

Understanding historic Māori fluidity within Ngāti Te Ata Waiōhua: An outline

What does the term 'Tāmaki Makaurau' mean? Some would argue that it means 'Tāmaki of a hundred lovers', while others would claim it means 'Tāmaki desired by many' or 'Tāmaki the bride sought by a hundred'¹. No matter which meaning you prefer, they all clearly suggest that Tāmaki has long been a place sought after by many rōpū (groups). Over the course of its more recent history, Tāmaki has become the seat of multiculturalism in these motu. At different points roughly over the last two centuries Pākehā, diverse Asian peoples, tangata o te Moana Nui a Kiwa and diasporic Māori have come to call Tāmaki home.

Centuries before this multi-ethnic rōpū found residence in Tāmaki, several ancestral tangata whenua groups sought sustenance and security here. These rōpū recognised the special position of Tāmaki, situated on a fertile volcanic field and lined with awa allowing for easy access to multiple moana. Over time through exercising their mana, these groups would become the mana whenua of Tāmaki. Ngāti Te Ata Waiohua, commonly referred to as Ngāti Te Ata, is one such mana whenua group of Tāmaki.

An early aerial view of Auckland, the city superimposed over the pre-existing tangata whenua settlements around Tamaki Makaurau. In 1920, when this photo was taken, less than a century after its founding, Auckland was already a bustling and sprawling urban and economic centre.

Source: Waters, W. A. AWNS-19220119-37-1 'Auckland taken from the air, showing the two harbours'. 1922. Digital Remaster. Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland City Libraries: Heritage Images, Auckland.



In this series of five articles, I will explore some of the history of an iwi that I whakapapa to, Ngāti Te Ata Waiōhua. In a broad sense, these stories highlight the fluidity and demonstrate the dynamic nature of historic tangata whenua. When discussing Aotearoa New Zealand history, whether with fellow history majors, friends, family or strangers, common misconceptions arise. One of the most enduring misconceptions is that historic tangata māori lived stagnant, rigid, and exclusive existences. Historic tangata whenua are perceived as subscribing to one rigid, inflexible version of te ao Māori. Also, tangata māori are thought to have occupied stagnant territories with wholly exclusive access. In reality, historic tangata māori were diverse in thought and action. Different hapū, iwi and waka groupings subscribed to varying versions of te ao Māori and tangata māori occupied fluid territories with overlapping usages to varying extents by different groups. In these articles, I will challenge

¹ The Waitangi Tribunal. 1985. "Wai 8: Manukau Report". Wellington: The Department of Justice.

this persistent misconception and offer a revised narrative through the experiences of Ngāti Te Ata Waiōhua. .

This first article sets the scene for my ideas, research limitations and terminology. Article two acts as a deeper historical analysis of the iwi to explain the Ngāti Te Ata claim to mana in Tāmaki through ahi kā. With the context established, I will, in the third article, dive into showing how Ngāti Te Ata was an example of the flexibility of historic tangata whenua, looking specifically at rohe (territory). The remaining articles will largely focus around the experiences of the Waikato War. As such, my fourth post will outline the diverse perspectives within Ngāti Te Ata in relation to the Waikato War. My final article will juxtapose the fluidity of historic tangata māori with the inflexibility of the Crown. To do this, I will explore the effects of the Waikato War on Ngāti Te Ata to show how the Crown was largely unbending in its definition of 'enemy'. Each of these articles includes an appendix for those unfamiliar with te reo Māori used. I acknowledge that this series is not a definitive history of this kaupapa and I welcome further contributions to this important narrative in the history of the tangata māori of Tāmaki.

Tahuna, the primary marae of Ngāti Te Ata Waiōhua, in 1964. On the left is the wharehenui (meeting house) named after the iwi's namesake ancestor, Te Ata i Rehia. This is the Tahuna my nana would have known as a teenager.

Source: Muir, Brian. *Footprints 07150 'View of Tahuna marae, Waiuku, 1964'*. 1964. Photograph print. Auckland City Libraries Heritage Collections: Kura, Auckland.



Limitations of my research

My articles are not a comprehensive history of this kaupapa because of the limitations of my research sources and the short nature of my research project². Overwhelmingly my sources were written in English, as I am not fluent in te reo Māori. It must be acknowledged that my English source material comes from Pākehā collections. As such, I was exposed to and have largely told a te ao Pākehā interpretation of Māori history. As such, the historical depth of my research would have been enriched by engaging more deeply with te reo mātauranga.

My research being restricted to the English language was not the only limitation on understanding this history. The short timeframe of my Summer Scholarship did not give me adequate time to collate original oral histories and to gain the required ethics for this type of research. Clearly, one cannot attain a full historical understanding when omitting source material as significant as oral history is to Māori history. I acknowledge these two limitations

² Roimata Minhinnick. Kōrero with the author. Waiuku. January 11, 2022.

and I suggest that keen readers who seek more historical depth, if possible, engage with Māori language methods of remembering the past.

Kupu (vocabulary)

In introducing this research series, I offer a word on vocabulary. Here I outline two purposeful kupu choices within these articles to contextualise their uses. This series does not refer to historic tangata māori simply as Māori. Tangata whenua from my study period, those from mai rā anō (the pre-Pākehā time) and the mid-19th century, would never have understood themselves as Māori. As such, referring to these peoples as Māori would be irresponsible. As Tiopira McDowell notes, during mai rā anō, there was no equivalent collective noun for what we now understand as Māori³. According to Dr Rawiri Taonui, the people of mai rā anō instead would have primarily understood themselves as the tangata whenua, people born of the land⁴, of certain places⁵. But after Pākehā contact, a new term seemed to gain popularity among tangata whenua to describe themselves in relation to Pākehā⁶. The adjective māori, meaning ordinary or normal, was combined with tangata, meaning people, to create the new term 'tangata māori'⁷. Tangata māori signified the 'ordinary people' of these motu relative to the abnormal Pākehā.

