

THEORETICAL ESSAY

TE TAIAO, TE TINANA, E RUA, E RUA: THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE HUMAN BODY

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ABSTRACT

The title of this paper reflects a *Māori* perspective to the world we live and move in and our interaction with the environment. Its literal translation, ‘The *taiao* (environment) and the *tinana* (human body) are kin’ is the underlying theme of this paper. In researching philosophies and narratives handed down by my ancestors, and those recorded by early ethnologists who came to Aotearoa/New Zealand, it becomes immediately apparent that the ancestors, through careful observation whilst living at one with the environment—its interconnectedness and infinite moods, fashioned a knowledge that everything in this world is connected through whakapapa (genealogy). The interconnected energies that dwell in *Ranginui* (Sky Father), *ngā whetū* (stars), *momo ua* (types of rain), *ngā kapua* (clouds), *te hau* (wind), and all weather patterns are all connected through a network of genealogies. On *Papatūānuku* (Earth Mother), *ngā toka me ngā kōhatu* (rocks and stones), *te wai* (water—fresh and salt), *ngā rākau* (trees), *ngā ngārara* (insects), *ngā manu* (birds), and animal life both on earth and in the ocean, are all part of a genealogy that reflects the ancestors understanding of the natural world. In the ever-present concern of global warming, climate change and the growing awareness of the need to protect and respect our environment, this perspective of connected genealogy will assist in providing a conceptual lens to encourage one to view the environment as a living organism, breathing with moods and emotions similar to the human body that is totally interconnected. Through an analysis of the linguistic terms placed on the land by my *tīpuna* (ancestors) in *Aotearoa* I will provide a unique perspective that individuals can utilise to solidify their own personal relationship to the *taiao*, to *Papatūānuku*, to *Ranginui* and the energies that sustain life. This analysis may also provide



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a conduit for comparison or contrast of other indigenous perspectives towards the use of terms for both the environment and the body.

RESUMO

O título deste artigo reflete uma perspectiva *Māori* para o mundo em que vivemos e nos movemos e a nossa interação com o meio ambiente. Sua tradução literal, 'O *taiao* (meio ambiente) e a *tinana* (corpo humano) são parentes' é o tema subjacente deste artigo. Ao pesquisar filosofias e narrativas transmitidas por meus ancestrais, e aquelas registradas pelos primeiros etnólogos que vieram para *Aotearoa* / Nova Zelândia, torna-se imediatamente aparente que os ancestrais, através de observação cuidadosa enquanto viviam em unidade com o meio ambiente, sua interconexão e humores infinitos, criaram um conhecimento de que tudo neste mundo está conectado através de *whakapapa* (genealogia). As energias interconectadas que habitam em *Ranginui* (Pai Céu), *ngā whetū* (estrelas), *momo ua* (tipos de chuva), *ngā kapua* (nuvens), *te hau* (vento) e todos os padrões climáticos estão todos conectados por meio de uma rede de genealogias. Em *Papatūānuku* (Mãe Terra), *ngā toka me ngā kōhatu* (rochas e pedras), *te wai* (água - doce e salgada), *ngā rākau* (árvores), *ngā ngārara* (insetos), *ngā manu* (pássaros) e a vida animal na terra e no oceano, todos fazem parte de uma genealogia que reflete a compreensão dos ancestrais do mundo natural. Na preocupação sempre presente com o aquecimento global, as mudanças climáticas e a crescente consciência da necessidade de proteger e respeitar o nosso meio ambiente, esta perspectiva de genealogia conectada ajudará a fornecer uma lente conceitual para se ver o meio ambiente como um organismo vivo, respirando com humores e emoções semelhantes ao corpo humano que está totalmente interligado. Por meio de uma análise dos termos linguísticos colocados na terra por meus *tīpuna* (ancestrais) em *Aotearoa*, fornecerei uma perspectiva única que os indivíduos podem utilizar para solidificar seu próprio relacionamento pessoal com *taiao* (meio ambiente), *Papatūānuku* (Mãe Terra), *Ranginui* (Pai céu) e as energias que sustentam a vida. Esta análise também pode fornecer um ponto de vista para comparação ou contraste de outras perspectivas indígenas em relação ao uso de termos para elementos do meio ambiente e o corpo humano.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Te Reo; Māori; Human Body; Environment.

