ABSTRACT

The Māori concept of ahikā (burning fires of occupation) was once a necessary part of asserting one’s mana whenua (rights to land) over customary territories. If ahikā was exercised over land, that land would be open for others to take and use. Physical presence, kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face), was therefore required in order to exercise ahikā over land. The notion of ahikā has significantly changed as new ideas developed to encompass a steadily increasing national and international Māori diaspora with more Māori living away from their tribal boundaries, lands, and waterways. This paper investigates the tensions and challenges that Māori living away from home face in the maintenance of ahikā, illuminating the pressures on the deeply held values and practices of kanohi ki te kanohi. A key aim is to provide greater understanding around the significance of kanohi ki te kanohi and its place in modern Māori society particularly in the context of the new technologies and practice known as social networking sites.

Keywords: Social networking sites, Māori, diaspora, kanohi kitea, kanohi ki te kanohi, ahikā

INTRODUCTION

He kitenga kanohi, he hokinga mahara
To see a face is to stir the emotions

The term kanohi ki te kanohi in te reo Māori (the Māori language) literally translated means face to face; the social meaning of the phrase emphasizes physical presence and even a sense of commitment, to whānau (family), to a place, to a kaupapa (purpose). Kanohi kitea is a similar notion, meaning “the seen face” highlighting the importance of “being seen” to strengthen relationships and one’s place of belonging in the community. These concepts are of much importance to cultural practices, rituals, and ceremonies that are central to Māori life and to the unique vigour of Māori institutions such as the marae (common gathering place), the papa kāinga (village) and the rohe (region).

Kanohi ki te kanohi has become increasingly difficult to achieve as a norm or even an ideal in the contemporary setting, due to the pace and pressures of work commitments, financial situations, diaspora, and family contexts. Many Māori struggle with pressures to return home to participate in cultural, social, and political activities of the marae. Prolonged absence from the papa kāinga (home) and marae may have major implications for the individual and/or the wider whānau/community if connections and a sense of belonging become weak or lost. Convenience, distance, time, cost, and the reason to be face to face all affect whether or not face to face engagement is possible or sought.

This study explores kanohi ki te kanohi and its importance to Māori society and culture, using the
specific context of ahikā, a set of practices surrounding rights to land. The notion of ahikā particularly from the perspective of Māori living abroad will be investigated to show how they constitute these practices from afar. The roles of new forms including “virtual ahikā” mediated via social networking sites (SNS), in contributions and connections to “home,” will be a key focus and highlight the tensions for the values around kanohi ki te kanohi.

Aotearoa New Zealand Context

to describe the context of Aotearoa New Zealand and, in particular, the state of the contemporary Māori nation is to acknowledge the histories of Māori people and culture. Here I provide a brief overview of Māori history: readers are encouraged to consult other sources to better understand the local context. The indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand, the Māori, had inhabited these islands (Te ika a Māui and the Watri Pounamu: the North and South Islands) for nearly 1000 years prior to the arrival of English and other European explorers in the late 16th century (Durie, 1995; Orange, 2011; Walker, 2004). In spite of provisions agreed to in the nation’s founding document, Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi), British colonization had severe effects on Māori people, society, economy, and wellbeing. The colonists worked to subjugate, marginalize, and displace Māori from their lands, forests, fisheries, and other treasured possessions (Walker, 2004). Land alienation and warfare resulted in major loss of life and resources, with profound impacts on Māori systems, values, and ways of knowing and being (Belich, 1996; Benton, 1987; Biggs, 1989; Kawharu, 1989). Despite this injustice and oppression, Māori culture and communities survived and, in some respects, are now resurgent with economic, cultural, artistic, sporting, and political development to the forefront as part of the Crown reorganization process towards Māori and their abhorrent loss of land, resources, and culture, many iwi (tribes) have made claims for the return of land and resources to Māori. Inherent within this process is evidence of the validity of claims, which is where ahikā comes in, playing a significant role in proving mana whenua (land) over parts of land and territories. Nowadays, ahikā has become a term used for the people who keep the metaphorical and literal home fires burning; those who are keeping things functioning at the coalface of hapū (sub-tribe) and iwi communities. Kanohi ki te kanohi interaction and engagement largely holds the ahikā together.

