

TEURIKORE BIDDLE

# The Mediation of Tikanga in Haka Competition

## Introduction

[M]ajor and significant changes can occur on the surface level of a cultural system without alterations to its more fundamental metaphysical assumptions. These surface changes require a process of remodeling through which they are reconciled with the lower level assumptions. Through this process of reconciliation the cultural system returns to an ordered and coherent whole (as cited in Mead, 2003, p.351).

There is today a lot of activity in the area of indigenous performance. For example kapa haka is a mainstay for most Māori enthusiasts of Māori performance. This is most evident by the number of passive and active participants in past regional and national haka competitions. What is striking about kapa haka is the manner in which tradition is mediated on the stage.

In the quote above Witherspoon (1977) cited in Mead (2003) suggests significant changes to culture can occur while simultaneously maintaining the fundamentals of the culture. Kapa haka as a living physical expression of culture sits somewhere between 'traditional' and 'competition' notions of performance. Even as 'echoes and reflections' of pre-European Māori performance, kapa haka is viewed by modern Māori as 'traditional' performance (Royal, 2004). Christopher Scales, while discussing tradition and competition within Native American Powwow suggests that,

...[this] culture began as – and remains – a complicated amalgam of sources of practices reflecting both particular and generalized notions of identity...new practices are created and understood outside of, or in between, the basic genre bifurcation of ‘traditional’ and ‘competition’ (Scale, 2007, p.2).

The same conclusions can be made about haka competitions. The value of kapa haka competition has been rigorously debated over the last decade by Karetu (1999), Richards and Ryan (2004), Papesch (2006), and Rollo (2007) who discusses historical moments of significance in haka competitions and evaluates the benefits and downsides of haka competition in relation to culture. As might be expected, long-term advocate for the revitalisation and maintenance of the Māori language, Dr Timoti Karetu, stresses the need for accuracy in lyrical composition and to some extent despairs at the lack of attention by groups to maintaining an iwi style of performance. TeRita Papesch also emphasises the importance of the language in haka competitions but also the need to maintain tribal distinctiveness within competitive performances and, like other indigenous commentators on performing arts, highlights the danger of the ‘standardization’ of performance within the context of cultural competitions (Papesch, 2006, p.34-35).

Tribal distinctiveness of tikanga and performance within the context of kapa haka competitions serves as the main focus of this article. This is dealt with in two parts first a discussion of the mediation of tribal tikanga within the context of kapa haka and second, a discussion of how the evolution from earlier forms of haka creates tension between the latter and tribal distinctiveness or what might be more aptly described as tribal performance identity?

## **E tū te tū a Tūhoe, e haka te haka a Tūhoe: Tūhoe Festival 2011**

Among those who paved the way for the restoration of *iwitanga*, John Rangihau understood the need for Tūhoe to continue the practice of *whanaungatanga* or *matemateaoe*, sharing an inter-connectedness with kin as a vast majority of Māori including Tūhoe people had moved to the urban centres in the 1950s and 60s. Rangihau recognised the direct benefits sports and cultural activities had in drawing together Māori but in particular Tūhoe people. By the 1970's and amongst a great surge of Māori cultural revitalisation larger pan-tribal competitions begin with the introduction of the Polynesian Festival in 1972 (Karetu 2005 and Battye and Kingi 2006). The Tūhoe Festival started in 1971 and was first held in Rotorua. Although *kapa haka* performances at the Tūhoe festival shares many similarities with other *haka* competitions, one of its distinguishing differences is that it is a forum for learning about being Tūhoe through exposure to, and involvement with a Tūhoe process and community. This at best is one of the primary benefits for active and passive participants of the festival. According to Nikora and Te Awekotuku (2003) the Tūhoe festival

is a splendid demonstration of the transmission of knowledge, the celebration of traditional language, values and culture, the retention of heritage; and the dynamic reality of being Tūhoe in today's world (Nikora & Te Awekotuku, 2003, p52)

