

DANGEROUS REMAINS:
TOWARDS A HISTORY OF TAPU

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ABSTRACT

The historical and cultural focus of this article is a connected sequence of rites performed by and on behalf of Māori kin groups in the mid-19th century aimed at polluting sacred groves (wāhi tapu). I argue that these rites were a logical sequel to others aimed at removing the tapu (sacredness) from chiefs prior to mass conversion to Christianity in the early 1840s. Both sets of rites sought the separation of gods from kin-groups, a process that entailed a transformation of the nature of tapu.

Keywords: sacred sites; ritual pollution; tapu; Deleuze; mythopraxis.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of ‘distributed personhood’ was introduced by Alfred Gell in his book, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, by way of a chilling example: the anti-personnel mines laid in Cambodia by Pol Pot’s soldiers were parts of their personhood. The soldiers ‘were not just where their bodies were, but in many different places (and times) simultaneously. Those mines were components of their identities as human persons ...’ (1998, 21). In subsequent chapters of his book, Gell explored different ways in which personhood has been distributed in a surprising range of ‘art’ objects, including sorcery dolls, wrapped Tahitian god-images, Hindu statues and Māori meeting houses, all understood as indexes of human or divine agency. The focus in this article is on improvised rituals performed by, and on behalf of, Māori communities in the 1850s and 1860s to deal with dangerous remnants of chiefly personhood, some of which were thought to be as lethal as land mines. These were indexes of an agency that was at once human and divine.

In Pre-Christian Māori society it was customary to deposit items associated

with the bodies of chiefs in sacred groves termed 'wāhi tapu', these normally situated on the outskirts of settlements. Dr Richard Taylor, a missionary who lived at Putiki, Whanganui, between 1843 and 1870 and who was fluent in Māori described wāhi tapu as follows:

The wahi tapu or sacred grove was not a place of assembly or worship; it was only entered by the priest and merely contained the tombs of chiefs, offerings to gods and sacrifices, together with food baskets and fragments unconsumed by sacred persons [chiefs], rags and old garments of chiefs, their hair when it had been cut and such things. (Taylor 1855, 65)

These groves were intensely tapu places in that they were places where atua (gods) were strongly present. Within these groves, priests (tohunga) performed rites of healing, divination and sorcery beside a shrine (tūāhu). In addition, they were places where the remnants of chiefly personhood were deposited – meal leftovers, old garments, hair and nail clippings. The ritual practices that I discuss in this article were intended to pollute the sacredness of these groves. Led by ritual experts who had been baptised as Christians, Māori communities sought to neutralise the malign influences of pre-Christian gods that had been associated with chiefly personhood and whose presence was concentrated in wāhi tapu by cooking and eating food in the groves.

I will argue that these rites continued and were intended to complete a process of intentional pollution that had been initiated in the late 1830s and early 1840s. In so doing, I will be seeking to build upon an earlier article (Sissons 2015) in which I demonstrate that a massive rise in the number of Māori baptisms in the 1840s was triggered, throughout much of the country, by the deliberate ritual pollution of the bodies of chiefs and priests. In the North Island and in the Lower South Island chiefs brought cooked food, the absolute antithesis of tapu (sacredness derived from relationships with gods), into contact with their bodies in order to render themselves noa (free from tapu). Some poured cooking water over their heads, some threw locks of their hair into cooking fires while others had a ruahine (priestess) touch their heads and other parts of their bodies with cooked kumara. Here I will argue that cooking and eating food in wāhi tapu constituted a logical extension of these ritual performances from persons to the landscape. In the first part of the article I describe a connected sequence of pollution (whakanoa) rites directed at the land, beginning in Whanganui with what appear to have been the earliest performances. These were followed by others in Taranaki, Northland, and the lower South Island. In the second part of the article I propose that these performances constituted

a form of ritual praxis that was intended to complete the separation of gods from kin-group assemblages (kin-groups included gods and ancestors), a process that had begun with the removal of tapu from chiefs.

