

Oral histories, mythologies and Indigeneity in Aotearoa – New Zealand

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Abstract: New Zealand history chronicles the numerous colonial measures of social assimilation which saw the indigenous Māori of Aotearoa yield to rapid socio-cultural deconstruction. Colonial efforts extended so far as to suppress the indigenous language and oppress the declining native population. During this era, the myths of pre-contact Māori were rejected by the early missionaries, their governing authorities and the rapidly growing colonial state, as all myths of indigenous origin were deconstructed, displaced, and disregarded. Today however, the intrinsic aspect of Māori mythology has come full circle, and formal Māori oratory provides broad facility for the expression of significant mythic deities, ancestors, events and declarations. Within the developing rubric of contemporary indigenous parity, previously censured and rejected indigenous myths have come to be wielded as ideological historical testaments validating tribal claims of autochthony. Indigenous myths have come to be exponentially used within contemporary indigenous reclamation processes, such as the NZ Waitangi Tribunal settlement claims, when establishing legal title of ownership and rightful governance over land, language and culture. This research examines the role of myths and the significant shift(s) of the acceptance of indigenous mythologies of NZ Māori by Māori, and considers how myths have remained in constant practice, how they have contributed to the indigenous identity, and how they have circuitously re-entered the New Zealand political realm.

Keywords: indigeneity; Māori, mythologies; oral histories; Waitangi Tribunal; whaikorero

Preface

The New Zealand Waitangi Tribunal, formed in 1975 as a commission of inquiry mandated with the priority of investigating vast numbers of complex disputes involving the Māori and the Crown, has efficiently bridged the more obvious cultural divides of its two adversarial and aggrieved opposing factions. Invariably such disputes have pertained to perceived Crown violations of the historical Treaty of Waitangi, and the Tribunal is the formally acknowledged specialist agency sanctioned to scrutinize such claims of violation. From its inception as a quasi-judicial authority the Tribunal realised that the necessary component of recognized historical evidence did not entirely suffice their mandate and, as their Chief Historian Dr Grant Phillipson noted:

Historical evidence to the Waitangi Tribunal takes a variety of forms. In many cases it appears as professional reports, researched and written by historians. But this is only one type of evidence considered by the Tribunal. In addition, there are eyewitness accounts of historical events; visual demonstrations of places and their significance; oral traditions handed down on the marae or in the home; and ceremonial songs or orations that illustrate a context or create powerful moods or expressions. These different forms of evidence contribute to a complex, layered interpretation of historical claims... (cited in Hayward & Wheen, 2004, p. 41)

Since its inception, the efficacy of the Tribunal can be seen with any cursory glance at already successfully concluded settlements involving several major iwi (tribes). The proficient bureaucratic capacity of the Tribunal is also reflected by the fact that it is now a core agency within a much larger overarching structure which includes formal representative bodies, the courts, various Ministers of the Crown, and the Office of Treaty Settlements. By means of Waitangi Tribunal recommendations, settlement claims then become a matter for the governing authorities once the Tribunal has reached its informed findings and the Office of Treaty Settlements can then undertake negotiating a settlement between the iwi concerned and the Crown. This formally legislated process thus empowers the Tribunal with the capacity to knowledgeably advise the governing authorities who administer the ongoing fiduciary responsibilities of the Crown and Māori. For the purpose of this research it is notable that a prevalent Tribunal practice is that they undertake all hearings within the precincts of mutually agreeable marae (meeting grounds), wharehau (meeting house) or parallel sacred Māori sites; a customary practice which of itself necessitates the enactment of whaikorero (formal oratory).

The autochthonous, pre-contact, culturally homogenous Māori lived within a framework of stringent customary laws, rigorous ancestral and nature-based spiritual ideologies, impressive principles of communal reciprocity and holism, and highly developed skills involving the ability of meticulous memory retention. As an intrinsic element of powhiri (formal welcome) the ancient pre-contact art of whaikorero has remained in continuous practice throughout the post-contact era, and remains the principal salutation art-form by which tangata whenua (the people of the land) formally greet and welcome manuhiri (visitors) who necessarily reply in kind. In its most basic form whaikorero deploys the interwoven expressions of mihi (greetings), whakapapa (genealogy), karakia (prayer), take (purpose), waiata (song) and hongiri (pressing of the nose). Within this rubric there is a broad facility for the acknowledgement of significant mythic deities, ancestors, events and declarations. To the best of my knowledge I have never witnessed a whaikorero which has not involved the mythic aspect in some form. However, the myths of pre-contact Māori were disputed and denigrated by the early missionaries, their governing authorities and the rapidly growing colonial state. New Zealand history chronicles the numerous colonial measures of social assimilation which saw the indigenous Māori of Aotearoa yield to rapid socio-cultural deconstruction. Colonial efforts extended so far as to suppress the indigenous language and oppress the declining native population. The myths of indigenous origin came to be deconstructed, displaced, and disregarded. Today, however, the intrinsic aspect of Māori mythology has come full circle, and formal Māori oratory provides a facility for the expression of belief in significant mythic deities, in the role of ancestors and related events and declarations. Within the developing rubric of contemporary indigenous parity, previously censured and rejected indigenous myths have come to be wielded as ideological historical testaments validating tribal claims of autochthony. Indigenous myths have come to be exponentially used within contemporary indigenous reclamation processes, such as the NZ Waitangi Tribunal settlement claims, when establishing legal title of ownership and rightful governance over land, language and culture. This research examines the role of myths and the significant shift(s) of indigenous mythologies of NZ Māori, and considers how myths have remained in constant practice, how they have contributed to the indigenous identity, and how they have circuitously re-entered the New Zealand political realm.

