

# Beyoncé's Response (eh?)

## Feeling the *Ihi* of Spontaneous Haka Performance in Aotearoa/New Zealand

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Backstage at a packed Vector Arena in Auckland, New Zealand, on 19 October 2013, a youthful group of Māori performers honor pop diva Beyoncé with a boisterous impromptu *baka* to mark the final night of the Mrs. Carter Show World Tour. The singer's reaction is electric: whooping enthusiastically, she attempts to emulate the performers by slapping her thighs, opening her eyes wide in *pūkana*, and thrusting her tongue out in fierce *whetero*—a gesture singularly performed by male dancers to signify sexual potency. Clearly affected, “Queen Bey” later posts a video of the spontaneous haka on her YouTube channel, contextualizing the scene with images of the All Blacks, the preeminent New Zealand National Rugby Union team, enacting their own proverbial version.<sup>1</sup> Responses to this performance by Beyoncé's global virtual audience are mixed, sparking a lively debate about propriety, authenticity, and spectatorial fatigue in intercultural presentations of haka.<sup>2</sup>

Beyoncé's response is a reaction unbound by cultural protocols: an organic reply to a spontaneous act. It reinforces the vital power of the performer-spectator relationship in making haka meaningful—when those being performed to partake in the performance. But it also reconfigures what indigenous performance can be when it is not bound by the constraints of the authentic or traditional: when a response is measured by a mutual energetic flow, rather than a perceived cultural imperative.

### Not Just One Thing

Haka plays a critical and contentious role in the cultural discourse of Aotearoa/New Zealand. An elder of the Ngāti Toa *iwi* (tribe) suggests that haka is one of the “few things, along with our *reo* [language] and our art, that represents us to the world” (in Grace 2011). But what exactly is it?

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1. We were unable to get permission to include still images from the YouTube video of Beyoncé's haka performance. The original YouTube film is unavailable to viewers outside New Zealand, but a version can be viewed at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZ3NxDFqACE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZ3NxDFqACE) (Beyoncé 2013).

2. For examples of these comments see Kenny (2013) and Bro in the Know (2013).

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Figure 1. The All Blacks perform the haka Ka Mate before a rugby match, 14 June 2014. (Screenshot by TDR; [www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPHed2T12M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPHed2T12M))

In the landmark text *Maori Games and Haka*, Alan Armstrong describes haka as

a composition played by many instruments. Hands, feet, legs, body, voice, tongue, and eyes, all play their part in blending together to convey in their fullness the challenge, welcome, exultation, defiance or contempt. It is disciplined yet emotional. More than any other aspect of Māori culture, this complex dance is an expression of the passion, vision and intensity of the race. It is, at its best, truly a message of the soul expressed by words and posture. (1964:119)

In form, haka is not simply a dance, as it is generically translated in English, nor solely a prelude to or provocation for war, a common misconception;<sup>3</sup> rather, it is an aesthetically and culturally complex intertextual mode whereby meaning and function are contingent on the chanting that accompanies the physical movement. The chanting can be either—or both—a “how to” guide to the actions of haka, or a specific message for and/or challenge to an audience.

The purpose of haka in performance is contingent on a number of variable contexts. Nathan Matthews<sup>4</sup> classifies haka through their functions as “war dances,” “ceremonial performances,” and as a “means for message transmission”—they function socially, spiritually, culturally, and politically (2004:10). Within these broad categories are many deviations, dependent on specific circumstances, which are affected by historical shifts as well as distinctions in local practices and beliefs. For instance, while the *peruperu* was a fierce war haka historically performed only on the battlefield, the *ngeri* is a short haka still performed today to express a collective goal—commonly used in sporting matches. There are innumerable *haka powhiri*—or welcome haka—along with other ceremonial dances for group encounters, such as *haka kai*, performed

3. Christopher Balme asserts: “The famous haka, an intimidating dance involving chanting, foot-stamping and aggressive gesturing, traditionally preceded and in some cases surrogated actual hostilities” (2007:93).

4. Matthews has ancestral links to the Nga Puhi iwi, a tribe from the Northland region of New Zealand. He specializes in Māori Education and is currently the executive director of learning at Te Kura Hourua O Whangarei Terenga Paraoa, a charter school in Northland, New Zealand.

before serving a meal. A version without weapons, *haka taparahi* is often performed to express a community concern, to “vent frustration,” and “to transmit political messages in a direct and unapologetic manner” (Matthews 2004:12). An example of this is a haka ngeri performed in 2006 by a group of 50 Māori schoolboys outside the education minister’s electoral office to protest a proposed curriculum that marginalized *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (the Māori constitution) and Māori language (*New Zealand Herald* 2006).

Haka is a mode that both retains and contains the history of the Māori people. The genesis of individual haka is transmitted through stories passed down in an “oral Māori historiography” (Ka’ai-Mahuta 2013:2) as well as through the palimpsestuous reproduction of the dance itself as it passes through generations, physically evolving but always maintaining the gestures of the founding *atua*, the spiritual ancestors. Indeed, haka can be seen as a kind of physical manifestation of *whakapapa*, or genealogy, reviving and affirming through the narrative, as well as in the distinctive body language of the performance, the *mana* (status, prestige, charisma) of those who create it.

