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Waikirikiri Marae: Shared Experiences of the Wharemate

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Abstract
In Te Urewera, wharemate (shelters in which the deceased receive their final farewells) have traditionally been temporary structures. In the 1980s, a new practice was introduced in the Ruātoki valley with the erection of permanent wharemate facilities. One was erected at Waikirikiri marae (tribal meeting grounds and associated buildings) in 1989. Knowledge and discussion regarding wharemate at Waikirikiri marae have changed over the years, and a whole generation has not been fortunate enough to experience tikanga (correct procedures, customary practices) that prevailed prior to the introduction of the permanent wharemate building that is there today. These changes are recorded in this paper through the shared stories of three kaumātua (elders) from Waikirikiri.

This paper is a summary of Hare Rua's thesis study, the data for which was collected in 2009. This work forms part of the Tangi Research Programme, a collaboration between the School of Māori and Pacific Development and the Māori and Psychology Research Unit at The University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.

Keywords
tangi, wharemate, marae, tikanga, death, Tūhoe

Background
In Tūhoe (Māori tribe) wharemate as permanent marae facilities are dedicated to receiving and sheltering the tūpāpaku (deceased person, corpse) and, usually, the women of the bereaved family while the marae rituals of encounter, mourning and remembering take place. Wharemate—along with whare pōtae and kirimate—is also used in Tūhoe to refer to the bereaved's immediate family and those who, in close proximity to the tūpāpaku, keep vigil, care for and metaphorically "warm" the tūpāpaku. The permanent wharemate structure is a recent development that tends to be specific to Tūhoe marae in Te Urewera; although other Eastern Bay of Plenty tribal groups have also established them. The introduction of permanent wharemate has occurred during the lifetimes of the authors of this article, but a whole generation of Tūhoe young people has grown up without the experience of the previous, temporary, wharemate. This deserves attention as it represents a tribal-specific adaptation to contemporary changing values, beliefs and circumstances, and is a trajectory different from that of other tribal groups.

Early New Zealand ethnographers have described Māori attitudes and beliefs about sickness, death and death customs. Illness was caused by malevolent spirits, and responses to illness involved making appeals for interventon to guardian gods, the use of herbal remedies and activities of appeasement. Best (1926) and Te Rangihiroa (1950) agree that sickness and death brought with them a great sense of danger and risk, and significant measures were taken to avoid being contaminated by death tapu (restrictions). When people were ill and there was a risk they might die inside a permanent dwelling, they were removed to a temporary shelter away from the activities of daily life. This was because the dwelling could become contaminated, which would mean further interruption to facilitate the return of the dwelling to a safe and ordinary state. Should an individual die in a permanent dwelling the consequences were significant. Te Rangihiroa (1950) elaborates on these:

> A death imposed a death tapu over the building in which the death occurred. Though various forms of tapu can be removed by the appropriate ceremony, there was something sinister and lingering about a death tapu. No one cared to sleep on the same spot where someone had died. A former objection to European hospitals was that beds in which patients had died were continued in use. The proper treatment for the removal of a death tapu over a house [was] … to burn it

down. An ordinary house could be burned down or abandoned without much loss but meeting houses were too valuable to allow of being destroyed. The only possible way of saving valuable houses was by not allowing anyone to die in them. Thus when patients became seriously ill, they were removed to a temporary shelter quickly made or, in later times, to a tent. For people of note, the temporary shelter or tent was erected near the meeting house and facing out onto the marae. If they died there, no further arrangements were necessary for the next stage in the proceedings [the tangi]. (p. 416)

The use of temporary shelters and tents as wharemate in the Tūhoe tribal region is captured by the colonial gaze in photography. An image taken at Mataatua in Ruatahuna at the tangi for Te Whenuanui in 1907 clearly shows the tent structure and organisation of the wharemate (Alexandra Turnbull Library, PA1-0-042-42-1). Best (1925, p. 1105) clearly notes that Tūhoe had a "whare potae … a house of mourning for the dead", but this was a temporary dwelling as "no permanent buildings, employed solely for such purposes, were ever erected in the hamlets of Tūhoe." The question that arises is why such a change has occurred.