POLLUTING DANGEROUS SITES

Rev. Hammond, who learned of the post-conversion rites of tapu removal from a number of people who had witnessed them (Hammond 1899), wrote that they had been performed ‘in many parts of New Zealand’ (Hammond 1940, 59; see also Elsmore 1989, 127–146). However, the best and earliest evidence for their practice can be found in the journals of the missionary, Richard Taylor.

In September 1851, Taylor wrote:

Some time ago at Tawitinui [Tawhitinui] where this new custom most prevailed a teacher named Pirimona assembled the inhabitants in the wahi tapu or sacred grove in the midst of which the ‘tuahu’ or praying stone still stands, and having lit several fires in the middle of the grove whilst the entire population sat round in a circle he read a chapter from the Testament and cooked some potatoes which he hukihukied or strung on short sticks and then laid on the fires which being done he presented some of them to each person in the circle... on speaking to a person who had done so he said ‘was it not right to drive away the ngararas or reptiles from them (so they called their ancient gods). (Journals, vol. 7, 10 September 1851)

The ngārara referred to by Taylor in the passage above were lizards. Best noted that there was a widespread dread of lizards in Māori society:

One explanation of this belief is that the lizard represents [the god] Whiro, and Whiro personifies darkness and death; a Maori belief was that evil spirits in lizard form entered bodies of men and consumed their vitals, so causing death. (Best 1924–1982, vol. 2, 460)

Best also noted that lizards were often ‘the form in which atua [gods] appeared to the sight of man’ and that they were placed by priests in wāhi tapu as ‘guardians’ of these places (ibid., 463; Best 1924, vol.1, 107).

The wāhi tapu ceremony described by Taylor had possibly taken place in June or August of 1851 when large parties had begun arriving ‘from the interior’, probably the shores of lake Taupo, seeking relief from illness. In June, for

example, Taylor had recorded:

Some natives from the interior arrived at Purua where there is a wahi tapu or place of sepulture [sic] belonging to them. They have been suffering from several complaints and had got the idea that these were caused by the spirits of their ancestors who were malignantly disposed towards them. They therefore came and cooked food over the place of their internment and then eating it they read a portion of scripture from the Ld. Our God and prayed to whakanoa or destroy the sanctity and power of the place (Journals, vol. 7, 14 June 1851)

Whanganui and Taranaki people continued their performances of these whakanoa rites throughout the 1850s despite Taylor's strong opposition. Although Taylor understood that many people considered it 'quite right to destroy the power of Satan for visiting them with sickness' he continued to pour scorn and ridicule upon the practice. Both parties appear to have agreed, however, that Satan was the enemy: I told them, Taylor wrote in 1852, 'that Satan was striving to regain his dominion over them by putting all these vain ideas in their heads'.

Taylor visited England in 1855 and when he returned to Putiki the following year he learned that the whakanoa rites were being performed with even greater determination than before. In March 1857, he wrote in apparent bewilderment:

...now they seem to have taken leave of their senses attributing all their sickness and mortality of their children to witchcraft, fancying that all the old stones used as land marks [marking boundaries of kumara gardens] and many others had been bewitched by their forefathers and that they caused the death of all who touched them. They had therefore carefully dug them all up and carried them to one spot where they formed a heap of considerable size, there were several tons of them. These they heated in a large fire and then cooked potatoes with of which [sic] the entire pa partook. (Journals, vol. 10, 28 March 1857)

Taylor says he tried to reason with his congregation but was told that he did not adequately understand the reality of what they were having to deal with.

It is possible that the March ceremony described above was directed by Tamati Te Ito, leader of a movement that came to be known as Kaingarara (Lizard-

eating). In August of the same year, 1857, an article in the *Lyttleton Times* announced that Te Ito had become the medium of a Waikato atua named Kurutahi and that the god had revealed to him that the cause of the widespread sickness among Māori was a disregard of tapu objects and places:

the ‘wahi tapu’ or ‘sacred place’ has been desecrated; from the consecrated grove flax and toetoe have been gathered; and the presiding deity has been offended: his vengeance, assuming the form of a ngarara (lizard), enters the body of man consumes his vitals and thereby causes death. (*Lyttleton Times*, 3)

