly in *Blackfoot Physics* (1996) F. Peat points out that:

Some time ago balls of string were discovered by anthropologists on the Northwest Coast. When they were unraveled they were found to contain long knotted strands to which pieces of cloth had been tied at periodic intervals. The anthropologists quickly figured out that the knots represented days and that the regularities of the pieces of cloth at every

twenty-eight days represented the appearance of a new moon. Clearly these strings were astronomical records, the 'lab books' left by Indigenous astronomer-mathematicians of the West Coast. This account was generally accepted until someone noted that these balls of string were usually kept by women. Suddenly the penny dropped - the regular markings were not recording the phases of the moon, but a woman's menstrual cycle ... In a culture in which everything connects and is related, it is no coincidence that the knots in a string refer both to the cycles of power and fertility within a woman's body and to the waxing and waning of the moon. Indeed, each is a reflection of the other, and it could well be that women first began to study and represent the harmonies and regularities of cosmic and human cycles. For the interrelationships of the cosmos are expressed through the periodicity of heavens, earth, and the human body (Peat, 1995, p. 158).

Māui as menstrual matter advanced Māori civilisation through acquiring fire from the atua Mahuika which transformed human reality; 'taming the sun', a metaphor for the productive management of time; and 'fishing up' whole new archipelagos from within the immense Pacific Ocean. All these examples brought tremendous cultural expansion throughout Polynesia. Compare this with another menstrual origin story found in literature that recounts Tāne's discovery of the terrestrial world of light through riding out of the darkness on the blood-tides of his mother Papatūānuku (Smith, 1913, p. 120). Her blood precipitated a new state of consciousness that affected the whole pantheon of atua with far reaching consequences. The event was an evolutionary leap, the dawning of a new reality. The blood was a medium of transformation and discovery whose tide opened the possibility of a new world. I will return to this story in chapter six.

Māui's feats are typically celebrated within a paradigm of Māori masculinity. As menstrual blood, however, I locate his achievements within a lunar context, emphasising this by reflecting on the significance of the lunar almanac in pre-colonial times. Fishing, eeling, harvesting seafood, agriculture, and trapping birds are some of the central tribal activities that were informed by the different days of the lunar month. Our ancestors had

a name for each day of the moon that reflected the growth and decay of the moon, the tides of the sea, the stars, the appearance of mist, fog, rain, and winds, and the productivity of cultivating and harvesting food from the ocean, rivers, forests and gardens (Best, 1955, 1973; Mitchell, 1944). Best (1973) observed that a crescent moon was often carved on the end of garden tools signifying the lunar based agricultural systems. The moon and its movements were central to the articulation of overlapping bodies of knowledge that practically and metaphysically equipped Māori civilisation.

Significantly the moon is deified as Hinateiwaiwa (also Hineteiwaiwa) who rules over the fertile cycles of women (Best, 1929, 1955, 1973; Yates-Smith, 1998). In former times the intimate relationship between women's bodies and the celestial lunar body was acknowledged in the belief by some that a woman's 'true and real husband' was the moon whose appearance summoned the fertile blood of women each month (Best, 1955, p. 27; Goldie, 1904, p. 89). Women's arts, ceremonies, ritual traditions, and knowledges are said to emanate from her realm.⁴⁸ If we locate Māui as menstrual blood within this kōrero, then his achievements become a continuation of Hinateiwaiwa's influence over the flourishing of Māori civilisation, through the continuation of whakapapa.

The connection between the lunar almanac and Hinateiwaiwa as an atua of women's reproductivity needs further research to explore its more profound significance. Similarly, reflecting on Māui's achievements within a lunar paradigm is potentially transformative and demands a deeper analysis.

Returning to Fletcher's (2000) theory, whilst I agree that Māui's restless spirit is consistent with the ethnographic accounts of mischievous stillborn and menstrual spirits, I also argue that his achievements as a cultivator of

⁴⁸ Elsdon Best (1955, p. 27) observed that Māori women would gather to sing and dance and greet the new moon. They would wail and mourn for those who had passed and they would also leave offerings to the moon to increase their fertility. This observation is extraordinary because it references the existence of Māori women's lunar-based rituals in former times. How these rituals were, in turn, influenced by the menstrual cycle demands further examination.

culture illustrate deeper themes of the role of menstruation in evolutionary expansion. Natalie Robertson (2008) proposes that Māui's abilities as a shape-shifter were bestowed upon him by the ocean that cradled him as a baby and transported him to his tipuna on a distant island. I would add that the deeper nature of his menstrual origin equipped him with his capacity to shift shape and transform as a medium between worlds.

In the mōteatea and tribal histories I have surveyed it is clear that menstrual blood was seen as a 'medium between worlds', used in a variety of contradictory rituals as a universal force capable of both causing and protecting one from harm. Māui's contradictory nature reflects the complexity with which menstrual blood was perceived by our tīpuna. Engaging with the complexities collapses the simplistic hierarchical dualisms that many colonial ethnographers imposed on Māori philosophies and epistemologies. Such binaries place menstrual blood within a misogynist paradigm of female inferiority. This is challenged and transcended by exploring the spectrum of menstrual rituals referenced in tribal compositions that I investigate in chapter six.

Significantly, Māui born of blood was chosen by powerful spell-crafting women, elemental women, women versed in ritual lore and wisdom traditions, to be taught specialised, and sacred knowledges. To subscribe to generalised story versions that he tricked these wise women in his pursuit of certain arts denies the careful and rigorous processes our ancestors designed in the institution of handing down knowledge. This is not to say Māui the trickster did not spin a trick or two! Rather it is to suggest that Māui was singled out because of his (menstrual) nature, by those women, and by the knowledge itself, as a worthy and appropriate recipient, and one who could meet the ultimate agenda of knowledge sharing; expansion (A. Mikaere, personal communication, July 28, 2010; Peat, 1996; Royal, 1993). Māui's final teacher, according to the Ngā Potiki, Ngā Uri-a-Māui traditions recounted by Aunty Rose, was his own mother who returned him to his origins as womb blood.

To conclude, Māui the trickster, who has ironically become the 'poster boy'

of Māori masculinist theatre, provides us in contemporary society with one last prank - that is, that in a culture which has come to see menstruation as 'unclean', what a challenge, what a trick to recognise that one of our most renowned and beloved heroes came from the blood of woman, and returned there in death! The trickster, always so contradictory, breaking social conventions and transgressing authority, has the last laugh!

CHAPTER FIVE

KURAWAKA



Figure 3. Te Ipu Hue o Kurawaka (Carved Gourd, 2010) by Ngāhina Hohaia

(Source: Photographed by Ngāhina Hohaia)

As I grew inside my mother's womb, she sang to me the teachings of creation, gifted by my grandmother. And as a young girl these teachings continued until I reached an age when blood became a sign of womanhood. Blood that not only shaped my mother but also shaped me, shaped my future

(Hinenuitepō. Te Kete Ipurangi, para. 10, 2010).

He Waiata Aroha nō Ngāti Porou

Taku mea e haramai nei, ē,
He whakahou mai ki ahau, ē;
He torotoro i tō waimanu, ē,
E mau nei, kei te paheke, nā.

E hua noa ana te ngākau, ē,
He haohao I aku mahara, ē,
Tāria ia rā kia tuakina, ē,
Katea ia rā kei te marae, rā.

My menses is approaching,
Appearing to renew me;
It searches out the overflow,
Held here and then flows out.

The heart has the thought,
It should draw my thoughts together,
Wait until the flow begins,
It will be scattered over the plaza.
(Ngata & Jones, 2007, p. 260-261).

In this chapter I focus on matrilineal knowledge and ceremonial traditions, beginning with a discussion on Kurawaka, the birthplace of humanity. I revisit Kurawaka from a mana wahine perspective and discuss what the consequences have been for Māori women of the colonial ethnographers' patriarchal interpretation of this story. I briefly canvas examples of the embodiment of matrilineal knowledges in cultural practices. This is important because their deeper meanings have been obscured by masculinist, colonialist interpretations that have perpetuated a patriarchal agenda.

Following discussions on Kurawaka I turn to examine menarche and other menstrual rites that celebrate menstruation as a medium of whakapapa. These ceremonial traditions have been lost to generations of Māori women through the infiltration of colonial and Christian discourses of menstrual impurity. Colonial ethnographers have also denied the existence of these kinds of ceremonies and I posit some of the reasons why. The small collection of ceremonies present in this chapter are important because they symbolise the way our tīpuna regarded menstruation and Māori women's bodies. I locate my discussion within broader cultural paradigms about the whare tangata. This is crucial because menstruation is often presented in isolation. Such isolation makes it easier to perpetuate narratives of pollution that contradict the significance of the whare tangata of which menstruation is a part.

Drawing on my participants' stories I touch on intergenerational tribal learning spaces on sexual development and the role they played in nurturing a bond between the genders. These accounts provide examples of male traditions that demonstrate a respect towards the fertile bodies of Māori women. Creating space for such examples is important because they emphasise the patriarchal nature of colonisation and how it has cut across tribal gender relationships. Finally, I turn to examine menstrual restrictions as nurturing traditions that have been distorted through a misogynist interpretation. I conclude with an investigation into menstrual spaces, as women's spaces of intergenerational teaching and learning.

I first encountered the term *ikura* for menstruation ten years ago. The explanation I was given was that the name *ikura* was derived from the saying 'mai-i-Kurawaka', that is, menstruation originates from the 'red earth' at Kurawaka, the birthplace of humanity according to many Māori traditions. A more deliberate reflection on the name Kurawaka provides illuminating clues; *kura* can be translated as a precious treasure, a shade of red, red ochre, and knowledge of incantation and ritual lore (Williams, 1991, p. 157-158). *Waka* is a vehicle or medium of *atua* (Williams, 1991, p. 478). *Waka* is also used as a metaphor for female genitalia in both its physical likeness as well as its capacity to convey the generations (R. Pere, personal communication, November 20, 2009). Therefore, the name Kurawaka implies a precious red medium that conveys the generations, a description synonymous with menstrual blood. Perhaps the treasure is humanity itself whose currents ebb and flow on the blood tides of women.

Kurawaka is located, according to tradition, at the pubis of Papatūānuku. Here at the creative centre of the world the *uha* (vulva) was found. In popular accounts it was Tāne the procreator, the *atua* of the deep forests who discovered the altar of humanity. He had searched in vain for the *uha* according to legend but the female element had remained concealed within the confines of his own birthplace (Best, 1924; Kahukiwa & Grace, 1984). Finally, and significantly, under his mother Papatūānuku's counsel, Tāne approached the place of deep red soils, the fertile crescent at his mother's pubis (cited in Cram, 2000; Kahukiwa & Grace, 1984; Mikaere, 2003; Yates-Smith, 1998). Here he discovered the elusive material capable of materialising his procreative longing, ushering in humanity.

What is consistently down-played across the colonial ethnographic literature is the significance of the location of Kurawaka at the vulva of Papatūānuku and the force inherent within the 'red soil' that made Hineahuone's creation finally achievable (Yates-Smith, 1998). Tāne is singularly celebrated for his act of procreation denying the raw, and very female, sexual potency imbued in the 'red soil'.

The 'red soil' is also used to fashion Adam, the first human in Biblical scripture, and according to Barbara Walker (1996) this is a delicate scholarly translation for 'bloody clay', a name translated from the feminine *adamah* of which Adam is derived (p. 635). Walker highlights that Adam's creation from 'menstrual clay' is an ancient cosmological narrative found throughout the world, from Mesopotamia to the civilisations of antiquity in the South Americas (p. 635). It is ironic that the etymology of the name Adam has its roots in a translation paralleling Māori cosmology when male-centric presentations of Hineahuone have been compared and dismissed as infiltrated by Biblical creation stories of Eve (Mikaere, 2003, p. 84; Pere, R. personal communication, 12 July, 2010). The following is a typical, standardised version of the creation of Hineahuone:

Tane the god created the first woman out of earth; he formed her by scraping up the earth into human shape and endowed her with life. He lay on her and breathed life into her and he called her Hine-hau-one ... he took her to wife (Cowan, 1930, p. 8).

Cowan's example denies the generative sexual centre of Papatūānuku, the mother of the gods, and relegates Hineahuone to a pile of dirt with language that erases the vocabulary of women's sexuality and power. The divinity of Hineahuone is negated and so correspondingly is the divinity of Māori women. Papatūānuku's status as an *atua*, as the mother of Tāne himself is overlooked in the colonial literature as she becomes subject to a gendered binary that subordinates women and the earth (Pihama, 2001). This kind of presentation of the origins of humanity, and women, has informed and perpetuated the myth that women are inferior to men "even as Hineahuone was inferior to Tane" (Best, 1924, p. 74). Here at the genesis of humanity in what could be a story reflecting the intense power of women, sourced from the creative force of the earth, we find a subdued story of female reticence. Translated in such a way, this story became the hook upon which to hang chronicles of masculine supremacy within the Māori world that continue today.

