AN IWI HOMELAND

Country of the heart

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Abstract

We explore the notion of homeland from the perspective of the Māori iwi or nation of Rongomaiwāhine from Māhia Peninsula. The research is drawn from a qualitative study initiated and conducted by the iwi in the period of 2012 to 2013 and sought to identify important iwi mātauranga from iwi members. Included within the research data was the iwi conceptualisation of a homeland, which is discussed through the three themes of connection, community and the tapu of the whenua. The homeland is identified as having a physical, social and spiritual effect on iwi members' well-being and being fundamental to their cultural identity, purpose and meaning of life.

Keywords

Rongomaiwāhine, Māhia, Indigenous homeland, Indigenous identity

Introduction

In this paper, we explore the notion of homeland in relation to whenua for the Nation of Rongomaiwāhine from the Māhia Peninsula. This affords the opportunity to explore the topic according to the context of iwi, people and geographic location, and to allow the knowledge spoken about to be "embodied by the knowers", "located in its local" and "connected

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with the cultural and social institutions that give it efficacy" (Nakata, 2007, p. 9). Herein, a cultural concept of mana whenua or territorial jurisdiction (Jorgensen, 2007) informed by our being tangata whenua is used. We draw on our understandings of iwi ontology and epistemology to speak as passionate tribal insiders (Rigney, 1999). Our aim is to draw from iwi customs and sociocultural relationships, which would usually alienate non-tribal individuals, whereas for insiders, such as ourselves, they offer rich insight.

According to Indigenous ontology, homeland is interpreted as a dynamic ancestral territory, landscape, place and community, whether it is physical or metaphysical. Literary presentations of homeland (Carter, 2006a; Emery, 2008; Kidman, 2007; Nikora, 2007; Ormond, 2006; A. Smith, 2004; C. Smith, 2006; Tomlins Janke, 2002) are characterised by the cultural concept of tūrangawaewae, understood to mean the perduring kinship relationship between a community of people and place, created by their continual occupancy of a specific territory and the nature of their links to it. Emergent from the connection between people and place is a cosmological worldview (Marsden, 2003), genealogical connection and philosophical history (Emery, 2008; A. Smith, 2004) that is expressed through tikanga, which, although specific to place, can also be shared between Māori nations. With our discussion distinct to our iwi location and history, we intend to avoid the simplification that can occur when speaking across a multitude of territories and fields of customary knowledge.

We acknowledge that the Māori and iwi nexus may have some overlapping of mātauranga (Smith, Maxwell, Puke, & Temara, 2016); however, common cultural principles may provide triangulation, or shared traditions, which can enhance the rigour of the discussion. Cross-verification from other iwi knowledge systems, knowers and locales will and should expand and deepen the contribution for the field of mātauranga.

Indigenous scholars (Kovach, 2010; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Wilson, 2008) argue that for Indigenous research and knowledge to have meaning it needs to emerge from community-specific knowledge understanding and on Indigenous people's terms of engagement with that knowledge. The orientation to place-based knowledge (Penetito, 2008) respects local knowledge without denying the interrelated cosmology of the tribes. Common characteristics can be shared throughout Māoridom and between iwi without generalisation and essentialisation for the notion of ancestral homeland. The ancient land of Hawaiki (Royal, 2015), as an example, is understood as the land Māori ancestors departed from on their ocean voyage to eventually arrive at the shores of Aotearoa New Zealand. It is also known as the final resting place of wairua (Mead, 2003). This ancestral homeland and spiritual resting place is ingrained in geo-genealogy (Justice, 2016), which Māori recite in rituals of encounter. It is fundamental to the knowledge traditions, socio-historical reality and cultural identity of many iwi. Although this study is grounded in a worldview specific to the Rongomaiwahine iwi, it may also share, reinvigorate and reinforce the mātauranga of other iwi.

Methodology

In collecting the iwi mātauranga, a research approach that placed Rongomaiwāhine iwi ontology and epistemology as the focus was considered essential. Kaupapa Māori (Pihama, 2010; G. Smith, 2012) is defined as the philosophy and practice of being Māori (Mahuika, 2008) and acknowledges Māori culture by placing Māori communities at the centre of research. It is anti-colonial, seeking transformation and Māori sovereignty by using research methods that resist the colonial reality through a decolonisation perspective (L. Smith, 2009). However, it is also flexible and can repurpose varied research methods and tools if they are

supportive of the emancipation of Māori. A Kaupapa Māori framework was used to theorise, conduct, analyse and present research and results.

