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# The Potential of Prophecy: Māori Prophetism and Community Development

In nineteenth century Aotearoa-New Zealand prophet-leaders challenged the hegemony of colonialism by melding Indigenous ideas with introduced ideas, as a means of both cultural survival and resistance against colonialism. One such nineteenth century prophet-leader was Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki (c.1832-c.1891) who blended traditional Māori knowledge with biblical ideas. Te Kooti gave many prophecies delivered as riddles rich with metaphor and mystery. Following severe land loss in the Rangitaiki Valley in the Bay of Plenty of New Zealand at the hands of a white man, Te Kooti issued a prophecy of promise and restoration. Within the Māori tribes of Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka, to whom this prophecy was given, Te Kooti's revelations of hope gained new meaning; his words continually transported from history into the present.

This paper will begin by giving some historical background around the emergence of the prophecy. This paper will also demonstrate the potential of prophecy by showing how Te Kooti's prophecy has been used as the basis for a research model which I have developed for my doctoral thesis. My doctoral research aims to use Te Kooti's prophecy as a platform on which to build a tribally relevant community development framework for the future.

Māori connections to land are pivotal to Māori identity. However, the Government of New Zealand disrupted these connections by claiming a pre-emptive right to land which was considered 'unused'. The basis for this claim was New

Zealand's founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1840 (Cheater & Hopa, 1997; Orange, 1987; Walker, 1990). The State launched an assault on Māori who refused to sell their land and by 1900 the relatively new State had acquired over ninety per cent of the country as State-owned assets and land earmarked for the plethora of Pākehā or white settlers (Cheater & Hopa, 1997; Walker, 1990). The Government became a forceful and exploitive land purchaser using methods which caused intense division within Māori society; from the late 1840s, secret land purchasing deals were facilitated by Government officials without thorough investigations into land ownership (Ballara, 1996). Huge lots of land were also confiscated by the Government as a method of punishment for Māori resistance, whilst also servicing the insatiable settler appetite for land (Boast & Hill, 2009; Gilling, 2009).

In the 1870s, the Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka tribes were considered by the Government to be rebels because they followed the nineteenth century prophet Te Kooti (Binney, 2001a, 2002, 2003; Paul, 1995; Pouwhare, 2004). Consequently they were captured and forced to relocate to an area outside of their tribal boundaries (Binney, 2001a, 2002, 2003; Paul, 1995; Pouwhare, 2004) where they were detained in what has been referred to by the late New Zealand historian Judith Binney (2002, 2003, 2009) as a 'concentration camp'. In 1872 Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka were released and they returned to the Rangitaiki Valley where they re-established their lives at a place called Te Houhi (Arapere, 2002; Binney, 2001a, 2002, 2003, 2009; Paul, 1995). From the mid-1880s however, the lives of Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka were to change dramatically.

In 1886 a prominent Pākehā (white man) by the name of Harry Burt, who worked as a Native Land Court interpreter, and lived in the Te Houhi community, defrauded Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka out of legal ownership of 7,000 acres of land at Te Houhi. He did this using the Native Land Court system,

set up by the colonists (Binney, 1997, 2001, 2002, 2009; Boast, 2008), which was an effective instrument for alienating Māori from their land (Ka'ai-Mahuta, 2010). Binney (2001a) contends that Burt belonged to a "sub-culture": a visible group of early settled Pakeha men who lived with Maori women" (p. 162) and spoke the native language. Burt "claimed friendship and more – kinship – with Maori... He was a manipulator, who created a mood and experience of confidence and trust. He was a swindler who outmanoeuvred a prophet" (Binney, 2001a, p. 148) and fraudulently acquired ownership of the home base of Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka.

