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## **New Zealand Rugby**

### **the All Blacks, the haka, and Maori representation**

Media and media representations of individuals surround us on a day-to-day basis. These images not only serve as entertainment but also help to socially construct our everyday lives and provide us with information about other people and their cultures. The purpose of this project is to look at the representation of the Maori people and the use of the haka by the New Zealand rugby team, the All Blacks. Rugby and the haka are two elements that have helped shape the identity of New Zealand within the realm of sports. Not only is the activity extremely influential within the culture of the Maori but it has also played a large role within sports globalization and the representation of the indigenous identity of the Maori to others. This particular team, although not the only one known for performing a war dance, interested me in particular because their ritualistic dance is in fact one of the more notorious. When you think of the All Blacks, you see the faces of strong men chanting a warrior song, and doing a dance before they go into “battle”.

The primary focus of this research include three questions:

1. How does the haka represent the Maori people and their culture within the realm of rugby?
2. Has the performance of the haka changed the way that other cultures view the Maori people as a whole?

3. Is the haka helping to create a stereotypically masculine image of the Maori players on the team? And generating even more stereotype of the Maori people?

To better understand the influence of rugby within not only New Zealander culture but also that of the Maori indigenous culture it is crucial to look at the emergence of the sport on the island. Many Europeans frequently visited New Zealand but it wasn't until 1840 that the Maori and the British came to an agreement concerning the island and its original inhabitants. The Treaty of Waitangi gave Maori individuals equal rights like British citizens. With the Pakeha (Europeans) came their culture and this is where you see the introduction of rugby into Maori society. It is key to note that, "rugby began as the sport of an elite" and that the "Maori people indeed appear to have taken up the game very early. A Maori called Takeru appeared in the Rangitikei team of 1876" (Phillips & Nauright, 1996, p.76). According to Calabro's (2012) dissertation:

"the relationship between Maori and rugby is more than one century old. In strictly cultural terms Maori exposure to rugby and following their adoption of this sport is to be situated within the acculturation process ensued by British colonization. This sport was initially meant to educate, in moral and physical terms, the Maori that were supposed to form the local male elite and help the British settlers governing the colony up to the time when the 'Maori race' would extinguish" (p.164-65).

The very introduction of rugby was meant to not only break down Maori society but to assimilate them into white British society. What is fascinating about this particular case is that rugby was in fact adopted into the Maori way of life and although was meant to be

a form of control over the indigenous people they managed to use it as a means to replace the loss of some of their own cultural competitions (Calabro, 2012, p.165-66). The Maori people utilized the sport “in order to fulfill their aspirations to sociocultural continuity, sociopolitical acknowledgement and self-realization” (Calabro, 2012, p.165-66).

Rugby also became a way for Maori men to gain status among not only their people but in the eyes of the Pakeha and also helped provide a way from them to “acquire national prestige, and reaffirm and define their indigeneity” (Calabro, 2012, p. 166). The opportunity for the definition of their indigeneity allowed for them to incorporate indigenous aspects such as ritual dances and the development of a particular way of playing the game that helped define Maori rugby as a whole. (Calabro, 2012, p. 166). This style of rugby play also became an essential part in how Maori young men were able to assert their masculinity and hold on to their male identity.

The first official game of rugby was played in 1870 and the sport only continued to grow during the 1880s. A variety of leagues were established on the island and soon teams began to play overseas. Around 1890 the first ever New Zealand team traveled to the British Isles to play competitively. The majority of the team members were of indigenous descent and even the Pakeha who participated were considered natives of New Zealand. Of the 74 games played in Britain the team managed 49 wins and 20 losses. By the end of that same year there were approximately 700 active club teams and 16 major unions established on the island. Eventually this led to the establishment of a national union, the New Zealand Rugby Football Union, in 1892. From this emergence comes the formation of “The Originals” which eventually became the All Blacks. In 1905 again playing in Britain it is documented that this is the first time that the native

New Zealand team use the haka before a match. This introduction was what initially started the popularization of the Maori war dance. By the time of the First World War the haka became a primary part of New Zealand rugby (McLintock, 1966).

