



# Mauri Hono: A Mauri sensory methodology

Methodological Innovations  
2024, Vol. 17(3) 135–146  
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DOI: 10.1177/20597991241263379  
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## Abstract

Within a Māori cultural context, the manifestation of mauri instilled in all living things, both animate and inanimate gives life. Previous research suggests Māori can experience somatic exchanges of energy such as mauri from both other people, as well as within the natural environment. Accordingly, Mauri Hono: A Mauri Sensory Methodology provides a foundation to understanding knowledge by tuning into our senses and using mauri states to help elicit meaning about ourselves and our relationships with natural environments when immersed in those environments. In this study, four key phases of the methodology are detailed; Rongo, Mōhio, Mārama and Mātau and applied to a case study which sought to understand how Māori draw meaning from their experience of being immersed in a natural environment. Ten participants undertook a hīkoi (walk) within a national forest park of regenerating, native, bush. Findings revealed the importance of tuning into one's senses and having the time and space to interpret different experiences. Furthermore, Mauri Hono, as a Māori methodology is predicated on the belief that experiential knowledge aids in providing a more complete understanding of phenomena than theoretical knowledge alone. It further highlights that whilst knowledge can come into fruition within the timeframe of the project, there is opportunity for insights to arise afterwards, comprising various layers of knowing.

## Keywords

Māori, Indigenous methodology, cosmology, Mauri, environmental connection

Waerea, waerea,  
Waerea e Rangi e tū nei, waerea e Papa e takoto nei,  
Waerea huarahi kia puta ki te whaiao, ki te ao mārama.  
Koia te mauri, te mauri nuku, te mauri rangi, te mauri tiaki  
mai nei i te tangata, tūhono ki te ao,  
Mauri ora te pūkenga, mauri ora te taurira!  
Hā ki waho, hā ki roto,  
Tau ana te ora!  
*Obstacles are cleared from the earth to the sky in the world of  
light and understanding.*  
*The terrestrial and celestial force of life protects, connects, and  
flourishes in all.*  
*The essence of the universe is present,*  
*Vitality is in balance!*

from a Māori perspective is not limited to traditional pre-colonial contexts, but also has relevance in modern times as bodies of knowledge that can be drawn on to make sense of the contemporary world, we live in. The beginning of this article explicates these understandings by centering one, generalised Māori cosmological perspective. Unable to capture the breadth and depth of various tribal

## Introduction

Māori hold holistic, relational and deeply spiritual perspectives of the world and our place within it. 'Knowing'

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understandings and nuances within the scope of a single journal article, we encourage instead the digestion of this work as a starting point that highlights from the outset our positionality as Māori researchers, rather than a detailed account of Māori understandings that can be generalised to the wider population of Māori. We then proceed to conceptualise a methodological approach known as *Mauri Hono* that places value on intuitive, participatory and experiential ways of understanding the world, acknowledged as central to Indigenous Māori understandings (Tassell-Matamua et al., 2021). This methodological approach recognises Māori as situated within a web of kinship relationships and acknowledges the potential for sense-making between people and the natural environment, through a concept known as *mauri*. The overall aim of the study was to understand Māori sensory experiences when immersed within the taiao, the natural environment, using a Māori methodology.

### Positionality

It is pertinent to overtly acknowledge one's cultural assumptions as these influence how research and subsequent analyses are undertaken and interpreted. Knowledge is neither acultural nor apolitical, rather it is context-specific and underpinned by cosmological, ontological, epistemological and methodological beliefs of the culture from which it derives. From the outset we view mātauranga Māori as the norm, the taken for granted, valid and legitimate. From this positionality we explore how knowledge can come to be, through the lens of Indigenous Māori – while also recognising our heterogeneity, as we each hold different perspectives informed by our own unique lived experiences, acknowledging that there is not one way to *be* Māori. We must also acknowledge that Māori are a people who have experienced and continue to experience colonisation and its on-going impacts, including impacts on our beliefs, values and knowledge systems as Māori living in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand. Experiences of colonisation include but are not limited to; the removal of Māori from ancestral lands, urbanisation impacting perceived feelings of connection to *whenua* (land), legal policy prohibiting the speaking of *te reo Māori* (Māori language) and access to *tohunga* (traditional Māori healers) subsequently, impacting acquisition of language and traditional knowledges. The legislation and oppression of traditional knowledge through the Tohunga Suppression Act played a key part in this, prohibiting both the use of customary healing practices as well as the transmission of customary knowledge. These experiences help contextualise Indigenous Māori experiences and how we come to 'know' contemporarily. When making assumptions and interpreting our methodological framework we recognise

our culturally bound understandings may differ from others, of both Māori and non-Māori descent. We are a small group drawing from our own interpretive lenses. On this premise, we extend Māori sensory understandings to include the energies that are shared and expressed between people and the wider ecosystem, with a focus on *mauri*.

Two key Māori methodologies that inform this article are Matamua et al. (2023) that explores *wānanga* (to discuss, to share knowledge) and Dell's (2021) *Rongomatau* 'sensing the knowing', that acknowledges the shared sensory relationship between researcher and participants. The other key methodology we draw from is the work of Pink (2003), who coined the term *sensory ethnography* within the field of anthropology. Pink outlined the intimate relationship between methodology and methods, arguing that theoretical underpinnings should inform the methods used within research. Sensory ethnography is a methodology underpinned by Western (Euro-American) understandings of sensory experiences and provides valuable insights for knowledge acquisition. However, Western methodologies such as Pink's do not fully capture Indigenous cultural assumptions or perspectives, which are often holistic and relational in nature. Our article seeks to frame a methodology that acknowledges the underlying cultural assumptions Māori hold about reality, about what constitutes knowledge and therefore, about what guides the processes chosen and carried out throughout the research process.

