

CONCEPTS, THEORIES, & INTRODUCTIONS

Belonging to the Land: Indigenous Māori Narratives of Home and Place

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Land is a place that Māori, the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand, are connected to ancestrally, spiritually, physically, and geographically. This relationship is emblematic in our native language, where *whenua* means both land and placenta, symbolising both as our sites of our origin and sustenance. For Māori, the land is a place that establishes our identity as *iwi* (tribal nations), *hapū* (sub-tribe) and *whānau* (constellations of extended family networks and friends). The imposition of land ownership has alienated Māori from our *whenua*, making us minorities in our previous home-spaces. Although colonially forced ideologies of land ownership complicate our relationship to place, for many Māori, land is a place of belonging and home. Drawing on research from a project on Māori conceptions of home and wellbeing, this article explores Indigenous experiences of home and place, which highlights Māori resistance to colonising narratives that associate place and home with economic wealth and power. Instead, ideas of identity, belonging, relationality, and self-determination are explored as lived realities of resistance. This article profiles Māori experiences across a range of urban and rural contexts that negotiate the tensions of colonisation, foster strong cultural identities, and cultivate meaningful enactments of home in diverse environments within Aotearoa New Zealand.

Introduction

“a notion of home must be built on the idea of love: a deep and abiding sense of love that comes from belonging, that comes from a certainty of place and a comfort in that place.” (Moana Jackson, 2022, p. 17)

This article draws on findings from the research project *Tō mātou kāinga, tō mātou ūkaipō - Whānau conceptions of home: supporting flourishing home environments (Tō mātou kāinga)* a current study undertaken in Aotearoa New Zealand (henceforth referred to as Aotearoa). The project

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is a five-year research project that investigates Māori understandings and experiences of home within Aotearoa. By interviewing *whānau* (constellations of extended family networks and friends) and individuals about their home needs and aspirations, alongside interviews with key stakeholders in areas of Māori home and housing, the project hopes to establish new ways of understanding ‘home’ that challenges hegemonic models of home and housing. This article draws on some of the findings from the interviews conducted with stakeholders (16 people working in a range of home and housing spaces) to give voice, firstly, to Māori re-constructing what place and home means in the current context of lived experiences, and, secondly, to show some of the ways in which Māori are creating diverse and nourishing home-places of their own choosing.

The history of home and housing in Aotearoa

For Māori, the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa, land and place are inexplicably interwoven into our past, present, and future. The Indigenous peoples now collectively known as Māori arrived on the shores of Aotearoa in a series of migrations across the Pacific from the second half of the 13th century AD (Hogg et al., 2003). Migration narratives tell the story of tribal ancestors, who arrived in a series of canoes from the homeland of Hawaiki and other places believed to be in Eastern Polynesia (Haami, 2018). The establishment of home spaces continued through further migrations across Aotearoa, where the search for seasonal resources or land disputes moved people into new areas.

The pattern of Māori kinship traces itself back not just to the ancestors of the migration canoes, but beyond that to a belonging to Papatūānuku (the Earth Mother) through the Māori explanation of all creation. This epistemology of creation charts the development from *Io* (the place where nothing existed) to *Te Korekore* (place of potential), through *Te Po* (the place of infinite darkness), to *Te Ao Marama* (the world of light and the place of the present earth) (Hikuroa, 2015). This connection means that ancestral relationships are bound to the very creation of the land and establishes “connections beyond just physical or geographical borders. They shared spiritual understandings of the earth, sky, ocean, stars and other natural elements” (Mahuika, 2009, p. 136). This connection from all living beings to land and the cosmos is also reflected in Māori identifying as *tangata whenua* (people of the land). The word *whenua* means both land and placenta, symbolising both as sites of our origin and sustenance (Boulton et al., 2021). The Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa thus identified themselves through their *iwi* (tribal nations), *hapū* (sub-tribe), *whānau* and their relationship with particular land areas in Aotearoa, as well as beyond that into the larger scheme of cosmological development. The notion of *tūrangawaewae*, a place where one has the right to stand and reside, is an intrinsic part of how Māori identified themselves, their histories, and their links to the larger place narrative (Hikuroa, 2015).