Kaumātua of Waikirikiri Marae

This paper explores the evolution of wharemate on the Tūhoe marae of Waikirikiri at Ruatoki from a temporary shelter to a permanent building. Three kaumātua, Te Uruhina Akuira Tiakiwai McGarvey (Nanny Uru), Mohi Rogers and Hina Nicholas recorded their reflections and surveyed the history of their wharemate, the tikanga surrounding its use and its evolution as a key part of the tangihanga (rites for the dead) process. Their accounts provide an opportunity for wharemate knowledge, history and practices at Waikirikiri marae to be recorded and shared with whānau (extended family, families) of the community. In their sharing of knowledge and experience, we gain an appreciation of the changes that have occurred, and reconnect to earlier generations to ensure a continuity of heritage and pride for the generations to come. All three participants were interviewed by Hare Rua, the first author of this paper, in 2009.

The topic of wharemate is interesting and important. Of interest also is the way the kaumātua, in telling their stories, move fluidly between Te Reo o Tūhoe (the Tūhoe language) and English, using Māori concepts in Māori and unashamedly appropriating English words as transliterations to serve their purpose. Those accustomed to Tūhoe speakers of this generation will find this familiar and clearly understandable. Others, however, might find this challenging, especially when the "how" of what is being said (eyes, hand motions, facial expressions) is vital to understanding what, to the foreign ear, may hear as incomprehensible utterances. As Tūhoe researchers and writers we are deeply enriched by the content of these conversations and the languages through which they are told. For this reason we have chosen to not translate quotes presented in the text below that are wholly or partially in Māori. Instead, we present the quote, and in the paragraph that follows, we describe and discuss the main issue or point raised in the quote. Context reveals the meaning. The paper, therefore, can be read either with or without the quotes. The non-reader of Māori will not be disadvantaged in this regard.

Waikirikiri marae is in the valley of Ruatoki, a rural Tūhoe community bordering Te Urewera in the Bay of Plenty. The marae is at the southern end of the valley on the banks of the Whakatane River, which flows north. Travelling from Taneatua to Waikirikiri (14 kilometres to the south), the traveller passes five other Tūhoe marae along a 7-kilometre stretch of road. Most have permanent wharemate structures. Shortly after Waikirikiri the road ends, giving way to the riverbed and rugged environment of Te Urewera. This is the domain of horses, hunting, food gathering, respite and reflection. This is the context in which Nanny Uru, Mohi and Hina were raised, and have lived and witnessed their lives and others. They are all elderly. They have Te Reo o Tūhoe as their first language and are active community participants, leaders in their own right and highly regarded for their knowledge, community contributions and gentle yet firm guidance. *Our* kaumātua (for each of them is related in some way to the authors of this paper), were interviewed by Hare Rua, as part of his graduate work at The University of Waikato.

Wharemate of Waikirikiri Marae

The temporary wharemate at Waikirikiri were always erected with the guidance of pakeke (elders). Mohi Rogers tells us that the materials used to build traditional wharemate included four kaponga

(*Cyathea dealbata)* pou, used as corner posts. The structure was to be approximately one-fifth of the size of the marae—about the size of a double garage. Branches of the nīkau tree *(Rhopalostylis sapida)* were woven together in a mesh-style pattern to form three walls of the structure (the back and sides). The front of the wharemate was left open. The roof was made of nīkau leaves and woven together in similar fashion to that of the walls. Roofing iron was sometimes placed on top of the nīkau roof. For insulation, raupo *(Typha angustifolia)* leaves were collected, dried and woven into the nīkau walls. Hay bales were placed on the bare ground and covered with whāriki (woven mats) for comfort and warmth. If hay bales were not available, long dry grass from the raised flats of the river bed would be collected and prepared as bales.

