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Some Brief Notes on Kai Māori

Food is a signifier of identity and status (Hayden, 1998, 2009; Hayden & Villeneuve, 2011; Neill et al., 2015). In traditional times, Māori consumed a range of hunted, gathered, and cultivated foods (Royal & Kaka-Scott, 2013). As a result of this diet, non-infectious diseases were low among Māori due to foods with higher levels of protective chemicals and nutrients (Cambie & Fergusson, 2003).

Pākehā settlers brought new foods such as wheat and potatoes (see McFarlane, 2007; Wharemate, 2015; Zhu & He, 2020 concerning potatoes specifically), corn, cabbage, and other vegetables (Royal & Kaka-Scott, 2013). Pākehā also introduced sheep, pigs, goats, and poultry (Royal & Kaka-Scott, 2013). These new foods added variation to the Māori diet.

Colonisation and land loss has negatively impacted Māori food sovereignty (Shirley, 2013), and poverty-related food insecurity damages Māori health (Beavis et al., 2018). In addition, due to the consumption of cheaper, processed foods, Māori

experience inexplicably high levels of obesity and associated illnesses, such as type 2 diabetes (Glover et al., 2019; McKerchar et al., 2021).

Indeed, McKerchar et al. (2015) argue that food security is one of the most significant issues facing Māori concerning nutrition. They note that the impacts of colonisation and urbanisation have resulted in the loss of kai gathering sites. Revitalising the gathering and consumption of kai Māori, McKerchar et al. (2015) assert, may increase food security for Māori.

Nan—Rēpora Marion Brown— was born in 1940 into the Patuheuheu hapū of Waiōhau (Rangiwai, 2015, 2019, 2021d). She grew up around her marae (Rangiwai, 2021d, 2021e). She recalled that every home in Waiōhau had gardens and fruit trees. Even in later life, when she lived in Murupara, she and her siblings and their children and grandchildren would return to whānau land at Waiōhau to plant and tend to extensive kai gardens. Although these practices are rare among Māori today, restoring these practices would certainly improve food security for Māori (Stein et al., 2018). Nan’s diet consisted of hunted, gathered, and cultivated foods, supplemented with flour, sugar, sausages, and other Pākehā food products. Of course, as food availability evolved, so did Nan’s taste for modern foods and takeaways.

This paper provides some brief notes on kai Māori— Māori food and makes some notes about the Māori

foods that I ate with Nan. This paper will be written in an autoethnographic way, drawing on personal experience, literature, and reflections (Rangiwai, 2021c).

Enamel mugs

My maternal great-grandparents and grandparents had enamel mugs. Essential kit for New Zealand soldiers in the 1940s (see Appleton, 2015, p. ii), these mugs seem to have been in common use among Tūhoe (see Doherty, 2010, pp. 27-28). Enamelware was made by coating metal substrate with powdered glass and firing at an extremely intense heat; the heat melted the powder, which then cooled and formed a highly durable and resistant coating (Emalco, 2020). The mugs we used were white with blue rims. Unfortunately, some of the enamel had chipped off, leaving black pits on the surface of the mugs. The mugs were very similar to the one pictured below.



Figure 1. Enamel mug; belonged to 25577 Gunner EA (Ted) Frost, 7th Anti Tank Regiment, NZ Artillery, 2NZEF, WW2 (Auckland Museum, 2007).

These mugs were filled with tea which was consumed throughout the day. Nan would make for me tea with sugar and milk. I would dunk biscuits or cream crackers into the tea. I would sit and listen to the stories of my grandparents and great-grandparents. I would listen to them talk and gossip, in te reo Māori, with their relatives and friends. Drinking tea and sitting at the table listening was how I gained and learned various bits of kōrero. Tea is now considered a very Māori drink.

Hāngī

The hāngī is a traditional Māori way of cooking food, well-suited to cooking for large numbers; smaller portions of food were cooked using embers (Royal &

Kaka-Scott, 2013). As with other people's of the Pacific, Māori cooked food in an umu or earth oven using the following process:

A pit is dug in the earth, in which a fire is burned for a number of hours to heat stones. Once these stones are hot, food in woven baskets is placed on top, covered in leaves [or wet sackcloth] and then soil. After the required cooking time, the soil and leaves are removed and the food is ready to be served (Rangiwai, 2015, p, 146).

