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MAORI NAMING IN TRANSITION:

How Maori have named from earliest times, through  
colonisation and missionisation, to the present day.

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### ABSTRACT

Both the type of personal names carried by Maori, and the ceremonies attached to their bestowal, have undergone some momentous changes since contact.

This study attempts to trace the customary concepts that surrounded naming when Maori alone inhabited these islands. It does so by examining the oral traditions from earliest times: through the mythologies, the whakapapa, the moteatea and other now-recorded literary forms. Establishing the nature of names and naming in 'the beginning' makes for more accurate observation of the changes that have since occurred.

That colonisation by another culture, accompanied by the evangelising activities of Christian missionaries had the consequence of virtually overturning the centuries-old naming practices of the Maori people, is the theory that has fuelled this study.

Establishing what was this other culture's background in naming its members, and what was the religious perception of naming held by those Christian missionaries, adds to an understanding of why Maori naming has been so affected by missionising activities. The processes themselves which brought about changes in Maori naming are examined.

Lastly, turning to how Maori themselves have continued to name innovatively despite these changes to what were traditional practices, observations of what appears to have been retained are made. What might have been lost is suggested, and what is now being retrieved is applauded.

## PREFACE

This thesis is concerned primarily with naming, the various customs surrounding it, their application, and the consequences of changes imposed on them.

Perhaps as the writer, it would be appropriate for me to reveal something of my own attitudes to the subject.

There is a connection between my own background and the writing. It is, in the words of another, partly an elucidation of my past and, although I have resisted focussing on that past, I expect that my experiences have provided insights for my research into the experiences of others 1.

Throughout this project, I have been conscious of an empathy with persons in some of the situations I have described. This has been particularly when these parallel my own experiences as a child, a young person and an adult.

In the British Isles and Ireland, where my origins most strongly lie, many names can be traced back to the eleventh century census known as the Domesday Book. Their presence in this register demonstrates their antiquity.

My own name, thought up for me by my parents before my birth, is such a one: Gerald, though amended to its feminine form when the girl who arrived instead of the expected son had to be accommodated.

Whether from disappointment or for more pragmatic reasons my father permanently absented himself. Whether from a broken heart or perversity, my mother decided I should not bear his family name. We lived in difficult circumstances, and with some shame, under a false name for the early period of our lives together.

Fortunately, my maternal grandmother, of the Irish Fitzgeralds, became aware of the situation and took us under her protective, if somewhat formidable wing. It was the power of my given name working on her rather than any sympathy for my mother, that was held responsible for this improved situation. Distance now effectively removed us from any further contact with my paternal links. For the next twenty years, until marriage again changed my name, I bore hers.

Meanwhile, though few in utterances, my infant person named her Margot, a name she preferred to her given one and by which she became widely known; the name I much later gave my eldest child.

Many years passed. My focus as an adult widened. Along with my Gaelic connections, Maori ones became important. In time, Maori honoured me with a name from their culture: the name Irirangi, by which I am known among them.

Together with the language, whakapapa became for me an absorbing interest. I have been privileged to listen to the classic recitation of these genealogies, some tracing their ancestry to the mythical figures of the past, to marvel at both the content and the expertise of the reciters. In this context alone, I have been aware of the importance of naming to the Maori people. Names were taonga to Maori of the past. They are still taonga today.

I have empathy with the Maori viewpoint.

Throughout this writing, I am constantly mindful that every individual from the past I discuss is someone else's revered tupuna; that every interpretation I make, regardless of what

empathy I might feel, represents an outsider's judgement. I am ever aware that, in speaking of just one among many of Maori society's customary concepts, the naming of its members, I have necessarily neglected others; in speaking of an area where the missionaries blundered, I have overlooked how much many were loved by the people.

Therefore, with respect, I bid farewell to and thank all who have gone on ahead, especially Tamihana Tukapua.

I greet the living who must carry forward the culture into a new age.