The author of the article went on to note that Te Ito had gained a considerable following, was always ‘attended by a large retinue’ and ‘heralded by blowing of trumpets’. He travelled throughout the Whanganui and Taranaki regions removing tapu from wāhi tapu, buildings and clothing and burning stone images on fires. With regard to the latter, Percy Smith noted that:

the stone image of the god Maru, which the Patea people formerly possessed, was burnt by Tamati Te Ito and his *ope whakanoa* (a party who took the old *tapu* off the pas etc.) in about 1855. (Smith, 1908, 143)

In the case of wāhi tapu the *Lyttleton Times* article noted:

The soil is dug out to a certain depth; potent incantations are made use of; the spirit is held fast whilst some food is being cooked; and ultimately the tapu is pronounced noa or void ... Natives professing Christianity have united with the others [presumably, non-Christians] in their endeavours to give effect to the plan laid down by Kurutahi’s agent. (*Lyttleton Times*, 3)

The above report suggests that building new alliances and overcoming tribal and religious divisions were significant political motives for Tamati Te Ito, a point I will return to later.

Māori concerns over the tapu of dangerous landscapes were by no means confined to Taranaki. In Northland in 1856 and 1857 an un-named tohunga living at Waimate claimed the ability to identify the locations of dangerous items and beings in the landscape that had been causing sickness. He did so by ascending to the top of a local pa (termed ‘mountain’ in the missionary report) where a ‘spirit directed his eye to the place where he found a remedy’ (Davis 1856). The missionary, Richard Davis, later reported:

The head man resides at Waimate and goes through all weathers to visit his patients. He and his party profess to have power over all the old Maori gods and they have for some time declared that the country has been depopulated on account of the inattention paid to the sacred places [wāhi tapu] since the introduction of Christianity. (Davis 1857)

In July, 1857, Davis attended a large gathering at which it was declared essential to remove the tapu from 'all their sacred places' (ibid). A party was immediately formed to undertake this task. Davis wrote:

The party was allowed to proceed in the destruction of the tapu and the object has been effected in various places both far and near... In visiting one of the pas a few days after I was told by the natives professing Christianity that the party had been there and he showed me a place of great sanctity, the sanctity of which had been destroyed. I said. 'Did you really believe in its tapu?' He declared in the affirmative and assured me that he saw a person die for having violated it, but he added: 'I shall this year plant it with potatoes'... The sanctity of the tapu is eradicated by boiling food on the place with the timber thereof, which food is eaten by the party, also on the spot; the party therefore eat the fat of the land. (Davis 1857)

The 'place of great sanctity' referred to here was undoubtedly a wāhi tapu. The party were not, of course, merely eating the fat of the land, they were polluting its heart.

While the Northland movement occurred at the same time as that in Taranaki and while its whakanoa rites were performed in a very similar manner, the two movements appear to have been politically distinct and to have emphasised different embodiments of atua. In Taranaki, the focus was on lizards, whereas in Northland, lizards appear have been less significant. A taniwha in the form of an eel was considered the most serious threat. The Waimate tohunga, who may have earlier been associated with a prophetic movement led by Papahurihia (Binney 2007, 315), used an image of a flying dragon (tarakona) to counteract the malevolence of taniwha and the local atua associated with wāhi tapu. Of this image, Davis wrote: 'There is scarcely a tribe throughout the country which does not possess a copy' (Davis 1856). It is possible that there was a connection between this 'dragon' and a flying lizard described in Māori myth. Best records that a lizard named Moko Kakariki was brought to earth from heaven by the god, Tane, to be his pet. When on earth this lizard 'attained the power

of flying through space' (1924–1982, vol. 2, 461).