The performance of the first haka can be traced back to Tāmanuiterā, the sun. During the summer months, Tānerore, the son of Tāmanuiterā, performs a dance for his mother Hineraumati, the summer maiden. This haka is (and also represents) a natural phenomena; on hot summer days, the “shimmering” atmospheric distortion of air emanating from the ground is personified as *Tē haka a Tānerore*—“The dance of Tānerore” (Best in Ka’ai-Mahuta 2013:5). As the antecedent of the form, *haka Tānerore* is also a narrative of the essential function/expression of all haka:

Ko te haka hoki he kupu korero  
He mea wharairo o te ngakau  
He mea whakapuaki e te mangai  
He mea whakatu e te tinana

(For the haka is a message  
Born of the soul  
Spoken by the mouth  
And expressed by the body)  
(Kāretu in Matthews 2004:17)

Haka occupies a significant role in defining and sustaining the values of *Tē Ao Māori* (the Māori world). Matthews delineates how haka fulfills both physical and spiritual functions: it encompasses the energies of *ihi* (“authority, charisma, awe-inspiring, psychic power”); *wehi* (“fear, awe, respect”); and *wana*, or *wanawana* (“thrill, fear, excitement, awe-inspiring”) (2004:10). For a haka to be deemed excellent, these energies must interweave:

Ihi is a psychic power that elicits a positive psychic and emotional response from the audience. The response is referred to as *wehi*; a reaction to the power of the performance. *Wana* is the condition created by the combination of the elicitation of *ihi* and the reaction of *wehi* during performance; it is the aura that occurs during the performance and which encompasses both the performers and the audience. (10)

A haka must be active and reciprocated in order to be meaningful. In this moment of climactic psychic exchange, the *wanawana* incites a spirit of empowerment and/or resistance for both performers and spectators. A haka is not set or complete; it is constantly evolving, with the creation of new dances replete with innovative actions and messages. Thus haka is a means of divining the *tipuna* (ancestors) as well as signifying the flexibility or hybridity of *Tē Ao Māori*—both past and present, for the living and the passed.

Yet it is the performance of haka in such varied contexts, enacted by diverse bodies, that continues to provoke critical—often negative—responses at home and around the globe.

The perception of contemporary haka as being abridged into the “theatrical” (Balme 2007, Mazer 2011)—as the “savage” on show—creates considerable controversy over whether or not through the presentation of vaudeville versions of haka for tourist displays, or even as co-opted by sporting teams, the power, authenticity, or accuracy of the practice is somehow diminished. Such protectiveness over cultural property is motivated by the ongoing commodification of haka for the tourist market and in advertising, where haka conveys the message “This is Māori” or even “This is New Zealand,” while stripping away specific meaning and cultural integrity.<sup>5</sup> Rather than a positive affirmation of Māori performance-as-living, commercial haka are stripped of meaning and cheapened (Grace 2011)—used to sell products that have no connection to Te Ao Māori, or even New Zealand. Similar reactions—informed by notions of what/how the practice “should be” and whom it should be for—resonate in responses to Beyoncé’s haka.<sup>6</sup>

## Beyoncé’s Response

While it is commonplace for haka powhiri to be performed to welcome international visitors to New Zealand in the context of a formal ceremony, the enactment of spontaneous informal haka is an equally ubiquitous, if less orderly tradition. One of the earliest instances of formal tourist performance, the haka performed during the 1901 royal tour of the Duke and Duchess of York, was circumscribed by ceremonial restraints and the desire of *Pākehā* (New Zealanders of European descent) audiences for an “authentic” experience. This is perhaps where the designation of haka as a traditional or folklorist practice—originating in a precontact past—was first formed.<sup>7</sup>

The tradition—for want of a better word—of performing informal haka to political and pop culture heroes unites the Māori world with iconic global figures. For example, in 1979, members of a local *iwi* (tribe) performed a haka for Jamaican reggae legend Bob Marley upon his arrival at Auckland airport. This meeting introduced Marley to the politically othered peoples of New Zealand, sparking a powerful relationship that for decades has bound the style and politics of reggae with Polynesian music. Perhaps it is this affiliation that Māori have with reggae and other music genres created and developed by black artists, such as R&B, hip hop, and rap, that explains why performing artists from these fields are increasingly the beneficiaries of impromptu or informal haka.

This North-South cultural encounter is also occasionally initiated from “above.” In October 2013, prior to Beyoncé’s haka, US-based Caribbean singer Rihanna received a formal *manawhenua haka poroporoaki*—or haka of farewell by a specially trained group of eight

5. Examples of haka merchandise in New Zealand include, for example, tea towels with the actions and lyrics of the *Ka Mate* haka and plush kiwi toys in All Black uniforms who play automated haka sounds. There are many examples of the appropriation of *Ka Mate* in advertising in New Zealand, but it has also been used in ads for whisky in Europe, “alcopops” in England, to sell Fiat cars in Italy (creativeNbeautiful 2012) and to peddle Coca Cola in Japan (see Dudding 2011). A recent example of the global misappropriation of haka includes the “haka-inspired” performance by South Korean K-pop band Exo (see Anderson 2014) as well as the “Haka Boys” in US rapper Nicki Minaj’s music video for “Starships” (NickiMinajAtVEVO 2012).

6. See Balme (2007), Mazer (2011) and Werry (2011) for discussions of haka and contemporary hybridized performance practices of *kapa haka* (team haka) through the frames of performance studies.

7. In performances of haka for royalty and foreign dignitaries it has become common practice for the participants to wear “traditional” costume: *tipare* (headbands), *whakakai* and *whakarākai* (neck and ear pendants), *tāniko* or *pari* (bodices), *tāpeka* (bandoliers), *piupiu* (grass skirts), *maro* (loincloths), and sometimes even *korowai* or *kakahu* (cloaks/capes) (McRae-Tarefi, Lentfer, Te Pou, and Taihuha 2013:151). Balme sees this “conscious [re]fashioning” as a Māori “configuration of performative and cultural codes to cater to the European gaze at work” (2007:119)—traditionalism for authenticity’s sake. Informal haka, or haka for a private Māori spectatorship, is not often bound by such aesthetics.



