The Relationship of the Maori with Antarctica

- A Critical Review

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Introduction

Eldon Best (1923, p.27) describes Maori:

"Their love of travel is innate; they are born sailors, and have invaded and conquered in many directions....are born sailors and rovers – the sea is their home." (Best, E. 1923)

Best illustrates that Maori have a history of exploring and travelling. This review attempts to investigate Maori connections within Antarctica’s history to establish where Maori youth pursuing Antarctic interests can connect and identify with. Due to knowledge being passed down by oral tradition within the Maori culture this review tries to consolidate what little literature may be available for future reference.

It highlights common themes such as oppression, discrimination, biculturalism and whaling and as such a lot of the literature is a reflection of the times in which they were written and could have been an impediment on Maori involvement on relationships with the Antarctic. It also shows that when papers and books were written reference to New Zealand is always assumed to include Maori with no need to differentiate between ethnicities until it becomes a criminal issue in which case the dissociation is made certain. (Dodds & Yusoff, 2005., Dannette, 2010).

Specific Maori are commented on for a key relationship played or either for commendable traits demonstrated in an effort to share with Maori today in the hope of increasing Maori involvement within New Zealand Antarctic society, and acknowledge the successes of Maori thus far. If anything it re-iterates what some already know and to educate what more should know as a part of New Zealand history, to get more Maori thinking about their concern for New Zealand’s relationship with Antarctica.

Maori history and culture

Acknowledgement is given to Hui-te-rangiora a Maori legend who travelled in a war canoe around 650AD who sailed south into a frozen ocean. Although Cook’s voyage in the late 18th century 1772-1775 is referred to in text as being “definite” and “clear” (Craig, 1997., Havercamp, 2002., Reed, 1977., Irvine, 1970.). This is assumed to mean because written records, such as newspaper articles, Cook’s diaries, and the mapping he did, to have more validation over the oral passing of knowledge within Maori culture.

Kupe is another of the Maori’s great voyagers who is held within Maori culture as having the credibility of Columbus or Cook 950AD. He travelled on his canoe named the Matahorua with companion Ngahue and is “widely accepted by all level of scholars... It is not unreasonable to be conjunctive that he penetrated Antarctic seas...” (Simmons, 2004, pg15). He records sightings of experienced seals, bull kelp, icefields, and dark places where the sun did not shine (Simmons, 2004, pg15).
A Polynesian voyager named Pou-paka is said to have arrived 2 generations before Kupe (Reed, 1977) but little is known of this person.

With an abundance of seafood, vibrant flora and fauna, there wasn’t a need for travel; resources were plentiful. Waka and clothing had the capabilities for the climate of New Zealand and oceans travelled, (Havercamp, 2002), however no record of the above voyagers handling of encounters with the Antarctic is recorded other than what was sighted. Whether it was because they travelled and perhaps lacked the correct equipment and perished is unknown or perhaps end findings of land and life were more important than a person’s own journey and experience.

Maori belief also shaped the type of exploration and travel pursued with the concept of mountain tops being tapu (sacred) in which case were not to be touched by humans or you would meet your death. Mountains therefore were not sought for climbing but rather large trees with trunks suitable for carving canoes. Maori observed British settlers who did not share these beliefs nor perish when going against them, in which case this challenged Maori belief.

During the heroic era Amundsen had reached the North Pole 15 December 1911 and Maori were recovering their numbers yet still a minority in their homeland. Irvine records “It’s a testament to the Maori will to survive that to some extent they belied this observation” (Irvine, K. 1970, Pg 209).

The rapid colonisation of New Zealand by the British from the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, saw impacts still being dealt with today and during the 1950’s 3% of the population at Scott Base were Maori, a number reflecting the urbanisation being dealt with in New Zealand, Maori viewing their priorities as being a presence at home before considering activities elsewhere (Havercamp, A. 2002).