Cowan's example, like many, employs a language embedded in the sexual power politics of conquest. "He took her to wife" (Cowan, 1930, p. 8) reflects colonialist, Victorian, and patriarchal attitudes of domination and control. It illustrates the Victorian ideologies of the time about women being the property of men. It is not consistent with karakia that convey a reciprocal love reflecting the gender balance Aunty Rose speaks about. Below is an English translation of such a karakia, chanted at the inception of Hineahoune:

For we are the waters, the clothing, we are spouses
Bound like a sister and brother, O Hine e!
We are spouses bound to one another in gladness
We belong to one another, O Hine-one, e, i!

(Smith, 1978, p. 141).

Hineahuone, far from the submissive Victorian caricature portrayed in colonialist literature, contained her own power, a force derived from the bloody earth at the vulva of creation itself. Aroha Yates-Smith (1998) confirms that Hine was imbued with her own autonomous power inherited from her mother's genital organs. This power Tāne encountered upon entering Hineahuone's vagina, experiencing "a tremendous force from within Hine, a powerful force, such as he had never experienced before" (Pere, 1982, p. 10-11). The force Tāne encountered was the raw primal sexual power of Hine, as a being created from the menstrual soil of her mother. This origin is analogous with our own as humans; we all find potential through the blood that symbolises fertility and the continuity of humanity.

According to Aunty Rose:

the first human was a woman. She was not formed by Tane, or any male god. She was from Papatūānuku, the earth mother, from earth and water. My old people said the reason why the first human was a woman is because it is women who give birth to children. This is the natural link with the natural laws, the natural way that things happen ...

All of us have sprung from the very beginning from the womb of a woman ... if the natural law was that we came from the womb of man, why aren't men having the babies? (Pere, 1994, p. 167).

Sacred Lore / Sacred Law

Returning to the name Kurawaka within a paradigm that vivifies the creative force of Hineahuone, I have been inspired to reflect on kura in its translation as incantation and sacred knowledge. What inspires me is the idea that the name Kurawaka encompasses sacred matrilineal knowledge traditions that celebrate the regenerative force of Māori women's bodies, the tides of our blood, our specific relationship, and consequent responsibilities to Papatūānuku through the uha, and the ritual and socio-political application of these knowledges. I think that the following passage reflects this idea:

Know that women hold the land for they are of the red earth.
Understand women count the generations and tie them to the beginning and the end. And always remember they flow with the Tides of Life
(author unknown, cited in Mikaere, 2003, p. 33).

'Know that women *hold the land*' (my emphasis) implies more than a spiritual relationship to the land through whakapapa. It speaks to our right to uphold practices that guard and maintain a state of balance across our whakapapa relationships. It speaks to a specific kind of kaitiakitanga that, whilst grounded in the cosmologic significance of our whakapapa back to the 'red earth', is not limited to the terrestrial. One example of this is the role of kuia as 'keepers of the correct records' described by Ngahuia Te Awekotuku, who wrote that if men in their whaikōrero deviated in recounting history and whakapapa:

certain women – an aunt, an elder sister, his wife – would gently correct him. That was their right. If he persisted or reacted adversely to a woman's counsel, they would humiliate him. This was effected by much louder verbal interruption, or by starting a full-throated pao, or dynamic chant, with other kuia (Te Awekotuku, 2007, p. 75).

On the surface this story tells us that women's knowledge of cultural institutions such as whakapapa, tikanga, tribal compositions, and histories was at one time immaculate and that women had a specific role in carefully monitoring the transmission of these knowledges. But deeper still, this account also tells us that part of the women's role was to ensure both the knowledge and the people were represented appropriately by the men, with full power to enforce 'the law' (through shaming) if they were not. Underpinning the importance of transmission is the overriding significance of whakapapa, in which our relationships to one another, to historical events, to certain knowledges, to the land, and to the elements and species of the terrestrial realm and beyond are carefully and appropriately acknowledged, represented, and maintained. The philosophies that underpin this practice are also akin with the ritual art of karanga that carefully nurtures whakapapa relationships across the cosmos (R. Maniapoto - Anderson, personal communication, November 8, 2009; N. Dixon, personal communication, November 8, 2009; A. Yates-Smith, personal communication, November 8, 2009). Both practices are roles in which women open and close ceremonial and socio-political cultural space, reflecting Native understandings of women's reproductive bodies. As Ani Mikaere (2003, p. 31) explains "the vagina is the pathway into this world for all human life and, through Hine-nui-te-po, the pathway out again". Maintaining the integrity of whakapapa relationships is consistent with our role as 'the house of humanity' and the medium of whakapapa through the ikura (Mikaere, 2003; Yates-Smith, 1998).

Further research needs to be undertaken to explore the philosophies underpinning these kinds of matrilineal traditions, eroded through the imposition of colonial ideologies. Aunty Rose articulates the significance of this, equating the social and environmental degradation we face with the violent suppression of 'the mother energy' encoded in women's knowledges that informed practices such as the one above (R. Pere, personal communication, June 11, 2010). My exploration of menstrual ceremonies, traditions, and stories, is motivated toward reclaiming these kinds of knowledges and the 'mother energy' that encapsulates them. I

turn now to take a closer look at some of these knowledges contained within our stories and traditions.

Menarche and Matrilineal Rituals

According to Aunty Rose, growing up in Te Urewera all the girls were told to inform the kuia when their time arrived. When the day did finally arrive:

My kuia washed all my clothes after my first menstruation and cried in regard to seeing the 'sacred river' that had come through her, and yet there was a spirit of celebration between us, because I brought in the continuity of our tangatatanga, atuātanga, whakapapa (R. Pere, personal communication, July 12, 2010).

Aunty Rose's memory is extraordinarily salient because it refers to menstruation as a celebrated medium of humanity, divinity, and genealogy that was ritually acknowledged through the puna roimata, the shedding of tears, and the careful washing of the clothes. Aunty Rose expanded on this kōrero saying:

When I got my first period my kuia cried because it put them in touch with the river again. You work that one out. Why would they cry? They washed my clothes and cried over them and as far as they were concerned I was a continuation of that beautiful river. It was special. I sat with them and they started going into the fact that there would be a time when the river would no longer be flowing into the earth because there would be a child in the womb and just how sacred all that was. So you got all these teachings from them and they explained te ira atua, te awa atua, the sacred seed and the sacred river are one (R. Pere, personal communication, July 12, 2010).

According to this account the arrival of menses was carefully observed and cherished between kuia and mokopuna in Te Urewera. It was celebrated as an intergenerational gift epitomised by the saying "Kua mimiti taku puna tamariki engari kua timata to puna" (My blood has run dry but yours has begun) (R. Pere, personal communication, July 12, 2010). The occasion was greeted with honour, providing an intimate source of

bonding for generations of women who, through small matrilineal ceremonies like this, celebrated the continuity that menstruation symbolised.

Another of my participants, Aroha Yates-Smith, also shared with me knowledge about the intimate ceremony of washing the stained clothes. Aroha remembers that when her daughter's time came:

I also cried when my girl went through this – I said a karakia over her and the toto and washed the toto away from her clothing using a bottle of our spring water from Awahou, our papakainga. It was an honour for me and all part of the continuum of whakapapa (A. Yates-Smith, personal communication, November 22, 2010).

The event also heralded an important opportunity to pass on teachings from mother to daughter (A. Yates-Smith, personal communication, July 28, 2010). The teachings from mother to daughter, and from kuia to mokopuna, are a crucial part of the ceremony of celebrating menarche. These conversations are a tradition that has been broken through the infiltration of Christian doctrines of menstrual uncleanliness. Clarissa Pinkola-Estes (1992) writes that presenting menstruation as a shameful and humiliating 'punishment of God' caused women to lose "their inheritance of the miraculous body" (p. 435) and broke matrilineal traditions of "teaching, preparing, and welcoming their daughters into the most basic and physical aspect of being a woman" (p. 435).

There are many devastating consequences for the loss of these kinds of knowledge traditions and ceremonies. One is that Māori women's bodies have become an internalised site of the violence of colonisation through domestic violence. Violence against the *whare tangata* in former times brought swift consequences. In Te Urewera, men who transgressed the *mana* and *tapu* of a woman through domestic violence or rape "were faced

with three choices; fight to the death, castration, or eat a lizard.⁴⁹ Most chose castration” (R. Pere, personal communication, July 12, 2010).

Speaking about the blood that carries ancestors and descendants as unclean is an extension of colonial violence against the *whare tangata*. Aunty Rose remarked that in former times “you would have been skinned alive” (R. Pere, personal communication, July 12, 2010) for talking this way about the medium of *whakapapa*. This seems extremely likely given the central significance of *whakapapa* within a Māori world view. In the *mōteatea* that I examine in the following chapter it is clear that menstrual blood was considered potentially dangerous in certain contexts, but not pollutive or unclean.

According to my research participant Te Wai Hohaia, our *tīpuna whaea* engaged in ceremonies and rites to welcome menarche, to return the blood back to *Papatūānuku* each month, and to mark when the *puna* ran dry (T. Hohaia, personal communication, August 18, 2010). All the seasons of a woman’s reproductive body were accompanied by ceremonies of acknowledgement and anticipation. In relation to menarche Aunty Te Wai reflected that:

young women who were coming into ‘their time’ would have been recognised by their entire *whānau*. Aunties were given the responsibility of teaching them how to care for themselves during ‘their time’ and what would be expected of them now that they were becoming women. Brothers, uncles and fathers would watch out for them in a much more formal manner as they would not want them harmed in any way. This was not because they wanted to keep them ‘virgins’ for marriage but because the continuation of *whānau* was imperative. Menarche rituals would have and did include: the girl receiving an adult name, often

⁴⁹ Lizards in Te Ao Māori are regarded as messengers, *kaitiaki*, and embodied *atua*. They are therefore *tapu* beings that our ancestors revered and feared. Their presence is perceived as an omen with various meanings including sickness and death, depending on the type of lizard (Downes, 1937). Each *whānau* and *hapū* had their own interpretation. The idea of consuming something considered extremely *tapu* is abhorrent to Māori, transgressing laws that in former times brought swift consequences, often to one’s entire *whānau*.

'hine' would now be renamed after a tupuna; the receiving of moko kauae after the first bleeding (many kūia have spoken about having their moko kauae after this time. It was a huge honor for the whole whānau, so celebration would almost certainly follow); girls would be given certain responsibilities and were taught different arts. These gifts and taonga were also seen as honorable and were respected by the whānau and ensured that they would keep being passed around. Listening to my aunties speak about 'your time' was incredibly informative for me; it taught me responsibility as an aunty and as a mother. It was done quietly and without a lot of hōhā. It was matter of fact! (T. Hohaia, personal communication, 25 July, 2010).

Aunty Te Wai's examples of menarche rites: receiving a new name; receiving moko kauae; and the formal beginning of traditional teachings are important because their existence has been denied within the literary landscape. From her survey of ethnographic and historic material, Fletcher (2000) states that menarche was something our ancestors did not mark. This seems unlikely for a culture that celebrated the significance of the whare tangata and engaged in elaborate rituals related to conception, pregnancy, birth and the post-natal period (see Best, 1906, 1929, and Smith 1978, for examples). Goldie (1904) insists that there was no special initiation, no rite of passage for the pubescent girl and yet Tregear (1904) mentions at least three rituals associated with puberty: taking a moko kauae, which was then celebrated with a hākari and presentation of gifts (Kent & Besley, 1990); having the hair ceremonially cut; and the piercing of ears.

There is a general silence in the literature regarding menarche rites and ceremonies, however, which Aroha Yates-Smith suggests is 'not by accident'. Rather, it indicates the early ethnographers' inability to access 'women's kōrero' because of their own misogynist ideologies as well as Māori women's disinterest in communicating their intimate worlds with Pākehā men. Aroha pointed out that very few Pākehā ethnographers spoke directly to Māori women. She knew of only two. The colonial ethnographers were therefore not in a position to assume anything about

the intimate worlds of Māori women (A. Yates-Smith, personal communication, November 22, 2010). The lack of information on menstruation contrasts the plethora of data gathered by ethnographers regarding birth rites. Aroha remarked that although the topic is related, childbirth is more generic and is not surrounded by the same kind of taboo that menstruation presents (A. Yates-Smith, personal communication, July 28, 2010). I agree and posit that although menstruation and birth occupy the same continuum, whilst birth produces 'male heirs' to forward a patriarchal agenda, the purpose of menstruation, in the early ethnographic mind, is much more ambiguous. The colonialists' determination to categorise every element of nature within an impenetrable dualist hierarchy was confounded by something that by nature breaks boundaries. Any ambiguity toward the mystery of menstruation may have been intensified when encountering Native notions of menstrual blood as a potent living entity, capable of crossing realms to be summoned for all manner of purposes that I examine in the following chapter.

A Dedication

Judy Grahn's articulation that "birth rites too are blood rites" (1993, p. 6) has been important in my research journey because of the profusion of historical material related to birth ceremonies and practices which contrasts with the lack of literary information regarding "one of the most important threshold rites" (Pinkola-Estes, 1992, p. 235), menstruation. Clarissa Pinkola-Estes (1992, p. 235) explains that menarche rites:

celebrated the crossing from childhood into the profound ability to bring forth life from one's own belly, to carry the attendant sexual power and all peripheral womanly powers. The ceremony was concerned with red blood in all its stages; the uterine blood of menstruation, delivery of a child, miscarriage.

