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MANAAKITANGA: A MARAE RESPONSE TO COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

Marae-led community development and well-being (kāinga ora) is at the heart of this research project known as Marae Ora, Kāinga Ora (MOKO). MOKO is a three-year research project designed to explore a holistic notion of kāinga ora and community well-being beyond the existing focus on marae-led housing interventions. In the current housing crisis in Tāmaki Makaurau,[1] marae have illustrated a capacity to not only provide the social support infrastructure for whānau in need, but also some leadership towards a formalised response to the housing crisis for the whole community, and not exclusively Māori.

Five marae are engaged in the MOKO project, all these marae are located in South Auckland. The key aims of this project are to examine the potential for marae to engage in future development of sustainable marae-led kāinga initiatives in and with their communities; and to provide insights that influence opportunities for others, in particular external agencies and services, to achieve greater outcomes and collaborative advantages for whānau and community wellbeing, alongside marae. It is critical for marae to be supported through this research, to work with their communities and stakeholders to formulate collective solutions and co-produce shared approaches, strategies and activities through the reproduction of new knowledge that emerges from this study. Community participation is a prerequisite to understanding and enhancing community well-being and kāinga.

The MOKO research project was in the first six months of environmental scanning following the appointment of marae-based researchers for each of the marae, when the first COVID lockdown was experienced in Aotearoa, 2020. It is the presence of these Marae Research Coordinators (MRC) that enabled the MOKO project to capture the first-hand response from the five marae to their whānau and community needs during the lockdowns. This article shares insights into the diversity of manaakitanga for three of the marae in meeting the needs of their distinct communities.

THE MARAE-SCAPE IN TĀMAKI MAKAURAU

The establishment of urban marae in the 1960s assisted Māori to retain a cultural connectivity to time-honoured practices.[2] Marae were located on tribal lands with landmark surroundings that identified their whakapapa and ancestral rights of belonging to that geographical site. In these contemporary times, marae are found in education settings, health and social service institutions, on land with no whakapapa connection, overseas, in museums and art galleries, in villages of the armed forces and in government organisations. The urban migration[3] of Māori in the 1950s and 60s created a necessity for Māori to reclaim a cultural archetype that was transferrable and would enable Māori to continue to exercise their ways of being. This was marae.

Marae have always been the heart of kāinga and flourishing Māori communities.[4] The critical nature of kāinga was traditionally recognised as a living space that interacts seamlessly with the environment, whenua and cultural ways of living as Māori.[5] The MOKO project aims to enable marae to develop their aspirations and collaborate with their kāinga (surrounding communities). This reference to kāinga, and how it is interpreted as part of this kaupapa Māori research project, provides an example of the ways in which Māori communities are continuously adapting their cultural markers within the urban landscape. The kāinga in South Auckland is multi-ethnic. It has legislated boundaries based on regional government governance structures. The Māori population is significant, and the disparate socio-economic issues are prevalent, "particularly in South Auckland where most of the Māori community resides."[6] The reality remains however, that the aspiration of reconstituting kāinga is difficult to uphold.

Within the Auckland region, there are 75 marae, which includes government institutional marae, marae-ā-kura (school based) and faith-based marae.[7] Of these marae, 38 are in South Auckland and service approximately 80 per cent of the total Auckland Māori population.[8] A range of status associated with these various marae entities in the urban context also exists—Mana Whenua (tribal marae), Mataawaka (pan-tribal marae) and Taurā here (tribal satellite urban marae). The transformational identities of marae over decades is an indication of the long-term significance and sustainability marae continue to have as "an established part of our cultural landscape, icons of Māori identity and corner-stones of cultural heritage that make modern-day Aotearoa unique."[9]

The well-being of whānau Māori, and the part that marae and kāinga have, in nurturing a sense of oranga is significant. Māori inextricably link culture to environment, eco-systems and human health whereby customary obligations tend to support well-being.[10] Place-based notions of well-being for Māori in the urban environment gravitate towards the marae as the source of cultural nourishment and well-being.[11] What we know is that the positioning of urban marae, or marae in the urban milieu, offers the same benefits to whānau Māori inclusive of their communities. The events of 2020 with COVID-19 certainly enabled marae to flex their super power as agents of manaakitanga, lending a lifeline to their local kāinga and in doing so increasing the wellbeing of whole communities in these times of crisis.