The research emerged from a situation in 2012 when the tangata whenua responded to a proposed subdivision (housing development) on one of the headlands that is central to the peninsula and includes wāhi tapu. This area is an iconic part of iwi history and cultural identity and of significance. The situation incited critical conversations (Freire, 1993) among community members, and they recognised that the conversations that occurred contained mātauranga that is rare and needs preservation. With the support of the community, iwi members experienced in research volunteered to document the conversations and formed the primary research team.

A self-selecting process (Creswell, 2013) was used to recruit participants; there were 30 interviewees in total and each interview lasted at least an hour, with most requiring three to four hours and extending over several sessions. Interviews were conducted over a six-month period from 2012 to 2013. Participants were both male and female, ranging from 20 to 80 years of age. One-on-one, unstructured interviews (Kvale, 1996) with open-ended questions were conducted as part of the method because it allowed the interviewees, many of whom were very knowledgeable on iwi mātauranga, to draw from their personal and collective socio-historical context and clarify their dialogue throughout the interview. For many interviewees, this was their initiation to research; interviews were conducted in familiar places where they were comfortable, such as their homes. However, it also included visits to wāhi tapu to provide more context for the discussion topic.

With the data highly relative to the iwi, the community, including interviewees, decided it should be collectively owned. Before the analysis, the primary researchers removed sensitive information, which may have compromised the interviewees. The analysis used thematic and discursive approaches (Bryman, 2008; Creswell, 2013) to allow for collective analysis as required. Quality assurance was conducted by tangata whenua knowledgeable in whakapapa, tikanga, wairuatanga, kaitiakitanga issues, community matters and more.

Analysis and discussion

Underpinning relationship with the homeland

A homeland was defined by iwi members as the territory they inherited through whakapapa and ancestral occupation, and the place where many of the iwi members interviewed resided. Common names for homeland were, home, whenua and Māhia. They described it physically as an earthscape (Hutchings, 2016), embracing the land, plants, life forms, waterways, skies and other physical, cultural, social and spiritual environments. Their relationship with it was drawn from an intersection of three worlds: physical, human and sacred (Foley, 2003). These interconnecting dimensions applied to the whenua-generated narratives that humanised and encultured the territory. Iwi members knew the whenua as a compassionate, powerful and intelligent being able to give, sustain, guide and take life. The intersection of human, physical and sacred dimensions created a cosmology distinct to their homeland territory; when they spoke about it they articulated a cultural interface (Nakata, 2007) or world that was different (Salmond, 2012; Viveiros de Castro, 2007) to what outsiders (Ormond, 2006) or non-Indigenous people might view and encounter. Deploying an iwi ontology and epistemology, iwi members articulated a network of relational living organisms who possessed spirits and emotions, and with whom they were connected. The earthscape was delineated by both personal and collective history, creating a collective cultural memory, a mooring for cultural identity and a mechanism for social order.

It is at the cultural interface (Nakata, 2007) of this ancestral landscape that we explore how the tangata whenua connect, understand and experience their homeland. Before proceeding, we acknowledge that the themes, expressions and explanations that are used to render meaning are by no means exhaustive and do not relay all the complex relationships to place that exist. These are only some of the many experiences that frame how the iwi members understand and engage with their ancestral landscape.

Connection

A sense of being accepted, belonging and connecting to the whenua was acknowledged by many, including elderly and young as crucial for promoting and supporting well-being, identity formation and quality of life (Durie, 2001) for both the whenua and individual. Iwi members believed the state of the whenua dictated their peace of mind and quality of life. This interdependence was expressed in statements such as "If the whenua is well, we are well, if the whenua is sick we are sick, if she dies we die" (Participant 17, 78-year-old female) and "We are one, our lives are intertwined. She is us and we are her" (Participant 3, 22-year-old male).