With the arrival of non-Māori post the explorer voyage of James Cook in 1769 and the increasing colonisation by mostly British emigrants, these lived associations between *whakapapa* (ancestry) and place began to be eroded. The epistemological framework pre-colonisation resided in belonging to iwi, hapū, whānau and land; with the arrival of European settlers these diverse groups became lumped together as Māori, a descriptor that became widely applied and is now the common usage to define the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa. What was once ‘the norm’ (the literal meaning of ‘Māori’) now became the ‘ab-norm’, or the ‘other’ to the European colonisers, who “brought with them not only firmly entrenched and established identities, but also the desire to construct a new one, a New Zealand one, at the expense of the natives” (Mahuika, 2009, p. 136).

The idea of ‘ownership’ of land, which was part of the colonial ideology, stood in strong contrast to Māori ties to the land, where land was part of identity and belonging and could not be permanently ‘sold’. The creation of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 was partly a response to the uncontrolled land sales that occurred prior to then; Te Tiriti (the Māori language version of the Treaty, which is what most tribal chiefs understood and signed) stated that the British government could have *kāwanatanga* (governance) and that Māori would remain in possession of *rangatiratanga* (sovereignty) over their lands and everything else. The English version, however, framed this as a complete cession of sovereignty to the British Crown. This misalignment has led to the erosion of Māori land rights, self-governance, and cultural autonomy, contributing to the marginalization and systemic inequalities Māori face today, as their expectations of partnership and autonomy were undermined (Mutu, 2019). The discrepancies between the English version of the Treaty of Waitangi and the Māori-language version, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, lie at the heart of ongoing tensions in Aotearoa. Te Tiriti, in its Māori form, was a promise of partnership and recognition of absolute Māori sovereignty over their lands and affairs (Mutu, 2019). The Crown’s failure to honour this is not just a breach of trust, but continues to represent a colonial symbol of justice denied to Māori for generations.

Colonisation in Aotearoa resulted in the systematic dispossession of land, language, and culture for Māori (Boulton et al., 2022). Esteemed rangatira (leader) and Māori rights lawyer and scholar Moana Jackson likens the events of colonisation in Aotearoa to that of a ‘home invasion’ when he stated that:

in all the many definitions of colonisation – a system of dispossession that takes away the lives, lands and power of the people – it seems to me they all come back in the end to the destruction of a place that people call home. Colonisation was literally a home invasion. (Jackson, 2022, p. 18)

The subsequent formation of the ‘new nation of New Zealand’ required that Māori assimilate to the now dominant Western hegemony, which became systemised through policies aimed at ‘integration’ (Pihama, 2022). Māori have

steadily become a minority in their homelands, now making up 17.3% of the national population (Statistics New Zealand, 2023). The increasing loss of land through government policies and targeted land acquisition changed the country from being previously legally entirely owned by Māori, to the state that by 2017 Māori ownership of land had decreased to merely 5% (Thom & Grimes, 2022). Furthermore, the alienation of the land, coupled with the development of colonial economic capitalist models, drove what has become known as ‘the second’ great migration of Māori, from their rural homelands towards the large city centres (Easton, 2018). In 1951 71% of Māori lived in rural areas (Easton, 2018), throughout the 1950s the rural population declined, to the point whereas at the 2018 Aotearoa population census only 18% of Māori lived rurally (Environmental Health Intelligence New Zealand, 2018).

In regard to the literal housing spaces that Māori inhabit today, rates of increasing homelessness, where Māori are five times more likely than non-Māori to be homeless (R. Smith & Edwards, 2023), precarious living where whānau live in unaffordable and unsuitable accommodation, and decreasing home ownership – less than 40% for Māori compared to 70% for non-Māori (Rout et al., 2022) – reflect deeply entrenched inequities in housing for Māori. For those that are fortunate to still own lands in their places of ancestry, legislation restricting land usage, in particular multiple-owner land use, alongside systemic barriers to access housing finance, means that the land is often unable to be utilised for the homes and wellbeing of the iwi, hapū, or whānau owners.