In the mid-1860s a tohunga who had been close to Tamati Te Ito and a member of his movement, visited the lower South Island removing tapu from sacred places that had become dangerous. Piripi (Philip), known only by his baptismal name, visited Murihiku (South of Dunedin), Otakou (Dunedin), and Arowhenua, (South Canterbury) performing tapu-eating ceremonies at each place. Mikaere writes that at Arowhenua, in 1866, Piripi 'called the entire population together and carefully inspected each person'; He then removed the tapu from the land:

The people showed Piripi all their sacred sites [waahi tapu] and he gathered little samples from them – here a tuft of grass, there a stick – into a pot filled with water from the lagoon. This was well known as the haunt of spirits for many unsuspecting travellers had died there. The concoction resembled a sort of vegetable stew, which the people – men women and children – swallowed. (Mikaere 1988, 45)

Piripi passed on his ritual knowledge to Hipa Te Maiharoa, a prophet and later the founder of a significant South Island movement of independence. Following the departure of Piripi from Arowhenua, Te Maiharoa continued his mission of removing tapu from the land. He also retrospectively as it were, removed tapu from people. Arranging the community members in a circle, he ordered one of his helpers to cut the nails and locks of hair from all those present. This done, each person's hand was then pricked and the resulting blood was smeared over the collected hair and nail clippings. This highly tapu mixture was then thrown into a pot of boiling tea from which all of the participants drank (Mikaere 1988, 46).

In addition to their performances in Whanganui, Taranaki, Northland and the South Island, whakanoa rites directed towards the tapu of wāhi tapu were possibly also performed in Waikato. Writing from Ngaruawahia, at the center of the Waikato-based King Movement in 1859, the Waikato chief, Rewi Maniopotō, expressed concern over the practices of Tamati Te Ito and urged him to stop. He began his brief letter as follows: E hoa ma, whakamutua ta koutou mahi kikokiko. (Friends, cease your demon-work) (Goode 2001, my translation).

It is possible that Rewi Maniopotō wanted Te Ito to stop his 'work' because it threatened to extend to Waikato and so undermine the emergent King Movement. In the early 1860s, however, strong ties were forged between this movement and the Taranaki prophet, Te Ua Haumene. Te Ua, who may have earlier

been active in Te Ito's movement (Head 1992, 9 n.15), advised Waikato to avoid the ways of the 'idolatrous Canaanites' and 'destroy those places associated with former religious practices', that is, the wāhi tapu (Elsmore 1989, 202).

My final piece of evidence for the widespread nature of the whakanoa rites is a published account written by Edward Shortland. Unfortunately, neither the location nor date of the ceremony described below are known:

On arriving one evening at a Maori settlement, I found a ceremony, in which everyone appeared to take deep interest, was to take place in the morning. The inhabitants were mostly professing Christians, and the old sacred place of their settlement was, from the increase in their numbers, inconveniently near their houses ... I was curious to see in what way the land would be made *noa* [free of tapu]. In the morning when I went to the place I found a numerous assembly, while in the centre of the space was a large native oven, from which women were removing earth and mat coverings. When opened it was seen to contain only kumara or sweet potato. One of these was offered to each person present, which was held in the hand while the usual morning service was read, concluding with a short prayer that God's blessing might rest on the place. After this each person ate his kumara and the place was declared *noa*. ... In this case, everyone present, by eating food cooked on the *tapu* ground, equally incurred the risk of offending the *Atua* of the family, which was believed to be removed by the Christian *karakia* [prayer]. (Shortland 1882, 27)

Shortland lived in New Zealand for four periods: 1841–1846; 1862–1865; 1869–1873; 1880–1889 (Anderson 1990). Given what we now know of the performance of whakanoa rites it is most likely that this ceremony took place between 1862 and 1865, when Shortland was living in the Hauraki region. If so, the ceremony was possibly performed there.

In summary, I think there is strong evidence to suggest that the performances of whakanoa whenua rites were widespread throughout much, possibly most, of the country between the early 1850s and mid-1860s. In the following discussion of these rites I argue that they represented a continuation of a ritual process begun a decade or so earlier with the deliberate pollution of chiefly bodies. The rites intended to remove tapu from chiefs and those intended to remove tapu from the landscape were together directed towards a separation of *atua* (gods) from kin-groups.

