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*Tradition, Invention, and Innovation: Multiple
Reflections of an Urban Marae*

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the requirements for the degree of

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in
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ABSTRACT

Marae have a place in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand that is vital to Māori culture, as well as for all peoples of this land. Māori cultural precepts intrinsically abound with notions of the importance of marae for the transmission of that culture. Marae are places of refuge and learning where the active expression of Māori culture is most obvious. Tendrils of tradition incorporated with contemporary nuances reach out to enfold those whom these places and spaces nurture and embrace. While these ideals may not always find articulation in reality, their presence at the least provides a foundation centuries old on which to build pathways in the present and into the future.

Awataha Marae is an urban marae based on Auckland's North Shore. The history of Awataha is situated within the latest of three Renaissance Periods in which there was an upsurge in Māori culture. These Renaissance Periods were about resistance to the impositions of another culture, reclamation of part of what had been lost through colonisation, and rejuvenation of people and culture. Renaissance Period Three, in which Awataha arose, also has connections to the efforts of indigenous peoples worldwide in their endeavours to forge self determining processes for themselves, including those of conducting research that was for their benefit and purposes, rather than for those of others.

Following the development of marae from pre-contact to the present day also illuminates the context within which Awataha was formed. From its beginnings as the space in front of the chief's house where the village members gathered and where relationships were negotiated, marae today are complexes of buildings that reflect the necessities of the society that surrounds them, as well as the desire of the people to retain Māori culture in its most fundamental form. Urban marae have arisen to fulfil those desires for Māori in urban contexts, often separated from their rural homelands and for many, from their cultural heritage. Following changes in the ways in which whareniui were decorated and embellished also provides evidence of the ways in which Māori consciously innovated culture in order to endure in the new world.

PREFACE

The great Rope of Man, Te Taura Tangata, stretches from the beginning of the universe to the universe's end. The rope comes roaring from out of Te Kore, the Void, through Te Po, the Night, and the first time we see it is when light flashes on it at the First Dawning. As it comes, the gods of the Māori weave their kaleidoscopic power into it. When they create man and woman, the rope sparkles and gleams with breathless excitement.

Ever-changing, the rope is a magnificent icon spiralling from one aeon to the next, charting the history of humankind. At the beginning of its life, it was strong, tightly bound by Māori strands. Some Māori believe that with the coming of the Pākehā it became frayed, and almost snapped during the Land Wars. Perhaps there were only a few strands holding it together. But the songs of the people can still be sung through one or two strands as they are through many.

When we see the rope again, after the wars, it is a different rope. It is different because the Pākehā became added to it, the strands of Pākehā culture entwining with ours, adding different textures and colours. It's also fiercely twisted and soldered together by many different histories, as Māori and Pākehā began not only to live together but to fall in love, marry and have children with each other. Some people think that diminished our strength. Others think it strengthened us.

The rope continues its journey, spinning, singing, weaving, sparkling, chanting its way through time. It charts the changing nature of the human odyssey. All our successes and failures as a people are woven into it, all our lapses from divinity and our triumphs over inhumanity.

The energy of the rope is awesome and awe-inspiring. As it continues into the future, parts of it split off through space, crackling and thundering, heading for other suns, ever, ever spinning, ever, ever singing, ever, ever glowing, onward and onward, ever, ever, forever.¹

It seems appropriate to begin with this beautiful passage by esteemed Māori writer, Witi Ihimaera. For many years Ihimaera has written of the conflicts and challenges of Māori society in its space as part of Aotearoa New Zealand society, as well as the strengths and beauty of our culture that sustains and nurtures our people through 'the changing nature of the human odyssey'. He has inspired and uplifted me, drawing me ever onwards to seek deeper and reach higher, as he has done for many others I'm sure.

¹ Ihimaera, 2005, pp.30-31.

And he is but one of many Māori who through uncountable generations remind us that we are descended from gods, part of the universe, a vital strand of the collective rope of man. He and others remind us of our responsibility to the world, and the strength of our contribution from the depths of our cultural heritage to furnish grace to the present, and bestow hope to the future. Many of our people do not know of these heroes; these ordinary men and women who through the faith of their acts, the vitality of their words, and the immensity of their hearts, inspire and show us that it is possible to create a heroes journey of our own.

I want to celebrate those heroes in this dissertation, to name and claim some of them so that perhaps a few of those who read this will know to a greater extent the treasures our ancestral and current heroes' gift to us. They are many, they are multiple, they are myriad. They flow aeon by aeon, generation by generation, person by person, along the unfolding everlasting energy of *Te Taura Tangata*. They surround us in the current times, lending their spiritual and intellectual potency, forming part of the genealogical and historical matrix that pushes us ever onwards.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to those whānau and friends who travelled the journey through Te Rerenga Wairua to the World of Spirit, while I travelled mine through the PhD.

To supervisor, friend and mentor – Raewyn Good – you gave so generously of your time and aroha to many people from many different walks of life. Although you were taken from us far too soon, your legacy will live on in those of us who were fortunate enough to know you and learn from you.

Most significantly, this dissertation is dedicated to baby Moana-nui-a-Kiwa Harmony Holyoake Taiapa, whose passing reaffirmed the preciousness of life and love, and showed us how to build bridges over gulfs of misunderstanding in order to bring cultures, families, and people closer together. Shine brightly little star, so we may all shine brighter under your light.

<i>Rimu rimu tere tere</i>	<i>Seaweed drifting, drifting</i>
<i>E tere ra i te moana</i>	<i>floating out to sea</i>
<i>E abu ana ki te ripo</i>	<i>Flowing with the currents</i>
<i>I raro ra e.</i>	<i>the whirlpool below.</i>
<i>Ka kati, ka puare</i>	<i>It opens and closes</i>
<i>Mo wairua e -</i>	<i>for the spirit –</i>
<i>Te huringa i Murimotu</i>	<i>flowing around Murimotu</i>
<i>Te huringa i Te Reinga</i>	<i>around Reinga</i>
<i>Te moana i kauria</i>	<i>the seas swum</i>
<i>Te wairua e -</i>	<i>by the spirit –</i>
<i>Ohau i waho ra</i>	<i>Behold Ohau out yonder</i>
<i>Te puke whakamutunga</i>	<i>the last summit</i>
<i>Haere whakangaro atu te wairua e.</i>	<i>Farewell o spirit.²</i>

² A waiata of the pathway of spirits – te ara wairua – that includes Ohau and the waters of Murimotu near Te Reinga, where spirits of the dead leave the land of Aotearoa. In Kawharu, 2008, p.122.

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Ko Ngaatokimatawhaorua te waka; Ko Kapowai te maunga; Ko Waikare te awa; Ko Ngāpuhi te iwi; Ko Te Kapotai te hapū; Ko Whiti te tupunanui; Ko Waikare te tūrangawaewae; Ko Te Turuki te marae.

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