Figure 2. Rihanna poses with haka performers after receiving a formal manawhenua haka poroporoaki. October 2013, Vector Arena, Auckland, New Zealand. (Screenshot by TDR; [www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQKLMR9zV3A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQKLMR9zV3A))

male performers. This performance of *Ka Mate*, originally composed by the chief Te Rauparaha and made famous by the All Blacks, was preceded by a *wero* (individual challenge) and accompanied by *putatara*, a conch shell trumpet, various weapons, and bare-chested players in *maro* (loincloths).<sup>8</sup> The distinction between this haka and the haka for Beyoncé is not only the “traditional” fashioning and the cohesion of the choreography in Rihanna’s haka, but also that the haka was instigated by a request from Rihanna’s own “people,” her management (Te Kanawa 2013). It was staged at the behest of a foreign artist desiring a bona-fide indigenous experience, rather than one initiated by Māori. In this instance, Māori were performing to a celebrity who had specifically requested an authentic Māori encounter. This event became a social-media souvenir of Rihanna’s indigenous experience, snapped on Instagram for the consumption of her many followers. While in New Zealand, Rihanna also had a traditionally inspired Māori *ta moko* (tattoo) inscribed on her hand. Just weeks later, on her return to the United States, the singer had her tattoo covered with another design inspired by Indian henna motifs; marking her interest in indigenous cultures as literally only “skin deep” (see ONE News 2013b).

In contrast to Rihanna’s celebrity show, the haka *Ka Mate* performed for Beyoncé was a makeshift performance initiated by members of her New Zealand support staff and backstage crew. The haka was led by renowned haka performer and teacher Kereama Te Ua and Māori pop singer Stan Walker, who performed as an opening act in the New Zealand leg of Beyoncé’s tour. The film recording of this backstage haka is prefaced by a montage of members of the national rugby team, the All Blacks, performing haka, interspersed with subtitles:

Before International Rugby matches, the New Zealand All Blacks perform the “Haka,” a traditional war dance meant to intimidate the opponent. It is also used to honor a distinguished guest. After Beyoncé’s October 19 show in Auckland the local crew welcomed her with a Haka. (Beyoncé 2013)

8. For a version of the haka poroporoaki for Rihanna see EDupEru (2013).

The clip establishes Beyoncé as the protagonist of this narrative. Against the soundscape of the haka already underway, the singer and her large entourage enter the space with Beyoncé already mimicking the routine, her eyes dilated, her tongue flicking. She even accompanies the chanting with her own indecipherable screams. Members of her entourage follow her, carefully holding up her hair like bridesmaids arranging a bridal train. Her entrance has a processional quality that complements the fiery version of *Ka Mate* in progress.

The haka is filmed from just behind Beyoncé, revealing a large group of young Māori men and women performing the haka not in traditional costume but in everyday clothing—or, significantly, in “backstage blacks” to signify their critical, almost invisible, designated roles in the orchestration of Beyoncé’s show. The dancers’ movements are not synchronized; some are obviously more skilled than others.<sup>9</sup> One of the young men in the front row moves with an exaggerated Elvis Presley–style pelvic rotation. Beyoncé, still in her elaborate stage costume, responds throughout the dance by slapping her own thighs, repeatedly laughing and whooping. As the climactic “Hi!” of the haka is reached, Beyoncé’s own rejoinder reaches a crescendo, replying to the whetero of the male performers with an impressively outstretched tongue. Afterwards, laughing and apparently delighted, she raises her arms and applauds the crew in appreciation.

The performance of haka has become a particularly polarizing topic in New Zealand social media forums. While many comments show support for and even pride in this expression of Māori and/or New Zealand culture presented to an international guest/audience—“Anō te pai, such a great spontaneous thing to do and so well received. Kia Kaha [Stand Strong]” (mine. is.mine, Kenny 2013)—there is also a large sector in the online community—predominantly non-Māori—who express contempt for the practice as a tired, clichéd gesture of a (contrived) primitive past. Local responses to Beyoncé’s haka included:

Not another visitor to NZ forced to endure another boring haka? They need to be warned in advance and get their limo to spirit them away from such an embarrassing episode. (747Dude, Kenny 2013)

The haka is uncivilised, barbaric and an embarrassment. (Gianni, Kenny 2013)

However, it is Beyoncé’s response that incited the most vitriolic online comments:

Who was her advisor, surely someone spoke to her of the protocols. (Geoffrey Smith, ONE News 2013a)

Disrespectful to be honest, imagine doing that to another culture and how they would feel. Sorry Beyoncé but it dnt matter if ur famous or not. (Cyrus Mihaere, ONE News 2013a)

She’s a bloody embarrassment should be intelligent enough to stand there and show some damn respect. Friggin fool hope she doesn’t come back. (Hannah Louise Howarth, Bro in the Know 2013)

Debate raged in these forums about what was the most respectful way to respond to a haka, particularly as Beyoncé is both a non-Māori *manuhiri* (visitor) and a woman:

If a regular woman does the haka, she’ll get ripped a new one and won’t have it let down until the day she dies. Beyoncé performs it and we should feel honoured? Thanks for the laugh. (Kyle Ruka, Bro in the Know 2013)

[N]ot that I care but back in the day when culture was important women weren’t supposed to do the haka, now it’s just a joke. (mexenaj, Kenny 2013)

9. Although it is important to note that every haka is composed of both set and impromptu actions (Matthews 2004:14).

As is commonplace in online threads, these comments received mixed and often contradictory responses/objections/advice from other online commentators. Taken together, there was a general lack of agreement on what the haka represents for New Zealanders. Opinions were divided among those who believe haka to be a precious *taonga* (treasure/gift) that should be preserved and kept within the contexts or constraints of formalized Māori performance; those who feel that it is outdated and misrepresents Māori and/or New Zealanders; those who celebrate it as a flexible, evolving performance mode unique to, but not necessarily representative of Aotearoa; and those who believe, because they are themselves not Māori, that the haka is a sign for which they are, categorically, not the signified (see Alderson 2012). While this is a fascinating discussion in and of itself—tied into the complex issue of understanding a heterogeneous New Zealand identity that does not exist—my focus is on the presentation of *Ka Mate* to Beyoncé and how she responded to it.