When Harry Burt sold Te Houhi many court battles followed. The land eventually fell into the hands of James Grant, who has been described as 'mean spirited' (Boast, 2002). Grant made it difficult for Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka by persecuting them and destroying their food supplies; and in the winter of 1907, assisted by the police, he evicted Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka (Binney, 2001a, 2007; Boast, 2002; Wylie, 1908, cited in Wouden, 1980), some say at gun point. Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka were expelled from their homes, some fled into the dense Urewera forest ranges for a time, while others relocated to Waiohau in the Eastern Bay of Plenty (Binney, 2009). Grant kept the community's school building and their wharenuī or ancestral house. The government paid Grant £140 in 1908 for the wharenuī which was then dismantled by Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka and transported by horse and cart, and by river, to Waiohau where it was rebuilt and reopened in 1909 (Binney, 2001; Boast, 2002; Paul, 1995). It was the original loss of ownership of the land at Te Houhi in the mid-1880s which led to Te Kooti's utterance of a significant prophecy which offered hope for the future, in the face of devastation.



**Tama-ki-Hikurangi whareniui, Waiohau. Photograph by Byron Rangiwai, 2010.**

The name of Te Kooti's prophecy was Te Umutaoroa, which means 'earth oven of long cooking'. As in other parts of the Pacific, Māori in Aotearoa/New Zealand traditionally cooked food using an umu, or earth oven. A pit is dug in the earth, in which a fire is burned for a number of hours to heat stones. Once these stones are hot, food in weaved baskets is placed on top, covered in leaves, and then soil. After the required cooking time, the soil and leaves are removed and the food is ready to be served. Te Umutaoroa refers to this process of cooking in a metaphorical way, and as the name suggests, this particular umu requires a long cooking time.

Te Umutaoroa is a prophetic discourse which promised Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka the return of their lost lands and resources, and according to some narratives, the discovery or generation of other resources such as diamonds, gold, oil and minerals (Binney, 2001a). According to one of the late leaders of Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka, the Reverend Hieke Tupe

(Doherty, 1995; Binney, 2001a, 2009), Te Kooti had a vision of an umu with the power to correct the wrongs of the past. It is said that Te Kooti placed eight stones, each with a particular restorative mauri or life force, to be uncovered in the future (Doherty, 1995; Binney, 2001a). The mauri of Te Umutaoroa, as articulated by the late Rev. Hieke Tupe, are as follows:

te mauri atua: the essence of spirituality; the belief in God  
te mauri whenua: the life force of the land  
te mauri tangata: the life force of the people  
te mauri whakapono: the power of belief, or faith  
te mauri whakaora i nga iwi: the power to heal the people  
te mauri hohonu: the mauri [life force] of hidden wealth – minerals, gold, diamonds and oil (perhaps), which lie underground  
te mauri arai atu i nga pakanga: the power to return war from this land to other countries  
te mauri whakahoki i nga iwi: the power to return people to their land (Binney, 2001a, p. 158).

The uncovering of these eight stones guarantees the people of Te Houhi, spiritual and physical renewal, regeneration, reuniting of people and land, and economic security (Binney, 2001a). The purpose of all umu is to cook food to feed a family, to feed a village, to feed a people, and so Te Umutaoroa promises Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka the ‘cooked sustenance’ of life and salvation (Binney, 1995, 2001a, 2007, 2009).

To this day Te Umutaoroa remains unfulfilled. It is however a discourse which is in a constant state of flux shifting from the past to the present, subjected to discursive modification, shaping the prophecy for the particular contexts in which it is used to inspire and give hope. Judith Binney (2007) states that:

Te Umutaoroa has become an unfulfilled quest-narrative. It is unfulfilled because the land is lost; indeed, it is now drowned beneath the waters of a hydro-electric dam, built in 1980. Little islands dot the lake where Te Umutaoroa once was. Once again new meanings are being wrought from this changed landscape (p. 154).



