

# CHIEFS, GENDER AND HIERARCHY IN NGĀPŪTORU

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The famous male bias has played a prominent role in Polynesian studies. The first observers were male; and their eyes fixed above all on two particular aspects of the society: firstly, on chiefs and warriors, who were seen as the main representatives of the social and political order and whose roles were ethnocentrically interpreted; and, secondly, on women, portrayed (also ethnocentrically) as willingly swimming toward the approaching ships and eagerly giving themselves to the European sailors. “Here Venus is the goddess of hospitality,” claimed Bougainville in his account of his welcome in Tahiti (Bougainville 1772: 228). If the men were viewed as the pillars of society, the women were looked upon as mere objects of desire. While expeditions, empires, and official delegations approached the men, the women were left to the ordinary sailors, who satisfied their erotic needs through them.

The male bias of the expedition era has left its mark upon the anthropology of Polynesian culture in general. Until recently the objects of analysis have been almost exclusively the chiefly system and warriorhood. Polynesian societies were envisioned as organized into conical clans composed of patrilineal segments headed by senior males (see Ralston 1987). This picture was contradicted early on, however. De Bovis wrote of mid-nineteenth-century Tahiti, for example:

Although the woman was reduced to an inferior state, almost in some cases to servitude, and although she was excluded

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## How to cite this book chapter:

Siikala, J. (2021). Chiefs, Gender and Hierarchy in Ngāpūtoru. In J. Siikala (ed.), *Culture and History in the Pacific*. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press (pp. 107–124). <https://doi.org/10.33134/HUP-12-8>

from the priesthood and the *marae*, she seemingly carried with herself a superior degree of nobility than that of a male (de Bovis 1980: 21).

Tahitian and Hawaiian women were willing to submit themselves sexually to foreigners not because of desire, however, but because of their own ability to transmit the high rank of the foreigners to their possible descendants (see Sahlins 1985). Viewed from the perspective of rank, women were as essential as men (see e.g. Bott 1981).

The chiefs even, as we very well know, were not always and everywhere men; Polynesian history provides examples of women who became important chiefs (Gunson 1987). The present-day situation is still more confusing. For example, in the southern group of the Cook Islands, a considerable number of the titleholders — along with household heads and the heads of larger kin groups — are women. The local people themselves explain this as the result of European influence. Almost all — especially men of chiefly families — claim that in precontact times, only men could be appointed to chiefly status and women were absolutely excluded. But one is left to wonder how nineteenth-century European society, where women's status was fairly low, could have had such an influence. The training the missionaries offered women in this area was aimed at making women suitable wives for teachers and pastors; and it included Bible studies, domestic arts, child care, and methods of leading women's church activities, but certainly nothing that would prepare women to be chiefs. The question then arises: what in traditional society explains the prominence some females achieved?

## The warrior and the chief

In the examination of male and female roles proper, the analysis of mythic narratives can be dangerous. As Mary Douglas has recently claimed, any one myth can be interpreted in many ways, none of which can be shown to be better than any of the others (Douglas 1987). In the case of Polynesian cultures, however, there is good reason to treat myths as sources for the study of society, for the line between myth and history is not sharply drawn in them. The whole cosmogonic process is usually regarded as a single unfolding, rooted in an undifferentiated *tumu* or source, which produces the various forms of life down to present-day populations. In these

cosmogonic myths, the world of humans remains undifferentiated from the natural order. Rather, a single “sacred history” encompasses both, the whole universe being charted on a single, comprehensive genealogy (see e.g. Valeri 1985; Sahlins 1985; Schrempp 1985).

In the southern group of the Cook Islands, the three islands of ‘Ātiu, Ma‘uke, and Mitiaro form a social unit called Ngāpūtoru. Historically Ngāpūtoru was also a political entity. On these islands there exists a rich oral tradition, which tells about the origin of the islands’ populations. In typical Cook Islands fashion, the narratives are migration myths rather than cosmogonies; but the migration myths have pronounced cosmogonic features. For example, not only do they tell us about the arrival of immigrants from beyond the horizon, but they also account for the origin of society and its basic institutions, including chieftainship. They therefore contain prototypic gender models. The Ma‘uke account for the origin of their island and society in the following way (shortened version):

The story of the beginning of ‘Uke. Avatea married a woman Pōuri and a son, Tangaroa-nui was born to them. He married a woman Kikiravai, and ‘Uke was born to them.

