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MĀTAHI O TE TAU MARAE:
EXPECTATION VS REALITY

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MĀTAHI O TE TAU MARAE: EXPECTATION VS REALITY

Karyn Paringatai and Heni Paringatai

Ko Maunga Kākā te maunga.
Ko Waipapa-iti te awa.
Ko Mātahi o te Tau te marae.
Ko Te Whānau-a-Hunaara te hapū.
Ko Ngāti Porou te iwi.

It is commonplace within te ao Māori to introduce oneself through the use of pepeha, identifying significant geographical landmarks and kinship groups that tells the reader which part of the country we tribally affiliate to and from whom we descend. Giving our names is the last part of this formulaic introduction and, to many, is a rather insignificant detail that they will quickly forget.

Ko Heni Walker Paringatai, ko Karyn Paringatai ō māua ingoa.

We are first cousins. We open this reflection in a way that positions us firmly within a body of knowledge that, from birth, was deprived to one of us (Karyn) and forms the heartbeat of the other (Heni). The public recitation of our pepeha indicates that despite the difference in our level of interaction with those things listed above, they are still of value to both of us.

In this reflection, we offer an insight in to our interactions with our marae. A place that provides comfort for one (Heni) and was (sometimes still is) a source of extreme discomfort for the other (Karyn). We are of the same generation but our expectations and our realities engaging with our marae could not be more different; as we are sure is the case for many other whānau around the country.

Karyn's Expectation

My father moved from Horoera to Invercargill in 1968 for employment at the freezing works. Dad took us back to Horoera twice before his parents both passed away in the early 1980s. Their deaths signalled an end to our return visits. I was 3 years old.

Throughout my childhood I was easily identifiable as Māori because of my name and my physical features – there was no escaping it. But I didn't 'feel' Māori. I wanted so badly to be Māori but I didn't know how. So I embarked on a journey of unravelling the mystery of being Māori. The one constant in all that I was reading, watching and hearing was the centrality of the 'marae' in one's identity as a person of Māori descent. Here is what I learnt:

- Marae are a collection of buildings centred around a carved whare nui adorned with whakairo, kōwhaiwhai and tukutuku panels, each carefully chosen to represent the whakapapa of the hapū and whānau who belong to that marae.
- The walls of the whare nui are lined with images of those who have passed, the activities held there pay continual homage to them, and we are reminded that the past most certainly has a continuing influence on the present and future.
- All important cultural ceremonies take place on the marae and the balance between tapu and noa is carefully maintained as people are spiritually guided from one state to another.
- Marae are spaces of intergenerational living and learning. Kaumātua are in abundance to help teach and guide the younger generations.
- Whānau gather there regularly to catch up and maintain their familial connections. The grounds are meticulously kept, the kitchen well stocked and the whare nui is always ready awaiting the next onslaught of marae users.
- The marae is the last bastion of te reo Māori.
- Every Māori person belongs to a marae. You may not know te reo, you may not know tikanga, but if you have whakapapa Māori, you have a marae.
- Everyone should go back to their marae. And they should go back often.

I learnt te reo all through high school. I completed my undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Māori Studies. I embarked on a career as a Māori Studies academic, having never been to my own marae. But I was ready. I had stayed at other marae around the country. They fulfilled, in varying degrees, the attributes of a marae listed above and they taught me a lot. I was absolutely convinced that my marae would do the same. I was ready.

Heni's Reality

Matahi o te Tau Marae (Mātahi) is located 30 metres from my home. Mātahi plays a vital role for the identity of the Te Whānau-a-Hunaara people (or it used to). We are a small hapū, with only 10-15 whānau who openly claim Hunaara as their primary hapū, and regularly return back to Horoera. I haven't seen them all come through the gates of Mātahi though.

Only people from Horoera live in Horoera year-round. It's hard. Our rivers eat the land, bridges get damaged in heavy rain, and roads slip into the sea making access to Horoera impossible at different times of the year. Our community is resilient. We know how to stock up and prepare for natural disasters, and to keep ourselves safe. But we couldn't be protected from economic change. Something that caused my whānau to leave Horoera.

My mum has five older siblings. All of them left Horoera years before I was born. My mum, sister and I are the only ones from our Paringatai whānau still living in Horoera. We are ahi kā, a continuous burning flame occupying our whenua. We are the people behind the scenes keeping our taonga protected and kōrero alive.

I can't remember the first time I stepped foot on to Mātahi because I was fortunate to have been born and raised there. We were always at Mātahi. In fact, I was there so often people thought I actually lived there. We spent all our time there attending tangihanga, wānanga and hui, and the days in between these kaupapa cleaning for the next one. It was a never-ending cycle. I've swept the floors, dusted the cobwebs, cleaned the toilets (yuck), aired out the mattresses, painted the buildings, mowed the lawns, washed the windows, and cleaned up after the rats (even more yuck). We show up when no one else does.

I grew up with our pakeke at Mātahi. They indirectly taught me tikanga, kawa and the protocols of our people, just by me listening and being in the same room as them. This was a blessing that no one else in my wider whānau had the good fortune to experience. I've also mourned the deaths of many of them.

A lot of my time was spent walking back and forth between Mātahi and home (avoiding the cow shit) to get yeast, baking soda, gladwrap, rubbish bags – a never ending list of things people overlook when shopping for their wānanga. When we were little someone even mowed a track through the long grass for us from home to Mātahi. Our marae kitchen pantry is not stocked with anything. Mātahi isn't used that much anymore and food left in the pantry will expire before it can be used. Or be eaten by the rats.

