

11.

Taera, Awenga: Sexuality, Power

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Abstract

A Māori-Pasifika dance crew called Torotoro was formed in 2000 to help create a song and dance show called *Mika HAKA*.¹ The dancers were in their teenage years and early twenties. The show sought to amplify, for British stages, the burlesque performance of takataapui (gay Māori) identity, through which Mika (then aged 38) had carved out a unique niche for himself in the UK fringe festival circuit. I was his international collaborator, supporting creation, development and touring of *Mika HAKA*. On the surface, *Mika HAKA* was a flirtatious, sexualised, glamorous and just-about family-friendly reworking of the concert party show format that is the core of touristic renderings of Māori culture. At the same time, it integrated hip-hop and other contemporary pop references. This reflected Mika's commitment to the juxtaposition of Māori-Pasifika performance with aesthetics and forms circulating globally as an expression of the complexities of (his) urban Māori identity.

¹ *Mika HAKA* debuted 25 January 2001 at the Maidment Theatre, Auckland (New Zealand). Its international premiere was 1 August 2002 at Dance Base – National Centre for Dance, Edinburgh (Scotland). The production toured widely in New Zealand, and in 2003 visited Adelaide (Australia), and revisited Edinburgh.

Torotoro's working life and creative process were informed by Mika's conviction that personal and indigenous empowerment, and Māori empowerment in particular, could be pursued in diverse contexts and via diverse means. He embedded a kaupapa (practical philosophy) of compassion, wellbeing, and collective and personal emancipation in the working culture of the rōpu (group), through protocols, practices, and daily performances of specially created haka (rhythmic verses) and karakia (evocations). Torotoro thus lived a dual identity: as international entertainers and as holistic practitioners. At times, when performing in spaces such as Te Pūrengi (the wharenuī (meeting house) of Auckland University of Technology's city-centre marae (meeting grounds) in June 2003, the performers' inner world and their intimate kaupapa was made more evident. The framing of the marae context and the perspicacity of the kaumatua (Māori elders) present revealed another work at play beyond the frippery and fun of *Mika HAKA*. Torotoro's dance imagery, physical practices and quality of embodiment were received as a model for a new way in which young Māori might invest in and value their bodies, their physical being, their material substance.

In its first life as Mika's apprenticed crew, Torotoro progressed through several generations of performers and multiple media, eventually transforming into a self-directed smaller group, New Native Dance, which disbanded in 2008.² Some of those who were once members of Torotoro are now principal performers in dance-theatre companies such as Atamira Dance Company and MAU, whilst others have returned to their original practices and contexts, such as kapa haka (customary Māori group performance) or b-boying (break dancing).

Here, I start the task of gathering narratives and perspectives from those who were once Torotoro to better

² The Torotoro members who formed New Native Dance were Kasina Campbell, Taupuhi Toki and Mokoera Te Amo.

understand how their life in the rōpu empowered them and what their notions of power in performance are now. At first, I wanted to understand how the explicitly takataapui artistry of Mika had informed their self-determination as artists and how the power of their artwork might be seen to extend Mika's performance of sexuality as a source of identity and creativity. I find, however, that just as an audience can reframe a performance, as happened to *Mika HAKA* in Te Pūrengi, so too the history from which I understood the dancers to have arisen has been reshaped in light of their reflections. Rather than charting how Totororo was born from Mika's vision, I have begun to see the meeting between Totororo and Mika in a new light.

In personal correspondence with me a number of the dancers who were once Totororo now speak of their art as a means of experiencing wholeness, as a means of healing. Importantly, they speak of their practice as offering a way towards restoration of connections — within themselves, with others and with their environments — that they perceive to have been more readily accessed in pre-colonial times. Renee Winters³ proposes that Christian missionary activity in the Pacific led to censure of pre-contact performance: 'Our culture entailed certain practices and celebrations that seemed carnal to "others".'⁴ It is, she says, only through the designation of a creative space as 'the contemporary realm,'⁵ and thus excused from the conservative responsibility of preserving legacies, that there can emerge a freedom from censure, allowing apparently abandoned modes of expression to potentially re-emerge. She notes an anarchic and taboo-breaking stream of creativity lurking on the margins of current continuations of hereditary practices.