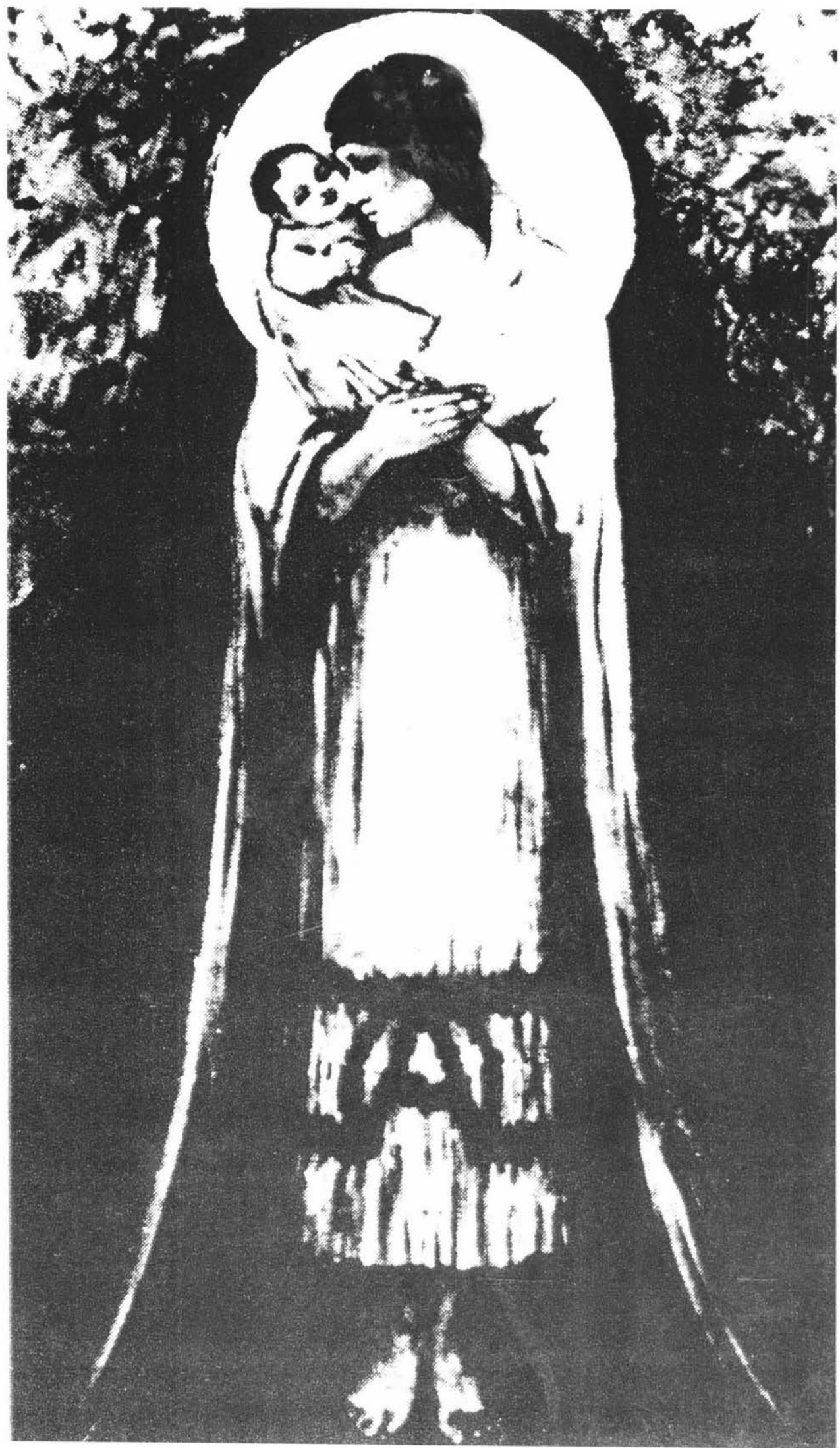
I thank all my friends who have shared their knowledge and personal stories with me, especially the kaumatua of my 'home' marae and families of the Ngati Hine hapu on whose patient understanding and support I so strongly rely.