Locating menstruation within the broader reproductive cycle of women allows for a more holistic and symbiotic interpretation and provides some context toward understanding how our ancestors perceived menstruation in former times. Reflecting Grahn's position Aunty Rose states:

Menstrual blood would be received by the mother Papatūānuku every month in the same spirit as the burying of the placenta. It would hold the same significance ... the ceremonies would have been similar ... the whare tangata is paramount and the blood is a part of the whare tangata because when it's not flowing, there's another tipuna, there's another child, the sacredness of that is all the same (R. Pere, personal communication, July 12, 2010).

This is an important connection to make because menstruation has often been presented as divorced from the cultural paradigms associated with the whare tangata, existing on an isolated limb. It is worth reflecting on the philosophies underpinning the return of the placenta to the earth in order to engage the significance of Aunty Rose's reflection. The late whaea Eva Rickard explained:

Firstly whenua is land. Secondly, whenua is the placenta within the mother that feeds the child before birth. And when it is born this whenua is treated with respect, dignity, and taken to a place in the earth, and dedicated to Papatūānuku ... And there it will nurture the child. You know our food and living come from the earth, and there also this whenua of the child stays and says, 'This is your little bit of land. No matter where you wander in the world I will be here and at the end of your days you can come back and this is your papakainga' (cited in Mikaere, 2003, p. 32-33).

Burying the placenta within the earth as an act of 'dedication' to Papatūānuku, the source of our sustenance, is a blood rite that marks one's belonging within an ancestral landscape. This act of 'dedication' reaffirms our whakapapa back to Papatūānuku, and more specifically, back to Kurawaka, the menstrual red earth at the vulva of Papatūānuku. Aunty Rose states:

I heke mai te awa o te tangata mai i a Papatūānuku. He tika kia hoki atu te awa atua ki a ia. He tika kia hoki atu te whenua ki a ia. I hou mai tatou mai i a ia. Whenua ki te whenua, awa tapu ki a Papatūānuku. (The river of humanity descends from Papatūānuku. And so the divine

river returns back to her. So too the placenta returns to her. It was gifted to us from her. Placenta back to the land, sacred river back to Papatūānuku) (R. Pere, personal communication, July 12, 2010).

If we follow this philosophy then returning menstrual blood to the earth is a ceremony that reaffirms our whakapapa back to the land and our cosmologies embedded in the natural world. Rather than 'a curse', menstruation was regarded as something that connected Māori women to our tangatanga, our atua, and our whakapapa (our humanity, divinity, and genealogy) (R. Pere, personal communication, July 12, 2010).

Ngahuia Te Awekotuku has consistently returned to the subject of menstruation in her writings and interrogated the notion of menstrual impurity as incongruous with Māori philosophies. She writes:

In previous times, the discharge of a woman's womb reinforced her connection to the earth, origin of all things. Each month, underdeveloped beginnings of another human being came away from her ... and thus it was considered inappropriate for her to cast them just anywhere (Te Awekotuku, 1983, p. 138).

Similarly Aunty Te Wai in sharing some of the tikanga she was taught about correct disposal of menstrual blood said:

I was taught when you bleed not to burn your towels,⁵⁰ give them back to the mother (bury them). If you want you can keep your towels in a bucket of water with a lid. When your (*sic*) finished 'your time', wring all the towels out and bury them, then tip the water from the bucket onto your trees. Not flax, or other medicine plants and not kai trees but any other trees. Keep your bucket separate from everything else, don't use it for anything else! (T. Hohaia, personal communication, July 25, 2010).

Another of my participants was Soraya Ruakere-Forbes (Te Atiawa, Puketapu hapū), a member of a Taranaki based collective of Māori and

⁵⁰ I note with interest that Elsdon Best (1904, p. 4) records the rite of burning the blood that exits the womb after birth as a means to cease fertility in former times.

Pākehā women of all ages who have reclaimed menstruation as a sacred ceremony. Soraya articulated that for her 'gifting' menstrual blood to the earth each month was an act of devotion that linked her back to the earth and Hineahuone, the first woman (S. Ruakere-Forbes, personal communication, July 28, 2010).

These examples emphasise returning the blood to the earth as a ceremony of reconnection to matrilineal whakapapa lines. Whilst rituals of returning the whenua (placenta) back to the whenua (land) are being reclaimed in the pursuit toward Māori cultural revival and decolonisation, my observation is that this awareness is not extending toward the inclusion of other blood rites such as the beginning and ending of menstruation. Perhaps this is due to a lack of information regarding how our tīpuna whāea marked these times. I think it is also influenced by ambiguous attitudes toward menstruation in contemporary Māori society, the consequence of inheriting colonial legacies of female pollution.

Sisters and Brothers

In Te Urewera the teachings that a kuia passed on to her mokopuna within the ceremony of the menarche experience built on the foundations of a tribal education. Menstruation, according to Aunty Rose, was talked about in detail in the whare puni (whānau meeting house) in front of both genders and including all generations:

We had intergenerational teaching and learning in my family with both genders, so that my tribal brothers knew all about menstruation, and I knew everything about their development. Since those teachings that we had in our family whare puni, there has always been a deep respect and a lot of aroha between my tribal brothers and myself (R. Pere, personal communication, July 12, 2010).

This story reveals that menstruation was openly discussed and anticipated within the tribal community. Makereti Papakura (1938) also wrote that menstruation was discussed frankly by the whole whānau without the squeamishness she observed within Pākehā society in the 1920s. During

my stay with Aunty Rose her brothers arrived and I carefully noted how she spoke about our kaupapa openly with them, and how they responded in an open manner. I found their warmth and engagement incredibly heartening and a powerful example of Aunty Rose's kōrero about positive attitudes toward menstruation and the significance of the bond between the genders. This bond was carefully nurtured through the inclusivity of whānau wānanga that engendered an intimate understanding of one another. Aunty Rose remarked:

My brothers were told about this (menstruation). We were all in the meeting house and you would hear them talking about these things ... I don't let the college or anybody else, any teachers, teach my mokos or my children sex education because they don't have a clue how it should be done ... The old people would explain that the men had sperms and all this. We knew what the boys had, and the boys knew what we had, it was all spoken about in the house, and you took it in, in your own stride. So I knew about menstruation well before I had it because it was spoken about in the meeting house. It came at about the age of 11 or 12. Some of our women got married at 12, and the tāne was 14.

Ngāhuia: They lived long lives too eh? My Nanny Poi and Koro Te Hau were in their nineties when they died.

Aunty Rose: Yup ... Once you get married and have children just keep having children until the puna runs dry (R. Pere, personal communication, 12 July 2010).

Aunty Rose's account cuts across some of the ethnographic reports that insist shame haunted the steps of a menstruating girl who must always maintain discretion about her 'condition' lest she be humiliated (Best, 1906; Goldie, 1904). On the contrary Aunty Rose pointed out that her brothers always knew when she was menstruating and respected that. She insists that the bond she developed with her tribal brothers through those formative years has continued throughout her life remarking that during her hapūtanga her tribal brothers went out of their way to give her the best of everything, bringing her flowers and special foods everyday.

Gift giving according to Aunty Rose was not unusual, rather it was the continuation of an ancient tradition that acknowledged the whare tangata as paramount (R. Pere, personal communication, July 12, 2010).

Throughout my time with Aunty Rose she consistently returned to the importance of the bond between the genders, declaring, “as a tribal woman I am my tribal brothers left, and he is my right. We complement each other and always will” (R. Pere, personal communication, July 12, 2010). Aunty Rose insisted that it was important to speak to this bond, and the balance between the genders that has always been a central element of Māori tribal society.

During her time in the education sector Aunty Rose commented that Pākehā women would confront her about the sexism of Tūhoe men, an accusation that infuriated her because of the deep bond instilled between the genders from childhood. Her response to such accusations was that a busload of her tribal brothers had travelled to Waikato to support her in the past. “Has anyone done that for you?” she asked (R. Pere, personal communication, July 11, 2010).

Aunty Rose’s example reflects a tendency by some Pākehā feminists to perpetuate colonial oppression of Māori women by speaking out about issues they are ill equipped to address because of a general ignorance toward a Māori world view. A recent, and topical, example occurred during the course of writing this thesis when the National Museum, Te Papa, was reported in the news media as having advised pregnant and menstruating staff to not attend a behind-the-scenes tour of Te Papa collections. Te Papa spokeswoman, Jane Keig, said that this advisory was one Te Papa agreed to when they were loaned the collection by the hapū who owned them. The reasoning behind it was that some of the artifacts had been used in battle to kill people and that because Māori considered that these artifacts contained a living spirit, the condition was put in place to protect menstruating and pregnant women from potentially dangerous forces (Wade, 2010).

Te Papa's decision (as it was reported in the media) was met with angry responses from some Pākehā feminists who leaped to the same conclusion as the colonial ethnographers, equating 'restriction' with menstrual pollution and female suppression, reflecting their own androcentrism (Buckley and Gottlieb, 1988, p. 9). Pākehā feminist blogger Boganette was quoted in the media as stating "It's disgusting that in this day and age women can be told they're 'forbidden' for menstruating or being pregnant. It's a completely archaic belief that is oppressive to all women" (Johnston, 2010). Prominent feminist blogger Deborah Russel also commented that this practice "had no place in modern society" ("Te Papa Bans Pregnant Women From Exhibit", 2010).

Responses such as these that consider only gender as a site of struggle deny the multiple axes of subjectivity such as race and class and illustrate an inability to understand the intersections of power that Māori women engage within a colonised reality (Awatere, 1984; Pihama, 2001, Te Awekotuku, 1991). They also demonstrate an exploitative attitude where Indigenous taonga, like Indigenous lands and resources, should be free to be accessed, mined, and consumed without restriction or hindrance by 'archaic' native⁵¹ superstition (Hutchings & Greensill, 2010; Mander, 1992).

The practice of advising menstruating (and pregnant) women to distance themselves from weaponry and other taonga included in Māori museum collections is a fascinating and incredibly complex issue that needs further research. On the surface the practice of warning menstruating women away from dangerous artifacts such as weaponry contradicts former practices found in war rites that used menstrual blood, which I explore in the following chapter. A significant difference, however, is that those war rites provided a controlled format for the summoning of atua imminent in menstrual blood. Museums, however, house eclectic and potentially

⁵¹ I deliberately use a lower case n for Native in reference to our colonial history where native was used as a derogatory term for Indigenous Peoples. In recent times Māori have claimed the term Native with a capital N as a site of resistance against colonising politics.

volatile collections. Each artifact contains its own personality, story, and set of circumstances for being there. Some have often been stolen, and others gifted in the spirit of both friendship, and malice. Māori have had to develop tikanga to assist in engaging with colonial institutions like museums which house and handle our taonga. Whilst restrictions surrounding pregnant and menstruating women handling certain artifacts may have been informed by Māori spiritual philosophies, they are, like menstrual 'restrictions' in general, often misrepresented and reinterpreted through a colonialist patriarchal lens of menstrual putridity and female inferiority.

Restriction

Aunty Rose stated that in former times menstruation was a time that women could give themselves to rest. They could take time out from what was a physically demanding lifestyle. According to Aunty Rose:

When I menstruated I had to apply the 'tohi whakatapu' (the principle of restriction) to myself. I did not go into the gardens where there was food, or the beach to get kaimoana, but went to quiet spaces like our sacred sites, or did light duties around home (R. Pere, personal communication, July 12, 2010).

When I asked Aunty Rose what the significance was of applying the tohi whakatapu she replied:

It was to remind us that we are sacred, the whare tangata is sacred, everything about her is sacred. It was a way of showing us just how special and how sacred the mother energy is.

Ngāhuia: So was it a time of rest for us?

Aunty Rose: It was a time of meditation, a time of thinking 'now why am I being treated this way?'. And it is because the whare tangata is paramount.

Ngāhuia: Somebody said that when we bleed we are more sensitive to energies, we have a form of matakite (psychic sensing) then. Do you think that's true?

Aunty Rose: Well we're all born with it. We are all born with that energy.

Ngāhuia: Do you think we are more sensitive to it when we are bleeding?

Aunty Rose: No, it simply means that we are taking space and putting ourselves back into a space of our own, and a sort of quiet time, yes of course. You know you've got time to feel for energies, you're not rushed.

Ngāhuia: Not a whole lot of chores to do?

Aunty Rose: No, no. It was a time for you to just get on with your own things and just like when you were hapū, people were always there just in case you needed help. You never had to ask them, they were just there for you (R. Pere, personal communication, July 12, 2010).

The key point in Aunty Rose's kōrero is that any restrictions upon menstruating women we placed upon ourselves in order to claim space for ourselves. We did not enter the gardens to perform work, set traps, or gather kaimoana from the sea because menstruation was a time where we could rest. In a society motivated by working toward the wellbeing of the collective, menstruation must have provided a welcome reprieve from the daily demands of community living.

