

INFINITELY WELCOME

Education pōwhiri and ethnic performativity

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Abstract

When as Māori we organise or participate in Māori culture within non-Māori settings, we must always act with a generous spirit: to remember that this is a gift we offer to ourselves (that is, to other Māori) as well as to non-Māori. In performing our culture, we draw attention to the history of oppression of Māori people, language and culture, and re-assert the right of “Māori” to exist. But difficult aspects must be negotiated by those who take responsibility for such events. The purpose of this paper is to explore the divergent possible meanings and implications of holding pōwhiri as part of education events, using a research approach that integrates narrative research and autoethnography with Kaupapa Māori scholarship in educational research. The narrative voice in the form of stories, both from literature and original, helps link personal and philosophical levels of reflection and analysis (Smeyers & Verhesschen, 2001).

Keywords

cultural hybridity, ethnographic fiction, indigeneity, Kaupapa Māori, performativity, pōwhiri

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Introduction

Through displays of symbolic difference such as pōwhiri, Māori exercise the right to assert cultural difference from the dominant Pākehā or mainstream culture in Aotearoa New Zealand. At the same time, such practices are clearly an appropriation of Māori traditions: they are, by definition, hybridised cultural forms (Bhabha, 2009). Guided by the principles of Kaupapa Māori research (G. H. Smith, 2003), this article draws on narrative/native texts and sensibilities (King, 2003) to blur the boundaries between literature and social science in an autoethnographic investigation (Ellis, 2004) into the complex issues underlying the increasingly popular practice in the contemporary academy of holding a pōwhiri at the start of an event or programme.

In this work, stories are useful for their immediacy and complexity in adequately representing indigenous worldviews (Keown, 2013) and educational scenarios. Stories “are wondrous things. And they are dangerous” (King, 2003, p. 9). The wondrous nature of stories is self-evident, but to call stories “dangerous” warrants explanation. The “danger” of stories is their radical teaching power: their ability to disrupt dominant discourses, to capture the nuances of complex educational scenarios. This ability is dangerous because it is critical, creative and transgressive of traditional Eurocentric hierarchies of economic and social power.

Māori ambivalence about performing our cultural traditions to serve Pākehā purposes is the theme of a famous short story by Patricia Grace, titled “Parade” (Grace, 1986). In this story, the central character, Matewai, has gone away to university, but returns to her childhood home town to take part in her whānau kapa haka during carnival week. There, she is stricken by a new sense of being put on display for the Pākehā audience, suddenly feeling that she and her whānau are like animals in a zoo, clowns in a circus, or artefacts in a museum; realisations catalysed by her time spent in the

outside world, which has caused her to lose her former innocence and unselfconsciousness (Tawake, 2000). Her elders understand and accept her spiritual malaise, without need of explanation. The kuia endorses her new critical vision, saying, “No one can take your eyes from you”, and the kaumātua adds, “It is your job, this. To show others who we are.” These simple statements point to the depth of everyday encounters with the incommensurability of the Māori–Pākehā gap, or ethnic binary, which is invoked to greater or lesser degree, each time te reo Māori me ōna tikanga are included in mainstream public institutions and events (Ahmed, 2000).

What does it mean to include Māori traditions and practices in events held in education and other contemporary non-Māori settings in Aotearoa New Zealand, such as conferences, graduations and other formal occasions organised by a school, university or learned society? In this country it has become almost mandatory to start an education conference with a pōwhiri—a formal welcome conducted along the lines of traditional Māori rituals of encounter. To begin a conference with a pōwhiri is considered to display respect for Māori culture, and to affirm the place of Māori people in society. Attendees from overseas enjoy the experience of “authentic” indigenous culture, and local attendees (non-Māori and Māori alike) have an opportunity to polish and display their own cultural competence. Opening a conference with a pōwhiri is seen as fulfilling contemporary policies of equity and diversity—a process also known as “tick[ing] the Treaty box” (Mazer & Papesch, 2010, p. 277); therefore the pōwhiri in such situations has a value for the organisers, so is in this sense a “good”.

