

THE HAU OF KAI HAU KAI: THE PRACTICE OF INTERGENERATIONAL RECIPROCAL EXCHANGE.

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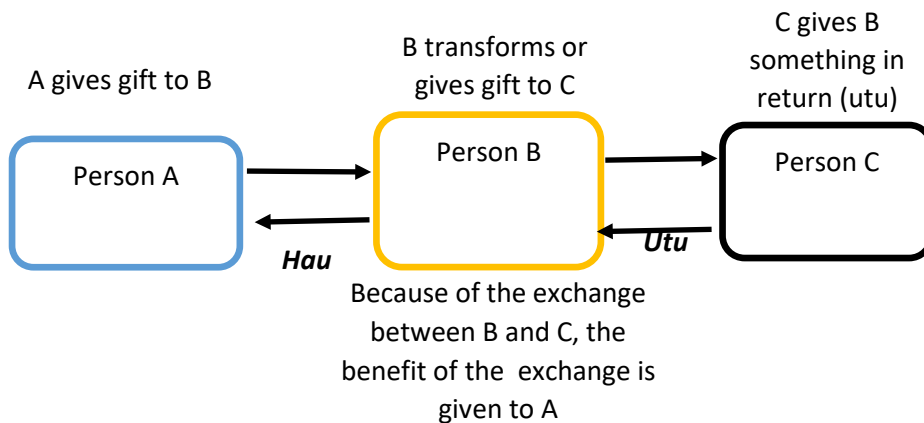
Kai hau kai is a practice of reciprocal obligation which can be misunderstood and seen as a primitive or archaic form of familial exchange. In reality kai hau kai is more fluid and organic and is a continuing embedded form of economic, political and social cohesiveness that is practiced today and involves the ability for rich geographical resources, narratives and practice to be shared inter-regionally. In many cases, kai hau kai is often relegated to primitive bartering systems. This article explores kai hau kai practice and the reciprocal responsibilities that are foundational to intergenerational knowledge transfer of mahika kai.

Ka whiua te pūehu ki runga o Pōkaewhenua. Taku pā tawhito i nohoia e toku tūpuna a Rangipuehu e Ngāti Hine ki Waikato e. Ko Pukekamaka taku tūranga mata titiro atu ki Kaiaua ki Tikapa Moana. Ko Pūkorokoro, ko Whangamarino, ko Rangiriri, ko Waikare, ko Tangoao, ko Matahuru e tāwharautia nei i ngā wai tuku kiri o te iwi. Huitia katoatia i roto i a au ki tōku tuarā nui ki Hapuakohe. Ka tū ki te pae o mahara hei hikina i taku kara mo te Kīngi. Ka hīria, ka hīria te ingoa a Tūheitia. He pare huia mōku. Hei pare tī, hei pare tā. Tihei Mauri Ora (Payne, 2015).

Kai hau kai has been discussed in a variety of ways with an emphasis on the reciprocal exchange of food as the primary focus. A key component of kai hau kai is the concept of hau. Ordinarily hau is translated as the wind or breath and in its simplest vernacular, this is correct. Within kai hau kai however, it has a deeper meaning, one aspect of which was outlined by Marcel Mauss (1967), Marshall Sahlins (1974), Elsdon Best (1929) and Levi Strauss (1949).

These writers consider the concept of hau as part of a reciprocal exchange process that involves the following: Person A gives a gift to Person B, who transforms or gives the gift on to Person C. Person C gives Person B something in exchange for his gift (utu). On receiving the exchange from Person C, Person B passes this on to Person A. The passing on of the gift from Person B to C, is the hau of the original exchange (Schrift, 1997, p.78). This can also be seen in Figure 1 which is an adaption of Shrift's (1995) "The Cycle of Exchange" (p.78).

Figure 1: The Utu and Hau of Kai Hau Kai



For Mauss (1967), "hau is the spirit of an exchange that is passed on to a third person after an initial exchange is undertaken" (p.14). While Mauss described hau as the product of an original exchange, Anne Salmond (1998) gave a more simplistic and readily understandable version noting that "Mauss thought that the hau, or 'spirit of the thing given', impelled the return of goods in material exchanges, so generating human solidarity" (p.38). Salmond (1998) goes on to discuss how kai hau kai was part of reciprocal exchanges aligned to the concept of utu, which was touched on above. She argues that:

The kai hau kai rite, in which the hau of offerings was literally 'eaten' to require prior offerings. The principle of utu, or equivalent return, thus generated

reciprocal exchanges between individuals and groups, working towards balance in the network of cosmic relations (Salmond, 1998: p.40).