No reira, ki oku hoa Maori, ki nga kaitiaki o nga tino taonga o mua, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena tatou katoa.

As my supervisors in this study, I thank Dr Peter Donovan who, from the very first, realised the importance of names, and Dr Bronwyn Elsmore who, throughout the writing, was able to temper my somewhat emotional response to the subject.

NOTE:

- 1 Beaglehole, A., Facing the Past, 1990:xvi, xviii.  
whakapapa: Maori genealogies, part of the oral literature.  
taonga: treasured possessions.



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### INTRODUCTION:

My research has revealed that there are two distinct types of historical change that occur in personal naming practices:

a. Those changes that occur by a natural evolution. For example, population growth can necessitate more explicit forms of naming; people within their own cultures can make innovative changes to their naming systems.

b. Those changes that are imposed from the outside; invasion or colonisation by another culture can occur. When this other culture sees its own world view and its particular religious beliefs as absolute, it tends to place no value on those it encounters in the people of the land. Traditional naming can easily be overturned when religious specialists of the proselytising culture, in their enthusiasm, do not pause to consider that their target people might already possess their own deep beliefs, expressed in rituals which the strangers cannot correctly interpret.

Often, in an attempt to replace such rituals with those that have evolved within their own religions, they bring about changes that perhaps might never have occurred in their absence. It is this sort of behaviour that can alter long-established traditional practices, such as naming.

Even before this country became a colony, missionaries came to its shores. They brought with them their western variety of Christian religion and their intention was to convert the New Zealand Maori to its beliefs and practices. This process of conversion, and the attitudes that underpin it, I have called missionisation.

New Zealand Maori named in many ways, and their traditional methods and practices of naming were profoundly affected by both the colonisation and missionisation of the nineteenth century. However, it was the latter, missionisation, that had the more serious consequences for Maori customary naming. Although Maori naming practices were subjected, from very first contact, to many new influences, the following research has made it clear that the most significant of these were the activities of the Christian missionaries.

For this reason, I consider the careful examination of naming practices, both of Maori themselves, and of those tauiwi who wrought the changes, together with the registers which record them, to form a vital part of this research project.

Whatever the intentions of the namers, the outcome of naming Maori in this new way, within the rite of Christian baptism, was to eventually dismiss one of the customary rites of the Maori people: that of naming within their own, ancient ceremonies.

In addition, the Christian names that missionaries gave Maori, replaced those with meaning within Maori society.

Likewise, missionaries introduced, if unintentionally, a completely foreign concept, one modelled on their own, cultures' patriarchal ideas. It was that of the surname which persists to this day, at times even written into the laws concerning birth registration 1.

As a consequence of these foreign introductions, the traditional naming ceremonies of the Maori people soon

became lost to them, as were many of the names themselves 2.

Although Maori have continued to name innovatively, as will be seen throughout this writing, to meet the expectations of both Church and bureaucracy, they have had little choice but to adopt, at least superficially, the naming norms of what was to fast become a dominant culture.

For these reasons alone, at a time when Maori are reclaiming their past heritage in so many areas, it is appropriate to ask when investigating naming traditions,

- In what ways was traditional naming first interrupted, then ultimately disrupted, by those tauiwi from afar?

- Did the missionaries not question the ethics of their actions simply because they saw them as legitimised by their own cultural and religious practices?

Already there is evidence that some Maori people are returning to a more traditional choice of names when naming their young. This extends even to the avoidance of the previously accepted, European-style surname 3. I believe that each such retrieval of taonga of the past can be seen as a positive re-evaluation of the present.

#### Review of sources used in the writing:

To test the claim that it was mainly early Christian missionaries who brought changes to the customary methods of naming that existed in Maori society, it is appropriate to inquire as to the nature of those changes, how and

when they might have taken place. Therefore, it follows that there is a need to define, in some detail, what is meant by customary naming in Maori society and, also, what was the perception of naming held by those who brought about the changes.

#### Part one:

My research questions, in some detail, the importance of naming to the Maori, how names were selected and by what ceremonies, if any, they were bestowed in mythological and historical times. What early precedents existed for those customs surrounding naming that survived contact, for those that were lost through it?