METHODOLOGY

This research project is underpinned by Kaupapa Māori (KM) and Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) methodologies.

Kaupapa Māori research is an appropriate methodology, given this project is both located and driven by marae. Key tenets of kaupapa Māori include the validation of Māori language, culture and knowledge systems.[12] Most important to kaupapa Māori research is that it makes a difference to the people on whom the research is centred, in this case, the people of the marae. Kaupapa Māori aligns well with a CBPR approach,[13] that also values the notion of tino rangatiratanga (self-determination), which is at the core of CBPR—to engage in research with and for community. Aligned to the KM and CBPR approach, the marae, community and key stakeholders will be an active part of development, implementation and interpretation of the survey. This will include strategies to ensure that we reach both whānau who are connected to marae, and whānau who are disconnected or not linked to marae, either their own hapū-based or local urban marae.

Securing a respectful relationship with the five participant marae in MOKO was one of the essential starting points for the research. This was achieved by launching the MOKO project and encompassing a ceremonial dual signing by the collective of five marae and Unitec, where the Ngā Wai ā Te Tūī research team is located, to a Memorandum of Understanding at Te Noho Kotahitanga Marae, on the Unitec main campus site. Subsequently, each marae proceeded to select and appoint their own marae-based researcher, known to the project as Marae Research Coordinators (MRC). It is this role and these people that bring the experiences from their respective marae of manaakitanga during COVID-19 that is shared in this article.

THE MANY FACES OF MANAAKITANGA

Weekly contact with the MOKO marae-based researchers has exposed the project marae to Kaupapa Māori research methodology and in turn, brought the lived-experience of marae activity and their contribution to their communities seamlessly into the academic research space.

The initial experiences from year one of the project aligns to the research hypothesis; that marae are suitably positioned within the South Auckland urban environment to provide a safe space for Māori and non-Māori to aspire to a more productive and collective way of living and raising healthy whānau. The COVID-19 lockdowns illustrated a range of examples of proactive and collaborative participation of marae and whānau to community wellbeing, such as:

- increased use of social media to share information and maintain a sense of social connection;
- the adaptation of tikanga to accommodate the need for whānau to grieve the loss of loved ones during a pandemic;
- a high level of obligation and expectation for marae to attend to the needs of the community it is located in.

This takes shape for each marae in the expression of manaakitanga, as defined by Professor Mason Durie:

> Manaakitanga transforms mana through acts of generosity that enhance all, produce well-being, and create a climate whereby the mana of all players is elevated.[14]

And further reinforced by Māori Marsden:

> Reciprocity therefore is at the heart of manaakitanga and rests upon a precept that by being of service, respecting and showing kindness to other through manaaki, the mana and wellbeing of others is enhanced, which in turn can nourish one's own mana and wellbeing.[15]

This paper will illustrate the exercising of manaakitanga across the three marae in the MOKO project and highlights their diverse interpretations and expressions of support and care afforded to the surrounding kāinga.

MAKAURAU MARAE

> *Period to rest, catch up on the world and tune in to ourselves*[16]
>
> Pania Newton

Makaurau Marae is the only mana whenua marae among the five marae who are part of the MOKO project. Located in Ihumātao Māngere, it is the "oldest continuously occupied papakāinga in Auckland."[17] During the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020, Makaurau Marae was closed for renovations. As such, those whānau occupants on the kāinga set about working within the pandemic restrictions to keep their whānau connected and able to access any resources being offered to community via their networks with other local marae and through tribal support offered by Waikato Tainui to beneficiaries.