### Framing a methodology – Ontology, epistemology and methodology

Ontology, epistemology and methodology are considered important concepts within Western scholarship. Indigenous scholars see these concepts as intimately linked (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo 2001; Kovach, 2010), so whilst they may be described separately, they should be understood as informing each other. Māori cosmologies, cosmogonies, ontologies and epistemologies are inherently holistic, relational and deeply spiritual. All things in the universe can be seen as coming from the universe, emanating from the universe and descending from the universe. While there are many interpretations of these informed by tribal nuances, Māori cosmogonies generally describe the creation of the universe as emerging through three states of existence known as *Te Kore*, *Te Pō* and *Te Ao Mārama* (Marsden, 1981; Tassell-Matamua et al., 2021). *Te Kore*, meaning 'the void', is understood by some as the core beginning, a state of infinite potential holding within it the energetic sources of all creation. The eons of time spent in *Te Kore* are reflected in various descriptive names and gradations of *Te Kore*, such as: *Te Kore te whiwhia* (the void in which nothing could be obtained), *Te*

*Kore te rawea* (the void in which nothing could be felt), *Te Kore i ai* (the void with nothing in union) and *Te Kore te wiwia* (the space without boundaries) (Walker, 2004). A Ngāti Hau (Indigenous kin group of Aotearoa New Zealand) tradition of how the world came to be indicates all phenomena descend from a divine energy, referred to as *Io* (White, 1887: 2). Considered a generative force of the universe, *Io* is depicted in *whakapapa* (genealogical lines of descent) as the primal *atua* (ancestral deity), eventually begetting other *atua* including *Papatūānuku* (the earth mother), *Ranginui* (the sky father), which will be described in more detail below.

*Te Pō*, the second state of existence, is the celestial realm and the domain of *atua* (ancestral deities). *Te Pō* also has qualifying adjectives and gradations (Walker, 2004). Beginning with *Te Pō*, *Te Pō* became *Te Pō nui* (the great night), *Te Pō roa* (the long night), *Te Pō te kītea* (the night in which nothing could be seen), *Te Pō uriuri* (the dark night), *Te Pō kerekere* (the intense night), *Te Pō tangotango* (the intensely dark night). As in *Te Kore*, these gradations of *Te Pō* reflect the eons of time when the earth came into being. *Te Kore* and *Te Pō* also reflect the emptiness and darkness of the mind, void of both light and knowledge. While *atua* are often defined as gods or supernatural beings, to Māori they are also considered to be ancestors from whom Māori can trace their ancestral lineage. The darkness in *Te Pō* was understood as being caused by the self-generation of *Ranginui* and *Papatūānuku* during this time of *Te Pō*, who in the closeness of their marital embrace were preventing light from entering the world. Through the procreative powers of *Ranginui* and *Papatūānuku*, their sons were born. Tired of living in the darkness, the sons plotted against their parents to let light into the world and concluded that living in a world of darkness and ignorance could only be alleviated by forcing their parents apart. This task was accomplished by *Tāne* who lay on his back and with his legs thrust above him, so that *Ranginui* would become the sky father and *Papatūānuku* would remain with them as their earth mother.

The separation of *Papatūānuku* and *Ranginui* brought into being the third state of existence, *Te Ao Mārama*, the world of light, the realm in which human beings exist. Each child of *Papatūānuku* and *Ranginui*, and other *atua*, are understood as having continuing influence on particular domains within the human, physical and spiritual realms. Therefore, *atua* can be understood as the generative forces of the universe that the natural environment descends from and evolves, including people, soil, trees, water, birds, rocks and so on. *Te Ao Mārama* is also a metaphor often used to describe ‘enlightenment’, where the word ‘*mārama*’ in te reo Māori also means to understand or to know. This speaks to the importance of knowledge acquisition in our experiences as Māori. This state of existence can be thought of as the space in which

people consciously experience Māori bodies of knowledge and apply it to everyday living, to make sense of and engage in the world. These bodies of knowledge are broadly encompassed by what is termed *mātauranga Māori* (Māori knowledges). *Mātauranga Māori* comes in many forms, including *pūrākau* (traditional form of storytelling), *waiata* (songs), *mōteatea* (chants) or *karakia* (incantations). *Tikanga Māori* (cultural customs) and *mātauranga Māori* inform the various experiential and intuitive knowledge-based practices used by Māori.

As depicted throughout the cosmological narrative so far, existence as human beings within the world of light is attributed to the actions of various *atua*. Through the actions of the *atua* in creating the world of light, they also bestowed upon humanity the role of guardians of the earth, making reciprocity an important value underpinning the relationship between humans and the natural environment (Wright, 2013). The creation of the universe and our existence through the above three states of existence are what inform Māori understandings of the inherent interconnectivity between the human, physical and spiritual realms and thus between all phenomena across time, place and space. Māori worldviews and ways of being recognise and respect the relationships underpinning this interconnectivity, which are reflected in the concepts *whakapapa*<sup>1</sup> and *whanaungatanga*<sup>2</sup> (Kawharu, 2000; Marsden, 2003). Indigenous Māori notions of interconnectivity between people and the environment can also be understood as being present through *mauri*. These concepts are similarly important for Māori epistemological understandings concerned with theorising knowledge and understanding researcher positionality (Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo, 2001; Kovach, 2010; Smith 2012).

