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Wāhine Kaihautū, Wāhine Whai Mana  
Navigating the tides of change:  
Whakatōhea women and tribal socio-politics

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Philosophy in Māori Studies at  
Massey University

Dorothy Maora Hayes

2003

## Abstract

This thesis explored the socio-political experiences and views of seven Māori women from the tribe of Whakatōhea. The project adopted a Māori-centred theoretical and research approach that included the researcher as a member of the researched group. It aimed to draw out the common themes, from the women's recollections of their experiences and views of the socio-political decision-making affairs within whānau, hapū, and iwi. The women identified barriers to participation and strategies to overcome these barriers. Qualifications reflected traditional Māori values and practices. Rights according to whakapapa, and the principle "he kanohi kitea", being seen, were the obvious criterion. Poor information channels, minimal consultation, gender bias, age and time constraints were some of the issues identified as barriers to participation. It was found that whānau governance committees more closely reflected traditional values and customs that saw women and men as sharing power, more so than hapū and iwi organisations. The gender imbalance was viewed, by the women participants, as problematic. They concluded that better gender balance at all levels of the socio-political affairs of Whakatōhea would ensure greater informed decision-making for the social, educational, economic, and spiritual well-being of the tribe today and for future generations.

## He Mihi

Titiro atu aku kamo  
Ki ngā tirohanga onamata  
A kui ma, a koro ma  
Kia whakarere iho nga hua pai  
Hei oranga ma ngā whakatipuranga o te iwi nei.

Ki o koutou kua wheturangihia, tena koutou.  
Ki toku whaea keke, ko Aunty Fanny,  
Ko koe te tino whetū o ngā whetū,  
Haere ki tua o te arai  
Haere, haere,  
Moe mai ra.

E ngā reo, e ngā mana, e ngā karangatanga maha,  
tena koutou.

Ko Makeo te Maunga  
Ko Waiaua te Awa  
Ko Muriwai te Whare  
Ko Ngai Tama te hapū  
Ko Whakatōhea te iwi  
Tena koutou katoa

Reflecting back over the time that I have been working on this thesis, I am aware of the emotional tides that it has taken me on. The women's stories were full of heart and emotion. There were tears of joy, sadness, anger, and frustration - a myriad of emotions. Today my heart is heavy and aching for the loss of someone special in my life, and special to this study. I have heard her voice through her beautiful transcript almost everyday for the past three years. I looked forward to presenting the final copy to her. That is not a privilege that I will enjoy now. This can be her legacy for those she has left behind. Her children and grandchildren can enjoy and grow from the wisdom that she shared.

He tohu aroha ki a koutou.

To the women, who shared so willingly their stories, and who have been so patient with me, tena koutou. To my mum, Ihipera, who without her guidance and help, this project would not have begun, tena koe. To Huia, who provides me with a wonderful example of academic excellence, tena koe. To my friends including, Wendy, Trish, and Cathy, tena koutou. To my colleagues Natalene, Ngawari, Zirsha and Noreen tena koutou. To the staff at Maori studies and Student Learning Centre, tena koutou.

Finally to my whānau. To Robert my husband who has endured the emotional rollercoaster - nga piki me nga heke – became a master chef, taxi driver, netball and tennis coach, financial planner, and so much more - love you heaps. To my children Ngāruī and Michael - Mum can now come camping, tramping, help you with homework, and become a Mother before you leave the nest. To my brothers and sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles who have been so encouraging, and supportive - he nui te aroha ki a koutou katoa.

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