Introduction -- an insider's view

Growing up in the Pākehā (non-Māori) dominated 1970s urban consciousness of NZ, I was occasionally sent to sit amongst family elders in the confines of the marae so as to learn the teachings of tribal histories, cultural traditions and the axiomatic responsibilities. During those

early years of childhood, I came to learn of particular family narratives, interspersed with stories learned during Bible study classes, before eventually being introduced to myths taught within the state education system. My maternal grandfather and my mother were each full blooded Māori. Both were versed in the limited bicultural fashion endemic to the early and mid 20th century. As a direct consequence of their indigenous heritage and the communication by them of cross-cultural religious beliefs, namely Rātana and Catholic, I was taught to develop an enquiring mind, framed within religious ideologies and linked to our indigenous history.

My grandfather Michael Tutere Hohepa, Āpotoro Takiwa o te Hāhi Ratana (District Apostle of the Rātana Church), had a preference for the stories of miracles scattered throughout the narrative of the development of his faith. On my first childhood trip to the Rātana Pā in Wanganui he drew my attention to a steel fence at the entrance of the Temepara Tapu (sacred temple) which enclosed a fruit tree that miraculously grew two distinct fruits (oranges and lemons), or so I was led to believe. That night he led me to an open field where multitudes were gathered, awaiting the appearance of flickering coloured nightlights that seemed to dance in the distance. He proudly exclaimed that this was divine confirmation of the presence of heavenly angels at the Pā. The next night he had me sit in the front section of the māngai's home (meaning 'mouthpiece' and pertaining to the church's founder) where a host of people were again gathered. We were instructed to gaze constantly upon the smokey-white, multi-shaded, stained glass panel which adorned the front door. 'The faithful are able to see the image of the māngai sitting on his rocking chair tipping to and fro as though vigilantly watching over his flock in death' (Apotoro Michael Tutere Hohepa, personal comment, 1977).

These events remain indelible although confused, in my memory. I certainly exclaimed my own excitement at the revelation of each event. But I also wondered, even at that young age, whether I was simply going along with my grandfather's determined perceptions. In so saying, and often in contrast to the Rātana doctrine, he resolutely ensured that I was instructed in the ways of ancient Māori. He had asked my father to ensure that I was shown how to interpret the unique narratives concealed in the carvings of the wharenuī (meeting house) and that whaea (aunts) teach me how to decipher the meanings in the intricate patterns of the tukutuku (woven wall panels). Each of these processes reflected distinct aspects of our pre-colonial oral society. As in traditional society it was required that I learn the family's historical narratives regarding ancestral heroes; their exploits, successes, marriages and the names of their progeny. However, many of the people who assisted my mahita (teachers) were unable to fluently converse in te reo Māori (the Māori language) for whatever reasons (such as fear, lack of knowledge, and illiteracy) and I suspect my grandfather was kept unaware of this fact. For this reason much of what I learnt was taught in English, and to this day I regret that was the case. My grandfather was a Church Minister, kaumatua (revered elder), marriage celebrant, inter-cultural orator, philosopher, evangelist and interpreter of mystic phenomenon who cautioned me that the Māori world had changed so drastically that he feared for the future of our people, unless we could safely navigate and bridge the widening cultural divide. He spoke despondently of that bygone era in which his own grandparents had been raised and of how, within his own lifetime he had witnessed the dying of his culture and incremental social assimilation of our nation. In the indoctrinated belief that Māori could only survive by way of cultural intermarriage, he had anticipated that my mother would marry a prosperous Pākehā, of the Rotorua District – an expectation which failed to eventuate.

My father, being of Māori and Scandinavian descent, made no overt efforts to exercise his dual heritage, instead preferring to practice his uniquely Māori worldview of life. It was my father who first told me of the tale of *The White Lady*. After finishing their morning chores on their rural homestead he and his brothers would begin their daily hour and a half trek through neighbouring properties and native forest to attend the nearest school. Along the way, and always at the same

point in their journey, they would encounter a curious sight marked by a particular fence-line where the early morning mists lifted over the landscape. It was the image of a tall, pale woman, seemingly pōrangirangi (distraught) and making her way quickly across the fields. Since every effort they made to get her attention failed, and she never turned to acknowledge their presence, they innocently assumed she was a troubled and timid Pākehā who deliberately evaded contact and in time they came to call the mysterious figure 'the white lady'. They eventually made a game of trying to catch her up, but even if they were riding horses they could never reach her before the mists completely lifted and she simply vanished. On days when there was no mist, the white lady failed to appear, and in due course each of them came to the realisation that she was a kēhua (ghost), so they naturally heeded their elders' warnings to avoid any potentially fatal contact.

