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GOVERNING BODIES: A MĀORI HEALING
TRADITION IN A BICULTURAL STATE

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology,
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ABSTRACT

Biculturalism is a relationship in government between the British Crown and the indigenous Māori people of New Zealand. I show that this relationship permeated some Māori healing practitioners’ healing knowledge and perception. A key way in which this occurred was through the practitioners recognizing biological and social boundaries between Māori and Pākehā [New Zealanders of European descent]. A second was through the practitioners’ embodiment of connections with social groups including the nation, a history and present shared between Māori and Pākehā and an idealized pre-contact past. A fundamental principle of Te Oo Mai Reia was that for the practitioners to harness the power of the various forces that sustained life they had to be in touch with their whakapapa [genealogy] for it was through their ancestors that they could commune with the Ultimate Deity, Io, the source of the most potent of all forces of life. A further key principle was that spiritually inspired and traditional Māori culture heightened the wellbeing of Māori, not modern, Pākehā culture. Spiritual and ancient knowledge was supra-conscious and made knowable through an embodied awareness of self and other. To make my argument I draw on literature inspired by Foucault that shows how states govern by implementing their operations and securing their penetration into the citizenry by drawing and building upon pre-existing bodies of knowledge and relations of power. I also draw on literature that shows how the human body bears the effects of such practices of government. To this literature I integrate perception by showing how, in this Māori healing context, the government of the bicultural nation-state worked through the ways the practitioners made sense with the body (especially through feeling, seeing and touching).

Keywords: healing, body, medical anthropology, governmentality, embodiment, perception, biculturalism, New Zealand
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# Table of Contents

**ABSTRACT** .................................................................................................................. 2
**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ............................................................................................. 3
**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION** .................................................................................. 8  
  Beginnings .................................................................................................................. 8  
  Bicultural government ............................................................................................... 10  
  Māori health and healing ......................................................................................... 20  
  Government of the Body......................................................................................... 23  
  Fieldwork and Methodology.................................................................................... 27  
    Field sites ............................................................................................................. 27  
    Participant Observation........................................................................................ 29  
    Interviews............................................................................................................. 30  
    The role of the body............................................................................................. 33  
    Research position................................................................................................. 35  
  Ethics.................................................................................................................... 39  
  Looking ahead.......................................................................................................... 41
**CHAPTER 2: TRADITIONAL MĀORI HEALING / TE OO MAI REIA** ..................... 45  
  Describing a Māori tradition of healing................................................................... 45  
    Bringing embodied knowledge to Te Oo Mai Reia............................................. 48  
  Te Oo Mai Reia – interpreting the phrase............................................................ 50  
  Te Oo Mai Reia – the healing methods ................................................................... 54  
    Romiromi and Mirimiri........................................................................................ 54  
    Korerorero............................................................................................................ 55  
    Karakia, Takutaku and Kaupare .......................................................................... 56  
    Rongoā ................................................................................................................. 60  
  Working as a Māori healer....................................................................................... 60  
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 66
**CHAPTER 3: MAKING A PUBLICLY FUNDABLE TRADITION OF MĀORI HEALING** ................................................................................................................................. 67  
  Making the State Bicultural ..................................................................................... 68  
  The Bicultural Development of Rongoā Services ................................................ 71  
  Modeling a publicly-fundable form of Rongoā .................................................... 75  
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 84
**CHAPTER 4: MĀORI ETHNICITY AND CITIZENSHIP** .............................................. 86  
  The Treaty of Waitangi and Māori identity ............................................................. 88  
    Political power and identity beyond the Treaty of Waitangi ................................ 90  
    Whakapapa............................................................................................................ 92  
    Spirituality............................................................................................................. 98  
  Illness, healing and Māori identity......................................................................... 102  
  Cultural Rights....................................................................................................... 106  
  Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 109
**CHAPTER 5: THE BODY** ...................................................................................... 111  
  The Body as a Material and Non-material Entity .................................................. 112  
  Te Oo Mai Reia conceptions of the body................................................................. 114
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge in the Body</th>
<th>Whakapapa – a principle uniting spirit and flesh</th>
<th>Mauri and Wairua – key principles of non-matter</th>
<th>Conclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 6: MAKING SENSE THROUGH THE BODY</td>
<td>Making sense</td>
<td>Making sense, spiritually</td>
<td>Making sense with the <em>whatumanawa</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 7: HEALING SUFFERING</td>
<td>The goals of healing</td>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>Neutrality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION</td>
<td>GLOSSARY OF MAORI WORDS</td>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 7.1 A healing method commonly used to evacuate spiritual entities from the body ................................................................. 155