

Kia ora, gday and welcome to the History of Aotearoa New Zealand. Episode 82: Taringa Whakarongo. This podcast is supported by our amazing Patrons, such as Madison. If you want to support HANZ go to patreon.com/historyaotearoa. Last time, we talked about games that were pretty much exclusively for young kids. Although today's topic was also somewhat for rangatahi, we will be focussing more on the adults. When we went over the games that were a bit more physical in nature, you may have noticed that we didn't cover probably the most famous physical activity Māori performed. This was mostly just cause I was saving it until last so today we will talk about probably the most famous physical activity in all of Te Ao Māori. The haka.

Before we dive more into what haka is and what it means, we need to light a match and clear the air of a couple of misconceptions. Firstly, when I say THE haka, you're probably thinking of Ka Mate, the haka that the New Zealand national rugby team, the All Blacks, have performed since 1905 but actually dates back to Te Rauparaha, a Ngāti Toa chief who composed it circa 1820. Alternately you are possibly thinking of Kapa o Pango, another haka that the All Blacks have performed on occasion since 2005. Haka in New Zealand rugby goes much further back than that, probably starting around the mid-late 1880s and really deserves an episode of its own but what I want to illustrate here is something you may have already picked up on. There is no THE haka, there is no single, monolithic haka that is always performed when a haka is needed. There are many different types of haka and many different ways that they are performed and used, all with different actions, words and cadance. As you might expect, different iwi or hapū have haka that they call their own and haka are still even being written today. Such as Kapa o Pango that I mentioned before, which was specially written for the use of the All Blacks or my own high school's haka which was written for use of the students on special occasions.

The second misconception we need to clear up is that most people know haka as something that was done in times of war, a display of martial prowess to intimidate your enemies. Most early European writers and even some modern ones often translate haka or describe it as a 'war dance' which is probably what has led to this heavy association with battle, aggression and warfare. While this is an aspect of haka and what it was used for, it really overshadows the other aspects of it that weren't explicitly martial. We have discussed these a little in the past when talking about pre-European Māori social structure and how during pōwhiri haka were used to welcome guests. Haka had a high level of social importance beyond that of war and a tribe's mana could grow or diminish based on how well they performed their haka. Both of these points we will go over and make clearer as we talk about it a bit more but I just wanted to get that out there just so we are all on the same page.

Let's actually go over what haka is at a surface level. You know, like if I told you that we were going to go see a group perform kapa haka, what would you expect to see as a few of you may not know what I'm talking about. A haka more or less involves a group of people, usually men and women but not always, chanting together, often loudly, or sometimes doing a bit of a call and response type thing from a leader to the rest of the group, sorta like a sea shanty. Although, it could just be a single person as well. The formation that the group would normally be in is a hollow square or a wedge, though today evenly spaced lines are more popular. The stance of the haka is that of 'relaxed readiness' whereby the knees are lightly bent with the feet apart, hands on hips and back straight. The key being that they should be able to have their hands reach their hips without any bending at the waist. Usually a haka will start with the leader shoutng 'taringa whakarongo' meaning listen up, followed by 'ka rite' and/or 'kia mau' basically meaning be ready. After that there will be a 'ringa pakia', instructing the group to slap their hands against their thighs. Sometimes the group will begin

to stamp their feet now but will most often await instructions from the leader. Once the tempo is set, the leader will give his opening call and the haka will begin.

Usually haka are accompanied by actions such as the slapping of the thighs, such as seen in Ka Mate, the shaking of the hands, jumping, pointing and that sort of thing, usually done in time to a beat which is kept by the stomping of the feet. Haka actually has a large rhythmic component, it requires everyone to be in time so that it all looked good. Historically, this skill translated fairly well into other areas, Best noting that military drills and parading were something that the Māori Contingent of WWI excelled at. He also mentions how when Europeans first arrived in Aotearoa that Māori were quite critical of their rowing skills. There are also often quite vivid facial expressions, the most famous of these being the widening of the eyes and the protruding of the tongue. I know I've been a bit vague here and put in quite a lot of caveats but that's really because there are lots of different haka that all have their own way of being performed and there isn't really a single straight answer. Calling it a dance or a posture dance or a war dance doesn't exactly tell you what you might be in for if you were told you were going to see a haka being performed. I am actually at a bit of a loss to describe kinda what they are so I'm kinda relying on the fact you have either seen the All Blacks perform or have some other prior encounter with one. In fact, Armstrong doesn't believe you can learn haka by reading about it, expression, inflections etc. just can't be conveyed fully through words or diagrams. You have to see it and feel it.