KEYWORDS

Te Reo; Māori; Corpo Humano; Meio Ambiente.

As with many cultures, the earth is acknowledged by the Māori as being feminine and the sky as masculine¹. The sun *Tama-nui-te-rā* masculine is complemented by the moon *Marama* feminine. This idea of masculine and feminine energies coexisting—as with many cultures—is infused into the *Māori* perspective which I will touch on with specific examples throughout this narrative.

I begin by referring to the curriculum that guided the *Māori* traditional *whare wānanga* (school of learning). The curriculum contained what was called the *kauae runga* (terrestrial knowledge) and *kauae raro* (celestial knowledge). The terms used for these two knowledge bases—the upper jaw and lower jaw respectively—give a profound view of the *Māori* mind of the ancestors who saw all knowledge as emanating from a giant entity, known in western science as the universe. These two concepts are also conveyed phonetically by the vowel sounds for ‘a’ (short as in the word ‘away’, long as in the word ‘far’) referring to terrestrial energies and the vowel sounds for ‘o’ (short as in the word ‘order’, long as in the word ‘for’) referring to celestial energies. When the two vowels are placed together, **ao**, they form the word for ‘world’ (as well as ‘daylight’, ‘dawn’, ‘bright’, ‘cloud’, and ‘bud’) and are also found in the word for environment *taiao*. When used with possessives these vowels indicate in some instances a spiritual connection as when using ‘o/ō’ - *E tō mātou matua i te rangi* (our father which art in heaven?) *ōku tīpuna* (my ancestors) and in other instances an earthly connection when using ‘a/ā’, *tā mātou māra* (our garden), *āku taputapu* (my tools).

The term that *Māori* use for the land is *whenua* (Hawaiian *aina*, Samoan *fanua*) Rarotonga ‘enua, Tongan, Nuiean, *fonua* (TREGGAR, 1891, p. 620)). The word *whenua* also happens to be the word used by my *tīpuna* to name the placenta. The *tīpuna* chose this word to recognise and acknowledge that both the land and placenta are living energies that sustain life. The placenta is the organ that nurtures the growing baby within the womb, ensuring it develops to its optimum potential by providing oxygen and nutrients and acting as a filter to remove waste products from the baby’s blood (Mayo Clinic)³. The land *Papatūānuku* being the life form that nurtures ALL life through providing minerals and water—provided by *Ranginui*—to the terrestrial ecosystems and forests which in turn provide materials, food, minerals to support human livelihood.

A *Māori* cultural practice named ‘*whenua ki te whenua*’ is to bury the placenta in a special place—usually on ancestral lands—along with the *pito* (umbilical cord). In some instances, the *pito* was placed in a cleft in a rock or tree, often on a boundary line of land in

1 Sanskrit-related languages (e.g. Latin, Greek, French, Italian and Portuguese), assign a masculine gender to the Sun and a feminine to the Moon. Older languages of the same Indo-European family (e.g. Sanskrit, German and old Goidelic) the Moon is masculine and the Sun feminine. <http://www.house-of-horus.de/zwoelf.html#> Retrieved 2019-09-10.

2 First line of the Lord’s Prayer

3 <https://www.mayoclinic.org/>.

which the infant would have rights of ownership' (BEST, 1975, p. 19). This practice strengthens the bonding of the newborn child to the land of their ancestors or in modern times to the land of their birth. There were other forms and methods of disposing of the *pito* within Aotearoa and similarly within the various social groupings, such as in the hollow of a tree, buried at the foot of a tree or a significant post.