Was there any notion of the family or surname in pre-contact times and, if not, was it a modern innovation on the part of Maori, simply a means of conforming to the patterns set by tauiwi, or an imposed requirement?

Attempting to answer these and other questions, I examine a selection of what I consider to be among the most significant stories in the Mythological Cycles. Preferring versions of these stories given by Maori themselves, wherever possible, I have chosen to use the writings of Wi Maihi Te Rangikaheke and others. Governor George Grey, in 1854, published the book, Nga Mahi a nga Tupuna or The Deeds of the Ancestors. In this classical collection, although Grey failed to acknowledge them, several Maori informants had recorded their oral traditions. Some two fifths of the material used by Grey was taken from the writings of Te Rangikaheke of Te Arawa and others. This fact alone makes the contents of this work particularly valuable, for

most of the stories were collected before the mid-1840s, when Maori could read and write, but were not yet too influenced by the new religion for knowledge of their own rich traditions to have become blurred 4.

Although Grey's considerable editing serves to tone down any elements considered too 'earthy' for the readers of his day, he deliberately withholds the fact that his Maori informants were familiar with British culture and Christian teachings. Nga Mahi a nga Tupuna still has much to offer. However, with these and other criticisms in mind, for greater clarity, I do refer to other informed writers if their versions have particular relevancy to the topic.

Where useful and appropriate, I also select a few songs from Nga Moteatea song-poetry collected by Grey, followed by Apirana Ngata and his successor in this huge undertaking, Pei Te Hurinui. These songs are faithfully recorded and many provide accurate genealogies as well as being rich in archetypal figures of another age. This is, of course, also true of the Mythologies, if in a less historical sense.

Illustrating traditional naming, but nearer the period under study, I quote articles in periodicals published in the Journals of the Polynesian Society, for these are known for their learned articles by both Maori and Pakeha. Many of the latter were from missionary families. Such writers had been raised with Maori, spoke the language, and were aware of the old religious traditions. Some Maori of that time were literate in both their own tongue and English, as well as being well-versed in their tribal lore. That both races recorded such valuable old material, and

in such prolific quantities can be seen as unique. It is thought that few, if any, comparable peoples have produced as many early works, comments a scholar of this century 5.

These investigations of the earliest literature serve to demonstrate how Maori naming practices functioned in a more classical period of the culture. Also, keeping in mind that 'the people descended from various canoes probably carried on cultural differences that were brought from various islands in Central Polynesia (and) as they developed local traditions, they cut off forever the sea roads to Hawaiki...',

and having considered the implications this must have for any differences or developments observed by tauwiwi, I also select examples from the Maori series of the New Zealand Biography, in the first two volumes, The People of Many Peaks and The Turbulent Years, together with the later publications in Maori, Nga Tangata Taumata Rau. These give biographies of well-known Maori born in pre-contact times, so include much valuable information on naming customs. The sequential nature of the biographies show both the way Maori chose and bestowed names, or suffered names to be chosen and bestowed, over several generations.

Likewise, the research and publications of Margaret Orbell have provided a broad spectrum of useful material, from song-poetry to the korero-purakau 7.

Similarly, tribal ethnographies, even when written quite recently, hark back to an orally transmitted past, so incorporating the knowledge of whakapapa and traditions of another age. To balance these, are the relevant articles

or books written by contemporary Maori scholars, such as Ranginui Walker and Hirini Moko Mead. Likewise, there are some perceptive analyses of naming within a culture other than one's own, as earlier produced by Richard Taylor, missionary, in his Journals, or in his later publication, Te Ika a Maui, and the many writings of the ethnologist, Elsdon Best.

#### Part two:

After describing how the Maori named in traditional times and questioning how changes in those naming practices might have taken place after contact, I research something of the history and experience of naming in the places of origin of those who instigated the changes.