Restrictions around the cultivation of food are interesting because, when reflected upon, they reveal cultural codes of conduct grounded in Māori metaphysical paradigms. Menstruating women, according to Aunty Rose, were in a sacred space because they became mediums of the blood that carried the ancestors and descendants (R. Pere, personal communication, July 11, 2010). Shedding this blood in food spaces, like gardens, was (and is) considered culturally inappropriate because of the risk of consumption, relegating the ancestors and descendants to food. The thought is an

anathema to Māori. Parallels of this kind of thinking can be found in tikanga that observe the careful storage of whakapapa charts and karakia. You would not place such materials on a food table or kitchen bench.

Aunty Rose's kōrero on applying the tohi whakatapu was reflected in Soraya Ruakere's kōrero explaining that for her, and other women she knew, menstruation was a time of rest, reflection and meditation. During this time Soraya said she enjoyed leisurely and creative pursuits that nurtured and reminded her that she was in a sacred space. Her time out was respected by her whānau who performed all the cooking and domestic duties during the first couple of days. Her two young boys have been taught to understand that this time every month is a special time where they can spoil and look after their mother (S. Ruakere, personal communication, July 28, 2010).

Part of reclaiming space for Soraya, and the women's collective she is part of, is reclaiming a vocabulary about menstruation. This means speaking to her whānau openly about it, especially her sons so that they know it is special (S. Ruakere, personal communication, July 28, 2010). Aroha Yates-Smith also spoke of the importance of this, adding that her sons would collect herbs and vegetables from the garden without complaint because they understood why their mother would not go herself (A. Yates-Smith, personal communication, November 22, 2010). For Soraya and others within her group, reclaiming a vocabulary means speaking the words out in the community as well. "I cant come in to work today because I am bleeding" (S. Ruakere, personal communication, July 28, 2010) is a bold example of how these women are publically reclaiming a language that has been repressed and censored through the imposition of colonial ideologies of pollution.

Based on Aunty Rose's account, Soraya's example of taking time out may reflect more ancient traditions of menstruation as a time of rest and rejuvenation where women, supported by the whānau, enjoyed a more leisurely pace. The significance of these nurturing traditions has been eclipsed, however, by the early ethnographers' automatic equation of

restriction with impurity and female inferiority (Buckley & Gottlieb, 1988; Grahn, 1993). Menstrual restrictions when interpreted through a patriarchal lens are easily distorted to convey a message of male control over the wild and uncivilised female body. When I spoke to Aunty Rose about this interpretation her response was swift and ferocious! She bellowed:

What are they on about! We had female ariki, ariki tapairu who were carried on a litter! Their feet were so sacred they couldn't touch the ground because if they did no food could be planted there! They didn't do that for the men! Why? Because the whare tangata and the mother energy is paramount! She is the waka that conveys the generations (R. Pere, personal communication, July 11, 2010).

So called menstrual restrictions are slavishly documented in ethnographic literature as a means to contain menstruating women who are "possessed of an extremely harmful influence" (Best, 1982, p. 614) during menstruation, the dreaded and malignant atua kahukahu mentioned in the previous chapter. Goldie (1904) states that Māori women are "possessed by a demon during menstruation – or rather, she becomes dispossessed of a malignant disease-dealing demon" (p. 91). We could make light of this by contemplating the nature of pre-menstrual emotional outbursts, concluding that they must have been particularly intense in former times! Ironically pre-menstrual syndrome is something our whāea tīpuna did not suffer from until well after colonial contact according to the literature (Gluckman, 1976; Riley, 1994). Themes of menstrual demons, however, are littered throughout the colonial ethnographic accounts. I explore this further in the following chapter and posit the political agenda inherent in such narratives.

The myriad of menstrual restrictions recorded in some of the ethnographic accounts ranges from the reasonable to "a clutter of nonsensical, demeaning, prohibitive beliefs" (Te Awekotuku, 1991, p. 68). Some of the descriptions use language that is near identical to biblical scripture and some of the restrictions are the same. This reflects the infiltration of the

colonial ethnographers' own beliefs. Examples of this include: a woman must never step over a man; a man will not engage in sexual relations with his wife whilst she is 'unclean'; a woman must not sit or step over where a man sleeps; a man must never sit or lie where a menstruating woman has been lest he lose his powers of 'sight' (Best, 1982; Goldie, 1904; Hanson, 1983; Kent & Besley, 1990; Lev. 15: 19-26 King James Authorised Version; Makereti, 1938; Riley, 1994).

These restrictions are contradicted by other ethnographic observations and cultural practices. For example, Goldie (1904, p. 90) reports that the second and third day from the onset of menstruation are regarded as fertile days and "when a woman does not desire to conceive, she will not cohabit with her husband during menstruation". It is "during the koero stage (the second and third day of menstruation) that the sexual act is most generally fruitful" (Goldie, 1904, p. 90). Similarly Gluckman (1976) records "The Maori believed that intercourse during menstruation inevitably resulted in pregnancy. Those Tuhoe women who wished to avoid pregnancy in the late 19th century abstained from coitus for three days after the menstruation ceased" (p.174). Clearly this knowledge is contrary to ethnographic accounts that proclaim menstruating women are prohibited from sex due to their 'uncleanliness'.

The claim that men must resist the sleeping and sitting places of menstruating women 'lest he lose his clairvoyant powers' is an interesting contradiction to the employment of female genitalia in rituals to attract the benevolence of atua and restore clairvoyance, reported by Best (1924). According to Best if a man lost his 'powers of sight', if he angered the gods and they deserted him, in order to regain their favour and protection, he would lay down and a woman from a leading family would step over him. "Women possessed peculiar powers in certain directions" (1924, p. 170) Best observed. This practice challenges all that has been written about the nature of female genitalia as a pollutant against atua, purported by Best himself, and others. This practice suggests that not only did female genitalia attract atua, as Hanson (1982) argues, but were also employed as a medium to facilitate relationships between atua and men on occasion.

Hanson notes that women had the capacity to act as a medium because the birth canal is a passage that runs between the worlds. Atua are attracted to female genitalia because it provides a pathway of repatriation and a point of communication between the human and spirit realms (Hanson, 1982, p. 13). Menstrual blood, according to Hanson, is not pollutive but potent, and is a powerful conductor of tapu because the blood is a conduit of atua. Menstruation, then, is a time that requires 'special precautions' (Hanson, 1982, p. 12).

Best (1924, p. 222) also recorded the practice where an anxious warrior would crawl through the legs of a highborn woman to cure him of nerves on the eve of a battle. The "mana of the organ, its innate power, has a preservative and curative effect" Best uncharacteristically observed, because it houses the "generating power of Nature". In the following chapter I continue this line of examination by extending it into examples that include the use of menstrual blood in rites of protection in battle. These rites provide a striking contradiction to general theories of menstrual pollution and fundamentally challenge narratives that align female genitalia and menstruation with female inferiority.

Some restrictions, Ngahua Te Awekotuku points out, are simply commonsense. For example the prohibition on women entering the sea to gather food, Te Awekotuku suggests, is sensible, recounting the story of her friend whose blood attracted the interest of a giant stingray! "It's not because you're dirty, it's because you smell tasty!" Te Awekotuku exclaimed (N. Te Awekotuku, personal communication June 18, 2010). Similarly Te Awekotuku points out that in former times a woman's kope (a pad made out of kohukohu - sphagnum moss) was held in place by a tukaretu (thin woven string belt) or a maro kopua (woven triangular apron). These may not have been as reliable as modern inventions. "There is a risk when you weave, particularly whāriki, your legs are all over the place and one splash of blood could ruin months of work" (N. Te Awekotuku, personal communication, June 18, 2010).

Over the years I have observed the very different opinions and actions of Māori friends from various hapū and iwi across the motu. One friend, raised on the coast in a fiercely pro-Māori household sat happily in the sea beyond her front porch whilst menstruating. Raised in a whānau of weavers she would weave out of necessity, being her livelihood, and also enter the garden to grow food for her children whom she was raising alone. For her the tohi whakatapu is a practice negated by the break down of whānau. A lack of support means that, whilst perhaps she would enjoy relaxing during menstruation, if she does not provide for her children, no one else will. Another friend, from a different coastal iwi, also raised within a politically active whānau, would enter a river without issue but not the sea because it was considered a food basket. Conversely as a river woman, I have always felt confident in the sea whilst menstruating but I would not enter a river or stream.

At a tangi recently, one of the whānau pani, an older woman, told me that she was menstruating. Whilst in some areas her participation in some of the rites may have been frowned upon, she declared to me in her typical feisty fashion ‘I feel just fine doing what I am doing!’ My personal observation has been that women follow their own intuitive wisdom in keeping themselves ‘safe’ when menstruating, the general rule being if it doesn’t feel good, don’t do it!

Judy Grahn (1993) points out that “in all probability each gender created its own rites” (p. 4) therefore women’s logic underpins menstrual rituals, practices, and restrictions. If we approach restrictions from this perspective, rather than the imposition of rules upon women by men because of some imputed menstrual malevolence, then the paradigm entirely shifts. This is not to say our tīpuna did not perceive the blood as potentially dangerous, as clearly they did in certain contexts. This much is clear from an examination of the mōteatea that follow. Rather, restrictions, the tohi whakatapu, were a way Māori women claimed space for themselves, exerting boundaries within the daily rigor of communal tribal life.

Menstrual Spaces

Upon asking Aunty Rose whether our tīpuna whāea in Waikaremoana had special places where they would go to menstruate she replied:

Pūrē - that's our word for sacred. So the space they would go to to get quiet time was the Whare Pūrē. The sacred temple. Anyone could go there, not just the women. Anyone who wanted space and quiet would go to the Whare Pūrē. Don't forget we didn't separate, not really. The men were still involved. We are not like other cultures that separate the men and women. We work together. That's why marriage between two people was likened to the huia bird because they had the same partner for life. And when one died the other one died. So your brothers were well aware of the fact when you were menstruating. There was that respect (R. Pere, personal communication, July 12, 2010).

According to Aunty Rose menstruating women were free to enter any of the houses and whilst they bled the men would cook special meals for them (R. Pere, personal communication, July 12, 2010). Another woman, raised by learned kuia, who informally participated in this research commented on the same, remarking that in her tribal area menstruating women would go to the whare kōhanga, the birthing house, to rest. Men were free to come and go from this space and it was their duty to prepare food for the women. Research participant Hinewīrangī Kohu also stated that menstruating women in some tribal areas retired to the whare kōhanga in the past to rest, and learn. According to Hinewirangi this space was a whare wānanga, a learning house of women where matrilineal knowledge traditions were handed down the generations (H. Kohu, personal communication, July 16, 2010). Similarly Te Wai Hohaia stated that in Taranaki the women would retire to a space and this space could be considered the original women's whare wānanga. According to Aunty Te Wai:

Because bleeding women were seen as being in their 'power time' there had to be separation. Separation was seen as a time to rest, to reflect, to learn (waiata, whakapapa, poi, ngeri, etc). The time away was not

spent idly, although this was not considered a crime. At times it was also not possible, because of war, travel, hardship etc. Women who bled were respected because of their possible fertility. Not all women were able to conceive and not all women were expected to have children. Those who were able to conceive and give birth did so (T. Hohaia, personal communication, July 25, 2010).

According to Aunty Te Wai within this space those who didn't bleed, whose time had not arrived or whose puna had run dry, had a role and responsibility to look after those that were menstruating. This space was where the young learned about the seasons of their body, the seasons of their blood. The patterns and seasons of the reproductive body were compared to the seasons of Papatūānuku who provided a metaphor of cyclic change to teach the young. Aunty Te Wai pointed out that the rhythms of the blood were represented in the mathematical patterns in women's weaving work. Because our workload eased off whilst we bled this was a time for in-depth wānanga, kōrero, learning, teaching, resting, and nurturing. Karakia, whakapapa, and waiata were absorbed in these spaces as during this time "you are at your best for those things, in tune with the natural elements" (T. Hohaia, personal communication, August 18, 2010). Aunty Te Wai stated that "If there were any problems between the women, boom! It was dealt to straight away in those spaces" (T. Hohaia, personal communication, August 18, 2010).

Whilst there are tribal variations in the above accounts there is consistency in the claim that our tīpuna whāea were regarded as being in a sacred state that relinquished them from their daily chores and responsibilities. Commenting on anthropologists' misconceived association of menstrual separation (and restriction) with female inferiority and uncleanliness Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1992, p. 293) remarks:

I always laugh when I hear someone quoting early anthropologists who claimed that menstruating women of various tribes were considered 'unclean' and forced to leave the village until they were 'over it'. All women know that even if there were such a forced ritual exile, every

single woman, to a woman, would, when her time came, leave the village hanging her head mournfully, at least till she was out of sight, and then suddenly break into a jig down the path, cackling all the way.

