

The Rangi & Papa myth and its influences

The story of Rangi and Papa has been a pivotal foundation in mythology from New Zealand and Maori mythology. The story goes that Rangi, the sky father, and Papa, the earth mother, are pressed tightly above a shell within darkness. They then have children who are confined in the darkness, so they come to a debate on how to create light, Tu-Mata-Uenga, the Maori God of war, came with the idea to kill their parents whereas Tane-Mahuta, Maori God of the forest, won the debate among his brothers with his idea to separate them instead as shown by the Maori quote "Nay, not so. It is better to rend them apart and to let the heavens stand above us and the earth lay beneath us". This quote shows that the heaven he refers to is his father Rangi and the earth refers to his mother Papa, to me this quote is highlighting his desire to separate his brothers and himself from his father in favour of keeping his mother close to them. I argue that this highlights the importance of kinship within the Maori tradition which is highlighted by the whakapaka that is vital within Maori traditions, whether it is modern or historical. After the split between Rangi and Papa, the light came forward as well as the idea of life, which is shown by "it was the fierce thrusting of Tane which tore the heavens apart, and darkness became manifest, and so was the light" which is a prominent quote in Maori mythology. I argue the quote shows the importance of not only the separation, but also the importance that Tane-Mahuta, who is mentioned in the quote, is to the Maori. The separation between Rangi and Papa, while crucial for the beginning of life as we know it, brought about grief and anger among some of the Gods. Notably Tawhiri-Matea, the God of wind and weather, was especially upset by the split and chose to retaliate by sending storms and strong winds down to earth to show his displeasure at the decision. Through the Gods joint pleasure of the life that the light had given, they made the decision to create human life which they did so from the red clay that came from Papa, and then asked Tawhiri-Matea to breathe life into the nostrils they had given so they could create life which he agreed to. To me, this part of the story provides a strong emphasis to the Maori belief of Whakapaka. This is because if we are created from the red clay that Papa gave, and also due to our creators being Tawhiri-Matea and Tane-Mahuta being the children of Rangi and Papa, that would then make us relatives to Rangi and Papa which is the core belief of whakapaka. There are different versions to this myth however with a more modernised version by Te Ahukaramu Charles Royal which speaks of Io, a creator before Rangi and Papa which I will further look into later in this discussion. In another version it notes that in the context of Mana, the incest relationship between Rangi and Papa was essential in strengthening the bloodline of the Gods, but humans who chose to also engage in incest relationships were diluting and tarnishing their bloodline and was therefore an act of taboo. But in my view, regardless of which version of the myth people follow, they are similar in their messages in kinship, whakapake among others, and the main myth remains the same in most such as light as a creation from separation ending the darkness, the earth and sky becoming and will remain separate and

Rangi's tears creating life giving water are both prominent in the vast majority of the versions of the myth. (The Polynesian Creation Myth - EBSCO, Michael P. Auerbach, 2021). Another version that caught my eye was a point raised by Antony Alpers in his retold version of *Maori Myths and Tribal Legends* which says "There was darkness from the division of time, unto the tenth, unto the hundredth, to the thousandth" (Maori Myths and Tribal Legends, Antony Alpers, 1965). This caught my attention as to me, it talks of these divisions of time as beings, so in a way, these divisions of time could be seen as beings before or during the time of the darkness brought by Rangi and Papa so that would make time whakapaka to the Maori people.

A leading figure within Maori mythology is Tane-Mahuta, Maori God of the forest. But he is not just known for the separation of Rangi and Papa, but he is also seen as a key model for behaviour of Maori people and there are several stories of his behaviours. One example is how he shows perseverance and strive, which can be seen in the tale of Tane's travel through the 12 heavens to obtain knowledge which I believe clearly symbolises his perseverance and strive for knowledge and understanding. A further example is him showing rationale and use of a clear head even in challenging moments which can be highlighted by Tane using logic and a clear head when debating with his brothers about whether to kill their parents or separate them, which is a debate he won which is why I believe is why these behaviours are key in Maori ways of living. There are other Maori figures who are seen as key to behaviours and ways of living. For example, Tumatauenga, Maori God of war, is believed to be all of us all the time in some Maori traditions. He is key as he shows and teaches that life is not always easy and is often frustrating, as shown by his frustration at his idea to kill his parents is shut down by Tane-Mahuta, but also shows the need to solve problems when they arise. To me, he highlights a key point in human behavior in the way that even when frustration or challenging times come, we must accept them and persevere through them, much like he accepted his idea was not going to happen but continued to help the rest of his brothers with the separation. Also his brother Tawhiri-Matea, God of weather and storms, to me is also a pivotal figure on how to behave, especially in modern society. I argue that him going against the majority of his brothers in the debate about his parents separation in favour of killing them shows great diversity and greatly promotes that a difference in agenda or opinion is ok and to persevere with your opinion with certain points of views despite what the majority may think. (Michele, Te Reo Maori Classroom, 18 July 2019). Many of these behaviours have brought forward rituals and practises that Maori people observe. For example, tikanga rituals and practises centre around respecting the earth and its environment out of respect to the Gods along with Rangi and Papa who worked hard and thank them for their sacrifices and pain to create the world for us. A notable practice they observe is kaitiakitanga, a practice which involves caring for the environment and protecting it as part of their stewardship and guardianship that has been given to them by the