Another story my paternal family taught us was that of *The White Bull*. All children quite naturally dream and whilst growing up in a modern, urban indigenous family environment, we were often asked what we had dreamed of in order that our whaea or kuia (grandmother) could, if necessary, interpret the events. This was how we came to learn that my paternal grandmother was a descendant of matakite (seers), and was herself, a skilled matakite. At a very young age we were vigilantly instructed that should we ever dream of a white bull, we were to let someone in the family know immediately. As the lesson was taught, so we learnt that the white bull was a family kaitiaki (guardian) and it appeared in dreamtime to forewarn of potentially impending doom or death within the family. As an adjunct to this story, I must say that we, the children of my generation, were also taught that the dreams of the white bull only came to the one child of each set of parents. I was subsequently the only one of my father's children who ever met the white bull in dreams.

Yet another tale was that which I shall call *The Hidden Prophecy*. My paternal koroua (ancestral grandfather) had, according to family history, created our papakainga (family habitat) and marae. This was a life-long effort requiring significant industry and expense on the part of the entire Ngāti Whare hapu (sub-tribe of Tūhoe - Children of the mist). At the time, Tūhoe were still recovering from numerous post-colonial impacts (such as introduced diseases, enforced loss of language, land and so forth) as well as traditional inter-tribal conflicts. This story speaks of a taonga (treasure), concealed by my koroua within the construct of the wharenuī. According to the story, my koroua was a tohunga (spiritual specialist) who had foreseen trouble and had subsequently left a taonga which, when discovered by the rightful descendant, would prove invaluable in the survival and success of our lineage. The last family story which I shall mention here is that of *My Grandmothers' Passing*. My paternal grandmother had been betrothed at 15 years of age to my grandfather who was only 13. In due course their union resulted in 21 children born at the papakainga in the isolated mountains of the Urewera. The story of her death at the age of 64 apparently began with various phone calls to each of the surviving children, instructing them to return to where she was preparing to depart this world in order to join my grandfather in death. Apparently my grandmother had undertaken this same task two years earlier in 1965, but had stopped the event with the announcement that she distinctly disapproved of the Pākehā lifestyle of her last born child and she therefore chose to postpone her *passing* until he had *sorted himself out*. Dad recalled how in 1967 he had eventually arrived to find his brothers and sisters with their mother, all of whom appeared in good health and high spirits. My father, the second to last born child, had found himself bewildered by the boisterous gathering and had almost convinced himself that the supposed kaupapa (subject) for the assembly must have been wrongly communicated. However, as the sun sank and night began they were called into her room and asked to form a closed circle around her bed whilst karakia (prayer) commenced. She spoke to them of respect, honour, fidelity and love before informing them, almost casually (as my uncle recounts) that she had carried out her duty to the family and it was now time to join her beloved

husband. With her children encircling her, the room lit by candlelight, and the soft sound of muffled sobbing, she closed her eyes and quite simply willed her wairua (spirit) to traverse through and join my deceased grandfather.

My father and his siblings had been born into a generation who had predominantly been forced to suppress their indigenous cultural knowledge including the language, in preference for ‘the western mechanistic system’ (a term used by father which I took to mean the domination of various introduced technologies). However, they had been raised, for the most part, in an isolated rural region in the uniquely indigenous environment of the Urewera Mountain Ranges. My paternal family had necessarily adapted to the inevitability of recognising the precepts of western religions, which in their case was the Presbyterian Church, although they surreptitiously continued to acknowledge the Māori pantheon and worldview; a common practice prevalent in Māori families of this generation. In later life, my father would demonstrate his exclusive commitment to the Māori worldview. Conversely, my mother was raised in the more urban-influenced Te Arawa system (centred in Rotorua), and her father, although a devout Ratana minister, insisted she attend the best Catholic schools. However, my maternal family also continued to practice kawa (protocol), tikanga (etiquette), and the holistic Māori worldview. Unsurprisingly, my siblings and I were exposed to a richly diverse and eclectic array of cultural, spiritual and religious ideologies. So it came to be that within the first decade of my life I had been introduced to an expansively diverse array of narratives by way of family members.