The number of Tūhoe people participating in the Tūhoe festival increases every year. This year Tūhoe saw the largest number of *kapa haka* to ever participate at a Tūhoe Festival. There were 22 adult groups in total that performed. There are various activities that are practiced at the bi-annual Tūhoe festival during Easter. This includes debates carried out in the medium of the Māori language, sports (netball, rugby and league), children's and adults *kapa haka* performance, stalls etc. The etiquette, protocols that are practiced, revisited or maintained throughout the festival are distinctly Tūhoe. *Kapa*

haka is a popular activity to attend and participate in during the festival and can be considered one way that Tūhoetanga or a Tūhoe tribal identity is expressed. This is evident in the type and subject matter of compositions performed as well as, the numerous protocols or tikanga that guide the way these items are taught, performed and judged.

Recent discussions among Tūhoe judges, tutors and performers (in the lead up to the Tūhoe Festival 2011) pointed out the importance of maintaining a distinctly Tūhoe style of performance at the Tūhoe festival. Niwa Milroy interviewed a number of respected Tūhoe elders for a documentary filmed this year at the 40year celebration of the Tūhoe festival. Of those people interviewed Reko Te Moana and Te Uruhina McGarvey make comments that are related to the style and stance taken by groups at the Tūhoe festival. McGarvey suggests that the Tūhoe style is being lost particularly among the women suggesting that the men have been able to maintain the stance of Tūhoe (Waaka, 2011). Reko Te Moana also notes that the stance of Tūhoe performers has changed suggesting that the Te Matatini competition has influenced the way performers move and thereby compromises the stance of Tūhoe (Waaka, 2011).

Karetu who was once the Chair for the Aotearoa Traditional Māori Performing Arts Festival (ATMPAS) committee now known as Te Matatini is well known for his criticisms of kapa haka activities (both good and bad) and argues that of the teams who participated at ATMPAS during the 1990s there were very few competing teams who were according to Karetu 'truly tribal'. He goes further to state that, 'Such factors have resulted in innovations which many of the traditionalist deplore' (Karetu, 2005, p.83). Papesch suggests that pan-tribal kapa haka performances are more Māori in expression than distinctly tribal and believes like Karetu that there are very few groups who maintain a distinctive tribal style of performance (Papesch, 2006, p.34-35). From this view

it would appear that kapa haka performance is becoming popularly standardised.

In contrast to this, it is a generally accepted view that various cultures can and indeed have distinct music and dance styles. This is true of Māori culture, which maintains a distinct national Māori performance style, but as noted by Karetu (2005) and Papesch (2006) there exists another layer, a distinct tribal performance style. In an interview on the television series *Wakahuia*, Wharehuia Milroy noted that those living within the boundaries of Tūhoe recognised changes in the style of Tūhoe performance becoming more apparent at Tūhoe festivals and acknowledged that preventing outside influence was difficult to avoid (Ngata, 1997).

### **Takahi as an indicator of tribal variation in haka performance**

Papesch has suggested that the stance and even the way people 'lifted their feet' helped identify where a group was from (Papesch, 2006, p.34-35). In fact it is common knowledge among Māori that groups who lift their feet high of the ground combined with the bending of knees is indicative of a takahi used by groups from the east coast of the North Island. In contrast to Tūhoe groups who do not swing or sway with great emphasis and although the foot lifts from the ground it does not flick back or lift as far from the ground as groups from the east coast:

The most flamboyant performers of [Māori action song] are the Ngāti Porou people. Their signature move is the high lifting of the right leg. Another feature specific to Ngāti Porou, is that actions are contained close to the body and the actions begin a beat before the singing. For western tribes of Waikato, Whanganui and Taranaki, the foot is either not lifted or only slightly lifted, but the whole foot never leaves the ground. Tūhoe lift their feet slightly and the actions are more to the

front and are quite soft and gentle (Matthews & Paringatai, 2004, p.111).