There was a broad consensus that connection was important because it provided context for comprehensive life issues, such as what the purpose and role of iwi members within the iwi might be, hope in hopeless situations and a sense of future. It also oriented tangata whenua about how to function within everyday community life. This included behaviour patterns that assisted fitting in to the community, observing tikanga and being able to contribute in a meaningful way to the iwi collective identity. Connection to the whenua was experienced through whakapapa, tūrangawaewae and tikanga. Two iwi members explained connection in the following way:

> If I didn't whakapapa here, I wouldn't bother. Being from here makes everything special.

It's my tūrangawaewae so I'm out and about doing stuff in the community and helping out all the time. (Participant 11, 31-year-old male)

There's a history to our whenua—my old man, his old man, our tīpuna are from here. We're all raised on Māhia, it's been our life and we've lived off it. (Participant 21, 41-year-old male)

Whakapapa was embedded in every aspect of life within the iwi and shaped how the iwi members engaged with the whenua and each other. Many spoke about the legacy of duty they inherited from their tīpuna and kaumātua, towards the whenua and their whanaunga in protecting and upholding their well-being. Two iwi members shared:

> Our tīpuna tell us to take care of our whenua, keep it safe and care for each other. We'll never sell Māori land. Our folks protected it for us, so we've got it. We've gotta do the same. (Participant 10, 28-year-old male)

> It's our responsibility, who we are, tangata whenua. We look after the land and each other. We care for the whenua and whānau. They'll be trouble if we don't, we'll be lost. (Participant 19, 39-year-old female)

Whanaungatanga was underpinned by an ethic focused on care that shaped their daily encounters with each other, the whenua and all life forms; it created a rich social, cultural and spiritual association that contributed towards a supportive moral community.

> Here at home we take care of each other. We live our own lives but if something happens we're there. Tangihanga, we do the marae, all the food, baking, kill beef, mutton, give money. Dig the grave . . . We're soft hearted to each other. We don't say it but it's in how we treat each other. We support each other, like I've got your back Jack. (Participant 25, 70-year-old male)

Connection with the homeland fostered social and cultural relationships that valued life and were underpinned by principles such as love, compassion, trust, loyalty, respect and cooperation. These spiritual and emotional principles aligned tangata whenua with each other and fostered a sense of solidarity that reinforced their humanity and interdependence for quality of life.

Tūrangawaewae refers to the connection Māori have with their ancestral territories, which gives them mana or "a place to stand" (Royal, 2007). It was understood by iwi members as an ancient historical dialogue originating with whakapapa and produced by the relationship between whenua and tangata whenua. As the offspring of the whenua, they believed they were spiritually (Moewaka Barnes et al., 2017) unified and often spoke about being the whenua and the whenua being them. This was reflected in their attitude and daily engagement with all life forms, including tīpuna, flora, fauna, waterways, sky and more within the territory borders.

> We share DNA, blood and bone. Our breath is one. I'm part of the whenua, the sea, air, creatures, we're from the same elements, same life system and the whole system has to function properly. That's whakapapa, we're literally each other so when you get it's a part of you, you understand what you do affects you both so you take care of it. (Participant 20, 40-year-old female)

Connection was of primary relevance to the ahi kā (Carter, 2006a), who are the tangata whenua that reside on the homeland and care for the whenua. The tapu connection with the homeland was present in the birth ritual of whenua ki te whenua (Cadogan, 2004; Le Grice & Braun, 2016)—burying the human placenta (whenua) in the earth or homeland (whenua). A kaumātua explained the purpose of the reunifying ritual, where the spiritual and physical interdependence of tangata whenua and whenua become inseparable:

> The whenua's a womb, we return the placenta to symbolise our relationship; the tangata whenua and whenua. It safeguards us so no matter what, this land is ours because we're a part of it, inseparable and we belong to each other (Participant 26, 73-year-old female)

Enacting the birth ritual was important to instil mana whenua within the child and other whānau to ensure they belonged to the whenua and the whenua belonged to them, reinforcing mutual interdependence (Emery, 2008).