When this son was born a name was not given to him. Tangaroa decided to take this child to his *marae* at Manuka. The name he considered to bestow to the child was Teariki-tini-tini (Chief of thousands). Various foods which were suitable for honouring him were put into the *umu*, but when the oven was opened all the food was uncooked. Tangaroa bestowed a name for that boy according to the events of that day, that is “Opening of Tangaroa’s oven of raw food”. Then he gave the boy to the hands of his *ta‘unga*, so that he may dedicate him to the gods.

In those days many canoes travelled on the Great Blue Ocean. Tangaroa-Nui was one of those who travelled in those days. Among all islands he had visited he had chosen one and that was Ma‘uke. He inspected the land first to know where the womb of the land was. He decided to sail around to the side of the sunset and he looked to the land and saw the womb of the land because the land was open towards the sea. On his way ashore he stepped first on the reef and there were two rocks standing at the mouth of the passage. So he gave these rocks the names Toka-rukuruku and Toka-aea. He looked at the goodness of the land. After staying on the island for a short time he returned to Avaiki and told his son to look for the island then when he would be grown-up. It will be his son alone who will conquer that island. And he informed his son about the signs on the island for finding the womb of the

land on the side of the sunset.

Now comes 'Uke's history. At this time 'Uke was standing on his own feet. He saw the land red with blood and the tribes at war. This is why he decided to sail over the Ocean with his people and look for an island for them to live on. So the canoe starts the sailing towards the sunrise. Because of a strong current they could not reach the island they were looking for. They turned towards the land in front of the canoe to give the canoe shelter.

This land was Vaerotā. The canoe was seen from the land. The warrior Manava ordered the tribes to prepare for a battle against the people coming from the sea. At this time the canoe has reached the land. Manava welcomed the warrior of the sea by saying that there will be no peace between them, many people will die and he will be but food for Manava's spear.

'Uke introduced himself saying he was son of Tangaroa Nui living on the island of men, and people travelling with him were 380. The battle began. The whole war party of the warrior of Vaerotā, Manava-tū-o-Rongo, was killed. 'Uke saw how the eel of Vaerotā fell and Vaerotā's sky was filled with sorrow when the foundation was smashed and the source and heaven were smashed. 'Uke's staff was a beauty to the open sky.

At this time the winds were favorable to leave Vaerotā. When the sun rose 'Uke told his people that they will sail to Avaiki in front of them and leave Avaiki behind.

They arrived on the side of the rising sun, but they paddled to the side of the sunset looking for the womb of the land by searching for the signs that had been given for 'Uke to recognise the land from the sea, the rocks at the opening of the harbour. These were Toka Rukuruku and Toka Eaea. They arrived at the main passage and a wave carried the canoe ashore.

A woman called te Niva-o-te-ra has come to my hands, said 'Uke, and the sun will move, the moon will move, the stars will move and Tangaroa-iti established the source of this land. While inspecting the island they arrived on the eastern side which people were very satisfied with and the district was named 'Ītaki. When 'Uke turned to the right he saw a place, which was ideal to be turned into a *marae*. He named that *marae* with the name Rangimanuka according to both his birth celebration *marae* in Avaiki as well as the beauty of the place. And when he looked down he saw a stream. This he called with the name Vai-roa, that is very long water. This is its meaning, how long it took for him to find this island so that he could drink water to wash the salty taste from his mouth. When he looked how round the island was and the lack of trouble, he decided that he would not sail the ocean again and

would rest on this island in peace until his death.

During their stay on the island, when he ruled over his people, there were no wars, no trouble, but they lived in peace. This is why he was then called by the name 'Au Ariki, which was Ariki-'Akamoeau (Peacemaking chief). He lived with the woman Te-niva-o-te-ra and six children were born to them, four daughters and two sons.

When these children were born 'Uke thought that he would take off his wife's first name, which was Te-niva-o-te-ra. He then bestowed the second name on her, Te-pua-i-'anga-uta. Meaning: the coming of gods through her.

This is clearly an important narrative. It not only recounts the arrival of the first people to the island, but it also tells of the establishment of the island's first *ariki* title, the title 'Uke. According to the narrative, the title is divinely rooted, since the father of the first holder of the title is Tangaroa. The genealogy traces even further backwards, to Atea and Papa, founders of the entire universe. 'Uke leaves his home in Avaiki in search of a new island to live on because Avaiki was "filled with blood" or at war. Simplified, the narrative's underlying scheme is the famous "lack — lack liquidated", beginning with the original strife and lack of land on Avaiki and ending with peace and land on Ma'uke. The means by which the original conflict is overcome has far-reaching consequences, for these are the very means by which the society is reproduced.