Levi-Strauss (1949) agreed with Salmon's analysis that hau was a practice that permeated "every transaction, ritual or profane, in which objects or produce are given or received" (p.52-53). In contrast, Raymond Firth (1973) believed that utu was the primary exchange and does not consider the concept of hau, whereas Peter Gathercole (1978), considered hau to be a vehicle to sanction utu. Where utu was "galvanised relationships of reciprocation...hau helped to shape the character of utu, because it was a negative phenomenon where a failure to pass on the reciprocated gift could lead to disaster" (Gathercole, 1978: pp.338-339). In this sense then, hau was the obligation or enforced exchange component of kai hau kai which would lead to negative consequences if the obligation of reciprocity was ignored. John F Sherry, Jr (1983) went further in the analysis of "gift giving" by focusing on the process and how it could be measured. Sherry also includes the gifting of women, which at first glance may seem crass or surprising to include the exchange of humans in an analysis of reciprocal exchange. However, there is an indigenous practice that strengthens familial ties which involves the gifting of children or the custom of whangai (loosely translated as informal adoption) between families within a customary context. Dr Matiu Payne's research on the taurima (whāngai) custom in Ngāti Mutunga provides an examination of the intergenerational practice of informal adoption and how this has the ability to strengthen social cohesiveness within hapū and iwi (Payne, 2019).

Other writers relegate the practice of kai hau kai and hau as a peasant economy or of no real consequence. James Seigel (2013) in examining Marcel Mauss considered gift giving as exchanges of little consequence and another form of begging, given "beggars of course live by gifts" (p.1). Seigel argued that the beggar was neither a necessary economic or religious practice, but rather a practice that worked in the margins of society and encouraged

“undesirable types” to work with people undertaking corrupt practices (ibid). In essence, if the barter or exchange of goods was not a part of a proper economic monetary system, then it was considered illicit and corrupt. This was not an unpopular opinion and one of the key reasons, the practice of kai hau kai is often considered quaint, primitive or backward. If it did not follow a commercialised standard, then it did not fit with modern society.

However, this practice of kai hau kai is not limited to Māori but has been seen in a number of communities. In the Chinese culture, gift-giving is a “widespread social behaviour, a social integration, the lubricant in social communication” (Sherry and Sherry, 1983: p.1) which played an important role in “building, maintaining and strengthening interpersonal relationships” (Yang, 1983: p.2). It has also been a practice for thousands of years in Chinese society (Liu et al, 2010). For Samoa, Serge Tcherkezoff (2012) seeks to draw similarities between hau and *sau* and their interrelatedness to further concepts of *taonga/toonga* and *mana*. The more relevant point raised by Tcherkezoff however, is the desire by Mauss and Levi-Strauss to redefine the custom of hau to fit their ethnographic preferences. While Mauss focused on the “spirit” of the gift, Levi-Stauss wanted to de-magic hau and have readers focus solely on reciprocity (Tcherkezoff, 2012: p.313). Essentially what both writers were seeking was to “apprehend social configurations and mythological schemes from “nonmodern” societies in a way that would enable a universalistic comparison” (ibid, p.314). More pointedly, anthropological observationists sought to add, subject and redefine Māori cultural concepts and apply it to their own ethnographic studies.

There remains a more important perspective, that of the indigenous culture, the insiders view. While these writers sought to explain the machinations of the practice, the opportunity to examine more closely the cultural context was lost. This was argued by Denis Vedal (2014) by noting that once the concept of hau was isolated by the interested party it was “far removed from what [Māori] actually think or do” (p.340). Vedal (2014) correctly states that concepts

such as hau are “reduced [to] an objective critique” that removes the indigenous perspective and context (ibid). This can also be said about the *potlatch* (First Nations) and *kula* (Papua New Guinea) ring where Mauss refers to the practices but is unable to make the connection to some of the underlying cultural contexts that lay within the practice (Adloff and Mau, 2006: p.99).