## Understanding Mauri and its Application to Research

*Atua tū, mana ū, mauri ora i te ao mārama*

The generative energy of the universe is instilled and flourishes in all living things (Te Rā Moriarty)

*Mauri* can be understood as the vitality, the life essence or ‘the essential quality and vitality of a being or entity’ (Moorfield, 2023: para. 3). Others acknowledge *mauri* as ‘te mana atua kei roto i te tangata ki te tiaki i a ia, he tapu’<sup>3</sup> (Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori, 2023; para. 3). Similarly, *mauri* has been described as ‘te pū o ngā kare ā-roto’<sup>4</sup> (Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori, 2023; para. 5). From a Māori world view, life is a manifestation of *mauri* instilled in all living things, animate and inanimate and life cannot exist or be created without it. Within the Māori cosmological understandings described earlier, *mauri* sits at the origin point of the universe within its

generative *atua* force. The potential for life to descend from this force is due to the *mauri* of the universe. In relation to the natural environment, Royal (2007a) states that the forest also possesses *mauri*, and it is *mauri* that creates life, allowing fruit to grow, birds to arrive and so on. *Mauri* is inherited and connects all things within *te ao Māori*, woven together through *whakapapa*, passed down from deities and *atua* to all living entities that are then understood to be *whanaunga* (relations or kin) to each other from the people to the trees, the water to the soil; everything is connected to everything by being instilled with the *mauri* and the *mana* of the universe.

It must be acknowledged that *mauri* does not exist in isolation, but it exists alongside many other energy forms, such as *wairua* (which is adeptly constructed by Valentine et al. (2017) as an ethereal, spiritual entity that is boundless, yet ever-present across time and space), *hau* (the vital essence or vitality of a person, place or object) and *mana* (spiritual authority, prestige). Each of these energy sources possess their own rich complexities and nuances that we do not have the capacity to explore within this piece of writing. However, *mana* is a particularly important concept that is inherently interlinked with *mauri*. *Mana* refers to the power, prestige or spiritual authority within living entities, including people and the natural environment. Royal (2007b) defines *mana* as ‘an extraordinary power, essence or presence’ that ‘applies to the energies and presences of the natural world’. Marsden (1981) described *mana* as a spiritual gift from *atua* (ancestral deities), delegated to humans and other living entities to act on behalf of *atua* and in accordance with their revealed will. *Mauri* can be considered the flow point of the *mana* of the universe. This *mauri* and *mana* is then inherited by everything that is of the universe and transcends through *Te Kore* (the void), *Te Pō* (the dark) and *Te Ao Mārama* (the world of light). Royal (2007b) elaborated on the relationship between *mauri* and *mana* stating that, ‘The idea that *mana* can flow into the world through *tapu*<sup>5</sup> and *mauri* underpinned most of Māori daily life’. It was understood that without *mauri*, *mana* cannot flow into a person or object (Royal, 2007b). Importantly, Marsden refers to people as being a vessel for *mana* and *mauri*, not the source themselves. *Mauri* stones are an example of how *mauri* and *mana* are channeled through customary Māori practices. A *mauri* stone is a stone, rock or carved figure, that serve as a medium of the *mana* of divine environmental forces, called *atua*.<sup>6</sup> Māori believe *mauri* could be instilled within an object, such as a stone, to benefit the flourishing of the natural environment (Best, n.d: 8). A *mauri* stone is placed within the natural environment that it seeks to support, such as within the forest, allowing the *mana* of the natural environment to flow through it to aid in the fruitfulness of the environment.

In relation to wellbeing, Durie (2001, 2017) suggested that *mauri* is not just a dynamic force *within* all living things, but it also recognises a network of interacting relationships *between* all living things. He stated that ‘the *mauri* of one object retains its momentum not because of its intrinsic qualities alone but because of its relationship with the *mauri* of others’ (p. x). What impacts the *mauri* of one will inevitably impact the *mauri* of another. For humans, *mauri* can be understood as our life force and our wellbeing can be understood in terms of the state of our *mauri* as it relates to the *mauri* of other living things. For example, Durie (2001) describes various states of *mauri* and wellbeing, including *mauri ora* (a state of flourishing), *mauri oho* (a state of alertness or awareness), *mauri tau* (a state of calmness) or *mauri noho* (a state of despondency or despair). These *mauri* states recognise both the vitality of oneself, as well as the interacting relationship with the *mauri* of one’s surrounding environment.

Based on the premise that everything is connected through an instilling of *mauri* and *mana* derived from a shared source that all phenomena descend from, it is important to articulate how *mauri* can be sensed within a research context. Sensing can be understood as holistic and inter-relational. Sensing in *te reo Māori* (the Māori language) is encapsulated by the term *rongo* (Dell, 2021; Tassell-Matamua et al., 2023) which means ‘to know or get to know through, not only by hearing but also, touching, feeling, intuition, or any other means’ (Smith, 2000: 55). Although *rongo* does not include ‘sight’, which is differentiated through terms such as ‘*titiro*’ – to look or ‘*kite*’ to see (Tassell-Matamua et al., 2023), it does include the traditional four modalities of sensing depicted within Western discourse, such as hearing, feeling, smelling and tasting, while also referring to whole body experiences (Smith, 2000) like intuition and intuitive inquiry, dreaming or *wairua* experiences (those that are considered to be of a spiritual nature). Hakaraia (2019) exemplifies one such understanding of sensing from a *rongoā Māori* (traditional Māori healing practices) perspective ‘When we smell the scent of *rākau* [trees] we are inhaling the *mauri* or vibration into the *tinana* [body]. It has the *mana* to trigger our cells to resonate to the frequency of the *rākau*’ (para.1). This example highlights a holistic representation of how sensing can be understood utilising a whole-body experience. Indeed, *rongo* may be understood as encapsulating an inclusive, embodied approach to coming to understand through the use of one’s inherent ability to sense (Dell, 2021).