The opening passages of the narrative, which concern the ancestry of the principal actors, introduces the basic dualism of Polynesian cosmology. 'Uke is a descendant of Atea and Pōuri, who represent day and night. Descended from these primeval beings through Tangaroa, 'Uke can clearly claim divine origin. His divinity is further emphasised in the episode recounting how 'Uke was named. It is the gods who eat raw food, and the raw/cooked opposition of the episode corresponds to heaven/earth. The original unity of opposites in Avaiki is not stable, however, for the elements of the duality are eventually dispersed, leading to the expansion of the universe through the exploration and conquest of new lands. In Avaiki "status rivalry" (Goldman 1970) continually spawns conflict and conflict in turn spawns new waves of emigrants. The inability of equals (or near-equals) to coexist peacefully is a general feature of East Polynesian cosmology and has far-reaching implications. One of these reflects on gender roles. In the origin myth, it is a male who leaves the supranormal realm of Avaiki to find not only an island but a wife so that he can found a new society that is historically continuous. The male *toa* (warrior)

coming from the sea finds this woman on land, but she is already married. So the second conflict takes place in which the seagoing warrior has to beat the warrior of the land and take the slain enemy's wife as his own. This conflict again creates further oppositions typical of Polynesian cultures: male/female, sea/land, wife-taker/wife-giver. The correspondence between these binary oppositions inheres in the structure of the text's action, not in the "totemic" principle of the world-view (see Lévi-Strauss 1966: 223), however. This orientation toward action becomes clear if the transformation the central actors undergo in the text is examined. With his newly won wife, 'Uke finds the new land and settles there, and this warrior, now entrusted with land and wife, becomes a chief and peace-maker. Accordingly, a new unity and peace are created in a new place.

The status of the narrative — which is regarded as historically true, despite its mythic themes — provides a clue to its interpretation. Because there is no gap between the mythic and historical components of this narrative, they must be regarded as continuous, the story unfolding, so far as Cook Islanders are concerned, connecting together "the mythical time" and "the real time". The myth does not culminate in a structure and the subsequent history does not simply "stereotypically reproduce" that structure (cf. Sahlins 1985; Valeri, this volume). Instead 'Uke leaves Avaiki and "decides to become a man". The "structure" must be sought in this process itself. In his analysis of Māori cosmogony, Gregg Schrempp has expressed this principle, stating that an inherently temporal formulation, such as the coming-to-be of a cosmogony, can itself possess an underlying form." A genuine rethinking of structuralism would imply more than a recognition of underlying forms, or even repeating underlying forms within the span of the coming-to-be; it would mean learning to view the coming-to-be as form, and as indistinguishable from the 'ongoing' social life" (Schrempp 1985: 33). In order to analyse the way history unfolds and society reproduces itself on Ma'uke, it is also necessary to look at the "structure of action" in this foundation-laying narrative. And the action of basic importance in this narrative is the action of becoming a chief. I am arguing that a chief is a chief not because of any static relationship to his people but by virtue of the way he becomes a chief and behaves. If he does not act according to the script of the cosmic scheme, he simply is not a chief.

Clearly the warrior and the chief in the legend of 'Uke are transformations of the same male figure, both being necessary to establish a new order on a new island. What the warrior is lacking is land and a woman. Significantly in his fight for the female he

symbolically castrates his enemy and claims that “the eel of Vaerotā fell” and his own “staff is a beauty to the open sky.” The warrior’s virility is incomplete, however, because although he is the active transformation of the male figure, he lacks the female component of the reproductive pair — that is, wife and land. After acquiring both of these through warriorlike conquest, the male figure becomes a chief and transforms the initial chaos and emptiness (the missing female element) on Avaiki into a new chiefdom, complete with the female element, on Ma‘uke.