Some participants lived outside of the homeland, mainly in urban areas. For them, maintaining a connection was a challenge and this had to be developed (Carter, 2006b). Removed from the homeland, they had a genuine intention to remain connected and they discovered different expressions that facilitated both their tangata whenua status and their urban reality. Many felt possession and occupation of their land was vital to their sense of belonging. For example, "We'll never sell our land, that's a one-way ticket to being nobody" (Participant 11, 31-year-old male) and "Sell, no way. We're only in town for work. We'll return home" (Participant 18, 36-year-old female). Their land provided them with the future possibility to return to their homeland and somewhere to build a papakainga. Within the urban areas, they maintained relationships with whanaunga from the homeland and who lived within proximity. One iwi member raising a family in the city described their effort to build relationships that reflect aspects of Māhia in the following way:

> We do a lot together. The kids go to the same school. Summer, we're here [Māhia] swimming, diving, camping together. We love it, our kid's mates are their cousins. We want them growing up with whānau. I say, "Son your cousins are your best friends" so they trust each other. We want them to know whānau cause we're away from Māhia. (Participant 19, 31-year-old male)

Whānau-centred activities with language revitalisation, whakapapa, traditional food and kapa haka were some of the ways they kept the spirit of Māhia with them. Technology and social media provided a convenient mode of communication and supported the development of relationships. This type of communication was largely relegated to the urban areas, because many who lived on the homeland did not have an internet connection. Through these relationships, the tikanga that underpinned the homeland was cultivated and maintained.

C. Smith (2007) views connection as vital for the well-being of Māori and argues that cultural disconnection is associated with poor health. She contends that Māori experience social pathologies, such as loneliness and depression, when separated from their place and the people they belong to. Pena (2011) emphasised the problems that arise when the connection between ancestral land and Indigenous people are broken by writing "place-breaking makes heart-breaking possible" (p. 209). A disease the community are familiar with is suicide (Clark et al., 2011; Statistics New Zealand, 2017), and one kaumātua contended that a contributing factor was disconnection from whenua, whānau and their iwi community:

> It's a terrible terrible sickness that's too common. It's not just the young, all ages do it. We've forgotten who we are, separated from home and whānau and learnt how to harm ourselves. (Participant 22, 65-year-old female)

The hope of many was that through whanaungatanga the community could embrace those afflicted and reconnect them with their culture as a means of assisted healing. Connection to the whenua was prioritised and emphasised as being vital in navigating crises and fundamental issues in life and death. Another kaumātua viewed culture not as a relic of the past but a power that was able to sustain life and avert tragedy:

> It's the worst experience, my heart aches when they return in a box [coffin] . . . Losing our land and reo broke us. We try to gather the pieces. We've got to return to the whenua. This is our home, we can heal here with whānau. It can make us whole again. It can heal us. (Participant 17, 80-year-old female)

Many iwi members acknowledged the whenua as an intergenerational source of spiritual and physical strength. Some preferred to be interviewed proximate to wāhi tapu who were significant to their whakapapa and cultural identity. They described being able to physically stand on the whenua that was an embodiment of their ancestral legacy, in the presence of tīpuna and being surrounded by mountains, rivers, vegetation and creatures, which symbolised their mana whenua as exhilarating. The connection between tangata whenua and whenua was acknowledged as possessing healing properties. One young iwi member phrased it as, "When I'm here, I'm strong, I'm not alone. I've got purpose cause I'm on my whenua and no one can touch me" (Participant 10, 28-year-old male). Iwi members acknowledged the timeless connection between themselves and the whenua that confirmed the reciprocal role that each had in the restoration and maintenance of the other.

Community

Geographical location, kinship, social organisation and leadership, neighbourhood networks, shared language, vision, experiences, common interests and goals are some of the features that have been used to try to render meaning around community (Harington, 1997; Jorgensen, 2007; Kidman, 2007). Yet, exclusively and collectively, these traits do not typify or exhaust community as it is understood, experienced and explained by iwi members. In a study about Māori community, research and intercultural relationships, Kidman (2007) argues that these cultural locales are complex networks, and iwi

insiders, rather than outsiders, are best positioned to identify what a community is.