Kanohi ki te Kanohi

While kanohi ki te kanohi is about physical presence, it also relates to mana tangata (status) and a person’s credibility in words, actions, or intentions. This idea of fronting up provides people with the sense of honesty and truth. Kanohi ki te kanohi gives mana to one’s kērēa (words, talk). It is essentially, a typically Māori way of communicating thoughts and perspectives and the manner in which speeches performers talk and small are delivered by skilled orators. The kērēa can often be challenging and intimidating but these types of deliveries are encouraged as the face to face environment is fitting for such occasions, particularly when the orator has the backing of his or her people. With kanohi ki te kanohi, there is an expectation the speaker will stand by their words in order to maintain their integrity and credibility (Mead, 2001). Both kanohi ki te kanohi and kanohi kērēa are physical forms of interaction, engagement, and communication and are foundational principles for the many processes of tikanga Māori (Māori practices). The Many Māori researchers have incorporated the idea of kanohi ki te kanohi into kaupapa Māori (Māori philosophical) theoretical frameworks for conducting research (Cram, 1992; Kepa, 2007; Pihama, 2001; Smith, 1997; Smith, 1999; Walker et al., 2006a, 2006b). Kanohi ki te kanohi in this context refers to the credibility and accountability of researchers when engaging with Māori communities in community-based research.

Kanohi ki te kanohi is regarded within Māori communities as critical when one has an important “take” or purpose. This form of consultation allows the people in the community to use all their senses as complementary sources of information for assessing and examining the advantages and disadvantages of becoming involved. (Cram and Pihama, 2000, p. 14)

Widely known Māori scholars such as Linda Tuhikai Smith, Fiona Cram, Leonie Pihama, and others have pioneered the way in developing kaupapa Māori methods based on uniquely Māori philosophies underpinned by Māori values such as aroha (love), manuakitanga (hospitality), kaitiakitanga (guardianship), and whanauakitanga (relationships). In the research context, kanohi ki te kanohi ensures that researchers are accountable to the communities with whom they are researching with openness and honesty. Researchers seek to form relationships and trust to enable the communities to feel free to interrogate, challenge, and criticize if they should feel the need (Edwards et al., 2005).

Very little literature has investigated how Internet technologies have affected kanohi ki te kanohi. One study looks at how a prominent iwi utilized computer-mediated communication to connect with its board members who lived around the country. While the use of the technology suited those who lived away from the rete of the tribe, those who lived locally felt that kanohi ki te kanohi was far more important to maintain:

Where distant and passive members saw computer-mediated consultation as a step towards more inner tribal democracy, locally active members were adamant that consultation should occur face-to-face. The insistence on face-to-face communication was seen as based on Māori culture: “kanohi ki te kanohi, face-to-face” (Hofmann, 2010, p. 197)

The above example indicates a split between those who prefer kanohi ki te kanohi and those who depend on the technology to participate in board tasks. Such conflicts are to be expected and finding the balance between utilizing technology to empower those who are physically dislocated, while affirming those who hold and maintain important cultural values through physical presence, is the challenge.

A study by Keegan (2000) in particular notes that kanohi ki te kanohi is critical to Māori society and engagements but he argues that new technologies are bringing Māori society even closer by facilitating engagements between people separated by distance:

Kanohi ki te kanohi, is another important Māori proverb literally meaning face to face. It implies that if correct contact must be made then people should meet face to face, one on one, so that no misunderstandings, misconstruing, misinterpretations, misapprehensions, misconstructions can occur. It implies that by taking the time and energy to arrange and travel to meet somebody you are showing the respect and homage that this person is worthy of your efforts. The Internet pretty much strips you away with this situation. Everything and every person (in theory) can be brought to you in the comfort and convenience of your home. Thus is this aspect of culture lost in the new environment of the Internet? I believe it to be the contrary, and that the Internet makes this proverb even more applicable! (Keegan, 2000, p. 1)

AhiKā

Māori people and communities have deep, intrinsic connections to the land that provide cultural markers of iwi-specific identity. A report from the Waitangi Tribunal aptly describes associations between people and place as being significantly linked to relationships, histories, and whakapapa (genealogy):

The lands of the people, then, are defined not by boundaries but by relationships. The identifiable lands of a group of Māori people are the lands of their history, the places where their tūpuna (ancestors) are buried, all those lands that they could occupy or defend, or on which they could keep their fires alight. (Waitangi Tribunal, 1997, p. 153)

There are further spiritual connections to land, through Papatūānuku (Earth mother) and other deities, as well as the role as a provider of sustenance to people where the bounty of the land (and waterways) feeds, shelters, and provides resources to tribes. Māori values of reciprocity are exemplified here in that if the people look after the land, the land looks after the people. Such associations collectively known as ahikā — routinely maintained by occupation of a place, are more difficult to maintain for those, who from diverse circumstances, have left their ancestral lands. Ahikā is an ancient concept and has been expressed in various ways in the literature recognizing that the occupation and use of land “was a collective right of all other rights to land” (Asher and Naulls, 1987, p. 22), Tinirau, Gilles, and Tinirau
(Tinirau et al., 2009) state that whakapapa qualifies as an assertion of āhikā. “Āhikā (the burning home fires) refers to specific whakapapa (genealogical) connections, and active participation in aspects of residency, land ownership and utilisation.” Whakapapa was important to the assertion of āhikā, and combined with physical occupation, productive use (often evidenced in cultivation) and kaitiakitanga (guardianship) responsibilities. Using resources from a specific area also indicated āhikā was alive and held by the inhabitants of that land, who are also referred to as mana whenua (Smith, 1942).