The wharemate was always erected to the right side of the whare puni (meeting house) as one approaches from the marae gate. This allows manuhiri (guests) to see inside the wharemate and for the kirimate (immediately bereaved, grieving relatives) to see manuhiri and observe the marae rituals of encounter. Unlike the other marae buildings, the wharemate of Waikirikiri did not have a name. The location of the wharemate, however, was called "Te Uruurunga", which was often used to refer to the physical structure of the wharemate as well. Nanny Uru tells us:

> Uruurunga—koina te ingoa. Ko te ūrunga hoki, koina tō resting place nērā. Ko te Uruurunga te okiokihanga o te hunga mate—ko taua wāhi rā. Koira hoki te uruhangātu o rātou—it was only a place; you know—te wāhi tū. Mokoe—i ā koe e kōrero ana, I just remembered koina kē he ingoa mo te wharemate. It never came into me, kā mēngia mātou kimihia he ingoa mo te wharemate nei—we never did—we never got a name for it. Always ka mea mai rā "heria atu ki te uruurunga," waihongiatu kē ngā mea ki konā.

While elaborate processes are usually entered into when deciding a name for significant buildings on the marae complex, as Nanny Uru explained above, this was not the case for the wharemate. It was simply referred to as a place on the marae where the temporary structure was erected. When its purpose had been served, it was dismantled. If roofing iron was used, it was often packed away and left behind the marae toilet block for further use. All other materials associated with the wharemate's construction—nīkau, kaponga, raupo and hay—were removed from the site and burned, lifting the tapu from the wharemate and tūpāpaku. The practice of removing tapu with fire is discussed by Te Rangihiroa (1950, p. 416) and referred to in the introduction above.

During the 1940s, Nanny Uru recalls the use of a tent as a wharemate at Waikirikiri. As with the traditional wharemate, hay was placed on the floor and covered by whāriki (woven mats). Whole bales of hay were also stacked along the base of the outer tent walls (excluding the front) to protect the wharemate from drafts, wind and rain. In contrast to earlier wharemate constructed of readily available materials, the tent was not destroyed but stored at a family member's home.

Temporary structures and tents continued in use at Waikirikiri until the late 1980s. The decision to build a permanent wharemate structure for Waikirikiri marae was made in 1989, following vigorous debate among the elders of the marae about how this would benefit the health and care of kuia (female elders), kirimate, and tūpāpaku. Some felt that marae tikanga and wharemate practices would be compromised for the sake of a few comforts. Initially, Nanny Uru opposed the idea of a permanent structure claiming it contradicted or at least challenged the teachings of her kuia. She feared that the tikanga associated with the wharemate would be transgressed, putting people at risk. Not long after these initial discussions a tangi was held for a significant elder of Waikirikiri marae. Wind and rain stormed through the valley during the tangihanga impacting the tangihanga process and those mourners keeping vigil over the tūpāpaku. This incident convinced Nanny Uru to reconsider her position and a few months later the present wharemate was erected.

Te Kawa o te Wharemate: Wharemate protocols

Until very recently, there were strict rules on entering and re-entering the wharemate. Kirimate and the kuia of the whānau and marae were the only ones permitted to enter the wharemate. Children were prohibited at all times as they could become sick or afflicted by malevolent spirits. Tūpāpaku were extremely tapu and children were seen as easy targets for retribution if safety rules, that is, tapu, were breached. Food and water are substances used in the removal of tapu at the appropriate time. Taking

food or sprinkling oneself with water removes tapu so individuals can go about their everyday activities. Tangi and the presence of tūpāpaku among the living, however, are not ordinary activities and the wharemate is charged with metaphysical activity that requires care and dedication to the task of supporting the wairua (spirit) of the tūpāpaku onwards in their spiritual journey away from the living.

The wharemate consisted of the kirimate, immediate whānau of the tūpāpaku including the pouaru or widow, and the kuia of the marae. This group of people was referred to as the wharemate or kirimate; they were exclusively female, and they were the primary mourners who constantly cared for the tūpāpaku. The tūpāpaku was never to be left alone. The role of the kirimate was to sit in the wharemate, head bowed with little eye contact with others for the duration of the tangihanga. Their primary role is to tangi, to mourn. Nanny Uru recounts:

> Ko te mea kē (mō rātou) he tangi, kā mutu, he noho ngā kuia, koirā te mahi, he tangi. Kāre koe e pai te titiro mākutu atu (ki) te tangata pēnei aianei—koirā ngā rerekēranga—noho tonu, noho tonu.