Then, for a few years before reaching an age when we could choose not to do so, we were required to attend Bible study. Dependent on where my grandfather’s ministering required him to be, and so we attended whichever convenient classes were offered by various denominational churches. There we received religious instruction and of course became familiar with biblical narratives such as The Nativity of Jesus, The Fall of Man (Adam and Eve), Noah and Moses to name but a few. These religious stories were reinforced in our early childhood home setting by a grandfather who insisted on daily services, both morning and evening, as well as prayer before each meal. I fondly recall that my grandfather in his sermons and prayers emphasised the religious beliefs of the Ratana faith, and effortlessly did so in Māori. The collection of family narratives, combined with biblical stories, was further expanded, albeit confusingly, when we were eventually introduced to various other narratives through the public schooling system. The New Zealand School Journal was an invaluable source of stories, folktales and myths for both Māori and Pākehā alike. In 2007 the centenary of the widely popular NZ School Journal was celebrated as arguably ‘the longest-running serial publication for children in the world’ (<http://schooljournal100.learningmedia.co.nz/>). It was through this particular source that I first learnt of the fantastic and numerous exploits of Maui, who had spectacularly fished up the North Island of NZ, captured the sun, stolen fire for his people and attempted to attain immortality. I simultaneously encountered the renowned tales of the Brothers Grimm, Charles Dickens and Hans Christian Anderson to name but a few.

Being so young, I was easily influenced by the multitude of ideologies which each of these varying narratives proffered, although the obvious juxtaposition certainly proved problematic later. The vignette of family tales deemed miraculous (such as the hybrid fruit tree) are perhaps to a large degree explainable by means of reductionist theorising. In so saying, I prefer to believe that my grandfather’s tales of assumed miracles in fact reflected his fervent optimistic hope that one day his people, Māori, would find divine salvation and deliverance in a world which for him seemed to be wholly disregarding of the first people of the nation. Conversely, tales such as The White Lady, The White Bull and The Hidden Prophecy are clear examples of oral narratives intended to obviate the danger, duplicity and sacrifice which previous generations of Māori had experienced when dealing with their newly arrived and rapidly dominating Pākehā counterparts.

The ancient traditional myths involving the Māori pantheon and legendary ancestors of modern Māori were taught to me as clear and distinct narratives which evidenced and affirmed the holistic presence and enduring status of Māori within the wider world at large. That is to say that the more recent traditional indigenous stories can be seen to echo a declining society's acute grief, pain and turmoil, all too common within colonised societies, culminating in the ancient traditional mythical exploits of omnipresent deities such as Io, Paptuanuku and Rangi (Omnipotent God, Sky Father and Earth Mother) and legendary characters such as Kupe (proclaimed as the first Māori to arrive on the shores of Aotearoa - Land of the Long White Cloud - NZ).

Interestingly the three differing environments of home/marae, church/bible-study, and school, also demarcated by the variables of family, religious tutors and school teachers, facilitated an overlapping yet divergent intercultural perspective regardless of, or perhaps even due in main part to, the incongruent aspects of each. I do recall asking why there were two all-powerful deities – Io and God – and being told by my grandfather that they were essentially one and the same. In fact, I now realise that the home/marae and church/bible-study environments were quite complementary systems. Each involved narratives of the physical and the meta-physical, the sacred and the profane, divine entities, genealogical hierarchies, ritual performance, worship and obeisance, traditions, etiquettes and protocols. Through both systems I quickly learned the respect, honour, humility and deference required to be demonstrated to those of a higher authority – which essentially meant everyone else who was older than myself. However, in my mind's eye the religious environment was never perfectly equal or parallel to the marae/home setting. The latter setting always facilitated a far more sociable, personal, interactive and nurturing sense of relations, whilst the former offered a more impersonal, emotionally detached and culturally sterile experience. It also never failed to escape my attention that the biblical depictions were only ever representative of white men and white families. (It was many years later that I learned of the celebrated Galilee Chapel Window at Saint Faith's Church, Ohinemutu, that portrays a Māori Christ in the korowai/cloak of a rangatira (Chief), seemingly walking on the background waters of Lake Rotorua).

As a student I was an obedient youngster, determined to comply with every instruction given by my authoritarian school teachers. In so saying, I only ever absorbed that information which fitted with my developing worldview, simply discarding the rest. In adulthood I have learnt that such pragmatism is a notable trait of Māori. I do recall being very confused when a school teacher asked who had discovered NZ, to which my reply was Kupe, only to find the classroom break out in stifled sniggering. Or being asked what makes plants grow, to which my answer of Tāne Mahuta (Māori God of the Forests), was similarly met. I was quickly informed that NZ was discovered by a white man, two in fact, and that I needed to look up the meaning of photosynthesis. I was also instructed to leave Māori superstition at home and that school was intended to benefit those who wanted a real education.