On stage, with Te Maire o Rangī Atea, Renee complies with their aim to present Cook Islands performance culture in ways

³ Renee danced with Totororo from 2001 to 2004.

⁴ R. Winters, Personal Communication, June 15, 2016.

⁵ Ibid.

that the troupe consider to be traditional and authentic to hereditary practice, though she questions the historical authenticity: ‘the “traditional” art we have been accustomed to is the PC version.’⁶ In rehearsal she dares to propose radical ideas: ‘Let’s all crawl in like tuatara and piss on the boys.’⁷ Her clowning beyond the allowed and into the disallowed can be seen as a raid on the past she envisages, carrying some of its anarchic power into the present. She describes her work with Torotoro as having given her, in formative years, license to recover a celebration of the carnal: ‘the contemporary channel has provided a safeguard from being attacked from traditional viewers. The contemporary channel has allowed artists to explore deeper and be connected with past/present/future.’⁸

Nancy Wijohn,⁹ now a prominent dancer with Atamira and Okareka (Māori contemporary dance companies), extends this idea. She speaks of loss and recovery of what might be called a *corporeal ecology* — that is, a conception and experience of the human body as indivisible from the environment and permeated with environmental forces:

Look at Papatuanuku (Mother Earth) — she’s seductive, the nurturer, her contours, her terrain — It all speaks a metaphoric language that evokes movement, love and a type of intimacy. Here is where I feel sexuality lies. [...] We move with these stories, these stories dictate how we express our sexuality.¹⁰

Nancy views the protocols of the pa (tribal settlement), some extant and some in revival, as ‘our ritualistic ways we related to our environment’.¹¹ Through such rites she understands the

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ R. Winters, Personal Communication, July 7, 2016.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Nancy danced with Torotoro from 2002 to 2004.

¹⁰ N. Wijohn, Personal Communication, May 22, 2016.

¹¹ Ibid.

sensuality of the land, the contours of Papatūanuku and the presence of the elements, to be embraced and experienced intimately. To this end, when she reflects on how sexuality may inform her dance today, she sees the entirety of the landscape to be implicated in her sensual body, and this interconnection to be a source of power through which her dance arises.

Nancy is, it seems, positioning her dance in a theo-ecology that connects her to the natural environment, her tupuna (ancestors) and the atua (deities) her tupuna intuited. This web is preserved explicitly and implicitly, she suggests, in the etymology of *te reo* (Māori language); ‘our language provides clues.’¹² She speaks of her art as empowered by the close connection she maintains to her heritage of myths and legends. Nancy’s words place her body in relationship with a parallel realm. The realm she describes, like her contemporary Māori dance practice, is inflected with the momentum of heritage in its *oceanic breadth*; that is, she (like Mika) works from a distinctly Māori perspective but an ontology and practice that is about a uniquely individual relationship to her heritage *in toto*.

In the promotional image of Nancy created for Atamira’s production *Manaia*,¹³ she is photographed in black and white, and superimposed on a black background overlaid with red characters spelling out the show’s title in graphics reminiscent of *tukutuku* (reed latticework).¹⁴ She stands in three-quarter profile with her gaze raised high above the horizon and her hands clutching the twists and coils of a thick ship’s rope. There are, in her taut stance, echoes of the majesty in social-realist Soviet statues or a Boadicea-like warrior queen. In the poster for Okareka’s *Mana Wahine*¹⁵ five images of Nancy, in a white

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The *manaia* is a Māori mythical being often with a bird’s head and human body.

¹⁴ Howells, C. (Photographer). (2016, May 20) *Manaia* [digital image]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/atamiradance/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1288037667873884

¹⁵ *Mana wahine* is a term that refers to the particular power and experience of Māori women.

leotard and with tightly-braided golden hair, are superimposed in a column over a sea-green background.¹⁶ She kneels at the base and at the top she stands with her arms lifted in a pose midway between a ballerina and a bodybuilder. The three figures in between reach and look out in different directions. Nancy is captured in different moments of dance and becomes a kind of complex poutokomanawa (central support pole of a meeting house). These two promotional images, encapsulating Nancy's embodied practice, have an epic scale and monumental quality, whilst also being connected to and informed by her quest for contemporary and innovative means of expression.