But for Māori involved in such events, the situation is often not so clear-cut. Such occasions often involve what is colloquially known as “dial-a-kaumātua”: a symbolic performance by Māori elders, who typically have little to do with the event or participants, in front of a group of non-Māori who frequently have little

or no comprehension of what is being said and done. But what is actually being “included” by these versions of traditional Māori customs, and whose interests are being served?

Joan Metge (2010) addresses this question in a book section titled “Pōwhiri, Tikanga and Kaupapa”, noting these words, though common in Māori life, “barely figured in New Zealand English until the 1980s” (p. 75). The “dramatic quality” of the pōwhiri attracts an audience including the media, with the result that non-Māori have become familiar with the word, but often hold very little understanding of its real meaning. Explaining the traditional form and purpose of the pōwhiri as introductory to the “hui proper” (p. 77), Metge observes:

as non-Māori take an increasing interest in Māori culture, the spotlight has been focused on the pōwhiri to such an extent that at times it is detached from the hui context and its preparatory role forgotten. (p. 77)

It has become standard practice for “organisers of events and conferences to invite the district’s tangata whenua to open proceedings with a pōwhiri” including for book festivals, motorsport events and visits by overseas heads of state. But “the tangata whenua who conduct pōwhiri in such situations usually have no involvement in what follows and leave the scene once the pōwhiri is over” (pp. 77–78): the definition of “dial-a-pōwhiri”. The “dial-a-” joke points to the fact that in such cases the pōwhiri has lost its traditional meaning, becoming merely a “symbolic acknowledgement” (p. 78) of local tangata whenua. This process goes even further in contexts such as education conferences, in which the roles such as tangata whenua become increasingly removed from their traditional Māori meanings.

Mō tēnei mahi rangahau—Research context and methodology

The catalyst for this article arose when the three Māori authors took combined responsibility for organising a pōwhiri to open a recent conference, at the request of the convenors—our Pākehā friends and colleagues. We agreed despite some ambivalence, while aiming to, firstly, ensure the pōwhiri happened in a way that respected tikanga Māori; secondly, make information about pōwhiri available on the conference website in advance, giving delegates an opportunity to be more informed participants; and thirdly, extend Māori practices beyond the pōwhiri in the conference programme. This last aspect was addressed by using waiata daily during the conference, and working with the organisers so that the pōwhiri and karakia whakamutunga were integral in the official opening and closing of the conference. We also agreed to explore the complexities of this form of work by Māori academics through co-writing this research article.

This article includes five short original narratives about education pōwhiri (Stories 1–5 below) produced by fictionalising the combined experience of the authors over many years working in Māori education. This approach aligns with recent autoethnographic and narrative research methods, including ethnographic fiction (Bruce, 2014), which includes engaging vignettes written from researcher knowledge and experience that aim for verisimilitude, or a “true to life” quality. Interweaving a number of original vignettes with analysis of published stories, research literature and Māori texts builds up the investigation represented by this article in the form of a “layered text” (following Rath, 2012).

Narrative research is sometimes described as using narrative forms to either collect or analyse data (B. Smith & Sparkes, 2008). The richness of narrative blurs the boundary between data collection and analysis in a way that reflects the complex relationships between knowledge,

language, culture and education, which are highlighted by education pōwhiri. The pōwhiri vignettes or stories below aim to unsettle facile assumptions, and stimulate deeper thought about the use of pōwhiri in contemporary settings.

Gaps in understanding invoked by education pōwhiri are textually represented in the stories and titles by using pieces of untranslated Māori language text. These reo Māori texts add “layers” to the “layered text” of the article (Rath, 2012). The point of this article is not to “explain” pōwhiri as cultural, historical or tourist phenomena: there are many good sources of information available for that purpose (see, for example, Battye & Waitai, 2011; Matenga-Kohu & Roberts, 2006; Mikaere, 2013). Rather, this article begins to theorise, using Kaupapa Māori theory, the material conditions of education pōwhiri, as part of contemporary life for education academics in Aotearoa New Zealand, both Māori and non-Māori. An example of using Kaupapa Māori theory in this article is the normalisation of Māori perspectives, words and concepts: methodological decisions that align with the principles of critical Māori bi-literacy (May, 2012) and Kaupapa Māori research methodology (L. T. Smith, 2012).