**The general area where Te Kooti was said to have placed Te Umutaoroa. The area is now drowned beneath the water after the building of a hydro-electric dam in 1980. Photograph by Byron Rangiwai, 2010.**

Te Kooti's prophecies were given in riddles, meaning that it is up to the individual to interpret the messages contained therein (Bennett & Mackenzie, 2011).<sup>1</sup> Te Umutaoroa has been subjected to interpretation throughout the generations and is still referred to today. For example, Te Umutaoroa is used to inform the pedagogy of the local Indigenous tribal school in

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<sup>1</sup> Hemana Eruera Manuera made this statement in episode five of 'Whare Māori' directed by Bennett & Mackenzie (2011).

Waiohau which teaches only in the Tūhoe dialect of the Māori language, and also the philosophy and practices of a Māori health, wellbeing and healing clinic. Additionally, from October 2008 the prophecy of Te Umutaoroa became the name and underpinning philosophy of a political movement. This movement included Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka, and clan groupings from other sub-tribal areas located in the Bay of Plenty who were (and some continue to be) dissatisfied with aspects of Tūhoe tribal management.

In September 2011 Auckland based Atamira Dance Company, led by Maaka Pepene of Patuheuheu, performed an interpretive contemporary dance piece. This performance was entitled 'Te Houhi: the people and the land are one' and told the story of Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka's land loss, whilst exploring the potential of Te Kooti's promise for the future. The work moves, according to Whyte (2011), through three stages:

*Te Ao o Neheraa (the ancient world)* establishes a relatively untroubled past, the Ngati Haka Patuheuheu people living in harmony and respect for the land and one another.

*Te Ao Hurihuri (the world turns upside down)* shows the impact of Pakeha colonisation, the rise of Te Kooti, military reactions to passive resistance, the demoralisation of the people through many years of court battles over the fraudulent sale of their land at Te Houhi, and finally the eviction of the people from their land, leaving behind their treasured wharenui which was inlaid with early Maori figurative art, and central to their Ringatu religion.

*Te Ao Marama (the world of light)* shows the eventual re-uniting of the people with their meeting house, which they dismantled and carried by hand to its new home at Waiohau [sic], along with ancestral remains and other artefacts necessary to the development of a new harmony of the people with the land. - though even today we hear on the News of ongoing tension between the Crown and Ngai Tuhoe (paras. 5-7).

From the way in which Te Umutaoroa has been utilised, it is clear that the prophecy continues to be re-interpreted for the needs of the people. The prophecy has, according to Binney (2007) "...acquired an autonomous life. It is no longer tied [exclusively] to its origins, [and] has been transformed to possess vastly extended meanings..." (Binney, 2007, p. 154).

In my current doctoral research I am using a model which is based on interpretations of the lifeforces of Te Umutaoroa. The model centres on the lifeforce of Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka epistemology (te mauri mātauranga o Patuheuheu me Ngāti Haka), and blends my own interpretations of the prophecy with specific research practices or outputs, some of which have been influenced by the ideas of educationalist Paulo Freire. I will now outline the eight parts of this model.



**Figure 1: Te Umutaoroa Research Model**



### **1.0 Te Mauri Atua: Respect for the Spiritual Dimension**

Te Mauri Atua, or the life-force of the spiritual dimension, acknowledges the connections of Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka to the ancestors and the spiritual realm. Te Mauri Atua is about the researcher respecting the elements of the spiritual dimension with an awareness and respect for Māori cultural protocols, concepts and values.

### **2.0 Te Mauri Whenua: Respect for Physical, Cultural, Spiritual Landscapes**

Te Mauri Whenua, or the life-force of the land, is about respecting the land, and in turn acknowledges the intimate interconnectivity of land, environment and people. Te Mauri Whenua insists that the researcher demonstrates respect for Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka land, people and environment, as well as a strong familiarity with tribal history and experiences.

