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## TAMARAŌŌŌ

- 103 Kō te tangata te ra nana i tēnīhanga a Nīnē-mui te po.  
Māi kōna te tēnīhanga tō e Māui tikitiki, kore e  
te tangata, ake, ake, ake.
- 104 Kī ta te pakaha tēhanga. no te tēhakaaro kore o tēi rā.  
Kīhai i māhara, kua hanga rana kī te te orcone a  
naua ora e te tēhakaaro na rōto atu i te putanga o tōia tē  
tētahi rākan i tēhanga i ana rākan kōroa, kō  
kamanawānūtanga kī te kīro, te rekanga kī te  
105 Tena i te putanga māi o tētahi i te ahua o tē  
ana rana kī ana kōpū. a kī noa iho rana

“KO TE HAU TĒNĀ O TŌ TAONGA...”:  
THE WORDS OF RANAPIRI ON THE SPIRIT OF GIFT  
EXCHANGE AND ECONOMY

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In the service of *hau* ‘the spirit of the gift’, this paper traces the exchange of ideas between people and cultures that led to Māori concepts of reciprocity being enshrined by Marcel Mauss (1923–24; 1950) in his seminal work, *The Gift*, and debated ever since. Most importantly, it identifies an error of transcription and translation that has considerable impact for understandings of the teachings of Tāmāti Ranapiri as received by Elsdon Best and utilised by Mauss. By correcting this error we get closer to the meaning of Tāmāti Ranapiri’s writing and can demonstrate that Mauss’s (1923–24; 1950; [1954] 1967; 1990) intuitive explication of the meaning and significance of *hau* was not an inappropriate conflation of French spirituality with Māori metaphysics. This paper emerges from the author’s doctoral work, “The Changing Images of Nineteenth Century Māori Society—From Tribes to Nation”, completed in 2003 at Victoria University, Wellington. *Tikanga hau*, the spirit of gift exchange or the ethic of generosity and its associated values, including *mana* (understood as ‘status, prestige and credibility’), is identified in this study as a principal motivation of Māori leaders or *rangatira* from ancestral times until today.

A focus on the metaphysics of things, in particular the politics and economics of reciprocity in early to mid-19th-century Māori society and the layers of meaning in gift exchange, is instructive for understanding and interpreting the ethic of generosity as practiced by 19th-century Māori leaders and their people. In anthropology, exchange theory and gift exchange are often presented in the form of the following propositions: that exchange is a fundamental social system; that gift exchange is a system prior to capitalism; that a gift economy is animated by the spirit of the gift (*hau*); that the spirit of the gift creates an indissoluble bond between persons engaged in the exchange; and that Anglo-Western societies were responsible for the separation of persons and things (Mauss 1923–24: 30–186; 1950: 143–279; [1954] 1967; 1990; Schrift 1997).<sup>1</sup>

These propositions are especially associated with the work of Marcel Mauss, who gained his understandings of Māori thinking from Tāmāti Ranapiri, a Māori of Ngāti Raukawa descent, through the writings of Elsdon Best. Mauss did not correspond with Ranapiri, but rather used Ranapiri’s letters to Best in their English translation, setting in motion a veritable

exchange economy of ideas in the disciplines of anthropology and economics, and beyond. Yet in my analysis of the Ranapiri letters, Mauss remained close to Ranapiri’s metaphysics and indeed was informed by it—a point to which I return below. Still, his work attracts commentators who have concentrated instead on the material and social aspects of gift exchange, disputing the relevance of any metaphysical explanation. Consider the severe critiques by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1997), Raymond Firth ([1929] 1972) and Marshall Sahlins (1997) of Mauss’s hermeneutics and discussion of *hau*. These reflect utilitarian, materialist, secularist, psychological and rationalist critiques of Māori metaphysics as understood by a French scholar. Such a focus on the material and cognitive anthropology of Māori gift exchange and generosity without recourse to its metaphysics is not adequate, however. Nor is their continued reliance, after Mauss, on working with Ranapiri’s letters in English (or French) translation. The only ethnographer to have worked with the original letters in Māori was Elsdon Best, with whom Ranapiri corresponded. As far as I know, none of the commentators listed above has read Tāmāti Ranapiri’s original letters in Māori. They have relied upon the accuracy and insight of Elsdon Best, an Anglo-New Zealand ethnographer and the author of many books about Māori, in transcribing and translating the letters.

