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Title

Traversing the plateaus of knowledge[s] within the rituals of research processes: how *mana* helps to determine activity

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Abstract

In this paper, narrative experiences are used to explore issues and practices of *mana* within a Māori New Zealand research context. On one level, *mana* is manifested through actions and behaviours of authority, prestige, influence, and power, and is rule-bound in traditional customs and protocol. However, in a taken-for-granted-world, where the different formal evocations of *mana* ought to be observed, we underestimate the extent to which the mundanity of our situations can allow for several discontinuities to occur. For example, the occupation of certain contexts allows *mana* to be determined through activity that undergoes processes of *territorialisation*, *deterritorialisation* and then *re-territorialisation*; through unexpected schemas and connections. But do these re-territorialised outcomes enhance the research space, or even the presence of *mana*? When Deleuze and Guattari (1987) used the term ‘rhizome’, they envisaged a network of multiple and branching roots, with no central axis, no unified point of origin, and no given direction of growth. The alignment of our experiences to *rhizomatics* then, is to openly share the ruptures, discontinuities, connections and interrelationships between phenomena, within the ‘fluid nature’ of ritualised research containment. The aim of this work is to present ideas for discussion about the ways that *mana* determines research activity through the juxtaposition of unfolding and unyielding ways of engagement.

Introduction

From where do we acquire our stance on research and knowledge? For Māori, these engagements have tacitly evolved over time and timelessness; through the applications of Māori principles that provide “Māori society with rules for living” (Edwards, McManus and McCreanor (2005: p. 4). Two of the principles underpinning issues around the process of research are *tapu* and *mana*. At the start of this discussion, it is difficult to be other than general when noting that in its “broadest sense *tapu* refers to the sanctity (or restriction) of something or someone and *mana* refers to the inherent power of something or someone” (*ibid*). In time and space, *mana* is realised through influential intersections that relate to authority, prestige, influence, and power. That is, rituals of memory highlight the juxtaposition of several knowledge(s) manifested through different practices and levels of engagement. The spatiality that is *mana* is at the very least inscribed in space and manifested through subject-positions that consolidate and perpetuate identity. On one level, the source of this spatiality is aligned to socially produced situations of continuous and discontinuous engagement. Through deliberate acts of formal recognition as well as through fluid interpretations within context, *mana* is validated. At the same time however, the word and concept can be *mis*interpreted through different perceptions of ritual. For example, *mana* also has links to the spiritual world; with a metaphysical as well as a ‘this-worldly’ dimension, which is sometimes overlooked through a tendency to relate *mana* to just ‘prestige’ or ‘power and authority’.

Within the context of working with Māori communities in Aotearoa New Zealand, a central tenet for action and behaviour is the maintenance of ‘status quo’ between the researched and the researcher. Certain behaviours personify the fluid nature of empowerment and disempowerment within the research process for Indigenous and Māori peoples, but the criticality of maintaining the balance between those two roles can be visualised not just through the multiplicitous worldview of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), but also from a similar metaphorical alignment to the creeping legacy of the rhizomatic kumara plant, and the idea of spiritual growth. Rather than a tangled mass of ‘insignificant’ plant the kumara has special significance for Māori, with its strong vines, spreading growth, and intermittent bearing of tuberous ‘fruit’. When the state of involvement and level of participation in the research process is passed from one individual to the other in the spirit of reciprocity and *evenness*, then the process also rejuvenates and ‘bears fruit’; and the co-authoring of knowledge continues to validate, establish, and re-establish culture.

When the research process becomes ‘uneven’, and when for example, the researcher assumes a privileged vantage, then for Māori – as for Indigenous peoples around the world - disempowerment emerges as an echo of colonising practices in the face of claims and discussion about lives that bear scant relevance to the actual lived experience (Mahuika 2008: p. 1). In contemporary times, human experience is not isolated from history; from Māori ontology and epistemology. The way of viewing the world, and acting within the world, is a timeless project linking ancestral knowledge to modern-day protocols and practices. That is, in order to give meaning to the world, through family and community life, Māori do not just look to the sides of their habitable landscape, or behind to note from where they have come, but they look forwards to their ancestors, their *tupuna*, guiding them to try to see what the future

might hold. When Māori stand in their meeting places, on their *marae*, they see all their ancestors around them, not just as ‘feel-good’ touchstones, but as markers for spiritual connection and growth (Mlcek, Timutimu, Mika, Aranga, Taipeti, Rangihau, Temara, Shepherd and McGarvey 2009). Rituals of life are passed along through heritage and belonging; through connections to a deep spiritual narrative that is more often than not acted out through oral traditions and ritualised communication.