**Maori people of Antarctic history**

Of the little literature available of Maori involvement with Antarctica four people are mentioned; Tuati, Louis Potaka, Te Tou and Robert Sopp. The literature often displays a few names for one person so reading is with some awareness of the changes in history. For example Tuati in 1840 was also found to be recorded as Te Atu, and he changed his name to John Sacs and more formally John Stewart when he joined Lieutenant Charles Wilkes aboard the Vincennes ship and discovered the Shakleton Ice Shelf. Whether this was because others couldn’t pronounce his Maori name is not commented on. Arriving in the U.S in the 1830’s he joined Wilkes in 1838 and was the first to view the coast of Antarctica while they explored the southern ocean until 1842 (Dodds & Yusoff, 2005., Norris, 2003). The son of a whaler and sealer Captain William Stewart (of which Stewart Island is named after) and his Ngapuhi wife. He is said to be the origin of character of Queequeg in Dickens Moby Dick.
who accompanied Wilkes writing (Maslin, 2003) and who is described in fictional character as being somebody who wanted to leave his native home in pursuit of a more Christian life. The irony of the British influence reflected here is circumspect due to the attitudes and beliefs still remaining at the time. Wilkes wrote of Tuati in his detailed narrative of the expedition in high regards with words such as “excellent sailor” and “very good fellow” (Wilkes, C. 1844).

The second Maori is referred to as both Dr Louis and Lewis Potaka of Nelson, from Richard Byrd’s BAE 2 expedition 1935, and travelled on the Bear of Oakland exploring Marie Byrd Land. (Havercamp 2002, Dodds & Yusoff, 2005, Harrowfield, D. 2007). He was the 5th New Zealand doctor to graduate and described as a keen fisherman in peers journals. “He was a passionate angler, and was counting the days before he would again be wading his favourite trout stream.” (Young, 2005, pg 47). 32yr old Potaka is suggested as one that “did not take things seriously” of questions asked about his journey, and his task ability is commended in the papers advertising the appendectomy he performed “Potaka cut deftly and with sureness” (Young, 2005. p149) both characteristics which are part of the Antarctica New Zealand’s National Programme selection process today.

Dr Potaka aided in the regular recovery of a pilot named Bill McCormick from Arizona who wrote in 1990 that

“Prior to my close association with him I just felt he was somewhat introvert, very quiet, laid back but very pleasant. After six weeks my opinion was pretty much the same, but from our chats I found him to be very brilliant and very capable. Potaka was always ready, willing and able to help everyone”. (Young, 2005. pg 52).

Here Antarctica’s remoteness allowed a person to remove them from the events of their country and form new bonds in a neutral space amongst a testing environment that in an otherwise easier situation, may not happen.

The third Maori person is Te Tou noted as the youngest party member who travelled to Ross Island during the International Geophysical Year and raised the flag at the official opening of Scott Base in 1956. (Havercamp 2003, Dodds & Yusoff, 2005), and is said to have been selected for his youth rather than because he was Maori.

Other than Dr Potaka, the first Maori to winter over at the new Scott base was diesel engineer Robert (Bob) Sopp, a fitter mechanic from Kaingaroa Forest whom carved a piece of wood subsequently gifted to the CPO Mess at McMurdo station with an inscription that reads ‘Rureka Taitea Kia Toitu Ko Taikaka’ directly translating to ‘strip away the sapwood and expose the heart wood.’ Reflecting the working culture of those in Antarctica and implying ‘choose friends who are dependable and steadfast’ (Harrowfield, 2007)
Whaling

Sealing occurred throughout the 19th century with the last sealing at around 1946 after which stock numbers had been dissipated and attention turned to whales (2007, Bluff History Group). Exploration of Antarctica and the southern ocean was thought to have begun in search of seals and whales for their economic value. Foreign ships would come to port in New Zealand and crews were hosted at local marae (Bywater, M. 1986., Ell, G. & Ell, 2008., S.Havercamp, 2002). Maori were active sealers and whalers and were recruited on foreign vessels (Havercamp, 2002), Pakeha whalers would stay and marry local Maori in settlements around stations. Maori were popular employee’s possibly for their cheap labour however across literature they are commonly referred to in text as hard workers, fine harpooners, excellent boatmen and hired in the groups of 20’s and 50’s (Grady, 1986, Burton, B. 2000). This is mirrored today with the same characteristics being displayed in the defence force where numbers are highest of Maori interaction with Antarctica.

A Maori whaler by the name of P. Willa also known as “Buddy”, of Stewart Island sailed on a Norwegian whaling expedition to the Ross sea in mid 1920’s (Grady, 1986). An interview with Buddy Willa in 1981 he recalls being aboard the C.A. Larsen and approaching the Paterson Inlet after a good whaling season in the Antarctic. The Te Awaiti Boys or Jackson Whalers, included Joe Timms who travelled on a topsail schooner named ‘Huanui’ down to Campbell Island from Port Chalmers. Other members were Arthur and Charlie Jackson, John Heberley, Jack and Dick Norton. There was great whaling potential at the subantarctic islands, sheep mustering and sealing.