For Māori to be expected to organise or participate in tikanga Māori within non-Māori settings can be a burdensome extra duty that does not necessarily count in terms of career advancement, so it is important to understand the deeper significance of this work. In thus including aspects of our culture in the contemporary milieu, we draw attention to the history of oppression of our people, language and culture, and re-assert the right of “Māori” to exist. To begin an event with a Māori greeting, prayer or song reassures Māori participants that Māori language and culture is welcome. To extend the cultural formality of a welcome event by including karanga, wero or haka pōwhiri inevitably heightens the sense of occasion. The reactions of overseas delegates at such events often suggest that, for them, such experiences

are “priceless”. Difficult aspects must be negotiated, however, by those who take responsibility for such occasions.

Two of the three authors have backgrounds as schoolteachers of Māori. Organising pōwhiri on formal occasions is part of the territory in such a position, since such practices are widespread in the local school sector as an accepted way to help Māori students and their whānau feel a sense of belonging, in addition to providing a valuable learning experience for the whole school community. As teachers of Māori, we take responsibility for making it happen. The tertiary sector has likewise embraced pōwhiri, especially in courses such as initial teacher education, and prodded by expectations on institutions to improve Māori student participation and achievement. The first vignette (Story 1) explores the ethical dilemma for Māori university staff created by the Pākehā “demand” for pōwhiri.

Story 1: Mā wai rā e taurima?

The phone rings. “Kia ora Wiremu, how are you? I know you’re busy, but are you available to do a pōwhiri next week to some important visitors from overseas?” What a contradiction! The caller starts with “I know you’re busy”, yet goes right ahead and asks, thereby making Wiremu’s life even busier! If Wiremu accepts, has the caller delegated responsibility to him? If Wiremu refuses, will he be seen as shirking his responsibility? Who holds the authority in such a situation: the caller requesting a pōwhiri, or the Māori listener at the other end of the phone? Which single staff member besides Wiremu carries the weight of responsibility for his whole people and culture on his own shoulders?

Many factors will influence Wiremu’s response. Before going further, more questions must be asked, keeping a quick mental tick-list:

- Is the caller known to Wiremu? Yes, tick; no, no tick.

- Does the caller have other colleagues on whom they can call? Yes, tick; no, no tick.
- Will the meeting happen next month (yes, tick) or tomorrow (no tick)?
- Does the hui have a Māori theme or participants—Māori keynote speakers, Māori on the organising committee, indigenous visitors from overseas? Yes, tick; no, no tick.
- Is the pōwhiri being held at a marae or Māori venue? Yes, tick, no, no tick.

The results of this checklist, ironic as it may be for a supposedly cultural affair such as a pōwhiri, will determine how things proceed. Perhaps Wiremu is unavailable, but knows others who could take on the request, if enough ticks are mustered. But how does Wiremu get a win from these requests, which may come at any time from colleagues, friends or even complete strangers?

The generosity of Māori staff towards their colleagues and visitors, and their desire to see tikanga Māori reflected within their institutions and society at large, ensure such requests for pōwhiri are usually met. The result is that, as noted above, in Aotearoa New Zealand, to begin an education conference with a pōwhiri has become the expectation of Māori and non-Māori alike. The four stories that follow are sequential snippets from “typical” education pōwhiri, rather than one combined coherent narrative. An important disclaimer is that while these stories portray “believable” happenings, it is not like this at every pōwhiri. The stories below illustrate contrasts and gaps in meanings for a diverse range of individual actors “in the moment” of typical events within an education pōwhiri.

Story 2: Ka karanga ki te manuhiri

Haere mai rā, e ngā manuhiri tūārangi e, i runga i te kaupapa o te rā nei e . . .

The woman sends her spine-tingling call soaring across the space between where she stands at the doorway, and the crowd of conference delegates, standing in a group waiting in the foyer. Instantly the atmosphere changes, becoming charged with an uplifting solemnity by the sound. After a few seconds, the women at the front of the waiting group begin to walk slowly towards the caller, and the delegates move off in formation behind them. As she walks, one woman lifts her head and calls in reply, and the two voices mingle in counterpoint. Though few listening on this occasion understand, the contrapuntal calling is addressed not only to those present but to their ancestors as well, who are present at spiritual or metaphysical levels, according to traditional Māori ideas. For some delegates the proceedings are taking an unexpected turn: one which irresistibly calls to mind certain Tolkien movie scenes, when different languages and cultural ceremonies are deployed to great dramatic effect. The group follows the lead and proceeds towards the seating, uncertain about the rationale and details, but prepared to show their support and respect for this charming experience. A few delegates are international indigenous scholars, who are familiar with the Māori protocols, and are relishing being part of it.