Myth and History

Myths may be described as multilayered narratives embedding universal and, oftentimes unique focal points, intents and prerogatives. Present throughout history(s), they exist within all cultures and societies as distinguishable accounts that can reveal cognitive, psychological, spiritual and socio-political aspects of a peoples' customs, laws, beliefs and traditions. Mythologies also render multifarious expressions of a people's social, political, economic and religious framework and as has been shown over historical time, myths have the authoritative means to establish an ideology upon which to found an entire culture. The study of myth(s), or theories about the meaning of myths, can be seen to have arisen as early as the sixth century BCE and a fascination has

remained with this form of narrative ever since. As American mythologist Joseph Campbell, most widely renowned for his late 20th C television documentary series *The Power of Myth*, so dramatically said:

Indeed the chronicle of our species... has been not simply an account of the progress of man the toolmaker but... a history of the pouring of blazing visions into the minds of seers and the efforts of earthly communities to incarnate unearthly covenants... And though many who bow with closed eyes in the sanctuaries of their own tradition rationally scrutinize and disqualify the sacrament of others, an honest comparison immediately reveals that all have been built from the one fund of mythological motifs variously selected, organized, interpreted, and ritualized according to local need... (cited in Van Couvering, 1997, p. 10)

Several millennia ago the earliest ancestors of modern humanity, preliterate but none the less logical and capable of reason, learnt to survive and necessarily adapt in a milieu wherein the local conditions dominated their existence. This was a world where early humankind, evolutionarily unique yet archaically primitive by modern measure, acquiesced to the environment and what must, at times, have appeared as seemingly whimsical, happenstance circumstances. Their reality was subject to the basic yet simultaneously uncontrollable polarities of day and night, light and dark, birth and death, health and ill health, safety and danger. What we today quite naturally conceive of as the seasons changing, intermittent eclipses of the moon and sun, freak meteorological events, predictable tidal shifts and so forth, must surely have been seen vastly different in the eyes of our earliest ancestral predecessors. Professor Emeritus of Biblical history at the University of Southern California, Gerald Larue contemplated such conditions and in *Ancient Myth and Modern Man* wrote:

In his community, a person who had been well would suddenly become ill and die. Another individual became ill but recovered. Why? Unique experiences added to the confusion. On one occasion, a root seemed to reach up and trip a man, causing him to fall and be bruised. A rock fell from the wall of a ravine and broke a man's leg. An angry wild beast or an enemy attacked, causing injury. Why did such events happen? (Larue, 1975, p. 8)

Lacking the necessary resources by which to harness or even comprehend such a varying array of external forces, they resourcefully conceived oral narratives which proffered sensible means of explanation. A rock deemed responsible for causing harm might have been conceived of as containing an evil spirit; whilst another rock used in a successful hunt might be deemed as containing a benevolent spirit. The ill person who recovered might be considered worthy of life or having unfinished personal business, whilst the one who died might have been seen as less worthy or having finished all personal business; conjectural perhaps, but none the less conceivable and reasonable. In this manner, our earliest ancestral predecessors were able to account for experiences and observations which exceeded their conscious intellectual limitations – events which today we understand as either pertaining to natural forces or simply based in superstition. By way of these earliest oral narratives, a means arose of giving order, structure and logic where humankind was otherwise unable to comprehend the wider world, cosmos and the intrinsic laws of nature which today we so effortlessly grasp. Oral narratives consequently served as a natural response to comprehend ostensibly inexplicable phenomenon.

As oral narratives were expanded upon and became dispersed – traversing their original spatial and temporal aspects – the narratives unsurprisingly developed beyond their original forms. This repositioning of oral narratives was most evident as societies shifted from pre-literate to literate,

and the spoken words became written dialogue; in its numerous and complex forms including sacred stories, tales, fables, legends and myths. Furthermore the repositioning of myth as an ideological tool is manifest throughout historical discourse. For the purpose of this thesis we shall restrain ourselves within the vast and complex theme of myth.

Contemporary academics and authors of both fictional and non-fictional literature, Scott Leonard and Michael McClure, have published multiple scholarly texts. In *Myth & Knowing* they embarked upon an enlightening analysis of this rubric, delving extensively into contemporary psychological, religious and cultural emphases of world mythologies. They point out that as early as Homer and Hesiod (700 BCE) we can see an identifiable perception of *mythos* as pertaining to ‘... divinely inspired, poetic utterance...whereas *logos* was often associated with a more mundane, common ‘transactional discourse’ (Leonard & McClure, 2004, p. 2). They argue that more than a century later an emphasis was made regarding *logos* as more disputative dialogue when contrasted with the more refined narratives of oral poetry. Another century later Plato proffered analyses which then led to a social repositioning of *mythos*, due in main part to his predilection for determining many such narratives as “synonymous with falsehood...” (Leonard & McClure, 2004, p. 3). Plato revealing an all too prevalent elitism endemic in the Greek empire, differentiated between the predominance of myth/truth views of a ruling elite, versus the myth-narrative propaganda disseminated within the lowlier classes. At the time of Euhemerus, the Greek philosopher of the early third century BC, the ancient commentators continued to consider myths as narratives containing historical facts; albeit encapsulated in the dominance of exaggerated superstitions accepted in earlier civilisations which they argued lacked the advanced tool of empirical enquiry. However, Euhemerus considered that particular myth details regarding the identity of the Greek Gods could be correlated with significant historical feats involving actual heroic figures. In this manner he determined that the deities were in truth men that had been elevated to god-hood.

