

Pakeha uses of Takitimumutanga *who owns tribal tradition?*¹

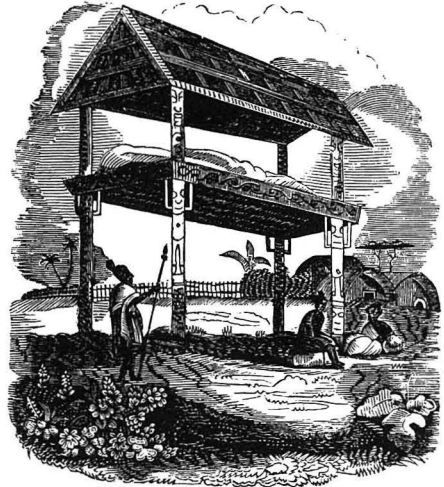
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Although the author's original text included macrons we regret that technical difficulties have prevented us from embodying them here.

At a history conference in the late 1980s at Victoria University, Michael King asked the question - should Pakeha academics write about Maori topics? He answered himself in the negative, saying that Pakeha historians should stand back from 'Maori history', and wait for Maori historians to come forward to write their own. While King's concern was with the times when European academics, often ill-informed, imposed their views of Maori events on the reading public, in fact Maori academics have been coming forward, writing their own, since the 19th century. In that century there were Mohi Te Atahikoia, Takaanui Tarakawa, Hoani Nahe, Hoani Paraone Tunuiarangi, Te Kahui Kararehe and many others. In the twentieth century Apirana Ngata, Te Rangihiroa, Maui Pomare, Pei Te Hurinui Jones and others were followed in recent times by Ruka Broughton, Joe Pere, Pou Temara, Hirini Mead, Ranginui Walker and countless younger people writing and publishing. These people were and are the public face of Maori academia.

But in the Maori cultural world there are ways to preserve the past other than academic publication. In both centuries there have been tribal historians working away privately or for such institutions as the Komiti o Tupai of the Tanuiarangi Committee, writing down accounts of tribal history, writing and preserving whakapapa books, and serving as repositories of taonga for their people. Their work is often neither published nor known outside their kin group. The fact that the majority of Maori historians do not publish their work should tell us something about Maori cultural attitudes to the sharing of tapu information. Those working from inside a culture, or way of life and system of thought and belief, are bound by its rules.

Since Michael King's remarks the debate has moved on from merely questioning Pakeha involvement. Some Maori academics are challenging the existence of anything called 'Maori history'. They are saying that there is only Ngati Poroutanga, Tainui-tanga, Kai Tahu-tanga and Takitimumutanga. In some cases, the cultural boundaries are even smaller, being based on local marae communities. Some Maori academics are saying that only local tribally based histories of people of Maori descent can have any validity, that unique kawa (etiquette), unique hapu



'Platform erected for the Remains of an Influential Chief near the East Cape.' from Manners and Customs of the New Zealanders, vol.1, by J.S.Polack, London, 1840, p.122.

actions and reactions to outside stimuli, and regional variations in traditions mean that attempts to write about 'the Maori experience' are necessarily doomed to failure. Even such efforts at pan-tribalism as the Kingitanga and Kotahitanga movements in the nineteenth century, and the Ratana movement in the twentieth, are seen as the history of the resistance of the various tribal groups to attempts at Maori nationalism and central leadership.

A tendency to exclude Pakeha academics from the field of tribal history is another aspect of the same debate. A 1992 hui was restricted to writers of Maori descent. One of the main topics of discussion was tribal history as the intellectual property of its respective descent groups. At first glance such a debate seems totally opposed to the 'western' tradition of academic freedom that has been the objective of a painful struggle since the middle ages. Peter Munz reminded us recently that tertiary education is supposed to be critical, secular and objective. To quote Newman's *The Idea of a University*, 'that alone is liberal knowledge which stands on its own pretensions, is independent of sequel, ... refuses to serve any end ... The most

ordinary pursuits have this specific character if they are self-sufficient and the highest lose it when they minister to something beyond them'.² To discourage anyone, Maori or Pakeha, from studying anything unless it serves a specific Maori community's culture, is seemingly a sacrifice of that academic freedom which is one of the few, slender guarantees the world has of honest appraisal, comparison and criticism of human behaviour.