Hikitia Howden-Ranga a long-standing member of the Hamilton-based Tūhoe kapa haka team has observed variation in the way Tūhoe groups perform (Personal Communication, 2011). For example, she describes the takahi used by Tūhoe ki Waikato as a slight rise of the right foot from the ground but unlike other Tūhoe groups they would lean to the left side. With the right foot lifting and left side taking much of the weight, the body was well balanced. In contrast, Te Ika (a Wellington based Tūhoe kapa haka team), the right foot lifts slightly of the ground, the body does not lean to the left but maintains an upright stance with the knees slightly bending in alternation to the other. Reko Te Moana in the 2011 40year Tūhoe Festival documentary recalled that some attention was given to the takahi by John Rangihau (respected Tūhoe elder instrumental in the establishment of the Tūhoe festival) while he tutored their group. She remembered that he would threaten to strike the performers with a stick when the stamping of the foot or takahi was not executed properly. Armstrong and Ngata suggest that a:

practice that is becoming increasing prevalent is that of alternating the foot movement from one foot to another with each successive beat. This is unacceptable [they write], both traditionally and aesthetically – particularly the latter. It will rarely be that an entire group uses this foot movement, and even where such is the case it is impossible to ensure that everyone uses the same foot at the same time. The result is therefore ragged and uncoordinated. Correct foot movement is most important and done poorly can spoil the whole appearance of an action song' (Armstrong & Ngata 2002, p.18-19).

Whether the comments from Armstrong, Howden-Ranga, Ngata, and Te Moana, speak to the necessity for the takahi to

maintain the beat of the song or as a matter of performance style or stance, what is notable is the importance or value placed on executing the takahi correctly. Further, takahi is one aspect of performance, which can be used to demonstrate a tribal performance style or to express a specific performance identity. In addition to this and as highlighted by Howden-Ranga there is variation in the execution of performance, such as the takahi even within one particular iwi.

### **Tāmaki Makaurau regional haka competition 2010**

The Tāmaki Makaurau regional haka competitions 2010 highlights some of the tensions that exist between traditional and competition notions of performance and the mediation of tikanga within this context. Although the Tāmaki Mākaurau regional haka competition is notably popular, due to the involvement of teams such as Wakahuia, Manutaki and in recent years Manuhuia and Ngā Tumanako, the Auckland competition became the focus of media attention (both Māori and mainstream) for very different reasons.

In short, Taiaha Hawke, a member of Ngāti Whātua and Tāmaki Makaurau regional competition judge, deducted 15 points from the Auckland-based Ngāti Porou team Porou Ariki because a female member performed a whaikōrero, something disallowed under Ngāti Whātua tikanga.

On one hand, writing in the *New Zealand Herald*, Yvonne Tahana quoted a source within the Ngāti Porou team saying: '[the judge was] being biased and utilised his iwi tikanga to judge us on the atamira [stage] which I thought had some neutrality about it...'. Tahana goes on to say that 'The source said she didn't view the matter as sexist, rather of one iwi's norms not being respected' (Tahana, 2010). Prominent leader of Ngāti Porou and identified as a Porou Ariki spokesperson, Api Mahuika supported this view, noting in his interview with Te Karere that: 'Ngāti Porou [should] be able to express their own traditions in kapa haka' (Te Karere, 6 July 2010).

Ngāti Whātua tikanga on this point is not unusual, as most tribal groups in Aotearoa recognise this particular practice. However, Te Kēpa Sterling, a long-serving adjudicator of regional and national haka competitions observed that what is practiced on stage is governed by the rules of the competition not by tikanga and kawa practiced on the marae (Te Karere, 6 July 2010). Kāa Williams and Wharehuia Milroy share this view of the competitive stage being a different space from the space where Māori ritual is conducted (such as the marae). Milroy, Tihi Puanaki and Williams in the Māori television program *Whare Tapere*, recognise the difference that exists between traditional and adapted aspects of kapa haka performances (Morgan, 2007).