For Patuheuheu the hāngī became symbolic of hope and restoration owing to Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Tūruki's prophecy concerning Te Umutaoroa—the slow-cooking earth oven. In 1886, due to severe land loss, Te Kooti offered to our hapū a prophecy of hope that promised the coming of a new leader who would unearth a hāngī and restore all that was lost (Rangiwai, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2011e, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d, 2012e, 2012f, 2012g, 2012h, 2013a, 2013b, 2015, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c, 2018d, 2018e, 2018f, 2019a, 2019b, 2021a, 2021e). For this reason, the hāngī evokes mystical, religious, and even theological connotations among Patuheuheu.

Boil up and doughboys

Pākehā introduced potatoes to Māori (Royal & Kaka-Scott, 2013). Potatoes were much easier for Māori to grow than kūmara, and pigs were easily reared (Royal & Kaka-Scott, 2013). This resulted in the popularisation of the ‘boil up’ among Māori, which remains a favourite and staple dish (Royal & Kaka-Scott, 2013). Boil up is a dish of boiled pork/meat, potatoes, and vegetables such as pūhā or cabbage, sometimes served with other vegetables such as kamokamo, kumara, and pumpkin, along with steamed dumplings known as doughboys (Royal & Kaka-Scott, 2013). Nan’s boil ups were often accompanied by her handmade bread. Nan’s ‘go-to’ weekly boil up was made with lamb or mutton neck chops.

Bread

Rēwena bread is Māori-style sourdough bread (Yazar & Tavman, 2012). Sourdough is defined as a dough containing metabolically active microorganisms—lactic acid bacteria—that come from a sourdough mother sponge and that can be reactivated by adding flour and water (Catzeddu et al., 2006). Lactic acid bacteria are found in carbohydrate-rich environments, including plants, fermented foods, and the mucosal surfaces—those surfaces featuring mucosal fluid and which form part of the immune system (Wohlfert & Russell, 2016)—of humans and animals (Florou-Paneri et

al., 2012, n.p.). Among some of the first living organisms on earth, lactic acid bacteria have been around for three billion years (Pessione, 2012). Nan did comment that her rēwena ‘bug’ was very old!

Nan made the best rēwena bread. Ever. She cooked her bread in her special cast iron camp oven. She mixed the ingredients, kneaded the dough, and let it rise. Once baked, her rule was that the bread could not be cut until it had cooled down. Sometimes she broke this rule and allowed me to eat the bread hot, dripping with butter and jam, and washed down with hot, milky tea. The bread did not last long!

When Nan was growing up, she often cooked bread in a hole in the ground. A small hole was dug, a fire was lit in the hole, and the camp oven containing the prepared dough was placed inside the hole and covered with the embers. Royal and Kaka-Scott (2013) note too that this cooking method was used for cooking small quantities of food.

Nan also made another type of bread called pāpākiri (Rangiwai, 2019). Pāpākiri can mean scaly or flaky bark, as found on the rimu, mataī, monoao and kauri trees (Moorfield, 2011). However, in my whānau and hapū, Patuheuheu, we use the word to mean a type of round, flattened bread (Rangiwai, 2019). Pāpākiri is a Māori flatbread which is also known in other areas as takakau. Takakau is an unleavened bread (Moorfield, 2011) or simple damper (Royal & Kaka-Scott, 2013). However, Nan

used baking powder in her pāpāpkiri (which she also, jokingly, called “patero” bread!). Nan made the best pāpāpkiri, which we ate warm with lashings of butter (Rangiwai, 2019). Nan made pāpāpkiri often to accompany meals. Nan also made fried bread cooked in animal fat—beef dripping or lard rendered from wild pork.

Kāuta

In Māori homes, like the home that Nan grew up in, the kāuta, or kitchen, was located to the side of the house; it was not inside the house. Food was cooked over a fire in cast iron pots and pans. The crackling of the fire gave warmth, and through the heat of its flames, nourishment was provided to the whānau. As a source of energy, heat, and essentially, food, the fire of the kāuta was life-giving. In Māori life, the kāuta is both a site of abundance and scarcity, where food is cooked and distributed as required (Trego-Hall et al., 2019).

Kererū

For Tūhoe, kererū is a taonga: it is part of Tūhoe cultural identity, a highly prized food source, and is valued for its feathers (Feldman, 2001). Tūhoe possess traditional Indigenous knowledge about how to manage kererū populations (Lyver et al., 2008, 2009). In Tūhoe tradition, kererū is a special food reserved for women, particularly pregnant women and chiefs (Lyver et al., 2009).