## Genealogy and continuity

But the history of Ma‘uke and even the way history is produced by male and female agents on the island is not explained by the way the island got its first chief and his wife. On the contrary, the legend of ‘Uke leaves the question open. According to the legend, ‘Uke and his wife gave birth to six children, the first four being daughters. Surprisingly enough, there are no traditions connecting the junior sons to the history of the island. So ‘Uke is left on Ma‘uke with his wife and four daughters; and from this genealogical situation begins the history of the island and the further formation of its social structure. Despite the fact that ‘Uke’s two sons disperse in search of “a new land to live on,” leaving behind the daughters, the genealogy of ‘Uke miraculously continues. ‘Uke’s first-born daughter is said to marry Temaru-‘enua-o-Avaiki, who is the son of the killed enemy from Vaerotā, Manava-tu-o-rongo. Marrying her own matrilineal half-brother, Kaitini Ariki is the first female link in the genealogy from ‘Uke onwards.

The second-born daughter, Taramatietoro, then marries Tura from the neighboring island of ‘Ātiu and, according to the information of William Wyatt Gill (1876), gives birth to the population of Ma‘uke and ‘Ātiu alike. This population has a double origin: on Ma‘uke, through an incestuous union between the firstborn daughter and her matrilineal half-brother, and in Ngāpūturu as a whole, through the marriage between the second-born daughter and Tura from ‘Ātiu. Taken together, these two origins have ambiguous implications, for while the one stresses the seniority and autochthonous character of the population of Ma‘uke, the other specifies a relationship between Ma‘uke and ‘Ātiu in which Ma‘uke acts as wife-giver connected to land, and is therefore junior while ‘Ātiu (through its ancestor, Tura) has divine properties and is connected to the heavens. With regard to the contrast

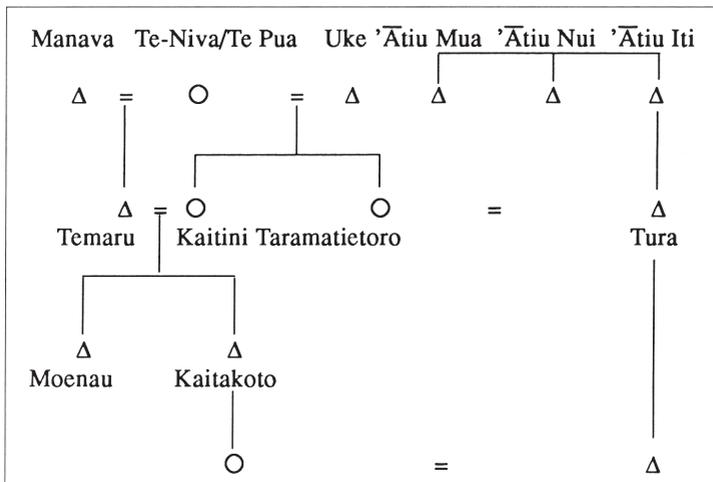


Figure 1. Genealogical connections of Ma'uke and 'Ātiu.

between the area 'Uke settled in, 'Ītaki, and Vaerotā, the island 'Uke conquered in battle and took a wife from, it can also be claimed that 'Ātiu is the masculine, warlike, 'Ītaki side while Ma'uke as a whole represents the feminine qualities of Vaerotā. In being the victor 'Uke is attributed with virility and power, while the island of Vaerotā is feminized as the loser who has then to give wives in tribute to the senior side. This diarchy has its direct counterpart on Ma'uke as well. This island is divided into two halves, distributed between the sons of Kaitini Ariki and her husband Temaru-Enua. These sides are named 'Ītaki and Vaerotā, and 'Ītaki is given to the older son, Moenau, while the younger son, Kaitakoto, receives Vaerotā. Figure 1 depicts the bipolar genealogical structure in its two modes, internal and external.

Though the legend of 'Uke establishes 'Ītaki as senior, chiefly, conqueror, male, and wife-taker, and Vaerotā as junior, loser, female, and wife-giver, in the larger political context, that of Ngāpūturu as a whole, Ma'uke stands as female and wife-giver to other elements within the configuration, although the question of seniority remains problematic. Tura's wife is not the first-born daughter of 'Uke and he himself can be said to be *teina* to 'Uke on two grounds. First, he is the youngest of Tangaroa's three sons and second, he is a generation younger than 'Uke. There also exist two kinds of systematic genealogical relationships: the one internal to Ma'uke and the other external. The first constitutes a closed system, as mentioned, and does not allow for the emergence of history of