Is it not the basic stuff of the university to subject all cultures, religions, political and philosophical creeds to the searching light of rational analysis, criticism and comparison? Should academics of any ethnic background have to justify such comparisons and criticisms? If, in general, we attempt to deny any particular class of academics the right to study any human phenomena, and, in particular, if we attempt to restrict the study of tribal history not only to descendants of those tribes, but to descendants working with the consent and support of their elders, then it might seem that we are subjecting the knowledge gained to control in the service of a specific group. Is it not true that we have not made much progress from the days when Galileo was forced to kneel at the altar rails and recant his heretical theory that Earth was not at the centre of the universe? When, in other words, the Church could dictate the limits of human knowledge in the interests of one particular belief system?

An extreme view of the western tradition of academic freedom has been given expression here. It begs the question of professional ethics which has the practical effect of 'limiting' academic freedom and brings the whole 'western tradition' much closer to the Maori position than at first seems apparent.

Maori cultural attitudes to tribal knowledge have yet to be outlined. Because the author is not Maori, this will be achieved by quoting the words of a writer of Maori descent. Graeme Gummer speaks of the 'intrinsically private nature of information derived from Maori sources'. He advises Pakeha who have in mind some research project involving Maori tribal history to ask themselves :
Who are the tangata whenua in this location?
Have you a connection with these people?
Have you standing on this marae?
What sort of information are you looking for? And why?
Are you entitled to be privy to that information? ...
Will the research be done in the company of tangata whenua?
With their blessing and prayers?
Will you be careful not to desecrate wahi tapu with food or wastes? ...
Where is the information to be held?
Who can access it?
Will its mana be diluted and dissipated by publication?
Who gets the benefit of this knowledge?
Who are to be the guardians of it?

His final series of questions and summing up are as follows:

Must it really be written down? How vital is it? For this is private information. It is ours, and we may not reveal it. You might not understand it, might not value it. Even amongst ourselves, we are cautious about sharing it - that should tell you something ...

Our approach to the past is different. The further we get back into history, the closer we get to the Creation and to the Creator. a very tapu area. Not for everyone. That might help you understand our reluctance, our wish that our taonga (treasured things) should be respected.³

The 'straw men' set up here, 'academic freedom' versus 'closed Maori culture' need not be a contest between a modern and medieval approach. The fact of the apparent opposition does not mean, necessarily, that one cultural attitude to tribal knowledge is 'right' and the other is 'wrong'. This is so not least because in the best liberal tradition there are no rights and wrongs, only points of view. There are other more serious reasons, discussed below. but there are major difficulties.

Academics will know that in practice the rules laid down by Gummer for Pakeha wishing to study and write about the Maori past are difficult to follow. Many of them run counter to that academic freedom to probe and analyse mentioned before. All of them fall outside the usual methods of research : examining and exploring countless documents in libraries and archives, or artefacts and other concrete phenomena in the ground, and coming to conclusions based on observed patterns of human interaction, as displayed in such material. Gummer tells us that the information is private, that its mana might be dissipated by publication, that it should not be available to everyone, that the benefits, including financial rewards, should be shared by the owners of the information, that such study inevitably trespasses on tapu. For Pakeha that last concept, tapu, is difficult; they are asked to accept that there are areas of Maori information that are literally forbidden, because to break tapu is to risk or cause spiritual damage, even death.

But Gummer's prescriptions are not impossible to follow. the visits to marae and tangata whenua have been and can be done. Joan Metge, Judith Binney, Anne Salmond, Jeffrey Sissons and others have based large research projects on extended interviews with their subjects, with their blessings and prayers. Gummer requires the writer to 'be entitled to be privy to that information'. That is impossible for Pakeha if interpreted to mean 'entitled by descent'. But if that entitlement is interpreted to mean 'with the blessing and permission of the elders' the problem is not impossible of solution.

But is the academic with a large project, let us say - the changes to social organization throughout the 18th century of a tribal confederation, Takitimu perhaps, bound to

visit every marae from Rangitoto and Palliser to Turanganui to explain the project before they start, and get the consent and blessing of every elder? It would be a logistical nightmare. And what if the elders refuse their consent, or some agree and some do not. Where is academic freedom then? How can academics contribute their mite to the study of the human condition in all its multifarious adaptations to different environments and circumstances if they are forbidden to begin on the basis of their ethnic background?

Even to ask such a question is to misunderstand the basis of the blessing and consent offered. Charles Royal has pointed out that Maori elders sometimes refuse to share their knowledge with their own descendants. Such a refusal might be temporary; the elder perceives that the would-be students have not yet acquired sufficient knowledge and wisdom to make proper use of the information gained; that misuse of it by insufficiently informed descendants could be dangerous for the tribe or hapu. Or that their attitudes to tribal knowledge have not yet outgrown the proprietorial or the egotistical search for personal mana through publication.⁴ Pakeha in these circumstances are in a similar situation. In a sense things can be simpler for them; the factor of danger to the descent group by one of its own is eliminated. If the elder can see that the knowledge and attitudes of the Pakeha academic are sufficiently informed and infused with the desire to serve rather than exploit, then very often the relationship develops into a true cultural exchange.