The existence of spaces where menstruating women bled together and the culture around such spaces is a topic that has not been addressed in the literature that I surveyed. Goldie (1904) is the only author who tentatively suggests that menstrual whare were used in Aotearoa. A much more rigorous study needs to take place to reconstruct this 'original women's whare wānanga' in order to rediscover the matrilineal knowledge traditions practised in those spaces. Historian Te Miringa Hohaia's analysis of the whare wānanga, informed by the manuscripts he possessed, was dynamic. Breaking rank with other Māori writers who all (except for Hirini Mead, 2003) insist that whare wānanga were exclusively male spaces, Te Miringa pointed out to me that there:

are several sites on Taranaki started by women, and specifically for women and girls. Those Parihaka photos show women and girls in waananga. Anyway, what was 'the whare waananga'? More often than not it was wherever knowledgeable people gathered, the hut, the fire, the whare, the riverside, the beach. And don't they know, women are the knowledge keepers? (T. M. Hohaia, personal communication, July 21, 2010).

In summary I have touched on the significance of Kurawaka as a primary site of Māori women's matrilineal knowledges and ceremonial traditions about menstruation. I have explored how the colonial ethnographers' masculinist interpretations of this story have invented powerful narratives of female inferiority that continue to marginalise the status of Māori women today. I have focused on some of the deeper women-centered philosophies embedded in Kurawaka narratives and how they may have informed Māori women's cultural practices and responsibilities. Creating a space to contemplate these kinds of philosophies is crucial because they have been silenced, and lost, for many Māori women. Deeper wānanga of these philosophies and knowledges and the cultural practices they

embody is critical in order to equip Māori women to challenge wider narratives of female inferiority.

I then touched on examples of menarche rites and menstrual ceremonies that demonstrate how our tīpuna perceived menstruation as a medium of whakapapa. Far from discourses of uncleanness, menstruation was a conduit of relationships, across the generations, between the genders, and between women and our atua wāhine. Locating menstrual discussions within a broader paradigm about the whare tangata has equipped me with a cultural context that exposes the contradiction of menstrual pollution.

I then turned to address the way colonial and patriarchal interpretations of menstrual restrictions distorted traditions of nurturance. Equating menstrual restrictions with female inferiority has been a powerful vehicle for forwarding colonialist discourses of male supremacy and female subordination.

Lastly, I explored menstrual spaces as intergenerational, matrilineal teaching and learning spaces. Further research needs to be undertaken in this area in order to identify and reclaim knowledge traditions and ceremonies that culturally, spiritually, and politically equip Māori women in engaging with the Māori world. The socio-political application of such knowledges is another area that could usefully to be researched further. I turn now to examine some of the tribal compositions related to menstruation and the earliest of the origin stories I encountered in my research journey.

CHAPTER SIX
TE AWA TAPU: POTENT NOT POLLUTANT



Figure 4. Te Ipu Hue o Hina (Carved Gourd, 2010) by Ngāhina Hohaia
(Source: Photographed by Ngāhina Hohaia)

Ko te mana motuhake o tamawahine ko te awa tapu
(The autonomous power of woman is the sacred river)
(R. Pere, personal communication, July 11, 2010).

Linking back to chapter four on Māui, I begin this chapter by examining the earliest menstrual origin story that I found within Māori cosmogonic cycles which portrays menstrual blood as a medium of evolutionary expansion. I then follow the theme of expansion through menstrual blood into tribal navigational histories that reveal dramatic rituals where menstrual blood was harnessed to overwhelm all other energies and bonds.

Following this I survey a spectrum of rituals and ceremonies recorded in tribal compositions⁵² that reference menstrual blood as a powerful protective talisman. This examination leads me to consider war rites, revealing striking Māori cultural representations of womanhood that challenge notions of female inferiority and menstrual pollution theories.

Informed by tribal records, I challenge the idea put forward and perpetuated by colonial ethnographers that *atuakahu* were regarded as intrinsically malignant. I argue that this assertion contained a political imperative that advanced a colonial and patriarchal agenda. The way our *tīpuna* regarded *atuakahu*/menstrual blood was not singular, rather it was multiple and full of complexity. I explore this through examining the variety of often contradictory rituals and ceremonies.

In general versions that recount Tāne's copulating in the orifices of Hineahuone, producing all of the body secretions such as ear wax, mucus, saliva, excrement, and perspiration, there is one vital secretion missing from the account, that is menstruation (Hanson & Hanson, 1983; Smith, 1978). This omission generates the presumption that menstrual blood already existed as a primordial universal force within Hineahuone. This brings me to an earlier story that relays Tāne's initial discovery of Te Aō Mārama, the realm of light, by flowing out of the darkness of his parents' embrace on the menstrual blood tide of his mother Papatūānuku (other versions state it was her urine) (Smith, 1913, p. 120). This event occurred during the cosmogonic cycles of Te Pō, an evolutionary phase born out of

⁵² I refer here to *mōteatea* (songs, chants, and laments) that record tribal histories across the centuries.

the 'womb space' of Te Kore at the beginning of creation. Te Pō is characterised as a time of quickening and becoming, where the primordial parents Rangi and Papa and their offspring were born, and grew until the confined space could no longer contain them, demanding an evolutionary leap. This leap was realised by Tāne and enabled through the medium of his mother's menstrual blood.

Best (1929) observed that, according to Māori, women in labour were often regarded as imitating Papatūānuku in her labouring of the elemental beings, mimicking her at a microcosmic level (p. 11). Similarly, Tāne's appearance in the world of light is imitated by menstruating Māori women. Each month an atua manifests, symbolising creations longing for expansion. Papatūānuku's blood birthed the pantheon of gods, male and female, secreting within the darkness until one atua rode out on the tide, instigating an evolutionary leap that birthed the multitudes. Te Mātorohanga describes this event as during the seventh cycle of Te Pō or the age in search of the "way of the female in order to go forth" (Smith, 1913, p. 120). This is a salient point as it suggests that 'the way of the female' was necessary to precipitate the next evolutionary phase. This reflects Grahn's (1993) theory about the role of menstruation in the development of civilisation and cultural expansion. Through the medium of menstrual blood Tāne discovered a new world beyond his parents' stifling embrace, and later, found within Hineahuone a unique evolutionary companion, producing humanity.

The discovery of a new world through the medium of blood continues into tribal navigational histories. According to Kelly (1949) and Evans (1997), the waka Tainui was built under the direction of the wise woman Māhurangi (also known as Maruanuku) who directed Rakatāura to shape the waka like the horns of the crescent moon raising the bow and stern. Significantly the tree selected to build the canoe sprouted wildly at the summit of a mountain called Maungaroa in Hawaiki, on top of the 'aborted foetus', Tainui, a child of the Rai'atea priestess Hinekura (Evans, 1997, p. 133; Jones & Biggs, 2004, p. 16-18; Kelly, 1949, p. 34; Reed, 2006, p. 97). The following incantation reveals that this tree was specifically selected:

No whea te waka?
No uta te waka,
No te nehenehe nui.
I kimihia, I hahautia.
Koia ra ka kitea
Nga rau nuku o te whenua.

From whence is the canoe?
From inland is the canoe,
From the great forest.
It was sought for, intently sought for
And behold! It was discovered
By the moving multitudes of the earth.
(Kelly, 1949, p. 36).

This account provides a powerful counter-narrative to singular colonial presentations of atua kahukahu as 'malignant cacodemons'. If aborted, stillborn and miscarried fetuses were perceived as 'demonic' and malignant forces, why would our tīpuna have purposefully selected a tree that grew out of one? Surely the risk of sailing the vast Pacific Ocean was great enough without employing the influence of a 'malignant demon' to cradle the people on their great sea voyage?

In contrast to the intensely misogynist ideologies of colonial ethnographers and historians an exploration of the term kahukahu reveals a rather different story. Kahu can be translated as a cloak with connotations of protection (E. Murphy, personal communication, October 15, 2009; Williams, 1991, p. 84). The whare kahu throughout Tūhoe were birthing houses that en-cloaked the mother and newborn baby within a protective, nurturing space (Best, 1929, p. 7; Williams, 1991, p. 84). Approaching the Tainui waka story from this perspective to me makes more sense. Perhaps Tainui's influence was one of a kaitiaki, protecting the people's journey across the vast Pacific Ocean. This explanation is consistent with

mōteatea that reference the protective qualities contained within the womb-matter of women across the spectrum, from menstrual blood through to stillborn babies. I shall turn to examine a sample of these shortly.

To understand the significance of the Tainui waka story I approached a Tainui woman involved in waka ama who has keenly followed my research journey. In studying the stories and karakia about this event she observed that Tainui's existence, as a stillborn child, as a medium between one world and another, is synonymous with waka. Waka are also mediums. They move from one space to another; from the forest (the world of Tāne) to the sea (the world of Hinemoana), from one island to the next, one reality to another. They represent a space in-between and move between realities. Alongside the theory of protection, did this symbiosis also influence which tree was deliberately chosen to transport a selected crew of tohunga and rangatira across the ocean to a new reality? It would seem likely and provides an example of the synergetic nature with which our tīpuna perceived their world. I also think this synergy reflects a holistic and Indigenous approach that collapses the hierarchical dualisms which colonial historians transplanted onto Māori ways of seeing and knowing the world.

The Power to overwhelm

Evans (1997) recounts that Rakatāura's initial attempts to cut the tree down were in vain. For three consecutive nights the tree sprang up again, reassembled by the birds at night. This was a sign that the rites were not conducted correctly (Kelly, 1949, p. 35). Rakatāura once again returned to Māhurangi for her advice. She instructed him to place her menses (roi which Williams (1991) translates as to knot, to secure) on the stump of the tree and furnished him with an appropriate karakia to chant in order to keep the tree down. Jones and Biggs (2004) write that he used grated kūmara, which is also translated as roi. Upon returning the next day Rakatāura discovered that this time his efforts were met, the tree lay on the forest floor indicating the power and potency of the blood and its role in

completing the rite successfully (Evans, 1997, p. 133). Kelly (1949) reasoned that the tree stayed down because “the menses of a high born or priestly woman would ensure the immediate flight of any forest gods from the vicinity” (p. 35). Whilst this interpretation could be read as reinforcing Smith (1974) and Best’s (1929) theory that a woman’s menses (and genitalia) repelled the gods, causing them to flee in abhorrence, it can also be interpreted as a reference to the power and mana of the blood in its capacity to overwhelm.

Hanson (1982) argues that atua are not repelled, rather, they are attracted to the female passage, which houses the capacity to repatriate them back to the spirit realms. Hanson maintains that this is why atua would abandon ceremonies or projects if a woman came near. If women had the power to overwhelm atua and interfere with ceremonies through the sheer force of their genitalia, this ability was heightened during menstruation (Gunn Allen, 1986; Hanson, 1982, Peat, 1996). Perhaps the potency of Māhurangi’s menses overwhelmed all other forces in the vicinity. The following karakia (a continuation of the above karakia) supports this theory:

Kei te kotikoti au

I nga uaua o Papatuanuku,

I nga taero o Tainui,

I nga tau rori o Hinekura,

Ka hinga i te whenako

Ka whatu petia

Ka takoto i te tapairu ariki

I am severing

The sinews of Papatuanuku,

The obstructions of Tainui,

The knotted fastenings of Hinekura,

Yielding to the forceful taking

Slowly leaning
Laid low by the highborn woman
(Kelly 1949, p. 36).

This karakia suggests that the application of Māhurangi's menstrual blood overwhelmed all other bonds, severing them at the roots. The clinging sinews of Papatūānuku gave way, Tainui's obstructions were overcome, and Hinekura's ritual fastenings were undone, yielding to the supreme force of the highborn priestess's blood. This description mirrors some Native American menstrual philosophies. Peat (1995, p. 158) writes that menstruation in a Native context is "a time of great power, when a woman will be very careful of the medicine and the sacred objects that she touches, for during her moon her own spirit can overwhelm everything with which she comes in contact". Paula Gun Allen (1992, p. 28) makes similar observations writing that menstrual taboos were not about the fear of pollution, but the power of the blood in its capacity to overwhelm.

It is possible that menstrual blood, *te awa atua*, was used to both attract and repel different *atua*, depending on the karakia used. Whether the forest *atua* were lured to yield to the purpose of Māhurangi's blood, or driven off by its force, they were either way overwhelmed by its power and purpose.

Three main themes arise from the Tainui waka story. The first is a continuation of the cosmological narrative about the role of menstrual blood and the womb-stuff of women in facilitating expansion. Secondly, that menstrual blood had the power to overwhelm and was used in rituals, like the above, to do so. Thirdly, that the womb-stuff of women was perceived as carrying protective qualities that were harnessed in ceremonial rites. Protection was one of the most striking themes to arise out of my research. I turn now to examine oral histories recorded in song and chant as well as tribal practices that reflect this theme, beginning with a re-examination of a practice recorded as *atua noho whare*.

Protection

The colonial ethnographers recorded a peculiar practice known as *atua noho whare* where menstruating women stuffed their menstrual rags within the walls of the house. Tregear (1926, p. 590) writes:

Native women had a dirty habit of thrusting menstuous cloths among the thatch forming the walls of houses. These cloths were supposed to contain germs of human beings, and the word *kahukahu* was given to evil spirits of the most fiendish kind which emanated from such rags.