By analogy, let me speak again of Te Pūrengi. It is not an ancestral marae. It was constructed in 1996 and serves as meeting house for people from across Aotearoa and beyond. It is, in a sense, a strategic creation needed to provide a physical centre for the Māori cultural life at Auckland University of Technology and to enable the university to interact with the world via a Māori interface. The whakairo (carvings) in Te Pūrengi integrate stylistic motifs from many iwi (tribes) and are on a scale of size that gives them exceptional grandeur. Each poupou (sidepost) incarnates detailed aspects of Māori history, yet even without a grasp of the narratives represented the intensity of their very form imparts magnitude and induces a state of awe in the viewer. In Māori aesthetic terms, the poupou have ihi (charismatic presence) that commands wehi (respectful awe).

Surrender to ihi as a diffuse and effuse force is a prominent characteristic of how Nancy speaks of her performance. She speaks of her creative motivation driven by engines that are not voluntary as much as involuntary, invoked rather than commanded, tangible but arising from amorphous sources. She speaks of experiencing 'many different power states', of 'the feeling of ihi [as] an internal fire' that emanates from within her,

¹⁶ Efimoff, A. (Photographer) (2016, August 10) *Mana Wahine* [digital image]. Retrieved from <http://okareka.com/portfolio/mana-wahine/>

and of possessing ‘a kind of superhuman strength’.¹⁷ These experiences or capacities arise, she says, through ‘my connection to whakapapa (genealogy), my fight and flight responses and the wairua of my tupuna.’¹⁸ A carousel of ancestral inspirations and deeply embodied instinctual motivations empower Nancy’s performance, giving her a driving force to which her heritage and her physiology contribute.

It is a core premise of Eugenio Barba’s theatre anthropology that the effective performer, across diverse cultural contexts and in diverse forms, always has access to the means by which to render his or her being somehow *dilated* — that is, enriched in its potential to become a vibrant and evocative sign.¹⁹ This capacity, he suggests, is somewhat quantifiable. It arises, amongst other details, from the performer’s use of: oppositional tensions in postures and actions; luxurious movement (redundancy and embellishment) when completing simple tasks; and simultaneously (and paradoxically) the omission of other movement details ordinarily seen in daily behaviour.

Though Nancy has extensive training, her reflections seem to describe dilation accessed not through a deliberate technique as much as through her surrender to — or allying with — a monumental momentum that she experiences as arising in her body from her hereditary legacy. Her commitment has afforded Nancy a breadth of highly technical expertise, but her description of her practice describes performance as a holistic experience and an engagement with her immanent potential.

In the monumental and superhuman dimensions of her embodiment on stage, Nancy also understands herself to be making connection to her full range of gender traits, to the two dimensions of her being she describes as ‘te taha wahine me taha tāne’²⁰ (female side and male side). Countering my initial

¹⁷ N. Wijohn, Personal Communication, May 22, 2016.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Barba, E. (1991) *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer*. London; New York: Routledge. pp. 52-65.

²⁰ N. Wijohn, Personal Communication, May 22, 2016.

enquiries, she says, 'Here is the empowerment, not so much in our sexuality rather in the restoration and equilibrium of our masculine and feminine both co-existing in both male and female'.²¹ Nancy's talk of recovery of balance might be positioned as part of *healing* of the colonial impact. Nancy couples it to the connected empowerment gained through 'the renaissance of [Māori] language and through the gifting back of whenua (land)'.²²

Fiona Wall danced with Torotoro in 2001 and was a judge of *Toa Toa* (the talent competition by which new members of the rōpu were found). She remembers the Torotoro regime as offering the tāne (men) in the rōpu time and space to discover that in addition to being strong and powerful, they might also be beautiful and expressive.²³ Equally, in Torotoro, wahine (women) enjoyed the space to be assertive and dominant: Mika encouraged the women to perform haka as they chose, adopting the masculine traits of legs akimbo — which they did frequently in the choreographed dances — and to *whetero* (extend the tongue) if they wished, though none chose to do so on stage.