By returning to the primary sources (see Table 1) I found that in the process of transcribing the letters and preparing various extracts for publication in “Māori Forest Lore”, Best (1909) made significant changes to key phrases. The effect of these changes was to transform Ranapiri’s hermeneutics about Māori metaphysics into a secular materialist version, thus reflecting Best’s views rather than Ranapiri’s own understandings. The error was partly rectified by Mauss, albeit somewhat intuitively, but Firth, Lévi-Strauss and Sahlins followed Best’s edited translation of the Ranapiri letters, and his materialist approach, challenging Mauss’s interpretation and his idea of the ‘spirit of the gift’ itself. Most others have followed suit (see Forge 1972; Frame 1991; Gathercole 1978; Godbout with Caillé 1998; Godelier [1996] 1999; McCall 1981–82; Parry 1986; Weiner 1985, 1992). According to Firth (1972: 418): “When Mauss sees in gift exchange an interchange of personalities, a ‘bond of soul,’ he is following not a native belief, but his own intellectual interpretation of it.” Claude Lévi-Strauss (1997: 55–56) wrote: “Hau is not the ultimate explanation for gift exchange; it is the conscious form whereby men of a given society, in which the problem had particular importance, apprehended an unconscious necessity whose explanation lies elsewhere.” Finally, Marshall Sahlins (1997: 93) presents a rationalist utilitarian critique: “Since Mauss ... anthropology has become more consistently rational in its treatment of exchange. Reciprocity is contract pure and mainly secular, sanctioned perhaps by a mixture of considerations of which a carefully calculated self-interest is not the least.”

## MORAL AND SPIRITUAL FORCE OF HAU

This paper offers a Māori view of exchange and the moral bases of *the human action that matters*. Here, exchange, spirituality and morality are part of a moral system based on a plurality of ethics. Sen (1985: 176) makes a convincing distinction between pluralism as a plurality of ethics and its “claim about the form of moral structures”, and pluralism meaning “intuitionism”, which, he says, is a “claim about how the moral structure may be *derived and supported* (i.e., whether by intuition only)” (Sen’s italics). The form of Māori moral structures is central to this paper. Rev. Maori Marsden, a leading philosopher on traditional *tikanga* Māori ‘ancestral ways of being; ancient virtue ethics’ and an evangelical Christian theologian, makes an argument similar to Sen’s when he contends that the cardinal spiritual values of *tapu* ‘ritual restriction; ancestral presence’, *hau*, *mauri* ‘life force’ and other spiritual properties “...form a powerful interlocking system which provides socio-cultural mechanisms of control in regulating behaviour, motivating, guiding and managing corporate activities; stressing the importance and the necessity for concentrated effort to be applied to different activities, or phases of it” (Marsden 1999).