## Not Just for Boys

Contradicting the widespread belief that the form traverses an exclusively male terrain, haka as a collective performance (*kapa haka*) actually began as an event initiated by women: a kind of perverted parody of the modern-day honey trap.<sup>10</sup> One of the origin myths of haka, passed down through oral narrative and in the whakapapa of haka itself, goes like this: Traveling to a village to seek out the villainous Kae—who can only be identified by his grotesque broken and overlapping teeth—a troupe of women devise a scheme. They begin to sing to the villagers, accompanying their humorous ditty with strange facial expressions and a rhythmic, frenetic movement of their hands, arms, and legs:

E ako au ki te haka  
 E ako au ki te ringringa  
 E ako au ki te whewhera  
 E kāore te whewhera  
 E ako au ke te kōwhiti  
 E kāori te kōwhiti  
 E kōwhiti nuku, E kōwhiti rangi  
 E kōwhiti puapua, e kōwhiti werewere  
 E hanahana a tinaku... e!

(I learn to haka  
 I learn to explore with my hands  
 I learn to open wide  
 Not to open wide  
 I learn to twitch  
 Not to twitch  
 Pulsating upwards, pulsating downwards  
 My vagina throbs  
 My vagina fibrillates  
 A haven of lingering warmth)  
 (Best and Kāretu in Ka'ai-Mahuta 2013:10)

The haka, with sexual lyrics and suggestive movements, proves extremely entertaining and by the end of the performance the whole village is laughing uncontrollably, so that Kae—with his gruesome dentistry, exposed as he laughs—is easily identified and apprehended.

10. A “honey trap” is a fidelity test where a privately hired investigator poses as a romantic interest to check the faithfulness of a spouse suspected of cheating.

The significance of this haka, *Nga Hine a Tinirau*, is not only that women are the sole performers, but also that it was led by Hine-te-iwaiwa, a figure recognized in Te Ao Māori as the *atua* (the first or primary ancestor) of the women’s realm and the paradigmatic wife and mother figure (Ka’ai-Mahuta 2013:6). In contrast to the “hyper-masculine” (Hartigan 2011) energy embodied by the All Black’s performance of haka, *Nga Hine a Tinirau* typifies the prowess and power of the female in Māori society. Women are not only present, they are the only figures performing. Thus the whakapapa of haka casts women in an auspicious role from the beginning.

The perception that haka is solely a male activity is connected to the widespread misapprehension that haka is only one thing, the haka *Ka Mate*, as performed by the All Blacks.

If any haka is a sign of Māori culture in global perception, it would be the haka *Ka Mate*:

Ka Mate! Ka Mate!  
 Ka ora! Ka ora!  
 Tenei te tangata puhuruhuru  
 Nana nei te tiki mai  
 I whakawhiti te ra  
 Upane Upane!  
 Upane! Ka upane  
 Whiti te ra!

(Avaunt, O Death! Avaunt, O Death!  
 Ah, ’tis life! ’tis life!  
 Behold!! There stands the hairy man  
 Who will cause the sun to shine!  
 One upward step! Another upward step!  
 One last upward step;  
 Then step forth!  
 Into the Sun  
 The Sun that shines!)  
 (Kāretu 1993:63–64)

*Ka Mate*—the same haka as that performed for Beyoncé—is synonymous with the New Zealand National Rugby Union team, the All Blacks. For many who support rugby in New Zealand and internationally, this is *the* haka; it is the only context in which they have witnessed the performance of haka.<sup>11</sup>

The original composition of *Ka Mate* is attributed to Te Rauparaha, an influential *rangatira* (chief) and war leader of the Ngāti Toa iwi during the 19th century. *Ka Mate* narrates a life-or-death encounter, where Te Rauparaha narrowly escapes certain death at the hands of a rival war party through the protection of the chief Te Wharerangi (the “hairy man”) and his wife.<sup>12</sup> The haka originates as a spontaneous reaction of relief reinforcing the inevitability of mortality or the fragility of life, but with the ultimate triumph of living: “Avaunt, O Death! Avaunt, O Death! Ah, ’tis life! ’tis life!”

11. Thus *Ka Mate* is used synecdochally for haka, and, by extension, in this context operates as metonymic for Māori performance and culture in international perception (Balme 2007).

12. When Te Rauparaha is informed that he is being pursued by a war party guided by *tohunga* (priests)—operating as “spiritual bloodhounds” (Grace 2011), he flees to the village of his relative, the chief Te Wharerangi (the “hairy man”). Te Whareranga advises Te Rauparaha to hide in a *kumara* (sweet potato) pit and for his own wife, Te Rangikoa, to sit in the entrance. Here, Te Rauparaha is protected from the extrasensory powers of the *tohunga* by the *noa*—or spiritual qualities—of a woman guarding the entrance as well as the *noa* of the food pit itself (see Ngāti Toa Rangatira 2010).