It is imperative then to take an indigenous perspective. A recurring practice in my whānau (extended family) while growing up included my father collecting road kill or dead animals on the back roads to our marae in Waikato. He would deliver the roadkill to my grandfather who was at that time living at Taniwha Marae in Waerenga and my grandfather would set his hīnaki (eel weir) in a nearby creek using the roadkill as bait. The following day my grandfather collected his hīnaki and catch of eels and distributed them to the wider whānau. Quite often, my grandfather would receive other food, pūhā preserves, bread, meat or other food and these were shared with my parents. In this context, the preserves and other foodstuffs given to my grandfather was the utu for him sharing the eels he caught. The onward sharing of those food items with my parents was the hau for his contributing roadkill as the bait that caught the eels. Throughout this reciprocal practice of kai hau kai, the connections between whānau were strengthened and interwoven in an organic and natural way.

More recently, during an online family gathering, my mother relayed her frustration when a family member delivered trout to their door. Simultaneously another family member helped to fix a water pump. When she offered payment for the water pump, she was given two large jars of honey in return. She estimated that the payment was insufficient given the commercial price of the honey and sought to add other food (likely the trout) to ensure they knew she appreciated their help. On the way home she stopped to visit another family member and handed over one of the jars of honey. By the time she got home, she had connected with three families and engaged in kai hau kai, as an ordinary day-to-day practice.

When considering hau, it is necessary to also understand other important Māori values such as utu, manaaki, kaitiaki and rakatirataka, which are regularly missed by writers. The focus remained on the act itself, the expected and timely reciprocal exchange that was required and the consequences if that exchange was ignored. There was little knowing of how hau or utu can be resolved, nor the wider cultural framework for kai hau kai.

In practice, hau and by extension, kai hau kai, is a more fluid and unspoken exchange that is supported by and undertaken within a strong foundation. It extends beyond limited non-Māori notions of a simple bartering or traditional exchange system.

In a wider context, kai hau kai is indivisible from mahika kai and the environs they are harvested from. The reason for this is that every aspect of mahika kai and te taiao has a whakapapa, a relatedness, that stretches back to our creation stories. When Māori speak of Tangaroa, Tāne Mahuta, Rongomātāne, Tāwhirimātea (the children of Rangi and Papatūānuku), there are cosmological narratives that have a deep-seated foundation in our culture. Each iwi has a whakapapa connection to one of these atua, some take their origins from particular atua such as Tāne Mahuta, while other iwi believe they whakapapa to others such as Rongomātāne. Regardless of the atua, their interactions with each other created a fabric of woven whakapapa that explains the connection from human to atua, flora and fauna to atua and flora and fauna to human. Mere Roberts (2013) states that

Whakapapa as a philosophical construct implies that all things have an origin (in the form of a primal ancestor from which they are descended), and that ontologically things come into being through the process of descent from an ancestor or ancestors. Further, because there is in Maori cosmogony only one set of primal parents or ancestors (Ranginui and Papatuanuku) from whom all things ultimately trace descent, all things are related (p.93).

Roberts (2013) gives the example of the whakapapa of the kūmara (*Ipomea batatas*) whereby, the kūmara is a descendant of Urutengangana, a child of Rangi and Papa. Although Roberts is focused on non-human whakapapa and considers humans as “offstage in the wings” in reciting the kūmara’s whakapapa, it is important to remember that Māori are also descendants of Rangi and Papatūānuku and in that vein are cousins to the kūmara. It is why Māori see te taiao, mahika kai and the practice of kai hau kai in a specific way. Our relatedness to Rangi and Papatūānuku, the progenitors of all tapu that exists in our world, means that every descendant is an extension of that tapu. Therefore, when we plant, nurture, harvest and eat kai, we are partaking of the tapu extensions from the centre. In order for healthy mahika kai to flourish, communities would need to ensure the hauora (wellbeing) of the natural resources around them given it is an extension of our creation stories and the pātaka that feeds and nourishes the people. These natural environs are valuable food sources, which require ongoing maintenance and protection. More importantly, the whakapapa connections of those food sources were known by select people in the community and its relatedness to whānau and hapū members. The whakapapa of all native flora and fauna provides a deep connection that supersedes quaint descriptions of kaitiakitanga. The whakapapa connections from human to food tells rich stories that explain how and why kai hau kai is an inherent part of, and responsibility for, Māori.

As noted, flora and fauna has a whakapapa that links its people to the environment. In protecting te taiao, through protective measures, the reciprocal exchange is its nourishment of the people. The greater the protection, the more bountiful and fruitful the exchange. This focus on maintaining te taiao was a shared knowing by Māori as the inherent connection was the future livelihood of the whānau and hapū. The hau is a continuous provision by the extended whakapapa connections to the environment and close association and understanding that our interaction with te taiao governed its reciprocal relationships with its people. It is the core reason Māori are concerned with the environment and food security.

