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**NGĀTI POROU LEADERSHIP - RĀPATA
WAHAWAHA AND THE POLITICS OF
CONFLICT**

“Kei te ora nei hoki tātou, me tō tātou whenua.”

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Abstract

The primary focus of this thesis is to explore the reasons for Ngāti Porou participation in the wars in New Zealand during the 1860s. Early writers surmised that the alliances between tribes like Ngāti Porou, Te Arawa and the lower Whanganui iwi and the settler government were due primarily to a sense of loyalty to the crown. Repetition by later historians has reinforced this notion in New Zealand folklore and historiography. While recent retrospective histories reveal a growing awareness that the motivation behind the alliances was more complex, no analysis of tribal motives worthy of the confidence of Māori has yet been recorded. This thesis initially sets out to determine whether the historical orthodoxy is founded at least for Ngāti Porou. It presents evidence showing that significant aspects of the Ngāti Porou story have been misunderstood and misrepresented by writers who have been unable to source or who have felt it unnecessary to properly canvass Ngāti Porou views and records. To date, tribal historians have on the whole refrained from presenting a tribal perspective, not because the information does not exist, but from a desire to keep such knowledge in the tribal arena where it is most relevant. Continued irritation, however, caused by historical publications that fall short when trying to comprehend the nature of Māori participation, has resulted in a freeing up of information by those who jealously guard their family's manuscripts, and others who retain the oral testimonies within the tribe, so that a re examination is made possible.

This thesis also generally seeks to link Ngāti Porou's involvement in war with leadership patterns that emerged within the tribe during the period 1865 - 1872, though this dimension of Ngāti Porou history is not canvassed exhaustively here. In times of crisis existing leadership patterns were challenged and as often as not new leaders emerged to lead the tribe. Perhaps the finest military leader produced by Ngāti Porou during the Hauhau encounters was Major Rāpata Wahawaha. His role in shaping Ngāti Porou's modern identity is a major theme running throughout this thesis. It is argued that his leadership and philosophy characterised the contribution by Ngāti Porou to theatres of war that followed the 1860s. It is proposed that such a contribution was both strategic and calculated to achieve gains for Ngāti Porou. Moreover, the wider question is raised: why, since the 1860s, has Ngāti Porou been so ready to join the battlefield and to stand alongside the Crown? The thesis contends that far from being motivated solely by loyalty to the Crown, Ngāti Porou entered into an alliance with the Crown in order to protect and to advance tribal interests.