With this in mind, the second part of the writing briefly explores the history of naming in Britain, Ireland and part of the European Continent: those countries which provided the Christian missionaries who came to convert the Maori. Here I discuss the development of naming from the eleventh century, the time of the census in England known as the Domesday Book, until the days of missionary expansion to the Pacific. The purpose of this section of my research is to better understand how these tauwiwi or foreigners perceived the significance of naming generally, or within the beliefs and baptismal ceremonies of both the Protestant and Roman Catholic persuasions of the time.

Understanding of their perception of naming within baptism should clarify whether it was necessary under church law to give Maori a name with Christian significance or if this was simply a customary protocol on the part of those baptising: the missionising churches.

In order to more accurately pinpoint changes in naming customs and when these began to occur, I searchingly study some of the early baptismal registers kept by the missionaries of both the Anglican and Roman Catholic stations in the lower North Island. These, if taken from their first entries, give a fairly accurate picture of Maori names before Christian names began to replace them. They also give some indication of when and how the European-style 'surname' began to be used by Maori people. In this respect likewise, Government legislation and copies of relevant Acts prove useful in demonstrating to what extent the laws of the land affected Maori naming.

Obviously, the former exercise has required some personal interpretation. Although a knowledge of the language has been of great assistance, my findings can only be informed guesses at times. This is especially so when information is scanty or as, in the case of the French missionaries' entries, one is grappling with names twice transliterated. Where available, I make use of early parish documents and publications as supporting evidence.

My study of baptismal registers and other writings, often by the missionaries themselves, centres on the Church Missionary Society's station at Putiki and the greater Whanganui river area during the time when Richard Taylor was stationed there. These records are held in the archives of the Whanganui museum. Catholic Marists' missions to the Maori in Whanganui itself and the river villages, and the more southern station of Pukekaraka, at Otaki, both have detailed records held in the Marist Archives in Wellington. General information on early missionary activity in this

country, has been obtained from a variety of sources, all listed in my bibliography.

### Part three:

Supposing that from traditional times to modern, Maori naming customs have passed through periods of change, both self-initiated and imposed, the third part of this writing includes a brief survey of the customs relating to group, as opposed to individual naming. As I believe such naming to have been affected less by the external influences that personal naming suffered, I have looked for reasons why the group names escaped interference and remained so stable.

I also ask how much has been retained of the old ways of naming, how much has been lost, and, importantly, is there occurring, as with the language itself, a revival in traditional naming of children? If so, how closely is this following traditional practices? Is the practice of passing names from an older generation to a younger one truly reflecting ancient patterns in naming, or is this a custom that was not common among Maori in former times, but is perhaps becoming so?

While whakapapa have shed light on these queries, as have records of the Maori Land Courts, autobiographies, biographies and, in recent times, birth notices and certain Maori television programmes, other stories must be more anecdotal; tales from the mouths or pens of older Maori who well understand the many aspects of naming; who know of names that were lost, names that were changed, names that were given for explicit reasons or purposes, names that challenged their bearers, others that shamed them; names occasionally put on a person of the other culture; names thoughtfully chosen for new family members. All such namings have a place in this study.

## NOTES:

Introduction

- 1 Manukau City Council publication, 1996:3, "Ko te Whiri-whiritanga o te Ingoa Maori mo tau Kohungahunga Hou"; traditionally, Maori began life with a single given name, but they could, and often did, accumulate additional names as they went through life; sometimes this happened in interesting ways as will be seen in later examples.
- 2 Births and Deaths Registration Act 1951, Form i:1,2, required that a child be registered under a surname as well as under its given name(s). The Act of 1995, however, allowed for some exceptions in the case of surnames.
- 3 Marae, "Te Rau o te Ture", Channel One, T.V.N.Z., Oct.11, 1998.

Review

- 4 Alpers, A., Maori Myths and Tribal Legends, 1964:232. Appendix, "The sources and the Background".
- 5 Orbell M., Encyclopedia of Maori Myth and Legend, 1995:18-19.
- 6 Te Rangi Hiroa (Sir Peter Buck), Vikings of the Sunrise, 1964:290.
- 7 korero purakau: legendary, mythical, or any incredible stories.