The whānau at Ihumātao reverted to traditional practices of survival, much like their predecessors who were "sustained by a stable, mixed economy based on horticulture, complemented by foods gathered from the sea and the forest."[18] Whānau looked at how best to utilise their land base to feed themselves, to maintain active kaitiakitanga responsibilities and to diversify in order to generate income, as a direct response to increased financial

hardship created by COVID-19 isolation protocols. Facebook and other social media platforms kept whānau up to date with government relief entitlements and community resource support available. These communication sites were also used to keep whānau upbeat by sharing their daily struggles and engaging in collective problem solving. This dialogue continued to motivate people to uplift each other and provide entertainment options for keeping tamariki and mokopuna safe and connected with their wider whānau. The MRC for Makaurau Marae commented:

> *Whānau became active in attending to the nurturing of seedlings and the creation of a seed bank onsite. Others took time to clean up the rubbish that was commonly dumped on 'unused and unoccupied' blocks of land in and around Ihumātao*[19]
>
> Moana Waa

The network expanded to the four other marae involved in the MOKO project and in doing so, maximised access for Makaurau Marae kāinga to a range of resources not readily available to their community during lockdown. Kai parcels, personal protective equipment and rongoā Māori were made available through this networking.

The impact of COVID-19 on the employment status of many was felt on the papakāinga at Ihumātao. Whānau utilised the thinking space provided by the lockdowns to generate new ideas of income creation. They reviewed existing skill sets, reinvented entrepreneurial ideas and reset themselves to adapt in this new environment and be able to continue to feed their families.

Through the observation of the MRC, whānau who lost loved-ones during the lockdown were faced with very different grieving processes influenced by the COVID-19 limitations. For one whānau this meant they felt more empowered than ever to practice traditional tikanga around caring for the tūpāpaku and grieving as a whānau. Manaakitanga was pragmatic and responsive among the kāinga whānau in these times of extreme vulnerability.

Manaakitanga and a commitment to sharing and caring for each other pulled together the whānau of Makaurau Marae to revisit their individual strengths and collective potential to co-create a new plan for intergenerational survival on their traditional lands. Working in collaboration with other local marae, their allies and their own hapū connections into tribal resources, Makaurau Marae are inspired to work on their future aspirations together.

MANUREWA MARAE

> *The spirit and the heart of the marae is alive and well, especially with the arrival of this pandemic in Tāmaki Makaurau.*[20]

Manurewa is the home to the largest Māori population in Tāmaki Makaurau.[21] Situated in the heart of this Māori and Polynesian community and along the shores of Te Manukanuka o Hoturoa, Manukau harbour, is Manurewa Marae. Established in 1988 as a mataawaka marae, Manurewa is one of the largest marae in Tāmaki Makaurau serving the local communities with a range of cultural, hauora and educational services.

Upholding the tradition of manaakitanga has always been a key pillar for Manurewa Marae, in keeping whānau safe and ensuring tikanga and cultural connection is maintained. When organisations were closing their doors at the time of the first COVID-19 lockdown, Manurewa Marae was one of the first to activate and respond.[22] As Aotearoa went into a state of national emergency, this marae swiftly mobilised to redeploy their kaimahi to become an Essential Service provider demonstrating manaakitanga in action. Joining workforces with Te Kaha o te Rangatahi, an Indigenous Youth Hub, they actively engaged in food provision and providing wellbeing packages, with a focus on ensuring that kaumātua were staying connected.[23]

By collaborating with key service organisations and agencies to access resources and services alike, the marae became a distribution hub for the local communities of South Auckland by providing kai parcels and hygiene packs, and support services such as Whānau Ora, Emergency Housing and Primary Healthcare. Manurewa Marae became a safe haven and a source of relief for whānau impacted by the increased hardship from the loss of employment and income caused by the lockdown. As a Whānau Ora partner, Manurewa Marae has continued to respond to the needs of whānau since the second wave of COVID-19, extending their provision to a soup kitchen, a food bank; as well as delivering kai and hygiene packs to local kaumātua.

