Contemporary perceptions of mana wahine Māori in Australia: A diasporic discussion

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Abstract: My proposed PhD thesis investigates contemporary perceptions of 'mana wahine Māori', both at home in Āotearoa (New Zealand), and in Australia diasporas. By taking into consideration that identity and culture are transformative and ongoing processes, the research seeks to understand how wāhine Māori (Māori women) in the Australian context are transforming their mana wahine Māori, while further adding to the evolving mana wahine Māori paradigm. The theories already informing mana wahine Māori will be scoped in this research, creating a clear picture of the shape and form of mana wahine Māori in Āotearoa. Fundamental principles will then be revealed to articulate the transformations emerging in Australia.

The proposed research will glean some of the challenges, compromises, and potential contradictions to tikanga Māori for wāhine Māori. They will be reflected upon to better understand the social realities in changed social contexts. Three target groups of wāhine Māori will be interviewed; those who have chosen to stay in Āotearoa, those who have resided in Australia and have returned home, and those wāhine Māori who are residents in Australia. It is hypothesised that mana wahine Māori continues to exhibit resiliency, strength, and adaptability, drawn from many realms in 'te āo Māori' (the Māori world), to continue to be robust in whatever social realities they are faced with in the Australian context.

Key Words: Diasporas; feminist studies; mana wahine Māori; Māori culture

Introduction

Two discussions are presented here that impact on the intended research on mana wahine Māori. The first represents preliminary thoughts and with a process of deconstruction, a closer look at mana to reveal some dynamics sourced from the traditional Māori world, that are still relevant in the contemporary world. The second discussion draws on a relatively new theorizing tool in the social sciences where the dynamics of diaspora are engaged to examine mana wahine Māori in the Australian setting. The intimate links between diaspora and identity are explored here.

Mana Wahine Māori

This research focuses on a social construction of many layers of thought, embedded traditionally not only from te āo Māori, but also informed by Western perspectives. It is described here as the meld of creative personality traits, intrinsic qualities, and cultural beliefs and practices, inherent in Māori women, the indigenous people of Āotearoa. It has metamorphosed through a thousand years or so of refinement of nga ahuatanga Māori (Māori philosophies). Included here are some of the practices and knowledge associated with…

- te reo Māori (the Māori language)
- whakapapa (genealogy)
- wairuatanga (spirituality)

- whanau/ hapu/ iwi (family, clan and tribe)
- whanaungatanga (relationship-building)
- manaakitanga (wealth-sharing)
- 'signature forms of identity' exclusive to wahine Māori.

These principles have survived two milieu of circumnavigation across the Pacific Ocean, in relative isolation of global dynamics. They have endured physical and psychological adaptations from a sub-tropical environment, to a more temperate climate. Tribal oral traditions continue to attest to the adaptability of nga ahuatanga Māori into a technological contemporary world.

Like other indigenous contexts, European contact exacted further challenges to this adaptation and resiliency demonstrated by mana wahine Māori; oppressive colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and European-style feminism. Defining, and re-affirming mana wahine Māori, in the midst of these over-whelming tensions "culminates in complex interpretations of what differences count for us" (Johnston & Pihama, 1995, p. 75). While the debates about these differences are numerous and complex, it is intended that this research will explore the notion of difference as constructed by a changed physical environment, changed family dynamics, displacement from tribal area and the socio-cultural norms surrounding those circumstances. This study focuses on wahine Māori, in a position that they are viewed as "central to any form of analysis" (Johnston & Pihama, ibid), whether that be in Āotearoa, or in Australia. The socio-cultural constructions that will be revealed will be framed from within the world of wāhine Māori themselves.

The 'mana' in mana wahine Māori

A deconstruction of the 'mana' in mana wahine Māori is necessary here, to understand one of the parameters of this research. Mana, as an intrinsic attribute, is composed of "both worldly and ethereal meanings" (Durie, 1998, p.2). Expanding on the concept of 'mana', divine attributes are imbued to living and inanimate objects by the sacred gods (Te Rangihiroa, 1970), and is often associated with other intangible qualities, like tapu (sacredness), ihi (awesome-ness), and wehi (fearsome-ness). The above inner qualities can manifest in both men and women, inherited from previous generations, bestowed, and transferred. The worldly dimension of mana is informed by the cultural concepts of teina and tuakana (younger and elder) relationships, and by whakapapa (genealogical linkages), refined by over two thousand years of history. Mana tangata is that possessed by people; mana tane is that possessed by men, and mana wahine by women.