While these indicators highlight the inequity in physical home-spaces for contemporary Māori, they do not capture the essence of the ‘homelessness’ that has resulted from spiritual and cultural displacement. Durie (1994) states that just as genocide had been the major threat to Māori from colonisation during the 1800s, for the 21st century Māori ethnocide remains an ongoing, daily threat. For tangata whenua, the alienation of land, the alienation of relationship to our places through our ancestral ties to humans and beyond has left many of us wondering about ‘our’ place. This experience is echoed by colonised Indigenous peoples across the globe, where “to be homeless in this context then means to be without country; to have no such set of intimate connections, to have an incomplete identity and only a set of unanswered questions” (Memmott et al., 2003, p. 14).

Today, many of us living as Indigenous peoples on what were once sovereign Indigenous lands, remember ourselves through connection to our home-places; the mountains, waters, sites of significance, our ancestors that inform our identities. While for many of us these places are often not where we can physically be, the act of remembrance, even in the abstract, means that there is the ongoing and deeply embedded sense of ‘love’ that Moana Jackson spoke of in the opening quote to this article. We believe it is this abiding sense of place, which even when it has been deeply buried by years of traumatic colonial impositions, is the shining light in the current experience

of ‘place-less-ness’ for many Māori. Despite the losses and hardships, there is an ongoing resistance by Māori against colonising narratives in a world where place and home are associated predominantly with economic wealth and power.

Methods

This article draws on the research project *Tō mātou kāinga*, a project that is part of a larger programme of research looking at generating new Māori knowledge to find new solutions to improve the health and wellbeing of all whānau Māori. The *Tō mātou kāinga* project engaged a Kaupapa Māori research methodology from the inception of the research through to paper dissemination to explore whānau understandings and experiences of home and home environments. To explore this objective, data collection was gathered in three stages: 1) interviews with whānau, 2) interviews with stakeholders and key informants and 3) *iwi wānanga* (focus groups). The data presented in this article is the outcome of analysis done on the second phase of data collection with stakeholders and key informants.

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 16 stakeholders and key informants who work in broad areas of Māori housing and home within Northland, Tāmaki Makaurau, Hauraki, Whanganui and Hawke’s Bay. Participants worked in a range of fields such as housing research and policy, housing development, architecture, social housing, youth homelessness, *papakāinga* (intergenerational, communal) housing and accessible housing. Participants were recruited through research partners and personal networks, purposively sampled to represent varied forms of Māori housing and home initiatives.

Interviews were undertaken at participants’ homes or workplaces between May-September 2023 and February 2024. Semi-structured interviews and flexible interview protocols guided discussions broadly exploring conceptualisations of home, housing solutions, and Māori aspirations for home-spaces. The current study is an analysis of participant *kōrero* that spoke to the importance of *whenua* (land), home and Māori identity. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and names of locations and identifying information have been removed during analysis.

The research team utilised Braun and Clarke’s (2012) method for reflexive thematic analysis with participant transcripts. As the research data was so rich and diverse, data was initially coded into broad categories that spoke to numerous aspects of housing and home for Māori. For this paper, all codes pertaining to *whenua* and relationships to the land were separated from the wider dataset and coded again in more depth. Through conversations with the research team, coding categories were refined and co-constructed through multiple analysis discussions until clear themes were shaped and defined. The analysis attends to how Māori identity and wellbeing in Aotearoa is shaped by deep connections and cultural values in relation to the *whenua*. We recognise that despite the damaging impacts of colonisation, Māori have maintained resilience and practices of sovereignty that have adapted and grown relational

ways of living and creating home spaces in contemporary Aotearoa. The co-constructed themes that explore these ideas are 1) What is home? Belonging to the land, 2) Home places, land and relationality, 3) Home places and self-determination, 4) Creating home-spaces in contemporary colonial Aotearoa.

What is home? Belonging to the land

While at the superficial level definitions of home tend to centre around a physical dwelling, home-spaces for Māori are a complex and, at times, contentious issue characterised by identity, culture, history, land and colonisation. Traditionally, Māori society was structured around tribal-based living where home was centred around tribal affiliations, family connections and intimate relationships with the natural environment (Moeke-Pickering, 1996) and all things are seen to have a *mauri* (life force, essence, and vitality). Māori philosophies emphasised interconnectedness through reciprocal living with the land and kinship groups (Burgess & Moko-Painting, 2020). However, subsequent and deliberate colonial strategies individualised and commodified land ownership, leading to the erosion of intergenerational living in favour of private housing and nuclear family units. Despite the role of colonisation in displacing many Māori away from their traditional homelands, contemporary Māori culture maintains a deep reverence for land and spiritual home-places, considering them inseparable to their physical entities (Nikora et al., 2013).

