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Puna Kei`ā: Te au tangata ē te `enua
The district of Kei`ā: The people and the land

A Seminar paper presented to INGX 501

Michael Reilly

Introduction

This seminar is about a place in the Cook Islands. To be more precise, it concerns a research project that explores the cultural meanings of the land comprising the district of Kei`ā, one of six wedge-shaped *puna* (districts) constituting the largest land units in the island of Mangaia. During my research over some 15 or more years there I have been privileged to build up a variety of relationships with the people of the land, the *tangata `enua*. The following seminar reflects upon the ethics of research in an indigenous community, and has benefitted from a long time collaboration with Dr Richard Walter, an archaeologist at the University of Otago. Many of the following ideas have developed in the course of conversations between the two of us about our work in Kei`ā.

My own connections with Mangaia begin with my Ph.D in 1987. Initially the thesis focused on the work of a mid-19th century missionary who developed an international reputation for his pioneering ethnographic research into the Island's mythologies and traditions. As I read at the various archives I became more interested in understanding Mangaia's traditional history; drawing on my language and ethnohistorical skills acquired at Māori Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. That original thesis continues to greatly interest those Mangaian who come across it in libraries. It was while researching the Ph.D in the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington that I met a Mangaian scholar,

the Rev. Pāpā Aratangi. He introduced me to Mataora Harry who is an important collaborator in my work and, in particular, in the research project that I wish to talk about today. Another Manganian who came upon my work, the late Teariki No`oroa, lived here in Dunedin. He encouraged and supported my studies in many ways; for example, by acting as my tutor in the Manganian language, *te tara Mangania*. He also became an important advisor for me in my subsequent researches into the island's early history. Unfortunately he died before much of it was ever published. These kinds of personal and intellectual connections create obligations for a researcher, binding us in a series of relationships with those people who have gone out of their way to help us.

This seminar might be described as a 'metaseminar' about research work in Mangania, focusing as it does on research methods and on attempts to practise an acceptable ethics as part of a project about an island's cultural landscape involving both outsiders, myself and Richard Walter, and different Manganians; in particular, Mataora Harry. The seminar will endeavour to describe our research aims, methods and ethics, with particular reference to the problems we encountered, and the answers we have come up with so far. Talking about research methods and ethics is particularly appropriate in this forum as it concerns a variety of issues of relevance both to the Master of Indigenous Studies, and to Te Tumu, the School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies.

The Project

First amongst these is the complex nature of the particular project we are discussing. It comprises three key collaborators: an historian (Michael Reilly) wedded to his written texts, an archaeologist (Richard Walter) deploying the wonders of modern science, and a local expert in traditional knowledge (Mataora Harry), who is also profoundly involved in the politics of the place we have set about researching in. We decided that a study of the

cultural aspects of Kei`ā's landscape might usefully combine all of our skills together in a mutually productive way. Our project is also consciously intended as an engagement between different intellectual and cultural traditions; between strangers and people of the land (who have also visited the strangers' land and often lived there); between first world researchers with access to research funds, and a third world society negotiating a way between an indigenous system of agriculture and land use, and a postmodern world of global capitalism and mass tourism. For Richard and myself there is also the challenge arising from our desire to develop an ethical practice about researching with and for a local indigenous community, while at the same time satisfying the expectations and requirements of a Western intellectual tradition based upon ideas of authorship and research outcomes that often ignore the dynamic (and unpredictable) relationship between researcher and the researched.

Backgrounds

The three principal participants in this project: Richard Walter, Michael Reilly, and the chief of Kei`ā, Mataora Harry, have each arrived at this collaboration from three very different worlds.

Mataora and I first worked together on Manganian traditions and their translations in 1997 as part of a University-funded project, with Mataora temporarily joining the staff at Te Tumu (along with Teariki No`oroa) as a researcher. My relationship with Mataora had been brokered by the Rev. Pāpā Aratangi who recommended that I contact Mataora when I had been seeking a research associate knowledgeable about Manganian traditions. I should observe that all these men proved willing to help a Papa`ā who could write about texts in the Manganian language but not speak to them in it, who wrote about places he had never visited, and of people whose descendants he would not recognise in the street!