Other rules mentioned by Gummer are also relatively easy to follow. The requirement that tapu material should not be in contact with food or human wastes is possible, but not always easy to practice. In work areas or domestic situations, if space allows, a room, or even a cupboard separate from daily living can be used to keep materials that might be considered to fall into that category; copies of whakapapa books and other manuscripts, copies of Land Court records containing whakapapa and waiata. Family members and colleagues can be persuaded to avoid this space. With modern sanitary methods, the issue of contamination by human wastes including menstruation need not arise. It becomes a question of the attitude of the academic to his material. The palpable sense of awe, of *wehi*, which arises from contact with Maori whakapapa books and similar manuscripts is akin to the reverence felt by professionals of any ethnic background when handling ancient manuscripts or artefacts of any culture. It is on such shared experience that Maori and Pakeha can move forward together.

Modern technology raises further difficulties. Are photocopies of whakapapa books tapu? Are whakapapa which emanate from public records of court hearings tapu? Does the tapu automatically extend to any material which contains whakapapa or *karakia*? While opinions

seem to be divided on these issues, it seems safest for the Pakeha academic, in the cause of sensitivity, to assume that it does.

Recently, a faint aura of scepticism about the tapu nature of Maori material has been discernible, not only in cheap shots fired by comedians in the media, but in the halls of senior academia. There are the mutterings that 'one didn't hear so much about wahi tapu before setting up of the Waitangi Tribunal'. It is similar to the debate about the meaning of 'taonga' in the Treaty of Waitangi. But just as the word 'taonga' carried meanings other than those pertaining to material treasure in the nineteenth as well as the twentieth centuries, there is no doubt that the concept of tapu played and plays a crucial role in Maori society before and after European contact. There are many earlier accounts of tapu in the records, but the following is Donald McLean's 1849 record of a Whanganui account of its origins:

[The sacred house] Wharekuru was built by Kahui-rua, Kahui-po, Kahui-kapu, Kahui-kauika, Kahui-wata, Kahui-ihii, Kahui-kaowai, Ika-o-wainui, Ika-o-wai-roa ... when the house was finished the priests and sacred people were placed in it, and those on one side of the house quarrelled with those on the other, and Tama-ahuroa took the end pole or support of the house down which caused the house to fall in and the people inside were crushed a few only escaping. Momori-kiki, Momori-kaka, [and] Mitihanga-te-kore, three great priests were killed which caused the first bloodshed ... Rangiao tells me that the tapu was brought up from te Reinga or hell by Ruamokoroa who got it from Miru, he got it from Keuea from the lower regions to kill Uenuku but it did not take effect ... nothing killed Uenuku till they tried ... makutu.⁵

This is not a simple story of a quarrel in a house, followed by banishment. Humans have often explained mysteries and origins by parable and allegory. This story is one of them. Although there are many elements of McLean's account wholly Maori in origin, parts may have been influenced by the biblical parallel in the quarrel of Lucifer with God in Heaven, the origin in Christian theology of all evil. This strand of the story's derivation may be interesting, but does not affect the fact that as early as 1849 documentary evidence supports the idea that Maori believed tapu to be the spiritual dimension of a great intangible force, and that it was deliberately introduced into the world. The story goes on to show that once in the world, priests of great powers learn to control and use tapu by the practice of makutu. In 1849 McLean came to the conclusion that the imposition of tapu was a religious rite rather than a device to maintain the dignity of chiefs because otherwise 'why would it be so strictly observed and feared by all [?] ... it is connected with their prayers and appeals to invisible deities & is derived from a place unknown.⁶

Another illustration of the perceived force of tapu and the dangers inherent in ignoring its power is the account recorded by Te Whatahoro Jury of the Wairarapa whare wananga conducted in 1965 by Moihi Torohanga, also known as Te Matorohanga. The events have been translated and summarized:

Moihi Torohanga and others were living at Hauturu, clearing the forest for a cultivation. Now at that time Te Ura said to Moihi, 'Sir, tell us some of the stories of the elders so that both we and our children may listen'. It took a long time for Riwai to persuade Moihi to make these treasures available. At last he said 'very well, but there will have to be a special house for it'. Riwai then offered the house of Te Rei and Pene at Mangarara.

