

trovesy. If, in turn, it is gifted to the Gisborne or National Museum, the many Maori advocates of burial for preserved heads will protest; while if buried, museums will regard it a dangerous precedence that may create public demand for burial of *all* heads in museum collections — something museums will strongly resist.

Advocates of burial for **mokomokai** claim that no scientific purpose is served by continued retention of preserved Maori heads in museums as research is exhausted; all that is possible to know about them is known. Consequently, a traditional burial, out of respect of ancestors or **tupuna**, is called for. To persist in the public display or conservation of head's in museums, reflects not a disinterested scientific concern, but (essentially) expresses a disquieting pre-occupation with the heads; something peculiarly European. Ethnologists

deny such claims, believing that there is still much to be learnt from the heads.

Traditionally, the human head was the most sacred part of the body and most subject to tapu; neither hands nor food could touch it, particularly if the head of chief or tohunga. Related to **mokomokai**, were ancient beliefs in the magical powers of such heads — which were connected to special prayers and ceremonies when publicly displayed in times of tribal and family mourning; the sacred head of a chief being the **taumata** or resting place of the ancestral spirit — communicated with through priests.

In times of war, chiefly heads were focal points of tribal resistance: appealed to and placated on the same level almost as **atua** or god's — their **mana** increasing with time and degree of success in prophecy and protection.

Painted with red ochre (**kokowai**) and shark oil, **mokomokai** were the highly valued possessions of a people remarkable for their cultural achievements, and deep sense of human continuity through the generations. It was not until European intrusion that the traditional world of the Maori underwent radical change — under the pressure of missionaries, traders, settlers and the demands of a new warfare involving firearms generally exchanged for preserved heads — and all the highly esoteric beliefs and practices associated with them. Inevitably, this loss of belief and practice contributed to the undermining of an ancient supportive religious system that, in turn, led to widespread demoralisation and, ultimately, almost extinction of the Maori.

Such was the importance of **mokomokai** — and respect for them.

# Grief, Death and Bereavement Among Maori and Pacific People

INcreasingly, health care workers are expected to offer competent intervention and support in cases of bereavement. Certainly more is known now, through a burgeoning literature on the subject, but more is expected too, as the public witness better terminal care and greater psychological awareness among professionals.

While the grief process and bereavement behaviour have been studied intensively in European culture, there has been comparatively little study of bereavement patterns among Polynesian groups in New Zealand, especially with reference to what may be offered by the doctor or other health care workers.

This article looks at bereavement in Maori, Samoan, Tongan, Cook Island, Niuean and Fijian societies and examines the psychological implications of these for the care of the family and of the community. Each pattern sheds useful light on European bereavement also.

As is usual in European culture, all Polynesian cultures try to make a member's last days as happy as possible. However, there is divergence on the propriety of divulging a prognosis. Most European clinicians in New Zealand would probably affirm (at least theoretically) the practice of 'telling the patient'. This open awareness is generally maintained in Maori, Samoan, Cook Island, Niuean, and Fijian Christian groups. In Tonga, the family and the community discuss death openly with each other, but not with the dying person himself, unless and until he raises it, after which communication will become open. Interestingly, the Fijian Indian is unlikely to discuss the impending death with anyone outside of the immediate family.

## Will of God

It is significant that throughout the Polynesian cultures there is an acceptance of death as being the will of God. Even Fijian Indians, who may be Hindu or Muslim, share a similar fatalism. This aspect aside, the terminally ill Polynesian appears to maintain considerable control in this phase as he begins to let go, quite deliberately, his relationships and belongings. Often he will make demands on certain members "Will you do this with your life so that I might die happy knowing that you are doing the right thing?" He may be actively involved in a verbally expressed will or a discussion of funeral arrangements. Such discussions have great power for the survivors who will seek

to obey out of respect, love, and obedience, and this is usually done without resentment. Later adversity following disobedience is often blamed on a lack of respect for these dying injunctions.

## Tongan Behaviour

After the Tongan dies the family elder will organise the preparations for various parts of the ceremony. He is usually the eldest living male relative of the deceased, although if this is not practical, the family elects an elder to preside. The women are expected to dress the body, which in the New Zealand setting, may be taken to the funeral parlour and displayed. Each evening people will come to pray and weep over the body, perhaps to kiss the deceased, and to speak directly to the person who has died. Such catharsis is encouraged and facilitated by the body's being kept for perhaps a week before the funeral to allow people to come from overseas to pay their last respects.

Even children are encouraged to participate in this ceremony and will kiss and touch the corpse. The Tongan view is that they initially associate death with sleeping but gradually, through such ceremonies, they learn to accept the reality of death.

The pre-funeral period is called A Po, meaning "to wait up all night." On the night before the burial the mourners may gather together around the deceased to accompany him through the