The elevated shrill of the women’s calls facilitates a state of released emotion and a sense of unity with the other delegates and the place where the event is located. Release of emotions during karanga symbolises spiritual and emotional bonds between hosts and visitors. The first words have been spoken: the first process for connecting or re-connecting the two groups has been completed. Once everyone is seated, the protocol of whaikōrero, or traditional oratory and speechmaking, commences.

Story 3: E mihi ana te kaumātua

Ko te kaupapa o te hui te tāhūhū o ngā whaikōrero heoi anō he mea nui tonu ki te tū ki te

mihi ki te manuhiri, ki te hau kāinga hoki . . .
 kāhore ahau e tino mōhio ana ki te kaupapa
 o tēnei hui, heoi anō e tika ana ki te tū ki te
 mihi ki a koutou, nā reira tēnā koutou.

The speaker, a neat elderly gentleman formally dressed in suit and tie, can see that few if any in the audience can understand his words, so feels comfortable admitting he has little idea what this gathering is about. He must somehow navigate the question of which is more important: adhering to te reo Māori traditional oratory, or ensuring the audience understands by speaking in English, despite thus straying beyond his oratory competence. As the first speaker, he sets the parameters for the occasion, amid the dilemma of considering the needs of everyone present, whilst maintaining the mana of his people.

Indigenous traditions direct the format and order of Māori oratory, from greetings that include those who have passed on as well as the living, to a focus on the kaupapa of the hui. Eloquence and expert oratory skills enhance traditional patterns with metaphor, recitation of genealogy, proverbs and tribal sayings, jokes and timing, and the connecting of past and present. The speakers for the manuhiri reciprocate in kind, with their speeches addressing the tangata whenua. Delivery through the medium of Māori ensures the sanctity of Māori protocols but bilingual delivery is another option, if the speaker judges it appropriate. In that case, the speechmaking usually starts and ends in Māori, with English used in the middle. The message may be the same in English, but the deeper levels of Māori meanings and cultural values are lost. The monolingual English audience understands, but the speaker bears the burden of cultural compromise, with implicit support for the demise of te reo Māori: a weighty consideration within the specific context of pōwhiri.

Opinions about contemporary pōwhiri were canvassed for a Māori Television documentary titled *Pōwhiri—Welcome, or Not?* (Edwards & Ellmers, 2010) from a number of Māori

individuals in the public sector, politics and broadcasting, as well as some working in tourism, making money by enacting Māori culture, including pōwhiri, as a marketable commodity, and a unique point of difference. Most Māori who were interviewed mentioned their ambivalence about pōwhiri being conducted away from marae or Māori settings, in terms of the danger of pōwhiri being trivialised or compromised, with loss of profound concepts and integrity. Māori politician Shane Jones spoke of his disappointment when Micky and Minnie Mouse were “accorded status as deserving a traditional Māori welcome”—an occasion that generated grotesque images of hongis between a Māori warrior in piupiu and the Disney-costumed characters—and recalled an aunt of his complaining that nowadays, pōwhiri are inappropriately held at the proverbial “drop of a hat”.

For Jones, pōwhiri in the state sector are used to affirm the importance of Māori identity and indigeneity. All those who were interviewed for the documentary acknowledged this positive aspect, with lawyer Moana Sinclair remarking, “It’s got to be a good thing.” The former Human Rights Commissioner (2001–2011) Rosslyn Noonan was unambiguous in stating: “There can’t be any state agency in New Zealand where it’s inappropriate to have Māori culture and language reflected in what they do and how they operate.” Yet such a statement suggests a politically innocent or uncritical view, seemingly oblivious to power relations, and at risk of confusing the appearance with the reality of Māori engagement. Such uncritical views also apply in the tertiary education sector, with many Pākehā academics assuming that holding a pōwhiri makes an event “more Māori”. But this thought can also be turned upside down: only if Māori were more central in organising an event would a pōwhiri be inevitable, natural and necessary, without the need to import cultural expertise in the form of a “dial-a-pōwhiri”.