Now on the 5th of January 1865 Moihi, Riwai, Te Kukutai and Te Whatahoro sat down together. Moihi saw their books, and asked what they were for. They replied that they were books to write down his teachings. Moihi said that it would take years to get through if written down, but Riwai replied that they would write quickly. Moihi then said that the procedure would be that they would talk from early morning till sunset each day; they would not be able to eat or drink while the teaching was proceeding. On the 6th of January they met at the house of Te Rei; karakia were said before the door was opened or closed, and a ceremony was performed both outside and inside the house.⁷

Te Whatahoro recorded at length the details of the ceremonies and the karakia, and it was only after all these elaborate precautions had been taken that Moihi Torohanga felt able to commence the teaching. In spite of this, at intervals during the whare wananga Moihi became upset, agitated at the potential danger of imparting the knowledge. He was angry when his pupils suggested mitigating the conditions of their teaching. He said :

'Now, from the words you have spoken here, you have not realised the depth of these matters. When you and your brother-in-law⁸ asked that the teaching be given you, I then said, and you heard my demand, it would do if it was completely separate in a special house. The reason for this is that this teaching is a great matter going to the roots; it is not proper to have it within people's living quarters, lest the teaching fail'. Moihi appeared angry; he finished abruptly, and postponed the teaching to the 14th of May 1865.⁹

At the end, Moihi was still unhappy. In spite of all the precautions he had taken, he insisted that the books in which Te Whatahoro had recorded his teachings were tapu, and therefore dangerous. He carried out a ceremony which involved a cooking fire, and laid the books to rest amongst its ashes.

From this account can be seen the perceived force of tapu and the depth of awe, wehi, felt by people whose systems of thought and belief are permeated by this

concept. There is no evidence that the force of this tapu, this wehi, has diminished in Maori lives today. All over the country there are whakapapa books containing priceless information kept in boxes and trunks which their owners sometimes fear to open, let alone make available to academics, Maori or Pakeha. They prefer that they risk eventual destruction by fire, rather than allow such contact. One prominent Maori politician once wrote down for the author, from memory, a long, complex genealogy, his own, to illustrate a point he had made. But there was one line of descent he would not write down - his descent from Ruawharo, tohunga of the Takitimu canoe. It was a tapu, tohunga line, not for Pakeha academics. The author's dilemma is that access to that tohunga line, through the papers of former Pakeha academics preserved in the Turnbull Library, was already available. How to handle such a problem? The only intellectual solution in such cases is to regard the information as confidential.

The problems of Pakeha academics are compounded because there is evidence that many Maori have extended the field of tapu to cover some nineteenth - and early twentieth - century published works. There are a number of books which are often regarded as outside the competence of modern Pakeha scholars to study critically. The irony is that some of them were written by Pakeha. There was a day when many Maori people tended not only to accept but to revere the works of such Pakeha ethnologists as S. Percy Smith and Elsdon Best. Only a few years ago a local elder refused to accept a whakapapa given by one of his own ancestors, preferring instead a version given in S. Percy Smith's history of the Taranaki coast. If it is there, he argued, then you may not touch it. M.P.K. Sorrenson has shown that Peter Te Rangihira Buck possessed something of this attitude towards Elsdon Best's work, at least when aspects of it were criticised by H.D. Skinner.¹⁰ In a different vein, some Maori regard Apirana Ngata and Pei Te Hurinui Jones's collection of Maori songs, *Nga Moteatea*, as outside the competence of Pakeha academics. There was Maori criticism when new translations were made of several of the waiata from the collection, even though, to many modern ears, some of the earlier translations now sound dated, over romantic, and over-inclined to bow to European social and moral conventions.

Some of the tribal histories from the first half of the 20th century are similarly revered. But they are in the same class as Ngata's and Pei Te Hurinui's work. They were not written by Pakeha, but by descendants of the tribal groups which form their subject, who also happened to be descended from prominent Pakeha families. Examples are J. Te Herekikie Grace's history of Tuwharetoa, and Leslie G. Kelly's plagiarised *Tainui*. While the material in this book was filched almost entirely from the work of Pei Te Hurinui Jones and published as Kelly's own, at least its source was impeccable and accepted by Tainui people.¹¹

In Hawke's Bay and northwards toward Turanganui, the work *Takitimu* by Tiaki Hikawera Mitchell is often regarded as sacrosanct. Its author had the backing of the Ngati Kahungunu chiefly families - Omana, Whaanga, Te Rito, Ropata, Niania, Christy and Carroll.