When Richard and I began to talk several years ago about collaborating together, combining our research strengths in archaeology and history, we assumed this would be based on Mangaia since we had both undertaken separate research projects there. The current project which includes cultural knowledge, such as traditional history, and the physical dimensions of the land itself, seemed an excellent way to combine our respective research strengths. What most appealed to me about this project was the opportunity it presented, firstly, to understand the relationship of the historic place names to the Island environment, and secondly, to establish connections between the ancestors in the historical texts and their contemporary descendants. These concerns and interests had crystallised for me a few years before in 1998 when Mataora had taken me to important historic sites that were referred to in the writings we had read together, and which he had some personal interest in. Many of these were old ritual *marae* sites now overgrown and lost in the bush; perhaps, the most dramatic remains of how Mangaian society used to be. I found it hard to describe or locate these places because my own researches had hitherto been profoundly textual and unrelated to a 'real' world out there where things existed in the round, and in which people continued to live and change the world around them.

Once we got more serious about a particular project, Mataora very quickly became a third member of this research triumvirate. Given our concern to join our research with local experts in a mutually beneficial project, this combination seemed the most satisfactory arrangement. It also meant that the particular focus of our enquiry would most likely be based in Kei'ā where Mataora held the traditional Ata title as *kavana*, or chief of the district, and therefore could most easily facilitate and guide our work. Thus Mataora's contribution determined the exact location of a research project which up to then had been only discussed in the vaguest of terms by Richard and me.

Each of us brought to our conversations about the project a distinctive view of the world and of the possibilities for research. We also shared an interest in the land, not simply as geology or geomorphology, but as something animated by cultural meanings. Richard, Mataora and myself were talking about the land as a constructed world, as a landscape, which had been transformed through time, by the actions of its inhabitants. As a result of our conversations the idea of landscape became the dominant theme of our research collaboration.

As any archaeology student or gardener might tell you the land you stand on comprises many layers, each distinctive in its own way. Depending on your point of view, each layer and what you find in it might say something about previous uses of the land, about the people who occupied it, or whether it was useful for growing one plant or another. These layers together tell a series of stories, about past land uses and occupations. All such stories are an historian's business. Thus the layers of the landscape of Kei'ā brought together the concerns of each of the three research collaborators. It has also become an explanatory metaphor for our work, referring to the layers of meaning, interpretation and of knowledge, which we each together and separately make as we talk, walk over and map the cultural landscape of the Kei'ā district.

Ancient Manganian society

The Manganian society portrayed in the traditions, as transmitted and recorded since the 19th century, is a distinctive one and the following is intended simply as a brief overview.

Manganian society is constituted by kin ties and by people's allegiances to chiefs. In the island's historical narratives the *ivi* was the largest category of kinship. Such an *ivi* incorporated several *kōpū* (usually three), each of which contained several *ānau*. Not all kin groups followed this model, with some never expanding beyond a *kōpū*. Only the *kōpū*

and the *`ānau* seem to have formed corporate groups. The *ivi* referred only to the ancestral ties that united (at least in theory) the different *kōpū*. These various groups were very independent-minded and were as likely to fight one another as combine against outsiders. There were also other kinds of groupings of people not strictly constituted in terms of their kin ties. These included *vaka* which normally referred to the forces arrayed under their respective chiefly leaders in battle. Other terms such as *aronga tangata*, or *matakeinanga* appear to have included kin and non-kin followers of one or other leading chiefs.

Government in these narratives was divided into two branches, the secular and the spiritual. The secular arm comprised the chiefly leaders, notably the *pava* (now known as *kavana*) and the *kairanga nuku* (now known as the *`ui rangatira*), responsible for the land divisions known as a *puna* and the *tapere* respectively. In pre-Christian times these leaders were distinguished by their abilities as warriors, though traditions also suggest a managerial capacity in terms of organising the people and controlling the land and economic activities, notably the production of food (the latter is a responsibility still carried out by their chiefly descendants).

The spiritual arm of government was formed by the priestly mediums for various *atua*. The highest ranking of these mediums were the three *ariki*, followed by mediums for the different tribal *atua*. The mediums of politically more significant tribes played a larger role in the island's government and history than others; doubtless because in their eyes the tribe's success was a sign of this *atua*'s greater powers and strength.