Reflecting on the performance by Porou Ariki and the consequential decision of the judge the situation sits somewhere between the tension of tradition as in tikanga and competition notions of performance. If the tikanga being contested is about whaikōrero performance the question has to be asked what constitutes an act of whaikōrero? Poia Rewi (2005) suggests that whaikōrero should be spoken in Māori, welcome visitors and engages meaningfully with the speeches of other orators. Te Kakapawaihō Kururangi Tibble explains that whaikōrero is found both on the marae and in other spaces, places the speaker under a state of tapu and that one must be learned in tribal histories of significance (Tibble, 2006, p.45-46). Whaikōrero performance than is most often performed on a Marae, or can be performed outside of the marae proper, engages in meaningful discussion with other orators, invokes a level of tapu and is ideally performed by those learned in iwi history and protocol. Generally, most kapa haka groups in competition will utilise what might be appropriately called whaikōrero. The performance by Porou Ariki however at least according to the description provided here does not constitute an act of whaikōrero even though both Taiaha Hawke and Porou Ariki described or interpreted the performance as an act of whaikōrero during their

interviews with the media. Rewi (2010) describes an example where a speech or 'address' as referred to by Rewi was performed by a woman at a designated area (that was not a marae) for the performance of formal rituals of encounters:

On the one occasion in the mid-1990's when I witnessed a woman of high-status speak, the event occurred at a recently built complex with a specific area designated for formal ritual encounters. It was regarded as a pseudo - rather than a true marae, and the iwi in question did not allow women to whaikōrero. After the tauutuutu speaking pattern had ended, the highly ranked woman opened her 'address' by saying 'ehara tenei i te whaikōrero', 'this isn't a whaikōrero'. Being respected in her own right throughout the country, I doubt that she said this to placate the male speakers or the iwi. I viewed it as a show of respect by this woman, this person of high standing, and perhaps it was said to allay and unease the men may have felt in the face of this potentially embarrassing situation (Rewi, 2010, p.67).

This provides an example of the mediation of tikanga where a respect for the practices of each side are acknowledged and protected. Further, one should never underestimate the value Māori place on ensuring matters concerning tikanga are played out appropriately and executed correctly. Api Mahuika when interviewed by Te Karere regarding the incident at the Tāmaki Makaurau regional competitions argued that young female Māori are able to participate in formal speech competitions such as Manu Kōrero, he argues that some of these participants are Ngāti Whatua descendants so why can they perform what he called 'whaikōrero' in this designated space and no where else and then criticize Ngāti Porou for expressing their own iwi norms? (Te Karere, 6 July 2010). This is not the case everywhere in Aotearoa. The children that attend Te Wharekura o Rūātoki (TWoR) operate from a distinctly Tūhoe world-view. Tūhoe

tikanga does not permit women to perform formal speeches, such as whaikōrero, and the young women from TWoR do not compete in the Manu Kōrero competitions. Aforementioned there are iwi that do allow women to perform whaikōrero, such as Ngāti Porou although Tibble himself Ngāti Porou notes that:

He ruarua ngā kuia whaikōrero i roto i a Ngāti Porou. Ko ngā mea i kite au ko Whaia [McClutchie], ko Kuikui Mōrete o Ngāti Uepōhatu, ko Te Huinga Keelan o Te Aitanga a Mate, ko Rēhia Henare o Te Aitanga a Hauiti, ka mutu. Ehara ko te tū a te wahine i roto o Ngāti Porou ki te whaikōrero i te mahi hōrapa ki te katoa o ngā wāhine. He momo anō. Engari he wāhanga nui kei a rātau kei ō mātau kuia ki te tiaki i ngā kōrero - me taku mōhio e pā ana tēnā āhuatanga ki ngā kuia katoa huri noa i Aotearoa. (Tibble, 2006, p.50-51)

Tibble suggests here that there is very few Ngāti Porou women who he witnessed in his time perform whaikōrero and that this was not something that necessarily is the right of all Ngāti Porou women. In this instance whakapapa will be key in determining the appropriate person required to carry the role. Tibble also highlights the significant role of Māori women as keepers of knowledge.