To many Maori, especially to non-academics, these are the only legitimate tribal histories. Problems arise when Pakeha work to revise these past writings. But some Maori have successfully challenged them. M.P.K. Sorrenson has shown through the publication of their letters that Sir Apirana Ngata and Peter Buck were aware of and dedicated to the need for review of tribal traditions. In the case of Buck this stance was a natural flow-on effect of his chosen career of anthropology. but Ngata too wished to review such matters as the 'Fleet' theory in the light of genealogy. In one passage he stated that he did not believe that 'the fleet people could have multiplied so quickly in the time that elapsed since the fourteenth century without ... commingling with a pre-existing people.'¹² His letters are studded with many similar passages. In 1979 Ruka Broughton's study of Nga Rauru reviewed their traditions, arguing against the position that their founding ancestors came on the Aotea canoe as popularly believed. He demonstrated through genealogy that they were, rather, tangata whenua who settled the land, who intermarried later with the Aotea strain.¹³ Contact with tribal historians and knowledgeable elders almost invariably demonstrates that a similar position would be found in most tribal areas. Even in the absence of critical academic examinations, these apparently new hypotheses are well known to those many expert genealogists who are the kaumatua of different tribal groups around the country.

The elements for a future solution to the problem of tribal history are all there. Critical examination of Maori tradition and whakapapa have been admitted to be necessary, desirable and practicable by Maori whose standing on their own marae and in the wider community was such that their judgements still stand unquestioned. There seems to be no quarrel with the entry of women into the field. Some of the greatest genealogical experts in Takitimu genealogy have been and are women. Examples are Niniwa-i-te-rangi of Papawai in the 19th century, Ema Lemuel and Lena Manuel in this. Many contemporary Pakeha scholars have shown both depth and sensitivity in their studies of the Maori past, or the interaction of Maori and Pakeha. We have all the elements for a working compromise; the accepted need, the admitted roles. Why then is there still a problem?

Many Maori have in the past accepted that some Pakeha academics have played a vital role in preserving and analysing much that would otherwise have been lost. They have accepted, in other words, that Pakeha with the right attitude and training can legitimately work within Maoritanga, while criticising the shallow superficiality

and insensitivity of others, which is not confined to abuse of physical evidence and artefacts. It abounds also in the written word. Even when the intentions are good, offence can arise through ignorance and the unconscious patronage of the academic towards 'his or her subject'. Academics can get quite a shock when they emerge from their studies and find that the theoretical problem they have been toying with over the last few months has living, breathing descendants, sharing the common room, whose standing on marae can be affected by their disinterested speculations.

The call by some Maori academics for the exclusion of Pakeha from tribal history need not be a blow against academic freedom. It can be interpreted as a protest and a plea. A protest against the insensitive denigration of the unique elements in their traditions by many past would-be experts in 'Maori history'. A plea that in the future, before they deem themselves qualified to describe any Maori pasts, Pakeha learn the true meaning of the words, wairua, tapu, mana and taonga.

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FOOTNOTES

- ¹ A version of this paper was first given at a Stout Centre seminar on 30 September 1992. The paper has been revised in the light of comment in the discussion which followed.
- ² John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, Oxford University Press, 1976, 101.
- ³ Graeme Gummer, 'He Tirohanga Ki O Matou Taonga; a view towards treasured things', *Maori Issues and Engineering*, The Institution of Professional Engineers, August 1990, 21.
- ⁴ Te Ahukaramu Charles Royal, *Te Haurapa. An Introduction to Researching Tribal Histories and Traditions*, Bridget Williams Books and Historical Branch of Internal Affairs, 1992, 12-3, 38-43.
- ⁵ Donald McLean, *Diaries and Notes, 1848-50*, entry for 26 March 1849.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ MS Papers 189, NZ Maori Purposes Fund Board, Folder 73.
- ⁸ Or other male connection by marriage.
- ⁹ MS Papers 189, Folder 7, the 'Pukupuka whakapapa Moihī Te Matorohanga o Ngai Tahu o Wairarapa', 284. Author's translation.
- ¹⁰ M.P.K. Sorrenson, *Na To Hoa Aroha*, 3 vols, Auckland University Press, 1986, 1987, 1988, I: 100-1.
- ¹¹ Michael King, *Te Puea*, Hodder and Stoughton 1977, 237-8.
- ¹² M.P.K. Sorrenson, *Na To Hoa Aroha*, AUP 1987, Vol. II, 22.
- ¹³ Ruka Broughton, *The Origins of Ngaa Rauru Kītahi*, Department of Anthropology and Maori, Victoria University of Wellington, June 1979.