

Joan Metge, *In and Out of Touch: Whakamaa in Cross Cultural Context*. Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1986. Pp. 159. NZ\$19.95.

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I first met Joan Metge in 1959 when I was in my last year as a student at Victoria University. I was introduced to her by Dr. Alice Dewey, University of Hawaii professor of anthropology, who was in New Zealand on sabbatical leave and staying with my parents while she pursued her studies. Since then Dr. Metge and I have met on a number of occasions, these occasions always being something to do with the Miiori. *Nii reira, Joan, tena ano taua.*

This book, I think, is timely in that it is available when relations between Miiori and Piikeha are in a state of flux and are a matter of concern to some. It gives deep insight into a form of Miiori behavior many Piikeha define as arrogance, sullenness, uncooperativeness, aggressiveness, and many other epithets. Such definitions, however, are formed without knowing, caring, or appreciating the Miiori viewpoint. Much of the lack of understanding between Miiori and Piikeha can be attributed to the Piikeha because of "their cool assumption that the Piikeha way of doing something is the only, the human, way" (p. 140).

Whakama (whakamaa) is a feeling common to all people but is treated differently by different cultures. The word means "embarrassed, shy, ashamed, coy, humiliating," and is well illustrated by the many case histories Metge uses to support her arguments.

The exact definition is dependent upon the generation of the person and the degree to which that person grew up in a Miiori society that was or is Miiori speaking and behaved or behaves in a Miiori way. The contention that urbanized Miiori youth are unfamiliar with the concept is debatable--even if unable to articulate the feeling they certainly experience it, although their reactions to it differ from their rural counterparts.

Whatever the reaction to *whakama* Metge states, "Properly handled, the negative aspects of whakamaa can be minimized and even turned to good account. Mishandled, whakamaa can be extremely damaging both to the whakamaa person and to the social fabric, especially when it becomes ingrained and chronic. Denied outlet or healing, it can erupt in violence" (p. 148).

The last statement is particularly pertinent to the urbanized Miiori

youth who knows no other way to react to his or her *whakama* except to, physically, strike back. He or she has not been brought up in the atmosphere where one accepts being *whakamā* as a consequence of one's having infringed ethically, socially, morally, "or deviated from a prescribed form of behaviour" (p. 94). Metge sums up the position of the urbanized Miiori as follows.

It seems to me that an unduly large proportion of Maori, especially of those born and bred in the city, show the signs of chronic whakamaa. Whereas earlier generations of Maori, including many of the present kaumaatua, found reassurance and status in the Maori world to counter the whakamaa, the dis-ease, experienced in relation to Pakeha, many young people today know comparatively little about ngaa tikanga Maaori because their opportunities for learning about them have been limited. They are whakamaa in many Maori situations, feeling uncomfortable, uncertain and out-of-place, especially at the marae and in the presence of native speakers of Maori. At the same time they are whakamaa in relation to Pakeha because of the higher status of Pakeha as a group in New Zealand society and their reputed power and achievements in school, work and public institutions. Yet when Maori show this whakamaa in their dealings with Pakeha in power--teachers, welfare officers, bureaucrats and police--they are blamed and punished instead of being helped to handle it. They find reassurance and support mainly with peers who share their experience, but this increased emphasis on age grading, especially in the form of 'gangs', increases their alienation from both the Maori and the Pakeha establishments, even while it provides a way out. (P. 122)

While mainly about *whakama*, its symptoms, its treatment, and its effects on the individual, this book also deals with related conditions such as *whakaiti* (humility), *whakahihī* (arrogance, self-aggrandizement), *mauri* (physical dimension of the body and senses), and *mana* (power, authority, prestige). Metge considers all these relevant to *whakama*, which should not be treated in isolation but should be looked at holistically.

There are degrees of *whakama*, each with its own suggested remedy. The danger is that people tend to translate *whakama* by one word in English rather than taking into consideration all ramifications of the

word. Such is also the case with other Miiori words mentioned by Metge. She warns against this practice of word-for-word translation, warning with which I concur. a

To treat the *whakama* of people Metge lists five principles for serious consideration (pp. 144-146). Personally, I feel that they are not only relevant to the treatment of *whakamā* but should be compulsory reading for anyone contemplating dealing with the Miiori. They are sound, common sense principles worthy of constant repetition and, if taken cognizance of, could do much to ameliorate the present situation between Miiori and Pikeha.

To conclude Metge states, "While the concept of whakamaa is Maori in origin, the feelings and the behaviour covered by the term are familiar to all New Zealanders of varied background. And the aroha that plays so important a part in handling whakamaa is not inhibited by differences of ancestry or culture but reaches out to touch all those in need of healing" (p. 150).

Metge's style is easy and interesting to read, but to reiterate that this book is important for anyone who deals with Miiori people is redundant and supererogatory. I recommend this book without any hesitation to all who care about race relations and to all who care about people. As the ancestors of Te Aupouri said:

*Kī mai ki a au he aha te mea nui o te ao,
Maku e kī atu he tangata!
He tangata!*

Ask what the most important thing is in this world,
And I will say people! People!

Kia ora tatou katoa.