Mana can be likened to the Greek equivalent of 'dunamai', indicating a 'capability' towards power (Marsden, 1977, p. 135). This capability may be described as charisma, an indefinable 'X factor' that some people possess that influences and inspires others. Charismatic people are telegenic, that is, they project a certain look, particular warmth in their smile, and a personal aura or presence. They communicate in ways that touch the minds and hearts of people for both positive and negative purposes (Tapsell, 1998). Media influence can enhance this telegenic quality, promoting both a provocative and reactive image for public consumption. High profile political personalities like Tariana Turia and Winston Peters, possess certain degrees of this quality.

Linking mana with leadership, indigenous Hawaiian feminist, Haunani-Kay Trask (1999, p. 94) refers to the "…ability to speak for the people and land, to command respect by virtue of this ability'. Associated then with authority, leadership, and control (Marsden, 1977), mana has many dimensions. te āo Māori has produced men and women with these skills, but it is in their passion and delivery that sets them apart from other people. However, it is within every whanau, hapu and

iwi, that individuals with these qualities are most valued, as they assist in maintaining the psychological and cultural vibrancy.

Rose Pere clarified 'mana ake' as one of the many metaphorical dimensions of an individual that requires sustenance to remain healthy and dynamic. 'Mana ake' pertains to an individual's absolute uniqueness, the distinctive genetic mix that is a part of an individual's mana as a whole. By pursuing a positive identity, the resultant mana is uplifting psychologically and emotionally (Pere, 1991, p. 15). Again, an individual increases it through their deeds in service, usually to their own whānau, hapū, or iwi. Conversely, it can be reduced, and made void by negative deeds and actions. Both men and women possess measures of these qualities, revealed and expressed in both private and public domains. In the public domain, contemporary role models of wahine Māori possessing of this are Te Atairangikaahu, Tariana Turia, June Mariu, and Rose Pere. More importantly though, are the female role models within each whanau and each hapu, for they are the ones to inspire and lead the next generation of young women.

A diasporic discussion of mana wahine Māori

Theorising about diaspora is a helpful analytical tool in this study because of the evolving contemporary implications and tensions for wahine Māori in Australia. Literally referred to as the "…dispersal- the scattering of a people" (Collins Dictionary, 1993, p. 359), the term infers many categories of people who either by choice, or by force, have left their homelands. Also described as "communities of an ethnic/national orientation" (Diamandaki, 2003), every nation state can attest to the experiences of multiple ethnicities and cultures, re-settling and creating their own special characteristics that form diasporas within their country. In a philosophical way, diasporas add to the "…diversity of the contemporary world" (Harvey & Thompson, 2005, p. 52). Australia is an example of this diversity, and the trans-Tasman Māori migration, has added to this veritable melting pot.

The contemporary notion of diaspora encompasses a larger domain that includes words like "immigrant, expatriate, guest worker, and ethnic community" (Tölölian, 1991, p. 5). For various purposes each of these descriptions can, at any one time refer to a diaspora of people, Māori in Australia included. This point is made because of the proportionately high percentage of Māori in Australia who do not take up Australian citizenship- 60.8% (Te Puni Kokiri, 2007, p. 63). By compromising citizenship, they become in-eligible to apply for governmental funding and grants. It is reasonable to suggest that at various times, a Māori would be described as immigrant / expatriate / guest worker, and of an ethnic community. Wahine Māori have opportunity to assert their own definition as to how they will be described, and this research will elicit those descriptors.

'He kakano ahau i ruia i Rangiatea'
(I am a seed dispersed from Rangiatea)

Population mobility, forced or voluntary, itself, is not a new phenomenon, and has been a global trend since time immemorial. Tribal oral traditions attest to several 'dispersals' from the ancient homelands of the Māori, as directly alluded to in the proverbial saying in the heading above. Rangiatea is part of Hawaiki, located about Tahiti and the Cook Islands. Metaphorically equated to as seeds (kakano), Māori forebears dispersed and scattered (…i ruia mai…) across the whole of Te Moana nui a Toi (The Great Sea of Toi / The Pacific Ocean). The settling of Aotearoa was

achieved by several such dispersals. Engaging a perceptual tool as 'diaspora' therefore adds considerable credence and mana to this conceptualization already articulated by Māori.