However, this is not shared by all users of the land. Although there are provisions “under the Treaty of Waitangi, the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), the Historic Places Act 1993, and the Maori Land Act 1993, to include Maori cultural, historic, spiritual, and physical values in environmental/land-use and social planning” (Harmsworth, 1997: p.37), the reality is that the drive for intensification and greater primary extraction is the dominant consideration. This lack of reciprocation for te taiao has led to the extensive pollution of our rivers, lakes, streams, harbours and the land.

This dissociative utilisation has had the greatest impact on mahika kai and more importantly, the quality of mahika kai. Dissociative disconnection and dispossession of Māori land has seen the flow on effect of kai hau kai as the quality and access to kai is constrained or removed entirely. The inability to fish streams traditionally accessible, the pollution of water ways (all the rivers and lakes in Waikato), recurrence of algae blooms and introduced species that harm native species (carp, noxious weeds) and the introduction of animals and plants that can have negative impacts on native species (rabbits, stoats, possums, gorse). In the colonisation of the environment and dispossession of land from Maori, many traditional mahika kai areas are either inaccessible as a result of private sales, intensification or the effects of pollution.

Despite these challenges, kai hau kai continues to be a prominent practice and its lens is far wider and longer than existing authors would have us believe. Although there are social obligations attached, there are seldom negative consequences. Similarly, other parts of Māori culture have been anglicised with biblical notions of fire and brimstone if certain actions are not performed. Kai hau kai is not exempt from this treatment. Māori culture is replete with instances of aroha and manaaki that allow for remedial resolution. It is more common in Māori culture to be organic and have support systems in place for whānau to ensure the interests of the whānau and hapū are protected. A good example of this can be seen in the writings of

Hone Taare Tikao in 1870, where he explains the ability for whānau and wider whānau to support those who have implemented kai hau kai practices. For Tikao, these tensions can be managed through intergenerational support. Hone Taare Tikao (1870) outlines the intergenerational practice in the context of mahika kauru (Cabbage Tree processing) as follows:

Ka whakaputa ai te kupu heoi ano e kore e taea te whakapeka mai e nga rangatira o era hapu taua tonu he taima ano kua pera mai hoki te tonu a etahi rangatira e kii ana e te Māori hei kai hau kai kia (mea) Rangatira o te kainga i (mea) he maha nga ritenga a te Māori e puta ai nga ritenga penei ka mau tonu te mahi kai hau kai a mate noa te Matua tipu noa ake ki ona uri i muri i a ia e kore e wareware i nga matua te ki iho ki ona uri ki a mahara i muri i a au.

Kaore ano kia utua te kai a (mea) heoi ano ka waiho tena ma ona uri e whakaaro ki te mea i oho rere tonu te matenga o te tangata. Kaore i ki iho ki ona uri ka waiho tonu tena ma ona uri e whakaaro no te mea he ritenga tawhito tena mo te iwi maori no tua iho no tua iho ki te mea i mate kore uri ka ngaro tena kai he mea ano ka riro ma nga whanaunga e utu ma te wahine ranei e hara i te mea he kauru anake te kai hei kai hau kai engari ko te tini noa iho o te kai he aruhe, he inanga, he kokopu he panako he pora e huahua me etahi atu kai (pp. 1-3).

English translation

When a chief's word is expressed those hapū cannot ignore an invitation has been issued. These kinds of invitations of chiefs were described as kai hau kai and rangatira of all localities participated. There were many Māori observances that gave rise to practices like this. It was held with the work in kai hau kai that if a parent died it would be incumbent upon his descendants

after him to not forget the responsibilities bequeathed to him and his descendants, to remember after me. If someone died without fulfilling the reciprocal gift of food that was then left to his descendants to honour. If it happened that someone died at short notice (by surprise) and that person hadn't told his descendants what to do, his descendants would still be bound to the practice. It is an ancient practice of the Māori people from beyond the times that we know. If it happened that someone died without descendants, and there was no kai, it would be left for his relations to reciprocate or for his wife that was left behind, to fulfill. It wasn't just kauru that was used as food in kai hau kai, but there were many types of kai some were the aruhe, whitebait, panako, pora and huahua and other types of food (Payne, 2020).

