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WHAKAPAPA/GENEALOGIES/ANCESTORS:
MAORI, PAKEHA AND ANTHROPOLOGY IN AOTEAROA/NZ

The literal meaning of whakapapa refers to the laying out of things in their proper order. Its common usage, something closer to the English term genealogy, is central in the way Maori understand their place in the world – the proper order of, and relationships between, people, places and things. Maori also speak of 'walking backwards into the future', meaning that their understanding of – and relationship with – the past (via whakapapa) informs their approach to the present and future.

So pervasive has the term whakapapa become in the broader culture of Aotearoa/NZ that it is widely used by non-Maori New Zealanders (Pakeha/Pasifika/Tauiwi) to refer to the tracing of lines of inheritance from ancestors. Those of us who study in the Pacific and Southeast Asia also recognise this as a case of a broader regional pattern of 'origin-based' social structures and ideologies. Even more broadly, anthropologists have long recognised that most cultures and communities define and understand themselves in terms of some kind of notion of inheritance from the past, hence our once extensive use of 'the genealogical method' as a key research tool.

But are we anthropologists so different? While we have notorious difficulty explaining, let alone defining our own disciplinary 'culture' to outsiders, we know it for ourselves, primarily in terms of a distinctive approach rooted in our relationship with our past – a tradition of ways of doing and thinking. But, in the conditions of the contemporary academic economy, we find ourselves constantly challenged to redefine and often defend our own identity, achievements, strengths, weaknesses and future. Challenges of this kind, albeit on a larger scale, will no doubt be familiar ones to Maori, but they give anthropologists cause to reflect again on the relationship of our own disciplinary whakapapa with Maori ones.

The disciplinary whakapapa of anthropology Aotearoa/NZ is a bilateral one.

One line springs from the encounters, exchanges and collaborations between Maori and colonial intellectuals which began in the nineteenth century. Better known ancestors in this line include Percy Smith, Peter Buck and Apirana Ngata. The other line descends from the British tradition of social anthropology, first by way of New Zealanders such as Raymond Firth, studying in British universities, and later by the establishment of our first department of anthropology in 1950 by Ralph Piddington, a student of Malinowski.

These two strands of disciplinary whakapapa were woven closely together during the first two decades of academic anthropology in Aotearoa/NZ (especially in Auckland), but began to part ways in the larger partings of the Maori renaissance of the 1970s, when Maori reclaimed (among other things) their intellectual whakapapa, ownership of knowledge, and rights to research. This led, by the 1980s, to the formation of separate departments of Maori Studies and an almost complete withdrawal of Maori from academic anthropology. But, as Jeff Sissons pointed out some years ago, 'genealogies of Maori tradition cannot be disconnected from genealogies of the discipline [in Aotearoa/NZ]' (1998: 3). During the first decade of the twenty-first century, a new generation of Maori (and Pasifika) scholars (certainly in Auckland and Waikato and probably elsewhere as well) began to become interested in anthropology again.

The theme of the ASAA/NZ conference in Rotorua in December 2010 picked up on this renewed interest and a significant number of Maori scholars attended. Since then conferences of the Association of Social Anthropologists of Aotearoa/NZ have explicitly included streams of indigenous participation. The papers presented in Rotorua were equally divided between those focused on (Maori) whakapapa and those addressing other genealogies and ancestries. Those collected here are mostly developed from ones presented at that conference. Others which also addressed the theme were invited later from colleagues known to be thinking/writing in this area.

We begin with three relatively short and informal pieces by Dame Joan Metge, Jeff Sissons and Lily George, which formed an introductory plenary session tracing and reflecting on three generations of anthropological engagement with Maori society. Steve Webster's much longer essay continues a long debate about the status and orgins of hapuu. Briefly he argues – against Jeff Sissons – that cognatic descent is the key determinant of hapuu formation. He supports this argument with an impressive body of ethnohistorical material on Tuuhoe hapuu. Like indigenous Maori social theory, it places whakapapa at the heart of analysis.

The next essay, by Margaret Kawharu, shifts from debates between anthropologists to debates between a Maori community and the Crown, over a Treaty of Waitangi claim. Establishing collective identity of the claimant group is an issue for both parties. Whakapapa emerges here not as the sole basis of this identity, but as the underlying ground of a more complex array of factors.

Mike Goldsmith considers another kind of claim to indigenous status – that of Barry Brailsford and his followers – to the effect that we all share a common meta-whakapapa, in the face of which, differences between Maori and Pakeha become irrelevant. This 'Pakeha nativism', Goldsmith argues, works by its combination of references to Maori knowledge and tradition, New Age ideas of transnational origin and selective use of scientific and pseudo-scientific theories creates multiple whakapapa of knowledge.

The final paper, by Mere Roberts, continues this theme of the interface between whakapapa and western science, but in a rather different way, returning to Maori use of whakapapa as a framework for an organising knowledge of the natural and human worlds into an integrated science of life, with both similarities to – and differences from – modern/western science.

Taken together, these papers invite us to think again about the multiple ways in which the whakapapa of our discipline and ongoing Maori intellectual tradition are once again weaving themselves together and will continue to do so, backwards into the future.

Graeme MacRae & Lily George (Guest Editors)

REFERENCES

Sissons, J. 1998 'Introduction: Anthropology, Maori Tradition and Colonial Process' *Oceania* 69(1):1–3.