Te Rauparaha is one of the most famous rangatira in the post-settlement era.<sup>13</sup> In gaining and sustaining this reputation, Te Rauparaha possesses significant mana among both Māori and non-Māori New Zealanders, which resonates psychically throughout performances of *Ka Mate*.

*Ka Mate*, now legally recognized as the cultural property of Ngāti Toa,<sup>14</sup> has been performed by the All Blacks before beginning to play since 1905.<sup>15</sup> This performance has evolved from a peculiar, slightly inept, touristic display for an international constituency, to a necessary augmentation: a nonchemical enhancement required to give the athletes—and their supporters—an edge over their opponents. *Ka Mate* can be viewed as both possessing and even fuelling the ferocity of the rugby game. The association of this haka with the warrior Te Rauparaha gives the All Blacks mana or even *mauri* (life-force) when they perform it. They too become “warriors.” Because *Ka Mate* is the most globally familiar haka, its hyper-masculinity buttresses the misconceptions that haka is from and for men.

Yet women play a highly significant role in the whakapapa of haka, with many haka specific to or solely for female performers. Often, male performers are placed in front of the women, a custom drawn from haka performed for encroaching war parties where warriors form a line of defense to shield the village from attack. In the backstage haka for Beyoncé, the women in the group are less prominent in the film than the male dancers, but are still present. There are also conventional distinctions between the actions of each gender in haka; for example, whetero is performed by men only, *ngangabu* (similar to *pukana*) is performed by both sexes, while *potete* (closing of eyes at critical points in the performance) is performed only by women. In general, however, the “rules” of haka are situational.<sup>16</sup>

*Ka Mate* is an obvious choice for an impromptu haka simply because it is the most well known. Children in New Zealand enact *Ka Mate* in playground games; on school holidays, my cousins and I used to perform a vociferous version of this haka for tourists in a picnic area by the family store. That is not to say that the backstage performance is a kind of rent-a-haka version, performed to offer a token Māori flavor to Beyoncé. The message of this particular haka can be viewed as an expression of admiration and respect for a distinguished guest, but also—in contrast to its function on the rugby field and the enduring association with the form as an act of war—might actually be seen as a kind of seduction.

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13. Te Rauparaha’s prowess as a strategist earned him considerable notoriety, including the moniker the “Māori Napoleon” (Bevan [1907] 2014).
14. In December 2012, Ngāti Toa reached a settlement with the Crown that attributed *Ka Mate* as property and *taonga* (treasure) of the iwi, stipulating that the haka could only be used in a commercial setting with acknowledgment of Te Rauparaha as the rightful author (Bennett 2012). To acknowledge that *Ka Mate* has only an adapted or received functionality, the All Blacks had a new haka composed in 2005, written specifically to represent the encounter it precedes and the performers who play it. *Kapa O Pango* celebrates the “dominance” and “triumph” of the All Blacks.
15. It is perhaps the context for which *Ka Mate* is best known to a global audience that has reduced or cheapened the meaning of both this particular haka and the wider form itself. In 1905 the All Blacks first performed *Ka Mate* as pre-match entertainment during a tour to Britain. Met with a vociferous reception, *Ka Mate* was soon performed regularly by both Māori and Pakeha team members as amateur theatrical entertainment on all overseas tours. In the 1970s the All Blacks began performing *Ka Mate* as a challenge before beginning play, and for the first time on New Zealand soil during international matches. Only since the 1980s has *Ka Mate* been considered to have been performed “properly”—both in terms of corporeal accuracy and broader cultural understanding. Wayne “Buck” Shelford made a concerted effort to learn the *tikanga* (protocol) behind the dance and to learn the actions correctly and teach these to his teammates, although Ngāti Toa elders claim that it was still “not quite right” (Grace 2011).
16. Nathan Matthews writes, “There are many actions associated with the use of the legs, arms and bodies of the performers. These actions may vary in definition and application from tribe to tribe and are sometimes only relevant to a certain haka or type of haka. They all, however, are used by the performer to emphasize the words and enhance the transmission of the message contained in the haka” (2004:16).

Rachael Ka'ai-Mahuta<sup>17</sup> suggests that haka has a history in Te Ao Māori of being performed to invoke romantic feelings, speaking of “the ability of haka to act as a catalyst for love. [...] To be skilled in performance is a trait that is valued, and many a love match has started with a brilliant haka performance” (2013:12). Timoti Kāretu suggests that the energy exchanged in haka is ideal for wooing a potential love interest: “It is not too difficult to imagine the mutual attraction that can be generated between performers when they are in full cry and giving their all” (1993:16). Thus haka, often misconceived as only a challenge from one warring party to another, can also be a means of winning the heart of one’s beloved through demonstrating proficiency in performance.

Stan Walker, the opening act for Beyoncé’s New Zealand tour and the leader of the backstage haka, is a self-confessed fan of the singer.<sup>18</sup> It is obvious in the passion displayed by Walker and the male performers that they strongly admire Beyoncé. There is also a heterosexual energy here directed toward Beyoncé that is never present in the All Black’s version of *Ka Mate*. This was also debated in online commentary: “Ha ha ha! Sexing up the *baka* for Beyoncé! It’s a war dance intended to intimidate an opponent; it’s always a form of welcome for honoured guests; and (now) it’s also an audacious act of sexual seduction” (Ben Mines in Kenny 2013). The backstage performance projects a fervor that is more about demonstrating impressive masculinity in pursuit of female admiration than intimidating or challenging an enemy, from Walker’s passion to the sexy Elvis-like moves in the front row to the macho chest slapping of the other performers. The *ihi* of this haka is a charismatic exhibition of virility: We offer you ourselves! The *wehi*, in reply, is Beyoncé demonstrating her respect for, or awe of, this fearsome display.

