

BOOK REVIEW

The Spirit of Māori Leadership. Katene, Selwyn, (2013). Wellington, New Zealand: Huia Publishers. 237 pp. ISBN:978-1-77550-121-3.

At the end of the 1970s the eminent Māori leader Hirini Moko Mead (1979) declared that “we need a Māui-like plan to help guide us into the twenty-first century” (p. 64). This concept of a Māui-like plan—a plan which uses the elements of intelligence, foresight, courage, and adaptability—was formulated within the context of Mead’s belief that “many of our present leaders are not at all like Māui and would prefer more of the same, rather than change”. (p. 64) While Mead was commenting on a time where initiatives around leadership were in a state of flux, the history of Māori leadership within Aotearoa is filled with stories of leaders who did indeed enact the “Maui-like plan”, and who did so in ever evolving and changing social, cultural and economic circumstances.

Selwyn Katene’s (2013c) publication, *The Spirit of Māori Leadership*, explores this long history of Māori leadership, and pulls together the wider body of work on this issue, including commentaries from people such as Maharaia Winiata, Hirini Moko Mead, Mira Szaszy, Ranginui Walker, and Mason Durie. As former Director of the Manu Ao Leadership Academy, Katene is in a good position to comment on the intricacies of Māori leadership. The Manu Ao

Academy acted as an inter-university Māori initiative, which aimed to accelerate Māori leadership, strengthen relationships between Māori academics and professionals and advance Māori scholarship. The publication of *The Spirit of Māori Leadership* is one of the outcomes of the Academy, which aspired to capture the legacy of their projects through a series of publications, which included *He Kōrero Anamata: Future Challenges for Māori, Ara Mai he Tētēkura—Visioning our Futures: New and Emerging Pathways of Māori* (Katene, 2013b) and *Fire that Kindles Hearts: Ten Māori Scholars* (Katene, 2013a).

While there are competing views on the definition of leadership *The Spirit of Māori Leadership* describes leadership as the “process of influencing the activities of an organised group in its efforts toward goal setting and goal achievement” (p. xx). This outlines leadership as an interpersonal process, where one person affects, or maximises, the efforts of others towards a particular goal. This definition sits well within the context of te Ao Māori, as it emphasises the relational aspect of leadership—or whānaungatanga—where the relationship of shared experience, finding links that bind, and

working for a collective goal, are all aspects that can be found throughout the history of leadership.

The Spirit of Māori Leadership is organised around the identification of three key questions, which inquire into the attributes of a good leader (He aha tēnei mea te rangatira), the kind of knowledge they have (Te Rautaki a Māui), and the central importance of people and relationships. The evolution from traditional types of leadership (which were built on whakapapa and predominantly arose through the descent lines of ariki), to leadership that was based less on lineage but instead on mahi (work) and personal attributes, makes for a good story, and one which Katene conveys through a historically organised review of the different examples of Māori leadership.

The changing face of leadership is here aligned with the historical context of a colonial and post-colonial world of rapid change, and where traditional cultural structures are in a constant process of diminishment. While *The Spirit of Māori Leadership* follows the historical trajectory of the impact of colonisation, and highlights the change in leadership approaches as a reaction to these impacts, the book reads more like a compilation of historical events and changes than a deep dive into the complexities around inequality and colonial overarching frameworks. If leadership is intrinsically tied to a dynamic interaction between “an individual’s ontological worldview and social systems” (p. xx) then the analysis of the changes in both, worldview and social systems, could have made for a deeper analysis of why Māori leadership has gone through periods of stagnation, and also periods of precipitous transformation. Furthermore, issues around gender and the impact of an overarching Westernised system in relation to te Ao Māori and traditions of leadership are not specifically explored in *The Spirit of Māori Leadership*, although this could have been one of the interesting examples of how Māori leadership has manifested change

within an evolving colonial context, and an evolving te Ao Māori context.

The Spirit of Māori Leadership does highlight the diversity of approaches by Māori leaders, and the different “fronts” at which leadership initiatives have been enacted—from the literal backdrop of the warzone battlefield, to the metaphoric battlefields of religion, academia and government, Māori men and women have worked hard to be conduits for positive change for Māori within Aotearoa. The next site at which leadership will now need to manifest its battle has to be from within the whānau. At this time, where building the capacity of whānau to be their own leaders within “their own whānau narrative” (p. xx) is needed to realise the full potential of a Whānau Ora vision, *The Spirit of Māori Leadership* delivers an important and well-organised contribution to a potentially disparate corpus of the history of Māori leadership, and will have its place in contributing to the ongoing discourse and understanding of the ways in which leadership can affect our indigenous realities.

References

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