

The Presence of the Past: Māori History in Contemporary Reflection

E Tipu e rea mo nga ra o tou ao – Grow up in the days destined to you.

- Apirana T. Ngata

This is the opening line of a famous saying in my tribe. For our people - Ngāti Porou - these words have become embedded in our tribal identity as important directives that we are encouraged to aspire to. In the “days destined to you”, Ngata reminds us that each generation has its own mana (or authority), our own responsibilities and challenges, our own dreams and destinies to fulfil, and our own histories to tell about Ngāti Porou: who we are, our past, present, and future. If we consider this expectant, and I think hopeful, affirmation as a gift and responsibility, then taking real ownership of the “days destined to us” requires us to know what our forebears have entrusted us with. What are those historical gifts that we might use to “centre” and assert ourselves as Māori, as Ngāti Porou? We might look at this directly, i mua: the past before

us because it is our history that is so crucial to us as we walk consciously, and with determination, into the future. Our past before us helps us to know where we are going, it helps us correct our course when we stray, keeps us mindful of the “kaupapa”: whatever that might be in our generation and corner of the Maori universe. We’ve heard already today from both Enoka and Arini how Māori, in our own ways, are engaging with our past, drawing on our korero tuku iho (our oral histories passed down across the generations), on our whakairo (our carving), to illuminate the many ways Māori do, and think about, the past.

I am also going to focus on how Māori are engaging with history, and I thought I would play with some ideas that I think are relevant to our history now, and also our relationship to the Pacific, and more specifically a Ngati Porou perspective on our history and connections. So as a launching pad to pondering and playing with some ideas and question about Aotearoa, Maori, and even Pakeha and the Pacific, I ‘m going to go back a few years to a 2003 essay written by Kerry Howe in the *New Zealand Journal of History* and use some of the observations he made about New Zealand and Pacific

historiographies. In it Howe argued that “diverging historical agendas [in New Zealand and Pacific history more broadly] since the 1970s have created two historiographic worlds” (p. 50). Howe argued that while Pacific scholars were “diverse” and “freer to range more widely across historical issues”, New Zealand historians have tended to be more “insular”, confined by an underlying “nationalist focus” and limited by the Treaty grievance industry where many of the rooms of New Zealand history remain empty or locked (pp. 50-51; 58). The very important area of “culture contact” that Howe saw as New Zealand History’s “particular and obvious connections to Pacific history” then came to an abrupt end with the public “castigating and effective banning of Michael King from writing Māori history” (p. 51). In locking the door, Māori “gatekeepers” also shut New Zealand history out of the Pacific because as Howe argues “Pākehā never regarded themselves as islanders or from the region” (p. 50). Meanwhile, Māori have wondered where the locked doors and gates are because Pākehā in New Zealand and abroad have continued to research and write on our people in not only specific histories addressing Māori and iwi, but in histories of nation and

empires in which our encounters and entanglements have been centred in their migrations and settlements. One of the more notable in recent times has been Paul Moon, who has helped himself to a history of Māori cannibalism and just last year produced his own history of the Māori language which was a pretty neat trick for a Pākehā who to my knowledge has never been involved in Māori language revitalization. Kerry Howe is right though, New Zealand history's "nationalist focus" has been, and continues to be, a powerful focal point in historical scholarship in Aotearoa. For Māori, we have been so busy dealing with how we want to write the past, and what we think Māori history is and should be, we have necessarily albeit reluctantly had to address New Zealand's Pākehā-centric nationalist narrative or risk being absorbed irretrievably within it. Our focus has been, then, on various fronts. We engage constantly with the immediacies of ongoing colonialism and nationalism, not simply in grievance mode, but with a deeper intent to determine our destinies and histories on our own terms. To this extent we recognise New Zealand as a discursive construction, and find ourselves drawn to it if only to either subvert or infiltrate it as a site of historical

power. But our focus has often been directed at our own tribal contexts. In these spaces, Māori historians write broadly about our people, our art, our migrations, our dead, our spiritual worlds, practices and beliefs. We speak our pasts as much as write them. This oral and textual historiography is much broader than a myopic fixation on settlement claims or holding colonists to account, but is mindful of what is most important for our survival and empowerment. We don't have the luxury of locking Pākehā out, but often work with Pākehā to achieve our aims. Where Kerry Howe highlights the narrow focus of grievance histories, a very large number of historians who have taken up research contracts and prospered in the claims process are not Māori but Pākehā. Grievance history is very much a Pākehā coloniser framework in which we have had little power to dictate the terms of these negotiations. In its outcome, the rhetoric of grievance is slowly giving way to full and final settlement, both terms that serve New Zealand coloniser interests and historical interpretations much more than Māori mana motu hake or self determining aspirations. Thus, many Māori are interested in the present, and how our

histories matter in what Linda Tuhiwai Smith refers to as “so what” research.