To answer the first question of how the haka represent the Maori people and their culture within the realm of rugby we need to look at several elements. This incorporation of the dance helped define the face of New Zealand rugby internationally. So we must ask ourselves what is the purpose of such a performance? The history of the haka dates back centuries and was used as a challenge when going into battle amongst Maori tribes. “In Maori mythology the Maori warrior is a hero and is personified by the mythological being endowed with supernatural powers known as Maui. Maui is skilled with athletic ability, leadership strategy and warfare knowledge” (Ormond, 2009, p. 2). There are also various forms of the haka and over time they have changed to fit modern day society. In regards to the All Blacks “New Zealand is most familiar with the ‘Ka mate’ haka and the way national sports teams use it to re-enact ancient Maori warrior preparation for warfare” (Ormond, 2009, p. 2). This particular style of the war dance was created “in the 1820s by a famous chief of the Ngati Toa Tribe, Te Rauparaha” (Jackson & Hokowhitu, 2002, p. 129). This is significant not only because it portrays an important aspect of Maori culture but also because it has created an interesting relationship and dynamic within rugby. According to Jackson and Hokowhitu (2002):

“It is rugby’s mythical and popularized role in defining New Zealand identity and in uniting Maori and Pakeha that helps explain the significance of the haka. This may be because the haka, as one of New Zealand’s most identifiable national

sporting rituals, is performed and displayed during heightened moments of national significance, that is, when facing foreign opponents” (p. 127).

But a primary problem that seems to arise is whether or not this is an appropriate representation of Maori culture because “...the haka, as a powerful symbol of Maori culture, has simply been colonized as a national rugby symbol to represent racial harmony despite the lack of Maori material advances. It is contested terrain, perhaps the key site where Maori culture gains more global exposure than any other aspect of Maori identity” (Jackson & Hokowhitu, 2002, p. 127).

On one hand, rugby is one of the most important mainstream symbols and venues of expression for New Zealand nationalism, and some argue that the haka’s privileged position within rugby speaks to the recognition of the biculturalism of New Zealand and the centrality of the Maori people.

“For many rugby spectators the haka is a patriotic ritual that is observed with as much respect as the national anthem. The performing of the haka immediately after the national anthems places Maori culture and the warrior in a highly visible position to the match spectators all over the world. Thus the Maori warrior has become a highly publicized icon which the world associates with [the] nation” (Walker, 1996, p. 2).

This idea of a national identity is an ideology that Communication theorist Stuart Hall focuses on heavily within several of his works. “Nationalist discourse, Hall argues, is a way of constructing meanings that organize the actions and conceptions of citizens. Meanings of the nation, he continues, ‘are contained in the stories told about it, memories

which connect its present with its past and images which are constructed of it” (Falcous, 2005, p. 376). James H. Liu (1999) also argues something similar that modern identities are socially constructed through shared portrayals of knowledge that are transmitted and reproduced by society and its affiliated institutions, in relation to a specific group (p. 1).

The story of the All Blacks, and in particular the story involved in and exemplified by their use of the haka, is a story of strong import to modern New Zealanders. It is believed by many scholars that rugby in New Zealand has played a role in a resurgence of nationalism that focuses primarily on their role within the international sporting arena. Rugby thoroughly represents “one of the most visible sports in media promotions of New Zealand national identity... appearing on television surrounded by supposed elements of New Zealand-ness and with patriotic music, expropriated Maori symbolism among other images” (Phillips & Nauright, 1996, p. 233). While being interviewed former All Blacks coach John Hart states that “the Haka goes back to our Maoridom and the roots of our country. We feel a passion for the country. It’s not just a game when we perform the haka. I think the players take a lot of pride in that” (Haka history behind the All Blacks – Adidas sponsored video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Txu5S7dcJjQ>)

This train of thought has been questioned and challenged. “During the 1960s and 1970s, feminists, Maori activists and revisionist historians openly challenged prevailing constructions of New Zealand national identity” (Hope, 2002, p. 236). David Murray (2000), the author of *Haka Francas?* states that the haka in itself is more complicated than representing just a national identity or a war dance used to intimidate the opponent.

“Discussions of the haka act as a means through which various identification can be positioned and articulated. Conversations with Maori participants and organizers reveal that whereas the haka was initially described to me as representative of a (pan) Maori cultural identification (a term which implies an opposing ‘not-Maori’ identification, most likely to be foreigner, pakeha or ‘European’ New Zealander in these contexts), it would shift in its representative meanings during the course of the conversation.” (p. 345).

Some argue that perhaps the haka’s use in this context, particularly by the All Blacks, is not appropriate, and might be an opportunistic or exploitative ploy at cultural appropriation. In 1997 the All Blacks came to the attention of Adidas. At the time they were sponsored by Canterbury International, a company who had handled the teams merchandising since 1905. In November of that year it was announced that Adidas would now taking over the All Blacks apparel (Motion, Leitch, Brodie, 2003, 1086) . With the approach of the 1999 Rugby World Cup the German company and another global advertising firm, Saatchi, focused heavily on the performance of the haka in their advertisements. This was their chance at turning the All Blacks into a brand. What was released was a 60-second video portraying the rugby players in their uniforms and the faces of Maori warriors. [\(At this point please watch the appropriate film\)](#) **All Blacks haka – Adidas Ad – (1999)**

This particular video was shown in approximately 40 countries, with the intent to leave a lasting impact on rugby audiences. What is key to note is that “The All Blacks sought advice from Maori cultural leaders about how they could reinforce the power and mana of the haka” specifically for this event (Jackson & Hokowhitu, 2002, p. 131).