For Kereama Te Ua, who performed in the debut production of *Mika Haka*, this exploration or facilitation of gender diversity was an alarmingly new world. He remembers how it departed too wildly, for him, from the explicit and comparatively rigid gender specificity of his usual genre of kapa haka 'where gender roles were specific and there is only one way'.²⁴ Kereama entered the world of Torotoro on graduation from Pounamu Training Systems, an apprentice scheme operated by kapa haka experts Ngapo and Pemia Wehi. He grew up in a small sub-section of Otahuhu in South Auckland known locally as The Village. It was exclusively inhabited by families affiliated to Black Power (a

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Feeonaa Wall, Communication with 'Once We Were Torotoro' Closed Facebook Group, July 8, 2016.

²⁴ K. Te Ua, Personal Correspondence, May 22, 2016.

Māori-Pasifika gang).²⁵ Kereama remembers his shock to find himself dancing in a context dominated by Mika's identity. Mika's career in Aotearoa had positioned his art as being about expressions of being takataapui, especially through prominent artistic statements such as the creation of a queer haka, 'Tēnei Tōku Ure' (This is My Penis), for the after-party of the 1993 Auckland gay pride march.²⁶

By inference, regardless of their personal sexual orientation, Torotoro became implicated in Mika's takataapui arts practice by taking to the stage with him. Only a minority of Torotoro's total membership identified as homosexual when performing with the rūpu. What is more, in *Mika HAKA* there was no explicit reference to Mika's, or to any dancers', sexuality. Indeed, all sexual references in the show were confined to te reo, little understood by most of Torotoro's audience. Yet the gender fluidity of Mika's stage persona and his personal use of choreographic and costume references to drag aesthetics would have provoked awareness in Kereama that he was a long way from kapa haka and Black Power culture.

With Mika, in Torotoro, Kereama expanded his unique personal performance practice; he had begun at Pounamu to integrate elements of b-boying and Japanese and Chinese martial arts in a kapa haka context. What he encountered anew in *Mika HAKA* was an acute awareness that his actions on stage could potentially attract the desirous gaze of other men. Kereama describes entering Torotoro as a kind of culture shock: 'I had never even been around gay people or even considered being in a roopu with gay dancers and choreographers. I could honestly say I was homophobic.'²⁷

Kereama now teaches and performs innovative haka theatre, combining kapa haka with new Māori dance and

²⁵ K. Te Ua, Personal Correspondence, May 22, 2016; Careers New Zealand [Oompher]. (Pub: Jan 13, 2016). Full interview with Kura Te Ua - Haka Theatre Director/Choreographer/Tutor [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXILgiPpVGs>

²⁶ Mika, *Lava Lover* (Auckland, Princes Wharf: February 1993).

²⁷ K. Te Ua, Personal Correspondence, May 22, 2016.

aspects of theatre. He leads the Māori strand of training at Whitireia (a Wellington tertiary institute) and, among other projects, has appeared in works created by the company Hawaiki Tū.²⁸ Kereama describes a journey from dancing in *Mika HAKA* to the present. He initially feared association with Mika's takataapui identity: 'I even thought to myself [...] if you dance with these fellas your gonna end up liking boys too.'²⁹ He speaks now of finding acceptance for a diversity of gender traits in himself and others: 'I started to create bonds and friendships with other dancers, shapers, circuit breakers, performers, innovators and like minds...to the point where sexuality was no longer an issue, and my focus turned to the mahi (work), the dream and the passion'.³⁰

Kereama also excels as a core member of a leading competitive kapa haka rōpu, Te Waka Huia. On stage with them, he delivers the explosive force he is expected to display as a kapa haka tāne. He uses the gym to ensure his physique is a cut above and beyond the muscular masculinity of his competition rivals. Yet, he says, the power of his performance (and his life) comes now from his understanding of the spectrum of his self. He says, 'yes, I'm hard, yes, I'm staunch [...] but I'm also soft [...] I'm gentle'.³¹ He too raises the motif of healing when he speaks of his journey through gender tropes, and sexual implications of performing in certain ways or contexts, to be a journey towards 'accepting myself in order to accept others'.³²

The narrative of synthesis and integration that Kereama brings forward is echoed in Nancy's reflections on her practice. She says that the power she brings to her contemporary dance performance has been noted, by others, as a concatenation of 'strength, beauty, grace'.³³ It is a list one might attach readily to

²⁸ Hawaiki Tū was founded in 2012 by Kura Te Waati (nee Te Ua) & Beez Ngarino Te Waati.