Other works suggest sensing is comparable to constructs of consciousness (Tassell-Matamua et al., 2023), highlighting how sensing is intimately related to *mauri*. From this perspective, *mauri* is thought of as a form of ‘individualised embodied consciousness which suggests an

ability (or not) to be aware of and respond to one's surroundings' (Tassell-Matamua et al., 2023: 160). This notion of consciousness as encompassed by mauri, can suggest not only cognitive functionality but also a sensory experience whereby people have the ability to receive and also pass on information to their surrounding environments. Hakaraia (2023) exemplifies one such experience of *rongo* through the process of engaging with *rongoā* Māori, whereby some people (acknowledging heterogeneity within Māori realities) are in-tune with their shared relationship with particular plants and trees and can sense which *rākau* (tree/plant) they may need, within a healing context. This process could be understood as entering into a *wairua* space whereby the mauri of the *rākau* is able to connect with the mauri of the individual. Knowledge is exchanged between the two beings whereby the *rākau* is able to sense the needs of the individual and the individual can sense the *rākau* they are drawn to and, if given permission from the *rākau*, access healing from. From this positionality people can then be seen as bound to the natural world due to an understanding that we descend from the same energy forces as our natural environments, linking us inextricably to one another (Nicholson 2020) and demonstrating how people can have a sensitivity to various *wairua* and mauri that exist outside of the human form.

### Mauri Hono: A Mauri sensory methodology

Mauri hono is put forward as a mauri sensory methodology that provides an Indigenous Māori approach to sensory ethnography as originally conceptualised by Pink (2003). It considers Māori understandings of sensing and looks at the role of mauri, the energy force that is instilled within all living entities. It is proposed that mauri plays an important role within humans' abilities to sense. It is one's mauri sensitivity that is active when immersed within the natural environment, whether one is conscious or aware of this sensitivity at a particular time or not. A mauri sensitivity allows for an exchange of somatic energies to be shared between both people and the natural environment. This perspective extends that of Dell's (2021) work whereby she brings to the forefront the ability for knowledge generation to occur through the exchange of somatic energies between the researcher and research participants. Due to the shared *whakapapa* of people and the natural environment descending back to our origins, the sharing of energy between people and the natural environment can and does exist. Our framework focusses on one particular energy source, mauri. A mauri sensitivity to our natural environment is chosen as an example highlighting how knowledge, reflections, awareness can be presented to people both immediately in-situ and later (post-experience), once they have had time to

reflect on their somatic experiences. Through interpreting these experiences people 'come to know' or come to understand things about themselves, about the natural world and about their relationships with the people and natural environments around them.

Interpretation of the somatic exchanges of energy experienced within the natural environment follows the traditional adage explicated by Dell (2021). It proposes four key phases:

- Mā terongoka mōhio* (through sensing comes awareness)
- Mā temōhioka mārāma* (through awareness comes understanding)
- Mā temāramaka mātau* (through understanding comes knowledge)
- Mā temātauaka ora* (through knowledge comes well-being)

We describe each of these phases below, and how they apply to the research context. Although distinctions are made between each phase for ease of reading, in practice the phases are not necessarily experienced as distinct from each other, nor do they occur in a linear fashion. The following is just one interpretation of the above adage; others may hold different interpretations.

The first phase named here as *Rongo*, requires one to be physically immersed within the research context, the sensory experience of that context will begin through the process of *rongo*. Each individual is different and will sense the research context in diverse ways. What is key is the importance of tuning into one's senses and recognising what one is feeling, thinking, seeing, hearing, smelling and doing. During this process one's mauri becomes sensitive to the energies that are present, both the mauri (and other energy sources) present in the surroundings and that of the people present (if this is the case). This sensitivity to mauri can present as *tohu* (signs) as defined by Matamua et al. (2023: 2) '*process of attributing synchronistic meaning to seemingly unrelated events...signalling a particular response, solution, direction or caution to a current issue that requires attention by the perceiver*', in the form of thoughts, feelings, reflections, somatic experiences.

The second phase denoted as *Mohio* (awareness), recognises some sensory experiences will arrive into conscious awareness at the exact point in time one is experiencing it. Other sensory experiences will linger within one's subconscious and whilst still present, may not be brought into one's conscious awareness until sometime after the experience. There are also limitations to the extent of sensory information human beings can process and as such, there are likely to be *tohu* presented that are not brought to awareness at all. Further, the mauri instilled within each environment is not the same and can elicit different responses depending on the individual. Whilst one individual may feel a sense of calmness in a

particular environment, another may feel a sense of heightened awareness. This phase requires one to be present in the moment and to give their attention to both their embodied experience and what is happening around them.