Another question that arises from this debate is whether it is a cultural norm for Ngāti Porou women to perform whaikōrero outside of its tribal boundaries. It is uncommon in contemporary Māori society to see women performing whaikōrero but – since the Manu Kōrero competition is held in different locations around New Zealand – the geographic location of the event should perhaps be of no consequence. If the issue of who holds mana whenua is relevant then perhaps it is not a question of whether Ngāti Porou women (based on their own cultural norms) are allowed to speak, but rather whether it would be respectful to perform whaikōrero within another tribal group's boundaries (and by consequence their cultural milieu). Alternatively, maybe we should simply ask

whether the performance of *whaikōrero* by women (as in the case of *Manu Kōrero* competitions) is a cultural norm within haka competitions. To add a further layer of complexity to the situation – should the Tāmaki Makaurau regional competition be regarded as an urban, metropolitan competition in which case an amalgamation of cultural norms should be accepted?

The Tāmaki Makaurau regional competition may have needed a much fairer respect for the cultural norms of both Ngāti Porou and Ngāti Whātua. The regional and national committees acknowledgment of the judges and groups rights to exercise their own cultural norms is by default also an admission that there is an inherent tension in cultural competitions and therefore requires attention. Recognising that regional committees have their own autonomy, could Te Matatini – in its monitoring of national kapa haka entry requirements – not also make allowances for special circumstances such as this, where both the judge and the group were correct in their interpretation and representation of their world view? Could the final marks awarded Porou Ariki have been mediated so that the 15 marks reportedly deducted from the groups' performance became inconsequential? One consideration that regional haka committees and Te Matatini would face is that a suggestion of this nature may herald an unwanted precedent for other teams to follow. In which case haka committees would need to consider treating each extenuating circumstance on a case-by-case basis.

It is seldom that events such as those that took place at the Tāmaki Makaurau regional haka competition are discussed so publicly. Although this is not the first example of inter-haka politics to be debated openly, it should be stated here that such incidents call for a level of sensitivity. The heart of the issue in the case of the Tāmaki Makaurau regional competition is the mediation of 'tradition' and 'competition' notions of performance. The opposing side to the argument presented by Porou Ariki is the right of the adjudicator to exercise his own view of tradition within the context of

competition. While some argue that Porou Ariki should have been allowed to act in accordance with their custom, it could be argued that so should Taiha Hawke have been entitled to act in accordance with his. Further complexities arise when consideration is made of the level of representation from Tāmaki Makaurau regions at a national level. In the case of urban centres like Auckland or Wellington how do iwi specific groups represent Tāmaki Makaurau? Another way to think about this is whether the geographical location of the competition should have any bearing on who participates in the competition or whether mana whenua should have representation in such competitions?

It is no easy feat to organise a kapa haka competition that attracts thousands of participants and spectators, particularly at a national level. The amount of attention awarded by the kapa haka enthusiast to such activities gives way to additional pressures to ensure the success of the event at all levels. This might include the key people involved in organizing the competition, where the competitions are held, the timing of activities, the selection of judges and the disciplines that they will judge, the judging criteria.

Judging is always an important aspect of competition; but it is also an area of complex difficulty. The judges of current kapa haka competitions are asked to provide a curriculum vitae, proof of judging experience, and knowledge and expertise in Māori language, culture and performance. With fewer native speakers among us, and the gradual decline in the number of competent speakers of the Māori language coupled with the lack of performance and musical expertise, the provision of quality judges –is no easy task.

Criticism of judges involved in traditional performance competitions is found in the following analogy by Carolyne Longclaws as told to Scales (2007): ‘a common complaint at powwow competitions: [is] favoritism and judging based on reputation and/or the family connections of dancers and singers’ (Scales, 2007, p.12). Scales notes that:

There is, of course, no way to substantiate these claims. But the insinuation that song and dance competitions can be, and often are, unfair is a source of a good deal of intertribal tension...When singing groups participate only in competitions at the expense of traditional powwows, their behavior is regarded as problematic (Scales, 2007, p.12).

