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## Kāpo (blind) Māori in the ancient world

Kelly Tikao, Nancy Higgins, Hazel Phillips & Christine Cowan

**Abstract:** This article examines the perception and treatment of the blind (kāpo) in traditional Māori society. It seeks to decipher the literature predominantly written by non-Māori missionaries, historians, artists, travelers and ethnographers who were often culturally biased when writing about Māori customs and lifestyles. The literature shows that while a blind person was often regarded very highly in pre-contact times, perceptions changed to the more recent belief that a person's blindness brought shame to the whānau or was the result of some social or spiritual transgression. Such changes are explored in this paper.

**Keywords:** blindness; traditional Māori society

### Introduction

*Ehara te takata kotahi ano i oho ai i neherū.*

There was not just one person alive in the old days.

The whakataukī above highlights the many iwi perspectives about our histories, our creation stories and our dialects that hold their own mana. In this instance, there can be more than one version of a story and each has its own mana.

Some perspectives will never be fully understood nor can be told fully in a brief literature review, such as this. This paper is a literature and brief oral history review that was undertaken as part of an HRC funded two-year project entitled, *Growing up kāpo (blind) Māori: Whānau, identity, cultural well-being and health*. However, it is a growing review because each time the research team has presentations about this project there are more perspectives and more stories that are given to us from more Māori representing their hapū and iwi. These stories, though, will add to the whakapapa (lineage) of knowledge that we have learned so far about kāpo Māori in te ao tawhito (the ancient Māori world).

Finding literature evidence about an oral culture is not always easy. Māori like many indigenous cultures spoke and sung their histories, their whakapapa and their stories. Would the information that we were seeking really be in any literature? Previous literature reviews on Māori health and disability reiterated that little is found in the literature on this topic or about ancient Māori ancestors and their lives, in regards to living with disabilities and impairments (Bevan-Brown, 1989; Nikora, Karapu, Hickey, & Te Awekotuku, 2004). So this wero (challenge) was laid at our feet and with our acceptance we proceeded to seek the relevant literature for this topic.

This literature review specifically investigates literature in book form, journals and online resources that make reference to blindness or kāpo in the ancient world of the Māori. A small group of people were approached for their whānau accounts, knowledge of karakia, waiata and tipuna within their whānau, who were visually impaired. For this review, the researcher also reviewed the literature of traditional narratives, which talk about the creation of the Māori world, often termed as Māori mythology. The term 'mythology' is shunned by some Māori academics as wrongfully placing these stories into a 'fairytale' type genre and are thus questioning the validity of the kōrero within Māoridom. The difference for Māori however, is that these creation stories

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are considered to be real and not placed in the realm of myth. The creation narratives are the *kōrero* (spoken words) about origins that provide accounts of human *whakapapa* (genealogy) which includes the *whakapapa* of all living things, animals, trees, and mountains, or, in other words, *te taiao* (the environment). Narratives about *tipuna* and literature written about early Māori settlement to the period of European colonisation were also explored.

Through recent disability research literature, it was forewarned that finding historical information on *kāpotanga* was going to be difficult (Bevan-Brown, 1989; Nikora, Karapu, Hickey, & Te Awekotuku, 2004). Using a 'snowball' literature review approach, library databases were first searched using the search term, 'Māori' along with the terms, 'kāpo', 'blind', 'blindness', 'vision impairment', 'disability', 'illness', 'sickness', 'impairment', and other Māori words (see below) to describe the experience of blindness. From this search, literature was obtained and key references in this literature about Māori were reviewed for relevant information. This work also took Ms. Tikao, the first author of this review, to a number of places and libraries around New Zealand, including Knox College's Hewitson library to review Presbyterian newsletters, missionary reports; and Canterbury University's MacMillan Brown library and the Otago University's Library in which the primary researcher for this review was assisted by Māori librarians. The national Māori Librarian Collective was also approached and they asked their peers for relevant literature and reference material about *kāpo* (or *kāpō*) and disability. As a result of this request, some citations were given by the few who responded. However, within these responses it was highlighted again that little was written about *kāpotanga*. The remainder of this literature review has come from books written by historians, anthropologists and from the knowledge of key Māori informants who provided oral information.