Understanding the moral system at play among Māori in the 1830s–1840s is important to present-day Aotearoa New Zealand, because a contrast needs to be made between the ancient ethical pluralism of Māori leaders and the monist utilitarian tendencies of Anglo-Pākehā agents and their moral structures, as reflected in the construction of Te Tiriti o Waitangi ‘the Treaty of Waitangi’, an international treaty of relationship between Māori leaders and the British Crown signed in 1840. In this way, it is possible to consider and understand the motivation and intentions of Māori and the British Crown and the Anglo-settler government that followed the signing of Te Tiriti. *Tikanga hau*, ‘the virtue of *hau*’, is evident in the politics leading to the 1835 Māori Declaration of Independence, known as He Whakapūtanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni, and the cautious willingness of Māori leaders to be party to the so-called “founding document” some five years later. The view taken here is that the Māori metaphysics and ethics that informed Māori leaders at that time focussed on the principles of *mana* retention, *mana* enhancement and *mana* consolidation. They did not consider ceding the *mana* of their people, *kāinga* ‘settlements,’ *whenua* ‘land’, *ngāhere* ‘forests’ or *moana* ‘sea’ to another authority under duress, fear of death or some cataclysmic circumstance. The idea that *rangatira* and their people freely and consciously ceded their *mana i te whenua* ‘power, authority endowed in the *rangatira* from the land’ and therefore sovereignty to the British has been challenged by Māori ever since Te Tiriti was signed in 1840, and this challenge has recently been upheld by the Waitangi Tribunal (2014), a Court of Enquiry, established to interpret principles associated with the relationship between Māori and the Crown.<sup>2</sup>

TĀMATI RANAPIRI, ELSDON BEST AND *TIKANGA HAU*

In October and November 1907 Elsdon Best, known by Māori as Te Peehi, received two letters written in Māori from Tāmāti Ranapiri of the Ngāti Raukawa people of Manakau, near Otaki. In these letters Ranapiri shared information with Best about Māori forest lore and related oral traditions of creation, rites and customs, which Best (1909) later described as “superstitions” and “the art of the fowler”. Between 1894 and 1907, Ranapiri and Best corresponded with each other about various matters related to customary practices for bird snaring and killing (Ranapiri 1907a, 1907b). With the assistance of Rev. J. McWilliam of Otaki, Ranapiri had already published a major piece in the *Journal of the Polynesian Society* titled “Ngā ritenga hopu manu a te Maori, o mua” (Ranapiri 1895a: 132–42) with four pages of illustrations, translated by S. Percy Smith (Ranapiri 1895b: 143–52) in the same issue under the title “Ancient methods of bird-snaring amongst the Maoris.” The article contains details of methods for catching such birds as *kererū*, *kākā*, *tūi*, *kākāriki*, *pārerā*, *kiwi* and *kokomako* (in English, respectively, wood pigeon, bush parrot, parson bird, New Zealand parakeets, grey duck, kiwi, and bell bird) In January 1895, Ranapiri discussed the origins of life forces and life itself with Best, using Māori concepts such as *mauri* and *mauri ora* ‘potent life force’. Significantly, he also posed an ancient metaphysical question: was the *mauri* a stone or some other thing? (Ranapiri 1907a). Here Ranapiri was articulating a Māori metaphysics that can be traced through East Polynesia back to Austronesia, in which all things of creation have a *mauri* or life force that determines the nature of their being.

These exchanges with Ranapiri prompted Best to seek clarification on the religious aspects of bird-catching in the forest. In response to a letter from Best dated 13 September 1907 in which he asks Ranapiri to explain the difference between *te mauri o te ngāherehere* ‘the *mauri* of the forest’ and *te hau o te ngāherehere* ‘the *hau* of the forest’, Ranapiri (1907a) answered seven questions. In his answer about the *mauri* and the *hau*, Ranapiri (1907a) notes the question as follows: “Patai 1. Te mauri o te ngāherehere, me te hau o te ngāherehere.” Ranapiri’s initial explanations in response to Best’s September letter contain his brilliant and tantalising explication of *mauri* and *hau*, which I gloss as two life forces recognised as separate realities, which are yet so closely linked in effect and power that they are symbiotic.

In describing the two life forces of the forest or *ngāherehere*, Ranapiri (1907a) refers first to the *mauri o te ngāherehere* as a *karakia* ‘ritual prayer’, *ko te mauri he karakia*, chanted by a *tohunga* ‘a religious specialist, male or female, akin to a high priest’ at a special place in the forest.<sup>3</sup> In this explanation, Ranapiri writes of a physical *mauri* recognised as a rock, a tree or a hill in which the *mauri*, the life force, resides, and which is to be protected from malevolent actions.