The third phase of the process is *Mārama* (understanding). Once one becomes aware of their sensory experience, they need to interpret this information in a manner that reflects their understandings of the world. Often this is a process of ‘coming to understand’ and requires both individual meaning making and input from others. When trying to understand embodied experiences, the use of mauri states (states of wellbeing) can help one identify how they felt within a particular space in time. Mauri states are subjective, mutable throughout the research process and ultimately are up to those participating in the research to discern. Pertinent to the understanding of one’s sensory experience is also drawing on the knowledge of others. This can take the form of *kōrero* (conversation) shared between people, *wānanga* (deliberate or consider) with a group of others or seeking out *kaumātua* (esteemed elders) who hold wisdom gained through their life experiences. Drawing on input from others and one’s internal meaning making, an individual can construct meanings and interpretations of their personal experiences within the research context. Additionally, if representing a collective experience, co-construction of narratives can be developed, thus demonstrating nuanced insights about experiences.

The last phase of this process is *Mātau* (knowledge), which is also inherently connected to *ora* (life, health, vitality). Once meanings have been created about sensory experiences, knowledge is gained. This knowledge can, for example, reflect personal learnings one has gained from their experience. Knowledge of one’s mauri state can draw attention to an area of *hauora* (vitality, wellbeing) that needs to be attended too or alternatively, indicate an area in which one is flourishing. At a collective level, mauri states can reflect the state of wellbeing of the research topic, setting and the people involved. This example demonstrates how knowledge acquired through sensing, awareness and understanding can provide key insights for both ourselves and the environments we are a part of. At a more general level, this stage provides space for theoretical knowledge to come forward about our understandings of the world and our existence within it, alongside how this knowledge can be applied practically.

## Case study

### Participants

To demonstrate the practical applicability of Mauri Hono within research, we describe a study under-taken by members of ‘He taonga kē te ngahere’ (the forest is an

extraordinary treasure), a collaborative research project between researchers at the Centre for Indigenous Psychologies at Massey University, the University of Waikato, the University of Auckland and Te Arawa Lakes Trust – all based in Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ). The case study explored how Māori drew meaning from their experience of being immersed in a natural environment setting, which in this case was a national forest park of regenerating native bush and was predicated on the belief that experiential knowledge offers a more complete understanding than learned or theoretical knowledge alone. This design was chosen as it was a study of localised, Indigenous, Māori experiences when immersed within a native, forest, environment, therefore a case study approach was deemed most appropriate. Participants were recruited through a convenience sampling method grounded in the principle of *whakawhanaungatanga* – a culturally significant principle in Indigenous Māori culture based on establishing and maintaining meaningful relationships. Participants were known to the research leads prior to the research through *whakawhanaungatanga*. Ten people comprised the research *rōpū* (group) as this study was not intended to make generalisations about the Māori population rather, explore the nuances of participants experiences in depth. Four self-identified as male and six as female. They ranged in age from 21 to 48 years old and were either students or staff at Massey University located in Palmerston North, ANZ. All but two of the participants self-identified as Māori, with one Pākehā (non-Māori New Zealander) and a Russian colleague part of the *rōpū*.

### Ethics

Institutional ethical approval was obtained prior to commencement of the study (MUHEC, NOR 20/49).

### Procedure

The data gathering process involved firstly, conducting individual interviews before the *hīkoi* began. The interviews ranged in length but, were approximately 30 minutes allowed us to gain insight into our thoughts and feelings prior to the *hīkoi* commencing. A range of data gathering tools were used and included: a drone, go-pro’s, cam recorders, voice recorders and cell-phones, with each participant having atleast one of these tools to capture the *hīkoi*. A variety of tools were used due to Māori knowledge acquisition methods being holistic in nature and aim to capture multisensory experiences which align with Indigenous story-telling approaches. From here, we were interviewed by each other at various stages of the *hīkoi* including set times: at the beginning, at a lunch stop just under half-way and at the end of the *hīkoi*. We were also free to capture our thoughts, feelings and emotions at any

stage we felt it was necessary. For example, one participant stopped at a Nikau tree (a palm tree endemic to ANZ) and started talking about its significance to another participant, unprompted. Alongside set phases of capturing insights, we were also free to capture moments at any point in time whether we were being prompted with questions or had moments of self-reflection we wanted to capture. At the end of the hīkoi, we were encouraged to share our insights about our experience and self-reflect on the whole process. This reflection occurred immediately after the hīkoi as we waited in the carpark for members of our rōpū to finish; a couple of days afterwards where we came together one last time before members of the team returned to their permanent areas of work; as well as a couple of years later in preparing to write this article. Therefore, data collection took place on the 3rd of December 2020 although the analysis process extended over many months as we further reflected on the experience and gained new insights. In line with the start and end of this article, we commenced and concluded the hīkoi with karakia, to provide safety and clear the way forward. From here selected anonymised quotes from the participants will be presented in italics to highlight each phase of Mauri Hono, they have been anonymised so as not to be identifiable beyond the research team.