Ma'uke society. Not admitting of outside relationships at the level of the system, it is doomed to eternal self-reproduction through incest. From this point of view, the name 'Uke gave his wife after she had given birth is an apt one: Te-pua-i-anga-uta means "the coming of gods through her." Though the gods are not inside the original system — they are, rather, outside it — they are nonetheless requisite for the continuation of life. The metaphoric richness of the name is not exhausted by this translation. *Pua* is "to blossom, bud forth" but it is also the name of a mythical tree whose flowers, when ordered as *'ei (lei)*, attract gods and life but also bring death through its branches, which grab souls and drag them along its path to the other world (see Gill 1876). The name also connotes transcendence of the existing system and the limits of the world-as-constituted — exogamy, for example. 'Uke's daughters are the "blossoms" of the *pua* tree attracting the gods from 'Ātiu and thus connecting Ma'uke not only to the political system of the Ngāpūtoru group but connecting the island with the realm of the gods. With respect to the original warrior's leaving his homeland in Avaiki and the constitution of the political order, the female position is decisive. The female is the mediator between warrior and land, transforming the male into a chief; and the female also mediates between the sacred ruler and his subjects, opening up the closed structure and inaugurating history.

## Ritual relationships in Ngāpūtoru

The relations of authority are manifest in the history of the islands in several ways. On the advent of Europeans, 'Ātiu dominance in Ngāpūtoru group was so marked that the chief of 'Ātiu was held as sole sovereign. According to Ron Crocombe's historical analysis, tire European influence had both consolidating and dissolving effects on 'Ātiu's dominance.

Before the arrival of the missionaries, political, religious, economic and judicial power tended to be less differentiated on 'Ātiu, and to be exerted by the same persons; but the mission period saw major adjustments in chiefly authority. The first was the loss of the islands of Ma'uke and Mitiaro which 'Ātiu had been accustomed to prey upon food and women. Sovereignty over the islands was not relinquished outright; but it had previously been maintained by military action and when this was opposed by L.M.S. agents, the people of Ma'uke stopped rendering tribute (Crocombe 1967: 101).

The “prey for food and women” and “tribute” paid by Ma‘uke and Mitiaro mentioned by Crocombe demand somewhat more precise analysis. What were the grounds and forms for the ‘Ātiu practice of demanding of and women and what kind of tribute did Ma‘uke and Mitiaro actually pay? Although the power relations making this kind of exchange chain possible are apparent, military action alone cannot have maintained it for long. Military conquest is an essential moment in the creation of interrelations, which are under normal conditions reproduced by other, above all ritual, means.

The missionary records — which, in the case of Mitiaro and Ma‘uke, are actually the first European documents — give some hints as to the nature of the ritual relations between the islands of Ngāpūturu. The chief of ‘Ātiu, at that time Rongomatāne Ngāka‘ara, is given in all accounts as the “principal priest” of the god Taringa Nui, who was an object of worship on all three islands (see Williams and Bourne 1823; Williams 1838: 88). There exists very little information about the god named Taringa Nui and the role of the chief of ‘Ātiu as its “principal priest.” In fact, almost all we know is that one of the idols collected by the missionaries and located in the LMS Museum was called Taringa Nui and it was said to be the fishermen’s god (Te Rangi Hiroa 1944). However, the role of the god becomes more clear when it is taken into account that its name not only refers to the “ear” but was also used in connection with *ara* as *taringa-ara*. The meaning of *taringa-ara* was, according to Savage, “the unloosening of, or the cutting off of sin or an offence: denotes: to confess the sins or offenses; to *propitiate*, as in *propitiating* to gods; to expiate” (Savage 1980: 356, emphasis mine). On the basis of this information, it is possible to offer a tentative interpretation bearing in mind the custom of *taringa motu* still practiced on Ma‘uke. The rite *taringa motu* is a pig offering compiled from individual household donations. The pigs are gathered together, marked, and slaughtered all at once. The best parts are then given to the *ariki* and *mata‘iapo* and the rest is divided among the commoners. One person has described the present-day custom as follows:

Right now we have to go to the male head of each household. If you have a small pig, you have to cut the right ear. There is a committee to do that for each household. If you and Tara are staying in one home, you will have two, one for you and one for Tara. We have to cut the right ear, no matter what *ngāti* you come from; then you feed the pig. just before New Year’s Day, one New Year’s Eve or in the morning, we have to kill

the pigs and then... there's our meeting house over there. Each home — by that time [New Year's eve] the pig will be that size or bigger than that, depending upon what size it was on the day the committee visited the home and cut the ear. You have to feed that pig until December 31st. Then, early in the morning you kill the pig and cook it in an oven and then bring it over there in the basket — the whole pig. Over there the pig is cut in half. You, the owner, will get one half, and the other half is divided among the chiefs and *mata'iafos* and... other important people on the island. My share, because we couldn't eat that at home, since there are three of us there, must be cut into pieces and shared out to our relatives living in other villages.