But nation-making and “grievance” histories are only one of many directions in which Māori historians are thinking, speaking and writing. Māori have and are still interested in the production of tribal histories which have long been a popular staple of Māori historiography, with particular interests in origin and migrations that take us back to the Pacific. Early writing on the histories of waka groups like Tainui, Te Arawa, Takitimu, and Horouta, for instance, have persisted to some extent in publications like Rawiri Te Maire Tau’s *Ngai Tahu Migrations*. These histories, of waka take us back to the Pacific, but most importantly they are for many Maori living histories beyond the text; we are using them on a daily and weekly basis in our tribal gatherings, in karakia, song, dance, and formal speeching making. Beyond straightforward tribal histories, studies in religion and Christianity especially remain important interests for Māori. Some of the more recent examples include Hirini Kaa’s excellent study on the Anglican Church – te Hahi matua - in Ngāti Porou, and Selwyn Katene’s

edited history of Māori Mormon families across Aotearoa. Many Maori historians are driven as both Hirini and Te Maire's work reveal by affiliations to tribes, but their visions are broad. Ngarino Ellis recent history on Whakairo is yet another testament to Arini's arguments about the importance of carving to our history, and with FestPac only days away, Māori historians who carry the past in their chosen fields, from waka voyaging to tattooing and kapahaka (dance and performing arts) reveal how dynamic and varied Māori histories are in their form, conception and transmission. They tie us in consistently to the Pacific. So while Pacific History might not be evident in Kerry Howes historiographical reflections, Māori have continued to speak and sing of the Pacific in our traditions and histories, and although Alice Te Punga Sommerville felt it necessary to remind us that we *Once Were Pacific*, our ties to the moana, Maui, and Hawaiiki remain strong in many tribal settings. In my tribe Ngāti Porou we sing of Kahutiaterangi, the Whale Rider, our revered ancestor and his journey to Whanagra. When I was young the story of this tribal ancestor and his journey and arrival in Aotearoa New Zealand was one of the most prominent stories in our family,

only matched by the stories of the great warrior chief Tuwhakairiora. Paikea, Kahutiaterangi, or the 'whale rider', as he is also known, has long been a key figure in Ngāti Porou history. His story begins in our ancient homeland of Hawaiki, where it is said that 'a battle took place over family status and rivalries.' In our history, Uenuku, a high chief in Hawaiki, chastised and belittled his son Ruatapu whom he humiliatingly declared was of low rank and status. In plotting his revenge, Ruatapu, a strong swimmer, invited his brothers to accompany him on an early morning fishing expedition. Among them was Kahutia-te-rangi (Paikea), who would be the sole survivor of Ruatapu's murderous plot for revenge. After Ruatapu had drowned his other siblings, Paikea, it is said, escaped and was left stranded at sea, but after uttering a powerful incantation was borne ashore on the back of a whale. This event in our history is known as 'Te Huripūreiata – the turning point', and is commemorated in history and song. Paikea, the story, the song, and the anthem, remains one of the prominent histories recounted during my upbringing. Although his narrative has been committed to print, and invoked, told and retold, in varying forms, it is the oral renderings of that history that I

recall most vividly. This living history, was spoken, transmitted face to face, was intergenerational, but most importantly, it was ours. In stories like Paikea, our tribe connected continually back to the Pacific. In the song our words stands as a remind of these conenctions:

Paikea song (here we speak of our connection to Whironui, and into the our deeply Pacific origins). Te Huripureiata marks a tunning point tha we invoke whenever our tribe moves in transformative turns to the days destined to us that Ngata spoke of).

Another important connection for us is our tipuna Maui tikitiki a Taranga. Maui travelling out with his brothers, the youngest or potiki, he discovered a giant sting ray, and hauling it from the depths left if his canoe stranded in petrified form on our sacred mountain Hikurangi. We sing, speak, and tell stories of this Pacific legend in almost every tribal meeting we hold. In the lament Haere ra e hika, we are reminded of our Pacific links, again through waka:

Ko taiopupua ko te raro tuamaheni e,

Ko araiteuru, kko nukutaimemeha, te waka I hi ai e, te whenu nui nei.

Araiteuru – another waka – is the name of the marae in Otakou. Te hono ki Rarotonga is another link back to the Pacific. Whitireia and Whangara – wherever we go, the Pacific follows with us – we are the Pacific, and are not simply a subfield of New Zealand historiography.

Maori never locked Pakeha out of Maori history as much as we might want to. Culture contact was not our particular focus in connecting to the Pacific in the first place: that was always a Pakeha approach to thinking about not only the Pacific but indigenous peoples more generally. But I think Maori history does provide a way back to the Pacific that Pakeha historians in New Zealand should consider much more closely. New Zealand history itself is just a small, and only recent part of a much broader tapestry of Maori history that continues to look to Hawaiiiki, Maui, to our waka conenctions, languages, and

the struggles and victories of our indigenous relatives in the Pacific. New Zealand history is Maori history, and if Pakeha are willing to allow these deeply connected Maori historical narratives to direct what we know in Aotearoa, then maybe we might move beyond the narrow “two world” dichotomy of New Zealand and Pacific historiographies.