The research context

This paper revolves around a research project that was implemented to explore relevant and effective foundational learning opportunities for Māori Learners in NZ (Mlcek et al 2009). The outcomes of the project that was funded by the NZ Ministry of Education contributed to a useful narrative about the criticality of marae-based education to facilitate ongoing and accessible pathways for Māori entering university study at the undergraduate level. The research context was set within a small coastal Māori community on the east coast tribal district of New Zealand, in which mana moved through stages of connection between the researcher and the researched. It is within this context that the inequality of mana and integrity within the research process was revealed through rhizomatic movements, and this activity will be analysed through a comparative framework that includes the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), and aspects of a uniquely Māori worldview - kaupapa Māori theory. Two specific research activities come to mind; the first involved interviewing a *kuia* [a female Elder], who lived on her own, with disability, but who spoke enthusiastically and with reminiscence and reverence about what she remembered from the past and the power of education to take Māori forward today and into the future. She spoke with authority in the language of Te Reo Māori, about how people learned then, and took on new knowledge. Her authority was stamped in the stories of how she accepted the oral histories from her father and husband, and how she imbibed those then on to her children. The second event included an arduous trip along a sometimes treacherous coastal road to an isolated hamlet where hospitality was abundant and over-whelming; the two researchers waited for the main interviewee [a male participant] to arrive from his preparation of food for his researcher *manuhiri* [guests]. There were endless cakes at morning tea, and then a fully-catered hot lunch following. As the researchers, we tried to end the visit early in order to get back on the perilous coastal road before darkness set in, but protocol won the day and we waited patiently; participating in every exchange.

In both cases the researcher pairs compared notes of these and other research situations within the project that revealed similar anomalies which could be equated to the presence or not, of mana. In the first situation, the welcome was warm and inviting but a starting prayer [*karakia*] was forgotten. In both situations the endings were ‘rushed’ and almost disingenuous. In the first situation no *koha* [gift/‘payment’] was extended by the researchers (not even something to eat like cake or biscuits), and in the second situation the *koha* was forgotten altogether in the pocket of one of the researcher’s jackets, until the farewell lunch when it was embarrassingly revealed. Usually, at an early part in the encounter, the offer of a *koha* is made in the spirit of reciprocity, and recognised appropriately. During the second interview, mana passed between researchers and researched, but in a disjointed fashion; at one stage Māori language [Te Reo] was interspersed with the English language and there were many apologies about the inappropriateness of language use.

In both cases, there seemed to be an awkwardness that came from the main researchers being *kaiako* [‘teachers’] and therefore people of ‘position’ and ‘authority’. There was also an interesting dynamic of gratitude on the part of the researched that the researchers had taken the time to visit and listen to their stories. This sense of gratitude came from a contrasting place of generosity; in the first instance, no matter that the main researcher was fluent in Te Reo, her language skills could never hope to match those of the *kuia*, who was her own rhizomatic; sifting and weaving and moving through story after story of invaluable information. In the second situation the researcher/*kaiako* was the ‘master’ of Te Reo, but in his wish to show his newly acquired learning of protocol and language, the designated knowledgeable spokesperson for this coastal hamlet graciously engaged with several researcher anomalies within the research process.

For example, on a serious level, turn-taking in the above situation became mixed up or ‘untidy’; there are definite protocols about whose place it is to speak, and whose it is to remain silent following a particular exchange, but when one extends that practice, the other is compelled to reply out of courtesy. When the acceptance of the reply moves to a continuation of conversation however, the likely ‘displacement’ of mana becomes evident. The notion is similar to the western perception of ‘having the last word’. Having the last word however, is actually not appropriate for the maintenance of mana; rather it can be seen as the undermining of the other’s place in the communication event. When this practice is conducted, no matter how unconsciously, the situation only serves to cement the ‘loss of mana’ on the part of that person who insists on ‘having the last word’.

In both situations, the humility surrounding what should have been part of the role and position of the researcher – after all, the researchers were trying to gain knowledge towards their research outcomes - was overtaken by a contrasting humbling regard directed by the researched towards the researcher as *kaiako* [teacher]; someone to be placed in a position of elevation and regard for the knowledge they supposedly have.

Mana in processes of *whakatau* [welcome] and *whakanoa* [the lifting of tapu]

Tapu

Tapu was used to control how people behaved to each other and within certain contexts; with the environment. From a traditional stance, it was seen as both implying prohibition and also as a protective mechanism for both people and their environment.