In the beginning, *Papatūānuku* and *Ranginui* held each other in a close eternal embrace within *Te Kore* (nothingness, potential), *Te Pō* (night, complete darkness). Eventually they were separated by one of their children - *Tāne-māhuta* (guardian of the forest domain and its inhabitants) against the wishes of another sibling *Tāwhiri-mātea* (guardian of the domain of weather) which brought light into the world. The tension between *Tāwhiri-mātea* and his siblings *Tāne-māhuta* and *Tangaroa* (guardian of the oceans) manifests into the forces of nature forever antagonising life on earth and the oceans in the form of hurricanes, storms, tidal waves, etc. Other offsprings of *Papatūānuku* were in various divisions of *Ranginui* and were nurtured by feminine energies *Hine-te-āhuru* (mother of the heavenly bodies), by *Hine-ruru-mai* and by *Hine-makohu-rangi* (both personified forms of mist). (BEST, 1976, p. 59).

The term *awa* (river) has an association with the breaking of waters before birth. Not having any clear written narrative regarding this phenomenon we can connect this concept through other narratives such as the term *ārai awa* which refers to a person blocking the *kūaha* (doorway) of an ancestral house. The *kūaha* reflects the *taiawa* (a term for the female reproductive organ) which reinforces the notion that the term *awa* could refer to the breaking of waters before birth.

The term *whēiao/whāiao* (place between darkness and light) originates from the action of separating *Ranginui* and *Papatūānuku* by *Tāne-mahuta*. The ancestors also saw a similarity in the separation of earth and sky to that of the birth of a child emerging from the womb via the *whēiao* (birth canal) and to that of the middle of the *tipuna whare*, an ancestral house named after the eponymous ancestor of a *hapū* (subtribe). These houses, also termed *whare whakairo* (carved house), reflected a human body - the *kōruru* (gable head) representing the face of the ancestor carved with oversized eyes to acknowledge the sentinel aspects of the *ruru* (morepork, a native bird) who oversees the *maraeātea* (plaza, land directly in front of the house). The *maihi* (bargeboards) represent the arms, the *kūwaha* (doorway) represents the mouth, the *pare* (carving above the doorway) represents a female ancestor alluding to the doorway, being the *ara o te ora* (pathway of life) the female genitals, where all life passes through. The *tāhuhu* (ridgepole) represents the spine and the *heke* (rafters) the ribs. The early houses had no windows on the back wall leaving that area quite dark. This is also the wall where carvings—and in more modern times portraits of the ancestors, are located. This area of darkness implies *Te Pō* - the *Māori* world where the spirits of those who have passed journey to *te wāhi ngaro* (the invisible realm), Nirvana, Paradise in other cultures. The middle of the house was termed the *whēiao*, the space between the

dark back wall and the front wall. The front wall of the ancestral house is where the windows are located and where light enters the house, relating to the concept of *te ao mārama* (the world of light) light coming into the world through the separation of *Papatūānuku* and *Ranginui*. This architectural design reflects the concept of the baby leaving the womb, *te pō*, and entering the *wheiao* to be born into the *te ao mārama*.