Nan ate the kererū first, and whatever was left was eaten by Papa. Nan fed me kererū flesh and waikōhua. It has a smell and taste that only those who have tasted it will recognise. The combination of the gamey flesh with the fragrance of the miro berries is distinct. While harvesting kererū is illegal, it is believed by some Tūhoe that it is this very restriction that constrains the mauri of the kererū—since the life-giving harvest rituals may not be performed as often or at all (Lyver et al., 2008).

Mīti tahu

Mīti tahu is meat that has been preserved by cooking meat and preserving it in its own fat (Collier, 2009; Doherty, 2010; Ryan, 2008). Mutton was a favourite source of meat to use for this preservation technique, mainly because the meat was very fatty. The meat could be stored for a long time in its own fat. When the meat was required, it could be reconstituted by placing it on top of pūhā simmering in a pot. Once reconstituted, the whānau could be fed. This is what Nan, and her generation grew up eating. It was one way that they preserved food for future use. It was a means of being prepared so that nourishment for the whānau and provisions for manaakitanga would always be available.

Kānga wai

Anyone who has had the (dis)pleasure of smelling kānga wai cooking in a pot knows that it has both a

unique and pungent odour. Grown, prepared, and consumed by Māori since the 1800s, kānga wai is prized by some Māori for its distinctive flavour (Brooks et al., 2016). Brooks et al. (2016) opine that the characteristic flavour of kānga wai may be due to the production of *n*-butyric acid as a result of the 2–3-month fermentation process where maize is soaked in a stream or swamp. Indeed, the process of acid fermentation that kānga wai goes through may produce a product that is considered “safe” from a scientific standpoint (Whyte et al., 2001).

While the smell is, for many people, impossible to get past, once you do, you realise that the taste of kānga wai, or fermented corn, is exquisite and unique. Most often served with sugar and cream, kānga wai is a prized delicacy. Commonly known as rotten corn, the smell of kānga wai lives up to its English nickname. The smell of kānga wai and the pure pleasure of eating it reminds me of my great-grandparents and grandparents. On one side of the family, the kānga was mashed with a texture like fine porridge, and on the other side of the family, it was left more or less as whole kernels swimming in a thick corn soup.

Pōkinikini¹

Known by different names in different areas, such as repirepi/rerepi (P. Gloyne, personal communication, June 20, 2021), pōkinikini is a porridge-like dish made from flour and water. We also called it ‘Māori porridge.’

To make pōkinikini, Nan made a dough with flour and water. Nan would pinch off pieces of dough into a pot of boiling water, which would cook in the water and gradually thicken the water to produce a porridge-like consistency. The pōkinikini was served with cream and sugar.

Very similar to pōkinikini, Tongans make tōpai and Samoans kopai—both are made or served with sugar and coconut cream (D. Enari, personal communication, June 20, 2021).

Tuna

When my grandmother was perhaps 14 or 15, she wrote a letter to the editor of *Te Ao Hou*, which described some of the activities that our whānau engaged in based around gathering food and, in particular, tuna or eels. She mentions too that the eels were being gathered, and prepared by drying,

¹ I acknowledge te reo Māori expert, Paraone Gloyne, for assisting my thinking around the term pōkinikini. In a discussion with him, it was suggested that pō may come from the shortening of the word poi, which means to knead or make into balls (Moorfield, 2011). While the word kinikini, means to nip, pinch, or pinch off (Moorfield, 2011).

for the Tekau-mā-rua, “the twelfth”, which is a special time for the Ringatū faith held on the twelfth of the month.

Ki a Te Etita,

Tena koe. E tonono atu ana ahau i taku reta ki a koe. I te Rahoroi ra ka mea mai taku Papa ko wai e haere ki te toa ki te tiki pihuka mo a matau raina. Ka mea atu ahau ki taku Papa, ko 'hau. Ka haere ahau ma runga i te pahi. Ka tae atu ahau ki te toa mea mai te Mangumangu, he aha taku pirangi. Ka mea atu ahau, he pihuka mo a matau raina. I taku taemaitanga ki te kainga ka haere matau ki runga o Waikokopu ki te hi tuna mo te tekau-ma-rua a te Hahi Ringatu. Ka uru atu matau ki roto o Waikokopu ka pahi matau i te awa tuatahi me te awa tuarua me to awa tuatoru. I to matau taetanga atu ki te waiariki ka mea mai taku Papa me noho mai ahau ki reira. Ka haere taku Papa raua ko Rihari ki te hi tuna. Ka noho mai ahau ki te waiariki ki te kaukau. Kotahi haora pea ahau i reira ka hoki mai taku Papa raua ko Rihari i te hi tuna. Ka mea atu ahau, “E hia a korua tuna me nga taraute?” Ka mea mai a Rihari, “Hai aha mau?” Ka mea atu ahau ki a Rihari, “Hai kai maku.” I to matau putanga mai i roto o Waikokopu ka kautehia e 'hau e hia nga tuna. I mea atu ahau ki taku Papa, “E rua tekau ma rima a korua tuna.” I to matau taetanga mai ki te kainga, ka whakairiirihia e taku Mama nga tuna kia marokeroke ai i te ra. I te marokeroketanga o nga tuna ka tipokapokahia e taku Mama nga piropiro. Koiane te mututanga o taku korero,