By the time of the Renaissance, myth and mythology had seemingly undergone yet another repositioning from that of the established Platonic/Euhemerist lens of elitist preference and particular truth attainment. The classical myths had become ‘mired in associations of make-believe or, even worse, outright falsehoods designed to damn souls to Hell’ (Leonard & McClure, 2004, p. 7). It would appear that at this historical juncture myth was now assigned the earlier social connotations of *logos* and vice versa, *logos* were repositioned as authoritative narratives. Leonard and McClure cite Doniger’s (1998) *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth* in which he discusses the political power plays of the early church fathers such as Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, and later Tertullian. Tertullian’s widely dispersed “Thesis of Demonic Imitation” was deliberately intended to contrast the rivalry of the Gods of ancient Greek myths with the church’s own legacy of Jesus. By the time of the Enlightenment, numerous scholarly efforts were being undertaken in the study of the Ur language; the ultimate intent being to identify the firstborn lineage of God, and of course, to then assume the contingent prestige and authority of such descent. In these undertakings it was appropriately necessary to evaluate and research myths, and of course in so doing they were in main relegated to their earlier position as potentially authoritative narratives. The Enlightenment, characterised by logical and scientific methods, then gave rise to various attempts such as Giovanni Battista Vico’s 1725 scholastic effort at reorganising the chronology and meanings of myths into a logical system ‘... that used history, linguistics, iconography, and a great deal of ingenuity to align Egyptian, Greek and Roman myths with the key beliefs of his Christian culture’ (Leonard & McClure, 2004, p. 8).

It appears as though two historical strands, intertwined though distinct, informed the way in which myth has impacted 21st century modernity. The myths themselves reveal one strand which is that of temporal preservation and continuous wider social proliferation. That is to say that the

general populace continued to propagate their myths regardless the era, political or economic environment, and social or religious situations, and that the myths, though debatably static, were for the main part preserved throughout the ages. The parallel strand is that of the scholarly and elite perception of myth, or perhaps more accurately, of mythology.

Myths mean different things at different times. Originating in ancient pre-literate societies, traditional oral story telling was an entertainment, utilised in ritual performances and, perhaps more crucially, was a means of transmitting significant information between the generations. The people who shared oral narratives were simultaneously and without doubt, the living repositories of their society's preceding and contemporary histories. They were, in effect, living breathing encyclopaedias, dictionaries, interpreters, entertainers and educationalists. Ancient oral narratives were infused with the orators' and performers own life force, and so the stories were transmitted with the authority of multi-generational transmission. As the transmission of oral traditions shifted between narrators, time-periods and societies, varying emphases were transmitted to each new generation. The narratives themselves continued to retain intrinsic aspects such as the polarities of sun and moon, heaven and earth, light and darkness, good and evil, sacred and profane, deity and human, hero and trickster, the initiated and uninitiated, the elite member of a society and the commoner. With the ultimate transformation from preliterate to literate, oral traditions then became recorded scripts, forevermore subject to interdisciplinary analysis by non-members of a society and inevitably debate whilst often simultaneously continuing to be transmitted by authoritative figures with the advantage of multi-generational insights. Leonard and McClure go on to state:

For two and a half millennia, debates over the importance and meaning of myth have been struggles over matters of truth, religious belief, politics, social custom, cultural identity, and history. The history of mythology is a tale told by idiots – but also by sages, religious fundamentalists and agnostic theologians, idealists and cynics, racists and fascists, philosophers and scholars. Myth has been understood as containing the secrets of God, as the cultural DNA responsible for a people's identity, as a means of recognising all human knowledge, and as a justification for European and American efforts to colonize and police the world (Leonard & McClure, 2004, pp. 5-6).

Theoretical approaches to mythology have seen the emergence of a diverse array of intellectual means by which to extrapolate and analyse insights from commentators of ancient and modern civilisations. Historians have long sought to reconstruct past events by analysing mythical narratives in conjunction with such archaeological evidence as ancient ruins, burial sites, skeletal remains, housing structures, eating utensils, legal documents, clothing styles, early art and so forth. Homer, the attributed author of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, chronicled the Trojan War waged at Troy; a location disputed as the modern-day archaeological site of *Hisarlik* in Turkey. First excavated by the amateur English archaeologist Frank Calvert (1828-1908), *Hisarlik* has continued to be scrutinized and argued as the very same city to which Paris of Troy abducted the famed Helen. In 1998, this particular archaeological site was added to the UNESCO World Heritage list, which aims at preserving and protecting sites deemed of significance to the common heritage of humankind. Of course archaeologists, not altogether focussed upon historical aspects as such, refer to mythic narratives in order to validate the spatial and temporal aspects of unearthed artefacts. Myths remain a crucial resource for archaeological finds as a means by which to authenticate their theories of utilization, application and social relevance; often revealing critical cultural aspects of societies long vanished from the modern world.