Secondly, Ranapiri (1907a) addresses the *hau* of the forest and instructs Best about two customary practices, “e rua ritenga o te hau o te ngaherehere”. Ranapiri’s musings about the metaphysics of the *hau* of a person’s *taonga*, glossed as a gift, or a valuable item given to another, are introduced in his second letter to Best, dated 23 November 1907. Later, Best translated these explanations of *hau* into English, and these translations were to be influential in shaping Marcel Mauss’s theories on the spirituality integral to gift exchange and reciprocity. Mauss refers to Ranapiri’s writings as a *texte capital* ‘text of paramount importance’ (Mauss 1950: 157–61; [1954] 1967; 1990).

In his correspondence with Best, Ranapiri responds to many questions about life forces and vital essences such as *mauri*, *hau* and *tapu* in the forest environs; and about associated sacred places and rituals, as well as the role of religious experts such as *tohunga*. Further letters detail the potency of women and cooked food in affecting the vital forces in animate and inanimate things of the forest; the ancient art of felling trees, including appropriate *karakia*; and catching *kiore*, the native rat of Polynesia. In succinct explanations, Ranapiri instructs Best about the *mauri* and the *hau* of the forest; the *manea*, rendered as sacred places, where food is placed for *atua* ‘spiritual powers’, often with the expectation of continued well-being; the *ahurewa*, rendered as a sacred place for the performance of a religious ceremony; and the *ika purapura*, the practice of feeding the life force of the forest (or lands or oceans) to retain its efficacy.

While preparing his texts on Māori lore of the forest, however, Best constructed another version of Ranapiri’s account of *hau* with some injudicious and judicious editing, cutting and pasting of extracts. In effect he created another letter, which—while attributed to Ranapiri—helped Best to present his own version of traditional Māori thought in the late 19th century. This was published in a series of articles under the general title “Maori Forest Lore: being some Account of Native Forest Lore and Woodcraft, as also of many Myths, Rites, Customs, and Superstitions connected with the Flora and Fauna of the Tuhoe or Ure-wera District” (Best 1909). The Ranapiri material was quoted in the section titled “The Mauri of the Forest”, which was read before the Auckland Institute on 22 November 1909 (Best 1909: 440–41). However, nowhere does Best inform the reader that he had edited Ranapiri’s letters, nor does he mention the significant changes he made to Ranapiri’s grammar. Best’s translations have confused scholarly discourse on Ranapiri’s texts ever since.

In his 23 November letter, when Ranapiri (1907b) explained the relationship of the donor’s *hau* to the *taonga*, the consequence of this relationship for the recipients of the *taonga*, and their ongoing obligations over time, he did this in two key sentences:

Na, ko taua taonga i homai nei ki a au, ko te hau tena o to taonga i homai ra ki au i mua. (Ranapiri 1907b: 2; underlining for emphasis, mine)

Now that gift which was given to me is your life force in your gift given to me before. (translation and underlining for emphasis, mine)

No te mea he hau no to taonga tena taonga na. (Ranapiri 1907b: 2; underlining for emphasis, mine)

This is because your life force [hau] remained in your gift given to me. (translation and underlining for emphasis, mine)

In his transcription, however, Best made changes to key pronouns, replacing “to taonga” with “te taonga” in both sentences. He then translated these as follows:

Na, ko taua taonga i homai nei ki a au, ko te hau tena o te taonga i homai ra ki a au mua

Now, that article that he gives to me is the *hau* of the article I first received from you and then gave to him. (Best 1909: 439)

Notemea [*sic*] he hau no te taonga tena taonga na. (Best 1909: 441)

... because they are a *hau* of the article you gave me. (Best 1909: 439)

I do not know why Best edited those letters as he did. It may have been a mistake in his transcription of Ranapiri’s letter into his notebook, or he may have misread his own writing. These explanations are unlikely because the two changes occur in the same paragraph of the November letter, and are consistent from Best’s point of view. Using the definitive article *te* ‘the’ to define an object is natural to an English-speaking person. Best may have had this in mind, and decided to replace Ranapiri’s *to* [*tō*] ‘your’ with *te* ‘the’ in his transcription (see Table 1). Whatever the reason, the change highlights the problematic nature of many early Anglo-Western interpretations of Pacific rituals and their meanings.