Mana whenua (people who exercise rights over land) had particular knowledge of the land that they inhabited; its topography, history, locations of special food resources, storehouses, and sacred lands) had particular knowledge of the land that was heavily influenced Post World War II and the advent of new technologies and tools to keep connected to people and places across the globe, the notion of āhikā may find new expression and contribute to the reinvigoration of Māori culture, with the implications for the meaning of kanohi ki te kanohi.

The Māori Diaspora
The Māori diaspora is widening with 1 in 5 Māori living overseas and more still no longer on their ancestral lands within Aotearoa. Te Puni Kōkiri (the Ministry of Māori Development) of New Zealand) recently conducted an online survey with 1,223 Māori respondents aged 16 years and over, living in 51 countries across the world (Kukutai, 2012) finding that the main reason for living outside New Zealand was for “the prospect of economic advancement.” Generations are being born and raised outside of Aotearoa New Zealand with a staggering 47 percent of Māori having children and raising them overseas. However, almost all (99 percent) of those surveyed, maintained some social connections to home, family, and friends in Aotearoa New Zealand and more than three-quarters used SNS for social purposes (Facebook being the most used by survey respondents, but also including Skype, Twitter, Google Plus, and others). The 16–30 year old age group were the highest users (90 percent) of SNS and the lowest users were those aged 50 years and older (62 percent).

The survey revealed some interesting findings in relation to respondents’ intentions of returning to Aotearoa New Zealand: “Survey respondents expressed a high degree of uncertainty about their future plans, including returning home” (Kukutai, 2012, p.4). Sixty-two percent indicated that Australia was their home and the country that they would settle in permanently. Broadly, one third of Māori living overseas were “unsure” about their future plans.

Māori living abroad are finding new beginnings and settlements away from their ancestral lands. Urbanisation and international diaspora, two main causes for the diminishing occupancy of customary lands, raise concerns around how āhikā might continue to “burn” in contemporary society. With the advent of new technologies and tools to keep connected to people and places across the globe, the notion of āhikā may find new expression and contribute to the reinvigoration of Māori culture, with the implications for the meaning of kanohi ki te kanohi.

This paper will explore contemporary notions of āhikā, what it means for Māori living abroad in the 21st century, and how they maintain their āhikā from afar, with a particular focus on the use of SNS. More broadly, this investigation will theorise notions of kanohi ki te kanohi and its importance and practice in modern Māori society and the age of SNS technologies. It will contribute to my doctoral thesis which is entitled: “Kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face) – a thing of the past? An examination of social network sites and their impacts on whakamutanga (relationships), taukiritanga (identity) and tikanga (practices).” The research objective from the thesis that is specifically investigated in this study explores the advantages and disadvantages of Māori cultural values (āhikā in this instance) being practiced online and the implications for kanohi ki te kanohi. The thesis is also part of a wider, Marsden funded research project entitled The Social Network Project which broadly focuses on SNS and youth drinking cultures.
covered three domains—demographic information (including iwi affiliations), knowledge and use of SNS, and cultural knowledge. This latter section included questions around maintaining virtual ahikā, role of SNS in knowledge of tribal identity, and advantages and disadvantages in trying to maintain such an important practice through kanohi ki te kanohi.

Before there physically, to touch, to have hands on, to counsel, to express, to be seen and to be present. To maintain eye contact; to know that you are loved by being there; to experience the wairau (spiritual connection) of the other participant. It’s very personal and engaging. (Female; aged 46–55)

Kanohi ki te kanohi to me means that I get to sit alongside my nannies, taudole [elderly man] and listen to the stories, hear the songs, learn the language; it allows me to be in the same physical space with our taudole while learning the wairau; ahikā [love], pūnaha [belief] and rika [true, correct] of ngā mātā o ngā tūpuna [the work of the ancestors]. (Female; aged 46–55)

Kanohi ki te kanohi be it physically or through a computer screen doesn’t make much difference to me… but I understand how it might not go down too well for some people, I’m guessing it would be the elder generation who prefer kanohi ki te kanohi… the younger generation not so much. (Female; aged 46–54)

It means my family gets to see my children who were both born in the UK and have never been to NZ. (Female; aged 46–54)

This is something that challenges me and brings into reality a need to regularly return home to remain connected. The connection with people is the easy part it’s more a yearning and a need to connect with the whānau. (Male; aged 46–55)