Alan Armstrong, a prolific writer on Māori games, songs and dances does quite a good job of explaining what haka is in a more conceptual way, saying it is 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, exultion, defiance or contempt of the words. It is disciplined yet emotional. More than any other aspect of Māori culture, this complex dance is an expression of the passion, vigour and identity of the race. It is at its best, truly, a message of the soul expressed by words and posture." That, from my pretty academic understanding, is a pretty good description of the emotional importance of what haka is, it is a very powerful expression of someone's or a groups feelings, whether those feelings being positive or negative.

Haka could be very short, from less than a minute to a few minutes long, depending on the occasion and the message trying to be conveyed. One example that came from a source read was a very short haka about his great grandfather that was performed during a pōwhiri on a marae. The haka was all about how his great grandfather would pull on his penis and how his hand would tire from doing so until the penis shrivels, which is quite graphic, particularly in a fairly public and formal setting. The author was later informed though, by none other than Hirini Mead himself, that this is likely from when his great grandfather left his wife and remarried someone else. The author was rather surprised that such a short haka with a pretty niche contextual use had managed to survive to the modern day, which really goes to show how a lot of very small things can be held by tohunga to be whipped out when the appropriate time called for it. In this case, despite the rather interesting content and probable negative context of the haka, the author took it as a sign of respect. He was the descendant of the person that the haka was about so the use of that particular haka showed that he was a significant person in that iwi's past and the memory of him had been held onto, so it was appropriate to acknowledge his descendant in that way. Haka words and themes can have a range of topics such as welcoming and farwelling people, expressing a grievance or making your desires known to the gods. They can be more intimate subjects like that of expressing your love or your excitement at escaping capture.

Like most ideas or concepts in Te Ao Māori, haka has a legendary origin, possibly in a place that you wouldn't expect. It actually comes from Tamanuiterā, the sun, or more accurately, the sun's son.

Tamanuiterā has two wives, Hine-raumati who is the embodiment of summer and Hine-takurua who is the embodiment of winter. The particular child that we are interested in is one from Hine-raumati, the summer. Her son was called Tānerore, who is the shimmering light dancing on hot days. This dancing is performed in honour of his mother and it is also said to be the influence for the trembling movements of the hands during a haka.

In terms of the different types of haka, there are quite a few but the lines between each type are blurred and it also kinda depends on who you ask as to how to categorise them. Adding another layer of complexity is the fact that haka is much different now to what it was in the pre-European era, given there have been other influences upon it and its interaction with other cultures has changed its form and the needs or use of the haka, which has led to a reduction in types. Armstrong defines haka between whether they are performed with or without weapons, which seems to be a fairly widespread categorisation. From the two broader definitions, Armstrong further narrows down haka into a couple of subcategories, haka taparahi and haka peruperu. The former are those not explicitly used for warfare, so anything used on the marae to greet guests or to honour someone, that sort of thing, Ka Mate would be put into this category as well since it is used by the All Blacks or Ngāti Toa for non-martial reasons. The latter, the haka peruperu are what you might call the 'true war dances' in that they were used to prepare for battle or celebrate victories. This classification isn't all there is though, as I said, it depends on who you ask. Armstrong's system has been called 'tidy' by some as it fits everything in just a bit too neatly and doesn't account for other variances. This is probably to be expected though since Armstrong is Pākehā and we really do like putting fluid concepts into nice, neat boxes when they really probably shouldn't be. Instead it was put forward that haka should be defined and categorised by a few different factors; their function, how they were performed, how the performers were grouped and one that was for haka specifically for funerals. From these broader groups there were a few more specific groupings, such as under haka by function there is a group for haka that contain sexual connotations or imagery and are meant to show derision or another for haka that are meant to indicate revenge. For haka based on grouping it could be based on having two ranks of performers or performing in a square, for the manner of performing it could be to do with the shuffling of the feet or kneeling and the funeral haka seem to be grouped by what part of the funeral they were performed at or in what context, such as to welcome the manuhiri or to honour those who died in battle.

Others define it more along the lines of whether the haka is meant to be received positively or negatively, whether the movements were uniform in their actions or whether the particular haka was meant for amusement, welcoming manuhiri, war or other purposes.