The troubling concern is that Māori migration from Āotearoa to Australia in recent decades has escalated at such an alarming rate, it is estimated that around one in seven Māori now live there (Te Puni Kokiri, 2007, p. Xii). By mid-century, the estimate becomes one in five Māori in Australia (Black, 2008). Empirical research in the area of population mobility to Australia however, has only just surfaced in the last two decades. In attempting to understand the causes and effects of this Trans-Tasman migration it has been limited to mainly demographic investigations of Māori to, or in Australia (Barcham, 2004; Bergin, 1998; Lowe, 1990). In 2007, Paul Hamer, contracted by Te Puni Kokiri, produced the first comprehensive social profile of Māori resident in Australia. He identified the four main cities of Perth, Melbourne, Brisbane, and Sydney as the places where these physical diasporas are located (Te Puni Kokiri, 2007, p. 4).The report emphasized economic opportunities as the key determinant for most Māori to move to Australia, but tempered this by acknowledging perceived challenges towards their "sense of Māori identity and desire to embrace Māori culture" (Te Puni Kokiri, 2007, p. XII). Wahine Māori are part of this Australian social reality and, after thirty plus years of intensive Trans-Tasman movement, it is timely and opportune for some critical reflection.

The 'host country / home lands' dilemma

Diasporic discussions cannot be explored without reflection back to the so-called home land, in this case, Aotearoa/ New Zealand. On a conceptual level, William Safran emphasises that the definition of diasporas 'goes beyond the purely ethnic, genetic and emotional' descriptors. He points out the complexities and "flexible positioning" (1991, p.94) of ethnic diasporas between host countries (for example, Australia) and homelands (for example, Āotearoa). This creates the conditions for "various sets of coordinates that individuals use for defining, centering, and (if necessary) 'delocalizing' their activities and identities. If one considers a matrix of co-ordinates; with one axis being the Australian culture ('the host country'), and the other composed of the cultural philosophies and practices Māori women bring from Aotearoa/ New Zealand ('the home land'), then the opportunities to re-define one's identity become numerous. These opportunities are also equated with the potential to be tensions as well. The extent that wāhine Māori deal these challenges will be explored in the proposed study.

William Safran, in his study of "Diasporas in Modern Societies" devised a general framework of an 'ideal type' of diaspora. He defines diaspora as 'expatriate minority communities' that:-

    (1)   are dispersed from an original centre to at least two peripheral places;
    (2)   maintain a memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland;
    (3)   believe they are not fully accepted by their host country;
    (4)   see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is right;
    (5)   are committed to the maintenance and restoration of this homeland; and
    (6)   believe the group's consciousness and solidarity are defined by a continuing relationship with the homeland (Safran, 1991, pp. 83-84).

Safran's ideal type of 'centred' diaspora as detailed above can be applied to Māori in Australia. Informed by continuous cultural connections to Āotearoa, and by teleology of 'return', Māori diasporas in Australia meet four of Safran's six criteria. Evidenced by the Te Puni Kokiri report (2007), the following comments are offered for discussion. (1) Māori diaspora dispersed and localised to the Australian cities of Perth, Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney. (2) Māori subjects in

Australia maintain a memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland- Āotearoa (3) This aspect is purely speculative, and the researcher offers no comment. (4) Māori have always considered going back to their home. (5) Another point of contention, the researcher believes that most Māori resident in Australia take for granted the fact that others will maintain the whānau, hapū, iwi and marae institutions at home (6) Māori maintain continuing relationships with whanau at home. A final note on Safran's framework; for every 'ideal type', there are exceptions to the rule. One framework does not necessarily account for all the wild variables that can occur. Wahine Māori are an integral part of these dynamics and variables, and these will be revealed in the study.

'Signature forms of identity' of mana wahine Māori

Diasporic discussions are intimately linked to what constitutes identity for wahine Māori. Naming one's world, in the Frierean sense (Friere, 1972), is an expression of tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) from the Māori world. The process of defining one's identity is an intimate part of this, and is pivotal in making sense of self, of the world, and of one's future (Irwin, 1991; Te Awekotuku (1991). With this in mind, wāhine Māori women have developed their 'signature forms of identity', public and unique expressions of mana wahine like the karanga (women's ritualistic call), performance artistry in waiata (song and chant) and poi (dance with poi formations), to the use of moko (body tattooing) and pukana (facial expressions). These external manifestations of identity and self-definition are dynamic in that they are vibrant and positive forms of identity for wāhine Māori. They are still evolving, and adapting to contemporary social pressures, yet the essence is still identifiably sourced from te āo Māori. How mana wahine Māori displays itself in the Australian context is speculative. Physically divorced from expectations and practices that guide the behavior of wahine Māori at home, how the attributes of mana are demonstrated, and possibly compromised, will be revealed in the projected research.

'Ko wai koe? No hea koe?'
(Who are you? Where are you from?)