Manaakitanga is a very powerful expression of how Māori communities care for one another[24] and Manurewa Marae has been highly responsive to act and mobilise in answering community calls for help. This was shown when they responded in setting up as an approved testing station for Papatoetoe High School, following the Auckland community outbreak of the highly transmissible Alpha variant of the coronavirus. This aided in reducing the spread of the virus into the wider community. As Marae Kaumātua and Manurewa Marae Board Chairperson, describes:

> *It's to provide any manaakitanga, not just for Papatoetoe but also for our wider community of Manurewa. Our whānau are still struggling. Lockdown is nothing new to us. You know we are used to this. We have done this three times now.*
>
> Matua Mclean[25]

On 8 April 2021, Manurewa Marae became the first marae-based clinic to roll out the COVID-19 vaccination[26] with kuia and koroua first in line. Manurewa Marae CEO promotes that "Manurewa Marae is a safe place for anyone who is vaccine-hesitant and for those seeking more information to make an informed decision for themselves."[27]

Manurewa Marae has demonstrated how, through the application of manaakitanga, whānau wellbeing can be facilitated by marae, enabling individuals and communities to thrive, even through a pandemic.

PAPATŪĀNUKU KŌKIRI MARAE

> *We are sustainable, we are bulletproof and respond as we deem fit*
>
> Hineamaru Ropati[28]

Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae was founded in 1984. As the name suggests 'kōkiri' to champion, advocate, lead all things pertaining to Papatūānuku (our earth mother). This is a mataawaka marae also located in Mangere on Council owned land. In 1990, the marae established maara (communal gardens) and is recognised globally for their sustainable practice in land development. They follow the principles of Te Hua Parakore—Holistic Māori Organics framework and deliver cultural and educational community programmes relative to soil and food sovereignty, tikanga Māori, well-being, and rangatahi activities.[29]

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, this marae became the organic supermarket to communities far and wide. They became a food parcel dissemination point, adding in fresh produce and recipes to help people feed their whānau. The development of food systems and knowledge of kaitiakitanga in marae communities, for communities in this climate of employment uncertainty and food insecurity is hugely important now more than ever.[30] An example of this is the Kai Ika project reported on by the New Zealand Herald:

> *Demand for the Kai Ika project, run by Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae and fishing advocacy group LegaSea has more than tripled this year, largely due to economic impacts from Covid-19. The collective rescues the two thirds of a fish that's typically left after filleting from recreational and commercial fishers, and distributes them across the city to those in need.*[31]

Beyond this obvious role as kaitiaki and networkers of whenua, kai and education, Papatūānuku hold close to them the mātauranga and experiences of manaaki tāngata that their ancestors gifted them with, to help others. They refer to tupuna processes as time-honoured teachings of manaakitanga that comes in the form of tikanga Māori and traditional growing techniques of maara. Papatūānuku Marae Board Chairperson asserts that "Kai is our currency, ā-wairua, ā-tinana."[32] It is how the marae feed the spiritual well-being as well as know how to plant, grow and feed their families.

COVID-19 forced essential services and Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae whānau alike to extend the nature of their support to help those struggling with the expectations of social isolation. The marae made contact by reaching out to Kaumatūa local residents and in keeping the marae whānau visible, active and providing care. Everyone played an important role to demonstrate a web of support and reinforce the role of the marae as a safe place that provides help in many different ways. As described by Distinguished Professor Linda Smith:

> *Manaakitanga is the reciprocal and collective expression of love for people and caring for elders that always comes back to us. We have to act together, collaborate for the wellbeing of the whole.*[33]

Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae are neither a Social Service nor a Whānau Ora provider, but as reflected in the quote by Ropati, the marae take pride in operating under their own rangatiratanga and in being able to determine their own scope of what manaakitanga looks like for their marae and their community.