## Our process for applying Mauri Hono

### Phase 1: Rongo

To shift into the first phase of *rongo*, the hīkoi began with two karakia (incantations); the first holding the intention to clear the pathway forward for those present, ensuring their safety. The second karakia was intended to connect us to the atua present and the mauri of the natural environment, for example;

*‘Tuia i runga, tuia i raro, it’s about threading the energies of the earth and the sky together so basically just allowing us to be present in the moment and experiencing the natural world really, through the earth and the sky, I mean we are in-between them’ (participant 1).*

By drawing our intentions to both the words and feel of the karakia we prepared our senses to become in-tune with the various energy forces present within the ngahere as alluded to by male participant one, *‘Karakia can help us become more mindful just by stopping and acknowledging the energy and the forces present in the natural world’*. The next part of the process was physically immersing ourselves in the 7-hour hīkoi through the natural, regenerative, forest. By immersing ourselves within a natural environment we were able to record our experiential knowledge of being present within the ngahere, allowing

us to hold both theoretical knowledge and that gained through practice. We recorded our reflections, our thoughts, feelings, emotions, expressions (both verbal and non-verbal), silences, anything that arose within our conscious awareness, using our multi-media tools. Indeed, both preparation of our senses and being immersed within a natural environment were key to our first phase of Mauri hono –*rongo*, and allowed us to shift into phase 2 *mōhio*.

### Phase 2: Mōhio

By intentionally recording our thoughts, feelings, emotions and reflections we were able to capture our sensory experiences that existed within our conscious awareness, as well as those we were not directly aware of at the time. Only upon looking back at the recordings were some things brought to our attention that were not at the forefront of our minds on the day. The process of capturing these sensory insights indicated we had moved into the second phase of *mōhio*. Some of the key insights that arose within our participants’ consciousness awareness on the day are presented here as quotes. Firstly, for some a strengthened sense of connection to te taiao was apparent as we immersed ourselves in the ngahere, which created a conscious desire to engage more with the ngahere, more often. This desire appeared to come from a conscious need to connect with something greater than oneself, for example, *‘I feel like it’s important to feel connected to something that’s other than just people or things (participant 2)’*. However, we also became aware that not all of us felt connected to the ngahere despite being immersed within it, and some felt a stronger connection to other spaces in te taiao *‘my strongest connection is to water (participant 3)’*, or even to built environments *‘I wouldn’t say I have a strong connection because I spend most of my time indoors, studying or working on my laptop (participant 3)’*.

Another key sensory experience held by some participants upon being immersed within the ngahere was a heightened sense of wairua present and its influence on their mauri. Upon encountering a man-made mine shaft participant 4 stated, *‘There’s something looking out of there, it’s feels weird, it has a weird feeling’*. Another participant could not visually see a presence but, was able to sense it in another way, via feeling; *‘I don’t see anything but, I do feel a bit weird (participant 5)’*. To help those that could feel the presence of the wairua (spirit entity) in the mine-shaft, kōrero was held to try and understand how it was impacting one’s mauri. The entity was not deemed to be harmful to the collective group, however, it was decided that a karakia should be carried out, nevertheless to ensure safe passage for the rest of the hīkoi and settle any disturbance we may have caused within that specific area. Together these quotes depict a range of mauri sensitivities specific to the individual person.

### Phase 3: Mārama

By shifting through *Mōhio* and becoming aware of what we were sensing, we were then able to try and make sense of these experiences and draw understandings, reflecting the third phase of our framework –*Mārama*. This phase occurred in many ways, it occurred over the course of our *hīkoi* through *wānanga* and discussion before, during and after. For those who became aware of their connection or perceived lack of connection due to other influences such as technology (as indicated in the *mōhio* section), renewed understandings started to form. By reflecting on our sense of connection, spiritually we were guided to think about what is important, what we are doing, what we could be doing better and why (because our wellbeing is both physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually dependent on the environment) both at the time but also, after the *hīkoi* commenced.

Additionally, individual level understandings came in the form of embodied experiences we had on the *hīkoi*, which reflected various states of wellbeing, as described through *mauri* states. *Kōrero* shared reflected a state of *mauri tau* (a state of calmness) for some members of the group, whereby at one point in time they felt their *mauri* become settled upon being immersed in the *ngahere*: ‘*You know when you go back to a familiar person and you’re like, ‘oh I’ve missed you’, but I didn’t realise I had missed you (participant 5)*’ and ‘*It makes me feel at peace and happy and like I don’t have to worry about life’s problems at the moment (participant 6)*’.

Other times one’s sensory experience could be interpreted as being in a state of *mauri oho* (a state of alertness or awareness). For the mine example above: ‘*There’s something looking out of there, it’s feels weird, it has a weird feeling (participant 4)*’, this experience can be interpreted as the participant’s *mauri* being alert to the presence of *wairua*. Without this alertness, one would not be able to consciously comprehend another being present within the immediate environment. Additionally, some participants experienced a state of *mauri oho* upon understanding what their bodies could tolerate and push through, ‘*For me, it was sort of just like a physically and mentally challenging experience...that was cool...knowing what my body is capable of doing (participant 7)*’ as well as reflecting on how those before them likely lived in comparison to our everyday lives contemporarily ‘*If my tūpuna (ancestors) did this every day, then I am very out of touch (participant 3)*’ Key to this process of understanding was being aware of our sensory experiences and coming together to find insights into what they meant both as a collective group and for each individual. Some understandings were made during the *hīkoi* however, other realisations did not come until sometime after the *hīkoi* when we had a chance to sit and reflect.