The questions that the research team were hoping to answer were as follows:

- Did the condition of *kāpo* exist for Māori in earlier times?
- Was *kāpotanga* a common occurrence?
- How did the *whānau*, *hapū*, *iwi* perceive *kāpo*?
- Did they have specific *rongoa*/medicines to treat the eyes? Did they have specific aids or ways that assisted *kāpo* Māori to take part in the daily activities of their *hapū*?

In the review below, the information that was found has been formatted around themes that are chronologically placed from ancient time to the mid 1800s. This *whakapapa* begins with the heavens, discusses creation stories, looks at early village life and then finishes with a discussion about specific Māori who were *kāpo* in the 1800s.

## Definitions

In order to complete a thorough search of the literature, one of the very first tasks that was undertaken was to document the terminology that was used for blindness in *te ao Māori*.

### *Kupu/Ingoa*

A search of the literature was done around the general themes of: *kāpotanga*, disability, impairment and birth defects, which were documented in Māori communities in early Māori times. Finding the key words or the Māori words to best describe blindness was a challenge. *Iwi* have dialect differences, and thus there were a number of different words to describe the same thing (e.g. *mātao* and *pohe*). There can also be slight variations to a similar word (e.g. *kāpō*, *kāpo*).

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hauhaua – crippled (Beattie, 1990)  
 kāpo – blind (Ryan, 1990)  
 kāpotanga – blindness (Ryan, 1995)  
 kerepō – blind (Ryan, 1995)  
 matakerepō – blind (Ryan, 1989)  
 matapō – blind (Ryan, 1995)  
 matapōtanga – blindness (Ryan, 1995)  
 pohe – blind (Beattie, 1990)  
 pohe ka kanohe – blindness (Beattie, 1990)  
 pōrangī - mad, in a hurry (Ryan, 1990)  
 pura – blind (Beattie, 1990)  
 pura o te kanohi – blindness (Taylor, 1848)  
 tamaiti whakatoī – wayward child (Best, 1974)  
 toretore – inflammation of the eyes (Taylor, 1848)  
 wairangi – excited, wild monster, reckless (Ryan, 1990)

In general the above Māori descriptions given for blindness indicated that Māori who had impairment, ‘deformity’, or a bodily difference often received a name that specifically described their difference (Best, 1924).

Ngāti Kāpo o Aotearoa Inc adopted the term ‘kāpo’ which comes from the Ngā Puhī dialect and was brought to Ngāti Kāpo by Bill Rako. It was subsequently adapted by the kaumatua (respected elders) and kuia (respected older women) of Ngāti Kāpo after wide consultation with elders without and with sight, like Sir Kingi Ihaka. These kaumatua were native speakers of te reo and the word kāpo was used to holistically identify the state of being for people who are vision impaired, blind or deaf blind. It is interesting to note that the term kāpo was initially spelt without a macron even though in some Māori dictionaries there are two macrons for the word (one over the ‘a’ and one over the ‘o’). Christine Cowan, the Ngāti Kāpo researcher on this research project, explained that Ngāti Kāpo's members were unaware of how the printed term would look when it was adopted, but later the first macron was added in print as Ngāti Kāpo's pronunciation of the word became consistent. Other terms that were considered by Ngāti Kāpo which identifies the ‘state of being’ blind were ‘matapo’ (black) and ‘pohe’ (dim). Also, of importance is the fact that the meaning of ‘kāpo’ for Ngāti Kāpo is directly linked with the term, Ngāti and with the whakatauki (proverb) ‘kā pō, kā pō, kā ao, kā awatea’ (the forward journey from darkness into the light). This whakatauki is also used in whaikōrero (men’s oratory) by most iwi. Further to this meaning, some have also indicated that the wairua (spirit) of a person may know before birth that their physical being will be kāpo but the onset of the physical impairment of blindness or vision impairment may occur sometime after birth (Russell, 2007).

## Ten heavens

In order to understand the context in which some Māori perceived illness, impairment, or disability, some of the literature on Māori thinking about the ten heavens (also known as 12 heavens) and Māori gods was relevant to this review. In some literature, the earth carried illnesses that were not found in any other part of the environment. Teone Taare Tikao confirmed this. He was given tohunga training as a child and carried a vast amount of knowledge about mythology and history on the South Island and was interviewed by historian Herries Beatties in 1920. Tikao supported the premise of purity existing only in the heavens and illness only on earth. Tikao attributed the cold weather on earth as the main reason for illness amongst Māori. Tikao told

Beatties, “There was no sickness in the heavens. . . . There was no dew, rain, snow and frost up here. These things bring sickness on the earth” (Beatties, 1990, p. 39).