### **3.0 Te Mauri Tāngata: Respect for People – Matemate-ā-one**

Te Mauri Tangata, or the lifeforce of the people, is about demonstrating respect, reciprocity, generosity, and matemate-ā-one. Matemate-ā-one refers literally to the process of dying and becoming one with the soil; this concept substantiates the interconnectedness of people and land, and describes the intense fondness and connection that exists between them (Moorfield, 2011). As a researcher therefore, it is important to demonstrate Māori cultural values in terms of showing respect to people, and ensuring that participants are taken care of. The researcher must also be aware of the absolutely cherished connections of the people to the land despite the tragedies of land loss.

### **4.0 Te Mauri Whakapono: Respect for Beliefs**

Te Mauri Whakapono, or the lifeforce of hope is a principle about faith, belief and truth. Te Mauri Whakapono is the

driving force behind Te Kooti's philosophy for change. Belief combined with action - like theory and practice - activates and transports the unlimited potentiality of being into the now, into reality. It is the power of belief which brings Te Umutaoroa into the lived reality of Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka, and as such the researcher has a responsibility to show respect to the kaupapa or philosophy of Te Umutaoroa, and the differing views and ideas which surround it.

### **5.0 Te Mauri Whakaora i ngā Iwi: Contributes to the 'Practice of Freedom'**

Te Mauri Whakaora i nga Iwi is about healing the people of Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka in terms of historical injustices and breaking free from the perpetual cycle of social, political and economic oppression. Paulo Freire (1972) states: "It is absolutely essential that the oppressed participate in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as subjects of the transformation" (p. 127). Therefore the research must contribute to Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka's engagement in the 'practice of freedom' where the oppressed liberate themselves through acting upon the world to change reality.

### **6.0 Te Mauri Hōhonu: Contributes to a Theory of Freedom**

Te Mauri Hōhonu speaks of hidden or underground wealth. In terms of transformation this mauri is about deeper theoretical understandings around oppression, liberation and freedom. The hidden wealth inherent in this mauri can relate to the need for the oppressed to access new knowledge and to engage in true conscientised education: the practice of freedom. This mauri emphasises the fact that the researcher must be motivated by theories of liberation, self-determination, and transformation when working with Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka.

### **7.0 Te Mauri arai atu i ngā Pakanga: Contributes to Conscientisation and Resistance**

Te Mauri arai atu i ngā Pakanga, is about “...the power to return war from this land to other countries” (Binney, 2001a, p. 158). War can be interpreted as a metaphor for physical, symbolic and ideological conflicts with colonisation. In my view this principle is essentially about de-colonisation. It is about becoming conscientised or in other words, being conscious and aware of the nature of oppression, the political, economic and social barriers which prevent Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka development, and how these can be overcome through praxis: action and reflection. Thus the researcher must be conscious and aware of oppression and hegemony at the global, national, and tribal levels, and must contribute to a culture of conscientisation and transformation within the community.

### **8.0 Te Mauri Whakahoki i ngā Iwi: Contributes to Restoration**

Te Mauri Whakahoki i ngā Iwi is about returning the people to the land, and returning all of the lost resources. This notion has provided Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka with the impetus to continue to resist historical and contemporary injustices, and work towards fulfilling the discourse of Te Umutaoroa: the restoration of their lost lands and resources. Therefore the researcher must engage with the community and contribute to ideas around restoration and community development.

### **Conclusion**

The legacy of Te Umutaoroa is a potent and highly significant narrative for Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka. Te Umutaoroa is literally a symbol of hope for a better, more just future, in the face of colonisation and severe land loss: it is a utopian vision directly connected to the history, experiences, and therefore the epistemology, of the people. Throughout its history, Te Umutaoroa has been used in a variety of contexts and in contemporary times is used to inform educational practice,

health and healing practices, and politics. I have demonstrated my use of Te Umutaoroa to inform my model for carrying out Indigenous research within my tribes, which activates the potential of prophecy in research and in community development. This model and my research into Te Umutaoroa, will inform the future creation of a community development framework for Patuheuheu and Ngāti Haka, which I hope will be beneficial to the community in time to come.

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