DETERRITORIALISING ATUA

In 1906, Percy Smith, co-founder of the Polynesian Society and recorder of Māori traditions of the Taranaki Coast (Smith 1908), talked with Tamati Te Ito, then a very old man, about his past activities. As reported by Smith, Te Ito said that ‘he was the man who went around the country to whakanoa the pas’, adding, ‘we wanted to combine all the Māori people from Mokau to Patea in one body and remove the tapu from the old pas as it was harmful to people’ (Smith 1920, 151). What is striking here is the juxtaposition of two projects that are, on the face of it, quite distinct: bodily protection and social unification. In this regard, Te Ito’s ritual praxis had much in common with that of the Flying Dragon movement led by the Northland tohunga and Te Maiharoa’s southern movement. All three were intent upon creating Christian communities that encompassed or transcended localised kin-group (hapū) divisions and they did so through ritual that was focused on the landscape. Initially, the King Movement also shared the goal of creating a united Christian community (Head 2005, 65–71), although there is only tenuous evidence of any links between this and the performance of whakanoa rites.

The question we need to ask is why did people pursue social unity through this particular ritual means, the polluting of parts of the landscape? My answer is that, like the earlier pollution rites directed at chiefly bodies, those directed at the land were a pre-requisite for a re-assembling of social life. In what follows I make this argument by drawing upon a Deleuzian understanding of hapū as kin ‘assemblages’ that were ‘territorialised’ around ‘intense centers’, a perspective that I have discussed in greater depth elsewhere (Sissons 2013). As kin-assemblages, hapū included people, gods, ancestors and their visible embodiments in features of the landscape – rivers, springs, mountains, or as flora and fauna – and in other material forms such as meeting houses. Hapū were ‘territorialised’ or consolidated around chiefs as centers of intense tapuness, their tapu personhood holding the kin-groups together more strongly than practices of coercion. Ariki (sacred, senior chiefs), in particular, were intense tapu centers of life who held together land and people with active ritual and genealogical connections to gods (atua). Through practices of naming they extended their personhood into the landscape to render it tapu. In this way forests, fishing grounds and gardens were protected by being placed under the influence of atua. Edward Shortland, writing in the 1850s, noted that ariki were almost regarded as atua and that a whakanoa rite ‘cannot be perfected without their intervention’ (1856, 104). Best was told that in order to protect the vitality or hau of people a lock of hair from the head of an ariki or leading chief was buried in the wāhi tapu beside the tūāhu or shrine of the settlement and that

‘the hau of the land was protected in a similar manner’ (Best 1924, vol. 1, 293). Because the tapu personhood of the ariki was so vital to the well-being and good order of both people and land, those who opposed Christian conversion in the 1840s fought to keep the ariki on their side. According to Shortland, if the ariki converted the whole of his people did so also (1856, 120–121).

If ariki and other chiefs acted as tapu centers, consolidating hapū assemblages around their personhood, then the ritual practices focused on the pollution of these centers was a pre-requisite for radical social change. I have elsewhere termed this transformative ritual action ‘rituopraxis’ (Sissons 2014, 2) and defined it as a mode of historical action that is distinct from, but potentially complementary to, Sahlins’ ‘mythopraxis’ in that, as a form of ritual improvisation, it draws directly upon ritual precedence rather than cosmological precedence encoded in myth (Sahlins 1985, 54–72).

In cooking and eating food in wāhi tapu and in eating samples of the landscape, the tohunga who led the whakanoa rituals were clearly drawing directly upon ritual precedence to produce radical social change. Cooking made food *noa*, draining it of its connection with the gods and, as Jean Smith notes, the eating of cooked food completed the process (1974, 28). To remove the tapu from a kumara garden, for example, two kumara were cooked on a sacred fire and eaten by a tohunga and ruahine (priestess) (Best 1924–1982, vol. 1, 323). To remove the *tapu* from warriors after battle two fires were kindled and a kumara roasted at each; one was eaten by the *tohunga* and the other by a priestess (ibid, 384). In his discussion of such rites Best added:

Any place where a ritual fire had been kindled remained *tapu*, and, should it be trespassed on, then the offending person would suffer some dire affliction, or even death. One marvels why such spots were not made *noa*, or common, instead of being left as danger-spots. (ibid, 325)

The lizard-eating performances of Tamati Te Ito and others also appear to have had ritual precedence. Prior to Christian conversion priests placed lizards within wāhi tapu to protect these groves and the shrines within them (Best 1924, vol. 1, 254) and a specialist class of priest termed ‘tohunga-taitai-ngārara’ (lizard-expelling priests) were considered experts in dealing with lizards. Kahui, a former priest from Taranaki, told Percy Smith that their practices included cooking and eating the lizards (Smith 1921, 176–177). Best notes that if a lizard was seen on a path taken by travelers it was caught, cut into pieces and thrown into a sacred fire along with a lock of hair from the head of the person

who first saw it (Best 1924–1982, vol. 1, 323).