The significance of land to Māori and the enduring connection between home, identity and wellbeing is profoundly summarised by one of the participants from the Tō mātou kāinga project:

We came here from all over the place, all the waka turned up, and we weren't Māori then (...) we were other people. The land made us who we are and that's our connection with it. The land created us as a people, it gave us our way of being, our physiology even (...) We can't jump in a boat or a plane and go off and find the reo [language] somewhere (...) because we were made here (...) Okay, our ancestors came from somewhere else, we as a people did not. So, when the land that created us is taken away from us, - that's a home in the deeper sense of the word because it physically made us, it culturally made us, and to be separated from that is a pretty horrendous thing to happen to us. There's other meaning of home I think, is that connection with our maker, and our maker is the land. I'm not talking about God here. Our maker is literally this space and place and environment and ecosystem, it's what created us.

Here, the relationship between Māori and the land is further expanded, recognising the lands of Aotearoa as the genesis of Māori ways of knowing and being. This is familiar with Māori creation stories where *Papatūānuku* is upheld as the source of all things, emphasising the importance of place

in our identities and home spaces (Mikaere, 2011; Simmonds, 2009). Land is therefore seen as a relational nexus – connecting Māori to our identity, language, cultural practices, and each other (Broughton, 1993; Moeke-Pickering, 1996; R. Walker, 2004). As all of these elements are seen as fundamental components of Māori identity, each must be cared for to ensure wellness (Mark & Lyons, 2010). The theft and removal of land from many Māori resulted in marginalisation of ancestral knowledges and weakened ties to tribal networks of support (Thom & Grimes, 2022). Home is therefore intimately determined by our relationship to land, as the ultimate source of our origin as a people, physically and culturally. This is further illustrated by another participant:

Mother earth, female entity. For me my mother is my everything. She created me. Physically, biologically, personality, character, philosophies. That was my mum. So, Mother Earth is in an entity parallel with that cycle. Anything to do with Mother Earth must be oppressed (...) They [colonisers] can't go and say we'll replace your Mother Earth with our Mother Earth. That won't work because Mother Earth is Mother Earth. So, they have to take away the whole identity and concept of Mother Earth and remove it. That means anything to do with Mother Earth. That includes Mother Earth the identity of Papatūānuku, earth itself as in growing our own food and sustaining ourselves. Growing large gardens and being economically viable and being able to have our own economy.

This participant speaks to the erasure of Māori identities and philosophies that takes place under colonisation. The foundation of Māori identity and wellbeing is defined by our interactions with the land and its resources. The above account describes how forced removal of land leverages colonial ideologies by removing Māori identities and understandings of Papatūānuku. This is a familiar strategy of colonialism, where assimilation functions to undermine Indigenous identities, holistic relationalities, and economic autonomy (Reid & Rout, n.d.). As touched on in the above account, this has far-reaching implications, where the inability to create economies limited the ability for Māori to sustain governance structures and maintain self-determination within a colonised Aotearoa (Pool, 2015), all of which are necessary for the development of sustainable and flourishing home-spaces.

Indeed, for Indigenous peoples worldwide, the very existence and survival of our communities – physically, mentally, spiritually and economically – is determined by active relationships with the land (Pool, 2015; Watts, 2016). The spiritual relationship Māori hold with land was succinctly captured by a research participant who stated: “It’s not that hard to go in there with guns blazing and remove people physically from the land. The hard part is removing them psychologically and emotionally.”

The psychological and emotional severance of land from Māori is a form of historical trauma, familiar with Indigenous peoples worldwide (Paradies, 2016; Thom & Grimes, 2022). Historical trauma is passed on intergenerationally and can impact on a person's health and wellbeing, as it limits the ability to live authentically, be mentally well and to draw on cultural and natural resources throughout generations (Brave Heart, 2003; Durie, 1985). Land theft and alienation for Māori perpetuated cultural and spiritual disconnection and hindered political and economic growth (Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2019). Despite these consequences of land theft, Māori remain adaptable, dynamic and resilient in maintaining strong identities and collective wellbeing and connection to their whenua (land) and significant places (Thom & Grimes, 2022). The importance of this relationship is demonstrated within ancestral wisdom through the whakataukī (Māori proverb): *Te toto o te tangata he kai, te oranga o te tangata, he whenua, he oneone* (a person's blood is nourished by food, our wellbeing is drawn from the land and soils).