One way of explaining tapu is that it is a sacred doctrine of social control, and like mana, is about the relationship between the physical and spiritual worlds. They are concepts that are underpinned by Māori philosophical and religious principles, values and goals that combine to regulate the conduct of individuals, whānau [family], hapū [sub-tribe] and iwi [tribe]. Mikaere (2003: p. 4) describes aspect of tapu, whereby: "No individual stands alone: through the tapu of whakapapa [genealogy], she or he is linked to other members of the whānau, hapū and iwi... Every person has a sacred connection ... to the natural world around them".

Still, within the mundanity of everyday practice, mana and tapu are interchangeable and inextricably linked to the behaviour of people and if not exercised properly, actions can cause an undesirable effect on people (NZ Ministry of Justice 2001 [online]). Māori Marsden’s quote, ‘Man remains always the agent or channel never the source of mana’ can also be applied to tapu (in King 1975: pp. 191-194, cited in

NZ Ministry of Justice 2001 [online]). Furthermore, the mana of a person will explain the comparative tapu of that same person.

There are two levels of tapu and mana – *tapu o and tapu i*, and *mana o* and *mana i*. Edwards et al (2005: p. 4) suggest an understanding of these concepts being derived from two separate states – *atua* and *tangata*, where for example mana o is derived from mana atua, and mana i is derived from mana tangata. To clarify, the state of atua has its genesis in the divine or spiritual realm and is present in all things or people created, while mana tangata and tapu tangata are strengthened or weakened depending on the actions of the various parties involved in an encounter (Barlow 1991). In the research context, two types of recognising mana need to be acknowledged through appropriate behaviour. There is the mana of the researcher which can sometimes be elevated in the eyes of the researched, either because of perceived ‘authority’, or someone having much knowledge, especially if the researcher comes from a *wānanga* [place of teaching and learning]. There is also consideration for *the mana whenua*, the customary authority and title exercised by a tribe or sub tribe over land and other *taonga* [precious gifts or attributes including knowledge] within the tribal district, particularly of the researched.

Noa

Whakanoa is the process of restoring something to its normal state, and after the restrictions of tapu have been lifted, therefore *noa* can simply be interpreted as ‘free from tapu or any other restriction’. In research situations, tapu can be lifted by performing a particular *karakia*, which could include incantation, prayer or ritual, depending on the circumstance and timing of the encounter. Reference is made here of the legitimacy of the mana whenua to lift tapu and create noa through the ritual of providing food to the visiting researchers.

The inequality of mana and integrity within the research process

Tikanga (customs and protocol) and Te Reo Māori (language) are the primary means through which relationships and bonds between people and communities, are developed and established. The transformative quality of tikanga is that relationships remain intact; processes are in place to preserve and protect whakapapa through a level of understanding about the importance of whakapapa relationships and processes. Where tikanga is a guide for behaviour that is based on Māori philosophies about the way in which whanau members should behave towards one another, mana, embedded in the manifestations of tikanga, should rest with the participants within any research project.

That is, the way in which research is conducted ought to reflect the dignity and integrity of people, and this factor impacts the degree to which mana is understood and practised between the researcher and the researched. Never far from any relational context is the question of *power*, for example, which person holds the ‘power’ at different intersections of the research event? As suggested, the concepts of *tapu* and *noa* are pivotal to the discussion about the practice of mana, as well as to the situation of being the disempowered researched, where memory and history can easily be transformed by the researcher into something that is not quite representative of a situation (Memmi 1965: pp. 190-191).

On a metaphorical level, understanding the place of women in Māori society provides useful understanding of the *plateaus* of mana that incorporate the interplay of power and participants. Through *mana wahine* for example, there is that fundamental link between mana impacted by the place of women as part of a trajectory of knowledges about the potential of mana to occupy spaces and activities. In Māori language, wahine is the female space that also implies being the carrier of culture. The strength of roles in Māori society to be both complimentary and reciprocal, is noted by Mikaere (1994: p. 53) who draws on iwi histories to describe the complementary roles of men and women including important leadership positions that also accommodated the spiritual power of women to lift tapu and make things noa (Smith 1992, Turner 2007: p. 35).

However, certain limiting, often colonised, modern-day practices have given rise to further discussion about the legitimacy and equalness of the above roles that are at odds with those cultural traditions (Irwin 1990: p. 84). As Hutchings (2005: p. 48) notes, “(mana wahine) ... is the definition and application of kaupapa to situations and analysis by Māori women and challenges current colonial patriarchal ideologies and hegemonies”. The inequality and integrity of mana must rest therefore within a critical theoretical discourse where similar thoughts of mana wahine address an intellectual and wider discourse.