Na to hoa,
Na Repora Maki,
Ko te Kura Maori o Waiohau (Te Ao Hou, 1955, p.
46-47).²

The tuna is a spiritual guardian for my whānau but also an important food source. Oral narratives concerning the mauri of the tuna in the Rangitāiki River identify a particular Patuheuheu family who carried the mauri of the tuna in their respective rohe. In the 1990s, I recall Mr Mangu Clarke telling our Rangitahi College class about how my whānau, the Maki Nātana whānau, held the mauri of the tuna. A Facebook post from 12 March 2020 on the Ko Rangitaiki toku Awa page states:

The tuna of the Rangitaiki have long been the lifeblood of the people of the awa - particularly for the people of Te Ika Whenua valley upstream from Waiohau.

Different varieties of eel once available in the rivers including:

Black eels, called Mataamoe, which lived in holes in the Okahu Stream;

² Although Nan was Ringatū and described Ringatū practices concerning food in her letter, she also told me about how she remember her staunch Roman Catholic grandmother fasting regularly and refraining from meat each Friday (Rangiwai, 2015, 2019, 2021b, 2021d).

The silver-bellied eels of the Rangitaiki, which Patuheuheu called Paewai;
Blind eels, called Piharau, which lived in the tributaries that flowed through the pumice lands;
And yellow-bellied eels, which lived in swamplands.

In different places, they tasted different; some were ordinary, some were special, but all were considered taonga. While the eel culture was common to all the people of Te Ika Whenua, certain individuals and families possessed special knowledge about eeling.

It was their responsibility to protect this knowledge and to pass it on to the next generation. ***A Patuheuheu whanau with special knowledge was said to carry the mauri of the eels.*** The people of Ngati Manawa, Ngati Whare, and Patuheuheu had their own maramataka or fishing calendar. The appropriate time for eeling was at hinapouri or when the moon was darkest (Ko Rangitaiki toku Awa, 2020, n.p., emphasis added).

I responded to the above post in the following way:



Byron Rangiwai The Patuheuheu family is the Maki Natana whanau. Our whanau is known for eeling. In the early 1990s it was common knowledge among Ngati Manawa kaumatua that the Maki Natana whanau were able to eel in certain areas where others were not. This particular korero was relayed to our high school class during "Maori week" at Rangitahi College in 1994 during our visit to "Aniwhenua" dam (Aniwaniwa). Those who are old enough to remember my great grand father, Hapurona Ted Maki Natana, will know this.

Figure 2. Facebook response (Ko Rangitaiki toku Awa page, 2020, n.p.).

Hākari

Feasting has been a significant custom throughout human societies for millennia (Hayden, 2009; Hayden & Villeneuve, 2011). Hayden and Villeneuve (2011) uphold that feasting is fundamental to the development of social identities and memories, the building of political power, gender identities, allocating and completing work, and the occurrence of prestige technologies—artefacts or objects that indicate “wealth, success, and power” (Hayden, 1998, p. 11). For Māori, the ritual feast of the hākari is intended to neutralise tapu following a pōwhiri, tangihanga, or any event where levels of tapu are elevated (Mead, 2016).

The blissful feeling of having a full puku following a hākari is something that most Māori would know and understand. At the end of significant events such as tangihanga and unveilings, the hākari is a

ritual feast that lifts the tapu of death and allows mourners to incorporate themselves back into the common world. At the conclusion of Nan's tangihanga in December 2017, the whānau pani, the immediate, grieving family, us, sat on the main table and were given the best food. After eating, I went into the wharepuni and slept until the next morning. After three or four days of 'running on empty', with very little sleep, and very little food, the hākari allowed me to have a large meal, to listen to the singing and laughter of whānau, and to finally collapse in a heap, on a mattress in the wharepuni.

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