Home places, land and relationality

For Māori, our sense of belonging to the land is guided by cultural values and our connections to each other. Māori knowledge systems and values foster unity between home-spaces, people, and the environment, contrasting with Western capitalist approaches that are shaped by commodification and exploitation. This relationality with the land is explored in the following comment from a project participant:

Yeah, well Māori tend to have land based thinking rather than engineering ways of thinking. Western thinking thinks that you can engineer your way out of problems. Whereas Māori will say, 'well no, we don't want to engineer the land we want to respect the land because it can turn around and bite us, it's something to be respected, not something to try to control'.

This participant, who works in urban design, spoke about how Māori tend to work in relationship with the land, prioritising respectful reciprocity and understanding the autonomy the land holds. *Kaitiakitanga* is a key Māori philosophy, that guides how the natural environment is managed and emphasises balance and protection of our environment and its resources (Kawharu, 2000; E. T. Walker et al., 2019). Although *kaitiakitanga* is often simply defined as 'guardianship', it is also, as the above account describes, a cultural and moral approach to the relationship with the land that foregrounds harmonious reciprocity and respect. In its dual capacity as an ideology and an active role, *kaitiakitanga* defines our responsibilities to the land. Conversely, this participant also highlights how Western approaches tend to 'engineer (their) way out of problems', seeing the land as something to be controlled and manipulated. While this perspective is slowly shifting within Western paradigms, with the growing popularity of sustainability

movements worldwide, the utility of Indigenous knowledges and values in this space has historically been undermined and seen as obstructive and incohesive with dominant approaches (Loomis, 2000; Wehi et al., 2019). For instance, the following account describes a project this urban designer worked on with a local council, where Māori were only involved in for the final two years of the project, acting in a role of *kaitiakitanga* over the environment:

For 13 years we developed a business case based upon ‘Business As Usual’ [BAU] Western style thinking, pretty much engineering how do we shape a river and how do we build a state highway (...) I guess BAU has this view of the landscape which is different from the Māori view. For 13 years we had this view of the river as something that we wanted to control, something to protect ourselves against, something to build a wall up against to stop it from causing billions of dollars worth of insurance damage to the city. But then at year 13 Māori came along and said, ‘No, that’s disrespectful to our *awa* [river]’ (...) It was no longer a foreign thing that we had to despise and engineer ourselves against. Māori said, ‘No, this is part of who we are, we need to be more respectful, we need to engage with this river and this river needs to engage with us.’ So the project changed complexion. For a large project now worth a billion dollars the river was viewed as something that has spirituality, that we needed to love.

Here, the participant explores a powerful example of how Māori cultural knowledge and values reshaped an urban development project to be considerate of the natural landscape and its agency. In this example, from a Western perspective the river was described as something ‘foreign’, positioning it as a potential financial liability and threat to the city. However, when considered from a Māori lens, the natural authority, spirituality and tenderness of the river is recognised, and it is treated as something to be understood, respected, and loved. Māori values, such as *kaitiakitanga*, therefore enact the relationality inherent between people and the natural landscape, strengthening connections between each other, their ancestors and the spirit world (Kawharu, 2000) and contributing to a stronger sense of place and home. Home-spaces and environments that foster *kaitiakitanga* can provide opportunities to reconnect with traditional practices with nature, enhancing overall wellbeing for Māori (E. T. Walker et al., 2019) and augmenting our ability to nurture and pass on cultural knowledge intergenerationally (Wehi & Lord, 2017).

Home places and self-determination

As *tangata whenua*, Māori have the right and responsibility to exist and exercise sovereignty over our lands and home spaces. Although enactments of sovereignty and self-determination are shaped and hindered by colonial power

struggles in contemporary Aotearoa, Māori maintain and continue to fight for *tino rangatiratanga* (absolute sovereignty), another fundamental Māori philosophy and value (Mutu, 2021). The below participant articulates the importance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi in the ongoing pursuit of authority and independence in our home spaces:

as Treaty or Tiriti partners we should have had that right, just as an automatic right, as Māori who are landless, who many of us still are, should have an automatic right to at least a home. We should have that right to live multi-generationally if we choose because that is then consistent to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Treaty articles. We don't have that right.