An analysis framework that integrates Māori and non-Indigenous worldviews

As part of this discussion the research process involving Māori participants can be framed within a dual paradigm that includes both Indigenous [Māori] and non-Indigenous worldviews. A combination of the non-Indigenous Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts and those from a kaupapa Māori stance, not only provides a rich contrast for analysis, but is supported by ideas from Graham Smith (2000) about the legitimacy of drawing on any theories to inspire, guide and support our own critical initiatives. The metaphorical richness within the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) provides its own binary ‘assemblage’ for an analysis framework that looks at the presence of mana. Using similar metaphorical expression to describe kaupapa Māori theory, the theory of *rhizomatics* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) is also a theory ‘on the edge’ and sometimes referred to as ‘anarchic’ or cutting across borders (Lechte 1994). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use vivid language devices to explain their image of thought; one which thinks of the world “as a network of multiple and branching roots” that are “lines of flow and flight, processes of territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation, networks of partial and constantly changing connections” (Thrift 2000, in Johnston, Gregory, Pratt and Watts 2000: p. 716). Their world is acented, that is, “with no central axis, no unified point of origin, and no given direction of growth” (Grosz 1994: p. 199). In many ways, their notion of *rhizomatics* is a pragmatic method and objective for making a situation real through performance and not just representation. Further, they would see that the research context can be referred to as a ‘plateau’ where intensity of activity is identified by more connections and reconnections, just like the interplay of rhizomatics, and is played out in fluid temporal and spatial moments. Plateaus are never wholly formed; they are recursively (re)constitutive in a way where they are only ever identified as *some* of a plateau and/or *some* of a rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: p. 9).

Similarly, kaupapa Māori theory is by its very nature, “on the margins, remaining critical and resistant” (*He Hoāka*, May 14 2011 [online]). Acknowledging this theory

as a relevant methodological premise is not necessarily about establishing one voice that is Māori, but about making allowance for a Māori voice that privileges the worldview of the researcher as an integral part of the research process. In this respect it adopts a mainly anti-colonial position while seeming to also “draw on western theories and theorists for inspiration and support” (Mahuika 2008: p. 11). This way of doing things is not without its detractors; at times accused of not providing a specific legitimate methodology for researchers to follow, it nevertheless has implications for how those researchers situate themselves within the research process, and how methodologies and methods are developed in situ with Māori communities. Moewaka Barnes (2000a: p. 4 [online]) provides a meaning of “kaupapa māori” whereby the word māori, when written in the lower case, is really about “referring to and reinforcing its meaning as ordinary, rather than its meaning of te iwi Māori, Māori people”. This important identification and clarification stems not only from challenging accepted norms and assumptions about knowledge but also constructs and continues the search for understanding within a Māori worldview (Bishop, 1996). The importance of kaupapa Māori as a legitimate research paradigm is that it has evolved from the historical experiences of Māori and other Indigenous groups having repeatedly had research ‘done’ to them, rather than for and with them. It is therefore a paradigm that provides possibilities “for creativity and innovation within a framework that is responsive, reflective and accountable” (Edwards, McManus and McCreanor 2005: p. 89).

Discussion and conclusion

The presence of kaupapa māori is to recognise its strength in articulating Māori ways of knowing and being. That is, how do Māori act and ‘know’ in this world? On one level, kaupapa Māori is informed by the instrumentation of whakapapa which provides that uniquely Māori way of knowing about who we are and where we come from; it is “a way of thinking, a way of learning, a way of storing knowledge, and a way of debating knowledge. It is inscribed in virtually every aspect of our worldview” (Linda Smith 2000: p. 234). On another level, within the research process, whakapapa provides a sacred and distinguishing element that defines interpretations and participation in situations, as well as if, and what, knowledge will be or can be, shared. There is both a dynamic yet static position to the solid nature of that continuation of knowledge through ongoing practices and protocols. Its ‘ordinariness’, as noted by Moewaka Barnes (2000a [online], 2000b) is to place it not just in a place of resistance as a ‘de-colonising process’ but in a position of acceptance along with other dominant research paradigms that have themselves become ‘ordinary’ through ongoing implementation. And for all their expert metaphorical and analogous linkages to resistance and movement, the Deleuzo-Guattarian (1987) concepts of plateaus and rhizomes to help explain the fluidity of contexts have their genesis in some very tangible ideas for Māori, for example, in arborified practice, potato/kumara production, and weaving. However, if kaupapa māori is envisaged in terms of being ordinary; of being ‘normal’ in relation to Māori ways of thinking and being in this world, the connections to a Deleuzo-Guattarian way of existence become susceptible to intangibility. When the latter exists to create resistant possibilities through acts and experiments of heterogeneous and non-linear iterations rather than by way of dichotomous improvisations, then it does so by refuting “normalisation” (Goodley 2011: p. 13 [online]).