The iwi members understood community as the heart and soul of the homeland and developed from the relational kinship basis of whakapapa. They viewed it as providing the cultural, spiritual and social space (Cajete, 2015) required to maintain whānau and iwi. The homeland was the physical setting through which structured patterns of relationships, shared rules and collective cooperation helped order and make the community functional (Kidman, 2007). However, although the whenua underpinned community, it was not merely a landscape on which cultural events and social life unfolded but a spiritual living being that contributed to and influenced all that occurred within the ancestral territory. For example, kaumātua who had an established relationship with the whenua believed that if it was not happy with the proposed subdivision, then it would ultimately prevent progression. Two shared their thoughts: "The whenua is capable of looking after things, she will stop it" (Participant 26, 73-year-old female) and "Māori land isn't something to mess around with. It will protect itself. You wait and see" (Participant 17, 80-year-old female). Therefore, the whenua had absolute mana in the decision-making process.

With isolation an aspect of life, occasions that gathered the community were important because they provided opportunity for iwi members to enjoy each other's company, catch up about local events and share resources within a context shaped by kinship and culture.

> Lots of community stuff, between the school, church and marae there's always something on. Tangi, birthday, land meeting, a reunion, gala day so we go help out and see everyone too. It's good for the kids too, because they get socialised in a Māori community so they'll know how to take over from us. (Participant 20, 40-year-old female)

> There's a lot of specialised knowledge here and you only get it when you spend time together. Hanging around in the kitchen, cutting up the meat for the hāngi, that's when we talk. (Participant 5, 53-year-old female)

Many felt that, along with everyday encounters, these occasions fostered whanaungatanga and provided a space where in-depth relationships could occur, allowing loyalty to whanaunga to develop. For instance, this statement from an iwi member symbolised such events: "My cousins are my best friends, we grew up at home. We can talk about things and no one else knows what we mean. There's nothing like it, can't beat it" (Participant 3, 22-year-old male). Cultural practices, such as whanaungatanga, created lifelong friendships between iwi members, which provided a deep emotional security that engendered social and cultural resilience (Nikora, 2007). Traditional practices were understood and explained as some of the ways iwi members built community and facilitated cultural continuity to evolve. The communal lifestyle was the social, cultural and spiritual basis from which knowledge traditions and practices were produced. It was the place where social relationships were negotiated, produced and reproduced; in the context of the homeland, relationships are a definitive aspect of life.

However, community is complex and for those who were coerced to leave in order to survive economically, the homeland is not a place of familial security but a site of historical trauma (Pihama et al., 2014) and separation from place and culture, resulting in restructured collective memory and iwi reality.

> Home isn't always lovey dovey stuff. We've done hard times too. Just look at our history. Māori are the longest resistance fighters I know. We've been at war for the last two hundred years. Read my face, it's in who we are. It'll be a different story if we'd been left to be Māori. There'd be a lot more of us here, people wouldn't of left for work, we'd be the

boss. Instead we're torn apart, it's sad, I'm mad about it. We'd be living here, it'd all be ours, lock, stock and barrel. (Participant 19, 39-year-old male)

Historic intergenerational trauma is, unfortunately, a feature of Indigenous communities and, for many, this trauma was initiated through the colonialism that destroyed relationships to the homeland. This is characterised by social pathology and the associated, unresolved "historical disenfranchised grief" (Brave Heart, 1999, p. 60) that lasts through several generations. For example, an iwi member commented:

We've fought for our land. Today, it's the three C's—Crown, Council, Con artists. Steal our tīpuna and whenua. We're poor because we lost our whenua. It's hard to make sense of this unless you've had your land stolen and been lied about, you won't understand. People are dismissive, they say "We want too much" and "Māori whinge". It'll do your head in, you've got to get your head around it. Otherwise you'll get sucked into believing it's Māori, something's wrong with us and that's another lie. (Participant 10, 28-year-old male)

Due to extensive land and resource loss (Roa, 2012) and external interference with various aspects of community life, comments about maintaining a sustainable economy ranged from a challenging possibility to something nearly impossible. Unfortunately, the community has limited freedom in exercising tino rangatiratanga over their economic sustainability and many have experienced poverty and financial hardship (Cram, 2011). They have become accustomed to the need to relocate to urban centres to pursue educational, employment and other opportunities (Metge, 1964; Nikora, 2008). Connection, disconnection and reconnection of those who live outside of the community created struggle for the community (Smith, 2004).