²⁹ K. Te Ua, Personal Correspondence, May 22, 2016.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

the presence and prowess of an athlete. (Indeed, when she joined Torotoro, Nancy was stepping sideways from her burgeoning career as a young professional netball player.) Torotoro were urged and aided to operate as athletes as much as artists, through a smoke-free and drug-free working context, provision of free healthy meals and a free cross-training schedule that included yoga, *tai chi*, and weight lifting.

These measures had a dual aspect. It helped Mika share his conviction that self-determination begins with physical self-development. It also helped the dancers to manifest as the lithe and vital young warriors the narrative and markets of *Mika HAKA* required. The show was explicitly made for export to the Edinburgh Fringe festival. It was crafted to sensually engage and satirically play with Eurocentric fantasies about the idyllic island tropics of the South Pacific, and of Maori and Polynesian peoples as figures akin to the Romantic noble savage.

The show and its promotional strategies positioned the dancers as members of a warrior society, whilst their adolescent athleticism reduced the threat and increased the attractiveness of their aggressive volatility. Only one of the company, Mokoera Te Amo,³⁴ had extensive knowledge of tu taua (Māori marital skills). Torotoro's particular power was not as potential combatants but as cute versions of the toa (ancestral warriors) memorialised and lauded in the historical narratives and male disciplines central to kapa haka. In their synthesis of aggression and attractiveness, Torotoro created a kind of warrior-athlete-dancer fusion that integrated different modes of performance and different gender and cultural tropes.

After dancing with Torotoro, Ramegus Te Wake³⁵ has further pursued the warrior-athlete model. He has trained extensively in *muay thai* (Thai kick boxing) and the attendant arts of boxing, grappling and throws that constitute the modern hybrid sport of mixed martial arts. In Torotoro, with his male

³⁴ Mokoera Te Amo danced in Torotoro from 2001 to 2008.

³⁵ Ramegus Te Wake danced in Torotoro from 2001 to 2005.

peers he performed as a warrior figure; his frame and his force allowed him to appear as if fighting-fit. Today, footage on line shows him pounding, kneeling, and punching his opponents into submission in the full-contact arenas that are his new stages of performance.³⁶ His power is now not just one of appearance. It is tangible force seen in the recoil of his opponents as his strikes hit home. (It should be added, in this same footage he kisses his opponent on the cheek several times after squarely defeating him.)

On a contrasting trajectory, of those who were once Torotoro, Kasina Campbell has enjoyed the most high-brow of careers, becoming a core artist in the Butoh-inspired large-scale performances created by Lemi Ponifasio and his company MAU.³⁷ On the main stages of innumerable international festivals, Kasina presents a power that is distinct from the substantial force of Ramegus' matches. In *Birds with Skymirrors*,³⁸ Kasina appears topless, and sometimes totally naked, as a central figure in the scenographic composition. In images from her performance of this role in Berlin and Athens she is captured in moments of confrontation staring down the audience with her hair scraped back, lips painted black and in *pūkana* (eyes opened extremely wide),³⁹ and in moments of self-absorption, as she walks in shiny black stilettos with her elbows held far backwards like the silhouette of a tekoteko (effigy mounted on the gables of a wharenuī).⁴⁰

³⁶ Peter Lee. (Pub: Jun 12, 2016). Ramegus Te Wake New Zealand WKBF Kickboxing Title Champion [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N02PRosvG0>

³⁷ Salā Lemi Ponifasio is a choreographer of Samoan descent who founded MAU in 1995.

³⁸ *Birds With Skymirrors* premiered at Theater Der Welt Ruhr (Essen), 16 July 2010.

³⁹ Bolesch, S. (Photographer) (2016, August 10) *Birds With Sky Mirrors* [digital image]. Retrieved from http://archiv2.berlinerfestspiele.de/en/archiv/festivals2011/08_spielzeit/ropa11/sze11_programm/sze11_programm_inszenierungen/sze11_programm_mlistedetailseite_inszenierungen_22311.php

⁴⁰ Makris, V.K. (Photographer) (2012) *Birds With Sky Mirrors* [digital image]. Retrieved from <http://www.vassilismakris.com/?p=950#>

Ramegus reveals his body in the course of his competitions; it is (apparently) incidental to the pragmatic focus of being ready to fight. Kasina explicitly presents her body as an element of the composition she has crafted with Lemi. It is not an incidental revelation. Her exposure of her body is intentional, and it becomes — on the festival stages she occupies — to be understood as expression of herself, of her being, of her sensibility.