## A Fierce Reaction

If the “experts” in the online forums are to be trusted one of the key problems with Beyoncé’s response was the way in which she, mirroring the male performers, gave her own *whetero*. *Whetero*, the sticking out of one’s tongue, is a potent emblem of Māori performance and art. The *wharenuī/whare whakairo* (meeting houses) always feature images of male *atua* and other *tipuna* with grotesquely large, extended tongues. Matthews explains why such a gesture may be considered improper for women:

The tongue has an important role to play in the performance of the haka. The tongue represents the penis, which was traditionally visible, and so the tongue should also be visible during performance. It is extended as a symbol of the performer’s penis, of his manliness and virility. Thus, female performers do not show their tongues during performances of the haka. (2004:15)

Because she was not briefed on the correct *tikanga* (protocols) of haka prior to the performance—as suggested in the accounts of Kiri Nathan (see Glucina 2013) and “Bro in the Know” (2013)<sup>19</sup>—Beyoncé did not know what she was doing (or implying); she did not know that what she was doing could be considered unacceptable or inappropriate for a woman. Yet, even if she had this knowledge and still responded with her own *whetero*, there is a strong feminist argument to be made in defense of her actions. As an “A-list” celebrity with significant popu-

17. Dr. Rachel Ka'ai-Mahuta is of Ngāti Porou, Ngāi Tahu, and native Hawaiian descent. Dr. Ka'ai-Mahuta is a lecturer in Te Ara Poutama and a postdoctoral fellow in Te Ipukarea and the International Centre for Language Revitalisation at Auckland University of Technology.

18. In a recent interview, Walker stated: “A lot of who I am as an artist is a reflection—even if it is just like, 1 percent—of her and what she does. She’s everything that I want to be anyway, and she’s beautiful [...]” (in Satherly 2013).

19. “Obviously Beyonce doesn’t know or understand our *tikanga* and *kawa* Māori. So if you take that out of the equation it is actually special to see that she felt the *mauri* and *mana* in that moment to respond in that way” (Bro in the Know 2013).

lar-culture sway, Beyoncé is a highly influential role model for women. The lyrics of her songs reverberate with messages promoting female agency and self-confidence.

The singer's assertion of strength is described best by the contemporary urban moniker "fierce"—a term made popular by US supermodel Tyra Banks to describe someone who possesses an intoxicating, brutally attractive physical presence or stance.<sup>20</sup> Until recently, Beyoncé's onstage alter ego was even named Sasha Fierce.<sup>21</sup>

This guise enabled the singer to explore a dominant, even transgressive sexuality. Soraya Nadia McDonald suggests, "Sasha Fierce as an alter ego was a useful tool: a mechanism Beyoncé could use to safely and publicly experiment with performances of her sexuality while keeping her ladylike integrity intact" (McDonald 2013).

However, McDonald also indicates that in her most recent work,<sup>22</sup> Beyoncé's feminist politics have shifted from a "murky" brand advocating the catch-phrase "girl power" embodied by her onstage persona to a more assured and complex form of black feminism. While seemingly attracting the male gaze, Beyoncé's performances and/or persona suggest a level of control and a particular power that complicates the often one-way transactional quality of this attention: she is controlling and challenging the gaze. While acknowledging her desirability, Beyoncé is explicitly offering this invitation on her own independent terms—with an intense physical vitality. This forcefulness possesses a kind of machismo that gives her "girl power" a masculine edge, playing off and with gender binaries. There is also an inherent challenge made here to the historical ghettoization of black women:

If women such as Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Josephine Baker, Eartha Kitt, and Donna Summer laid the foundation for sex-positive imagery of black songstresses, Beyoncé has erected a temple to it [...]he's emphatically presenting the radical image of a wealthy, self-possessed black woman who is there to be catered to. She is not the help. (McDonald 2013)

This evolution from a temporary performative experiment with female sexuality to an embodied or actualized political feminist stance suggests that in participating in this haka Beyoncé was less concerned with losing her "ladylike integrity," than in performing her (re)assured, independent sexuality.

Beyoncé's confidence, critical to her appeal, owes much to this shift from a clearly feminine performativity to the more provocative gender play in her recent work that expands the definition and presentation of femininity. In consolidating her expression of strength into something beyond the tropes of black/female, the artist finds her real power. Given this context, it



Figure 3. The All Blacks perform the whetero before their game against Canada, 3 November 2013. (Screenshot by TDR; [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vlm6OfXzH78](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vlm6OfXzH78))

20. Banks claims to have used "fierce" in this context in the first cycle of the television show *America's Next Top Model* (2003). See Banks's definition of "fierce" at officialANTM (2012).

21. Beyoncé's 2008 album is entitled *I Am... Sasha Fierce*.

22. Beyoncé's most recent self-titled "visual" album was released online, without publicity, in December 2013. Sales of the album across the globe exceeded all previous records.

seems almost unsurprising that Beyoncé might respond to a large group of men who are performing a penis display by thrusting her own figurative “penis” at them. Consider Beyoncé’s response in relation to the “seductive” nature of this haka—the men are presenting their “manhood” to Beyoncé, but she will not be wooed in this way. Antithetical to female stereotypes of both a colonially constructed Polynesian world—the passive yet sexually available Dusky Maiden—and the image Beyoncé herself perpetually works against, “the help,” this response becomes a challenge to male demonstrations of power through virility: Anything you can do, I can do too (or, even better). It disintegrates notions that gestures of sexuality—or “sexiness”—must correlate with a specific gender. She is clearly powerful *and* sexually appealing—or perhaps sexy *because* of this demonstration of power—even while performing an ostensibly masculine gesture. She is also transgressing the proviso that females are prohibited from using the whetere because of the strictures of “indigenous tradition.” But, ultimately, was Beyoncé aware of all this when she responded backstage? Likely not. However, even if she did perform unaware, the meaning of her performance transcends her conscious appropriation of the male gesture.