Being Māori is physical. It engages all your senses. You feel the warmth of someone’s hongi. To taste the tears of happiness/sadness and to see pukana [dilating the eyes, to stare intensely], hear the tears of happiness/sadness and to see pukana directly into your eyes, to feel the warmth of someone’s pāpaea [‘kis’], to respond to your whakapaehā [orator’s intent], despite not standing on the paepae [orator’s bench] or marae. (Female; aged 46–55)

Maintaining Ahikā from Afar
One respondent provided the following description of ahikā “ahikā refers to having an active caretaker and/or participant role within your tribal/subtribal areas and/or marae.” The survey asked for respondents’ opinions regarding what ahikā meant for them and how they virtually maintain their ahikā. The question was then asked, “Does SNS assist you with maintaining a virtual form of ahikā?” Of the 124 respondents that answered this question, 20 percent said they did not use SNS in this way and 80 percent said they made some use of SNS to maintain ahikā, agreeing that their connection to their kāinga can be maintained virtually.

Of those who agreed that SNS can help to maintain a form of virtual ahikā, half reported both advantages and disadvantages in trying to maintain such an important practice through kanohi ki te kanohi.

Virtual ahikā practices through SNS included being kept updated and having a finger on the pulse, enabling respondents to feel a sense of belonging and place in their communities, despite being away from home. These interactions helped respondents feel comfortable in voicing their opinions regarding important community decisions and discussions. Respondents also contributed to the development of their communities with expertise and kāhū (gifts, offerings). These were discussed by respondents as virtual ways of maintaining ahikā that were meaningful for them.

Keeping updated
Respondents discussed the importance of being “in the loop” with the affairs of home and having a sense of satisfaction that their ahikā was being maintained from afar. It is perhaps predictable that this theme would emerge from the data, given the evidence that a primary use of SNS among Māori is to communicate with whānau, friends, marae, hapū and iwi (O’Carroll, 2013). However, some responses suggested that keeping informed and participating in dealings, discussions, and meetings around marae, hapū, and iwi, provided them with a feeling that their ahikā was maintained.

An example for my whānau is that we recently voted in a treaty settlement. We were able to follow the debate on line through our whānau [iwi/hapū organization] and other FB [Facebook] pages. (Female; aged 46–55)

They give you the sense that you’re near or close to something happening. You receive updates of news and issues that are happening and it gives you the sense that you can still participate, whether by contributing to discussions or answering questions on the whānau [orator’s bench] or marae. (Female; aged 46–55)

Opinions are generally heard and acknowledged when there is a solid relationship with the home people. Without this base, respect can often be absent. Being respected is an important aspect of Māori society when it comes to having a say and making decisions for the collective. Some respondents described having a voice on topics such as development, land claims, or governance of marae, hapū, and/or iwi board committees. Through SNS they felt directly connected to and respected by the community group, despite living away from home.

Especially being abroad… we are able to have input into our community back home… Facebook was used recently to rally some funds for our marae back home. We set up a FB [Facebook] page and began fundraising by setting back… the whānau at home were able to see what we were doing and how we were progressing. (Male; aged 46–55)

An example for my whānau is that we recently voted in a treaty settlement… We made an informed decision and felt like we were being an active part of our tribe. (Female; aged 46–55)

SNS give you the sense that you’re near or close to your kāinga. You receive updates of news...
and issues that are happening and it gives you the sense that you can still participate, whether by contributing to discussions or answering questions. (Female; aged 26–35)

[SNS] allows the opportunity to have input into critical issues going on at home. (Female; aged 46–55)

SNS in these instances enabled respondents to engage and participate in decision-making and contribute to their ahiākā through virtual methods.

Koha

Another way of maintaining virtual ahiākā for respondents of this study was to contribute financially to their Māori communities. (I contribute) to a certain point, (not in a physical sense) since my marae created a FB (Facebook) site, I am more aware of what’s happening at home. When big events are due to happen at the marae I am aware of it and can plan holidays home to participate. When I want to help from afar I can send a koha to help that way. But there are limitations on how I can help being far away. (Female; aged 26–35)

Well, we send money back to our marae every week, and at the end of every month we receive photos of where and what our money is used for. So yes it is tīto pā [very good]. It’s [SNS] the easiest and fastest way for the marae to send out pūnoni [information] and really cost efficient for our marae. (Female; aged 26–35)

[We've] able to take part in whānau discussions requiring a response and/or vote and contribute funds for marae upkeep. (Female; aged 46–55)

Providing regular or one off monetary payments gave some respondents the feeling that they were giving back to their communities, despite not being able to physically contribute. Funds to help pay for essentials such as power, phone, and maintenance can be a struggle for many marae across Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly if they do not have a steady form of income from land banks, trusts, or other sources.