The next vignette illustrates how pōwhiri

may have mixed value for the non-Māori conference organiser, or even come at significant personal cost.

Story 4: He wai hei kīnaki kōrero

Whakarongo mai, ki te reo e tangi nei, e ringihia mai ana, mai i aku kamo, ngā roimata e . . .

As the designated group of singers join in and the song gets underway, the Pākehā convenor of the conference breathes a large silent sigh of relief, realising that the ordeal she has been through to arrange for this pōwhiri to happen is almost over. During the planning of this conference, her emails and phone messages had gone unanswered. Despite months of advance notice, things seemed to have been arranged at the last minute. Regardless of her repeated offers of help, no details of who would be doing what had been shared with her. Even getting the name right for the programme had been confusing—sometimes it was a pōwhiri, other times they called it a whakatau, and though she had asked, none of the explanations made much sense. She had almost boiled over earlier; as the starting time had loomed closer, her conference delegates were standing awkwardly around near the entrance to the venue, and her contact was nowhere in sight, and not answering their phone. At literally five minutes before the starting time, a car had hurriedly pulled into the carpark and the man and woman within had efficiently organised the group of delegates and led them through the entrance way towards where the people—the tangata whenua, she supposed—were waiting for them.

At the conclusion of each whaikōrero, the melodic group singing comes as a welcome change in proceedings for the overseas delegates, who are seated in the hall in rows, facing the seats in front occupied by the speakers and their supporters. Many international delegates have arrived from the opposite side of the globe within the last 24 hours on their first visit to

the country. Sitting listening to cascades of incomprehensible words, on top of jetlag and long-haul air travel, has lulled some nearly to sleep. Others are entranced at literally being caught up in the sounds and gestures of an alien ceremony, conducted in an unfamiliar language sounding by turns lyrical and guttural. The next ceremony that takes place is the hongī, an up-close-and-personal part of proceedings that invades personal space. A representative number of the delegates are marshalled to come forward and proceed slowly past the line of tangata whenua, with each pair pausing briefly to touch noses, cementing the connection made through oratory with physical contact.

In the final vignette below, the labels “South Island” and “White Australian” act as literary devices to help create a believable story: there is no intention to suggest that all such delegates react in these ways to education pōwhiri. On the other hand, the story works *because* it reflects widespread social trends and attitudes.

Story 5: Kua whakarite te kai

Nau mai e ngā hua o te wao, o te ngakina, o te wai tai, o te wai māori, nā Tāne, nā Rongo, nā Tangaroa, nā Maru, ko Ranginui e tū iho nei, ko Papatūānuku e takoto nei . . .

Over refreshments, a Pākehā delegate from a South Island university offers congratulations to the convenor, now feeling flushed with success, as the delegates around her talk excitedly about the opening ceremony in which they have just taken part. “It’s great to see it being done *properly*”, her colleague enthuses. At the next table, two White Australian delegates help themselves to coffee and a slice. “That was *interesting*”, murmurs one to the other, raising her eyebrows. “Thought this was an *academic* conference”, replies her companion quietly, as they move towards the seating area.

The kaputī (literally, “cup of tea”) protocol usually completes the education pōwhiri: an informal opportunity for all those present to share kai and socialise with each other. In more traditional Māori terms, this protocol represents the whakanoa or removal of tapu—in this case by food and drink. This protocol clashes with the standard conference approach of offering light refreshments on arrival: a subtle example of cultural difference in academia. Furthermore, while a pōwhiri may be first on the programme, ironically enough, it is often immediately followed by the “official” conference opening. The same at the end: organisers offer final comments as the “official closure” of the conference, before “handing over” to the Māori contingent to conduct karakia whakamutunga.

From a Māori perspective, including tikanga in such events would be more meaningful if the pōwhiri and karakia whakamutunga were to be seen as the official opening and closing. Pragmatically, adopting these Māori traditions provides more formality and structure to the beginning and ending of such occasions than is generally available under the secular conditions of contemporary global culture. Symbolically, to allow a place for Māori traditions within the conference format is a political decision that affirms the ethical awareness of the host organisation.