This prestation and grand distribution of *taringa motu* is structurally very close to first fruits offerings (see Valeri 1985). However, the Rarotongan rite of “biting the ear” in the installation of an *ariki* or *mata'iafo* suggests that the ear is a metonymy for chiefliness. *Taringa motu* can then be connected to the rituals of installation at large. In the Rarotongan case, the chief to be installed has to bite the ear of a special pig brought to him by his supporters. If he is unable to do this, he is retarded as unsuitable for the title. It may be surmised that biting the ear of the pig signifies the candidate's merit to receive the tribute of the tribe — his willingness, that is, to listen to his subjects, who, in turn, listen and obey him. Only through this mutual listening can he succeed, and “if the king is successful, his reign is legitimate” (Valeri 1985: 211). Ears are thus metonymies of the encompassing unity of chief and people, the way social groups are bound together. Accordingly, ears are symbolically loaded, as is the umbilical cord, which is also the object of complicated ritual practices. These body parts symbolize the two means by which the body social is constructed: through birth and common origin, exemplified by the umbilical cord, and through listening. Listening, in turn, is a two-way practice: the chiefs have to listen to their subjects to be able to fulfill their needs, and the subjects, in turn, have to listen to their chiefs and obey their orders.

In the Tahitian installation ceremony, the offerings are handled in a corresponding way — at least, symbolically. For an heir apparent to the throne, one or more human victims were offered by the priest at the national *marae*, while this rite was performed at the ancestral *marae*. Several human victims were suspended with sen-nit strings strung through the ears, as Oro's fish, as they were hung upon the *toa* tree around Tarahoi for Pomare II, under the direction of the high priest Tua-roa (Henry 1928: 188). These human offerings were bound together through the ears and the usual symbolic

equivalence of fish = man = pig = banana apparent in ritual offerings in general is apparent in the metaphor of Oro's fish. The essential here seems to be not the marking of the ears as a sign of *tapu* restricting the use of the marked species for other uses, but the symbolic "binding together," the aggregation of individual household pig prestations and their symbolic subjugation to the highest authority through the metonymic device of ear cutting. Collectively roasted, the pigs are butchered and the pork redistributed to the people, the chief keeping the first parts. The high chief thus manifests himself as the first man and leader of the collective tribes.

The 'Ātiu custom of getting "tribute" from Ma'uke and Mitiaro can be placed in this ritual context, especially since, in following the orders of the 'Ātiu chief and destroying the idols, the people of Ma'uke and Mitiaro identified Taringa Nui and no other gods as the supreme object of worship in these islands. With certainty it can be established that the chiefs of 'Ātiu received the first-fruit offerings in the beginning of the last century. At the arrival of the missionaries, it was Rongomatāne Ngāka'ara from 'Ātiu who acted as a guide to the missionaries in their cruise among the island group. According to the journal of Williams and Bourne, the people of Mitiaro and Ma'uke were in fact waiting for the arrival of Rongomatāne and preparing for two great ritual feasts, *taupitira* and *takuruua*. These are exactly rituals of first-fruits offerings. Rongomatāne had also given orders to build a house for him on both Ma'uke and Mitiaro for these rituals. As further evidence it can be added that the *marae* system of the whole southern group includes a Marae-O-Rongo on the north-west coast of all the islands and this *marae* was held in the position of "national *marae*," in which all occasions of importance to the whole island were held. This was also the place, where important guests were (and still are) welcomed and where not only 'Uke on his journey from Avaiki but also Ngāka'ara from LMS missionaries landed. From the point of view of the unity of the participating social groups, the first fruits offering and *Taringa motu* mark the gathering and dispersion of the tribes originating from the same *tumu*. This dispersion began with the original emigration out of Avaiki and the subsequent consolidation of larger political units. This dispersion and coming together in collective rituals is symbolized through signs of centrifugality and centripetality deployed in the corresponding ritual apparatus (see e.g. Salmond 1975). Special emphasis is given to the metonymic signs of unity: the cord with which the offerings are bound together, the marking of the ears, which signifies the aggregation of society as a whole. Even in the ritual feasts of *kainga manga*, the

collection and dividing of the food is emphasised and the *manga* actually separates something that is bound together: the tribal totality, each household participating as the contributor of a share. This totality is a combination of differentiated elements in which both the male and the female have their specialize roles.