Nanny Uru also remembers how kuia from the manuhiri would sit in front of the wharemate and tangi, rather than entering into the wharemate as people do today; she notes that this has changed and laments the current lack of commitment to the behaviours, like not leaving the tūpāpaku, that she had witnessed in her youth.

> You know the kuia ka haere ana ki tētahi ūhunga—and this is one thing kua kore... kua kore te ia o ngā kuia ka haramai, a, kua noho mai ki mua tonu mai te wharemate... kua noho ki reira ke tangi atu ai te tūpāpaku, kāre e kuhu ana ki roto i te wharemate. Kua rerekē pea inaeanei. …Inaeanei hoki kāre e roa kua taki rere (ki te mimi). Kāre e whakarere te tūpāpaku (i nga tau o mua) i runga tonu pea i o rātou tau.

Echoing Nanny Uru's sentiments, Hina Nicholas reflects on rarely, if ever, seeing the kuia of the wharemate leaving their positions for any reason.

> Kā mutu, mēnā ko koe te pouaru a tērā e takoto rā, a te kāmehameha, mē ko koe tana pouaru, kāre koe e haere ki te horoi, tapu tonu atu tō noho. Kātahi au ka whakaaro ake, ha, must be rā taki haere ai te mimi, ē aua, ko wai hoki kā mōhio, kāre hoki e taki tū te haere ki te horoi. Kaua rā e taki haere te kai maybe i ngaā pō, kāre au e kite ana i aua kuia rā e haere ana ki te kai, te toilet, anywhere.

The commitment by those of the kirimate, their discipline and focus on the tūpāpaku is noted by Dansey (1975), who reflects, "our dead are very close to us in Māoridom. They do not lie alone on that short space between death and burial. We stay with them every minute and talk to them and sing to them" (p. 116). Moreover, the commitment of kuia to their role in the wharemate is highlighted in their abstaining from attending the toilet for bodily relief, and only taking food at night. All three of our informants commented on this, suggesting an intense focus on the immediate task.

At Waikirikiri the sanctity of the wharemate was important, and those who left the wharemate were often prohibited from re-entering, particularly those who had been eating or working in the wharekai (dining hall). This prohibition is discussed below but people could return to the wharemate the following day, after the passing of some time. Nanny Uru and Hina Nicholas both refer to a separation between food and water, and members of the wharemate. Not only were they prohibited from taking food or water, speaking of hunger or thirst was frowned upon. To Nanny Uru's mind, the simple act of talking about food is transgressive and can have significant consequences. Even consuming lollies within the wharemate had consequences.

> Rerekē hoki when I was learning. I was staunch ki ngā tikanga and I think ko ahau te kuia te strict katoa kai ngā marae nei. Kaua e mau i āu e mea ana (e hē ana). Iaeanei kua kai rare ki roto (i te wharemate) kua kii ahau "hey, haria o koutou rare", nā, kua kōrero kai, kua kii au "kaua e

kōrero kai. Kai te tānoanoa ē koutou te tūpāpaku". But some of them kua kuia kē wētahi, kāre e mōhio ana he aha tērā kupu. Koira taku kore hiahia [ki] te wharemate.

Nanny Uru uses the term "tānoanoa" with reference to the tūpāpaku to describe the unwelcome onset of decomposition, or more colloquially, to the body "going off" or "going bad" ahead of burial. Tānoanoa of tūpāpaku could occur when people transgressed the laws of tapu related to the wharemate, for example, talking about food or eating lollies. Such were some of the consequences. The tapu on wharemate was paramount and the presence of or even reference to food was a serious breach. In the following excerpt, Nanny Uru reflects on past practices and the present acceptance of comments about the length of the day and satisfying one's hunger, comments that would not be tolerated in previous times.

Kāre e korerongia ana te kai ki roto i te wharemate, kāre e pēnei iaianei—kua mea, "aiiiiiii, te whakaroaroa o te rā ki te tō kia āwai tātou te kai".

Conversation in the wharemate was also limited to the kaupapa of the tangihanga. This was the priority and the tūpāpaku the focus of all of one's attention.