The most politically dominant chief became the *mangaia*, usually following one or more battles in which he defeated any other contestants to the title. This supreme secular ruler allocated lands to his various supporters. If not already kinsmen, the *mangaia* would effect marriages between his kinswomen (such as his daughters) and his supporters in order to

guarantee the latter's loyalty. To be formally recognised as the *mangaia*, the chief had to undergo a ritual inauguration supervised by the collective *ariki*. This involved a series of ritual acts, the best known of which (because it fascinated Europeans so much) involved a human sacrifice from one or other subject tribal groups.

Being a chiefly society, where the lives of commoners counted for very little in the scheme of things, the history of Mangaia centres around the various deeds of the ruling class; in particular, the contests for political dominance by aspirants to the *mangaia* title. Various stories relate the assassinations of office holders, their betrayal by one or other putative supporters, and the battles which decided who would hold that office. The support of the priestly orders could help or hinder the selection of such leaders. Sometimes a medium (as the inspired voice of the *atua* itself) advised the tribe's leaders in terms of strategies, sometimes an *ariki* opposed the candidate for *mangaia*, and sometimes the medium became the *mangaia*. Women too, through their marriages into other tribal groups, could intervene and save the day for one or other defeated person. They were also redoubtable warriors and would fight alongside their husbands and sons against opponents. If women were not chiefs, they did serve as mediums, and on occasion succeeded to one of the three *ariki* titles.

Mapping the cultural landscape

Mapping a cultural landscape is a lot easier said than done. Armed with the maps of the physical dimensions of the landscape, I strode off into the valleys of Kei'ā, along with Mataora or Tua'ine Papatua (one of the lesser ranking *rangatira*), to try and place the names and associated histories on them.

My journeys with Mataora covered much historical and cultural information, prompted by particular place names. Every Manganian language reference had to be checked back, often more than once, in order for me to make sure I had the glottal stops and macrons in the right place; vowels too, such as the difference between the *e* and *i*, had to be checked. Mataora insisted on this, and spelled out each word if need be. These conversations had many of the features of a one to one instruction, between the knowledgeable native teacher (Mataora had been a schoolteacher in his earlier life), and the foreigner who did not know the most obvious things. Once I had obtained the correct names I was faced by the task of transmitting this information to the mapmakers, and of making sure that the names got spelt correctly on the maps themselves (something I was not always successful in).

The greatest challenge I experienced was the movement between the oral narratives in my conversations with Mataora and others, and the forbidding precision of the mapped spaces on paper. It was as if I had to move between two worlds. James Robinson, who undertook the arduous technical work of making the maps, had warned me that once the names were written on the maps, these locations would be accepted by the locals as being the true ones, regardless of whether that was actually the case or not. This put the fear of mapmakers into me. Until then I had not realised what a hit and miss affair it can be to transfer local knowledge onto these paper emissaries from the Western cartographic tradition. I tried as best I could. The following is the kind of scenario that frequently occurred.

Mataora or Tua'ine would gesticulate towards a long ridge totally covered in dense forest cover and say that 'over there' was such and such a place. I would hold out the map towards them and say, as diplomatically as I could, 'where would "there" be on the map do you think?' 'Oh, it's between . . . ' (and proceed to name one or two more names, neither of which were on my map either, thereby compounding my mental crisis). And so it would go on, as both parties had to think out exactly what part of that ridge, as drawn on the map

before us, could properly be called such and such a place. It required both of us to grapple with new worlds of knowledge. However, it also made me ponder about the complex negotiations and discussions that went in to deciding on the correct location of place names on any map. I wondered about the experiences of other mapmakers, and about the processes required to bring their maps into being. Did the local people simply provide inaccurate or false information in order to get some importunate foreigner wielding a map off their back?

Tua`ine retold this story when farewelling us from the island on one of our visits. It was filled with this kind of conversation: 'Such and such a place is over there', 'where over there is such and such a place', 'there!', 'But where is there?!', and so on; to everyone's evident amusement. As such an anecdote reveals, our colleagues such as Tua`ine soon grasped the demands of locating their three dimensional knowledge of a place onto the one dimensional requirements of a map. In that sense, my journeys and efforts to understand the history of the land and to record it in map form, were matched by a similar passage by the locals, who had to convert their intimate knowledge of place as a space they worked in and traveled through into the new context of maps and their associated systems of recording cultural knowledge.