Ramegus and Kasina might each be seen to have differently realised the militant and sexual themes that interlaced *Mika HAKA*. In the show, Mika issued the rallying cries in te reo of mana motuhake (self-determination) and tino rangatiratanga (self-government) while Torotoro danced their flirtatious burlesque. Torotoro's performance offered audiences the confrontational address of haka in items such as 'Ko te Iwi, e Kore' (I am not of the People), where, clad in black Lycra shorts, they leapt from deep squats into fist-thrusting stances. And with animal-relish they gyrated and writhed in lime-green hipster loons whilst Mika sang the song 'Wera Wera', musing in te reo about the joys of opening your legs wide for hot sensuous sex. Now, Ramegus is a martial artist competing in a sport that channels violence into a statement of self-mastery and fine discipline. Kasina is engaged in crafting innovative iconography that interweaves her personal sexuality with the eco-political and existential themes of MAU's work.

What is certainly common to the narratives of all the former Torotoro dancers shared here is that they have each continued to enjoy the global mobility that *Mika HAKA* introduced them to. To this point, my focus has been mainly on the power inspiring their performances or emanating from their chosen stages. I centre now on the inward effect of the agency they have accessed through their performances of power.

There are many ways that people become globally mobile today, but in the case of the tāne and wahine I speak of here that power has come through their embodied performance practices. Peter Brook coined a term to describe the final phase

of research and practice evolved by the pioneering Polish theatre practitioner Jerzy Grotowski. He spoke of a mode of work he called 'art as a vehicle', in which the transformative effect of the process upon the practitioner was the foremost focus, not its impact upon a witness.⁴¹ I want to adapt this term to speak of the power that the former Torotoro dancers have found through *body as a vehicle*. I am here seeking to widen the term Brook coined to indicate the move that Grotowski was making from theatre and associated presentational aesthetics towards performance (in its broadest definition) as an experiential somatic realm of practice.

Body as a vehicle helps to encapsulate the breadth of developments pursued by those who were once Torotoro. It links them as sharing an orientation to the potential of their body as an anchor and core for self-development and empowerment. It seems to me that there is a collective journey shared by these peers in which they have moved from early days in a context of no or few formal qualifications (mainly in performance arts) into a realm in which their acumen as practitioners has somewhat eclipsed such considerations. They have made qualitative and enriching (including fiscal) changes to their lives via harnessing the transformative potential and affective potential of the materiality of their bodies, as sites of profound self-experience and as the means by which they command audiences and fees.

The power of performance for the former members of Torotoro is one that penetrates inwards into their being as much as it reaches outwards to the audience. They have become powerful presentational images of their selves (and, perhaps by inference, their natal and current communities) while they have also entered further into a way of being in which their experience of selfhood is sited in and elaborated through the power of their bodies. In the words of Brendan Hokowhitu, 'The

⁴¹ Brook, P. (1991) 'Grotowski, Art as a Vehicle.' *TDR: A Journal of Performance Studies*, 35(1), 92-94.

materiality of an Indigenous body can be drawn into the symbolic realm without ceasing to be a body'.⁴²

To speak of the performance is always to be speaking of the performer. To describe the development of tangible practices and abilities is also to indicate the practitioners' sensory journey and their experience of the shifting facets of being. Writing elsewhere, Hokowhitu urges for consideration of a 'spiritual immediacy' in Māori experience that orients towards 'the metaphysical practices ingrained within the immediacy of the *everyday*'.⁴³ He reminds us that rather than speaking of bodies in functional action we must always speak of bodies in evolutionary process — a contrast described sometimes by others as the distinction between human being and human becoming; not a stasis of having a fixed identity but the flux of evolving an identity. In Hokowhitu's parlance this becomes stated so: 'The body's past, present and future [is] in a constant interdependent state with its facticity — its situation'.⁴⁴ I understand this to mean that the experience of being — especially of being indigenous in a post-colonial context — is one in which each moment of immediate corporeality is in constant, dynamic and potentially strategic dialogue with historical, contemporary and efflorescent tropes about *being indigenous*.