According to the linguist Winifred Bauer (pers. comm., 1992; 1997: 397–99), Māori make a fundamental distinction between ownership and what is considered temporary possession by using two versions of the possessive particle—either *tō* and *tā* in this case. By using *tō*, Ranapiri signals possession or ownership, rather than the alternative form *tā*, which signals temporary possession, which is expressed as location. Ranapiri’s use of *tō taonga* in the text implies that the *taonga* is still in the possession of (still belongs to)

the original donor, even though the physical location of the *taonga* may be elsewhere. This distinction between ownership and location, which is not made in English, is lost in Best's transcription and translation.

It seems to me that in these two key sentences, Ranapiri is alluding to two distinct *hau* associated with the *taonga* in question. The first is the *hau* intrinsic to the *taonga* itself, which is the *hau* infused at its creation. The second *hau*—and this is what Ranapiri refers to specifically—is the original donor's *hau* that is associated with his possession or ownership of the *taonga*. I therefore argue that Marcel Mauss's (1923–24; 1950; [1954] 1967; 1990) intuitive explication of the meaning and significance of *hau* has been correct all along and is close to Ranapiri's meaning, whereas Best's editing out of Ranapiri's possessive pronouns “*tō*” places emphasis on the *hau* of the *taonga* itself rather than the *hau* of the possessor, and is the cause of confusion and debate among international scholars.

Ranapiri's texts reflect the metaphysics of a world that includes Te Pō, the ancestral realm inhabited by a Supreme Being (Io Matua Kore), Mother Earth and Father Sky (Rangi and Papa) and other *tūpuna* ‘ancestors’, and the Te Ao Mārama, the visible, material world of *tāngata* ‘humans’, and exchange and reciprocity between the two. I have transcribed both of Tāmāti Ranapiri's letters in full, and followed Best in terms of adding full stops and paragraphs. This helps in the reading of the letters and provides a more complete context in which to understand Ranapiri's narrative on the spiritual and moral dimensions, both implicit and explicit in obligatory reciprocity in gift exchange, trade and labour, and in locating the ownership or source of the *hau* in the *taonga*.

Ultimately, Ranapiri is articulating a notion of economy described elsewhere as an economy of affection, or an economy of *mana*, which exists to maintain the four well-beings of Māori and the Pacific—spirituality, environment, kinship and economy. Elsewhere (Hēnare 2011; Hēnare *et al.* 2017; see also Merrill 1954) I have proposed that these well-beings establish four types of capital of economic significance—spiritual capital, ecological and environmental capital, kinship as human capital and economic capital. In combination they instantiate levels of reciprocity: of the spiritual with humanity; of humanity in ecological systems; of humans with other humans; and economies embedded in the spiritual, ecological and human societies in which they are located (Hēnare 2001, 2003; Roberts *et al.* 2004).