Whether they are located on the homeland or away, iwi members felt a deep appreciation for the community they belonged to and the capacity the homeland provided to experience everyday routine, celebrations and situations of grief and loss as a collective, where individuals were not isolated. An iwi member expressed his thoughts:

It's very reassuring to whakapapa to the community you're in. You belong and don't need to be anyone else. You belong as you. Birthdays, tangi, community stuff its more central, everyone comes together and we support each other, lift the other up. I'm not alone cause of whānau. (Participant 23, 20-year-old male)

In their experience, connection with whenua and whānau (Metge, 1995) contributed towards an individual and collective cultural identity. Community gatherings that required physical attendance on ancestral land were viewed by the iwi members as significant because they provided a way to mediate the past, move forward and become involved in creating the future. Community projects, such as the collecting of mātauranga, were important to iwi history and identity, allowing tangata whenua to learn about their history and revitalise communal identity.

Sacred nature of relationships

Spiritual and physical dimensions are inseparable; this connection is reiterated in the iwi mātauranga. The whenua is a physical touchstone, and as a living vital part of the natural world, it possesses the ability to feel and communicate with all its inhabitants and beings. As in other Indigenous communities, the interrelationship between people and the natural environment is essential in the formation of cultural traditions that embrace the natural environment to become what Pena (2011) calls "cultures of habitat" that are embedded in the whenua—tangata whenua are connected to

the natural world through a cultural intuition (Cajete, 2000) that allows them to communicate and be aware of its needs. They are gifted with this intuition through a relationship with the natural world that spans generations (Wildcat, 2010). It has enabled an expansion of a human orientation to the world through communication with the environment and its creatures (Marsden, 1992). Iwi members shared experiences of birds, animals and creatures providing guidance in their daily lives by warning them of danger, leading them to safety and guiding them to or away from tapu places. For example, one iwi member spoke about being protected during expeditions into the native bush to hunt. He believed that, because his intention was based on the need to provide for his whānau and community, he was guided by tīpuna and allowed to fulfil his intention to be a provident provider:

> In the bush I'm careful, hunting's serious, taking life is serious. Everything has a spirit and I respect that. Tikanga keeps me safe, I listen to what tīpuna tell me otherwise they won't help me and I won't get anything. (Participant 6, 37-year-old male)

Another spoke about how she was able to know about impending death within the whānau through communications with the atmosphere and tīpuna:

> I know when whanaunga pass on. It's hard to describe how, tīpuna and signs from nature. Like there's a certain wind, or the sea changes . . . They let me know and then someone comes over or phones to let me know but most of the time I already know. (Participant 1, 50-year-old female)

Many were familiar with such communication, no one questioned their credibility and all believed that their spiritual kinship (Durie, 2005) ensured they were safe in their various activities and roles as tangata whenua.

The whenua is a physical and spiritual home for all who live there. It is a dwelling place for both the living and the spirits of all life forms, especially tīpuna, after they leave this mortal existence and enter the next. One iwi member commented, "They live here too, with us. It's their home and when they go to the next life they don't go away. They stay here cause it's where they belong" (Participant 17, 80-year-old female). One way tīpuna continue to live on the homeland is through becoming part of the natural environment and taking the form of a mountain, a river, a landmark rock, creature and so forth. Their personality traits, deeds and mauri are inscribed within the whenua, or within another life form such as a creature or a pattern of nature like a cloud or seasonal storm. In this way, their mauri becomes a living part of the collective conscience of the iwi. In landscape, their courage, wisdom, leadership, protection and so forth were memorialised within and were a witness to their descendants that they have walked this land and continue to reside on it. These sites are tapu because of the eponymous history they hold. Tangata whenua are known to visit such places when seeking the wisdom of their tīpuna, as mentioned here by an iwi member: "When I need perspective I go where they are, so I feel them, spiritually it helps. They clear my mind, calm me" (Participant 21, 41-year-old male).