This practice is also recorded by Shortland (1856, p. 112) who noted that men would always sit at a distance from the walls of the house because of “their dread of the mysterious influence of certain *tapu* objects which have been thrust into the rush walls of dwelling houses for concealment”. Why would our *tīpuna* have done this? If the menstrual blood was considered home to the threatening and demonic *atua kahukahu* why would our *tīpuna* have willingly invited this threat into their homes? The colonial literature offers no suggestions.

Fletcher (2000) posits that perhaps this practice was about the practicalities of sleeping in a communal space. Not wanting to be caught in the ‘humiliating act’ of burying a cloth, menstruating women stuffed them into the walls of the house. The problem with this analysis is that by treating it as a mundane domestic act it ignores the cosmological and metaphysical narratives about the power of menstrual blood as a living entity. It also fails to consider Māori cultural paradigms about houses. The house is conceptualised as containing its own life force. It is a living structure that en-cloaks the lives of the people. If both the *whare* and menstrual blood were regarded as living entities, how did the two interact and for what purpose?

Once again the key to begin understanding this practice is to re-examine the terminology. The name *atua noho whare* denotes that this practice ran deeper than a domestic habit. *Atua noho whare* implies a practice that invited an *atua kahukahu* to reside in the house. As mentioned earlier,

kahu can be translated as a cloak, with connotations of protection. The Tūhoe birthing houses, the whare kahu, were spaces that shielded the imminent mother as her body opened up to act as a doorway between the worlds. From this perspective atua kahukahu appear to be regarded as kaitiaki, rather than as an evil spirit invited to reside in the house. This approach appears to make more sense.

When placing this tradition alongside other menstrual rites recorded in mōteatea, powerful themes of protection begin to emerge. From Tūhourangi, Te Arawa, the following lament, composed by Parewahaika, was recorded:

Tēnei te waiwhero te paheke i raro rā,
Hei whakamatara mō te hunga mākutu,

Here is the blood flowing below,
To keep the sorcerers at a distance,
(Ngata & Jones, 2004, p. 40- 41).

Menstrual blood in this mōteatea is clearly perceived as a protective agent against the forces of mākutu (curses) and those that wield them. Williams (1991) records that menstrual blood, the 'wai whero', was used in 'occult rites', and provides the above mōteatea as an example (p. 478). Alongside this example he provides another, which I discovered in full in the George Grey (1853) mōteatea collection. Entitled He Whai Kanohi me ka Pohea (composer unknown) it recites:

Te ra e hara mai ra,
Rere kura, rere toro hai,
Te marama e rere mai ra,
Rere kura, rere toro hai,
Ka whekite,
Ka whekaro, te kahui tupua,
Nau mai ki waho;

Te ritorito,
Te wai whero;
Tupu te ora,
He ora, ora.

The sun arising, flying red,
Seeking its journey,
The moon arising, flying red,
Seeking its journey,
One sees it dimly,
For the first time, the supernatural being,
Welcome, come forward;
The potential of life,
The menstrual blood;
Let life grow,
Life itself.

(Grey, 1853, p. 281. Translated by E. Murphy, 2010).

Whilst I have used this mōteatea to open my thesis, I repeat it here to demonstrate Williams' (1991) point. This mōteatea indicates that it may have been used in menarche rites of passage in the tribal lands of its origin. Here the arrival of the wai whero is celebrated as a gift that precipitates life. This mōteatea and the one above suggest that there was once a corpus of 'occult rites' that acknowledged the arrival of menstruation and employed the power and potency of menstrual blood.

I think that the atua noho whare practice is a dramatic example of this knowledge. By placing menstrual cloths within the walls of the house the menstrual atua was invited to stay. Clearly its nature was considered ambiguous as men did not 'lean against the walls' through a fear of coming into direct contact with them (Shortland, 1856). The atua noho whare tradition reveals, however, that even though the men perceived a

potential danger, this danger was not great enough for them to leave the space. Rather they accepted the presence of the atua because of a greater benefit. Discussing this practice with an informal participant I asked her why she thought the men did not lean against the walls. Her swift response was that it was 'not their business to'. The atua noho where was a woman's practice and the atua contained within the blood, a woman's power.

Another mōteatea refers to the use of menstrual blood in protection rites of preparation for war. A Lament for Papaka Te Naeroa, composed by Te Heuheu II Tukino of Ngāti Tuwharetoa recites:

Taku wai whakatahetahe
Ki te kauhanga a riri;
He rīanga tai, he rutunga patu

All in vain was my water offering
At the altar to smooth the way in battle;
The ocean was defied, when weapons were held on high,
(Ngata & Jones, 2004, p. 284-285).

The key word in this verse is tahe, translated by Williams (1991) as menses, abortion or flow. Ngata does not provide any notes or reference for the term in this particular mōteatea, but in another, a love song, he also translates tahe as menses (see Ngata & Jones, 2005, p. 229). Williams translates whakatahe as abortion, the clearing of obstructions, and sacred food offered to atua (1991, p. 358). Wai whakatahe in this context suggests the use of menstrual blood as an offering to atua to clear obstructions, to protect and ensure the success of a war party.

The theory of protection as the rationale behind the practice of atua noho where is also supported by the following quote by L.K. Gluckman (1976) who refers to the practice of a mother anointing her child with menstrual blood to "drive out the evil spirits" (p. 252). Like the Tūhourangi mōteatea, the blood is used to protect, purify, and banish unwanted influences. This

report is an extraordinary antithesis to masculinist Christian traditions that use heavenly holy water, blessed by male priests under the power of a male god to banish evil forces and purify. Here the purificatory water is a woman's menstrual blood. This difference provides a striking testament to the philosophical chasm between colonial cultural ideologies and Indigenous philosophies. If our tīpuna saw menstruation as a powerful protective force that held the capacity to purify and shield against malignant energies, what does this communicate to us about Māori constructs of womanhood in former times?

In asking Aunty Rose if she had heard of the practice of *atua noho whare* she commented that *raupō* was traditionally used throughout Te Urewera as a menstrual pad called *puru*. *Raupō* was also used as insulation for houses (R. Pere, personal communication, July 10, 2010). Ngahua Te Awekotuku commented that perhaps menstrual rags provided both a physical and psychic insulation against unwanted energies (N. Te Awekotuku, personal communication, June 18, 2010).

The ritual use of menstrual blood as a talisman of protection was one of the most consistent and striking themes that emerged from my research. Its ability to protect, as Aunty Rose points out, is an extension of the power that women had within a Māori world-view. She states:

We are very powerful, women are very powerful. For example John Rangihau and I and others climbed a sacred mountain in Waikato and we were in a state of *tapu* up on this hill, and we were the only outsiders of this group. It was one of King Tāwhiao's sacred places, and Rangihau, he came straight to me, so that I could hold him and he was safe. Cos I could apply the principle of neutrality, *te tohi whakanoa* which can remove restriction, *tapu*, anything like that. He didn't go to anybody else! He came to me, and I knew, so I did. As soon as I got down to the vehicle I ate something to remove the *tapu*. I covered him, but I was still in the state of *tapu* myself. John Rangihau would never go in front of me on a *marae*, I had to go in front. Why? To suss people out. If I didn't *hongiri* or shake hands with a person, nobody else would.

Ngāhuia: What's that about?

Aunty Rose: The men protect us physically, we protect them psychically / spiritually ... Take the karanga for example, the kaikaranga goes in front of the men in Waikaremoana. We went on to one marae, Tamati and I, and I could pick up this one woman cursing Tamati by spitting on her hand and aiming it straight at him. I went in front, and when I got to that woman I didn't touch her, she got a big fright because I was young. And she knew she'd been caught ... the rest of my group didn't touch her either, didn't hongi her, walked straight past. Tamati would tell that story saying they always felt safe as long as I was there ... we can protect a child or anyone by bringing them under our skirt between our legs, and god help anyone who touches them. That's why some wharenui you will find a woman just above the door, so it means you go underneath her you see, so you are safe (R. Pere, personal communication, July 12, 2010).

Women's protective qualities, and more specifically, the protective qualities of menstrual blood can be examined in their ritual application by surveying mōteatea that recount its use in rites of war. I turn now to examine these examples more closely.

Women and War

Continuing on the theme of protection and the way women, and menstrual blood, were used in rites of protection, Best (1941) records that not only would nervous warriors 'insert their head between the thighs' of a woman in order to restore their courage, but also, warriors would wrap 'a woman's apron' (the word apron is delicately used by Best (1941, p. 228) and Ngata and Jones (2006, p. 325) in reference to the soiled menstrual cloth of women) around their head for a moment if they were feeling 'hauhauaitu', a word Williams translates as weak and listless and Best describes as "extremely pernicious and dangerous to human life" (Best, 1941, p. 227-228; Williams, 1991, p. 39). This state, Best records, is due to the atua withdrawing their sustaining and vivifying influence because of a transgression of tapu, leaving the warrior apprehensive and afflicted,

having lost his nerve, sight, and courage (Best, 1941, p. 228). In order to remove this 'evil affliction' and regain the influence of atua, warriors would wrap the 'soiled apron' of an influential woman around the head for a few moments, a protective measure that Best describes as "life insurance" (Best, 1941, p. 228).

This rite demonstrates that menstrual blood was used to restore the relationship between men and atua, and thus reclaim mental power, vigour, and courage in battle (Best, 1941, p. 228). Best notes that the "ancient belief in the extraordinary powers of the human organs of reproduction" (p. 228) made it an effective cure against affliction caused by the withdrawal of atua influence. This war rite is a stunning example of indigenous metaphysics that conceptualise menstrual blood, and women, as a medium of direct contact to atua.

Best also records the practice of an armed force carrying a 'soiled apron' of a highborn woman into battle for the same purpose as the above, summoning the protective influences of the atua in order to maintain a state of courage, vigour, and mental prowess in battle. These examples provide a convincing record of male rites that engage the immanent force that exists within menstrual blood. Carrying a 'soiled apron' into battle was a form of 'life insurance', to use Best's words. It was used as a protective shield, a talisman that symbolised the presence of an atua, summoned to overwhelm opposing influences and provide a confident assurance amongst the men.

Interestingly, Best recounts an enemy practice of burying articles on the warpath in order to 'smote the path of the enemy' and to cause harm. A tohunga would therefore, lead the war party performing karakia in order to clear the path (1924a, p. 239). Perhaps the 'soiled apron' was also used to 'clear the path' and 'smooth the way to battle', reflecting my earlier argument that menstrual blood had the power to overwhelm all other energies and was summoned on occasion to do so.

The practice of wrapping a 'soiled apron' around the head of a listless warrior collapses the hierarchical dualisms that separate men from women

in a politically imbued polarity of dominance and subordination. This example demonstrates that men used the awa atua in rites that acknowledge it as a potent force. As both a conduit of atua and a medium that connected one's humanity back to atua through whakapapa, the blood was used to overwhelm feelings of 'weakness' and instill courage and fearlessness. This war rite is similar to the ritual practice of anointing weaponry, imbuing the object with a potent force, a practice I examine shortly.

According to Aunty Rose "our mothers would put menstruation on their sons before war to protect them" (R. Pere, personal communication, July 10, 2010). Men in battle were very cautious of the sons and nephews of powerful women because they knew and feared the protective talisman these men carried with them (R. Pere, personal communication, July 10, 2010). These practices provide a striking revelation about the way our tīpuna perceived menses. Clearly the atua imbued in the blood was capable of actively shielding and protecting one from harm if summoned or applied to do so. These traditions speak to menstrual blood and the womb-stuff of women as a conduit of powerful forces that were harnessed by whānau and hapū, for socio-political and economic purposes such as warfare. The sheer intensity and supremacy of the force housed within the reproductive body of women is referenced in this sample of menstrual rites and is also endorsed by Aunty Rose who states "men are vulnerable ... I protect my grandsons but not my granddaughters in the same way because they have the awa atua. They are all right" (R. Pere, personal communication, July 10, 2010).

The roles of menstrual blood in rites of war are as dramatic as the stories of our ancestresses in armed confrontation. I was provided the opportunity to reflect on this at a hui on constitutional change. I was randomly approached by a young Māori man who took the liberty to inform me that a woman's role was not at hui, such as this, but at home raising the children. It took me a swift, furious moment to recall the exploits of my grandmother's people, Tūhoe, and the kuia who fought to the death wielding patu in frontline close quarter combat. Whilst I am sure theirs too

was the domain of child rearing, these women, grandmothers, were infamous in war (R. Pere, personal communication, July 10, 2010). Their participation against the invasion of colonial forces at the battle of Orākau alongside Rewi Maniapoto is a testament to this.

It is salient that the detail most remembered and celebrated from that battle are the words some attribute to Ngāti Te Kohera woman Ahumai Te Paerata whose response to the colonial army's declaration to surrender the women and children present was 'if the men die, so too shall the women and children. Ka whawhai tonu mātou mo ake ake ake' (we will fight forever and ever) (Cowan, 1955, p. 393). Peita Kōtuku, father to the Ngāti Manawa matriarch Kiekie, was my great, great, great, grandfather. Escaping out over the wetlands, he was one of the very few to survive, and so I find myself, generations later, chanting on marches that assert Māori independence, the words his own ears would have caressed in those final moments of the battle, committing the women and children to die alongside their men.