## Female and the transformation of the hierarchy

As we have seen, a female is involved in every phase of the coming-into-being of a chief and in the building up of the genealogical bias of the political order. Even in mediating the relationship between the sacred ruler and his subjects, the female plays a prominent role. Ritual is usually looked upon as a purely male domain in which females are the objects of rituals, the means of ritual exchange, or even the producers of ritual paraphernalia, which males then alienate (see Valeri 1985). The female role seems to have been essential to ritual life, however; and it still is, even after the conversion to Christianity. The new Christian religion was brought to the island of Ma'uke in such a way as to perpetuate the role of the female mediator. Rongomatāne Ngāka'ara, the chief of 'Ātiu, introduced the religion, and he was married to the daughter of one of the Ma'uke chiefs. The way the Ma'uke church is built provides us with a clear case of how apparent novelty nonetheless perpetuates pre-existing structures. The church can be viewed as a fixed text in Ricoeur's sense (1976). Although it is not possible to know the original intentions of the original builders, it is possible to analyze the interpretations the islanders themselves make of the building. The narratives recounting the construction of the building, as well as the social activities connected with the building, are suggestive. The church is famous for the two distinctive styles of its ends, the pulpit dividing contrasting ends. Tire two ends of the church correspond to the halves of the traditional dual organization, which itself was conceptualized in terms of seniority and gender. One side is elder and male, the other side is junior and female. As in the building of a *mara'e*, so in the building of this church, the pillars of the church were and are of great importance. In building these pillars, each chief selected a tree from the forest. The importance of the pillars is emphasised in information given by Gill and obtained from Tinomana Ariki:

The principal thing of importance... were the posts of the house... When prepared the posts were brought, with great

ceremony, to the spot of the *mará'e*. Wide and deep pits were then dug, into which native cloth... and other articles were thrown. Then the posts were then erected by the priest, and placed with great care on those articles while the assembled crowd would shout the name of the god to whom the *mará'e* was dedicated. On some occasions one or more men were buried alive in the pit of the posts as an act of propitiation. (LMS, SSL, Gill, April 10th, 1845).

The narratives recounting the construction of the work provide elaborate details of the great ceremony with which the posts were brought from the forest to the building site. Significantly enough, the main theme in these narratives is the competition among the chiefs over the gender implications of certain architectural features. This was true particularly of the posts, but it was also true of the rafters of the roof. These were joined in such a way that neither end could acquire gender connotations. Neither side could then claim masculine superiority. Even so, what is most striking about the building is the incongruity of its ends, as if the building were a compound of two entirely different structures.

The significant differentiation connected to the hierarchical positioning of the social units seem to be eliminated from the interior of the church. The total transformation of the symbolic values of the duality become apparent only after looking at the cult grounds as whole. Beyond the church itself, the entire churchyard forms a complicated system of signs. At its foundation, the structure is clearly that of the traditional *mará'e*. The church itself is facing the sunset in the middle of the inland village, Oiretumu. Opposite the church on the other end of the yard at a distance of 200 meters lies the meetinghouse. The churchyard is surrounded by an upraised coral path 2 meters wide and about 70 centimetres high. The path leads from the meetinghouse to the church on both sides of the yard and forms a completely closed quadrangle. The churchyard must be analyzed as a whole, for the society in its totality is expressed in its structure. The path surrounding the churchyard is differentiated into sacred and secular elements in recognition of the multiple components of the society. Each half of the society has its own sides, and doors its members approach and enter the church on different sides as they pass from meeting house to church. But also the smaller social units have their signs of identity along the path surrounding the churchyard as well. Every sub-segment of the society has its own ramp to the upraised coral path. The churchyard of Ma'uke thus provides a map of society that, in its fixity, belies the underlying conflict engendered by the ambiguity in status between the two sides. Like the church itself,

which denies the ambiguity in denying the hierarchy, the churchyard is constituted as a solution to this underlying conflict, for the actors representing either path are separated as well as joined through its structure.