It is possible, however, that these tapu-removal rites involving lizards were also a form of mythopraxis in that their significance appears to have been partially encoded in a mythological struggle between the gods, Tāne and his older brother Whiro. As told by Te Matorohanga, the tohunga whose teachings are included in *The Lore of the Whare Wananga*, Tāne and Whiro's bitter dispute began when Tāne proposed that he and the other children of Rangi and Papa separate their parents; Whiro was opposed to this plan, wanting to remain within the warm dark embrace of his parents. Whiro's animosity towards his brother later became progressively more intense – not only had Tāne's plan won the day, inflicting violence on his parents, but Tāne was later chosen over Whiro by his siblings to ascend to the highest heaven and obtain three baskets of knowledge and in recognition of his success he was baptised with the name Tāne-nui-a rangi (great Tāne of the heavens) (Smith 1913, 124–125). Whiro's anger eventually propelled him into outright war with Tāne. Defeated, Whiro was sent to the dark underworld from where he continues to attack Tāne, assuming the form of a lizard-god or lizard-demon– a ngārara-atua-Māori – to inflict sickness and death upon Tāne's descendants, the Māori people.

Elsdon Best wrote that since Whiro went to the underworld 'the old contest between him and Tāne is still continued' (1924, vol 1, 106). He added that in addition to Whiro himself inflicting harm in the form of a lizard:

The most relentless and effective emissaries of Whiro are the dread Maiki brothers. These are Maiki-nui, Maiki-roa, Maiki-kunawhea and others, all of whom are personified forms of sickness and disease. This dread of grisly company ever assails mankind, ever wages ceaseless warfare against the descendants of Tane in the world of life (ibid).

All evil in the world is said to have originated with Whiro-the-demon (Whiro-te-tipua). The tohunga who performed the whakanoa whenua rites at wāhi tapu in the 1850s were Christian and they appear to have equated Whiro with Satan, regarding their mytho-practical project as allied to that of the missionaries; they were at a loss, therefore, to understand missionary opposition to their activities.

Irrespective of whether we understand the pollution rites described above as ritopraxis, mythopraxis or both, they were, I argue, a continuation of a single ritual process that had begun in the late 1830s and early 1840s with the

removal of tapu from chiefly bodies. This process, which was directed towards the separation of atua from kin-assemblages, also transformed the very nature of tapu itself. In an insightful essay on the meaning and translatability of tapu Anne Salmond concluded that ‘*tapu* seems to refer to active relationships between gods and people and the practices which govern them’ (1989, 73). She continued:

Atua were the gods born of the union of Rangi and Papa and their descendants, including any living beings who exhibited extraordinary powers. Thus chiefs of great mana could be termed *atua*, as could extraordinary phenomena or creatures that behaved in inexplicable ways. *Tapu* was the state of active relation between gods and the human world, regulated by knowledge brought to earth by Taane when the world was still being formed (ibid, 74–75)