But the inclusion of pōwhiri into events (such as education conferences) where hitherto they have not featured risks paradox at many levels. For Māori participants, such pōwhiri may seem gratuitous, extracted from their natural settings and shorn of cultural meanings. For those who are newcomers to Māori culture, the pōwhiri may seem simply quaint: a tourist experience that delights, baffles or offends. The expectation that Māori staff will organise pōwhiri at the behest of their Pākehā colleagues serves to highlight the dissonance of being Māori in a non-Māori dominated world. Significantly, this dissonance is visible now, at a point in time when there is a *take* (Māori word used in wero): a “thing” that needs to be discussed

(Mika, 2015). In the future, holding a pōwhiri may become so much part of routine in educational events that writing this paper would no longer be possible.

The disjunctions of including tikanga Māori in educational institutions are central in the work of Wally Penetito, who invokes the term “a limited version of te ao Māori” in discussing the rationale for institutional marae, in particular those established by universities (Penetito, 2010, pp. 208–209). It is assumed that such marae will help Māori students and staff “be empowered and experience active agency within the institution in its entirety”, but Penetito notes that achievement of this “lofty goal” has never been proven (p. 209). The same reasoning applies to pōwhiri in academic conferences. Pākehā might assume that starting with a pōwhiri will encourage Māori to attend and participate in the conference, but this is an innocent or politically uncritical assumption that ignores the artificial nature of a “dial-a-pōwhiri”. Similarly, from this uninformed outsider perspective, the pōwhiri is in danger of being seen as “more Māori” than the Māori delegate’s discussion of ideas relevant to the conference theme.

Simone Drichel uses the above-discussed story “Parade” by Patricia Grace to apply work by Jacques Derrida on deconstructive practice to the Māori–Pākehā scenario. Derrida’s deconstructive practice operates through the key characteristic of iterability, by which post-colonial identities are able to escape the fixity of stereotype. In order for deconstruction of colonial hierarchies to proceed, Derrida insists it is necessary to engage with the logic of binary oppositions, which “must begin with an inversion of the hierarchy into which the terms are locked” (Drichel, 2008, p. 594). Referring to the kapa haka performance at the heart of the story, in terms that also apply to education pōwhiri, Drichel observes:

More notable even than the fact that the otherness of the colonized can be turned into

subjectivity by othering the colonizer is the framing of this reversal by a performative act. (p. 598)

In the context of contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand and the Māori experience of assimilation, Drichel offers a warning about the trap of “neutralization—‘We’re all New Zealanders’” (p. 595). With this in mind, Drichel argues for the importance of “a certain emphasis on the otherness of Māori from the dominant (Pākehā) identity, rather than a quick-fix universalism” (p. 595). The education pōwhiri might be a case in point of this “emphasis on the otherness of Māori” and the performative iterability of hybrid cultural identities, but this assertion warrants further consideration.

Iterability and hybridity in performative indigeneity

Contemporary understandings of identity build on fundamental concepts such as these explained by Derrida, which see postcolonialism as an ongoing process of deconstructing the colonising binaries and power hierarchies. This process of deconstruction involves using these ideas to significantly re-read and re-think assumptions and attitudes about social interactions and situations, such as education pōwhiri. Judith Butler’s (2010) concept of “performativity” in identity acknowledges the agentive performative nature of ethnicity. Performativity and the fluidity it offers is also key to Homi Bhabha’s (2009) concept of hybridity: less interested in what identity is, and more interested in what identities are for, and what identities can do.

These concepts suggest the Māori–Pākehā ethnic binary is best understood as a relationship, rather than a set of categories. Bhabha’s term for this positive potential of cultural hybridity is the *third space*, in which cultural difference is kept in play as a productive tension, and which “explores the spaces in-between fixed identities

through their continuous iterations” (Drichel, 2008, p. 605).