Another purposeful kupu selection in these posts is using mana in place of rangatiratanga to explain tangata māori political authority. In discussion with Roimata Minhinnick, a historical expert from Ngāti Te Ata, we concluded that rangatiratanga is the exercise of authority by a leader who weaves a group of people together in the process⁸. Rangatiratanga undoubtedly existed during my study period. For example, 1835's He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni (the Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand) included the concept in its title. Modern 'Treaty talk' promotes the idea of tino rangatiratanga, meaning sovereignty or self-determination⁹. But, it seems that ancestral Māori understood mana to be

³ McDowell, Tiopira. 2020. "Introduction To Te Ao Māori". Lecture, Te Whare Wānanga o Tāmaki Makaurau: The University of Auckland.

⁴ Moorfield, John C. 2022. "Tangata Whenua". *Te Aka Māori Dictionary*. <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=Tangata+whenua>.

⁵ Taonui, Rawiri. 2019. "Ihumātao | Tangata Whenua Vs Mana Whenua". *Waatea News*, 2019. <https://waateanews.com/2019/09/02/ihumtao-tangata-whenua-vs-mana-whenua/>.

⁶ Wilson, Ormond. 1963. "MAORI AND PAKEHA". *The Journal Of The Polynesian Society* 72 (1): 11. https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/stable/20704069?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

⁷ Wilson, Ormond. 1963. "MAORI AND PAKEHA". *The Journal Of The Polynesian Society* 72 (1): 11. https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.auckland.ac.nz/stable/20704069?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

⁸ Roimata Minhinnick. Kōrero with the author. Waiuku. January 11, 2022.

⁹ Moorfield, John C. 2022. "Tino Rangatiratanga". *Te Aka Māori Dictionary*. <https://maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=tino+rangatiratanga>

the concept that best encapsulated their political sovereignty. For example, tangata māori authors of mid-19th century letters consistently use the term mana as opposed to rangatiratanga in reference to their collective's authority. However, only in certain contexts would mana have meant authority in this explicitly political way. Understanding mana only in this political way would oversimplify this fluid tikanga¹⁰. Rangatiratanga, on the other hand, acted as the day-to-day exercise of mana. A rangatira (leader of a hapū or iwi) was permitted to exercise rangatiratanga because the mana of their collective and the collective's tūpuna was vested in them¹¹. Over the course of these texts, I will use mana to encapsulate historic tangata whenua political authority instead of rangatiratanga. If, as Jonathan Scott argued, the historian's job is to seek to understand past peoples as they understood themselves¹², then using their kupu is a good start.

An 1860 map showing the area around the Manukau Harbour. Notice that there are many neatly grided land allotments, highlighting the large amount of tangata māori land that had already been 'sold' in the area by the mid-19th Century.

**Source: Unknown
Cartographer. *Map 4450 'Map of land around the Manukau Harbour showing lots'*. 1860. Manuscript, map. Auckland City Libraries Heritage Collections: Kura, Auckland.**



Conclusion

This first article has laid the foundations for those to come in this series on an iwi I whakapapa to, Ngāti Te Ata Waiōhua. To begin the tangible historical analysis of this series, we must start with the collective – the next article will focus specifically on Ngāti Te Ata Waiōhua. By the end of this series, I hope you, the reader, using Ngāti Te Ata as an

¹⁰ Aroha Harris. Kōrero with the author. Auckland. Semester One, 2021.

¹¹ Hikuroa, Dan. 2020. "Tikanga Ancestral Ways, What is Mana?". Lecture, Te Whare Wānanga O Tāmaki Makaurau: The University of Auckland.

¹² Scott, Jonathan. 2021. "Thinking History: Approaches To The Past, An Introduction". Lecture, Waipapa Taumata Rau: The University of Auckland.

example, will reflect on your own understanding of the fluidity and flexibility of historic tangata māori.

Kupu Appendix

1. *Ahi kā* | Often understood as ‘keeping the fires burning’, this term refers to the continued occupation of a group in a certain rohe as acknowledged by whakapapa
2. *Hapū* | A collection of interrelated whānau (families) that was traditionally the primary political unit
3. *Iwi* | A collection of interrelated hapū
4. *Mātauranga* | The combined body of Māori knowledge and understanding
5. *Tangata o te Moana Nui a Kiwa* | The peoples of the Pacific Ocean
6. *Tangata whenua* | ‘The people of the land’, a term used to identify Māori, but ‘people of the land’ could also refer to people of other geographical features, like waterways (as is the case with Ngāti Te Ata who are a tangata whenua group of Te Manukanuka o Hoturoa, the Manukau Harbour)
7. *Te ao Māori* | The Māori worldview
8. *Te ao Pākehā* | The western worldview
9. *Tikanga* | Refers both to broad Māori customs and customary concepts, otherwise conceptualised as the specific Māori way to do something, and why it is done that way
10. *Treaty talk* | The rhetoric that has come from the particular word choices within the English Treaty of Waitangi and te reo Māori Te Tiriti o Waitangi
11. *Waka* | In this context meaning a collection of hapū and/or iwi who share descent from a common migratory canoe

ENDNOTES