Lets go back to haka peruperu though cause from what I found, there is a fair amount more info on them as opposed to haka taparahi, probably because to the Europeans who were writing this stuff down, the war dances were the ones that really caught their eye more, especially with the addition of weapons being used. Peru is the Te Reo Māori word for being angry, or more specifically the look that someone has when they are angry. So doubling it up and saying peruperu is a more intense version of the word, the repetition indicating more than one of or lots more of something, in this case probably a lot more aggression. This naturally leads to the naming of haka peruperu as they are kinda intended to be anger distilled into a raw, powerful form that is projected by voice and body. As mentioned, haka peruperu were generally performed with weapons like patu, mere, taiaha and te whatewha, later muskets were also used when those were brought to Aotearoa. Interestingly, this type of haka wasn't just used to intimidate an enemy or to celebrate a victory, it had a variety of uses which centered around war and battle. Armstrong describes haka being used prior to a taua leaving for battle, they would assemble somewhere in the kainga or pā and perform a haka for the

rangatira and tohunga. This had both a practical and spiritual purpose. The practical was that the rangatira could inspect their troops and ensure they were ready for battle. Haka is quite a physical activity so it would become pretty clear if someone was struggling due to an injury or wasn't able to wield their weapon correctly, making them a liability on the battlefield. The tohunga were concerned with the spiritual aspect and in particular would be looking at the troops' feet, making sure that everyone was jumping in the air at the same time and that their legs were high enough. If they didn't, this would be considered a bad tohu that they weren't going to be victorious. Tuta Nihoniho, a Ngāti Porou chief also makes comment that men should show their legs to the women before they leave for battle and perform a haka for them as they will point out if they are doing everything right and look ready, with the women's appropriate response being "advancing with war like faces" if they approved. However, if they don't do this, they are likely apprehensive cause they don't look ready. To me this sounds like they were using this as a way to further assess the fighting skills of the troops as the women had as much of a stake in this as anyone else, it was possible that they were going to lose husbands, brothers and sons, so they wouldn't want a taua to leave if they felt the blokes weren't ready. Again, all of this was steeped in the spiritual but it had a very clear practical purpose, assessing the taua to make sure everyone was fit enough, had correct discipline, posture etc that would benefit them in the battle. War was risky and you wanted to make sure you gave yourself the best chance to win, some weak links in the chain could be fatal. If when watching the haka, the tohunga thought the omens were bad, they would ask the taua to repeat the haka to double check the omens. If they were good, then the first was considered a bit of a dud and the taua proceeded to war. If it was bad twice in a row, well then they were meant to not fight but I'm sure some did as we have seen in other cases across the world with similar practices. Alternately, if it was only one man that was out of time, he could just be left behind as the rest of the taua went off to battle or even just killed on the spot!

Haka peruperu weren't just used for inspection and tohu but could also be used to intimidate an enemy group, usually with both groups performing their haka to each other. Although Best calls this 'mock combat' this potentially wasn't quite what they were doing. As you might expect, Europeans didn't have much of positive note to say about the haka, saying it "consists of a variety of violent motions and hideous contortions of the limbs... their eyes appear to be starting from their head, their tongue hanging down to their chin, and the motion of their body entirely corresponding with these in a manner not to be describe." Another European talked about when a group was performing a haka on the deck of a ship, "they danced so heavily that we were afraid they would break through the deck." Others, as you might expect, were terrified of the haka, "The whole performance was so perfectly horrid that, although I am possessed of strong nerves, I could not repress a shudder, and my hair almost stood on end." In particular, this was in reference to a haka that was performed by 3000 people, so it certainly would have been quite intimidating! Best observed that the haka peruperu were performed on three occasions. When manuhiri arrived as their intention was unknown to the receiving group and this showed the visitors that the tangata whenua were ready for battle should it come to that. To me it sounds like Best is describing a pōwhiri and how tangata whenua would perform a haka as well as a wero to gauge the manuhiri's intentions. The second occasion was that we have already talked about, before going to war to check if the gods approved of the reason for the conflict, as well as practical preparedness. The other occasion was when the battle was won and the enemy was fleeing, letting them hear the victors revel in their triumph over them.

Next time, we will continue talking about the social importance of haka, what Europeans thought when they first encountered it and the women's role in it all.

If you want to send me feedback, ask a question, suggest a topic or just have a chinwag you can find my email and social media on historyaotearoa.com. You can also find helpful resources there like transcripts, sources and translations for some of the Te Reo Māori we have used. You can help support HANZ through Patreon, buying merch or giving us a review, it means a lot and helps spread the story of Aotearoa New Zealand. As always, haere tū atu, hoki tū mai. See you next time!