Here, this participant sustains the argument that having a home is a right afforded to Māori under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the founding document of Aotearoa. Although The Treaty of Waitangi (English version) is a contested issue, we support the view that Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the te reo Māori version) is the rightful document and are referring to this in our discussions (Mutu, 2019). Te Tiriti o Waitangi guarantees that Māori have *tino rangatiratanga*: absolute sovereignty over our decision-making. It also defines that the role of the settler colonial government is to ensure that Māori can enact this sovereignty (Lawson-Te Aho et al., 2019). The above quote highlights that a right to a home also includes choosing *how* we want to live within that home, for example, through multigenerational and intergenerational living. Te Tiriti is, therefore, a useful mechanism upon which Māori can keep the government accountable and demand they fulfil their responsibilities and obligations as a Tiriti partner (Rigby, 2019). This right is also supported by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), of which Aotearoa is a signatory and has an imperative to uphold (Mitchell et al., 2021).

Te Tiriti o Waitangi foregrounds the relationship between Māori and the Crown as Treaty partners. Therefore, the pursuit of *tino rangatiratanga* and independence for Māori does not negate the Crown's responsibility to contribute to the realisation of these aspirations. As this participant elaborates:

I also think that the State should be looking at developing Māori housing on state owned land not our land (...) I think it's really good when whānau can build on their own whenua [land], but I do think if we keep doing that my fear is the state abdicates its responsibility to be part of a very clear Māori social housing agenda.

Within Aotearoa Māori have long struggled against colonial impositions that hindered the advancement of Māori legal and political systems and structures (Durie, 1998; Mutu, 2021), which has impeded the growth of thriving Māori home spaces. As Wolfgramm et al. (2018) posit, home is

“inextricably associated with enacting and asserting sovereignty (tino rangatiratanga) over environs and destinies” (p. 16). The above account describes one example of Māori exercising self-determination in the housing space by developing home spaces and housing developments on Māori and iwi owned land. Although Māori are enacting leadership in advancing house and home, the Crown must fulfil its responsibilities to meaningfully contribute to this aspiration.

Tino rangatiratanga will benefit Māori most when it is led by Māori. While the government has a role in supporting these aspirations, Māori leadership and solutions need to be prioritised. Creating nourishing home spaces and reconnecting with the land is an inherently political act of self-determination. “Rangatiratanga is not only found in the flag, in protest, or in fighting, no. If we return to our land, our language and our customs; within all of that is our rangatiratanga” (Taipari, 2020 as cited in Blundell, 2020, p. 37).

Creating home-spaces in contemporary colonial Aotearoa

Despite the ongoing colonialism of Māori society and successive government legislations that have removed Māori from their ancestral homelands, Māori in contemporary Aotearoa create nurturing home spaces across a variety of different contexts. Stakeholder participants of the project included people who were actively (re) shaping home spaces for Māori, and who did this from within the context of te Ao Māori (the Māori world and worldviews) by prioritising connection to land and people, and tino rangatiratanga. Participants spoke about the idea of wellbeing as being holistically embedded within the convergence of these three aspects:

I feel like the big concepts that really pop up is like, tino rangatiratanga, mana motuhake [autonomy, independence, self-sovereignty], about whānau, it's about aroha [love], all these things (. ...) And really for us to be able to live well with our people, for our tamariki [children] to be able to play outside, to go to kōhanga [Māori language preschools], to go to kura kaupapa [Māori language schools] if they like, have access to all these opportunities within their community. For them to go to their nana and papa's house just down the road. For us just be able to continue to swim in our wai [water] because they're healthy or to harvest rongoā [medicine] from our ngahere [forests], even if it's in the urban ngahere, have access to these things that our tūpuna have already set out for us (...) So many dreams, and it's always more than Māori housing. I feel like if you know who you are you can be anything that you want.