The ritual praxis that had been directed at chiefly bodies prior to, and as a ‘trigger’ for, a massive increase in Māori baptisms in the early 1840s had been intended to create a distance between chiefly personhood and gods – to render the relationship between gods and the human world less active or inactive, thus allowing people to create relationships with the Christian God (Best 1904, 221). But if sickness and death continued to emanate from wāhi tapu – places where the dangerous remains of chiefly personhood had been deposited and where relationships between gods and people had been cultivated by priests – then tapu continued to exist as an active relation between gods and the human world, although it now did so in an entirely negative way. Whereas prior to Christianity this relationship was life-producing and life-threatening – a source of *mana* and hence life – now it was only life-destroying. The solution, for some, was to complete the process of withdrawal from an active relationship with gods by aggressively polluting their final places of abode. Hapū assemblages had included atua that were specific to them and the ritual practices of pollution were intended, in Deleuzian terms, to ‘deterritorialise’ these atua, that is, to separate them from the assemblage. By so doing, Tamati Te Ito and other tohunga were also clearing the way for Christian hapū to become more united; relationships between hapū would, ideally, no longer include antagonistic relationships between the atua that had formerly been attached to them and the chiefly personhood at their centers.

CONCLUSION

Reflecting in 1887 on the consequences for Māori conversions to Christianity, the Ngāti Awa tohunga, Hamiora Tumutara Pio wrote to Elsdon Best:

Earlier, sickness was on a small scale. [Later] there was a great desire for the Christian Faith. But then many cemeteries appeared like many islands of fallen believers. This was because Maori believers had performed ritual ablutions using cooking water, hot water, it was because their sacred life force (*mauri*) had been made *noa* (polluted). This is how the Maori was struck down. (Mead 1981, 25–26, my translation)

Earlier, around the time that the wāhi tapu rites discussed here were being performed, Te Matorohanga reached a similar conclusion concerning the loss of tapu, but he also extended the consequences of this loss from personhood to the land:

Because *tapu* is the first thing, if there is no *tapu* all the works of the gods have no *mana*, and if the gods are lost everything is useless – people, their actions and their thoughts are in a whirl, and the land itself becomes confused. (Smith 1913, 12, transl. in Salmond 1989, 70)

The ritual performances discussed in this article seem to confirm that many people did, indeed, view the land as confused in the 1850s and 1860s, but I think this confusion was less a result of an absolute loss of tapu than its transformed nature. The tapu stones that had once marked the boundaries of kumara gardens where the growing kumara crop was under the influence of the god, Rongo, were now conduits of sickness and death. *The very nature of tapu had been transformed* as the relationship with atua had changed. Atua had been brought into conflict with the Christian God and Christian Māori communities had come under attack from atua as a result.

Reflecting on the ritual events described in this and an earlier article on Māori conversion (Sissons 2015) I have begun to wonder whether it might be possible to write a history of tapu, of Te Matorohanga's 'first thing'. I envisage that such a project would not simply be a history of tapu as an idea, but, instead, it would be one that understands tapu as a changing set of practices and embodiments distinctive to a Māori mode of becoming in relation to Pakeha settler society and the colonial state.

When Deleuze wrote, in *Difference and Repetition*, that the world is an egg he was, of course, speaking metaphorically (1994, 281, 327). However, the following passage, in which he extended to the world the notion that the limbs of an embryo progressively form out of different intensities or concentrations of chemicals within the yolk of the egg, was meant to be read literally:

Every phenomenon refers to an inequality by which it is conditioned. Every diversity and every change refers to a difference which is its significant reason. Everything which happens and everything which appears is correlated with orders of differences: differences of level, temperature, pressure, tension, potential, *differences of intensity*. (ibid, 293, my emphasis)

Alongside the differences in intensity listed by Deleuze above, Te Matorohanga would have included those of tapu and mana. Tapu, the first thing, and the mana that it enabled, together comprised an immanent plane of intensity that infused the entire universe. The world, for Te Matorohanga, was not an egg, but ideally, like that of Deleuze, it was in a continuous state of becoming, or growth (tipu). His forlorn assessment was that this continuity had been broken and that people had lost their way.

But what neither Te Matorohanga nor Tumutara Pio could have known is that, like the underground rhizome made famous by Deleuze and Guattari in their 1987 book, *A Thousand Plateaus*, tapu's history was always in the middle, spreading in multiple directions at once. One such line of growth would see the tapu of chiefly personhood re-emerge and be re-distributed in the form of meeting houses, these becoming the intense tapu centers of new hapū assemblages (Sissons 2010; 2013). A Deleuzian history of tapu would follow such rhizomic flows, discovering new, unexpected underground connections.

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NOTES

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