The ten heavens are often discussed when talking about Māori creation stories and about stories of a particular tipuna and their amazing feats which were undertaken to reach the heavens (Beattie, 1994; Best, 1982; Reed, 2004). Tikao told Beattie (1994) that the heavens extend beyond the stars and are suspended one from another. It was here in the levels of heaven that atua Māori dwelled and these atua enforced Māori lore. If lore was broken, it was the atua that delivered the reprimand. The consequences for infringement of lore or tapu are discussed below under the tāngata Māori section. Also of importance is that Māori had a spirit for each part of the body, for the eyes the spirit was Tongameha (Orbell, 1995).

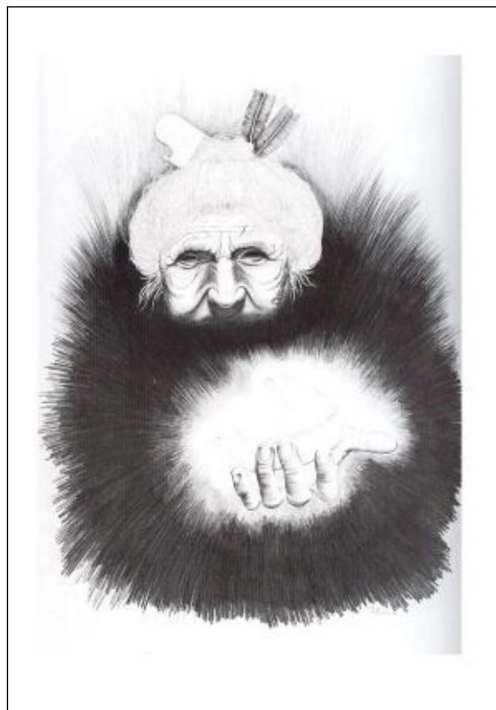
### Traditional narratives

Then one day when my face was turned to the west I smelled food, and I smelled man, there is someone near I called. But there was no reply. Because you come from the west and are therefore a descendant of mine you will be safe, I called I will not hurt you. I will not eat you. You must be Maui. Maui the trickster. I have heard of you. (Muriranga-whenua story) (Grace & Kahukiwa, 1984, p. 52)



Figure 1. Robyn Kahukiwa's painting, *Muriranga-whenua*, (Grace & Kahukiwa, 1984, p. 53). Reprinted with permission from the artist.

In Māori mythology kāpo atua existed. Whilst their blindness was acknowledged in some of the readings no detail about their blindness was discussed (Best, 1982; Reed, 2004). Questions about why these atua were blind or how they coped with their disability were not examined in any of the literature. In some mythology kāpo was not a disability but a tohu (sign) of greatness. Being kāpo was their source of power because they were not reliant on all of their senses and had high levels of ability, which were displayed in their use of the senses that they did possess. For example, Maui Tikitiki a Taranga, a well-known hero and trickster of Polynesian mythology had a blind grandparent, Murirangawhenua (Note: some readings vary in the gender of Murirangawhenua). Murirangawhenua was also known as Matakerepo (cloudy vision) (Williams, 2008). Murirangawhenua gifted her jawbone to Maui so he could create a fishhook that would be used to fish up Te Ika a Maui (North Island) and thus show his ability to his sceptical brothers. Maui used karakia (prayer) and blood from his ihu (nose) to smear on the jawbone and lure the whenua (land) to his hook. Murirangawhenua was held in high esteem for her/his knowledge and wisdom and in te ao Māori these qualities reside in the jawbone. Hence, Maui knew that this was the tool that would make his mission successful.

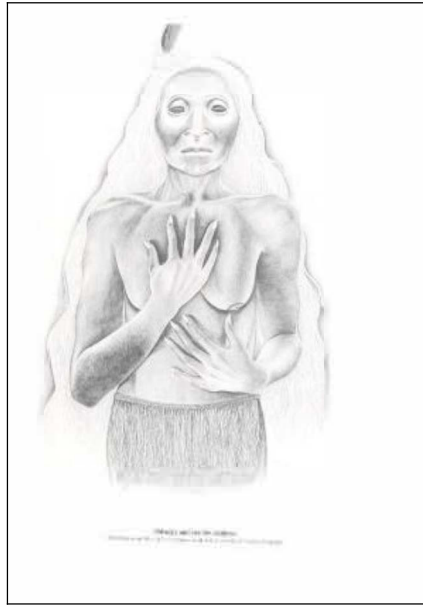


**Figure 2: Robyn Kahukiwa's drawing *The Gift of Muriranga-whenua*, (Grace & Kahukiwa, 1984, p. 55). Reprinted with permission from the artist.**