For many Māori, the impetus to move away from one’s haukāinga is based largely on greater economic and work opportunities in Aotearoa New Zealand or further afield. Many who leave home to pursue an education or career develop specialized skill sets. Some respondents commented on providing expertise and specialized skills as a way of contributing to ahiākā and the life of their communities, back home.

I feel my tribe information about how the oil spills in America are affecting the coat stores and how they need to be careful. I also post my support about various issues that affect my people so I feel that I have a virtual ahiākā. (Female; aged 46–55)

For others, SNS was a means to an end, allowing them to fill a void until they could physically return home. Some participants commented on SNS providing a satisfactory and temporary solution to the distance that kept them dislocated from their haukāinga and ahiākā. Despite the lack of kanohī ki te kanohipa interactions, SNS was better than nothing.

Although I do communicate with some people more than I ever did, I still feel compelled to share the same physical space, there’s definitely something missing by not being able to touch someone, eat with them, just hang out. Hence I’m driven to return home and am making plans to come back! But networking sites are a good tool and offer a replacement interaction that will have to do for now. And without it I’d be even further distanced, so am grateful for things like email and Facebook. (Female; aged 46–45)

Distance and longing for home appears to be encouraging some to return and therefore, physically maintain their ahiākā. This may produce benefits for them, their family and, of course, their haukāinga and marae.

Maintaining ahiākā kanohi ki te kanohipa

SNS did not help 20 percent of respondents (52 people) to maintain a virtual sense of ahiākā. Comments were that ahiākā cannot be maintained through virtual connections and can only be practised kanohī ki te kanohipa. Although SNS provided them a connection to home, it was not intended to replace face-to-face interactions. Strong opinions and perspectives (comments) were shared by 47 (out of 52) of the respondents who spoke against using SNS as a tool for maintaining ahiākā.

Personally I feel that the true meaning of kanohī ki te kanohipa is physical face to face. Social networking is an alternative or a back up but I don’t think that [SNS] can replace it. (Female; aged 26–35)

I do not believe Skype etc. will ever be able to replace the connection felt when you are in the actual physical present of a loved one. (Female; aged 26–35)

You can’t replace the actual physicality of being next to someone, or being able to touch someone or being able to feel their “presence” — while social networking is great to keep in touch, it can never replace the physical aspect. (Male; aged 26–35)

You can never replace all the things that one receives from being truly present with another, however when you live miles away from your family, this is the next best option you have of interacting on more regular basis with them. (Female; aged 36–45)

Although it’s [SNS] better than nothing... It can’t replace touch, feel, sense etc. (Female; aged 36–45) for me, I would love to be home to lose, nurture, and counsel and hold each of our children and grandchildren. To provide assurance and assistance when enduring challenges. Being physically present is having my family bonded and strengthened because we are ‘kanohipa ki kanohipa’. (Female; aged 46–55)

Respondents felt that kanohī ki te kanohipa was irreplaceable and that the value and importance of being physically present should remain a priority for Māori. However, there was an acceptance and acknowledgment that SNS provides a temporary solution. This was echoed by the respondents of the survey who argued that virtual connections are “better than nothing” but that face-to-face interaction and communication can never be fully replaced.

Physical touch

Respondents commented on emotion and physical touch that could not be expressed through SNS. They highlighted the importance of human touch in relation to the physical connections people make when they see each other which words (spoken or typed) are unable to convey. This suggests that physicality and being present (kanohī ki te kanohipa) was of utmost importance to these respondents.

Everyone will drift apart and never connect if everything is done on site [online] where as kanohī ki te kanohipa is straight upfront about everything. People can see your face, hear what you’re speaking, see your emotions etc. (Female; aged 18–25)

It takes away from the physical aspect that human beings need to interact 100%. It’s like when we only had the telephone to rely on, it would still feel empty after you hung up. (Female; aged 46–55)

The mana that is felt and acknowledged during kanohipa ki te kanohipa interactions encompass wairua (spirit, spiritual) and mana whenua (life force, life principle) aspects that are experienced in physical contexts. The idea that “kanohipa ki te kanohipa is straight upfront” suggests that there is no hiding behind computer screens and aliases that might otherwise shield you from the physical dimension that kanohipa ki te kanohipa provides. Kanohipa kaita, or the seen face is indicative of ahiākā, as when one’s face is constantly seen, the contribution to and participation in the haukāinga is substantial. Being seen is an integral dimension of ahiākā. For these participants, the idea of kanohipa ki te kanohipa is crucial to being able to maintain some form of ahiākā and thus, one’s ahiākā from afar was seen as not possible through SNS.

This respondent describes a virtual haukāinga, where physical contact was made with the screen as a representation of a person.