In the short video we see All Black players in their Adidas uniforms and the sequences flash back and forth between the players and Maori warriors. Their faces are covered in Maori warrior face paint, also known as moko. Simultaneously we also hear the Ka Mate chant in the background. Ultimately the intent of this video is to intimidate and instill a bit of fear into the viewer. These men are strong, fierce and willing to fight for victory. A significant problem with this advertisement is that it globalizes a particular image and exposes other cultures to it. This can create a realm of misunderstanding from other groups who do not understand the true meaning of the haka, the All Blacks and what their Maori culture and identity truly represent in the realm of rugby. These are the lyrics of the Ka Mate translated from the Maori chant to English:

Ka mate! Ka mate! Ka ora! Ka ora!	I die! I die! I live! I live!
Ka mate! Ka mate! Ka ora! Ka ora!	I die! I die! I live! I live!
Tenei te tangata puhuru huru	This is the hairy man
Nana nei i tiki mai	Who fetched the Sun
Whakawhiti te ra	And caused it to shine again
A upa ... ne! ka upa ... ne!	One upward step! Another upward step!
A upane kaupane whiti te ra!	An upward step, another... the Sun shines!
Hi!!!	

(<http://www.haka.co.nz/haka.php>)

The lyrics alone are not threatening in any shape or form, but because the performance requires such intense emotion and expressive body language, it can be seen as such. These misrepresentations help enforce stereotypes that already exist about the



Maori culture and their identity. Saatchi's head of television, Howard Greive was quoted as saying that:

“One of the key words that Adidas were keen to go with was authenticity – so that's why we shot a game that's why we shot the haka... We knew that if we could just show people what it is actually like to be confronted by the haka and to watch the All Blacks play their game – then you don't have to manufacture anything. All you have to do is show it (“Primal Team,” 1999, p. 22).

It is hardly appropriate to describe this ad as authentic due to the amount of editing necessary to portray this particular image. Jackson and Hokowhitu (2002) claim that although Adidas attempted at capturing the authenticity of the All Blacks through this representation it only manufactures one aspect of Maori culture and ultimately this manufactured image is exploiting the indigenous culture itself. “The exploitation occurs not only through the misappropriation of ritual but also through the attempts to nostalgically forge a particular version of New Zealand's past” (p. 133-34).

This point of controversy with respect to the haka is the common perception that the haka could be seen as encouraging a narrative that depicts the Maori as noble savages. The stereotype of the Maori warrior could potentially become the face of the All Blacks along with other negative connotations. This is no longer about a cultural representation but the making of the brand the All Blacks via Adidas.

“Part of that brand, is the history, tradition, and culture of the All Blacks. Within a local context, this means ownership of aspects of the New Zealand community and its collective memory. Thus, transnational investment in the national sport

provided privileged access to the past, present, and future meaning of not only the game but also the nation” (Jackson & Hokowhitu, 2002, p.126-27).

Adidas’ involvement helped the All Blacks both financially and with their image, but at the same time control was and has been taken away in regards to how they are presented to audiences. This also affects the narratives that are derived from the lack of control within the situation and “as a consequence, there is greater potential for misunderstanding and exploitation” (Jackson & Hokowhitu, 2002, p. 128). Many who are not native New Zealanders or Maori do not understand the chants or what the actions of the players means.

[\(At this point please watch the appropriate video\)](#) **Impossible is nothing – Haka – Adidas commercial (2008)**

In 2008 Adidas created another advertisement, but this time the advertisement focused instead on the history of the haka. Instead of showing terrifying faces they show players drawing figures on a clear screen. As the figures become animated, an intricate Maori tribal design appears and grows and the men describe their experience of being an All Black and what the haka truly means to them. The reason Adidas went this route in the first place may have had something to do with the opinions of players and Maori audience members or the protesting that emerged a year after the 1999 commercial. Many Maori people believed that because the Adidas branding campaign relied heavily on Maori culture that they should have received some of the proceeds for the use of their indigenous culture, specifically the use of the haka. Dave Rutherford the chief executive of the New Zealand Rugby Football Union made a statement stating that:

“We don’t want the haka to be for sale and if it were we wouldn’t be a willing buyer of it. I don’t think anyone thinks the haka is performed for commercial purposes. If it was ever reduced to that I’m reasonably sure we wouldn’t want to perform it. If the haka is for sale what isn’t? The haka is very special to New Zealand rugby and it has a very special place. It’s part of our game; we’ve defended the right to do it from time to time. We’ve never had to pay for the privilege. To do so would demean the mana of it for us (“No \$1.5m Haka,” 2000, p. 18).