Here, this participant gives an account of the importance of living in well-connected home spaces informed by te ao Māori. This participant speaks to the power of home spaces that foster living relationally through closeness to family, the environment, and the Māori language. In doing so, home creates

a sense of belonging and a strong identity that can encourage people to ‘be anything that you want.’ For Māori, individual wellbeing is determined by collective wellbeing (Cram, 2014), and home becomes a place to develop and nourish both domains.

The idea of homemaking for contemporary Māori as a diverse and dynamic process was expressed by this participant, who stressed that there is a myriad of ways in which land, relationality and tino rangatiratanga can converge to suit the needs of tangata whenua:

I think there needs to be lots of different options because what I would say is (...) for Māori who are connected to a hapū [sub-tribe] and iwi [tribe], the ability to be able to go home, go back to their whenua, home (...) the option for them to go home and build and have their brick and mortar on their whenua in a way that is reflective of how they want to live connected to their hapū and iwi, that would be the ideal. Massive papakāinga [intergenerational, communal living], community, shared housing, whatever you wanna call it, cohabitation for those, all of those different options (...) Then there’s a whole lot of Māori who are not connected (...) they need to be able to create the same space wherever they’re living in urban communities.

Many Māori from different backgrounds have signalled the desire to live in communal and intergenerational home spaces (Palmer, 2016), and this style of collective-based living is termed papakāinga. Papakāinga refers to a home place and conventionally means “a true Home as papa refers to a house-site or the earthen floor of a traditional home that connects directly with Papatuanuku” (Wolfgramm et al., 2018, p. 10). In modern contexts, papakāinga are home spaces designed to facilitate intergenerational, communal living and Māori values (D. L. Smith et al., 2024). Māori are restricted in their ability to be self-determining in the practice and expression of their home spaces due to colonisation that has facilitated geographical, economic, and sociocultural restraints (Berghan, 2020; Lawson-Te Aho et al., 2019). Housing options in contemporary Aotearoa tend to cater to nuclear family structures, with limited options available for those who want to live in collective, culturally oriented home spaces (Lawson-Te Aho et al., 2019). While research has demonstrated the health benefits of living in strong, socially connected environments that facilitate wellbeing (Boulton et al., 2021; Olin et al., 2022), papakāinga tend to be more attainable in rural areas. For example:

During the 50s and 60s, when they came from all the rural areas into Wellington, places like that to work, they’d come out of papakāinga or a marae environment, which is quite different to what they’ve learnt in the city. They’ve come out of that environment where everyone’s working together; joined

together, enjoying each other's company, and they've come to the city environment where everyone's after themselves. It's man eat man; dog eat dog, etc. There's no cooperation and you're stuck in your own little box, and that's you can't go out and fish for your kaimoana [seafood] or go pig hunting or that sort of thing and you live off the land, and that whole cycle is broken and people have been completely displaced for four [to] five generations now, and now the need is to go back there.

Although papakāinga housing is a popular ambition for many Māori, it is important that housing strategies and policies cater to the diversity of Māori with different housing and home aspirations. Whānau, Māori housing developers and researchers are evolving papakāinga models in unique and creative ways to suit urban contexts and the needs of modern life (Berghan, 2020). Home spaces are felt and experienced within their wider environments where neighbourhood settings also contribute to a person's sense of home and wellbeing (Olin et al., 2022), and papakāinga models of home may be conducive to contributing to stronger socially connected neighbourhoods and community places more broadly.

Another example of an approach that centres relational wellbeing through home environments that are strengthened by connections to people and mātauranga Māori (Māori ways of being and knowing) is the creation of kaupapa Māori housing developments within urban contexts (Awatere et al., 2008; Kake & Paul, 2018). The idea of these housing developments is to provide opportunities for housing where the “ultimate goal is the nurturing community and a nurturing community is a diverse community of a mixed typology and mixed tenure.”