Iterability is central to “both Judith Butler’s performativity and Homi Bhabha’s hybridity” (Drichel, 2008, p. 601). Derrida’s notion of iterability refers to the plasticity of “the sign” or symbolic culture, which can be reproduced in ways that are not only recognisable versions of the same, but also infinitely adaptable and new. Informed by this notion of iterability, critical indigeneity recognises the positive potential made available in specific cultural binaries that, crucially, exist within the matrix of time, in a “complex relationship to temporality” (Drichel, 2008, p. 589). This complex relationship includes multiple temporal dimensions, from the epochal time of sociocultural change, to the biological time of a person’s life, to the programme of a single event such as an education conference.

Contemporary Māori identity is (or has potential to be) a critical indigeneity, a radical cultural hybridity, with an aspect of performativity that entails temporality, since agency is located “in the moment” of the re-enactment of otherness. For this reason, enactment of Māori culture always surfaces the ethical question of acknowledging the Other (the capital “O” signals the theoretical nature of this entity), hence bringing into view the historically contingent discourses of colonising power (Dutta, 2004, p. 439). The irony of “organising pōwhiri” being part of someone’s job description can hardly be overstated. The nature of education pōwhiri and how they mostly operate reaffirms the assumption that Māori are cultural, traditional and “outside of time”, whereas the participants in the conference “proper” are intellectual, modern, “in time” and official. The question that remains is whether some visibility of Māori culture in such events, albeit problematic, is better than none at all.

Temporality entails (among other things) a trajectory into the future, which inserts the possibility for change: it produces the iterative “ethical moment” of engagement, open to the

“possibility of the unforeseeable” (Drichel, 2008, pp. 608–609). The central role played by temporality in this performative understanding of cultural hybridity invokes the ethics of Levinas, for whom “time is the ultimate other” (Drichel, 2008, p. 589). This argument serves to clarify and emphasise what is at stake when conference organisers ask their Māori colleagues to organise a pōwhiri.

Mā te tika, mā te pono . . .

The above discussions remind us that the need and point of ethnic performativity in the contemporary milieu goes far beyond a “yes/no” checklist or binary question: Is the conference having a pōwhiri, or not? Ethnic identities are as vulnerable as any other form of culture to the dehumanising managerialism of neoliberal reform, with its requirements for paper trails and measurable outputs (Roberts, 2013; Roberts & Peters, 2008). In these rapidly changing times, many Māori involved in education and the public sector share an uncomfortable awareness that the more Māori traditions become “business-as-usual” for institutions such as universities, the greater the risk to the integrity of Māori culture, as in the documentary discussed above (Edwards & Ellmers, 2010). Assessing the ethical quality of what happens in any situation cannot be simply read off the programme: “Did the conference begin with a pōwhiri? Yes, tick; no, no tick”.

The “otherness” of Māori goes far beyond holding a pōwhiri in a conference programme. A wider view encompasses aspects such as marae within schools, universities and other institutions; the Māori electorates; and the status of te reo Māori as an official national language. The idea of emphasising “otherness” or Māori difference echoes the Kaupapa Māori use of “strategic essentialisms”, borrowing the words of Gayatri Spivak (cited in Hoskins, 2012, p. 85). So where does this “strategic otherness” begin and end, and where does it

shade into indigeneity, or the right of Māori simply to be Māori?

These open-ended and ineffable questions underpin Te Kawehau Hoskins’ argument that Levinasian ethics are relevant for Māori, since they rest on a relational sense of infinite responsibility to the Other, who “is unknowable and irreducible to my comprehension and any unity” (Hoskins, 2012, p. 91). This line of thought begs a further difficult question: If the true value of holding a pōwhiri at the beginning of an academic conference is to remind those who operate according to the dominant or “business-as-usual” global culture of the existence of the Other, then does it matter exactly what is said, who says it, and all the other concerns that Māori participants might have about such an occasion?

This reasoning clarifies the distinction between Māori and Pākehā attitudes towards pōwhiri: different motivations, different criteria by which to assess such an event, different responsibilities. In short, what is brought to light is the detailed content of the difference between Pākehā and Māori subjectivities, which will never be erased, except by supreme force. Differences aside, under the institutional expectations of tertiary education for pōwhiri, non-Māori and Māori education academics alike are caught in a trap of the “damned if you do, and damned if you don’t” variety.