Approaching mythology from the psychological vantage point enables a greater comprehension of cognitive intellectual behaviour and mechanisms, both in the narratives themselves and as they

are reflected within a society. Applying the principles of psychology, Carl Jung (1875-1961) emphasised his theory of the collective unconscious in an effort to explain cross-cultural similarities in mythology, as well as introducing in-depth analyses of archetypes, dream interpretation and the personalized meaning of myth within the individual psyche; regardless that the components of a myth were shared throughout members of a society. By contrast, Jung's former master and older contemporary Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), with whom he collaborated before parting ways, preferred to analyse and hypothesise about myths as containing embedded notions of religious origin, as well as ritual processes and systems. Notably, and contrary to Jung's more useful works in this field, Freud's own efforts focused more on the social perspective shown within myths. Much has been written regarding the significant works of both Jung and Freud; espousing their evident commonalities as much as their clear divergences. Nonetheless they each explored mythologies in order to assert their own ideas, albeit the more materialistic and reductive Freudian psychoanalysis versus the comparatively spiritualistic and holistic Jungian analytical psychology.

Sociological examinations of myths have tended towards sharing insights relevant to contemporary collective group behaviour. Sociologists, such as Malinowski and Levi-Strauss, looked at the underlying elements revealed within myths, going beyond assumptive reality (those 'taken for granted' aspects) in order to distinguish patterns which define particular groups and entire societies. Myths typically reveal hierarchical systems, whether of aspects of nature (earth, wind, and fire), animals (eagle, bear, and buffalo), deities (gods, demi-gods, angels) or humans (kings, princes and commoners). Sociological analyses go beyond such renderings in order to comprehend notions of social order involving ideas such as totemism, animism, pantheism and other social chains of command. In this manner they can further hypothesise about a society's value system(s), codes of conduct, laws, customs, and traditions. By interpreting the underlying and implicit descriptors and narrative ideology, sociologists can even suggest an entire society's foundational bases. A glance at the mythology of the ancient Romans quickly reveals the considerable extent to which this formidable single empire was in fact comprised of a multitude of important and much older conquered nations that were forcibly integrated into the one political power.

Imperial Histories of Myths in Aotearoa

Forcible integration by a conquering society, such as in the case of the Romans, is by no means a wholly ancient phenomenon and can be observed when we consider the imperialist histories of the Pacific. In so saying, Aotearoa NZ was not conquered as such, albeit various perceptions of our history may well portray such an idea. The advent of imperialism was in fact a mutually agreed event, with Aotearoa Māori originally seeking British protection against other unfriendly seafaring nations. As we understand our history today however, imperialist interests far exceeded those initially innocent prospects and the protectorate vantage proved privileging for the newly arriving colonials. Throughout the early 19th century foreign traders, then missionaries and eventually colonial settlers, bought their families, their dreams and of course their eurocentric ideologies. The rapidly increasing Pākehā population quickly sought to etch out a civilised landscape, and the significant differences between the two societies became ever more evident as points of contention which would lead to ultimate warfare. The Māori waka was conspicuously diminutive alongside the English sailing ships; the korowai (cloak) and piupiu (grass skirt) were minimal next to the full length dresses of the settler's wives; the patu (short club) and taiaha (long spear) were absurdly inferior to the imperialists' arsenal; and the indigenous pantheon and mythology was largely incomprehensible in contrast to the western religious doctrines and incumbent traditions. As Aotearoa swiftly transformed to the British Dominion of NZ, the

assimilationist intent of reconstructing the native population to resemble a civilised society required firstly dismantling the existing socio-cultural frameworks. To this end, and on the early settlers misperceived presumption that Māori were ‘primitive’ and ‘savage’ natives who desperately lacked in regards to literacy, morality and religion, the missionaries embraced their self-stylised evangelical commissions. Early ethnographic works by authors such as Grey, Shortland and Tregear cite frequent cases wherein Māori were encouraged and coerced to set aside their ancient practices in order to partake in the new teachings and favours of the missionaries and settlers. The pragmatic nature of Māori also admittedly facilitated this injurious process. From the onset, Māori as the then dominant society initially adopted these practices in parallel with their own so as to access the missionaries’ educational teachings and receive articles such as blankets, flour, hatchets, saws, nails and so forth. As Māori began the detrimental shift away from what in modernity we would refer to nostalgically as the era of pre-contact Māori, this initial mutual exchange system would ultimately expand from those most basic commodities, to eventually encapsulating complex social ideologies. Pre-contact weaponry, garments and so forth such as the waka, korowai, piupiu, patu and taiaha would become consigned within the modern classification of *traditional Māori symbols*, whilst the indigenous pantheon and mythology would be consigned to children’s story books.