Caring for the tūpāpaku was interrupted only for a short period late into the night and in the early hours of the morning before sunrise. This respite was noted by Te Rangihiroa (1950) who wrote, "Widows fasted during the period of attendance on the corpse, but they were persuaded to take nourishment under the cover of night" (p. 417). Nanny Uru, Hina and Mohi all recalled food being prepared and presented during the late hours of the night, often in front of the wharemate as the kirimate women were prohibited from entering or eating in the wharekai for fear their association with the tūpāpaku would contaminate ordinary activities. To assist with this meal time, a fire was sometimes lit directly in front of the wharemate. According to kaumātua interviewed, the fire was called "Te Mahurehure". It not only provided a light during meals but also comfort and warmth. The type of food, according to kaumātua, was often the finest available to the marae, a point also noted by Best (1906) who writes "near relatives of the dead, who take charge of the corpse, receive the choicest food, albeit they eat but at night" (p. 211).

Many kuia would not wash throughout their time in the wharemate. Nanny Uru recalls a conversation with her mother where she learned that the immediate family of the deceased did not wash. She remembers asking her mother whether the family members smelled. While being firmly reprimanded, her mother explained that they did not.

Me kii pea immediate family, me te pouaru, kāre e horoi. I thought "Farrrrrrrr out kāre e horoi"—but tērā āhua—ka mea atu ano au ki tō mātou māmā:
Nanny Uru: "Kāre e puta ana te haunga?"
Māmā: "Aiiiiiiiiii, kaua e korero i tēnā kōrero. Karekau (e puta te haunga)!

In the following passage, Nanny Uru suggests that the absence of odour was related to their consumption patterns and the food prepared for them. They abstained from eating during the day thereby limiting their intake. Drinking water was also limited thus reducing the need to pass water.

Ka āta noho ana koe, karekau tērā mea ē puta—you know—then I suppose karekau wēnā momo kai I think (the type of kai that would affect the body in that way—maybe they were very particular about the kai they were fed?)—what they eat nehā—wā rātou kai tonu pea e kai ana, nothing disturbs their stomach or whatever it is anyway. But i āu kua kuia nei kua mōhio au, awwwwwww tō rātou whakatapu i a rātou—you know—they preserve themselves kia kore (rātou) e mea (keha).
Mōhio rātou te whakatapu i a rātou—kua kore e inuinu wai kia kore e hia mimi—so they stay dry all the time. Noho hoki ki te mahara tō mātou whaea rā (Wairimu), kāre hoki e kai—kare e kai aaaaaaaa ka nehua tana tamāhine.

Ngā Taonga o te Tūpāpaku: Treasured Possessions

In the wharemate, taonga (treasured possessions) such as taiaha (wooden fighting staff), mere (nephrite weapon), patu (cleaver), tokotoko (walking stick) and korowai (cloak, usually with tassels), would be placed with the tūpāpaku. Sometimes these were buried with the tūpāpaku. Nanny Uru discusses how items would be placed if they were to be buried.

> Ana kua huri ki tana ringa. Koira te mere ka hoki ki tana taha. Kāre i runga i ā ia, kai tana taha kē, ana, ka heria, always put it on his right hand side, pēnā kai te tuku i tērā mea.

She explains that if the item was a mere, then rather than resting atop of the casket, it would be placed by his right hand side, with the handle turned towards his hand. This signals the intention to bury the object. When considering why taonga would be buried with the tūpāpaku, Nanny Uru recalls conversations with her own kaumātua.

> Ko te whakapapa rā te take ... ana ka pātai ai ahau a muri ake “he aha i tukuna ai?” Reply “Kua mutu te raina o tēnā”. I rongo hoki au e kiia mai ana “kua mutu kē te raina a tena—tukuna”.

Best (1906) supports Nanny Uru’s comments about genealogical lines ending, and refers to this as “peka titoki”, that is, the broken branch of a titoki tree *(Alectryon excelsus)*. When broken, it decays and dies and is seen no more, similar to a family line with no more issue. The burying of taonga, prized possessions, while a symbolic act, also serves to remove the object from circulation among the living, and with it, any risks to them.

Nanny Uru also talked about the placement of photos in the wharemate. She explained that only photos of female relatives were placed at the feet of the tūpāpaku. Often even these were restricted to a few photos of immediate family members.