Mataora, Tua`ine, Richard and I complemented our struggles with making maps, with a series of interviews, exploring local understandings of the land and its uses. Many of these concerned the most striking feature of the landscape for a modern visitor; namely, the *taro* plantations and the complex system of irrigation which sustains them. At times, our conversations were conducted in the field, standing at significant sites; for example, beside the boundary markers, *kena*, usually a block of coral transported to the site, which delineated the *tapere*, sub-districts, of each *puna*. Other times we conducted interviews at home or in people's front yards. A notable outside interview was conducted with an old

man, Pāmetu Metuauti, well regarded for his knowledge. The interviewer was the *rangatira* of the *tapere*, Tua`ine Papatua, who in part conducted the interview because Pāmetu only spoke the language of Mangaia. In the process Tua`ine provided the rest of us sitting there with a translation of what the old man said. As Tua`ine explained he could ask Pāmetu such questions and the latter would answer because Tua`ine was the local chief. In this situation the outsiders's role was restricted to setting the questions, and recording the talk. In fact Tua`ine asked many questions of his own in addition to ours, as he became more confident in his ability to conduct research. In this example, the researched began to actively participate in the seeking out and recording of local knowledge. When we returned to New Zealand and wondered what would be the most appropriate gift for Tua`ine, we quickly decided on a tape recorder, because he had expressed an interest in continuing the interviewing role he had assumed, initially for practical and political reasons, in the course of our work on the Island.

Walking around the landscape, especially in association with Mataora and Richard, began to change my understanding of the narratives I had previously read in manuscripts or books. For instance, I had always conceived of the battles to decide who would take the *mangaia* title as taking place in some remote and uninhabited corner of the island. Perhaps I was imagining courtly duels at dawn in some discrete, out of the way place. In fact a lot of the major battles between substantial numbers of men and women occurred right in the middle of populous areas. Traditional sources had described how people had often at the first sign of trouble fled to refuges away from the living areas (such as caves, remoter areas in the bush, or the rockier and less accessible *rāei* areas in the *makatea*), and it now made a lot more sense why they would do this.

In walking about the Kei`ā landscape, I also realized that the battle sites could be quite small in size which perhaps suggests that the numbers involved in the fighting at any one

time were quite limited (sometimes various groups might fight, and be replaced or reinforced by latecomers). Other sites seem to suggest that the fighting took the form of running battles, which went for some distance, in and around the nucleated housing. Again traditions do talk of pursuits during or in the closing stages of a battle and this is most likely what they meant. One or other side was forced to run literally for the hills and valley ridges, hotly pursued by their opponents. The defeated party might have to stop and fight at some times, and run at others. Meanwhile, the air would be thick with tribal war cries, the loud commands of chiefs, the calls, cries and moans of the afflicted or dying men and women, and the sharp clash of ironwood weapons. The hunting of opponents in fact could go on for months after a decisive contest, with individuals or small groups of refugee opponents in out of the way spots being caught and either saved or killed depending on the relationship between the parties.

Other favoured fighting sites were amongst the *taro* plantations, on the banks and pathways which threaded their way between them, or on the flat areas surrounding the plantations, and always with escape routes inland or to the coast available in case of defeat (Te Ruanoni'anga was an example of the latter). Other battle sites were indeed fought in remoter locations, on or near the inland hills or ridges above the valleys, or in places situated on or near the boundaries between *puna*, either inland or on the coast.

Outcomes

Just as Mataora, Richard and I contributed many layers of knowledge to this project about Kei'ā's landscape, so there is more than one layer of outcomes. If Mataora facilitated our stay, shared his knowledge, advised on the maps, participated in our interviews, and helped determine the research focus of this project, so too did he have other more local concerns which he involved us in. Thus as the then Tourism Officer for the Government in Mangaia,

he was interested in information which could be used to make a trip to Mangaia more interesting and informative for tourists, and so help generate some income for the locals through increased tourism. Already the limited numbers of tourists are guided around historic sites. Mataora hoped to build on this, as well as increase the number of activities tourists could do, including walks around attractive or historic places and so forth. We had a number of discussions about ways our research could be presented so as to interest such people as eco-tourists visiting Mangaia. One of these included our multimedia presentation of our research that is planned for a website. Another was the writing of tourist oriented brochures and the creation of a tourist map highlighting places and sites of potential interest to visitors. Mataora himself had started having informational signposts placed at particular historic sites, which in part at least drew on our collaborative work (and on my previous work with Mataora).