By the turn of the twentieth century the former dominant and self-governing Māori population had dramatically fallen as a direct consequence of introduced diseases to which they had no immunity and the incapacity to maintain comparable hygiene standards to those of their dominant counterparts. Māori had simultaneously succumbed under the weight of adverse assimilationist forces such as the superior imperial military during warfare, government-enforced social autocracy, which supplanted their customary systems and language censorship which saw the society reach the point of being almost moribund. Of course such was not the case.

Following World War II, a new found respect for Māori arose, reflecting their much admired and crucial wartime participation alongside their Pākehā counterparts; each having fought under the banner of the same flag. By the mid twentieth century the urban Māori phenomenon had seen the vast majority relocate from their rural lifestyles to the burgeoning centres of commerce and industry, in order to earn satisfactory wages and support their families. The NZ landscape had begun to transform yet again, or perhaps the earlier transformations simply advanced, as biculturalism became a political manifesto and both society’s looked upon each other favourably. Māori efforts for autonomous recognition, parity and accord had by now facilitated the development of carving and weaving schools, cultural studies and language programs as the revitalisation of their heritage and indigeneity came to be asserted. As acclaimed academic Emeritus Professor Ranginui Walker has alluded, Māori had taken the deathbed which had been offered to them by Pākehā, and transformed it into a formidable vehicle for cultural mobilisation. The decades flew unceasingly towards the twenty-first century as reclamation processes and declaration events saw Māori grow from strength to strength. The Māori population had recovered from the edge of a precipice that had seen them almost utterly decimated. Not only had they recovered, they had learned to use their counterpart’s tools of education, law, economics, politics and their own intrinsic cultural attributes to advance their developed, and developing, indigeneity and prosperity.

Core agencies at local and national levels, such as formal representative bodies, Trust Boards, Federations, Leagues, Ministerial positions, the Office of Treaty Settlements and the Waitangi Tribunal, are prime examples of indicators that show the growing Māori success. Children are no longer permitted to be punished for speaking their native tongue in public. Instead they are now encouraged to speak both Māori and English, with nationwide programs available to facilitate this. The Māori language has been revitalised, the culture and belief systems reinvigorated, their

holistic worldviews re-empowered, their ancient histories acknowledged, and their perpetual myths and mythology have been circuitously reinstated.

Conclusion

In Aotearoa, a century and a half ago, my great grandparents knew of little else but their unique kin, culture and immediate worldview in a landscape whose population was almost entirely indigenous. The privileged positioning of the atua was unquestioned in their world, and their myths had continuously perpetuated ancient and customary Māori ideologies. Then a century ago as my grandparents fought for survival in the wake of the inevitable imperial dominance of the Dominion of New Zealand, the indigenous knowledge systems and myths were necessarily concealed in order to abide by the newly introduced assimilation processes. Of course my parents had already left the modern education system by the time the Dominion had completed its contemporary transformation to global recognition as an independent sovereign state half a century ago. Yet my parents' memories of having been unabashedly admonished for speaking their native tongue or expressing their indigenous ideologies remains acute. Māori myths had of course been hushed and had become largely consigned to children's story books or secreted at marae. That is to say that the atua had either been confined by their own people, or demeaned by others.

Then by the time I had left high school, a quarter of a century ago, the educational environment was such that I was still being mocked for having innocently referred to indigenous knowledge systems, mythic figures and customary law. The wider NZ public arena was still able to turn its back on the myths; regardless that vast formal Māori oral traditions had not only persisted, but had by now departed the confines of marae and entered the advanced realms of academia and politics. The memories, collective narratives and privilege of the atua was being released as Aotearoa New Zealand embraced its autochthonous cultural heritage.

Today, if I were to approach a politician and ask them to acknowledge my mythic narratives involving deities, ancestors, events and declarations, for which it may be impossible to produce verifiable evidence from a non-Māori perspective, I suspect I might well be looked upon with disdain and disparagement. However, if I were to speak with politicians and academics present at a formal occasion, and impart a whaikorero, in which those very same deities, ancestors, events and declarations are spoken of, I would be acknowledged, silently applauded and accorded respect.

Crucial aspects of this oral phenomenon still require consideration. As the Tribunal and parallel organisations continue to develop, so too do they inadvertently advance indigenous ideologies. In my mind I hear the privileged Māori pantheon gracefully returning to their former status and homeland shores of Aotearoa, and to the public realm of debate and consideration. I don't think they ever left, not truly. They simply became temporarily hushed within tukutuku covered whareniui and momentarily consigned to the special spaces of children's imaginations. However, the voices and memories of the atua are being amplified and their narratives are being re-encountered and disseminated. Māori myths, and mythology, are again being engaged at a higher level of communication, and oral histories are echoing their revered teachings whilst the indigeneity of Aotearoa Māori continues to be strengthened.

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Author Notes

The author acknowledges the invaluable academic and professional contribution, care, support and advice of my supervisor and dear friend, Dr. Wendy Cowling of the University of Waikato.

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