It’s complicated. Aligning gender roles in Māori performance with Western gender and sexuality discourses forces haka into a theoretical and cultural frame it does not operate in. In *Te Ao Māori*, the roles of women, *mana wahine*, and men, *mana tane*, are not bound by binaries but are interdependent. Hinematau McNeill and Sandy Hata deploy the metaphor of *Ranginui*, the sky father, and *Papatuanuku*, the sky mother, to illustrate this relationship: “The relationship is equal and both entities are interdependent: the earth and sky are prerequisite for human existence” (2013:56). In everyday life and performance, women and men perform roles that require a reciprocal action from the other sex. Thus, while the haka is often dominated by men, it is also heavily connected with *karanga*—a vocal call—that is the exclusive property of women.<sup>23</sup>

Beyoncé’s response should not be understood as a feminist defense (or defensive female) protesting the “sexism” of indigenous customs: while she might not understand the context, she is clearly not reacting in a hostile way against these performers. She is co-celebrating with them. For Māori women, the haka is a demonstration of their own particular female strength. As a woman from the Ngāti Toa iwi suggests: “If women can give birth, they can do the haka” (in Grace 2011). Thus the haka can be a dialogue expressing the different ways that strength can be displayed, both masculine and feminine. Beyoncé is not fighting against this encounter; she is rising to meet the *ihi* of the performance-after-the-performance. The backstage haka was, fundamentally, a demonstration of respect for this powerful performing artist.

Outside the confines of Western discourse, I believe that the response by Beyoncé to the haka and the response by the public to Beyoncé’s haka are necessarily informed by the intrinsic mana of the haka’s intended audience, Queen Bey herself. The mere fact that a haka was performed for her (without her asking) emphasizes the high opinion that these New Zealanders have of Beyoncé. In fact, prior to this performance, Beyoncé was presented with a *korowai* (feather cloak) and *pounamu taonga* (greenstone adornment) as tokens of love and respect by renowned Māori artist Kiri Nathan (Glucina 2013). Nathan, witnessing the haka, stated: “The room was filled with mana and respect for her. Everyone was emotional” (in Glucina 2013). This sense of an inherent mana is linked to the perception of Beyoncé’s “fierceness.” I suggest that the word “mana” closely aligns with the notion of a “fierce” individual. Therefore, the haka, which has been endowed with the spirit of an ancestor with significant mana (Te Rauparaha), seems entirely appropriate to present to a figure who bears a considerable yet distinctly different kind of influence in today’s world. If the haka resists oppression and celebrates freedom, then Beyoncé is an ideal advocate.

23. In Ka’ai-Mahuta’s *tienga* or model of Māori performing arts, *haka* is interwoven on the *reo*, or language, strand with *karanga* (2013:xiv); emphasizing the interdependence of male and female in message transmission.

It is precisely because Beyoncé is fierce that she would not simply let the haka group perform to her without offering her own *wehi*/response. This is where the performance embraces the spirit of haka. A haka must be responded to in order to be excellent (Matthews 2004). While it was true that her response did not fit with the traditional *tikanga*, it was appropriate in its own context. Critically, it was not Māori who had a problem with this intercultural encounter; it was an ill-informed, predominantly Pākehā, entirely *virtual* viewership trolling for evidence of cultural faux pas to support their belief in haka's irrelevance to society.

Because she did not know what she was “supposed” to do, Beyoncé responded instinctively, using her emotional/psychic storehouse to offer a performative gesture in keeping with her energy and abilities. Her response was both a demonstration of her strength and a validation of the haka's energy, which Beyoncé responded to with equal energy. Beyoncé felt the *mauri*, or life-force, of the situation. Kiri Nathan asserts that Beyoncé “knew the significance and was really genuine in her gratitude, it was all from the heart” (in Glucina 2013). It is this interchange of *ihi* and *wehi* that evoked the *wana* of the performance. Even for a spectator experience limited by film, the power of this “haka-exchange” is undisputable.

## Feeling the Ihi

Haka is a conversation in which the audience is explicitly invoked. So, although Beyoncé is not the performer in this haka but the subject, her participation allowed her to be a truly active (or pro-active) spectator—or, in Augusto Boal's terms, a “spect-actor” (2002:15).<sup>24</sup> Through this invocation or interaction, the trinity of *ihi*, *wehi*, and *wana* was exemplified and thus the haka was successful. As Matthews reinforces, a successful haka is measured on “whether the standard of performance [is] worthy of the message being transmitted” (2004:11). As an exemplary performer, Beyoncé was invested in her role as a spectator and entered the performance voluntarily to validate the message of the haka. The message, which is a demonstration of respect, is thus transmitted and reciprocated simultaneously.