The last phase of our framework *Mātau* reflects the understandings and connections we made between our sensory experiences and insights gained and how this knowledge can be applied to ourselves and the natural environment. Firstly, many were reminded of the inter-relativity between all things in the cosmos for example:

*Ko te hau ki waho, ko te hau ki roto. Āe, ko Tāwhirimātea, kei ō tātou tahataha i ngā wā katoa a Tāwhirimātea.... ‘hoki atu ki tō maunga kia purea e ngā hau a Tāwhirimātea’. Pēnei i a tātou i tēnei maunga, purea nei e te hau a Tāwhirimātea. Āe, koia tētehi o ngā atua tino kaha. [Translation: The wind and vitality outside, the wind and vitality inside. Yes, Tāwhirimātea is at our sides at all times...return to your mountain to be cleansed by the winds of Tāwhirimātea. That’s just like us here on this mountain, cleansed by the winds of Tāwhirimātea. Yes, it is one of the strongest atua.] (participant one).*

This relationship also facilitated a sense of obligation to care for *te taiao*, ‘*we’re all connected you know. Like the land gives us life and we need to do our part to give back to the land; and it’s a responsibility for everyone (participant 3)*’. Further, participants recognised states of *mauri* within the natural environment. For instance, one participant recognised *te taiao* was in a state of *mauri noho* (languishing) and recognised the connection this has to the *mauri* of the people, ‘*Our freshwater systems are doing pretty crap ‘cause agriculture; and something definitely needs to be done about that (participant 8)*’, ‘*It’s just poor for the environment and us...the product of commercialisation (participant 8)*’. We also found that immersion within the environment furthered our understandings regarding sources of knowledge and the key role *te taiao* plays in helping us understand the world and our existence within it. Becoming consciously aware of this connection practically not just theoretically, allowed us to remember how our *tūpuna* lived and engaged with the natural world ingraining a lived, experiential process of coming to know:

*Ahakoia ki hea, he ngahere me te mātauranga e pupurihia ana i te ngahere, ngā ingoa, ngā rongoā, ngā kai...Ko ngā mātauranga katoa kei konei e pūpurihia ana e te ngahere. Ko Tāne-te-wānanga, koirā te ao i noho ai ō tātou tūpuna. [Translation: No matter where you go, there is a forest with knowledge that is held by the forest, the names, the medicines, the food...All of the knowledge bases are held here in the forest. Tāne-the-knowledgeable, this is the world that our ancestors lived in] (participant one).*

### Reflection

By immersing ourselves in the *ngahere* and intentionally reflecting on the state of our *mauri* and that of the environment, our sensory, emotional and spiritual experiences, this process encouraged us to be aware of ourselves

and our relationships with our surroundings through mauri energies. Co-constructing understandings of those experiences and interpretations through wānanga with others allowed us to uncover and explore new understandings of ourselves and our relationships with the environment, and how we experience and interact with the world. Through Mauri Hono, our hīkoi was an opportunity to move beyond physicality and experience nature intentionally, consciously and with all our senses. Senses not limited solely to the traditionally acknowledged senses, but also derived from spiritual connections and energies such as mauri, to different aspects of the natural environment.

We found immersion in the ngahere positively influenced our holistic well-being. Some participants felt their mauri shift into a state of mauri tau at times, exemplified through feelings of calmness and peace. Others sensed a state of mauri oho at times, both individually and within the natural environment. By moving through the stages of rongo, mōhio, mārama and mātau we were able to become consciously aware of our own attitudes and behaviours to the ngahere and te taiao, and this influenced a desire for some to connect more with the ngahere and/or other natural environments they more closely relate to (e.g. moana – ocean). This allowed us to recognise and locate ourselves within the natural environment, with some participants feeling a greater obligation and responsibility to care for and protect these natural spaces, which was coupled with an extreme concern for specific environmental issues.

Another key reflection of this process is the acknowledgement that there are many layers of knowing and these layers maybe revealed over time, not necessarily in the exact moment or immediately afterwards. As an example, one participant found some feelings were able to be identified in the moment through wānanga. However, other insights into her experience did not come until sometime afterwards. Upon reflecting further, she realised there were a number of sensations she felt during the hīkoi that she did not have the words for. Things that were sensed (rongo) and brought into one's awareness (mōhio) but could not be understood at the time because she did not have the words to put those feelings into understandings (mārama) or knowledge (mātau). It is not until three years later and with those years, learning more about one's culture, that these understandings could finally be realised. Learning more about her language, healing practices and what different states of being meant, helped her understand why she felt different things in different parts of the ngahere and why she may not have felt others. These insights would not have arisen without firstly being immersed in the environment and secondly, having the time and space to interpret different experiences. Therefore, whilst knowledge may come into fruition within the timeframe of a project, Mauri Hono

acknowledges the opportunity for insights to arise afterwards, comprising various layers of knowledge.

## Conclusions

Mauri can be understood as giving rise to feelings, thoughts, emotions, spiritual and embodied experiences we have. Within the context of this research, we interpret feelings of being relaxed, calm and peaceful as possibly meaning we were in a state of mauri tau, which may mean our relationships with the people or environments we are in at that moment are nurturing. On the other hand, feelings of being overwhelmed or coming to realisations about ourselves could be likened to mauri oho (awakened mauri) which may be indicative of a tohu (sign) that we need to understand to improve our state of wellbeing. Tuning in to the state of our mauri can teach us about ourselves and the quality of our relationships with our surrounding environments (Hakaraia, 2023). As well as the potential for us to be given insight into our own wellbeing and how it could be improved.