It’s cold pressing your nose against the screen ... not the same as in person but I’ll do for now until we see them again... (Male; aged 46–55)

While physical kanohipa ki te kanohipa was absent, technology provided an avenue to connect in some way. There is a degree of give and take where some things are forsaken to gain something small in return, as illustrated in this respondent’s experience.

Cultural experiences

Respondents commented on the feelings that they experienced when kanohipa ki te kanohipa interactions occur, particularly on the marae where many cultural tikanga and kawa (customs) are practised and maintained. Te reo Māori is the dominant language of the marae space with regards to rituals, ceremonies, and customs (formal proceedings) as well as in informal contexts. Experiences on marae reinforce knowledge and understanding of culture, values, and cultural identity.

Examining the Notion of “Virtual” Ahiākā and the Implications for Kanohipa ki te Kanohipa

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and language. According to two respondents these experiences are not replicable through SNS.

Social networking is fine for updates and information, photos and a few funny anecdotes, but nothing will replace being close physically to the ones you love, admire and respect. There is a feeling I get in my heart, stomach, and soul when I step on to a marae that will never be replaced. (Female; aged 36–45)

Our culture is based on connections and is subtly present in nature like the lack of technology on the marae and the fact that Māori are great storytellers and singers. No SNS can replace that, it fills a void when you’re away and is helping me to learn new waiata. (Female 26–35)

There are some clear distinctions made here around the marae as a space in which Western influences and technologies are yet to dominate, where tikanga Māori, and being Māori remains intact. With that in mind, they affirm that technology can never replace cultural practices and experiences of the marae and, as one comments, there is a visceral certainty on this point. This refers not only to the act of physically being there, but to the wairua and mauri that are critical elements of the physical dimension of engagement.

Wairua and mauri

The wairua and mauri of Māori relationships and communication are important dimensions of interactions in SNS. Wairua refers to the spiritual connection between people, objects, and places. Mauri refers to the life force innate within all things, including people, nature, and objects. Mauri is a life force shared between people and objects and is a spiritual connection binding the two together. To experience the mauri of another is to be in its physical presence. These two concepts are important dimensions of the Māori world and pervade much of Māori culture, values, and belief systems. Respondents commented extensively on wairua and mauri and how the two are integral to their claims to an akikā or virtual world and pervade much of Māori society. According to two respondents these are integral to their claims to a Mauri world and pervade much of Māori culture, and language. According to two respondents these experiences are not replicable through SNS.

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Being there physically, to touch, to have hands on, to counsel, to express, to be seen and to be present. To maintain eye contact; to know that you are loved by being there. To experience the wairua of the other participant. It’s very personal and engaging. (Female; aged 46–55)

To be able talk on one on one and feeling the wairua, physical presence and working one’s mind. (Male; aged 46–55)

Respondents made connections between the physical and spiritual realms, commenting on the personal and intimate nature of this exchange and experience. Similarly, the final response mentioned “feeling the wairua,” suggesting wairua is something experienced and felt through physical interactions with people, places and objects. The physicality of sharing a space with others allows spiritual connections to be made.

One respondent spoke about wairua being important to akikā, a common thread binding her to place. Through maintaining a virtual connection to her whānau, marae, hapū, and iwi, she felt a sense of spiritual connection.

Any form of connection to whānau/hapū/whānau/iwi, keeps the akikā burning because I also believe the akikā is within as well and any connection will keep my wairua burning/yearning for home. Some form of connection is better than none! (Female; aged 26–35)

Connections to home helped this respondent to nurture and take care of her wairua and her akikā, which she felt was a part of and connected to her; “the akikā is within as well.” Similarly, the more she felt connected to home, the more her wairua yearned for her whānau, hapū, and iwi. As she states, some connection is better than no connection and, to some extent, SNS filled a void.

Another respondent raised the idea that mauri was not transferrable from physical to virtual spaces and asks how it can be shared and expressed.

Mauri doesn’t translate when you are not occupying the same physical space. I feel like we will always need that mauri as a people. It [SNS] is just a tool to help us manage between times. It can’t replace it. (Female; aged 46–49)

It [Mauri] literally means to be in the same space. I do not use it to refer to virtual space like Skype. To me it has to do with mauri. You have to be in the same location. (Female; aged 36–45)

The akikā of the kāinga is a good example and symbolic of the mauri of home. The mauri refers to the life and vitality or wellbeing of the hapū/hākāinga. This could be symbolized as the burning fires of home. These burning fires must be nurtured and taken care of else they will die out. Mauri, in this example, is connected physically and spiritually; when the mauri of home and the mauri of a person are shared and linked, connections are made. The following question was asked in the survey; “how is kanohi ki te kanohi and social networking sites negotiated (compromised, balanced, etc.) in your life?” The question was asked to explore how people navigated and negotiated kanohi ki te kanohi in the context of living outside of Aotearoa New Zealand and their need to communicate and connect with home through technologies such as SNS. Some spoke of the improvements that SNS had on their kanohi ki te kanohi engagements as they felt more connected to home.