Another whanaunga (relative) of Maui, Mahuika was the Goddess and Guardian of Fire, who was depicted and described as having no eyes:

Mahuika, the goddess, rose up before him, fire burning from every pore of her body, her hair a mass of flames, her arms outstretched, and with only black holes where her eyes once were. She sniffed the air (Ministry of Education, nd).

The story that is told is that Maui, in order to obtain the secrets of making fire, tricked Mahuika into giving Maui all of her fire children which were contained within the fingers of her hand.



**Figure 3: Robyn Kahukiwa's Drawing, *Mahuika and her fire children*, (Grace & Kahukiwa, 1984, p. 49). Reprinted with permission from the artist.**

After Maui had tricked Mahuika for all but one of her fingernails of fire, she became very angry. Maui ran from Mahuika and she pursued. Maui turned into a hawk so he could fly above the flames. However, his feathers were scorched and so he dived into the waters below him only to find that the water was boiling. He called on his tipuna, Tawhirimatea, to bring rain to drench the fires. This is what saved Maui. Mahuika, before being consumed by the torrential rain, threw her last fingernail of fire into the trees. Today, kaikōmako, mahoe, tōtora, patete and pukatea are now seen as guardian trees of fire.



**Figure 4: Robyn Kahukiwa's Drawing, *Mahuika, Konui, Koroa, Manawa, Mapere and Toiti*, (Grace & Kahukiwa, 1984, p. 48) Reprinted with permission from the artist.**

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Another relation of Maui was Tāwhaki. He needed to travel the heavens to find his father, and there he met his grandmother, Whaitiri (full name, Whaitirimātakata – Crashing Thunder), who was blind. Whaitiri after leaving her husband Kai-tangata to live with her sky parents returned to the base of the sky's ascent and waited for the arrival of her grandson, Tāwhaki. Elsdon Best (1982) wrote that when Tāwhaki encountered Whaitiri, she was “quite blind” due to her eyes being scratched out by a “multitude of small birds” that passed Whaitiri each night (p. 383). Best's description of this story told of Tāwhaki destroying the birds and consequently restoring Whaitiri's sight.

Other versions of this myth tell how Tāwhaki performed karakia over Whaitiri and made her see again. It was Whaitiri who knew, and told Tāwhaki, about which aka matua/rangi tuatangi (the main or parent vine) to climb to the heavens, and thus she gave Tāwhaki the correct knowledge to proceed to the heavens in search of his father. Interestingly, it appears but cannot be confirmed with absolute certainty, that those in Māori mythology who did not have sight and who had great powers were wahine, who assisted tane (males) to gain knowledge.

Another South Island myth that is related to blindness is that of Hina. Hina was Maui's wife. Otherwise identified in other parts of New Zealand as Maui's sister or the daughter of Mahuika (Goddess of Fire). Hina is the personified form of the moon. Maui is said to have cured Hina of blindness but not in a physical manner but in a metaphysical one in that he restored light to the darkened moon (Best, 1974). Hina was also called Hinauri which literally means dark moon, as opposed to Hina or Hina marama which means new moon and therefore one which is lighter, brighter, and fuller (Reed, 2004).

In contrast to these positive myths about impairment, another creation story that may help to form the context for kāpo Māori is the Kai Tahu creation story. For this section, Matiaha Tiramorehu from Moeraki was an oral informant and spoke about the Kai Tahu creation story involving Raki (Ranginui) (skyfather) and Papatuanuku (earthmother). Raki had many wives, who bore many children. Papatuanuku according to Southern traditions was first partnered to Takaroa (tangaroa), the god of the sea. When Takaroa left to bury their child's pito (placenta), Papatuanuku partnered with Raki and begat Rehua, Tane and all their other children. Takaroa returned and discovered what had happened and a fight broke out between Takaroa and Raki at the beach. Takaroa speared Raki in both buttocks. Raki did not die but from this time onwards all of the children whom he had with Papatuanuku were weak and sickly. These children were named after their impairments:

- Tānekupapaea – excoriated – skin disease/condition
- Tānetūturi – deaf
- Tānepēpeke – short limbed or disabled limb
- Upokonui – large head, perhaps encephalopathy
- Upokoroa – oblonged shaped head, another birth defect
- Upokowhakāhu – undeveloped, stillborn, membrane of foetus
- Tāne-i-te-waiora – translation not known although it suggests a spiritual/mental disability
- Te Oi – translation not known although one of the meanings of oi is disturbed/agitated and perhaps can be understood in behavioural contexts

Raki was saddened by the reality that his later children with Papatuanuku were weak or had an impairment. He asked his previous children to kill him so that the human race, which he was creating, would be stronger. Tane (his son) asked Raki about how this could be done and Raki instructed Tane to lift him away from Papatuanuku. The myth continues that with this separation, light and wellbeing came forth. In this creation story, it appears that the union of Raki and



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Papatuanuku was cursed after Takaroa discovered he had lost his wife Papatuanuku to Raki. Their tamariki bore the brunt of this kanga (curse), and were born with illness and impairments (van Ballekom, & Harlow, 1987).

### **Te ao Māori (The Māori world)**

The lives of Māori in te ao tawhito (the old world, from their arrival in New Zealand to the end of the 1800s) were harsh and short. Life expectancy for both sexes was between 40-50 years. Māori were nomadic, travelling to survive. For peace and wellbeing, they set up new kainga (home/village) many of which were temporary. They moved towards the coast for kaimoana (seafood) or returned inland to grow crops depending on the season and the plentifulness of the resources (Salmond, 1997). Best (1924) wrote that because Māori survived off the land and thus had a tough physical lifestyle, that sight and hearing were two important senses that were needed to carry out the daily task of food gathering.

Nekenekeiterangi Paul described mana atua tamariki in these times. He stated that he had heard that children with disabilities were begat from a Māori mother and a tohunga (expert) with great knowledge. The tohunga would intentionally impregnate the wahine to give forward all of his knowledge and learning to this child. These children were known as Mana Atua. Paul explained that the reason that the tohunga passed his knowledge onto tamariki was because that by the time they reached adulthood, they had forgotten the source of their knowledge and the source was protected. Mana atua tamariki were gifted, perceived as very different from other tamariki, and may also have had an impairment.

Jill Bevan Brown (1989) found that birth defects were viewed by some hapū as a punishment for the offence of breaking tapu by someone within the whānau, hapū or iwi and that some Māori believed the same was true for people with an intellectual, physical, and sensory disability. Therefore, disability and impairment were “accepted with an air of fatalism” (p. 5). Mason Durie (1994) describes tapu as:

... secured by the sanction of the gods and reinforced by the endowment of mana. Tapu can be applied to people, places, animals, plants, events and social relationships...transgression of tapu earned rebuke, ridicule and intense mental suffering – physical consequences were also expected, epidemics, bodily wasting, or even death (p. 9).

Durie wrote that tapu was essentially a safety measure in that it was intended to make Māori cautious and to warn of imminent danger should tapu be broken. For Māori, it offered a series of practical rules to protect communities. Without spiritual awareness, the individual was considered to be without well-being and much more prone to disability or misfortune (Durie, 1985). Elsdon Best's writings in 1941 also supported this view. According to Best sickness not only occurred as a result of a tapu infringement or incorrect processes according to lore. It was also the sign of transgression – punishment of the gods.

Bevan-Brown (1989) stated that it could be said that traditional Māori society, whose economic level was often that of subsistence, would not be very tolerant of people with an intellectual disability who were considered dependant and who may not contribute socially or economically to the welfare of the iwi or hapū. A pakeha participant in Bevan-Brown's (1994) study said that they had heard that Māori babies with a disability were left to die at birth. However, Bevan-

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Brown could not find a written source to confirm this. Best (1924) wrote that people with a disability amongst their hapū did not appear to receive a lot of sympathy from other whānau and hapū members. Perhaps, a sense of shame was present for the individual and hapū. Also, fear of further misfortune may have caused Māori to not mention any incidents of disability. These issues may also help to explain the dearth of information around blindness during this particular period.