In Tūhoe it was the grandmothers, the women who had ceased bleeding, who engaged themselves in battle. In the tribal nation of Ngāti Kahungungu, however, it was the menstruating women. These Kahungungu women were lethal with taiaha and were celebrated for their fighting prowess, many known to have stood over six feet tall (R. Pere, personal communication, July 12, 2010). Aunty Rose stated that these women would "move up into the frontline with their taiaha and perform haka peruperu to incite the men" (R. Pere, personal communication, July 10, 2010). These war dancers exposed their genitalia, flashing the doorway of life and death as a signal of contempt. It was a gesture that goaded the enemy, drawing it forth, as well as summoning the ferocity of one's own tribal kin in battle. Aroha Yates-Smith pointed out that it may have also been a powerful gesture of protection.

Having the menstruating women warriors move forward to the frontline, would probably have provided strong spiritual, psychic *and* physical protection for their iwi. It is very evident that there is an element of tapu

associated with menstrual blood and inherent within that tapu is a protective element. It appears to me that this has generally not been acknowledged by the colonisers and over a period of time we have lost much knowledge associated with menstrual practices (A. Yates-Smith, personal communication, February 16, 2011).

Atua Kahu in War

I have provided examples of war ceremonies that harnessed the awa atua as a commanding protective force. This force could act as a kaitiaki, shielding men in war, but it could also be channeled toward causing harm. The following mōteatea, recorded by Governor George Grey (1853), entitled Ko Te Tangi, mo Tuwhakararo, Te Rangatira o Taranaki, provides an example:

Kore wai whero,
Kia utuhia,
Hei wai kana hoeroa ma Rautao,

A menstrual sponge
Shall return,
As weapon bewitching fluid for Rautao,
(Grey, 1853, p. 185).

Williams (1991) modestly translates kōrē as “A moss used by women at certain times” (p. 140). As I mentioned earlier, Williams translates waiwhero as menstruation and notes its use in occult rites. Here menstrual blood is used to ‘bewitch’ weaponry. This insinuates that the blood had the power to captivate, overwhelm and imbue power within an object. Ngahuia Te Awekotuku points out that a hoeroa was a weapon often used by women. Weapons carried their own personal names that indicated their lethal nature as they consumed the mana of those they slayed (Te Awekotuku, 1996, p. 28). I think that this rite resonates with the atua noho whare practice. Like the whare, weapons were seen as having their own life force. Anointing them with menstrual blood, like inserting menstrual

cloths in the walls of the house, was a ritual designed to intensify the force within those living objects. Feeding the power and potency of the weapon is akin to feeding the shielding and protective qualities of the house. In other words, the blood could be applied to anything animate or inanimate to empower the quality already latent or active within it.

Another *mōteatea*, recorded by Governor George Grey (1853), and composed by Ngāti Raukawa chieftainess, Hinewhe refers to the power of menses in battle:

Kāore koe i te koa mai,
Taku wai whakatahe, Ki Horokiri,
Rutunga patu kei te puke i Remutaka rā,

You will not rejoice
At my menses, At Horokiri
Which will overcome you at the hill of Remutaka,
(Grey, 1853, p. 282).

Grey (1853) notes that when Te Rauparaha was arrested, Hinewhe, a chieftainess of his tribe, composed this *kaioraora*⁵³ cursing the tribes of Ngāmotu for having assisted the Pākehā in war. Cowan (1922) and Taylor (1855) point out that Remutaka is a mound at Horokiri, a battle-site where Te Rangihaeata, Te Rauparaha's nephew, clashed with government forces who were aided by Te Āti Awa. Whether the power of the blood to overwhelm was through rites empowering weaponry, or whether it was a more general summoning of a menstrual *atua* in battle is unclear. What is clear from this *mōteatea*, however, is the purposeful application of menstrual blood to overwhelm and attack opposing forces.

Hinewhe's composition resembles colonial ethnographic reports of *atua kahukahu* as malignant spirits. Another example of this is provided by Best

⁵³ Literally means to 'eat alive' and is a cursing song of which Māori women were reknown composers (Kāretu, 1978).

(1972) who recounts an inter-tribal skirmish between Ngāti Manawa and Tūhoe at the battle of Te Tapiri in 1865. On either side were powerful female prophets. Hinekou of Ngāti Manawa is recorded by Ngāti Manawa historian Henry Bird (1980) as being “absolutely amazonic in her fighting prowess” (p. 20), also equipping her tribal brothers with battle strategies as a matakite (clairvoyant). Of the Tūhoe prophetess Maraea, Best (1972) records: “Not a shot was fired before the arrival of the prophetess” (p. 585) who was a medium of the atua kahu known as Te Awa-nui, a war god who was a stillborn child of Maraea’s (p. 585).

The battle at Te Tapiri provides an historic example of a stillborn child summoned to both protect the iwi heading into battle and overwhelm the enemy. Whilst I acknowledge the histories that speak to atua kahukahu as forces used for malignant purposes, I challenge the idea forwarded by some colonial ethnographers that atua kahukahu were intrinsically malignant. Rather, upon exploring tribal histories and compositions, I conclude that they represented a powerful force that could be channeled towards whatever purpose was ritually prescribed for them. The repeated colonial misrepresentation of atua kahukahu as malignant spirits has progressed the discourse that menstruating women house evil and dangerous forces and thus, need to be contained through the enforcement of restrictions. This has progressed a colonial and patriarchal agenda of female subordination. Drawing attention to the overwhelming theme of protection in this thesis presents a tool to deconstruct colonial narratives of female insignificance and profanity that have, unfortunately, found traction in the Māori world.

Multiple Meanings

The use of menstrual blood for contradictory purposes reveals the complexity with which our tīpuna perceived the blood. As a living force occupying an in-between state between the worlds, it could be harnessed to protect, to overwhelm, and to curse. As a conduit of atua it could also be used to heal. Fletcher (2000, p. 93) describes the practice where plants used as menstrual cloths were placed above the heads of sick persons in

order to draw out and away from the patient the sickness inflicting them. The plants were seen as being 'pathways of the atua' where the atua responsible for inflicting the sickness were drawn out and provided with a passage of repatriation home. It is unclear from Fletcher's account whether the plants or menstrual cloths used in this ritual were marked with menstrual blood. In absence of this information, I think it is still important to acknowledge the powerful idea that menstruating women, and menstrual paraphernalia, were seen as conduits of atua and employed in a spectrum of rituals that challenge notions of menstrual contamination.

Best (1906) also records the use of menstrual blood in fertility rituals where barren women would insert a portion of her menses into *karety* (*sic*) sweet grass, which the *tohunga* would then take to a sacred river where community rites were performed. Here the *tohunga* would perform *karakia* over the menses in a rite of sympathetic magic to increase fertility (Best, 1904, p. 4). What is interesting about this record is that menstrual blood is readily taken to a sacred area within the community without any fear of it 'polluting' other talismans and objects of power. The potency of the blood and its ability to psychically overwhelm was perhaps contained by the intentions of the *tohunga* whose *karakia* conducted it toward a purpose.

The frank and open attitude towards menstruation is captured by some *mōteatea* that reference it as a symbol of the vibrancy of life, good health, and youth. In *A Lament for Rangiamohia* (Ngāti Whakatere, Ngāti Raukawa), composed by Tokorau, the following was recorded:

Ki te tiki pounamu, ki a Awarua, hei kope toto
Mōku I mua rā, i tō kuia e ora ana.

Prized like the greenstone, or the Awarua padding for blood staunching

As used by me aforesaid, when I your grandma was vibrant.

(Ngata & Jones, 2005, p. 32-33).

Similarly, in a love song from Ngāi Te Rangi, the following was recorded:

He aroha noa ake
Ki a Te Rewarewa rā
Nāna tōku aro
I huawaere iho,
I pākaru mai ai, ē,
E te tahe I ahau.

Oh, how I long
For Te Rewarewa now afar off,
He who all my charms
Did fully discover,
And caused to pour forth,
The tahe⁵⁴ from me.

(Ngata & Jones, 2005, p. 228-229).

The open and completely unashamed reference to menstrual blood parallels the statements made by Makereti Papakura (1938) and Aunty Rose who both claim that menstruation was once discussed candidly and without shame or derision. Makereti insists:

Every phase of life was freely discussed by the parents in the presence of the children, even things which western people deem most intimate ... there was no word considered rude; in the body there was nothing unclean; no bodily functions were treated as being unworthy of mention in plain language (1938, p. 101).

To conclude this chapter I draw attention to Buckley and Gottlieb (1988) who, in their examination of international ethnographic reports, observe “again and again menstrual discharge has indeed been granted the

⁵⁴ Ngata & Jones (2005, p. 229) translate tahe as menses.

extraordinary powers of the anomalous, or liminal” (p. 34) making it a “prime substance for manipulation in rituals” (p. 34). The authors continue that “its frequently multiple meanings as well as its symbolic arbitrariness suit it for use in a variety of rituals with diverse and even contradictory intent” (p. 34). Judy Grahn (1993) points out that the word ritual itself, is from the Sanskrit r'tu, which means any act of magic toward a purpose. It also means menstrual. Grahn writes that this suggests the art of ritual itself began as menstrual acts (p. 5-6).

Conceptualised all over the world as a “primary life force, the generative principle” (Grahn, 1993, p.6) menstrual blood was used in rituals to heal and kill, to curse and cure, to protect and charm. Its contradictory application reflected the symbolic power of the blood to ravel and unravel “since what consciousness (spirit, mystery, and mind) gives us, it can also take back. And the power of creation and destruction, as at one time evidently all humanity believed, was in the woman's blood” (Grahn, 1993, p. 18).

CHAPTER SEVEN

HE WHAKATEPENGA: CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this thesis was to uncover pre-colonial attitudes, stories, and practices regarding menstruation. In examining tribal oral histories alongside ethnographic accounts, I have located multiple contradictions and inconsistencies surrounding menstruation. I have conducted my analysis of tribal histories, menstrual practices, rituals and cosmological accounts within a decolonising mana wahine and kaupapa Māori framework. I maintain that this is important because menstrual practices have been (mis)interpreted and distorted in the accounts of the Victorian, colonial ethnographers who have recontextualised these practices within narratives of female inferiority. Such narratives continue today. In chapter four I provided some examples of contemporary literature, which includes the work of some Māori writers, who perpetuate the same colonialist discourse, creating powerful textual legacies of female inferiority and menstrual contamination.

Returning to menstrual practices, rituals and stories and reinterpreting them from a mana wahine and kaupapa Māori perspective recontextualises them within the appropriate cultural, philosophical and metaphysical paradigms. Situating menstrual practices within Māori cosmologies leads to a very different interpretation from that reached by colonial ethnographers. It also exposes the political agenda of colonial patriarchy inherent in discourses of menstrual pollution. Whilst kaupapa Māori grounds the subject of menstruation within an activist agenda of decolonisation and cultural reclamation, mana wahine creates a space to focus specifically on the voices of Māori women. This is important because Māori women's voices, stories, knowledges, roles, and multiple realities have been banished to the fringes of history through the patriarchal processes of colonisation (Hutchings, 2002; Pihama, 1994a, 2001; Smith, L. 1992a, 1992b).

Locating my research within mana wahine theories and methodology has allowed me to privilege the voices of Māori women. Our matrilineal ritual traditions about menstruation have been infiltrated and severed by Christian doctrines of menstrual impurity and patriarchal disgust toward the female body. Our stories and ceremonies that celebrate menstruation as a medium of ancestors and descendants, and *atua*, have been silenced. This thesis is concerned with creating a space to reclaim Māori women's stories and ceremonies about menstruation. I think that menstruation is a powerful symbol that represents our ritual and ceremonial traditions, our matrilineal cosmology based knowledges, and our political responsibilities and autonomous power as the human counterpart of Papatūānuku.

Indigenous autoethnography is an appropriate research tool for Māori women because it creates a platform that acknowledges the legitimacy of our own life experiences and stories in the production of knowledge. Our personal stories reflect the political battles of our people and our histories of colonial invasion (Houston, 2007). Celebrating our own stories as a legitimate source of knowledge transforms the hierarchal, gendered, and politically imbued dualisms that underpin western systems of knowledge. These dualisms are not neutral, rather they are a racist and misogynist construct that is grounded in the politics of power and control, privileging white able-bodied heterosexual masculinity as the unmarked norm (Grosz, 1994; Johnston, 2005; Longhurst, 2001, 2005). Women, children, Indigenous, Black, and Coloured Peoples, the earth and our elder siblings in creation, are categorised as the inferior 'Other'. Ordering the world within a hierarchal polarity of opposites has justified the conquest of Indigenous lands and communities, and the extermination of Indigenous populations. Narratives of menstrual putridity are an extension of these dualisms.