Additionally, mauri is an energetic force that extends beyond theory to hold practical relevance within the everyday lives of contemporary Māori, both those living in urban and non-urban areas. Using the Mauri Hono framework allows us to use key Māori concepts and understandings to build knowledge about ourselves and our surrounding environments. Given the premise that both the natural environment and the people have mauri and that mauri can be traced back to our cosmological origins, mauri can then be a foundational theoretical and practical way of gaining knowledge, through our sensitivity to the mauri of other people and the mauri present within our natural environments. It enables us to gain insights into our wellbeing and recognise what our relationships are with the natural world. For those who perceived feelings of disconnection to te taiao, this reflection provides us with the opportunity to change our behaviours and choose to reconnect with te taiao in ways that are of meaning to the individual given; a lack of immersion and engagement within natural environments prevents our ability to understand the environment, our relationship with the environment and the importance of this relationship as Māori. When looking at this experience through the lens of our methodology, this sudden awareness of one's connection (or perceived lack thereof) to their whanaunga, in the form of plants, trees, water, birds could be attributed to one's sensitivity to mauri, in which they are now experiencing through access to the ngahere. This indicates the importance of experiencing our natural worlds in practice and having a framework that helps us understand and be able to draw conclusions about these experiences.

With regards to our methodology there are numerous assumptions underpinning it. Firstly, that we have the ability to tune into our mauri state and that of the natural environment by being immersed in and intentionally observing our thoughts, feelings, emotions, spiritual and embodied experiences. These observations can then provide insight into our understandings of ourselves and our relationships with the natural environment. We can theorise about phenomena from a distance based on our own preconceptions and biases, but that theoretical knowledge may be limited and we miss opportunities to gain other insights that can only be sought by fully immersing ourselves and allowing ourselves to rongo within the environments we are theorising about. Immersion in this process allowed many of us to see the bigger picture and understand that we are just a small part of a greater whole. Another assumption is that there are multiple levels of knowing and that each level is required to inform the others. Theoretical knowledge is grounded in our co-constructed understandings of the world and the interpretations we make based on the knowledge and insights that others share with us. In order to make meaningful interpretations or understandings we must be consciously aware of our experiences, thoughts, feelings, emotions, spiritual and embodied responses when immersed in certain environments. This conscious awareness may occur immediately however, it can also come sometime after the experience itself has occurred. In part this maybe because for many (but not all), our contemporary lifestyles may mean we do not have direct access to various environments such as native ngahere, therefore the process needs to be active in making time and seeking out natural environments. We must then reflect on why we might be having particular responses, and what our mauri state in that moment might be telling us, either about ourselves or the environment we are within. Lastly, it is acknowledged that knowledge acquisition is never ending, and we must continuously go through cycles of sensing, awareness, reflecting and understanding to gain knowledge. This process is ever-evolving and non-linear, sometimes insights will present themselves immediately whilst other times we require time to sit and reflect or have wānanga with others to 'come to know'. Each of these phases are key to understanding ourselves in relation to our natural environments under-pinned by mauri.

This research contributes to Indigenous Māori understandings and ways of conducting qualitative research relating human connections to natural environments and vice versa, in a way that elevates and honours Indigenous beliefs and practices. This manuscript is not intended to be prescriptive but, we encourage other researchers to seek out research approaches that align with their beliefs and ways of being. Future research could include conducting similar research and methods among Māori in

different geographical, social, economic, historic, community contexts to gain insight on how such factors may impact participants experiences and interpretations of being immersed in the natural environment. Further research could also investigate whether gender plays a role in how we as Māori experience the ngahere, taking into account masculine and feminine energies. Similar to the beginning of our article we will close with a karakia;

Unuhia, unuhia, unuhia te tapu nui kia wātea!

Ka wātea i runga, wātea i raro, wātea i waho, wātea i roto,

Ka wātea kia āio te noho, kia māmā te noho, kia ora te noho!

Koia rā, e Rongo, whakairia ake ki runga kia tina,

Tina!

Haumi ē, hui ē, tāiki ē!

The restrictions are removed above and below, outside, and inside,

The way is clear so we can dwell in serenity, peace, and wellbeing.

That's it, Rongo, suspend these intentions above and fix them in place.

We are joined, gathered, and woven together.

### Author Contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.


### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work is funded by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (Mobilising for Action theme of the Ngā Rākau Taketake programme of the Biological Heritage National Science Challenge in Aotearoa/New Zealand C09X1817).

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### Notes

1. A line of descent from one ancestor to the next; a way of categorising the development of the natural world and how everything came to be, and is connected, within it.
2. Relationships that people have to each other and to the environment; the connections present within all natural phenomena (including people).
3. The divine power within a person that protects them, it is sacred.
4. The source of emotions.

5. Sacred, restricted, prohibited, something under the protection of a divine force.
6. Deity. This concept is defined in further detail on the following page.

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**Nathan Matamua** is a junior research officer with the Centre for Indigenous Psychologies at Massey University, Aotearoa New Zealand. As a member of the He Taonga Ke Te Ngahere team, his research experience is centred around the environment, particularly from a Maori cultural perspective. His current research interests include Maori astronomical knowledge and its application to environmental management.

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**Lorena de la Torre Parra** (PhD) is a *mestiza* woman. She was born in the Andes of Ecuador, nestled high between the clouds, in the place they call the country of hummingbirds. She is a daughter and granddaughter of these mountains, valleys, rivers and shores, a storyteller, a gardener, a writer. She is a gentle yet fierce fighter for social and environmental justice. Her research, work and story advocate for the disruption of scholarship, education and development, in ways that honour, reflect and respectfully uphold the sacredness of our environments and the standing of Indigenous methodologies, epistemologies, values and practices.

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