The future of the people and landscape is entwined in the maintenance of the collective conscience and memory that includes love, wisdom and prosperity that nurture all throughout their journey, whether mortal or in spirit. Over successive generations, the collective conscience, memory rituals and physical inhabitation enrich the tikanga that governs the tangata whenua, community and culture. The transition of ancestors into the collective conscience of the iwi through metamorphosis into the natural environment is a powerful admonition that their whakapapa governs in this area and of the mana they carry. It is also a token of the role that the ancestors' judicious decisions and circumspect activities have played in preserving their line to

produce offspring who could easily never have existed. An iwi member acknowledged her sense of gratitude: "We wouldn't be here without them, we've got to honour them and never forget we live here because of their greatness, wisdom, knowledge. They made us possible" (Participant 14, 26-year-old female).

Iwi members upheld the tapu nature of the homeland through kaitiakitanga. This cultural lore is based on the tikanga of successive generations drawing on traditional practices that enable the mauri of the whenua to flourish. When the mauri is well, the whenua is well and able to provide for the tangata whenua. Young and elderly iwi members believed this: "The whenua's been around forever and knows how to survive" (Participant 20, 40-year-old female) and "We have to protect it because it protects us but it can take care of itself too" (Participant 26, 73-year-old female). The tangata whenua understand the responsibility to protect and preserve the homeland for their future descendants. The dutiful awareness of kaitiakitanga was a catalyst for many to become involved in protecting the whenua and wāhi tapu from the subdivision: "When it goes down and everyone's sitting around talking about us, their gonna say, it didn't happen on their watch" (Participant 3, 22-year-old male). They believed that if they tried their best to protect the whenua, then it would respond in a like manner and protect them. Over generations of time, iwi patterns of existence have synchronised with the natural world so that a harmonious relationship has developed. Proven strategies for survival have evolved, enabling a lifestyle so that tribal members are born, sustained and memorialised through this relationship. A distinct iwi identity is drawn from the physical and spiritual relationship they share with the earth, plants, animals and all other life forms which help to form the homeland.

Conclusion

A homeland embodies a physical, human and spiritual meeting place where issues of whakapapa, tikanga and mātauranga are used to inform current and future needs of tribal members. In an era of cultural reclamation (Alfred, 2008), an iwi homeland is a political contested space where Māori nations are strongly positioned to claim sovereignty over culture, knowledge traditions, language and natural resources because they are literally on their home ground. Admittedly, the Nation of Rongomaiwāhine has been redefined to varying extents by the colonial era (Walker, 2004) and the continual engagement with bureaucracies premised on colonial power. However, despite this, the homeland remains a potent point of demarcation in cultural foundations, social operations and economic systems. In effect, it is the cornerstone of current and future systems of culture, society and economy. Therefore, relationships to place matter, and it is important to understand some of the ways tribal members experience and explain their tribal reality. The iwi members shared their experiences and explanations about their distinct homeland because of the relationship they feel for their ancestral homeland—the Māhia Peninsula, the country of their heart. It is their hope that the discussion will motivate deeper consideration of the myriad of ways in which other iwi collectively and individually connect to their unique homeland, including the role it has in sustaining community life, knowledge traditions, identity and collective and individual well-being.

Glossary

ahi kā	tribal members who reside on tribal land and maintain the whenua and tribal lore
Aotearoa	New Zealand
hāngi	food cooked in earth oven

iwi	tribal kin group; nation
kaitiakitanga	environmental stewardship
kapa haka	cultural dance groups
kaumātua	tribal elder
kaupapa	topic, basis; guiding principles
Kaupapa Māori	Māori-based topic/event/ enterprise run by Māori for Māori
mana	authority
Māori	Indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand
marae	communal complex used for everyday Māori life
mātauranga	customary knowledge
mauri	life essence
papakāinga	whānau settlement
reo	language
Rongomaiwahine	Māori chieftainess that governed the Māhia Peninsula and from whom the Māhia people descend
tangata whenua	people of the land
tangi	death ritual
tangihanga	death ritual
tapu	sacred
tikanga	cultural lore, practices and activities
tino rangatiratanga	self-determination
tīpuna	ancestors
tūrangawaewae	ancestral territory that the people occupy
wāhi tapu	sacred cultural sites
wairua	spirit
wairuatanga	spirituality
whakapapa	genealogy
whānau	family; nuclear/extended family
whanaunga	family and kinship based relationships
whanaungatanga	social bonds and kin-centred activities
whenua	ancestral land; placenta of a newborn child

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