Mataora also wanted to inform the people of Mangaia about their own history and of our work. In earlier visits he had arranged for me to talk to students at the local high school. During each of our visits Mataora has interviewed Richard and the others in our party about our work on the local community TV. For a moment several reclusive and somewhat intense scholars, committed to the sharing of knowledge with the locals, have found themselves crammed into a very small room and made to speak into a camera perilously near their faces, all the while hoping that their answers might seem coherent to the viewers. Another time Mataora interviewed Richard and myself on video and included a critical commentary about some contemporary issues which concerned him as a chief. I looked at Richard to see if he was feeling as uncomfortable as I was at the way our research had so effortlessly become part of a local issue which we knew nothing about. If not a form of involvement with indigenous communities that we had envisaged or had any control over, it did highlight the fact that local people had their own issues which they wanted to talk

about in relation to our project. Fortunately, no Manganians have ever said anything to either of us about our performances on this or any other occasion.

Our desire to contribute to the community involved Richard and our map maker, James Robinson, in other local projects, where their map making skills proved of immense help to Mataora and other people. One example, concerned the surveying of a site for the installation of a wind turbine. These commitments came up in the course of our work on the Island and had to be juggled with the completion of the research tasks we had planned for the trip. Having some technically competent researchers (as opposed to historians) on the ground meant that the community were able to get tasks done that otherwise would have to have waited for someone from Rarotonga, or Tahiti. The locals, I suspect, had more control over the proceedings than might have been the case if they had called in technicians from such places.

The maps of Kei'ā proved our greatest success, combining as they did all of our collective knowledge. Some days I would leave the archaeologists to their field work and pore over the map with one or other Manganian, or just try and make order of my notes sitting on a bench outside our accommodation. I had some of my most revealing encounters then, as one Manganian or another, on the way somewhere else, would call in and look over the map with me. Of course they could 'see' it all differently from me; I suspect they had a three dimensional view of the district in their mind's eye. They would peer at some of the names I had recorded, and we would talk about them, and then all of a sudden, they would provide me with a flurry of other names, that filled up some blank or another. Or they would tell me a story they had heard about such and such a place, and try and put it into an English form of narrative that I would understand. Other people sitting around or passing by would almost inevitably involve themselves in this informal seminar.

If the local people and their leaders wanted us to participate, wittingly or unwittingly, in their own world and its concerns, then they also accepted the fact that we were academics from a New Zealand university who undertook 'research' for our living, and like them had to show tangible results from our work. In effect, some of our research is intended to assist in local projects, while other parts of it are intended for a more strictly academic audience. Thus we expect to produce learned papers, monographs and seminar presentations (such as this one), in order to contribute to intellectual debates about history, archaeology and the possibilities for connections between them. Some of this we produce under our names, others we write in collaboration with locals such as Mataora Harry. As we complete and publish some of our research, we have sought ways to return our publications to the people of the place. For example, I make it a personal policy to gift copies of my work to Māngaians who have contributed to it in any way. In the case of one publication, Mataora Harry has undertaken to act as its Island agent, organising locals who are interested in buying it, and sending their payments to the publisher, thereby ensuring that books published off shore find their way back on to the Island.

Underlying these different activities is the recognition that like the landscape we talked, mapped and wrote about, there is more than one layer of meaning and more than one outcome to this collaborative project. The land and the people who dwell on it remains at the heart of what we are attempting to research. Richard, Mataora and I each brought to this project something unique in terms of ideas and knowledge. Conversely, we will each take from it distinctive interpretations which we will go on thinking about and acting on in the years to come. Be it a historic places sign, a television interview, a multimedia presentation on the web, a map, a seminar, or an academic monograph, all of them reflect some layer or other of the complex world which is Kei'ā, its people and their land.