This is something that is still being discussed because the All Blacks branding relies very much on this aspect of the identity of the Maori and their warrior culture. Unfortunately for Rutherford, it is very possible that the All Blacks would not have as much financial success without the haka. This very ritual brings in thousands of viewers and this is what can influence audiences if this is the only exposure they have had with the culture.

According to Butler and Hinch (2007):

“[Words] used by tourists to describe their impressions of Maori culture were stereotypical and traditional in nature; including ‘rugby’, ‘All Blacks’, ‘haka’, ‘painted faces’ or ‘face tattoos’, ‘warriors’ and ‘tribal image’, ‘mostly black/dark skin colour’ and ‘concert or dance performance’. Interestingly, most of the tourists interviewed by McIntosh (2004) did not feel their impressions of Maori culture changed after their visit to New Zealand, although slightly more respondents did indicate that they may have received a more contemporary and less stereotypical experience and impression of Maori culture during their visit to New Zealand. It appears, likely, therefore, those stereotypical impressions of

indigenous people and their culture may to some extent be reinforced by tourists' experiences of those cultures; (p. 79).

In 2005 the All Blacks stunned their audiences by performing a new haka the Kapa o Pango at the Rugby World Cup against South Africa.

Kapa O Pango kia whakawhenua au i ahau!	All Blacks, let me become one with the land
Hi aue ii!	
Ko aotearoa e ngunguru nei!	This is our land that rumbles
Au, au, aue ha!	It's my time! It's my moment!
Ko Kapa O Pango e ngunguru nei!	This defines us as the All Blacks
Au, au, aue ha!	It's my time! It's my moment!
I ahaha!	
Ka tut e ihiihi	Our dominance
Ka tut e wanawana	Our supremacy will triumph
Ki runga kit e rangi e tu iho nei, tu iho nei ihi!	And will be properly revered, placed on high
Ponga ra!	Silver fern!
Kapa O Pango, aue hi!	All blacks!
Ponga ra!	Silver fern!
Kapa O Pango, aue hi!	All blacks!

(<http://www.haka.co.nz/haka.php>)

During a television conference, Tanga Umaga a player for the team said that “ it represents a lot of the things that we thought were strong within us...the blackness of the

jersey, the silver fern” (Haka Interview Umaga, Smit – Kapa O Pango - News Broadcast (2005) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qj3MyMifguE>).

The All Blacks have continued to attempt to use the Haka as a tool of New Zealand unity and as a means of furthering Maori identity. In relatively recent years, the All Blacks have even met with the Maori king Tuheitia Paki and performed a haka in his presence, which incorporates a unique dynamic to the use of the haka in regards to the All Blacks and Maori cultural representation. ([At this point please watch the appropriate video](#)) **All Blacks meet Maori king with massive haka.** In this regard the All Blacks are not only showing respect to the Maori culture but also building a relationship with their Maori counterparts. These events of both the Kapa o Pango’s performance and that of the gathering for King Paki shows that perhaps the All Blacks do have some control over how they are represented to the Maori community. Although the branding of this team will affect the perceptions of rugby audiences internationally, for the players and for a lot of community members the haka is something that they hold in high regard. Also if more broadcasts are shown worldwide that explain the history behind the haka and its significance to the All Blacks perhaps it would help change the stereotypes that are created from advertisements like the one shown in 1999. It is crucial that “we need to recognize that social groups do not have essential identities; any attempt to define who we are ‘ is a communicative process that includes many voices and varying degrees of understanding and most importantly misunderstanding” (Murray, 2000, p. 347). In the case of the Maori it is about a collective identity that affects all within the community. In case of the haka it “may represent (pan) Maori, tribal, extended family and/or performance team identifications – all are equally valid positions employed in different

contexts for different purposes, ranging from political and economic to personal or descriptive” (Murray, 2000, p. 356). Overall what is significant and important is that this ritualistic dance means something to not only the players but to the people as a whole. Taine Randell, who was the All Blacks captain from 1995-2002 states that the haka “is just a form that’s treated with respect by the people who do it. It is a part of our culture and not everyone in the All Blacks has been a Maori or of that descent, but it is a part of our culture and a part of our identity” (Haka history behind the All Blacks – Adidas sponsored video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Txu5S7dcJjQ>).

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The All Blacks legendary haka – Historical video  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9GW11X0r1M>

Impossible is nothing – Haka – Adidas commercial (2008)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X01B4XAi15I>

Haka history behind the All Blacks – Adidas sponsored video  
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