In the 2007 Te Matatini competition, Māori Television coordinated an inaugural People's Choice voting competition whereby both viewers at home or in attendance at the Te Matatini competition could text the name of the group they thought the best competitors at Te Matatini. This resulted in the selection of Ruatāhuna Kākahu Mauku in first place, followed by Te Waka Huia, Te Whānau-a-Apanui, Whāngārā Mai Tawhiti, Taura Mai Tawhiti and Opōtiki Mai Tawhiti. In contrast the judges of 2007 selected (in order from first): Whāngārā Mai Tawhiti, Te Waka Huia, Opōtiki Mai Tawhiti, Ruatāhuna Kākahu Mauku, Te Whānau-a-Apanui and in sixth place, Taura Mai Tawhiti. I note this here to demonstrate the difference between the judges' choice and the people's choice as to who was the best team in the competition. The official judges for this competition worked to set criteria compared to the audience whose selections were personal opinion and preference. There are obviously different facets of practicing impartiality when judging, some of which are carried out through a process of 'performance praxis', described by Ngaroimata Fraser (2009) as, 'the bridge between 'decision analysis' as rationale and 'decision making' as organization', (Fraser, 2009, p.54).

Clear instructions with tutors of competing teams and the judges is foremost and in addition to this a head judge be appointed to make an executive decision in cases such as this. Alternatively, the Olympic scoring system is not foreign to the world of kapa haka; it is a system that was and is still used by some regions. Media coverage of the Auckland regional

competition showed that the difference in marks between the three judges for whakawātea was great. Porou Ariki may have still gained a top 6 placing in the Tāmaki Makaurau regional competitions and met entry requirements for Te Matatini 2011 had the Olympic scoring system been used for the sake of mediating the vast difference in points allocated by each respective judge. This will have meant that the top and bottom marks are removed and the middle mark used as the final overall score. Finding an alternative, which might have prevented the issue from escalating into a public debate, will have ensured protection of the integrity of the people involved judges and teams alike. Ironically, Te Taha Tu from the Tāmaki Makaurau regionals had to withdraw after breaking Te Matatini national rules which meant that Porou Ariki could perform at the National haka competitions held in Waiohika, 2011 (Te Karere, 16 July 2011).

Kapa haka like the culture it derives from has and continues to evolve. Arguably development is both inevitable and integral to the continuation and survival of a culture. With this in mind, how can the amalgamation of tradition and competition notions of performance be ‘remodeled’ and reconciled to ‘an ordered and coherent whole’? With a growing trend among haka performer enthusiasts to return to their tribal roots how is the space between competition and tradition negotiated and how far are Māori willing to stretch the boundaries of the fundamental principles of tribal tikanga for a place in the Te Matatini competition? Furthermore, how well does a distinctly iwi style of performance withstand standardisation, that is to say that the performance remains more Tūhoe than Māori in either tribal or pan tribal haka competitions. Should cultural, musical and performance diversity be embraced or like the boundaries that mark out the areas occupied by iwi be discussed, debated and by general consensus clearly marked and mapped on their own terms? In the case of Tūhoe, is being Tūhoe and performing Tūhoe the same? How can this identity be represented through dance?

These are issues relative to many indigenous groups around the group in particular Native American Indians at Powwow competitions and the Hawaiian people with Hula competition most notably the Merrie Monarch festival as such the mediation of tradition in competition and the search for tribal distinctiveness is a global issue.

While participating in a panel discussion at Te Papa Tongarewa this year with Angela Karini, Piri Sciascia and Teina Moetara on the future direction of haka one of the comments that we all agreed upon was the fact that haka at best is an organic expression reflective in part of the environment or context in which it is practiced. It is also for this reason transformative with its fundamental underpinning's derivative of those aspects of Māori, tribal or community culture that is most valued. Regardless of all the woes that come with haka competitions these are almost always outweighed by the positive contribution such initiatives provides for the affirmation of Māori cultural identity. Haka, tikanga and culture in competition - perhaps worn in part, remodeled and a little overworked at times to satisfy the haka enthusiast's of the next generation one thing is for sure, it is a lived experience, and it is very much alive.

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