I’m not sure if it is compromised. It may not allow for direct social engagement, but as someone who has lived outside of my own rohe for many years, social networking has enabled me to have more direct contact with whānau than I would have without it. (Female; aged 46–55)

A respondent who had lived away for a long time felt that SNS was the only way to engage kanohi ki kanohi with her people, as the challenges of having grown up outside of Aotearoa New Zealand had had negative impacts on how her whānau, hapū, and iwi accepted her as one of their own.

Because I’ve been away so long and I have a strong Aotearoan accent, face to face has been problematic in the past. In terms of distance, money, and time to get home. This was coupled with the extended whānau not knowing who I was. My presence online has allowed me to connect with my extended whānau and I know that next time they won’t be wondering who the Māzzy (Māori Australian) is in the corner kit [kaka te kata, similar to lol or laughs out loud]. (Female aged 46–55)

Some respondents called for the concept of kanohi ki te kanohi to be broadened and more inclusive of the variations of what kanohi ki te kanohi is for them, which is still face to face, just not in a physical sense.

Skype is not exactly physically interacting but is an extraordinary creation for a lot of us. It helps bring us closer to home when we’re abroad. So I get a similar feeling to Whānau, it’s almost like we’re face to face. (Female; aged 18–25)

I’m of the belief that we need to broaden the definition and articulation of kanohi ki te kanohi. (Female; aged 26–35)

As for kanohi ki te kanohi obviously it’s about face to face physical relationship, but I’m not sure that we need to keep the definition limited like that. (Female; aged 36–45)

A range of generational perspectives presented here, advocate for alternative methods of kanohi ki te kanohi that enable more of the diaspora to connect to the hākāinga in meaningful ways, through SNS, providing a stronger sense of being “kanohi ki te kanohi” with their extended whānau, marae, hapū, and iwi, despite not being physically face to face.

Conclusion

Participants who used SNS regularly to contribute to akikā commented on the technology being a means to an end; a temporary fix that provided at least some sense of connection and participation. Their inputs and contributions were meaningful, despite being expressed and communicated through virtual channels. While kanohi ki te kanohi was preferred by many participants, the reality is, that where great distances discriminate people from their Māori communities, SNS provides some means of connection to allow people to contribute to the akikā of home. What is abundantly clear in the data is that people are expressing their contribution to akikā in diverse ways and that, given the current state of Māori society and the dislocation from ancestral lands, alternative methods and processes are being developed to accommodate traditions and responsibilities.

Some respondents felt that contribution to akikā in SNS did not help them to maintain satisfactory connections and when asked about the importance of kanohi ki te kanohi, reiterated that meaningful interactions are face-to-face and could never be reproduced through SNS.
placed by virtual means. Being present on the marae was discussed as a powerful experience for some respondents who connected to the wairua and mahi that, space provides, through rituals, ceremonies, or listening to Elders speak about traditions and genealogies. Such kanohi ki te kanohi experiences were profoundly important for some respondents in nurturing their identity and connection.

This study found that many Māori of the diaspora are actively seeking and using virtual media to make and maintain strong connections with their hapū, despite being physically dislocated from them. It is clear from analyses of the survey data that personal use of SNS is based on attempting to balance the all important kanohi ki te kanohi values with maintaining some connection to whānau, marae, hapū, and iwi. Although this key ingredient was absent, SNS provided an avenue for respondents to connect in some way. Without this compromise or temporary medium filling the void, the Māori di-
aspora would be less well served.

**Reconceptualizing akikā**

The multiplicity of meanings for akikā and the processes for maintaining akikā are changing and evolving with the use of technology. The redefinition of akikā by Māori living, working, and raising their families outside of Aotearoa New Zealand and away from their tāranganauewae adds complexity to debates about connections to place. Akikā continues to connect people to their whēnua. These connections are maintained in diverse ways and SNS play an important, if partial, role in this process. This re-
search could be extended to ascertain what marae, hapū, and iwi communities think about the emerg-
ence and effects of virtual akikā.

More importantly, redefining what akikā means may have potential impacts and consequences on issues to do with rights and ownership of resour-
ces, assets, lands, and waterways. Akikā as a concept is being redefined and expanded with potential im-
pacts on land claims between hapū, iwi, and govern-
ment as well as boundary and resource disputes amongst iwi. In ownership and/or rights to land, akikā is an important concept that is considered and debated when it comes to claims against the Crown. The expansion of the definition of akikā from the Native Land Court had severe impacts on rights to land. Virtual forms of contributing to akikā may also have wide reaching implications. Evidently, definitions of akikā have and will remain contested in the settling of hapū and iwi land claims both from a government and hapū/iwi perspective as more Māori reside beyond their tāranganauewae and away from their whēnua. This issue will be of interest in future research as more iwi around the country move closer to finalizing treaty settlements with the Crown.