Me te aroha e

The documentary on pōwhiri concluded that deeper discussions are in order about the role of Māori culture in Aotearoa New Zealand society today (Edwards & Ellmers, 2010). Critical examination of cultural politics in the contemporary milieu is bound to reveal the infinite and paradoxical nature of intercultural relationships (Ahmed, 2000).

This quality of “infinity” calls, ultimately, to love, understood as a boundless sense of responsibility for the Other—whoever it is with

whom we interact. Responsibility to others in relationship sits at the heart of a Māori ethics based on traditional concepts of whakapapa, mana and manaaki (Hoskins, 2012). Hoskins argues that Māori politics based on these traditional concepts is a fundamentally relational politics: one which recognises the risk of relating, and relates anyway. Such a relationship can be thought of as an “enabling binary” and the total opposite of the binary of terrorism, in which “neither side can really ‘see’ the other” (Dutta, 2004, p. 434). It is safe to assume that most Māori–Pākehā relations in Aotearoa New Zealand occur somewhere in the vast terrain of ethnicity: located closer to the middle rather than nearer to either of the two extremes of terrorism and the third space.

Can this notion of love as infinity overcome the incommensurability inherent in the Māori–Pākehā ethnic binary? This is not a question to be answered in one article. Hoskins (2012) cites Māori scholars and elders including Cleve Barlow, Eddie Durie and Māori Marsden, who reason that inherent in aroha—the nearest though by no means exact Māori equivalent of the word love—is “a deep comprehension of another’s point of view”; an “unconditional concern and responsibility for others” (p. 91). This is why when, as Māori, we organise or take part in Māori culture within non-Māori settings, we must always remember to act with aroha: understanding this work as a gift we offer to ourselves (that is, to other Māori) as well as to non-Māori.

Like ethnicity, aroha and relational ethics, research and writing also involve performative aspects, and interact with many of the ideas discussed above. The temporal aspect of this work has already been noted: there is a point to it now that may not exist in time to come. The inclusion of original narratives and untranslated Māori texts is part of a methodological strategy for keeping cultural difference in play; an attempt to capitalise on the “productive tension” of ethnic hybridity, including Kaupapa Māori theory and philosophy. The radical ideas

of Kaupapa Māori theory need to be matched by more radical thinking about research methods and approaches. New modes and forms of research hold the possibility of opening up new pathways for critical Māori scholarship to follow further, in future work still to be done.

This article lays down the mānuka in a wero—a challenge: it is a piece of plant material with a meaning, waiting to be picked up and taken somewhere. This article challenges the ways institutions frame Māori culture within programmes and meanings in which Māori are subjugated. It issues a challenge to academics and others to think about the effects of making pōwhiri part of everyday practice in our schools and universities. The question of what might change is the next step to be taken in the challenge of the research process: the next topic waiting to be written about.

Glossary

NB: Meanings given are as used in this article.

Aotearoa	New Zealand (modern)
aroha	love, empathy, ethical response
haka pōwhiri	traditional welcome haka (dance)
hongi	traditional greeting of touching noses
hui	gathering or meeting
kai	food
Kaiurungi	Cultural consultant to Dean
kapa haka	family culture performance group
kaputī	cup of tea (transliteration)
karakia	prayer
karanga	call
kaumātua	elder/s; grandfather
kaupapa	main purpose
Kaupapa Māori	politics and tradition of Māori regeneration
kia ora	hello, thank you
kuia	grandmother

mana	authority; favoured by the gods
mana whenua	traditional authority in a specific location
manaaki	to host or take care of
manuhiri	visitors
mānuka	tea-tree, indigenous tree used in wero
marae	traditional Māori community centre
Pākehā	white New Zealander
piupiu	traditional Māori garment made from flax
pōwhiri	traditional ritual of formal welcome
take	issue in contention
tangata whenua	hosts, holders of mana whenua
tapu	sacred; imbued with spiritual power
te ao Māori	the Māori world
te reo Māori	the Māori language
tikanga	practices, protocols
waiata	song
wero	marae traditional challenge ceremony
whaikōrero	oratory
whakamutunga	concluding
whakanoa	to remove tapu
whakapapa	genealogy, including kinship relationships to personified aspects of the natural world
whakatau	less formal welcome ceremony
whānau	family

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