Table 1. Ranapira’s original Māori text and subsequent translations.<sup>1</sup>

Ranapiri (1907b), letter of 23 November 1907	Best’s (1909) translation of Ranapiri’s two letters, edited as one letter	Mauss’s (1950: 158-59) French translation of Best’s translation	Biggs’s translation of Best’s version (for Sahlins 1972: 152; 1997)	Hēnare’s (2003) translation of Ranapiri’s original text
Na, mo te hau o te ngaherehere (Whangainga o te hau ngaherehere.)	I will now speak of the hau, and the ceremony of whangai hau	Je vais vous parler du hau...	Now concerning the hau of the forest.	Now about the life force ‘hau’ of the forest, and the feeding of the forest life force.
Taua mea te hau, e hara i te mea ko te hau e pupuhi nei	That hau is not the hau (wind) that blows	Le hau n’est pas le vent qui souffle.	This hau is not the hau that blows (the wind)	That aforementioned force ‘hau’ is not the wind that blows
Kaore. Maku e ata whakamarama ki a koe. Na, he taonga	Not at all. I will carefully explain to you. Suppose that you possess a	Pas du tout. Supposez que vous possédez un	No. I will explain it carefully to you. Now, you have something	Not at all. I will explain it carefully to you. Now, supposing you have a certain
tou ka homai e koe moku. (Kaore a taua whakaritenga utu mo to taonga).	certain article, and you give that article to me, without price. We make no bargain over it.	article déterminé ( <i>taonga</i> ) et que vous me donnez cet article; vous me le donnez sans prix fixé. <sup>6</sup> Nous ne faisons pas de marché à ce propos.	valuable which you give to me. We have no agreement about payment.	gift, which you give to me. (We have no agreement about a payment for your gift.)
Na, ka hoatu hoki e ahau mo teteahi atu tangata, a, ka roa	Now, I give that article to a third person, who, after some time	Or, je donne cet article à une troisième personne qui, après qu’ un certain temps	Now, I give it to someone else, and, a long time	Now, I give it to someone else, and, after a long time

Ranapiri (1907b), letter of 23 November 1907	Best's (1909) translation of Ranapiri's two letters, edited as one letter	Mauss's (1950: 158-59) French translation of Best's translation	Biggs's translation of Best's version (for Sahlins 1972: 152; 1997)	Hēnare's (2003) translation of Ranapiri's original text
pea te wa, a, ka mahara taua tangata kei a ia ra taua taonga	has elapsed, decides to make some return for it, and so	s'est écoulé, décide de rendre quelque chose	passes, and that man thinks he has the valuable,	passes, that person remembers that he has the gift,
ka homai he utu ki a au, ā, ka homai e ia. Na, ko taua taonga	he makes me a present of some article. Now, that article (taonga)	en paiement (utu), <sup>6</sup> il me fait présent	he should give some repayment to me, and so he does so. Now that valuable	and should give some reciprocity 'utu' to me, and so he does. Now that gift 'taonga',
i homai nei ki a au, ko te hau tena o to taonga i	that he gives to me is the hau (te hau) of the article I first received from	de quelque chose (taonga). Or, ce taonga qu'il me donne est l'esprit (hau) du taonga	which was given to me, that is the hau of the valuable	which was given to me, is your life force 'to hau' in your gift
homai ra ki a au i mua. Ko taua taonga me hoatu e ahau ki	you and then gave to him. The goods that I received for that item I	que j'ai reçu de vous et que je lui ai donné à lui. Les taonga que j'ai reçus pour ces taonga	which was given to me before. I must	given to me before. The aforementioned gift I must
a koe. E kore rawa e tika kia kaiponutia e ahau moku;	must hand over to you. It would not be right for me to keep such goods for myself,	(venus de vous) il faut que je vous les rende. Il ne serait pas juste (rika) de ma part de garder ces taonga pour moi,	give it to you. It would not be correct to keep it for myself,	give it to you. It would not be correct to keep it for myself