Contemporary Māori society and the changing definitions, values, and principles of akikā are com-
plex, dynamic, and constantly evolving. As Tinirau argues, “the akikā” — those who live and breathe the home fires, tending them in all ways possible — are likely to have varying opinions on the things that constitute their roles. On my marae, those who return home, literally to stoke the fires, cook the kai, feed the people, call to our guests, welcome our visitors, sing the songs, run the board meetings, and pay the bills are considered hāikā, the akikā. Without hāikā or akikā tending to these dut-
ies, the life of the marae would be lost, and tikanga and values would also be lost. The distinction be-
tween being akikā and contributing to akikā can be seen in this example where the hāikā collectively work together to look after and nurture the marae (and therefore, the whēnua). They are considered the akikā. Virtual akikā then, is the contribution and supporting of the akikā (hāikā) at home, by those who are away from their tāranganauewae.

Maintaining akikā in this study is about keep-
ing connected and informed, having a voice at meet-
ings, or providing koha to the marae account each week to pay the bills. These forms and methods have all been identified as important ways of supporting the maintenance of akikā from afar, requiring a ne-
gotiation of how kanohi ki te kanohi is considered, applied and practised. However, these methods of akikā maintenance are not possible unless the hāikāngā and akikāngā of home endorse these practi-
ces and support those living abroad to find alterna-
tive means to contribute back home.

**Negotiating Kanohi ki te Kanohi and SNS**

For some, kanohi ki te kanohi is irreplaceable and SNS cannot facilitate linkages and connections that akikā requires or to the extent that some people seek. For others, kanohi ki te kanohi was practised in various ways and at different levels through SNS. This study raises issues about virtualizing aspects of Māori culture, which has implications for the co-
hesion of Māori society. The economic climate and better financial opportunities that exist offshore continue to beckon our people and virtual forms of akikā will inevitably begin to spread and increase in Māori seek ways to stay connected to the source, to the hapūngā.

What lies at the heart of this paper is the no-
tion of kanohi ki te kanohi, its importance for vari-
ous Māori communities and how we may practice kanohi ki te kanohi in new and innovative ways. Contribution to akikā through virtual pathways allows participation and support of the hapūngā and is one way in which some kanohi ki te kanohi values can be met by whānau who are not physically present. While most respondents were satisfied with their virtual connections to the hapūngā, there was a considerable negotiation around using SNS to maintain virtual kanohi ki te kanohi and physical kanohi ki te kanohi.

If we return to what constitutes the value of kanohi ki te kanohi for the Māori diaspora, there is a very strong sense of physicality and the importance of physical presence. While SNS cannot fully deliver this, it does provide opportunities for people to be “face to face” and present and the responses suggest that kanohi ki te kanohi as a Māori concept could be broadened and applied in some ways to virtual forms of kanohi ki te kanohi.

SNS are already empowering many Māori with the tools to access information and knowledge about their cultural heritage, identity, values, and language as well as participation in cultural practices of akikā. This is a testament to the adaptive flexibil-
ity of Māori culture, society, and its people. Māori have long been early adopters of communications technology be it literacy, telephone, or Internet. The ability to transfer physical norms to virtual realms is, I believe, positive for Māori development.

Some Māori living overseas have no current plans to return home. This is concerning in terms of the continuation and perpetuation of tikanga, kawa, and language on our marae and how our cultural values and practices are to be maintained and up-
lifted. The heart of the issue is multidimensional: the yearning and desire to go home is much easier to deal with when virtual connections are satisfy-
ing some of these needs. Furthermore, by keeping lines of communication open, virtual connections could equip people with the necessary knowledge, capability and confidence to physically return home.

Equally the notion that the akikā can be augmented from beyond the mara is by the diaspora means that they can fulfill at least some of their roles of leader-
ship and knowledge bearing in ways that make it more attractive for people to come home. However, the life of the marae and the nature of the connec-
tions that Māori have with home still require some physical presence.

The future of our marae lies in the hands of the new generations and in how they choose to main-
tain the values and practices handed down from our tāpuna. The marae is the stronghold of tribal identities and knowledge systems, which will al-
ways have a place in Māori society, as long as tech-
nologies work to facilitate and connect people to the hapūngā and not replace marae or kanohi ki te kanohi. Negotiating and balancing these is a key challenge for Māori, ensuring that we can remain connected to one another while upholding the integ-
rety and potency of our culture, values and prac-
tices.

**References**