Gods which promotes the kinship between humans, the Gods and nature. (Twinkl, Who Are Papatuanuku and Ranginui - Teaching Wiki, Date Not Mentioned)

There are also influential figures in Maori mythologies other than the deities, such as Maori philosophers. One name that has become popular in recent years is Te Ahukaramu Charles Royal who has written books and published papers on the Maori myth in years as recent as 2021. A key figure he often references in his work is the 19th century Ngati Raukawa chief, Hukki Te Ahukaramu who says the world goes from Te Po, Te Ata, Te Ao, Te Ao-tu-roa and finally Te Ao Marama meaning darkness, dawn, light, longstanding world then the world of light respectively. However he adapted this work into his own version of Aitua, Te Kore, Te Mangu and then Rangipotiki meaning calamity, nothingness, darkness then the sky. He mainly highlights the importance of spoken repetition for the Maori people as a way of early documenting their belief which I agree on seeing as written documentations for something like the Maori myth wasn't prominent at that point so I believe that the spoken repetition they used is the key part in what kept the belief alive. But the main point he highlights is the key absence of Io from the Maori myth as it was only manuscripted from the 19th century by S. Percy Smith in *The Lore of Whare-wananga*. He says that Io was the creator of Ranga and Papa making Io the first deity which goes against the typical Maori tradition where Rangi and Papa were the first and explains that the reason Io isn't mentioned before Smith's manuscript is because it was only the initiated among the Maori people who were allowed to know of Io. However, much like how Smith was critiqued for Io, Royal has faced similar critiques in that it is argued Io was created as a way for the Maori faith to fit more in line with christian beliefs of a single deity creating everything from nothing. However, many tribes accept the popularity that Io has gained and each tribe has their own opinion on the matter. Personally, I don't find it feasible to believe that only the initiated were allowed to know of Io and find it more believable that Io was lost in the spoken repetition, but that being said, I don't believe that there was Io before Rangi and Papa as I find more evidence in this through many Maori tribes not agreeing with the Io story. But he also speaks much about the traditional Maori ways. The powhiri ritual is one in which he places great emphasis on. He says it is vital as it guides the participant from a state of darkness to a state of light. He notes that the carvings and layout make it more prominent and more personal to the Maori people. The ceiling represents Rangi in the heavens and the floor represents Papa being close to us with the pillars of the building representing Tane-Mahuta separating his parents. He says that this ritual is vital in Maori traditions as it moves the participant from a state of Po, or darkness, into a state of Ao, or lightness, which I agree with as I also would link it to a re-enactment of the creation of the world as you move from darkness and allow light which Royal also mentions. Another point he notes about traditional Maori ways is his belief that each time whakapaka and korero about creation are repeated, then the world becomes ritually recreated. (Te Ahukaramu Charles Royal, Maori Creation Traditions - Encyclopedia of New Zealand, 4 March 2009). I agree with Royal's belief and emphasis on the importance of Maori rituals and practises such as

the Powhiri ritual as a way to connect deeper to their whakapaka, but I don't believe the credibility of lo just being kept to a select group of a few initiates as to me, that doesn't show Maori ways of thinking in a sense of not showing their connections to each other or their kin.

A second influential philosopher in Maori mythology is Reverend Maori Marsden who was a prominent figure in Maori writings in the late 20th century. He believes that the separation caused Rangi to become the sky and along with Tawhiri-Matea, created life-giving rain from Rangi's tears because of his separation from Papa and that Papa became the soil and earth so she could give nourishment to her children and the life they would create. He sees this as a pivotal ideology to help promote rituals such as kaitiakitanga to protect the environment. I agree with this position as it aligns with other evidence seen within Maori beliefs and it is pivotal for the promotion of rituals. A further pivotal moment in Maori history for him was Tane-Mahuta ascendance through the 12 heavens to gain the baskets of knowledge which he saw as a special moment for humanity, but also says it was one of the most vital moment for the Maori as it ensured the long-term survival for all living beings through the knowledge to adapt and evolve (Garth Harmsworth and Nick Roskurge, *Indigenous Maori Values - The Soil Underfoot*, 2003). Marsden further says that the Maori people have an ability to shape the story of Rangi and Papa in a way that leaves long lasting impressions of it, but in Te Ao Maori, there is a sense of embodiment that the earth is prominent but that idea is not modernised to modern civilizations which shows their ideas aren't always reflected in modern civilizations despite the Maori's rich history. On this point, BERL argues that the Maori people find themselves trying to incorporate their ways into modern life which Marsden rejects as he believes it compromises their core identity (Pepere and Raana, *A Presence of Aria - Within the Indigenous Corporate Body*, 7 December 2021). While I understand Marsden's point of view, I disagree and believe that the Maori people have evolved and adapted to the modern world and will continue to do so.

To conclude, I believe that it is clear to see the influences that the Rangi and Papa myth has among the Maori people through the kinship it gives the Maori people from the Gods, but also the influence it has on behaviours such as practising rituals. Its influence is also seen through different Maori writers' views such as Marsden and Royal.

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