## Tāngata

In 1884, a traveler named Mr. Kerry Nicholls wrote that he saw an albino Māori woman and described her as having “light flaxen hair, pink eyes and white complexion” (Robley, 1998, p. 45). Makereti Papakura (1938) asserts that albino Māori were mainly seen as atua (godlike) and were highly respected. She noted that they were often blind and the impression gained was that this was an addition to their status not a subtraction. Makereti wrote that albino Māori were called turehu or urekehu and said “these turehu children are supposed to be born of an ordinary Māori mother and a patupaiarehe (fairy) father” (p. 123). Patupaiarehe were described as “supernatural children of the mist...seen in the indistinct form... they are fair, and are clothed in flimsy white like the web of the pūngāwerewere/spider” (p.123). According to Elsdon Best (1982) fairy people were fair skinned and had light brown or red hair. Patupaiarehe, heketoro, turehu, urekehu, and korakorako are some of the Māori names for these people. Korakorako (also written as korako for short) was the name associated with albino Māori and was described in Best (1982, p. 547) as people who “could not see or look into the full blaze of the sun”. He also referred to a korako as a child with light, soft straight hair and blue eyes. Similarly Queenie Hyland (1997) states that the korako people had white skin and pink eyes, which glowed in the dark.

Beattie (1990) documented a range of vision impairment and blindness. He noted that Tikao witnessed blindness in the elderly because of the constant work that was done over fires, which could cause damage to the eyes. Also of note was the fact that illnesses increased when Māori moved from high hilltop forts to lower flat land dwellings. Houses were built on swamp-like land with spongy soil. Manning (2001) stated that these were heated with fires and were warm at night but were too moist during the day. This brought illness through poor ventilation and moist living conditions. Beattie (1994) reported that the Murihiku Māori had eye problems because they sat in smokey dwellings over long periods of time and as a result suffered ophthalmia or inflammation (kukura) of the eyes. When they entered their later years the kukura (inflammation) would often progress to pohe (blindness) (Beattie, 1994).

Blindness may have also been caused by injuries that were sustained during tribal combat. For example, the Waikato chief Horomona Maruhau lost his eyesight in a conflict with Ngā Puhi. Horomona was called Maruhau initially and was referred to in literature as Horomona Maruhau or Blind Horomona. The literature also noted that he met with missionaries, converted to Christianity and became a native teacher. In 1866, Miss Tucker made a glowing reference to Horomona in the *Southern Cross and Southern Crown* report. She described him as a “consistent Christian” with a great memory and he was well respected amongst his peers. Miss Tucker was impressed that Horomona could find his way alone to places within a three mile radius of his kainga/whare (home) but beyond this distance he required a guide. She also was quoted as saying that “he was all light within, that the people of the world could not discern the light he possessed” (Tucker, 1866, p. 8). In 1849, Horomona met Governor Grey, Grey was impressed at Horomona’s attitude towards his blindness and in the writings about this occasion Miss Tucker wrote, “his blindness added a peculiar and calm dignity” (Tucker, 1866, p. 8).



**Figure 5: Drawing of George French Angas (1807–1889), *Horomona Maruhau*, aka Blind Solomon (White, 1890, p. 81).**

Another chief, Hongi Hika, was documented to have had a blind wife in the 1920s. He was a well-known Ngā Puhi chief who was related to all the principal Ngā Puhi chiefs of his day. One of two wives Turi-ke-tuha was also the mother of Hare Hongi and of Harata who later married another infamous Māori warrior, Hone Heke. One interesting fact about Turi-ke-tuha was that she accompanied Hongi Hika on all of his fighting campaigns. She advised him, and it is written that Hongi Hika followed her advice. Kelly (1938) wrote that a chant was composed by an unknown Ngāti Whātua person about the battle of Te Ika a Ranganui and within this chant or kaioaraora, Turikatuku (aka Turi-ke-tuha) is mentioned:

Tarure ki te taha ko Turikatuku ko te wahine taki wairua  
Languishing listlessly to the side is Turikatuku, the spirit-challenging woman  
(p. 180).

It is interesting that Turi-ke-tuha was given this description by a composer from Ngāti Whatua, because it provides evidence that she was at Hongi's side in battles and was perceived by others as a gifted and knowledgeable woman to be feared.