Oppression

Entertainment with the introduction of the British recalls one record of settlers being boiled alive by Maori’s in a big cooking pot after being admitted to their Savage club, this displayed racism, barbarism and civilisation all ensuring the oppression and dominance of British influence (Dodds & Yusoff 2005). It enforced the Maori’s social position and thus became cheap replaceable labour, reflected in Maori’s numbers of participation in the whaling and sealing era, which we explore later. Contact with Pakeha introduced illnesses such as whooping cough and measles (King 1997, Havercamp 2003), which meant reliance on British knowledge of a familiar illness to them.

Discrimination

Perhaps as a way of trying to falsify within New Zealand an image of pristine nature as is Antarctica, few New Zealand Based writers have paid little attention to the scholarly debates about NZ’s colonial/post colonial debates (Dodds & Yusoff 2005).
Young’s 2005, biographical essay, shows Dr Potaka in a favourable light, however also illustrates the discrimination that still occurred even before he got the position and after his return to New Zealand all of which originated in New Zealand. When Byrd’s current ailing doctor was getting worse he sent a message to Wellington advising to organise a doctor “regardless of cost or consequence – or else cancel the expedition” DISCOVERY, p.102 – (Young, 2005, pg 42).

Byrd was advised: NO DOCTORS VOLUNTEERING STOP THE FEW APPLICANTS OFFERING ASK FOR FROM 300 TO 2000 POUNDS NEW ZEALAND CURRENCY STOP DUNCAN HAS TWO YOUNG DOCTORS JUST PASSED THROUGH MEDICAL SCHOOL AND NOW SERVING IN HOSPITALS EACH REQUIRE 350 POUNDS.

The message continued with: NONE AVAILABLE WELLINGTON STOP BUT ONE IN NELSON THOROUGHLY CAPABLE MAN HIGHLY RECOMMENDED STOP BUT HE IS ONE THIRD MAORI IN BLOOD WOULD THIS DISQUALIFY HIS FEE ALSO 350 POUNDS.

From down South, Byrd soon came back with:

WILLING TO PAY THE MAORI 350 POUNDS STOP HE LOOKS LIKE THE BEST HAVE NO OBJECTIONS TO HIS BEING ONE THIRD MAORI STOP HE HAD BETTER BRING INSTRUMENTS HE HAS

(Young, 2005. pg43)

In 1935, 95 years from the signing of Te Tiriti O Waitangi, The Treaty of Waitangi, (a document that was signed in 1840 between the British and the Maori introducing the colonisation of New Zealand) the discrimination is still evident upon questioning his ethnicity aside from his high task ability and experience; he is not considered as equal.

The biographical essay highlights a 24 second piece of Potaka in the motion picture ‘DISCOVERY’ was extracted and both in picture and newspaper was referred to as ‘the doctor’ rather than by his name, because they were unsure of spelling and pronunciation so emitted it, however this contradicts the British practice of putting your name to something to claim the credit.

**Biculturalism**

Kiwi’s continue to struggle with the impacts of 1840 and remain a minority as well as misrepresented in various areas. Although Maori at University have increased two thirds are non-Maori, this is acceptable if we know that others are engaged in alternative disciplines such as trades, apprentices and military. Maori staff at Canterbury university tend to be balanced and observed in a broad range. (Haveramp. A, 2003)
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and Antarctic New Zealand (ANZ) only began addressing Maori involvement in 2002. This is attempted to be addressed in the addition of the Ngai Tahu scholarship towards the Post Graduate Certificate in Antarctic Studies at Canterbury University where Maori numbers attending science continue to be low.

The blind attempt by New Zealand government to demonstrate equality is shown through place naming as a “belated form of recognising all NZ life need to be exposed to bicultural scrutiny” (Dodds & Yusoff, 2005). However naming things tends to be a colonial form of claiming using a name, whereas Maori practice for naming things were due to their description or ancestral linkages. Comments are made that it is a token gesture (Dodds & Yusoff, 2005) In 1993 New Zealand the geographical board named Tuati Peak which rises 2,595m above the glacier head of Mitchell Glacier at the north wall in the Royal Society Range, of Victoria Land. This very much illustrates an ancestral value for Maori. The peak on Mt Erebus is named Te Puna Roimata, Spring of Tears in honour of the 257 people whom crashed November 28, 1979. Other Maori words have also been designated to Nunatak’s with reference to bird types and weather types such as Kaka Nunatak, Kakapo Nanutak, Kea Nanutak, Ruru Nanutak, Ruru Crests and Takahe Nanutak. Maori words for winds have been applied to Nunutaks include Mumu Nunatak, Parawera Cone, Ponui Nunatak and Tarakaka Peak. Mumu translating to boisterous wind, Parawera as south wind, Ponui also means south wind and Tarakaka translates to southwest wind (McFarlane, 2007).