I argue in this thesis that narratives which position Māori women's menstruating bodies as 'pollutive' are highly political and are a continuation of colonial violence and cultural genocide. This is because it perpetuates the dualistic language of conquest and denies our

cosmologies which inform us that menstrual blood is a medium of whakapapa that connects us to our pantheon of atua. As a result this powerful ritual medium has been reduced to a discussion of menstrual restrictions and prohibitions, while the significance of even those elements has been lost. A recent example is the Te Papa Museum debate that I mentioned in chapter five. Examining restrictions from a mana wahine perspective and grounding restrictions within the stories of my participants tells a different story. It reveals rich traditions of nurturance that are conducive to wider kōrero on the significance of the whare tangata.

By highlighting tribal histories, incantations, chants and songs that recount menstrual blood in rites of protection, I provide examples of the multiplicity of ways our tīpuna regarded menstrual blood. These rites speak to the summoning of atua kahu in powerful rites of protection and guardianship. Whilst there are examples of atua kahu/menstrual blood being channeled toward harm, a survey of tribal practices reveals a much broader spectrum of beliefs that challenge singular notions of menstrual malevolence. In particular the parallels between the traditions of atua kahu and the origin stories of Māui-tikitiki-a-Taranga highlight this complexity.

On another theme, the Ngā Pōtiki, Ngā Uri a Māui story, relayed by Aunty Rose, recounts that Māui, the legendary shapeshifter and sacred trickster figure celebrated throughout Polynesia, became the first menstruation in his quest for immortality. His final gift to humanity was continuity, through the blood of woman. The stories about menstrual blood as a medium of atua and a connection back to atua continue in the Kurawaka stories. The ikura, the precious red medium steeped in the soil at the vulva of Papatūānuku, the birthplace of the gods, created the first human, Hineahuone. Here menstruation is a powerful procreative medium that connects us back to Papatūānuku. The stories about Tāne riding out of the cosmogonic cycles of Te Po on the tides of his mother's menstrual blood, discovering a new world and precipitating an evolutionary leap, illustrate the role of menstruation as a medium of expansion and transformation. This story links us back to the creation of our world and our pantheon of deities.

Menstruation is a powerful site of cultural identity, grounded in our cosmologies. Not only does menstruation symbolise Native constructs of womanhood, it represents our relationships across our metaphysical universe. Menstrual blood connects us to our atua and creation stories. Monthly menstrual ceremonies of returning the blood to Papatūānuku reinforced our whakapapa connection to the whenua and our ahi kā. The coming of menarche provided an opportunity for intimate teachings across the generations, bringing together mokopuna and kuia, mother and daughter.

Contrary to misogynist colonialist assertions, menstruation also united the genders as men had their own practices that honoured the 'house of humanity', te whare tangata. The gathering of special foods, the giving of gifts, the preparation of hākari and meals are some of the practices that speak to male traditions of nurturance towards menstruating women. I have drawn heavily on Aunty Rose's examples of gender equality in former times, detailing male traditions, like those above, that provide significant examples which contradict menstrual pollution narratives.

If menstrual blood symbolises the continuity of Tangata Whenua, what does it mean to represent it as putrid? The blood represents our connection to our atua, and thus our divinity, and menstrual ceremonies reinforce our ahi kā and connection to our lands. Narratives of pollution have the effect of severing these connections. Menstrual ceremonies bind the generations and the genders together through a common metaphysical paradigm but the infiltration of Christian, patriarchal doctrines of putridity have almost eradicated these traditions, leaving many Māori women ashamed of their bodies and the symbol of our connection back to our atua.

This serves the agenda of colonial conquest. The politics of power and control are invested in terms that associate menstrual blood with pollution. These politics are patriarchal in that they attempt to subordinate women, but they also concern Māori whānau in general because the language is couched in the politics of Indigenous extinction. It should concern all Māori

that the blood, which represents our survival has been described as pollution and filth. Menstruation is, therefore, a powerful site of decolonisation. If we reclaim menstruation and speak to it as our ancestors did, as a symbol of our continuity, then menstruation becomes an activist site that represents the continued survival of Māori, despite an agenda of cultural annihilation.

Future Research

Throughout this thesis I have identified several key sites that demand future research. In particular the relationship between the significance of the lunar almanac in former times, and Hinataiwaiwa the atua of childbirth and women's ceremonial arts require deeper reflection. It invites several questions: What significance did Māori women's rituals and ceremonies have within our society in former times? What did these matrilineal knowledges and ceremonial arts consist of? Is there value in reclaiming and reconstructing some of these traditions? What might be some of the political outcomes for Māori women in reclaiming these practices? Similarly an exploration into women's roles as 'wisdom keepers' and maintainers of the correct historical records (such as whakapapa) needs further investigation to determine the different ways Māori women asserted this role. The decay of such traditions and its consequences for Māori women and men requires a closer analysis.

Another related area that demands a more vigorous study is the issue of whare kōhanga and other menstrual spaces. Some of my participants have informed me that these were teaching and learning environments where elder women schooled the young about the seasons of their reproductive bodies. What other tikanga and kaupapa kōrero were passed on in these spaces? Was the whare kōhanga used as a space for political strategising amongst the women and across the generations? How could Māori women benefit today from the reclamation of these kōrero?

During my research I encountered powerful Hawaiian chants and songs of praise about menstruation that reflect our own mōteatea. I decided to leave them out due to a lack of space. Future research about menstruation

would benefit from locating this subject within the broader Oceanic philosophies of Polynesia. Whilst examining other colonised Indigenous women's accounts of menstrual ceremonies and colonialist pollution discourses has revealed striking similarities, a deeper analysis will ensue by tracing our menstrual practices back to the Pacific Islands.

Investigating museums as paradoxical, colonial spaces that restrict the movements of menstruating and pregnant women is a complex issue that urgently requires a critical analysis. It is a site where colonialist narratives of 'female pollution' overlap narratives about the 'sacredness of women' in ways that are confusing and contradictory. Given that museums and their restrictions toward menstruating women fall under the public gaze, it reveals an opportunity to educate and transform derogatory narratives and is a crucial site to claim control over.

Finally the roles of women in war is a fascinating research topic that crosses colonialist dualist boundaries that locate Māori women in roles of domestic subservience. There are powerful historical stories to be told of our ancestresses as fighters and military strategists whose visions and foresight catapulted hapū and iwi into battle. Investigating these stories may provide empowering philosophical examples to Māori women in present contexts who continue to fight against marginalisation and oppression.

To conclude, the divine river of women, the medium of ancestors and descendants, was used in powerful rites of protection by whānau and hapū. The blood was called atua and was also seen as a medium back to our pantheon of atua. Through the infiltration of Christian doctrine and colonialist patriarchal ideologies, what was once seen as a powerful universal force has come to be viewed as something putrid, something abhorrent. It is now described by many, as *mate*, as sickness and death, with any deeper meanings of this term displaced by a general silence that engulfs the subject.

What does it mean to call menstrual blood, the medium of ancestors and descendants and the medium of atua, a name translated and understood

now as sickness and death? If menstrual blood and menstruating women were once located as the conduit of relationships between generations, between genders, between people and the earth and the wider cosmos, does presenting it as unclean cut across those relationships? I argue it does. What would it mean to change this and reclaim ceremonies and kōrero that celebrate the ancestral blood? In the pursuit of the politics of tino rangatiratanga these are questions we must ask ourselves. Having offered these questions and this kōrero before you, I bring this ceremony full circle.

GLOSSARY

Ahi kā- occupation rights, Māori land tenure system

Aituā- accident, ill omen

Aotearoa- Indigenous name for New Zealand

Ariki- chief, leader, priest

Ariki Tapairu- female leader

Aroha- love, compassion

Atua- God/Goddess, supernatural being, menstrual blood

Atua kahu (atua kahukahu, kahukahu) - entity residing in menstrual blood

Atuatanga- divinity

Awa – river

Hākari- feast, gift, entertainment

Hapū- be pregnant, sub-tribe

Hauhauaitu- listless, weak, without heart, faint

Hine- girl, daughter,

Hine-ahu-one- the first woman

Hine-nui-te-pō - goddess of sunlight and stardust. Also known as the goddess who receives the dead

Hine-te-iwa-iwa - goddess of the moon and reproductive cycle of women, originator of haka, goddess who resides over women's esoteric knowledge and ceremonial arts

Hine-tītama- daughter of Hine-ahu-one, goddess of the dawn binding night and day

Hoeroa- a weapon

Hōhā- bored, monotony, pest

Hongi- Māori greeting, smell

Hononga- union, connection,

Hui – gather, to gather

Ia- he/she, him/her

Iwi – tribal nation, collection of families related through a common ancestor, human bone

Kai- food, to eat

Kaimoana- seafood

Kaioraora- cursing song or chant

Kaitiaki- guardian, caretaker

Kanohi ki te kanohi- face to face,

Karakia- chant , incantation

Karanga- women's ceremonial call

Kaua- do not, had better not

Kaupapa- topic, subject, theme

Kete- basket, kit

Kitea- to see

Koha- donation, gift

Kohukohu- sphagnum moss

Kōkōwai- red ochre

Kope- menstrual pad made out of kohukohu

Kōrero- talk, to speak, narrative

Koroua- elder (often male, however, I have heard it in relation to elder women in Taranaki)

Koru- spiral pattern

Kuia- elderly woman

Kupu- word(s)

Kura huna- school of mysteries

Māhaki- be inoffensive, humility

Mahi- work, undertaking

Mākutu- bewitch, curse

Mana- prestige, authority, control

Mana Wahine – power and authority of Māori women

Māori – Indigenous People of Aotearoa/New Zealand, fresh water, normal

Marae- open area in front of meeting house, also refers to general complex of buildings and land

Maro kopua- woven triangular apron

Māui- Polynesian cultural hero and demi-god

Matakite- seer, prophecy, intuition

Maunga- mountain

Mihi- greet, admire, respect, congratulate

Moko kauae- traditional woman's chin tattoo

Mokopuna- grandchild(ren), young generation

Mōteatea- laments, selection of tribal songs

Motu- island, cut off

Ngeri- fierce chant

Noa- be free from the extensions of
tapu, unrestricted

Pākehā – non- Māori, European settlers

Pao- song, strike, scattered

Papatūānuku –earth mother

Patu- strike, hit, weapon

Pepeha- proverb, motto

Poi- swing, twirl, bewitch, light ball with string attached

Pūkana- stare wildly, dilate the eyes

Puna roimata- wellspring of tears

Pūrē- (also pure) sacred, ritual to remove tapu, purge

Puru- menstrual pad

Rangatahi- youth, new net

Rangatiratanga- self-determination, sovereignty, right to exercise
authority, ownership

Ranginui- sky father

Raupō- bullrush plant

Tā Moko- Māori tattoo

Taha- side

Tahe- menstrual blood, abortion

Taiaha- weapon

Tana/Tona- his or hers

Tāne- male, man

Tāne-mahuta- atua of forests, trees and birds

Tangata- person

Tangatanga- humanity

Tangata Whenua - people of the land

Tangi (hanga)- wail, mourn, funeral

Taonga- treasure, possession

Tapu- be sacred, set apart, under atua protection, restricted

Te Ao Māori- the Māori world

Te Ao Mārama- The world of life and light, physical world

Te ira atua- divine life principle

Te ira tangata- human life

Te Kore- the void, the primordial womb-space at the beginning of the world

Te Pō- the darkness, the night, place of departed spirits

Te Reo Māori- the Māori language

Te Reo me ona tikanga- the Māori

language and associated customs and practices

Te Taiao- the environment

Tipuna/Tupuna- ancestor

Tipuna/Tūpuna- ancestors

Tipuna whaea- ancestress

Te Tiriti o Waitangi- the Māori version of the Treaty of Waitangi

Tekoteko- carved figure on the gable of a meeting house

Tikanga- procedure, custom, practice, habit

Titī- mutton-bird

Titiro- look

Tino Rangatiratanga – political, social, cultural and economic autonomy

Toa- be brave, strong

Tohunga- specialist, chosen expert, priest

Toto- blood

Tuakana- elder sister of a female, or elder brother of a male

Tungāne- brother of a female

Tukaretu- thin string belt made of flax

Tūpato- be cautious

Tipuna whare- ancestral house

Tūrangawaewae- place to stand, home

Tūturu- real, trustworthy, traditional

Uha- female genitals

Ūkaipō- beloved name for Papatūānuku, night feeding breast, mother, origin, source of sustenance

Utu- price, reciprocity, satisfaction, reward, response

Wā- time, season

Wahine- woman

Wāhine- women

Waiata- song, sing, chant

Wairua- spirit, soul

Waiū- milk

Waka ama- outrigger canoe

Wānanga- learning, series of discussions, occult science

Whāea- mother, aunt, female relative

Whaikōrero- to make a formal speech

Whakanoa- to remove tapu

Whakapapa- genealogy, descent lines, to layer

Whakarongo- listen

Whakataukī- proverb, saying

Whakawhānaungatanga- to make relationships

Whānau- family, to be born, give birth

Whānau pani- bereaved family

Whare Kahu- nest house, birth house (Tuhoe)

Whare Kōhanga- nest house, birth house

Wharenui- ancestral meeting house

Whare Puni- family meeting house, dormitory, main house of village

Whare Tangata- womb, house of humanity

Whare Wānanga- schools/environments of learning

Whāriki – woven mat

Whenua- land, placenta

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