The Māori population declined dramatically from the 1840s – 1890s and during this time Europeans began to increase in numbers and interact with Māori. Papakura (1938) wrote:

There were few ailments before Europeans visited Aotearoa (New Zealand), but soon after Captain Cook came, the first epidemic swept over our land, and according to our traditions many thousands of men, women and children perished. It was called by the Māori Te Upoko o te rewharewha. Each vessel that visited us left an epidemic of some kind, which wiped out many children as well as grown up people. Though I could mention various epidemics, here I merely want to say that before Europeans came, there was comparatively little illness. (p. 149)

Micheal King (1991) talked about the changes to Māori living conditions during this period of colonisation. Typhoid and dysentery were present in epidemic proportions. Fertility rates also declined because Māori women suffered from general ill health and from the affects of syphilis, gonorrhoea and tuberculosis. King commented that in parts of the Waikato in the late 1850s over one third of married Māori women were found to be barren.

## Conclusion

There is very little in the academic literature about Māori and disability and, more specifically, Māori and kāpotanga. Information and knowledge is available in oral form, but has been rarely studied. The stories, waiata and memories that have been carried through whānau oral traditions can certainly provide enlightenment on kāpo Māori i te ao tawhito and need to be prioritised. However, further research is needed to gather this oral information and to search historical collections of relevant documents throughout New Zealand.

Researchers need to be aware that all of the literature from this period (before 1840) was written by non-Māori historians or missionaries who carried their own cultural bias. They would often write their own interpretation of what had been told to them by their informants, and thus placed a particular lens on their knowledge and writings. This will have an impact on how the reader sees and interprets the material. Linda Smith (1999) questioned the value of some of the research that has been compiled by early ethnographers, educational researchers and the occasional travellers' various accounts of Māori society. While this research of the early contact between Māori and Pākehā may have been validated by academic affirmation and scientific method it does little to extend the knowledge of Māori. However, it also needs to be acknowledged that there would be no literature of this early period had it not been for those early writers.

For this review, a search was done in a selection of libraries at the University of Otago and Canterbury University, and discussions also occurred with knowledgeable Māori historians and librarians, using the wider term, 'kāpo'. Searches under subject headings such as birth defects, illness and disability were also conducted to find information that could provide some understanding about how Māori perceived particular illnesses, what were the illnesses or disabilities that Māori had, and how they treated people with an illness, impairment or disability.

The writings of Elsdon Best and Herries Beattie, and articles from the *Journal of Polynesian Society* provided the most information. Other fragments of information have come from general Māori historical literature.

In general it appears that Māori in the ancient world who had impairment were people with god-like power and god-like status. They were known for the talents that they possessed, not for what they didn't have. As time progressed, this notion appeared to change. Perhaps these changes were influenced by periods of turbulence with war, food shortages and land selling. Instead of being held in high esteem as valuable members of a hapū and iwi, Māori who became ill, who were born unwell or who had a disability were perceived by the hapū as a tohu (sign) or an outcome of an infringement of tapu. Therefore, this may have caused the hapū or whānau of a child born with impairment to provide karakia (blessings) that could heal the shame and correct the previous hapa (mistake) or breaking of tapu. Interestingly, nothing in the literature indicated that rongoa (medicine) has been studied in detail in relation to Māori who experience blindness.

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There is a feeling, which one gets when studying Māori psyche in te ao tawhito, that if something is unexplainable then it is either perceived to be a positive tohu (sign) for the hapū or a bad omen. For example, albino Māori were seen like atua yet perhaps other impairments were perceived in a negative light. The explanation for this phenomenon remains elusive. With colonisation and Christianity, and with the introduction of influenza, measles and venereal diseases the Māori view about birth defects and disability appeared to change and bring shame to the hapū. Today, with better living conditions, socio-economic circumstances, medical care, and rehabilitation services it is hoped that this has given way to acceptance and respect of people with an impairment because they can contribute in a valuable way to their whānau and hapū.

The researchers' hope is that as we become aware that kāpo Māori were once acknowledged by te iwi Māori as gifted people with talents to share with their hapū, positive change away from negative perceptions around impairment and disability will occur. Māori on a large scale are returning to their roots; te reo revival, mahi toi (art, raranga - weaving, whakairo - carving) and mahinga kai (food gathering places and techniques). Many are recapturing past knowledge and returning to old tikanga (customs) with the intention to obtain and maintain their mauriora (wellbeing, life force). Furthermore, stepping even further back into our histories may be the key to unlock any 'matakū' that may be in the minds of some of our kāpo Māori whānau so that they can also accept visual impairment as our ancient tipuna did: Not as impairment or a 'dis-ability', but as having vision within ones true knowledge and true power.

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