Ranapiri (1907b), letter of 23 November 1907	Best’s (1909) translation of Ranapiri’s two letters, edited as one letter	Mauss’s (1950: 158-59) French translation of Best’s translation	Biggs’s translation of Best’s version (for Sahlins 1972: 152; 1997)	Hēnare’s (2003) translation of Ranapiri’s original text
ahakoa taonga pai rawa, taonga kino ranei, me tae rawa	whether they be desirable items or otherwise. I must hand them over to you, because they are a hau (te hau) of the	qu’ils soient désirables ( <i>rave</i> [ <i>sic</i> ]), ou désagréables ( <i>kino</i> ). Je dois	whether it be something good, or bad, that valuable must be	irrespective of whether it is something good, or bad, the gift must be
tāua (taonga) i a u ki a koe. No te mea he hau no to	hand them over to you, because they are a hau (te hau) of the	vous les donner car ils sont un <i>hau</i> <sup>s</sup> du	given to you from me. Because that valuable is a hau of the	given to you from me. This is because your life force ( <i>he hau</i> ) belongs to your
taonga tena taonga na. Ki te mea ka kaiponutia e ahau taua taonga	article you gave me. Were I to keep such equivalent	<i>taonga</i> que vous m’avez donné. Si je conservais ce deuxième <i>taonga</i>	other valuable. If I should hang onto that valuable	gift ( <i>tō taonga</i> ) given to me. If I were to keep that gift
moku, ka mate ahau.	for myself, then some serious evil would befall me, even death.	pour moi, il pourrait m’en venir du mal, sérieusement, même la mort.	for myself, I will become mate [ <i>sic</i> ].	for myself, I could as a consequence die.
Koina taua mea te hau, (hau taonga, hau ngāherēherē).	Such is the hau, the hau of personal property, or the forest hau.	Tel est le <i>hau</i> , le <i>hau</i> de la propriété personnelle, le <i>hau</i> des taonga, le <i>hau</i> de la forêt.	So that is the hau—hau of valuables, hau of forests.	So this thing the life force that generates/motivates reciprocity is the force of valuable things, it is the life force of forests.
Kati ena.	Enough on these points.	<i>Kati</i> [ <i>sic</i> ] <i>ena</i> . (Assez sur ce sujet.)	So much for that.	So much for that.

<sup>1</sup> Numbers in Mauss quote refer to his footnotes.

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## NOTES

1. My thanks to Amiria Salmond, then in the Anthropology Department, Cambridge University, England, for discussions on these points in 1999 and in New Zealand in 2000.
2. The British Crown being the symbol and power of the British monarchy.
3. *Karakia* are the means by which people communicate with spiritual powers and spiritual beings such as *atua* and ancestors. At least 19 types of *karakia* can be identified that speak to diverse major and minor situations of daily life.

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#### ABSTRACT

In the 1890s, a dialogical exchange of ideas of people and cultures started with Tāmāti Ranapiri, a Māori scholar of Aotearoa New Zealand, and Elsdon Best, an Anglo-New Zealand ethnographer. Their exchange of letters, in Māori and English, impacted profoundly on the nascent discipline of sociology, and the spirit of the gift in rituals of gift exchange. This paper traces an extraordinary cross-cultural Pacific-Europe dialogue that led to Māori concepts of reciprocity being enshrined by French sociologist Marcel Mauss. According to Mauss's sociology, exchange theory and gift exchange present themselves in the form of a set of propositions: that a gift economy is animated by *hau* 'the spirit of the gift'; that exchange is a fundamental social system; that gift exchange is a prior economic system; the effect of the spirit of the gift creates an indissoluble bond between persons engaged in the exchange; and that it was Anglo-Western societies who were responsible for the separation of persons and things. The propositions are particularly informed by Māori thinking as articulated by Ranapiri, whose texts reflect the metaphysics of a spiritual world of the South Pacific Islands. By returning to the primary sources in Māori language, I find Best both mistranslated and misinterpreted the hermeneutics of Ranapiri. In effect, Best reduced Māori metaphysics to a secular materialist's explanation, thus reflecting his Anglo-world view more than that of Māori. Ultimately, Ranapiri articulates a Māori notion of economy described elsewhere as an economy of *mana*, or economy of affection, which exists to maintain the four well-beings of Māori and the Pacific—spiritual, environmental, kinship and economic.

*Keywords:* exchange theory, gift exchange, *hau*, *mana*, *mauri*, Mauss, Ranapiri, *tapu*, *wairua*

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