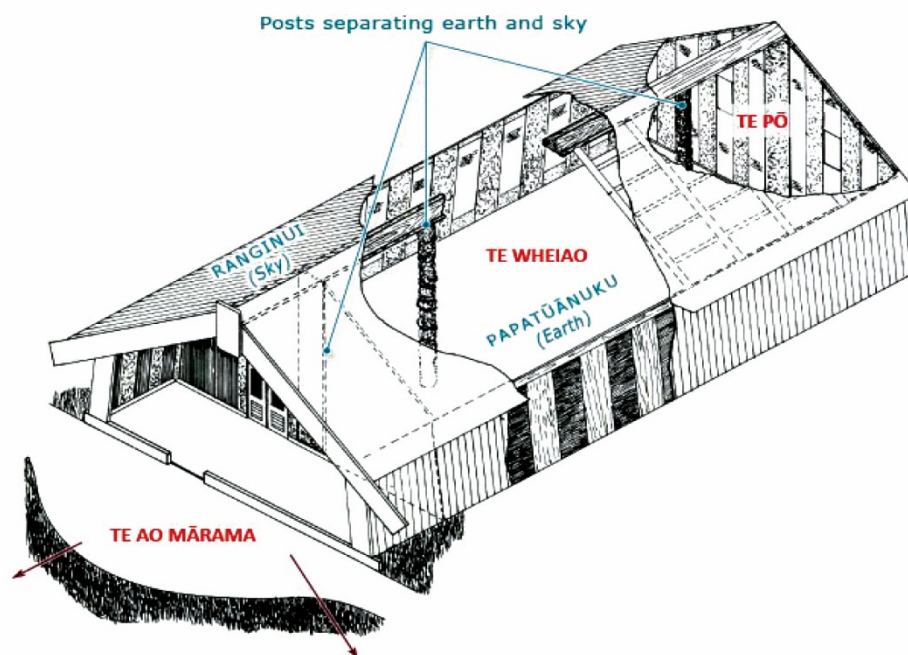


Figure 1. *Tipuna whare*, an ancestral house, also termed *whare whakairo*, carved house.
Fonte: Original image taken from: <https://teara.govt.nz/en/artwork/45736/whare-whakairo>.

There is a common proverbial saying used in Māori oratory, *ki te wheiao, ki te ao mārama*,

*Tihei mauri ora
Ka puta te ira tangata
mai i te pō, ki te wheiao
ki te ao mārama*

The sneeze of life, life's energy
Humanity emerges
from darkness, to the dawn
to the world of light

This brings to the fore another example of a term—from a Māori perspective—that reflects both the environment and the human body. That term is *hau*, the word for wind or air which Māori perceive as 'the vitality of the universe', and the 'quality that pervades the whole being of humans' (BEST, 1982, p. 51), i.e. human vitality.

E mōhio ana ahau kei te patu mai koe i a māua ko taku hau; e kore taku hau e roiro i tō karakia⁴.

I know you are attempting to kill both my **vital essence** and me; my **vital essence** will never succumb to your spell.

The term *hau* originates from two words, *hā* (breath, essence) and *u* (instil) and during the act of pronouncing this word a person experiences both the outward breath and the inner vitality at the same moment. If for some reason the *hau* of a person is disturbed or restricted then it is identified by the addition of the letter 'ā' termed *hauā* (crippled, lame, disabled), *hauā ā-hinengaro* (intellectually challenged), *hauā ā-tinana* (physically challenged), *hauā-pekewhā* (quadriplegic). The people who reside close to or on traditional lands, *kāinga*, and play an active part in caring for the *marae*⁵ and providing hospitality for *manuhiri* (visitors) are termed *hau kāinga* literally meaning 'the vitality of the village'.

The next term to illustrate the close connection of *Māori* to the environment is the term *kiri* (skin), used also in reference to the bark of a tree, the hide or pelt of an animal and the rind of a fruit (Tongan, Niuean *kili*, Hawaiian *il*). It is also the base word of terms for the bereaved family *kiri mate*, (*mate* meaning death), self-esteem *kiritau*, (*tau* meaning settled), and identity, personality *tuakiri* (*tua* meaning the back of a person).

The *Māori* word for the forehead is *rae* (Tahitian, Rarotonga *rae*, Samoan, Hawaiian, Tongan *lae*) which is the word and base word for words used to describe a headland, a promontory or peninsula - *rae*, *kūrae*, *pukerae*, *mātārae*⁶. Once again, a geographical feature of the environment encapsulated in the human body to reflect the idea that *Papātūānuku* is also seen as a living being. Another example of an indigenous perspective when *Māori* walk the earth and acknowledge landforms and the environment.