Before European contact, identity reverberated from a long territorial and warrior history that is still fresh in tribal memories. For wahine Māori the energy in this tribal identity is now finding contemporary expression in new arenas such as Kapa Haka (Māori performing arts) and tribal festivals. Events like the Tūhoe Ahurei (Tūhoe Festival) re-affirm tribal mana and tino rangatiratanga, as well as consolidating tribal knowledge, and strengthening the tribal relationships inherent in whānau (family), hapū (clan), and iwi (tribe).

Within Āotearoa, national pride and identity conjures descriptors like 'New Zealander', 'Māori' (Indigenous people of Aotearoa), and 'tangata whenua (People of the land). Distinguishing from Non-Māori, at one time, was confined to comparison to 'Pakeha' (People of European origin), but now includes 'Pasifika' (Pacific people), and 'tauiwi' (Foreign people). The colloquial descriptor 'Kiwi' is more often heard in foreign countries, or when media attention focuses on high-profile sporting events, like the Rugby World Cup, or the Olympic Games.

The self-confidence of knowing… ko wai koe? No hea koe? Haere ana koe ki hea? (Who are you? Where are you from? Where are you going?), is important as this knowledge is valued in Te Āo Māori. These questions are part of the essence that composes Te Āo Māori- the complex relationships of whanau, hapu, and iwi. What shape and form this wahine Māori signature will evolve into in host countries like Australia in the future, is pure speculation.

'Ka pu te ruha ka hao te rangatahi'
(As the old net is cast aside, a new one is used)

Opportunities to continuously redefine one's identity, and one's mana wahine Māori, are presented constantly in a new cultural context that spans time and distance, like in Australia. The ancient Māori proverbial saying used here literally describes the 'succession of a younger person to the work of a retiring elder'. Metaphorically though, it is a representation that old ideas make way for fresh thoughts and perceptions. Relating this to the discussion to diasporas and identity, Diamandaki (2003, p.4) speaks succinctly about "doing away with old ties that bind…and continuously searching for new ones". An example of this is drawn from the Te Puni Kokiri report (2007) that when Māori were questioned about descriptions of current identity, evidence suggests that as the length of residence in Australia increases, there is a tendency for Māori to first remove 'New Zealand' as a descriptor in their identity, eventually to opt for the term 'Australian'. Noting the challenge for young Māori to 'fit into' Australia culture (Te Puni Kokiri, 2007, p. 66), the report drew on other similar research with Turkish migrants in Germany. The sense of 'being in limbo' is experienced by other second-generation migrants in other countries (ibid., 2007, p. 66). The implications for wahine Māori serves as a foreboding of what else might be in danger of dying-out? Whether wahine Māori are starting to reject tikanga Māori (Māori philosophies and practices) in a new country, that once guided them at home in Āotearoa is yet to be explored.

On a more positive line, like the resurgence of te reo Māori in the 1980s within Aotearoa, the strength to meet such challenges was not avoided by wahine Māori. The Kohanga Reo (pre-school initiative utilizing Māori philosophies and te reo Māori) movement was, and still is, driven by wahine Māori. This is an example of tino rangatiratanga (self-determination) that wahine Māori engage in, in order to protect and sustain mana wahine Māori. As Diamandaki (2003) and Castells (1997) succinctly noted, cultural identity can sometimes "re-emerge even more vehemently out of the very conditions of globalization that are responsible for undermining them" Castells (1997, p. 450). Whether the desire to continue speaking te reo Māori, or whether a hybridized dialect will evolve in an Australian context, will further be explored in the research.

This very phenomenon was discussed in a recent study of Māori on the Gold coast of Australia. Green & Power (2006, p.37) argued that New Zealand identity is strengthened in Australia "…because, in defining themselves, people (Māori) need to assert their difference from a dominant majority". It is a reality that Māori in Australia are viewed as being a "subset of New Zealanders" (Te Puni Kokiri, 2007, p. 65), at times informally regarded as 'Kiwis'. However, Māori have historical experience of gaining identity through difference, and for wahine Māori, these differences are even more acute due to gender and colour. This contemporary tension adds to the growing discourse of politics of identity, to which wahine Māori in Australia are not immune. The intended research will shed some light on these issues.

Summary

A diasporic perspective of mana wahine Māori in Australia illuminates fresh tensions for wahine Māori, tensions challenging the core of their identity. The need to define it in academic constructs is a response to new dispersals of Māori settling in places like Australia. Mana wahine Māori is transportable in ways never seen before, transforming and adapting to new cultural contexts. The

resultant resiliency and flexibility of mana wahine Māori is challenged yet again in a contemporary setting, and will be scrutinised in the proposed research.

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