In looking at how marae respond to crises, Kawharu writes of an unfurling taniwha in a time of "extreme uncertainties and salient possibilities" in responding to a pandemic crisis, anticipating a future that relies on collective interests and action. As illustrated by the three marae profiled, the pandemic crisis can be a catalyst for change in the exercising of 'rangatiratanga', but also in providing further opportunity in strengthening tikanga and improving practices of kaitiakitanga. With community cohesion and connection being vital markers of collective well-being, Kawharu warns that "nothing should be taken for granted."[34]

CONCLUSION

> *Manaakitanga acknowledges our responsibility to give at all times with generosity and respect, and in a manner that is consistent with enhancing the wairua and mana (pride) of past, present and future. It is grounded in working with and for each other in the spirit of reciprocity and demands a high standard of behaviour toward each other.*[35]

The MOKO research project positioning has been ideal to observe marae naturally kick into their role as activators of manaakitanga across South Auckland communities during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Like marae up and down the country, they have stepped into the essential services space through their recognised role as places of 'community protection' and safety, providing 'social cohesion and information networks' and acting as 'distribution networks'[36] in providing resources to their local communities. As indicated in the three marae commentaries above, each have been able to determine the extent of their reach and gauge the degree of their capacity to manaaki their communities. What can also be concluded is that manaakitanga is extended in whatever form that marae or kāinga choose. There are no standards, expectations or measurements to critique the value of manaakitanga. It is fluid and marae are adaptive and resourceful.

If we in Aotearoa are looking to follow examples of working collaboratively and cohesively as a Te Tiriti nation, then marae are models of community-led hubs that bring people together. We are reminded of this with every natural disaster that the nation encounters, and yet as quickly as we engage with this place of aroha and relief in these times of need, we move on to some sense of normality where marae return to be cultural icons for Māori to do what Māori do in these spaces.

MOKO is providing a viewing platform where marae are pivotal entities in the future development of housing strategies, alongside their potential partners in communities. It is this synergy of marae with their kāinga or communities that we experience collective, solution focused strategies. Ultimately, in operating under the principles of manaakitanga, by valuing each party's contribution and ensuring that the necessary resources are distributed equitably, this will work towards making the wellbeing of every community possible.

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Professor Jenny Lee-Morgan (Waikato-Tainui, Ngāti Mahuta, Ngāti Te Ahiwaru) is the founding Director of Ngā Wai ā Te Tūī, Māori and Indigenous Research Centre at Te Whare Wānanga o Wairaka, Unitec. Jenny has a distinguished track record of teaching and kaupapa Māori research. Previously a Māori secondary school teacher, Jenny has a strong background in education, te reo Māori and community-based research. Formerly the Head of School of Māori Education at the University of Auckland, and Deputy Director of Te Kotahi Research Institute at the University of Waikato with Prof Leonie Pihama. In 2016 Jenny was awarded Te Tohu Pae Tawhiti Award by the New Zealand Association for Research in Education in recognition of her high-quality research and significant contribution to the Māori education sector. Building on her interest in pūrākau as methodology, her most recent publication is a co-edited book with Professor Joann Archibald and Dr Jason DeSantolo (2019) titled *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology,* published by Zed Books. Jenny is also a very devoted grandmother.

Ngahuia Eruera (Ngāti Awa, Ngai Tuhoe, Tuhourangi, Ngaiterangi, Ngāti Rangitihi, Ngāti Tamaterā) is the Research Manager at Ngā Wai a Te Tūī, Māori & Indigenous Research Centre. Her background is in operations management and leadership in the tertiary education sector, where she has worked primarily in wānanga. She also has a background in sport and sports management, as a coach and national representative in several sporting codes. Her research interests include iwi/hapū governance leadership with particular focus on strategic marae development.

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