Moving down from the forehead, we come to the mouth *waha*. The word *waha* can be found in other words such as *kūwaha* (doorway), - *waharoa* (gateway or entrance to an ancient fortress - *pā* and *marae* (modern-day space where a community gather). The word *pūwaha* (mouth of a river) also reflects the *Māori* mind when it views the mouth as being similar to an entranceway. Other parts of the human body reflecting the meaning

4 A response said by the tohunga of the Te Arawa canoe Ngātoro-i-rangi to Tama-o-hoi, JPS v. 2, n. 4, December 1893, p. 223.

5 courtyard - the open area in front of the *wharenuī*, where formal greetings and discussions take place. Often also used to include the complex of buildings around the *marae*. <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=marae>.

6 This word also describes the 'mind's eye', *mata* = eye (*mata ā-rae*).

of this word are the cervix *waha kōpū* *whare tangata*⁸ or simply *waha* the pudenda muliebria, female genitals.

The word for neck or throat, *kakī*, found in one of the terms for the source of a river *pūkākī*, is also the word for a brook or stream paralleling the narrowness of the flow of these waterways to that of the shape of the neck or throat upon Mother Earth.

The words *hiwi*, (a ridge of a hill)⁹, is also found in the word for shoulder - *poko~~hiwi~~|paki~~hiwi~~|poki~~hiwi~~*, illustrating again the thinking of *tīpuna* in seeing a connection of the body to the lay of the land, or the lay of the land to the human body. Other words for a ridge are *tuahiwi* and *kāhiwi* (Hawaiian *hiwi*, a flat or depressed summit of a protuberance; Tahitian *tuaivi*, a slope of a mountain ridge; Mangaiian *tuaivi*, a hill, *kaivi* a ridge, crest of a hill; Marquesan *tuaivi*, a mountain; Paumotan, *tutaivi*, a hill) (TREGGAR, 1891, p. 75).

The Māori word for hill, hillock, mound, swell up - *puke* is the term also used for pubes¹⁰, mons veneris (of female). This word is also combined with other words to reflect other environmental elements - with *wai*, water = *waipuke* (flood, swelling or mounting up of water), with *huru*, (feather, pubic hair in some dialects) = *puke huru* (puberty) with *moana*, sea = *moana pukepuke* (choppy seas)¹¹. On the first sighting by the ancestors of a ship ploughing through the ocean creating its wake, they viewed it as though the ship was devouring the swell, thus the Māori term for a ship is *kaipuke*, eating, consuming the swell.

Turning to words used to describe internal parts of the body that reflect the environment we begin with the word for the *manawa* (physical heart), used also for deep underground—the bowels of both the earth and the human body—and to describe an unfailing deep spring of water - *manawa whenua*, more lately used to describe an aquifer. An oasis is termed a puna *manawa*. The word *ngākau* is the word for the spiritual heart.

The human bone, *iwi* is a common term also for people, tribe and nation and used widely in the phrase, “*Ko wai tō iwi?*” (Who are your bones/people/tribe?) when discussing tribal connections. In the term *iwi whenua*, it refers to people of the land like the term *tangata whenua*. Another word for bone and for skeleton is *kōiwi* also the word for a trunk of a tree.

One of the terms used to describe emotions, *kare ā-roto*, (ripples within) refers to the environment with the use of the word *kare*, (ripple). Other terms referring to the emotions

7 *Ko te waha kōpū: He tarawhiti uaua ki raro tonu o te kōpū* (RP 2009, p. 383). | The cervix: A ring of muscle just below the uterus. Retrieved from:

<https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=waha>.

8 This term ‘whare tangata’ means the ‘house of people, humankind’ referring to the womb.

9 Retrieved from:

<https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=hiwi>.

10 Retrieved from:

<https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=puke>.