There are also occasions in contemporary practice where an impromptu haka is given in response to a more formalized performance. Describing the biennial Te Matatini festival—a national *kapa haka* competition where teams contend for the top prize—Sharon Mazer refers to performances of “ad hoc haka,” where family members in the crowd show support for performing groups by performing a *haka mibi* (haka of introduction/acknowledgement/greeting) at the start or end of a routine. In the rules of this event, the audience is “not supposed to do this” (2011:49). Mazer frames this spontaneous haka in a Western theatrical context: “The ad hoc haka acquires the effect of recalling the team to the stage as if for an encore, except it is the audience performing while the performers are caught in a kind of limbo” (2011:49). Yet this instance, when propriety is dropped, also produces a kind of cleaving of the event's theatricalism: “For a moment, we have the potential to see the gap between the performance of protocol [...] and its enactment in everyday life” (49). The formalized circumstances of Matatini make this interchange seem like a transgression; yet Mazer sees this contravention of protocol as creating an opening where Te Ao Māori is revealed as something lived, rather than merely preserved:

It seems almost utopian, this vision of a stadium full of indigenous people, singing and dancing their way past the deprivations of colonisation and, via the magic of a theatricalised restoration of tradition, facing up to globalisation with their localised identities as *tangata whenua* somehow remarkably intact. (2011:50)

The formalized *kapa haka* of Matatini is reversed in the informal haka for Beyoncé backstage at Vector Arena. At Matatini, the performers are onstage in “traditional” costumes while

24. “‘Spect-actor’ is a Boal coinage to describe a member of the audience who takes part in the action in any way” (translator's introduction, in Boal 2002:xxvi).

spectators “are dressed in such a way that wouldn’t look out of place at McDonalds afterwards” (Mazer 2011:48). In the backstage haka, the haka is performed by a group of performers in plain clothes to an outstanding spectator dressed in an elaborate costume. While the haka at Matatini is carefully choreographed and framed within a “theatrically restored tradition,” it is Beyoncé’s backstage haka—the performance itself—that is ad hoc, a theatrical transgression of the everyday or contemporary. There is something in the liminal space of this backstage site that reinforces the liveness and potency of the ritual: it is a performance situated just beyond the performance space, enacted raucously for a spectacular artist.

As a nonparticipating spectator to the Matatini performances, Mazer recognizes the interchange of *ihi* and *wehi* yet does not describe the *wana*. The intangible *wana* is electric. When I witness a haka performed live (and often even in recordings), it feels as though my insides are roaring. The hairs on my arms stand on end, my heart throbs, and I almost always weep. A powerful internal physical violence, a tearing, a drawing in—but also healing and cathartic.

It is clear that Beyoncé felt something like this and performed back without the burden of protocol or ceremony. Like her own acclaimed stage performances, there can be much more than pleasure in the exchange between performer and audience. It is an electric space in-between, exemplifying *te mana o te haka*—the prestige of the haka (Ka’ai-Mahuta 2013:14). This, to me, is the point of the backstage performance: it is not how haka was done that measured its worth, it is how it was *felt*. The criterion for critique is not in the form but in the feeling. While the dissenters to this presentation were virtual and not present in the space, *wanawana* transcends this: you don’t have to be there live to feel it, you just have to be *alive* to the *ihi*.<sup>25</sup>

So what did Beyoncé really do? She exposed the widespread delusions about contemporary haka shared by many New Zealanders. She revealed the fatigue and insularity that comes with familiarity—the inclination to see something without feeling it. Yet she also captured what it means to experience haka for the first time, without expectation or anxiety. She felt the joy of it.

Māori culture flourishes in these moments when the feeling received prevails over the politics of cultural—or sexual—propriety. It is a conservative constituency wielding the scythe of authenticity that reduces the supposedly appropriate reception of haka to a polite clap and a nod. Perhaps sometimes we need to face each other with tongues out in order to feel the space that separates us.

## Haka ā mua

### Haka of the Future

Apprehension about performances of haka and other Māori forms that seem to deviate from what is perceived to be “authentic” is understandable. The vast history of cultural imperialism in New Zealand and the misappropriation of Māori taonga for corporate purposes necessitate wariness of any adaptation. Yet, by viewing haka as an evolved and evolving cross-disciplinary form, there is an acknowledgment of the form’s relevance as a living practice. Haka is, or can be, many things: it defines a culture’s history and people, expresses symbiotic masculine and female strength, is a kind of sport or a prelude to a sporting encounter, demonstrates respect, and projects a message of love. It can woo or seduce; it can both initiate catharsis and demonstrate resistance against oppression. Just as haka is not one thing, there is often more than one way to understand what the encounter means to the performers and the performed-to. Who is doing it, to whom are they doing it, and why? What is the response?

25. In contemporary Māori theatre, haka is often incorporated, like classical soliloquy, to speak directly to the audience: to rouse, confront, or resist. Haka, in these contexts—shown powerfully in the final scene of Hone Kouka’s *Waiora* (1997)—transcends the literal world of the narrative, fracturing the proscenium frame to incite the audience to feel the *ibi* of a performance, to reconnect an audience to the spiritual realm.

Beyoncé's haka is troubling only when cultural rules—configured as “tradition” and “preservation”—are imposed on its reception. For Māori present at the performance, the experience reinforced the potency of haka as a mode that electrifies and activates its audience: where the ultimate success is in finding a spectator who truly matches the intensity of a vigorously performed haka. Indeed, it could also be argued that a vibrant Māori culture has been sustained in New Zealand because of the people who have constructed a worldview that is flexible and fluid: the “rules” depend on the situation. In this regard, let's consider the divergent circumstances between the haka for Beyoncé and the one for “culture-vulture” Rihanna. Rihanna sought an indigenous performance to satisfy a (demonstrated) fetish for otherness; Beyoncé was honored as a performer who has earned respect across cultural divides. Beyoncé, like Bob Marley, is particularly relevant to Māori partially because of her alternative and resistant expression of black identity. This performance must be considered in context as an acknowledgement of the mana of the manuhiri, a situation where the star's “inappropriate” was in fact appropriate: “We didn't expect Beyoncé to join in, but she really felt the mana and ihi in that special moment” (Bro in the Know 2013).

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