There are a number of important concepts contained in Tikao's writing, the first of which is confirmation that kai hau kai as an ancient practice was still a foundational part of Māori life in 1870 and generations before. Kai hau kai was also directly passed from generation to generation as a reciprocal obligation to cement familial ties and responsibility in the practice of mahika kai. Furthermore, kai hau kai is a bequeathed responsibility that passes to successive generations and includes wider whānau members for support. This continuous interweaving of whānau shows a rich tapestry of socio-economic engagement that was focused on mahika kai and utilised as a well-practiced component of Māori life that spanned generations.

Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, kai hau kai was an unnamed cultural practice that was observed daily. It included picking puha or watercress on the side of the road for whānau members, eeling in local creeks, sharing meat from abattoirs or kouka from Cabbage Trees. Kai hau kai could also include growing communal gardens, milking cows, growing and harvesting tobacco plantations and ensuring the quality and cleanliness of local puna wai (water springs). The hau in this exchange is watercress or puha for a cup of tea, spending time with

whānau, checking on the weave of interpersonal ties to each other. It can be elongated to include a whānau member dropping off road kill or a geese cull. The roadkill can be utilised for eeling whereby the fruits of the hīnaki are then dispersed to both the giver of the roadkill and the whānau that set the eel nets. The hau in this instance are the eels.

These were unspoken norms that were observed and participated in as a child. We were not told that this is what must be done, but rather that the practice of the giving, exchange and fruit of that exchange were undertaken constantly. Today we try to articulate what seems a simple practice into something more complex, when in reality, it is a continuously weaving, checking and rebinding, where necessary, of familial relationships that are important to the social fabric of Māori society.

However, it was not always in the physical exchange of a thing or product. The maintenance of natural resources is a good example of environmental hau. Preserving the quality of natural resources for future seasons, soil quality through hua whenua (fruits of the earth), collecting seeds for future planting, monitoring the numbers of animals and birds for harvest, maintaining fresh and sea water resources on a seasonal basis and harvesting food as needed or for trade. From an indigenous perspective, mahika kai requires a process of taking what you need and preserving the environment for future seasons and generations. The practice of kaitiakitaka then, is the ongoing hau that Māori preserves for the exchange we receive in gathering food. Our continued nurturing and protection of the environmental mauri that sustains us is the deeper connection we have with mahika kai. The physical exchange amongst ourselves is the physical practice of weaving whānau and hapū together through the generations, while the tighter weave is with Papatūānuku and our connection to our creation stories.

It is for this reason that Māori need to focus on the indigenisation of our food sources. If COVID-19 and the Level 4 lockdown has shown us so far in 2020, nature has had a reprieve

from mass consumerism, intensification, exploitation of our natural resources and the ongoing human taxing of the environment. Around the world, rivers and canals became clear of pollution, smog reduction was at its highest and animals were able to roam more freely in their traditional realms. This was the best example of how nature heals when humans are sharing the environment.

Conclusion

Indigenising our food sources is synonymous with extensification (Morrison, 2019) and in this context means applying Māori values to the utilisation of how we produce, harvest and gather food. It can also inform how Māori utilise existing commercial activities to provide indigenous outcomes (Coté, 2016). This can involve utilising the return on commercial operations to provide manaaki and practice kai hau kai in a sustainable manner as well as returning to mara kai and other mahika kai practices for self-sufficiency in the whānau and hapū. It is not divorcing oneself from the modern world, but reflecting and considering how the returns from a modern world can better reinvigorate and support an indigenous approach to supporting whānau and hapū. Rather than Māori investing in internalised forms of intensification, there is a need to hold our leaders accountable for the intergenerational impact on the environment and move into sustainable and mauri-enhancing practices that support our environment. The reinvigoration and revitalisation of māra kai during COVID-19 is a startling example of how this can happen.

The practice hau of kai hau kai is a dynamic intergenerational practice that endures today and was actively used during lockdown. While non-indigenous attempts to explain the practice have diminished the true meaning of kai hau kai by removing hau from its cultural context, hau is best understood from an indigenous perspective, which articulate the fluid unspoken exchanges that occur naturally. It is indivisible from mahika kai and te taiao and deeply rooted in our creation stories. These whakapapa connections are what grounds our

relationships with the environment and articulates how Māori exercise reciprocal exchanges between themselves, the environment and mahika kai – as social, economic, spiritual and familial obligations and responsibilities that protect the environment, indigenise our food sources and supports whānau, hapū and iwi.

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