Apparently, we are also electricians and plumbers. People using the marae always come to us for help with the water pumps, gas califonts for heating water, electrical wiring, and appliance breakdowns. We are neither of those things. Sometimes I think it's more trouble than it's worth.

Ironically, I've never actually slept at Mātahi.

Karyn's Reality

In 2003 my dad volunteered to drive a van from Christchurch to Te Araroa (the nearest township to Horoera) to deliver some carvings to the marae there. The carvings were of Hunaara, an ancestor of Horoera who was renowned for feeding manuhiri with an abundance of food, and were to be placed in the whare kai. Whilst I didn't fancy the long-distance drive in the middle of summer, I quickly offered to keep him company. This was my first chance to go to my marae. Hinerupe Marae.

Hinerupe fit all the criteria. I had already mentally created a relationship with her. I had made my connection to Hinerupe through piecing together whakapapa descent lines in books. I had learnt some of the stories of Hinerupe through online sources, the tipuna after whom the marae is named; her ancestral prowess and her exploits that enhanced her standing in the community. She embodied the concept of mana wahine and I was convinced that, as one of her mokopuna, I would also inherit those qualities.

Hinerupe Marae fulfilled all my expectations. And meeting her was magical. But it was a fleeting visit. Just long enough to deposit the carvings in their new home.

During this trip I met my dad's sister (Heni's mum) and her children for the first time. This was before Heni was born. We stayed at their house in Horoera. As we drove up to their driveway I looked to the right and across the paddock stood Mātahi o te Tau Marae. The revelation that Mātahi was actually the marae that instead filled the heart of my whānau came as a complete shock.

I stood aloof from Mātahi the entire visit. I knew nothing about this marae. I wasn't prepared for this thing to be on our doorstep. We left a few days later.

I didn't step foot on Mātahi for another four years. It lasted for all of 30 minutes as we took Heni's dad on during his tangihanga before his burial. I didn't make it past the veranda. I didn't make it inside the whare nui. I still didn't know how to deal with this stranger. In the years that had passed since I was last there, my knowledge of Mātahi had not increased.

Everyone says go home to your marae. Everything will make sense when you do. Nothing about going back to Mātahi made sense to me. But I had to figure out how to do that because my dad passed away two weeks after Heni's dad.

Death has always pulled me back to Horoera. Death has always pulled me back to Mātahi. Tangihanga. Kawe mate. Hura kōhatu. My connection has always been through activities of mourning.

I have to change that. My son's name is Mātahi.

Heni's Expectation

Mātahi should always be in use and it should never be empty: ā-tinana or ā-wairua. It should be a place to reset, where you see the people that matter the most to you. My whānau should always feel welcome and safe to come back to Mātahi. My whānau need to figure out how to be from there to go back there.

People preach about going back to your marae, back to your pakeke to learn your reo and your tikanga. Mātahi should be the best place for intergenerational learning in a safe environment. The reality is our pakeke aren't at Mātahi anymore. No one is. My whānau need to come home to be the pakeke.

Mātahi shouldn't be used as a museum to leave photos of tīpuna just sitting there not being seen or spoken to by their own whānau. The few photos that are there date back to the 1940s. I feel mamae looking after them. My dad and Karyn's dad should not be the responsibility of others to clean. My whānau need to come home and talk to our tīpuna.

Belonging to Mātahi is devoting yourself, your time and your energy to uphold the mana of our tīpuna and our hapū through the act of service to others. Whatever that looks like and wherever we are. It's a commitment to our Hunaaratanga.

My whānau have a lot to learn. [I'm trying].



Figure 1. First cousins at Mātahi o te Tau Marae, January 2024.

L-R: Manu Paringatai, Steven Anslow, Heni Paringatai, Karyn Paringatai, Maumahara Paringatai, Kandy-Lee Malcolm, Debbie Paringatai, Wiremu Paringatai-Walker.

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Heni Paringatai is a raukura of the kaupapa Māori schooling system and is an emerging scholar of Māori Studies. She has been raised within the knowledge systems of Te Whānau-a-Hunaara and is a member of the Ngā Tapuwae - Cultural Mapping Project, revitalising mātauranga Māori in ancestral landscapes.

Kuputaka / Glossary

te ao Māori	the Māori world
pepeha	formulaic expression of identity
whānau	extended family
te reo (Māori)	Māori language
tikanga	right way of doing things, customs, protocols, customary practices
whakapapa	genealogy; genealogically encoded knowledge, practice and belief
whakairo	carving that are placed on the walls of the whare nui
whareniui	large ceremonial house
kōwhaiwhai	painted scroll patterns commonly on the rafters of the whare nui
tukutuku	ornamental lattice work commonly placed on the walls of the whare nui
hapū	sub-tribal group
tapu	being sacred, holy and set apart from normal human interactions; spiritual beliefs pertaining to restriction or prohibition
noa	neutral state, that which is mundane, every day and has a lesser degree of restriction
Kaumātua	elders
ahi kā	burning the customary fires of occupation
taonga	precious items
kōrero	stories
wānanga	learning
tangihanga	funeral rites and rituals for the dead
hui	meeting
kaupapa	event
pakeke	adult
kawa	a system of appropriate rules, rituals, practices and behaviour that should ideally occur and apply on the marae
whare kai	dining hall
mana wahine	acknowledgment of the mana inherent in a woman
mokopuna	grandchild, descendant
kawe mate	mourning ceremony that carries the spirit of the deceased on to a marae that is different to where that person is buried
hura kōhatu	headstone unveiling
ā-tinana	in person
ā-wairua	in spirit
tīpuna	ancestors
mamae	pain
mana	spiritual authority, influence, prestige
Hunaaratanga	one's identity as a descendant of Hunaara, the ancestor after whom our hapū is named