In several different ways, there are both similarities and contradictions in Māori and non-Indigenous ways of knowing and doing things. *Mana* in the research context provided is played out in an almost ambiguous zone with seemingly no definite boundaries. In this respect, power and legitimacy were animated through rhizomatic shifts and balances; these rhizomatic practices are multiplicitous. However, the linear and hierarchical nature of Māori cultural practices is never far from the communication event; determined by protocols and rituals that have an almost totalising effect on how even the processes of research are used to validate and stabilise Māori knowledge. Interestingly, while the effect gives rise to an almost sedentary outcome, this kind of situation is characteristic of a strong and solid cultural legacy, and the process actually moves in a continuous state of healthy connections and re-connections; of territorialisation, deterritorialisation and then reterritorialisation.

However, the above connections are not the same as those fluid, non-linear ones that epitomise a Deleuzo-Guattarian invocation. For Deleuze and Guattari, the occupation of territory runs counter to a more traditional tree-branch-root analogy but more like a tide of seawater as it moves in to cover a muddy flat plane, filling crevices made from crabs and other shell-fish, evening out watery depths around tree roots and sandy shelves, and smoothing fissures and cracks in the mud made from debris. Just like the multi-directional movement of tides that intensifies its multi-dimensionality, the movement across plateaus of knowledge sees both the plateau and the rhizome always at the centre; creating connections that converge and move around; generating and generated by circles of convergence (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: pp.9-22). Pomare's (2010 [online]) ideas suggesting that Māori are *not* linear-thinking people appear to suggest actions that align with the above Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts. For example, an interpretation of that phenomenon can be found in how Māori use whakapapa; engagement with whakapapa acknowledges that life is a continually investigative exercise of moving forward, while still allowing Maori to revisit past history in order for that moving forward to occur. Similarly, when *mana* is realised within processes of research, these originate from a place of historical significance, and they move and yield to the specific situations. However, the centrifugal force of those encounters remains structurally linear and even hierarchical through the recognition of whakapapa. That is, this discussion maintains that the very act of moving forwards, sideways and backwards, as noted in the introduction to this paper, is part of the process of engagement with whakapapa and allows for the checking and re-checking of information, as well as providing a more edifying account of the *linearity* of that forwards-sideways-backwards process.

A main part in acknowledging mana is that it is the recognition that people give for deeds and actions undertaken. It does not automatically evolve that a person born from 'great lines' necessarily means they will have great mana amongst Māori. The mana a person is born with bodes well for an effective life journey, but the way that they conduct themselves throughout that life will either strengthen their own personal mana, and therefore the mana of their *tupuna* [ancestors], or weaken their own personal mana.

Mana does not allow for *re-territorialisation* in the blur of Deleuzo-Guattarian rhizomes and plateaus or even in their 'elusiveness', but there is a definite relational and interconnected quality about its practice. Connection to family and heritage as a

result of whakapapa can reveal branches of knowledge that are sometimes surprising and unexpected, but whereas Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe plateaus as being formed by “any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities by superficial underground stems” (p. 22), through connections that “defy the imposition of external constraints” (Lorraine 2005: p. 207), plateaus of mana that have evolved through whakapapa are intensified *by* constraints, containment, and by boundaries. Mana is about cumulative knowledge that is fully formed and not recursively (re)constituted. That is, while allowance can be made at the time of research encounters which witness an abrogation of mana, such gaps in process do not constitute an acceptance for future contexts on the pre-text that ‘*this happened last time, so we can do it again*’.

In the research context provided, the practice that is mana moved through plateaus of knowledge that were embedded with kaupapa and mana wahine Māori theories, and all that those intersections entail – te reo, kawa, tikanga, whakataū, whakanoa, whakapapa, whakawhanaungatanga, wairua, and more. Utilising these knowledge theories to overlay with the metaphor of *rhizomatics* has provided some interesting alignments and conclusions. When discussing practices by Māori, involving Māori within Māori research situations, there is a definite nexus between rhizomatics and kaupapa Māori theories that incorporate plateaus of mana. In a contemporary context the exclamation term ‘*Kia hiwa ra*’! is used as an oratorical device *before* formal speeches by Māori orators (Aranga, Mika and Mlcek 2008 [online]). Here, the call to be ‘alert’ and to be ‘watchful’ (Williams 1992: p.54) suggests a watchfulness over those *kawa* [practice] restrictions that continually protect and restore the principle of tapu that underpins all Māori spirituality, beliefs, values and social life; in fact the whole act of living, and processes of mana.

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