11 A proverbial saying in Māori, *He moana pukepuke e ekengia e te waka* - choppy seas will be navigated by a canoe. All troubles can be overcome.

are *tama roto* and *tama tū ki roto*, the male aspect within. The word *hinengaro* (mind, intellect), literally, the invisible female aspect, provides a nice balance to the masculinity of emotions and supports the notion promoted in other cultures such as the Chinese *yin* feminine, and *yang* masculine. ‘These opposite or contrary forces may actually be complementary, interconnected, and interdependent in the natural world and they may give rise to each other as they interrelate to one another.’¹²

Kōmata, (zenith, extremity, pinnacle, high point and acme) is also the word for nipple (of the breast). The term *kōmata o te rangi*, (zenith of heaven) reflects the influence of Christianity in early Aotearoa history. *Pito*, as mentioned previously, is the word for the navel, the umbilical cord, or an extremity. The *pito* which is the section of the umbilical cord nearest the baby’s body—once it detaches from the navel of the baby—is buried alongside the placenta in a special place. The *pito* also refers to the end of a beach, the extremity of the land, and the ends of the earth as used in the terms for the North Pole - *Te Pito Raki*, *Te Pito Whakararo o te Ao* and the South Pole, *Te Pito Tonga*, *Te Pito Whakarunga o te Ao*.

The word *puku* meaning stomach, belly, abdomen is also a term used for the centre of the land, *te puku o te whenua*¹³. The belly of the fish, *te puku o te ika*, refers to the centre of the North Island (*Te Ika a Māui*¹⁴ – The Fish of *Māui*). This analogy extends to other parts of the North Island - *Te Upoko o te Ika*, (The Head of the Fish - the Wellington region), *Te Hiku o te Ika* (The Tail of the Fish - Northland). See the following map for other references to the land as being part of *Māui*’s fish.

12 “The hidden meanings of yin and yang - John Bellaimey”. *TED-Ed*. Retrieved 2019-09-08.

13 A term used to describe one of the five Māori electorates created in 1996.

14 According to legend, the ancestor Māui fished up the North Island of Aotearoa from the ocean. The North Island is shaped like a fish.



Figure 2. Aotearoa – New Zealand.

Fonte: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/map/6767/maui-in-new-zealand>¹⁵

The *rekereke* (heels/ankles) are used as an analogy for the base of a mountain and used in oratory to acknowledge the deceased lying in state and more specifically the photographs of close relations that are placed at the foot of the casket as if placed at the base of a mountain. Some people also use the term *rekereke* when informing others of their upbringing, where they reside or where their authority to speak, their *mana* rests,

*Kei ngā rekereke o Ruahine tōku kāinga*¹⁶

My village/hone is at *the base* of Ruahine mountain

Waterways such as streams and rivers were also viewed as the arteries of *Papātūānuku* supplying *waiora* (life giving waters). Other supplies of *wai māori* (freshwater) were termed *waiū*—literally liquid of the breast—water that gives us sustenance.

¹⁵ Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand (accessed 11 September 2019).

¹⁶ A metaphor sometimes used by the author.

Ko Ruahine te maunga

Ruahine is my mountain

Ko Whatumā te waiū

Whatumā is where I gather sustenance

The *waewae* (legs), found in the term *tūrangawaewae*, is an analogy for land—literally, a place to stand—in respect of where a person’s *mana* (authority) rests and where a person’s connection to the land is.

He tūrangawaewae (a place to stand) is an appropriate phrase to end this narrative as the words used by the ancestors to define both the land we live on and the body we live in is my place to stand, my place to share these concepts with other indigenous people. The wish is that these terms, phrases, words handed down through the generations will stimulate further discussion and research into the close interrelationship we as occupiers of *Papatūānuku* have. We are but *kaitiaki* (guardians, custodians) of Mother Earth for the next generations.

Ehara nō tātou te whenua, engari kē he kaitiaki mō ngā whakatipuranga e heke mai ana

We do not own the land but are mere custodians of the land for the coming generations

Tau ana!

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PAE IPURANGI

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