Te Whakamāmā ake o ngā Tikanga: The Easing of Marae Traditions

The kaumātua highlighted the rigorous nature of tikanga surrounding the wharemate and the kawa (protocol) inside the wharemate. They pointed out, however, that there had been an easing of the tikanga in recent decades. The kaumātua of the 1970s had noted the drift of its community members into towns and cities for better jobs and education. This urban drift meant a loss of resource for the marae and its community (Nikora, Rua, Te Awekotuku, Guerin & McCaughey, 2008), putting pressure on those remaining to carry on the traditional practices. The kaumātua decided this was too much of a burden and endeavoured to relax some tikanga.

The kirimate were no longer required to eat out the front of the wharemate. They could now move into the wharekai. The other protocol that was relaxed was the restriction of times for pōhiri (ritual welcome) to daylight hours. This allowed the kirimate to eat at sunset and relieved them from the physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological pressure of staying under tapu for long durations.

Kōrero Whakamutunga: Conclusion

Many practices have changed with the building of the permanent structure for use as a wharemate for Waikirikiri marae. The days of the earlier temporary structures were synonymous with intense tapu practices that were strictly adhered to, practised and policed by the old people of that time. There are challenges in passing on knowledge to the people of Waikirikiri marae. Although the teachings are passed on, the people of today bring with them their own set of values and beliefs. Nanny Uru comments:

> You at a loss pēnā koe kai te noho noaiho te kōrero ki to marae because sometimes wētahi o ngā whānau kai wērā atu marae e noho ana and they come back and bring some of those things through and you’ve got to repeat [your teachings]—well, kāre hoki au e hōhā ki te kōrero, I always talk.

Many of the people at Waikirikiri rely heavily on Nanny Uru to provide leadership and direction within the wharemate. The succession planning has long been in place for people to assume

responsibilities she carries. She has this to say about those who will continue with this tikanga; the octogenarian matriarch speaks with confidence:

> Ko te tikanga rā mē mōhio wō whāea. They've been taught. Well he pai rātou, kai te kōrerongia rātou kaua e pēnei, kaua e pēnā, he aha atu, he aha atu. But whether you like it or not, ko tō māmā rā, she's really staunch. Pērā anō tēnei kai konei [referring to Julie, her daughter]. I would think Julie will catch what I'm doing. Mea atu au kia Julie, "the worst thing that can happen to you is kā eke ana ki to kotou taima, don't listen to people. If you get a gut feeling you're doing something right, you listen—just whakaakonga ngā tikanga kia tangata whenua ki roto i ā koe". Kai te pai tonu ngā wāhine o Waikirikiri.

Nanny Uru believes that the generation of women that grew up in the 1940s and 1950s are aware of the tikanga and that they have been taught. She is impressed by their willingness to teach others, and indeed, by her own daughter. Of the knowledge she has passed on about the wharemate, Nanny Uru concludes, "kai te pai tonu ngā wāhine o Waikirikiri"—the women of Waikirikiri are well versed.

Glossary

kaponga	*Cyathea dealbata*
kaumātua	elders
kaupapa	purpose
kawa	protocol
kirimate	immediately bereaved, grieving relatives
korowai	cloak, usually with tassels
kuia	female elders
manuhiri	guests
marae	hapu reservation and associated buildings
mere	nephrite weapon
nīkau	*Rhopalostylis sapida*
pakeke	elders
patu	cleaver
pōhiri	ritual welcome
pou	posts
raupo	*Typha angustifolia*
tānoanoa	the unwelcome onset of decomposition
taiaha	long staff, weapon
tangihanga	rites for the dead
taonga	treasured possessions
tapu	sacred, restricted, restrictions
Te Reo o Tūhoe	Tūhoe language
tikanga	correct procedures, customary practices
titoki	*Alectryon excelsus*
tokotoko	walking stick
Tūhoe	Māori tribe
tūpāpaku	deceased person, corpse
wairua	spirit
whānau	extended family, families
whare pōtae	immediately bereaved, shelters in which people receive their final farewells
whare puni	meeting house
wharekai	dining room
wharemate	shelters in which the deceased receive their final farewells
whāriki	woven mats

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