I am particularly interested in how Renee and Nancy identify their present and future empowerment as achieved through the performative reclamation of integrations and connections that they see as being once their ancestors' norms. They locate that which they reap now as being a remembering of that which was before. One might ask how each dancer

⁴² Hokowhitu, B. (2014a) 'Haka: Colonized Physicality, Body-Logic, and Embodied Sovereignty.' In H. Glenn Penny, *Performing Indigeneity: Global Histories and Contemporary Experiences* (pp.273-304). Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press. p 113.

⁴³ Hokowhitu, B. (2014b) 'If You Are Not Healthy, Then What Are You? Healthism, Colonial Disease and Body-Logic.' In K. Fitzpatrick, *Health Education: Critical Perspectives* (pp. 31-47). Abingdon & New York: Routledge. p 41.

⁴⁴ Hokowhitu, B. (2014a), p.114.

understands their complex genealogy and acculturation to figure in this process. Renee has Dutch ancestry and performs Cook Islands dance, whilst Nancy has Native American ancestry and dances in a contemporary idiom fundamentally informed by Northern Hemisphere practices. Each engages in a *strategic historicising* to underpin the power and empowerment of their practice. By this term, I infer that the narrative woven about their practice serves to reinforce the empowerment they seek as Māori women: that is, their description serves to reinforce the movement towards the emancipation that they pursue, via an implied or intuited connection between collective pre-contact sovereignty and contemporary individual intercultural liberties.

A comparison might be made to Mika's role of Tahu in Jane Campion's film *The Piano*.⁴⁵ The historical accuracy of Tahu's cross-dressing in Western women's clothing mattered little to Mika: what was important was that contemporary audiences should be able to experience takataapui identity in a prominent and influential work of art.⁴⁶ Mika's creation of Tahu helped make possible a conception of takataapui identity as having a pre-contact history.

Kereama speaks vividly of his personal history, of how kapa haka led him from potential inculcation into a culture of 'gangs, drugs, alcohol, violence'⁴⁷ towards, instead, a theatre career and a wider and more globally connected Māori identity. In a similar way, I argue, Renee and Nancy narrate their work as a step away from a kind of post-colonial shadow, or reactive cultural identity, towards a contemporary life that they experience as being connected to a pre-colonial vitality and an integration of spirituality, sensuality and ecology. There is a curious loop implied, in which recent international and intercultural practice seems to offer opportunities to reconnect with ways of being that are understood as resonant with pre-colonial experience. The

⁴⁵ *The Piano: A Jane Campion film*. (1993). Toronto, Ont: Columbia Tristar Home Video; distributed in Canada by Lions Gate Films.

⁴⁶ Mika X, Personal Correspondence, August 9, 2016.

⁴⁷ K. Te Ua, Personal Correspondence, May 22, 2016.

anthropological accuracy of this historical narrative seems less relevant to me than the empowerment the women explain (and gain) through its narration. It is as if the repressions of colonial history are placed in ellipsis by the opportunities of global interconnectivities.

I close with an image of transgressive performance recounted by Rachel Swain in her essay 'A Meeting of Nations: Trans-Indigenous and Intercultural Interventions in Contemporary Indigenous Dance.'⁴⁸ Together with Yawuru dancer and choreographer Dalisa Pigram, Swain directs an intercultural dance theatre company called Marrugeku (based in Broom (Australia)). Her journal article details a series of a series of laboratories she facilitated between 2009 and 2011 in which choreographers from Australia, New Zealand, West Africa, and Indonesian Papua worked with a group of participant dance artists from Australia and the Pacific. Swain describes Nancy participating in an extended improvisation at the Auckland gathering. Nancy was 'running speedily in circles around the room, repeatedly hurdling an installation of piled chairs.'⁴⁹ Swain then recalls the departure of Nancy from the room, followed by and Eric Avery (of Marrugeku), 'bursting out of the performance space to continue running on the ground outside.'⁵⁰ Those who once were Torotoro may continue to exceed limiting frames such as my own, revising and retelling their personal and collective histories in ways that empower their material transformation.

⁴⁸ Swain, R. (2015). 'A Meeting of Nations: Trans-Indigenous and Intercultural Interventions in Contemporary Indigenous Dance.' *Theatre Journal*, 67(3), 503-521.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 518.

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 518.

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