The introduction of the Maori language brings up much discussion within New Zealand and the Antarctic Treaty Parties. Other countries feel New Zealand are asserting their “custody” or claim by naming places in Maori (Havercamp, 2002). This produces some irony suggesting that an indigenous language has more influence over interpretation in comparison to an English word; it also may appear to foreign states to be an image of good race relations and contemporary bicultural New Zealand (Kearns & Berg, 2002., Bell 1996., Berg & Kearns, 1996), in which case could ignite other indigenous cultures within other Treaty Party’s. Other practical issues considered involved lack of accurate pronunciation causing confusion over radio messages hindering safety.

**Natural Resource Management**

Much of the current literature involving Maori and Antarctica revolves around natural resource management after the 1996 Bolger Crown agency Antarctic New Zealand set to re-identify themselves as a leader of “environmental stewardship, territorial sovereignty and resource protection.” (Dodds & Yusoff, 2005). Again it throws itself to irony as the Antarctic Treaty System does not recognise or deny Treaty Parties claims to sovereignty. Maori within NZ have continued to voice their concerns over resource management ever since the signing of The Treaty of Waitangi for various reasons including management, exploitation and access for cultural and ecological reasons. The World Council of Whalers is suggested to
have been set up to organise a group for naïve indigenous people to be led by economic enthusiasts. Debates within Maori are on making sure this isn’t happening, on sustaining whales as a resource for the future and on whether to increase commercial whaling. (Orange, 1987; Dodds & Yusoff 2005, Burton, B. 2000). Other issues include access to those whales that have beached themselves, DOC has supported the access to local Maori to whales which have beached and died to use for food and bones for decoration. The claim has also been made that it “is a new form of religion” to protect whales.

“Maori don’t recognise Antarctica in terms of its global ecosystems and conservation, topics which Maori iwi focus on in New Zealand. New Zealand’s Antarctic programmes aims to reflect New Zealand’s diversity the Maori component is therefore 10% - Lou Sanson (Havercamp 2002). This is mirrored as aforementioned where only 3% of Scott Base were Maori for the reasons that Maori had issues of concern within New Zealand that required addressing first the same applies in health and education today, however Maori economic development amongst fisheries sees an invested interest on ensuring sustainable marine eco systems.

New Zealand Defence Force

What isn’t commented on, is the involvement of Maori within the defence force interacting with Antarctica. Numbers of Maori in this area have not changed however is where they are recognised most in comparison to specialised areas of science within Antarctica. It brings to interest a mirror of the large numbers of Maori whom worked on whaling ships and their success in comparison with the 21st century where they continue to work in large numbers in the defence force and wether this is a cultural aspect in which the Maori prefer to work together as a unit, for reasons which would greatly benefit from some research. If thus is the case it would seem they have retained there cultural work ethic yet expressed it in another capacity. This is not to deny of course the opportunity to those Maori who seek to learn in highly specified areas within science (Mercier, 2007).

Conclusion

This review uncovered more people whom I hadn’t encountered in any Antarctic study thus far. Louis Hauiti Potaka displays for me the Maori character that I would hope other Maori would recognise today as a part of Antarctic history not only for his novel experience but his conduct and professionalism.

Obvious issues arose oppression, discrimination and biculturalism however progress is clear between Maori and Pakeha. The irony is the events and attitudes within the homeland in the literature did affect the occurrence of Maori relationships within Antarctica, even with
its remote access and distance. Cultural trends within Maori remain of working together, they have had to re-interpret as to what capacity but both still having formed a connection with Antarctica first with sealing and whaling and now with the military.

Now with biculturalism and Maori’s progress within themselves, they now have a significant chance to support the sustainability of the Southern Ocean with an economic interest in fisheries. This would see them support a natural resource of which they have always been passionate about and allow them to express their cultural values and contribute to and align with the rest of New Zealand’s 1996 re-image of being an environmental leader.
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