This stakeholder participant, who is part of a development group of Kaupapa Māori housing on the east coast of Aotearoa, comments on the way in which these housing developments are grounded in regional Māori values at their core are about “a place where just being Māori is normal.” The need to create home places where being Māori is ‘normal’ is a subversive response to contemporary structures and institutions that reinforce dominant cultural norms and marginalise Māori values, beliefs, and cultural knowledges (Rameka, 2018). When Māori have a sense of belonging and connection to place, they are better supported to live relationally, engage in Māori practices and traditions, care for the land, and foster confident identities (Marques et al., 2018; McCreanor et al., 2006). Home spaces that integrate Māori knowledge and affirm Māori identities, therefore, have the potential to facilitate cultural connection, rejuvenation, and collective wellness. This powerful statement about creating home spaces where being Māori is ‘normal’ lies also at the heart of another independent Māori housing solution, which is the creation of *whareuku* (earth homes). Here too the connection to the land is inextricable from home spaces that are built on Māori values and needs:

[Whareuku] Clay/earth homes, their entire purpose is to create life. If you get a bare patch of clay, it will immediately begin the process of becoming an environment that attracts life. It'll sit there and wait for a seed. The seed will land on it, and straight away, it will grab that seed, and it will start to make that seed grow and become something. A piece of grass, a flower, a tree, whatever, bush. That's its purpose. If it's too dry, it will grab the moisture, and it will give it to that thing that's got life. If it's too wet it will disperse the water away from it and it will fight to create a perfect medium for that entity to grow (...) I don't have all of the expenses of having to fight nature, having to be controversial to live in a place where I'm not invited to stay and live. This land wants me to be here. This land loves me here.

In this powerful account, this participant reflects on the holistic and sustainable philosophies that underpin living in whareuku earth homes, drawing parallels between the life-giving properties of Mother Earth and the reciprocal relationship of living with the land. Whareuku has been described as a hopeful housing alternative for many Māori communities due to their affordability in comparison to other housing forms and the integration of core Māori values in its creation (Cheah, 2014). The above account describes living in a home space that is harmonious with the land and environment, highlighting how alternative approaches to house and home can be powerful enactments of self-determination that prioritise relationality for Māori. Our existence is nourished through intimate relationships with the land that emphasises our collective identities to each other and the environment (Burgess & Moko-Painting, 2020). Home spaces that foster belonging, wellness and connection have the greatest potential to cultivate prosperity for future generations.

Conclusion

While colonisation in Aotearoa has created disconnection from traditional home spaces for many Māori, Māori identity and expressions of home are resilient, dynamic and ever-evolving (Wolfgramm et al., 2018). Across a range of urban and rural contexts Māori negotiate the tensions of colonisation, fostering strong cultural identities and cultivating meaningful enactments of home in diverse environments. The desires for safety, freedom of expression and belonging are the core things that all people long for in a home (Gallegos, 2019). Western capitalist notions of home are firmly grounded in home as a site of power, specifically economic power and ownership, which contrasts with Māori notions of land, people and self-determination. The re-shaping and re-appropriation of homemaking within an Indigenous context also potentially subverts dominant hegemonic meanings grounded in power and belonging. Gallegos (2019) calls these “hometactics”, which are “a mode of survival and the expression of identity as an intentional form of resistance” (p. 229).

In the absence of physical access to ancestral lands, many Māori are re-conceptualising home in ways that exemplify their strengths, aspirations and solutions to progress their creation of home spaces. Connection to land remains prominent in Indigenous understandings of place and home, a relationship based on respect, reciprocity, balance and protection. These concepts highlight the enactment of tino rangatiratanga and the cultural imperative Māori possess as kaitiaki (guardians) of the land, no matter where they reside. Kaitiakitanga is played out in cultural and spiritual practices of Māori that illustrate the mutual connectedness of land and people, and vice versa. Home spaces and environments fostering kaitiakitanga provide opportunities for enhancing Māori wellbeing through traditional practices with the environment afforded by whānau, hapū and iwi ancestral lands.

Māori create home spaces through their sense of connectedness to land, people and tino rangatiratanga. Notably, this connectedness is not reliant on ownership or possession of structures like houses but on the ability to holistically interact with various features within the immediate environment, like water and forests. The convergence of land, people, and tino rangatiratanga to create distinctly Indigenous home spaces occurs in diverse and varied ways despite the restrictions imposed by cultural expectations and norms that do not cater to extended family networks that can involve multiple generations. No matter how and where Māori conceptualise home, their constructions of home spaces and places reflect their Indigenous rights and expressions of tino rangatiratanga and resistance against hegemonic home expectations. Through this resistance we can begin to re-claim what Moana Jackson called “a very different idea of being at home” (Jackson, 2022, p. 24); an Aotearoa that was envisaged under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

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