The two paths leading from the meetinghouse to the church pass through different gates. The path of the 'Ītaki side passes under two stone pillars 4 meters in height, and the path of Vaerotā passes under an arched stone gate. These stone structures are imbued with their own meanings, which are expressed in narratives, *pe'e* songs, etc. There is no artificial landmark on Ma'uke that does not have its historical traditions. So, too, with these gates. The path itself is called Takarakei, and the *pe'e* concerning the pillars tells about decorations of the church (*rakei* = decoration):

*Topa atu ra taku vāvia ki Tākarahei  
karo atu ra au i ngā va'ine Peratāne  
nō tō raua kāka'u, 'akaperepere'ia  
titiro atu taku mata ki Ziona  
white paint, blue paint, yellow paint and green paint  
titiro roa atu ki Peritāne.*

(My feet have stepped on Takarakei  
then I looked at two women from Britain  
these two treasured dresses  
as I gazed at Ziona  
white paint, blue paint, yellow paint and green paint  
looking all the way to Britain.)

The posts are said to represent “two beautiful ladies from London, with dresses... who brought the paints with which the church is decorated”. The southern gate has three *ariki* on top of it instead. Taken together these posts represent the constituent elements of a new order. Were the female element eliminated entirely, Ma'uke society would lose its gender equilibrium and the basic and necessary sexual opposition for reproduction. As already noted, the female element has always functioned internally and externally, and it is in and through the female element that Ma'uke society has acquired its dynamics. So, also, in the nineteenth century, with missionization and conversion. Through the Ma'uke church, the female element predating Christianity is now absorbed within the new religion; for the two ladies of the *pe'e* are said to be the wives of two English missionaries who visited Ma'uke in the last century. Here, then, is a solution. Once again a feminine element intervenes between the sacred and Ma'uke chiefs, not just in myth but in

concrete historical artifact. But the female here is no longer the daughter who moves as tribute to 'Ātiu, as the mother of the heir to the 'Ātiu title, but English ladies. This means two things. First, Christianity was indigenized, brought within the symbolic fold of the traditional cosmology and social order. The cosmic aspect of the position of missionaries wives derives from the female's location between a male-identified humanity and a more undifferentiated divine sphere. In this way, through the female figures in the churchyard, the Ma'ukeans symbolically severed their ties with 'Ātiu. In indigenizing the English ladies, they transcended the previous political structure and created a new one. As symbols, the English ladies constitute a new departure, offering a new solution to the problem of structural ambivalence. The new religion opened up the world of the Ma'ukeans to new points of external attachment, here symbolized by these foreign ladies, who nonetheless had been fully incorporated into Ma'uke society. The female figures are still positioned between sacred and chiefs, and their role is said to be a "decorative" one. Through their decorative function, they attract the god of Christianity but not the 'Ātuan chiefs. The symbolic prototype of womanhood decorates the churchyard and through her decorations it is possible to see "all the way to Great Britain" and thus open the horizon and world to Ma'uke history. In this transformation, however, the autonomy Ma'uke acquired from the 'Ātiu domination was transformed into dependency on another "foreign" power; and here the efficacy of signs, deployed in "structures of the conjuncture" (Sahlins 1981) and under modified historical circumstances (Sahlins 1985:ix), comes into play. Acquiring autonomy from 'Ātiu, Ma'uke courted the hegemony of Western ideologies.

## Back to the problem: the female chiefs

As mediators between a bounded structure and what lay beyond it — be it political authority, supranormal spheres, or Western culture-bearers — the female played a decisive role. But they always did so as means to a male-devised end, whether as means of exchange, links in male-deployed genealogies, etc. But they were not only passive objects. They also acted as chiefs, sometimes even as warriors. This poses a paradox, for the structural position of women, cosmic in nature, does not allow for female chieftaincy. On the contrary, the coming-into-being of a chief requires the conquest and subordination of actual women. Men come to power through

women and the land that attaches to them. Women are vehicles for male ambition.

What is important here is a gendered category and not particular males and females. Thus, whole social groups and islands can be regarded as “warriors” or as “females.” Taken together, at whatever level and as instances of a category rather than as actual historical actors and actresses, these produce (reproduce) chiefs. Actual women who have historically achieved chieftaincy do so as sociological males, not as females, for, while women are a means to the end of chieftaincy, chieftaincy is still gendered as male. But becoming male for a female is as possible as becoming female is for a male, just add the causative prefix *‘aka* and act like one.

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